

Family Circle

by John Wentworth Chapin

They all held Christmas back in Pemberton. Only old Mick Turner and FJ —one of the middle sons — still lived in Pemberton, but the far-flung Turner boys and their broods descended upon Pemberton like locusts. The clan had long since outgrown the pine dining room table with its single leaf; FJ set out four long plastic folding tables on the lanai. The old pine table sagged with aluminum trays of meat and soft vegetables. The Turner boys loved the homecoming and their women graciously tolerated it. Family is what it is.

When the hour grew late and the supply of whiskey dwindled around the circle, each prodigal Turner boy lamented his state. Each past holiday was farther back than the distance between the previous two. One brother spoke of his desire to return to Pemberton, to give the finger to the fast lane and come home. The other boys grumbled in agreement: FJ had it good here. FJ grinned and nodded into his cup.

Old Mick Turner struggled not to weep: all this flesh from his own, longing for home. But in two days' time, he would be alone again with this loathsome sponge who reminded him daily of his failure to have loved enough as a father. FJ might drown or disappear, something painless and eternal, but such freedom was a hopeless dream for Mick.

