

**Menupoems: the idea**

by Esther Cohen

If you could were able had occasion  
with the right word  
albacore, amphibian, even elevator  
to write on a menu  
replacing unappetizing  
too many eee's entrée no adjectives not even  
fantastic dessert, what would your words be?  
Today, anyway, I want ecstasy.

by Renee Armand

I'm sitting alone, a fork  
in my hand; men stare at women,  
rare cuts of lamb in delectable  
clothes, truffled hair (a strand  
in the salad, one on the chair).  
A bite, then back to the book or  
the pen, things of necessity, unlike  
diets or men. No need to ensnare;  
I'm just eating, amazing, with  
this honey mouth, this caviar air.

**Eating Out Without**

by Michele Battiste

the baby, without the body listing  
and pitching off my lap; without quick  
fingers that dart into sauces, squeeze  
the butter, chuck the bread. Restaurant  
dining without mashed biscuit smashed into  
cleavage, without Pelligrino toppled  
and soaking the puff-pastry shell. Without  
the babe, I order the snails. Indulgent —  
but not for the butter, the garlic,  
the price — solely to feed only myself  
with the exquisite, silver, child-sized  
fork.

**Ordering Dinner in Jiuhuashan**

by Nancy Vienneau

The woman handed us each a small card  
And disappeared behind a ripple of fabric tacked over a doorway  
Leaving us to decipher.  
No pictures, no clues,  
Impenetrable as the Great Wall.  
We left our table and drew back the curtain: a kitchen's  
Modest wood counter lined with  
Baskets of bok choy and spring onions  
Garlic scapes and blue-brown eggs.  
We pointed to our wants, the peppers and greens, the steamed rice on the stove  
And pressing luck, tucked our hands into armpits,  
Flapped and strutted a giddy chicken dance for  
Dinner.

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**Night Shift**

by Amanda Reynolds

There is always someone waiting  
for a napkin, a salad, a tray full of grease.

*Crimson and clover*, over and over  
from some anonymous speaker hidden

in a dank corner that no server  
has ever dared clamber up a stool to clean.

Three-top in section eight,  
one coffee, two creamers,

six screaming kids.

"Waitress! There's a hair in my chicken."

"I get two sides? How about left and right?"  
"You want a tip? Third horse, second race."

The biggest insult is always the pennies left,  
cold soup, a tipped and flying glass of milk.

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**Unnerving**

by Caryl Avery

Whenever you reach for hors d'oeuvres  
The waiter sadistically swoeuvres  
And then they are out of resoeuvres  
Which is why they serve drinks — for your noeuvres.

**If You Believe That, I'll Tell You Another One**

by Caryl Avery

They tell you we're free roaming,  
But I tell you we are not.  
If we could really roam free,  
Would we wind up in a pot?

Would we choose a life in aspic,  
Give our gizzards to the cause?  
Become Kentucky Fried Chick  
Served with corn bread, fries and slaws?

Would we fall upon a skewer,  
Dress in bread crumbs from Milan?  
No, if we could really roam free  
We'd be chicken parmi-gone.

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## The Ghostly Bread

by Janice Krasselt Tatter

One night a new loaf of bread disappeared,  
its polka-dotted wrapper intact, empty.  
Like a hunter, my grandmother searched  
for signs of mice, holes in the wrapper.  
I was old enough to know that vanishing bread  
was as illogical as prayers to the dead  
so afterwards I slept with one eye open.

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## Potatoes

by Katharyn Howd Machan

for Eric

It's the way he slices clean potatoes, boiled just soft enough  
to fry in oil with salt and onions: she's known a dozen men  
who can't compare. They might add pepper, garlic, even splashes  
of paprika red as midnight lace; but none have had his fine  
musician's hands, the flick of wrist that works the spatula  
in perfect time, preventing burn. He knows the kitchen  
of her dreams, all right, and fills it up with simple spices  
he's aware will flower in her mouth. When he carries her  
the polished platter, heaped with feast for eye and tongue,  
how she sings in praise of fragrant food as good  
as winter sleep, his love waiting at the table  
for her to raise her fork and eat.

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by Annie Lanzillotto

My heart is crushed tomatoes  
I drink Chianti and sit in the heat  
Staring at the aged tree arm of Grandma Rose's peach tree,  
A rare glimpse at the good life.  
My heart is crushed tomatoes  
When my American name comes out of her mouth  
When her voice says something so sweetly.  
My heart is crushed tomatoes  
Squeezed through Grandma's hand.  
Squeezed into the aluminum pot.  
My heart is crushed tomatoes  
When she tells me to be quiet.

## A Drinker's Love Poem

by Carly Sachs

I could drink the glass of you down, the vodka of you —  
how you can lose yourself in anything,  
the woo-woo of you, the kamikaze of you, the fuzzy navel of you.  
The rocks of you melt into another round, the Maker's Mark of you,  
the martini, dirty of you, the extra olives of you, the Sapphire eyes of you,  
the Effen body of you,  
the make it a double of you until we order tequila shots past the midnight  
of you, no salt, no limes,  
the pure scotch of you, the peaty sex of you, the my father of you,  
the Freud of you, the Oedipus of you. Mornings of bloody mary sting of you,  
Afternoons of the perfect manhattan of you, the sleepless city of you.  
I want the distillation of you, the fermentation of you, the rim of my finger  
on the glass of you.



## Tête à Tête

by Meredith Escudier

We order different things, or try to,  
a glass of wine, a bottle for two.  
When our plates come, he lifts his fork  
and dips into mine, disturbing the display  
of a well-ordered entrée.  
My women friends go berserk  
at the perceived intrusion.  
How possessive, presumptuous  
ill-considered, they find.  
But who cares? I don't mind, plus  
we've been married all this time...

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## Treat

by Eleanor Gaffney

It was always  
Welch's grape jelly bleeding  
into soft white bread  
and milk for dunking Oreos.

She'd pull out the speckled tray  
of the white enamel stove  
and I'd climb up  
the step stool.

Perched beside her  
as she washed dishes,  
neither of us knew  
a whit of what was to come

or how simple ritual  
would sustain.

## My Last Day, and Then, My First, Or Café Loup

by Esther Cohen

### APPETIZER

Years and years and then again, years,  
I've been working one of those  
long hours Advil in my bag sometimes  
wonderful work never enough money, help,  
support from outside jobs.  
At last I left.

### ENTRÉE

To celebrate, we go to Café Loup.  
Perfect black and white room,

Prix fixe \$28 including peach tart  
with abundantly real whipped cream.  
Magic owner Ardes gives us French Fries  
for our table. We devour them.

### DESSERT

The evening becomes one of those  
light pink restaurant nights. Food  
was what we wanted. Even strangers  
from the next table joined us.

### AFTER DINNER DRINK

Good sign, or good meal?

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**What To Do When Your Meal Is Over:**  
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