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My Mother Continues to Stuff Bell Peppers

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Robert Pesich

My Mother Continues to Stuff Bell Peppers for Dinner

for Jagoda

Look at them!

Look at her fingers scorched scarlet from cooking.

The unpainted fingernails that once fed bony chickens

fingers that milked goat teats for thicker milk

long fingers that burrowed in Gnjlan earth to pull milkweed roots.

Those muscled fingers that bore buckets of cold mountain cesma
water for everything.

The marble cobble Gnjlan knuckles kneading easy
ground beef, pork, veal.

Kneads diced onions into that meat.

Kneads half-cooked white rice, parsley, celery,

black pepper, white pepper, paprika.

Kneads this ball of meatrice spice at midnight.

Stuffs each red bell pepper,

the small scritch and sigh of her greasy hands squeezing meat,

that sighs scribbles of grease on the breadboard,

rattle sigh of her lungs sounding the last winter wind virus,

hiss of simmering lamb hock bones, fat emerald leeks.

She scribbles grease on yesterday's newsprint.

The dark shadows bloom across maps of Yugoslavia,

across the red geranium, sulfur chrysanthemum houseboats,
their lace curtains that swell with the Danube breeze.
Blooms dark over the liverish burlhands, scrag white hair of
old men
bent over playing chess forever on the banks of slow Nisava.
This grease she smears on each pepper,
gives each an eyelid of tomato skin
to cover the glaring socket,
to keep these peppers blind in 350 degrees.
Familiar. The blindness, the heat,
the black pepper not unlike his knife sharp words,
the stiff silences, years of enduring.
Tomorrow, we will open these peppers and eat,
find small empty spaces,
the dark greasy cooked air knifed
open under yellow kitchen light.
Her small caves she left at midnight,
that she sprinkles salt over because they deserve more.
This empty air and salt we eat together, hungry.
Washed down with red wine.
The shrapnel of crumbs
she sweeps together, in silence,
alone.