The one with all the pies

by LostinFic

Summary

An irresistible apple pie delivered to the wrong address leads to an equally irresistible first kiss. Autumn fic.

Notes

Prompted by Fadewithfury
and written for Timepetalsprompts’ Autumn bingo
Inspired by the Friends episode “the one with all the cheesecakes”

Hardy was halfway through slipping on a sweater, when someone knocked at his door. He glared at it, in confusion and annoyance. He slipped his other arm in the sweater, and, with his head still under wool, he opened the door. His head popped out of the collar, and he froze at the sight of his beautiful neighbour.

Hannah lived across the hall, and they seemed to share similar irregular schedules. He was acutely aware of being way out of her league, so most interactions with her had happened entirely within his mind. However, last week, her date had turned ugly, and he’d helped her get rid of a drunk, aggressive man. She was quite shaken afterwards and had asked him to stay for a while. They’d watched television as she blabbered nervously. She’d fallen asleep during Iron Man, and he’d covered her with a blanket before quietly leaving.
“Hey Alec! I think this is for you.” She placed a white box in his hands. “Sorry, I opened it, I thought it was for me.”

It was addressed to A. Harris.

“Right. But I’m not Harris, I’m Hardy.”

“Oh. Who’s Harris?”

He shrugged. “Bloke on the first floor maybe. Albert, is it?”

“Could be… It’s a pie.”

Out of curiosity, he opened the top. It wasn’t just any store-bought pie. This was a work of culinary art. Golden strips of dough sprinkled with powdered sugar, arranged in a lattice over thick filling full of real apple chunks. His mouth watered as a whiff of sugar and cinnamon reached his nose.

“It smells really good,” he said.

“Heavenly,” she leaned over the box, licking her lips.

“That crust must be made with real butter.”

“Mmmm yeah. And I think there’s salted caramel sauce in there with the apples.”

He peered closer, and he could almost taste it, the rich caramel and flaky crust melting on his tongue.

“I suppose we should take it to Albert,” he said, reluctantly.

“I suppose, yeah.” She didn’t take her eyes off the pie.

“That’d be the right thing to do…” His stomach growled. “Is that a fork in your hand?”

Hannah tucked her chin in her shoulder with a mischievous smile. “I was really hoping you wouldn’t be home.”

“You’d have eaten it?”

“Yeah.”

“But what about the person who ordered it?”

“I figured they’d just call the bakery and get a new one sent for free. And they’d verify his address so they’d get it right this time.”

“You’ve thought this through.”

“It smells really, really good.”

“Maybe…”

“Yeah?” Her eyes sparkled with anticipation.

“It’s the delivery man’s fault.”

“Yes! Exactly!”
“And as you said, Albert will get another one for free.”

“So, your place or mine?”

“Sorry?” he sputtered.

She walked past him into his flat and sat down at his table, fork in her fist and a grin on her face.

He’d barely placed the pie down that she dove in. Well, too late to bring this back to Albert now. He hesitated half a second before getting his own fork.

He hadn’t indulged in pastries in a long time because of his heart issues, but he firmly believed this pie was by far the best thing he had ever put in his mouth. Smooth, creamy caramel and tart pieces of apple, not overbake so they still crunched under his teeth.

They scarfed down the pie, with barely enough time for a breath in between bites, let alone for words. Crumbs fell into the cowl neck of Hannah’s sweater. Hardy scraped his fork along the bottom of the box to catch every drop of filling.

Hannah laughed.

“What?”

“You’re moaning,” she said.

“Oi! I’m not moaning.”

“Yes, you are.”

She nudged his leg under the table and the corners of his mouth twitched.

“It’s really good,” he protested.

“I know. God, I’m so full but I can’t stop eating it.”

She took another bite and rolled her eyes heavenward with a sigh. He distantly wondered what else could make her do that face again.

He brought the last bite to his lip and slouched down in his chair with a satisfied sigh. She rubbed her distended stomach.

“You’ll have to roll me out of here,” she said.

*Or you could stay.* “Cuppa? It’s good for, erm, digestion.”

“Sure.”

He stood up with a groan and turned the kettle on. As he placed two mugs down on the counter, he realized, he’d never had a visitor here, beside Daisy.

He suddenly felt self-conscious about his worn sweater, scruffy cheeks and the pile of unopened mail.

Hannah brought her feet up on the chair, holding the steaming cup over her knees. She scanned the flat as if only now realizing where she was.
“Just moved in?” she asked.

