

THE RED GODDESS

The pass lay in the northern California Mountains at an elevation of 3,112 feet. This is where she was born on a hot August morning, in the brush at the bottom of the pass. Her newborn voice crackled softly as she absorbed the morning heat. Hunger soon set in. She spread her red-blushed arms and grasped the surrounding shrubbery. Devouring it, her strength increased.

A hot gust of wind blew her arms against the hill that rose before her. Her body widened as she crept upward, struggling desperately to gain more ground. Then the most natural and wonderful idea came to her. She stretched an arm out and shot a hot ember over the brush. It landed 6 yards away and quickly went aflame.

The Red Goddess crawled to it, embraced it, and knew now that this was the way to grow. She roared with delight and cracked the air with her energy. More, she must grow more. She reached her arms out and shot embers in every direction. She joined them, and soon covered the entire hillside.

An icy pain—a portion of her body—destroyed!

Above her, figures sailed high in the sky. They again dropped something cold. More of her body, destroyed. She spread herself around in such a way that her smoke billowed heavily. The Red Goddess roared fiercely as the sky turned black.

They were gone. She felt no more of their coldness.

Reaching the hillside's crest, she saw what she did not understand. She could not possibly know what a four-lane highway was, vehicles racing in two different directions. She studied the treetops on the far side of the highway. To reach them she knew what she had to do.

The Red Goddess shot embers onto the highway's pavement. Others struck vehicles, some bursting into flame. She gathered all the strength she could muster and pulled herself up to the highway, grasped an ignited vehicle and consumed it. Keep going, she told herself. Yes, stretch and leap to the next vehicle, confident now that she would spread herself to the trees.

Ghostly figures appeared in the smoky haze. The Red Goddess felt a freezing pain as she lost one of her arms. Drivers with extinguishers continued their attack. She had met her enemies; she knew them now. With renewed energy she wrapped herself around the biggest thing she could find. She knew not what it was, did not know it was an 18-wheeler carrying hazardous material. It exploded and her enemies fled from her wrath.

The Red Goddess was now well over a 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit and felt the power of her existence. Pushing forward to the far side of the highway, she consumed the treetops and drove her way downward into the valley, spreading herself wider, temperature increasing. Her arms flailed to a height of nearly 90 feet.

Before long, the entire valley was aflame, and the dense smoke continued to rise against the enemy. Leaving the valley, she climbed the mountain she faced. She did not know that she now covered 10 square miles. Upon reaching the mountaintop, her enemies scurried about their structures, while vehicles sprayed her with their coldness. She had not yet won, and refused to give up.

From her arms she flung hundreds of embers. The homes soon ignited, and the vehicles retreated. At 2,000 degrees she blanketed the mountaintop with her orange-red body, and she pushed on.

A town lay a long way down the other side of the mountain. She knew it belonged to her enemies, knowing now what their structures looked like. Her body spread wider and grew to

over 20 square miles.

Once at the edge of town the Red Goddess halted and gathered her strength. She then took her outermost arms and wrapped the sides of the town. When encircled, she drove forward and set everything aflame.

The evacuation of the town had already begun. Business owners fled their burning shops. Bankers fled as their money sailed as ash on the fiery winds. While the religious devout cried out to the heavens as if it were judgment day.

End of Excerpt