Capricciosa

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There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn.

—Samuel Johnson

The man behind the counter rubs dried oregano between his palms. It falls over the ham and mushrooms, catches in the shredded cheese, settles on the exposed tomato at the edge. There is enough of it to see. His hands make one last pass over the pizza, scattering what remains, and then it goes into the oven. Seven minutes at 330 degrees Celsius. Outside, somebody is getting into a car. Inside, an old woman is putting an amount of black pepper on her cabbage

that suggests a serious and enduring commitment. The pizza will not be cut unless somebody asks.

The tomato sauce has already been cooked. This matters. Tomato purée, dried oregano, garlic, salt, black pepper and a little sugar have been simmered together and then allowed to cool. The garlic has lost its raw edge; the oregano has had time to become part of the tomato. The sugar belongs in the sauce without making the sauce taste of sugar. What reaches the dough is a seasoned preparation, something already finished in one sense before the pizza has begun. The oven is not being asked to turn a spoonful of cold tomatoes into all of this in seven minutes.

Spread across the thin base, the sauce makes a red field with a narrow border of bare dough. You want enough to taste beneath everything that is coming, enough that a bite of the middle still has tomato in it after the first impression of cheese and ham. The slightly sweet, peppery, garlicky red must persist. A pizza can be covered in ingredients and still taste strangely empty if the sauce underneath has nothing to say. Here it has been given its own time on the stove. It can hold its end of the fucking conversation.

Over the sauce goes shredded cheese: mild, semi-hard, low-moisture cow's milk cheese. Its mildness is a

positive quality. The cheese is going to melt into a continuous layer, occupy the intervals between the other ingredients, brown where the heat reaches it, and remain soft underneath. The individual shreds disappear. There are no white islands of fresh mozzarella with separate little lives of their own. This cheese becomes the common material of the pizza, a warm, yielding surface through which the other things emerge.

It would be possible to name a more distinguished cheese. That would tell you less about what is wanted here. The important information is in those apparently unromantic words: mild, shredded, low-moisture. You can feel the result in your mouth before the pizza has been baked. You can anticipate the thin, browned skin yielding to the softer cheese beneath it, the stretch that briefly joins a lifted piece to the rest, the little pockets where melted cheese has gathered against a slice of mushroom. Its job is substantial and quite exact. It does not need a biography.

The mushrooms are ordinary button mushrooms, sliced and blanched before they go on. They are soft and pale, their curved caps and short pieces of stem recognizable beneath the cheese. There should be a good amount of them. They have not been taken away and browned separately until they qualify as another, more

expensive dish. Their moisture belongs here. Against the crisp bread and the occasional browned point of ham, you want that yielding little slice of mushroom, the particular soft resistance of it, its modest taste arriving from inside the hotter, saltier mouthful.

An attempt to improve the mushrooms by making them more emphatically mushroom-like can miss the point. A darkly fried mushroom would occupy a different place in the bite. This one is doing something quieter. It is wet and soft where the bread is dry and crisp. It lets the ham remain the ham. You can find a piece with your fork, separate it from the cheese and look at it: an ordinary slice of an ordinary button mushroom, doing exactly what it was put there to do.

The ham is wet-cured, smoked and cooked. Each of these words matters as well. It is salty and juicy, with smoke already in it before the oven begins to work on its edges. There is plenty. You are not meant to discover one carefully positioned piece and feel fortunate. A forkful should pick up ham without having to hunt for it. Where it lies protected by cheese it stays soft; where an edge sticks up into the heat it darkens and becomes a different pleasure. The same ham supplies both, depending on what happened to that particular piece when the pizza was assembled.

This is skinka. Replacing it with translucent sheets of cured raw ham would produce something else, perhaps something very good, but you would lose the cooked, smoked, faintly springy substance that belongs between these mushrooms and this cheese. The pizza is not waiting for somebody to discover a superior ham and rescue it. The ingredients have already found one another. Change one carelessly and the whole mouthful begins speaking in another accent.

Then comes the oregano between the hands. There was oregano in the sauce, cooked into the red; now there is oregano on top, dry, newly crushed and directly exposed to the oven. The same herb arrives twice by different routes. Underneath, it belongs to the sauce. Above, it meets the hot cheese and ham, and its smell gets out into the room. That final generous scattering is the difference between knowing, in a general way, that food is being cooked and knowing that your capricciosa is in the oven.

