

*PORT SALUT*

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Mouth sharp, like dagger, heart soft, like tofu

Daughter of a butcher, Alice learns not to sign her heart to any animal because one day it could be laying on the plate in front of her. 'It's both tender and crisp now, I'm salivating', her father says at dinner. She doesn't answer, she hasn't said a word to him all year. Instead she takes a sip of water from the glass that once contained a half-off tiramisu, which she washed and peed in to take a pregnancy test. Her father swigs his scotch down from the glass that she had used in the morning to reduce the swelling of her eyelids. Her mother taps her nails on the glass that held the cotton swab with which they wet her grandmother's lips on her deathbed.

Instead of preserving her secrets in a diary, Alice tells them to the family's smart refrigerator after dark. She confesses that she hides formula in her take away-cups. "Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa." That she scratches her psoriasis until she feels the flesh under her nails. That she smears ghost pepper in the open wounds because the stings numb her entire upper body. That she named the cluster of pimples on her back after her sister. That she, knowing it will never be served, has betrothed the rat king in their basement. The magnets shiver and gasp but the fridge tilts its head, nods and understands. It helps her tweet her heart out via the built in web browser. It assists her in snapping a poorly lit selfie. It streams the Daily TV Mass on its flat screen to rock her to sleep.

In high school, no one accepts the butcher's daughter. "Here comes the girl who reeks of period and pork!" they would scream. "What scents that I carry have I actually chosen?" she would respond. "Here comes the girl who leaves a trace of dead skin behind her!". This particular day, she takes out the cheese knife she got for her 13th birthday and waves it around until she is left alone. She studies the skin on her palms but only half of it remains. The rest she has shredded like uneven flakes of parmesan.

Safe back home in the kitchen, she starts preparing dinner - taking out glass containers with yesterday's carrots fried with onions and sugar, Sunday's cabbage marinated in vinegar, Saturday's rabbit and guinea-fowl-meatballs. "My hair has been ripped off by the hand that has fed me", she thinks. "That hand will serve as worm-food from now on." A drop of the rodenticide - meant for her lover downstairs - on her father's plate. She winks at the fridge, saying "Revenge is a dish best served cold."

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