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The Thanksgiving Search Party

Family: the loving people that will always be there for you. Smiles that are so wide, the reflection of the white teeth make everyone's eyes squint. Football: the wonderful American sport that is looked forward to every fall. Mouthwatering food that only comes around once a year. Card games where the innocent competition may become more than intended. The sweet smell of grandma's fresh baked pie that my dear father couldn't resist. What do all these have in common? Thanksgiving.

It is a family tradition to eat Thanksgiving at my parents' house; we host it every year. The same standard people bring the same customary food: Aunt Kathy brings green bean casserole, Aunt Sue brings (my favorite) homemade mac n' cheese, and of course my sweet Grandma Snyder brings the infinite desserts. Every family member participates in the same usual events: watching football and playing cards. This special holiday—that only comes once a year—is the mirror image of the last, yet no one ever has the slightest idea of it becoming boring. However, about three years ago, the universe decided to make Thanksgiving excessively more interesting than usual.

The few months prior to Thanksgiving, my dad had been away on business in Chicago, Illinois. While there, he went on a daring quest to lose weight—A LOT OF IT. He lost over 25 pounds by strictly consuming only fish and eggs for three months. *Yuck!* My dad practically turned back into his old modeling self, but that's a whole other traumatic childhood story. He looked as thin as he was in his twenties. Frankly, I would never strictly consume only fish to lose weight, I'd rather gain it. However, it worked for my dad. Even though he was ecstatic to lose so much weight, he constantly wished he could come home to his family.

To no one's surprise my dad was able to come home for the holiday, he didn't dare mess with missing Thanksgiving. Missing Thanksgiving was like missing the birth of your first born child; he wouldn't even let the thought of being absent cross his mind. My dad was home and I couldn't be happier to see him. I remember finally being to give him a bear hug and have my corresponding hands touch—which I was never able to do before. Of course he felt excited to see me too, but by his facial expressions towards the surplus amount of food I think his first thought went a little more like, *Man, I couldn't be happier to see all this scrumptious food after eating fish for three months.* If you didn't get the hint earlier; I absolutely despise the taste of seafood. Joyful to have all the Thanksgiving dishes displayed in front of him, my father began to drool at the sight of **five pies**. So many choices, how could anyone resist?

The family was settled into their individual grooves after stuffing their bellies like my mother stuffed the turkey that morning. Some chose to lay around and watch the game or play

cards, while others (most of the women) sat around the kitchen table looking at magazines to scribble down ideas on their shopping lists for the next morning at 3 A.M.

It was now half-time of the Detroit Lions football game and to everyone's surprise they were dominating the Green Bay Packers. During what seemed to be the never-ending commercials, the herd of men—including my tomboy sister—migrated up the narrow basement stairwell to snag their seconds of supper before returning to their nest.

After the crowd of them seemed to get all into the kitchen, my mother began to have a concerned look grow on her face. When all of a sudden I hear her say, "Where's Al?" If you weren't sure, that's my father's name. Everyone's heads started scanning the room to catch a glimpse of him—no one was able to.

At first the whole family wasn't too concerned, but then it was almost the start of the third quarter and his whereabouts were still unknown. The entire bunch of us began to wonder and search the house. Not a single family member had a clue where my father could have gone. The other jocular fathers in my family, such as my uncle and grandfather, would make silly accusations like, "I bet he was still hungry so he went to the store to get another turkey."

Others which chime in and say, "I bet he deci'ed to go back to Chicago af'er being wif all us weirdos." Of course, everyone would grow a slight smirk or peep a quiet giggle, however deep down we all were a bit concerned.

It wasn't until the Lion's scored another touchdown that we heard my mom's galvanizing outburst. At once all the family members in the kitchen gaze around the house trying to discover it's place of origin.

Finally, my mom sneaks out from behind her bedroom door on top of the second floor balcony and gently clicks the door shut behind her back. Her body was stiff, all the muscles in her body clenched. Myself and a few other family members stare at her, waiting for her to speak.

She pauses until she is able to mumble the words, "I found AI."

All of us sit there anxiously waiting to find out what tragedy our family would have to go through. Whispers begin to build up, then finally my great aunt kathy asks, "Well is everything okay?" I believed at the time my mother was trying to cover up her facial expressions to hide her concern, however she was truly attempting to mask her giggles.

Her only reply was, "I'll let him tell you!"

My father slowly drags his feet out of my parents' bedroom. His right hand is neatly placed over his left that lays across his grumbling stomach. He lifts his hanging head to catch a glimpse of his beloved family looking up towards him.

My father was not quick to deliver the secret of why he was in his bedroom for the last hour and a half, so my impatient cousin squeals, "Well what happened to yah?"

His face begins to turn blush red from his embarrassment. My father catches the gaze of the five mocking, half-eaten pies and mutters the words "I just couldn't help myself... I had to try them all."