



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 twist 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.

I leave one bite
of Nonna's warm caramel cream cake
on the plate
for another time.

Grazie, grazie, grazie mille.