

Four and Twenty

Donald was ten and tall for his age. He freckles were pronounced from playing in the sun – he hardly ever did his homework and was always running around outside getting into mischief. His ears that stuck out were often sunburned. He didn't care. His was the favorite; his sister didn't count – his father as much as told him so. "Donnie, when you grow up, all this is yours," and had waved his hands about as if it encompassed all.

He liked sweets but especially cakes and pies. His favorite rhyme as a child was Sing a Song of Sixpence and he frequently recited it when he went to bed. His favorite game was to play king. He would place a pillow on the floor in the den and slapping his hand on the coffee table in front of him proclaiming repeatedly, "that was a dainty dish to set before the king." Never for a moment did he doubt that he was the king.

All of that was before he became ten and was puzzled how anyone was able to put 24 blackbirds in one pie even it were fifteen inches across since all the blackbirds he had seen had been large, the size of a crow. *If I'm going to be king someday, I need to check and see if that can really be done.*

Therefore, he decided to collect his own blackbirds until he got to 24 and then see if they would fit on the pie plate he had found in his mother's pantry. He got his slingshot and collected small round stones. Luckily, for the blackbirds he was a poor shot. However, he wasn't afraid to climb trees and soon had gathered eleven small fledglings that he drowned one by one. He put them in a plain paper bag, hiding it the basement freezer.

He knew his father would understand and guessed that his mother would be angry since she was always going on about how important it was to take care of the environment.

But since he needed more blackbirds, he decided he to climb higher to reach the more inaccessible nests. Things went well. When a mother came back to feed her chicks, he found her nest and chased her away. He then pushed the fledglings to the ground where he broke their necks. Soon enough he had 23 blackbirds.

He needed one more but the next time he climbed a tree he slipped and broke his arm. He had to explain why he was up in a tree and was surprised when his mother said she understood. She told him he was a brave boy and as soon as his arm healed, they would work together to make a pie with four and twenty blackbirds.

This encouragement was all he needed. A week later, with the cast still on his right arm, he tried to climb the maple tree in his neighbor's yard. Alas, he slipped and landed on his head snapping his neck.

His father yelled at his mother and his mother yelled back at his father each blaming the other for Donnie's death.

Donnie was buried and the pie soon forgotten. His parents wept but six months later, they were divorced. Neither was willing to admit that children cannot be permitted to run wild. The pie was forgotten.

PROVING that children must be taught boundaries before learning to bake pies.