

BUG APPÉTIT

by Barb Goffman

It was the night before Thanksgiving, and Garner Duffy stood just inside the entrance of the community center, scanning the large room. He knew exactly what he was looking for.

Twenty-five tables filled the space. Each one had two chairs. One was empty, and on the other sat a girl looking for a date for Thanksgiving—someone who couldn't bear one more family meal as the pathetic single one. Oh, that's not the way the community center worded the ad for tonight's Love at First Bite speed-dating event. They were promoting it as a chance to find true love over a turkey dinner. But that's what it boiled down to, Garner knew.

A pretty blonde in a tight, low-cut top leered at him from a nearby table. Nah. She was nice on the eyes, but her clothes screamed Old Navy.

A sexy-as-hell brunette winked at him and crossed her legs, letting her short skirt slide up her thighs. Yum. But nope. She had way too much confidence.

Ahh, there she was. Garner set his sights on the plump girl with acne and thin dishwater-blond hair in the fourth row. She was twenty-one, maybe twenty-two. A couple of years younger than he was. She noticed him watching her, then quickly cast her eyes downward. Her clothes and purse appeared stylish and new, and her diamond and gold jewelry looked real and expensive. *Ding, ding, ding.* We had a winner.

Mystery short story writer Barb Goffman has won the Agatha, Macavity, and Silver Falchion awards for her fiction (and received 22 best-story nominations!). Her work has appeared in a wide variety of anthologies, as well as in our sister publication, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, and the new *Black Cat Mystery Magazine*. This is her *EQMM* debut! †

All Garner wanted for Thanksgiving was a rich girl with low self-esteem. Someone he could charm and get a good meal from, before he robbed her blind and disappeared. This girl fit the bill.

The dude running the event tapped his microphone and explained that each guy would have two minutes to chat up each girl. When a loud buzzer sounded, it would be time to switch tables. Easy enough. At the event's end, each guy should return to the table with the woman he liked best, and she could decide whom she wanted to invite to Thanksgiving, if anyone. It wasn't the smartest design because the hottest girls would probably attract several suitors, while some of the ladies would end up alone. But that could work well for Garner.

He positioned himself so he'd hit Chubbo's table last. That way, when they met, her confidence would be in the toilet—surely none of the guys

here would be clamoring to go out with her—and Garner could become her knight in shining armor. Once he turned on the charm, Garner was sure she'd jump at the chance to invite him to Thanksgiving dinner.

About forty-five minutes later, Garner had finally reached the table beside Chubbo's. The gangly woman yapping at him was going on and on about her job. She was a printer. Or a painter. Something like that. Garner didn't care enough to pay attention. He was too focused on his mark. She seemed down. She was trying to make conversation, but the guy beside him was slouched in his chair, clearly bored. Exactly what Garner had hoped for.

Don't worry, baby. I'm heading your way.

The buzzer rang, and Garner sprang from his seat, not bothering to say goodbye to the potter. He hurried to Chubbo and gave her his best smile. He'd dyed his hair brown and wore fake glasses so he'd be harder to recognize just in case things ultimately went south and Chubbo called the cops. He hoped she liked what she saw. Hell, what was he worrying about? Of course she would.

"Hi," he said. "I'm Garrett." He always used a name similar to his own when he ran a scam so he'd remember to answer if someone tried to get his attention.

Chubbo gave him a tentative half smile. "Hi. I'm Kaycee."

"Well, am I glad to meet you." Garner tilted his head toward the rest of the room. "All these other ladies have been pleasant, but none of them have eyes that sparkle like yours."

Kaycee's blue eyes actually did sparkle at that moment, and Garner knew he'd scored. Now it was time to reel her in.

"I'm in my first year of med school at the university," he said as Kaycee perked up even more. "The schedule is rough, so I don't have time to go home for Thanksgiving. But I decided I could take a few hours away from studying to try to meet someone nice. Someone like you."

Kaycee grinned.

Jackpot!

She started talking about herself. She grew up in town, had two years of college, and now was working as a baker or a ticket taker. Something like that. Garner didn't pay attention to the boring details. Instead he asked questions designed to make her think he was interested while eliciting important information. Kaycee lived with her parents in the wealthy part of town, he learned, so if he ate at their home the next day, all her jewelry should be right there for the picking. Excellent. If all went well, he'd only have to go out with her once. Her dad owned a chain of dry-cleaning stores, which made Garner confident that Kaycee's jewelry was real. And she had two older sisters, both of whom were already married and pregnant. So Kaycee had to be desperate for a boyfriend—so desperate and insecure that when Garner stole her gems and disappeared, she'd be too embarrassed to tell anyone. Yep, she was the one for him.

