



SOUVENIRS

BY

BRONWEN TATE

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Pill Box with Image of Padre Pio

And the blank becomes a hurry. The alternative is trying *d'appoggiare il piede per terra*. They say evacuate to sound formal. When my shin gets hot, I say “*scotta!*” I want to remember something that goes beyond these walls. A broken ankle is a good premise for a play – you have an excuse to never change the sets. Enter Franco with water basin and croissants. Once you start telling a story, there isn't anywhere to stop. The days that followed were pretty much the same. Until I woke up breaking out of a rock.

Murano Glass Jewelry

It was all such initial discovery and then progression. Tell me anything to start from. If not rosemary and salt, maybe minnows. Hard to be gripped by anthologies, only the fingers, not the arms. I'm getting better and better at tilting my wrist to write *sdraiata*. My first one revealed a moon and stars encircled.

Venetian Carnival Masks

Counting backwards nine to think which state my sister is flying over. My mother noted punk-rock, thin ties, and physical fitness in the book where she also kept the dried-up raisin of my umbilical cord. When speaking a foreign language, there is the possibility of being another person. Everyone had so much nervous energy, and I absorbed it at least until I started knitting. The drying rack was skillfully arranged to drip down into the sink. They painted stars and swirls around my eyes. Wondered if I would be more shocked under different circumstances. How to slap arms down in the water. My skin. The ankle bone beginning to reappear.

Flag of the Winning Contrada of the Palio di Siena

Polenta for lunch, accompanied by stories of how they ate polenta in Pianello. Corrects the way I pronounce double 'r's. *Terra. Ferro.* I search a walled cemetery for foreign-sounding names. Afterwards, among the flotsam and jetsam. To chase down things *che mi colpiscono*, more unexpected. But each door to the *cortile* let slam shut, sounds like him coming home.

Hand-Painted Ceramics

The streets of Napoli are full of built-up trash. I lie languorous: “nude with cast up to knee.” One can smell Faenza from the train without needing to look up. I memorized the order. Hopped around and barely nibbled on things and read dated “New Yorkers,” increasingly anxious as the day went on. His cousin went to San Francisco to do an MBA and ended up with two shops in malls and a husband. When pressed, I estimated that I had read either two or three thousand books, maybe. All of the religious paintings featured strange faces: a Madonna with an exposed breast set unnaturally high. My mother acts as if my prolific kept correspondence is a curse on any possible descendants. My solitary activities hinge on the mention of dogs or cats or car doors. A return. But the sun doesn’t really get into the kitchen at this time of day. Delineating and documenting. I might sleep better.

Fellini Stills

Told me every last moose was made in China. In Montefiore, we could see the rain arriving. Last this and that until you can't stand it. We asked if we could have the cheese shrink-wrapped. She offers me the little gold charm of the *mano cornuta*, but I press on towards the train station. But all that was three years ago, and I smell like roses anyway. Reopening boxes, contents may have shifted. *Così tanto che non ho fatto.*

Herbal Teas from Alto Adige

Maybe everywhere else has more space. For example Toronto. If I lived here alone, I wouldn't even close the shutters. Sleep in a tank-top. Otherwise too tangled. I need to get accustomed to these wide margins again. Stars are similarly uncountable, but hairs can be plural too I suppose. *Che si può fare?*

Pressed Flowers

I wonder if he is as *preso* as he seems during the shifting and moving of mouths and little shivers. We ate chestnuts in the evening. *Je ne sais pas si c'est un bien qu'il me suffît.* Storm that sometimes catches up. And *così* the year. I'm waiting for retrospect as usual. *Rimpiango. Marea.* Wore eyeliner to resign myself to sitting in front of a computer. *La luce ti dà fastidio? No, no, Io fra un momento dormo.* He has been persuaded by a program on Waterloo.

Bottle of Chianti

Feeling as sweetly dissipated as. His eyelashes were the only thing to catch the light. Evening disintegrated from there. Nothing I say in Italian as real as the same said in English. He used both my balled-up towel and the stuffed duck for a pillow, but I didn't want them back. Anything I asked was like tossing a match. Around the corner, they give you free bunches of basil, rosemary, and bay leaves. But at 5am it rained so hard it woke me.

Train Ticket (Bologna to Pesaro)

Buy new postage stamps. To import, the essence removed, home. What with Carlo Zucchini out of town. I'm tired and sort of *scombussolata*. An Italian TV show displays theories of personality based on how you sleep – back, side, stomach, crunched into a ball or spread like a starfish. But my handwriting is constantly changing. I disappeared from inside the covers. Various things happened. Saddam Hussein was captured by the American troops. Carlo and I went to Firenze with Enrico for the day.

