

Thanksgiving: Livingston, New Jersey

My grandmother had gold chairs. In her small house, wallpaper grew in soft green stripes, like moss, which you could pet, and her magnificent and certainly objectionable fur coat lived inside the closet like a civilized animal without a head. And the cast-metal boy forever whistling at the base of a lamp. And bowls of raisins and walnuts, like in a Yiddish song. Curtains you could hide behind, yellow chiffon. Upstairs, an artificial fern and silvery chaise longue.

We played outside where like a shot of mercury the brook plunged through the woods. In the luscious deep piles every leaf was chased with copper foil. And inside, always, grown-ups' aromatic coffee just coming to a boil.

Were we Jewish? Well, Jew-*ish*. In that house of crowded oil paintings, not one much bigger than the span of, two up, two down, four ordinary grown-up's hands. The farmer plowing by his blooming tree, and the one she always said she'd one day give to me: a Primitive, kids with balloons, a sky of birds that looked like fish.

In the kitchen with its friendly wallpaper of stylish orange flowers, I smelled dill and chicken broth and schmalz. Papa's brick- or lilac-colored vitamins sat beside his breakfast cup. You could kneel next to the dishwasher and see the pattern (houses, wagons, horses) that had long ago been covered up. We never had apple pie

or cornbread or anything, besides a turkey, that the Pilgrims ate, but lemon meringue, and dark sweet chocolate Bundt cake Aunt Roz baked reliably, each year. And in the morning, always, bagels and a schmear. I slept dreamless nights in my father's bronze-colored childhood bed. Or lay beneath the dining table, where you could look up through the glass

just like the dead. November now means all of it is gone.
Those strange Thanksgivings, which I never can get back:

No pumpkin pie, no green beans, no Mayflower,
but gilt-legged chairs and late dark minty hours,
powdered sugar topping cakes like swirls of stars,
and on the mantel, Yahrzeit candles burning in glass jars.
The leisure, glitter, silkiness of those old days
are nothing I can find now in simple flat American ways.