

Joey awoke before the alarm went off. He showered and shaved as he did every morning. He liked the ritual of whipping his shaving brush in the mug of soap – hearing it gently clatter against the ceramic mug like a tiny bell. He applied the soapy brush to his whiskers as he looked at his reflection – not merely at his face in a routine manner of hygienic maintenance – but deeply in an attempt to recognize who was standing in front of him – returning the gaze. This daily accounting of his identity took on a Zen-like meditation. However, unlike the art of shaving, he rarely applied the same attention and thought to his attire. But today he actually invested some time and consideration into what to wear. His dress had to be both functional, allowing him to complete his role as cook, yet somewhat fashionable in keeping with his role as host. At the same time, he wanted the day to be casual and relaxed. He eventually opted for some light brown khaki pants with a black oxford shirt with the long sleeves rolled up, to reflect his efforts in the kitchen as well as an air of informality.

Once dressed, he began adding the final touches to everything inside his house. After he put the turkey in the oven, he set the table with three settings, wondering how things had gone with Laurel and her mom. He could only imagine what their greeting at the airport was like. Likewise, he wondered about the conversation they would have. Deep inside, he was actually worried and concerned causing him to jump when the phone rang. His heart went up into his throat, fearful that their reunion had gone poorly. As he put the phone to his ear, he prepared himself to hear Laurel say she was calling the whole thing off.

“Hello?”

“Hi. It’s me...us, I mean. We’ve had an interesting evening.”

“Interesting?” Joey probed.

“We had a good long talk...as you can image. I’ll tell you all about it later. I told her all about you...and...she’s excited to meet you. We’re OK...it went better than I thought it would. Anyway, I just called to say we’re on our way. We’ll see you in about 45 minutes...OK?”

“OK.”

He hung up the phone and through the kitchen window noticed some flowers in the courtyard longing to be collected and displayed on the dining table. He put them in a vase that Laurel had given him. She had found it perched on the top of a garbage bin on campus, apparently deemed useless due to a minor break along top rim. Laurel rescued it and carefully mended the broken piece with Super Glue. Joey was touched and amused by her uncanny ability to find beauty in the brokenness of the world. He placed the resurrected vase on the table and smiled knowing she'd be pleased to see it on display. Joey suddenly noticed a chill in the room and decided to light the fire. Once lit, he stood up from the fireplace and surveyed the room, finding it suitably cozy. Crosby, Stills, and Nash would approve.

He ran the vacuum cleaner one more time, although the floor didn't need it, and opened the curtains to let the sunshine in. Joey went into the kitchen to check the turkey and put the final touches on the salad, stuffing, and potatoes. Suddenly realizing the potential of splattering something on his shirt, Joey donned a plain maroon apron. Despite his cooking prowess, he opted to pick up a pumpkin pie from Marie Callender's restaurant the day before, making it one less thing to worry about and do. He withdrew the pie from the box and placed it on the countertop. He returned to the table and lit the candles before going over to select another album when he heard Laurel's car pull up outside. They were early.

Of course traffic would be light on a holiday, he surmised. He quickly dropped the turntable stylus on the spinning vinyl of a jazz guitar album by Joe Pass. The doorbell rang and Joey took one final look around the room. He saw family. He saw a festive table of bounty and gratitude. He saw storytelling and laughter. He saw celebration and a reunion. He saw Thanksgiving as he knew it or hoped it to be.

Satisfied with what he saw, and surrendering to the fact he didn't have time to do anything else, he walked to the door and opened it. Laurel nervously bounced up and down announcing with a beaming smile, “We're here!”

Laurel was standing next to an attractive and older version of herself. Other than age, the only main differences in their appearance were their hair and eyes. Her mother wore her slightly greying hair pulled back and up in a bun while Laurel, as always, had her hair down and pulled back by a single rubber band. The color of Laurel's eyes had always accentuated the botanic beauty of her name whereas her mother's eyes were an uncanny shade of blue – more of a smoky grey that were striking with her grey hair. Otherwise, Joey could immediately discern where Laurel's doll face and Mona Lisa smile had come.

Joey welcomed them exuberantly, "Happy Thanksgiving! Welcome, welcome!" Laurel bounced to him with a flash of a hug and quickly stepped back. He stood tall and rubbed his two hands down his barrel chest, suddenly realizing he was still wearing the apron, almost as if he was wiping her affectionate greeting away in embarrassment. Joey offered his hand and rehearsed greeting, "It's so nice to have you here." Laurel's mother tentatively received his outstretched hand. She stood there quietly for a moment, lightly pumping his hand in slow motion, long enough for Laurel to turn her head toward her mother wondering why she hadn't yet returned Joey's greeting. Her mother just kept standing there, his hand in hers now stilled, gazing at him. Now, even Joey tilted his head in slight wonder. Finally, she smiled and matter-of-factly replied, "Hello, Scooter."

He looked at her for what seemed like an eternity. He swallowed hard. "Gale...it's you."