

Life-fuse

In the Apennine tunnel between San Benedetto-Val di Sangro in Italy, 18 people were killed by a terrorist bomb, December 23, 1984.

I could have been on that train,
as I often hurl through those mountains,
pulled back down the claustrophobic streets of Florence
and forward to our precise pledge

to know what we can of each other.
I am usually half-thinking
through windows. Olive, vine
twine in truce. Nothing in Italy rises new.

Tunnels through the Apennines—
whose deaths do we thank
for opening centuries
of distance?

The whistle blows
and we never see
the intricate set of signals.
We get on,

assuming
we have a name and a place
that the dark is not
completely grim,

that we'll not surrender
to the banal whiff of violence
the threat under

someone's breath.

What is that dark seam
tearing through the mountains?
In some ways, it's the life-fuse
that's lit.

The hour has never been different.
That hand in the window
is waving a white flag.
We're speeding to the point

where we must show
that not just fools love.
In your green eyes
the bursting ways you've died for me

and I for you
leave places of clearing.
A little and a lot
we inch forward.

Long After

My eye and my hand,
between them an improbability,
stars, the Dolomites, a Roman amphora,
snow flakes, your light breathing,
and now news that rhinos are disappearing.

Long after we recognize our shadow

as one version mediating another's
the hope for a brighter atmosphere condenses:
to see the pool and minnows underneath
detached from the larches and you moving on the surface.

Journeying into someone's eyes
the brain saturates with
frank and contrasting hues.
The same for a vein of a leaf.
We reach for things,

leave prints in melting snow,
burn holes in matchbox covers,
use binoculars, talk again and again.
These green snips,
little moves, scraps

are real like the rest
of what we can't quite
piece together. Saying
soul it feels like these mountains
that were once the ocean floor.

Drawing a Line

Alone at the table, with a thin
light on

making circles
and shadows on the tablecloth

nothing frightens me deeply
about the broken pieces.

They represent two lives
like a house does, with a torn roof

an album of pictures that if you look
at the well-timed smiles

little of a real story can be seen,
not the golden boat oared by a spirit

not the butterfly as big as my hand
with dark wings and eye spots like madness

not the struggle that went on
with your mother in your heart.

One obvious missing element is
the bee-keepers' suits

we wore to keep death
from stinging us. Stroke. Do you remember

how in New York they say *hello*
like an insult or a light smirk

to wake one up from the wrong line?
Stroke.

In Italian it means a blow
or a hit.

In English, a mark,
someone brushing or rowing. It means

a caress,
coming close

a profound mark
that in your case

came within one hair from stopping
your life. And now you are walking,

the stores are in front of you,
two winters have passed.

From a stroke one seeks
a source or a story,

an explanation for the power of a blow;
how one small vessel

we never saw
or thought about

or even considered when defining a life
released its bewildering, dense glory,

on either side
by drawing a line.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Wallis Wilde-Menozzi has published two books of nonfiction, *Mother Tongue* and *The Other Side of the Tiber* with Farrar, Straus and Giroux; a novel, *Toscanelli's Ray* with Cadmus Editions, S.F.; more than one hundred essays and poems, many of which have been anthologized and translated into other languages. A collection of her essays was published in Italian by Moretti e Vitali. Work by Umberto Saba, Primo Levi, Mario Luzi, Luigi Malerba, Dino Buzzati, Natalia Ginzburg, Antonia Pozzi, Antonella Anedda and Mariangela Gualtieri are among her Italian translations.