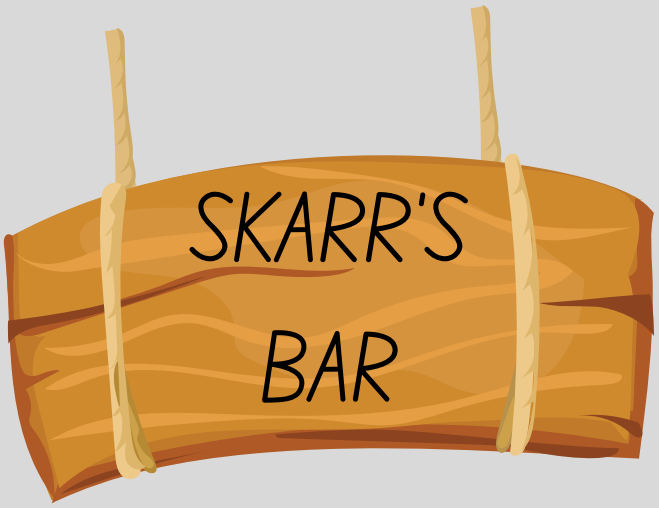


"So, Quin," Skarr asks amongst the mess of a kitchen his bar has become. "What are we baking today?"

Colette rubs her stomach. "Please not more cookies. I had six of those oatmeal crumbles before bed last night. I'll need to work a few doubles to lose the pounds!"

"I wouldn't mind another brownie," Tomas says while licking his lips. "The triple chocolate threat we made a couple days ago was amazing, Ms. Cherryberry!"

Quin toils over a half dozen cookbooks she 'borrowed' from her grandmother's house. Some of the tomes are older than Summerton! Cakes, pies, cookies, brittles, muffins, scones, pastries of all sorts dot the many pages before the squirrely halfling.

"I reckon I got an idea, but I ain't sure we got tha ingred'ents." Quin flips one of the books all the way to the index in the back. "Thar's a recipe I been dyin' ta try fer sum time now, but it'd be mighty tough ta do."

Skarr steps closer, resting his hand on the countertop next to Quin. "You aren't alone in this. Let us help you."

Quin nods, pointing to one of the index's short recipes. "Spiced Rum Pecan Pie. I ain't never had it, but grammy said she had a slice as a wee girl. Tha candied pecans, tha dark rum custard, the heat of tha spices straight from Sin City. I reckon it just might be tha most devilishly good pie tha world's ever gon' know! An' I wanna make it fer Tim Bucktooth."

"Okay then, what do you need from us?" Skarr flexes his knuckles, ready to move mountains to get Quin her win. "What's the first ingredient?"

"Well, every pie's got two main part: Tha crust an' tha fillin'. This here fillin's got rum, spices and pecans ta it, plus all tha normal pie stuffs. We'll need tha darnedest pecan ya ever laid eyes on ifin we're gonna win this bakin' comp'tition."

"Where can we buy some extra special pecans from?" Tomas wrings his hands, salivating at the thought of such a delectable pie. "I guess the market here in town wouldn't do, right?"

Quin chews on her lip, one of her quirks when she thinks exceedingly hard. "I'on't know where we're gonna get enough pecans fer a test pie plus tha real thing, in this kind o' quality. We'd need at least a cuppla pounds!"

"Okay, let's start somewhere else then. What about the rum? You said you want dark rum?" Skarr looks back at the shelves of drinks the bar has collected. "Any particular reason for dark?"



Quin nods excitedly, nearly falling off her stool in the process. “Dark rum’ll give tha pie that classic amber hue that white rum ain’t cap’ble of! Plus, ifin we find a good bottle, it’ll help candy tha pecans themselves. I reckon we need us a quart’er so.”

“Fort Lisbet might have rum like that!” Colette cheers. “I could write to my cousin, see if she can get some.”

Skarr looks at Quin, then nods approvingly. “Get on that. We’ll handle the rest.” He eyes the recipe, a single paragraph of fine print in the crusty index of a high-end cookbook. “What about the spices?”

“Well, we got us a lil friend that might can help wit that, ifin yer willin’ ta reach out? Ya ain’t seen her in a hot minute, pardon tha pun.” Quin bats her eyes at Skarr, pleading with all her small body’s might. “Please say you’ll ask Sanasha fer help, pardner!”

Skarr grimaces at the display, but reluctantly agrees. “Fine, but only because you asked nicely. You know how busy she is these days.”

“That brings us back to the pecans, yeah?” Tomas tries to peek at the book over Quin’s shoulder. “Maybe I can ask my mom if she has some from Greenwood. She buys them from a traveling market every year.”

“I reckon that’s a mighty fine idea, Tommy boy!” Quin hoots happily. “We might just bake us a pie yet!”

The corner of Skarr’s mouth curls into a smile, something he is glad his beard hides. “Don’t you worry. We’ve got your back. They say it takes a village, and we are yours.”

Quin beams with glee. “When this is all said an’ done, I wanna thank y’all fer everythin’ y’all done fer me. We’ll have usin a feast like no other!”

Skarr bites his tongue to stop from smiling even more. “Let’s just focus on the here and now. Let’s get this pie made so you get your just win.”