

1981

# Restaurant

Maxine Hong Kingston

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## Restaurant · *Maxine Hong Kingston*

*for Lilah Kan*

The main cook lies sick on a banquette, and his assistant  
has cut his thumb. So the quiche cook takes  
their places at the eight-burner range, and you and I  
get to roll out twenty-three rounds of pie  
dough and break a hundred eggs, four at a crack,  
and sift out shell with a China cap, pack  
spinach in the steel sink, squish and squeeze  
the water out, and grate a full moon of cheese.  
Pam, the pastry chef, who is baking Choco-  
late Globbs (once called Mulattos) complains about the disco,  
which Lewis, the salad man, turns up louder out of spite.  
“Black so-called musician.” “Broads. Whites.”  
The porters, who speak French, from the Ivory Coast,  
sweep up droppings and wash the pans without soap.  
We won’t be out of here until three a.m. In this basement,  
I lose my size. I am a bent-over  
child, Gretel or Jill, and I can  
lift a pot as big as a tub with both hands.  
Using a pitchfork, you stoke the broccoli and bacon.  
Then I find you in the freezer, taking  
a nibble of a slab of chocolate big as a table.  
We put the quiches in the oven, then we are able  
to stick our heads up out of the sidewalk into the night  
and wonder at the clean diners behind glass in candlelight.