

# The Amazing Story of Four Crafty Cousins and the Thanksgiving Chocolate Cake



by Papa





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by Papa, with invaluable assistance by Nana

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The four crafty cousins.



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Eriselle had eaten a whole bag of potato chips in the car on the way to Uncle Joe and Aunt Elena and Jed and Maggie's house in the afternoon. After they got there she had eaten three ears of corn, each with three shakes of salt from the shaker, and so she woke up at 5 a.m. because her mouth was dry.



If she had been a year younger, she would have called out to Annali, “I’m thirsty,” but she was five years old now, and she thought she could go to the kitchen and get a drink all by herself.



She crawled out of her sleeping bag (she was next the window, in Maggie's room). She tripped on the Harry Potter book that Annali was reading for the fifth time and had left lying on the floor. But she caught herself and did not fall.





And then she almost fell over again when her left little toe ran into the right leg of Maggie's art easel, but again, she did not fall. She had learned to keep her balance when she had gone skating with Sugar, her grandmother.



She very carefully opened the door and crept out into the hallway. She almost screamed when she saw one of Jed's origami pieces, a dragon, swaying back and forth, hanging from the ceiling, with the night light casting weird shadows, but she covered her mouth and no one heard anything.



She turned to her right and then to her left, into the kitchen. She reached up and clicked the light switch on. She first thought she could reach up on the counter and find a glass and fill it from the faucet, but there was no glass there. She didn't want to go to the dining room and drag a chair into the kitchen because she was afraid it would make too much noise. And then she looked to her left and saw the refrigerator, covered with pictures Aunt Elena had stuck on the door with magnets.



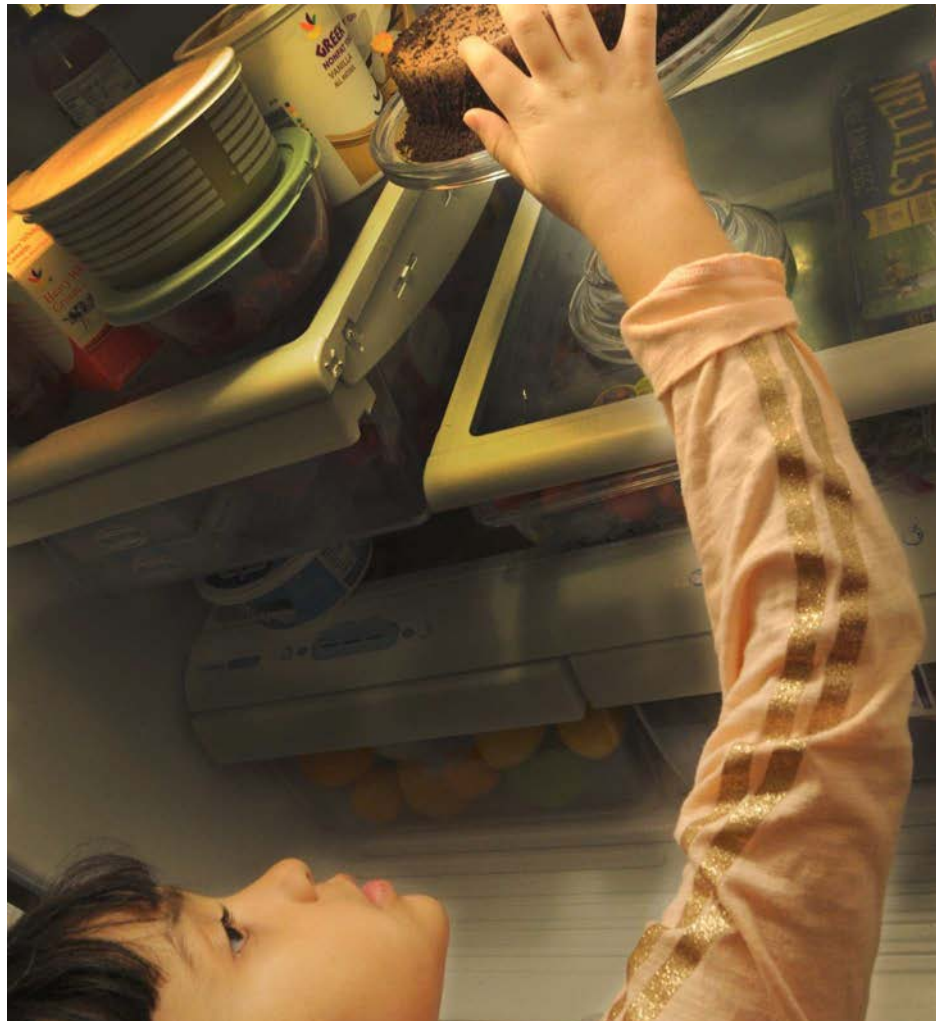


She thought there would be a bottle of water inside, so she opened the door and sure enough there was. She pulled out the bottle and tried and tried to twist off the cap but it was too tight. She finally had to give up and put the bottle back. And it was then that she saw...





