Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree

Some Notes

I have always had a complicated relationship with milk. My ways with it are erratic. There are the obvious connections linking it with maternity and nurturing of course. And you may know of the intriguing mythology surrounding the pagan goddess Brigit of Kildare, in Ireland. Her popularity to this day in Ireland almost equals that of Mary. She was the Sun Goddess, a warrior maiden a symbol of sexual purity and came to be associated with the milk of cows, the sacred food of the Celts. So great was her popularity that she was finally imported into the Christian canon, associated with the life of Jesus himself and she has become a symbol of the transition from paganism to Christianity. However, my revulsion at milk, which is neither consistent nor universal I believe, has no underlying meaning; there is nothing to be read into it since I had no difficulty whatsoever with motherhood or indeed with Brigit or those issues which I see as choice:sexuality and purity are elective. Nor has it anything to do with taste; no, my lack of predictability with milk, the ability to drink it with coffee but never on its own and absolutely never in tea, goes back to my childhood.

From Bruntsfield Links to my convent primary school was a ten minute walk. It was my most anxious time of the day except maybe, when my mother herself was anxious, uneasy or distracted which was really always for that is how I remember the mother of my childhood. And so, like her, I spent my days with a low level feeling of disquiet which I at least knew, had nothing to do with me, but was heightened first thing in the morning. I also knew not be obvious. There were more important things going on which I was not to interrupt. My nights when darkest thoughts are made material and when we can pinpoint exactly what we have been most afraid of, for me, were easier than daytime. At night, I was able to surface.The fear of balconies crashing to the ground in a theatre, being bombed by jets overhead or of the sea engulfing and choking me, those things came later. My earliest memories are life in our second storey flat in Morningside opposite the Plaza dance hall, where we, my mother and father lived with my grandmother. It was her house and she always told us so. There were two double beds in my mother’s bedroom and I shared one of them with my mother. I felt no anxiety at night, except maybe, occasionally at the unexplained empty bed across the room.

My first day at school was in September 1954. On that first morning, I was led through a dark oak - panelled corridor of a Victorian house. There was a stairway that curved all the way up to a window and another floor, a long mirror at one end and a glass panelled door leading to the front garden at the other. I can never remember that door being open. We generally came in the back door through the playground where the cloakrooms were and the little window where the nuns sold tablet, a Scottish favourite, at break time. A nun, my teacher for the year, all in black, her tight small features made even less appealing by the stiff white surround of her wimple, and whose tone was more suited to litany than light conversation, took me to my desk in the second row of a room full of children of my age. I was given a slate and chalk to write on; there was an inkwell; the desks were attached to the wooden seats and so the positioning was fixed. We went to the classroom door to say goodbye to my mother and she pointed to a throne-like seat outside the room, saying said she would wait for me there until the break. I saw crates of small bottles of milk beside the throne. When the break came, I ran to the door, to check if she was still there. She wasn't. I was lost, maybe in some ways, lost well into my adult life and certainly to milk.

From then on, every morning as we crossed the links, me in my not one but two pairs of knickers, lumpy in navy gaberdine stretched tight over my blazer, laced brogues to correct flat feet, I cried, retched and vomited all the way to Whitehouse Loan, my mother hurrying me along. I could do nothing to stop it and it was important I knew, to keep going. When the milk crate was brought into the classroom at break time and placed at the French doors to the convent garden, I had to struggle not to bring attention to myself by being sick in front of my classmates. Along with the nausea at the sight and smell of the milk, were of course, the cracked green crust under the nose of the girl next to me, the sight of the Slipper, the daily use of the ruler and the confusing practice the teacher had of choosing someone to sit on her knee for sometime during the afternoon lesson. I guessed this signalled good temper and a trouble free rest of the day.

A woman who witnessed the spectacle of our halting pathway across the grass every day, once said to my mother "I don't know how you have the heart to take her to school". On a few occasions I did make an effort with breakfast, usually porridge, but it came back up soon enough and so I stopped having breakfast completely. That morning feeling of faint nausea together with an anxiety that might arise at any time, sometimes for no reason, have accompanied me for much of my life and

only in more recent years, has early avocado, eggs, toasted artisan bread and crushed tomatoes with olive oil ...become a real pleasure.

Introduction

I want to give an account of a life's journey, inspired as I am by the writing of Elena Ferrante. In her Neapolitan novels, she writes about the lives of people living in a suburb of Naples and their struggle to make something of their lives...there were those who stayed and those who left...those who returned and those who stayed away never quite able to shake off their origins. What they had come from continued to threaten to repossess them at every crossroads, at every high and especially at every low, at each failure and success in their lives.

I don't know what it was that made life in an Italian home in the post war years, so raw, so relentless, merciless and destructive..so deadening to the spirit, to love and joy. It seemed that every area of your life was a family affair to be considered, approved or not; intrusive, judgemental and directive. The power in my home resided in the matriarch, my grandmother and her son, both of whom monitored, allocated, punished, and schemed. My mother was a servant to their plans....a pawn really; her life nothing but a strand of family business; her marriage partly destroyed by them and partly by her own bid for freedom from the family system. Yet, latterly, my mother herself, maybe with age came regression, sought to reel me back into what she herself, had desperately tried to escape.

The memories of those dark early years was one of frustration at my powerlessness and indignation at my mother's subservience, head down, bending to the will of her brother; chastised for not; a childhood of fear, of physical violence; of a grandmother who both loved and cursed, wary and cunning, rosary in hand, candles in her bedroom and at the feet of her statue of the Sacred Heart, beat her head on the wall to bring about angina attacks when thwarted. She was a woman of great physical strength who could throw Ernestina, our Italian help to the ground and upturn an entire set table minutes before Christmas lunch. He was an uncle who beat his wife then wept, punched his sons to the point where police were called and together he and my grandmother were suspicions always, wary and watchful of my mother because of her glamour, because of her make up and free spirit..."'Nna puttan'" or slut, were words I knew well.

I saw it all, always and I wanted to leave it all behind...the system, the family, the values, the insidious control of spirit, aspiration; the robbing of us, the new generation, of what it was to be young and hopeful....to be happy. There was none there in that tragedy. I remember no laughter around my grandmother...only secrecy, subterfuge, pulsating resentments.

And I did leave it behind through my education, a tool my mother struggled hard against that system to give me, and my own ability and skill not only to thrive at school, at university, but to seek and know those who could inspire me, give me the gifts of culture, of music, and poetry. And I connected, clung to, learned from them and in their company, I lived and breathed, was able to move away. In their company I embraced and developed with them, values very different from where I had come. I held these values close, silently; and I rarely challenged the family structure; I just determinedly moved away with each step I took and throughout my life, and even into my sixties, I have lived those values and dropped almost every family connection... the lifestyle, mindsets and values which my southern Italian family and those others, stood for.

My marriage was I thought a definitive final ascent from that ghetto; a positive move to together with my husband, create something of ours.....our joint desire so I thought, to leave the Family, the System and create our own professional, liberal lifestyle of equality, refinement, culture and the arts. I had a vision of a professional couple sharing, growing, learning and every day, with each new baby and each new career move, gaining distance from where we had been....putting that repressive, gut wrenching old order based on survival in different times and a different context...the village...the war...behind us; indeed I saw us criticising,challenging, and despising what it had tried to do to each of us. And I saw an intelligent, artistic lifestyle....a family thriving within it....a life of gentle art and ideas...of idealism and creativity. I also know that increasingly in my years after school, when I chose an honours degree, a career in secondary and not primary teaching, went to live in France, got married, got pregnant, had one, two and then a third child, when I left the classroom, went to work in Glasgow, took posts (as my career grew), which involved daily commuting to places other than Edinburgh, when I began to argue for the ordinary people, assert feminist rights...I know that I became someone my mother no longer recognised. While she was always proud of me, she didn't know me...could not reckon with me. She would look at me in a puzzled way. It was as if, she had never taken account of the energy and vision that I had been covertly nurturing all my childhood years. Here I was, hers and yet very much not hers.

What Ferrante brings out in her books about Naples, is that whether you stay within the system...the ghetto...or leave, grow, become a respected and successful professional, the ghetto never quite leaves you and those who were there with you, including those you marry, set up with...who travel away from it with you, will always treat you as if you are still both in the potato fields of your origins, the stables they shared with their animals. The same rough, disrespectful language; the same roles and the same pecking order. A doctorate you may have, a respected role in society you may hold, but in that vice of the old ways, of *gl'Vtratur*, and those of *gl' Piciniscar*, you are as you were.

In order to hold on to where you have reached, in order to maintain that construct which is what you have made of yourself, hewn out of distress, insecurity, the omnipresent light of the goal you seek, and your life, you have to keep that distance, and in doing that you are always conflicted. Increasingly as years pass, you yearn for Home...the home of familiar, of ordinary, of history, of your dialect, of the customs you knew, and the syntax and cadencing of those who went before you. But you know and fear that in embracing them, in that homecoming, you will sacrifice a life's work and deny all you saw and hoped for at the outset; and you know too that for those who stayed, and for those who came even a little way with you, who left only for a little while, you will always be nothing but a woman they think they know rather than the conflicted achiever , the pilgrim that you are.

Rooting One

My journey starts in a place I have never lived in, indeed, I have visited as a tourist only. This visiting has always been a disconcerting experience....knowing at a glance, the spirit and instincts of people you meet, the familiarity of a mannerism, a look, a jawline, an emotional stirring, the strongest urge to reach out as if to your own, tear at barriers that upbringing, a history and geography have created....

Mamma Ciociara reaching out from the Rocca di San Pietro in the region of Frosinone, La Ciociaría in Central Italy, is the region's tribute to the thousands of women aged 11to 86 who were dragged by the hair like livestock, beaten and then raped by Les Goumiers, auxiliaries in the French army during World War 2. It is also a memorial to the 800 men shot, stabbed and cut down as they tried to defend their children, wives, daughters, mothers and sisters. Though in fact, when there was a choice and despite the pleas of mothers to offer themselves and spare their children, the preference

was always for the youngest of the families. Accounts of that night in 1944, the night of the Allies' victory at Montecassino describe animal screaming across the Lazio area as village after village came under the control not of the Americans bearing candy for the children which was what they expected, but of the Maroccan troops; as they swarmed across the countryside,leaving bloodied devastation behind them.

Silvio Palombo (resident in Esperia Fr) described the experience: "Portavano delle tuniche, così, di tutti i colori. portavano dei capelli lunghi, sporchi, in un modo che non sembravano nemmeno truppe, sembravano gente raccattata. (...) Noi stavamo aspettando gli americani, la cioccolata... (...) Quelle grida che ho sentito io quella notte, erano un'inferno, un inferno dantesco. Sembravano quelle belve che sbranavano gli animali... quella notte fu terribile". (They wore tunics, of all colours, had long hair. They were filthy and didn't look like troops at all. They were like jail breakers, criminals. We were expecting the Americans, chocolate...those screams that I heard that night...it was like hell....a scene from Dante's inferno. The sounds were like animals howling...it was a terrible night). Often women were taken by two soldiers, sodomising and raping at the same time. Many women died as a result of those attacks.

The sculpture in Castro dei Volsci, where 7000 civilians alone, including children were raped, is both sensual and ethereal; is like a spirit rising untouched from the battered bodies of these brave women....Mamma Ciociara in continual flight across the hillsides of that proud land, her womanhood ever and only hers.

Viticuso, was one of those Laziale villages. It had originally been founded in medieval times by the monks of Montecassino to provide the abbey with supplies. Montecassino itself was a key stronghold during that war, 800 metres above sea level, on the Gustav line separating Nazi and Fascist Italy from the Allied advance from the south. The outcome of the 1944 battle would determine the outcome of the war. It was this village, Viticuso, which produced Paolozzi, Cocozza or Mario Lanza, my relations, the artists, singers and musicians....so heralded and honoured at a later time, the post war era. It was this village, so uniquely bound up with the fate of Montecassino, which my grandparents left; not for America but for Edinburgh in Scotland, but where in both countries, streets were " paved with gold". I have only became aware of what it was like to live these events late in my life. Before that I had only known the story of those who left...the struggle of my own family settled in Edinburgh since 1913 and those like them, Italians across Scotland, after Italy en-

tered the war. I found the accounts by chance, have been shaken by them. Then there came the slow realisation of what it had been like, not only for those Italians, my mother, grandmother and grandfather, treated as enemy aliens but also for those relations who stayed behind: the imposition of German soldiers on their homes and frugal supplies, the daily shelling and bombardment of Montecassino, gunfire, aircraft, bombs, grenades, soldiers on motorbikes, soldiers on the hills, soldiers marching. The rubble that Cassino itself became, and the the "Marocchinate" as those violent events against principally women and children came to be called.

Reading about that history and hearing interviews with those who remembered did however bring to mind from years back, a photograph in a Sunday newspaper: a deserted expanse of land, dust, stones and plaster; in the centre of the photo, a man and a little boy walking hand in hand along what had once been the main street in Cassino.

Rooting Two

Viticuso, 1913 and 2005

At the golden gate of this sparse country
Long emptied of its youth, its finger games and hopscotch,
And where we sat, my daughters and I,
Eating a handspun meal, sipping red wine from lemonade bottles,
Visited family, long ago interred in marble,
Started at a photo of a woman we had once met
Smiling out from her tomb under the weight
Of a mezzogiorno afternoon,
Where we saw an unclothed sun finally give itself up,
Dipping its rim into those sweat sodden fields,
Was it here that my grandfather ate his bread and sweet onions, while resting his back at the angelus tolling?
Or here that he lay to capture the woman who courted with tricks?
Here that she danced her ballarella, hankie in hand for decency's sake?