Seven minutes is long enough for something decisive to happen to the edges. The rim takes color, the underside crisps, the cheese loses its separate shreds and develops its little browned places. The mushrooms remain moist. The ham is pink in one place and darker in another. The oregano has ceased to look like some-

thing recently applied. It belongs to the baked surface now, while the smell of it seems to belong to the whole establishment. The pizza comes out broad, thin and thoroughly cooked, with no need to explain its intentions.

This is the small-town Swedish capricciosa. Ham and mushrooms, tomato sauce, mild cheese, dried oregano with a sufficiently heavy hand. The name is Italian. The thing in front of you is entirely at home where it is.

Artichoke can go on it. An artichoke heart has a perfectly reasonable claim to a place beside ham and mushrooms, but its presence asks a little more of the eater, particularly after a long delivery. What was attractive hot can arrive as a lukewarm, wet, fibrous piece that has spent too much of its afternoon under a cardboard lid. Someone who likes artichokes may still be pleased. Someone who was merely prepared to put up with them is now being made to work. Leaving them off the standard pizza is an intelligible courtesy to that second person.

Olives are less of an undertaking. They can be added to this pizza as they can be added to many others; somebody asks for olives, and olives appear. Put both olives and artichokes beside the ham and mushrooms and the

basic combination becomes recognizably Italian again. The rest of the pizza has not changed countries. It still has this sauce, this cheese, this smoked ham and this amount of oregano. The relationship to Italy is there in the ingredients, available without being a source of anxiety. Nobody needs to stand beside the oven adjudicating the citizenship of a fucking mushroom.

The pizzeria may be called Milano. The name does not oblige the man making the pizza to imitate somebody in Milan, any more than it obliges the old woman at the table to order a meal she does not want. Here, capricciosa names a reliable arrangement of tastes and textures, made for the people who come through this door. There is care in getting that arrangement right. It is the care of having made something many times and still knowing what a proper one ought to be.

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The grease has reached the lid before you open the box. Dark, translucent patches show through the cardboard where the hot pizza has been in contact with it. You can see evidence of the cheese from outside. The box has acquired a little of what it contains, and this is encouraging. There is a good-ass pizza in there. It has been hot enough and generous enough to leave a mark.

The pleasure begins before the first bite, in the warmth coming through the base of the box and the oregano escaping from its edges. You carry it with a certain levelness, aware of the broad, soft thing inside. The lid gives you its greasy report. An immaculate box might contain an excellent pizza, but it offers less to go on. This one has already begun telling you what happened between the oven and your front door.

There is usually no small plastic table planted in the middle. That little American device looks foreign here, a piece of disposable furniture somebody has inexplicably decided your dinner requires. Its practical purpose is easy enough to understand. The lid might touch the cheese. Yes. The lid has touched the cheese. You can see the grease through it, and you were pleased. Protecting the cardboard from all evidence of its contents would solve a problem you had not experienced as a problem.

Open the box and the pizza is still one whole circular object. In the ordinary course of things, a Swedish pizzeria does not slice it. You have to ask for that. The absence of cuts is so familiar that the arrival of a pizza already divided into wedges can feel like the discovery that somebody has started making decisions about your dinner without consulting you. There were several

ways you might have wanted to eat it. Now a stranger has picked one.

An intact pizza leaves its possibilities open. Some people cut their own wedges. Some take a knife and fork and work steadily through it, mouthful by mouthful, without ever producing a slice in the recognizable sense. Others tear a piece away with their hands and fold it so that the cheese and ham are held inside. The bread cracks a little at its crispest points and bends elsewhere. Fingers acquire tomato and oil. There is no difficulty here worth turning into a discussion of table manners.

Some people roll the whole thing into a large, irregular wrap. It is a substantial operation, gathering that broad disk into something that can be held and approached from one end. The crispness underneath has to make its peace with the fold. Mushrooms and ham, which a moment ago lay spread across a considerable area, are brought into intimate proximity. The pizza becomes thick in the hand although the dough itself remains thin. This is another way of arranging the same dinner, and nobody behind the counter needs to give permission.

Then there are people who eat the middle first. They work through the rich, soft center and leave a ring of

crust, refusing the supposed necessity of traveling from the point of a triangle toward a bread handle. The middle is where the cheese and sauce have collected, where a knife encounters least resistance, where the mushrooms can be picked up with their share of everything underneath. It is quite a reasonable place to begin. The fact that the plate looks increasingly peculiar is between the person and the plate.

