

## THE ROAST

Sept, 26 2014

The thick fog had rolled back to the bay and the warm sun was showing itself. It was the middle of August, 1928. George Hoenisch, a handsome man, five foot eight, with very thick dark brown hair, hurriedly walked home in the early afternoon to his rented lower flat on Grove Street in Oakland, a few blocks away from his upholstery shop. He was coughing up the dust collected from his work deep down in his chest, wetting his three day growth of whiskers as the sticky ingredients made its way to the gutter.

Passing a few cars and a few children playing in the streets, he heard the familiar sound of the driver of a horse driven wagon with wooden oak wheels and iron rims yelling, “Rags, bottles, and socks.” It reminded him of the old days before the automobile when he was a boy. Saturday was his day to go shopping for the week at the market on Sixth Street and he had his mind set on a pot roast for Sunday dinner.

His children, Eddie and Lucille, were excited and waiting, they knew they would get some treats which was a rarity during these hard times. Eddie went to the back yard to get Miggs, a brown and black pit bull with a large white heart on his chest.

The year before, the children found Miggs in the gutter, half dead from being on the losing side of a gambling private dog fight. They nursed the dog back to life and kept him hidden from their father for a week for lack of funds to feed him, but soon the dog was discovered and the children received a bawling out. The dog was accepted into the family. A cable was strung across the yard with a large ring and spring tied to Miggs so he could run back and forth across the yard without escaping.

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George parked his truck on the street in front of his home. It had dents on the grill, bumper, fender and a broken light, caused by George two months before after he got all dressed up wearing his best suit for a date with a lady and headed for the truck. As usual Lucille got in the front seat to move the handle, to spark the ignition. George cranked and cranked; the engine back fired; the crank went in reverse and almost tore off his arm. He unfastened the crank and beat the hell out of the truck. Lucille jumped out of the truck and ran into the house and hid until George calmed down.

George was in a good mood this Saturday afternoon. He washed up and began singing some of his favorite songs while putting on clean cotton slightly wrinkled light blue long sleeved shirt, tucking it into his baggy brown pants over his slight pot belly. Adjusting his glasses he grabbed his brown fedora felt hat and headed for the truck, knowing the children were already waiting. Lucille, nine years old with her flaming red hair, got in the front seat to spark the nineteen twenty- three Ford car converted to a pickup truck that her father used for his business and pleasure. She moved the handle while George cranked three or four times before it started. This was hard work it took a good sized person to turn the crank.

After the truck got started, Eddie jumped in the back and George, with the crank in hand, got in next to Lucille and Miggs.

Arriving at the market, Miggs was left tied to the steering wheel to protect the truck and its contents from thieves. If any strangers came close by, he would bark, show his teeth, and was ready to attack.

George knew the closer to the six o'clock closing time, the better the bargain. He was intent on purchasing a pot roast, but he also needed to shop for the rest of the groceries for the week. He walked by the meat counter and there sat one last neatly tied little pot roast. He went to where the vegetables

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were displayed watching from the corner of his eye at the meat counter. If he waited, he would get it cheaper but if he waited too long, someone else might buy it. The children stood by the glass fountain bubbling with sweet celery phosphate fizz. George bought each of them a glass, it was sweet and delicious. George picked up a bag of five heads of lettuce for a quarter and some potatoes, carrots, celery, peanut butter, honey, a couple pounds of raisins: a big bag of oats, and some broken pieces of chocolate always on sale for the children.

The time was five fifty- five and George made a beeline toward the meat counter.

“Hi George, got just what you want this time, the last pot roast tied up and ready to go home,” said Tony the butcher.

“How much?”

“One ninety-five.”

“Too much.”

“OK, one seventy- five.”

“I’ll think about it,” said George. The butcher looked at the clock, it was five fifty eight, he could not save the meat until Monday, it would spoil and George knew it.

“One fifty- five,” said the butcher.

“One dollar,” said George holding out a crisp one dollar bill. There was no one else going to buy the roast, it was almost closing time and the roast would have to be discarded.

“You’re robbing me! How do you expect me to make a living?” The butcher’s hand reached for

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the money.

George pointed to the almost empty shelf, "I'll give you thirty- five cents for that piece of baloney, how much for that chunk of white cheese?"

