Cookies and Meat to be More Beautiful

Try to put on weight, and your husband will love you more. Don’t you have any eggs to make your pastry? – Madalena had supplies, but she had no money to waste on delicacies. One day her stepmother observed that the wheat crate was pierced and that the wheat was blooming. Do one thing, my silver daughter: sell the wheat and buy eggs and sugar. You will tell Mauru that little by little the ants have stolen the wheat from the chest. He is simple and he will believe you. And so they did, and they bought eggs, sugar, and chocolate, and they made cookies, island bread, raisin, and sapa cakes; and after the wheat, it was the turn of the barley; and you will tell your husband that the monks and priors of St. Francis and St. Cosimo passed by, and that you gave them barley for almsgiving. They also decimated the oil and mixed the water with the wine, and the mice gnawed the cheese. (…) But one day, Madalena said: Now that’s enough: I’m fat enough. In fact, she looked like another; her face had taken a dark and warm tint and her eyes shone like two stars in the brown sky of the evening.

With renewed blood, an unusual energy flowed through her veins; and when her husband came back, she knew how to tell him so many lies that he looked at her with respect and thought:
“Almost as if she were as wise and thoughtful as her stepmother.”

Mauru left on Monday morning with the bag of provisions on his shoulders. Some neighbors who were going to the fountain, reached him, looked laughing at the bag, and asked him:

“Did your wife, Maureddu Pi, give you good stuff?”
“Good stuff; why, what do you care?”
“No, nothing! Because she fasts when you’re not there, and so should you.” (…)

A few days later, he suddenly returned home and found the house dimly lit and Madalena roasting a nice piece of fatty meat on a spit.

“We have a guest,” she said. “Your friend Juanne Zichina, who came from his country because of a quarrel he had with his brother.”

(from the novel *Le tredici uova*, from the collection *Chiaroscuro*, 1912)

Mauru is a farmer who stays in the country for weeks, so his wife Madalena has to prepare his saddlebag (a typical bag he puts on his horse or shoulders) full of cooked and non-perishable food.

To keep her husband close to her, Madalena follows her stepmother’s advice and tries to eat very substantial things to become white and red and round, which Sardinian men seem to like.
The reconstituent “natural” care begins with the preparation of sweets made with genuine ingredients: eggs, sugar, and chocolate. Then raisin sweets and sapa, which is a sort of jam made with what remains after the pressing of the grapes. Even the island bread, a term put in italics by Deledda herself, underlines the specificity and originality of the sweets presented.

We have already seen how important the guest is in the Sardinian tradition. And it is for a friend of her husband’s, who suddenly arrived, that Madalena cooked a nice piece of fatty meat on the spit over the fire, inside the large fireplace that was present even in the poorest Barbaricine houses.