
Chicken Tonight

Do you mean to say it's chicken tonight
with mustard glaze
and spears of broccoli?

Sweet-n-sour and Hawaiian, in beds of rice,
casserole, skinless, stir-fried with snow peas,
pattied and slid into a bun with low-cal cheese.
God! Enough! See your penitent chicken
head bent to the earth, scratching out a prayer,
praying for dark meat and fatty constitution
to be spared from salad and fajitas-lunch!

And at dinner
in despair Craig dances the Chicken Dance
sings "I feel like chicken tonight,"
lifting bowed heads eyeing their breasts
and listening to the crackle of ice cooling soda-
lifting kitchen help's humor
Grouped closely at the small table, jostling elbows,
laughing hard once at two girls spilling gravy
simultaneously on their sweats;
from several mouths strew pieces of rice and broccoli
over the others, on the table and floor.
The wrathful house-mom, fork in fist, striking the table
to regain some order, and the girls quickly obey.

Little later Randy slips sly into the dining room,
grinning, straight into the milling, chatting group
waiting to hand me plates and silver through the window.
He snaps his wipecloth at them and they shriek, scatter about,
their napkins fluttering to the floor.

Dazed I watch the chicken breasts bobbing,
disgusting, gravy-soaked down the disposal
watching girls stamp over rice, handing me plates
loathing tonight my job and chicken.

Matthew Burden