

# A New Tradition

*a Forgotten Relics short story*

“Those firemen were super nice.”

“And hot, too. You think you’re required to take a sexiness test before they let you be a firefighter?”

Cora snorts through a tablespoonful of jellied cranberries. “Do you think about anything besides dudes?”

“Sometimes I think about sleeping,” Sofi replies from the other end of the couch. “Sometimes work.”

Cora pushes her in the thigh with her foot, sending a handful of Sofi’s cereal skittering onto the carpet.

“Hey, my Lucky Charms!”

“Whatever. You’re practically done with the box anyway.”

Sofi scoots around in the cushions to get comfortable again. The two of them have been ensconced on the couch since the firemen left in her apartment. It seemed silly to eat what was left at the table, even if it is Thanksgiving.

She jams her arm up to the elbow in the box she’s holding, and it comes up filled mostly with marshmallows. She grins. “The perfect bite,” she says, shoving the dry cereal into her mouth and chomping loudly.

Cora chuckles and scrapes the dregs of her can of cranberries. “Seriously, though, sorry about the oven. And the floor. “

“It’s all good,” she mutters. “Not our fault our mommas didn’t teach us how to cook a turkey.” She pauses to swallow. “Or anything else, for that matter.”

“You’d think YouTube would know, though, right?”

“It was the stuffing that got me. I didn’t think wet bread had such a low flash point.”

They both giggle. Whatever substance the stuffing had morphed into was better suited for construction work than eating.

Sofi shrugs, “Oh, well. The whole point of the holiday is to hang out and eat, right? I think we’ve got that pretty well covered.”

Cora nods, then peers at the TV in front of them. “*The Curse of Spider Island*. Have you seen this one?”

“Yeah, but it’s good. Turn it up.”

The Turkey Day Marathon is new to Cora, but she’s no stranger to Mystery Science Theater 3000. She used to watch it with her dad every weekend—until she moved in with Jeremy. No one else in her small town ever understood it, though. Irony and satire were totally lost on the cheerleading set. Finding out that Sofi’s also a fan of the show was a huge discovery. Much excited hand-flapping was involved. They had planned to watch the marathon today, although it was supposed to be accompanied by significantly more and better food.

Cora pokes a few buttons on the remote, and Tom Servo’s voice fills the room. They watch for a while, chewing and giggling and enjoying each other’s company. When the movie starts, though, there a lull in the background that quietly begs to be filled. An odd tugging on things that are going unsaid beneath the surface, reminding them there’s more to the day than what they’re admitting.

It’s Cora that gives in first. She keeps her eyes on the screen, and her voice is light, but the words are heavy in her throat.

“You know, it’s weird being away from home for the holidays. I’ve never done it before.”

“It’s not so bad after the first year,” Sofi says, setting the empty cereal box on the floor. “This is basically the same thing me and my friends did after I left home. It’s not that big a deal. Just another Hallmark holiday. Tomorrow everyone’ll forget about it and be all gung-ho for Christmas.”

Cora turns to look at her and shrugs, “Maybe. I just miss my family, you know?”

There’s an odd expression on Sofi’s face that Cora can’t quite read. Something guarded but hurt. “Eh, family’s pretty fluid,” she says. “You’ve got good parents back home, but some folks aren’t so lucky.” She gives Cora a tight smile.

Cora set her empty cranberry can and spoon on the end table. “That’s true,” she says slowly. “But, there’s something to be said for getting to choose your family when your old one sucks.”

Sofi’s smile brightens a bit. It gives Cora the courage to scoot across the corduroy cushions and slide her arm around her friend. There’s a tremor in Sofi’s dense frame, an added tension, when she touches her, but she ignores it.

“We can be family now if you want,” Cora says. “I always wanted a little sister. Even if she is technically a mamma bear.”

An awkward second passes in which Cora’s suddenly horribly uncertain she’s done the right thing. Damn her rusty friend-making skills. Misread the situation again.

But then Sofi relaxes. She exhales hard through her nose as the iron falls out of her muscles, then reaches down next to the couch. She gives Cora a look and pulls up another open box of cereal. She holds it out Cora, who laughs and grabs a handful. Sofi follows suit.

“Thanks,” Sofi says sheepishly.

Together, both women lift up their fistfuls of sugary cereal and bump their knuckles together like wineglasses in a toast. Well, Cinnamon Toast Crunch, anyway.