

A woman in a standalone house ran the vacuum every morning I saw my life reflected in her lot Like her I spent my time cleaning and cooking for my family I had a grown daughter who still lived at home It was just us two but we were a family I was a widow I gave her my recipes My husband died in a car accident He was in the hospital for a long time I spent sleepless nights beside him as he succumbed He fell into a coma and I made the momentous decision to pull the plug Since then the wisdom of the ages has nestled in my memory I kept photos from the happy times when we would go to the country house that we later sold I talked about him to the neighbor woman with whom I shared recipes like eggplant parmesan You slice the eggplant fry it in oil bake it with tomato sauce parmesan and mozzarella

Sometimes she ventured to imitate my recipes We had intimate dinners we three lone women She looked into our eyes She spoke little Like me she'd broken away from society When I went to eat at her place I'd bring homemade pasta and bread to her table and we'd light candles for us three lone women My daughter didn't always come She said the neighbor and I were like a couple of war widows Our problem was living in anxiety or abandonment Solitude corrodes the soul—Reader—

We three lone women would visit at dinner and the neighbor would tell us about the housewares store she used to have She would spend hours arranging coffee pots and salad bowls in the window She'd put all her savings in that business after her

husband died The neighbors commended her hard work and goodwill Everyone in the little town where we lived remembered her shop She had a boundless love for objects which gave her refuge like an open shore after a storm That's where she got the vacuum that now she used at home

The sound of that vacuum that she used maniacally was a savage drone that dispelled sleep and peace Maniacally she cleaned the whole house every day Nothing was ever clean enough She looked around The dust of time was her nemesis Ravenous time snapped at her ankles

The sound of the vacuum was a deafening drone that blasted like a storm wind into the houses of our little hilltop town that held the wisdom of the ages in its ancient earth Every window had a grille with a clock and a copper pot and a worn doily Everything exuded oldness Everyone knew everyone's business They talked about those three lone women who had the audacity to engage in trade and commerce on their own They cursed the din that vacuum made growling night and day like a chained animal They were driven mad by the deafening tick-tock of clocks that mark the tempo of death and life The neighbor's husband had been a butcher who worked day and night preparing stuffed chickens and liver roulades and roasted veal with bay thyme sage rosemary the smells of which wafted from the shop They made fifty-person dinners to order in their rich little town in the Po Lowlands full of fog and crime in winter when everyone holed up away from the cold and damp and sad nights Incest theft violence multiplied They kept a gun in the drawer

The neighbor devoted herself to dusting the terracotta and porcelain knickknacks left over from running the shop all those years She'd painted the walls in blue and white stripes All the neighbor ladies were jealous and gossiped about her She was

still young at the time They said she'd gotten the money for her shop ingratiating herself like a whore with a wealthy local entrepreneur who owned a confectionary Every day they saw him bring a box of sweets to the widow who bared her fair fleshy arms She'd put on weight since her husband's death A good meal was all she wanted after a day's work Lustily and lazily she ate the man's sweets while the neighbors' tongues wagged

The store was blue and white and bright When it was quiet the neighbor peeked out at the street and the oaks and the alders on the lane Everyone in town came to her for wedding and baptism and confirmation favors The coffee pots the cups the glasses exposed to the sun their bare skin from which the dust of time had been lifted by the shopkeeper's hands that dusted them daily The dust of time, time was her sworn enemy At home and in the store she silenced every irksome tick every shrieking alarm The madness of clocks would be the death of her

She looked around her and found refuge in a sandwich or dessert that subdued her yearning for love and affection I gave her the recipes of my dead mother whom I'd seen in her white shroud Before she died I brought her pasta with fresh tomato sauce You take cherry tomatoes on the vine sauté them and strain them then add a little salt sugar and oil and basil no garlic and pour the hot sauce over pasta al dente

I gave her my mother's recipe for pastry dough You combine flour with equal parts butter and sugar Knead the dough into a dense grainy ball and place it under a cloth to rest after carving a cross in the top Roll it out on a board then place it in molds with fruit and pastry cream and glaze Then bake it at medium heat for thirty minutes

The shopkeeper tried to cook but she wasn't very good Her true talent was cleaning

