Breakfast in Rome for the Newly Married Couple

“Let’s go, what are you doing?” he said, a bit impatient. And he took her hand and pulled her into the dining room, where Mrs. Anna was waiting for her in front of the table, set for two, but with enough food for ten.

“I just want some black coffee,” Regina said.

“Just black coffee? You are crazy, my dear, crazy, so to speak. Sorry, you know. In Rome we must eat. Here is the black coffee: would you like some cognac in it?”

“No: I wouldn’t, I don’t like it.”

“Well, try. You’ll like it, you’ll see.”

“No, no.”

“Yes, yes, otherwise you’ll make me unhappy.”

She had to drink coffee with cognac, and then she had to drink coffee and milk, and then the frollata, and to eat bread with butter, and the cookies, and the bread. In the end, she had tears in her eyes: her mother-in-law’s insistence oppressed her. To comfort her, Mrs. Anna asked her if she wanted a cup of broth and a chicken wing.

“But you want to make me die!” she cried, comically desperate.

Antonio ate and laughed.

(from the novel, Nostalgia, 1905)
The novel *Nostalgia* was published in 1905, when Grazia Deledda had lived in Rome for five years, having settled there after her marriage with Palmiro Madesani. The protagonist Regina lives a psychological situation that is very similar to the one that sometimes must have also overwhelmed the writer’s spirit: the impact of city life and the deep nostalgia for her village, left after her marriage. If Grazia Deledda had left Nuoro with great enthusiasm, full of hope for Rome, city of literary glory and fame, Regina, the protagonist of Nostalgia, also saw Rome as a city in which she could fulfill her dreams.

Regina moved from Viadana, a town in the low Padua valley of the Madesani family, which Deledda learnt to understand and love when she was a guest of his husband’s relatives.

Unlike Grazia, Regina would not find what she expected in Rome, and the nostalgia for her town would soon become a real existential crisis, which would influence her marriage as well. In the narrative place I presented, you can see, through a food scene, how Grazia Deledda highlights Regina’s unfamiliarity towards the Roman environment that has embraced her.

Her husband Antonio points out that “here in Rome” it is necessary to eat a lot, while she refuses the food with a sense of nausea, which is a herald and prelude of the existential discomfort that will soon overwhelm her.