

menu poems

Maybe

by ESTHER COHEN

What would you
Like to say
On your menu
If you could
Say anything
And what would you
Like to read
When you are

Having dinner
Somewhere
You sit down
Longing for a word
Or two
Even a story
What would those words be?

Bread

by ALASTAIR REID

Such wonders: how the yeast will froth and flower,
the flour begin to take on bulk and substance,
the mass grow firm, forming under the fingers,
the new dough sleek and smooth in the cool bowl.

The waiting is a rich suspense. The rising,
almost too slow to see, with patience puffs
into importance, and assumes a shape,
a pale bread-embryo, about to be.

Now, give it to the oven, to become.
Wait in the warm rise of anticipation.
Breathe in the round aromas of the baking,
and spread your spirit in the smell of bread.

This warmest, most rewarding ritual.
This miracle. The good sense of bread.

Praline To A Kiss

by DOUG MAGEE

I kept myself for you
Dessert
Through courses one to four
My belt cinched tight
I kept my bites
Chipmunk-like, no more.
Resist, resist, temptation's lure
I mantraed as the table groaned
Here, have some of mine, I offered others,
And then my doctor phoned.

How's it going, he asked,
Though he seemed to know.
I'd eaten tiny portions
With all the calories of snow.
Fine, fine, he said, as if hurrying to the door.
Now push back from the table, nothing more.

You arrived akimbo on the virginal plate
Your wings of fine chocolate
Shadowing sugary bait.
My doctor's voice screamed
His smoke-alarm warning.
No! No! Don't do it!
You'll hate yourself in the morning!

In the end, of course, he was absolutely right.
But thanks to you
Dessert
I loved myself in the night.



Invented in Switzerland,
By a man named Spitzer, and
Patented later by Weiss.

Spitzer died poor and anonymous,
While Weiss drew praise unanimous.

Invited to lecture,
Pontificate, conjecture,
On everything and anything gastronomic.

A lesson is here demonstrated;
You must protect what you have created.

You need lawyers, accountants and so on,
Tine and tide, as we say, wait for no one.
There, we've said it.
Aren't you glad that you waited.

From The Great Tablecloth

by PABLO NERUDA,
TRANSLATED BY ALASTAIR REID

Hunger feels like pincers,
like the bite of crabs,
it burns and has no fire.
Hunger is a cold fire.
Let us sit down to eat
with all those who haven't eaten;
let us spread great tablecloths,
put salt in the lakes of the world,
set up planetary bakeries,
tables with strawberries in snow,
and a plate like the moon itself
from which we can all eat.

For now I ask no more
than the justice of eating.

The Fork

by DANIEL MELTZER

Let us pause to consider the fork,
Without which we'd finger our pork,

Our egg and zucchini,
Anchovy, weenie,
At Maxim's or Sardi's, New York.

A marvelous simple device,
Essential to dining as spice.

Posthumous Hummus

by ESTHER COHEN

Last night's dream
I heard someone say
Everyone Loves Hummus.

It was one of those
Absolute declaratives
Indisputable, entirely
True. Who doesn't
Love hummus?

My first plate, in the city
Of Nazareth, served
With a puddle

Of greenish olive oil, pine nuts
Floating like lily pods
Across a hummus lake.

And Agram,
Who brought me one plate
Then another, accompanied by the way
With cardamon coffee
Blackish and sweet.

I was so happy
With my hummus, Agram,
His coffee and Nazareth,
I wrote a whole novel
As thank you.

Senator Lyndon's Morning

by MARINA NEARY

He sits at a sidewalk café,
Plucking burnt raisins
From his soda bread,
While the wind rustles the newspaper
With his picture on the cover page.

He dreams about a girl in a vintage dress,
With black hair in a French twist
And a dozen ethnic jokes
Under her bra strap.

When the sun hid behind the clouds,
He stood up and walked to the city hall,
Leaving a crumbled napkin
And his wedding band
In the coffee cup.

Plums

by GARY J. WHITEHEAD

I like to slice them along the seam,
blade balanced on the fulcrum of pit
—that density, like bone, inside the flesh—
and roll until it's cut clean through.
Then the twist as if uncapping a jar,

and I'm holding hemispheres:
the center of one an oval cup, the other
an egg I pluck from its sweet nest.
But always before I eat each smooth half
comes the urge to put it all back together.

The Fruit

by STEPHEN GIBSON

I stared at the kiwi that the girl forgot
on her tray at the Vatican cafeteria.
I had some wine, bread, bowtie pasta
but no fruit—it didn't cost a lot
and I had money, but I'd lose my spot
at the table if I got up—the cafeteria
was filling. I'd sat there watching her
playing catch with the fruit. She was not
at all interested in eating that kiwi—
and then my staring made her suspicious
because she stopped, looked hard at me—
as if she were marble and I was Lazlo Toth—
and left. I felt embarrassed for us both—
then vindicated. The kiwi was delicious.

Ode to a Lychee

by JEN KARETNIK

"Handsome, dense, round-topped, slow-growing," a fine specimen of a tree, not just a tree but the keeper of "the world's most romantic fruit," another way of saying aphrodisiac, and it's easy to see why the translucent globe, slick under the papery shell, yet firm, too, stretched politically around its one, central seed (for etiquette I refrain from "nut") appeals to the voyeur of the culinary kind, who may dither over every element from transliteration – is it litchi, leechee, perhaps lichee or lichi? – to aroma and taste but must come every time to the same conclusion: No matter of what consequence I weigh the act, this juice I accept when I take you in my mouth.

He only wants

by ESTHER COHEN

he only wants
caesar salad with chicken
although there are occasions,
rare enough, where he
will order shrimp
even tuna, on top.
Once we were at junior's
in brooklyn and he said
with the kind of wistfulness that goes hand in hand
with food,
if only I
could have
pastrami.

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