**THE CHOCOLATE CAKE!!!!**



Eriselle forgot that she was thirsty. Eriselle was suddenly hungry. Before she could think she stuck out her finger and plunged it into the cake. When she pulled her finger out it was covered with chocolate frosting, and when Eriselle put her finger in her mouth, the frosting melted within three seconds, and it tasted so very good that she had to stick her finger in again.

After three more sticks of her finger into the cake, she saw there was now a hole in the cake. She tried to smooth it over by smearing frosting from either side of the hole to cover it.







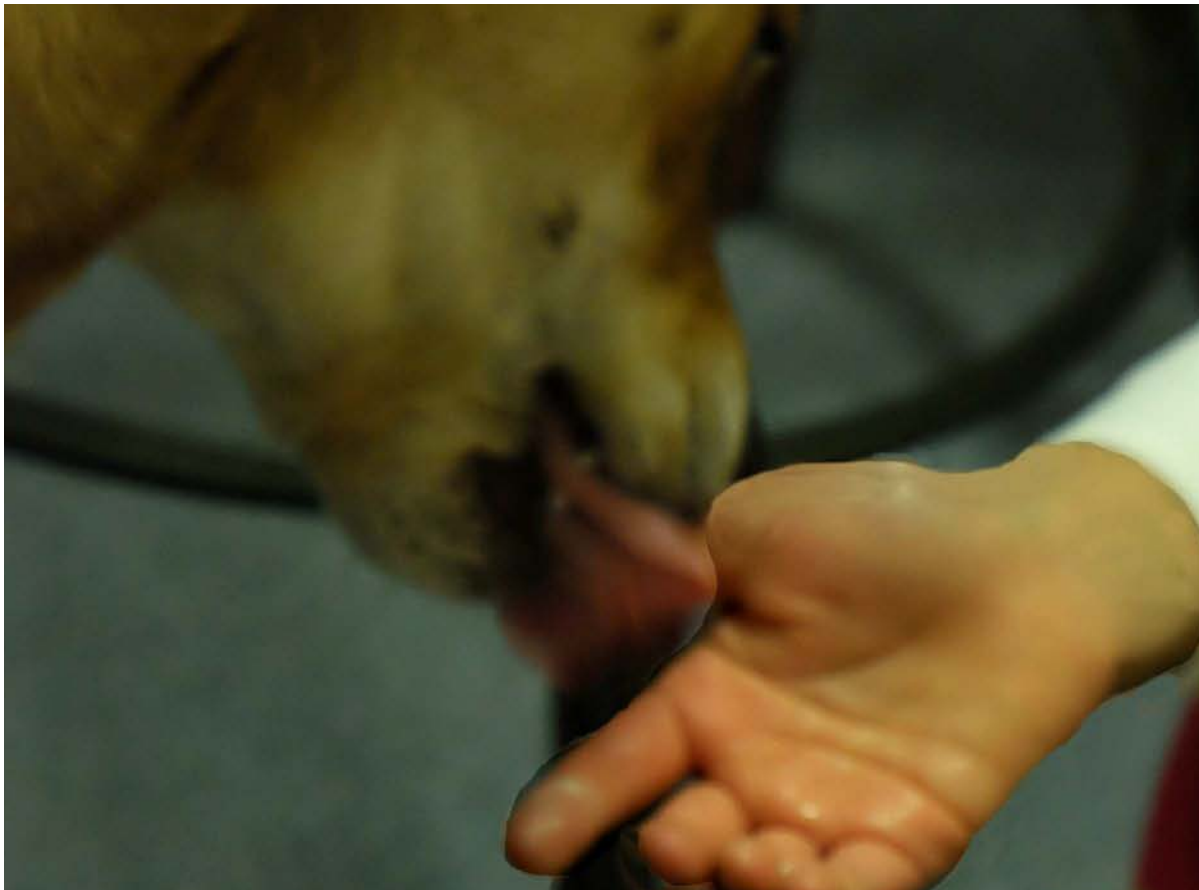
She thought it looked like it had never been touched—but then her hand jerked and she gouged out a big hole because...

