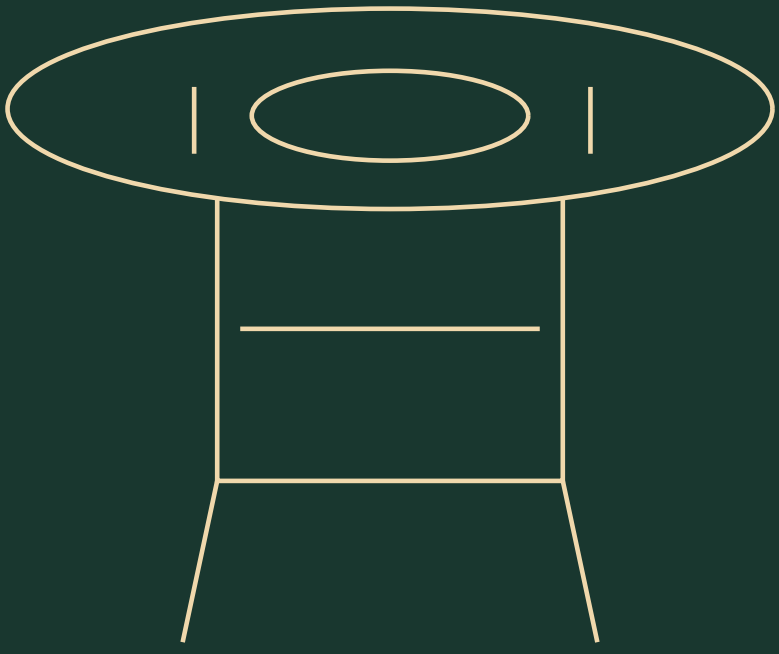
LOVE, MOM, PIZZA, SPAGHETTI



FERDINANDO FREGA

THEME I

(MOM- LOVE) Mother is not just a person. She is a place. A scent that lingers on your hands, a voice that can console even when it is silent. She is the first home we lived in, and the last we carry within us.

She is not always perfect. Sometimes she makes mistakes, sometimes she gets angry, sometimes she withdraws. But even in her silences, there is a kind of love that does not ask for confirmation.

Mom is the one who cooks without asking if we are hungry. Who looks at us without judging, even when she does not understand? Who holds us together with an invisible thread, made of gestures, memories, dishes that remind us of childhood.

This section is for her. For all the mothers who loved unconditionally, who resisted without a sound, who taught without speaking.

It is for the mom who made us laugh when we wanted to cry. For the one who said "don't worry" even when she was the one worrying. For the one who made the perfect sauce even on bad days.

Because behind every story, every dish, every caress, there is always a mother who chose love.

The Invisible Fortress

I do not remember the exact day I realized my mother was a fortress. There was not one event, one sentence, one heroic gesture. It was a silent accumulation of trivial things. The kind you do not notice until they are gone.

Like when I had come home from school and found the table set, without having told anyone I felt empty that day. Or when I wake up at night and she, without making a sound, already knew I needed a glass of water and a caress.

My mother never raised her voice to be heard. She spoke with gestures. With the way she folded the sheets, with the way she looked at me when

I could not explain myself.

It was there. Always. Like the foundations of a house: invisible, yet essential. And precisely for this reason, I often did not see it. I took it for granted. Like you take your breath for granted, until it is gone.

One day, during an ordinary dinner, I asked her, “Mom, don't you ever get tired?” She smiled, still stirring the sauce. “I get tired, yes. But then it passes.”

That sentence stuck with me. Because it was true. Because it was simple. Because it was her.

Now that I am an adult, when I feel lost, I do not think about grand speeches or brilliant solutions. I think about my mother stirring the sauce, getting tired but then getting over it, keeping the house afloat with silence.

She is my invisible fortress. And every time I cook, every time I comfort someone without knowing how, every time I resist without making a sound, I know I am continuing her story.

As a Foundation

You do not need photographs to remember her. You do not need videos, quotes, or hanging portraits. The Italian mother is not a figure. She is an internal landscape. A silent plot that intertwines with the days without demanding attention. She does not appear—she works beneath the surface.

It is in the pot you keep using even if its half chipped. In the drawer where you fold towels "like we do." In the way you set the table when you have guests, leaving out that thin-rimmed glass because "it was Mom's."

She never said, "I am your foundation." But she became one. With every hand that wiped away tears without question, with every door closed slowly so as not to wake the sleeping ones, with every "eat something" said without knowing what you were missing—but wanting to be part of

the solution.

The mother does not appear in the credits. She does not sing anything. But she is the set designer of all your emotions. She is the one who decides, without realizing it, the emotional tone of Sundays, the temperature of hugs, the geography of memories.

She is not a modern woman. She does not need it. She is an eternal woman. Who knows how to adapt without shouting. Who changes roles every day: cook, nurse, judge, lawyer, seamstress, psychologist, coach. But she never presents herself as a professional. She presents herself as a mother. With the same humility as freshly baked bread.

When we got angry with her, she did not argue back. She just said, "You'll understand." That verb, in the future tense, was the most powerful prophecy ever uttered. And one day, yes, we understood. When we found ourselves doing for our children what she had done for us. Without asking for anything in return. Without knowing where that strength came from. Only knowing it was there.

An Italian mother supports entire families even when they falter. She does it not with shouting, but with order. Not with scolding, but with perseverance. When the father withdraws into silence and the children escape into their own worlds, she stays. She adjusts the pillows, puts them on the water, checks the bills. She does not do it out of duty: she does it because she knows that love lives in maintenance.

She is the only one who knows every birthday, every favorite dish, every unspoken dream. She is the one who recognizes fevers from a distance. Who senses seizures from the wrinkles on your face. Who protects without invading, loving without suffocating.

And then comes the day he leaves. Too soon, always too soon. You do not feel that day in your heart. You feel it in the house. In the different sound of the dishes. In the coffee that, even if it is the same, does not taste like home. In the silences that make more noise.

The mother was the foundation. That unseen beam that holds everything together. And when she is missing, everything creaks a little.

Not because we do not know how to live, but because we no longer know how to live "properly."

She is ingrained in everything we do without realizing it. In the way we ask our children, "Have you eaten?" In the way we slowly stir the sauce. In the way we check the weather forecast to know whether to bring a jacket, even if it is not raining.

A mother is not inherited. She has guarded. Like a silent knowledge. Like a scent that returns only at certain sunsets. Like a caress you did not ask for, but that changed you.

And while the world changes, rushes, and gets angry, she, even though she is gone, is still there. In the basil that continues to grow. In the homemade bread, even if it does not turn out well. In the way, when we are tired, we return to that thought: "If she were here, she'd know what to do."

Childhood Sewn

The house smelled of soap and broth. Every room had its own sound: the washing machine singing in the kitchen, the pots and pans quietly bubbling, the wooden spoon turning like an ancestral clock. And she was there. Between a dishcloth and a chipped chair, between a flowered apron and a gaze that followed you even when you thought you were alone.

As a child, I did not realize how everywhere she was. She would appear when I fell, as if she were already there. She would arrive with bandages and measured words. She did not make a fuss; she did not raise her voice. But the way she held my chin, while she looked at the scratch, had all the healing power in the world.

The apron was her cloak. She used it to prepare our lunch, hug us, scold us. She fixed our hair after running and took us away from the stove. It was like a second skin; it smelled of soap, onions, and the fullness of the day.

When I came home from school, she already knew if things had gone well. A glance, a way of putting down my backpack, a moment's silence was enough. She read it, like one reads the mood in the sky before a rainstorm. She did not ask if she acted. Make lasagna instead of minestrone. She knew that that dish, more than any word, would get me back on my feet.

He followed me without chasing me. He was that presence that lets you run but already puts aside the ice for when you return with grazed knees. He did not invade the playground; he did not interfere with my homework. But he kept the blanket, the tea, the tender reprimand ready.

His sentences were customs conventions. "You don't leave the house without saying goodbye." "When you eat, thank the person who cooked." "You don't refuse caress." Those sentences were not impositions. They were teachings sewn into my skin, becoming part of me without me even realizing it.

Every morning, before leaving, he would ask me a question unique to him: "Have you got your head together?" He did not mean your backpack. He meant your clarity, patience, respect. It was his way of telling me: "Pay attention to the world, not just to yourself."

When I argued with my brother, she did not immediately intervene. She let us slam doors and exchange words. Then, silently, she had set two plates of pasta beside us. With the same sauce. It was her way of saying: "Blood doesn't break. It nourishes."

His love had no captions. He did not say "I love you" at every turn. But the way he caressed the bread before cutting it, the way he checked to make sure his shoes were not untied, the way he sat down for a second after we had all eaten—that was a language that spoke clearly.

Some children grew up surrounded by toys and televisions. I grew up surrounded by aprons and eyes. Eyes that knew everything, even when they were not looking directly.

She was childhood. Not as a memory, but as a system. As an active principle.

And now that I am a father, I try to do the same. To read the silences, to cook up solutions, to use the right tone.

But every time I succeed, I know it is not just my merit. It is her, who from that apron sowed the seeds of a generation.

No One Would Ever Say That

The Italian mother's phrases are not just sounds. They are daily incantations, behavior manuals, emotional diagnoses, protection rituals, reprimands disguised as caresses. They are uttered while stirring the sauce, while cleaning a window, while folding the apron. And yet, they remain. More than any lesson, more than any written advice.

