

# RED MOON

**RACHEL ANDERSON**

'Innovative and daring' BOOKS FOR KEEPS

# RED MOON

五洲图书公司  
RACHEL ANDERSON



Hodder  
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**TALES  
FROM  
SCHOOL**



## **Hamish and the Blood-sausage Butcher**

Hamish was not like other boys. There were six reasons why.

1. He never played football. 2. His father was a knotty Scot. 3. His mother couldn't cook to save her life. 4. He suffered from asthma. 5. He had no friends. 6. He always handed in his homework on time.

One morning, near the lock-up shops on Paragon Parade, something occurred which confirmed that peculiar things happened to him that didn't happen to everybody.

His route was blocked by metal barriers. Red and white striped tape, marked Do Not Enter Do Not Enter Do Not Enter, stretched between them. The surly woman who ran the launderette was leaning on the metal barrier as though she was waiting to watch a horse race.

'If them bastards won't let an honest citizen open up

her Washeteria, I'm blowed if I'm hanging round here all morning while they make up their minds,' she muttered.

Who were the carrion she was referring to? There wasn't a soul about, though Mr Joel must have already arrived for his metal shutter was unlocked and half up. The bookie, the estate agent's and the DIY never opened before nine.

'*Who* won't make up their minds?'

'It'll be the foreigners again, won't it? Creating trouble for the rest of us who pay our way. So I'm off back to my burrow for the day. And if you take my advice, you'll do the same.'

'I have to go to school,' said Hamish reasonably.

'Suit yourself. But you don't want to get yourself mixed up in their sort of trouble. You should see some of the things those women bring in to wash. What they wear under their big drapes is no mystery to me, I can tell you.' And she waddled away.

Hamish remained resolutely by the barrier. He'd been off school with another respiratory attack yet had, nonetheless, completed his homework. He must hand it in in time for it to be awarded the grades he knew he deserved. Despite his disability he was no dingbat.

If he squeezed round the barrier he could sidle rapidly down the pavement. However, what if the

closure of the thoroughfare was for a sound reason? Gas leak? Unexploded bomb? MP's visit? His life had, so far, been uneventful apart from asthma attacks. He could think of no further excuses for closing off a pedestrian street.

He'd have to go to the bus stop by the alternative route. Go back three blocks, skirt round the park, scary territory ruled by slurred drunks and aggressive ne'er-do-wells (as his father called them). Anticipating the long walk made him reach nervously for his inhaler. He could become breathless from overexertion before he'd even moved a muscle.

A dark-uniformed figure was suddenly crouching beside him. The top half of its face was hidden behind the visor of a helmet. 'Get down! Get back! Get down!'

Having a mouth order you about when you can't see the eyes is spooky. Hamish obeyed. Immediately, a whole team of them leaped out of nowhere. All in riot gear, fatigue pants, big boots, body-protection vests, leather gauntlets, visored helmets. Like a streak of navy-blue lightning, they ran along the pavement to the butcher's.

The leader clicked some quiet commands, then shouted that whoever was hiding inside was to come out. Hamish saw Mr Joel raise his arms. In alarm, or surrender? It was hard to see through the metal shutter.

Mr Joel was a mild, old-fashioned butcher. He prepared all his own sausages, black puddings, chopped-liver-and-herb faggots, pressed muzzle, marinade tripe, chitterlings. Some mornings, Hamish saw him struggle in with the sides of beef, half lambs, bags of pigs' blood for making the blutwurst. Hamish wasn't a vegetarian so he didn't mind. The only item he couldn't bear was the lungs, white and flaccid, reminding him of his own feeble organs. If the butcher spotted Hamish, he would dart out with a gift.

'For you, mein herr! See, such just a tiny smidgeon! To munch on your motorbus! To keep strong your brains.' And he would hold out a sample of that day's speciality sausage on a wooden toothpick. Mr Joel was always pressing. It was impossible to refuse his gift, even though it meant going to school with pork grease leaking through the lining of his blazer pocket.

But today, no free samples. Mr Joel stood, hands up inside his shop while, with a cacophony like clanging bells, the raiders rammed at the front shutter with an instrument like the barrel of a cannon. They dented it but failed to force it up so swarmed under like blue ferrets.

Hamish was squatting by the barrier, stupefied as a dog in a thunderstorm, when the team swaggered out.

Now their visors were pushed back. Hamish saw happy eyes, smiles of satisfaction.

‘So. Nothing,’ one said with a grin. ‘False lead. Ha ha.’

The leader snapped commands into the radio-stick clipped to his helmet. The heavyman lifted the battering ram lightly onto his shoulder like a woodsman bringing home a log for the hearth, and the team trotted off like children playing Down into the Dingly Dell. At the end of the street their transport van nosed round the corner. They scrambled in and were gone. The whole escapade was through in minutes. The grey parade was quiet.

Hamish crept to the butcher’s. The shutter hung lopsided. Hamish dipped under.

Mr Joel stood, hands limp, in his wrecked shop, shaking his head. The mirror behind the counter was cracked. Hamish saw his own misaligned reflection and behind it, distorted chaos. The cold-store door at the back swung open. Half sides of pig, sheep, cow, dragged from their hooks in the cool dark, lay like savaged victims on the floor. A stainless-steel trayful of lambs’ livers slid along the sloping shelf, clattered to the sawdust. Hamish jumped, too late to avoid the crimson splatter.

‘What’s going on?’ he asked.

The butcher shrugged. 'Indeed, what? Perhaps an erroneous betrayal? One customer is not liking my blood sausage? He tried to spill the beans. He spilled the meat.' Mr Joel smiled at his little joke.

Hamish said, 'Seriously, what were they looking for?'

'Turks. Always searching for the Turks.'

'Why here?'

'How am I knowing this? Nobody is knowing the names of the sans-papiers. They work like slaves in Germany, these poor lonesome men speaking no German, then hope it is better here. The authorities like to poke the thumb at me because I speak German and make good blutwurst.'

Mr Joel's use of English could be as unusual as Hamish's mother's. Sometimes, when Anne-Marie came with Hamish to buy a slice of black pudding, she would unconsciously break into Alsace dialect with Mr Joel, leaving Hamish bemused.

'The authorities think I store Turkish delights here! Can they not see that I have no free spaces in my cold-store for men-meat? I have space only for animal-flesh. And what is all this doing for my business?'

'But Mr Joel, they'll pay you? For the damage?'

'Reparations! For broken hinges and much lost flesh. So what compensation for lost customers?' He picked up a cloth and made as if to wipe a shelf but



instead wiped his forehead. Then, from a glass jar which had not been shattered, he fished out a gherkin, brown and warty as a toad. He presented it to Hamish.

‘For you. For your friendly face in time of despair. Youth is the hope for the future.’

With the minty taste of toothpaste still in his mouth, mingling now with the acid of shock, Hamish couldn’t even pretend to eat the gherkin. ‘Bit early for a snack. I’ll save it for later. Thank you.’

‘Bitte schön.’

Hamish picked up a paper napkin from the pile which used to sit neatly beside the gherkin jar but now lay scattered on the floor. He folded the gherkin into it and slid it into his pocket to join the slice of blutwurst from last week.

Mr Joel took a clean apron from a plastic pack and tied it on. ‘So off you canter now, young man, to your teachers to become wise and save the sad world for me.’

Hamish hurried to his bus stop with a thundering heart. He stood in the queue. As the crowded bus approached, he realized that his white shirt and grey trousers were splattered with crimson as though he had been involved in a violent stabbing incident. Nobody drew attention to the blood-stains. They were scrabbling to maintain their places in the surge to