

Connection

A square cherry table,
a large brimmed glass of virgin strawberry daiquiri,
a glass of lemon water,
an unlabeled bottle of homemade barbecue sauce,
a bottle of Red Hot, your prerequisite for every meal,
a shaker of salt and pepper,
and a muscle man magazine
sit between us.

Soft light overhead,
behind you,
Daughtry strums his guitar singing *I'm Coming Home* with his band
stretched across four white screens along the length of the back wall
and behind me,
on a trio of TV's hanging from the ceiling like a chandelier.

In the center,
rows of cherry chairs
and tables stagger the
waiter's station and kitchen

On the side,
moose heads,
hunting rifles,
black and white hunting pictures hang
on wood grain brown brick walls,
high blades of tan grass, blue sky, and open pasture painted on the walls.

Silverware,
empty glasses,
empty plates,
clink and clatter on black trays,

you flip a page.

To our left,
a guy in a blue-collared shirt and jeans reaches for his date's hand across
the table,
she laughs,
grabs his hand, says something,
he laughs,

you flip a page.

Forks pitch into baked potatoes,
fingers pinch fried chicken wings and fries.

Across from us,
a man's eyes catch mine watching. I push out a smile. He smiles, and shifts
uncomfortably, leans back in his seat and puts his arm around
the back of the woman's chair beside him. She smiles. He looks across the table
at a similar version of himself, says something, they laugh loudly,
I laugh inwardly. A teenaged version joins in, and the woman talking
to the woman with the arm around her, links into the men's conversation,
until they're all connected.

A waiter slides five plates piled with fried chicken wings across their table,

you sip your daiquiri through your straw,

they all dig in,

set it down and flip a page.

Our white tee, black-jean, black-shoed, spiky,
short-haired, reddish-blond waitress, pulls out a white pad,
and says, "Ready to order?"

You order chicken wings and fries,
I order rotisserie chicken and baked potato,
she leaves,

I look up at you. My smile slips. I try to hold it, force
the edges of my lips to curl before you look up,

but you never do. You flip a page. Then another. Then a couple.

~Marion Thomas