

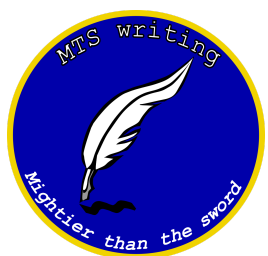


**MTS Writing
presents**

**Something lost,
something red,
something new**

OLD STORIES REFASHIONED

Something lost,
something red,
something new
old stories refashioned



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The best day of my life... so far

'Open the door! I know you are there!'

The voice not only managed to startle me with its shrill tone; it also seemed to invade my ears like some sort of acoustic corkscrew. 'I'll be out in a minute!' I shouted towards the door and went back to staring at my own reflection in the mirror. I hated what I had seen there. I felt that rebel inside me awoke and started preparing for war.

If Reynolds Black sneezes, next day his mailbox is overflowing with letters wishing him to 'get well soon'. When such a malady inflicts his son, Edward, the amount of letters is doubled. Also, envelopes are red from smeared lipstick and moist from perfumes. And now, the mentioned head of the society in our county, decided to organize a big social event. It was supposed to be a charity ball to collect money for the poor. What poor exactly – no one knew and no one really cared. There are always some poor people out there, the trick is to keep them out there, within the lines. What everyone KNEW and grew excited about, was the rumour that the real purpose of this

event was for Edward to look for his future wife. Apparently, his father got quite impatient with the boy's free-spirited and wild ways (which from Snobistic to Common translates as: gambling and drinking). They started to harm the reputation of the family. Old Black believed that nothing fixes up an irresponsible youth like a good old imprisonment by wedding vows.

'I don't want to go there!' I pleaded with my stepmother, as we were discussing the invitation over the tea.

'Darling! Don't be so hard on yourself! You are prettier... almost as pretty as my own girls. You simply have to go! Just think of it, what a great chance to meet some nice, rich, young men, and bring their attention!'

My two sisters almost jumped with excitement at the thought of such a luminous prospect, but I just wasn't convinced. Nevertheless, in the end they got me a gown, a pair of shoes and matching jewelry. Soon the whole house became chaotic; witnessing pre-ball preparations of three excited women and of one sceptic. But when it was time to go and I was standing in front of the mirror, fully ready by appearance to blend in the world of rich and beautiful I hated so much, an impish idea grew in my mind.

That was it. The gazes of absolutely EVERYONE were resting upon me. So here I was, standing on the top of the stairs, below me a sea of finely dressed lords and ladies. 'Who is she?' I heard the whispers. 'Who let her in?' came to my ears from another direction. And one, almost hysterically voiced gasp: 'Somebody call the police!'. Faces stared in horror, disbelief and clear displeasure at... a simple girl in the plain and a bit tattered workhouse uniform. A girl I used to be before my father had married money and title. An example of a poor person, a commoner they all dreaded so much, while pretending they cared. Oh, how I despised all that double-faced and lazy upper class; people who couldn't find their own backside without the help of a servant. Seeing the effect of my little joke on them I couldn't stop a triumphant smile. Yes, that felt like the best day of my life – at least so far. But when I noticed half a dozen strongly-built men hurriedly coming in my direction, I decided it's time to run.

'Hey, wait!' someone shouted after me when I was already on the outer stairs. It didn't sound unfriendly, so I stopped and turned. To my astonishment I saw young Edward; he was out of breath after running.

'Yes?' I asked, my voice pure ice.

'I recognized you' he said, smiling. 'That was a jolly good joke, you really cocked a snook at all these stiff dummies there. You will be the talk of the town for months!'

'Thank you for appreciation sir' I said in only a slightly mocking way. 'Is that all?'

'Wait! I wanted to ask... You are bricky* girl, you really are. Would you like... Would you like to play tennis sometimes? With me?' he added almost pleadingly.

I looked at his face, full of cheap charm, and at first I wished, oh, wished so hard, to punch it. Then I just felt pity.

'Maybe I would if you weren't one of these stiff dummies yourself' – I burst into laughter, turned and ran away. With every hastily taken step I felt lighter and lighter. He was calling something again but I did not care to listen; the wind in my ears muffled the sound. Just when I reached home and looked down at my feet I realized that what Edward was shouting, was: 'You little fool! You lost your shoe! I'll bring it to you tomorrow!'

