The Pudding Like a Night on the Sea

“I’m going to make something special for your mother,” my father said.

My mother was out shopping. My father was in the kitchen looking at the pots and pans and the jars and this and that.

“What are you going to make?” I said.

“A pudding,” he said.

My father is a big man with wild black hair. When he laughs, the sun laughs in the window-panes. When he thinks, you can almost see his thoughts sitting on all the tables and chairs. When he is angry, me and my little brother Huey shiver to the bottom of our shoes.

“What kind of pudding will you make?” Huey said.

“A wonderful pudding,” my father said. “It will taste like a whole raft of lemons. It will taste like a night on the sea.”

Then he took a knife and sliced five lemons in half. He squeezed the first one. Juice squirted in my eye.

“Stand back!” he said, and squeezed again. The seeds flew out on the floor. “Pick up those seeds, Huey!” he said.

Huey took the broom and swept them up.

My father cracked some eggs and put the yolks in a pan and the whites in a bowl. He rolled up his sleeves and pushed back his hair and beat up the yolks. “Sugar, Julian!” he said, and I poured in the sugar.

He went on beating. Then he put in lemon juice and cream and set the pan on the stove. The pudding bubbled and he stirred it fast. Cream splashed on the stove.

“Wipe that up, Huey!” he said.

Huey did.

It was hot by the stove. My father loosened his collar and pushed at his sleeves. The stuff in the pan was getting thicker and thicker. He held the beater high in the air. “Just right!” he said, and sniffed at the smell of the pudding.
He whipped the egg whites and mixed them into the pudding. The pudding looked softer and lighter than air.

“Done!” he said. He washed all the pots, splashing water on the floor, and wiped the counter so fast his hair made circles around his head.

“Perfect!” he said. “Now I’m going to take a nap. If something important happens, bother me. If nothing important happens, don’t bother me. And – the pudding is for your mother. Leave the pudding alone!”

He went to the living room and was asleep in a minute, sitting straight up in his chair.

Huey and I guarded the pudding.

“Oh, it’s a wonderful pudding,” Huey said.

“With waves on the top like the ocean,” I said.

“I wonder how it tastes,” Huey said.

“Leave the pudding alone,” I said.

“If I just put my finger in – there – I’ll know how it tastes,” Huey said.

And he did it.

“You did it!” I said. “How does it taste?”

“It tastes like a whole raft of lemons,” he said. “It tastes like a night on the sea.”

“You’ve made a hole in the pudding!” I said. “But since you did it, I’ll have a taste.” And it tasted like a whole night of lemons. It tasted like floating at sea.

“It’s such a big pudding,” Huey said. “It can’t hurt to have a little more.”

“Since you took more, I’ll have more,” I said.

“That was a bigger lick than I took!” Huey said. “Look at the pudding you spilled on the floor!”

“I am going to clean it up,” I said. And I took the rag from the sink.

“That’s not really clean,” Huey said.

“It’s the best I can do,” I said.
“Look at the pudding!” Huey said.

It looked like craters on the moon. “We have to smooth this over,” I said. “So it looks the way it did before! Let’s get spoons.”

And we evened the top of the pudding with spoons, and while we evened it, we ate some more.

“There isn’t much left,” I said.

“We were supposed to leave the pudding alone,” Huey said.

“We’d better get away from here,” I said. We ran into our bedroom and crawled under the bed. After a long time we heard my father’s voice.

“Come into the kitchen, dear,” he said. “I have something for you.”

“Why, what is it?” my mother said, out in the kitchen.

Under the bed, Huey and I pressed ourselves against the wall.

“Look,” said my father, out in the kitchen. “A wonderful pudding.”

“Where is the pudding?” my mother said.

“WHERE ARE YOU BOYS?” my father said. His voice went through every crack and corner of the house.

We felt like two leaves in a storm.

“WHERE ARE YOU? I SAID!” My father’s voice was booming.

Huey whispered to me, “I’m scared.”

We heard my father walking slowly through the rooms.

“Huey!” he called. “Julian!”

We could see his feet. He was coming into our room.

He lifted the bedspread. There was his face, and his eyes like black lightning. He grabbed us by the legs and pulled.

“STAND UP!” he said.

We stood.
“What do you have to tell me?” he said.

“We went outside,” Huey said, “and when we came back, the pudding was gone!”

“Then why were you hiding under the bed?” my father said.

We didn’t say anything. We looked at the floor.

“I can tell you one thing,” he said. “There is going to be some beating here now! There is going to be some whipping!”

The curtains at the window were shaking. Huey was holding my hand.

“Go into the kitchen!” my father said. “Right now!”

We went into the kitchen.

“Come here, Huey!” my father said.

Huey walked towards him, his hands behind his back.

“See these eggs?” my father said. He cracked them and put the yolks in the pan and set the pan on the counter. He stood a chair by the counter. “Stand up here,” he said to Huey.

Huey stood on a chair by the counter.

“Now it’s time for your beating!” my father said.

Huey started to cry. His tears fell in with the egg yolks.

“Take this!” my father said. My father handed him the egg beater. “Now beat those eggs,” he said. “I want this to be a good beating!”

“Oh!” Huey said. He stopped crying. And he beat the egg yolks.

“Now you, Julian, stand here!” my father said.

I stood on the chair by the table.

“I hope you’re ready for your whipping!”

I didn’t answer. I was afraid to say yes or no.
“Here!” he said, and he set the egg whites in front of me. “I want these whipped and whipped well!”

“Yes, sir!” I said, and started whipping.

My father watched us. My mother came into the kitchen and watched us.

After a while Huey said, “This is hard work.”

“That’s too bad,” my father said. “Your beating’s not done!” And he added sugar and cream and lemon juice to Huey’s pan and put the pan on the stove. And Huey went on beating.

“My arm hurts from whipping,” I said.

“That’s too bad,” my father said. “Your whipping’s not done.”

So I whipped and whipped, and Huey beat and beat.

“Hold the beater in the air, Huey!” my father said.

Huey held it in the air.

“See!” my father said. “A good pudding stays on the beater. It’s thick enough now. Your beating’s done.” Then he turned to me. “Let’s see those egg whites, Julian!” he said. They were puffed up and fluffy. “Congratulations, Julian!” he said. “Your whipping’s done.”

He mixed the egg whites into the pudding himself. Then he passed the pudding to my mother.

“A wonderful pudding,” she said. “Would you like some, boys?”

“No thank you,” we said.

She picked up a spoon. “Why, this tastes like a whole raft of lemons,” she said. “This tastes like a night on the sea.”

by Ann Cameron, 1981.
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