

JOEY NICOLETTI

Onion Pie

The wind, the rattling wall, dinner
baking in the oven, the dead of winter
a string of salt diamonds
alight in a street of slush and starlit ice,
and the cat retires
to his feathery bed.

I'm the child who's read
every issue of The Amazing Spider-Man:
I spin webs of all shapes and sizes
in my sleep, on and off the page,
to capture the nebulous villains of memory and tradition
who would otherwise evade or defeat me.

I investigate my mother's stories
about her childhood in Orsogna, Italia.
The latest case: Lisa,
my mother's kid sister,
who went to school one day and didn't
return. Three army soldiers stormed
into her classroom.

Reeking of pipe smoke and wine,
they demanded everyone's jewelry,
including the teacher's.
The class obeyed.

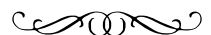
Then the soldiers left, and set
the school ablaze.
The fire fighters saved some
of the children.
Lisa wasn't one of them.
I've never seen a picture of her.

Thus, the character of Almost Aunt Lisa has appeared
in my life like a phantom
in the mausoleum of my imagination.
My Mother, Nonno Giovanni, and Nonna Ida were in America
11 months later.

The details of the journey are limited
to adjectives and events:
long, cramped, vile;
a cousin and an uncle dead.
The causes:
Malaria. Maybe Scurvy.
Death had a clammy grip
on the forehead and the heart.
Ellis Island was a hovel.

Since we've been partners,
my wife and I have tried
to find the answers together.
We have yet to fill in all of the blanks
of the blue-exam-books
of our respective cultural and familial histories.
Mastering recipes is the closest we've come
to a thoroughly successful search.

Tonight features a succulent trip
to the old country;
a buttery, spicy-sweet taste of Orsogna:
my wife pulls the Onion Pie
out of the oven, kissed by steam.



ABOUT JOEY NICOLETTI

Joey Nicoletti is the author of three poetry collections: the chapbooks *Borrowed Dust* (Finishing Line Press), *Earthquake Weather* (NightBallet Press), and *Cannoli Gangster* (Turning Point), which was selected as a finalist for the 2009 Steel Toe Books Poetry Prize by Denise Duhamel. His poems, reviews, and nonfiction essays have appeared in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Waccamaw*, *Aethlon*, and *City of the Big Shoulders: An Anthology of Chicago Poetry*, among other journals and anthologies. A graduate of the Sarah Lawrence College MFA program and New Mexico State University, he is a former poetry editor of *Puerto del Sol* and currently teaches at SUNY Buffalo State College.

