

Sunday Sauce by Claudia I. Haas;

Two cousins polish silver for their uncle's memorial dinner.

(ANGELA gets her leg of lamb from the fridge.)

ANGELA

What do you think? It's a thing of beauty, isn't it?

CHIARA

I – really wouldn't know. I don't eat lamb.

ANGELA

How can you not eat lamb? You're Italian. It's required.

CHIARA

I don't eat cute Disney animals. Bambi ... baa ...

ANGELA

It's not Bambi!

CHIARA

Lambchop.

ANGELA

Puppet!

CHIARA

But cute!

ANGELA

It seems prejudicial to only eat ugly animals.

CHIARA

What can I say? Animation has affected my choice of food.

ANGELA

Do you eat cows?

CHIARA

Meatballs.

ANGELA

I like cows.

CHIARA

I am so pleased.

ANGELA

I mean – I like cows. I go to farms and heal sick cows and I eat meatballs, too.

CHIARA

Life's all about choices, Angela.

ANGELA

Are you saying I shouldn't eat cows because I like them?

CHIARA

I wouldn't eat an animal that I liked. But that's just me.

ANGELA

So you are saying I shouldn't eat cows!

CHIARA

Did you hear me say that? That's *your* mother speaking!

ANGELA

You're ... implying that.

CHIARA

Don't read something into every word I say! I'm just talking.

ANGELA

Like *your* mother.

CHIARA

Don't/

ANGELA

/No! You don't. Don't criticize my meat! Especially now that you live in a state where everyone goes deer hunting. Like cave people – they hunt your Bambi.

CHIARA

They hunt Bambi everywhere. Even in New York!

ANGELA

I don't live in New York.

CHIARA

Oh I forgot – you live in *New Jersey*. There are no hunters in *New Jersey*.

ANGELA

But there are more hunters in Minnesota!

CHIARA

Did you seriously research this or something?

ANGELA

I just know.

CHIARA

Get off the Internet and get a life, Angela!

ANGELA

You pay taxes in a state to keep a large deer herd so you can slaughter them!

CHIARA

Why are you attacking my adopted state?

ANGELA

Because you don't approve of my meat choices!

CHIARA

Where do you think that leg of lamb came from? Animals died to give you a freezer filled with meat!

ANGELA

BUT I DIDN'T KILL THEM!

CHIARA

BUT IF YOU DIDN'T BUY THEM THERE WOULD BE NO MARKET FOR THEM AND THEY WOULDN'T BE KILLED!

ANGELA

Shhhh! You'll wake the dead. Or our mothers. Which would be worse.

CHIARA

And the dinner would be pointless because Uncle Gene would be back from the dead telling us to stop shouting.

ANGELA

I don't know if you can wake someone who's been cremated. Food for thought.

CHIARA

Everything's food. Every Saint has a Feast Day. We eat. Then we gain weight and get criticized –

ANGELA

I don't gain weight.

CHIARA

No. You don't. You clearly are adopted.

ANGELA

Organic fruits and vegetables. Protein. No carbs.

CHIARA

How can you be Italian and not eat carbs? We grew up feasting on carbs. Stuffed carbs! Sauced carbs! Sauteed carbs! And that's just the pasta! Don't get me started on the risotto! We celebrate with carbs, we mourn with carbs, we are genetically programmed to be carbed to death! No wonder I resemble a stuffed manicotti!

ANGELA

Don't forget the polenta!

CHIARA

Oh M' mona mia! How could I forget the polenta – topped with creamy gorgonzola/

ANGELA

/You clearly did not rebel enough. I long ago switched to meat and vegetables. Carbs only on Sundays. Try it. The weight will come off fast enough.

CHIARA

Are you saying I am fat? Please don't tell me I'm fat. Only I can say that. Don't sound like "them."

ANGELA

Don't push that button ...

(Pause)

ANGELA (cont'd)

Do you remember how you would never wear my clothes?

CHIARA

What?

ANGELA

My clothes that I outgrew. My mother would work her fingers to the bone cleaning and pressing and hemming my clothes to go to you. And when she gave them to you, you would say, "I can't wear those. They're too big."

CHIARA

Who remembers those things?

ANGELA

The shoe's on the other foot now, isn't it? Once you wouldn't wear my clothes because you thought I was too big and now you're bigger than me!