Another method is to cut straight across near the edge and set the crust aside, turning it into a supply of bread. A curved strip comes away, with a little red and cheese along its inner boundary. You can cut off another as you work. The rich part of the pizza is now available separately from its dry, toasted margin, and you can bring them back together in whatever proportions the next bite requires. Too much soft cheese and mushroom in one mouthful: a little crust. A particularly salty piece of ham: bread beside it. There is no reason every bite must contain the same ratio.

The crust can also go into the béarnaise sauce. Take a piece by its dry end, dip the other end into the little container, and bring back a thick yellow coating that settles into the broken surface of the bread. The crust has edges and cavities for it. The sauce is cool and rich against what is still warm and toasted. You eat it beside

the pizza, return to the middle, come back to the crust. What might otherwise have been the last, less interesting part of each slice has become a side dish you can use throughout the meal.

Sometimes the béarnaise is reddish yellow. The pizzeria has a special version with tomato sauce mixed into it, and the result sits beside the pizza looking as though it has already been in contact with the pizza. The red has entered the yellow. There is a little of the tomato's character inside the richness, while the sauce remains recognizably béa. It is a very particular color, warmer than the ordinary pale yellow, belonging easily beside the browned cheese and the orange grease on the cardboard. The piece of crust disappears into it and comes out improved for the purpose at hand.

There is no need to build an argument for béarnaise beside a Swedish pizza. The tub is already open. The interesting thing is the use a person makes of it, how a bite of bread can be made richer or a rich bite followed by plain bread, how the meal can be adjusted without anything being sent back to the kitchen. Even the edge of the pizza remains available for another job. Nothing requires you to finish eating the center and then dutifully chew through an unwanted circumference.

These methods can coexist around one table. One person has a wedge in hand, another a folded piece, another is conducting a small and orderly excavation with a fork. Somebody has built a reserve of crust beside the sauce. The pizza has not become less itself through any of this. It can withstand the preferences of the people eating it. That is part of what a whole pizza offers when it arrives uncut: enough confidence in the food to leave the eating to you.

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There is a large bowl of pizzasallad in the pizzeria. Its size is part of what it says. Pale, finely sliced cabbage, dressed and settled together, rises in a mass flecked with black pepper. Here and there a narrow strip of red pepper interrupts it. You take a plate. Nobody has to explain that this is for you. The bowl is there, the plates are there, and you are waiting for a pizza. These facts are sufficient.

Pizzasallad comes with the meal. The first portion is included, and an extra one may be handed over for nothing as well. A customer who asks for more has expressed a perfectly understandable desire. Whether somebody bothers to charge for the second tub depends on the place and the occasion; the first belongs to the

pizza as plainly as the box belongs to a delivery. It would be peculiar to have to negotiate separately for the cabbage. The meal has already accounted for it.

The dressing is sharp with vinegar, salty, and oily enough to coat the thin surfaces of the cabbage. The shreds bend under the fork but still break with a fresh crunch when you bite them. This combination matters: pliant on the plate, crisp in the mouth. The salad has been prepared and allowed to take up its dressing, rather than assembled as a pile of raw vegetable strands with something dribbled over them at the last moment. A forkful brings the seasoning with it. You do not have to travel down through dry cabbage looking for the place where the vinegar went.

There is already a generous amount of black pepper integrated into it. The black specks are visible throughout the bowl, held against the pale cabbage by the dressing. You get pepper with the first forkful and with the next. The salad arrives properly seasoned, quite capable of making itself known without anything from the table. Adding more black pepper is for somebody who loves black pepper more than their own children. Such people exist. They should have access to the shaker, but the rest of us can eat the salad as it stands.

The little red strips should be there. They are slices of pickled red bell pepper, soft, with that fermented, preserved character, folded among the cabbage. They have a taste, certainly, and the occasional piece changes a forkful, but their importance exceeds the amount of pepper you actually eat. Their first work is visual. A small amount of red can make a whole bowl of pale cabbage look attended to. You see the strips and know that somebody cared enough about pizzasallad to finish making it.

They are highlights rather than a second bulk ingredient. If every mouthful contained a substantial piece, they would be doing another job. As it is, you may encounter one after several forkfuls of cabbage: a glossy, yielding red ribbon with a slightly different acidity and texture. It gives the eye something to find before it gives the mouth something to taste. The next forkful goes back to cabbage, and the pepper continues its intermittent work elsewhere on the plate.

