

Joshua Johnston

white man cooks a chicken

On the way home, you bounced around and slid across the passenger seat of my Chevy. You were the third one I'd taken home this week. The others didn't work out, but forget about them. "Third time's a charm," my dad used to say to me after I had wounded the deer twice without killing it, once from a distance and once up close.

"Third time's a charm," I said to you as we pull into my parking space that the pickup barely fits in. Over the line. Oh well. That bitch that parks next to me can get over it, with her stupid green hair, always complaining about the treatment of women in Afghanistan or something. "She's probably too busy with one of her whiny protests to cry over my parking job," I jokingly mumbled as I picked you up and took you out of my car and into the apartment.

I set you on the counter. You looked beautiful on top of the black-white imitation marble, and I had a good feeling about this time. Soon enough, I thought, this is going to be the best night of the month. I found the remote hiding behind a wall of empty light beer cans on the coffee table, and I turned on the game so that I had something to do while preparing your marinade. Cowboys and 49ers. As I went back to the counter, I looked at you and licked my lips excitedly. "Let's get this show on the road!" I yelled at you like my grandpa used to yell at me. Can't remember why.

I got out my mixing bowl and gathered the ingredients for your marinade, putting them in as they popped into my mind from the other two times I'd attempted this recently. Half a cup of water and a three-fourths cup of balsamic vinegar. A teaspoon of onion powder. Kaepernick's whiny ass gets sacked by a Cowboys defensive end. "Ha!" Half a teaspoon of crushed red pepper flakes and garlic powder. A one-fourth teaspoon of salt, ground black pepper, and paprika. I look over to see you shimmering in the light from the plasma glow of ever-changing shots of men safely butting heads and fans screaming. The same amount of crushed rosemary, dried parsley flakes, and chili powder. Finally, an eighth of a teaspoon of oregano. Done. One step closer to you bringing me my much-anticipated bliss.

I freed you from your covering and laid you on the cutting board. Time to tenderize. Timing my punches to the theme music of the car rental commercial playing above, I club you again and again, right, left, right, left like that time in third grade I beat the shit out of Billy Tidmore in the bathroom for opening the stall door on me and looking down. It always feels good to make something better by beating it down. I looked down at you, splattered, for a second wondering if you'd agree with me or if you'd be like my mom, quietly crying on the porch when I was twelve and trying to go to sleep.

I looked up to see a close-up of Colin Kaepernick, the camera still zooming in. The volume isn't super high, but I could tell they were talking about his senseless political statements. Is no place safe from obnoxious advocacy? Can I not just live my life without being accused of something? My scowl disappeared as the camera cut to the Cowboys cheerleaders.

Ah. The perfect woman. Crafted by God himself for one purpose, to dance and shake and shout and jump. I put you in the bag with your marinade so I could focus all my attention on these five redheads, six blondes, and three brunettes. It wasn't until the screen jumped to the players that I remembered to preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Propped up on the counter, I waited for the ideal female form to return to the screen, but all I saw was Dallas's run-heavy third quarter and Jennifer Garner pleading me to use her credit card. The oven beeped.

I put you on a baking sheet covered in aluminum foil and slid you into the middle rack of the oven; it's harder to get to, but that was always the one my mom used to make me and my dad cookies while we watched the game.

Before I closed the oven door, I stared at you for a long time—all dressed-up but still visibly pale. I may not ever have a Cowboys cheerleader, I thought, but I have you. Eager for the fine night ahead, I smiled and shut the door.

Back at the couch, I finished a beer that had been sitting there since the guys came over the other night. Early fourth. Dallas takes it down the field, but the weak-ass running back fumbles the ball. Mila Kunis tries to sell me some bourbon. Kaepernick completes a thirty-five yard pass to a tall black kid with long dreads and too many tattoos. "What the hell? We can't guard him?" Next play, he throws an interception. "Hell yeah!" Perky young girl begs me to use her phone service. Dallas pussyfoots around and has to kick a field goal: misses. Morons. "Last minute! Here we go!" 49ers grow some balls and score a touchdown on a long run play. "Noooooooooooo!" The pouty-faced Cowboys cheerleaders come on the screen for a second but are quickly replaced by an ad for a new show about detectives or doctors or something.

I can't believe the game ended like that, I thought. That's the same shit that happened to us in the high school playoffs—some idiot can't tackle and the whole game's over. If I could go back, I'd—oh shit! I jumped up and ran to the oven.

You'd been in there a while, but it wasn't *that* long! "You just burnt yourself to a crisp! I did all this for you, spent all this time... and you just... just threw it all away!" I was fuming. I touched you, and you were rock hard, still smoking. "I wouldn't have even brought you here if I knew you'd be so high-maintenance!" I picked you up and palmed you like all those footballs from high school. "Damn it! Why is everything so weak?" I yelled as I did the three-step shuffle and took a hard left-foot lunge to throw you as hard as I could at the wall, not forgetting how important a good follow-through is on a tough pass like this.