

The Little Berry

—*Daniel McNulty*

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a little berry who lived on a little bush on the edge of a sunny fencerow. The little berry was surrounded by those he loved, in a beautiful world of warmth and family. One of his favorite things was to feel the dew covering him in the early hours of the morning, then to have it evaporate, bead by bead, with the morning sun.

One morning toward the end of a long summer, the little berry noticed people walking around, and touching some nearby bushes. HE asked one of the nearby berries if they knew what was going on. “They are picking berries to take into town to market.”

“Why are they doing that?” asked the little berry. No one knew why, but soon a human came to the little berry’s bush and began picking. Soon the little berry was picked and put into a basket full of excited berries all talking, some happy at the prospect of seeing more of the world, while others were frightened to be leaving home.

After some time the basket, the little berry was dumped out into a pile. He could see a human sorting through the berries, putting them into three

different bowls. Soon he was picked up and put into a bowl and carried away.

He asked the berry next to him what was going on. “We are to be food for the Queen.”

“Why would I want to be food for anyone?” asked the little berry in shock and revulsion.

“It is really quite an honor to be eaten by aristocracy,” replied the berry next to him. That was the general consensus of all the berries around him. “It is actually very difficult to get into this bowl,” said one. “We are the cream of the crop,” said another. The little berry noticed that some did not seem genuine in their enthusiasm, but no one complained, and those who did not seem genuinely enthusiastic, at least feigned enthusiasm when confronted with it.

The bowl was placed on a table in an ornate hall, but the little berry could see none of this, because he was at the bottom of the bowl. As he sat there, he could hear human voices and feel movement above him. The weight of the other berries was lessening and soon he could see light. As he looked up, he saw a middle aged woman dressed in fine cloth-

ing, with sparkling jewels, and paint on her face. She was reaching in with long painted nails tipping delicate fingers ringed in gold and diamonds. He felt her fingers embrace him and pick him up. He wanted to scream, but just held his breath as he entered into her dark maw. It was wet and warm, and he could feel her hard white teeth gnashing about him. He was only scathed by a molar before he was whisked down her throat into her waiting stomach.

As he sat there, he was surrounded by many other berries, some mutilated by the teeth, other more intact like him. The stomach was cramped, wet, and dark, but most around him still expressed their excitement at being here.

Soon, the little berry could feel himself moving into an even more cramped area. It was like a hallway filled with other berries.

The little berry had been silent up until then, but now had to speak up. "Something is wrong here," he said. "This isn't right. I can feel myself changing. We need to get out of here."

One berry next to him replied, "Oh no, we shouldn't leave, this is a great honor, we are being shaped and molded within these hallowed halls."

But the little berry knew better. He

could feel his life being sucked out, could feel his essence being taken away. As the little berry passed further along on his journey, he could feel himself changing. Those around him who had not been satisfied with their lives and who needed someone else to tell them they were doing the right thing, exclaimed how happy they were with having a purpose, with being shaped by the aristocrat, and with being molded into new beings.

As the little berry moved further and further, he looked around. What once had been blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries, now all looked the same. Homogenous little nuggets surrounded him, and the little berry knew that this too was his fate. As the little berry passed along, there came a great excitement from the nuggets ahead, the time was near to leave these hallowed halls and pass back into the world.

Soon the little berry felt himself crammed tight against many other little nuggets. It was hot and uncomfortable and it seemed as if he waited here forever for the commencement of his entry into the world again. Finally the time came and the little berry could feel himself falling through the air. He landed in a large bowl, staring up at the pimpled rear end of the Queen. Soon she departed and he could feel himself being picked up by another

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human. He heard this human mutter, “I hate cleaning up her waste.” The bowl was then carried through long corridors, down staircases, through doorways, and out to the horse barn. There the contents were dumped into piles of human and animal waste.

“Where... where are we?” asked the little berry. “Yer inna pile a shit,” replied a dried up turd, cracked and bleached by the sun.

“But, I’m a little berry...why would I be in a pile of shit?”

“Ya ain’ta lil berry no mer,” replied the dried up turd. “Yer a lil turd like da ressaus. Yuer eatn like da ressaus, be it by anmal er arissocrat. Best yer fer now is bein’ put in da field fer nex year’s crops.”

And the little berry had nothing to say. 