

“Three extra *extra* large pumpkins, check. Two dozen eggs, check. Four gallons of whole milk. Check. Two boxes of butter, check. Food coloring, check. I thinkkkkk... that is all that’s needed for the base of the cakes. Thanks for lending me a hand with getting all this stuff to city hall, Mud.” Phyll said, an ingredients list tucked neatly into a clipboard with pencil in hand. Phyll and Mud had gone straight to the local grocery store with the fancy spending card the city officials had given them to use on the ingredients list, the total ringing up being higher than Phyll or Mud owned combined sent a wave of shock through them. After putting up all the necessary ingredients in the massive fridge located within the city halls own personal venue Phyll and Mud headed home for the evening where the two of them would spend the remainder of the night playing video games and eating junk food together, as was their normal Friday night routine.

“I’m really, really nervous and excited at the same time for Sunday.” Phyll said between bites of cheese covered bread, his orange eye sitting nestled in his lap. One hand held the gaming remote while the other reached to grab another slice from the open pizza box nestled between the two friends.

“You’ll be fiiiine” Mud replied, hand holding an additional gaming remote. Some sort of platformer played across the tv screen with red and green men in overalls as their respective characters, the two men jumping over small monsters and collecting coins as they went. “You seriously worry too much, y’know. You’ll put yourself in an early grave if you keep at it.”

“That’s easy for you to say, Mud butt. This could make or break my career as a professional baker, I could finally be more than just a farmer.” Phyll replied, cursing under his breath as his character blinked in and out of the game after coming into contact with one of the monsters.

“Yeah but like.. everyone, and I mean *everyone* loves your cooking. Name one person who didn’t like what you’ve made for them.” Mud shot back before setting his remote down to look his friend in the eye, a supportive smile spread across his face.

“You got this dude, don’t worry. I’ll be right there with you in case you need a reminder of what an amazing chef you are.”

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Phyll and Mud created a more thorough game plan over the next few days, Sunday quickly approaching as the celebration where to begin the following Monday. They were to bake the cake as well as decorate the entire thing before Monday at noon, leaving little time for error. After a quick breakfast consisting of coffee and waffles the two began the short trek across town back towards the city hall, rolling clouds moving across the sky. Phyll was surprised to find the city official’s desk empty at the time of their arrival but paid no mind to it as he already knew where the staff kitchen was. Phyll was quick to get to work with Mud accompanied as emotional and moral support, the sandy colored cccat sitting propped up against the side of the island with a sketch pad in hand.

“Okay, breathe, you got this.” Phyll said to himself as he pulled the various ingredients from the large silver fridge. Once all the items were out on the table Phyll began by pouring several cups of flour and sugar into a massive bowl followed by the milk eggs and butter. Using a large wooden spoon Phyll began to turn all the ingredients inside the bowl, sweat breaking across the

front of his brow from exertion. *If only this place had a comically large stand mixer* he thought to himself as he continued to fold the ingredients into each other. Once the ingredients had turned into a semi-visquis like slop Phyll carefully poured it into the three large cake pans he had pre-sprayed with butter, the butter acting as a non-stick spray to prevent the cake from adhering to the bottom and sides of the pan. Last thing he needed was to go back to the grocery store and purchase more ingredients because he messed something up.

Once the pans were inside the oven Phyll quickly set a timer for an hour using the microwave next to the stove, the buttons beeping mechanically as he inputted the time.

“Okay, time to breathe. Time to make fondant. Ugh.” Phyll wiggled his way beneath the island countertop to grab at the large bottle of corn syrup he had brought from his house, the one ingredient he had forgotten in the store. Using a large amount of sugar, water and corn syrup Phyll quickly began working the sugary mush into a large ball, the ingredients somehow turning into a thick yellow-y paste.

“Mud, can you toss me the food coloring? I left it in the bag on the floor with you.” Phyll called, hoping his friend would hear him over the headphones he currently wore.

“Hm?” The brown cccat raised his gaze from his sketch pad, tongue slightly protruding from his mouth in concentration. At the realization his friend was talking to him Mud quickly slid the headphones down to his neck to better hear him. “I’m sorry buddy, I didn’t catch that.”

Phyll rolled his eye inside his skull before repeating himself. “Can you toss me the bag next to you? It’s got the food coloring in it and my hands are covered in pre-mixed fondant. Please.”

“Oh yeah! Sure thing.” Mud replied, placing his sketchpad and pencil down on the floor next to him before grabbing at the thin plastic bag. He quickly got to his feet with the bag in hand, walking over to the kitchen island to place it next to Phyll’s sugary creation.

