

“It should be cool enough to grab now.” Cam whispered to his tiny companion, a chipmunk perched on its hind legs atop the boulder he hid behind. Both boy and rodent eyed the delicious prize held by the log cabin some twenty yards away, a freshly baked pie on its window sill.

The great pastry rose over the rim of its cast iron pan, perfectly browned crust nearly overflowed with whatever sugary jams and fruits the the enemy had decided to fill it with. Steam that floated above the treat had finally dissipated within the breeze, a signal to Cam it was ready to be snatched.

Cam hoped it was filled with berries, mixed-berry pie was Dido’s favorite.

The boy’s wardrobe aided his cover; he wore dark brown trousers and the long-sleeved green button down shirt his great aunt had gifted him for special dinners, his brown cap for school covered his pitch black hair as a finishing touch. The burglar remained careful however no matter the amount of camouflage aiding him.

Cam’s bright green eyes focused on the cabin’s singular window, waiting and watching to confirm its occupant’s whereabouts before commencing his plot. His olive brown fingers fidgeted with the carvings strewn about the boulder’s surface, carvings of animals transitioning into humanoid figures. Cam was unaware of the story depicted by the ruin even after it had been explicitly taught in Ms. Hamilton’s history lessons earlier that week. He liked history class, it was perfect for day dreaming.

The chipmunk squeaked and it’s little tail flicked with aggressive alarm. Movement! Movement in the main window! Cam made sure to crouch lower behind the rock as much as he could while maintaining his view of the window.

Mister Bromley, a gigantic man in both height and width, eclipsed the view Cam once had inside the cabin. The man placed his palms on either side of the window sill, with pie tucked snuggled between his thumbs, and leaned over to poke his head outside the window. The sill’s wood creaked under the goliath’s weight. Purples and reds stained Bromley’s shirt, the man could have been mistaken for a

butcher, but those purples and reds were not from an animal.

The pie was mixed berry!

Cam ducked fully behind the boulder, sacrificing his view for safety from Bromley's glare which found Cam's rodent companion on the boulder. The chipmunk flattened its ears, uneasy with Bromley's leer, before deciding to flick its tail and wash its face with its front paws - as natural chipmunks do.

Bromley grunted with a vague sneer and moved on his stare from the chipmunk, carefully examining each rectangular boulder that dotted his property, even squinting for anything in the distant tree-line for any perpetrators looking to pilfer the sweet magnum opus resting at his window.

The too large man had had many pastries stolen that week: a raspberry cake, a loaf of pumpkin bread, two pumpkin muffins, and two lemon tarts.

The lemon tarts proved to be Bromley's last straw as their making required special attention. And not only were lemons rare, they had been gifted by his mother!

Nobody was taking this pie.

Another creak of the window's sill alerted Cam the coast had cleared. The boy peeked over the boulder and confirmed the man had withdrawn from the window to continue his afternoon chores.

Cam briefly wondered how a sour man made such sweet creations.

"Okay," Cam whispered to the chipmunk who flicked its tail with adrenaline, having been subjected to Bromley's intimidation. "Just as we planned, you distract while I get away with the package. Ready?"

The chipmunk gave a squeak accompanied with a single nod.

"Good. Go. And wait for my signal."

The chipmunk repeated a squeak of confirmation before hopping from the boulder and disappearing into the surrounding grass. A trail of green blades rustled in zigzag formation until the head of it hit a nearby tree, in which the chipmunk subsequently scampered up the trunk.

During his companions ascent, Cam ducked and weaved between the boulders closer and

closer to Bromley's bakery. The boy would pop his head up with each new boulder to be certain Bromley didn't decide to return watch. Mama had already been confronted by Ms. Hamilton for Cam's poor test scores, the last thing her stress needed was for him to be caught as a thief of sweets.

Cam had reached the final boulder before the bakery, and with a deep breath, he dove and rolled over the grass in one great leap to find himself underneath Bromley's window sill.

Cam giggled to himself, elated he pulled off the jump he practiced all afternoon.

Busy sounds of dish washing within the cabin snapped Cam back into focus.

Like a frog ready to jump, Cam crouched beneath the window with his legs wide and his palms on the grass. He took another deep breath of preparation, then lifted his hands from the ground and waved them wildly below the window sill.

Cam heard a distant crow cawing behind him. The continued cawing became louder, and louder, until the bird flew through Cam's view in a black blur of an instant into the bakery.

"Don't think 'yer gettin' away this time!" Bromley shouted from within the bakery as the crow cawed and waved its wings in distraction just as planned. On cue, Cam leapt upward and snatched the pie from the window sill in one motion.

"~Ah!" Cam sharply inhaled through the corner of his mouth. The iron pan the pie nestled in remained hot, not enough to sear skin, but enough to refuse capture. Thankfully the pie landed iron down, intact. Cam flapped his hands like a crow flapping wings to alleviate the pain. He returned to the window on his tippy toes to shout at the crow to abort, but -

"Gotcha!" Bromley yelled within the commotion of flapping wings and cawing. The mean man had scooped the crow within a bug catching net! The bird flapped and cawed with desperation, the net twisted around its rod left no opening for escape. The baker gleamed. "Finally! Now where's ye' partner?"

"Let her go!" Cam yelled from the window, propping himself up with his elbows on the sill and kicking the wall with his feet.