Leather Boots and Belts

I didn't want binaries, but sometimes reduced pluralities to a continuum. I wanted to mix and match bathing suit separates. Rip the ears off whoever is wishing you hope and peace and a river and mid-range mountain or lily upon your bereavement. I wasn't sure if I should wake her up and make her put her pajamas on or let her sleep. Hobbling along behind trying not to slip on wet mossy bricks. Too much reading about algae and meerkats; I'm beginning to feel shipwrecked too. Needed to open. We talked from 12:00am till about 1:49am. In between I ran around (on crutches) and actually did. Swimming for rehabilitation.

Labello Chapstick

House requires a general unpiling of my stuff. Waking up to it. The missionaries are so clean it's scary. *E allora*. Everyone looks for something to fasten. An immense collection of locks clinging to a corner of *Pontevocchio*. I feel like I could sleep, as long as I stop the tap from dripping. He is shutting and duly locking the doors that matter. At a messy desk and with a nagging knowledge. The bathroom floor filthy. Disappointed when I have free time, I expect to do everything.

Illy Café

I knew that the verb *sciogliere* also meant “to untie,” but I still exclaimed: “then he melted the dog!” Thoughts accumulate when I’m lying in the next room. It completely changes work to leave at 20:30 and still light out. *Sembra tutto piu facile li, ma vediamo.* He calls his uncle *tato* instead of *zio*, because he’s from Abruzzo. I put off the sorting, shifting and generally inevitable. Apparently *coglione* doesn’t involve *cattiveria*, just *defiscienza*. Finally relaxed enough to breathe in and out. *Come se ci fosse altro modo per respirare.* I didn’t really notice the dog barking. One word for “more” and “anymore.”

Postcard of the Vatican

Which of several pleasant and somewhat necessary if not exactly urgent things should I do? My concentration shot – maybe it's the chamomile tea. Apparently here they don't say the seventh wave is more powerful. I'd say "until you're in such a position," but I'd have to make the *mano cornuta*. As long as my fingers are chilly I consider it cold enough. Taught the passive voice today. If you know something and keep it in mind but don't write about it explicitly, it will make its presence felt regardless; I paraphrase. You always reach for where you aren't. I interpreted. I understood everything, but they were only able to talk because I was there. The wedding. Our arms got cold. A grandmother spoke whenever the priest did.

A Placemat Used by Carlo Levi

If I've ever been eloquent in a way that could apply. Easier to write and eat than to read and eat, turning the pages less frequently. "What means honky-tonk? Is it a Klaxon?" Actually, our actually is not your actually. What language reduces to when teaching, the way she thinks her own language transparent. Things haven't been especially quotable lately. Maybe we've had enough about morning light. Today I taught Rapini something, anything, nothing, no double negatives, never/ever, squid/ octopus.

Model Gondolas

Are the remaining two potatoes worth boiling in the meantime, or what could I do to shake myself more awake? We took a little road that got worse and worse until it said “*strada disastrata*,” and then we made tentative maneuvers and turned ourselves around. In the evening, I got sleepy while people drank things, as usual. Grappa can be *secca* or *morbida*. I think in English we say sweet. *Dormiveglia*. *Giacere*. Sleep is a passage. I am afraid to scratch it for this reason. Something dragging me forward, not even to find out what happens next, but to witness it. Woke you up to ask you to buy me unripe bananas. And a glue stick.

Miniature Tower of Pisa

I couldn't find them or their recipe either. Buy milk for tea. Went to the library to change books, but it was closed for strike. In the center and by the sea until 17:30. How many of my notebooks include a recipe for Welsh cakes? Though the sun doesn't really get into the kitchen this time of day. I imagine reading that sentence if my grandmother had written it. The brick wall that was only beautiful once when it rained. How biased am I just by the fact that books are written by people who write books?

Fresh Tortellini

A casa fra pochissimo. Sitting outside the fountain waiting for Daniele and listening to a couple of maybe Mormons or Jehovah's witnesses talking to this guy in English about "asking ourselves questions." *Magari.* Though I guess any kind of jam or something in a jar would be fine. Thanksgiving, but I'm not feeling especially thankful since the oven fucked up my pie crust. I've been told that there's a nice *enoteca* on via San Felice, where I rarely go.

