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La Cucina
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Rosa's Homeland

Rosa's family farm is in the lush Alcantara Valley, to the northeast of Mount Etna, which dominates the skyline, and which still erupts from time to time. The volcanic soil is very fertile, and the Fiore grow oranges and lemons, grapes, cherries, apricots, peaches, plums, figs, and prickly pears, all kinds of nuts, tomatoes, eggplants, asparagus, artichokes, and olives. They have herds of goats which graze on the steep hillsides, and keep cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens. The *fattoria* also has a dairy where cheeses and butter are produced in large quantities.

A short distance away from the *fattoria* is the hill town of Castiglione, built on a rocky promontory which looks down over the valley. The buildings are constructed of the local purplish gray lava stone, and have pan-tile roofs of terracotta. At the citadel are the ruined turrets of the Norman castle of King Ruggero, where Rosa and Bartolomeo spend that one night together before his death. Castiglione

is also where Rosa goes to school and to church; it is where Bartolomeo's family lives, and where Bartolomeo dies, in the Piazza di San Antonio. Just outside the town is the cemetery where Rosa buries her loved ones over the course of the years.

A little taste: The following recipe is excerpted from *La Cucina*:

Rosa's Maccu (Fava Bean Soup) Recipe

I made this dish on the Monday morning when l'Inglese was coming to the Library to inspect the manuscripts. Do you remember how I made a fool of myself by dressing in my best clothes and then hiding in the restrooms because Costanza and the other library assistants were laughing at me?

Ingredients:

½ lb. Dried fava beans (soaked overnight in water, then drained)
2 pints cold water
A bunch of fennel
Salt and pepper
Olive oil

Directions:

Place the soaked beans in a pan with the water and salt. Bring to a boil and simmer for 1 ½ - 2 hours. While you are waiting you can visit the bathroom, take a doccia, and make yourself beautiful. You will know when the fava are ready when you can squash them against the side of the pan. Add plenty of black pepper and a liberal dash of olive oil. Serve at once with some *Pane Ramacinato*.

Caution:

If you cook while naked your neighbors may leer at you.