After the housewares store she got bored and replaced the knickknacks with shoes The empty shoes watched the road like strongholds of time They were empty of themselves as if waiting to be filled with the warmth of a foot They contained the same enigma as the shoes in the Edita Broglio painting that depicts them like the virgins waiting with their lamps and oil for the time when we'll all leave this earth Maniacally she dusted the shoes and tried them on her plump glutton feet She gave me some red shoes like a pair my mother had bought me when I was a little girl In return I gave her my recipe for shortcrust You mix flour water oil and salt into a silky dough by rolling it out and kneading it until it's springy Then roll it out over a large surface into a big layer that you cut and put on baking sheets to make savory pies with meat and vegetables You bake them on medium heat until the crust turns golden These dishes are full of the Mediterranean wisdom of the ages that my mother passed down to me When we were little smells from the kitchen wafted through our old house like indelible traces of what had been *Be calm* my soul's voice says when my mind returns to my noble mother's chapped white hands consumed by the extreme domesticitude that corroded her life Only by passing down her love for making food that her mother had passed down to her did she find a crumb of eternity on this earth

I taught the neighbor simple things like bread with butter and tuna or butter and sugar and bread with oil tomatoes and salt and Neapolitan caponata which you make by soaking a frisella in water and topping it with chopped tomato mozzarella oregano salt and oil Those heavenly hunks of bread are the taste of childhood I also gave her my recipe for stuffed peppers You peel roasted peppers and fill them with pasta olives and tomato sauce or with oil-soaked old bread capers parmesan

parsley and olives You arrange them on a baking sheet and sprinkle them with breadcrumbs

One evening when I invited her to dinner she greedily ate four stuffed peppers It was a joyful hunger My daughter looked on in astonishment It was a joy to watch her as warmed by wine we drank our coffee She told us about her shoes enumerating them like children The shoe shop shone throughout the land

My daughter had no interest in housekeeping or cooking After working my whole life I lived off of interest from savings I'd put away in the bank I didn't look back I didn't want any nostalgia or bitterness

While we were having dinner I started thinking about a trip to the sea we could take together and as we ate I saw my dead mother's eyes that held centuries of Mediterranean wisdom My mother died thirty years ago consumed by the plague of our time that confined her to bed for nine months long enough to give birth to her death and her life and go to the land of no return where she would find my dead brother The lands of the Nevermore are invisible to the eyes of the living but appear in the wisdom of madness and delirium We ate foods made from her recipes that interested my daughter as little as housekeeping We ate fried anchovies You coat rinsed anchovies in flour and fry them in boiling salted oil You can also marinate them raw with salt parsley lemon and oil As my neighbor devoured the fish I told her about my mother's escarole pie and her other savory pies In the kitchen that was her life's prison and salvation my mother made bread by combining flour yeast water a pinch of salt and oil She kneaded the mixture into a dense and stretchy ball that she left to rise under a cloth in a warm place for an hour after carving into the raw dough the sign of the cross that was on the missal and the prayer book that she kept in the credenza that's now in my house and filled with her bills

her recipes and her jewelry as if the recipes were as precious as gold She passed down to me the wisdom of the recipes that earned her a scrap of eternity on this earth After that she would take the mound of risen dough roll it out with her hands dip little discs of it in boiling oil and then top them with tomato parmesan basil and oil Or she would roll the dough out into a big circle on a baking sheet add basil tomato oil and mozzarella and bake it for twenty minutes in the hot oven

In the evenings we would sit at the kitchen table overlooking this sea finite flayed furrowed by ships carrying centuries gold millennia wines spices oils handicrafts freemen slaves This sea struck by waves by lights which never forgets a vessel a lighthouse a house This sea of buried dead And back come the millennia and centuries past the buried and reanimated dead and dark women hunched shrunken They weave cloth by the sea They wait rip stitch add rip hook gather They give substance to the sea A sea written drawn corporeal They make it the open closed body of the age-old sea barred with columns with vessels with lighthouses Sea of war sea of earth paper sea of flesh paper Egyptian Sicilian African sea Italian sea Sea of Spain France Greece Albania Roman sea inked hand-crafted articulated sea fatigued never tired of setting forth Mediterranean

