

LAURIE KRUK

The In-Laws for Christmas Dinner

What we can agree on:

That the sacred bird must be sacrificed
at three hundred and fifty degrees
of the interior sun, ruling the day
from mother-robed morning
till solstice-dusk, when man-stomachs growl,
and the wand of augury, read by three hands, declares *It's time*.
That all the trimmings are required—gravy, cranberries, homemade
stuffing—and
Thou Shalt Not leave the table until bellies groan and spouses frown.
That family is the heart of Christmas and we'll try to “be nice,”
even to those we avoid most of the year. That dishes
must be done, but left to the least “merry”
making soapy penitence afterwards, alone.

What we can't:

What to do with the silence between mastication, mouth-
fuls of labour shared annually by assorted personalities
crammed into Grandma's kitchen, joined
by quirks of courtship, breeding, blood. Who
to talk to, *whom* to ignore, what children can get away with
(disappearing, mid-meal, to TV?), what they can't
(eating dessert without cleaning their plate? Although Grandma *did*

buy fudge cookies just for *them*—).

Who has the correct memory of the last time the basement flooded,
or the middle brother tried to kill the younger with a snow shovel,
or the year the dog was run over by the neighbour, rushing to hospital
for a burst appendix or a miscarrying step-daughter.

That adolescents should be seen and not heard from,
or heard from (long-distance, collect, or email) and not seen.

That ex-wives must never, ever be mentioned,
(even with bloodcells swept with the liquor of human kindness?)
and that Grace (if remembered) must never take up
more than two cooling breaths to say
before starting in on the martyrdom of meat-
ing.

Notes

“Poem for Sept. 13th, 2001,” “Time Coming,” “Vaudevillians of Time,” were previously published in *Loving the Alien*.

“Good-Enough Friday” was published in *The Windsor Review*.