

## The Ghosts of Sicily

The ghosts of Sicily are rising again  
Searching for me in the scorched hills  
Slithering up the mountain from dusty hot graves  
The donkey brays

They find me dreaming of Taormina  
Tossed in sea-swept sleep  
Smelling of Etna sulfur  
Sliding on fire-licked lava

They speak Greek and broken dialect  
They whisper you're crazy  
They scream I hate you

A *malocchio* slips  
Under the door  
Crawls into a jacket pocket  
Superstitious salt left decades ago stings and brings tears  
I am safe for now

Among the ruined columns the conquered spirits swarm  
Among the petrified corpses the angry phantoms  
Prowl

A *strega* winks at me with a cloudy eye and knocks over the salt shaker  
The ghosts of Sicily are howling again

## Space-time

I didn't forget about wormholes even after we stopped talking about them

The kid sticking a pudgy finger in the cake frosting  
wormhole  
The tunnel under the river  
The covered bridge  
Wormholes both

The wail of the siren in the afternoon  
The sluice of rain  
The slide of snow  
The fall down the stairs  
Wormholes all

Spade in the earth making room for the seed  
Blood through the vein  
Air through the tube  
Silent screams  
Little worms wiggling toward the sun

Empty words  
Garbage down the chute  
Circular stairs to the top  
Looking down into the wormhole

The fall from grace  
The jump from the one hundred third floor  
The last quiet breath  
The cave in my heart

*The shortcut connecting two separate points in space time*  
deep dark dank  
indecisive on the edge  
spiraling uncertainty

## **Pockets of Protection**

Salt in my pockets  
deep in the crevices  
each new coat christened  
Grandma takes a handful  
Tosses it in each fearful hole  
Tosses some over her shoulder  
Tosses a prayer to the saltgod.

In the dead of winter  
deep in a snow bank  
salty mittens, salty treasure  
line the crevices of my pocket  
Keeps the cold from killing  
Keeps the white from blinding  
Keeps the tongue lively

Sea salt nuggets  
deep into my daughter's pocket  
a new coat christened  
white treasure in crevices to discover  
Trace a salty path  
Trace the superstitions  
Traces of the old lady and her god.

## **Cobble Stones**

Smooth clusters of stones  
Worn shiny by many feet

I rub my hands  
on ancient Sicilian rocks  
Connected to a line of history  
worn shiny by the many  
feet

Stones lugged from the mountain  
nestled into clay  
held in place  
pathways to each other

Cobblestones shined smooth  
so many weary feet

The soft skin of my grandmother's feet  
walking on an old road of stones  
I trace my fingers over the curved flawless rocks

## “Christmas Tree Down”

Sometime during the night  
the tree comes down.

*I'm sorry* the husband says  
*the Christmas tree did fall down*  
*I've tied it up now...*

I sit hunched over the trash  
sobbing and sifting out thin bits of broken glass —  
the ancient Santa, the bell with a burn hole,  
ornaments once on my papa's tree

Too little, too late

The husband is a careless guardian  
he hopes the cat will pull down the tree  
so I'll get rid of her.

The cat is just being her catty self  
she's not even drawn to shiny glass  
she prefers to bat at the fat stuffed elf  
or the little red dog,  
or the crocheted snowman.  
The felt and fabric trinkets she can sink her claws into.

I am a careless guardian too.  
Why didn't I tie up the tree  
Just as easily done by me?  
I decorate the branches, string the lights, I draw the line  
He brings in the tree; he should secure the tree.

But I am the one sitting, sobbing, thinking  
*I'll glue the pieces together*, knowing it will not work  
I gather the slivers into a small black box,  
Knowing, even shattered, I'll keep them  
I can't bear to leave them in last night's scraps of food.

My husband lingers, waiting for consolation  
I'm still fishing for bits of old glass.

His remorse hangs in the air  
a cracked ornament  
my silence, all my anger, pricks him.

He will scotch-satisfy that hunger  
he will drink it until he is sick.

The vomiting will sound like glass ornaments  
Shattering in the middle of the night.

I place the lid on the box; I can't find any more pieces.

I blow my nose, wipe my eyes,

Tell the husband:

*Papa would think I was crazy*

(In America you only look forward)

*Too sentimental, grandma would say*

(I'll buy you new ones, better ones)

*I will miss the ornaments but,*

*I still have the other two;*

*Oh hell, I still have you.*