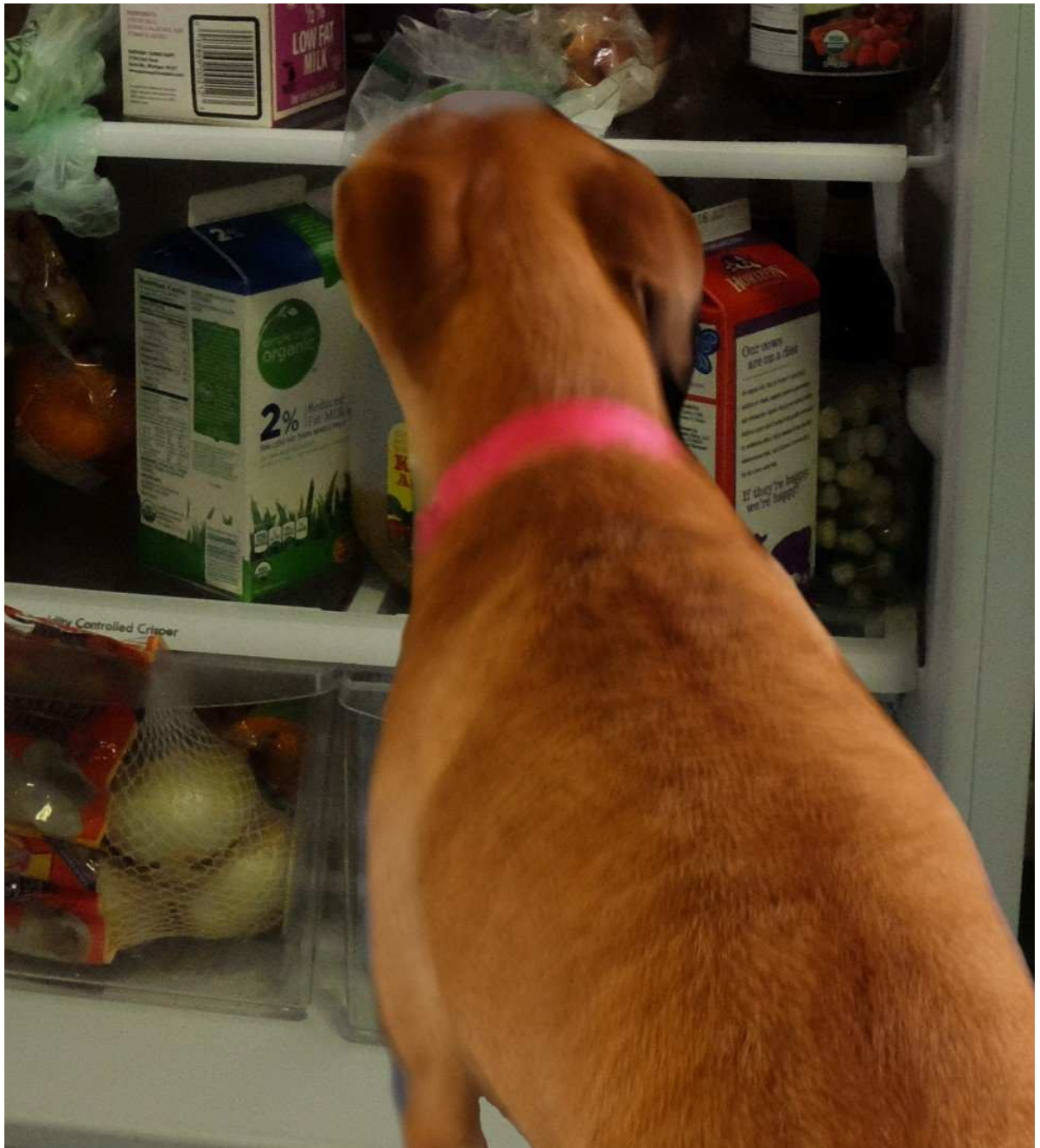


she heard a growling noise. Not very loud, but louder than the hum of the refrigerator and louder than the buzz of the light on the ceiling and louder than the airplane flying overhead. Eriselle almost screamed. But then she remembered that Jed and Elena had a dog named Ginger and that Ginger slept in the cage in the kitchen. Ginger had been sleeping and dreaming of chasing deer. When her dream was over she had awakened and saw someone in the kitchen that was a stranger to her.



Ginger growled louder. Eriselle did not know what to do. She had petted Ginger the night before and she had gone on a long walk with Ginger and Uncle Joe, so she thought that if she could pet Ginger, Ginger would remember who she was and not growl anymore. So she turned around (she was in such a hurry that she forgot to close the refrigerator door) and ran to Ginger's cage. It was very hard but she figured out how to open the cage. She reached in and patted Ginger on the back. Ginger wagged her tail and licked Eriselle's hand (which still had some frosting on it) and stopped growling BUT...





