

## Years in the Kitchen

### Fall

Peter stabbed the pineapple onto the skewer, then the meat. The way the flesh gave and surrendered to his will made him think and it also made him hungry. Whitney had made a cheesecake, the first one since they'd started using the oven again as it cooled down. She could do this by herself now and in the most subtle ways the flavor had become more complex as she had aged and settled with some discomfort into necessary adolescence. It was still very fluffy though, very light, technically quite excellent.

His mom finished the kabob she'd been working on and brushed them all with a marinade his dad had made. Peter tasted it and even though he'd helped with the preparation it still surprised him in the best of ways. He hoped that when he was older he could manage such concoctions. Admiration filled his chest, he was always happy when he was cooking next to his mom. She smiled at him casually, with no provocation and he knew she felt the same way.

They each stabbed another piece of beef, rushing a little as they smelled the grill getting warm. He loved being next to his mom and helping her with food, especially when stabbing was involved but he was also excited to learn the manly ways of the grill and its fire. He knew that once his dad taught him everything to know about it, as he currently was, Peter would be somewhat of a master at it.

“Can I see what dad’s doing on the grill?” Peter asked as he finished the kabob he was working on, not wanting his mom to feel left in the lurch.

“Oh, yeah, I think we’re about done here. Let me know how far off the grill is from being ready.” She was relaxed as she said this, the timing would be sublime.

Peter soaked in the golden fall sunshine, the sort that felt on the brink of fleeting, his dad looked powerful next to the grill, he was in control. He walked toward the man, content with the state of things, however they had gotten this way.

## **Winter**

Her body wiggled and teased, just for him, he knew it had to be just for him and though they were so young, he was struck by this in her, as she dipped and enticed over to the cutting board he was suddenly aware of how young she was, just for him, as she smiled in her eyes at him and wanted him to show her the way of his world.

“So, why are we making these wings this way, I could have just picked up a bag at Wal Mart?” She said as she moved around, she said it like it was part of a young little celebration, so though it would soon become apparent to her, the question was cute.

“Because, my wings and the way that I make them are special, you’ll see.” And though he needed to chop garlic for the wing sauce, his concoction waiting to boil any minute, he wrapped her in his arms.

“But no one has to chop anything for the bag ones.” This could have been an annoying statement but the wind had no trouble penetrating their poorly sealed windows and her

nipples poked her skin tight sweater as a gust perceived only by the movement of the blinds and the sensitivity of her flesh blew all his troubles away.

“These are better, you’ll see.” There was lust in his voice as they stood face to face, and his head had tilted some to look as though he was talking to her body. She was wide eyed as he did this, like no one had ever taken the time before and she could tell he loved it, the privilege of holding her close, looking at the work of the wind, feeling the way he impacted her. Then he sighed a breath, primal and sophisticated all at once, and was gentle as he backed away, slowly, letting his hands linger, letting them place her before his eyes left to tend the food they were making. She stood in a daze. It was pleasant, not too wet or dry, the way poultry sometimes is.

## **Spring**

He’d made a believer of her long ago. Though, since she’d had Whitney, they’d bought bagged food a few times. Now she felt like plodding as her spring clothes didn’t feel tight but still made her miss her old body. It was too nice for that today though. Or it was now that he was home. Now she was light, it was almost showy and though he was unwinding on the couch, he was amused, by her feathery prances, by his little drooling enigma and the TV.

The Italian sausage started to stick, every time she turned her back on it to chop garlic. It would be too hot to cook pizza soon and she wanted it to be good and she knew that both things, chopping garlic and cooking sausage, could be done at once but something was eluding her.

“What temp is the sausage on, seven?”

“Seven.” She confirmed.

“Okay but it’s about half done now.” Correct. “You’ll have an easier time if you turn it down to about five until it’s done.” Immediately after she turned the heat down the sausage mellowed and she felt a gushy sort of amazement at his ability to cook so well he could do so remotely.

“How did you do that?”

He shrugged, modestly but not embarrassed or proud. “I can hear it.” She was more amazed at this. “In a minute, I’ll get up and help with the crust. I’m just trying to sit down for one second and get home.”

This was understandable. They intended to get a car as soon as possible but for now they took the bus and he had just walked, not far, about half a mile, to get home and eat dinner with his young family.

The breezy way she said ‘no worries’ was sincere even as it floated in the air. When he got up the hug he gave her was tender, less needy but still wanting, it lasted less time but meant more. He was careful as he gently prepared the crust just so. He had a secret to making it taste perfect, she would keep it for him as long as he liked.

## **Summer**

Whitney moved sluggishly, as though if she moved like ice she would feel like ice. Her mom’s shorts were small, like underwear, she shifted around in them uncomfortably, though not the same shamed discomfort that she’d had right after having Peter. She’d started working

out after that, she'd been cheerfully proactive, admirable. The girl would watch her mother going through the motions, down, up, reach left, bend right, something about some muscle and it was fascinating. A little different every time.

When the girl approached her face bore the same look of concentration as when she exercised, though she was looking at imitation crab. Like when she exercised her face bloomed into a smile when she saw Whitney, perfectly at first, then off to the side, like her left side was happier to see her daughter. Whitney didn't feel this way but the idea amused her as her mom's eyes twinkled with her smile.

"Dad said I could help." Whitney was seven but already very pretty in the way that looked as though it would last. She had no idea how nervous that made her parents.

"Uh, good. Did he say what you should do?" Years later he was still vastly more skilled, talented really.

"She should break up the crab. I think she'll do good at that." He popped a piece into his mouth and smiled before adding, "Let me see it when you're done."

Faint, real smiles graced their faces, they were of the relaxed and genuine sort. Whitney's little hands worked through the crab, flaking it. Her mom was chopping green onions, celery and garlic. Her dad was mixing the sauce and tending the noodles, tasting and stirring. The ingredients he used to make it were ordinary, mustard, mayonnaise, spices, but all of it would combine into a pasta salad that would let the taster know why people made such things.

The crab felt cool and smooth on Whitney's fingers. The chopping was done with a rhythm, not as well paced as if he had done it but to a soothing beat, everything was more uniform than it had been before she'd really understood the point. The sauce was focused on with care, stirring was done fast like magic, when it was tasted its current flavor was perceived and what it would become imagined.

The squishy crab was nearly done, it was little bite sized flakes and Whitney would miss its coolness amidst the stifling day. Her dad tasted the sauce another time and smiled. Pleased with himself he presented some to his wife to try, she would give her opinion, probably she would love it. Pleasure spread across her face and it pleased him too. The girl smiled as she watched her dad become overcome with a different sort of pride.

He grabbed his still pretty, though differently so, wife around the waist and kissed her, not so much deeply but meaningfully. She melted into it and her hand found its way out the window she'd been standing next to. A piece of paper from the garlic she'd been chopping floated off her graceful, aging fingertip into the whisper of the breeze provided by the summer's gently descending dusk.