

ELISABETTA ILLY

Aroma of the World

A JOURNEY INTO THE MYSTERIES
AND DELIGHTS OF COFFEE



PREFACE BY SANTO VERSACE
EXCLUSIVE RECIPES BY GIANFRANCO VISSANI
CONTRIBUTION BY ANDREA ILLY

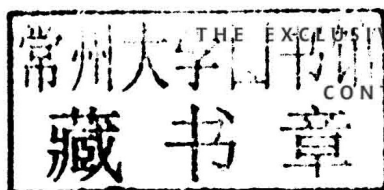
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ELISABETTA ILLY

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WITH A PREFACE BY SANTO VERSACE



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FOR YOU, NONNO ERNI







Preface

BY SANTO VERSACE

Coffee is my drink, the one I like best, the drink that punctuates my days and gives my life its rhythm. I drank my first coffee when I was a little boy. It was instant coffee from the States and my mother used it to make *café au lait*. I remember it as a happy moment in my day, when I would have breakfast with Gianni before going off to school: me to primary school, him still to nursery school. At the time I didn't realize how important this drink was; it was part of my daily routine and that was enough. It was only later that I got to enjoy real coffee. At home, like everywhere else, it was made with the moka percolator, and those first coffees sipped without being diluted with milk felt like a mark of emancipation. I was big enough to drink it like the grown ups, perhaps with a just little more sugar. So even then coffee marked a stage in my life. Today you would call it a "rite of passage", an initiation. But the real change, the step up, was a coffee drunk standing at the bar. I would sometimes go with my friends and school-mates to a bar to have an orangeade. The economic miracle was in full flow and for the first time we had a few coppers in our pockets and we loved the thought of drinking something at the bar just like grown-ups. The most daring, including myself, would order an espresso, not the usual fizzy drink or squash of some kind. It was the kind of daring deed that made us feel more grown up than the others, more confident, ready for fresh adventures.

The aroma rising from those scalding cups was the smell of emancipation. And, on top of that, it was good. I can still remember the slightly smoky atmosphere in those bars, where the sound of talking blended with the noise of people working at the bar, those afternoons spent sitting at a table with a coffee in front of me and a paper in my hands, trying to look cool. Little by little this ritual became an important part of my day, a chance to keep up with friends and make new ones.

But coffee was something else too: it kept me awake during my late nights when I was revising for my final school exams. I remember the short breaks I took to prepare another moka between a balance sheet and a mathematical formula as if it were yesterday. Coffee was my last resort between two and three in the morning, when the temptation to give in to sleep's sweet embrace seemed irresistible. But this dark, aromatic drink had an immediate effect and my friends and I were able to delve once again into the mysteries of algorithms and equations.

But I have other memories associated with coffee: I remember when I would sip it in the bar of the Genoa Cavalry Regiment with my fellow officers, after a tiring day spent on manoeuvres in the Carnia countryside. At the time we felt like characters in *The Tartar Steppe*, manning the forgotten Bastiano Fort frontier post. Our imagination was certainly working overtime... but that's the way it was. I have fond memories of those evenings spent in front of a steaming cup of coffee during what was an important experience for me.

So, coffee has always been and still is my favourite drink, and it was Gianni's too. During the

frenzied work in the atelier to prepare our latest collection for a fashion show, coffee was an indispensable support. Sometimes we would overdo it and drink three or four one after another.

Over the years I've learnt to savour coffee. I used to just drink it without a moment's thought, but I've long since begun to appreciate the sequence of actions that make sipping a good coffee a ritual of extraordinary beauty. Everything contributes to the pleasure I take in it – the careful preparation, the quality of the service, the sensation I get from the feel of the cup in my hand and then the fragrance, the aromas, the enveloping flavour. From being a simple coffee drinker I've turned into an enthusiast, a devotee. I don't claim to be an expert, but I know what coffee I like, how I like it to be made and what I like to eat with it. And being Italian I'm lucky enough to be able to enjoy the best coffee in the world. It can't be an accident that in every country I've been to I've come across attempts to copy our espresso coffee, with varying degrees of success. There are some things that stand for a country: Italy is renowned throughout the world for the superb quality of its products, ranging from fashion to sports cars, food and precision engineering.

The *Made in Italy* label has established itself everywhere, just as Italian cooking and the Italian way of life have. One of these icons is precisely the espresso. The Italian way of making and drinking coffee will sweep all before it because it expresses a taste, a style, a capacity to appreciate the good things in life that everyone envies us and would like to copy.

That's why, among many other reasons, a good coffee is my favourite beverage.

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