Extra Virgin Olive Oil

It felt less aimless if there was water nearby. A rhythmic banging from downstairs made me wonder if they were having sex, washing tennis shoes, or performing minor household repairs. Anything I asked was like tossing a match. When heated past a certain temperature, the chemicals rearrange. I was still reading that book about salt. A sort of calloused blister on my hand from using the crutches. We walked half-way there and then called a taxi. The digital video followed his hand, the movement of his napkin. I had expected a walking cast, but instead it was naked and fragile and I could only gradually start to *sfiorarla* against the earth. His grandparents kept water in a blue bottle to disguise their poverty. And when I removed it, a wealth of hideous peeling.

Dolce and Gabbana

A scar. Tired of its soccer scandals and crowded trains and polemical discussions. We watched the close motorcycle race between Max Biaggi and Valentino Rossi and saw the resident of Tavullia win. A red watch or engraved belt buckle. “Oh? You work for a shelf company? How interesting!” Having taught the conditional today, it all leaps out as an example; we skimmed the iced-over edge of an argument. If plus past simple followed by would and present or modal. Persist in reading in the dark, salting the water before it boils. If I didn’t always wear black shirts, we could have our sixth, seventh, and eighth conversations.

Giotto Reproductions

I remembered the limp and the pink cashmere sweater. He'd collected pieces to make a robot before he'd even reached middle school. We acquired a drying rack but no ironing board. For example, I walked around the corner and gingerly saw a dog. My ancestral home is exploding with ottomans. Resigned myself to losing my watch like a sacrifice and didn't look for it. In almost thirty years including ten years of biweekly train travel he has never used a train toilet.

Pan di Stelle Cookies

When I get vibrant or very outdoors or laugh really hard, I realize that it happens too rarely. Enough brightly colored vegetables. Everything red and old and inviting. The children at the *Scuola Alberto Magno*. Italy outside, not understanding, humming. In my dream, a golden fox played solitaire in the *cortile*.

Pistachios

I need another of water and then. I go over my check-list: flip-flops, towel, pieces of swim-suit, goggles, swim cap, lock for locker, money to pay for a 10 entry pass, shampoo and conditioner, lemon, a change of underwear. He measured my ankle and leg muscles and the angles of how I was able to bend. Past continuous. Couldn't hear the crossword puzzle over the wind and splashing. The corner of the portico was glowing when the rain struck the hills. You were mispronouncing "drinks and snacks" when she burst in.

Florentine Paper

The smooth grain of maguro and the chewy rice – it felt strange to hear the Italian all around. Near Sant’Archangelo “Ladies and gentlemen, please remain calm. Pardon the smoke. The train is not on fire, we will now resume our journey.” I memorized the order. He tried to speak Spanish by adding ‘s’ to all his Italian words – works ok with *grazies* but not so well with *arrivederci*. Did their math homework and ate cookies until someone’s phone rang. Sometimes I say things because I know how to say them. So if a plumber wrote a book, he wouldn’t just be a plumber, he’d be a plumber writer. A complete roast pig presented in state. But we didn’t swim in the sea even though I’d hopefully brought all my pieces of bathing suit. You notice the things they repeat and almost want to feed them lines to say it and get it over with.

Gold-Plated Rosary

So finally that one is over, and this looks identical, but won't be. Away from *le vecchiette e le loro piante*. I don't close my eyes and get the vivid sensation that my leg is trapped in a narrow crevasse created by an avalanche and damaged and impossible to remove. Anymore. They leave the TV on during meals. Oh miseries of old age. Miniseries. Perhaps now that I have written this, it will never enter my mind again. Gave myself the shot in the stomach. Everything safe until you die. Conclusions still too fresh to coagulate. It used to be easier to unhinge, to sweep everything in and surprise myself. Maybe if we knew how fragile, we'd be frozen.

Blood Orange Marmalade

Walking in the dark brings me to transformations. Various phrases start up in my mind but don't demand to be completed. He thought she said "ambition is the eyes and legs of emotion." We can see the dome from the campsite. I'll sit down *con la famosa calma* and write letters tomorrow. Probably cantaloupe. It'll all sift through somehow. I still don't like to see people around the house anyway. "I used to scratch open my oranges like a cat, before I went to Sicily," his father said. You won't find *cappelletti* anywhere but here. "Because you won't go out to dinner with me?" Dr. Riccio asked Anna, thinking there was only one word.

BRONWEN TATE was born in Vancouver, British Columbia and grew up in Portland, Oregon. She wrote these poems in Providence, Rhode Island using scraps and bits from journals she kept while living in Bologna, Italy. She printed them and sewed the chapbooks in Brooklyn, New York where she was working last year as an adjunct English professor. She's typing this bio now in Palo Alto,



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