485 words

Lasagna

By Trina Kurilla

It started with lasagna.

I was reading the newspaper when the second chime of the doorbell rang out. Then there was a pot of soup followed by a roast chicken. When I was working on eleven down and thirty across on the last page, the corned beef arrived. A few times I didn't make it to the door in time and a dish would be left on the porch with a note. I was on the phone with the attorney when the pies came, each from a different person, fifteen minutes apart, one apple and one cherry. Both pastry deliverers excused themselves, not wanting to further interrupt my call. Pierogies, stew, and more appeared at the door, always with a sympathetic face and a loss for words, but they all ended up saying the same thing as everyone else.

Death did that to people.

It brought out the chefs in all of them. Comfort food in all forms continued to arrive, savory to sweet. But each meal came without company, just wanting to stop by before work, wanting to let me know I was in their thoughts, and not to worry about returning the Tupperware. By the second day, there was so much food I had trouble closing the fridge door all the way.

Every person that came around offered condolences, expressing their worry for me, that I should get a pet or take up a hobby. They knew my loss was great.

You two had a good run, so many happy years together, they told me.

I agreed. I wasn't ready for our time to be over. Admitting that would make them shift on their feet. It was their inadequate attempt to conceal their own discomfort for my sake.

Staring at all the food, I felt the quiet of the empty house that no radio or television could disguise. I had my pick of the buffet that had been gifted to me. I wasn't even hungry, but I didn't want the food to spoil. I set my place at the table, sitting in the same spot I had sat in for fifty-three years, and I ate the donated, "made-with-love" food, alone.

These self-declared sorrow-sharers were just going through the motions. When they saw my stocked fridge, I had lingered with the door open, waiting for them to jokingly ask if I needed help eating it all. They'd check the time. They'd say they had to be on their way, most of them running late for somewhere or someone. None of them, not a single one, mentioned the obscene amount of food that I was obligated to eat.

So much for hospitality. People I had known for sixty-plus years, retired friends, neighbors, and family, were busy—all of a sudden. And just when you needed them, all of them, all at once, they couldn't bring themselves to stay and grieve with you.

Lasagna isn't a meal for one.