We ate pizza and salad with broccolì tomato potatoes and green beans dressed in garlic basil oregano vinegar and oil drizzled over the fresh steamed vegetables We would eat in silence I hung on to my brother so as not to hear my father's gnashing teeth and crunching jaws as he ate wordlessly as if merely sitting with us was a concession to my mother At Christmas he didn't accept her gifts He would open the packages and put everything away until the next year when someone finally decided to use the socks or robe she had given him the year

before Every Christmas our mother would become sad and cry at this form of rejection and disregard for her attention and care but my father too was tired worn down by his job selling fabric all over Campania and Lazio One day he brought home a Jewish textile merchant named Ettore Diveroli who'd sold out his stock of fabrics Our mother wasn't comfortable with my father's associates but she drew on her age-old culinary wisdom for them all the same Knowledge of food was knowledge of the Mediterranean centuries that lived on in my mother's eyes She prepared a meal worthy of a New Year's feast for Diveroli and our father She made tagliatelle with clams and sole in butter and poached salmon That morning she took me aside and showed me how She kneaded flour eggs water salt and a drop of oil into a dense stretchy dough Then she rolled it out on the counter She left the thin rings of pasta to rest on the flour and then rolled them up and cut them into thin strips In the evening she boiled the pasta and dressed it with oil and all the fish The Jewish merchant complimented her and greedily devoured her wise foods My mother looked on barely eating at all When she cooked a lot and was tired she would reject her own wisdom Her ancient sadness infected me Therein derived the germ of sin and excess I later saw in food First it was something divine simple and natural and later became something controlled regimented and overwhelming But food conserves the nature of the ages and the wisdom of God That was when I stripped away my childhood which perhaps I'd already buried when my grandmother died and I became what I was: a being destined just as my mother was to pass on the wisdom of the ages in food Our food contains all the knowledge that lives in this sea finite flayed furrowed by ships carrying centuries gold millennia wines spices oils handicrafts freemen slaves This sea struck by waves by lights which never

forgets a vessel a lighthouse a house This sea of buried dead
And back come the millennia and centuries past the buried
and reanimated dead and dark women hunched shrunken They
weave cloth by the sea They wait rip stitch add rip pierce gather
They give substance to the sea A sea written drawn corporeal
They make it the open closed body of the age-old sea barred
with columns with vessels with lighthouses Sea of war sea of
earth paper sea of flesh paper Egyptian Sicilian African sea
Italian sea Sea of Spain France Greece Albania Roman sea
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forth Mediterranean

Sitting at the neighbor's table we ate the escarole pie that
you make by rolling out dough on a baking sheet and stuffing
it with bitter escarole wilted and tossed with sugar salt pine
nuts olives and raisins I contained the wisdom of the ages The
neighbor enjoyed its fruits but like my daughter couldn't cook
and showed disinterest My daughter was eighteen and wanted
to move out and leave town She never went to the neighbor's
shoe shop The neighbor's talent was cleaning the way mine was
cooking Every day she carefully dusted the house and the store
the register the shelves the shoes and the windows Hungry
and gluttonous after her husband's death food was nearly the
only thing she enjoyed The blue-and-white store sparkled clean
Everyone gawked at the woman baring her mature blond arms
Irrepressible curls escaped from her bun Aging's no picnic in
the sticks Men don't even look at you and women badmouth
your independence and your past pleased to see your youthful
graces fade This was the oppression my daughter wanted to
escape To distract her I started thinking about a trip to the
sea for us three lone women That night at dinner I said let's
take the train to a beach town I know from my youth I was
thinking of Torca a spot in Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi where

you can see the Dolphin and the other two Galli islands where Nureyev and Lorca Massine had homes and where a childhood friend died jumping off a rock When we were young and went to the house in Torca we'd roast a tray of potatoes onions and tomatoes with oil It was simple good food Making good use of simple ingredients simple flavors is part of age-old Mediterranean wisdom

The landscape of streams canals creeks irrigating the rice fields and the poplars extending in regular rows between the dams and the Martesana At the house in Torca surrounded by stars and delicate baby's breath we would gaze out at the mist and the constellations all the stars and icosahedra in the sky

