

Lunch with Mr. Gibbs by Ewan McEwan - Ewan Radojkovic

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By Ewan McEwan

Oh gosh I'm late. I was skinning the rabbits, not paying attention to much, when I looked up and saw that the sun was already bang in the centre of the sky. Just like a bullseye. I must hurry, Mr. Gibbs would hate it if I'm late, although he'd hate it more if I didn't bring a snack. It's a shame that he only eats meat, I quite like the creatures of the forest, rabbits may, well, replicate, at an astounding rate but they are quite nice. They're very smart and just about as quick as I am. But they aren't as smart as Mr. Gibbs. I grabbed my things, a sack full of meat and my archery kit and started heading off down the trail. It was well worn from my previous visits, Mr. Gibbs and I are such great friends. We met oh so long ago, down by the river. Standing there in the stream fishing, he seemed scary at first, he was absolutely massive, thrice my size at least; and the way he clawed through the water gave my stomach a rather queasy feeling. I was standing on the small cliff overlooking the stream when he saw me watching, gave a strange look and yelled out.

"Staring is rude young lady!"

"Oh gosh, I'm so sorry sir. Just- admiring your catch!"

"Ha! Some catch. I haven't caught anything since yesterday evening!"

It was at that moment when I knew he was truly harmless. Well, not harmless, but kind. We stood there for the rest of the day, I helped him with his fishing and he told me joke after joke, it was hard to catch the fish I was laughing so hard. Mr. Gibbs can make anyone laugh, he could reduce even the mightiest lion to a mere cackling hyena.

The trail wound round the oak tree and across the willow tree and stopped just before the maple tree, at Mr. Gibbs' house, quite a small house for someone so large, he liked it though, said it was 'as quaint as one place could be'. I knocked on the door three times. Thud, thud, thud, like a woodsman knocking down a tree; when there was no response, I knocked again. Thud, thud, thud. I heard a great crash from inside, like the tree had fallen, followed by some rather coarse language.

"Oh dear, Mr. Gibbs, are you quite alright?"

There was no reply, only more curses; and so I opened the door, just a smidge, to see what was happening. What I saw was a great, brown bear, lying face down, hurling profanities.

"Mr. Gibbs! What did you do!"

"I right bloody tripped! And on that same step again!"

"I told you to get that sorted months ago."

The great bear lifted himself off the floor and leant back on his two hind legs.

"And I told you not to be late."

"I'm so sorry Mr. Gibbs. I wasn't paying attention to the time."

"So unusual of you. At least tell me you brought some food."

I let out a triumphant grin as I lay the fresh rabbits I caught alongside the hemp sack upon the table. Mr. Gibbs let out his own toothy grin, licking his lips.

"Have you not eaten today?"

"Why would I. Not when you always bring me such lovely meals."

Then his head disappeared into the meat, tearing it to shreds with such vigor that I could hear my own stomach rumbling, causing Mr. Gibbs to look up from the table.

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"Oh dear. Pardon my manners, let me fetch you something."

"Thank you very much Mr. Gibbs."

He turned towards the kitchen, leaving behind only a plate of limbs and blood, I thought my hunting was messy.

"You really do have appalling table manners Mr. Gibbs."

"You expect the bear to eat like a prince do you? Let me just grab my napkin."

I giggled predictably at this as he came back with a platter of berries, there was so much colour, red met blue, which met purple and black, a feast not just for me, but for the senses. It was mostly for me however.

"Please dig in."

I smiled politely, then stuffed my face with as many of the colourful orbs I could, they were oh so juicy.

"You're one to talk about manners. You've got more blood on your face than me!"

"Yes but mine is the blood of berries. You're supposed to stuff your face with berries."

"And rabbits are different because?"

I thought on this for a moment. He had a point. But I wasn't going to let him know that.

"Because I said so."

"Oh yes of course. How silly of me."

We then both proceeded to spurt the juices all over the lovely oaken table. They seeped into the cracks of the wood, melding together until you couldn't tell what had come from a fruit and what had come from an animal. The two of us barely stopped to breathe we were so fierce. Finally our rampage came to an end, our platters clear and our bellies contently filled.

"Delicious as always Mr. Gibbs."

"The same can be said to you my dear."

"Perhaps this time you will tell me where you get these berries, the ones I find around the forest aren't nearly as juicy."

Mr. Gibbs let out a sigh, followed by a sharp burp. I giggled at this, Mr. Gibbs giggled too but, in between additional burps.

"My, BELCH, dear; goodness me."

"This is what happens when you eat so--"

I was cut off by my own loud belch. This Mr. Gibbs found most amusing, his laugh was almost as big as the burp that came after.

"I bet I can belch louder than you."

"Louder than the bear? You can't be serious."

"Watch me! BURP!"

"You call that a belch? Watch closely, BURP!"

GURK!

BELCH!

BURP!

We burped so loud that the entire cottage began to shake. Then Mr. Gibbs let out one, gigantic, earth-shattering and preposterously loud belch. It was so loud I could feel it bouncing around my head.

"Oh alright you win. I suppose there's no use competing with a bear."

Mr. Gibbs looked incredibly proud of himself for a moment, before realising that he'd won a belching contest. After realising that he looked rather self conscious.

"So why won't you tell me where to find these berries?"

"Oh right. You wanted to know about that. Well like every other time you've asked my dear I must give you the same answer."

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I knew this was coming and thus spoke in rhyme with his words.

"It's far too dangerous!"

"See you do know my dear."

"I'm not a little girl, Mr. Gibbs! And I do know how to use that bow."

"Because a couple of arrows are going to do a lot of good against trolls."

"Trolls! You get these berries from trolls!"

"Did I say trolls? Oh dear, I did say that didn't I."

"Why on earth do you get berries from trolls!? Trolls ruin everything they touch!"

"I don't get them from trolls, I just get them from where trolls live."

"No wonder I never found them. Wait. Trolls live in the forest!"

"Well. Yes. But. Oh dear."

"Where do the Trolls live."

Mr. Gibbs was shifting rather uncomfortably now, I would assume that he had sweat beading down his forehead, dampening the mass of fur.

"Mr. Gibbs. Where. Do. The. Trolls. Live."

"I can't tell you that! The very next thing you would do is go off and get yourself killed! Trolls are not to be trifled with my dear."

"And yet you go off and pick berries where they sleep."

"Well I'm a bear aren't I. A little harder for a troll to kill a bear, then it is a young girl."

"I'm not that young! And besides if you can handle the trolls I'm sure I can too."

"Absolutely not."

"Oh Mr. Gibbs you worry far too much. If a Troll were to spot me I could run much faster than he could."

"So you're an expert on Trolls now are you?"

"Well no. But they're made of stone! Stone can't run very quickly now can it!"

Suddenly, with very little warning, Mr. Gibbs leant in close to me.

"My dear. Trolls are far more dangerous than you realise. They are as big as mountains. As strong as steel. And as hungry as the earth herself. And there favourite meal isn't bear meat. It's the meat of girls like yourself."

The way Mr. Gibbs talked made me feel nervous, like a wind on the back of your neck. But there was something else it made me feel. Something like a whistling in the woods.

"Oh! I'm so sorry Mr. Gibbs but I must be going."

"Going where?"

"Home. I have so much to do."

"Well. Ok. Goodbye my dear."

"Goodbye Mr. Gibbs."

When the door of Mr. Gibbs' house closed behind me. I ventured deep into the forest. In search of trolls.