**Inviting a Friend to Supper**

Tonight, grave sir, both my poor house, and I

Do equally desire your company;

Not that we think us worthy such a guest,

But that your worth will dignify our feast

With those that come, whose grace may make that seem

Something, which else could hope for no esteem.

It is the fair acceptance, sir, creates

The entertainment perfect, not the cates.

Yet shall you have, to rectify your palate,

An olive, capers, or some better salad

Ushering the mutton; with a short-legged hen,

If we can get her, full of eggs, and then

Lemons, and wine for sauce; to these a cony

Is not to be despaired of, for our money;

And, though fowl now be scarce, yet there are clerks,

The sky not falling, think we may have larks.

I’ll tell you of more, and lie, so you will come:

Of partridge, pheasant, woodcock, of which some

May yet be there, and godwit, if we can;

Knat, rail, and ruff too. Howsoe’er, my man

Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,

Livy, or of some better book to us,

Of which we’ll speak our minds, amidst our meat;

And I’ll profess no verses to repeat.

To this, if ought appear which I not know of,

That will the pastry, not my paper, show of.

Digestive cheese and fruit there sure will be;

But that which most doth take my Muse and me,

Is a pure cup of rich Canary wine,

Which is the Mermaid’s now, but shall be mine;

Of which had Horace, or Anacreon tasted,

Their lives, as so their lines, till now had lasted.

Tobacco, nectar, or the Thespian spring,

Are all but Luther’s beer to this I sing.

Of this we will sup free, but moderately,

And we will have no Pooley, or Parrot by,

Nor shall our cups make any guilty men;

But, at our parting we will be as when

We innocently met. No simple word

That shall be uttered at our mirthful board,

Shall make us sad next morning or affright

The liberty that we’ll enjoy tonight.

 —Ben Jonson

**The Book of Yolek**

*Wir Haben ein Gesetz,*

*Und nach dem Gesetz soll er sterben.*\*

The dowsed coals fume and hiss after your meal
Of grilled brook trout, and you saunter off for a walk
Down the fern trail. It doesn’t matter where to,
Just so you’re weeks and worlds away from home,
And among midsummer hills have set up camp
In the deep bronze glories of declining day.

You remember, peacefully, an earlier day
In childhood, remember a quite specific meal:
A corn roast and bonfire in summer camp.
That summer you got lost on a Nature Walk;
More than you dared admit, you thought of home:
No one else knows where the mind wanders to.

The fifth of August, 1942.
It was the morning and very hot. It was the day
They came at dawn with rifles to The Home
For Jewish Children, cutting short the meal
Of bread and soup, lining them up to walk
In close formation off to a special camp.

How often you have thought about that camp,
As though in some strange way you were driven to,
And about the children, and how they were made to walk,
Yolek who had bad lungs, who wasn't a day
Over five years old, commanded to leave his meal
And shamble between armed guards to his long home.

We’re approaching August again. It will drive home
The regulation torments of that camp
Yolek was sent to, his small, unfinished meal,
The electric fences, the numeral tattoo,
The quite extraordinary heat of the day
They all were forced to take that terrible walk.

Whether on a silent, solitary walk
Or among crowds, far off or safe at home,
You will remember, helplessly, that day,
And the smell of smoke, and the loudspeakers of the camp.
Wherever you are, Yolek will be there, too.
His unuttered name will interrupt your meal.

Prepare to receive him in your home some day.
Though they killed him in the camp they sent him to,
He will walk in as you’re sitting down to a meal.

—Anthony Hecht

\* We have a law, and according to the law he must die.

**Family Reunion**

The week in August you come home,

adult, professional, aloof,

we roast and carve the fatted calf

—in our case home-grown pig, the chine

garlicked and crisped, the applesauce

hand-pressed. Hand-pressed the greengage wine.

Nothing is cost-effective here.

The peas, the beets, the lettuces

hand sown, are raised to stand apart.

The electric fence ticks like the slow heart

of something we fed and bedded for a year,

then killed with kindness’s one bullet

and paid Jake Mott to do the butchering.

In winter we lure the birds with suet,

thaw lungs and kidneys for the cat.

Darlings, it’s all a circle from the ring

of wire that keeps the raccoons from the corn

to the gouged pine table that we lounge around,

distressed before any of you was born.

Benign and dozy from our gluttonies,

the candles down to stubs, defenses down,

love leaking out unguarded the way

juice dribbles from the fence when grounded

by grass stalks or a forgotten hoe,

how eloquent, how beautiful you seem!

Wearing our gestures, how wise you grow,

ballooning to overfill our space,

the almost-parents of your parents now.

So briefly having you back to measure us

is harder than having let you go.

 —Maxine Kumin

**Divorced Fathers and Pizza Crusts**

The connection between divorced fathers and pizza crusts

is understandable. The divorced father does not cook

confidently. He wants his kid to enjoy dinner.

The entire weekend is supposed to be fun. Kids love

pizza. For some reason involving soft warmth and malleability

kids approve of melted cheese on pizza

years before they will tolerate cheese in other situations.

So the divorced father takes the kid and the kid’s friend

out for pizza. The kids eat much faster than the dad.

Before the dad has finished his second slice,

the kids are playing a video game or being Ace Ventura

or blowing spitballs through straws, making this hail

that can’t quite be cleaned up. There are four slices left

and the divorced father doesn’t want them wasted,

there has been enough waste already; he sits there

in his windbreaker finishing the pizza. It’s good

except the crust is actually not so great—

after the second slice the crust is basically a chore—

so you leave it. You move on to the next loaded slice.

Finally there you are amid rims of crust.

All this is understandable. There’s no dark conspiracy.

Meanwhile the kids are having a pretty good time

which is the whole point. So the entire evening makes

clear sense. Now the divorced father gathers

the sauce-stained napkins for the trash and dumps them

and dumps the rims of crust which are not

corpses on a battlefield. Understandability

fills the pizza shop so thoroughly there’s no room

for anything else. Now he’s at the door summoning the kids

and they follow, of course they do, he’s a dad.

 —Mark Halliday

**Many Bird Roast**

I came in, dandy and present
arguing for a moratorium on meat
of the kind splayed out on the table, legs akimbo
like a fallen-over ice skater skidding on her backside
there are dogs in the outhouse and all over the world
that we do not eat
and one small sparrow in a pigeon in a grouse in a swan
that we will certainly eat
overlooking all the drama, with as many eyes as a spider
that we’ll cut in two
and the compacted layers of the various meats
will fall away dreamily as a rainbow melts down
into the marsh where it came from
slipping meat from the bone
onto a specially designed knife
there’s a call out for plates –
I’m the only one with a sense of outcry
someone says, *you weren’t like this when it was broiling away*
*smelling like your history, smelling like*
*the deep skin on your knee grazed after playing in the sun all day*
*skinned with good dirt and your under-blood just showing through*
*smelling like warm dry firs after burning and the outdoors*
*after fireworks and Novembers after tea*
*you eat and smell like the rest of us*

*dirty rat under your armpit*
*dirty bird in your stomach*
and birds fell down through the chimney with thwacks into buckets
and we got so poor we had to eat them too
strange cockatoos and once a brilliantly lit pure white dove
that we kept in a hutch with a small pot of ink
and when we let it out
it wasn’t so much a raven as just a plain black dove
ready to cook, and with superstition, I learnt to.

 —Rachael Allen