

Who Wields the Blade

by Daniel Garcia

The Butcher was given the responsibility to do his job here on Darkview Farms, even when no one was watching. He was tasked to care for, execute, dismember, and carve the animals that were sent his way into the desired morsels that represented their former selves. If he was given a chicken, from start to finish, it would take him no more than five minutes to remove the life from its body, pluck the feathers, fish out the innards, and with surgical precision, divide the carcass into eight pieces. If he was given swine, it would take him exactly three hours to move the pig from the slaughterhouse to the display table, making sure not to waste any parts, preserving everything from squeal to tail. If he was given a cow, he could close his eyes and daydream for hours about how he wished to be free from the knife he wielded day after day and yearned to replace it with a pen, so he could use his words to release the emotions that are like fire within his chest. If he could find the right words, he'd write about how the smoke is suffocating and he feels as if he's being consumed by an untamed blaze. Like every dream, he opens his eyes to see the cow that was once lively now in front of him, broken down into hundreds of pieces ready to be consumed. Until he is able to find the words, the knife he wields is how he copes.

It used to bother him, knowing his hands were responsible for the endless slaughter that he was tasked with at Darkview, but after years of seeing the knife he wielded pierce through flesh, cut through meat, and splatter blood so frequently, the regret he once felt turned numb and he learned to separate himself from the knife in his hand. He stopped looking the animals in the eye, stopped giving them names, and refused to see them as anything else but cuts of meat waiting to be harvested. He convinced himself that his knife was not taking life, instead, it was transforming it into an object that sustained other life. He started to believe that animals were meant to be slaughtered. If they weren't, then he wouldn't know how to live with himself.

Being a butcher turned him into another machine in the slaughterhouse. He became efficient at turning carnage into mundane because after a while all the animals started to look the same. The only way he could recognize them was by how they fell. If he could find the right words, he'd say that chickens were frantic then suddenly calm, like raging flames facing their final breath. The swine, so stubborn then tranquil, like a sinking ship accepting its fate. The cows, so oblivious then a hard crash, like a lightning strike on a tombstone. It made him think: if he were a beast under the blade, how would he fall?

The Butcher's knife's handle is wrapped tightly in black leather, its blade is made of damascus steel that's razor sharp and curves at the tip to puncture the meat it carves. Along the spine of the blade is engraved, *Man and beast are both the same. Either defined by who wields the blade.* The knife's origin is lost to him because after years of using it he feels as if it's always had control over him. The cold hard steel is all he knows. For as long as he's had it, the quote on the blade has not made sense to him, but now, after seeing The Beast that's just arrived at Darkview, it's all he can think about. However, his disillusioned thoughts are interrupted by a blood-curdling squeal from just beyond the slaughterhouse's walls. The Butcher clutches his ears, but the squeal has already pierced his mind and carved its way to his heart. He's overwhelmed by an alluring sensation, as if the squeal is beckoning him. Entranced, The Butcher, without his will, sheathes his knife and begins to go towards the squeal.

There, underneath the dim light post, just outside the door, stands The Beast. The Butcher's eyes lie upon him and his blood turns cold like the chilling night breeze that crashes against his body. He's never seen anything like it. *Swine with the body of man.* Pink leathery skin, sad beady eyes, 215 cuts of meat. The two lock eyes, if he could find the words to say it, The

Butcher would tell you he recognized what he saw. The Beast's grunts are hypnotizing, each one is a chain that binds The Butcher in place. The Beast, without hesitation, approaches The Butcher, gets so close they can feel each other's warm tacky breath between themselves, then the Beast reaches down to the knife sheathed on The Butcher's belt.

The Beast takes the knife in his grasp, admiring the power it possesses over those who take it, then brushes his finger along the engraving on the blade. If he could still read, the quote might have made a difference, but now, words have no meaning. The flame inside of him is now somber. A tear falls from The Beast's eye as the hand that wields the blade rises. The knife peaks, time becomes still, and the second before it plummets convinces The Butcher that it will be his last. Before he can savor his final moment, the second ends and the knife falls with contempt then blade makes the familiar sound of puncturing meat. The Butcher winces but feels no cold steel in his warm innards. He opens his eyes and is dumbfounded by the sublime sight he sees. The Beast is using the blade to butcher *himself*.

With surgical precision, the knife moves through The Beast making sure to preserve everything from squeal to tail. The Butcher, enthralled by the marvel, is unable to look away from the butcher, The Beast. The knife gently falls to the ground and The Beast is no more than a carcass laying in a pool of its own blood. The Butcher is finally able to break free from his trance and approaches the self-butchered beast carefully. Reflecting in the pool of blood that he stands above is something familiar. *Swine with the body of man*.