



Tradition

by Isabelle Lyon

THE old table now sat in the middle of the small vinyl-tiled dinette. Instead of the matching chairs, four plastic backs of modern design were barely visible above the table top. A fifth seat was improvised from another room — the sewing machine bench.

The round oak table had nevertheless been pulled open to its maximum length, and its two extra leaves fit into the gaping middle-section. The white linen cloth that Grandmother had made for it, “for special occasions,” was spread out over the oblong surface so that the squared corners draped evenly a few inches from the floor. Shiny silver and Irish-green crystal reflected the soft glow of tall candles burning at each end of the yellow-brown cornucopia and varicolored fruit — our traditional Thanksgiving centerpiece.

The steaming meal was ready: a huge, golden-brown turkey; sagey giblet dressing, and oyster dressing; rippled white potatoes, with butter melting in the center; browned turkey gravy; yellow candied yams; creamed peas; bright-red, tangy cranberry sauce; and for dessert — two kinds of pie to choose from. . . pumpkin or mince meat. . . with home made ice cream that was brine-packed for final “setting” in the basement.

My eleven and twelve-year-old sons took turns saying Grace. Then my mother stood up and held out the gleaming carving set to Uncle Chuck.

"You're elected," she gestured towards the golden-brown turkey.

He arose, reluctantly accepting his sister's offering, "Aw, heck — I can't carve. . . can't even carve my own initials on a piece of wood. . . ."

My boys giggled. Anticipation rustled them in their chairs. "Why don't *you* do it, Gramma?" Joe hungrily eyed the turkey.

The eleven-year-old echoed, "Yeah — " Roy watched impatiently as his great uncle studied the situation before him, trying to decide on the most strategic point of attack.

The carving set waivered. "Sure, Sis — go ahead."

"No, you're doing fine," Mom reassured him, turning to the boys so she couldn't see the proffered carving set. "You see, boys, the oldest man of the family acts as 'head of the house' and has the honor of doing the carving."

Uncle Chuck snickered, "Honor?"

"But, why?" Joe queried.

"Tradition," answered his grandmother.

"Oh-h-h." That word was quite familiar to the boys by now, as it had been to me at an even earlier age.

As Uncle Chuck moved the carving set closer to the turkey, a hush fell over us. My eyes flitted from face to face, my mind registering the same table in a different room, and different faces long-absent from the family circle. . .

I saw the soft, old-fashioned, blue-bordered rug with red splashes of flowers surrounded by shiny waxed hardwood. In the center of the rug stood the heavily-laden, traditionally-set, oak table. The soft candle glow cast shadows beyond the table where the double-doored oak buffet stood against the inside wall, its mirror reflecting the scene. Grandmother's treadle sewing machine stood in front of a window, displaying her "prize plants." A radio squatted in the corner.

Uncle Chuck was sitting at the table with Aunt Mary and their three small pre-schoolers — the youngest had just started to walk. Grandmother sat there, her regal head tipped

at a slight angle, watching Grandfather testing the weight and balance of the carving set in his square hands. A smile teased at her lips. And mother, sitting beside me, talked vivaciously with everyone, her brown curls accentuating her words.

Suddenly, as though at some unseen or unheard signal, all talk stopped — heads bowed. Mother's finger tapped my knee under the table. A reminder to say Grace. Proudly, I peeked up along my eyebrows at the eight bowed heads. Humbly, I shut my eyes tight and talked with our Heavenly Father. My mumbled "Amen" was echoed around the table. Heads raised, then — quietly — Grandfather stood up. I half expected to hear trumpets blare, a long drum-roll, and the crash of a cymbal. With great pomp and ceremony, Grandfather picked up the sharp carving set, flexed his elbows slightly, and reached forward.

"Ah-h-h's and "o-o-o's filled the room as the gliding knife revealed tender succulent white meat beneath the golden-brown exterior. Plates with steaming slices of turkey were being passed around the table — soon to be followed by the hot serving dishes of "the trimmin's."

Someone spoke my name. I looked up.

"Hm-m?" I blinked and gazed at Mom.

"Welcome back," she laughed, "have some turkey?"

"Thanks, Mom," I breathed, suddenly realizing how much like Grandmother she seemed as she sat between her beloved grandsons — her regal head nodding to their chatter, a smile teasing at her lips.

Evening Mourns

by John C. N. Smith

Evening sun mourns for the death
Of a cloud,
And birds are still.