

Crow's Nest Pie

Mabel carefully set a second pie on the table. She shuffled the other entries around to make them all fit, careful to keep the accompanying labels with the correct pies.

She was glad they'd decided to hold the recipe contest outdoors this year. It was such a beautiful day that it would be impossible to entice folks indoors for the annual cooking contest.

People browsed the four display tables set out under two open-sided tents, admiring and judging the entries in this year's categories: pies and gelatin.

Mabel had submitted two entries in each category.

"All that jello is going to melt in this heat," Penny said, ducking in under the tent awning. She handed Mabel a glass of lemonade. Ice clinked in the cold drink and the outside of the glass was beaded with condensation.

"I sure hope not, kiddo, though both mine are based on hot foods so that might not be a bad thing." She took a long sip of lemonade and sighed in pleasure.

"Why you think anyone would ever eat onion soup jello is beyond me." Penny made a face. "It smells disgusting."

"You won't know until you've tried it," Mabel countered. "Remember the bacon & egg lasagna? You had no issues with that combo."

"That lasagna had already won first prize so we knew it was good. I didn't have to taste all the other entries."

A chorus of high-pitched barking erupted at the other end of the park. Tammy had tied her four small dogs to a tree and was heading toward the pie tent. The dogs yapped and strained at the ends of their leashes to follow their mistress.

"So what have you come up with this year?" Tammy called out as she approached.

"These two are mine," Mabel answered, proudly pointing out entries whose tented cards read *Crow's Nest Pie* and *MagPie*.

Tammy examined *Crow's Nest Pie* with a sceptical frown. The pan bristled with fried chow mein noodles surrounding four hard-boiled eggs that had been dyed blue-green and speckled with black. "How's this a pie?" she asked, snapping off a piece of crunchy noodle.

"There's a crust so it's a pie. You just have to peel the eggs before you eat it." Mabel stroked the tip of one egg and smiled fondly at her creation.

Tammy waved a hand dismissively and moved on to *MagPie*. It looked like a normal pie, but the top crust didn't quite fit, as if it had been baked separately.

"*MagPie*? Really, Mabel." Tammy asked. "Tell me you didn't actually go bird hunting."

"This one's a pun," Mabel said with a grin. "Magpies love shiny things so I've filled it with little toys and trinkets."

"Kind of like a piñata only you don't hit it with a stick," Penny added helpfully.

"But you have to be able to eat it," Tammy exclaimed. "You can't call it pie if it isn't edible!"

"I put candy in it too. Besides, nothing in the rules said it had to be edible." Mabel said, deliberately rolling her eyes to a pie sitting on the far corner of the table. It had a dark crumbly top on what looked like a normal bottom crust.

"This pie is completely edible." Tammy straightened out the card that read *Canine Delight*.

Penny sniffed it delicately. "Ew, it smells terrible."

"That's because it's canned dog food," Mabel said with a grin.

"Speaking of inedible..." Penny backed away from the pie.

"I only feed my babies the best," Tammy said as she moved the card another fraction. "This recipe is so high-grade that it could pass inspection for human consumption."

"And what about those bits on top?"

"That's an expensive daily supplement that also cleans their teeth."

"Looks like rabbit turds," Penny muttered as she took Mabel's empty iced tea glass and slipped out of the tent. Her break was nearly over and she was due back at the café in five minutes. She hurried past the tree where Tammy's four dogs had hopelessly tangled their leashes and were sitting quietly, uneasily eyeing the only other dog in the park, a huge bull mastiff bearing straight for them. It outweighed young Todd, who held the leash tightly as he was practically dragged across the grass.

The dog ignored the boy's shouts in its eagerness to play with the four bundles of quivering fur but paused as it reached Penny, wagging its tail. She scratched velvety ears and smiled at Todd, who was bent over and gasping. She felt the dog tense and it raised its nose in the air, sniffing and turning in a circle.

Todd cried out "No, Maxie!" and fell on his face, letting go of the leash as the dog lunged away.

Tammy's dogs barked shrilly as Maxie sped past them with Penny and Todd in hot pursuit. Penny tried vainly to step on Maxie's leash, but the dog had a head start and was widening the gap between them as it headed for the pie tent.

"Incoming!" she shouted, to warn Mabel and Tammy, who turned at her voice in time to dive out of the way. Maxie snatched *Canine Delight* off the corner of the table and ran off with his prize clamped firmly in his jaws. The crowd cheered and clapped as Tammy raced after the dog, screeching in fury.

"We should give her the prize for most entertaining pie," Penny said, gasping for breath.

Mabel grinned and moved the other pies around to fill the empty corner. "At least she proved it was edible."