

## Cherry Pie

Billy walked into the house swinging the front door shut in the loud way a child would when he was set upon by his very livid mother.

“Where have you been young man? Your grandmother phoned to tell me you never made it to her house and I have been worried sick!” She stood, fists driven into her hips and, foot tapping the floor as she tried desperately to suppress the strange mixture of feelings welling up inside her. One minute she felt angry, the next she was overjoyed that her missing son was no longer missing. “Well?”

Billy hung his head in shame, not sure where to begin. “I left for grandma’s house to take her her pie, just like every Saturday . . .”

Billy’s mother handed Billy the cherry pie she had baked for her mother and leaned down to kiss his forehead. “Hurry on to grandma’s, and don’t dawdle or the pie will get cold,” she told him.

“Yes, mother,” Billy said.

He turned from the house, making his way down the walkway to the sidewalk, being extra careful with his precious cargo. A few weeks ago Billy had become overconfident in his abilities and had dropped his grandmother’s pie. No matter how much both his mother and grandmother had comforted and made assurances that it was okay, Billy knew it wasn’t. He had been given one simple task, and he had failed at it. He was mortified and he never wanted to experience that shame again.

He looked back at the house, his mother standing smiling on the front porch, one last time before turning to his right and setting off on the walk to his grandmother’s

house. It was a short trip, just two blocks, and everyone in the neighborhood had been living there for years and years. Many had known Billy since he was a baby, and they would wave to him as he made his weekly trip to grandmother's house.

"Hello Billy," Mr. Jamison said, returning the salutation.

"Off to your grandmother's house?"

"Yes, sir," Billy said.

"Don't get lost," Mr. Jamison joked.

Billy continued walking, his purpose fixed resolutely in his mind, passed Mr. Jamison's house, passed Miss McAllister's creepy old house, to the end of the street. Billy stopped, looked both ways, and crossed the street staying well within the crosswalk lines designed for just that purpose.

As he made his way up the next street he heard a rather loud rustling noise coming from the large hedge across the street. Billy froze, remembering the time he had been riding his bike down this very street, and a mad dog leaped from that very hedge and chased Billy all the way back to his house. Billy didn't have the luxury of a bicycle at the moment. What he had was a fragrant, but cumbersome pie. If a vicious, angry dog leaped from the hedge again Billy would find no escape.

The rustling of the hedge ended abruptly as a figure, a human figure, clad all in black burst forth from the bush in a spray of twigs and leaves.

Billy had seen plenty of movies, and watched his fair share of cartoons, so he was no stranger to what he was now seeing, but never in his life did he think he would come face to face with a real, living, breathing ninja.

The ninja's glare fell on Billy, standing across the street, mouth agape and pie in hand. It moved with deadly intent, away from the hedge, quickly crossing the street, until it stood, tall and proud before Billy. Its cold, hard glare moved from Billy's face to the warm, gooey parcel clutched tightly in his little hands. It reached a hand out to take the pie from Billy who instinctively moved back a step. Its glare, impossible as it may seem, hardened even more until it seemed as if the ninja could pierce a man's heart with just a glare, and its hand moved, once again, to take Billy's grandmother's pie.

Its hand never reached the pie. Another hand, strong and quick as lightning, snatched the ninja's hand away from the pie with a vice-like grip. Here, in full armor, was a samurai. According to the movies Billy had seen, a samurai was a ninja's most hated foe, outside of pirates, of course. That's common knowledge. Billy had even seen t-shirts confirming this.

The samurai shook his head at the ninja and, with his free hand, wiggled a finger in its face as if to say, "no, no, no." The ninja twisted the arm gripped by the samurai in an attempt to break free, but the samurai held fast. The samurai's wiggling finger joined its brothers and sisters of his right hand, clenching into a righteous fist, which he slammed into the face of the ninja.

The ninja stumbled back into the street from the force of the blow, but remained on its feet. It straightened itself, proud and erect, once again. It tilted its head slightly, considering the samurai and the boy, as a hungry cat might consider the wounded mouse it had decided to toy with before it was to be devoured.

The ninja snapped its fingers, and was immediately answered by the materialization of three of its ninja brethren. The four ninjas unsheathed their swords, and moved to surround Billy and his samurai guardian.

Like a flash of lightning, the samurai pulled his katana from its sheath and set to work. He moved with the grace of a skilled dancer, his sword swinging with surgical precision, fending off the rabid ninja horde that had beset poor Billy.

Before Billy could even blink, the fight was over. The lead ninja disengaged from the fearless samurai to take stock of the situation. Its brethren lay in the road, and crumpled on the sidewalk, wounded and tired from their battle with the tireless samurai. It snapped its fingers again backing away and, just as before, its brothers dragged themselves from the street clutching injured sides, and massaging wounded shoulders, to join their leader.