At the table here we gazed out at the landscape of fog and crime where in winter conflict incest and crime exploded along the Martesana in a landscape imbued with Leonardesque sorrow The fog of the Po Lowlands inspired infinite ennui And all that ennui took my mind back to our trip to the sea and I recalled Turchillo our dog in Torca darting between our legs like a little devil Then I looked back out at the fog waiting for the women to speak

Thinking about that trip it occurred to me that our children are other to us Once they're grown we see them as individuals with their own lives The total attachment that binds baby to mother is gone The placental detachment a mother may dread for so long finally happens It's less painful to see them leave us behind and walk tall down their own path toward their own destiny You stop wondering what their lives will become and whether they'll get married and have children or go off to live in London New York Paris You proceed down parallel yet communicating paths That takes my mind to friends and how all our work is talent endowed with its own force Sitting in the kitchen it was less painful to see my daughter's disinterest

in the house and the age-old art of cooking We all choose our own life I didn't need her to resemble me She was other than me My mind drifted back to Torca and the days I spent there with friends at Christmastime when it was cold and the olive trees shimmered metallic in the pale sun and we went out to have fun hang out have sex I remembered Marina with her Botticellian face smiling at me from an immeasurable distance My first unfulfilled love She was like a father standing in for the patriarchal realm which I had yet to enter My daughter had and that's perhaps why she took no interest in the feminine arts of cooking and housekeeping I was revisiting my past I went back to the Tricarico Hotel which extended room after room in a concatenation of corridors that my grandfather managed and guarded I recalled the little checked dress my mother made me when I was a girl All my clothes were the product of her magisterial will of her seamstress's hands that contained the Mediterranean wisdom of textiles and sewing The same knowledge that inspired the fishermen of Positano when the number of fish diminished and they couldn't support themselves to turn to hand-dyeing and sewing beautiful rough fabrics Together with their wives they tinted them and made simple dresses and bathing costumes that made a bright backdrop in Nietzschean colors in that pearl of the Mediterranean Now that ancient knowledge has disappeared replaced by the beige taupe black and white of designer brands Among the olive trees and lemon groves and orange gardens color once gleamed against the great ramparts of the sky

The next day I made pizzaiola which is done by pan-cooking chicken or veal cutlets with fresh tomatoes oil basil garlic and salt I also made pork liver wrapped in caul fat with bay leaf and thick slices of Venetian veal liver cooked with onion slivers and dressed with oil a little butter sugar salt and a splash of milk

and then vegetables agrodolce: zucchini eggplant carrot and
scallion sautéed in oil sugar vinegar and salt

The gluttonous neighbor in her florid middle-agedness ate
everything under the disapproving eye of my daughter who
felt extraneous in that provincial context of lonely women
She saw her mother's kitchen as the effect of a castration
and a renunciation of better things She would probably leave
I didn't know with whom or for where or how she'd get by but
it no longer tormented me I saw men and women all over the
Po Lowlands put one foot in front of the other and kilometers
and insects and lightbulbs while algae flowed in the canals like
long green hair They lived by the clock buying butter cookware
TVs dinosaurs insects and lightbulbs Children put one foot
in front of the other going to school to lunch to learn to live
meanwhile the planet increased in missiles aims plans nuclear
reactors waiting to hit the edge of the abyss But all this didn't
torment me anymore

I let life flow by and into the distance without leaving
anything behind without waste without regrets without pain
Without anger at death I'm less afraid I've done what I could—
Lord—give me the peace I've earned I've worked I've been a
mother I didn't do all the good I could have I didn't go off to
be a missionary like I wanted when I was young I didn't waste
my talents but I didn't love myself Now in the kitchen I feel
the grip of my chains slacken

One night I brought struffoli to the neighbor's: the simple
Neapolitan Christmas treat made of honey and fried dough
covered with sprinkles The austere and ancient sweetness of
Greek cheese honey and dough from the rugged ancient land of
the Peloponnesus and the tang of tragedy Our struffoli and our
cathedrals of sweets and pastry and pasta preserve the pomp
of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Naples when

