

ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT
SOMETHING... LIGHTER?

The setting is a quaint restaurant on the outskirts of San Sebastián, Spain, in Monte Igueldo. Four men of different ages and weights —one of whom could set off the weight limit alarm in any elevator— have planned to meet for their customary weekly lunch. The youngest is a friend of mine and, since I'm in town, he invites me as a guest. The menu is simple, but just reading it makes me salivate. They know what they'll order right away: they'll have a huge grilled T-bone steak, with added green chili peppers and fried anchovies with garlic, a valiant feat of impressive proportions. I'm the only one left to order. The restaurant owner, who doubles as a waiter, patiently awaits my decision. I clear my throat and announce with confidence, "I'll have the duck magret with prunes, please."

Much like in documentaries that tell of man's great exploits, like reaching the summit of a 23,000 foot peak or returning to Earth after spending weeks away at a space station, the sentence that I just spoke required tremendous effort. For me

to utter a sound, the air had to get past not only my vocal cords but also the mental image of salad bowls with meager dressing, of cereal bars as lunch and dinner substitutes, or even of vanilla SlimFast shakes available only in pharmacies, urging, "drink me and give up the duck." For better or for worse, to decide on my high-calorie duck buddy is to be immune to the contemporary demand that I watch my figure even while eating out at a restaurant. Plus, I refuse to be one of those people who come home with a ton of bags from a boutique where "there was a super sale" and still feel like they've saved money. I choose to spend frivolously on food without pretense, to be the actress Andréa Ferréol at this Spanish "Grande Bouffe" that I'll boldly enjoy with my own entourage, my own personal Mastroiannis, Noirets, and Piccolis.

Extensive experience in the professional field of gluttony has honed my intuition to the point where I know exactly what will happen when these men receive their mountain of steaming meat: they'll let me try some. Among foodies in the Spanish Basque Country, giving someone a taste —known as *dar a probar*— means you get a piece of food on your plate that's about the size of a typical restaurant serving. So, in addition to my duck, I'll be eating steak, anchovies, and green peppers to the delight of my fellow diners who will enjoy seeing this young lady feast and drink like she really should. I'm aware

that I'm in an uncommon situation since, nowadays, if a woman deeply identifies with Pantagruel the giant, her best bet is to hide away to avoid being the target of often undesirable comments. Hence my near gratitude for the attitude of these men who have erased the word "moderation" from their vocabulary and who warmly welcome women like me who are erasing it from ours as well.