

through her Magnani mane, still thick and well coloured and after a couple of deep sighs she begins telling me how striking she was when she was young and how the suitors of her day would not leave her alone. She had many to choose from as she recalls, “*I was too beautiful not to marry, so many want to make me their wife, so many, but I choose the first one because he love me.*”

Her cheeks darken with a blush as she turns to look at the picture of the man with the moustache. If the first one had not died, she would have been a fine lady in a fine house. If the first one had not died she would have lived a pampered life. The first one was from a family of merchants, well established in commerce and highly respected in their village and she would have inherited much property in due time. But he died before he could give her children and without children there was no claim to position or property.

“In my time the women ... we marry ... we make children ... we become good wife, good mother, that’s what we do.”

There is a look in her eyes that is unconvincing, faintly distant, as if she might be trying to talk herself into believing her own words, or perhaps hoping that I will accept them without any further questions. I know she married the first one for love, so she says, the second she married because the first one died. It was the second who gave her the children but not the indulgent, lavish life.

“A young widow no good in my days. For the womens in that time with no husband you don’t got nothing in the life, so you find the husband and you make the life.”

The second one brought her to Toronto, gave her the children and a house that was less than fine. It’s the same house where the photographs now hang, where my mother was born and where I played as a child among the knick-knacks and photographs. It is the same house where my grandmother waits for my drop-ins, where we sit on her bed and flip through memories in between folding laundry or making pots of espresso which we drink as if we never had need to sleep again.

It is this house she will leave to my brother and me when her time comes, her simple and unpretentious legacy, her gift to us. She will leave us this house so we will remember, on occasion, that she once existed.

But I do not know what house I will live in, or whom I will share it with. I don’t know what I will remember if I live to be her age or if I will ever have children of my own. I cannot tell my grandmother my dreams because I know they would upset her. There are truths and desires in my life that have no words or prayers she will understand. I am as much a casualty of my time as she was of hers.

But now, in this room with her photographs and memories I will remain the granddaughter who could not find

a man to make her a wife, and hope, while we fold sheets and iron pillowcases and talk of her lovers who hang dust free on her pale blue walls that she can feel in her old, settled heart how much I love her and that I need so much more than a man, or even two, to “make the life.”

Gianna Patriarca is an award-winning author of eight books of poetry and a book for children. Her work, adapted for stage and radio, is featured in numerous documentaries. Her work is taught in universities in Canada, the United States and Italy. She was runner-up to the Milton Acorn People’s Poetry Award, shortlisted for the Bressani Prize, and in 2010, she was the first recipient of the Science and Cultural Award from the Italian Chamber of Commerce. In 2009, an Italian translation of her first book, Italian Women and Other Tragedies, was launched in Italy. She is currently working on a short story collection, All My Fallen Angelas, stories about Italian-Canadian women. She lives in Toronto.

JOANNA M. WESTON

In Another Time

they fire-bombed
the cities
rose petals
fell from your
bruised hands

when I remember
stories of gun-smoke
I breathe
the scent
of Christmas roses

my hand in yours
on the beach
dune grass blows
where young women
grew roses

Joanna M. Weston is married with two cats, multiple spiders, a herd of deer, and two derelict hen houses. Her middle-reader, Those Blue Shoes, was published by Clarity House Press. Frontenac House of Calgary published her poetry collection, A Summer Father.