* Victorian slang word for 'brave', 'bold'



Red beanie, red flag

There were no birds singing overhead, but who would wonder? Old fashioned birds, which survived the radiation, were scarce, and spent more of their miserable lives on hiding from their predatory, mutated cousins, than singing. Whole forest seemed quiet but tense at the same time, like if space filled with grey leaved trees was a sentient being, awaiting for something. But maybe it was just her imagination. She was on fairly neutral ground and shouldn't meet any of the imperial hunters, unless a very lost and desperate one. Her task seemed pretty easy then.

Suddenly, she felt a cold touch of steel on her temple. Before she reacted as she normally would when someone pressed a gun to her head, she heard slightly shaky voice, saying:

'Red riding'.

'Blue moon' – almost an automated reply escaped her lips. The pressure of steel disappeared and she quickly turned around. Standing behind her was a skinny, young man of medium height, dressed in worn out grey-green clothes. In fact, he was all looking worn out and tired. But who wasn't tired in these difficult times?

'Oh, so it's you. You're supposed to take me to Gran. D.'s hideout', her words were

more of a statement than a question.

'Yes. I recognized you easily from the sign'. He gestured towards her head, and she quickly pulled down that ridiculous red beanie the Quarters made her wear on that particular mission. 'Do you have it? Is it safe?' enquired the young man, but didn't even let her answer. 'Don't show it to me! Don't show it to anyone, except from Gran D.! It's not safe here anymore, nowhere is! They're saying even...', his voice lowered almost to a whisper. 'They're saying that BBW himself is in that area, and that he's after the Disk too..!'

The girl's heart almost jumped on hearing these words, but she tried not to show her momentary feeling of fear. BBW, known also as 'The Wolf', the most feared agent of the Empire, could be somewhere around? The rumours surrounding his actions and his true identity sometimes seemed almost fantastic, but one thing was certain: he was the most trusted man of the current Emperor, and most declared enemy to anyone from the Resistance movement.

'The sooner I'll deliver the Disk, the better' she decided. 'Lead on!'

'What? No way! I'm not going with you, I'm only going to show you the way.'

'But the Headquarters said...'

'Damn that Headquarters!' burst the man, his fear almost forming a scent in the already tense air. 'It was supposed to be an easy mission! I don't want to be killed by Wolf, I'm getting out of here!'

And he went quickly in a direction opposite to the one shown to her. She sighed, made sure that the precious Disk is still with her, and moved down the path.

Her fingers played a simple, arranged melody on the dry wood. A muffled voice from the inside bid her to enter. As soon as she crossed the entrance to the semi-dark, dust-smelling room, she knew that something was very wrong. Since childhood she was sensitive to the odour of death, but this place was simply reeking of that horrible smell. Slowly, she took out her gun, and proceeded carefully towards the human shape, which was partly hidden in the shade of the wall.

'Gran D.?' she asked, her voice a bit faltering.

'Of course, dearie', she heard the answer said in a female voice. 'Now, be a good girl and hand me over this, what you brought here.'

'Come to the light first!' said the girl firmly, and to her amazement, she heard an outburst of the loud, male laughter. In a voice strangely familiar.

'Well done! I knew you will be much more clever, than this old hag', emerging from the shady corner was the Resistance agent, who some time ago showed her the way. There was no trace of fear on his face now, it was replaced by an almost animal-like, amused smile.

'Why are you looking so surprised, my pretty friend? Do you know why you are still alive? Why the Disk is not in my hand yet? I know a lot about you, and I must say, you are very promising. I want to give you a chance of a lifetime; you can give the Disk to the Emperor by yourself.'

The mention of the Emperor and this wolfish smile suddenly brought her back from the dumbfounded state and her brain set to the feverish work. She stood almost no chances; young girl in the beginning of her training, versus the best trained, legendary

agent. And yet she felt an excitement taking hold of her and adrenaline running through her veins. She was not going to give up without a fight! She did aim her gun at him, which only widened his smile. She moved slowly to a different spot, her hands still outstretched and holding the weapon.

'That's cute, but I'm afraid I must ask you to drop it', said the man. These were the words she was waiting for. She threw the gun in seemingly aimless way, and when his eyes automatically followed it, she reached for a medium size bowl, made of some sort of stone, lying in the chosen spot, and gathering all the strength of her trained arms, she threw it at her opponent. She managed to hit him in the stomach, and when the man bent down in pain, she jumped, reached for her gun and shot him in the head.

