How to Eat a Crawfish

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First, remember your granny’s backyard and the tiny creek bisecting it, her dead husband’s sagging toolshed, his stacks of *Hustler* left on the back of the toilet as a kind of shrine. The craft room with safety scissors gliding through your bangs like a different sort of stream. Recall the bowls of used-up milk, the creamed corn, Jell-O mold and meatloaf, the first time you smelled cigarettes as a toxic red halo that shrouded her on the wraparound porch. Smoke and hair competing for heavenly whiteness, white as the notes from Gabriel’s trumpet and pure as her rounded fingernails. The sewing needles, the suspicious lack of domestic animal. So the creek, then, and the tiny brown lobsters. That aunt who asked if you’d started kissing boys so she could swipe a bit of her glittery clear gloss from finger to mouth. When you’re ready, you’ll sit on the front deck of a rental house with someone who leaves a trail of silver glitter collaring your neck; he and his friends give you the real tutorial, the whole shebang. First, bisect head from tail and wrap your lips around the cavity guarded by scarlet armor and suck the Creole blood right out of it. Then, with scummy fingernails, pry open the tail with its nugget of treasure and its dead little claws, and next discard the dark vein running below the placard of a faux backbone. You’ll drink Chianti and listen to Usher and watch the white bag overflow with ruddy debris, including but not limited to the deflated googly eyes like capers glancing at you between limp whiskers, and you’ll start to feel a little loose at the joints yourself, like a tensing at the neck, then pillows all around. Someone lights a cigar
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and the air becomes a blanket of bourbon and brimstone. Watch your feet scuttling from kitchen to bedroom in your own brand of foxtrot. You wonder how you turned out so rosy, with all these spices kissed off your lips, how your legs got slung over somebody’s lap, shoes off, jazz hands, armor on the floor.