"Twenty- five cents, it's not on sale, oh, what the hell fifty cents for both and get out of here, it's time to go home." They both laughed. The butcher wrapped the meat cheese and baloney and handed them to George.

"Enjoy, have a nice week end. See you next week, and try not to beat me up so bad."

"If I don't beat you up, I won't eat."

"Me either, if you keep doing this to me," said the butcher.

George thought he hit the lottery, he had his roast and for half price, his blue eyes twinkled and the red veins popped out from his face, he was going to have his pot roast on Sunday, his favorite meal.

At seven a.m. George woke up startled after yelling and screaming in his sleep. It was a special day for George; the day he dreamed of all week, the day he worked and scraped for, it was Sunday morning and he was going to have that pot roast for dinner. He looked at the clock and was relieved that he had not overslept; he quickly jumped out of his late mother and father's old walnut antique bed with a high back and big rounded carved mahogany posts in each corner. A slight breeze was blowing the old faded dusty thin light blue curtains, covering the window that his mother had hung twenty years before. It was chilly but George could not sleep if he did not have fresh air, even if it was bitter cold outside. After going to the bathroom, he lit the wood stacked by Eddie the night before, in the old black and white iron Wedgwood stove, to cook breakfast and warmth house. While the stove was warming up he went to his bedroom, got on the floor and did his usual fifteen minutes of exercises with his husky

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body in the little bedroom, squeezing in between the bed and the wall

In the medium size combined kitchen dining room he prepared his breakfast. He got out the double boiler aluminum pot with dents that had been passed down for three generations, filled the top with enough water for oatmeal for three, and the bottom with water, setting it on the hot stove until the water came to a boil. He poured in the right amount of oats in the top boiler added a handful of raisins and a quarter teaspoon of salt and stirred. When the oats were cooked, he separated the top boiler which held the oats from the bottom boiler that contained boiling hot water and poured the hot water into a cup and added leaves of dried alfalfa, that he brought home in the summer from the country that he picked it up from a mowed pasture on the side of the road; filling a large gunny sack, enough to last him for a year.

George called the children and they slowly came to the table. After finishing up his breakfast and drinking his tea, George went to the small walk-in pantry, separated from the kitchen by heavy curtains, picked up the roast and set it on the kitchen table. He unwrapped the roast, admiring it in the light as if it was a great gift from God. He checked the contents to verify it was real. His stomach churned and the juice in his mouth rolled around as the sweet smell entered his nostrils.

“Lucie, I want you to cook up this roast for dinner, make sure you put plenty of potatoes, onions and carrots in the pan so they can suck up the juice from the meat, and don't forget the salt and pepper. I have to make a couple of deliveries. I'll be back around two o'clock. Put the roast in the oven at one thirty, it will take about two hours and fifteen minutes to cook and don't let Miggs in the house!”

George carefully rewrapped the roast and set it back in the cool pantry.

Lucille and George got the truck started and George went down the road. Lucille was nine and Eddie was eleven. Their grandmother, (George's mother) whom George and his two children had

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previously lived with, took care of the family and did all the cooking and cleaning. She had taught Lucille how to cook and prepare the meals. The grandmother died of cancer the year before, and now it was Lucille's job to take over the chores.

Miggs was chained to the cable in the back yard. He barked and stretched the spring on the wire cable and scratched at the back door, as usual the children let him in, even though their father said not to. They wrestled and played with the dog, chasing him around the house. But Miggs had other ideas. He made a bee-line for the pantry; his senses told him there was something good in there. He jumped up grabbed the roast and headed for the back door which was partly opened and jumped over the back gate, banging the roast on the top of the gate but holding on to it with a tight grip, and down the street he went.

The two children chased after him bare footed. Eddie wore his overalls with one of the knees torn out and a pocket ripped weeks before by Miggs and Lucille with her one size too small handed down light brown dress hanging just below her knees with curled up white lace stitched on the sleeves and neck. The meat dangled from the dog's jaws, while it scraped along the gutter between Grove Street and Telegraph Avenue in, horse manure, dog poop, spit, oil, cigar butts, garbage, grease and other things. Before the dog could devour the roast Lucille grabbed him by his tail and then his collar and Eddie grabbed the roast. A tug-of-war started and Eddie pulled and Miggs pulled and growled as the roast ripped leaving Miggs with a small piece while Lucille retrieved the major portion of the meat. The children gathered a few torn off pieces on the ground and rushed the meat back to the house, with Miggs running behind barking, following the roast.

