

Bread and Milk

Karolina Ramqvist

Saskia Vogel, Translator

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A tantalizing smorgasbord of culinary memories, Karolina Ramqvist's memoir discusses family and community love in terms of shared dishes.

Ramqvist's earliest recollections speak to her enduring love of food: "when I ate something delicious, everything seemed to come alive, inside me and out," she writes. Her prose has an insatiable quality as it sifts through hearty reminiscences, as of her methodical, out-of-body, rash-inducing consumption of thirteen tangerines; the simultaneous intimacy and distance of cooking for others; and the Rorschach challenge of interpreting the shape of each first bite into a peach.

Elsewhere, there's a lengthy meditation on a disappointing day spent reconstructing her grandmother's rice pudding—"less a dish and more a material representation of the basis of my entire existence"—to teach her daughter about the great-grandparents she never met. Ramqvist also recalls learning about her absent father via stories of his restaurant orders. The text weighs personal foibles against inherited traits and lifelong desires with wisdom; sometimes self-conscious, Ramqvist observes that she turned to cooking and baking because it was "quotidian and straightforward and served an unassailable function"—a certainty in an uncertain world.

Bread and Milk is a delight-filled memoir—a multicourse helping of food-based memories seasoned to perfection with keen introspection.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2025)

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