The Sampson Murders:

“You hear about the new court case, then? Right, it’s bloody madness what’s going on down there in New Mexico. Heard they’re bringin’ the whole thing up to the top.”

“Yes, well, Yokel can try as much as he wants. I’m not sure he’s getting away with this one.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure. He’s got a damned good lawyer if I ever knew one. You gonna eat that?” My friend pointed at my last blueberry scone.

“All yours.” His fat hand reached across the table and seized the pastry.

“Blessings, mate.” He dipped his knife into a jar and spread its contents. “Just gotta finish up the jam, y’know? It would be a disservice to waste it.”

“Yes, of course.” He went on mumbling about the Yokel case but I didn’t hear a thing. A sinister thought had eased its way into my mind and captured my attention. I watched as he spread that terrible strawberry jam; I watched as he downed his glass of cranberry juice. It seemed as much as I wanted to hide the memories, they only grew more powerful. Deeper and deeper they swam, myself the founder of their start, imploring them and leading them, into the canals of my own heart…

“Hey, mate, you alright?” My friend jerked me out of my thoughts, his hands gripping my shoulders. “You look like you’ve just seen a ghost.” Perhaps I had.

I gazed into his wildly superficial eyes. I didn’t want to tell him, but you only rid a secret by giving it away. I met his eyes dead with mine. “Have I ever told you about the Sampson murders?”

I was assigned to the curious town of Filipitus a couple of years back on account of several missing persons—well, not several, dozens. As I found my way into the downtown area I started asking questions. Each question led me to the answer of Pectechuan Sampson, an old headed lumberjack and self proclaimed sugarbush farmer who isolated himself in the woods not far from town. According to the citizens of Filipitus, there was something off about this man—the whole bloodline, even. There were rumors of unforeseen hobbies that the Sampsons had acquired over the years, almost certainly passed down to Pectechuan.

In the beginning I had my doubts. But a lead is a lead, so I made my way out of the downtown and into the isolated wood of the Sampson property.

Dirty brown and crumbling, the aeon-old log cabin looked as though at any moment it would fall in on itself and I made sure to use excessive precaution when knocking on the door so as to not be victim to the aforementioned precariousness. No answer. No worries, I could come back later with a search warrant.

But there was something off about this place. The air was thick, chaining me down to the earth; a smell—so familiar, yet I couldn’t pin down what it was—wafted around my body and offset my mind; the dark wood of the cabin was knotted with evil. Who was I to wait for a warrant? If you had been there you would’ve known: whatever force brooded here had to be stopped immediately.

So I entered.

In opposition to my harrowing predictions, the interior of the cabin yielded relatively little oddities—this being a paradoxical oddity in itself. Lamps, couches, dressers, the regular furnishings populated the cabin and at first it seemed that there may not be much of a case here. Yet that familiarly tantalizing smell followed everywhere I went and I knew there must be a source.

After clearing the house, I made my way to the backyard, or rather, the dozens of acres that hosted the isolated wood. A multitude of things could be hidden in such a large space. I would need a team to search the whole expanse, I myself could only handle what was in my view. And what was in my view brought back to me the citizens' description of Sampson. In particular, the fact that he was a self proclaimed sugarbush farmer. I could see, now, that the wood lay dense with sugar maples and that several of them were tapped.

As I made my way closer, I could see that the sap was flowing well, and the tantalizing smell even better. I put my hand to the tap and retracted some sap. It was even darker and thicker than the wood. I put it to my tongue and instantly recoiled at the sensation of iron, and the *recognition of blood.*

“It helps bring out the flavor.” A gravelly voice appeared behind me and I whipped around to meet the eyes of Pectechuan Sampson. He stood there, standing well above me with a frame double my size. A messy beard lined his face and neck and he wielded his lumberjack ax above his shoulder.

“Don’t tell me you’ve put the bodies in the trees and are tapping them for blood?”

“I suppose I needn’t. It seems you are familiar with my production…and the taste?” He motioned to my hand and the realization of what I had tasted again churned up my innards. I took a step back and he advanced to the tap. “It’s delicious, isn’t it?” He brought his head down to the tap and began to guzzle.

What a monster lay before me. To imagine, and then to produce that imagination in full? Who could be capable of this but the devil himself? I grabbed a log next to my foot. I had to do what was meant to be done, even if it was the first step towards becoming one of his kind—a murderer. I raised it high above my head and blew down upon his with as much force as I could manage. His head smashed in and the tap lodged into his throat. I could see him writhing, trying to get free as the bloody sap flooded into his body. And soon, it overflowed from his mouth and the writhing stopped altogether.

“So now you see why the jam and juice deter me—they remind me of the blood tapped maples of Pectechuan Sampson.”

My friend looked at me in a strange manner. I couldn’t tell whether he believed me or mocked me with his astonishment. His response held the same tone. “I…well that would certainly do it.”

“And maybe you can infer why the recent Yokel case makes me boil with unease.”

“Why…I’m not sure.”

“You see, Mr. Sampson didn’t actually own the land behind his house. It was a local wood, but only he ever used it. And when the judge made his decision on the case, he concluded that there was no *certain* way to link Sampson to the murders, harboring, or cannibalism of the bodies. Since they were hidden in the trees and the blood was mixed with sap, he had a foundation to plead ignorance. His only crime at the end of the day was illegally tapping government wood.”

“I see. Must’ve been a damned good lawyer.”

“He was. But he didn’t stop there. He’s defended many guilty criminals: Dr. Perkins, Dr. Martin, Burkson, Greene, and now Yokel. If the system lets him keep going, who knows where justice will stand, if at all.”

My friend nodded along. Something in his eyes told me that the recantation was already getting work done on him. His body slowed and his eyes glassed over as he finished the last bite of scone, forever damning his mind to the memory of the Sampson murders.