



# Brunch

THE FOLLOWING recipe comes to you from the Gourmand Recovery Unit at Ulitsa Fadeeva — bed.

I misjudged the quantity of tonight's little supper and consequently had to make an early retirement. It all came about from an idea about creating the simplest supper snack that still looked like a little effort had been made and was tastier than potato chips.

I have a friend in Sydney who despite being a Serious Television Producer, or because of it, confessed that her favorite meal, above all things was cheese on toast.

I scoffed, too. Fancy such a paltry snack. Rubbery, bland cheese on burnt charcoal scorching your mouth when you take a big bite.

Well, a few years of Russia has changed all that. I have come to worship good cheese as an item as rare as hen's teeth.

There are 597 cheeses in the world — from Abbeydale and Achiotte to White Stilton and Zsendice, a Hungarian cheese made from ewe's milk. The offerings in Moscow never seemed to stretch further than an industrial slice from Lithuania and occasionally something resembling Zsendice at Georgian restaurants.

And then in 1992 cheese came back again. First, tentatively in the *rynoks*, then in the stores. We all held parties to celebrate and life looked normal again. I have, therefore, given cheese a serious reappraisal. But cheese on toast was out of the question. I don't have a toaster.

The French gourmand Doctor Edouard de Pomaine has a delicious recipe — but you needed a griller and a French country house to eat it in. ("Take a slice of black bread the size of a dessert plate and just as thick, spread it with a layer of French mustard and cover the surface with strips of Gruyère about half an inch thick. Place the bread under a grill and just before it begins to run, remove the dish, sprinkle with salt and pepper, cut into quarters and serve with melted butter.")

With a bit of scrabbling about the fridge the humble potato came to the rescue. It is the perfect medium for cheese. Can't overwhelm the flavor, behaves beautifully when cooked by keeping its shape and besides, it was all I had to eat.

The only flaw in this recipe, which has sent me to bed, is using four potatoes and not having anybody about to help eat them. Take my advice: Even greedies should never try eating more than two.

# Cheese On Not-Quite Toast

5-4 small	potatoes, washed well
Thin slices	sensible cheese
1 tbsp	French mustard
1/2 tsp each	salt and freshly ground pepper
1 tsp	herbs

Preheat the oven to 180° Celsius.

The spice that makes this memorable is the freshly-ground pepper; it should sneak into the meal as a hot surprise every few bites rather than a thin warm blast.

Slice the potatoes quite thinly, ensuring an evenness in size. Place them flat on a large platter, put in the oven and cook until done but not soggy. For microwave fans, 4.5 minutes on high ought to do the trick.

Remove the potatoes and place a good dab of mustard on top, then a slice of cheese on each portion of potato. In this case, less is definitely not more. Layer it on thickly. (This will also give yourself an excuse to drink a glass or two of beer despite it being almost bedtime or alternatively brunch. Nothing beats the combination.)

Generously grind pepper all over the dish and put it back into the oven. One and a half minutes more in the microwave or ten minutes in a conventional oven should have the cheese just start to change consistency and melt evenly over the potatoes.

Transfer the potatoes to a serving dish and decorate with an extra grind of pepper or your favorite herbs; or do as I did, and just wolf them down on the same plate. That way you get to eat all the little cheesy bits that dropped off.

THE DOGGY BAG concept has not caught on in this town. There are plenty of doggies, so maybe it is for want of bags. In western Europe it may be chic to sashay down the street with a Valentino or Armani bag; here the plastic bag still reigns. Live here long enough and you will never be able to throw a plastic bag away again.

I clutched mine closely to my heart this afternoon on my way back to work. Warm and comforting, inside were four cheesy *khachapuri* treats direct from the sweaty Guria restaurant kitchen. It is a small Georgian restaurant tucked away in a side street off Kom-somolsky Prospekt. They don't take reservations, they close at eight, and you will meet very interesting people in the line.

Well, interesting probably doesn't quite convey the right meaning — let's just say Al Capone wouldn't look out of place here, but then again food fans are a common sight, too.

Some dishes at the restaurant are a must — the green bean *lobio* salad, the meat *kharko* stew, the eggplant *Pkhali* dip. But more than any of these, you can't leave without eating *khachapuri*.

Is it a pie, is it a fritter? No-one really has the answer. Needless to say it comes from Georgia, it is made of cheese and I don't know anyone who doesn't like them.

My recipe comes from a special source: My friend Karen and I took a boat trip up the White Sea Canal a few summers back and we shared our meals in the ship's dining room with two lovely ladies, Genrietta and Larissa: a niece and aunt combination who were most entertaining.

As with all ship journeys, we were cautious for the first few days — not committing ourselves to firm friendships just in case we found ourselves plagued.

We did have to do a bit of stern maneuvering to avoid the charming company of two young gentlemen on board. Luckily they were more often than not spectacularly drunk to ever succeed in really annoying us, and we found Genrietta and Larissa just the tonic.