Ginger could smell chocolate a thousand times easier than Eriselle, and Ginger could see the cake. She jumped out the cage and in two big hops she was at the refrigerator

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and in two seconds she had taken a huge bite of the cake and in two more seconds the cake toppled off the shelf and fell to the floor. Luckily, very luckily...





Aunt Elena had a little rug on the floor in front of the refrigerator so it only plunked to the floor and luckily...



at that very instant Jed peeked around the corner. He often got up at 5 a.m. anyway, and although he didn't wake up exactly at 5 a.m. today, he was almost awake. He had heard Ginger's growl and had jumped out of bed and came running to the kitchen and got there just in time to watch the cake crash down to the floor.



Jed grabbed Ginger by the collar and pulled her with all his strength back to her cage (all four of Ginger's legs were stretched out, trying to keep from being pulled). She finally relaxed and went into her cage obediently and before Ginger could get out Jed locked the door.





Eriselle started to cry but Jed said, “Don’t worry, I came out to the kitchen myself in the middle of the night and I snuck a swipe of icing myself and turned the cake around so no one would see. Ginger knows me but she doesn’t know you, and you were smart to pet her to try to hush her. I can’t believe you could open her cage door—it is very hard to unlatch.”



Eriselle smiled. And then Jed and Eriselle looked at the floor and saw the cake turned upside down, smeared all over the rug. What in the world could they do now???





The only thing they could think about was cleaning up the globs of cake. Eriselle pulled a paper bag out of a box in the corner of the kitchen and Jed scooped pieces of cake into the bag.



There was still icing stuck to the rug so he got a big spatula out of a drawer and scraped the rest of the cake into the bag.



He told Eriselle to take the rug and bag outside and throw it under the deck. Because it was heavy, the put the first bag inside a second bag.





Jed knew that there was another rug almost exactly like the first one but he didn't know where it was. He looked in three different closets and found a carton of toilet paper and four pairs of galoshes and an old kite, but could not find the rug (even though it was right in front of his eyes). He knew...

that Maggie would know and so he woke up Maggie. She wiped the sleep from her eyes...





and got up and in ten seconds found the closet where the rugs were kept, on the third shelf from the top (exactly in the same place Jed had just looked).



By now Annali had awakened. Jed had forgotten and had turned on the light when he went into Maggie's room, and besides, he didn't remember, in the direness of the moment, that Annali was sleeping in the room.





Annali came out to the kitchen and saw Jed and Maggie and Eriselle talking. She said, “Why are you up? What is going on?”

Eriselle told Annali about the cake and Ginger. Jed told Annali about the cake and cleaning up the floor. Maggie told Annali about the cake and the rug that looked almost exactly like the old rug. Jed and Maggie and Annali were getting ready to go back to bed. But...







Annali asked, “Won’t Aunt Elena wonder what has happened to the cake?” Jed and Maggie and Eriselle looked at each other. They were no longer smiling.

The four children sat on the floor and scratched their heads. They did not know what to do.







Suddenly, they had an idea. (The next day, when they were together playing, when the adults were out in the family room chatting away, when the children were talking about the adventure of the night, no one could remember whose idea it was).



The idea was...to bake another cake. It was almost 5:30 a.m., and Jed knew that Papa often got up about this time. But luckily Papa had stayed up with Uncle Joe watching a Nebraska football game that had gone into three overtimes (Nebraska had won) and so he had not gone to bed until well after midnight.





And luckily Aunt Susan and Aunt Elena and Nana had gone shopping the night before and did not get home until almost 11 p.m. because there was a huge sale at the store. When they got home they had to divide up the things they had bought and they didn't get to bed until well past midnight.



And luckily Uncle Teman had been writing an exegesis paper for his seminary class and he didn't get to bed until 2 a.m. So...







Jed and Maggie and Annali and Eriselle thought that if they could bake a cake in an hour's time...

So Jed pulled a recipe book off the shelf and found a chocolate cake recipe. He told Eriselle to pull out the canisters of sugar and flour and salt. He told Annali to get the milk and eggs and butter out of the refrigerator. Maggie talked to Ginger to keep her from barking.







