

Cookie Crumbs

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Une collection de fragments de prose autour de la relation de l'auteure avec son père. Les thèmes d'amour, de respect, mais aussi des sentiments de dispersion, de culpabilité et de privilèges qui s'entrecoupent dans sa vie dans la société canadienne moderne grâce aux sacrifices consentis par son père et à ses luttes comme émigrant avec un passé qu'elle ne pourra jamais vraiment connaître.

1.
I don't know my father's family. They are an incomplete collection of yellowed photographs. Jaundiced looking, striking figures in black and white. Yellow and black over time.

They are my father's voice yelling, echoing in the kitchen early on Sunday mornings.

Incomplete phone conversations that startle me grudgingly from sleep each time.

They are absent.

Incomplete.

I didn't even see the pictures until I was a teenager when my dad asked what souvenir I wanted him to bring me back from Italy.

"Pictures."

And he was startled, stunned that I even cared, proud and shy that I wanted them. Not realizing that I needed them. Me, wanting to know if maybe I never fit quite right because I belonged with them.

Loud, yelling, passionate people.

I wouldn't know.
I couldn't know.

2.
Sometimes, as it gets darker, I can write better. It is all more soothing without the glare. It gets easier to hide that I am transcribing.

"Spaghetti or di other one?"

That's how my father speaks. That natural accent I have grown up with.

My father.

Exists on a different level of me.

He is sustenance and comfort. Daddy still calls me Cookie and I love him for that alone.

Father.

The water is boiling. I can hear it hitting the burner. I turned it on twelve minutes ago. Salt. Oil. Water.

He sacrificed for his future, but his future isn't even his. It is mine. My brother's. My sister's.

Our future. His future.

Sincere and unobtrusive, he knows only parts of his future. Others I hide out of fear.

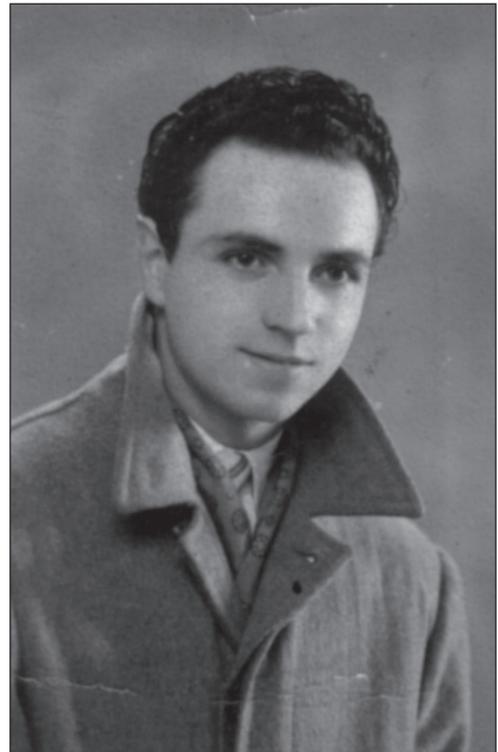
Out of pity.

"You and Mom, you eat it with vegetables. You better eat it if it have leftovers." The sauce.

He has made two kinds. One with meat and one without.

He scratches the top of my head like I am still a child.

He knows nothing of emails, lit-



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erary devices, or VCR recording. He has given those to his future.

And I feel selfish. My future. My future. I won't give it to children who can't even show me what it is.

No matter how much they might want to.

I could never understand it to him.

"What you do, homework?"

"Mmm hmm."

It is always homework.

No Dad, I write. I am writing about you.

You can't read your own future. It's in the wrong language.



Luigi's parents, Pietro and Tranquilla Gobatto



Tranquilla as a teenager, with her sister.

3. I'm copying out poems in Italian. I don't understand them, but it's as if something in my hands wants to write it because I never have.

There is something comfortable about it—copying it out.

Like trying to sound out the words. The muscles in mouth and jaw seem to know more than my mind does. If I don't think so hard some of the words just flow like I've said them a thousand times. But I haven't.

It's like some part of me is going home. It's like a part of me I never knew existed is reaching out to be recognized—to be read—to be heard.

My father never taught me how to speak Italian. Somehow his learning three languages before English didn't make him recognize what a gift that was. And English, likely the most difficult thus far, seemed worse than the others. There are memories of confusion and embarrassment—being misunderstood—being judged—being discriminated against. He always says he never taught myself or my brother because he needed us to help teach him English. Well, that and the fact that my mother doesn't speak Italian.

To me, my father's English is perfect. I understand it as well as anyone's. I forget he has an accent. And perhaps that's what he wanted. Perhaps that is how I taught "perfect English."

But now I am beginning to wonder what I've missed. What little words or expressions can't be translated? What could I have known that I don't because he never gave himself the chance to hear my own "perfect Italian?"

4. My father was talking the other day.

He is driving his car—his seventh brand new car since coming to Canada. I watch him maneuver through the light traffic, careful because there is snow. He's in the three-quarter-length navy coat he wears to shovel

the snow. Regardless of the season, he is diligent about maintaining the house he brags of paying off in under ten years when he took the longest mortgage available. But today I am struck by how his winter clothes hide the strength of his arms and the tan that lingers through December because he spends all summer outside in the garden.

"Me I tell you, Cookie—every time me I buy-it one new car, someone he hit me. Ev-er-y time," he emphasizes. "In Windsor, in Gaspe, someone he hit me."

"But not in Italy?" I question, momentarily forgetting my father's ancient history.

"Eh, *dio furbo*, who have-it one car then?" He glances at me and starts to laugh, "Small town, two-hundred people with the dogs and cats. I tell you before, Cookie, me I *very* poor when I grow up. Me, I lucky to buy-it one bicycle and that take-it lots of work. *Lots* of work."