“Have you eaten?” is not a question. It is an emotional X-ray. It means: are you okay? Are you sad? Has someone hurt you? Are you taking care of yourself? And when she says that—even if you are forty and live alone—you feel like you are home again.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full.” It is not just politeness. It is a lesson in respect: for the listener, for the person who cooked, for the word itself. It means when you speak, do so with awareness.

“I’ll leave you alone... but you know I see you.” The phrase that taught us to think before acting, that gave us freedom, but under surveillance. We knew nothing went unnoticed. There were no cameras. There was her. Silent eyes, invisible antennas.

“Come here and I’ll fix you up.” That phrase meant everything. It could have meant I will tie your tie, I will fix your heart, I will straighten your posture, I will cut your nails, I will prepare your future. It cared without words, a gesture without fuss.

“You’ll understand when you have children.” That phrase was an oracle. It seemed annoying. Then the day came. And you understood it. But not in the way you thought. You understood it by feeling fragile, by

redrawing the tone with which you say "no," by discovering that love is not a certainty, but tenacity.

“I make you feel worse if you spoil yourself.” A paradoxical phrase, a piece of interlocking parenting. It was his emotional pedagogy: I do not take you away because I do not love you. I will take you away because I am preparing you.

“I’ll save you something.” Said as you said, “I’m going out.” You were already outside, but she was thinking about when you would return. Whether you were tired, sad, angry, she was not caught off guard.

“Be careful of friends who are too hasty.” It was not paranoia. It was popular wisdom, based on observation. He could immediately tell who entered the house with the wrong look in their eyes, who smiled too much, who spoke little but ate too much.

“Things are said to one's face, but not all at once.” That was maternal diplomacy. The mother was an ambassador of balance. She knew how to wait. She knew how to strike gently. She knew how to postpone the truth so as not to hurt.

“You are not better than others, but not worse either.” It was his moral pedagogy. No idealism, no delusions. Only fairness. Only reality.

wordless sentences, the ones said in tone, the ones uttered while folding the napkin, the ones thrown with a look while you talked too much, the ones whispered softly while he knew you were deluding yourself.

The Italian mother's phrases are unrepeatable. They do not work in anyone else's mouth. If the father says them, they sound like orders. If a brother says them, they sound like jokes. If a friend says them, they sound like advice.

But when she speaks to them, she embroiders them. She folds them among the fabrics of everyday life. She leaves them in your pockets throughout the day. And you find them when you need them.

Some people remember the song that raised them. I remember the intonation of the phrase "cover yourself, it's windy," spoken in August.

Only she knew how bad the wind hurt.

There are those who author books full of aphorisms. The Italian mother already has them all, under her apron. She pulls them out without knowing it. She says them while chopping onions, while shelling peas. And each sentence is a line of emotional code.

One day I stopped. I wrote down all the sentences I could remember. There were twenty-three. All different. All necessary. I tried using them with my son. Some worked. Some did not. Because sentences are not just words. They are tenses. They are hands. I am living. I am tone.

In the digital world, everything is written. But nothing is as engraved as a mother's words. And when she is gone, the phrases remain. You find them in your mind, like invisible posts. " Don't forget those who loved you without telling you. " " You understand people by the way they cut bread. " " Better to be alone than to live badly. " " Water boils even when no one is looking. "

These are nuggets of home-made philosophy, truer than a thousand courses. More powerful than a thousand famous quotes.

I am Italy. I am your mother. I am the voice that raises you as the world races by.

The Gestures

There was a time when I thought feelings could be explained. That affection could be expressed, love could be declared, anger could be shouted. Then I looked at my mother. And I understood that certain truths have no voice. They have gestures.

She never told me, “You’re special." She never gave motivational speeches. But when she made me a salami sandwich and placed it in foil, folded neatly at the corners, I felt like a king. There was no need to say anything: that sandwich was a silent proclamation.

Her every gesture was a line from the novel of my childhood. The canvas bag was packed for the market. The way she selected peaches with her

thumb—neither too soft nor too unripe. The gesture with which she checked my temperature, placing her hand on my forehead: no thermometer needed, she was enough.

When I was little, I sometimes pretended to be sick. I wanted to skip school, I wanted attention. She understood immediately. She did not scold me. She tucked me into bed, brought me tea, then left the door ajar. It was her way of saying: "I see you. I know you are lying. But this, too, is needed."

He had a gesture I have never forgotten: the way he folded the blankets. He would pick them up by the edges, spread them firmly across the bed, then smooth them out with his open palm. As if he were preparing shelter. That way of doing things taught me that caring for space is caring for people.

And then there was the gesture of the spoon. That slow stirring of the sauce, with the left hand resting on the waistband of the apron. A precise, deliberate, almost meditative rotation. Stirring the sauce was a sacred act, and each ladle stroke was a prayer for those about to eat.

When someone was sick, she did not make a fuss. She cooked. She brought broth, an extra blanket, and a glass of water placed on the bedside table with a napkin underneath. They were gestures. But inside was the universe. The day my grandfather died, she did not cry in front of us. She cooked dinner. Few ingredients, no words. But the way she arranged the slices of bread in the basket— straight, alternating, neat—was the clearest demonstration of composed grief I have ever seen.

There are gestures you do not see right away. They are understood later. The way he set the table even when we were eating alone. The way he checked to see if our teeth were clean without asking—just by looking at the light reflected on our mouths.

One evening, while I was distracted, he fixed my scruff. With two fingers, he straightened my collar. He did not say anything. But that gesture, that delicate, precise touch, made me feel seen.

A mother does not need to declare herself. She has gestures. She slips them into everyday life. She hides them among the clothespins, among the sugar packets, among the blankets folded into triangles.

And when she is gone, those gestures remain like silent legacies. You find yourself stirring the sauce the same way. Arranging the sheets with that precision. Placing the glass of water next to your son's bed, without knowing why, just because that is how it is done.

One day, my daughter said to me, “Dad, why do you caress my hair while I sleep?” I smiled. I do not know. I just know my mother did it.

The Days

Families do not fall apart on holidays. They crack in silence, on rainy Tuesdays, on Thursdays without answers, on Saturdays when no one wants to talk. And yet, on those days, she remained.

When my father lost his job, the house became heavy. Not because of the money—that can be fixed, you tighten your belt—but because of the silence. He spoke less, ate quickly, and stopped watching television. My mother said nothing. She did not ask. But every evening she put a little surprise on the table: a different omelet, an improvised tart, a bottle of "good" wine. It was her way of saying: "If you can't talk, at least eat something that makes you feel alive."

When I got sick—truly, not the usual cold—she made no fuss. She took notes in front of the doctors, wrote down the medication schedules, and put on water to boil for the warm washcloths. She slept little, ate less. But she did not falter. Not once. She massaged my shoulders, adjusted my pillows, asked, "Do you want me to hold your hand for a while?" And when she did, the fever was already going down.

Even when there were tensions between us—the real ones, generations of misunderstanding—she did not raise her voice. She waited for the right moment. She baked a cake, opened the windows, and turned on the radio. And then she spoke. Few words, but full of meaning. Phrases that were profound. "You think I don't understand... but I know how

painful it is to feel alone among those who love you."

Once, during a sibling fight, we ignored each other for weeks. She did not intervene. But one day she prepared dinner with our childhood dish. And she put it on the table. For everyone. It was a truce. She did not talk about peace. She served it.

When her sister died, the woman she had grown up with and loved more than anyone else, she did not cry in front of us. She lit candles, arranged photographs, and cooked for thirty people. Only that evening, in the dim light of the kitchen, did she put her head on the table. And said, "Today I let go of a piece of me." Then she got up. And tomorrow she had come back for breakfast.

The strength of the Italian mother is not what pushes. It is what holds. It is what says "I'll take care of it" even when no one knows where to start. It is what puts the laundry away while her soul shatters inside.

When my grandmother fell ill, my mother became a daughter again. And there I saw the woman, frail, tired, trembling. But even there, she remained. She never missed a visit. She never forgot the medicine. She brought her folded clothes, caressed her hands, spoke to her as if one spoke to someone who had already passed through time. I have seen storms: financial, family, emotional. And among all of them, she was there. Not as captain. But as anchor.

The Time

First, do not notice. The mother continues to do the same things. She arranges the sheets firmly, cooks without notes, tells you to "put on your scarf" even though it is seventy-two degrees outside. It always seems the same. But then one day, quietly, you notice that she needs to lean on the table to get up. That she turns the ladle more slowly. That she repeats things twice. And you realize something has changed.

Time has not taken away her dignity, but it has softened her movements. Her gestures have lost their haste, gained sweetness. Her voice is weaker, but it remains authoritative. She says "I'm coming too"

more softly, but she still says it.

The first clue is in the refrigerator. Once upon a time, everything was there. Now, the things "you buy tomorrow" are missing. Then you see it in the unopened mail. In the books left on the nightstand. In the half-drunk glass of water.

We begin to understand when he stops remembering his medicine time. When he called to ask, "Where were you?", but it was your missed call. When he says "I'll take care of it" but cannot make it. Then the gesture is reversed. You are the one folding her sweater. You are the one explaining the bill to her. You are the one arranging her flowers.

And then, something happens. It is not sadness. It is mature tenderness. It is knowing that the woman who taught you everything is now teaching you detachment. The care that goes in reverse. The patience that spreads.

She does not complain. She does not ask. She just says, "I'll take it easy." Then she smiles, as if to make nothing of the matter.

When you talk, it is mostly about the past. She tells you things she has never said before. She tells you that her first love left her without explanation. That she wanted to be a teacher but could not. That day you were born; her hands were shaking.

