

The Last Supper

In the dining room my mother stencils male robins
and mistletoe along the top of a wall. My father goes
to the sink and starts to fill a tub with hot water.
There must be a way to clean up this mess.
The room smells like Pine-Sol and a burnt out
vacuum motor. When the weather shifts,
we watch my uncle shovel the walk. *He's*
such a thankless man, we'll say later, meaning
he has no backbone. My mother finishes
with the robins, now they sing.

My grandfather labors onto the snow-covered porch
and lights the charcoal after emptying a can
of lighter fluid. My aunt says, *You don't have to douse it*,
under her breath then she goes outside and shouts,
You don't have to douse the damn charcoals like that,
and the snow keeps falling behind them so there is a hush
as the cold breaks blood vessels in her cheeks
and sends her inside flushed. She hugs herself. *Sometimes*
there is nothing to do, she says, accurately. And we all laugh
when on the first burger my grandfather melts
a Kraft single without removing the cheese
from its wrapper. What an idiot, we all think.

In the kitchen I sit next to my grandmother playing cards.
Her hands are shaking, and she can't keep rules straight.
Her mind is faltering. I start feeding her good cards,
and she starts to win. I kick my mother so she'll have
this memory, too, how much I love my grandmother.
My mother whispers to her sister through a fan of cards,
but my aunt protests, wanting her mother to lose one more time.

In the kitchen someone turns on a yellow light.
Dish towels hang like chickens off every hook.
On the wall an ornate cuckoo clock chirps every fifteen minutes.
The linoleum floor sticks and sings under our feet.
We are told there are rewards for our behavior.
My grandfather says there will not be enough food,
as if it is a surprise to any of us. We compete
to look full, all the children puffing out their bellies.



My grandmother puts her hands together into a cup.
Here is your supper, I joke pouring liquid from an imaginary pitcher.

Before we leave my grandfather tells my mother
she will return to the church when she needs it.
Every small betrayal happens earnestly, even this one.