

Upfront

Consider this a “soft launch.” Food is a very significant protagonist in my life story. So is travel, which often leads to maniacal focus on eating wherever I go. I’m pretty good at a few things. Crosswords. Writing (you might agree, or you might not). Cooking (informed by my afore-implied insatiable lust for food). I’m not good (at all) at social media, but I’m going to try for the purpose of “brand” development. I’m renaming my sometimes-Skinnie-feature, La Mia Cucina, and planning to publish it in every other issue. From now on, it will be known as “Smells Like Sunday,” and ode to my home’s seductive simmering weekend scents. Concurrently, I will attempt to manage an Instagram presence, @smells.like.Sunday, that will chronicle the food I make and eat and the places I visit that inspire me. Please, consider coming along.

It’s fitting to start this endeavor with the Italian-American staple, Sunday sauce. I’ve iterated often over years and years to the version herein. Dare I say, it’s been “perfected” through continuous evolution. You’ll notice the meatball recipe included measurements, while the braciolo does not. It’s intentional. Because measurements are completely subjective. Consider them guides, rather than rules. Adhere to the basic ideas I’ve outlined and you’ll be in heaven this Sunday, with plenty of leftovers for the rest of the week.

BRACIOLE

1 piece flank steak (about 1 to 2 lb)
Pecorino cheese, grated
Garlic, minced
Italian parsley, chopped
Fine bread crumbs, plain
Olive oil
Butcher’s twine
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Work on a large piece of parchment paper on top of a solid cutting board. Pound the steak to thin it by half (a little less if the meat is stubborn). Season the pounded meat liberally with salt and pepper. Drizzle with a little olive oil.

Spread the remaining edible ingredients to cover the visible side of the meat, not quite

all the way to each edge. Starting at one of the two short sides of the meat rectangle, begin by tucking it back into itself and jelly-rolling the meat into a cylinder, taking care to keep the stuffing inside the roll as you go. Tie the rolled, stuffed steak with twine to secure it, and season the outside all over with salt and pepper.

Add a little more olive oil to the Dutch oven and return to medium-high heat.

Sear and turn the rolled steak until it’s all over browned. Remove and set aside.

MEATBALLS

(makes about 12, almost as big as baseballs)

1 lb ground beef (80/20)
1 lb ground pork
2/3 c yellow onion, diced
6 cloves garlic, minced
1 c grated pecorino cheese
1 egg
2 c day-old bread, torn into small pieces (crust included)
1 1/2 c whole milk
4 tbsp olive oil plus 1/2 c
1/2 c Italian parsley, chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat 4 tbsp olive oil in a small saute pan over medium-high. Add onions, season with salt, and cook for 5 minutes, stirring to prevent excessive browning. Add garlic, stir well, and cook for another minute. Remove from heat and transfer to a large mixing bowl.

In a small bowl, combine the bread and milk and allow the bread to absorb the liquid.

After 5 minutes, add beef and pork to the large mixing bowl with the onions and garlic, and season liberally with salt and pepper. Mix lightly by hand to equally distribute the meats.

Squeeze excess milk from the bread. Add soaked bread, cheese, egg, and parsley to the bowl with the meat. Mix well, but gently, by hand until everything is well combined.

Line a baking sheet with parchment or aluminum foil. Roll meat mixture into balls, smaller than baseballs but bigger (significantly) than golf balls. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to firm.

Preheat oven to 375. Remove meatballs from refrigerator.

Heat 1/2 c olive oil in a Dutch oven or heavy, high-sided pan (at least 8 inches high). Carefully brown meatballs, in batches if necessary, on all sides (taking care not to break when turning). Remove to the lined baking sheet.

Place baking sheet with browned meatballs in preheated oven for 15 minutes. Remove sheet from oven and allow meatballs to cool while you continue with other items.

SMELLS-LIKE-SUNDAY SUNDAY SAUCE

1 recipe meatballs
1 recipe braciolo
4 – 6 beef short ribs
1/4 lb pancetta, diced
4 – 6 tbsp tomato paste
2 28-oz cans San Marzano tomatoes, crushed in a bowl with your own hands
Medium yellow onion, chopped
8 cloves garlic, minced
2 tbsp butter
1/c white wine
2 bay leaves
Pinch of ground cinnamon

Salt and freshly ground black pepper. Season short ribs well all over with salt and pepper.

Heat olive oil in the Dutch oven in which you browned meatballs and seared braciolo, over medium-high heat. Add short ribs and turn as necessary to brown all over. Remove and set aside.

In the same Dutch oven, melt butter over medium heat. Add pancetta, render, stirring often, until all-over brown. Add onions, season with salt, and cook for 5 minutes. Add garlic, bay leaves, and cinnamon, and cook for a minute. Add tomato paste, stir to mix well.

Add white wine, increase heat to high, scrape up all the bits from the bottom of the Dutch oven and incorporate into the building sauce. Cook alcohol off, about 3 minutes. Add crushed tomatoes, season very liberally with salt, stir to thoroughly blend and bring to a boil.

As soon as the sauce boils, reduce heat to low, carefully add meatballs, braciolo, and short ribs, and submerge them in the sauce.

Cover and cook over low heat for about 3 hours. With a ladle, skim excess oil/grease from the pot.

Serve over pasta, polenta, bread...whatever works for you. And offer more grated pecorino alongside.

Scott A. Laurenti

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