The samurai stood before the four ninjas, ready to reengage in battle if the need arose, but his readiness was unnecessary. The lead ninja produced a tiny ball from somewhere Billy did not see. It threw the ball to the ground, causing smoke to erupt in a thick screen, obscuring Billy's view, allowing the ninjas to make their escape.

The smoke cleared, leaving just Billy and the samurai standing on the street.

"I must rest," the samurai said. He began walking, leaving the astonished Billy behind. "Are you coming?"

Billy shook himself from his reverie and scampered quickly to catch up with the samurai. "You saved me," Billy said.

The implacable samurai did not answer. Suddenly he veered off the sidewalk, heading down a walkway toward a charming little house off to the right.

“Isn’t this Miss Stark’s house?” Billy asked.

“Yes,” the samurai said, opening the front door. “Miss Stark is an old friend.”

The samurai entered Miss Stark’s home, bypassing the front room on his way to the kitchen. Billy kicked the door shut and hurried to keep up with his new friend. In the kitchen, the samurai took two glasses from a cabinet, opened the refrigerator door, took the half-gallon of milk he found there, and filled two glasses. He set a glass on the counter in front of Billy and took a sip from his own.

Billy set his pie on the counter top and climbed atop a nearby stool and took a sip of the milk the samurai had given proffered. “That’s some good milk,” Billy said.

“Yes,” the samurai said, “but it would be even better with a slice of pie.”

“But this is my grandma’s pie,” Billy protested. “I’m supposed to deliver it to her.”

“I see,” said the samurai. “I will leave you to your mission then,” he said downing his milk and turning to leave.

“Wait,” Billy said, hopping from his perch atop the stool. “Maybe you could have just one slice. You did save me from those mean ninjas.”

“But it’s your grandmother’s pie.”

“I know, but my mom makes one for her every Saturday. I’m sure once I explain how you saved me grandma won’t mind,” Billy said.

The samurai thought Billy’s proposal over for a moment and nodded. “Very well then, let us eat.” Billy handed him the pie and retook his seat on the stool. The samurai searched through a few kitchen drawers, finally fishing out a sharp knife before returning

to the cabinets to fetch two small plates. He used the knife to carve up the pie, dishing out a slice for Billy and himself.

The samurai refilled his own glass of milk and returned to the drawers for two forks, handing one to Billy, who set about devouring his pie, and kept the other for himself.

The samurai intently ate his pie, and listened to Billy as he gushed about the samurai's battle with the four ninjas. Billy laughed, and giggled, and jumped from the stool once or twice to reenact the battle.

Having finished his pie, the samurai set his plate and fork in the kitchen sink, took Billy's plate, which had been licked clean, his dirty fork and glass and deposited them with his own dishes in the sink.

"That was delicious," Billy said.

"Yes, thank you," the samurai replied. "But I must go now."

"Wait," Billy said excitedly. "I've been thinking. Since you saved my life and you like my grandma's pie so much, maybe you can take the rest of the pie. I'll tell my grandma how you saved me and I'll just bring her two pies next week."

Without hesitation, the samurai snatched the remaining pie and bowed respectfully to Billy. "That I very honorable of you," he said.

Billy smiled, returning the samurai's bow, and the two left the kitchen, walked back through the front room and headed down the footpath toward the street. When they reached the sidewalk, the samurai bowed to Billy once again, thanking the boy once again for the pie.

Billy waved as the samurai marched off, into the setting sun, and began skipping home, his trip to his grandmother's house completely forgotten in the wake of his ordeal with a real life samurai.

“And that's what happened,” Billy said.

“That is the most preposterous story I have ever heard,” his mother said, wiping off the cherry sauce smeared on her son's face. “You obviously found some little corner to hide yourself in while you gorged yourself on your grandmother's pie. When your father gets home—“

At that moment the front door opened and Billy's father entered the house. Before his wife could open her mouth to tell her husband of her son's antics he said, “Have you spoke to Miss Stark today?” he asked. “There were a couple of police cruisers parked outside her house as I was driving home. Old Man Jamison said someone broke into her house while she was at her weekly bridge game. It doesn't look like anything was stolen, but her kitchen was a mess.”

Billy's mother, fists once again driven into her hips, glared down out her son who was only now realizing he was in real trouble. Her tone was stern and cold as she said, “Go to your room this instant, young man. No dinner for you, seeing as how you've gorged yourself on pie, and no television for you for a month. Your father and I need to discuss the rest of your punishment.”

As Billy made his way up the stairs to his bedroom, he could hear his mother telling of how he had snuck off and devoured his grandmother's pie she had baked for her

mother, and suspected he may be the culprit wanted in the break-in of Miss Stark's house.

The samurai entered his apartment, pulled his cap off, and set the pie on the counter. As he began stripping his armor off, the apartment door opened and the four ninja's, their masks long removed, entered as well. The samurai and his ninja friends laughed and joked together over slices of Billy's grandmother's pie, and marveled at the gullibility of little boys. They wondered if they, too, were so foolishly trusting when they were Billy's age and began plotting their next mark.