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## Fowl Play

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**FOWL PLAY**

**MJ Bressler**

The holidays are upon us, and I've been summoned to the kitchen for a lesson in preparation for the big dinner.

"Get your hand in there!" my mother directs in her authoritative voice. "Come on, reach in and pull it out. It's not going to bite you!"

It's nineteen forty-two, and Don McNeil's Breakfast Club has just ended on the radio in our living room. Mother hurries to turn it off and returns quickly to take up where she's left off with me.

The apron around her middle is splashed with droplets of blood as she folds her hands around the material to keep from interfering with the task she's determined will be mine today. She believes it's her duty to teach me, and when she's made up her mind, nothing will change it. I, of course, am well aware of this. However, I never let "her way" go unchallenged.

Gingerly, I reach my hand out to touch the purplish, goose-bumped, cold movable skin of the dead bird in the sink. I shudder, a chill climbing up my neck.

"Don't be such a sissy!" she intimidates, name-calling being one of her weapons.

I whine, "Why do I have to do this?"

"Because you have to learn sometime. I won't be here forever to do it for you," she replies in a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

I am expected to reach in and pull out the innards from this dead creature. I shiver at the anticipation of performing this maneuver and rebel in my most award-winning, Bette Davis imitation.

First, I cry!

Then I gag!

Finally, I scream! Stamping my feet in defiance.

But I place my hand into the mysterious cavity where the slippery, cold organs evade my small ten-year-old hand when I try to grasp them. Repulsed, I pull my hand back out, and nearly lose my breakfast as strands of bloody flesh cling to my fingers.

“That’s nothing,” my mother says. “Reach back in and get the gizzard. There’s a liver and heart in there too.”

“But they’re slippery,” I answer, half crying, half whining. None of this, of course, persuades her to excuse me.

I really should know by now that any defiance on my part only makes her more determined and angry.

“Now!” she raises her voice as her hand grasps the back of my neck. She means business and my obstreperous behavior had better end, for she’s losing patience. Though I try, I can’t win this battle of wills, so I had better find the inner resources to do this despicable job and get it done.

I grit my teeth and close my eyes. Tentatively reaching into the turkey’s cavity, I grab the slippery organs and withdraw my hand with such force they fall onto the floor.

The gizzard hits Mother’s leg and drops on the top of her shoe. The liver slides under the stove, while the heart bounces twice, before lying inert upon the braided rug by the sink.

Despite the fear I feel at this mishap, a laugh begins its journey from the depth of my gut and explodes from my mouth with such force that saliva sprays my mother’s back. Bent to remove the gizzard from her shoe, she suddenly straightens up and glares at me. Except the glare cannot quite establish itself, because the crinkles at the corners of her eyes erase its potency. Her face contorts, trying to maintain the “no-nonsense” demeanor she had previously established. The laughter comes in spite of her effort to contain it. She succumbs.

We both stand there laughing, she with her legs crossed and me with bloody hands, unable to wipe away the tears that stream down my cheeks in grateful relief.