

The Daunting Saga of the 37 Tunnels

The GPS says I am 3 hours 54 minutes from Siena, but it knows nothing of the tunnels twixt here and there, the shock of sudden darkness pierced by pursuing yellow eyes, glowing red advice to "moderare la velocità," blinding flashes of sudden sun as I jump through stripes of light and dark, 13 tunnels and counting.

The car is stuffed with stuff rattling clay pots beating a clunky arhythmic clang as I swerve and slide through exit curves from each of the 19 tunnels on the way to Siena -- some quick, some interminable trips into heavy mountains that hang on manmade promises of strength. Do you doubt steel as I do? Surely one of 22 tunnels will fail, crash or crumble or gobble up space it gave.

I escape briefly from the autostrada, exit to slower curves, through tree canopies, and stop at a roadside shrine, thank whatever gods may be for a road that leads to Siena, however convoluted and constricted its 27 tunnels, a fit price to pay to return to the dream of Siena.

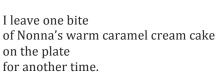


How did they find my grandmother 's imperfect perfect tomatoes, tart and sweet and juicy pale, misshapen, slightly green at the edges, my reward for surviving another tunnel on the journey, for gripping the wheel, turning, turning, turning, ever so slightly on every curve of the 32 tunnels.

A Brunello toast to any person reborn, empowered, tough enough to conquer 37 or 40 or 63 or all the tunnels that ever tried to test a traveler on the journey to Siena.

The waiter offers a firefly, softly in his hands, to a bambino, giggling at captured light that twinkles and wiggles.

Tomorrow
I will eat breakfast
with the sunrise,
stand at counters
like the Sienese,
expresso bitter on my lips,
sit in the Campo,
grateful
for all difficult journeys
that end at a homecoming.



Grazie, grazie, grazie mille.

