

Feast

by Nicholas Hayes

You retreat through dark alleys, following votive candles flickering amid overflowing dumpsters and tallow barrels. As wind gusts, the flames almost extinguish. Points of light curl down into molten wax. You follow them hoping to discover a point of origin.

You follow them, fondling votives in your pocket.

Then framed in a window of The Chicken Shack, a boy.

You grip a single candle, pull it from your pocket.

From an alley his pale skin seems to recede deeper in the distance than his black hair, his unibrow. Tonight reflected light pulls from, retreats from darkness.

As you enter the parking lot, his hair streaked with greenish fluorescent light, recedes to the same plane as his skin.

You light the candle and cross the lot. A dim streetlight makes you conscious of gray cat hair on your navy blue peacoat. As you brush some hair from your forearm, you tilt your hand. Light blue wax pours over your fingers. Pain fails to distract you from the vision you approach.

You set the candle on the small black ledge in front of the boy.

His fingers work through a breast. Batter flecks from the meat and scatters onto his table, his lap. Off-white strings of flesh connect the torn strips to the breast for a moment as he brings the strips to his mouth. The boy's fingers glisten as they emerge.

Wax fractures on your fingers. Sloughing off, the pieces dangle from your knuckle hair close to where they hardened. You brush them onto the dark asphalt, noticing a slight pinch as the hair is torn from the roots.

The boy has color in his cheeks, which you could not see from the distance. The color is brighter, stronger than the normal rosiness of acne, like a flush of fever or wine--as if he had drunk half a bottle of cheap merlot in the early evening after school.

The boy almost smiles but his lips tense in mid-action. His long black lashes stir, flutter a wink. His eyes catch yours through the dark

reflection of your face, illuminated from beneath by wavering
candlelight. Reflection obscures his features; they become yours.
He knows what you want. The corner of his mouth quivers, as if
restraining laughter.

You cannot respond.

You flee.

You run to the nearest alley.

Candles fall from your coat. They hit the ground with a hollow
percussion.

You retreat through dark alleys. No longer able to follow the
candles, which have burnt out, you speed past obscure forms.

You retreat not knowing how much distance you have between you
and the boy, not knowing what vision, which visage you flee.