And in leaving that dry, slow place, and putting it back on the shelf
Like an unfamiliar book we took down, for this one day,
An odyssey to read together, maybe
Like the Katie Morag tales that we once loved,
An accordion took us by surprise, breathing life into that street,
As if replacing sunlight.
And I see

A clog-shod woman, proud duchess that she was, standing at the crossroads,
Child at her skirts, spun cloth across her back and legacy in her pockets,
About to turn the corner of her life,
Bound for a land that would call her Mary, a Leith street,
A new war not yet in the making,
Cots for her children which smelt still of oranges
A hurdy gurdy, the salt and grit of a cream ice,
Italian delights and satin overalls,
White gloved car rides to country hotels, for a two week treat,
She leaves this land to the ghosts yet to come.

And today, in the white sand of an untrafficked Hebridean island,
A lifeboat, lost "Star" of Italy at its journey's end, here and not there;
Its load scattered like roses on the water,
Their shaming call in the seas' tides.

The night Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, the 10th of June 1940, was a night of terror for those Italians living in Scotland. Across the country angry riots broke out in many British cities. Mobs ransacked Italian property, mainly businesses, forcing entry, terrorising even the youngest of the families, smashing windows and looting shops. The shocked owners, many with British citizenship and having been resident in the British Isles (often for decades), were forced to barricade themselves into back rooms. The worst of these took place in Scotland, in Glasgow, Clydebank and Edinburgh. and on the following day, Churchill announced his Collar the Lot policy, a policy which would in a short time, turn out to be one which would have unfathomable repercussions on almost every Italian family across Scotland.

My mother, Cristina Rossi, spoke rarely of the war years but this was her story.

She was "minding" the family cafe in Edinburgh's Leith Walk, on her own that night. The family had made its pilgrim way up to Leith from the Bonnington area; from selling ice cream from a barrel, from living in the back room of a small shop, to setting foot solidly on Victorian Leith Walk. For immigrants, "arriving" was Edinburgh,and the nearer to that border between Leith and Edinburgh, the more successful a family saw itself to be. So, in the good Italian traditions of "bella figura"...or how we present in the world, the orange boxes in the Bonnington backshop were replaced by beds for the children in a flat above Shrubhill Cafe; and Maria, Mariuccia, Mary, Mrs Rossi, indeed The Duchess, took to wearing satin overalls behind her shop counter and white gloves for

shopping trips in Darlings of Edinburgh or a visit to Peebles in a taxi for a two week break in The Hydro. She had acquired the manner and dress of a lady.

Business even for a summer's evening, was slow and my mother , age 23, was staring out of the shop window…a dreamer...given to getting absorbed in her thoughts, standing gazing at her reflection in the glorious guilt mirror in the backshop. If her mother caught her, she would thunder towards her, screaming oaths about gutters and poorhouses, grab her, not always by the hair, and propel her to the door and the common stair. To her mother's mind, any inactivity and by that she meant, reflection, dreaming, reading, signalled laziness. My mother's most provocative habit was to play a dumb piano on the flat surfaces of outers of sweets or boxes of wafers. On the other hand, it fell to Louisa her elder sister, plainer and more practical, who undertook most of the housework then. Monday was family washing day. Louisa was kept off school to fulfil the task. I can never remember, nor did I hear any tale of my grandmother doing housework. She was devoted to her shop and her till; a fine role model for the strong career women, feminists, who were to succeed her. My grandmother's mood was often dark, and for so many reasons, but mainly because she never totally fell in love I believe, with my grandfather. She had turned down an unsuitable Tony left behind in Viticuso, and disillusioned maybe with marriage, the daily struggle of city life, a new language, and ways of being, anything that annoyed her would cause a violent scene, a hard slap on the face, normality among Italian families of the time.

This enforced absenteeism from school for Louisa, the denial of music for Cristina and the privileges given to their brother Enrico proved toxic for years to come. Louisa who died in her fifties of overwork, stress and a poor diet, but mainly the worry that her realism and wisdom brought, never learned to read and write well. Enrico however, had learned from what he saw daily, and continued to physically abuse any female family member who did not do his bidding, including their and our poor "Italian girls", me, and his depleted wife. My mother craved music all her life. At Mass, she sang the Latin responses in the manner of Billie Holliday. She went from thumping away on wood, all the while crooning to herself and imagining she was Bessie Smith to later undertaking marriage to a saxophone player. He, my father, was talented but a devoted drinker and that finally ended both his promising musical career and their marriage.

My grandmother was generally fearsome and it was hard to imagine her in any kind of "delicto" which led to her three children. She had her own view of men....there to serve her, there to obey but

constantly seeking sexual satisfaction. There had been family secrets of her poor dishevelled husband, appearing in his son's bedroom in the middle of the night, torn nightshirt and face bloodied as a result of an amorous advance. While sex was by all accounts always or mostly denied, his wife became increasingly obsessed with where else he might be seeking to satisfy his "animalistic" impulses. However, Emilio in fact, was quiet, gentle and mild. A timid and sensitive man; loving, hard working and dutiful especially to his wife. My mother was without any doubt his favourite. They were similar in temperament and she was both proud and vain, thereby charming her long suffering father. She and her father in tacit agreement and with the minimum provocation rode the roaring storms of Italian life in a Scotland-based home with a mix of humour and resigned detachment.

The night of June 10th, 1940, the phone rang. It was 8pm. A voice my mother didn't recognise said "Cristi', get out of there now. There's a mob movin' up the Walk and they're smashin' up a' the Italian shops. I'm no jokin' with ye..get out! We're at war wi Britain *e chiam'a Di'ch'c'aiut' (May God help us now).* Shaken and bewildered, for despite her age at 23, my mother knew fear. She rushed out of the shop and just as she got into the stair to their flat and closed the door, she heard the first sounds of breaking glass.

One of her greatest pleasures during the war had been to collect and play jazz records in the café which was open until late at night. People would come in out of the cold for a bit of fun; a bit of cheer during the deprivations of war time. They wanted their coffee, Russian teas or plates of hot peas and vinegar which were popular at that time. Peas were not rationed after all…and once the music started from the old gramophone, people got up and started to dance..the quickstep, the jive and the waltz if they were feeling a bit nostalgic. Many a romance was begun in Shrubhill Café….many a falling for polka dots and silvery moons. For those were the days of the Bobby Soxers and a brilliantly fresh Frank Sinatra with a technique honed from the Dorsey horn and the dreams of a young going-places Sicilian. They were the days of the rough-smooth voice of Billie Holliday and the ephemeral and "divine" (as my mother called him) Glenn Miller, his newly released "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" and "Moonight Serenade" breathlessly brought in by Cristina's brother Rico or her cousin Ernie Rossi.

My mother used to say that those were the happiest days of her life; and I do believe it was an era of romance stolen at a time of fear; sweetened by both uncertainty and inevitability; but it was a strange thing to say nonetheless since the country was at war. And that night, her most treasured

possessions, her jazz collection, along with the carefully polished sweetie jars, the tables and chairs bought one by one, the coffee machine and hand rotated ice cream maker all destroyed by bricks, iron bars and fury. That was the night when the fate of every Italian family in Scotland turned. They became enemy aliens and for many, living in Scotland as unwelcome immigrants or on borrowed time; their family connections and how each family member was to another, irredeemably altered. I do have one relic which survived…one remaining sweetie jar. Its glass yellowed with age. It sits on a shelf in my lounge, my link to my grandfather.

There have been some somewhat touching accounts of that night in other narratives….three children left in charge of the family shop, the eldest 13. Their father was arrested and they, stood at the window watching while their mother - since wives were a threat too in Edinburgh, a protected city, was taken off in a police car. Some families were spared the devastation because of individual loyalty of Scottish friends and their local Scottish community. But the Rossi family, homely Mary and not Mariuccia, the gentle moustached Meelie and not Emilio were in that one night transformed from being a well loved and honoured family into dirty “Ities”. Any racism which had been tamed through the necessity of communal living in hard times and interdependence, finally found its voice. Indeed historians are keen to point out that anti Italianism was in fact perhaps, not something of the moment, a response to the war announcement, but that an undercurrent of racism towards Italians immigrants had been present since the first mass arrivals in 1870. This prejudice was further added to by a general mood of anti Catholicism.

My grandmother had shown remarkable foresight. She had both the gift of foresight and second sight, knowing through her dreams of the death of both brothers in the US and her sisters in England. Her constant mantra..*never speak loudly in Italian; we are guests in this country; learn from those you see around you..please please take British citizenship.* She as did many others, knew how important it was for Italians to be as invisible as possible..to be aware at all times that they incomers; that things could turn at any time. As she put it "Dio lavora in un' ora" (God works in an hour). And on the night of June 10th, He did. On 11th June, and all through the following night, every Italian household across Scotland and Britain, was raided by police.

Di Mambro in her moving play "Tally's Blood" tells the tale well....in a household of fear...suddenly a knocking at the door. It is 2am. It's the police. There is joy and relief...finally, some law and order to protect us. But not. A general commotion ensues as police rush in, haul a fifty year old man from the bed where he is sleeping with his wife, handcuff two younger men , one is only 16 and take

them away. The whole operation amidst pleading, dragging, clinging and tears, takes minutes…sufficient time to get dressed. No explanation given. When I saw that play many years later in the small Scottish town of Dunfermline, the murmur of weeping women in the audience was more moving than what was happening onstage. This event heralded a further episode in our history.

At this point in the story, things become confused and unclear. But what is now clear to me is the desperate suffering of my family both in Viticuso and in Scotland. Like many peoples throughout history, Italians grasped a vision of a "better life', of less hardship and of esteem from their neighbours. That vision, was the power and eloquence of a dictator. Mussolini offered dignity and respect to a country which in the words of Dante had been "*serva Italia, non donna di provincia, ma bordello*"…a country historically and repeatedly invaded, trampled on and subjugated. And in the days after the declaration of war on Britain by the Italians, the arrests of its citizens who were staunch in their loyalty and trust, no help or support came. Italian government officials who had encouraged summer camps, trips to Italy to see the great dictator, who had encouraged the beating romantic hearts of young women and made youths stand proud, who had organised local fascist clubs, dances, an ideology of hope and trust, suddenly not only silent, but completely absent. For in the ensuing days there was no one to turn to.

The arrested men from all over the country were taken to Donaldsons School in Edinburgh, a makeshift prison; then still wearing the same clothes that they had been arrested in, underfed, frightened and weary, they were taken to Liverpool. My mother and grandmother saw my grandfather only once in Donaldsons. The same night they arrived in Liverpool, like troubadours, Round Table knights with none of the glory, they had access to priests, took communion and were finally loaded on to the Arandora Star. It set sail at 4am on 2nd July, 1940:

"*The Arandora Star was a cruise ship that, like many others, had been requisitioned by the government for war use. Painted battleship grey, she had retrieved British troops after the fall of Norway in early June 1940, andplayed the same role later that month after the fall of France.*

She was designated to sail from Liverpool to Newfoundland, carrying 712 Italians, 478 Germans and 374 British guards and crew. Even though this was more than three times the peacetime occupancy, the number of lifeboats had not been increased. Layers of barbed wire were placed between

decks. Captain EW Moulton had protested, demanding the number of passengers be halved and the barbed wire be removed, saying, 'if anything happens to the ship that wire will obstruct passage to the boats and rafts. We shall be drowned like rats and the Arandora Star turned into a floating death-trap.' He was overruled.

At 4am on 1st July 1940, across the river from the Birkenhead shipyard that built her 14 years earlier, the Arandora Star left Liverpool. She was unescorted, unmarked, and steamed at cruising speed. Had she been painted with a red cross it would have been apparent she was not on a military mission. As it was, she looked like what she had so recently been, a troop carrier.

At 7am on 2nd July, north west of Ireland, a German U-boat spotted her and fired. The unarmoured ship was deeply penetrated and took on water for just half an hour before sinking. and And a parallel monument to that of Mamma Ciociara, to the ill fated Arandora Star and the 700 men lost at sea on 2 July, 1940 is now a place of dignity and repose in the city centre of Glasgow" (internet entry)

I still muse over the barbed wire which prevented escape; the shortage of lifeboats for the 700 or so men; the sleeping bodies on the dining room floor of the boat; my grandfather reconciling with his brother Pietro Rossi, Ernie's father, after a 20 year fall out and when it was clear that they had only minutes left to live. Finally, I never met him but I always think of my grandfather standing on the deck, unable to swim, frightened in that way that the unworldly are afraid, erect in his formal black overcoat …for the cold, for dignity…to meet his Maker? And despite the shouts from his fellow prisoners, refusing to "jump…jump". There have been reports of shooting and of soldiers prevent ing escape, bullet holes in the lifeboats…conjecture..drama? Who knows.

Italian Odyssey

It is 1st July 1940.

He is breathing cargo
and still wearing the reek
of 21 days in a cell

he is a traveller again, peaceable and without baggage .
Or sin.
There had been a visitor, late in the night
but was this a time for host or any sacrament?

Before him, in the late evening
a cruise ship, Arandora Star
proud in her dock,
her deck now laced with metal
a crowning with thorns.
Mother for all ages, taking to her belly,
all 700..sellers of hams, sweeties and flowers,
her dance room floor is soft with boys and men
the air stale with uncertainty .

Then at sometime around 7am,
a last fling of a passing German boat
a torpedo, the spider's bite,
a danse macabre in full fatal swing,
the sliding slowing
he holds a brother close, a first in twenty years,
"jump, jump",
but there had been no sea in Lazio,
he stands erect, overcoated, elegantly poised.

The stranger's arrival is swift.

