

Great Aunt Thelma's Last Thanksgiving

The twins were acting up something awful, which was about par for the course for them, since they just turned twelve and all. They bickered and fought and poked at each other in the back seat all the way to Grandma's house, to the point that Dad said in that tight-throated-growl that everyone, me included, knew meant business, "Don't make me reach back there." And I filled out the rest, since Tim's threats tend to be a little open-ended. "Boys, if you don't behave right now I swear you'll never see that turkey, let alone taste it." I thought I heard one of them mutter "I don't even like turkey," but since they settled some, I didn't pursue it. When you have boys, you can't just ride them down into the ground or you'll crush their spirits, though as their long-suffering mom, I can tell you their spirits could use some compressing.

When we got to Tim's mom's and parked the car, I turned to them and, ignoring their mocking expressions and rolling eyes and groans and whines of "do we have to?" told them once again everything I always tell them when we go visiting, about watching their mouths and their manners and about being polite and kiss your grandma and Aunt Susan and Great Aunt Thelma and shake hands with Grandpa and Uncle Nate and don't tease your cousins and all the rest of the stuff that goes in two ears and out the other two. Jack and Zack were so identical, I not only didn't know which was which, I didn't know which was worse.

We got out of the car and stopped on the sidewalk so I could look them over. I sighed, put some spit on my hand and smoothed down their identically unruly cowlicks and straightened their identically spotted ties and I swear those ties were clean when I clipped them on but my boys attract dirt like magnets attract paper clips.

Dad gave them his Significant Look, and then we all traipsed up to the front door and I rang the bell.

Tim's mom pulled the door open with this worried look on her face and after we kissed hello and all, said, "There's a problem, dear. Great Aunt Thelma died."

Well, I thought that was real sad, and I said so, although I could hear the twins snickering behind me about one less relative to kiss.

Mom shook her head. "You don't understand. She *just* died. She's inside on the sofa."