

The day I got that old ugly, dirty, crinkled, cardboard box was not average. I had gone to school and then to the pottery lab and then I was on my way home. It was too windy that day, annoyingly so actually. My dark brown, almost black, curly, shoulder length hair was blowing all over the place, making a huge snarled mess of my head. A giant gust of wind and snow cut through me, chilling me to my bones, blinding me with my thick hair. While I was trying to resituate myself I guess I wasn't paying attention to where I was walking. Next thing I knew I heard an engine roaring and felt like every bone in my body had been pulverized. My lungs and heart froze, unable to breath or move.

I had only caught a glimpse of the person driving. It was a woman with straight brown hair, dark aviator sunglasses, a cigarette hung from her hand, glowing a soft orange. As she drove away the car swerved a little and she tossed a medium sized box out the window of the large white Ford truck and screamed at me, "It's your problem now!" I felt blood trickle down my head and my vision was streaked with red. Kind of fitting to die seeing red when that was my name, Red. My mother loved the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* so much that she decided to call me Red. Yeah, I know it's a little weird, but I like it.

I tried to get up but as a burning sensation started through my body and quickly turned into a searing hot pain, making me fall back to the ground. You're probably wondering why she didn't stop after hitting me? I'm sorry to say I don't have an answer yet. I'm still wondering what is in that box too. Other than that you probably want to know what happened next. It was late to be out, around eight, and it was winter, so not many people were out. After about five minutes of helpless intense pain of laying on the ground, a dedicated jogger, all geared up, found me. I was surprised that I didn't at least pass out or die before then. When this woman started talking I wished I were dead.

She kept assuring me that I was going to be all right and called 911 to come pick me up. This woman was beautiful. She was tall and had her long wavy blonde hair tied into a ponytail, those kind of grey blue eyes that sparkle and light tan skin. She had a lot of great looks but, damn, was she noisy. Clearly she has eyes in her head but somehow I think she lacked to see that I was lying in a pool of my own blood and in a great deal of pain. In a loud excited and slightly horrified voice she kept asking me, "What happened?" and "How?"

I tried to explain it to her as I struggled to breathe and make my mouth open and close. Then finally the whole kit and caboodle of ambulances, fire trucks, and police cars got there to save me from her--and from dying I guess.

Now here I am lying on a crisp white hospital bed with sheets like paper. The walls are that pale yellowish you see at every other hospital and doctors office. Supposedly these pastel colors are supposed to be soothing but I'm not sure it's working. I'm wrapped in rolls and rolls of gauze bandages barely able to move and that noisy woman somehow thinks because of what happened we are now "like totally best friends" and I feel very frustrated not soothed. Almost three months passed since I got hit and she came by with flowers or balloons every day and I learned her name was Dagmar. She also made me take her phone number just in case I needed anything. And here she is again talking my ear off. I never really listen to what she is saying. I just nod every once in a while.

Then I realized she had that box. She noticed me looking at it and said in a wondering kind of way, "I found this box by you. I wasn't sure if it was yours but I thought I would bring it anyway. So what's in it?" As always, she was such a nosey creature. Although I still didn't know what was inside. I supposed I should find out. I took the box from her; it was surprisingly light. I opened the box and it was quite anticlimactic because all it held was a blood red sheet of paper. At first I thought it was just a pretty piece of paper, but then I turned it over to see a drawing of a rather realistic severed hand, which was kind of gross but intriguing. On the top of the hand there were six pin head sized spots. If you were to play connect the dots with this you would find the mystery picture to be about one inch in the shape of a hexagon. That truck driver said it was my problem now. Whatever the reason, I wonder why she didn't want it.

"Wow, that's creepy. Did you draw it?" Dagmar breathed out into my ear.

I jumped a little because I had forgotten she was there. "Huh? Oh, no, I didn't draw it. The person that hit me with their trunk threw it out the window and screamed something about it being my problem now." I said in a matter of fact kind of voice. "I'm kind of tired so I think I'm going to go to sleep." I yawned trying to sound tired, but I wasn't. I just didn't want to have Dagmar around anymore.

