

Dear everyone

Who's read a menu
Who has ever eaten
Caesar salad with possibilities
of chicken or shrimp
The more foodish version
Chopped up salad (up
Always eliminated
For reasons of sophistication)
Although I personally
Like up
Still chopped down
Salad has an unexpected ring
Maybe this year
We can spend
Some time
Ok we are all
So busy but maybe
A few minutes let's all agree
To spend a few minutes
Considering words.
We'd like to eat.

—Esther Cohen

Butterfingers Strikes Again

Pop corn.
Drop corn.
Mop corn.

—Walter Ancarrow

Just One

The lovely hostess asks *table for just one?*
I am used to this, having no date, no company;
I am a woman who does not mind eating out
alone. I have brought the Post, am here for miso,
maki, spicy eel. I relish dinner without small
talk, dinner without sharing a dish, separate
checks, two forks. *Just one?* she asks again,
giggling; as if I might take too much room,
cheat
a couple out of this small booth which fits one
as easily as two.

—Catherine Harnett

Ode to a Mushroom in four four time in a Ruined City

djon djon, djon djon
that turns rice black
like a Haitian
mushroom should do
in por-o-prins
the great grangou
poets, killers,
shacks and mansions
and now tents too
so much so lost
still the one land
where djon djon grows

—Mark Kurlansky

Entrée neurosis

I cannot pronounce half the names.
I lock eyes with the waitress.
She understands.
I point to the spelling error of
consonants and vowels
and try to read her face
as she scribbles on the white pad.
"Very good. I'll take that menu for you,"
she says,
a machine, skillful and rehearsed.
Pleasant.
She bolts through the flap of doors
to emerge in twenty minutes with my fate
on a beat-up oval tray.

—Emily Stokes

Soufflé

Five days into February, they're snowed-in
together for the first time. They are early
at this thing they've yet to name and she is thinking
about soufflés, how she knows nothing of how they're made
just how readily they fall. He recalls the bread factory
near his first apartment and the smell of what had to be
a promise in the air. She watches the snow flakes fall in braids:
ropes of double-helixed descent, and considers the patterns
things draw as they fall. For years he's thought nothing
about snowcrete: fresh snow, vanilla, sugar, and milk
in the dairy glass bottles, but today he remembers
the sweetness, the recipe for the way to take a weather in.

—Ariana-Sophia Kartsonis

2010 Menupoeems

PRESENTED BY
Alimentum
The Literature
of Food

National
POETRY
MONTH
April

love dinner

you are a succulent heart
pinched off from my heart
a custard pie big as two hands

*
emily cooked fried chicken
before you came
drank a cold glass of buttermilk
before i tasted you & before
my sentences changed into loaves of bread

*
you are a cake of yeast—my favorite letter o—
the first mushroom i found in the grass
a sweet pear in the garden on that first
most beautiful day

—Lara Candland

Dig in

The bread basket appears somewhere between
removing overcoats and opening menus.

We are unprepared,
weak-willed as we reach for that crusty dome
pulled from the oven just in the nick.
No time to unwrap a foil packet—
no need.

It's all about the chewy yeasty center and
speckle of poppy seeds,
the oily film on our index fingers.
Just twist off a hunk and let the steam escape.

—Emily Stokes

Eating Ants

It was fifth grade, I'm pretty sure, and the day crisp for summer
so the chocolate squares didn't melt, torqued bodies of ants protruding.

As boys we had a history with ants—learning physics
in the focused suns of magnifiers, watching them fssst and pop; dropping

blacks into spider webs; stirring up nests of the angry reds
and always getting bit; owning ant farms and watching

perfect social order in action. So eating them
was simply part of the continuum. First Lupo bit, then I.

They were tangy and offset the chocolate in a savory way,
and we downed the second square with nothing to prove.

There was a third, but Tennert tossed it into the bushes.
"Giving back," he had said, to those families and friends of the eaten.

—Paul S. Piper

Ghazal for Vine-Pickers and Wine-Drinkers

You need to drink a lot of good beer to make a good wine.
And consider also the blush you need to make a good wine

drinker, at least at first, to ease the palate into bouquet and brix,
to teach the throat to be receptive, the saliva to mix, sweet with wine.

Call it white zinfandel after you graduate to chardonnay
and pinot noir, or rosé after the diploma you receive in wine

hangs on the wall of your heart (though not vin gris unless
the pips you pick are in France), but know there would be no wine

without the explosive, malty sugars of introductions.
We are all more welcome with wine, any kind of wine.

—Jen Karetnick

Cork

The only reason we have heads
you said (between chopstick
loads of fuqua in black
bean sauce) is to prevent our hearts
from escaping through our otherwise
gaping necks. And I secretly
questioned your critique of pure
reason, but hid my feelings
since we had only been together two
weeks and I wanted to finish my sweet &
sour tofu and at least get to the fortune
cookie before the cork came off.

—Kim Goldberg

Perfect Cake

How do you bake a perfect cake
To lessen the guilt of too shoddy a gift,
Of a party unplanned and wishes overlooked?
A cake gentle on the waist line
Not the 'hey presto' ones from the instant mix packs
But one which swells with the labor of love
From a pink slipped single mother.
Beating the dough with a barbed wire whisk
So that the eggs, flour, butter and sugar dissolves
In a sweet dream of once upon a hearth.

—Shweta Rao

Grapefruit

What's so alluring?
Pale, waxy skin?
Imperfect triangles
of pink flesh within?

Perhaps geometry of halving—
the scent released so fresh
it smells of my mother.
Or juice spray that draws a tear

Lips puckered as if to kiss
someone no longer there.
Or the final hard squeeze
for that last bittersweet drop.

—Linda Simone

Mango is offered on the Menu

Alone, I run my fingers over the word
and breathe in a favorite memory.
He is holding a knife to the awkward fruit.
Like a heart;
not entirely round, not entirely red.
He cuts into the flesh and it bleeds.
A clear syrup coats his tanned fingers.
He places a soft orange cube on my tongue
as the heavy August air settles around us.
Outside, snow is blanketing a strange city.
I order the mango and eat it with my eyes
shut tight.

—Alexis Weber

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