Fresh red pepper would be a different interruption. These strips have already softened into the preserved company they are keeping. Their color is more emphatic than their resistance to the fork. They belong among dressed cabbage without becoming more cabbage, and that small difference is enough. There is

something affectionate in bothering with it, in giving this huge communal bowl its few bright particulars when the customers would probably have eaten the contents anyway.

A bowl without red pepper can still contain excellent pizzasallad. It may be exactly as sharp and salty as you like, with a perfect cut to the cabbage and enough black pepper to make your nose notice. Its appearance simply says something else. Without the red highlights, the sheer quantity becomes more conspicuous. Somebody has made a fucking mountain of cabbage. There is no pretending that the portion you put on your plate is a precious little composition. There is a lot of this stuff, and there is no visible reason to be timid about it.

In that sense the plain bowl can look even more inviting. The red pepper says that somebody took care; the uninterrupted mass of cabbage says that somebody made enough. You can respond to either. A particularly good bowl manages both, its few red strips dispersed through a quantity that would look absurd in a domestic kitchen. The care has not made it scarce. The abundance has not made the care pointless. You can take a large portion and still find the little red thing that somebody wanted you to see.

Eaten while you wait, it is a surprisingly good starter. Cold vinegar, salt, cabbage and black pepper make the next forkful attractive, and beyond that forkful the thought of hot cheese becomes more attractive too. Many starters begin satisfying the appetite so efficiently that the main course arrives to find some of its work already done. Pizzasallad usually points the appetite forward. You feel the acid and pepper in your mouth, hear the cabbage breaking between your teeth, and want the pizza more than you did before you sat down.

There is no need to maintain a ceremonial distance between starter and main course. You may still have a little salad when the pizza arrives, and it is useful beside the hot, rich food. The cool forkful gives the next bite of cheese and smoked ham a new edge. Or you finish the plate and go back for more. The bowl has not gone anywhere. Taking a second helping is not an admission that somebody calculated your nutritional requirements incorrectly. You liked the salad. There is more salad.

At a table in the pizzeria, you can see what other people do with that permission. Some take a modest plateful and eat it while talking. Some create a height of cabbage that the diameter of their plate does not appear to justify. The shreds cling together well enough to

support an ambitious structure, until a forkful removed from one side brings a small landslide down into the dressing. A piece is pushed back with the knife. Eating resumes. Across the room, somebody else's plate is already empty.

Delivery puts the salad into a small plastic container, usually a round one for the smaller serving or a rectangular one for the larger. Lift the lid and there is the cold cabbage, compressed a little by travel, with dressing caught at the bottom and red pepper showing through the pale shreds. The pizza beside it is hot now. You can eat the salad first, but the box is open and seven minutes of baking have just delivered their result. It is difficult to be conscientious about the order of courses while your cheese is cooling.

So the salad goes onto the pizza. Take some with a fork, let the loose dressing fall back, and put the cabbage directly on top of the ham, mushrooms and cheese. Its temperature remains briefly separate from theirs. The first bite breaks through cold, vinegary crunch into hot, soft, salty food, with crisp bread underneath. The blanched mushroom and the cabbage are almost opposites in the mouth, though both are wet: one yields, the other snaps. The tomato has been cooked into its

sweetness; the salad brings an acidity that has not been through the oven.

There is a particularly good mouthful in the middle of a capricciosa with pizzasallad on top. The cheese holds the ham and mushroom together, the bread supports it, and the cabbage breaks up the softness without concealing it. You taste the black pepper through the vinegar and then the smoke in the ham. A little red pepper may be caught in there as well. It is a crowded bite, but the parts have different enough jobs that the crowding feels generous rather than confused.

The salad has moved from communal bowl to starter, from starter to accompaniment, from accompaniment to topping. None of these uses needed to be invented in a kitchen meeting. Somebody had hot pizza and cold pizzasallad in front of them and put the two together. Another person left them separate and alternated. A third was already dipping a piece of crust into reddish-yellow béa. The meal gives you enough differences of temperature, texture and richness to keep doing this, a little more bread here, a little more sharp cabbage there, until the broad disk has become dinner.

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The old woman has taken enough pizzasallad to make the plate difficult to see. She puts Tabasco on it. The dressing already contains a perfectly serious amount of black pepper, but she adds more of that as well. She has the steak cutlery provided by the pizzeria, a substantial fork and a knife with which to keep the advancing cabbage within the boundaries of lunch. Beside her is a starköl, a strong lager. She takes a large forkful, eats it, and reaches for the glass.