“Erm, no. Haven’t had time to…” He gestured vaguely at the blank walls.

“I’ll take it you’re single then.”

“Aye.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “Have you lived in this building long?”

“About three years. I had a house before but I just wasn’t any good at maintaining it, you know, the lawn and the shingles and plumbing.” She grimaced.

“I had a house too. Hated that stuff too. Not very good with my hands.”

Her gaze dropped to his hands wrapped around the warm mug. She shifted on her chair, leaning towards him on the table. She ran her finger around the bottom of the pie box, picking up crumbs and bringing them to her mouth.

“You know, I never said thank you for the other night,” she said.

“Don’t mention it.”

“No, I’m sure most people would just shut themselves up in their flats if they heard shouts in the hall. I don’t know what I’d done if you hadn’t come to my rescue.” And there was something in the way she lingered on that word, fluttering her eyelashes, that could be mistaken for flirting. But Hardy knew better.

“You don’t strike me as a woman who needs rescuing,” he said, remembering all the times he’d seen her come and go in sharp suits, killer heels and a confident gait.

She picked up a few more crumbs with her index. Hardy leaned forward on the table too.

“Still,” she began with a sad smile, “it’s nice not having to deal with wankers all on my own every once in a while.” She shook her head and plastered on a cheery expression. “So, do you make a habit of eating your neighbour’s pie?”

“Sorry, gotta get this. Thanks for the cuppa. Catch you later.”

And just like that, Hannah was out of his flat, and he was certain they would never speak again.

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Back from a long day at work, Hardy walked up the stairs to his flat. He stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of a white bakery box in front of Hannah’s door. She came out at that moment, in a pea coat and knee-high boots, as if she’d been waiting to go out with him.

“There’s another one,” he said by way of greetings.

She gasped at the sight of the box. “They delivered it to the wrong address again?”

“Well, we just have to bring it to Albert this time,” Hardy said, mustering all his willpower.

“But…”
“What’s the problem?”

“I dreamt I was eating pie aaaaall night long,” she said as if it had been a dirty dream.

“Well, we can’t eat another one.”

“Can’t we?”

“For god’s sake, we ate an entire pie yesterday and you want more?”

“I always want more.”

Their eyes met, and he hesitated, remembering the buttery crust melting on his tongue and subtle mix of cinnamon and nutmeg. His mouth filled with saliva. Even from his place on the steps, he could smell its divine fragrance or was it just his imagination? But it wasn’t just about the pie, it was about Hannah in his flat, her sighs of delight and teasing tone. How was he supposed to say no to her?

“We’re just hungry. We haven’t had supper,” she reasoned, straightening her back.

“Yes, you’re right. It’s hunger.”

“D’you want to grab a bite with me?”

“Sure,” he replied. “Best take the pie downstairs, so we’re not tempted.”

“Good call.”

Hannah held the box at arm’s length, keeping the delicious scent at bay. They reluctantly placed it on Albert Harris’s doorstep. They didn’t knock for fear they’d have to explain what happened to the previous pie.

Outside their building, the street was busy with Londoners enjoying a rare warm autumn night. Not a cloud on the horizon, only golden rays of light streaming between trees and buildings. The scent of earth and of the first wood fires of the season lingered in the air. He thought of Daisy’s first day of school and of raking leaves with his grandfather who would recount embellished stories of his youth.

The weather was so inviting, they walked for a while without looking for a place to eat. They wandered around the streets of their neighbourhood. Hannah pointed out the finest coffee place, the best dry cleaner, her favourite music shop.

“And that shop on the corner there, if you have a sister—or girlfriend—and you never know what to get her as a present, this place will save your arse.”

“Noted… For my sister. Not girlfriend, I don’t…”

“Noted,” she replied with a smirk.

Her enthusiastic speech made him want to get out more. Since moving to London, he hadn’t really taken time to enjoy the city.

“And you’ve got to try The Other Henry.”

She pointed at a restaurant across the street. Hardy had spotted the place before, but wasn’t comfortable eating alone there.

“Let’s try it now,” he suggested.
Hardy opened the door for her, and she grazed him on the way in. It could have been an accident, but he didn’t miss that cheeky glance through her eyelashes.

