

THE SUNDAY ROAST

It began and had no ending on the ritualized Sundays, after dinner, after the women had gone into the kitchen with the dishes, while the uncles, grandfathers, and fathers stayed at the table with the children . . .

it began after the women had cleared the table, the coffee had been served, the wait for a pipe, chewing tobacco, cigar had ended, after they lit those tobacco products and their saliva became brown . . .

it began, the hunt of the men after the lost years which could not be lost, which were the best years of their lives, confessions in the good room that was open to its owners only on Sunday, nowhere else these words, locked up all week long, like pressure cookers that boiled over on a regular basis . . .

it began or had never ended in the fifties, in a village in Austria, in the good room, Sundays, that the men complained without end and kept alive their yearning for what was their youth, which for them had become one with the great murdering. It had left behind its traces, although they didn't pursue these traces, only those of comradeship, the trenches, narrow escapes, furloughs from the front, the unfulfilled hope that life would always mean this almost unbearable suspense. It was the war that had become their measure for a future they wanted no part of . . .

it began with opening their treasure chest, as they tugged and pulled out the few adventures that had to fill up time—that whore, who leaves you, alone, with your semen spilled for nothing . . .

it began with the war that wasn't over in their heads, that they had believed in as they would believe in nothing again, only one escape from this disappointment, to jump Sundays into the years before it, never into the years after it. What a shallow replacement to be called the "reconstruction generation." Naturally they had reconstructed, lent a hand where it was necessary, but how much more exciting the destruction had been. Compared to the war years, the reconstruction years were dog years, not worth mentioning . . .

it began in the years after, which just happened to be our childhood years, but they certainly couldn't be bothered about that too, about these brats who sat with them, seven of us, seven children with no experience and

no idea of the war. What will become of them—nothing came of us, although everything came of us . . .

it began with the sentence: If you don't work you don't eat either, which was applied to each of us children by turns or jointly, which banned us from the dinner table into the corner, where we had nothing of the roast—it had to be a roast on Sundays—just the smell . . .

it began with the other sentence, that once, one single time in life, work was fun, when they had foreign workers and concentration camp inmates to order about and to whom they could relegate the dirty work. Ever since then life was pain and trouble, and it really wasn't worth it anymore . . .

it began in the late sixties when they finally had guest workers to order about again, but they didn't call them "guest workers." The old word is good enough. This was something they could be happy about and laugh about at the beer table, something they could brag about to others . . .

it began with the end of their wisdom, with their warning: Just don't ever attract attention to yourself. Do that and you're lost. In such sentences they betrayed their knowledge, their fear betrayed them, they betrayed their children so as to cherish the war that had eavesdropped on their nights. The murderers shadowed their steps . . .

it began with the secret thoughts, with the fact that curiosity had deserted their bodies and taken questions with it, questions which, if encountered again in their children, only roused them to prohibitions or cynicism. The present had the size of a Sunday roast, and over afternoon coffee the future was spilled with scorn and alcohol into their insatiable stomachs, unfilled by the emptiness into which they had strayed . . .

it began during dinner, while serving the Sunday roast, the nice big pieces for the men, the smaller gristly ones for the women, a few scraps or not even that for the children who served the heroes returning home and the heroines who never left home as the dung heap, right in the middle of the good room, without possibility for escape . . .

it began in the morning; it began in the evening and knew no day of rest; the war was continued, and it had no end, no end . . .