Buzz!

As all the men hurried back to the girls they liked best, Garner stayed put. "I've really enjoyed getting to know you, Kaycee. I hope maybe you'd like to get to know me better too."

Her cheeks flushed as she nodded and invited him to Thanksgiving dinner, babbling about the meal her mother was making. She'd be cooking with jugs. Or mugs. Something like that. Garner kept nodding and smiling. He couldn't wait. This year, he'd

definitely have something to be thankful for.

Early the next afternoon Garner parked his car outside Kaycee's house. As usual, he'd been spot on. Her family lived in a McMansion with a huge front lawn. He hoped he'd be able to find her jewelry box easily.

The cold bit through his jacket as he made his way up the brick path, a bottle of wine in hand. He was grateful when Kaycee answered the door straightaway, even happier that the house smelled delicious when he stepped inside. He'd charmed his way into a lot of homes up and down the West Coast over the past few years, and it always made the memory more special when the mark made him a home-cooked meal before he swindled her. He'd never pulled a Thanksgiving job before. This would be a shining achievement.

"Thanks for inviting me," he said.

Kaycee fluffed her hair in a hopeful way. "You're welcome. Happy Thanksgiving."

"Happy Thanksgiving." Garner pecked her cheek, pleased that she still seemed into him, as well as that the diamond bracelet she'd worn the prior night wasn't circling her wrist now. That meant it should be in her bedroom, waiting for him.

"Nice place," he said as he handed over the wine. He approved of the oversized black leather sofas, sparkling glass tables, and plush slate-gray shag rug covering much of the living room's rich hardwood floor. Except for a huge TV, the walls were covered with framed family photos. All the walls. Nearly every square inch. These people were proud of their kids. It was a bit much, Garner thought, but at least the furnishings screamed money.

"Thank you," Kaycee said. "Come meet everyone."

In short order, Garner shook hands with Kaycee's father, brothers-in-law, and several uncles and cousins, all of whom were watching football while munching on chips and guacamole. Garner's stomach rumbled, but before he could grab a chip, Kaycee steered him into the kitchen.

"Everybody, this is Garrett, the guy I met last night."

A bunch of women stared at him, some smiling, some eyeing him up and down. Garner smiled back, trying to look trustworthy, while Kaycee pointed to and named each woman in the room, until only a tall redhead remained.

"And this is my mom, Shirley," Kaycee said.

Shirley wore a long psychedelic silk shirt and a broad smile. She shook his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Garrett. We're thrilled you could join us for Thanksgiving. I hope you have a big appetite. I'm trying something new this year."

Kaycee bit her lip, appearing embarrassed. "Mom loves being inventive."

"Inventive! That's one word for it," Kaycee's grandmother Helen yelled. She reminded Garner of Betty White, except she was taller and had more wrinkles.

"Yes, inventive." Kaycee leaned toward him. "Sorry about Grandma. She's hard of hearing and a bit senile, so she'll say anything. And, again, I'm glad you don't mind about the food."

Mind? Garner thought. Had Kaycee mentioned something unusual about the menu the prior night? He must have missed it. No matter. Whatever Shirley had cooked would surely be great, considering the kitchen was filled with mouth-watering smells. Garner was allergic to shellfish, but he had no worries about that on Thanksgiving. And he could put up

with a loud granny for a few hours in exchange for the payoff.

After a couple of minutes of small talk, he and Kaycee headed into the living room to watch the game. Turned out Kaycee was a sports fan and didn't talk much while the teams were on the field. That was a big relief. A lot of girls would have wanted to chat, but Garner knew the less he talked, the less likely he was to say something contradictory or too revealing.

Of course, there were the inevitable commercials, and Kaycee tried to engage him in chatter whenever one aired. Garner repeatedly filled his mouth with chips and guacamole, encouraging Kaycee to carry the conversation while he chewed ever so slowly. That gambit wouldn't work forever, he knew. When the third commercial break came, he was ready with a diversion.

