

*No.8*

*Lil Red Rides Da' Hood*

By Khalid Patel

The city was a forest of corruption, drugs, murder, rape and prostitution. It was a Saturday evening in the heat of July. The drug-dealers had begun to roam the decaying streets, keeping a vigilant eye out for vulnerable targets - the homeless, whores, corrupt cops, schoolchildren; anything was fair game. Scantly-clad daughters had started to take their places, their garish make-up painted on carelessly, yet resolutely. Their scarlet lips called out alluringly from the street corners, "Pleasure!...STD's!...Save Me..."

Forest Grove was a particularly notorious district of the city where crime was rampant. A young girl walked hurriedly through the streets of Forest Grove with her face down. The gaudy lighting of the lamp-posts reflected off her beautiful cerise Latino skin. When she walked past one of the seedy neon-lighted shops, her red skin seemed to glow. She was a loner yet was known by everyone. They called her Lil Red, not on account of her fine red skin but because she was always seen reading. She was on her way to her grandmother's house after spending much of the day in the downtown library. She lost herself in literature, reading of a better life than the one handed to her by the cruel hand of Fate.

Fate was her father's nickname back when he was a legendary drug-runner in the city. However Fate was not careful. After unwittingly selling narcotics to an undercover officer, he was incarcerated for fifty years. This all happened when Red was still living in the soft, comfortable, bloody membrane of her mother's stomach. Red had never set eyes on her father, yet she knew the

mess of her life was his fault. Red's mother was a crack whore. When not selling her body she was injecting herself, or snorting, or smoking. After doing so she would lie in delirium for hours on end, mumbling nonsensically about what a good girl she used to be. Red thought of her grandmother as her real mother. It was at her grandmother's house where Red slept most nights as it was in a safer section of Forest Grove. However the journey there, especially on a steamy Saturday evening, was treacherous.

Red walked hurriedly with her head down. She clung tightly to her basket of books. Police sirens splashed past her but she paid them no heed. As she glanced up momentarily she caught the silhouette of an imposing man standing motionless on the far end of the street. As Red walked closer, it appeared to her as if he was covered in magnificent grey fur. A beast waiting for her? No, it was no animal Red saw. It was a man wearing a glorious fur coat. A coat made from the carcasses of four wolves, people had whispered. Red knew who the man was. They called him The Wolf. When her father was at his prime, his only competition was this man. Yet The Wolf back then could only dream of controlling the streets the way her father did. After her father was imprisoned, The Wolf naturally took his place. Forest Grove was his fortress. He controlled all the vices in the borough; drugs, prostitution, gambling, it all led back to him. However nobody could prove it. The Wolf maintained a disguise of decency and rectitude.

The Wolf seemed to be staring straight at her. She walked closer to him, subconsciously slowing down her shaking legs in the process.

“Come hither child”, he growled in a low husky voice. Red stopped roughly a metre away from him. He smirked before continuing. “You be Red aintya? Fate’s little child? Word has it your old man escaped from prison jus’a few hours ago. Now if he per chance happens to run into you, do be a good girl and tell him to stay away from MY town. We don’t want anyone gettin’ hurt now do we? Huh? You goddat?”

Lil Red nodded. Suddenly a jet-black car silently drove up beside The Wolf and stopped. He smirked again before getting in. The car howled off. Lil Red tried to stop trembling. She simply stood there for a few moments waiting for stoicism to permeate again before continuing on her journey. Evening had turned into night, but the city was only now truly waking.

Red calmly thought about what The Wolf had just told her. “We don’t want anyone gettin’ hurt now do we?”... The words lingered in her head. Red knew her grandmother had money. Not much but it was enough. Enough for Fate to intervene. Red quickened her pace as her mind began to simmer. She knew she had to get to her grandmother’s house before The Wolf, and more importantly before her father got there. Distant screams pierced the air. Screams of pleasure? Of pain? Perhaps both, Red thought as her walk melted

into a run. The dope-men stared at her as she streamed past. “In a hurry there young lady??” She was now only two streets away. Her basket of books was slowing her down but it never occurred to Red to let go of the precious words.

She could now see her grandmother’s house. Soon she was standing in front of the door. Her grandmother was a wise old lady and always kept the door tightly locked. She knocked on the door, however with the knock the door moved slightly open. Red did not allow this to trouble her. She already knew either The Wolf or her father was inside. She placidly entered and made her way to the living room. She could hear her grandmother’s gentle voice but couldn’t make out what was being said. She entered the living room and saw her mother sitting next to The Wolf.

“Red!” exclaimed her grandmother. “I never even heard you come in. I’d like you to meet this delightful gentleman Red. He was a friend of your father’s.”

“Pleasure to meet you m’aam”, The Wolf softly husked. The edgy growl of his voice seemed to have disappeared. Red played along. She knew warning her grandmother would be foolish. One wrong move and The Wolf would doubtless not think twice of slaughtering them both with any of the numerous guns he indubitably had concealed under his fur.

“Nice to meet you too sir”, Red replied coolly, making sure her voice did not betray her.

“Would you like a drink sir?” asked her grandmother and ambled to the kitchen before waiting for a reply. The Wolf and Red were alone in the room. The Wolf silently stared at Red with a perverted smirk across his face. Red unflinchingly returned the gaze. As she did so, she caught her grandmother from the corner of her eye returning from the kitchen. She was holding onto something. Something big and lethal. It was a shotgun. Her grandmother waited silently for The Wolf to see her. He noticed the apprehensive look on Red’s face and looked in the direction of her stare. His cool countenance quickly dropped. Red’s grandmother edged closer to The Wolf with the shotgun held firmly in her hands. “You be getting out of our house now, sir”, Red’s grandmother gently commanded. “We’re not wanting any trouble now.” The Wolf slowly took a step back.

“Ma’am, there appears to be some sort of misunderstanding.”

“Nu-uh. There ain’t no misunderstanding here mister...just get out WOLF!” Upon hearing his name being barked The Wolf’s countenance changed back to composure.

“So, you do know who I really am then?”

“Known all along mister!”

The Wolf stood there motionless. Suddenly Red saw The Wolf’s hands slide slowly into his fur. She knew what was to happen next. “NO!” she screamed as The Wolf swiftly slid out a pistol from his fur and fired. Red shut her eyes as the sound of bullets bellowed around the small room. As she reluctantly opened them again she saw The Wolf drop, his glorious fur tainted red. Her grandmother was still standing

with a fearful yet appeased expression upon her face. Red heard a soft groan coming from behind her. She swung around and saw a small, unassuming thin man of around fifty lying on the floor, the life slowly draining from his body. Blood was oozing out of a large gaping hole in his chest. A hole fit for a shotgun Red thought. She noticed there was a small pistol by his side. Soft wispy smoke was emanating from its barrel. Red swiftly deduced that it was he who had shot The Wolf and not her grandmother. But it was her grandmother who had shot this unknown man. Unhurriedly Red's grandmother reached inside The Wolf's fur and pulled out bundles of money, stuffing as many as she could into Red's basket. She then took Red by the hand and slowly walked out of the room. Before exiting she glanced over her shoulder at the small, inconspicuous man lying on the floor and whispered "Sorry Fate..." Red and her grandmother exited the house and walked down the street calmly as police cars came blaring from the opposite end. They took a turn into another street and were gone.

*The End*