

# My Writing Life



December 2013

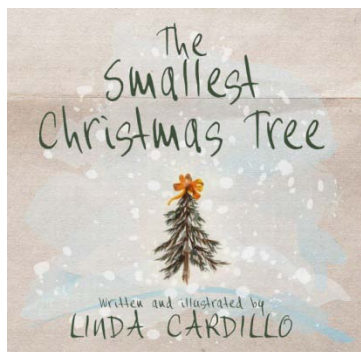
Dear Friends,

Winter arrived in New England Saturday night with our first snowstorm of the season. It was a lovely excuse to light the fire, bake some banana bread with the fruit I'd neglected in the inlaid wooden bowl passed on to me by my mother, and curl up with a good book. Of course, when it was all over Sunday morning, I spent two hours shoveling. I came back in with rosy cheeks and only slightly aching muscles.

The fire is still warming the house as I write this. In an hour or so, the sun will set as the days continue to shorten, hurling us toward the winter solstice. Christmas projects still await me as I prepare for my family's return from far-flung places, but I decided to take a few moments to wish you the most joyful of seasons and a peaceful new year.

*Linda*

## Thank You!



A warm and very grateful "Thank You!" to all who ordered *The Smallest Christmas Tree*. I hope reading it to the children in your life becomes a Christmas tradition as it has for my family. If you would like a signed bookplate, please [email](#) me your request by December 19 and I will make every effort to get it to you before Christmas.

And if you are still searching for the perfect gift for the young and young-at-heart on your list, copies are still available [here](#) on Amazon.

A special request if you enjoyed the story. . . Please recommend it to your friends and add a rating or review on [Amazon](#) and/or [Goodreads](#). Thank you!!

## Update on The Poet

My wonderful agent, enthusiastic champion and insightful critic has the manuscript in her competent hands and is currently pitching it to potential editors. Keeping fingers and toes crossed that it receives a warm reception. As soon as I hear, I will share with you the future of *The Poet*!

In the process of preparing *The Poet* for editorial consumption, I also developed proposals for the remaining books in my 16th-century trilogy. Here is a sneak peak at Books 2 and 3:

### The Queen

A contemporary and friend of Vittoria Colonna, Marguerite de Navarre is the sister of Francois I, the king of France. With her mother and brother, she completes the "trinity" that rules France. Marguerite is queen in her own right of a small kingdom in the Pyrenees after her political marriage to King Henri d'Albret of Navarre. But it is her role within her brother's court that defines her, both in the scope of her influence and the unusual authority she exercises as a woman. Like Vittoria, Marguerite is a prolific writer, a deeply spiritual leader of the reform movement within the French Church and an adept politician who skillfully navigates the treacherous alliances of sixteenth-century Europe. Despite her intensity and disciplined intelligence, however, Marguerite is a vulnerable, complex woman who is at the center of several relationships with powerful men-her brother's childhood friend, Bonnivet; a radical bishop pushing for reform within the Church; and poets and artists who look to her for both financial and artistic support. Her friendship with Vittoria reflects the passionate concerns of both women who recognize the prominent and very public role they play in sixteenth-century society.

## The Duchess

Giovanna D'Aragona is a young mother of six children when she leaves her husband, Vittoria Colonna's brother Ascanio, and returns to her childhood home on Ischia. She never reconciles with her husband, but forms a strong bond with Vittoria as they become enmeshed in the foment of religious reform originating in Naples. After Vittoria's death, Giovanna follows in her sister-in-law's footsteps and takes on the mantle of patroness of an intellectual circle that sparks an extraordinary outflow of literary works. At a time when it is increasingly dangerous to publish ideas that were contrary to Church teaching, Giovanna passionately promotes poets who dare to challenge the Italian Inquisition. She earns the enmity of the pope, who wages war on the Colonna, arrests Giovanna and condemns the work of the poets she supports. When she escapes her imprisonment in a daring flight disguised as a peasant, her reputation soars and she becomes a symbol of hope and defiance for the literary community. For twenty more years, she is at the heart of an intensely rich period of creativity, fostering in particular the publication of works by women.

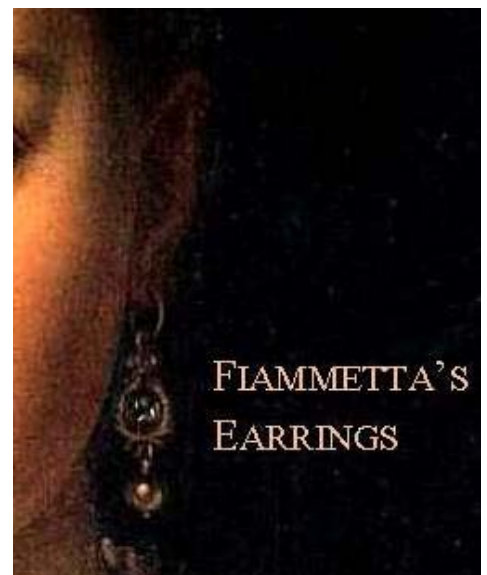
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*"With Michelangelo I grew, like a budding peony bursting into bloom when nurtured by an attentive gardener. Instead of the muted colors of my mourning and my descent into self-punishment, I experienced myself in vivid pigments, another wall on which he painted."*

## A Special Gift for You

If you recall, one of items on my "to-do" list in August was the completion of a short story set in early 20th-century Italy. I have reached the half-way point in "Fiammetta's Earrings," and I would like to offer you Part One as a Christmas morsel, like the nuggets of fried dough soaked in honey that my mother made every Christmas (see the recipe below).

Here is the opening paragraph. Click on the link to read all of Part One of "Fiammetta's Earrings."



*Every year in their all-too-brief marriage, the goldsmith Bernardo Navarra fashioned for his wife a pair of earrings, crafted of gold and set with fine jewels. Navarra poured energy and desire into these anniversary gifts for Fiammetta. He intended their brilliance and their music as she moved her head to be an echo of Fiammetta herself, and a reflection of his love for her. Each new pair was unique; and all of them were unlike anything he had ever created for his customers. To read more, click [here](#).*

## Struffoli

Christmas in an Italian household is not complete without the crunchy, sticky treat called "Struffoli." Here's how my mother made it.



2 ½ cups sifted flour  
¼ teaspoon salt  
½ tablespoon confectioner's sugar  
3 eggs  
2 egg yolks  
¼ cup butter  
1 teaspoon grated lemon peel  
2 cups canola oil  
1½ cups honey  
1/3 cup multicolored sprinkles

On a pastry board, place the flour in a mound and make a well in its center into which put the salt, sugar, eggs, egg yolks, butter and lemon peel.

Mix thoroughly, kneading dough with hands until it has the consistency of pie crust dough.

Lightly roll the dough out until about ¼ inch thick.

Cut the dough with a pastry cutter into strips about ¼ inch wide. Roll these with the palm of the hand to form rods about the size of a pencil. Cut the rods into pieces about ¼ inch long and shape into balls.

Fry these balls in a deep saucepan in very hot oil. Drop as many of them at a time as will float in one layer without crowding. Fry about 3 to 5 minutes, turning occasionally, until puffed and lightly browned. Skim the balls out of the oil with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.

Melt honey in saucepan over low heat for about 5 minutes. Add the fried dough balls to the honey and stir gently with wooden spoon until all the balls are coated with honey.

Arrange the coated balls in a cone-shaped mound on a platter and sprinkle with multicolored sprinkles.

Serves 6.

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Wishing you peace and joy!

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