And you, who have always seen her as strong, now see her as human. I am a little tired, a little forgetful. But still her. With the same look. With the same worries.

You notice she is afraid. Not of the pain. But of becoming useless. She asks you, "Do you still need me?" You say yes. She nods. But she does not know whether to really believe you.

So, you give her homework. You ask her for the recipe. You involve her in lunch. You ask her for advice. Not because you need it. But because you know that feeling needed is her secret medicine.

One day, as you are adjusting her blanket, she looks at you. She does not say anything. But that silence holds a thousand "thank you."

You begin to understand what his love truly was. Dedication is not just sacrifice. It is the ability to stay even when your body wants to sit down.

You see her walking slowly and you want to slow down too. To keep up with her. Not out of pity. But out of respect.

Then comes the day when she does not cook anymore. She asks you to do it. She leaves you the pan. The apron. And when you bring her the plate, she says, "It's better than mine." It is not true. But you accept it like it is a degree.

Here, these are the changing times. It is not a loss. It is a transition.

The aging mother does not disappear. She transforms. She becomes a mirror. She becomes a tranquil source. She comes home even if she does not remember all the details.

And you, finally, understand. You understand what that gesture on the collar meant. That slowly stirred spoon. That "don't worry, I'll take care of it." And as you protect her, you discover that you are still growing. That you are becoming her son for the second time. The one who understands. The one who stays. The one who speaks little, but with the voice she taught you.

The Full Void

It is not silence that strikes. It is the noise that is missing. The mother who is no longer there does not just leave behind absence. She leaves behind presence everywhere: everywhere to be called absent.

The house is full of hers. In the way the light streams in from the balcony. In her favorite spoon, which no one dares use. In the sound of the refrigerator opening memories. In the apron hanging behind the door—still there, still ready.

When he is gone, you realize things you had not thought about. That he knew your way of keeping quiet. That he could tell by your breathing if you were in crisis. That his rebukes held a hidden sweetness.

You find yourself cooking like she did, but it does not turn out the same. You miss that extra touch, that precise timing, that way she tasted with the tip of her tongue and said, "Just two more minutes."

Every room remembers her. Not for what she left behind, but for what she taught. The bed is made "properly." The way a towel is folded. The gesture of checking that there is always fresh water.

And then there are the words that come back. “Don't trust coarse salt.” “You'll hurt yourself if you don't sleep.” “You can tell people apart by the way they caress their bread.”

Those sentences, which then seemed simple, are now a poetic testament.

The funeral day is the shortest and longest. Everyone talks about her, but no one can truly express her. Because a mother is not talked about, she is carried.

And you find yourself cold. Not because the heat is missing, but because the source is missing.

You see yourself as a child again. Her stroking your head. Adjusting your collar. Looking at you and understanding.

And now you try to do the same for your children, for your siblings, for those left behind. You try to be her. But you cannot. You can only imitate. You can only honor.

Every year, her birthday is a hidden occasion. We do not celebrate. We cook something. We light a candle. We say, "She would have smiled today." And the aroma wafting from the kitchen is the only gift we can give her. Her things become sacred. That little ring. That handwritten recipe book. That note found in a pocket, with a shopping list and a strange phrase: "Don't forget that I love you even if I don't say it."

That sentence is an earthquake.

Then there is the first time you cook his favorite dish. You do it for yourself. To feel close to him. To ask for forgiveness. To say, "Look what

I've learned."

It does not come out perfectly. But when you eat it, you cry.

Not for the taste. For the memory.

Every mother who passes away leaves behind a gesture of grammar. A hidden dictionary in her hands. A way of acting, of smiling, of sorting things out.

Mourning is not crying. It is active memory.

It is keeping the rituals alive: the sauce on Sundays, the nice tablecloth when needed, the right phrase at the right time. It is telling your children, "Your grandmother used to make this." And then letting them feel the warmth.

Emptiness is never complete. Because, deep down, it is everywhere. In the way you want to clean the kitchen. In the way you hug someone who is tired. In the tone you choose when you say, "I'm here." She is in the slowness with which you wake up. In the smile you give without knowing. In the bread you cut with precision.

And one day, in the middle of summer, you smell the basil. You stop. And you understand. It is her.

Social Conscience

The mother never spoke about politics, but she was politics. She never held rallies, but her every gesture was a statement. The Italian mother, in the silence of the kitchen, taught generations to respect, not to trample, to think before acting.

He never read Kant, but he knew what ethics was. He said: "If something benefits you but hurts someone else, don't do it." It was cheap philosophy, but it was justice. It was the basis of all coexistence.

When we took something that was not ours as children, he did not yell. He looked at us. And he said, "If they didn't give it to you, it's because you shouldn't have taken it." There was no need for sermons. Just that

phrase. It kept coming back to you even at forty, when faced with certain things.

He taught us with a small wallet and a big heart. He taught us not to boast, to "stay in the middle, not on top." To say "thank you" even when we had not asked for anything. To understand that those who give have made a choice.

The Italian mother turned humility into a form of power. She used to say: "Don't be a bully. You can tell who's truly worthy when they don't speak." And so, she kept us away from arrogance. Even when we felt invincible.

Respect was his commandment. Respect for the elderly, for neighbors, for those who work. Respect for those who are different, for those who have nothing, for those who are tired. He taught us not to judge by clothing, but by the way we eat. He said, "Polite people fold their napkins."

When we argued, she would not take sides. She would look for the point no one else could see. "You're right, but you didn't listen." "He was wrong, but he did it because he's tired." She was the invisible mediator of the family.

He taught without a blackboard. With his eyes. With his tone. With the right pauses.

He taught us not to waste. Bread runs out. Water runs out. Words are weighed.

He taught us that cleanliness is a form of respect for others: we do not go out with dirty shirts because those who look at us deserve to find us tidy. She was a sociologist without a degree. She could tell who was lying. She could tell when someone lied out of fear. And she explained to us that evil does not stem from character, but from a fragility that no one can help.

She welcomed friends of all kinds. She fed the neighbor's son, sewed for those who did not have time, and listened to stories no one wanted to

hear.

He used to say: “If someone confides in you, it is because they trust you. Do not betray them, not even with your thoughts.”

He taught us discretion, the kind that has been lost today. The kind of thing that says: "If you've done something good, there's no need to post it. Whoever needs to know will hear about it."

When someone came to the house, she settled in, put on the coffee, and got them talking. And when they left, she would tell us: "The world changes one at a time. Make them feel better than when they arrived."

She was the master of invisible civics.

And today, when we go our separate ways, when we talk to someone, when we decide whether to be arrogant or kind, she is there. With that recurring phrase: "Words have weight. Use them like cutlery: with grace." He never got votes. But he taught us to vote with our behavior. To make the right choices even when no one is looking. To not trample on the most vulnerable. To leave things better than we found them.

Home Is

The house was not made of walls. It was made of smells.

Every time I returned, I knew if she 'd stopped by the kitchen. The basil. That unforgettable scent. It could be fresh if she had just picked it from the plant. It could be mixed with the sauce if she had been cooking. It could still be there, in a dish already eaten, but its scent lingered—like an invisible signature.

That basil was home. More than the bed, more than the photographs, more than the blankets. It was concrete proof that she had been there.

He did not put it everywhere. He had his own ritual. Never too early, never too late. He broke it with his fingers, never with a knife. He said that this way "you don't break the soul of the leaf." I laughed. Today I did it too.

When I moved, he gave me a little plant. Small, light, fragrant. “It follows you,” he said. “So, when you're sad, you remember you're not alone.” In my first apartment, I did not miss her—I missed the basil. The scent it gave off when she added it to the sauce. The sacred silence we all respected while she prepared it. Because when Mom made the sauce, it was as if time stood still.

Olfactory memory is the deepest. It creeps in, hides, and returns when you least expect it. Every time I smell basil—even in a restaurant, even on the street—I want to call out to it. Even though I cannot anymore.

I realized it late. She did not cook just to feed. She cooked to root feelings. To say: "You are loved here." "You are expected here." "Here we love you even if we don't say it."

I have smelled basil at various times: On happy days. On days when everything went wrong. On farewells. On homecomings.

Always him. Always strong. Always home.

And now that she is gone, the little plant grows on my balcony. I care for it as if it were sacred. I water it in the morning. I protect it when it is windy. And when I make sauce, I touch it gently. Because I know that is how she did it.

My son once asked me, “Why do you smell it before you put it on?” I said, “Because my mother did. And sometimes, people come back to perfume.”

His Hands

They were not fine hands. They were not manicured hands, like those of a beautician or a photo in a magazine. They were real hands. Full, square, marked by stitching, soap, flour. Hands that held boiling pots without gloves. Hands that knew how to caress without touching.

My mother's hands were not just tools. They were languages.

With them, she fixed the world: one spoon at a time, one broken zipper at a time, one dried tear at a time. With them, she stopped arguments, carried groceries, closed suitcases she did not want to see go. With them, she created dishes that will never be replicated, and hugs that no one else can give.

When she showered me as a child, my hands became my shield and my vessel. They washed me, protected me, and taught me to tolerate the cold. Each finger had a function. And even though she did it quickly, she was saying, "I love you."

Then you grow up. Hands no longer wash you. They do not dress you. They do not feed you. But they still touch you. They straighten your collar. They hand you your plate. They touch your back when you are tense.

When he got angry, he did not raise his voice. He raised his hands. Not to strike, but to stop time. It was the signal: enough. It was dignity, it was boundaries, it was respect.