She stood a few more minutes, holding the dead body on the point of the gun, half expecting it to stand up and maul her to death. She couldn't believe it, why was this so easy? She searched the little hut and found the body of the poor Gran. D. Apparently, the woman was taken surprised during her meal: broken bottle of cheap wine and trampled cake served as an evidence.

The girl searched the body of the BBW and found some strange device, the size of a pen. When she toyed with it, trying to find out its' purpose, she pressed some shiny metal buttons and suddenly realized that her hands look quite masculine, and the clothes resemble those worn by agent. There was no mirror around to make sure, but she felt that she just found out the secret of the Wolf's success. Shape-changing device. And apparently working on the DNA samples, with quite rich database formed already.

She quickly run to the recently deceased agent and took a sample of his genetic material. When she'll bring it to the Headquarters, she will surely get promoted. But... She suddenly felt very tired. Tired and disgusted. She looked at two dead bodies. Best of the best agents from both sides. One caught unguarded and unprepared, another killed by the teenage girl. What was the point of this stupid war anyway, if both sides were too much indulging in self-importance to actually do their job properly? This way no-one will ever win and the fight will go on forever. Unless... She suddenly smiled, feeling the well-known and welcomed rush of adrenaline. Instead of changing back to her own shape, she left the hut as the Wolf, and instead of turning south, towards the Headquarters, she went north, where the capital of the Empire lied. She was clutching the newly found device in her pocket. So many possibilities. So many thrones to claim. So many lands awaiting her rule. Some truly exciting time has just begun..!



Sorry, I am fully booked!

Once upon a time (although closer to our timeline than to dinosaurs), in a kingdom far, far away (still within the borders of Europe), lived a princess. She was beautiful as default, as any princess from a story must look good. To be honest, she wouldn't win many followers on Instagram by her charms nowadays, but royal blood can be a beauty enhancer better than botox and liposuction together.

The princess was strange. She wasn't dreaming about a prince. She wasn't uttering heavy sighs of melancholic fashion while combing her long, brown hair. She even refused to stand in the window and sing about wanting more from life; although her royal father constantly encouraged her to do so. Servants were encouragingly opening the window in her chamber; even placing soft pillows on the sill, for her royal elbows. Her father's knights on the courtyard below her window waited in a nervous state of anticipation, ready to join in chorus if the princess would decide to sing. But she wouldn't - and the reason behind it: she had better things to do.

What the princess loved was books. She did not simply read them, she devoured them. The more she read, the more hungry she got. It is not clear who exactly taught her

how to read (most probably her old nanny, but who had taught HER - that remains a mystery). It is enough to say that she was spending all her time on reading, instead of, as any self-respecting princess should do, on looking for husband. Her father tried to take on the task himself, of course. Many princes, dukes and lords were visiting the castle, especially that the clever king was promising quite a handsome dowry. Sadly, after just a few minutes of polite conversation with the princess, most of the princes, dukes and lords suddenly remembered that they have forgotten about their appointment to the blacksmith to pick up a new armour. Or they forgot to pay for parking, and had to rush to avoid getting their horse clamped. Or... They were crafty in making excuses, and princess in spotting a fool when she'd seen one. And in showing clearly the intellectual gap between her and him.

One day everything has changed. The King and Queen (yes, she was alive, just not exactly kicking) finally had lost their patience. Their daughter was close to the ripe age of twenty five. Who will marry her? Not to mention that her room was more than demanded by their older son, or rather by the dozen of his kids. It wasn't a big castle (or a big country), so difficulties on the property market were worse than you can imagine.

Anyway, the king found the solution that pleased him and seemed to be solving the problem: the tower. He was counting on the fact that from the heights of a tall tower it is hard to hold a conversation. The princess was sent packing and the only thing left to sort out was some ferocious beast to guard her. It couldn't be too ferocious of course, as at least one of the knights must succeed in the end. Luckily, the king managed to find on the local black market of beasts a dragon just to suit his needs. It was big as a house and as stupid as a moulded cheese.

The day of departure arrived. The princess, guarded by twelve knights, stepped into a coach. Her royal mother waved nearly-white handkerchief, her royal father rubbed his own hands, appreciating his own genius. Her royal nieces and nephews started the mad race for the empty room before the coach door even closed. Life in the castle went back to normal (only knights on the courtyard seemed to be more relaxed).