Who knows too if there is any significance in the pull I have felt for some ten years or more towards the Scottish isles. They, more than anywhere, are where I am most happy in solitude, in a woolly hat, porridge and whisky in my panniers and a notebook in my rucksack. I have made it my business to visit them all with a tent, on a bike, by post bus and train...mostly on ferries. One of my formative and favourite poems in my teens was Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey:

"and I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply inter fused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, and the round ocean and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man: a motion and a spirit that impels all thinking things,
All objects of all thought, and rolls through all things”

....the sandstone shelving at Duncansby Head, Rhum's cuillins glowing red at dawn, the airy grasses of Berneray, the still, pale desertland of a North Uist beach, sandpipers busy among shells, and the deliberate beat of the wings of a heron, these are the images that infuse me with a sense of reconciliation primarily with myself; and strangely, it was on these islands, in that machair, on these beaches that the dead of the Arandora Star washed up. I did not know this until very recently, when I visited Colonsay and where I was grandiosely and annoyingly escorted to the grave of a British soldier ; but for many years I have been urged by some force within me to return in simplicity and alone, again and again. And to come back into the city pacified.

Finally:

“I sometimes wonder that the Scottish Italian community wanted to stay on here post war. I remember my Mum talking about the horror of what was done and later Italian friends, neighbours told me more. I am very glad that the Italian Scots did stay. Scotland is greatly enriched by the Italian community”(Facebook;anonymous).

“My mother was always a kind and generous person…never bitter after what happened and she like all of us, loved this country” (Interview; BBC Radio Scotland).

If there was any discussion in my home about those events, I never heard it. That silence was offset by my early experience of Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Cab Calloway and the Hot Club of France, the magic of the Grappelli violin; music to get lost in, music to swallow you whole, music so visceral that it seems to pour out from inside you. This was one my mother's gifts to me in those years. I believe that for her, to disappear into that world of improvisation and syncopation, of Lady Sings the Blues and Satchmo, into a universe of fantasy, her other gift to me was the love of books, Pearl Buck and Rider Haggard, Louisa May Alcott, the Brontes. .these were the only escape routes available to her, confined as she was by a tradition and system that even then, I saw as unjust. I do often believe too, that my mother always hoped that her Heathcliffe might suddenly show up one day on the Meadows when she was walking the dog. The continual fluctuations in the role and status of my

family in post war Scotland I suppose, made a strong case for an anchoring. And so, the prime relationship in the family in the new order Grandad dead, became the one between Grandma' and her married son, Enrico. I was a silent witness to those mother and son strategic conversations, to the dictats given to my mother, and I agonised, felt grossly impotent at being a voiceless child. I raged at my mother's servility and my own inability to defend her or raise her up. I saw her negated.

My own journey of detaching, not attaching, of great care in what I committed to, of cool objectivity, of identifying with both sides to the point sometimes of not knowing what to think, my tendency to critique and question, my passionate articulation of distinction and difference, most of all my rejection of norms, and my lifestyle fashioned on not what I saw, but what seemed natural, had started.

A Time of Learning: a Time of Landing

From my grandmother, with whom I slept from the age of six until my early teens, I learned a great deal. There was my growing sense of womanhood: of both the strong in her and the denied in my mother; of traditional roles allocated and expected on the one hand and the power and potential of woman on the other. My grandmother commanded; my uncle acted; my mother obeyed; Rico worshipped one woman, disrespected all others.

An important influence for me from birth, was the southern, Laziale Italian dialect and with it, a way of seeing the world. It is an altogether different language to standard Italian, it brings a different lens on people, their habits and purposes. That was the language I heard around me and spoke with Grandma'. The dialect was a seed-bed for the ease I have with foreign languages and the extent to which a language for me is more than a technical skill. The integration of another language which has more to do with feeling and instinct offers new possibilities for identity. Together with English, the dialect was my first language..the language of familiarity and home. Even today, when I get the chance, speaking that dialect though it sits incongruously with how I present now, I find another, truer identity. It brings with it more honesty and humour. It brings a practical understanding of human nature. But it also seems to have opened a consciousness of a different language system and the real heart of words despite their various manifestations in the different Romance languages,

dialects and tenses. Whenever I came across an unfamiliar word at school in French and later in Spanish, even Portuguese and oddly Catalan, though I cannot claim to speak either Spanish, nor any version of it and far less Portuguese, it seemed as if I had always known the word. There was rarely a need to write it down and once heard, I remembered it. I feel a deep afinity with conditional tenses and instinctively know how they should sound. This linguistic and cultural empathy and fluidity, and the different identities which I inhabit and present when travelling in Southern Europe, in Greece even where I at least pass for Mediterranean, comes I believe from the skills I learned in those post war years. At primary school with mainly Scottish girls, I had a strong sense of difference which I neutralised often by silence, watchfulness and choosing to remain peripheral; verbalising most often in writing. At the same time, I took care not to establish a connection with the substantial number of Italians or Polish children in my class. I was a reluctant Italian. I kept my distance. To this day, the Italians I went to school with remain unaware of how culturally close we really are. My Scottish surname, was both my camouflage and my opportunity.

The voice that drove me then, I still hear it, was mainly my grandmother's. Her frustration at her inability to read and write; an intelligent woman and an able businesswoman; a woman who was Mary from Bonnington Road where they started out wheeling an ice cream cart, and who became at the last, even soon after the war, the dignified lady who would in Jenners tea room be both known and respected; the lady in the hat, evocative of a Colourist portrait, greeted by Sir Wilwye Darling himself in his store in Princes Street, and where he would rush to get her a seat. To "be respected " was her compass; valued, earned not through any vulgar display of wealth but through the power of letters and education. Education as Paolo Freire defined it for the Brazilian people was literacy, democracy and power. That was how my grandmother regarded it too; emancipation, independence and freedom; a means of moving forward in the world. Her inability to read and write was an obstacle to her achieving what she knew she was truly capable of. She felt powerless, ultimately having to rely on others to read her letters, deal with the doctor, solicitors and banks. Remembering her now, struggling to write her own name on her pension book at the post office every month, I know that these were the values that formed and fired me. '*Fatte' maestr' mama*" and I did become a teacher. This belief in education and its ability to transform and raise us, to win and require respect, have been my guide throughout my life. For what always causes me the most pain is to be ignored.

Sunday mornings in Morningside, were as I remember them, sunny. That must have been after my drunken father was eventually bundled out the door; mainly by her, after another assault on my

mother but this time in front of me. What I could never share at school when the inevitable questions about what we did on Sundays and did we go to Mass, was the glorious smell of sugo for spaghetti; and not going to Mass since it was not an imperative in our Italian, broadly Catholic home. She did however, as did many Italians, treat priests and religious with respect. She mainly fed them them or offered a whisky. I have strong memories of coming home to find a priest sitting chatting to Grandma' and having a dram or two mid afternoon. Religious practice however for Grandma' was fear and fate, appeasement, retribution, and the sense of an all-seeing eye. She had her own favourite curse of course, "*te pozze schiattá*"... but fortunately none of her targets did actually implode or indeed explode. She had a firm belief in the power of the *mal'occhio.* In order to break the spell of the "evil eye" as she told it, she would put rice grains into a basin of water and and determinedly "drown" any grains floating on the surface. The *mal'occhio* well dealt with for the time being.

She did not have a wide cooking repertoire; she had come after all, from a place where people survived on "pan' e cipoll" (bread and onions), pasta, bread, garlic, potatoes, lentils and on special days, a chicken's throat would be cut, cooked and brought to the table. There were pigs too, but these were valuable and sold when the time came. But from my grandmother I learned the importance of generosity..there was never too much food..if there were no left overs, she had not fed her family enough. I saw her often cooking a frittata for un unexpected visitor at 11pm at night, when in a Scottish home you might be lucky to get a cup of tea. For her a welcome was the offer of food and drink. They were her currency. She made people feel warm and happy and so they came often. I also learned that Christmas and New Year in an Italian home were about family. I do not remember wine or indeed alcohol. But I also learned something else. Every family needs a heart and a hearth. When Grandma' , Zi' Mariucc' died no one else took on that role. But the instinct to offer my family and friends a place of good fare and fun has been a role I have carried through my own life. Family cafés opened for a half day or as long as there was business to be done on Christmas Day so our lunches were staggered, with people coming and going. New Year was a full day of opening. But nonetheless, I remember preparations for these days, Grandma' and Ernestina working in the kitchen; chickens roasted and boiled, spaghetti, "bracciol" and never a turkey or a desert though maybe there was indeed jelly and ice cream our trademark as Italians, for us children. At New Year, my mother's cousin Ernie from Loanhead would be at the door with his guitar and a lump of coal.

Parcels to and from Viticuso were a feature of upcoming celebrations. That meant too, that we were able to eat Italian food at a time in history when it was impossible to find it here in Scotland nor could we request such was the burden of the past war and the limits imposed by ration books. But we were blessed with the arrival of sausages cured and made in Viticuso and sent by Zi'Nicandro, my grandmother's cousin and brother of "'Gnor' Zi", a Monsignor of the Church and of whom Grandma' was fiercely proud. Those amazing boxes also brought baccala (salt cod), walnuts and dried figs. In return, we sent tea and hot chocolate, sugar and chocolate bars. My grandmother never lost her ties with the country..she made pizza with olive oil, garlic and fresh tomatoes, bought rennet from the chemist to make her own ricotta and would occasionally persuade her son, Enrico (Rico) to drive to a farm where she bought two live chickens, put them in the boot of the car and disposed of them at the back of the house.

She would then gut them in the kitchen sink, a smelly task, remove the feathers and them hang the birds between two dining chairs to rid them of any blood and fluids. That done, they were ready for the pot. I still remember the wonder of Scamorza when it arrived from Italy and the little balls of butter embedded within the waxen kidney shaped cheeses.

Transitions

Ernestina arrived in Edinburgh from Viticuso in 1958. She was 18. My uncle went to Italy to collect her and I can still remember waking up early one morning to find this dark forbidding looking stranger in my grandmother's bedroom. She stood barely in the door, slightly to our left. She spoke no English, her hair was caught up in a fat round bun, she wore quality grey suiting which I imagine had been bought and tailored especially for the occasion and no bra. It was not unusual during the fifties for Italian families to request a home help from their native village back in Italy and the whole operation was handled within the family networks that extended back across to Italy. So, my uncle's family had Amelia, Ernie my mother's cousin had Concetta and we had Ernestina. The work for them was heavy, particularly in my home for we had no washing machine, no fridge and there were coal fires in all the rooms, which had to be cleaned and set every day. Ernestina also helped out in the café, to help my mother in The Copper Kettle and learn English. But these were strong, hardy girls used to working the fields, women who made bread and pasta for the daily meals; who fed, bled and cleaned the animals they shared their night shelter with; women who helped with birthing and laying out the dead of their families, building walls and repairing the roof after a storm.

In the devastation caused by the war in the area of Lazio generally and frequent earthquakes and tremors, although life in Edinburgh was tough, it still represented an opportunity. To come from Viticuso to an Italian family in Scotland was a chance to make something of her life, to be educated, polished in the ways of a city, make a marriage, be a “signora”.

Ernestina told many stories about her life in Viticuso, I liked the ones about her school experience best; about her teacher "Don Cocò”, basically a gentle lumbering man with a task to fulfil. He lisped curses at his class of untameable tricksters, wielding a large stick, and vowing to "*la Maronn*' " , the Holy Virgin, the most extreme physical punishments. But he rarely caught them and things generally died down. She and her classmates found his clumsy attempts together with his halting delivery a fine treat, an incitement to even more devilry, resulting in even more entertainment. Neither were they unaccustomed to beatings with whatever came to hand by whoever felt it was deserved. In the villages at that time, children lived by “*il baston*”..the stick, survived the beatings, took it in good part.

Nonetheless, Ron Cocó and Ernestina had been respectively effective; for unlike many of her peers, Ernestina arrived in this country able to read and write in Italian rather than dialect and she later went on to teach herself to read English, though not to write it. A skilful tailor, a natural cook a lover of quality with a strong instinct for business investment and an appetite for both gambling and risk, for she was often lucky on the roulette tables, I not at all. I loved the glamour of it of course. I had grown up in my own world ...my bedroom....of Hollywood and Frank Sinatra and I used to love in my twenties, leaving the shop, dressing in glamorous clothes for an late night session on the tables; but I have a clear albeit dismal memory still, of driving home in the wee small hours of Monday, another hard earned £20 lost at Edinburgh's Carriage Club and an early train to Glasgow where I had my first teaching post.

Ultimately liberated from the confines and narrowness of my family, and late in her life, Ernestina became a highly successful business woman, and owner of a number of high earning properties . It was an astonishing achievement. This was the raw young woman for whom running water in the home had been a miracle, as indeed was a toilet and a whole room given over to it. "*Sott ' la macer*' " or under a tree, was generally how people went about their regular business. And I remember visiting Viticuso in 1967 when flushing was still a matter of throwing a bucket of water down the toilet. In fact, it was still several years before water was plumbed into every property. Ernestina fol-

lowed my grandmother's advice as I would do later. She seized the opportunity given to her; she firstly learned the rudiments and then the refinements of language and behaviour of the middle classes, for that was the aspiration of my own family; those were the accent, the speech mannerisms the ways we made our own. Watchful, intelligent, Ernestina listened, especially to me as I moved successfully through the education system and she also came to know the value of a university education. She observed advancement; she understood financial security; thrift and hard work as the means to it.

The arrival of Ernestina in my home, as a survivor of the atrocities of war, for who knows what she saw and suffered together with the renegotiation of our position in Edinburgh life as former enemy aliens, confirmed my home joyfully and shamelessly as an Italian one.

