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Salutati Award Essay

I'd always watch her. Nanny eats an apple every day after lunch. She uses a knife to remove the skin, even after she's rinsed it. She slowly turns the apple in her hand and peels it off. It makes the shape of a snake, and I'd always watch it. Rarely does the strand break. If it does, she begins another until the apple is bare.

My sisters and I have always called her Nanny. I think she thought we would call her Nana, because that's how she signs the birthday and Easter cards she sends us in the mail though we live at the same address. Mom says she wastes stamps, but Nanny doesn't mind it.

She helped me with Italian homework until it was I who helped her write letters to cousins across the ocean. Still, I doubt my speaking skills will ever surpass hers. I found the letter from her while emptying my suitcase into tiny drawers. I read it before the first dinner in this new house.

The food, I had eaten before but called it another name. It was that way for other things, too, the fresh towels and sheets and blank pages of notebooks ready for words. They were all the same but surrounded by differences.

I always watched her but never attempted. Maybe I wasn't as brave with a knife, or maybe I just enjoyed watching her peel mine the way she peeled hers, the way no one else I knew did. Maybe no one else had time.

When the meal was gone from our plates, everyone grabbed one from the colorful bowl. The apples were deep red, and Virgilio put the knife to his. I watched the familiar

snake form by way of his careful hand. Beside me 12-year-old Luca mimicked his father, attentive not to break his own twisting strand. I thought of Nanny and lunch with her in the kitchen on days home from school. I thought of all the differences and of this which was the same. I knew there would be other similarities, and I would find them.