Miggs was chained and locked outside while the children washed and retied the roast back together slightly smaller but presentable. Eddie went to the back porch while Miggs was barking and yelling for his roast.

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“Shut up! Miggs, you’re in a lot of trouble, if Dad finds out, Lucie and I will get a whipping and I will whip you, so shut up!”

Eddie picked up more wood from the box next to the iron stove to keep the fire going. He went down the street to play with one of his friends; while Lucille peeled the potatoes, skinned the carrots, and put the contents in the pan with the roast, sprinkling a small amount of salt and pepper on top. At one thirty when the oven heat was the right temperature, Lucille put the roast in the wood burning oven and proceeded to cook dinner watching the roast closely.

George was home at two o’clock, he could smell the pot roast cooking and cracked open the oven to inspect it while Eddie and Lucille watched and worried about their father finding out, and the consequences would be a whipping. George proceeded to the living room to read his Sunday morning Tribune newspaper, his stomach growled for the roast but he remained patient knowing that a feast would soon begin.

Lucille continued to check the roast just like her grandmother had taught her while Eddie stood by and worried that somehow their father would find out what happened to the roast. George could smell the delicious roast and couldn't resist taking a peek now and then as it got closer to dinner time. He also kept an eye on Lucille, to make sure the roast would not get overcooked, although he knew that Lucille could do the job, after all she was taught by his mother, and Lucille had cooked many roasts before with her grandmother and by herself.

“Let me know when the roast is ready and I’ll take it out of the oven.” George did not want to take any chances of the roast dropping on the floor and getting dirty, since he was the most qualified one to take the roast out of the oven.

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Eddie went into his bedroom and hid for fear of being found out. When the roast was ready, Lucille watched her father take the roast out of the oven. He set the hot pan with its contents on the counter to let it cool some before taking the roast out of the pan and placing it on a wooden block on the kitchen table.

George admired the roast. Miggs chained to the cable could smell it and started barking, crying for the roast.

“A special treat and I got it for a song,” said George.

Eddie appeared. George started cutting the meat and put it in a dish for serving while Lucille removed the potatoes and carrots and put them into a bowl and then scooped out the juice from the pan into a container.

“The meat is done just right Lucie, nice job.”

“Thanks Daddy,” slightly smiling as she looked with some relief at Eddie.

George put a big portion of meat and vegetables on his plate and poured the meat juice on his carrots and potatoes with delight. He was hungry, especially for the roast that he had been dreaming about all week. He skipped lunch to save up for the roast and started eating.

“Have some meat,” said George pushing the meat and vegetables closer to Eddie. Eddie swallowed hard and stared at the plate without taking any while spreading butter on a piece of bread.

“Don't you want any of this delicious meat?”

“Uh, - no thank you, I, I'm not very hungry.”

“Not hungry? You don't know what you are missing. Pass the plate to your sister.”

Eddy pushed the plate in her direction. Lucille glanced at the steaming platter and reached across the table; picked up a piece of bread and reached for the butter.

“Dish out some meat potatoes and carrots and pour some of this delicious meat juice on top, it's



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really good.” A little bit of grease was running down George’s chin.

The children kept quiet looking away from George.

“I don’t understand you two, this is really good, eat some.” George shoved a big piece of potato covered with meat juice into his mouth.

“I know what your problem is; you two ate too much chocolate candy today.”

“Yes we did daddy,” said Lucille chewing on her bread.

George reached across the table, pulled the plate towards him and put another large portion of meat potatoes on his plate.

“Well from now on, I am going to ration the candy out to you.”

After pouring meat juice over the contents of his plate, he stuffed a piece of meat into his mouth with a rush of overwhelming satisfaction. In his happy mood looking at his children through the top of his stained glasses from the meat juice, he preceded to advise them. ”You both need to eat a good healthy meal, and from now on, no more candy until you finish your dinner.”

Eddie and Lucille looked and smiled at each other, they were out of harm’s way, most of the meat was in George’s belly, and they had passed the test.

After dinner Lucille cleaned up and washed the dishes while Eddie dried them with a towel. When they were finished they went into their bedrooms and ate all their chocolate, the final piece of evidence.

Miggs got some of the left-overs, he didn't seem to mind.