We were however, also in transition. My own negotiated position, since it was mine to determine was both conflicted and clear. I developed a strong attachment to many of the values, attitudes, language, lifestyle which were different and which I began to believe were superior to those around us. But the pathway to a better position in society was education, and most especially culture and the arts. When I was old enough to be allowed to go my own ways during the day, I went regularly to the music library or the art library in George IVth Bridge in Edinburgh. I followed up on an author or poet someone at school mentioned and later to continue my journey of a broad education, of respectability, I chose my friends carefully choosing those I felt I could indeed learn from. I bought a season ticket for Friday night classical music concerts, spent my pocket money and later, my student grant on solo excursions, often four performances a day, to the Edinburgh Festival. I did not want company on these missions for they represented my private life. I had to work at appreciating a music very different to that of my upbringing, to categorising the key artists, sculptors, architects of the Western world. There were one or two teachers at school who saw my interest and encouraged me. I remember the first time I heard Schubert's Trout Quintet. I was in my 6th year at school and was totally thrilled by it. My French teacher encouraged me to attend concerts and would often put records of classical music my way. However, it was my piano teacher who made the greatest contribution to my journey. This is how I described that interchange .

"Throughout a childhood, where my mother would have had more freedoms without me, my relationship as a thirteen year old with an adult, my piano teacher, who spoke to me, was interested in how I felt, could somehow intuit my unexpressed, and not only guess at but create aspirations that

went far beyond the dark days of adult divorce, and the continual muted mutterings of the rosary by a ferocious grandmother, brought to me the greatest joy I ever experienced. Through this personal connection, I had my first real encounter with classical music. My pleasure, as I dug ever deeper to articulate tenderness and fragility and to infuse those notes below middle C with my own spiritual breath grew with hers. She didn't need to say anything. I felt it and responded. I looked at her and flew. She took me somewhere else: to a place unimagined and in the doing, gave me the greatest gift I have ever had. In those moments I was transformed; I was in another place and anything was possible. I learned about me, I saw what I could be and I learned about those rare transactions between people which involve all but the use of speech. That learning gave me a life of my own, distinct from the suffocating convent classrooms around us; it distanced the loneliness and terrors of my won home life; it formed an inner voice which has not only sustained me throughout my life but has helped me to challenge and to forge and to reconfigure….." (Pia, A.;Scottish Educational Review; 2009; Vol. 41, number 1;pp. 51-52).

All of this was a challenge, a new code, or grammar system but the beauty of which both teased and overwhelmed when I learned the how. The intimacy of finding a book about The Concerto, reading the poetry of Matthew Arnold, the prose of Joseph Conrad, discovering the Beethoven Violin Concerto, a Menotti opera or gazing at photos of Degas ballerinas was not something I would admit to or could share. This was as raw as any of my first awarenesses of sexuality and arousal.

In the 50s and into the 70s even, we were the object of post war insults and negativity. It was all around us…I guess that prejudice was present even in the the homes of many of my school friends. The insults landed over the shop counter, in the street and in the playground. In the workplace, partnership in a legal firm was withheld because reportedly, of a name. The prejudice within the professions was more silent and subtle. Fortunately, the jibes were never directed at me, because of my Scottish name and because i was careful distract from my own ethnicity. But I heard and saw it… railed at it and even on one occasion pursued a man down the street who insulted my mother over the price of an ice cream cone. We countered this in our minds, in the privacy of our home and with biting humour. I observed rather than inhabited therefore, two worlds. The public life of school and learning, of moving, of the shop counter, shopping with my grandmother, while in my head and at home I engaged in a counter narrative; a defence and affirmation of our own better and informed Italian identity. It was with amusement that we sold chocolate….they can't get enough of it… "mang' cioccolat'" (my grandmother's label for someone she considered unmanly)…such an at-

tachment to biscuits, sweet things! Our café menu consisted of variations around chips as a staple; we scornfully gloried in pasta, smoked fish with olive oil and garlic, believing in careful food preparation and confused at a Scottish reliance on frying, lard and tins. These were also the days of cinecittá, Loren, Lollobrigida, Fellini, Mastroiani, glamour and romance. We read "Oggi" the old time equivalent perhaps of "Hello". It was both an inspiration and an affirmation. The beliefs that Ernestina showed as a girl from a village in good quality tailoring were and are endemic to the Italian psyche I think. For, despite the still limited resources of the post war era, I admired, the efficiently, elegant and careful presentation of my own community compared to the dull rag tag of what I saw around me in Edinburgh. Attention to how we looked was a strong factor in certainly the women in my family. I learned it then and I live it now.

But I think that the issue of dress and presentation has been a defining and complex one for me. It was only well after my teenage years that it became important. Before that with hindsight, I saw my non conformity as superiority and an assertion of my personal freedom from the family. As a growing child, I came to value Italian attitudes above how we understood those of Scottish society. There was an intimacy and passion in the home which I did not see elsewhere; hard truths, a cruel, unfettered directness about who you are in yourself, often delivered in anger, with some degree of violence and usually resulting in some long term family feud. Sometimes these would heal at the very last as in the case of my grandfather, very often not. Or they would resolve for short periods, with highly charged meetings descending into chaos. In my own family, there remains much that is unresolved. But I have always felt an urge for that same honesty with colleagues, in relationships, and friendships. This has caused me many problems, not least throughout my career and I have usually felt diplomacy was a waste of time; less than honest in fact. Unadorned honesty being the issue for me, since it was the way of my family, moving forward in honesty after "'*na buon sfogat*'" (getting it off your chest). But I also felt that this should be the case in how we present to the world. To disguise that truth of who or how we physically are seemed to me at the time, maybe still does, to be superficial and misleading. This belief caused me great misery and unhappiness in my mid and late teens. I remember feeling very close to Hamlet in his dilemmas, how he regarded his mother and her coquettishness, fickleness, and in his lone contemplations about whether or not to be.

While my friends and particularly my family worked hard at presenting at their best...make up...clothes to flatter...I held firmly to being just me. The more pressure from my glamorous mother and what seemed to me to be over glamourised cousins, the more tenacious I became and the more

introspective and depressed I became. Indeed, I have a memory of an Ice Cream Alliance Ball, the social highlight of the Italian community, UK wide, to take place in Edinburgh and of which a relation in Huddersfield, Tony, my grandmother's nephew was the retiring President. I did have a boyfriend by then, for which my mother was thankful, and everyone else astonished, but I had returned from a year spent in France with my hair completely shorn…a stylish look in France at the time. Every branch of the Rossi family , from Fife, Lytham, and Loanhead as well as a contingent from Huddersfield, had gathered days before. While the "glamorous" female family members were planning a bejewelled, backcombed, lacquered and beautifully bouffant presentation, my plan was cropped hair and small rimless glasses. My dress was incongruously, pink and flouncy however. On the night of the event, at my mother's bidding, and after some plotting, my eldest cousin Marie, grabbed me by the head, took charge of my make up and stuck a small hairpiece on top of it which she then back-combed into position. And so, obedient and unsure, I made my even more bizarre way to that ball.

Things for me earlier in my development, were especially acute in the area of meeting and being attractive to boys. Basically, and sadly, I was always the only one to leave a snogging roomful behind in a taxi home. And it took until my twenties, for me to learn about my own unique version of "attractive", never beautiful, though that is something I would loved to have been; and once I discovered to my delight that I did indeed offer something sexually inviting, indeed it became a truism. I worked on it, fashioned and developed it. I saw what pleased and did my best to please. I revisited the family values I had rejected, and moved to heels, make up and halter necks. My trajectory was from fat, from flat feet and Gor-Ray pleats, to unmade up understated French student, thence to the dramatic flourish as a lusty, lipsticked Italian woman, teaching the significance of gesture and the Tarantella to my bewildered but eager pupils. While I still live the learned importance of presentation from my Italian background and from my French experience however, I long every now and then, regularly, for those days in my two person tent, my odourless thermals, knitted hat, seeking out a shower and breakfast at 4pm, content with sausages, oatcakes and a small dram.

While there was no compromise with regard to presentation or appearance in my family, I do remember the first appearance of Knorr chicken noodle packet soups in my home. I remember the simple joy of tinned spam, the glossy jelly of tinned pork meat, beans on toast though I really preferred late night beans on their own, Cheyenne style. And eventually Mary Baker cake mixes, Bird's custard with tinned pears, rich tea and digestive biscuits found their way even into my home.

It also occurs to me that we never observed the Italian tradition of the major meal being eaten on Christmas Eve and it was on Christmas Day that we had our pasta with a sugo that had cooked for hours, the meat removed from it and served separately with salad. If there were vegetables such as Brussels sprouts or broccoli, they were first blanched before being sautéed In garlic and olive oil. The small changes to what we ate at home, the Scottish influence was partnered however, with the aroma of fried whitebait begged or preordered from the fishmonger, capons stuffed with forcemeat consisting of sausage, garlic, raisins and breadcrumbs; camomile tea, broth with pasta and the discarded parts of the chicken, I particularly remember the brown scaly meat of the neck, fish coated in home made breadcrumbs, eggs fried in olive oil and the first Moka coffee maker brought straight from Italy by my uncle. We learned to make chips too but an altogether better version was potatoes sautéed with onions and garlic.

Walking with Grandma'

By 1956, we had moved into the new house my grandmother had bought. This time in Bruntsfield. She also bought a café: The Copper Kettle which was to be the main focus of life for me and my family for many years to come. Our changed situation, my father no longer present but hovering in the shadows of my mother's and grandmother's consciousness, often consuming my mother with anguish for she became very black and thin, meant that I then settled gratefully into my grandmother's bed.

Trying not to intrude into the life of mainly my mother but also into the conversations between my grandmother and her son, was always a challenge. But, I could not help being ill often. This created a major upheaval since kind Dr. Shearer had to be called in and the day had to be organised around his arrival. Sometimes Dr. McLaren would come instead. His smile was kindly too but his rimless glasses and his quizzical expression made me shy. Each bout of asthma required at the most three visits; I had to be given pills at regular intervals while in bed and I didn't ever want anything to eat which horrified my grandmother for whom food spelt health (she had taken over my upbringing after my mother and father separated when I was six) and she would promise me five shillings for every cup of hot milk I drank. Milk then came to be associated with the smell of my leather schoolbag and my grandmother's large warm bed and brightly lit bedroom. The gift of illness however, brought hours of uninterrupted reading... history books about the Magna Carta and the Tudors, a brother and sister- Neil and Alison in the Highlands, the serialised magazine "Knowledge". The

other benefit was the effect of ephedrine as medication for my asthma . It quickened my heartbeat and caused me to be sleepless and loquacious. So, we would lie side by side in the early hours, Grandma and I, sometimes she would face the window, her back to me, rosary in hand and I would chatter. These were the only times when I spoke at length, when I had attention. At school, as a young child, I was known to be quiet and shy. I had few actually, I had no friends. But in those hours I had Grandma to myself. She recited her mantras and curses and I gave voice. She prayed to all the madonnas she believed in for she was convinced that there were as many virgin Marys as there were incarnations of her; she spoke of her life in Viticuso, of her courtship, of the unsuitable Tony, and Emilio who would not give up. She used to sing a little ditty that I can still almost remember " com'è bello far l'amore, la domenica mattina....chi a letto a riposar"...how wonderful to make love on a Sunday morning. She did then, have her moments; and the specialness of Sunday in rural Italy...Mass, l'aperitivo, the gatherings of family for lunch, all of this I love to observe even today.

Grandma's roots were in Viticuso, and although I have happy photographs of her with her sisters Zi' Martell' and Zi'Mink' and cousin Nicandro in Viticuso, I have no memory of her leaving for Italy in in the fifties or later. Whether this was because of the unsettled situation in both countries after the war or because she felt the need to take care of me, I do not know. I do remember though, the joy with which she greeted the early morning, standing at the window of our ground floor flat. And as she looked out at Bruntsfield Links, the Copper kettle cafe beyond, in her mind I know she saw Viticuso, the Apennines, the fields where her people toiled and the small home she had shared with my grandfather and their hens. They had married in 1911 and left for Scotland two years later. I am convinced that for my grandmother at least, marriage was a functional matter. Scotland must have been the plan, the courtship strategy, the "better life". Those morning visits to that window, the Links and the potato fields of Lazio: "chill' beglie patan' re' Viticus' " as she would say were a coming to terms, the construction of a narrative for the events of her life in Scotland and the sum of her years. Her language was of journey and gratitude despite the war and the loss of my grandfather. "This country has been good to me" she would say. But her life was what she herself had made it for she was an initiator, never standing still and skilful at integrating into firstly Scottish life and secondly at winning hearts and admiration even during the war years. Whatever she truly thought, I believe she never shared, her presentation always willing in that Italian way, but dignified nonetheless and refined; for she had indeed "mixed with her betters" and "fatt' la spes' " (learned their

ways). That example of aspiring, striving, moving, positioning and learning from others was I think, a model for my own life journey. It was never about status but it was about leading rather than being led; being at the top; winning.

She liked a gamble, though she couldn't read , got help to do the football pools and had a sense not only of destiny but a belief in randomness, of luck. One of her intriguing skills I remember was to read teacups. There were two main themes to these readings: one was prosperity usually symbolised by a tree and the other was disaster…or death. There were other things…a stranger, a birth, a journey, a letter. Ernestina at 18, fresh from Viticuso herself, used to listen eager for her own better future, and I, all three of us seated coven style at the table in the kitchen recess, would watch, amazed.