Volaire and Germans and Flemings came to paint Vesuvius which they depicted erupting red with fire and fervor in its age-old rock tufa lava shell bursting from its internal fiery torment Our pizza contains Pulcinella and Queen Margherita and the ancient mother goddesses and the steatopygous black Madonnas symbols of a fertility divided between the opulence of extreme rotundity and the austerity of the korai And our communion host and our mostaccioli cookies for Christmas and the dead hold the rituals of the Etruscans mixed with those of the Romans and Oscans when this was the home of Isis and Osiris

Our bread with tomato salt and oil and our pork sausage contain the orgies of the royalist masses and the madness of Masaniello and the gallows on which the Austrians and the Bourbons hanged Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel and Gennaro Serra di Cassano

Our refined pastiera preserves the pomp of the courts The humble one harks back to a people still tied to their Oscan and Greek past For the rich pastiera you roll out buttery pastry dough on a baking dish You fill it with ricotta mixed with melted sugar wheat berries candied fruit dark chocolate flakes and orange blossom water You criss-cross the top with thin strips of dough and bake it until it turns golden brown The poor pastiera is made of simple pastry filled with ricotta sugar and candied fruit The poor use lard for flavor The rich bring pastiera to its full splendor during Easter by adding almond paste and multicolored Jordan almonds The glorious people murderous and vile are appeased with this rustic recipe from Magna Graecia


I shared these stories and sentiments about food with the neighbor and my daughter It was late We were tired We went to sleep I thought I would buy the tickets for the trip to the

sea tomorrow I'd book a pensione It's hard to look back at the
past years later Perhaps I would never return to the mythical
house in Torca I didn't know yet I drifted into the hollow
groove of sleep

The next day I went to the kitchen and made the neighbor
pumpkin pasta by sautéing the squash in oil with garlic and
parsley and adding it to spaghetti al dente The colors of Van
Gogh exploded in the orange and green Then I stopped by the
station in the Po Lowlands filled with fog and crime I wanted
to buy the tickets for the Amalfi Coast I hesitated It's hard to
revisit the past The landscape with rows of poplars and larches
and rice fields was entrancing with its gray damp under the
vault of the sky and it made me long for this sea finite flayed
furrowed by ships carrying centuries gold millennia wines
spices oils handicrafts freemen slaves This sea struck by waves
by lights which never forgets a vessel a lighthouse a house This
sea of buried dead And back come the millennia and centuries
past the buried and reanimated dead and dark women hunched
shrunken They weave cloth by the sea They wait rip stitch add
rip hook gather They give substance to the sea A sea written
drawn corporeal They make it the open closed body of the age-
old sea barred with columns with vessels with lighthouses Sea
of war sea of earth paper sea of flesh paper Egyptian Sicilian
African sea Italian sea Sea of Spain France Greece Albania
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tired of setting forth Mediterranean

I roamed the halls which were cold and silent at that hour
and the stacks of scrapped tracks and retired cars covered in
lichen and ivy and rubble as the international trains headed for
distant destinations zipped past I went back home where my
daughter told me she wanted to go to France by herself I said
"Stay" She gave me one of those endless smiles that engulf

their recipient and replied “I have to go” That night I made her Sicilian cassata I was using the ancient wisdom of food to chain a creature who I had just realized was other than me I crushed toasted green pistachios and almonds with sugar On a tray I placed sponge cake made of sugar flour egg yolks and whipped egg whites I added ricotta mixed with melted sugar candied fruit dark chocolate flakes and more ricotta I flipped it and covered the cassata with candied flowers and leaves It was the apotheosis of color Cassata preserves the pomp of the European courts that met at the royal palace facing Piazza Plebiscito whose back bore the solemn weight of kings The Austrians the French the Normans the Bourbons and Charles of France and Frederick of Swabia It is a glorious dessert the richest and most sumptuous from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies My daughter eyed it suspiciously She sensed that I wanted to hold her back In the youth of our lives—Reader—reflected in the primordial soup and the icosahedra of the sky—we set sail on a ship that bears our name alone It was a sad and silent meal My daughter went to pack The next morning she left for the station by herself Her backpack had just socks and underwear and a sweater and pajamas a scarf and gloves She wanted to see Antibes Nice Picasso Matisse and eat bouillabaisse made with seafood and rice and bread and tomato and fish She crossed the Po Lowland landscape of fog and crime She gazed out at the rice fields and rows of poppies maples and birches into which she was born The breaking day dissipated in the ennui that dwindled in the northern light as day broke Moss and lichen crept up the tetragonal and steatopygous art nouveau structures like Moretti’s majestic hydroelectric power station in Trezzo sull’Adda and the industrial complex in Crespi d’Adda built according to the industrial paternalism of Owen and Fourier In the light that



