

A FEAST FOR POPPINS

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SHORT PITCH

When a deranged alchemist, Cornelius, finally creates an elixir to eternal life, his apprentice, Theo, couldn't possibly care less. Theo's motivations lie elsewhere, in the form of his masters' spell book - a book that would grant him power beyond his imagination. Unfortunately, in the meantime, he must put up with Cornelius' cruel taunts. But when he finally devises a plan to steal the spell book, something goes horribly wrong. His dog, Poppins, eats the cake containing the elixir as a distraction from the missing book, unknowingly ingesting a poison that causes him to become a rabid, drooling monster. As Poppins begins to wreak havoc on a nearby town, master and apprentice must put aside their hatred and work together to defeat the monster they have created.

SCENE SET UP

This would be an early scene in Act I of a feature. It establishes the dynamics and attitudes of the two main characters, exploring Theo's hatred of his cruel master and Cornelius's disregard for Theo as his apprentice.

INT. ALCHEMIST'S LABORATORY - NIGHT

A musty odour fills the room. An old alchemist, CORNELIUS, stands before a bubbling caldron, his hair almost as frayed and eccentric as his brain, rubbing his sweating hands with glee. He pulls a dripping cake from the foul bowl, his dark, wrinkly eyes glittering with nauseating excitement.

His apprentice, THEO, watches through glaring eyes from the corner next to a roaring fireplace, cradling a scruffy, grey dog, POPPINS, and sliding a knife through his fingers.

His lip curls as CORNELIUS places the cake on the table.

CORNELIUS (WHISPERING)
Finally. Finally, I've done it.
Fifty long years, fifty years of
living on the brink of death, of
living without passion, without
risk, of living in fear. And I've
done it.

THEO rolls his eyes so hard he thinks he saw his brain.

CORNELIUS continues to mutter excitedly, pacing around the table and staring at the cake as if it has just flashed him.

CORNELIUS (CONT'D)
It's gorgeous. It's beautiful. It's
everything. *I will be everything.*

THEO cuts a clump of POPPIN'S fur and rubs it lightly in his
fingertips. It feels kind of slimy. He grimaces.

THEO
How do you know it's actually going
to work? Remember what happened in
Amsterdam?

CORNELIUS whips around, his eyes filled with deranged glee.
He stalks over to THEO, who watches him with unimpressed
contempt.

CORNELIUS grasps THEOS' face in his hands and leans so close
that THEO struggles to decide if it actually is the caldron
making the room smell so bad.

CORNELIUS (SNEERING)
You think you're so smart, boy. You
think you're soooooo special. But
I'll tell you the truth.

He leans closer.

CORNELIUS (CONT'D)
You'll reek of failure next to an
immortal man.

He pulls back and pats THEO on the cheek, leaving a smudge.
THEO wipes it off, glaring at his master with a hate so
severe it would make the Devil cry.

CORNELIUS stalks back to the table.

THEO eyes a glittering book on stand next to the caldron. The
alchemists spell book. The only reason he is still here.

He strokes POPPINS, his eyes sparkling.

THEO (WHISPERING)
Soon, Poppins. Soon.

CORNELIUS slams his fist down on the table. POPPINS shoots
his head up.

CORNELIUS
Damn it!

THEO

What?

(MUTTERING)

You batty old bastard.

CORNELIUS

I forgot the goddamn cutlery.

THEO snorts.

CORNELIUS (CONT'D)

Shut up.

He strides to the door.

CORNELIUS (CONT'D)

Wait here. Watch the cake. If that bloody dog goes anywhere near it, I'll use both of your eyeballs for my martini nightcap.

THEO says nothing, his eyes flicking between CORNELIUS and the book. He nods.

CORNELIUS hurries out of the room, still muttering to himself about eternal life and other such nonsense.

THEO waits for his footsteps to fade before leaping out of the chair and rushing over to the book. POPPINS tumbles off off his lap with a yelp.

THEO runs his hands over the books' spine, his heart surging with adrenaline. He slowly takes it off the stand, gazing at it like he would a first love. Smirking, he slips it into his coat.

THEO (TURNING BACK)

Poppins. You're up. Distraction time.

He points at the cake.

POPPINS leaps onto the table, attacking the cake with a vicious intent.

THEO grabs a different book and runs back to the chair, pretending to become invested in its pages. He listens to the snarfing coming from the table, trying to hide his smile.

CORNELIUS rushes back into the room, stopping dead in his tracks when he sees the murder scene before him. The cutlery in his hand clatters to the floor.

POPPINS licks his lips, not a single regret in his beady eyes.

CORNELIUS (HISSING)
What...have you.. done, boy?

THEO looks up, an oblivious expression on his face. He surveys the room, taking in the happiest dog in the world, and the unhappiest master.

THEO
Oh no.

He tries to sound sincere, but fails horrifically.

THEO (CONT'D)
I am so sorry.

That was probably worse.

POPPINS burps.

CORNELIUS
Do you have any idea what you've done? You stupid, stupid...

He begins backing out of the room.

POPPINS burps again.

THEO rises out of the chair.

THEO
I promise, I only looked away for a second, Master. I would never betray you like that.

POPPINS continues to burp.

CORNELIUS stares at the dog. A look of fear swells in his eyes.

CORNELIUS (WHISPERING)
We have to run.

THEO
It's just the dog.

CORNELIUS
No, no. You don't understand. We have to go. NOW!

POPPINS lets out a burp so ferocious, there is a tremor in the room.

THEO watches in horror as the tiny, scruffy dog standing on the table begins to grow. His bones crack, his teeth rip through his gums and his skin seems to bubble as it stretches to fit. A dark red engulfs his eyes.

CORNELIUS (CONT'D)
NOW, BOY! RUN!

THEO leaps across the room as the table splinters under POPPINS' weight. The dog snarls, swinging around and whipping CORNELIUS with a paw, slamming him into the wall.

THEO
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?!

CORNELIUS groans, his mouth bleeding.

THEO sprints to the door.

CORNELIUS
Help me, boy!

THEO turns back to look at him.

THEO (SNARLING)
No eternal life for you, Master.

POPPINS leaps forward and THEO dives out of the way. POPPINS' tail hits the fireplace with a THWACK! Embers scatter, sending flames creeping up the bookshelf.

THEO and CORNELIUS race for the door, leaving POPPINS screeching in the lab. They run out of the house and into the cold night.

EXT. DARK FOREST GLEN - CONTINUOUS

Master and apprentice collapse onto the grass, panting. They watch the tiny cabin flicker with angry flames. CORNELIUS spits blood.

They watch the enormous dog flee into the night, his tail trailing a smoking ember.

THEO tackles CORNELIUS to the ground, his hands grasping his masters neck.

THEO
What have you done to my dog you
crazy old man?!

CORNELIUS lets out a strained laugh, his eyes glittering.

THEO (CONT'D)

Answer me you freak! What in
Satans' name was in that bloody
cake?!

CORNELIUS grins through blood-soaked teeth.

CORNELIUS (STRAINED)

Chocolate.