(CHIARA goes to the fridge.)

CHIARA

I need a cannoli. Before I say something that will prevent us from ever talking to each other again.

ANGELA

Is that what you do when you're mad? Eat?

CHIARA

Yes. And when I'm sad. And happy. And tired. And when my therapist is one thousand miles away.

ANGELA

Don't be so thin-skinned.

CHIARA

You sound like my mother! "You look nervous. Stop being nervous!"

ANGELA

Remember when we liked each other? When we spend every weekend together? Those four blocks between your home and my home were a lifeline back in the "olden days." (Beat.) You were nicer then.

CHIARA

That was before therapy. Where I am learning I don't have to please everyone.

ANGELA

I get criticized for going my own way. But still – that blood-thing runs pretty deep.

CHIARA

We'll always be united by blood. And food. We grew up in three kitchens. I am as much at home here as I am in my own kitchen. Decades of Christmas Day right here.

ANGELA

How many turkeys were thrown out?

CHIARA

What was with the turkey? How could we eat turkey after two hours of prosciutto, salami, provolone, and all that egg nog?

ANGELA

Spiked. Who serves kids spiked egg nog?

CHIARA

They did. They conspired to make us happy on Christmas Day. And then the lasagna. And the yearly fight about who made the best lasagna. And the meatballs and sausages.... And somewhere hidden in the kitchen – *the bones!*

ANGELA

I'd catch them in the kitchen gnawing on them while they cleaned up!

CHIARA

Our mothers are not far removed from the Clan of the Cave Bear!

ANGELA

And after a day of eating – out came the thirty-pound turkey. Why'd they cook a turkey every year?

CHIARA

Grandma. She wanted to have an American Christmas. Remember the Thanksgiving ravioli? I don't think the Pilgrims had ravioli.

ANGELA

Endless holidays in this kitchen gorging ourselves. And then the menfolk would go on the porch to watch TV –

CHIARA

And fall asleep! Why is the porch door closed?

ANGELA

Aunt Tess doesn't like to turn the heat on out there – too expensive.

CHIARA

Do you think she's all right? She's awfully calm. She's never calm. I thought she'd be wailing like your Mom did.

ANGELA

And what's with the stethoscope?

CHIARA

I know! She's acting like she's keeping it warm for Uncle Gene. And why are we boxing up her china?

ANGELA

It's not for us to say, is it? The decisions she's making are her grieving decisions.

CHIARA

What if she's not in her right mind? And regrets all this later? Aren't we supposed to guide her through this?

ANGELA

I think you just listen.

CHIARA

Is that what you do?

ANGELA

It's what I try to do. At vet school, the teachers would tell us to listen to the animals – their vitals, their faces, their noises. Without the trappings of language, those signs were true.

CHIARA

It must be hard to figure out what they need without words.

ANGELA

Words can be used to throw you off track. You need to really listen and figure out what's true, what's cover, what's terror. Mom didn't use a lot of words when Dad died. She scrubbed the floors and wailed. She dusted the furniture and cursed. But when she set the table and automatically set a place for my dad – she would go silent. And quietly put his dish away declaring how happy she was that she never had to make his favorite liver and onion dinner again! But she makes his fish soup. Every Friday. Ten years later, I know if I visit on a Friday, Mom will have fish soup on the menu. Maybe we're not the ones to give advice. We've never been they are.

CHIARA

I remember that soup. I sometimes visited on Fridays knowing I would get some.

ANGELA

I can make it for you. Everything's fresh by the shore. And there's a specialty organic farm nearby. The asparagus is up. Spend a few days with me.

CHIARA

Oh Angela – I'm sorry. I'm going to stay with Mario in the city tonight and then I leave.

ANGELA

Spend the night with me in Jersey instead. It's not that far – I'll take you to the airport tomorrow.

CHIARA

I'm sorry. I have plans for the morning. I just don't have the time to get all the way out to where you live.

ANGELA

If I had a dime for every time someone said, "all the way out to where you live," I could retire. Nobody thinks about driving to the end of Long Island to visit Sue – but cross state lines? M'ona Mia! YOU'D THINK I LIVED IN TIMBUKTU!

CHIARA

You do. Jersey is Timbuktu.