

"Five thousand lire, *Signora*," he quickly told me. Five thousand lire are the equivalent of about four dollars. "Sure," I said.

Thinking how much he would make on that 5,000 lire, I took the candle and lit it. In silence I cried, mourning my grandmother all over again, feeling guilty for her children leaving her, and facing the reality of life which is mortality. I wanted to leave, run, and never look back. I wanted to find a place somewhere and cry all by myself.

Peppino walked me to the car, and I reached for my purse and gave him the 5,000 lire. I touched my shoulders as I remembered the shawl the old lady gave me; I didn't have it anymore. "I must have dropped the shawl that the old lady gave me," I said to the Peppino, "the one that came to get you."

Puzzled, he replied, "*Signora*, no

one came to get me. I saw your car parked here and I knew someone was on the premises; besides, old people seldom come down here. It's too far from town."

I was too annoyed with him and exhausted to even try to explain to him about her. I asked him to please check the chapel, certain that I had left it there. "Please return it to her, I'm sure she'll be back later. And one more thing, thank her for me," I concluded, and drove off.

Those few hours were an ordeal. Driving back to the city, I paid little attention to making sense of the old lady. I didn't know her name. All I knew was that her son and a brother named Giuseppe left years before to go to America. I felt bad for not returning the shawl personally to her. The minute I reached the house, I called my mother in Toronto. It was seven o'clock in the evening and

in Toronto it was lunch time. When she answered the phone, I must have sounded like I was on drugs. Finally, I composed myself and tried to calmly explain what had happened. She too, was shocked and very upset. My mother had known about the exhumation but, over the years, she had completely blocked it out. Trying to make me feel better, she told me that she sends money to the nuns at the church every November 2nd for "the day of the dead."

Both of us were without words after that. She was too far away to be able to console me. Then, out of the blue, I asked, "Ma, *Nonna's* brother, your uncle that went to Pittsburgh years ago, what was his name?"

"Giuseppe," she replied.

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RONNIE R. BROWN

... Perchance to Dream ...

The hand, strong, manly, is touching her shoulder ... Since Dad's death the kids have noticed how she goes to bed early, sleeps late She feels the silk as it moves against her arm, feels his hand as it moves ... They have begun to worry, have started taking turns calling in the evening "to chat," dropping by unexpectedly for breakfast Forty years of marriage and yet she never felt like this, never wanted this way ... They are afraid that she has given up. The youngest girl, who has taken two courses in psychology, has warned them that this could be a symptom of ...

He is undoing the buttons, his hands so competent, so large, patient with the tiny round pearls Out on the line her corset moves with the wind, she has heard the neighbour's children laughing at it. No wonder, the bones hold it stiff, a headless, limbless thing, the exoskeleton of some prehistoric beast. Her own children have rarely seen her free of its grip, would be surprised by the soft rounding of her ... Hands cup her naked breasts, his lips kiss the nipples reverently (like a supplicant kissing a holy ring), his tongue ...

Her own fault, this fear, this lack of faith, when they were young she used to fool them, call them, come home early, sure one day she'd catch them in the act—of something. For her sex was a sin. A word that was never spoken, something done only in marriage, only ... Her thighs are parted now, anxious for his tongue to seek out another jewel as a duty, never for ...

Somewhere a bell, the door, the phone, she isn't sure, doesn't care ... somewhere, somewhere ... Her back arches pleasure ringing, radiating, rocking her to ... sleep.

Ronnie R. Brown is a freelance writer/broadcaster living in Ottawa. She is the author of two books of poetry. Her work has appeared in magazines and anthologies in the U.S. and Canada including Antigonish Review and Room of One's Own.