“Is that edible?” He asked, a finger reaching out to swipe some of the fondant onto the tip of his claw. Phyll batted it away before Mud got the chance to contaminate the mixture with his dirty hands. “Ah ah, when is the last time you washed your hands, buddy boy.”

Mud quickly retracted his hand, arms folding up close to his body like a t-Rex. “Good point. My b.”

“Last thing we need is to potentially get the whole town and then some sick, I’ll never hear the end of it then.” Phyll teased, using his tail to grab at the small box of food coloring while his hands continued to work the fondant into a usable form. “And what kinda friend would I be if I ruined that for ya. I’ll support you from afar.” Mud replied, seemingly unbothered by the string of comments calling him dirty— he knew it was a trait of his considering he lived in the swamps and often spent his days rolling in the dirt and muck. That is when he wasn’t spending time with Phyll who wasn’t afraid of a little mess in his home, they had established a boundary at the beginning of their friendship where Mud would stay several feet away from Phyll’s kitchen while he was cooking at home.

Sitting back in his previous spot Mud picked his sketchbook and pencils back up before placing them in his lap, eye darting back and forth between his current sketch page and watching his friend as he worked.

With a little patience Phyll was able to get the box of food coloring open with just his tail, his hands currently wrist deep in sugary paste as he continued to knead the ball until it became a

more usable form. He lifted the dyes he needed to his lips with the help of his tongue, his teeth going to work on the plastic seals vacuum sealed to the lids, once the plastic had been dealt with Phyll quickly poured several drops of both red and yellow onto the top of the fondant. He allowed the color to absorb into the sugary mess as he moved to wash his hands, choosing to put on thin plastic gloves in favor of staining his hands bright orange. Phyll threw down a thin layer of cornstarch atop the granite countertop to prevent the dye from damaging it as well as toning down the intensity of the color. He pushed with his wrists and pulled with his fingers as he worked the color through the dough, the pasty yellow color of raw fondant slowly turning to a light orange, the color intensifying as he worked. Eventually Phyll was happy with the color, the plastic gloves stained orange like he had anticipated.

The microwave behind him beeped, signaling that the hour it had taken to bake the three large sheets of cake had finished. He quickly hopped over to the oven where he proceeded to open the door with his tail. Phyll swiped a toothpick from a small container next to the microwave and carefully pushed the thin piece of wood into the center of each cake, testing to see if they were truly baked all the way through. When the toothpicks came back clean Phyll slid his hands into a set of large black oven mitts to protect his paw pads as he removed the pans, heat radiating off the tops of them as Phyll placed them on top of the stove to cool.

"Mmmmm... those smell good, Phyll..!" Mud exclaimed from across the room, having sat up a bit to glance over the top of the kitchen island to watch his friend. "Now I don't want to wait for tomorrow!" He finished with a laugh.

Once the cakes had cooled off enough Phyll carefully flipped each pan, the spray butter acting as a libracent as the sweet bread slid slowly from the pan onto the freshly cleaned countertops. He carefully placed each layer of cake on top of one another with a layer of pumpkin icing acting as a bonding agent before beginning to carve his first shape into them. With intricate precision Phyll used a series of knives to cut away at the breadding, with each slice he would reanalyze the entire shape before committing to another. It took Phyll an additional hour of cutting and slicing to get the cake into a form he felt was most realistic before laying the orange fondant across the top. He used some sort of edging tool to insure the fondant would settle into the cracks and crevices of the cake giving it the more realistic look possible before painting on any extra details with the food coloring.

"Okay.. I think I'm done with the base here, now all that's left is to make the two smaller cakes, several vines, leaves and clean up... I'm gonna be here for a while."

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Mud carried Phyll home on his back, the orange and cream colored cccat out cold from the sheet exhaustion of having made three cakes worth of dessert in the span of a single day, decorating and painting all of them by himself. Mud was careful to transport his friend back to his home, choosing to walk slower than he normally would if it meant less bumps for his friend. All in all Phyll had managed to create one large orange pumpkin cake with a medium green one in the middle and a white one on top, a series of vines twisting and turning cascaded down the

sides of the pumpkins with the occasional leaf here and there. From a distance the masterpiece almost looked real, had Mud not known any better.

Once home Mud carefully placed his friend onto the soft couch before dragging a blanket over his sleeping form, ensuring that all sides were tucked in for maximum warmth and coziness.

They'd have a long day tomorrow participating in the town festival and knowing Phyll, he wouldn't relax until the cake had been cut into and the guests happy with icing the cake crumbs littered across their faces.