



Stolen Figs: And Other Adventures in Calabria

Mark Rotella

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An effortlessly artful blend of travel book, memoir, and affectionate portrait of a people

Calabria is the toe of the boot that is Italy—a rugged peninsula where grapevines and fig and olive trees cling to the mountainsides during the scorching summers while the sea crashes against the cliffs on both coasts. Calabria is also a seedbed of Italian American culture; in North America, more people of Italian heritage trace their roots to Calabria than to almost any other region in Italy.

Mark Rotella's *Stolen Figs* is a marvelous evocation of Calabria and Calabrians, whose way of life is largely untouched by the commerce that has made Tuscany and Umbria into international tourist redoubts. A grandson of Calabrian immigrants, Rotella persuades his father to visit the region for the first time in thirty years; once there, he meets Giuseppe, a postcard photographer who becomes his guide to all things Calabrian. As they travel around the region, Giuseppe initiates Rotella—and the reader—into its secrets: how to make *soppressata* and *'nduja*, where to find hidden chapels and grottoes, and, of course, how to steal a fig without actually committing a crime. *Stolen Figs* is a model travelogue—at once charming and wise, and full of the earthy and unpretentious sense of life that, now as ever, characterizes Calabria and its people.

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