streamed from the sky my daughter was a lunar creature She held the package of food I had given her From home I saw the train depart and I turned to the statues in the station in their stony sleep watching people head for unknown destinations Then I was gripped by melancholy as if her destination was death Every time she leaves I'm assailed by thoughts of death I wonder How will I bear not seeing her face for eternity?

Alone under the icosahedra of heaven and the flesh of God I shut myself in the kitchen That was the terrain of my eternity as it was for my mother I made a casatiello It was almost March, a cold March It was almost spring Birds mosquitoes flies darted through the air I took flour cracklings lard water and pepper and put the eggs to boil I mixed everything into a soft dense dough and placed it in a round tin with four boiled eggs at east north west and south the sign of the cross marked on their shells I baked it until it turned golden It was a simple peasant dish I took the casatiello to the neighbor's by myself We ate in silence My mind drifted back to Antibes and I recalled Matisse and Picasso and the Fauves and the Corniche d'Or Picasso watched over the little town My gluttonous neighbor bit into the casatiello which contains the knowledge of the peasant age I told her about my daughter leaving She looked at me with one of those smiles that engulf their recipients like gifts from the heavens Now I thought of my daughter as something of mine that had detached from me She had left She was going far away I couldn't follow My longing was infinite

The next day I made the neighbor pasta with broccoli to eat at the table by ourselves I made it by sautéing the broccoli in a pan with garlic and oil and mixed it with long pasta We sat at the table as the icosahedra of the heavens continued their celestial dance and the great ramparts of the earth towered over us like giants on night watch I kept thinking of my daughter

and again my mind went to the gun in the drawer I wondered whether I would ever use it but I had the ancient art of cooking in my soul Perhaps that would save me I suggested to myself after the seaside trip going to stay at a sanitarium where I'd been before It was a villa in the Po Lowlands surrounded by the landscape of fog and crime that watched us through the window as we ate our pasta

The past weighed on me like never before The landscape of the Po Lowlands accentuated my sadness The poplars the birches the maples the oaks formed woven rows that ran by the thousand then a hundred then a thousand more like ships toward their destiny I thought of my daughter as a creature I had raised with every care Too much care—Reader—and it had pushed her away I had bound her with ties of love too tight for an only child without a father My husband died in a road accident that mutilated his legs Then he went into intensive care and into a coma I had them pull the plug The remorse that came from the uncertainty of whether I'd committed a crime led my mind to the gun I kept in a drawer in the kitchen where shamanically I practiced the ancient art of the age-old wisdom of food that belongs to this sea finite flayed furrowed by ships carrying centuries gold millennia wines spices oils handicrafts freemen slaves This sea struck by waves by lights which never forgets a vessel a lighthouse a house

I made the neighbor rice with chickpeas I slow-cooked the beans without soaking them first and added rosemary garlic and oil Then I mixed them with rice and mixed pasta: maccheroni tagliatelle ziti the way this simple peasant dish is always made I also prepared fagioli della regina by cooking borlotti beans in tomato sauce basil and garlic with rice and mixed pasta These are simple Neapolitan dishes In the kitchen the noble Neapolitan people makes no distinction between high

and low rich and humble or simple Neither the rich nor the courtiers or entrepreneurs or petite bourgeoisie or merchant class disdained putting beans on their table To distract me from nostalgia my mind wandered to the Neapolitan nativity scenes I had seen years before with my daughter and husband The porcelain statuettes were dressed in fine cotton silk satin and lace Their limbs were slender like heavenly creatures At the Certosa di San Martino where the nativity scenes were my daughter wanted to get a red coral and gold cornicello She too loved beautiful and gratuitous things that radiate the absolute light of things that exist whether we see them or not