Maggie told Eriselle to watch Ginger while she crawled up on the counter and reached into the cupboard and found a big stainless steel bowl. She measured out sugar and flour and added a teaspoon of salt. Annali stirred it with a big spoon while Jed broke six eggs and separated the yolks from the whites. He beat the whites using an eggbeater that he turned with his hand (he knew he couldn't use the mixer with a motor because it would be too noisy). He poured the yolks into the bowl while



Annali kept stirring everything into the gooey mixture and then Jed added the beaten whites that had turned into two cups of foam. Maggie found three round cake pans and sprayed them so the batter would not stick. She had remembered to turn on the oven and set the temperature to 350 degrees. They were just about ready to put the pans in the oven when Annali said, “What about the butter?” Jed said he had added it. Annali and Maggie thought he had not. Just to be sure Jed cut a stick of butter in half and quickly mixed it into the batter. He divided the batter between the three pans and then they put the pans into the oven and set the timer for 30 minutes.

Ginger started to whine so Jed unlocked the pen and put the leash around her neck and dragged her outside.





She tried to lick the floor but Jed would not let her. When he came back in Maggie and Annali were mixing together sugar and chocolate and butter to make the icing. They had Eriselle taste it to be sure it was chocolaty enough and they asked her if it was the same color as the icing on the cake that Jed and Eriselle and Ginger had tasted. Just to be sure Jed tasted it too. They did not let Ginger taste it again. They decided it needed a little more chocolate so Annali added twelve more chocolate chips.

They were careful not to let the timer beep when the thirty minutes were up. Jed put on heavy padded cloth gloves and carefully pulled out the three pans of cake. The icing stuck to the knife and then stuck to the cake just like it was supposed to. They took turns plastering the frosting all over the cake. Ginger was very quiet because Eriselle was talking to her quietly and petting her. They stuck the cake back in the refrigerator. There was enough frosting left in the bowl that all four of the children each got several licks. Ginger was not allowed to lick the bowl.







Luckily Maggie had remembered to turn off the oven because it had cooled down by the time Papa came upstairs for an espresso. He thought the room smelled very good and said to himself, “My, how long the cake smell lasts. I remember Elena baking it yesterday. I didn’t think I would still smell it. I can hardly wait to taste it.” He opened the refrigerator door and he looked around to be sure no one else was up. He stuck in his right index finger and coated it with icing and he popped it in his mouth and said to himself, “Wow!” He closed the door before he yielded to the temptation of snagging another bite.

Papa was surprised that Jed was not up doing origami. He had to waken Ginger to take her for a walk. Usually she was whining when he came up the stairs. And later when Aunt Elena got up she couldn't understand why Ginger would not eat her breakfast. Aunt Elena looked at the rug on the floor and said to herself, "I didn't remember that it was so clean." She opened the refrigerator door to check on her cake and saw that someone had snuck a tiny bit of frosting off one side.





She wondered who that could have been. She had gone to bed after everyone else and had checked the cake before she went to bed and there were no holes in it then.



It was Thanksgiving Day so all anyone had to eat in the morning was cereal and toast. The turkey came out of the oven at 2 p.m. and they ate it (with gravy) and mashed potatoes and baked corn pudding and cranberry sauce (both jellied and the whole) and sweet and dill pickles and the homemade rolls that Nana always made.





Then it was time for desert. Aunt Elena went to the kitchen and pulled out the cake. Uncle Teman was asked to cut it. He said he'd never cut into a cake like this one. He said the knife went through it like it was melted butter. Everyone had a piece, with vanilla ice cream. Papa had to put some chocolate sauce on top of his ice cream, and although everyone groaned, Jed and Annali and Maggie asked for some syrup on top of their ice cream, too. Eriselle asked Aunt Elena if she had strawberries.



When the meal was all over, Uncle Joe asked everyone what their favorite food was. All but one of the adults and all the children said it was the chocolate cake. Nana said, "That was the moistest and tastiest cake I've ever eaten in my whole life." Aunt Elena felt proud that everyone had liked her cake so very much. She was a little puzzled that the icing was not quite the same color she had remembered. She asked Uncle Teman if the temperature in the refrigerator might have changed the color of the icing. He said that there are certain conditions in which that might happen. Jed said that he thought so too, that they had talked about freezing and melting in science class and the teacher had mentioned this very thing.







Aunt Elena said, “Okay. I guess that is what happened.” Jed and Maggie and Annali and Eriselle looked at each other and started to laugh.

Annali thought quickly and told a funny story so that everyone would think that was why they were laughing.







After dinner Uncle Joe took Ginger for a walk. She followed Uncle Joe out the back door and before he could stop her, she broke free from the leash and tried to crawl under the deck. Uncle Joe grabbed her and clicked the leash back on her and dragged her away. He told Aunt Elena, when he came back, that he thought a skunk had crawled under the deck, and that they must not let Ginger try to eat her.

THE END