"Could I use the restroom?" he asked.

"Sure," she said. "Down that hallway. Second door on the right."

Savoring the unusually tangy taste of the guacamole still on his tongue, Garner hurried to the bathroom, closed the door, and pressed his ear against it. The commercials were louder than the game, so when things quieted a bit outside, he figured the game had come back on and Kaycee's attention would be on the screen. He flushed the toilet, ran the sink a moment, and sped out to the stairs. This could be the perfect time to search Kaycee's bedroom.

Thankful that the staircase was carpeted so his steps would be muffled, he started up.

"Garrett," Kaycee called as he reached the seventh step. "Where are you going?"

Damn! Garner slowly turned, forcing his irritation off his face. Kaycee was standing at the bottom of the

staircase, staring at him with her brows furrowed.

It was moments like these that separated the true grifters from the mere pretenders, he knew. Garner flashed a big smile.

"I can't get over how adorable you are in all these photos." He nodded toward the wall. "How old are you in these?"

The doubt melted from Kaycee's face as she climbed the steps, and Garner knew he'd won her over again.

"I was eight in that one." She pointed to a photo of a girl dressed like Cinderella. "And maybe ten in that one," she said of another image in which Kaycee stood in a pink swimsuit. She'd been chubby even then, though Garner had to admit she'd also been pretty cute.

Screams of excitement erupted from the living room.

"Come on," Kaycee said. "We must have scored."

They returned to the living room in time to see the kicker make the extra point. While Kaycee cheered, Garner felt relieved he hadn't been caught in her room. He'd try again later.

Soon another commercial came on. Kaycee turned his way, but Garner was quick with his guac-covered chips. He nodded at Kaycee, prompting her to keep talking. She kept jabbering about books she liked to read. *Cozies? Nozies?* Something like that. He only paid enough attention to nod and smile at the proper time, while wondering how quickly he could pretend to use the restroom again.

When halftime began, Kaycee's father, Brian, joined the conversation. "You seem to love that guacamole, Garrett."

Garner nodded and swallowed. At least this would be something safe to talk about. "It has an interesting, tangy flavor."

"That's because it's homemade," Brian said.

"I'm so glad you like it, Garrett," Shirley said, stepping in front of the TV. "The key is using the right ingredients." She clapped twice. "Everyone, dinner is served."

They all walked into the dining room. Garner was given a seat near the end of the table, with Kaycee on one side of him, and her grandmother Helen on his other side. Each place setting held a bowl of creamy golden soup. Looked like butternut, Garner thought.

As they all dug in, Brian asked everyone to share what they were thankful for. Garner pondered what to say. He couldn't tell them he was grateful that pawning Kaycee's jewelry might enable him to move closer to the ocean. And he certainly couldn't share how thankful he was that he'd never been arrested, so he had no police record hounding him and didn't have to worry about leaving fingerprints here. Garner returned his attention to the others when he heard his fake name being used.

"And I'm so grateful I got to meet Garrett last night," Kaycee said. "You don't meet that many nice guys—at least I don't." She sighed. "And especially one who is such a good sport." She smiled his way.

Good sport? Garner shrugged, hoping he looked affable.

"And I am grateful to all of you for letting me share this holiday with you," he said. "This butternut soup is fantastic. I especially like the bacon bits."

As he lifted another spoonful into his mouth, Helen yelled, "Bacon bits my ass. That's worms you're eating!"

Garner spit the food out of his mouth, the soup flying all over his place setting, and he gagged. "Wor . . . worms?"

Kaycee stared at him and began

blotting up the spewed soup. "Well, the culinary term is roasted sago grubs. Garrett, what's the matter? You knew my mom was cooking this meal with insects."

Bugs? The food was made with bugs? Not jugs or mugs. Not even drugs. Garner took deep breaths, trying not to vomit. Then he noticed that everybody was staring at him. They all seemed shocked, like *he* was the weird one.

"It's okay," Shirley said. "Everyone has a different reaction their first time."

She seemed willing to overlook the fact that he was surprised, so Garner decided to go with it. He couldn't admit he'd tuned out most of what Kaycee had said the prior night. He dabbed his mouth with his napkin and said, "Sorry about that. Yes, I knew. I just . . . well . . . it's one thing to know you're going to eat insects, and it's another to hear the word *worms*. There's just something about that word, you know?"