Our last night we braved the scorn of the waitress by bringing a bottle of red wine to the table, and all four of us polished it off telling wild tales. Genrietta claimed to make the best *khachapuri* ever. And she promptly wrote down the recipe.

I still have the original, complete with diagrams on how to fold the pie as well as her Moscow address. If anything went wrong with my *khachapuri*, she said, I must give her a call.

# *Khachapuri*

2 cups	plain flour
1/2 cup	butter
1	egg
1/2 cup	sour cream
1/2 tsp	baking soda
1/2 cup	cottage cheese
1/4 cup	feta cheese
2 tbsp	softened butter
Plus	flour for dusting
	vegetable oil

Preheat the oven to 220° Celsius.

Rub the butter into the flour and mix well. Break the egg into 1/4 cup sour cream, mix well and pour into the flour and butter mixture. Stir well.

Add the baking powder to the rest of the sour cream and whip well. Add this to the rest of the dough and with clean hands, mix.

Put the dough into the refrigerator for no less than two hours. Roll the chilled dough out onto a floured board about 2 centimeters thick. You can choose to make one large pie, or smaller ones.

Place the filling on half the dough and fold the rest of the dough over the top, making a triangular envelope.

Coat a baking tray with vegetable oil and place the *khachapuri* on the tray. Bake for about 15 minutes, or until the pies are golden brown. Serve very hot.

IT IS MY FATHER'S BIRTHDAY this week — and his birthday wish didn't surprise any of us. For dinner he will be served his favorite dish — Lobster Newburg.

Just a small portion, mind you. The principal ingredients of this very simple dish are lashings of sherry and cream, smothering the most delicious seafood obtainable. (And if the thought of such a dish alarms your blood pressure/cholesterol-count sensitivities you will understand why this treat is only granted him about once a year.)

It was always a mystery me why in all the books on our recipe shelf at home one of them was the crime thriller *Too Many Cooks*, by Rex Stout. Little did I know that lurking among its pages (look for the cream-smeared page in question) was the most scrumptious, gooey, fattening secret of happiness on earth.

I exaggerate. But it is a great dish. The original recipe calls for Lobster, but it can easily be served with prawns or crab. Serve this for brunch for two people, or double the ingredients and make it an appetizer for four.



# Lobster Newburg

<i>1 cup</i>	prawns, lightly cooked (or lobster)
<i>1 cup</i>	cream
<i>2 tabsp</i>	butter
<i>5 large</i>	egg yolks
<i>A large wine glass</i>	sherry
<i>1 cup</i>	cooked fluffy rice
<i>for garnish</i>	parsley

Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the cooked prawns and heat through. Add the sherry and stir. While these are warming in the saucepan, mix the cream and egg yolks together and pour into another saucepan. Stir carefully and let it come to the boil for a few seconds, then turn down the heat to the barest minimum. Keep stirring until it thickens. Then add to the prawns and mix carefully.

Serve immediately on a hot bed of white rice with a little parsley as a garnish.

I'VE HAD MY NOSE buried in a good book so much these past few days I've barely had time to eat. Save a few omelettes when the hunger pains get too fierce.

The pain is abetted somewhat by the fact that the book is about food. *The Rituals of Dinner*, by Margaret Visser is a ripping yarn all about the rituals of cannibalism and how to behave when you are roasting a loved one, or what to wear at an Aztec slaughter ceremony. Needless to say that's just the first chapter. The book is bound to settle down and actually tell me why I insist on using my fork the wrong way round when eating peas.

The biggest surprise was discovering that added to all my isms and phobias, I can now happily announce that I am a neophiliac.

And so are most of you. Except for those of you who like to eat baked beans for breakfast every morning. That makes you a neophobe.

Insulted? Read on.

Neophobes fear the new in their eating behavior. Apparently this means you are all very clever when it comes to surviving the perils of dying from poison mushrooms and mysterious small mammals you club outside your cave. You wouldn't even think of trying them, but would stick to your sensible grains (or baked beans) instead.

The neophiles on the other hand, will happily eat dingo's kidneys on toast at the drop of a hat.

If like me you are feeling smug being in the dingo kidney category, and not the baked beans one, you should. But I don't want to alienate the neophobes. There's too many of them. So as a treat here is a recipe that can reassure the phobes and give a little challenge to the philes. (Actually the only challenge to the philes is the choice of eggs — buy them from the *rynok* or in a state store that hasn't learnt about the concept of use-by expiry dates and you may just expire yourself.)

This recipe is the classic one perfected by Mère Poulard, a Frenchwoman who ran a restaurant on the island of Mont Saint-Michel. Ran a restaurant isn't quite the way to describe it. People dragged themselves by their fingernails all the way to this island just to sample her magnificent omelettes and were always rewarded just on the point of death with a taste of heaven.

Learn to cook this well and you can open a restaurant and treat neophobes to perfection every night.



