

Nightcap

by Gary V. Powell

One Christmas Eve, while our guests bundled up to leave for home, my old man mixed nightcaps for him and my uncle Rich, my old man's little brother. They'd been drinking screwdrivers, so my old man mixed orange juice and vodka, but instead of splitting what remained of the vodka evenly, he dumped nearly all of it into my uncle's glass. Uncle Rich, not the fool my old man took him for, switched their drinks before they chugged them down.

Outside, snow was starting, big, fluffy flakes. My sister helped my cousin Cari out with her presents. My cousin Bryan and I brushed snow off my uncle's Mercury. My mom steadied my aunt Betty with a hand on her elbow. About the time my uncle reached for the passenger door, my old man heaved and threw up in the yard.

Chunks of ham, potato salad, baked beans, and deviled eggs glittered in the orange stained snow.

My old man staggered and fell.

My uncle pointed and laughed.

My mom asked what was so goddamn funny.

My old man made it to his knees and called my uncle a motherfucker.

My aunt said my old man had it coming.

My sister and my mom helped my old man to his feet and steered him into the house.

I formed a snowball in my bare hands. Hard as a rock, I let her fly, and caught Bryan square in the face. Blood gushed down his winter jacket and onto the driveway.

Cari started to cry, my aunt called me a little shit, and my uncle said this wasn't by God over. He got into the car. My aunt backed out and managed to make it to the road without getting stuck. I watched their tail lights out of sight.

The next morning, when I let the dog out to pee, deep drifts stretched across the landscape like ocean waves mounting a beach. Everything lay covered in pristine white.

