

“I don’t like her being in there without us,” said the Fishwife, spreading mayonnaise on a *pistolette* for Ronnie. She always prepared his plates for him as if he were a prince or an invalid.

“Would you rather stay in there yourself and change the dirty sheets?” said Anthony.

“No,” said Rose, “but I think she knows something.”

“Knows what?” asked Anthony. He was examining the broccoli on one of the trays, turning over one piece and then another with his stubby, tobacco-stained fingers.

“I don’t know, but I think they talk to each other sometimes.”

Rose was, of course, being irrational. Her newfound distrust of Wanda could only have been caused by the poor old domestic’s getting my mother and me to the house and spoiling their plan to have Mama Migliore to themselves before she died.

“Wanda and Mama?” said Anthony. “Don’t be stupid.”

“It’s possible,” said the Fishwife. “I know someone at the beauty parlor who has a colored maid who speaks Spanish.”

“She’s probably from Cuba,” said Anthony. “Wanda can’t speak Italian. She’s practically illiterate in *English*.” He seemed to have found a flower of broccoli to his liking and started rolling it like a candied apple in the cucumber dip. “Besides, what are you afraid they’d be talking about anyway?”

“You never know,” said Rose. “She could be turning Mama against us. I don’t think she likes me.”

My uncle seemed to have something to say to that—he looked to my mother for a moment—but decided to let it pass.

“I heard on the radio,” Rose went on, “where some wealthy woman turned against her family at the end and left everything—her house and all the money and valuables, jewelry and everything—to her maid.” My aunt poured Ronnie a glass of iced tea. She always squeezed the lemon wedges over a strainer to make sure no seeds got into his glass.

“We don’t have to worry about that,” said Anthony. “Mama’s got a sense of family, if nothing else.”

“The woman’s children didn’t even get her clothes. She left them to the Salvation Army.” Rose paused for a second, looking for a place to put the spent wedge. Finally she just left it on the table for Wanda to clean up. “They didn’t say if the maid was colored, though.”

“Where was that?” asked Anthony.

“Somewhere up north,” said Rose. “New York or New Jersey maybe.”

“See!” said Anthony. “That can’t happen here. I checked with de Salvo.” (Michael de Salvo had been the family attorney since Papa Migliore’s time.) “He says Louisiana has forced heirship. Mama couldn’t cut us out if she wanted to.” He licked his broccoli flower and took a bite. There was still so much dip on it, it looked like an ice cream cone. “It’s the Napoleonic Code,” he continued. “One of the advantages of living in a state that’s a century and a half behind the times.”

“Thank God,” said Rose. “But I still don’t think you should have hired a colored woman. They’re always trying to worm their way into white families. And you should have gotten a nurse. Then people wouldn’t feel so sorry for her.”

“A nurse?” spat Anthony. “Do you have any idea how much a nurse would have cost?” he said, swallowing hard on his broccoli cone. “Especially a white one!”