Meanwhile, the princess was travelling on a bumpy road to meet her destiny. The beginning wasn't too encouraging at all. The tower was in quite a devastated state; full of dust, junk and suddenly evicted bats. Knights helped their lady to get inside, brought in her baggage (heavy! Books have their weight!) and after bidding quick goodbye they run back to their small but cosy castle. Probably their hasty departure was rushed by the sight of a great winged creature approaching.

Once completely alone, the princess decided to arrange her new abode. After lots of sweeping, dusting and decorating, the place started to look almost comfortable. Then, paradoxically, sweet freedom had began.

The princess could now read as much as she wanted. No complaints, no nagging, no bothering. She was spending all her days in bed, with a story in one hand and some snacks from her supplies in the other. The only nuisance in this seemingly perfect life were princes, dukes and lords on noble quests to save her.

Every now and then she would hear the sound of a horse rider approaching. Then some male voice would call her to look at its owner through the window - to give him the chance of seeing her fair face before he will challenge the death itself. This way they wanted to make sure the game is worth it. But as there's no better beauty enhancer than royal blood AND great distance matched with poor visibility, knights would usually proceed to the dragon.

The beast was not only as big as a house and as stupid as a moulded cheese - it was also as cruel as a cat. It was clearly seeing its opponents as tinned mice, and treated them accordingly. The princess sometimes watched; from the heights of her tower she had a splendid view indeed. SHE wasn't cruel, not really. It is just hard to live on literature only. One sometimes needs a different type of entertainment, to relieve mind filled with serious matters. And Netflix wasn't invented yet.

But one day everything started in a completely different manner. Instead of a typical sound of a horseman approaching, the princess heard a loud thud noise. It came from the roof of her tower, and soon the author of the noise appeared in front of her. He. Was. Gorgeous. His golden hair bounced softly when he slipped swiftly inside through the opened window. He fell heavily in front of her on his knees, raised his head, and his blue eyes twinkled with... surprise? Slight disappointment? Whatever it was, it took him only a second to compose and to bring a dreamy smile on his perfectly shaped face.

'Oh, my lady!' he exclaimed taking her hand in his strong palm. 'Let us run from this cursed place and find happiness of freedom in the peaceful haven of my father's land!'

'Yes, why not?' answered the princess quite meekly, staring into a pair of the most blue eyes in the world. 'But why such a hurry?' she added as the knight picked her up and rushed towards the window. He did not have to answer. The mighty roar of the stupid and cruel creature, complaining in its own way about someone not playing by the rules, served as a perfect answer.

'You did not slay the dragon?' enquired the princess, freeing herself from the knight's arms. She, like the dragon, felt tricked. Anyone can do it this way, slip in, steal the girl and run away, like a common thief. She told it to the knight. He wasn't even offended. Instead, seemingly proud with himself, he presented her with his cunning plan. It involved a trapped dragon, burning tower and the two of them riding towards

the sunset. His plan had one weak point, which she, with her swift reasoning, spotted very quickly.

‘Wait, wait. Burning tower, roasted dragon, I understand it all. But... what about my books?’ she gestured towards the heaps of literature surrounding them.

‘My lady, with all respect... leave all that rubbish. What will you need it for when you become a lady at my side?’

The heart of the princess seemed to skip a beat. Then, after composing herself, she produced some tiny package from one of the pockets of her dress (she always preferred the practical look over the fashionable one, so her gown had many handy pockets). She handed it to the knight with a whispered promise, that she’ll share with him a secret.

The setting sun was painting the whole area in warm tones. The nearby lake was looking like a pool of liquid gold. Tops of the trees seemed to be on fire. The sun also played with a polished helmet, now empty, lying on the ground. Next to it golden sparks had a real playground, chasing each other on the massive body covered in shiny armor of scales. The princess (whose name by the way, was Sophie) stretched her arms and looked in self appreciation at the dead dragon. The other body sadly wasn’t visible anymore. The fool believed in a magic potion increasing power and bravery. He drank the content of the small bottle quite readily, which made her laugh internally. The next part was easy - she left it entirely to the dragon. The stupid beast consumed a poisoned tinned mouse this time. They deserved each other; one holding her prisoner, another intending to burn her books. Anyway, she was free now. The world lost one imprisoned princess, but gained one learned Sophia. And invited her to explore it to her heart content.