

# *Topper Family Lasagna*

FROM THE KITCHEN OF JOSEPHINE MACRI

*One of the themes in The Secret of Clouds is how food is an expression of love. I've been lucky enough to be the recipient of the cooking of Ms. Josephine Macri, the woman who served as the inspiration for Maggie Topper's mother in my novel, and her cooking always feels like a warm hug. I wanted to share one of her signature recipes with my readers because there is nothing more comforting than some good food to accompany a good book. And for all my book clubs that Skype with me, I know you're often looking for dishes to accompany your discussions. So it's my pleasure to gift you the recipe for this magical lasagna. Enjoy!*

## TOMATO SAUCE:

- 1 medium onion
- Olive oil
- Parsley and basil, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 (1-pound) packages ground beef, pork, and veal combo
- 1 pound Italian sausage meat (hot or sweet)
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- ½ cup red wine
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed San Marzano tomatoes

## RECIPE

### RICOTTA FILLING:

- 1 (2-pound) container whole-milk ricotta
- 1 pound-plus whole-milk mozzarella, shredded
- Grated Pecorino Romano cheese
- ½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- ¼ cup chopped basil
- Salt and pepper
- Olive oil
- 1 large egg

### BÉCHAMEL:

- 5 tablespoons butter
- 4 to 5 tablespoons flour
- 4 cups warm whole milk
- ¼ cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese
- Nutmeg
- Salt and pepper

Package of no-bake lasagna noodles (buy 2 packages in case you need extra)

### TOMATO SAUCE:

Sauté the onion in a couple tablespoons olive oil until golden. Add the chopped basil and parsley. Add the finely chopped garlic. Add the meat, sausage meat, salt, and pepper. Cook, breaking up the meat, until it is no longer pink. Add the tomato paste and cook for a couple of minutes. Add the red wine. Let the alcohol cook out, and add the crushed tomatoes, along with about a can of water. Simmer for about 45 min to 1 hour.

## RECIPE

### RICOTTA FILLING:

Put the ricotta in a large bowl. Add about a third of the shredded mozzarella, ¼ cup of the Pecorino Romano cheese, the parsley, basil, salt, and pepper. Drizzle with the olive oil. Add the egg and stir until smooth.

### BÉCHAMEL:

Melt the butter in a heavy saucepan. Add the flour, and stir until it has the consistency of wet sand. Slowly pour in warm milk. Stir until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Stir in the cheese, and sprinkle in a little nutmeg and salt and pepper to taste.

### ASSEMBLY:

Lightly cover the bottom of the baking dish with the tomato sauce. Place the noodles over the sauce evenly, breaking if needed to fit the pan. Cover the noodles with the ricotta filling, pressing it evenly onto the noodles. Sprinkle more of the shredded mozzarella over the filling. Add another layer of tomato sauce, and top with more of the grated Pecorino Romano. Repeat, ending with noodles and sauce. Pour the béchamel over the top of the lasagna, cover the dish with foil, and bake at 350 degrees, until it is bubbling around the edges, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Remove the foil, and return the lasagna to the oven until the top turns slightly golden. Let the lasagna rest before cutting. Enjoy!