This person is uncommon, but she exists. The quantity of salad is not an exaggeration produced by looking at an elderly woman and expecting her to eat delicately. It would be a large quantity in front of anyone. It is a gym-bro quantity of cabbage. The Tabasco has made red tracks across its surface; the extra black pepper has settled over those tracks and into the folds below. She takes another forkful with the straightforward appetite of somebody eating a meal she has deliberately chosen.

There is no pizza coming. This takes a moment to become clear. You expect the plate to be an unusually ambitious starter, perhaps the result of a long wait, and then she finishes it, orders another beer and goes back to the bowl. The second mountain answers the question.

This is lunch. Or dinner. She came to the pizzeria to eat pizzasallad and drink beer, and the restaurant has supplied both. There is nothing missing from her order.

Watching her eat, you can see how little the word salad tells you about the appetite involved. There is no restraint in this meal, no apologetic exchange of something desirable for something dutiful. She is attacking exactly what she wants. The cabbage is sharp, salty and crunchy, the Tabasco gives it another kind of heat, and the black pepper has been taken to a level that satisfies her personally. A mouthful of cold lager follows. The fork goes back into the plate. She is not making a statement about healthy living. She is having her fucking dinner.

Falcon seems right. Åbro would do just as well. These are plausible beers for this particular table, beer that can arrive and get on with being beer. Eriksberg would introduce a faint suggestion that a selection had taken place, and that does not quite belong to the woman as I picture her. Even Pripps Blå feels like a variation requiring a moment's consideration. The point is not a ranking of breweries. It is how completely the glass belongs beside that plate, how little either object asks to be discussed.

The lättöl version is even better. Give her a low-alcohol beer and the scene becomes more, rather than less, itself. You can no longer account for the cabbage merely by imagining somebody who has come to drink and found something convenient to eat alongside. The cabbage stands more plainly as the reason for being there. She likes this salad, this much of it, in this room, with this beer. Another lättöl and another helping are enough to complete the afternoon's culinary ambitions.

There is a freedom in knowing so precisely what will satisfy you. Other customers have read a menu and chosen a pizza, which is also a perfectly good way to eat in a pizzeria. She has recognized that her meal is sitting in the communal bowl. It does not trouble her that most people treat it as a preliminary to something else. They can have their something else. She pushes the fork into the cabbage, gathers the shreds that escaped with her knife, and continues.

The steak cutlery is important to the scene. It gives this apparently modest food the equipment and physical scale of a substantial dinner. The knife can hold one side of the heap in place while the fork works at the other. A stray length of cabbage is drawn back from the rim. A heavily peppered patch is turned into the less heavily peppered material below. There is a practical

concentration to the movements, the small adjustments of somebody who has eaten the same thing this way before and does not need to think very hard about how.

There may be very little conversation. A word when the beer arrives, another when she orders the next one. Between these exchanges she eats, and the owner works. They can share a considerable part of an afternoon this way, with the sound of cutlery and the opening and closing of the oven doing most of the talking. When she gets up with her empty plate, he knows where she is going. When she comes back, the beer is still where she left it. The room makes a quiet allowance for her movements, as it does for his.

What is visible is pleasure expressed as consumption. She has not complimented the dressing in carefully selected words. She has eaten an enormous plate of it and come back for more. When she lifts another helping from the bowl, the owner can see the result of the morning's work being received with an enthusiasm that requires no interpretation. That is his pizzasallad. She wants another mountain of it. There are worse things to witness from behind a counter.

A person can love the form of a restaurant without eating its principal dish. She has accepted its room, its beer, its cutlery, its seasoning and its idea of how much

cabbage ought to be available to the public. She is using the place thoroughly. Calling this a failure to order pizza would be a strangely impoverished description of what has happened. She came in, sat down, ate well and stayed for another beer. The pizzeria has succeeded in being somewhere she wanted to be.

There may be an even more concentrated version of this life. I have never seen somebody make a habitual meal of nothing but pizzasallad and béarnaise sauce, but somewhere in that long country, surely somebody is doing it. A plate of cold, sharply dressed cabbage and a little tub of rich yellow sauce. A forkful goes in and comes back wearing béa. Sweden has a great deal of north in which to accommodate such a person. It would be rash to assume that nobody has thought of it.

