

Onion Soup

By Sierra Prochniak

The little girl ran as fast as her small legs could take her. She knew dusk was nearing because the pastel pink in the sky was turning an inky purple, and the clouds were beginning to part and reveal the moon. She needed to capture the rabbit before it became too dark to see her own feet moving below her. It was always two paces ahead of the girl, it had been for the past ten minutes. Every time she thought she reached it, its small pale body leapt through the tall grass and out of sight. She could find it again if she squinted and searched for two white, tall, ears within the grass. She was finally getting closer, as the sun and the moon began to trade places in the sky. If she stretched her arm out as far as she possibly could, her fingertip could graze its soft tail. With all her might, she pushed her body forward, finally matching the pace of the rabbit now beside her. In a quick motion she swooped it into her arms, slowing to a halt and cradling it like a newborn. It squirmed in an attempt to escape, but relaxed its muscles as the girl took a deep breath. Animals could sense adrenaline and calm, she knew. She took another breath, lifting her hand to stroke its soft back.

Before her palm could touch the rabbit's back, it suddenly disappeared from her clutch. In its place was a bulb of garlic. It was unnatural to cradle a bulb of garlic like a child, so the girl let it roll down her arm into her palms. Clutching it, she looked down. She knew she needed to make some food, it was dark and well past dinnertime. If only she had a cookbook! She sighed, her chest heavy with the knowledge of what she would have to do. She pocketed the garlic and continued walking through the tall grass, forging a pathway that sealed her inside the field as she moved forward. She could hear the crickets chirping and the owls hooting beyond the field and she did not like it one bit. Her stomach churned at the thought of what lived beyond the safety of the grass wall. Thankfully, she was protected from the disquiet of the night and could trust her path was safe.

Finally, she arrived at her destination. A small clearing within the grass that could have resembled a lake, although the water was thick mud and the lounge chairs were old wooden rocking chairs. She sighed again. She did not enjoy the idea of doing this, but she knew replenishment was on the other side. Reluctantly, she dragged one of the rocking chairs by its arms so its back faced the mud. Gently, she placed herself in the chair and took a large breath in, filling her lungs and puffing up her cheeks.

She leaned back, until she was sitting with her back parallel to the mud. Slowly, her feet came off the ground and the mud engulfed her. She squeezed her eyes shut, and let herself sink into the thick brown mass.

Once her whole body had sunk into the mud, she opened her eyes. What had been brown mud on the surface was underneath, a sticky, beautiful amber. She stuck out her tongue and tasted the amber that submerged her. It had worked! She was in a vat of sweet honey. She pulled herself out of the chair, slowly working against the thickness of the honey. Once standing upright, she learned forward until her stomach was facing down, and she was in a swimming position. She knew the cookbook would be somewhere around here, she just needed to search for it.

She swam through the seemingly never-ending plain of sweet, sticky honey, keeping watch for a book of recipes. She found it after what seemed like hours of swimming. She had no idea where she had started or how to get back to the mud lake, but it was no matter. The

cookbook would have the answers. She opened it, stomach grumbling. There was a single page inside, titled "*Onion soup*". She smiled, pulling the onion bulb from her pocket.

Scanning the recipe, she realized there was one ingredient she couldn't get; the hide of a rabbit. She wasn't sure where she could find that. Frustrated, she closed the cookbook with a slam. Amber bubbles rose dispersed up into the amber from the pressure of the book. She shut her eyes, wishing there was an easier way to satisfy her hunger.

When she opened them, she was in a tall grass field and the sky was a cotton candy pink. The cookbook was in her left hand, and the onion was in her right. She blinked, confused as to how she had arrived in a field of all places.

A rustle from the patch of tall grass beside her stopped her train of thought. Seemingly out of nowhere, the grass parted and revealed a large brown bear. Shocked, she released the onion and cookbook from her grip and let them drop to the ground.

Quietly, she approached the bear, trying to make slow movements. It turned its large head to face her, staring directly into her eyes. It cocked its head at her in a playful manner, and she giggled. *It's okay*, it seemed to say. With a calm smile, she placed her hand on the jaw of the bear. Slowly, the bear began to open its mouth. She jumped back. Out of the bear's mouth, crawled a small rabbit. It hopped out of the bear's mouth and onto the grass. The bear shut its jaw and faced the girl again as if nothing had happened. But she was not paying attention. A rabbit? What were the chances?

The rabbit leapt away and out of sight, but she was determined to catch it. She began to run, pushing her little legs with all her might.