I also have very happy memories of listening to a nightly exchange of ghost stories and spirit world tales between Grandma' and Ernestina. I would be tucked up in bed beside Grandma' and Ernestina would sit at the end of it, telling stories about apparitions on the road to Venafro or through the mountains to Cervaro; of snakes hypnotising breastfeeding mothers, taking her milk whilst soothing the baby with a tail. Folklore and superstition were a strong feature of the culture I grew up with. Between Grandma' and Ernestina, the fireside telling of tales, a gathering of neighbours, in the harsh cold of winter, deep in the Appenines was recreated every night in a Bruntsfield flat. I was wide-eyed. I grew up too, in the care of a woman who claimed she saw my grandfather standing in the hallway behind her on the afternoon of the morning he was drowned, who while travelling in a taxi to the War Office in Glasgow to find out if he had survived the sinking, heard him whistling behind her all the way; and who went for her usual afternoon nap one day and woke up telling us that she had dreamt her brother Gelardin' in Canada had died" s'ha mort' Gelardin' ". It was then that my uncle handed her an unopened black bordered air mail letter on the thin paper of the time, which had arrived at his house and not ours. Her antidote was pragmatic and undramatic. Tears streaming, she fried two fish, placed an egg on top and continuing to wipe her eyes, ate with gusto. It was important 'pe' mantene' la salut'": eating to stay healthy.

The morning of my first Confession which was taking place at school, I woke up with the early morning sun filling the bedroom and a sense of something different. Grandma' was lying back making strange sounds which weren't words. She got up and went through to my mother, and I could hear her trying to speak. I don't know what experience my mother had of these things, but she knew

enough to call a doctor and my uncle. There were no lasting effects from that stroke but it was however, a signal.

As a countrywoman, Grandma' was pragmatic about her death which she made careful preparations for. A favourite phrase of hers was "quann' me mor' I" , when I die, and this would lead to another phase in her evolving plan. The first sign of this was her constant, daily repetition of the rosary; she was always muttering, it was always in her hand. She would make her gradual slowing progress down Greenhill Gardens to St Peter's Church for confession on a Saturday evening and early Mass on a Sunday, probably as she sensed her time was passing. In our outings in Rico, her son's car, there would be frequent trips on the way home, if I wasn't being annoyingly sick, to the cemetery at Mount Vernon while she decided which not one, but six layers,she would buy, for she clearly wanted a Rossi family mausoleam. During the days when I was in bed unwell and reading usually, I tried not to see the enormous statue of the Sacred Heart on Grandma's dressing table. For there was an altar, complete with candles and a standing crucifix, on top of her dressing table. The bottom drawer of this piece of furniture was set aside for the clothes she wanted to be laid out in. There was mainly white, delicate underwear. The undertaker would do the rest. In addition, there was a bottle of Holy Water which she sometime drank herself, or gave me to drink when I had a particularly bad asthma attack, brought from Lourdes and two long candles. These were to be placed beside her in her coffin. Finally, not long before she died, she bought a set of receptacles for the oils and water used by the priest for the Last Rites of the Catholic Church, now referred to as the Sacrament of Healing. She was both thorough and realistic.

Grandma' was 75 when she died. I was 14. I think the dying process was not too long drawn out and I was in the room when I heard and saw her last breath. That left a very big impression on me but what can haunt me still, is the sound of her breathing which dominated the whole house for those interminable hours before she finally gave in, for she was stout hearted and strong. Most of all, I remember the coffin, the hardness of her cold skin, the smell of church candles and the clawing scent of funeral wreaths covering most of the floor space in our house. I have been affected by death and my own especially has been a lurking presence every day of my life. The reality that it is, nods to me each morning and night and frequently backs me into a corner forcing me to look hard at it; unexpectedly and unprompted. It is a presence that watches me all the time; knows the when and the how, while I remain disturbed that I do not and will never know. At a whim, it will one day show itself in all its grim glory, it will choose its time and I will say to its face, "ah, you're here.".

The family had gathered in the hours before the event, dressed in black, and they paced the floor of the room next door to Grandma's bedroom as they waited for the end. I do not remember drama of any kind; only dignity. Soon after, the house filled with people, a few old ladies, friends of Grandma's asking my dead grandmother to remember to pass on messages; one still beautiful, gentle old woman in black wearing a veiled hat, asked for time on her own with my grandmother. We could hear her heartbreaking pleas for Grandma' to tell her husband, Raffaell', that "she was sorry" for her adultery. And the men, not the wives came, with whisky; the shopkeepers, the sellers of wafers and cones, the makers of pasta, of ice cream and of fudge; the café and restaurant owners, the car dealers, the grocers, the God fearing and the womanisers, the drinkers, the shady, the Padre Pio and the Fatima fanatics, and the mentally unwell; the cross eyed, the lame, the pallid and the bronzed; the swaggerers and the earnest; there were open shirts, bow ties, waistcoats, sparkle and velvet; shoes of crocodile, of patent leather and of cool suede; the bald, the Brylcreamed, the backslappers and the blessed; the fragrant, the fresh, the bearded and moustached; the overdone, the overbearing, the mighty and the slight; those who wept and those whose large laughter filled the house; parked outside…the big red Zaccardelli and Cervi truck, the Coletta Daimler, the modest Morrises and Fords, the Jaguars and a variety of ice cream vans, each an indicator of rank and fortune: the Edinburgh Italians.

Such was the intimacy of the Italian community that the old way of visiting the house of the bereaved was customary even in Scotland among second and third generation Italians. There was no delay. Within the hour, a queue would form at the door. It was also traditional for guests to take over the house, relation or not; to look after the children, answer the telephone and the doorbell, wash dirty dishes or clothes, deal with the detritus from the death; principally to bring food and drink, cook and serve the mourners and the bereaved family for the thinking was, it was important to maintain strength at a time of shock and loss; equally, the bereaved would neither think of eating or have any interest in preparing food. It was also customary for two rooms to be used for the purpose: one room where the body was laid out and where each visitor was expected to view, kiss, take their final leave of the dead person, and another for social interaction. This practice could be awkward for the squeamish, the nervous or those who felt no sense of loss at the death, for one would be closely observed and most especially, if there had been any difficulty or issue between the person gone and the person standing at the coffin. Children were often included in the rituals. They were not spared any of the physical processes or the emotion. My presence at all of it, was not so very

unusual. Any prayers were confined to the room with the body while the other room was a room of recovery, healing and distraction. Tears were clearly shed in both and by most, however they felt, and people often went between the two.

I remember much later in my life, a student at university, the father of a close friend of mine died in tragic circumstances. We were both astonished at my sudden, unbidden arrival..he as a Scot, was quiet at home in lone privacy, there was no body and he clearly had no appetite; where I blundered in, expecting a crowd, with pasta and a bottle of Talisker. I had a similar embarrassment in France when again the father of our host died suddenly. Having taken him to catch the first plane to Paris, I shopped for a banquet and cooked a meal of seafood for the entire family, his wife and children, which I realised later must have looked like a celebration.

“La Questione della Lingua” (What language?) we know, has been an issue in Italy for centuries. The original Latin tongue spoken by the people of Italy, the linguistic legacy of Ancient Rome, gradually changed and evolved by degrees and over time throughout much of the European continent as we know. In Italy this was the “lingua volgare”, a vernacular or language of the “vulgate” or people. This new emerging language varied from region to region and it was only as recently as the 1950s with the advent of television, the media and the spread of literacy, that a common language known as Italian emerged. Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, "le tre corone", were significant in this process, writing their major literary works in the medieval and early Renaissance era, not in Latin as was traditional, but in the language spoken in the streets of their native Florence. Much later, Manzoni, author of the first novel to be written in Italian in 1827, “I Promessi Sposi” inspired by the example of the French, where the language of the street was the same as that of literature, was also a major not only literary, but political and social influence. He stands then with Garibaldi as a key figure in the unification of Italy.

This said, regional languages remain strong to this day……the mother tongue. At these Scottish Italian gatherings in those post war years, at the funerals, weddings and christenings, the language spoken was perhaps surprisingly and generally, English but intoned in a way that was more country Italian than Scottish, pronounced in the manner of a resident of the Grassmarket, Newhaven or Leith. Whether this adoption of English was a natural development or an effect of the war…of internment and therefore, a deliberate attempt to disguise ethnic difference, whether it was a new demographic, a sign of natural integration, or quite simply the result of a Scottish education, it is hard to

say. The dialect was but a tracing, a humorous sprinkling, a means of emphasis..it was easier to curse or utter expletives using the rough language of intimacy and cradle. And it was all the more powerful when interspersed with English. Sometimes to use the dialect is a necessity there being nothing in the English language appropriate to what is required. Furthermore, the dialect also serves as a means of connection, an acknowledgement of roots, blood and ancestry: " è cumpá" a greeting between people with the same history; "va coll' la lun' ", literally she changes with the moon; "cott' pe n'om" , polite version…she is hot for a man; "schifoso" …disgusting just doesn't render it at all! And my favourite: "non c'e ver cchiu' pe' la fam'", I'm so hungry I can no longer see!!

Finding the right phrase works the other way too. That famous " com'e va gle business?" (how's business?); "tre pund'" (three pounds). English words did then also become absorbed into the Italian of the community.

There are some interesting studies on the links between language and identity; the fluidity of identity or identities and what it is that we really share when we are in conversation. These propositions are all the more interesting when applied to a community in transition where the languages used represent markers of both a cultural identity and an identity aspired to. What I know to be the case then, is that unlike subsequent Italian immigration to Scotland, that of the fifties for example when people were more literate, had had some exposure to the media, the post war generation of Italians for whatever reason could speak very little dialect. They understood it completely and what is more, they had little Italian if at all. The attempts of my mother, my uncle and cousins at converting what active Laziale language they had, with all its truncations, rich consonantal texture, sentence formations from deep in the vocal register and its archaisms of vocabulary that is the character of it, into something equating the elegant smoothness of Italian, in a Rome or even worse, a Milan hotel has often embarrassed me.

The prudishness of my generation surrounding heritage mirroring a reluctance among Italians in Italy to acknowledge their own birth languages, is now, in a more recent valuing of the rich contribution of Italians, with our flair, creativity, instinctive insights, a spirit of enterprise and endeavour, being hastily thrown aside and replaced by a sudden trumpeting of ethnicity. What's more, we find that there is an eagerness to hear the stories. The mark of those clever, able, energetic, committed and inventive Italians is present in every profession and area of Scottish life.

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to speak and understand that beautiful dialect. That language of fun and laughter, of life at its most basic, of a shared knowledge of the challenges of life and a wisdom of the ways of human nature. I never spoke it with my mother nor she with me, but in Ernestina's last days, I remember sitting with her in a bay window of her lounge, softened by the green of the old trees outside, laughing freely over tea and talking "Viticusar'" in a way that we had not for years, in the language of her beginning here in Scotland and my childhood.

In my late teens, somewhat reluctantly, in order to qualify for entrance to a degree in languages at Edinburgh University, I learned Italian in three months and I lived in Florence for five. I have fluency but my Italian never has quite the authenticity and naturelessness of the language of my home.

My Mother and Father

My mother and father married in April 1943 when Italy and Britain were at war and my grandfather had drowned as a prisoner of war less than a year before. Only now, do I realise the huge import of this action. My mother had always been very clear that she would not marry another Italian. She flouted the prevailing system of family approval, of community dances and social get togethers where that new generation, Italians born in Scotland, survivors of internment, family loss and prejudice, gradually emerging into a new Scottish life, were encouraged to meet their prospective partner in innocence and establish a contained, well-policed courtship. Those few who sought love outside the community were the butt of gossip. They were seen to be morally free, acceptable as far as men were concerned but not women.

There existed a well recognised practice of much of the contact between boy and girl taking place within the families of both or within the wider community. It was brave for any individual from the community to bring a native Scot to that tight group and so, much of that relationship would be conducted elsewhere thus further fuelling speculation. The parameters of these marriage arrangements were mainly economic security, collateral...a family business, "respectability" and a known family history; as far as the the woman was concerned, modesty, support of her prospective husband and freedom from any prior entanglements, above all, possessing the wherewithal for motherhood and homemaking. These were the criteria for suitability.

I have attended many weddings within the community over the years. I have married within it; observed many newly weds. Even today, what is striking in the community of today and of the years when I was growing up, is the emphasis on family rather than passion or love, or on a relationship between existing lovers or lovers in the making....with sexual needs and aspirations both. There is a tendency among the parents of the couple to speak of them as their own, pure, untainted children, within an existing economic structure....working, playing children who will in time, somehow, seductively, secretively and surreptitiously extend the family network. This I believe stands in stark contrast to weddings in Scotland where there lurks a realistic awareness of the sexuality of both parties..the pleasures and fun of sex...there is a light-hearted explicitness in the bawdiness of the speeches and jokes. In Italian circles that major step of choosing a life partner because of love, lust or sexual compatibility is neither alluded to, considered or talked about. If passion is indeed present, though I have often wondered about that, the obligation is to keep it for the bridal suite where a great tsunami will hopefully be unleashed if not at first, then eventually. These things do also take time. The most daring aspect of these weddings is to this day, an intermittent chant from the coy crowd of "bacio, bacio,bacio,bacio" and the blushing kissing response. Another bizarre practice possibly a throwback to village life, where a first night takes place in the heart of the community in a private place reserved for the purpose, is for the new couple to join or visit the family the day after the wedding and their first night spent together. I find this painfully embarrassing and it is in my view, further evidence of Italian marriage as primarily a practical, economic arrangement.

