



## My Writing Life

November 2016

I live surrounded by oak and maple trees, so my last few weekends have been spent in the annual fall New England ritual of raking leaves. On Sunday evening, we could finally see the grass that had been buried under a multicolored carpet of brown and orange and red. But, as I look out my window this Tuesday afternoon, a rain and windstorm has driven yet another layer to the earth from almost barren limbs. It's the price we pay for the brilliant foliage that is so breathtaking at this time of year.

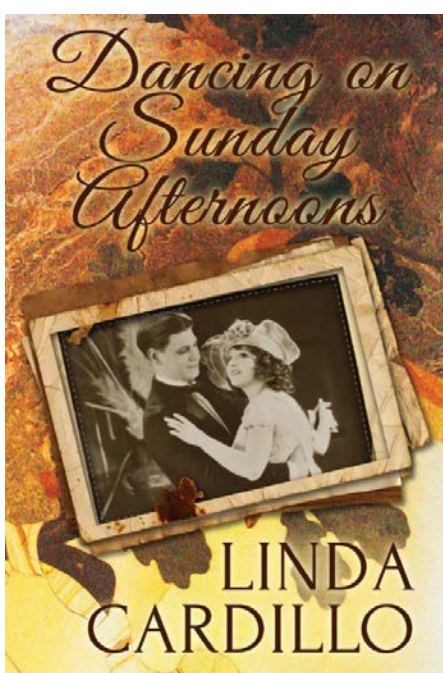
In a little more than a week Thanksgiving will be upon us. I hope that your celebration will include the gathering of loved ones around a table laden with family favorites. In our house, that means a vegetarian roast in addition to turkey, as well as my sister's incredible recipe for sweet potato casserole; my mother's stuffed mushrooms and artichoke hearts sautéed with garlic and then baked with bread crumbs and parmesan cheese; German sweet-and-sour red cabbage; broccoli and cauliflower in a lemon-garlic sauce; apple, pumpkin and pecan pies; roasted chestnuts; and a fruit bowl filled with tangerines, apples, pears and pomegranates.

My warmest wishes for a happy Thanksgiving!

*Linda*



## Dancing on Sunday Afternoons

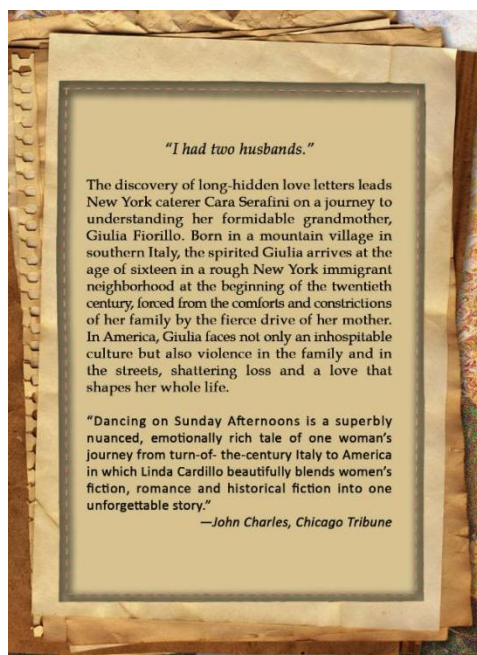


Twenty-six years ago my Aunt Susie presented me with the gift of my immigrant grandparents' love letters. When I translated the limpid, passionate Italian I knew I had discovered a treasure. Those letters became the seeds for my first novel, the award-winning *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons*.

*Dancing on Sunday Afternoons* went on to sell nearly a half-million copies, but slipped out of print a few years ago. When I was granted back the rights to the story this year, I knew I had to reissue it. Just in time for gift giving, the new print edition of *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons* will be available for sale on December 1. You'll find it on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and

other online and bricks-and-mortar retailers, as well as on the Bellastoria Press website. If you would like an inscribed copy, please order through Bellastoria Press and put what you wish me to inscribe in the "Order Notes" box on the checkout page.

Many thanks to those who participated in the cover survey in the summer issue of My Writing Life. Your votes and your comments helped to shape the final design!