I watched them for years, without understanding them. Then, one day, I saw that they moved slower. That their nails were breaking. That they trembled as the sauce stirred. And then I understood: those hands were the book of my childhood.

With those, she got married around my fears. She sewed my school apron. She counted the coins to pay the bills. She cut the meat "into small pieces" because "that way it's sweeter to chew." She collected the crumbs as if they were gold.

When she got sick, her hands were the first to give out. She could not hold a fork. She could not fold sheets. But she still caressed me.

With a finger. Slowly. As you do with those who should not be woken up.

And now that she is gone, her hands are everywhere. In the way I spend time together the laundry. In the way I knead the dough. In the way I hold my son's hand when he is scared.

One evening, I found her hand cream. The one she used every night, "not for beauty, but because they burn." I smelled it. I cried. Her hands are gone. But everything I touch, everything I brush against, everything I hold—it carries a bit of her.

Because his hands are our story. Written without a pen. Etched into the skin. Tattooed in gestures.

And when I talk about her, I do not use words. I use my hands. Like she did. Always. With grace. With strength. With love.

THEME II

(Pizza and Spaghetti)

Pizza and spaghetti are not just food. They are collective memory, emotional language, shared identity. They are the way Italy tells its story without speaking, the way we console ourselves without explaining, the way we love each other without asking for anything in return.

Pizza is the gesture that unites. It is the round table where everyone has a place, where differences melt in the heat of the oven, where even a dreadful day can end with a mushy smile.

Spaghetti, on the other hand, is the perfect metaphor for life: it intertwines, breaks, tangles, but in the end, if cooked well, it holds everything together. It is the thread that binds us to home, to our mother, to Sunday lunches, to the simplicity that endures even when everything seems complicated.

This section is dedicated to them. To the dishes that need no introduction but deserve to be shared. Because in every bite there is a story, and in every forkful, a memory.

Pizza and spaghetti are the poetry of everyday life. And in these pages, they become the protagonists of gestures, emotions, and truths that are part of us. Even if we have never spoken to them.

Italy in Small Gestures

In Italy, pizza is not cooked: it is prepared as a ritual. It is more than just flour and oven. It is the caress of tradition, it is the language of families, it is an invitation that does not ask for permission. Pizza is edible democracy: everyone likes it, it embraces everything, it judges nothing. It can be simple or rich, thin, or thick, solitary, or shared.

Every family has its own: – the Saturday night one – the “homemade one, even if it's not perfect” – the grandmother's one, with the high edge and too much oil – the one you order when you're tired, but you want to be together.

Pizza is rising. It is anticipation. It is the scent of announcing a truce. In the neighborhood, the pizza chef is the psychologist. He knows about marriages, betrayals, and melancholy. "What do you want tonight?" Anyone who answers "Four cheeses" is fragile. Anyone who says "diavola" needs to vent. The Margherita is for those seeking simplicity—or for those who are just starting out.

Pizza makes us laugh, we keep quiet, we postpone goodbyes. It is the dish that saves conversations, heals arguments, accompany movies, quenches hunger, and sparks memories.

And if you wonder what Italy is, sometimes all it takes is looking at a badly cut pizza. Those who take the smaller slice do so out of kindness. Those who wait for the last bite do so out of respect. Those who suggest sharing it do so out of love.

Saturday It Was

Every Saturday night, my father makes pizza. It was his only concession to cooking. Big hands, awkward movements, but the dough always came out well. He rolled it out without saying much, letting us choose the ingredients, then adding oregano "because it's a celebration." That pizza was not good, it was right. It was home. It was a way of saying, "I've been thinking about you all week." And we, sitting there, knew it.

He needed to forget

When things went wrong, she did not yell. She went into the kitchen and started kneading. "Patience also grows," she said. Watching her was therapeutic. Flour on her hands, silences that told everything. That evening the pizza came out thick, perfect. While eating it, no one spoke. But everyone smiled.

I Cooked Myself

I was seventeen. I had to be impressed. I used too much sauce, burned the edges, forgot to add salt. But the girl said, "It tastes like you." Since then, every time I cook, I make a deliberate mistake. To remind myself that cooking is also about showing off imperfections. Just like love.

Who Saved

We had been arguing for days. Harsh words, swollen silences. The house was a cold war. Then she came back with a takeout pizza. Yes, she cut it calmly, and said, "Eat first, then we'll decide whether to break up." We ate. And we never broke up again.

What He Knew

It was a small pizzeria, with yellow photos and paper napkins. He knew everything. The divorces, the secret loves, the children who returned. "Four cheeses?" "Tonight we need something sweet." Every pizza was a diagnosis. And every customer, a story to be slowly cooked.

Who Cooked

Suitcase full, eyes shining. She said nothing. She put a pizza in the oven with fresh tomatoes and the basil she had grown. She cut it into squares and said, "Eat it, so you remember who you are." That flavor stayed with me even though it was far away. Even when it was no longer there.

On the Balcony, Italian Summer

It was August. Heat everywhere. My brother brought two cold pizzas, beer in a bag, and a red tablecloth. We ate on the balcony, barefoot. We laughed about nothing. Every bite was time. Every slice, a vacation without travel. From that day on, the balcony has been my seat.

For Two

Every time we ate pizza, my mother would cut an extra slice. Even if there were only two of us. She would say, "You never know who's coming." No one ever showed up. But that excess was openness. It was her way of saying: there's room here. Always.

To meet again

We had not spoken for months. Pride, misunderstandings, silences. Then he texted me: "I'm making pizza. If you want." I went. We did not talk about the argument. Only about the crust, the tomato, the mozzarella. That evening, everything was not mended. But the first stitch was.

On the Roof

We were kids. Little money, huge dreams. We went up to the rooftop of our apartment building with two cold pizzas and a radio. We looked at the stars, ate in silence. One of us said, "We won't get rich, but this is wealth." Since then, every time I see a pizza, I hear that roof.

CHAPTER I

The stories that follow are not made up. They are collected. Breathed. Lived. Some are mine, others I listened to in silence, between coffee and a caress, between an interrupted phone call and a shared plate of pasta.

You will not find heroes. You will find people. With flour-stained hands, hearts full of questions, voices that tremble when they speak of love.

Every story is a fragment. A gesture that seemed small but left its mark. A sentence spoken without thinking, that changed everything. A silence that spoke more than a thousand words.

I have chosen to portray the Italy that does not show itself. The one that lives in the hallways of homes, in Sunday lunches, in the tears held back in the kitchen, in the smiles that taste good sauce.

These stories do not ask to be understood. They just ask to be felt. Because deep down, we are all made of love, mom, pizza, and spaghetti. And each of us has at least one story that begins like this.

Mother's Caress

I never heard my mother say, "I love you." Not even once. Yet, no one loved me like that. As a child, when I pretended to sleep on the couch, she would come over slowly, quietly, and tuck my neck, as if that pillow were too cruel for my six-year-old neck. She did not say anything. But the gesture was precise, repetitive, always the same. That caress on the back of my neck—quick, silent, warm—was her way of saying: "I'm here, don't worry."

As a boy, when I had come home late and did not want to tell her where I had been, I would find the kitchen tidy. There were no dirty dishes or cups lying around. Just a slice of warm bread on a white plate, with a note on it: "If you're hungry." That "if" was everything. It was her request for permission. As if to say: "I respect you, but if you want, I'll take care of you."

Even during arguments—because there were some— she never raised her voice. But she would start dusting. The dust was no longer on the shelves, it was between us, and she wiped it away like that. An Italian mother never gives up, but she does not fight bare-handed either. She fights with good sauce, with fresh bread, with the silence that educates, without hurting.

When I first got sick as an adult, I did not call anyone. I was twenty-nine, had a high fever, and was coughing like a diesel engine. I

lived alone, her twenty kilometers away. At eleven o'clock at night, she rang the doorbell. She had not called me; she had not texted me. She simply understood. She came in with a bag full of medicine, hot tea, and minestrone soup. She put me to bed. She covered my shoulders. Then, as I slept, she touched my forehead and whispered, "Don't be so strong. You're my son."

That night I cried like a baby. Not because of the fever, but because of the shame of not telling her I needed her.

And when she left—too soon, like all mothers, the only thing that truly remained was that way of doing things. I now put the pillow on the couch for my son. I leave him a note saying, "if you're hungry." I never say, "I love you." But every gesture is my way of telling him. This is the Italian mother. She does not need words. Words are for those who do not know where to put their hands. She always has them ready. To cook, clean, protect, caress. And even when she is gone, every gesture we make is her vocabulary of love.

That Table That Trembled

There were mismatched plates, chipped glasses, and the tablecloth had a wine stain no one could remove. And yet, that table saved us. Years of silence, badly spoken words, promises made and then forgotten. And that table continued to wait for us. Always set, always trusting. Even when we were not.

My mother always said the kitchen was the heart of the home. I did not believe her until I saw my father get up to leave, take a few steps toward the door, look at the floor, and then sit back down, silent. The smell of the sauce held him back more than any conversation. He had argued with my brother. They had not spoken in weeks. But that day, my mother made bread and cheese meatballs, both of their favorites. And so, tensions settled in beside us, like unwanted guests. They were not chased away but ignored. Because, when we eat, we are together. And those who stay together still have hope.

Sunday lunches are the last secular ritual of true Italy. A liturgy that endures the years, separations, moves, and ideologies. The table does not ask who you voted for, or who you slept with. It only asks if you want another ladle of sauce.

Even when my sister separated and came back to live with us, my mother did not ask questions. Her first act was to prepare her stuffed eggplant. It was her way of saying, "No one judges you here." She ate in silence, saying nothing. But that silent cry, as she took her first bite, was her way of saying thank you.