"You no remember? I tell you before. When me I sixteen I want-it one bicycle. That way when I go to the dances—we have dances then—I go faster and I take-it one girl on the handles."

"The handle-bars."

"Yeah, that. But I no have-it money for one bicycle. So I get-it some rabbits and you know the rabbits they have lots of babies—"

"No," I interject, "I don't know. You never let me have one when I was little." I put on a fake pout and he laughs.

"Yeah, cuz then me I have to take careful and I no want to anymore. But—why you interrupt my story?" He is still smiling. I shake my head at him and smile back, "Eh, let me finish, then you complain."

"Okay," I say, "The rabbits have lots of babies and you wanted a bicycle."

"Yep. So me I grow-it lots of rabbits—"

"Bred."

"What?"

"You don't *grow* rabbits, Dad. You *breed* them. You grow vegetables.

You breed animals.”

“Who tell-it the story, you or me?”

“You.”

“Okay, me I grow-it lots and lots of rabbits and sell them to the people. People they like them rabbit. Some for pet some for eat—”

“Oh, that’s just gross.”

“Is good, Cookie! How you know if you no taste it? Like-it the chicken.”

I shake my head, “Then I’ll eat chicken.”

“Eh ... that is my daughter,” he pats the back of my head.

“And you sold enough rabbits to buy a bicycle?”

“*Dio furbo*, I sell-it enough! Lots, Cookie. I sell a lot to get money to come to Canada too. But first I buy-it one bicycle. And not everyone have-it one bicycle. Eh, then me I popular!”

“Lots of girlfriends, eh Dad?”

“No, me I dance with my cousins and sisters.”

“Right.” I look over at him smiling, “Did you get to bring your bike to Canada?”

“On the boat!” he looks at me like I’m insane, “*Dio furbo*, Cookie—you can’t bring-it one bicycle on the boat.”

“But I thought you could bring it in storage,” I say.

“Sure, if you pay. Me I have to borrow \$300 from Zio Bruno just for me to come. I sell-it the bike before I leave.”

“Oh, that’s sad.”

“Et, *dio furbo* sad, Cookie. How I go ride one bicycle in Quebec anyway, with the snow?”

No, then I save-it money for one car and then, when I have-it the car one week—”

“Some one hit you.”

“Yep, cuz someone he always hit me when I have-it one new car. I want-it buy another soon if Mom she save money but you watch, someone he hit me.”

5.

“What you sick, Cookie?” my father asks me over the phone. “Is it one headache again?”

“No, um...” I’m not exactly sure how to explain Paxil withdrawal to my father since I never really explained Paxil to him in the first place.

There aren’t words like *clinical depression* or *generalized anxiety* in his vocabulary—not in English or Italian. He might remember *self-mutilation* from my teenage years but I really don’t want to go there with him now. He doesn’t *really* understand it anyway. I mean, I’m his grown-up daughter, but I’m still his “Cookie.” So I never told him how I found myself in a doctor’s office about 14 months ago spewing the psycho-babble I’d learned from my first two therapists. After years of resistance I finally yield to the capitalist motivated dream put forth by the pharmaceutical megalomaniacs—the one that promises a muted sort of contentment with the help of a daily pill. In my case, that’d be Paxil.

See, the thing is, for my dad, admitting that you can’t keep your emotions in check, that you actually *have* emotions that lead you to physically hurt yourself is taboo enough. Taking “drugs” to fix it just compounds the inappropriateness of the whole situation. There is an unspoken disappointment. It’s because I’m not strong.

I remember the times growing up I’d end up sobbing in the bathroom with the water running full-blast to muffle the sound because I didn’t want him—or anyone to know I was crying. Cold water splashing tears from my eyes even before they hit my cheeks because crying was just too uncomfortable for everyone. Trying to catch my breath I notice my reflection in the mirror—I look pretty when I’m crying.

As and adult I learned to cry but then I cried so much it led me to that doctor’s office 14 months ago (as I’ve already said). But now I’ve changed my mind. I miss my mania more than I thought I would. I’m ready to feel again, I think. But at one week Paxil-free, my body clear-

ly rejects that decision. And in the midst of the constant nausea and dizziness I find myself on the phone screaming at my mother. Telling her she doesn’t understand and that her fucking drug-books can’t fix anything. She, of course, is her usual passive (supportive) self. She is soft and cushioned and I spent so many years letting her completely envelop me. She will absorb me, swallow me whole and the way I feel I can’t maintain the discrete boundaries I’ve discussed with my new therapist.

And that’s all it takes. By the time she hands the phone over to my father—so I can say “goodnight”—he has realized something is wrong.

“What you sick, Cookie?” he asks. “Is it one headache again?”

“No, um ... I was taking some medicine because I get too nervous and now I stopped and I feel sick.”

“Eh, that’s why me I no take-it the medicine, Cookie,” he begins and I press the palm of my hand into my forehead trying to balance the interior pressure with external force.

“You know me I have-it one sore throat,” he continues, “and I no tell-it the doctor when me I go with Mom because I no want-it the medicine.”

“Yeah, I know, Dad.”

“Okay, well, goodnight, Cookie. Daddy love you.”

“I love you too, Dad.”

Click.

Nancy Gobatto’s writing has appeared in Zygote, Kiss Machine, The Green Tricycle, Taddle Creek, XX Magazine: Women in Contemporary Arts and Culture, TRANSverse: A Comparative Studies Journal, Word: Toronto’s Literary Calendar, A Cafe in Space: The Ana’s Nin Literary Journal, Canadian Woman Studies as well as the anthology, Girls Who Bite Back: Witches, Mutants, Slayers and Freaks (Sumach Press 2004). Currently teaching in Women’s Studies and English at the University of Windsor, she expects to finish her Ph.D. in Women’s Studies (York University) by 2008.