*"I had two husbands."*

The discovery of long-hidden love letters leads New York caterer Cara Serafini on a journey to understanding her formidable grandmother, Giulia Fiorillo. Born in a mountain village in southern Italy, the spirited Giulia arrives at the age of sixteen in a rough New York immigrant neighborhood at the beginning of the twentieth century, forced from the comforts and constrictions of her family by the fierce drive of her mother. In America, Giulia faces not only an inhospitable culture but also violence in the family and in the streets, shattering loss and a love that shapes her whole life.

"Dancing on Sunday Afternoons is a superbly nuanced, emotionally rich tale of one woman's journey from turn-of-the-century Italy to America in which Linda Cardillo beautifully blends women's fiction, romance and historical fiction into one unforgettable story."  
—John Charles, Chicago Tribune





## A Special Gift for You

The image above is one of eight diamonds that graced a pair of earrings I received on my sixteenth birthday. The diamonds had originally been set in a brooch of my grandmother's—mentioned in the Prologue of *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons*:

"Over on the radiator cover in the corner of the parlor is the portrait Salvatore and I had taken on our twenty-fifth anniversary. This brooch I am wearing today, with the diamonds—I'm wearing it in the photograph also—Salvatore gave it to me that day."

This year, when my son proposed marriage to his girlfriend, the diamonds were once again transformed, this time into an engagement ring. I think my grandmother would be happy to know that they now encircle the ring finger of her great-grandson's wife.

Another set of diamonds had a place in *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons*, but the chapter in which they appeared was cut from the final version of the book. That happens, by the way. We authors call it "killing our darlings," all those words we originally pour out onto the page that we sometimes have to let go of for the sake of the story.

In honor of the reissue of *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons*, I am releasing the excised chapter as a stand-alone story, a special gift for my newsletter readers. Enjoy!

## Caterina's Earrings

Giuseppina's gift to Caterina was a pair of diamond earrings. Exquisite, tiny drops. My tears of joy, I think. My stars. My beacons.

I pierced her ears with a heated needle while Flora held her. She watched me with her brown eyes, sucked on Flora's finger. She cried, but only a little. Once the earrings were in, I nursed her and she quieted.

They were so tiny, just like she was. Her little pink earlobes. I stroked her with the tip of my finger, tracing the outline of her flesh. I looked ahead, to her growing, to her life. She would not see the same things I did as a child. She would not look out the window to see a march of stone houses and tile roofs clinging to a mountainside. Or the mountains themselves—more stone, rock upon rock. She would not hear the same things I did as a child. The braying of mules, the tinny jangle of the bells Tomasio's goats wear, the music of the Tarantella, of tambourines, of cicadas. She would not smell the same things I did as a child. The earth turned over in Giuseppina's garden. The herbs drying in her back room. The hay in the fields, freshly cut, burning our nostrils. A different life.

She spent it then sleeping in a baby carriage in the courtyard behind the Palace while I cooked. The music of her father at the piano, the lazy chatter of Bifaro's girls, the crackle of sausages and *bracciola* frying, the footsteps of Bifaro's customers shuffling furtively up the stairs. That is what she heard.

When Rosa Santomeno's house in Tuckahoe burned down, I said nothing. I kept my nose out of it, going about my own business while the gossips sifted through every rumor as if they were Rosa herself sifting through the ashes for whatever fragments of her household she could find.

"Such bad luck," they sympathized with her, as she enumerated the losses of her father's pocket watch, her mother's intarsia armoire, her own jewelry. "At least you all got out alive."

But behind her back, they criticized her slovenly habits, suspecting that it was Rosa's own carelessness that had brought about the catastrophe. And if not her carelessness, then her treachery and dishonesty finally catching up with her, paying her back through the vengeful act of someone she had harmed in the past. More and more people began to believe that someone had indeed set the fire, especially when Rosa herself began muttering that she believed someone was out to get her. But she kept her mouth shut about who she thought it was, or why. And she didn't show her face around my neighborhood.

She had reason not to.