Then there were the empty Sundays. The ones no one could come. Too many commitments, too far away. My mother cooked anyway. She turned on the television, took out the good dishes. She put them away afterward, as if they had been used. And when I asked her why, she said: "Cooking must continue. If we stop, love will stop too."

The chairs, though empty, still retained the scent of those who had occupied them. And in the spoons, the faces we would have liked to see were reflected. I do not know if Italy will profoundly change. If we become less human, we will become less united. But if there is a mother who sets the table without guarantees, there will be hope.

That table was not made of wood. It was made of memories, of masked urges, of the desire to say "sorry" without saying the word. It was our place of respite. Of truth without judgment. “I love you" said with bread and oil. And when my mother is no longer here—because that day will come—the table will remain. Preserved. Intact. It will await a meal, even without a cook. And we will sit there, each with our own melancholy, to once again smell that scent that kept us standing.

Love That Is Not Said

He never said "I love you" to her. Not with those words. He said, "Did you put salt in the pasta?" He said, "Today's sauce tastes like grandma's." But between the lines, every word was a declaration. True love in Italy is like a slow sauce: it is unhurried, it has no special effects, but when you taste it... you recognize it.

She knows he does not like overcooked spaghetti. So, she tastes it, turns off the heat, and waits. She waits for the right time, not the clocks, but the one she has learned from watching him for years. When she serves them, he does not say anything. He eats them. Just a little nod with his eyes.

That nod is worth more than a thousand roses.

The two have lived together for twenty-seven years. The first dinners were fireworks. He brought flowers, she wore uncomfortable shoes. Then life began to quieten. The shoes became slippers. The flowers, succulents on the balcony. And yet, the feeling has not receded. It has just changed its costume. It is disguised as gestures. When he comes home from work, he does not say, "I miss you." But he peeks into the kitchen and asks, "What did you do today?" in that voice that hides anxiety. She replies, "Nothing special," but she knows he just wants to know she was there. That she did not run away.

One evening, during a wordless dinner, she broke the silence by saying, “You think I don’t notice, but every time you look at my phone, you’re trying to protect me.” He did not deny it. He simply said, “The sauce is different today.” And so, they changed the subject, but not the sentiment.

In movies, love is shouted, written, and sung. In Italian homes, love is cooked. It is measured in centimeters of tablecloth, in supplies of peeled tomatoes, in domestic rituals that seem banal but sustain the world.

One day, their daughter watches them from outside. She sees them eating in silence, with the TV on and simple dishes. She says, "Do you

still love each other?" She smiles: "Tell me another reason why I keep cooking without being asked."

Love that is unspoken, but prepared al dente, needs no confirmation. It just needs hot dishes. And eyes that know the exact time to serve.

A Routine That Becomes Poetry

Every morning, he got up fifteen minutes before her. Not because he had nothing to do but simply to watch the sun stream through the window and listen to the mocha whistle softly. Then he sat down in the armchair, the one that over time had taken the exact shape of his tired backs. She woke with a measured pace, searching for her slippers under the bed without bending too low. They did not say anything at first. The sound of the coffee, the sound of life, was enough.

There was a ritual: he opened the newspaper; she turned on the radio. Always the same station, the one that broadcasts traffic reports and unlikely recipes. Then, with gestures that seemed choreographed over years of living together, she would add sugar to his coffee—even though she had preferred it bitter. He poured it into a chipped cup that she had declared "my favorite." Small mistakes, repeated on purpose. To remind her they were still choosing each other.

The day continued with minimal gestures. The laundry at 10:30. The news at noon. Lunch that needed no compliments, simply good silence. She told him about her children, about things to do, about the plants on the balcony. Always the beautiful ones. He nodded, or said, "We'll see." But his listening was never distracted. He was present, clear, genuine. At 9:30 PM, as always, he closed the book he never managed to finish. She double folded her pajamas. Then, together, they turned off the lights, leaving only the hallway lamp on. They said "night" without hugging. But warmth lingered in the air that needed no confirmation.

There had been difficult moments. Harsh words, days filled with silence that made noise. And yet, no one had packed their bags. Not for lack of courage, but for love of the everyday. Because sometimes, love is not

about forgiving. It is about staying even when there is nothing to forgive.

One evening, she cooked the dish he had always hated. Not out of spite. But to see if he would eat it anyway. He ate it. Chew slowly. Then he said, "It's better than your mother's version." She laughed, as she had not done in a long time.

It was then that they realized: their life was not perfect. But their routine was.

Routine does not ask for applause. It has no titles. But it is the soil where authentic feeling grows. Every repeated gesture, every mistake left unsaid, every cherished habit is a poem that seeks no rhymes. Only attentive readers.

The Father Who Didn't Cry

He never said, "I'm proud of you." He never came to watch me play soccer, and when I graduated, he only said, "Have you eaten?" But every evening, I came home and found a dark chocolate bar on the table. Small, precise, always the same brand. It was his way of being there. It was his way of saying, "I was thinking of you."

My father worked with his body, not his emotions. Big hands, a lined face, few words, and a lot of habits. His voice only rose when there was correction to be made, never when there was praised to be given. He was the type who would hand you a wrench without looking but always remembered where you had left it.

Every morning, he took the time to clear the table before leaving. He did not do it out of order. He did it out of respect. To avoid burdening anyone with his presence.

One day, coming home from school, I told him I had gotten a bad grade. He did not say anything. He left. He returned half an hour later with a hot sandwich. He placed the bottle of water on the table, said "eat," then went to the bathroom. I understood that sandwich was a caress he could not pronounce.

Then came the hard years. The arguments, the emotional distance. I wanted a father who could talk, he wanted a son who could keep quiet. In between, there was silence. And the chocolate, always there. Even when we could not look each other in the eye.

One evening, my mother confessed to me: “Do you know why she leaves you chocolate? Because as a child, you once cried, saying that no one ever gave you anything good.” He had heard it. And from then on, without saying anything, he had started leaving it for you every day. He never asked if you wanted it. He gave you what he thought you needed.

Now that he is gone, every time I see a dark chocolate bar, my stomach tightens. I always have one in my drawer. I never eat it. It is his voice, his way of being there. His way of loving.

Italian fathers are not made of letters and songs. They are made of locks, hot sandwiches, repeated gestures. They are the ones who teach you the dignity of discretion. And when they leave, they leave you with a silent—but eternal—vocabulary.

A Lie Told to Protect

“Mom’s fine,” Dad said. I looked at him. She had been in bed for two days, her eyes dull, her coughing like a hole. But he said it softly, in the tone of someone who wishes it were true. It was a small, fragile lie, told more for himself than for me. A love lie.

There are things you do not say out of protection. Lies that come not from a desire to hide, but from the need to contain the pain. Dad never lied. He was a dry, practical, honest man. But when my mother was sick, he became poetic. He invented well-being where there was struggle. I did it later. As an adult. "Everything's fine," I would say. When there was no work, when the nights were sleepless, when other people's eyes sought reassurance. I lied like him. Not to deceive. To protect. To avoid breaking the branches we clung to.

One evening, my wife asked me, “You look strange. Are you scared?” I smiled. “I'm just thinking,” I said. But inside, I was shaking. I received

an uncertain diagnosis. I did not want to say it. Not yet. I loved her by choosing to let her sleep in peace.

In my family, we have all lied at least once for love. My grandmother, who knew my grandfather had cheated on her, continued to cook minestrone for him. My brother, who lost his job, claimed for months that he was training. And every lie was an unspoken embrace. An attempt to preserve the beauty of one more day.

But there is a price. The lies of love consume us. They force us to wear heavy masks. To smile while something inside spasms.

One day, my mother looked at me. She had not spoken for hours. In a faint voice, she said, "Don't say I'm fine. Say it hurts." She was tired. More than the illness, she was tired of having to be strong for others.

That night, I did not say anything else. I sat down next to her. I took her hand. And when she asked, "Did I do everything right?" I replied, "Yes, even when you lied. You did the right thing."

Lies told to protect should not be judged. They are the grammar of invisible love. The emotional code of those who, despite knowing the truth, choose gentleness. And in the end, this is precisely what love is: not just telling the truth. But protecting what is fragile.

The Silence of the Couple

They do not talk to each other like they used to. No "my love" on the phone, no heartfelt text messages. But every morning he picks up her pajamas from the radiator and finds them already folded, warm. She laid them out without telling him. It has been like this for twenty-two years. And he knows it.

She no longer asks if he slept well. But every night she turns off the light exactly when he closes the book. A small synchronicity that requires no coordination, just presence. A gesture that says, "I know you."

When they go to the supermarket, they walk apart. She leads with the cart; he follows with his hands in his pockets. But if she slows down near

the cookies she likes, he picks them up and puts them in the cart without speaking. She does not look. She just smiles.

They do not need confirmation. Every gesture is already a declaration. Every silence is full of meaning. They have stopped saying "I love you" because they say it in every language they do not speak.

At dinner, they do not make conversation. But he knows she likes crusty bread. So he goes to the furthest bakery, the inconvenient one, the one that closes early. He buys it and places it in the basket, with the napkin on top. She sees it, breaks off a piece, and simply says, "Thank you." And that thank you encompasses twenty years of forgiveness, arguments, and renewed choices.

One evening, his daughter asks, "Do you still love each other?" She smiles. He gets up and pours the wine into her glass, without letting it overflow. Then he says, "If you stop doing it, you stop loving it." She nods. Nothing else is needed.

