

## *Meat Pie*

Mother draped a thin gray cloak over my skeletal shoulders, and handed me a basket. “Hurry now, Red. Grandmother will be waiting.” I groaned, rolling my eyes. I lacked the enthusiasm my mother was always full of when I was visiting grandmother. With one last kiss, I was ushered out of our, forced to deliver a frail woman her medicine. Grandmother was a wrinkled old lady who never had a nice thing to say about anybody. She was called a number of colorful names by the majority of the village, including myself. It was rumored that she ate children, and was a witch who had lived alone for centuries. Despite my protests, my mother still made me visit her every week. I remember her always scaring me, with her wispy hair, and liver-spotted skin. There was always something off about her. I wasn’t the type to be scared of fairy-tales and witches, but grandmother made it feel like acid was running through my veins.

My thin cloak failed to keep me safe against the wind's brisk bite, and the falling snow made it feel like ice water was coursing inside me. One foot ahead of the other, I dragged my pathetic self to grandmother’s house, still shivering. With frost on every surface, the forest lacked it’s usual bright warm colors and frolicking animals, making it even more hostile.

I swung my woven basket at my side, which held medicine, wine, and food, beheading the few wildflowers that peeked through the frost, and crushing the few insects lounging in the shrubbery. Above me, birds sang in languages I could not understand, and the wind whispered secrets, telling me to turn back. I shivered, turning around, and seeing only trees and a dark mist that was clouding my vision. There was no turning back now. Whenever I gazed behind me, I could swear that something was right on my heels, tracking my every move. *Stop it, Red.* I

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thought. I fingered the blade under my layered brown skirt that my mother had given me, in case I ran into any trouble. *You're fine. Everything is under control.*

After what felt like a year, I finally arrived at grandmother's worn-down cottage, the paint peeling, and the windows dirty. Curtains were drawn, and there was a *Keep Out* sign hanging on her front door. There was also a tangled garden in front of her white picket fence that was covered with thorny shrubs, looking like an eerie fairy village from a story mother would tell me. I skipped through her garden, picking a single red rose, and tucked it in my hair. I then clenched my fist, and rapped at the mahogany door three times.

Her raspy voice which seemed so cold and cutting, so unfamiliar called me. "Come in darling!" I hesitated. Something wasn't right. I shook off the feeling. *Stop being so paranoid.*

Obedying her command, I pressed my perspiring palm to the wooden doorknob, twisted, and walked in. There were painted portraits on the walls, which seemed to watch me, and contrasting to the outside of the house, the interior was scrubbed spotless. I bet she could see herself in the tiles. I emptied my basket, and shoved everything in the pantry.

I then began to become more and more nervous. Why had grandmother not welcomed me yet? I began to search the home, tip-toeing into the living room. "Grandmother? I'm right here!"

I turned on my heel, and walked back into the kitchen, where the curtains were now in shreds. I could see the old woman's frail body slouched in a chair. "Grandmother! Are you alright?" Her head bobbed. She would have replied with a snarky comment by now. I ran forward, worried that somebody had killed her. Sure, I didn't like her, but I didn't want her dead!

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She suddenly turned, an old lightbulb illuminating her face. Her smile was sadistic, and her face now looked dark- almost furry. I pulled my cloak tighter around me than before, a chill running through my spine. Were the rumors about her eating children true?

“Grandmother, you’re feet! They’re huge!” She stood up, now towering over me. “And you’re much taller than before.” My voice wavered at each syllable, and my throat was starting to feel tight. I could barely get the words out of my mouth “And your teeth- they’re so long.” I fingered the dagger, hoping that I wouldn’t have to use it.

In one fluid movement, she stepped towards me, both her bony arms reaching for mine. I dodged her. Was her illness making her do this, or just her hatred of her granddaughter? I screamed as she shot towards me like a bullet, forcing me to arch my back against the counter. Her full lips pulled back, and I could see her gleaming teeth, dripping with saliva. She loomed over me, blocking all exits, and steamy canine breath blew in my face. A growl escaped her mouth, and her tongue shot out. The flower in my hair floated to the floor.

“What are you doing?” I whispered, terrified. She took a moment to formulate her answer, and I used the time to stomp on her foot with my pointy-heeled shoe. Her yowl reverberated through the kitchen, but I couldn’t feel bad. I had to run. Knocking her away, I sprinted through her hallway, and tried to pull the door open, but it was locked. I let out a screech of frustration. Looking behind me, I saw my grandmother. She ran forward, and then knocked me to the ground, twisting my legs under my body. My muscles seemed to scream at the pain, and I went limp. I tried to slap her away, but one look at those teeth made me stop. Grandmother took a swipe at me. She reached for my neck and bit. No matter how much I resisted, it was no

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use. The bite added to the collection of daggers piercing my body. The physical pain might be bearable, but the emotional blow- my own grandmother hating me would hurt more than ever. It was too much. I felt like it was all over, and began to give up. There was nothing worth fighting for.

Blood pooled in the curve of my neckbone, and I was feeling faint. Then with a jolt, I remembered my dagger. The dagger mother had given me in case I was attacked in the woods. The dagger I was going to use to stab my grandmother. *Don't feel guilty Red. She was a horrible hag who hurts others. She deserves this. Don't worry, you can do it. Be strong. Remember mother? Mother needs you.* I used my left arm to reach into my skirt pocket, while my right hand protected my face from more scratches and bites, and pulled it out. The cool feeling of the blade calmed me, told me that everything was okay. That I was strong, and could protect myself. I held it tightly, and while she was marking my skin with her long, dirty nails, drawing red lines across my snowy cheek, sunk it into her gut using all my might. Grandmother howled, like the wolf she had traded places with. She fell backwards and went limp. I shoved her off me. Her wolf form was gone. She was now a thin, naked woman, who was very much dead. I grabbed the largest kitchen knife, and beheaded her, making sure that she couldn't menace poor villagers anymore. I could see how the rumor of her eating children, and being a witch came to be. Blood stained my pearly gray cloak, and I almost felt guilty. Then I remembered how many people I was helping, and my aching neck, and didn't feel so terrible about my choice. I kicked her body away, and looked for a mop.

I proceeded to scrub the cottage clean again, and made sure that all signs of the fight were gone. Every bloodstain had to go. I kicked grandmother into a closet, and swept and dusted every

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surface of the house. I worked for hours in the kitchen, cooking a special meal for me and mother to eat when I got home, using ingredients I never would have been allowed to touch if grandmother was alive. When I was finally done, I grabbed my basket and headed back through the forest. Everything seemed so much cleaner and brighter now, even though the sun was starting to set. I could almost hear the birds singing about the new spring coming. The snow had stopped falling, and I felt warm. There was a slight bounce in my step, and I felt optimistic, even with my bitten neck and ruined cloak. Grandmother and the wolf would never hurt anybody from the village again.

When I finally got home, my mother peppered me with kisses, ignoring the fact that there were red stains on my cloak. She grabbed my basket and rummaged through it, pulling out the meat pie I baked at grandmothers.

“Why Red, this looks wonderful.” She sliced it up. The warm pie crust shone under the cozy light, and the glaze on top caused me to salivate. It was cooked to perfection, seasoned with the special spices I had found. The meat looked soft and tender, like it could melt in your mouth, a juicy, flavorful, filling. Mother was quick to grab some for herself. She handed me my plate, and without pausing to wash up or say grace, we dug right in.

“This is quite good.” Mother commented between bites. “But she tastes too much like your grandfather, don’t you think?”