The day I discovered Caterina's earrings missing—the diamonds stolen from her tiny earlobes—was the day after her christening. We had closed the Palace that Sunday. Paolo and I, exhilarated by the joy of Caterina's birth and finally released from the agony of uncertainty that had haunted the final months of my pregnancy, were ready to celebrate. It was also an opportunity to welcome Papa and the boys to America and to show off to Papa the gleam and polish of the Palace's success. I cooked for days ahead. I had prepared manicotti, a cacciatore with rabbit, and sausage and peppers. I made eggplant parmigiana and arrosto di maiale. Tilly had helped me bake a sweet ricotta pie with orange peel, a torta di nocciole, and two trays of anise cookies. The morning of the christening, I heaped an antipasto platter with prosciutto, mortadella, salami, and soprasatta, roasted peppers, anchovies, olives, my pickled eggplant, provolone, and mozzarella.

We invited everyone we knew—family, friends, neighbors, even business associates. Philly Santomeno, Rosa's husband, was the brother of Madama Bifaro and a business associate of Claudio's every now and then. Rosa showed up on her husband's arm with a little nothing for the baby, a cheap medal on a pink ribbon. Ever since Philly built the house up in Tuckahoe we hadn't seen much of Rosa. She was trying to be a respectable lady, closing her eyes to where most of Philly's money came from. I had never had much use for Rosa. I had learned early on that she lied when it suited her, that she envied other people's good fortune, and that whatever she had in her own life did not satisfy her. She had no children of her own, but had enough to say about other people's—how wild they were, or unkempt, or ugly.

Caterina had been passed around the room, from aunt to uncle to grandfather. People admired her dark ringlets and the satin christening gown that all her cousins had worn before her, a gown that my mother had sent when the first grandchild in the family—Claudio's son Adamo—had been born eight years ago. People also commented on the little earrings—how striking they were, how brilliantly they caught the afternoon light. Zi'Yolanda was holding Caterina when Rosa came up. Rosa stroked the cream-colored skirt of Caterina's dress and reached out with a broken fingernail to the diamond in Caterina's left ear.

"How ridiculous, to waste stones like these on an infant. What is Giulia trying to prove, that nobody else has ever had a baby before? She should watch out how much attention she is calling on her daughter."

With these pronouncements she glided away.

I didn't think any more of her comments than to dismiss them as the sour complaints of a jealous spirit.

The last of the guests drifted out of the Palace by seven in the evening. Caterina was weary and cranky, so I nursed her and settled her into her carriage while Paolo and I swept up and put the Palace back in order.

The next day the sun shone strong and bright, and even though it was November I was able to put Caterina out in the courtyard bundled up for her nap. It was too cold for Bifaro's girls to be out on the balcony, but every now and then one of them stepped outside for a cigarette or a few minutes respite from the boredom and the squalor. Once, when the door opened, I heard an argument going on inside. I was surprised to hear Rosa's voice. She usually doesn't want to have much to do with her sister-in-law Bifaro, especially not at the hotel. But she was ranting about some injustice that Bifaro had committed. I heard what sounded like a slap, followed by more angry words, the clink of something metallic hitting stone, a slammed door, a shrill scream, and then rushed footsteps descending the stairs. I had my back to the courtyard, with my hands grabbing the handles of a pot heavy with cannellini beans that I had left to soak and was now bringing inside to simmer. Inside the kitchen I was greeted by a deliveryman with a bill for me to sign.

When I returned to the courtyard, Caterina was fussing and working herself up to a full-scale wail. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of the back of a respectably dressed woman entering the ground floor door of the hotel. It was Rosa's back.

I picked up Caterina to comfort her and brought her inside. She didn't leave my sight for the rest of the day. It wasn't until that evening, when I was giving her a bath, that I noticed that the earrings were gone.

The next day I took the trolley with Caterina to Tuckahoe and walked the two miles beyond the trolley stop to Rosa's house. I saw the curtains move at the side window when I rang the doorbell. Nobody answered at first, but I wouldn't go away. I knew she was in the house, so I continued to ring and knock until she finally opened the door.

I demanded the earrings. She denied that she had them. "You have no proof," she threw back at me. "You can't even prove that I was there. You never even saw the face of the woman you said was in the courtyard. And I wouldn't want those gaudy things anyway. Why would I take your baby's diamonds when Philly buys me my own? Go back to your kitchen, Giulia. Find somebody else to blame your misfortune on."