True love is not what shows itself. It is what endures. What hides in the smallest gestures? What can remain even in silence, without losing its power.

In this house, there is no music. But there are harmonies. There are no love poems. But there is meter.

Every day, they choose each other. Not because they must, but because they want to. And every gesture is a stanza. A poem that does not need to be read. Just lived.

Grandma Needle and Sauce

He had wrinkled hands, quick fingers, and a voice that rose only to call us to the table. He did not speak English; he did not know the names of modern diseases. When he saw you sad, he did not ask why. He would sit you down. He had cut you a piece of bread. He would say, "Eat, then we'll see."

Grandma was the antidote to everything that hurt. She sewed buttons with the same patience she used to repair hearts. Stitch after stitch. Each thread was a prayer that did not pass through the church. She made broth with leftover bones, but every spoonful was reconstruction.

Once, I saw myself secretly crying. I was eight years old, and I had been unfairly reprimanded. She came over quietly, not asking me anything. She opened the fridge, took out the ricotta, and added sugar and cocoa. "You only eat this when your heart is beating," she said. It was the first dessert that comforted not the palate, but the soul.

Over the years, I have seen my grandmother heal pain in ways doctors cannot even imagine. My uncle, who had lost his job, made fritters for him because "that way you'd think life loved you." My mother, tired, drowned herself in a plate of polenta with cheese. And every time I returned, unwilling to talk, I always found something on the stove. I cannot say if it was a coincidence. I can say that I never felt alone. When Grandma cooked, she sang softly. No one understood the words. She said they were songs of the women of her village. One day, I tried to record her. She stopped me: "Words aren't necessary. Feeling is what's needed." I never tried again.

Then came the years when she sewed less. Her hands shook; her heart was playing tricks. But when someone was sick, she returned to the kitchen. She tried, an extra turn with the ladle. She said, "This isn't just soup. It's my way of telling you that I understand."

When she left, the house no longer smelled. The refrigerator had room. The silence was louder.

One evening, I tried making sweet ricotta again. It did not turn out well. But my son ate it, looked at me, and said, "I feel better."

You do not need to be a chef or a poet. You need to understand others. And, when you can, mend the cracks in your soul. With sauce. With a needle. With presence.

Grandma never really died. She became part of the salt I use without measuring. It is in the gestures I make when someone's face is dull. It is

in that word I do not say, but that simmers gently in the pot.

Sundays

The table was set, as always. Two extra plates. The silverware arranged just as they liked it: the fork a little further apart, the napkin folded in a triangle. Even the glass, with that thin rim that their daughter said, "makes me look elegant."

But no one would come that Sunday. "Too much work," "too much traffic," "I'll talk to you later." Short, polite messages. Promises postponed.

She knew it. She already knew it on Thursday, when she bought the zucchini to make parmigiana "like grandma used to make." She knew it on Saturday, when she spread the blanket on the sofa, "so they can rest after lunch." And yet, she cooked anyway.

He cooked as if they were there. With the same time, the same attention. He tasted the sauce, added fresh basil, and cut the bread into thin slices, the kind that did not crumble.

Her husband watched her. He did not say anything. But when she set out a second glass for each of them, he stood up. He took the good wine. The one you only open in company.

They ate slowly. They talked about their children, not their absence. “Do you remember when he said he did not want to grow up? “She used to put Parmesan cheese on her hands and eat it like that.”

They laughed. Not much, but they laughed.

Then, when they cleared the table, she put everything away as if it had been used. She washed every plate, every glass. And as she did so, the aroma of the kitchen wafted like a bomb, like an invisible call.

That Sunday, no one came back. But love did. Love returned to the table, between them, ate in silence, and stayed until evening.

Italian parents do not just cook to feed. They cook to remember. To keep memories alive. To say: "Even if you're not here, there's still a place."

Because Sundays are promises. And even if no one keeps them, they prepare them anyway.

That Gesture That Saved

It was an evening like any other. He came home from work later than usual, and she was waiting for him without any expectations. They had argued two days earlier—not out of anger, but out of exhaustion. The kind that accumulates like dust on furniture and is not noticeable until you touch it. She cooked it anyway. A simple dish, short pasta. Without too much attention.

But that evening, he did something he had not done in a long time. He opened the tablecloth drawer and chose the best one. The one hand embroidered by her mother. He ironed it. He laid it out calmly. He lit two candles. One on the left, one on the right. He arranged the silverware elegantly. He poured the wine into tall glasses; the kind used for celebrations.

She entered the dining room and said nothing. She looked at the table. She looked at him. He stood up and indicated her place: "Tonight I want to have dinner with you. Not with routine."

They ate. A little, slowly. They talked about the weather, about work, about the pizza his mother made, which was too dry. They laughed. Like they had not in months.

And when they finished, he made the coffee. He also brought her chocolate. She took it. Slowly put it in her mouth. And said, “You know, right, that this saved me?”

He nodded. Nothing else was needed.

Because love does not end in an explosion. It goes out like an unlit candle. But all it takes is a spark, a choice, a gesture, to reignite it. And from that evening onwards, every now and then, even for no reason,

they put on the best tablecloth. They light candles. They choose to love each other, as if it were the first time.

CHAPTER II

We talked about gestures, scents, and silences. Now it is time to listen to the stories. The ones you will not find in history books, but which have shaped the history of each of us.

These are stories born from crowded kitchens, from interrupted phone calls, from dishes shared on ordinary days. They are fragments of life that stand the test of time, passed down without needing to be written down, but which today, finally, find a voice.

In this second part, the stories become closer. More personal. More real. They do not ask to be understood, but to be felt.

Each story is a caress, a stumble, a laugh that comes when you least expect it. Each character is a face you might have met, or it is you, another time.

These stories have no moral. They have memories. And if you recognize yourself in even just one sentence, then you are already part of this journey.

Dignified Aging

There were days when the body slowed, but the mind sharpened. It was not called old age—it was called time. And time was not an enemy. It was the companion who taught measure, grace, direction.

It started with the wardrobe. That gray, heavy coat, always the same. Worn every winter, even when new ones arrived as gifts. "It keeps me warm and keeps me together," you thought. The buttons loosened, the fabric lost its luster. But there was something there that spoke of permanence. A small act of resistance against the rush of the world.

At four in the afternoon, coffee was prepared anyway. Even if no one arrived. Even if the second cup remained empty. It was the gesture that counted. Respect for the unexpected. Because those who arrive unannounced deserve a table already set.

The pace changed. There were no longer strides, but measured movements. The sidewalk became a field of patience. Someone bumped into someone, someone overtook someone, someone forgot that those who walk slowly are protecting their own history. That pace was a way of saying: "Life is not a race. It's a careful gaze."

Their hands were beginning to shake, but they were not forgetting. They could not remember where the lighter had gone, but they still knew how to knit, the perfect knot, the right fold. Memory was not just in their thoughts—it was also in their muscles.

Every morning, the mirror became a silent interlocutor. The comb still passed, even though the hair was thinner. "If the face looks, it deserves a response." Even in change, there was care. Even in transformation, there was respect.

There was always a clean handkerchief in my pocket. Embroidered, folded, scented. It was not needed every day. But "if someone cries, you have to be ready." That handkerchief became a cloth caress, a pocket hug, a silent consolation.

The greeting was invincible. "Good morning" to everyone, even those who did not respond. They were not seeking approval—they were seeking continuity. Each greeting was a gentle stone in the wall of daily disinterest.

On the bedside table, a photo endured. He and her, young, smiling. He was gone, but she greeted him every evening. She spoke softly, saying simple things: "I cooked badly today." Memory needed no voice. All it took was looking—and feeling.

An umbrella accompanied every outing. Not for the rain. Because it was important to know that something protected you. That there was a cover, even if invisible, even silent. A gesture of caution became a

gesture of peace. Every Friday, an extra dish was cooked. "Someone might come by tomorrow." And even if they did not, the dish stayed there. It was not a waste. It was hope. A way of saying: "I'll wait for you, even if you don't promise anything."

Aging was not a collapse. It was a restoration of the necessary. We spoke less. We listened more. Opinions became thoughtful thoughts. We said "I don't know" more calmly. And that "I don't know" contained wisdom that once seemed feeble.

The body craved rest, but the soul became alert. You could tell people by the tone they used when they said "hello." By the way they put down their fork. By their posture when they tell stories.

Afternoons were unhurried. The radio was turned on. Photos were arranged. Sheets were folded, even if it was not necessary. Because a clean gesture was good for the heart.

We learned to let go. Things, people, demands. And we learned to hold on to only what was valuable. A spoon that belonged to our mother. A plant that was still blooming. A phrase we never forgot.

Someone said, "You're old now." But that was not true. Now it was dense. Full of time, full of glances, full of days stitched together. And when she sat in her favorite chair, cup in hand and apron folded neatly beside her, she did not seek company. She celebrated the company of her own story. The kind that makes you feel good even when you are alone.

Because aging, when done with dignity, is not dying slowly. It is a low-intensity light, the kind that does not blind—but illuminates what is necessary.

The Worn Sole

He walked every day in the same shoes. They were not broken, but the soles were smooth, marked by the long strides of a lifetime. When someone suggested changing them, he replied that those shoes had seen every era. The winter of mourning. The spring of his first grandchild. The slowing pace does not seek novelty. It seeks continuity.

Next to the Bed

In the room, there was a folded chair, which never moved. It was no longer needed, but it remained there. It was the one used for telling fairy tales, for taking temperatures, for watching over uncertain nights. No one sat there anymore, but its presence whispered a clear phrase: "Someone here has been watching over you."