In reflecting on these conventions, many of which still persist, what I understand of my mother is that unlike her siblings, and contemporaries, she was an unrepentant, devoted romantic; subtly and sexually driven, passionate and resourceful in her loving and her approach to life. She referred to my father's lovemaking as considerate and beautiful; him as golden. That she wanted no part of the perfunctory coupling rituals of her heritage is not surprising and is something that I feel greatly proud of. That she had the courage to step outside, challenge norms and have the confidence to infiltrate another culture and a more liberal set of norms other than her own, is to her credit as well as intensely shocking at that particular period in the history of her people living in Scotland. To pursue glamour, to emulate Hedy Lamarr, be fascinated by the androgeny of Marlene Dietrich, style herself as a Loren in that closed Italian value system required the creative energy, open mindedness independence of mind of a self styled woman in an old, anachronistic world. Her actions represented a stubborn deviation; from the behaviours of other young Italian women, for she could not or refused

to cook and clean, preferring her dialogues with the mirror to the drudgery of the shop counter and the till. Her activities outside the Italian community challenged both her equally determined mother and her controlling, abusive brother, who was the new Head of the family. Her romance and subsequent marriage to an RAF serviceman, under the ultimate command of Churchill, in a context of "collaring the lot" and the recent death of her own father on the Arandora Star, was it can only be said, both deliberately challenging on the one hand and audacious on the other. Flirtatious and "painted", were how both her family and that dull, conventional community saw my mother. For my part, I bow to her spirit and her grasp of a world beyond, her eye on the post war years and the wider context of which the Italian community was she recognised, one small element.

Her route to that hasty marriage was not entirely clear. She maintained her secrets, from time to time, offering only clues to her reality; "you don't know me" her constant theme and I don't think I really did. I only knew her through her actions and words and these changed over time. I remember her both as a vamp; dark haired, seductive and curvaceous, making careful preparations for her entry through the doorway of The Copper Kettle Café in Bruntsfield, no earlier than 11am, the shop in full busyness, school children clamouring at the counter. At the same time, I experienced her as increasingly disapproving of my own developing womanhood and my mounting confidence in my own powers. I generally managed to maintain an equilibrium in our adult relationship by adopting a neutral persona, devoid of sexuality, mainly as a mother; any glamour acceptable if merely cosmetic, and never alluring. She did of course attend the Italian dances, weddings and fascio gatherings as a young girl, but my guess is that like many of her generation, her participation was certainly not political. While romance in her heart ebbed through despair at the honest young men and the settled shop life they offered, it flamed ever more strongly in the clubs, the Jazz venues; the daring drinks and dances of Edinburgh's night life where she first met Alec Argent.

My father, Alec, was a musician, a saxophone player and clarinettist, eventually achieving a seat in the Geraldo orchestra, a well known big band in the 40s and later the offer to play in the well-regarded Ted Heath orchestra, which he never took up. I think because of his unreliability. I remember watching television with my mother and grandmother in the late 50s, sometime after he had left Edinburgh; and once or twice, spotting him among the front desks of the Geraldo brass section. But Alec was as alien to the community of Italians as Italian tradition was to him. This was no less true within my own family. Had he been willing to integrate and learn Italian ways, appropriate new and what was believed to be better values, become a steadfast, hard working brother and son-in-law,

things might have been different. But as a working class Scot and a musician the overt disapproval of the marriage both by my grandmother and my uncle, was matched in intensity I think, by his own obdurate, unchanging attitude. I did not know him, but I know this instinctively.

Not only was there a vast divergence in culture but those were the days too, when the Catholic Church demanded that anyone marrying a Catholic, was required either to embrace that religion or in practice, value it above their own. Though not religious, Alec did not become a Catholic and so my mother and father were not permitted to marry at the main altar of St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Leith Walk, but in the vesting room, the sacristy, the annexe to it. It is telling that there are no photographs of that wedding, nor have I heard any accounts of it. The only evidence of its legality is the marriage certificate and the divorce papers. One could say, that disapproval of the match came from every quarter.

The concept of being owned within an Italian family, especially as a woman, I think was a major factor in the failure of that marriage; that and the clash of one culture against another. There was no lassitude given for the new couple to build together, because Cristina remained a Rossi, possibly in her heart, and certainly in the eyes of her family. Given space, differences could have been harmonised, a new culture, harnessing both traditions, created by the couple. Quite possibly, too, my mother after what was probably seen as folly and disloyalty, was anxious to appease; or maybe she already recognised the unachievable; two opposed paradigms wrought on the one hand from the deprivations and frustrations of a bloke from Bangholm who used to climb out of his bedroom window at night to get to the clubs and play his music; and a family made vulnerable by events; and clutching at any opportunity to find solid ground. This was a family with its eye on respectable and a middle class way of life. Or maybe, as life became more difficult financially with their uncertain income from music and car dealing, my mother began to value what she had previously rejected. Cristina's brother and her older sister, now married into the Coletta family with a reputation for ice cream and catering in Blackpool, made strenuous efforts at the start, to involve my father in the family businesses.....in my grandmother's shop in Bruntsfield.....my uncle's shop in Morningside and in the Coletta empire on the Fylde Coast in Lancashire. All were unsuccessful. The fact that they married in the war years also meant that my father was away from home for extended periods. Some of that time was spent ironically in Italy.

It was also expected in Italian circles, that the youngest daughter take on the responsibility of ageing parents. Despite her lack of interest and unsuitability for this caring role, and the fact of her marriage, her own life, and the existence of her husband, this was repeatedly demanded of my mother, mainly by her own mother.

The couple went then for a short time to live in Blackpool, in a bed and breakfast, returned to Edinburgh and in the end, settled down to live with my grandmother in her flat in Morningside. My mother it seemed finally capitulating to mounting pressures on both sides, with acquiescence and indecision, an unwillingness to take further risks. These were character traits which contradicted the bold step of her marriage and which I only saw consistently in relation to men....to her brother and husband. My father on the other hand, expressed his smouldering anger and ultimate rejection of the Rossi family through whisky and drunkenness. He did sometimes I believe, spend time with his brother-in-law, Rico, but generally, the arrival of family members most especially from Blackpool, signalled his exit from the house. His sorties to the Miller's Arms, were a haven, compared to Rossi family life.

Like geysers in a geothermal field, eruptions through the compression of the spoken and unspoken were both predictable and more often unpredictable, dramatic and increasingly devastating. This then was the scenario of my early years. Whenever I was alone with my father, I had a strong sense of being with a stranger, with a man I didn't know and I longed for security and the familiar; for my mother or my grandmother to come back soon. He was a reluctant caretaker of his daughter, a mysterious visitor in our home. Because I didn't know him, I was unsure and wary of his reactions. Above all, I tried hard not to irritate or anger him. I sensed his detachment and rancour, what I felt possibly remembered, to be his potential for violence. I don't remember him ever speaking to or engaging me. Except once, my mother in the kitchenette making tea, he keeping me busy while we waited to eat and then my mother, seeing the mounting signals I intuited, threatening to pour a pan of boiling fat over him should "he lay one finger on me".

I do have a memory too of being left with him one cold, shadowy Sunday morning; a memory one afternoon of creeping into the boxroom where I saw the parts of his clarinet and saxophone, neatly stored in black casing, his black jacket and trousers, a bow tie...work attire. And I remember a tense, wordless evening with my mother and father on either side of a coal fire, my father's eye on

the clock, his quick escape before pub closing at ten. The final chapter for me but not for my mother I know, came one winter night when I was six years old.

The kitchen/living area was brightly lit, the wallpaper brown, we had tea. My grandmother had retired to her bedroom at the front of the house and my mother was buttoning up my dressing gown before putting me to bed in the room across the corridor, the room shared by my mother and father, and the room where I slept in my mother's bed. I had sensed a tension in my mother all evening, she was emotional, distracted. Then I heard a key in the front door and the kitchen door opened behind me. My mother became stiff, a strange look in her eyes. I remember being puzzled. I kept my eyes on her, I didn't look behind. No words were spoken. She led me through to bed and my father followed. She tucked me up and kissed me. My eyes were now on my father, just inside the door, and standing behind her. I seemed to know what would happen next, maybe I had seen it all before, I have no idea. What I do know is that any memories of my early years are random and few. My mother turned around to leave the room. He struck her hard. I don't remember any sound from her. Was she used to it? Should I have warned her? I certainly had seen the danger...knew the plan. She was defenceless, soft and vulnerable as she bent over me. Yet I had done nothing to stop it. I started to scream, jumping up and down on the bed and heard the heavy advance of my grandmother through the hallway. With no hesitation, with her full strength, she lashed out and knocked him down. It was easy. He was drunk. I remember blood on his hand as he scraped it on my little basket chair at the foot of the bed. I have no other memory. I can't remember what he, or my mother or grandmother did next. I seem to remember him not getting up from the floor. But I do remember then, a photograph taken from his jacket pocket which was hanging over the back of a chair in the kitchen, of a woman...my mother looked at it, put it back and I took it out again to see. Then, suddenly there were men in the kitchen, the doctor and my uncle and I think then my father. Someone, I think my mother took me across the landing to the door opposite and tried to make me stay with Miss Thomson but I wouldn't and so, I was put into my grandmothers bed in a dark, cold room. I felt confused, very alone and wondered what would happen now. I also felt strangely satisfied that my father had been knocked down. It was the first time I had had that feeling...my mother championed, him knocked down. I heard voices, couldn't make out what was being said. I heard the front door close. I ran to the window and looked out at the street. My father was standing looking back up at the windows. I felt no sadness or loss, only I think a relief I cannot account for. I went back to bed. I didn't see him again.

The Man who was my Father

The dark man whose voice I can't recall
who was my father
offered me a boiled egg
one Sunday morning when it wasn't sunny
and you had left for Mass
when the gas hob in our ration book scullery was still
the pots, our story books of roots and rooting
of Italy and immigration, not needed,
they held their breath
and the bread bin where you kept the few pounds
my father couldn't find, kept your secret.
I cant recall if it was the yolk or the white
that I couldn't eat or why
but I can recall a room the colour of fudge
but without its sweetness
a tenement window which kept out the light
stale grass of our shared green below
the daily drudge of a pulley
my oversized cot a barren place.
And for the first time that morning I tasted frozen
like the chill on your face at some later time
at the opening of a door somewhere behind me
the draught of air that blew fear into your eyes
uncertain into mine as you did up my buttons
put me to bed, kissed me goodnight
and I didn't feel safe
and I saw him behind you waiting
for you to turn round
for the fairy tale to finish.

I can still see him now after..your tears,the police and people..
standing on the pavement below in standard gaberdine,
dance hall lights behind
the man who was my father.

Comes Light

Paris in June 1970; a vibrant Matisse palette,his major exhibition in the Bibliothèque Nationale that year; a memorable conversation about artistry and possibility; then one single, defining moment. I looked out over the familiar, iconic landmarks of the city and up to industrial glass and steel high above, the sky a promising blue, a dawning...a new era beginning, all mine. I was finally ready to embrace it, was free to inhabit and even fashion it. This was my time and my life and I instantly resolved to live it; to remain in all the wonderful years ahead, coolly unhampered by the claustrophobic clamouring, and entrapments of guilt, duty and even love; for love as I had experienced it had not been love of me. Never once in my childhood and adolescence had I felt loveable. And all the beautiful words that people use for children, had never been for me. I had been an ungainly, unbecoming load which my mother struggled to carry, she too desperately seeking her own liberation finally after the death of her own mother when my mother was nearing her middle age. Standing on that threshold then, in the Tuileries gardens, the fresh and the undiscovered around and before me, I felt light. Suddenly aware of my own power and of my selfness, of my ability to be whoever I determined to be, I made up my mind to challenge norms rather than settle into them, to question and critique rather than to accept, to value the untried, to adopt an ideology of the contemporary, of ideas and trends in the making, of future in every aspect of life. That was the moment of my steely partition from the tired, crushing old order of family and friends; from a religion which offered no answers, safeguards or resolution; and from a past which I determined would not claim me. This was the time of the first appearance of responsibility to myself, cleansed of my history, unwritten and fully ready.

In that year, spent mostly in Montpellier and frequently in Millau, under the unyielding ever caring eye of my close friend and mentor at that time, Marie-Cécile and through my frequent contact with her family, honest and warm, I learned for the first time in my life, harmony within family life and

I learned the great miracle of homemaking. I learned about cohesion within a family....bonds created by the sustaining heartbeat of a loving mother, a quiet, solid, reflective source of all nourishment for everyone in the household and anyone associated with it. A family of jewellers and watchmakers, Marie-Cécile's house was the home of jams, savoury puddings, 48hour beef stews and slow, stove- cooked game. For Madame consistent in all things was a magnificent cook as well as the driving force in that business. The clients respected her, her husband and son, front of shop, followed her quiet, steady lead from the back room. She was fine featured, refined in speech and manner, in all respects cultured, with a love of literature, and the gift of laughter. I will never forget the engagement party of her youngest son, Jacques. Her elder son was studying for the priesthood. After and between many courses of the finest food I had ever seen, and it has to be said that I have never been as heavy since that year in France, there were organised games, singing, storytelling and I learned there, the finest drinking songs which I sing to this day. But my main memory is of her wicked participation in a game I have never seen since. The men were robbed of their socks and shoes and were made to sit trousers rolled up to the knee. Then blindfolded, the women came into the room one by one, feeling their way down the line, to their husbands. Madame Froment set about the task energetically with all the experience of the seasoned lover of a rollickingly unpolished Frenchman from Northern France, the father of her children. As a woman from the luxuriant, green southern lands of pasture for ewes, flowers for honey bees, the thick, tarry tongue of Georges Brassens and the Auvergne, from a land of rosemary and the bluest of cheeses, in themselves a delicate science of density and moistness, she was, in those smiling moments equally, the natural, comfortable mother of four children and a deft woman who knew her man by touch.

