

Room for one more: After the hunger strike we got an absolute "thing" about food - we talked about it day and night, the subject never palled. As soon as we sat down to a meal, we started all over again, swopping recipes, ~~remembrances~~ remembrances of memorable meals, restaurants we have known, and so on endlessly. So I called this one:

WHAT DO DETAINEES TALK ABOUT?

We've endured incarceration
With a stoic resignation
And a patience that has conquered every mood.
We can weather a crisis
For our one and only vice is
Our all-absorbing interest in food.

What do detainees talk about
During the morning walk about
When grinding down the gravel? Do they brood?
Is it gossip, plots or chatter
When they natter, natter, natter?
No. They're voicing views about their favourite food.

When sitting down at table
You might think we are able
To discuss and solve the problems of the nation.
But we avoid such precipes;
We swop our favourite recipes.
And that's the summit of our conversation.

When we put our heads together
Is it politics or the weather,
Subversion, or the H.bomb, or just bitchin'
About police and Saracens?
No, we're weighing up comparisons
On the merits of the haute or bourgeois kitchen.

There must have been some urgency
For a National Emergency,
And our thoughts about Erasmus may be crude,
But if we're learned discernment
From this enforced internment
It's only of our palates and our food.

But while we argue which is finer,
Food from India, Spain or China,
Or the restuarants in Paris or in Rome,
Our idea of ambrosia
Is smaller and much cosier -
A glass of wine or cup of tea at home.

It is still astonishing to me what you and Vera did on our behalfs - not astonishing that you should do it, but that you managed to do so much, and give so much time, while so tied up with family and work. I am going to visit Leo again tomorrow, and will take your letters over to read to him. I really must get down to work, so will leave all the other questions unanswered for the moment, and add a couple of verses. All my love to you both, and to the boys - how I would love to see them. Do you still take those colour stills? (I've just thought what an international family you have become - A South African and Canadian living in America with an English maid.) Tons of love *Hilda*

PRETORIA CENTRAL REFRAIN - or What did you do in the Great Emergency, Mummy?

It's Sunday again, and here we are sitting
 And reading, or talking, and knitting and knitting.
 We're up in the morning, we each make our bed;
 We eat up our breakfast of porridge and bread.
 Then out in the yard we go for a bit
 And under a palm tree we sit and we knit.
 Sunday papers and scones in the world that we quit.
 But here we just sit and we knit and we knit,
 We knit, and we knit, and we knit, and we knit.

1+4
 10+13/2

Now Monday has come, and the children are dressed
 In shirts or in blouses, with gyms ~~are~~ nicely pressed.
 They're ready for school; while to work folks are flitting.
 While here we are - sitting, and knitting and knitting.
 Are the streets jammed with traffic? We don't care a bit.
 We just sit and we knit and we knit and we knit,
 And we knit and we knit and we knit.

Wednesday and Thursday, Friday and Saturday,
 Each one like the former, each one like the latter day.
 Cold days or warm days, we care not one whit.
 We just sit and read, or we read and we knit.
 At night round the table in nightgowns we sit,
 And we talk, or we read, or we just sit and knit.
 There are earthquakes and floods, or a batsman gets hit
 But we're quite unaware, so we sit and we knit,
 Yes we knit, and we knit, and we knit and we knit!

One day they will say, "The Emergency's over.
 You may pack and return to your husband or lover.
 Your children are waiting, so why don't you ~~quit~~ flit?"
 We won't even hear them. We'll sit and we'll knit.
 The prison door's open, and Spengler has gone
 But the women detainees sit on and sit on.
 And three decades later, they'll dig through the grit
 And there they will find us, while we sit and knit.
 While we sit and we read, or we read, or we sit,
 And we knit, and we knit, and we knit, and we knit.

(Spengler's the head of the Special Branch)

Major is

Written after First State of
Emergency

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INFORMATION CONTROL

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The things in Helen's bun
And what we learned from what we learned - you must say that was fun
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And voices harsh that called Vagarsh! And the oddest
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Becky and her dry-cleaning;
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The cups we downed until we nearly drowned
And night-time meetings on the triple-seatings;
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And thanks for the memory
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Lights out at eight - a dreadful fate for girls in such
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We're not so keen on Royalty but we're tired of being pawns;
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Many's the time that we've wanted
A rest cure at state expense;
Well it was swell while it lasted,
Now we want the other side of the fence.

And thanks for the memory
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The peephole in the door, the wardress's roar, and the joy
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Thanks for the memory
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Of that morning in Marshall Square - the cream of the named
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But some of the resurrections made us open our eyes and stare;
How startling it was!

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Of the joy-ride in the pick-up - and the row that we did
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How eager she was.

And thanks for the memory
Of that morning in Marshall Square - the cream of the named
were there;
But some of the resurrections made us open our eyes and stare;
How startling it was!

And thanks for the memory
Of the joy-ride in the pick-up - and the row that we did
kick up;
Trying to sing the Marseillaise while the jolts they made us
hiccup;
How tuneful it wasn't!

And thanks for the memory
Of mattresses with lumps that didn't fit our bumps;
And lavs that always overflowed and wetted our poor rumps;
How stinky it was!

And thanks for the memory
Of quacks prescribing pills supposed to cure our ills;
But they nearly killed our Bettie with nausea and chills;
How ghastly it was!

And thanks for the memory
Of sirens screeching shrill T'wards the hospital on the hill;
Did they ask the patient if he could afford to pay his bill?
Thank you, Mr. Pratt!

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Collection Number: A3299

Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Collection Funder: **Bernstein family**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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