“You the Miller’s boy, aye? Just wait ‘till yer mother hears ye’ been materializing with one ‘a them!” Bromley shook the net, waving the poor animal around maniacally.

The crow tucked its wings into its body before curling into a ball, the bug net its hammock. Within a blink of an eye the ball of black feathers shrunk half its size and turned brown with white speckles - what unfurled was the chipmunk once more!

The chipmunk attempted to squeeze its body through a hole of the netting with no success, then decided gnawing on the thin thread was the only option.

“Oh no you don’t!” Bromley growled through gnashed teeth and shook the net once more, causing the chipmunk to lose its grip and bounce around the threaded cage.

“Stop it!” Cam shouted. “You’re hurting her!”

“Ain’t nothin’ compared to what it’ll be dealin’ with in town!”

The chipmunk squeaked and again curled itself into a ball, then grew. The ball became black and returned to the size of a crow before continuing to grow, and grow, and grow.

Bromley’s eyes widened as the weight of the net forced his strong arms to let it rest on the floor. The black ball grew shaggy fur and continued to grow even further, so much so that-

*-Crack!-*

The net had burst entirely into a shamble of wood and thread.

Bromley yelped and backed himself into a corner, because what unfurled before him snarled an enormous, black wolf!

The wolf barked at the baker, saliva oozed from its razor teeth with each growl.

Cam, eyes wide as well with disbelief, shook his head to collect his jaw from the floor. “Dido!” The boy yelled at the wolf. “Dido let’s go!” He slid down from the window sill and grabbed the pie. The wolf followed close behind, leaping out of the cabin, over the sill, and into the grass with two heavy thuds.

The pie found itself in Cam’s sleeved arms, its iron pan still warm but more forgiving. Cam

darted to the tree line, concentrating on his breath as the weight of the pie proved more threatening than the heat.

Behind him Cam heard the *thump thump, thump thump* of the wolf's sprint, and for a moment he wondered if the animal really was still his friend, whether he'd be it's lunch rather than the pie - a pie with such sugared gravity it ought to not be a very good lunch for even a boy, let alone a wolf.

But alas, the wolf quickly caught up to Cam and raced past him with a happy gallop through the trees. Adrenaline shot up the boy's back and goosebumps covered his arms, the realization of success and safety filled him with such invigoration he didn't drop the pie for the entire run.

Lucky for Cam the invigoration only waned once he made it to the destination, a collection of boulders the last edge of forest before a great cliff. Actual boulders, none with the silly carvings Ms. Hamilton drones about. Atop one sat a little girl with bright red hair and pale skin.

"Dido!" Cam trotted to the girl, out of breath and pie still in hand. "How did you do that!"

"No idea!" Dido dropped from the boulder, she wore a tattered blouse, once white but now filthy with dirt and grass stains, along with ill fitting, brown trousers tied around her waist with a simple rope.

The two met at a stone in between them that was half their height and flat, if not a little lopsided on its top, but still made good use as a table.

"That's the biggest you've ever been! And a wolf? You looked so cool!" Cam set the pie down with a metal clank.

Dido giggled. "Did you see the look on Bromley's face?"

"You almost scared me!" Cam faked a laugh. "Maybe you can go even bigger, like... a bear! Or something."

"You think so?" Dido motioned to grab a handful of pie, but stopped and pointed. "Your hands."

Cam looked at his palms, the pan's heat had turned them tender pink. "Oh, that's nothing."

“You’re burned!” Dido exclaimed and grabbed Cam’s right hand held it open. She moved her thumb over the pad of his hand. “Does that hurt?”

Cam retracted his hand from Dido’s grasp with a quick inhale through clenched teeth. “I’m fine.” Her touch hurt as much as it made him blush. His eyes darted from his hand to the horizon, then back to the pie. “Well, what are we waiting for?”

The pie’s gooey innards of purples and reds were finally revealed once Cam haphazardly snatched a random chunk from its middle. Dido’s eyes widened with the sight and smell of her absolute favorite, mixed berries. But her expression dropped while watching Cam wince each time he ate from his burnt palm.

“I wish we didn’t have to steal.” Dido murmured, brow furrowed at the pie.

“What?” Cam asked, chewing the pie in one cheek.

“You’re hurt, and he saw you. You’re going to get in trouble too! I wish we didn’t have to be trouble.”

Dido had shared this sentiment before their heist, and the plan Cam promised would go perfectly had admittedly gone anything but. Cam studied the pie for a moment and gently fidgeted with a piece of crust between his pinked fingers.

“I’ll bake a pie for you.” He stated.

“You know how to bake pie?” Her furrowed brow lifted.

“Well, no. But I can learn.” Cam took another handful of garbled pastry and stuffed it in his mouth. “I can make you all sorts of things.” He managed to say through his chewing. “That way we don’t have to steal anymore.”

Dido grinned at Cam’s declaration before finally digging into the pie for a handful. She nodded happily to herself as the berry mixture and crust melted in her mouth. Human’s did many things, mostly terrible, but without a doubt made the best food.

Cam’s pie would surely be the best of the best, whenever he’d manage to make it.

The robbers surveyed the distant horizon as they munched their prize, the cliff granted them an unmatched view of the forests and plains stretched across the distant, forbidden land. Their view made for a good excuse to gaze elsewhere as they had trouble looking at each other.

Their cheeks remained as pink as Cam's palms.