The ample architect-built house, comfortable and sturdy amidst gardens of hanging vines, bougainvillea, bushes of lavender, thyme and bay was fuelled, resourced, preserved and presented by Marie-Cecile's mother. It was the home that her grown children, two at university and two employed, came back to and a house for receiving close family friends. I saw there, for the first time, and in contrast to my childhood experience, a place of order and seemly behaviour, a place of retreat and restoration, a source of physical energy and wellbeing. It was I believe, the combination of tranquility, of kindly, loving tolerance of eccentricities and human foibles, and of an environment where the land and nature were so central to life and the enjoyment of it, that made it so strengthening for those who lived there. And I was surprised to find myself suddenly excited and joyous at the start of each of my days there. I was not Italian, not Scottish but culturally open and growing. I did of course have an understanding of what I observed in the Froment home but it was as if the ele-

ments of mine had been somehow reordered into one cohesive whole there, honed and refined into a purpose and an interaction between people that was altogether civil, thoughtful and sophisticated. As I exited the shower, each day, groomed in a way that I had newly learned, as I increasingly embraced and entered into the rhythms and dynamics of a new language, collecting words, which was a truer me, and as I set about my "bol" of coffee for breakfast, my tartines au beurre and confiture aux abricots...fruit from the garden and cooked in that wonderful house, I can easily say that I began my life.

Unmade and unfinished, I had come to this family with a need but not an intention to set my feet on good soil which would hold me up and give me an identity that I could present to the world with some assurance and a congruence that I badly needed. For in the leaving of my mother at Waverley station in Edinburgh, I felt no sentimentality and only opportunity very close at hand.

I met Marie-Cecile, in the convent hostel where I first found lodgings. She was studying dentistry at the university of Montpellier. We eventually took a flat in the Montpellier suburbs. As a twosome, our conversations were mainly an exchange about the arts...newly qualified that year with a diploma from the London College of Music, as a sideline to my degree in Modern Languages, I traded my developing knowledge and my appetite for music of almost every kind but especially for Beethoven, in return for her thoughts on and her increasing yearnings for fine art and for becoming an artist herself. I shared with her that violin concerto, Beethoven's, as my first awakening to spiritual power, other than the power of any God or religion, such as Roman Catholicism with which I had grown up; and my realisation, my deep understanding that the arts can say most eloquently that which speech cannot. I had also begun to write poetry and had had some publishing success which she enhanced with her great love of Lorca and that took me into other directions.

Walking in the footsteps of my grandmother, with her counsel in mind, I was learning from her as I went; not only about art, literature and philosophy, about the creative impulse, about reaching an understanding of the world which we inhabit and the potential of the arts not only to offer a perspective on what is but what will or could be. She was relentless in her schooling of me and my French; permitted no aberrations of language, despaired at the slightest grammatical fault. She was amused at my Scottishness, my unpolished presentation; highly critical of my Italian ways which to her were unruly: speaking too loudly, flouting traffic regulations with my bicycle, shouting. They offended her sense of order and decorum. So, through her and through observation, I began to un-

derstand my life as a continual piece of self presentation, never to be ignored or set aside. An interest in clothes and fashion while often seen as superficial, I began to regard as having the potential to volunteer a unique personal commentary to the world about who we are. I saw myself through her eyes on the world and I understood. Presentation can suggest belonging, an intention, a hint of something unique to offer.

This was provincial France in the late sixties and she was not alone. I was often made to feel uncomfortable in cafés and restaurants at my blatantly ill-combined appearance and my noticeable lack of interest in it. And so, with my French haircut, new rimless glasses, my pipe, my Gauloises Bleu, and my two Yves St Laurent blouses, ill-afforded, having put the ugly old clothes I had arrived with into a trunk bound for Edinburgh, also at some expense, I created another identity, and a currency; and for whatever reason, it came so easily. I was acquiring then, a taste for the outrageous on the one hand, an obsession with fashion on the other. Neither have ever left me. I enjoyed disrupting convention and expectations but also learned that it could only be done from a position of acceptability; appearance was a marker of how well I fitted in. And I very much wanted to belong, generally and most especially in France.

An unwavering eye, hers, creates a great deal of self evaluation and reflection. And so, equally strong was my determination to taste and to explore the new and unknown.. areas of knowledge and activity I knew nothing about, had no experience of. I enrolled at the music Conservatoire in Montpellier, abandoned my classes at the university, went exploring my surroundings on my motocyclette, lay on the beaches of Palavas with my book. Later, with no prior understanding or background in drama as an art form, I chose, as an experiment, twentieth century French drama, the Absurd....Ionesco, Beckett, Anouilh, Genet, as my final Honours specialism, which turned out to be unwise and which I have no recollection of at all. I bought the books of San Antonio and worked hard at acquiring French slang, I bought myself a Livre de Poche series on Physics, which I have never understood and a Concise History of Art in three volumes which I studied attentively when I was later in Florence. I did not attend to the matter of research for my final dissertation for my degree. In fact, I sat up all one night, before the final date for submission and both started and finished it, in a manner of speaking. Nor did I pay much heed to the translation assignments that arrived monthly from my university in Edinburgh. I returned them completed but disinterestedly, since my thoughts were elsewhere. I started to write poetry in French, I took lessons in drawing, which I have no ability for; I deserted the Church, a dramatic step since up until then, I had thought I might make

a good religious; I took an interest in pop music, learned to play chess and developed a liking for cognac, often concluding my day, when my university grant allowed it, in Le Riche café, hideout of the smart and fashion conscious of Montpellier. On quiet evenings, we would go to the practice rooms in the Conservatoire where I played her Chopin, Liszt,and Beethoven on the piano. By contrast, she walked me through the streets of our adopted town, to every exhibition she deemed worthy of her consideration. Then when we had exhausted our surrounding area, we hitch hiked, to Arles, Avignon, La Grande Motte, Nîmes, seeking lifts from lorries, Jaguars and whatever else would take us, to see Picasso, Matisse, Miró, Chagall, Vasarely, Gauguin and many others. We became for each other a powerhouse of ideas. We grew together in the unfamiliar.

For her part, I do not know if she ever inhabited classical music in the way I pursued an understanding of painting and the visual arts but these were the foundations on which I began then, to build a self and emerge from a conflicted and bewildering past. I do know that in the course of her first year of dentistry, she changed to Les Beaux Arts in Paris to study the visual arts, to become latterly, a successful artist, specialising in iconography, lecturing at the Sorbonne. We laughed a lot in that year. We were giddy. We tasted the dark side of alternative Paris. We grew to understand the realisms of French cinema and the creative truths of French singer songwriters. And I now, take much pride and pleasure in my daughter Roberta's gift for writing and performing her own material in a different context from France, almost half a century later; continuing the worthy tradition of Brassens, Moustaki, Brel, Sylvestre.

I arrived back in Edinburgh with deep reluctance and the earth irrevocably tilted on its axis. I gained a decently passable Honours degree. But my knowledge of French, the depth of my understanding of the language, it's nuances, subtleties and dialects, of the country, and my enduring love of them, the people and my wish to be one of them, remain. I gained from Marie-Cécile, from her family, from her confidence within that family, her trusting, reliable relationship with her mother and father, perhaps too from my life in France, a pivotal first valuing of who I was; of what I could offer another person, of what I could summon in that person to the point of changing the course of a life. I received that most precious gift from her, of love and affirmation. In short, a life. This was my beginning.

Copper Sun

My joyful amazement at the feeling that I had somehow come home to France, afforded a new perspective on my upbringing and my life in Scotland. The practices and behaviours of Italians living in Scotland became to me in some ways discomfiting at times they filled me in horror. I felt the world they inhabited was narrow, driven by many values that in general, I did not and do not share. I could not however, and still can't, deny the warm feelings of the familiar, of expansiveness, exuberance and at times, overwhelming generosity. A tenderness which would demand acknowledgement. By contrast, I took much pleasure in the conduct and demeanours of people in the cities and villages of Southern France, altogether in my view, more mannered and dignified. I had been in flight in France for sure and in coming back to Scotland, released from the oppression of my background, strong in a newly made and new found self, I was able to be both dispassionate and discerning as I felt my careful way back. It was an exercise in both acceptance and standing aside, my eye on another destiny.

The Copper Kettle café was the scene of my reconciling of self with history. The café had been in the family since 1955. Family life existed around it. It was only in the late 60s that it closed on a Monday. The hours were long but with moveable opening and closing times depending on customer demand and latterly the prevailing wind, or to be clear, my mother. But there, in that busy little shop, *italianismo* was assured and safeguarded through bold ethnicity, dialect and gesture; and through espresso, expressiveness and excess.

Second generation Italians, of roughly my mother's age, would drop in for a coffee and a bit of nostalgia mainly on a Tuesday, the common day off for fish and chip shops. They spoke English of course but with that slightly mellow, lilting delivery of people brought up in a home where only Italian was spoken, people who in their lives as children had spoken one language at school while growing up with and hearing another at home. Survivors of a shared challenging past, during and after the war and the losses of the Arandora Star, more or less integrated, they chatted, laughed and lingered.... Italian Scots and a new race. The café was a small oasis of familiarity for Italo Scots and

for incoming Italians alike. It was also instantly seductive to those non Italians who were open to it. Intrigued, they circled its periphery, found it irresistible and were soon drawn in, ultimately laughing lightly at the exaggerations, extravagance, dramas, and reconciliations that were played out and tasting the rich beef ragùs thickening in the back shop with a hunk of bread, dipped, like a good Italian.

Because of my mother's divorce and her marriage out of the community, as a single woman her relationship with the community was a little compromised. Ordinary, decently settled Italians, mainly the women, and for different reasons reliable husbands, viewed her with distant wariness. The shop was more a place for the fallen, the liberal and the raunchy. But it was, and this was part of the problem , mainly somewhere that young Italian waiters, from the Edinburgh hotels and restaurants would be directed to and spend time. While my mother enjoyed being surrounded by handsome boys, once again, her life was marked by notoriety. As before, with previous generations, their journey to Scotland and into gainful employment, had been made possible by relatives and friends already here. And like those first pilgrims, those of my grandparents' generation, so enigmatically represented by Eduardo Paolozzi's Montecassino Manuscripts, the Big Foot which stands at the boundary between Edinburgh and Leith, this fresh wave of immigrants had come to make a living seeking a life unavailable to them, in the mountains of Lazio or the Ferrante neighbourhoods of Naples. As is characteristic of their kind they charmed with words and a smile, impressed with their stoicicism, an ability to work hard, and their ready adaptability throughout and after the depredations of a world war, still felt in Italy throughout the sixties and beyond. As Italians often do, they would noisily pace the floor of that café, telling an unlikely tale, making light of any problems, and with wonderful mimicry, such a gift in Italians; with the humour and "furbezza" that shapes the language of Lazio and the Mezzogiorno, it's words and syntax.

The concept of the Mamma is never as strong anywhere, I believe, as it is in Italy. I cannot think of another culture where the mamma is sung about with a longing that in other countries men reserve solely for lovers. I recall many years later being in the opera house in Bari the emotional high point , the seats rocking with suppressed weeping, at the leave taking of a young soldier from his mother. Fiercely amorous and protective of their mothers, these boys, worshipped and indulged - the pride of the household - migrated to my mother the older but unlikely Italian woman, for her inclination was certainly not to offer a hearth and to Ernestina, related if not by distant blood ties, but by geography a common legacy and the bond of language.

I was mainly an onlooker in those years but I cannot say that I did not enjoy them. I was mightily entertained at the energy and the flair that flowed through our shop; most of all, I recognised in myself that same propensity for studying people hard, staring even, and picking out the peculiar in a look or a way of being, in others but also in myself as a consequence. My mother and many of the Italians around us, had immense presence and personality, individuals each, their eccentricity instinctive and overt. Ernestina, displayed the typical traits in southern Italians of practicality and a resigned tolerance of human foibles; always biddable, she would shrug her shoulders in that Italian way "che puó fa'", showing no surprise but simply mild amusement at my mother's unusual behaviour and often quite astonishing suggestions.

The house in Bruntsfield was a two minute walk across the Links to the shop. As the family "odd jobber" she was persuaded by my mother to paint the floor of bathroom in the house last thing at night before we all retired to bed, since her thinking was that the paint would have a chance to dry, Ernestina quickly expedited the job and went to her room. We were under strict instruction of course not to use the bathroom during the night, whatever happened. She heard my mother out quietly as usual, raising no objection, for my mother could never be diverted from her plan. However, sometime in the small hours that night, as it happened, she did perversely, wake up with an urgent need for the toilet. She made several futile attempts to enter the bathroom without disturbing anyone but then, braving both the hour and the temperature outside which was certainly cold, there was nothing for it but to either use the public toilet just across from the house, which was a place for homosexuals in the area to meet or to go the full way across the path to the shop. She sensibly opted to avoid further upset, and possible ambiguity, put her dressing gown on without drama and made her dogged way to the shop, in her nightwear she was indeed an interesting spectacle in the streets of Bruntsfield. Fortunately she remembered to switch off the alarm and the police box opposite was unoccupied at the time.

There was also the day of the mini explosion. Ernestina and my mother were both in the back shop and I was reading. One of the gas rings on the cooker had been turned on but Ernestina had forgotten to put a match to the gas. Suddenly, there was a blast, the oven door flew open, Ernestina, her face glowing red, hair in scorched threads around her face, tights hanging in rags round her ankles, remained dutiful at her post, stirring the pasta while my mother had disappeared, charging headlong out the door and into the street clutching only her poodle. It was a habit of hers too, the shop full of

customers on a Sunday afternoon, for instance, to approach each table one by one, where a mainly genteel clientele sat astonished, prodding the cakes, set out in trays, in order to find the freshest one to have with her cup of tea.

In the final stages of my grandmother's life, with Ernestina's help, my mother had taken over the entire running of our Copper Kettle Café. Together, she and Ernestina developed a lifestyle in that café which as the years passed, provided them both with almost all the dreams, ideals of love and romance, friendship and social contact they needed at the time. I remember copies of the Italian magazines "Epoca" or "Oggi", on permanent, special order from a newsagent in Princes Street being pored over as one or other of them leant on the freezer, near the shop window, head bowed, to read. This was an ideal location at the counter for not keeping customers waiting...near the till and directly in front of the cigarettes, sweetie display and Golden Wonder crisps. There were stunning photoshots of Lollobrigida legs, Loren curves, of the mystical chiaroscuro of the Anna Magnani face and the assertions about Mastroiani and Buongusto.... "real men".

