

SUNDAY DINNER

After work, Sunday dinners
were at Mema's house. Mema
could make a meal out of anything.
No leftover, nor rind, couldn't
be recycled, reanimated — four
burners getting red, things bubbling
things steaming like her stove
was Pittsburgh. Mema was from an old
country where sometimes sustenance
was milked from one eggplant
for eight bowls. She taught me to eat
all my food because we were lucky
to have it. I'd use a slice of bread
to wipe my plate clean.

SPOONERISM

was the Dictionary.com "Word of the Day"
waiting for me in my Inbox. Before opening
the e-mail to get the definition, I thought
of my family's restaurant back home: *Spoonem's*.
But "spoonerism" has nothing to do with
eggs over easy or corned beef hash, even less
to do with me framed behind that little square
window where sticky plates were passed:
and my mind unconcerned with making clean.
The word didn't make me think of an inverted
phrase, or a couple of misfired consonants either—
Only could remember that one waitress, the little
windows between the buttons of her tight white shirt,
and those tig 'ol bitties.

STRIPPING SHRIMP

I make them naked. I buck the shrimp.
I bare them all one by one. Disrobe, undress
the decapods. I take a pairing knife and slit
a long pocket down the back of the jacket,
like a pleat, and slide my fingertips into the coat
to peel it off. I stark the shrimp, denude before
deveining, husk the crustaceans like lollipop
wrappers. Each one reduced, divested, doffed
of their drogue duds. They got birthday-suited.
They got unveiled, for Fra Diavolo, for you —
I make them singe. I sizzle the shrimp. I dress
them up. Pop garlic out of its silk socks, dice.
I doll up the decapods: put on pepper flakes like
lace, onions, dollop with tomato/paste, drizzle with salt,
fire. I wardrobe them, attire each one by one, for you.
Because without you: just plain pasta plain sauce — shrimp
left at the bottom of the sea in their nautical knee-
higs, their see-through raincoats, transparent fig leaves.

for Sara

PANELLE

In a past life, I was a chicken
cutlet. In a past life, I was a Hershey's
chocolate bar. In a past life harvested,
boiled, and rolled inside a grape leaf.
I was a rack of lamb, I was a half pound
of strawberries, was string beans
in a Mason jar. In a past life, I was 196 chickpeas
struggling to stay together. I was ground
to flour, turned to batter, and fried.
In this past life, I evolved into a square
of panelle, and you — you were only two
slices of bread in the loaf, the same two slices
a paesano topped around me.

FAMILIAR

If you blindfolded a dozen bankers' kids
and had them listen to that sound of *ting*
ting tap tapping I heard this morning
on my way to work — they may say
it's sword fighting, or call it hammer on anvil,
or a tiny dinner bell (which is closer
I'd tell them, *getting warmer* I'd say), and if you
blindfolded me and played the song
of the calculator, I might hear *edding a poem*,
and I'd probably be wrong too, like the bankers' kids,
but the sound of that tap tapping that plumed
from the open door of some hit-or-miss diner
today was familiar, (familiar as cranking gears
to a madnist's son) — and in it I heard my father
scripting his morning Morse code, turning over
pancakes, catalyzing scrambled eggs with the tap
of his metal spatula on that hot metal grill.

196 chickpeas

by

Michael Cirelli



Please recycle to a friend.

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Origami Poetry Project
196 chickpeas
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