In silence the neighbor and I also ate the stuffed chicken I prepared by deboning a whole bird and sewing it back up with thread filled with cubes of prosciutto and old bread soaked in milk and mixed with salt parmesan ricotta basil and sausage bits

This total devotion to food was getting me as fat as one of Botero's big women and my mind drifted to the gun Then I had the idea of making my house into an elegant and exclusive trattoria in the Po Lowlands amid the rice fields the streams the fog the crime With the restaurant I would provide for mouths other than my own I didn't want to become a being ruled by hunger I told the neighbor I was going to turn my sitting room into an elegant and exclusive dining space with little lamps and flowers on the tables covered with embroidered linens my mother had left me I would find suppliers through the wealthy butcher I'd met at the sanitarium last year who made roulades and meatballs and rotisserie chickens for the whole town

Before throwing myself into such an endeavor I wanted to give myself a little rest at the Villa Maria Luigia in Monticelli outside of Parma its grounds surrounded by poplars oaks and acorns against the landscape of fog and crime against a lunar

backdrop I looked out from the neighbor's kitchen at the icosahedra in the sky dancing in the primordial soup from which all life forms come

The next day my daughter got back from France The week had crept by I went to pick her up at the station Under the stone statues I saw a sea of people My heart pounded like I was waiting for a lover I scanned the steel and stone above and below with increasing hope The restaurant plan distracted me from the gun I wasn't so apprehensive or possessive The train braked with a screech of metal bolts rails and wheels Out came a woman I barely recognized In seven days she'd become a woman I asked her what did you do? She just replied that she had seen Antibes Picasso the Corniche d'Or and Nice and had eaten pâté and bouillabaisse France had taken ahold of her heart She just said "I'm moving there" "Did you meet a man Did you fall in love?" Yes she had met a young engineer who worked at a marine pleasure craft company "I'm going to visit him as much as I can" she said simple and direct Her distant future no longer terrified me I saw men and women in the Po Lowlands put one foot in front of the other buying butter cookware insects dinosaurs lightbulbs TVs None of it tormented me anymore I watched the algae flowing in the canals like long green hair grazing the walls of my future Neapolitan restaurant I already saw it silhouetted against the landscape of fog and crime with a discreet little neon sign I asked my daughter to tell me about him She just said that he was separated and had a young daughter My daughter wanted to study and to go to France with her new love Like me she loved books more than anything Our house was filled with art books history science philosophy and literature I told her about my plan She enthusiastically approved We were two free women alike and equal in our life plans Now we loved each other without chains or

restrictions Back at home I served her the casatiello I had saved She ate it without reserve without regrets without resentment without leaving anything behind She told me I'd need to find an assistant a cook an accountant and a server I told her I would defer those expenses until I turned a profit It was nice to look each other in the eye without possessiveness without darkness without waste without resentment without regret

It was late We watched the stars in the sky that endured in the music of chaos in the mad and mute music of the icosahedra of the sky The madness of existence in the geometry of chaos that exists for itself and for everyone swept us away on a lunar path of stars and comets I put her to bed tucking her in like she was a little girl whispering a few words about our future trip She was tired She murmured something and dropped her young head on the pillow I cooked and we ate together for another week in which I drew up plans and worked out figures for my future restaurant


Then she along with the neighbor were the ones taking me to the station I went to the sanitarium in Monticelli for a week where I could unburden myself of the daily housekeeping and cooking We got up at six in the morning and had breakfast with caffè d'orzo and cookies and toast and jam At noon and at six they brought us a first course of pasta and a second of meat or cheese or fish with a vegetable side At ten they gave us chamomile tea with sugar which sweetly ushered us into the night We strolled through the small dewy courtyard with its dry fountain Our feet sank into the acorns the leaves and the pine needles with a quick soft crunch You could see—Reader—unquiet souls in solitude in peace silently strolling the trails of desire smoking cigarettes The morning was spent chatting walking and doing crafts in the community room with Laura and Bruno drinking caffè d'orzo from a machine These are the

sacred and austere places where the wounds of the soul are healed by taking a little break from life in the outside world You feel protected and provided for like when you were a child home sick and your mom would put a book an orangeade and a poached apple on your nightstand and a simple cutlet with warm broth A soft sun filters through the window shutters and we give in to the slow hours and the care of others without plans or even thoughts or concerns for the future Food prepared by others tastes of the gratuitous and the gift It's nice to be served sometimes in life