"Of course," Kaycee said.

Shirley nodded, then her eyes drifted past him. "Mom, you're the last one up," she said to Helen. "What are you thankful for?"

Garner was utterly thankful that Kaycee had bought his lame excuse and Shirley had taken the focus off of him. While Helen yelled about how grateful she was for her medicine—or Thomas Edison, something like that—Garner inched his chair away from the bowl of worms. It didn't help much. So it was a complete relief when Kaycee's sisters cleared the soup bowls a few minutes later and two platters began being passed, light-meat and dark-meat turkey.

By this point, Garner wasn't feeling hungry, but he had to put on a good show. The light meat reached him first, and he inspected it. He didn't see any creepy-crawlies. And turkey wasn't

soup, in which bugs could be mixed without being noticed. It must be safe, he figured. He took a couple of slices and asked Helen if she wanted any.

“No way! I’m holding out for the dark meat. At my age, I’m going to eat what I want.”

That sounded smart to Garner. He started passing the white-meat platter to one of Kaycee’s brothers-in-law, while Kaycee asked him if he wanted the side dishes. Without thinking, he said yes.

In a split second, it seemed, one of Kaycee’s sisters spooned stuffing onto his plate, the other ladled cranberry sauce, and Kaycee set down a helping of green-bean casserole. Garner examined the food. It all looked bug free.

He waited until everyone else dug in and decided to start with the turkey. He took a tentative bite. It tasted fine, so he took another.

Brian started laughing. “You look scared, Garrett. Don’t worry. There aren’t any insects in the main dish.”

Garner’s cheeks burned while almost everyone chuckled at his expense, but he didn’t care. At least he could eat this course in peace.

The conversation moved onto politics—who would’ve thought politics would be a less problematic topic than the food itself?—and Garner busied himself eating. Shirley became animated, jabbing the table, insisting that honesty was of the utmost importance, and not just for politicians. She glanced Garner’s way. He focused on his food. Could she suspect something? Nah. Why would she? He had to be imagining things. *Just play it cool, Garner. Show you like her food. That’ll make her happy.* And he did like this course, especially the green-bean casserole. It had this cheesy topping with a yummy peanut flavor. He helped himself to seconds of that, as well as the cranberry sauce.

He enjoyed its sweet almond taste.

At one point, Kaycee reached over and squeezed his hand. “I’m glad you’re enjoying the meal.”

“I am. To tell you the truth, it’s a relief that this course doesn’t have any insects in it. Those grubs were more off-putting than I’d expected.”

“No insects?” Helen yelled. “Sonny, are *you* in for a rude awakening?”

Garner’s stomach twisted. He turned to Kaycee, his eyes wide and questioning. “I thought this course had no insects in it. Your dad said—”

“I said that the *main dish* didn’t have any insects in it,” Brian said, grinning. “I didn’t say anything about the side dishes.”

As bile rose in Garner’s throat, he stared at his plate. He’d eaten almost everything on it, including the extra helpings.

“You liked it all, didn’t you, Garrett?” Shirley asked.

He nodded, the bile inching higher as disgust at what he might have swallowed washed over him.

“I’m happy to hear it,” Shirley said. “You’re a good guinea pig. I’m thinking of offering these dishes at my catering company.”

“Catering company?” Garner said. *She thinks people will pay to eat bugs?*

“Yes,” Kaycee said. “Remember, that’s where I work as a baker.”

“Right,” he said. She was a baker. Not a ticket taker.

“So tell me,” Shirley said. “Did anything taste too buggy to you?”

The word *buggy* made the bile rise even higher in Garner’s throat.

“Could you taste the mealworms in the cornbread stuffing?” Shirley asked.

Mealworms? Garner’s stomach flipped.

“How about the wax worms in the cranberry sauce?”

Garner felt the blood drain from his face.

“Or the green-bean casserole. Could you taste the grasshoppers?”

Garner began gagging. “Bathroom.” He heard laughter as he ran, barely reaching the toilet before he retched.

Garner spent at least ten minutes in the bathroom, vomiting three times, then dry-heaving several more. The food had actually tasted good, but the thought of eating bugs kept making him sick. When he finally left the bathroom, he hoped he might be able to sneak upstairs, but Kaycee was waiting for him. Of course.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Sure. Sorry if I’ve upset your mom.”