It was a cozy bistro, high vaulted ceiling and low lights, red brick walls covered with vintage French advertising posters. *Chat noir, Absinthe, Moët, Ricard* and *Chocolat*. Around the bar, a group of young professionals flirted with girls while keeping an eye on the football game.

They slid into a booth, away from the crowd. Hannah removed her coat, revealing a low scoop neckline that slid off one shoulder. She tossed her curls over the other shoulder and smiled. In the candlelight, her eyes glowed golden, and nervousness gripped his stomach.

“What do you do?” Hardy asked lamely after they’d ordered.

“Erm, I’m in between stuff at the moment.”

“Between what kinds of stuff?”

She fiddled with the cutlery, running the butter knife along the checkered pattern of the table cloth. “Freelancing stuff.”

“That’s vague.”

“Yeah. Sorry.” She tucked her hands under her legs. “I’m a writer… slash client liaison.”

“What do you write?”

“Books. And I collaborate with some magazines and websites.”

“Like a journalist?”

“Sort of. And you, what do you do?”

“Detective inspector.”

“That explains the interrogation… and the rescuing.”

“Shit, sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. How about an original question? Hmm, let’s see: if you could travel back in time to relive any day of your life, which day would it be?”

They reminisced and talked and argued and laughed between bites of duck confit and tartare steak.

Hannah was really easy to talk to, always a witty quip on the tip of her tongue, she dodged awkwardness like a pro. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been so comfortable with someone. She was this whole new person to discover. Not a colleague or a suspect. And, unlike on a date, there was no pressure to expose past relationships or reveal what he was looking for in a partner.

They ordered dessert, but unlike the rest of the meal, it was unsavory.

“Nothing will ever compare to the pie,” Hannah said, pushing away a barely-touched brownie. “Let’s get mulled wine instead.”

The sun set replaced by a moon, huge and bright orange. And they sipped hot, spiced wine in companionable silence, cocooned in the velvet upholstered booth, their legs brushing together under the table.
“I had a good time,” Hannah said as they walked back home.

“Really?”

“Don’t sound so surprised.”

“I mean, I did too.”

“Good.” She beamed. “It’d been a while since I just hung out with someone. Since I’ve… reoriented my career, there’s lots of people I don’t see anymore. Writing is kind of a lonely job. Just me and my laptop, you know.”

“Well, if— if your laptop ever feels lonely too I’ve got this computer.”

“Yeah, I think he’d like that.”

“But it’s kind of old, and rusty.”

“That’s okay, I-- my laptop knows better than to judge a computer by its appearance. As long as it has a good… hard drive?”

They laughed, and, amazingly, she looped her arm through his. They walked the rest of the way in silence. Too soon, they reached their building. He didn’t want to part from her already.

A few steps in, Hannah froze.

“Do you see what I see?”

The bakery box was still on Albert’s doorstep.

“It’s still there,” he said.

“Albert must be out.”

“He could be out of town. Away for days. Weeks.”

“Well, we can’t leave it out there,” Hannah said.

“It could go bad.”

“We don’t want him eating a bad pie.”

“No. That could make him sick.”

“And we don’t want him to be sick.”

“So, we’d be protecting him.”

Hannah dashed for the box, then grabbed his hand and they ran up the stairs. They reached their floor, laughing and gasping for air, still holding hands.

“We’re thieves,” he declared.

“I prefer the term ‘partners in crime’.”
She gave him a dazzling, toothy grin, and warmth flooded his veins. *Partners.* And there was a moment of wordless smiling, looking into each other’s eyes like a couple of dorks. He ran his thumb over her knuckles, and her gaze dipped to his lips. He swallowed thickly.

“There’s something else I’d like to steal,” Hardy said.

She tilted her head coyly. “Oh yeah, what’s that?”

“… A kiss?”

She chuckled.

“That bad?”

“No! It’s sweet. Smooooth.”

“Urgh, forget—”

She cut him off, pushing up on her tiptoes to press a kiss to his mouth. Craving quickly replaced his surprise. He chased her lips of honey and wine. Eager. Cradling her jaw in his palms. She responded in kind, opening her mouth. A small moan encouraged him. He pressed her against the door. It squashed the pie between their stomachs. Apple filling oozed out of the box.

“Shit.”

“Well, that’s one way to get rid of evidence.”

“I am so sorry. Your dress.”

“And your suit… I suppose we don’t have a choice but to take off our clothes now.”

He couldn’t resist kissing her again, smiling lips moving together as the pie fell to the floor.

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