



DARRYL BERGER
IN THE KINGDOM OF CHICKEN

In this kingdom, she thought, I make the chicken. Somewhere in the back of a blue-lined book, on an antique telephone table in a hallway across town, was written her name and phone number and the word *chicken*. And when that name was pressed with a finger and half whispered her phone would ring and she would be invited to a dinner party. The married voice on the other end would talk in a hurry about how busy they'd both been and how bad it was that they hadn't seen each other more and how that would have to change, starting now, we're having some of our friends over for dinner and you just have to come, I insist, you can bring your fabulous chicken.

The recipe book called it Indian Chicken Curry, golden slick and gleaming in its photograph. But when asked by the new people she said it was just chicken. Everyone said how delicious it was and made the appropriate noises, and while she could hear them and see how their mouths moved (how could she not, all chairs pushed together under one Chinese lantern, all hot shadows and elbows, careful), it felt like something careless and thick and rubbery inside, how hard she worked for these promised white moments that arrived instead like something pink and skinned and quivering. Sometimes she didn't know what the hell she was doing, who she was trying to please, the faces so close around the table making it hard for her to breathe, especially this man across from her who just sat there and smiled, this man she had been introduced to so his name could fall right out of her head two minutes later. This tall, blonde man with his tight, shy mouth.

Here and there, in little glances, she watched him eat. She had done this before, with other men. Sometimes it made her happy, too. There was something simple and physical and human about it, this thing about eating together, especially about a woman watching a man enjoy food, seeing his satisfaction, this man's lips moving like an inside joke, like a secret story. After dinner she could walk up and put her hand on his arm and that secret would fly right out of him: men never knew what to do when women did that. And then she would have him. Her hand could push and pull at him however she liked; he would have no more sense than a kite.

They would have a connection then, tethered together for moments of close focus, wet eyes staring, a kiss in the kitchen, in the car in the park, telling her how fantastic she was, that voice in her ear on her neck, those weeks where everything is said with your hands, he would push her down and push up her knees and look up at her with his face like a furnace, greedily from between her legs, telling her how great she tasted, her hands in his damp hair to say what are you doing, what are you doing to me, it would be something to hold onto, to hold in her head, to feed her in those

empty moments while driving or watching television when there was nothing on or sitting there at lunch pushing a fork around, not eating, looking around to see if anyone was watching her, so conscious of herself these days, the way her body couldn't be trusted, trying but always tired, making her late. She'd come home from work to see her face fixed hard with lines, stand there in an ugly sleepiness, not knowing what to do with herself, not wanting to do anything except take a nap on the couch so she'd still have her bed to go to later on, waking up sweaty and sick, swearing tomorrow will be better because she had a list and the alarm set for five a.m., she'd get up early and exercise, every day, if she could just lose tenfifteentwenty pounds, in the meantime keep the list taped to the mirror: paint the bathroom grout the kitchen finish the book the yard the basement, maybe even plan that trip with her sister, and she'd get new glasses too, and some new clothes, and then steal into the realm of this blonde man and take all his princely power, and this time she'd keep it too, and be free, so she wouldn't have to sit starving in this other once-a-year kingdom, as flimsy as a leper's tent, thinking next year you bastards, next year I'll be ready and I'll have you in my jaws.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DARRYL BERGER's writing has been published in literary magazines like *Prairie Fire*, *The New Quarterly*, *Geist*, *subTerrain*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Kiss Machine* and others. The manuscript for his short story collection—called *Punishing Ugly Children*—won the 2007 David Adams Richards Prize. His short story "Scissors" was Highly Commended (included in the audio anthology, for radio) in this year's Commonwealth Short Story Competition. He lives in Kingston, Ontario.

In 2006, **GEORGE BOWERING** wrote a dozen 30 or 31pp poems of different forms and orders. Half of them have now been published as chapbooks, among them *U.S. Sonnets* and *Montenegro 1966*. His novel *Burning Water* was published in a new edition by New Star Books in 2007. He lives in Vancouver with his wife Jean Baird.

BRIAN ALLEN CARR is a Special Education teacher in Deep South Texas, and an MFA candidate at The University of Texas-Pan American. His fiction has appeared in *Pindeldyboz*. He's never pissed on any one's face, but he once wet his pants during Sunday school.

REBECCA CUTTLER is a recent graduate of Emily Carr Institute in Vancouver, where she spent most of her time writing (instead of painting like she was supposed to). She was a prizewinner in the Federation of BC Writers' 2007 Literary Writes competition and is currently working towards a collection of short stories.

DAYLE FURLONG studied English Literature & Fine Arts at York University. Her writing has appeared in *Taddle Creek*, *Kiss Machine*, *Word & The Voice*. She works for Sumach Press and *Descant*. Her debut collection of poetry will be launched with Tightrope Books this spring.

KATE HEARTFIELD is an editorial writer, columnist and blogger for the Ottawa Citizen. She just finished a novel under the mentorship of Paul Quarrington through the Humber School for Writers correspondence program, from which she received a letter of distinction. She also just moved from Sandy Hill to the rural fringe of Ottawa, and is very proud of the dirt on her car.

MICHELLE MILLER Michelle Miller is a MFA student in creative writing at UBC in Vancouver. Originally from Ontario, she misses home an awful lot more than she thought she would, and would take an Ottawa winter day over a Vancouver rain storm in a minute, although she loves the mountains. She has had work published in *ditch poetry*, *The Danforth Review*, *Black Heart Magazine* and others, and recently won second place in *This Magazine's* "Great Canadian Literary Hunt." You can find Michelle online at www.michellemiller.ca.