

Inviting a Friend to Dinner

When you are next in town, I would be honored, sir,
if you would dine with me. I have a small place,
a little shabby perhaps, but cosy. The lamps
glow soft and warm, and with the curtains drawn,
you'd think you were in some New York or Paris bistro.

I would serve you something humble first,
home-made hummus, say, with warmed bread,
salad from the local farmer's market, tasty
green beans, roast chicken, with peach
and honey sauce, rice—and wine, of course.

For dessert, I would offer my apple pie with cream.
And I would have Schubert playing, something quiet and sweet,
with a touch of sadness, to remind us of *all* life's delicacies.
And I could read to you, or sing, or we could both sing,
or you could recite poems over cognac or coffee or tea.

And we could talk, of extraordinary or ordinary things.
For there is something to be said for the quiet, daily ritual
of breaking bread, for the discussion a meal engenders—
nothing fancy, neither food nor talk, just the old
stories, the old good-natured teasing between friends.

I don't think Horace or Homer and his Odysseus
would disagree that at such moments people
are at their best, that spirited conversation over lunch,
or dinner or tea, or even breakfast, may be the essence
of humanity. Sir, let's put this theory to the test.

(after Ben Jonson)

Charlotte Innes

Charlotte Innes recently published a chapbook *Reading Ruskin in Los Angeles* (Finishing Line Press, 2009). Her poetry has also appeared in *The Best American Spiritual Writing* 2006 (Houghton Mifflin), and various journals including *The Hudson Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Pinch*, *The Chaffin Journal*, and *Knockout*. She was a semi-finalist in the 2008 St. Lawrence Book Award, Black Lawrence Press, N.Y. Her other awards include Knockout's Inaugural Poetry Award 2008; the 2007 Chaffin Award for Poetry; the Anne Silver Award for Poetry sponsored by *Speechless Magazine* (2007); and a First Prize in the Poetry in the Windows V contest in Los Angeles (2003). She also writes about books and the arts for many publications, including the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Nation*. She has taught journalism as a part-time lecturer at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, and Columbia University, New York. She has also taught creative nonfiction in the summer session at Colorado College in Colorado Springs. In recent years, she has taught at three high schools in the Los Angeles area including La Cañada High School and Brentwood School. Currently, she is writer-in-residence at Pilgrim School, where she teaches English and creative writing; assists students in putting out a literary magazine; and runs a visiting writers series.

