

Once upon a time, in a time much further gone than our own, there sat a quaint little cottage, built by hand, on the side of an unkempt dirt road. This road shot straight down the slope of a large dirt hill, the horizon hidden on the other side. This small cottage sat alone, aside from a pen for chickens, in a large stretch of seemingly barren land, one primarily comprised of dirt with only small pockets of grass protruding in a couple of spots. As the sun rises over this land, one could, from a good spot, look out over this sea of even dirt to see nothing of particular importance. And this nothing would stretch out for miles.

As the sun rose, at exactly the same time every morning, smoke would begin billowing out of the stone chimney of the cottage. Inside, an older woman would be boiling a black kettle full of water. She would place three eggs in it to cook, and then go over and set the table. She'd place crackers from a dirtied box down onto some plastic plates, placing a jar of jam down for spreading. As she finished, an old man would come around the corner, sleep thick in his eyes. The old man would shuffle over to the woman, kiss her on the cheek, and then drop down into a wooden chair at the table. The woman would get the eggs and place them onto the plates, one for her and two for him. They would eat in silence, then upon finishing the man would stand and make his way back to get changed.

After donning a racoon skin cap and a fur coat, slinging a satchel with a can of tuna and a few extra rounds in it, and grabbing his hunting rifle, the man would step out to greet the morning. There his wife would be sitting on a lone rocking chair, humming to herself as she sewed a torn brown sack back together. She rocked slowly, the red shawl draped over her chair waving softly along. She would nod to her husband who would know back before making his way up the hill to scavenge, same as he would do any other day. The sight from the top of the

hill was one of ruin. A large city sprawled fourth, with skyscrapers stretching up and becoming shredded and pointed at their peaks. They lay in piles around the city floor, buildings falling over into each other like dominos. The sky over the city was a pale brown color and clouds of dirt were carried with the wind. The light of the sky blazed through creases in the cloud cover. The sight was one of a time long past. The old man moved forward, eyes glazed over, with not even a moment of recognition.

He would walk through the ruins of the city, past charred locomotives and the frozen silhouettes of people burnt into the cement walls around every city block. He entered stores, searching every shelf and overturning every can. His eyes scanned each label half heartedly, knowing that he and his wife had enough food stocked for two generations after them. He sighed and stepped out of the store, making his way to the center of a four way intersection. A circle of car frames littered the ground around him, and the old man sighed. He looked over down every lane. Suddenly, he froze. His eyes lit up, and he quickly darted over behind one of the cars. Down one of the streets he spotted another one. A sentinel, dressed in red, standing with its arms stretched upwards on top of a pile of cars. The old man swung his hunting rifle through the open window of the car, peering through its scope to get a better look at the red silhouette. He could see the figure, motionless, arms out as if praying to some other worldly being. The old man smiled, glad to have been unseen. He took a deep breath, placing his finger onto the trigger. The old man aligned the center of his reticul, and, holding a breath, pulled the trigger. A roar rang out of the gun as it pushed back into the man's shoulder. In the distance he could see the red figure spin for a moment, and then fall without so much as a yelp. The old man sat still for a moment, waiting for a potential second wind. Nothing but the sound of dust

scrambling over the ground could be heard. The old man's face was cross with a look of unmeasured glee, revealing a full row of crooked and stained teeth. He jumped up, taking off his hat and swinging it around. His laugh could be heard bouncing off the city walls for miles.

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Upon returning home, the man would be greeted by his wife inside, who would scan his face for a moment. The man would smile, and his wife would turn back and stir the creamed corn. They would eat, in silence, before the man would unpack, undress, and go to bed. The woman would stay up to clean up and get the kitchen ready for the next morning.

Once the dishes were cleaned, she would step into the bedroom. She would stare at her husband until he let out a guttural snore, to which she would slowly step out, shutting the door behind her. The woman would go to a drawer and pull out the brown sack she had been sewing shut that morning. She would step out of the house and grab her shawl from her rocking chair and throw it over herself. She began to make her way up the hill, as twilight lay over the land. The terrain was a deep blue as the woman stepped into the city limits. She made a direct path towards the four way intersection her husband had battled in that afternoon. She made her way to the mound of cars where the red sentinel had stood guard, and climbed over to the other side.

She bent low and lifted up a scarecrow. It was a simple design, two brown sacks wrapped in a bright red shawl. She pulled out her sewed brown sack, and, untying the brown sack that was the scarecrow's head, emptied the remains of its feathers into the new one. She then stuffed more feathers from her pockets into the new brown sack, and replaced it upon the scarecrow's head, retying it. She folded the previous brown sack, which now had a massive hole

in it, and placed it into her pocket. She took the red shawl on the scarecrow and wrapped the one she was wearing around it. She then put on the tattered, perforated shawl, and grabbed the scarecrow, setting it up in some other spot in the city. She'd then make her way out of town.

The wife of the hunter would get home in about two hours time every night on the mark. She'd then retire for the evening, sleeping until the same time as always the next morning.

And so the two lived happily enough, as they ever had, ever after.