The Ruined Keychain

The house keys were attached to a faded, worn leather keychain. Every time the door was opened, the gesture seemed part of an ancient ritual. There was respect in the way the fingers searched for the lock. Not for fear of making a mistake, but to preserve the small sacredness of the entrance.

The Good Used Plate

When cooking, even for oneself, one sets the table well. Placemat, glass cup, heavy cutlery. "Respect isn't for others. It's for the time one dedicates to oneself." That meal, consumed in silence, contained the dignity of someone who knows that the most precious company is that which makes no noise.

Fixing the Scarf

Every winter outing began with the same gesture: the scarf folded, crossed, artfully arranged. Not for elegance. For ritual. "The neck must be protected. If you do not do it, who will?" That gesture seemed simple, but it said a lot. That the body must be honored. That age is not surrender.

The Unsent Letters

In the drawer remained unsent letters. Carefully written, affectionately signed, but never delivered. They were messages to those who had refused to listen. And yet, they were written with respect. Without rancor. Only the will to put things in order inside, even if outside everything remained in disarray.

The Glass Half Full

After lunch, the unfinished glass was washed and put away. "Nothing is left lying around. Not even what's incomplete." The gesture was not obsession: it was awareness. That everything has a place. That respect is also for what is unfinished, but which deserves a kind conclusion.

The TV is on

The television remained on. The images scrolled, but the volume was low, off. You did not really watch. You kept yourself company. You gave rhythm to your thoughts. Every light, every movement on the screen served to say: "The world is still turning. And I'm keeping pace."

Written Shopping List

Every Wednesday, we wrote the list. It did not matter that we only bought three things: bread, milk, tomatoes. The writing was neat, unhurried. Not to show it to others. But to say: "If I respect myself when I write down what I need, then I also respect those who will consume what I buy."

The Open Window

In the morning, she opened the window, even in the wind. "Air must come in, because the house needs to breathe." It was not comfort. It was principle. Every day she gave herself to the sky. A breath of fresh air. A silent agreement with reality: no matter how old you get—you can always renew yourself a little.

Italian Rituals

Being Italian is not about speaking a language. It means having a dictionary of gestures, habits, tricks, phrases, and superstitions that make up our invisible DNA. They are the things we do without knowing why. The things we learn as children, the things we repeat as adults, and the things we do not dare change.

The kitchen is the first temple. Here, we respect the sautéing times, peel the potatoes "mother's way," and put the pots on the stove even when no one is hungry. Because food is not nourishment: it is symbolic reassurance.

The table is the second course. It is set "properly" even if two people are eating. The napkin is never left on the chair, the knife is never sharpened, the oil bottle has its place. Every meal is a celebration: not of luxury, but of living. Then there are the greetings, the coffees, the short phone calls, and the long chats. The phrase that repeats every summer: "Ah, the seasons are no longer like that." The gesture of the bread that is never thrown away. The caress on the sliced bread "to let it breathe."

Italian rituals are cultural traces that endure over time. Often, they cannot be explained. But when they are missing, something creaks.

This chapter is a tribute to the gestures that make us recognizable even when we are far from home. A map of habits that speak for themselves.

CHAPTER III

We walked amidst gestures, scents, and silences. We touched upon memories that seemed to belong to others yet resembled us. Now is the time to pause. To listen carefully. To let the stories speak.

This third part is not a passage. It is a threshold. Here the words become slower, denser, truer. They tell not only what happened, but what remains.

Each story that follows is a small truth. A truth that does not pretend to be explained, but that knows how to endure. Like the scent of tomato sauce that never fades, like a mother's words never forgotten, like a kind gesture that saved an ordinary day. You will not find heroes here. You will find people. With hands stained with life, with hearts full of hope, with the desire to keep believing, even when everything is telling you otherwise.

The following stories are not meant to be read. They are meant to be lived. Felt. Taken with you.

Coffee as soon as you wake up.

The first thing you do in the morning is not stretch. It is putting on the coffee. Even if you are alone. Even if it is Saturday. Even if you have nothing to do. That smell is the soul's wake-up call, the signal that the day has begun. And even if you do not drink it right away, knowing it is there means something is right.

Greeting the Cat

Every time you enter a house, you say hello. Even if there is no one there. Even if there is only one cat. "Good morning," you say anyway. It is a form of housekeeping. You do not say hello to make yourself heard. You say hello because you recognize the space.

Thursday and Monday

It is not clear exactly where it comes from, but on Thursdays, long pasta is cooked. Spaghetti, linguine, fettuccine. On Mondays, penne, rigatoni, farfalle. It is not a written rule. It is a weekly balance. Each type of pasta has its own time. And changing it disturbs something.

The Good Tablecloth

In every home, there is a tablecloth set aside. Never used. Kept folded, ironed, inside a plastic bag. "This is for when people come over." And when someone does come, there is a fear of ruining it. That piece of cloth represents status, welcome, and superstition.

Bread Never Thrown Away

If there is any stale bread left, do not throw it away. Scrape it. Soak it. Make much out of it. And if you really cannot use it, put it on top of the bin, "so maybe someone will take it." Bread is sacred. Anyone who throws it away whole is not of the same school.

The Clean Plate

When there's sauce on the plate, you mop it up with bread. Even at restaurants. Even at elegant dinners. Even if someone looks askance. That gesture is called "scarpetta" (little shoe), and it is an act of love, not rudeness. Anyone who denies it has forgotten where it comes from.

I disturb?

Every call begins with this question, even among family members. "Am I bothering you?" It is emotional etiquette. The answer is always no. But the question is useful. It says, "I know you have a life, but right now I want to make the most of it."

Fridge Control

You do not leave the house without opening the refrigerator. Even if you do not need to take anything. You look, then close it again. "Just to be safe." It is an inherent maternal gesture. Those who do it seek order. Those who do not forget their schooling.

The Open Window

Every morning, the window opens. To let the air in. Even if it is cold, foggy, or windy outside. "The house needs to breathe." It is more than a habit: it is a life lesson. If a place stay closed too long, something goes out.

The Closing Phrase

“The one mom made was better.”

After every important meal, after a successful lunch, after a slow and thoughtful dinner, there is always someone who says, "Good, huh. But the one Mom used to make..." It is not criticism. It is a culinary commemoration. A way of saying that the flavor is not just in the dish, but in the memory.

CHAPTER IV

We walked among memories and flavors, among silences that speak and words that console. Now there is no need to prepare. All you have to do is let go.

The stories that follow do not demand attention. They demand presence. They demand heart. They are tales that do not want to be analyzed but are experienced. They do not seek to explain, but to accompany.

Here, every sentence is a gesture. Every character, a face you might have loved. Every scene, a fragment of yourself you thought forgotten.

This is the part where stories are not read: they are inhabited. They are carried within. They are recognized.

Because deep down, we are all made of small truths, of dreams that endure, of shared dishes, of mothers who taught us to hope with gravy.

Welcome to the truest part. The part that is not written: it is felt.

Time and Nostalgia

There are days when you go back without taking a single step. The smell of tomato sauce is enough, a song on the radio, the sound of the intercom that reminds you of the house you grew up in. Nostalgia, yes. But alive. Not slippery sweetness—an affectionate presence.

Time is not regretted. It is observed. Like looking at the streets after the rain. Like rereading letters already opened. In Italy, nostalgia is a discipline: it is cultivated slowly, preserved, shared in everyday gestures.

Every object has a past. Every corner of the house tells a story. The curtain that moves like grandmas. The inherited spoon that tells the time. The landline that rang in the middle of the afternoon.

Memory does not escape. It is structure. In speaking softly. In touching things with respect. In putting away what is used. Every action is already memory. And every memory is a form of love that endures.

The Pasted Photo

Whenever you opened the kitchen drawer, you would always find that photo glued to the bottom. It never came off. A faded image, two smiling people in front of a house that no longer exists. No one really looked at it, but everyone knew it was there. It was a fixed point, a root, a reason not to change the furniture.

Discolored Wood

The spoon had lost its color; the tip was worn. Yet it was still the one used for Sunday sauce. Some people bought new ones, shiny, professional. But this one, rough and worn, was the right size, the exact weight. The flavor did not depend on the ingredients. It depended on the gesture that accompanied it.

The Button Box

In the cupboard, among the tablecloths and breadcrumbs, lay the box of buttons. Of every shape, color, and era. It was almost never used, but it was preserved. Because inside were the father's shirts, the mother's coats, the christening gowns. Each button was a small sign of a past presence.

It Smells Like Childhood

A certain type of soap, hard to find, had the scent of childhood. Just the smell of it took you back to a warm kitchen, a striped apron, a rainy Sunday. It was not nostalgia; it was olfactory recognition. A subtle truth that passed from the nose to the heart.

It Always Sounds the Same

Even moving house, even changing neighborhoods, the sound of the doorbell remained familiar. That dry, ancient, metallic "ring." It was not the electronics speaking. It was time, making itself present every time someone arrived. And every "Who is it?" was already a journey into the past.

The Chipped Cup

There was a small, but visible, cut on the rim. Someone said to replace it. "It can hurt." But that cup had held too many important mornings, too many thoughtful coffees, too many cold phone calls. It was an emotional container, not ceramic. And if it remained there, it was because the wound was part of the story.

Do You Remember That Time...

During dinner, halfway through the main course, someone would say it. "Do you remember that time..." And the table would transform. Every fork slowed, every glance sought confirmation. Food became context. Memory was a shared dish, an invisible spice.

