

Raspberries

Maggie leans back on her palms, the tin roof hot against her skin. She stretches out her long, tan legs, examining the thin scratches and splotches of purple that mark them like watercolor. She rubs away at the purple stains before popping a fresh raspberry into her mouth, the burst of flavor is only slightly ruined by the seeds that wedge between her teeth.

“Maggie stop!” A high-pitched voice emerges from the bramble of raspberries along the bank of the old cinderblock barn. Deep within the thick of the bush, just barely taller than the highest raspberry-covered branch stands a barefoot, freckle-faced 10-year-old. “If you keep eating them we won’t have enough for the pie!”

Maggie sighs, looking down at her younger cousin, “Tay, a few here and there won’t hurt.” She holds up the clear Tupperware container she’d been using to collect the berries. “We already have more than enough.”

Taylor huffs, crossing her arms, and staring into her own bowl of berries. “Well, they’ve got to be unsanitary, full of tiny microorganisms. You’ll get sick.”

“I’ll take my chances,” Maggie laughs, taking another handful of the fruit, the juice dyeing her fingertips before reaching her mouth.

“Can I get on the roof?” Taylor asks, handing her Tupperware up to the teen.

Maggie catches herself, before answering. Sure, she was sitting on the barn roof and had been doing so since before she was Taylor’s age, but the idea of Taylor doing so made her slightly uneasy. The barn was not nearly as structurally sound as it once was; the concrete blocks slowly caving in on one side with time. She doubts the weight of a scrawny girl would be the thing that would finally cause the barn to give up, but the worst-case scenario plays in her head

anyway. She dismisses the vision of dust and rubble, standing up towards the edge, a hand outstretched, “come on, I’ll hoist you up.”

Wearing a grin, Taylor gladly takes Maggie’s hand. Soft dirt and fallen berries grip Taylor’s bare toes as she’s lifted to the roof. “Ouch.” She recoils at the sudden heat greeting her soles. Both girls sit at the edge, the slight pain subsiding. “I’ve never been up here. You can see the whole valley!” She follows the small meandering creek with her eyes as it wove through the quilt of farmland and lush summer trees.

From where they sit, the two girls aren’t actually that high off the ground, but even Maggie admits to herself that the view is worth the possible barn collapse and burned feet. “My mom will be starting dinner soon, we better get the rest of the raspberries that we can.” She pulls a branch towards her, avoiding the small thorns and wasps that float through the twigs in search of rotten, overripe fruit.

“Why are they called raspberries?” Taylor says, sneaking a juicy berry into her mouth.

“Huh?”

“Raspberries. Why are they called raspberries?”

Maggie shrugs, moving on to another bunch. “Don’t know.”

Taylor blows air through her lips. “Blowing raspberries! Why is that called raspberries? Are raspberries and raspberries related?”

“Good question.” The older girl blows a raspberry back, earning a smile from her cousin.

“Grandpa would know. He was the best a blowing raspberries.”

“He was wasn’t he?” A solemn quiet falls upon the girls, the sound of swallows, the distant creek, and the gnats swarming the bush suddenly louder than any words the two could speak.

“Do you think our pie will taste as good as grandma’s did?”

“Tay.” Maggie pauses, ruminating over her thoughts and her potential words. It had been over a year since they had had their grandmother’s famed raspberry pie, but it would be the first not made by her hand. Maggie pictures the worn, tea-stained recipe card written in their grandmother’s cursive, detailing the steps to the mouth-watering raspberry pie. It would be her recipe but there would be no way it tasted like her pies.

Their grandma was always baking pies. Big pies, half pies, tiny pies specifically for their Uncle Jordan. Made with love was not just a saying when it came to their grandma’s baking; it was true.

“Tay, I’m sure it will be the best pie, one anyone would be proud of.”

“Even Grandma?”

“Especially Grandma.”