"Alright, call me tomorrow when you get out!" she chirped cheerfully as she trotted out of my little yellow patient room. I kept looking at this picture hoping that somehow it might come to life and give me some answers. At that moment it was just my luck because the paper

did “come to life,” but not in the sense you are probably thinking. It didn’t jump out of my hands and start walking and talking. The red pigment faded into the center and so did the picture of the hand revealing the page to now be a plain white. When all the color had vanished the same pattern in the same orientation appeared on the paper and the outline of a hand with its fingers spread out. I felt compelled to put my hand inside the outline and soon found that might not have been the smartest idea. It’s like when a little kid sees something that says “do not touch” and they just have to touch it.

The spots that were on the paper slowly appeared in the same place on my hand. I was a little freaked out but still more curious about my new “tattoo”. As I lifted my hand to my face the paper I was still holding spontaneously burst into flames and instantly turned to a thin ash upon combustion. I was hoping for answers to all this and all I got are these hand dots and a pile of ash in my lap. Disappointed with my results I realized people would be wondering how all this ash got here. I better clean this up and get ready to leave I thought because I was not staying another night in this hospital.

I scooped the ash into the small standard waste bin by my bed and got out of that horribly uncomfortable gown. I’m just letting you know now that if you ever go to a hospital insist that you have to wear the clothes you are wearing not only because those gowns feel like sandpaper but also because of the embarrassing cut down the back. I’m just not the kind of person that feels I need to show off my butt to the world. Dagmar was actually helpful for once instead of bringing me pointless flowers and balloons she got me a new pair of black skinny jeans and a long sleeve navy blue shirt. I put them and my coat on, grabbed my back pack, and went to the checkout desk.

Finally I was standing outside breathing in the frigid air of freedom. The weather was still a little chilly but most of the snow had melted. My apartment wasn’t that far from the hospital, only a couple of miles so I decide to walk. It was pleasant. Quiet.

I got my key from the key chain on my backpack. The deadbolt on the door unlocked with that familiar *chu-chunck* sound that I missed. My apartment door still had that squeak to it that I had grown accustomed to and I walked inside. I took off my shoes and coat and threw my backpack to the corner near the door. At the hospitals they have yellow walls but I personally find an orangey-red color to be the most soothing, which was the color of my walls. I walked into the kitchen to find something edible unlike the hospital food. The stove said that it was 8:30

PM. I took a frozen mac and cheese out of the freezer and popped it in the microwave for ten minutes. After it was done I sat on the couch looking out the window eating the creamy goodness of noodles and cheese.

I lost track of time and fell asleep. I woke up again and looked at the clock on the small side table. It said 11:59 PM. I should probably get in my bed I thought. It'll be more comfortable there. I walked to my room and paused in front of the mirror. My vision became distorted and everything turned into a marbled blur. When things returned to normal everything looked too bright and big. I tried to look at the mirror but found that I was now below it. I figured I must have fainted or something but when I tried to move I clumsily tripped over myself.

In a moment of terror when I look down I begin to back pedal my steps furiously because the legs I saw were not those of a human. I noticed that the legs were following me and I tried to scream but I could not vocalize anything. Then a thought occurred to me that those were my legs and I had eight of them! What happened?! How?! Wow, I'm starting to sound like Dagmar. I moved all of my little eight legs as fast as I could to get to the mirror. I crawled up on the wall and onto the mirror. I looked at my reflection and saw six beady black eyes staring back at me. My body was covered in tannish and grey bristles. The top of my little jumping spider head was red and so was my abdomen.

Now I really did look like little red riding hood, but a spider version. My spider legs were striped and my spider fangs were the metallic colors of yellow and pink mixed. Well would you look at that, who knew that spiders could see in color. That's not what I should be thinking! How am I supposed to turn back into a human! It's all because of that paper! Now that I think about it I'm sure that my Grandmother, Baba Yaga, could help me get out of this mess. She's kind of scary looking and acting too at that, but she is quite informed when it comes to black magic and such. And that is the start of my own journey to my grandmother's house through the woods.