The combination is plausible enough: crunch and vinegar meeting cool richness, the black pepper carried into the sauce, perhaps a strip of preserved red pepper folded into the mouthful. It would be a violently Swedish relative of coleslaw, assembled a little at a time according to the eater's requirements. Someone who had done it twice and liked it would have every reason to do it again. Somewhere, perhaps, the order has already become so familiar that the sauce is fetched before the person asks.

The pleasure in imagining this is partly that the meal needs no audience. It could have been happening quietly for years. Its inventor may feel no urge to photograph it, defend it or give it a name. Pizzasallad and béa. That is what the person wants. The owner has the ingredients and understands the request. A whole private tradition can exist in the short distance between a salad bowl and a table, maintained without ever being announced to the rest of the country.

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The owner wants the woman in his pizzeria. Her second plate is welcome. She is not being tolerated until somebody gathers the courage to tell her that the free salad was meant for different customers. The man who made the enormous bowl can see what it is for. She is eating it. She has taken the restaurant's abundance seriously enough to act on it.

Suppose someone did complain. A customer at another table notices the replenished mountain, notices that there has been no pizza, and decides to make himself useful by pointing this out. What response does he expect? That the owner will hurry over and stop the old woman enjoying his food? That the bowl was an elaborate misunderstanding, its size an error, its accessibility

a trap? The complaint requires the proprietor to take the side of an imaginary shortage against the person sitting in his room eating what he prepared.

Why the fuck do you think we make a mountain of this stuff every morning? I don't see you making a dent in it, sir.

That would be a satisfactory answer. The final sir gives it the small additional dignity it deserves. There is a considerable difference between a restaurant that hopes customers will overlook its complimentary food and a restaurant that has made a great deal of something because people like it. The bowl in front of you is not hiding. It is sitting there in the open, full of cabbage. Taking some is the most obvious possible understanding of the arrangement.

The woman has not found an exploit. An exploit would mean that she was using the place against the intentions of the person running it. He sees her coming back with her plate. He knows about the Tabasco and the black pepper and the absence of a pizza. The arrangement continues in full view of everybody because he likes having her there. It is possible for two people to be satisfied with a transaction whose charm a third person has failed to grasp.

There is an affection here something like feeding the cats that live around the neighborhood. You recognize an arrival. You know a preference. You make the small provision that allows the familiar life to continue alongside your own. The cat need not perform gratitude, and the person need not become entertaining. Much of the pleasure is simply that the same creature has come back and feels sufficiently at home to eat. A place acquires these attachments through repetition, a little attention given again because it was pleasant to give it before.

For the woman, being welcome can mean being left alone to get on with lunch. The owner does not need to walk over and praise her eccentricity. He brings the beer, answers when she speaks, returns to the oven. Perhaps an occasional glass arrives without being charged for. It would not require a toast. The kindness can remain small enough to fit into the ordinary movements of the room, where neither party has to stop what they are doing and acknowledge the relationship as an occasion.

The extra tub of pizzasallad handed over at the counter belongs to the same scale of attention. Someone asks for a little more, and there is plenty, so the owner passes it across. The gesture does not need to establish a principle governing every future portion of cabbage. It

is enough that this customer wants more today and that another container is close to hand. A generous place can make room for these minor decisions without turning each one into a story about its generosity.

Look at the woman, though. Look at this fucking lady. The plate is full again, and the Tabasco has been picked up again, and the beer stands in its familiar place beside the knife. There is more convincing evidence of a proper small-town pizzeria here than in a description of the restaurant composed by somebody who has never eaten in it. She has returned. She has made herself comfortable. She is trusting the place to continue being the place she came for.

The owner has his own satisfactions in that continuity. He still has pizzas to make. The tomato sauce is ready, the cheese is shredded, the mushrooms are prepared, the ham is within reach. The large bowl will be less full at the end of the day than it was in the morning. People will have carried away boxes with warm, greasy lids and little containers of cold cabbage. Others will have sat at the tables and worked through their pizzas in ways that would have been inconvenient to prescribe. The food will have been used.

You can watch the work without finding anything particularly ceremonial in it. Another base is spread

with the cooled sauce. Cheese falls across it. Ham and mushrooms follow, in amounts established by the hand and checked by the eye. The oregano is rubbed between the palms. At a table, someone has cut a strip of crust away and is dipping it into béa. At another, the old woman has reached the lower slopes of her second mountain. There is still a great deal of pizzasallad in the bowl.

A new employee pauses beside the owner. He has been watching the woman and has noticed something he thinks ought to be mentioned. “Hon beställde ingen pizza,” he says. She didn’t order a pizza.

“Nej.”