**Meat**

**i.**

I knew this place. The rickety boards assumed to be called “steps” leading to a flappy, yet stern, screen door preceding a loud wooden door. I’d follow excitedly behind grandma. An old man, who looked like a Howard, stood behind a display case and greeted us upon entering. I wasn’t even worried about the dead animals in the case or the possibility of all the blood dripping in the back butchering room, falling between old, poorly stained floorboards. I was there for the smell. Towards the front of the shop was a hot smoker bringing an enriching flavor to, most likely, a slab of bacon. The aroma was so strong and collective, bursting intrusively into my smell-receptors with a concoction of scents like a bouquet of flowers; only this was more a bouquet of organs, strips of muscles and fat. The fragrance was absorbed into the wood and the building. Even the bathroom smelt like an inviting pot roast. The aroma was like a slaughter-scented Glade Plug-in. Similar to the smell being engrained in the fibers of the wood of the decrepit, white building, the smell engrained into the fibers of the nose and brain of the seven-year-old, energetic boy I was.

**ii.**

The building’s been shut down for years now. The white paint has turned to a dirty tan color and is chipping off the textured walls, weathered by a decade of no upkeep. The warped steps still align crookedly leading to a rusty door. Boards are over the windows now. The big red sign still reads “Helgeson’s” in block-like letters. I bet the musk from the smoked meat still lingers in the rotting, soggy floorboards and sift groggily through the undisturbed air.

No one has touched the place in years. A faded yellow and black “For Sale” sign sits out front. But it’s not easy to sell a store that’s filled with smells of cooked animal carcasses. I wonder if the smells inside rotted like meat does when you leave it out for ten years; or is it still engraved in the building, preserving the history?

**iii.**

Fretta’s screams: “New York Italian Deli and Meat Locker.” Sausages of various colors, lengths, and sizes classically line the shop’s windows and walls alongside balls of cheese ranging from the size of a fist to the size of beach balls. Shelves of pasta, coffee, and other Italian goods cover the rest of the building, some packages only readable by Italian speakers.

Just walking into the welcoming place, the essence of Italian culture hits you right below the ribcage. The store seemed to have been taken out of an early 50’s movie. A butcher shop front, with a modernized, antique-style shop within, Fretta’s embraced the remnants of an individual culture. The history that the original owner possessed, the culture he enveloped within himself, still resonates within the walls; bringing one back to the days of immigration to the east coast.

**iv.**

Christmas in New York has beautiful warmth to it, a sort of glow and shine of spirit. This is probably because, at twenty, I spent my first Christmas with my dad and his side, the Italian side, of my family.

An eighty-dollar bouquet of meat formed in a round of ribs, the center filled with stuffing, handcrafted by Fretta’s meat locker, of course; an elegant display for a cozy family Christmas dinner. The elegant structure was the kind of centerpiece you’d see in a movie or a magazine with those fancy paper chef hats on the ends of each rib bone.

A combination of myself, grandma, grandpa, and dad brought together by the Christmas season, surrounded by this gorgeous meal, with this masterpiece front and center. This food, our love for one another, and our Italian roots and togetherness melded us into a family, which created a magical Christmas we celebrated as a whole for the first time.

**ix.**

Thanksgiving dinner, a banquet for a king, a meal for the noble, and an aroma that melts the nose like butter on hot potatoes. Dad would be up at four in the morning starting the turkey. This was when the day began. As the hours ticked by, the smells began to flood the house. A plethora of foods began to materialize: a crockpot with green bean casserole; the turkey, gathering moistness and savory flavors; acorn squash engulfed in butter and brown sugar; hand-smashed potatoes with warm, hearty turkey gravy; sweet potatoes, glowing brown and oranges paired with ooey-gooey marshmallows; steaming corncobs drowned in pools of butter; and toasty, steaming stuffing; together, all as one, in a symphony of delightful foods. Supper gathered, elegantly placed and spread across the dinner table. Then the plates started being passed around.

Food began to be dished and the circus initiated the performance; arms crossing each other, bowls and dishes in a frenzy, crumbs dropped, turkey carved, stuffing yanked out of the turkey’s butt, sweet potatoes dealt, corncobs passed along, squash splattered onto plates, and mouths started to draw the big top to a finish.

**v.**

I don’t know why I wanted them. I never tried them before, and the word never seemed to have the best connotation: chicken gizzards. I mean, they are an organ of a chicken used to collect rocks and junk while they peck up food from the ground and break it down. But going on break at the grocery store, the chicken gizzards were hot and ready in the deli, and I only had fifteen minutes. I thought, “Why not?”

I sat in the break room with my gizzards, mashed potatoes, and chocolate milk. Opening the hot deli bag, I smelt the little deep-fried, peppery nuggets of throat organs. They were warm and chewy. People say scallops are like eating erasers; if that’s the truth, then gizzards are like chewing a bike tire. But there was something so comforting about them. I don’t know if it’s because of the heat and being like deep-fried chicken or if it’s because they’re easy to throw in your mouth, like popcorn shrimp, but I do know I can’t get enough. Along with the mashed potatoes and gravy, the combination was a comfort food filled break, which made it hard to get back to work.