“You haven’t,” she said, grabbing his hand and leading him into the living room, where everyone was now watching the game. Garner and Kaycee took their spots on the couch, and she rubbed his back. When he spotted the guacamole in arm’s distance, he pushed it away.

“What was in the dip?” He didn’t want to know but couldn’t keep himself from asking.

“Grasshopper,” Shirley said. “You toast them, then mix them in with all the usual ingredients.”

Garner covered his mouth with his palm, breathing deeply, trying to settle his stomach again.

“I have to say, Garrett, I’m surprised by your reaction to the food,” Shirley said. “Being a med student, I’d think you would appreciate the health benefits that come from eating insects.”

“Benefits?” Garner immediately regretted his response as Shirley’s eyes flashed. That clearly hadn’t been the correct reaction for someone who was supposed to be in medical school.

“Yes, benefits,” Shirley said, taking on a snooty tone. “They’re full of protein. Much better than meat, dairy, or eggs. They’re low in cholesterol and are a wonderful source of iron, zinc, and

magnesium, among other nutrients.”

Time to get back in the game, Garner. You’ve got to win this lady over before she asks you to leave. You didn’t go through all this for nothing.

“I didn’t know that,” he said. “You’re certainly widening my worldview today. Thank you. I think I’d like to try them again on another day . . . once my stomach has settled.”

Shirley nodded, apparently appeased. Kaycee squeezed his hand. Seemed he’d made her happy too. That made him surprisingly glad. Now he just had to figure out how to ditch everyone for a few minutes so he could find Kaycee’s room.

His chance came when Shirley said it was time for dessert. She and her daughters would slice up the pies and bring pieces out so they all could continue watching the fourth quarter.

“We have pecan pie and pumpkin pie,” she said. “Who wants what?”

After everyone else put in their orders, Garner patted his stomach. “I don’t have any room left for pie.” He figured that while they all ate, he could excuse himself to the bathroom again and sprint upstairs.

“Boy, is he a liar,” Helen yelled. “Considering how long he was throwing up, he should have room for a whole new meal.”

“Grandma, shush,” Kaycee said, her cheeks reddened in embarrassment. “Garrett, don’t worry. I made the pumpkin pie. There are no bugs in it. I promise.”

“Really?” he asked.

As Kaycee nodded, Shirley cleared her throat loudly. “Well, it seems my daughter has said the magic words.” She had that snooty tone again. Garner guessed Shirley would only be satisfied if he ate the bug-filled pecan pie, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

“I’ll have a slice of the pumpkin pie,” he said.

“Wonderful,” Shirley said. “We have five orders for pumpkin pie, including for the med student with the weak stomach, and pecan pie for everyone else. You’re going to be missing out, Garrett. The mealworms have a nutty flavor that complements the pecans well.”

Garner shivered at the idea.

While Kaycee and her sisters went to plate the pies, Garner calculated his next move. He’d finish his slice as fast as possible, then, while everyone else was still eating, he’d excuse himself to the bathroom and sneak upstairs to Kaycee’s room. Once he had the goods, he’d say he needed to leave, that his stomach was still bothering him.

And then it would be time to get out of Dodge.

“Here you go.” Kaycee handed Garner a plate with a large slice of pumpkin pie on it. It looked good. It smelled good. While Kaycee settled close beside him, Garner dug in. He was surprised he could get anything down, but the pie tasted too good to ignore. It was sugary, with hints of cinnamon, ginger, and nuts. An unusual combination.

Kaycee slowly licked the crumbs from her lips as she ate pumpkin pie too, and Garner became aroused. It was too bad he wouldn’t get to see her again, he thought, as he swallowed his last bite. She was sweet, and the more time he spent with her, the more her curves turned him on. Her lips looked especially soft and luscious. Plus she could bake to beat the band.

She eased even closer to him on the couch, and he brushed against her. Maybe he could get her to show him her room.

“Garrett, would you like a tour of the house?” she asked.

It was like she’d read his mind. He rubbed her hand and smiled once more. He didn’t usually go this far

with his marks, but what the heck. He might as well make her happy before he ripped her off.

A half-hour later, after he and Kaycee had gotten busy, she began dressing.

“I’m going downstairs. Wait a few minutes, then come down. We shouldn’t walk down together. They all might think we were . . . you know.”

