smitten kitchen Because I don’t say it often enough, do know that one of my favorite things about this site is the way your presence, whether active or lurking, quietly provides the encouragement I need every time I want to tackle a dish or recipe that daunts me. Like bagels. Or Lasagna Bolognese. Or Baked Alaska. Or Russian Honey Cake. But I’m not sure that any of these dishes have struck terror in my heart — laced with impending doom over inevitable failure — over a dish as much as this. Let me rewind a little: I was lucky enough to preview some of the pages from Luisa Weiss’s new cookbook, Classic German Baking in June. It was around my birthday and my mother and I had gone to Cafe Sabarsky, one of my great New York City loves, for lunch. My mother’s parents were from Germany and although they didn’t leave under good circumstances, we both have a huge soft spot for the baked goods of the region. This book — filled with Sachertorte (glaze chocolate torte, which my kid left the book open to this morning, an unsubtle hint) and Mandelhörnchen (almond horns), Amerikaner (the original black-and-white cookie), Butterkuchen, Linzertorte, Bretzlen (soft pretzels) and miles of Christmas favorites — enveloped us with such an intense longing to run to the kitchen, bury ourselves in flour, butter, almonds and yeast and not come out for one to two years, it was clear it would be impossible to choose what to bake first. But then I saw the three-page spread for apfelstrudel, and the fright took hold. I’ve watched videos of people making apple strudel before — the massive tables of dough stretched film-thin with a family of hands, nobody allowed to stop until a newspaper could be read through it, and concluded, as any sane person would, that it is best left to the pros. But as I read through the recipe — damn you, Luisa, and your eloquent, reassuring writing — and it was just apples and flour and oil and butter and breadcrumbs and raisins and absolutely zero voodoo and…