

Shallow

Grandfather pulls the dark wooden box out of the freezer from under a package of frozen steaks marinating in a gallon ziploc baggie. Placing it on the glass patio table, he lifts the lid open. Four cigars are snatched by the raw, red hands of uncles and cousin and grandfather. They guillotine the cigars with a silver plug, place the cubans in the silent o's of their hungry mouths. They pass around the lighter – thick barreled, stainless steel – that flames like a pyre. Fat fingers wrapped around brown parchment scrolls. I am offered one, encouraged as I take the butt in my mouth. Tobacco flakes feel like paper against my teeth. On my tongue, I taste earth – dry dead leaves and sweat, hot gray air. Father holds the lighter to the tip. My eyes rear in the back of my head as I inhale. I cough, eyes watering and red as wine. They laugh and slap me on the back. Someone has been taking pictures. “Shallow, girl, shallow. Don't take too much– you'll get sick.” A sort of hazing, a welcome. Am I a man now?

We sit by the pool – these men in their shirts with straining buttons, jackets removed in the warm evening air, tossed across the backs of lounging chairs, ties loosened around short thick trunks. I cross my stocking legs under the hem of my dress, draw my scarf around my neck. They talk of good liquor, sipping on after-dinner drinks of iced gin with sugar and lemon. I am offered one, but my head spins and I decline. Water gurgles, gives off a colorless glow, loops of pale light swim across our faces as we look down into shallow water. Grandfather shuffles by the pool, slippers whispering against the linoleum. In a pool chair he leans back, puffs at the cigar. Smoke filters out the gaps in his teeth, floats above his burnt corked profile.

“So, I tell ya, I’ll tell ya. We were staying in– well, we were staying somewhere. I was in a room with whatshisname and I said to him, I said, ‘we gotta bring the fucking turkey.’ So whathisname and I got the turkey– I dunno, we rented it or something, maybe I bought it, I dunno. So whatshisname and I got the turkey on a leash, right, and we bring it up to the room, ya know, lead it up the back stairs. When we get in there his wife says, ‘hell no, you get that turkey out of my room!’ And so, and so whatshisname takes the turkey back down to the car and sleeps with it. He sleeps with the turkey in the car! And its fucking cold, and whatshisname is out there with the turkey. His wife said, she said, ‘get that fucking turkey out of my room!’ Next day, we got the turkey on the leash, some guys holding it while the games going on. We’re down, its close though, and the team is down so I think, ‘I gotta get the fucking turkey.’ So I grab the turkey from this guy and I’m parading it up and down the sideline, and it’s just all ‘gobble gobble gobble’ like its singing. The quarterback calls a hail mary, right, and so I fucking book it down to the end zone with turkey. This guy throws the damn ball down the field, like all the way down, and I’m running with this turkey on a leash. And we’re celebrating– no yeah, yeah, he fucking catches it, catches it in the end zone, and I got the turkey down there and its going ‘gobble gobble’ so we all start flapping our arms and singing ‘gobble gobble gobble’ like we’re goddamn turkeys. And so– no yeah, it was the last play of the game. We fucking won cause of the turkey. A fucking turkey. A turkey on a leash!”

Cigar smoke fills our eyes as we all cry. The men slap their polished shoes on the ground and roar as grandfather stands, begins waving his arms in the air, gin sloshing from the glass tumbler in his hand. Drool pools in the corners of his mouth like alcohol stains, tongue flicking into the creases, lips left parted, wet and glistening. He speaks erratically,

drops syllables, blunders at the cusp of words. He finds himself winded, reclaims his poolside seat and chuckles to himself, wiping tears from his eyes. My foot in my heeled shoe goes numb. I shift my legs, one over the other and wrapped around, settle the dress skirt across my knees. Cigar ash litters the pool deck. I breath shallow.

Word Count: 773