# Omelette

5 large	eggs
1 tsp	water
2 tbsp	unsalted butter
1/2 tbsp	chives, finely minced

The trick to perfect omelettes? Room temperature eggs. Remove them from the fridge half an hour before you need to cook. Break the eggs into a porcelain or glass bowl and add the water. Season with salt and pepper and whisk lightly for at least two minutes.

Melt separately one tablespoon of butter in a small pan and set aside. Heat a medium sized pan over moderate heat until a drop of water sizzles on its surface. Add one tablespoon of butter and swirl it around so that the pan is coated.

Carefully add the beaten eggs. Swirl the pan with one hand while stirring the eggs in a circular motion with a fork. Keep swirling carefully and when the omelette begins to set, start pushing the cooked egg towards the center of the pan so that the uncooked egg runs around the outside and cooks as well.

Now comes the artistic bit. Have your plate nearby (warmed of course) and tilt the pan away from you and fold the third of the omelette closest to you toward the center.

Next slide the omelette carefully onto the plate so that a third of the omelette is sitting in the middle; raise the pan and roll it so that the omelette plops onto the rest of the dish. You should have a neat little package of just-cooked egg.

Brush the set-aside melted butter over the top of the omelette and sprinkle with snipped chives.

Serve at once.

THE TERM "MEDICINAL" for sherry has always applied in our family. Dad's mum had an evening tippie in her declining years to relieve aches and pains. She wouldn't buy it herself of course. It was not done. It was always Dad's duty to nip down to the bottle shop and bring back the offending booze well concealed in a brown paper bag. Many of us speculated that she didn't even know it was sherry; just medicine prescribed by the amiable family doctor.

I don't remember her very well, apart from the sherry — and delicious ginger nut biscuits she always fed us when we went to visit. They were tasty but utterly impossible to eat. We would spend ages sitting quietly in the corner working at our biscuits and our elders and betters barely heard us squeak.

But squeak we did when we got home.

When asked how they managed to bring up three boisterous children under the age of three, my father was always quick to reply "a glass of medicinal sherry every night." (And Mum would correct him and say "two".) They should have fed us scrambled eggs instead. This is a very simple dish which will serve two.

# Scrambled Eggs

5	eggs
1/4 cup	cream
1/4 cup	sherry
1 tbsp	tomato purée
1 tsp	tobasco sauce
1	orange, juice and zest

Combine all the ingredients except the orange in a heavy based saucepan and scramble the eggs in the traditional way —slowly and stirring carefully.

When cooked serve with a squeeze of orange juice mixed into the egg and a little grated orange peel on top. It makes a great cold dish for lunch if you are adverse to having a little sherry for brunch on Sunday.

GREAT WEATHER THIS JULY. For tadpoles, ducks, deep-sea divers, manic depressives, arctic explorers. Have I missed anyone? Submariners, mosquitos. I've spent years spreading the propaganda about how warm Moscow summers are — how you could head out to the country on the weekend, wear a large sun hat, add suntan cream to the mosquito repellent cream, to the peaches and cream complexion. Instead, all I am doing is cursing the city's lack of storm water drains and admiring how my basil plants have taken to swimming on the balcony rather than growing.

Still. At least you have the excuse of staying indoors reading books and eating cheese on toast.

And not just cheese on toast, Welsh Rarebit. The dish that has to be up there with Spotted Dick and Toad in the Hole as a contender for the British dish with the silliest name. And that's only because the last 20 generations have called it Welsh Rabbit instead of Rarebit and found themselves bitterly disappointed with the result. Mind you, if given the choice of rabbit on toast or cheese and beer, I think the cheesy concoction wins hands down.

I'll be honest and tell you that you can miss out on the eggs for this dish at a pinch. Separating them is all very well, but what useful thing are you going to make with just two egg whites afterwards? Everyone knows that egg whites get popped into the fridge in a sensible pot and then blithely ignored for weeks until someone opens the door to get a beer and pulls out a strange sinewy animal and starts asking impertinent questions about your cooking habits. This dish will serve two.

## *Welsh Rarebit*

<i>1/4 cup</i>	butter
<i>1 cup</i>	strong Cheddar cheese, cubed
<i>1/2 cup</i>	beer
<i>1/2 tsp</i>	paprika
<i>1/2 tsp</i>	pepper, freshly ground
<i>1 tsp</i>	Keen's mustard powder
<i>2</i>	egg yolks, beaten
<i>4 thick slices</i>	hot toast

Place the butter in a double boiler or in a saucepan over another saucepan half filled with simmering water on the stove. When the butter has gently melted, stir in the cheese. Once it has melted, slowly add the beer, stirring continuously.

With your free hand, toast the bread and set aside.

Once all the cheese, butter and beer has combined and isn't erupting like Mount Vesuvius, add the paprika, pepper and mustard (and egg yolks).

Keep stirring until it is very hot. Place the toast on plates. Pour the cheese over the toast, serve immediately.