



Maria DeSantis

Sunday Serenade

Every Sunday morning my nose was taken hostage by the smell of Noni's delicious fried meatballs. She would let the sticky, moist round balls, made from blended ground meats, roll off her palm one by one into a giant cast-iron pan. There they sizzled in olive oil to a crispy brown. The grassy scent of chopped parsley, sweet onions, and garlic forced my stomach to rumble and my mouth to water, waking my senses from a dream state.

My mother stirred an enormous pot of tomato sauce filled with meatballs and sausages. She used an oversized wooden spoon that looked like an oar from my father's rowboat. Papa sat at the head of the long kitchen table, grating a chunk of Parmesan cheese, releasing a deep nutty aroma onto a sheet of wax paper. I sat beside him, hoping to catch a crumble or two while I studied the morning sun light that forced its way through the lace curtains, their patterns splayed across the kitchen floor. They looked like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. Later, my father would sit in

the living room, read the newspaper, and listen to an Italian opera. A woman sang like an angel, her voice so heavenly it made the hair on the back of my neck stand up straight.

Mid-afternoon a caravan of cars pulled up in front of the house, unloading hungry relatives one by one, and looking like an endless line of circus clowns exiting a toy automobile. My grandmother always baked at least four loaves of bread; slices would be used to dunk into the pot of pasta sauce. The day before the feast, every table in the house was draped in an ironed white sheet with rows of drying homemade pasta.

The pot of tomato sauce would cook for hours on the stovetop, slowly releasing the blended aroma of fresh-cut oregano and basil. A crisp romaine lettuce and tomato salad made with ingredients from our own garden was served after the main course. Papa insisted it would aid digestion. He would toss the salad with a dressing that included a smelly blue cheese. I liked how creamy and tangy it tasted.

The best part of dinner began when my mother presented a silver tray loaded with all kinds of homemade Italian cookies and candies. Cousin Lucia brought a platter of her famous eclairs and cannoli filled with luscious vanilla custard so thick it stuck to the roof of your mouth. The scent of rich, dark coffee hung heavily in the air while the adults sat around discussing world events, until Papa stood up and retrieved a bag of change to begin hours of poker. Even with everyone talking all at once, I could hear the clink of coins that were tossed into the middle of the table and the shuffling of the cards that snapped loudly.

I would sit out on the porch swing, swaying to the rhythm of muffled laughter that escaping from a window. The soft, pink glow from living room lamps made the night appear less frightening than it otherwise would have been. I didn't want to be anywhere else in the world, especially with stars in the night sky. My eyes closed and my ears welcomed the sound of crickets that carried me into a deep sleep.

Maria DeSantis lives and writes in Wilmington, Massachusetts in Middlesex County. She has fond memories of her family and the foods they have long enjoyed.