I wanted to tear apart her house looking for the earrings. But I got up and left with my dignity.

When I got outside, though, I realized that I wasn't ready to leave. Something held me there in the yard. I started to walk slowly around the house. I bent down and picked up a handful of dirt and rubbed it between my fingers and my thumb. Then, I knew what I had to do to quiet my outrage. I let the dirt leave my fingers as I circled the house. I keened words that came from somewhere else, from someone else. I blew the last of the dust from my fingertips as I rounded the final corner of the house and then I walked away, never looking back. If Rosa was watching me I will never know. If she heard my curse, or felt it, she never admitted it to anyone.

Seventeen days later, the house burned down. Eight days after that, the fire marshal discovered the faulty wiring that had started the blaze. The next day, a package arrived at the Palace addressed to Caterina with no return address. Inside, were her earrings.

## *The Boat House Café* Named Finalist for the Goethe Prize

**The finalists for the Goethe Prize in Historical Fiction were announced in early November and I am honored to announce that *The Boat House Café* has been named to the short list.**

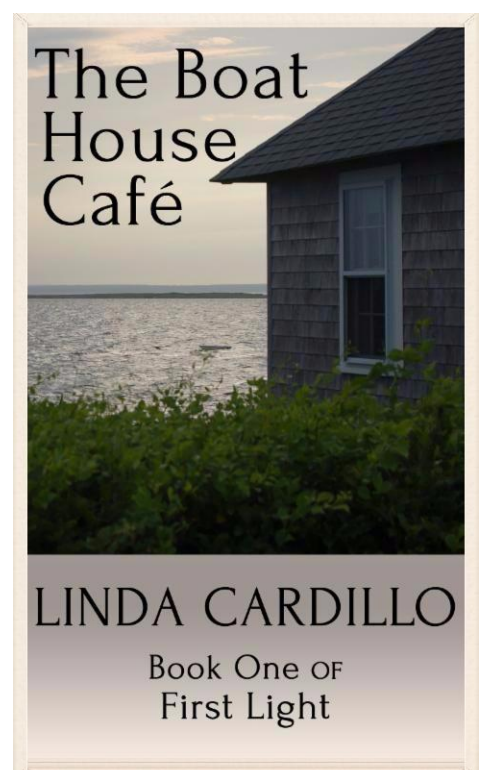
Recent reviews have continued to bring me the joy of knowing that this story is resonating with readers. Here are a few excerpts:

"The Boat House Cafe is a wonderful book! The characters are drawn very vividly, and the descriptions of the Island and the historical period are so evocative, that I feel like I have met every character, been inside their dwellings, and lived alongside them. The plot is very compelling as well, and I found it was the proverbial "couldn't put it down" read. I would highly recommend this book to anyone."

"I was drawn into this book from the first chapter and it held me in it's thrall to the very last page."

". . . a great read and very haunting."

"This is a wonderful novel and a really compelling read. The characters are rich and fully drawn and the setting is powerful and evocative -- especially if you've ever spent time on Martha's Vineyard. . . "



Have you written a review for one of my books? Please let me know!



Sharing your opinion is one of the most helpful things you can do for authors whose books you love.

Thank you!

## Welcoming Paula Eykelhof to Bellastoria Press



Bellastoria Press is thrilled to welcome Paula Eykelhof as our editorial consultant, advising us on acquisitions and the publishing market.

Paula is the former (retired) Executive Editor at Harlequin and MIRA Books (now a division of Harper Collins). She has worked with a number of *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling authors (including # 1 bestselling authors). Her work at Harlequin included responsibility for several programs within series (including Romance, Super romance, American Romance, Everlasting and more) as well as single title imprints, principally MIRA. She's been a frequent speaker at writing conferences as well as a contributor to *Writers' Digest* magazine.

On a personal note, it was Paula who bought the manuscript for *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons* and launched my publishing career. She has nurtured my writing for more than ten years and helped me become the writer I am today.

As part of her role at Bellastoria Press she'll be offering her thoughts on the craft of writing in an ongoing blog, "Talking About Writing." Read her first entry [here](#).

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