It Smells Like Good Weather

It sat at the back of the closet. It was worn only on certain days: when you needed to feel safe, warm, and at home. It was not beautiful. It was effective. Anyone who saw it said, "That one again?" Everyone who wore it thought, "I've been through everything with this."

The Column

In the drawer, among the pens and paper clips, was the address book. Not digital. Not automatic. Just paper, handwriting, pencil corrections. Many numbers were no longer active. Many names belonged to days gone by. But that address book was untouchable. It was a list of connections, not contacts.

The Voice

Sometimes, during the night, a voice would return. Not loud. Just the tone, just a word. “Be careful.” “I love you.” “Don't run.” It was not nostalgia—it was a sonorous memory. As if loved ones lived in the folds of sleep and spoke when all was quiet.

CHAPTER EPILOGUE

We have come this far. We walked among memories, silences, flavors. We listened to voices that did not ask to be understood, but only to be welcomed.

Now the stories become more intimate. They are no longer just tales: they are confessions. They are the truth you tell only when you feel safe. The ones you write are not to be read, but to never be forgotten.

In this section, the words tremble. Not because they are weak, but because they are sincere. Each sentence is an attempt to endure each page; a caress left on the edge of a difficult day.

We are not looking for the perfect ending here. We are just trying to say, "Me too." To recognize ourselves, even in fragments. To feel less alone, even for a moment.

The stories that follow are made of skin, pasta, and suppressed tears. They are the Italy that does not show itself but is felt. That is eaten, embraced, remembered.

Welcome to the most fragile part. Which, precisely because of this, is also the strongest.

The Memory

Italian memory is not an archive. It is not a museum. It is a living presence that permeates the kitchen, the photographs, the tone of softly spoken sentences.

Consolation is not forgetting. It is knowing where to look when you are cold inside. And memory, when treated with respect, does exactly that: it warms. It does not take much. A neatly folded apron. A broken plate that is not thrown away. A notebook with a penciled grocery list.

Every object is a trace. Every gesture is an echo. Every returning thought is a hand on the shoulder.

Memory does not console with words. It consoles with details. With the way the sheets fold. With the sound of the spoon in the cup. With the sentences that come back to you: "Don't rush." "Eat slowly." "Be careful of the cold."

In silence, memory does not leave you alone. It creates invisible companionship. And in difficult days, it is memory that allows you not to lose everything. Because remembering is not about falling behind. It is about moving something forward.

The Pan

In the kitchen, there is a pan that has always been used. It is old, burnt, with a loose handle. No one wants to wash it, but no one changes it. It was the one her mother used for omelets, and her father for sauce. The flavor lingers there. And every time you cook with it, the memory comes flooding back. Messy, but comforting.

The Ticket

In a forgotten book, between the pages, a handwritten note. "Take the tuna. I love you." No date. No signature. Just a list and a fragment of love. Found years later, on an ordinary day. That note spoke more than a thousand letters. And it consoled without making a sound.

The Caress

Every time you cut bread, you caress the slice. Not out of habit. Because someone once did it that way. With that gesture, they said, "This is for you." And today, even without an audience, that caress remains. Because consolation also means slowly cutting something simple.

The Song

While shopping, a song comes on. Old. Intimate. Light. It was the one you listened to with a person who is no longer with you. And for a second, between the fish counter and the biscuits, you sigh. You do not cry. You remember it well. As it should.

The Pot

It is not silver. It is not beautiful. But grandma's pot is still there. It is used to make broth, but also to keep alive an invisible line between those who were there and those who are. Memory is not inherited. It has been cooked.

The Collar

Every now and then, before leaving, he adjusts the collar of the person next to him. No one knows where that gesture comes from. But we know who did it, all those years ago. And that small, almost invisible touch says it all. "I see you. I hold you together."

In the Moments

On hard days, in deep weariness, a phrase returns. "Tomorrow will be different." It was said by someone with conviction. Not as a promise, but as a possibility. And in remembering it, something straightens. Memory consoles because it repeats what was needed.

It is not necessary.

On the table, a plastic napkin holder. Broken, chipped, no longer used. But it is not removed. Because it was there even when we had snacks with Mom. When we played cards with Dad. Removing it would be breaking something. Better to leave it. To say: "Everything is still here."

The Jacket

A jacket hanging, never worn again. Every now and then, you touch it. The fabric is firm, the smell lingers. There is no sadness. There's immobile company. And knowing you can still touch it, even without a hug, is good.

The Finale

After every story, after every dinner, after every gesture, something is said. "She would have liked it." It is not nostalgia. It is an emotional reference. Everything continues to revolve around the person who taught the tone, the pace, the flavor. Memory consoles, because it builds a present on good foundations.

Aphorisms

The Italy I have described is not the Italy of monuments. It is the Italy of kitchens, of stifled cries, of mothers who resist. It is made of pasta, of hugs, of silences that keep homes standing.

This is the Italy that is not shown but felt. That is not celebrated but lived. That is not explained but recognized.

And if even just one sentence made you stop, then this Italy belongs to you.

The Soup That Tasted Like Home

“Love is like hot soup when everything outside is shaking.” It was winter, and outside it was raining as if the sky had decided to empty itself. I was tired, confused, lost. My mother said nothing. She placed a steaming bowl of soup in front of me, with that aroma that reminded me of when I was a child. She did not ask me how I was. She fed me. And in that gesture, there was all the love I needed.

The Silence That Kept Me Standing

“Silence is not absence. It is a deeper form of presence.”

When I lost my father, everyone was talking. Small talk, advice, memories. Not her. She looked at me, took my hand, and cooked. She did not say anything. But in that silence, there was the strength that kept me standing.

The Voice That Trembled Was Mine

“The trembling voice was the sincerest one.”

During that phone call, I could not speak. My voice was shaking; my words were broken. I thought I sounded weak. But she said, "I can finally really hear you." And I realized that sincerity does not require force. It requires truth.

Spaghetti and Unspoken Promises

“Every plate of spaghetti is an intertwined story.” On Sundays, at home, we ate spaghetti. As I rolled it around my fork, I thought of all the things I had not said. About my brother, my mother, and myself. Every bite was a knot. Every silence, a promise. And yet, we understood each other. Even without speaking.

The Pizza That Saved the Evening

“Pizza brings together not only diners, but generations.”

We had been arguing for days. My dad and I, two different worlds. Then, one evening, I ordered a pizza. He took a slice and smiled. We ate in silence. And in that gesture, there was everything we could not say to each other.

The Mother Who Asked for Nothing

“Mom doesn't teach you how to speak: she teaches you how to feel.”

As a child, I did not know how to say, "I love you." She did not ask me. She left notes in my backpack; she made me a sandwich the way I liked it. She made me feel loved, even without words. And today, when I cook for my son, I understand that I am continuing her way of loving.

The Melancholy That Taught Me to Stay

“Melancholy is the musical background of true Italy.”

Every time I return to my hometown, I feel a sweet melancholy. The streets, the voices, the scents. It is not sadness. It is a sense of belonging. It is knowing that, even though I have changed, there is still a part of me there that endures.

The Sauce That Made Me Cry

“Being Italian means remembering with your heart, not with your head.”

I had been abroad for months. One evening, I cooked the sauce my mother used to make. The smell split me in two. I cried. Not out of nostalgia, but out of gratitude. Because remembering is feeling. And I felt everything.

The Caress That Tasted Like Sauce

“Italy is a caress that tastes like sauce.”

When I was sick, my grandmother made me the simplest sauce. Tomato, oil, basil. She said it healed more than medicine. And she was right. Because that flavor made me feel safe. Like a caress that never ends.

The House That Had No Walls

“Italy is that place where even pain feels like home.”

When I lost my job, I did not want to see anyone. I went home. My mother told me, "You don't have to explain anything. You're here." And at that moment, I understood that home is not a place. It is a space

where even pain can breathe.

LETTER TO THE MOTHER

We parted in the worst viable way. And now there is no point in chasing what was wrong. The silences, the badly spoken words, the ones left unsaid, have affected, eroded, and made distant what could have been close. There is no point in looking for blame. That is how things went. You returned to your father's house, and now you have reunited with the loved ones you had lost along the way. But to do so, you had to leave others behind. As if to say that in life you can never have everything, you just must figure out what is that matters.

I do not remember you in detail. But I will not forget you. You brought me into the world, and that alone deserves a silent debt of gratitude.

You did not prepare me for life, not like a lioness would with her cubs. You were my crocodile: ready to bite me because of that powerful jealousy of yours, which clouded my mind, my reason.

Yet, you have never been a stupid woman—quite the opposite. But your game was clear from the start. And it created distance.

I have no regrets. What happened is the result of a destiny that continues to walk: for you, among the clouds. For me, it is still among the stones.

And if I told you I am poor today, I know you would laugh. Not out of malice—but because you have never doubted me. My lively mind, my creativity, my way of changing things.

Knowing I am poor would only make you ask, "What are you up to this time?" It is true. But every gift has a repercussion. And I bid my time. Without haste. With respect.

I embrace you. No longer as a wounded son. But as a man who has learned to carry within himself even what has burned.

Your son.

Until we meet again

The pages collected here are the result of a life lived with open eyes and a burning heart. Authoring this book meant reviewing every unspoken gesture, every caress given without thinking, every sentence that educated in silence.

Every story is a gentle confession. Every ritual, an invisible signature. Every object, an unsaid declaration of affection.

A work that does not pretend to be high literature but becomes so precise because of its disarming truth. A book that is not read: it is lived.