

For You Grandmother

Thinking of you on this Montreal balcony
I remember a story
of when I was almost a full note
in mother's womb
and from out of nowhere
you came knocking on our door
your face lean and determined
a loaf of bread and a bottle of whiskey in
your hands
and over the weeks bits of both
coming my way
to relax me into a sooner downward swim
on Valentine's Day I came breaching
forth
your message shot straight as an arrow
from mother to daughter and grand-
daughter again
but in growing up we never saw you
your dislike a family's sad fruit
now we're older and you're still a
stranger
yesterday we sent you a get well card
we only really remember your face
always smoothed with cream
hardly a wrinkle at 83 hardly a grey
hair
cabbage rolls that once hot dry
apartment in Strathcona
your stubbornness hung in its air
our regret now hangs 3 thousand miles
away
through daughters to mother
stopping at you once again
a clothesline of female lineage
we are a small family
and our door has opened and closed
through the years
you may have stood there once
but only an old woman passes by now.

Mona Fertig

How To Kill Your Father

He breaks a promise on the road to
Firenze.

You will not speak to him all through
the drive in the Tuscan hills,
the rented Alfa Romeo bitches
but the poplar's got your tongue,
long and green and aloof.

You abandon the car and walk
into a Roman afternoon,
you know how to kill your father,
he knows how to kill you.

The wind is waving little white
handkerchiefs wilting in the heat,
they are for tears and for truce
but your eyes are still red for quarrel.

Your head is being kneaded
like dough in the noon
baker's hand. Your flesh
sizzles on the skewers
of your bones. Then evening
comes like a nervous sweat,
as anger condenses,
dew in cool grass.

You are alone on the highway to the
sun.

Your north american education
has taught you how to kill a father,
but you are walking down an Italian
way, so you will surrender
and visit him in the hospital
where you will be accused
of wishing his death
in wanting a life
for yourself.

A scorpion's sting darkening
your heart buries July in Italy.

Mary di Michele

From *Bread and Chocolate* (Ottawa:
Oberon Press, 1980).

First Draft

My grandmother in her lifetime
roared like a lion, prowled the boundaries
of cages she never acknowledged.

1894 to 1984: changes
in everything but her conviction,
her power, her will. She made
herself a businesswoman, she wheeled
and dealt — they tell me.

I came into her life when she was already
fifty-six, only daughter of her only daughter —
no sons. She wanted, I thought,
to buy me: I retreated. She unabated
wooded, reproached and, later, shouted.

She was in her prime a force
to be reckoned with, they say, with a habit
of winning. What other women mostly didn't,
she did. Prosperous, confident, business-
suited — in the photographs.

For the puny twelve years
of my adult life, my grandmother
was a lion at bay,
the scope of her power shrunk, her will
a gleaming, lasting monument.

"Old Boot" I thought — a grudging,
distancing compliment — still
nervous of approaching the old woman
for fear of the lion.

This lion, made tearful by increasing impotence,
this old lady who, rejecting the last
social constraints, snarled at everyone,
she died in the night, curled on her side
peacefully, we assume from appearances.
Then she lay quiet and waited, like a good
little girl, for us to come and take over.

And we, who had leaned for years, as if against
an opposing gale, found ourselves suddenly
off balance.

Christine Donald

Heritage

Strong arms mid-wife
calves, breasts nurture
babies, hips sway to building
brush piles (burning new clearings)
shoulders heave with hoe
and rake, able hands
shape loaves, voices ring
sure and confident
in evening kitchens and
public meetings,

and in my head
and in my head.

Elizabeth Kouhi

Home

Where comfort is and warmth
Close to
Someone Who Matters.

Like animals in burrows,
Ancestral tribes in tree, pond, cave.

I wonder why we silly apes think it takes
So much else to furnish one?

Gail M. Martin

you never told me you were a musician,
yet look at the way
you have put those notes together
in your laughter.

Clara Valverde