

Boner 1 - harvesting a rat.

HARVESTING THE rat was a mistake.

It started when Codell's uncle Odell said that rats were impossible to catch. They have a secret bone, his uncle said, that made them invisible. Codell wanted that invisibility bone more than anything.

The opportunity came when he found a freshly dead rat by a dumpster. He didn't want to be disgusting, so he picked up the departed rat by the tail and dropped it in a plastic bag to bring home and boil. The next day, as soon as his mother left for work, he got out her biggest kitchen pot, plunked in the rat, filled the pot with water, covered it, and lit the burner. His mother would be proud that he turned the fan on.

It went swimmingly. After a while the water percolated, giving the rat's limbs and tail the illusion of vitality. Codell, no stranger to his mother's kitchen, got a carving knife to cut the rat into serving-size pieces to speed up the process, but thought better of it so as not to damage the bone of invisibility.

By late morning the rat and water, indistinguishable from one other, bubbled in a thick, furry gunk of blood, bile and innards. The tail, undissolved, twisted like oversized spaghetti. Codell put a big colander in the sink and strained the steamy, primordial stew. Just like his mother did when they colored Easter eggs, he spread newspapers on the kitchen table and dumped the gooey - *substance* - onto it. Bones were abundant - long ones, knobby ones, big ones, small ones, dark ones, light ones. One bone, two bones, red bone, blue bone. There were a lot of bones. Dozens. Only then did Codell pause.

Written by K.G. Jones.

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He would have to test every bone for invisibility. Every. Single. Bone.

He got a mirror from the bathroom so he would see when he turned invisible. It occurred to him, his clothes would still be visible, so when he went outside he'd have to go naked. How long would he stay invisible? What if he was outside and he became visible without any clothes on? Would he have to hold the invisibility bone the whole time? Maybe he could put it on a necklace. But wait; if he was invisible, wouldn't his eyes be invisible, too, and he'd be blind? No, he'd absorb light or the light would wrap or warp around him or something. That's the only way invisibility made sense.

With a long handled wooden spoon, he spread the oozy rat matter over the newspapers. Were those teeth? They were so tiny; how many teeth does a rat have? The long bones, they must be ribs; they were flexible. The skull broke up into multiple bones. What if the invisibility bone broke up, too?

It was past time for lunch. Codell wasn't exactly sure when his mother would be home, but he had too many worrisome questions to stop and eat. What if it had to be inside of him to work? What if the invisibility was enough for a rat but not enough for a human? What if he had to do something for the invisibility bone to work? Were there magic words? Was there a rat king he had to pray to? What if the bone had to be from a live rat? *What if the invisibility bone was invisible?*

The questions overwhelmed him. He was thinking too much. It was just as possible that the bone of invisibility could stay mixed together with all the other bones. After all, it worked that way for the rat. All he had to do was get it to work for him.

Codell placed both hands palm down in the warm sludge. He believed with all his heart, the invisibility bone would work. It would work. He closed his eyes, breathed deeply, and imagined himself invisible. He could scare his teachers, get on a bus without paying, hide from anyone, spy on anyone, go into the girls' bathroom.

"Rat King, oh Rat King, I summon you to vanish me, please make me vanish." He concentrated on his fingertips and they became numb and invisible. He did the same with his toes. The invisibility spread up his arms and legs to the rest of his body and his head. He concentrated so intensely that he didn't hear the key turn in the apartment door lock.

"WHAT IS ALL THIS?" It was definitely not the voice of the Rat King.

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It took a long time for Codell to clean up the kitchen. Memories of the consequences, too severe to put into words, faded over time. Their disappearance was a grand irony. It was not those consequences, but his mother's words, that he remembered years later:

"You got it all wrong. Your mistake was not boiling the rat. It was thinking that you need a bone to make you invisible. You're already invisible. It's the bone of visibility that you should search for."

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Inspired by a passage in T.H. White's trilogy, *The Once and Future King*.

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