

MARTINA

Aunt Mary says
I look like you.
Says I resemble her ma.

I have a black and white picture.

A short, stout woman
with short, dark hair
and a long nose
on a dish-shaped face
and eyes too close together.

You stand on the porch
of an old two-story house.
Ropes tied from pole-to-pole
hold the railings upright.
A rug is flung over
and a broom leans.
Over your head, a clothesline
with a towel hanging
and a sponge resting
where the rope meets the pole
that holds the roof up.

A little boy stands
on the steps below you.
My dad, at four or five,
he waves to the photographer.
You hold a girl of one or two,
my Aunt Git,
with flaxen hair
and a frown for the sun.

When the picture was new,
you went to a man
who would help you.
Couldn't feed another,
porch couldn't hold another child.
But things went wrong.
"She needs a doctor,
but first find Pasquale."

Wasn't home —
too late to be at the mine.
Aunt Til found him
at the tavern.
He said, "Save my Martina!"
"Stop the blood."
But the blood had stopped.

Aunt Mary says
I look like you.
Says I resemble her ma.

I have a mirror with a gold handle.

But I don't see you there.
I search for the wooden tub
that scrubbed the town's laundry.
From aunt to aunt
I ask
for the white lace doilies
you monogrammed with white floss.
And I trace the letter M
in my mirror.

Laura Livrone