The café was a self sustaining world, ever changing, ever nourished by the personalities of those who passed through and the regulars who inhabited it. It was known in the neighbourhood as the café run by "those two Italian women", sisters, cousins....no one knew. Many I gather now, had the disquieting feeling that somehow, they, the customers , were not actually the main event and that there was something more compelling just out of the reach of their consciousness.

I am a lover of coffee shops. I collect and keep them wherever I go and my phone cleverly homes in to my city favourites like a dog nosing out its home territory. I am always seeking a slow-paced, well crafted latte among the cool, the creative and the intriguing. My friends and those I invite to join me in these my chosen haunts, often regard my peculiarities as unnecessarily pretentious. But in my student years, occasionally while "minding the shop", the Copper Kettle, or indeed doing paid work in my uncle's café in Morningside Road, I did actually acquire the skills of a fine barista...the ability to create a froth, the spout of the steamer tilted at an angle to both move the milk and aerate it, and to carefully balance the quantities of coffee and milk with aplomb and without much fuss. As a child, I had not been part of that shop life except to be present briefly. It was my mother's life and she lived it entirely there, returning home only to sleep as I remember it. But after my return from France, somewhat of a stranger, displaced, with the cool eye of emotional distance,

for I felt none of the joy of homecoming; true to my own reality and aspirations; never failing to surprise, my mother now saw me as someone she needed to hold and keep. I was suddenly someone who might up and leave again for another life which I had only glimpsed.....struggled to forget. She took account of me, of my freshness and new energy and they offered her something she had not anticipated. For my part, I got to know her, appreciate and enjoy her, though that route to our connection had been unusual.

One of her favourite customers was called Jack, who despite problems with his back and frequent visits to the chiropractor, managed with Aileen, his pretty, precious but patient wife, to produce six children. He was the opposite of energetic but I think my mother liked him because he was both sweetly appealing and always suggestive which made us laugh. We never took his offers of a kiss or a squeeze seriously, though I am in no doubt that they were meant. Several coffees with Jack would always relax and brighten the day. Somehow, in his company, everything would feel sound. He would shuffle in, in a shiny suit, probably recycled from years before, always oversized. And with his floppy, crooked smile, drink his coffee at the counter. But when things got busy, he would sensibly withdraw to a table. He had an eye for good looks and we spent several laughter filled Hogmanays with Jack and Aileen in our home, the jokes ribald and the gossip at the expense of others often wicked. They sometimes came to Italian dances and Ice Cream Alliance dinners with us, though his style was always slow, a waltz and never a jive. I think in his heart really, watching him dance with his wife, he was a loving romantic who had only her in his heart. Along with others, including Paul, who was "courting" me at the time, and whom I later married, and various Italians, waiters, hairdressers, tailors, and shy new arrivals, Jack and Aileen made up the happy, raucous fun-seeking group.

Jack's business activities were in fact somewhat dubious, he possessed a number of battered leather suitcases which he frequently took to Yorkshire and I seem to remember a Gladstone bag. But it was nonetheless, he who gave my mother and me a taste for roaming, in my second -hand first car, a white Citroen Dyane. On his recommendation, we moonlighted often.... to York, Harrogate, or Richmond, sometimes even just for an overnight. There was no practice in the Italian community of exploring the countryside, for the pragmatic Italian Scots, animals. nature, city and country, are seen mainly in terms of financial return. But independently minded as she was, and always the dreamer, my mother had a love of the quaint, the picturesque, and the historic. The Shambles in York, the Minster and the Whip ma Whop ma Gate would prompt a stream of imaginings and postu-

lations from her. She was childishly entranced. However, after several visits and armed with some basic knowledge then, of the origins of York city, my mother was suddenly and inexplicably no longer willing to stay in the dignified, costly Station Hotel which was close to the old walls. She was she explained, afraid that a gladiator would crash through her bedroom wall or that an entire Roman Legion would invade during the night.

There had been no encouragement in my mother's upbringing to read either. Yet, unlike her brother and sister, more income focused, more acquisitive, my mother loved books and I have no idea, I regret to say, where this interest came from. I can find no trace of it in the Italians that frequented our home or shop. She encouraged me from an early age to read and enjoy books and as I grew, she sent me down various paths of surreal and highly evocative writing, of Pearl Buck, Ryder Haggard, Daphne du Maurier and being easily terrorised, was very firm in her advice to avoid Dennis Wheatley! In particular, my mother loved the Brontes. So, during one of these escapades to the dales, we visited Haworth in that little white car of mine; only my poor mother, who was substantial, and always high-heeled, had not only to exit the vehicle, but to push me and it up the hill of the town's Main Street.

I have no memory of setting off down that A68, which was the route Jack advised, at any "normal" time of day. We used to make our escapes from the shop, leaving Ernestina in charge, towards the close of business at around ten pm, when things were slowing, and checking into our luxury hotel in the early hours. These wild trips down the motorway, lights flashing in the dark, negotiating not two but three lanes which neither I nor my mother I had never done before were exciting for us both. And we both liked service and comfort and a suitable setting for our nail varnish and our coûture. It was in York that we sought out the best gin and tonic bars, ate toasted tea cakes; in Wensleydale that we ate apple pie with a slice of Wensleydale on the top, not cream; and in Melton Mowbray that we sought out the famous pies. I think these were the best times together, getting to know one another, laughing mainly at anything that struck us as bizarre, and usually the behaviours of or what accidentally befell others. Our disagreements were like hurricanes which at a single word or a look could end in uncontrollable, tearful laughter and which would sometimes, continue to burst out for no reason throughout the remainder of that day.

I will never forget though, a trip to Harrogate that we had planned for some time. This was to be a four day event and having settled my mother's dog, done the necessary in relation to the running of

the shop, we set off unusually in daylight. Just after the English border my mother unexpectedly ordered me to turn the car around and head for home. I tried to ignore this, hoping that her unreasonableness would pass, since she could give me no sensible cause for her malaise, and after several attempts from her to jump out of the moving car, I gave in and angrily turned back. I never knew what had prompted this behaviour but I did know her to be volatile and totally uninterested in what others made of her, childlike in her fear of the possible or even the impossible.

It was a dark night in November 1976. By then, I was teaching Italian and French in a Roman Catholic comprehensive school, ambitious and good at the job. My mother had sold the family business, The Copper Kettle Café and in her late fifties, was working as a temporary sales assistant selling bridal gowns. She hated both the work and the gowns but seemed to acquit herself well, being offered the role of assistant manager after a few months. She had never had much time for marriage though and far less, mothers with push chairs coming into the café, often to their astonishment, declaring it closed to bar entry. Sometimes, having allowed them in, she would decide enough was enough, put the keys in the door and tell them we were now closed. Ernestina had left our home to marry and was working in her spare hours at dressmaking and alterations. We were adapting to life without the café, life at home, life without someone to do the laundry, since we had no washing machine, someone to clean and a ready supply of food. We seemed to eat a lot of sausage casseroles, cooked in a slow cooker until the grease marks on the wallpaper brought for an invasion of mice. Most of all we both missed the wonderful variety of humankind coming and going, in and out. Movement, change and activity were all we had ever known. On a day when as an adult, I had nothing to do, when school had finished early, or when I needed distraction, the shop was reliably there. My mother, restive, delightfully capricious, with a need for a public, glamour and the bright lights found it even harder. The café had been my mother's social life. Favourite customers got to sit at the "staff table" in the wee nook behind the counter drinking coffee with us. Some of them became family friends.

On that evening, we had our fish suppers on the draining board of the kitchen sink...there were no working surfaces in our under-developed kitchen in Bruntsfield Terrace...and were both waiting for the kettle to boil. The doorbell rang. I heard my mother's hollow greeting. Then she entered the kitchen swearing. What to do about the fish suppers?! "You see to the tea" she said quickly. She disappeared off, I assumed to entertain our guest, a lamenting, tedious relation through marriage to Benny in Fife, my mother's cousin. Tilde lived in the future...with airy dreams about what she

would do with all the money, the house and café that Benny would leave when he died. In the meantime, while she awaited her luxurious, relaxed life without the demands of an ageing mate, she would turn up on our doorstep , from time to time, in her thirties, no older, puffy ankled, breathing hard, asking if she could lie down for a bit. I don't remember a single conversation between either my mother, my grandmother or Ernestina with poor Tilde. Benny, I imagine intelligent as he was, must have, at least at some point in their lives, exchanged a few words with her. The kettle boiled, I carried the tray of teacups etc into the sitting room to find our cheery Tilde, sitting patiently waiting , her feet up on a stool. No Mum. Where the hell was she?! I went back to the kitchen, looked in her bedroom, back to the kitchen and saw one fish supper. The light dawning, but surely not, she couldn't have, I looked out of the window. It was raining lightly by then and foggy. Then I saw her seated on the park bench in front of our house, contentedly, calmly eating her food, and nodding happy greetings to passers by with their dogs, they, politely doffing hats, wishing her a "good evening Mrs Rossi" and all as if it was midday on a sunny afternoon; leaving me as the dutiful, unfed, grown up!

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The A68

How well I remember this way and this road we chose
for our night escapes,
our journeys south
the promise of Scotch Corner
the smooth, easy tarmac of the M1
its warming lights adding glitz to your glamour
to your legs and your lipstick, to my fine cropped style,
my trophy from another life .
We abandoned our sleeping city, leaving it to burrow for its dreams,
those prima donnas of cafe life... the gruffness of Gaggia, toils of an ice cream freezer,

the fragility of espresso.

Maybe in those giddy days in the dales and our search for a good gin and tonic
we were hoping for Hollywood, life in a Rat Pack
and one of us would be Shirley McLean.

Could we have seen me now, then?
My life's years piled high and heavy
the flotsam and makeshift of my days
barely ten years behind the age when you probably found answers
to the questions in our last conversation
you were so hungry to hear
you knew then how to recognise endings.

How easily the daughter becomes the mother.

I had been given a record player for my Christmas some years before, a clumsy, cumbersome machine with a powerful sound box. It was home to my vast collection of Sinatra LPs, EPs and singles. I had and still have every iteration of Sinatra on the Columbia record label , Decca, Capitol and the golden years and later his own Reprise. I was so well known in the record shops, that they would routinely telephone me when a newly released album arrived in store. That machine was my music tutor...consolidating what I learned from others, from my piano lessons and what I had discovered in the concert halls, The Freemasons Hall, the Usher Hall, the Kings Theatre of Edinburgh.

I would carry that blue and white record player across the Links from my house to the Copper Kettle and when there were no customers or in the early evening, only Italian friends, or when the shop was shutting, and the "boys" would gather, we would play the latest Italian hit songs, brought from Italy by one of them or ordered in especially by Jeffrey's record store in Bread Street. The streets of Salerno, Naples, Picinisco or Atina, tearfully left by the young tailors, hairdressers, cooks where

they as is the custom, stand at the bar with an espresso, were for a short time, conjured up in those hours in our shop. Such was its reputation among the Italian community, that the shop even attracted a few Italian artists, performing in the Edinburgh Festival and notably the orchestra and cast of the Teatro San Carlo from Naples, playing in the theatre a few minutes down the road. Tito Gobbi, the famous tenor and Maria Callas were also part of that cohort, but I imagine their preference was for somewhere much grander and altogether less couthy.

The Italians found Scottish girls pleasantly available compared to the protective, limiting family set up back home and they recounted their experiences of them with some appetite. They would often arrive in the shop on a day or night off, fresh shaven, beautifully suited, focused on the mirror, to have a quick coffee before a night in one of the discos or bars. For the most ambitious, many only just in their twenties, the overall goal, as in pre war years was to lay down good roots, and to invest their efforts and futures in Scotland. Sadly, there have been other migrations from Italy of course, possibly more so in the years immediately after the war, for whom Scotland has been quite simply a source of money and from which through highly profitable businesses, small fortunes could be built, sent back or carried back in currency to Italy, and mansions ultimately created, towering among the humble houses of hard working local people. It is not unusual today, for a random German luxury car, where no transport is actually required, to be seen cruising the streets of a village in Lazio; or to be self consciously parked in the main square of Villa Latina alongside a ramshackle van full of farming equipment or a hen or two.

For many, of these hopeful youngsters, a convenient route to self betterment was through a sensible marriage. Ideally, while their first years in Edinburgh was essentially a time of dare devilry, many men ultimately found wives within the Italian community. If they were willing to work hard, work with their wives in the already successful family business, good fortune and security through patronage were certain. This was an attractive proposition on both sides, delighting both sets of parents, with cultural harmony, shared values and similar attitudes to family assured. If fidelity was in doubt , financial ties would guarantee that the newcomer to the already established Italian family would act with discretion, stay with his wife and family. Old age would also be less of a threat, with a strong sturdy son-in-law and a solid, dutiful daughter-in-law fully harnessed to the demands of relatives.

I am unclear about when exactly my mother fell in love with Alberto, a tall, lean Italian of 21. She was 42. But it was a relationship that spanned around eighteen years of my own life and ending when I was, myself about to marry. As a divorced woman, from an Italian home and a Catholic, my mother was no stranger to scandal. In some ways, she was proud of her power to attract a much younger man, at an age when the years were beginning to tarnish the style and figures of those of the same age, and to fray marriages of many years. As before, when she married a British service-man, the family was once more horrified, my grandmother continually raging and my uncle over-bearing.

The Copper Kettle became in the sixties and seventies a centre for young Italian men to gather. was the centre of that group's attention and when Alberto was present, was in either in full sway or full fury at some misdemeanour or other of his.

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