June 2014

Easter falls on sunday and he carves the ham

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Recommended Citation
Hoen, Sean (2014) "Easter falls on sunday and he carves the ham," The Laureate: Vol. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol1/iss1/3

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Easter falls on Sunday and he carves the ham
Sean Hoen

From the kitchen there is sweating and slicing. They call him grandpa and he carves hams and meats for the holidays. His knife is large and ugly and used, a scratched softwood handle leading to the blade. Like words, and language, and bred love, his knife changes form and purpose when it is in his hand. They call him grandpa and his hand wraps around the wood and exposes the blade. In the kitchen he eats the first tethers of meat and fat. He speaks with poorly malted liquor in his stomach, and the excess of his daughter’s fleshy waistline makes him sick and angry, and he slices the meat and feels the knife in his hand.

In the sitting room men eat salted nuts and slurp beer and coke with rums, and with tiny red stirring straws they toy with ice and swirl the liquids of their glasses, to control something anything something they play with ices and liquors and let the poisons bind in their bellies. A few drink coffee by law, but dream of rum and wait for hot pork. And they speak of competitions, and men in uniforms, cars and lawns, ham and meats, and the smells of gravy, and the color of the walls. And the television always shows Lawrence Welk, always a Christian, but makes no sound as the meat is trimmed. And their words are thinner and are then nothing. And one of them coughs at his coke and rum, and another pours a greasy handful of salty nuts into his throat, and the knife cuts the meats thinly and articulately, and the smell of pork stains every nook of the room but no one says a word that is more than a word.
At the piano the aunts play stiff artless sing songs. Fat women with cheap shoes and foul sprays on their necks and wrists. Women with sorrowed smiles and clumpy legs. With bad dry hair and failed diets and coupons. They can feel the elastics of their underpants dig and cut into their fats as they bend for a kiss-and-hug. And the blindest child is nominated to a sing song along; and he sings of christ and words he doesn’t understand and words he makes up, and there’s no difference. And the fat women laugh, and pound white and black, with meaningless silver squeezing their pudgy fingers tight. And soon the meat will be hot in their waters and none will say a thing, but grin.

In the basement there are other generations and bystanders. Young men and girls with fresher bruises and a hate of pork. They hate and don’t know what to call it. They hate and don’t know why. And hate because they don’t know why. And hate because it hurts to not know why. And they’re never told why but they look to a confusing god, and that god is opaque and their hate is larger than it because their fear is empty. And another slice of steamy meat falls juicy from the knife; a boy cousin grazes the inner leg and soft pink cotton of a girl cousin, and he aches in a way that god doesn’t permit, and he aches because god taught him not to. In the basement they know no better, and denying denial is a covenant. And the smell of meat and sound of bad sing songs has something to do with love; it must have something to do with love. And a cousin smashes toys, and another sneaks with a cigarette, and another has a sin slinking in her womb, and another has deep
pockets and strokes himself secretly as the young girls in homely pink-laced dresses are too young to sit cross legged. And the sing songs and pork and stench and coke-and-rum-words make the house warm and foul, as all wait.

The men in the sitting room clack their liquored ice faster with their straws and salivate for the cuts. And the women know that everything is fine because the songs are comfortable. And they call him grandpa as his knife saws at the fats, as he suckles the fats and juices from his fingers; a few strings of dying hair swivel across his scalp skin. And he cleans his blade and looks from the kitchen window and through the backyard, but can’t recall any single or particular cut; only that there is a fresh stack of new meat and that his knife is hot and honored. With pink flesh under his nails and liquor in his love. Dinner is served, he barks. And they shuffle to the kitchen, rolling their bellies, and pork stenches their speech. Waiting and sweating in lines, with plates and wide eyes and smaller knives. Smiling because meat and feeding are familiar, smiling because it’s easy.