Oh, he knew. It had been glorious. Who would have suspected that this plump girl would know how to turn up the heat in the kitchen *and* the bedroom. In another life, he might have married her. If only she didn’t think his name was Garrett and that he was a med student. No way he could explain those lies away.

Kaycee leaned down and kissed him again, and he stirred. Too bad there wasn’t time for another round.

“I’m going to tell everyone you’ve been sick again,” she said. “That’s why we’ve been up here so long. Actually, you do look pale. You might want to splash water on your face.”

He wiggled his eyebrows at her. “I need to splash cold water all over me.”

She laughed, then left. He jumped out of bed, and his stomach cramped. Unbelievable. Hadn’t he puked all the bugs up?

Once he got dressed, Garner hurried to Kaycee’s jewelry box. He’d spotted it sitting on her dresser when they first walked in the room. He flipped it open. Hubba-hubba. This was what he’d been waiting for.

The diamond bracelet Kaycee had worn the prior night was lying there. So was a sapphire bracelet, a thick gold necklace, another necklace with a deep red—read pricey—ruby pendant, several pairs of earrings, and a lot of rings, including some emerald ones. Hot damn. He could make a lot off of them.

Garner was reaching for the ruby

necklace when his stomach cramped again, and he began to feel light-headed. Those insects were still doing a number on him.

He started stuffing the jewelry in his pants pockets. Suddenly he pictured Kaycee realizing he'd stolen her jewelry. That he'd used her. He imagined her plump lips quivering. Tears filling her eyes. Wow, he'd never been a sap for any mark before. For some reason, this girl was different.

He couldn't do it, Garner realized. He couldn't break her heart. It would be hard enough to not see her again. He couldn't bear to think how betrayed she'd feel if he stole from her too. As his stomach churned, he returned the jewelry to the case and headed downstairs.

He'd nearly reached the kitchen when his throat started itching and his lips began swelling, and he put things together. Cramping. Itching. Swelling. Paleness. Crap, he was in anaphylactic shock. How was that possible? He'd heard that delayed onset could happen up to an hour after eating shellfish, but he hadn't had any shellfish. The only thing he'd eaten in the last hour was pumpkin pie. What the heck? He doubled over, kicking himself for not carrying an EpiPen today.

"Give it a rest, Mom," Kaycee said in the kitchen. "So I lied to him. It was just a little lie."

"All lying is wrong," Shirley said. "You know that."

"Worse than having him leave Thanksgiving dinner without any food in his stomach? You know he wouldn't have touched the pumpkin pie if I'd told him it had crickets in it. He clearly isn't into eating insects."

Garner stumbled into the kitchen. "Help," he whispered, feeling faint. "Ambulance. Allergy. I'm in . . ."—he tried and failed to take a deep

breath—"anaphylactic shock."

"Oh my God," Kaycee screamed.

While Shirley dialed 9-1-1, Garner fell to the floor. "Need EpiPen," he said, wheezing.

"We don't have one." Kaycee dropped to her knees beside him. "No one in the family has allergies. Do you have one?"

"No." As Garner struggled for air, he stared at Kaycee. God, she was pretty. And she never would have hurt him like he'd planned to hurt her.

Brian ran into the kitchen. "What the heck happened?"

"Garrett's having an allergic reaction," Shirley said. "Get some cushions from the couch to put under his legs. The operator says to keep them elevated."

"I want more pie," Helen yelled, hobbling into the kitchen as Brian ran out. "Holy moly, what happened to Kaycee's boyfriend?"

"Shh, Mom. He's not her boyfriend. They just met." Shirley stepped closer to Garner. "What are you allergic to? The paramedics will need to know."

"Shellfish."

"Shellfish?" Kaycee said. "But we didn't serve shellfish."

"Oh no. The crickets," Shirley said. "In your pumpkin pie. They're arthropods, just like shrimp and crab."

The irony, Garner thought, as he grew increasingly lightheaded, finding it nearly impossible to breathe. If only he and Kaycee had both been honest, they really could have had something.

"The pie was supposed to be an aphrodisiac," Kaycee said, crying. "It wasn't supposed to kill you."

"Boy oh boy," Helen yelled as Garner took his final breaths. "I said the kid would be in for a rude awakening, but this is ridiculous. Well, I guess this means there's more pie for me. Bug *appétit!*" ● © 2018 by Barb Goffman