

Notes and doodles turn from gray to black as the surrounding white paper shifts to an orange-reddish hue. Poppy finishes up her lesson and the students begin to depart. Wess packs up their things and approaches Poppy's lectern.

"Thank you for class today!" Wess chimes.

"Of course, anything you have questions on?"

"Nope! Look!" Wess pulls out half notes half doodles.

"That's a very good Puptual!"

"Ah!" they quickly flip to a different page, one with slightly more notes and less doodles, "I was paying attention, I promise" they blush.

"I know," she chuckles, "you've been doing really well this week. I'm super proud of you."

Wess gives a toothy grin, "Well biology is really easy. You can just go outside and see it."

"Hmm, maybe you'd like to be a biologist when you grow up then?"

They squirm at the thought, what they were going to do when they grow up was a big source of anxiety. "N-no!"

Poppy sighed with a knowing smile, "That's alright, you don't need to know now anyway." She pauses, "Well, if you don't have any questions I'll let you go. Have a-

"Wait do you- ah! Sorry I didn't mean to interrupt ah"

"It's okay, what is it?"

"Do you need help with anything? Like cleaning or something?"

"Everything's still nice and tidy from Tuesday and I plan on going home once everyone is taken care of. I've gotten all my errands done for the weekend."

"Oh.. do you know if Lucky-"

Poppy's expression turns stern "You will not be going into the woods again."

"Wha- but I just"

"Lucky told me exactly what happened yesterday, you could have gotten hurt or worse. Do you even know?" her voice trails off, Wess is visibly

rattled. "I'm sorry, just, I-we both want you to be safe. The woods are no place for a child."

"I know" Wess looks down.

There is an awkward pause, then Poppy has an idea.

"If you are feeling up for it, Marbles is a bit under the weather today" she grabs a bag from one of her desk's drawers and places an untouched apple into it. "Do you remember when I introduced you?"

They did. A few years ago Wess had stumbled into an ice sculpture for the winter festival and shattered it. They wouldn't leave their home for days after the incident, wracked with guilt. Marbles ended up stopping by and sympathized with Wess by recounting some of his own experiences. He gave a hearty retelling of a time when he destroyed months worth of research over a flick of the wrist. In a few short hours, he ended up coaxing Wess out of their house in time for the main winter events. It was one of the first times that Wess felt like they had what it takes to be a good grownup, despite their flaws.

"I remember Marbles!" they beam.

"Good, please take these to him and wish him well okay?"

"Okay!"

Wess stretches their hands out and Poppy drops the care package into their arms. Wess quickly slings it over their shoulders and runs out to Marble's house.

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Wess arrives at Marbles house and idles in front of the door. They hadn't talked to Marbles since that day and suddenly grew concerned he wouldn't know who they were. They sat, stood up, paced, and sat down again. Every now and then they'd reach towards the door before chickening out and sitting down again. They were having trouble working up the nerve to knock.

"What are you doing?" an unfamiliar voice asked from above.

"Gah!" Wess jumped, some cookies and the apple went flying from their care package.

A large, dark Acacia was standing above them. Also, spooked by Wess's surprise.

“Ah! Uh, hello,” he moves back a bit before recovering, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to give you a fright.” He picks up the apple and two cookies. The rest broke on impact to the point of being unrecoverable. “Here, he reaches out, I don’t know if you believe in the 5 second rule, but if you polish off the apple it should be fine.”

Wess looks at his outstretched hand and accepts the apple, “Thanks”

Seeing Wess doesn’t take the cookies, he performs a small autopsy on the two cookies. After removing any unsuitable dirt flecks he chows down. “So,” finishing the first cookie, “what business do you have fidgeting in front of Marble’s abode?”

“Oh, he’s been under the weather and Poppy sent me to give him this care package” they look at it a bit tearful.

“Ah...” he looks at the last cookie in his hand and shrugs, “well, since you’ve given me such a nice treat, I’ll help you out.” Mothra plops the final cookie in his mouth. He then proceeds to open the door to Marble’s house without so much as a knock.

“Huh! O-oh” Wess isn’t quite sure what to think of his sudden intrusion and assumes this gentleman is a friend of Marbles. “I’m Wess by the way.”

“I’m Mothra, pleasure to meet you” he holds open the door with a hand outstretched.

After an awkward handshake both go inside. Mothra opens the satchel he was carrying and roots around Marble’s kitchen for some utensils. After finding a pot, knife, cutting board, and stirring spoon he gets to work. Carrots are sliced, a potato is effortlessly peeled, and some spice Wess doesn’t recognize starts filling the pot.

“You’re... really cool” Wess stammers.

“Oh?” Mothra smiles, not looking away from his work.

“I’m not really good at talking to people, so I think it was cool how you did that.” they go a bit quieter towards the end. “Thank you.”

Mothra lets out a sharp laugh, “You should go say hi so Marbles doesn’t think a burglar broke in”

“Right! Um, I’m going then” they shuffle off deeper into the house.

Wess makes their way to Marble’s bedroom door. Tentatively, they knock twice and wait.

A muffled, groggy voice rises on the other side "Hello?"

"Ah, um it's Wess"

"Wess?"

"Um, from the winter festival. Poppy told me to bring some snacks over." They start speaking fast, pulling at the bag around their neck, "I dropped a few, but I have some cookies and an apple, and I'm sorry."

"Ah, I know now, come on in."

Wess opens the door to find Marbles twisted around a blanket surrounded by pillows. His face is more saturated than his normal pale complexion, but adorned with the same smile.

"It's nice to see you again Wess, don't worry about anything you dropped on the way. I'm just happy you came to visit." His tail wags weakly.

"H-ere's the snacks" they say, slowly approaching Marble's beside. They place the snack on a nightstand.

"Oooo" he takes out a cookie and takes a bite, "delicious, thank you. This means a lot to me."

The sound of cooking emanates from the kitchen.

"Oh, did Poppy come here with you?" Marbles asked.

"No, a nice man named Mothra let me in."

Marbles makes a confused face, but then shakes it off. "I see... well you both have my thanks. What's he doing?"

"I don't know," Wess replied, trying to recall what he was making.

"Huh."

"I mean, I think he's cooking something"

"I would be more concerned if he wasn't."

Wess looks over their shoulder to the hallway and back to Marbles with a blank look.

Marble sighs, "Well, anyways, how is schoo-"

"WESS!" Mothra yells from the kitchen. "COME OVER AND HELP ME SERVE THIS!"

"Ah, I've gotta go. Be back soon."

"Of course Wess, thank you again."

Wess trots back to the kitchen where Mothra takes the pot off the stove.

"What did you cook?" Wess asks, peering up over the counter.

"Soup." Mothra responds back, blankly.

"What kind of soup?"

"Soup soup, here take this to Marbles." he ladles out a serving and hands it to Wess. Wess uses their ears to hold it atop their head.

"Okay!"

They both exit the kitchen, Wess holding one bowl of soup on their head and Mothra with two in his hands. Marbles, Wess, and Mothra all eat together in the bedroom making idle chat and laughing the night away.