I decided I would lead the cooking group and pass on my ancient culinary knowledge to the others That way I made strides toward my future restaurant by guiding people in the kitchen I felt unburdened of the weight of my soul Even the past weighed on me less I thought less nostalgically of Torca of my friends from the past on the Amalfi Coast

I had the nurses and other patients make a Caprese cake which is done by mixing toasted ground almonds flour butter sugar melted dark chocolate rum espresso and whipped egg whites and baking the batter in a pan for half an hour until it becomes a dense cake that tastes strong and heavy and light at the same time It tastes of the sea and olive trees and almond blossoms and evenings spent drinking wine with friends by the sea and with the history that accompanies any food The Caprese is dark like the complexion of an Ethiopian or Saracen soldier


I talked to my daughter about her Frenchman She told me she'd met him one night when she was sad and walking alone down the shore in Antibes Her eyes were still full of Matisse's *La Danse* Provence in its splendor had swept her up in a dream of never-ending youth and she felt the power of chaos alive inside her like hot magma Everything in her young and inexperienced heart was waiting to burst She'd stepped into a café and



asked for a light wine She drank in a daze like Degas's absinthe drinker and a young man came up to her He took her hand without speaking and she let herself be chained by that direct and uninhibited gaze that seemed to come from an infinite distance It was a gaze that contained all the knowledge of the ages She gave this man one of those smiles that engulf their recipient like rivers cascading from the springs of chaos which contain the primordial fetus that hovered over the houses of Antibes He had rescued her from her melancholy by passing on to her the dark and luminous knowledge in his eyes that showed the way to his heart



I watched her as she talked and I saw in her the woman she was Full of expectations of fears of fury of anger of calm of torment all embedded in her life like scarlet marks of the hopes in my own soul Now she was opening her soul to me and showing me the wounds and holes and seams Like me she had a spine of iron and dead children's bones Sitting at the table in the kitchen we ordered the bones of creation as well as our souls Way up high the bones mixed in with the icosahedra of the sky with the stardust in the way up high of the world They were the bones of the primordial fetus that lives in every creature and thing In the closets we put the phalanges of the hands that have worked so hard In the drawers the tarsals the metatarsals of the feet that have walked so far and the tibias and the fibulas of the legs that have traveled so long down the endless and mysterious roads of the earth And in every cavern of dust and on every cushion we stowed the bones of our aching souls that now flooded the surrounding world with the smiles of a mother and a daughter joined in commonality and peace I didn't think of the gun Then I gave her a recipe and together we went to make brioche just like my mother did with her ancient culinary wisdom You mix flour eggs sugar milk



butter and yeast You work the batter in a big bowl and smack it
raising your arm high over the golden wheat The dough leavens
and swells like an erupting volcano With the vehemence and
violence released you leave it to rest for an hour Then bake the
product of this joyous battle in a hot oven for half an hour and
you have a little mound of gold and stardust and golden wheat
like a plow-furrowed field

We ate it together with the neighbor My daughter didn't
disdain the ancient art of cooking She talked some more about
France and I showed her my plan for the future restaurant In
the sitting room with the four big windows overlooking the
garden I would put six round tables I would leave the book-
shelves and the desk where I sat to read and write in my journal
where that day I wrote "My daughter gave me a heavenly smile
full of sky" This sentence contained the sense of an entire life
and of two lives spent in the fray of the radiant and tenebrous
love that binds a mother and a daughter In my journal I kept
this poem

*woman, don't worry
don't think of the shape
things take
take your child
your day with your work
for them
your child will have children
and their children's children
and their children
so what if the neighbor broke
your glass
today it's you too and you and you
and you and you and you*