

Story for performance #948
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Tags: [child/parent](#), [food](#), [streets](#), [home](#), [nostalgia](#)
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There are no backpacks, no suitcases, no bags. I carry all the history in my bones.

You see these modern streets? My bones don't recognise them. They want to feel the old paths and the gutters of stone back in the village.

It's too quiet here. Everyone is inside their rooms watching the box. The silence plays on my nerves. At night, there is only me and the crickets awake. In my mind, I see all our neighbours back home, sitting on their verandas or out on the street, fanning the heat away. Watching out for something new.

There, of course, we knew how to be social. There, you knew everything.

'Carmelo, how much did your mama pay for the plastering?' they'd yell out. Sticky beaks. Or 'Hey Carmelo, remember that my niece Maria is coming over on Saturday.'

'Carmelo...'

These memory-neighbours must be wondering how I got so old.

Was it hotter then? I can't tell anymore. The temperature certainly put us all on edge. You'd always hear couples bickering. Someone would be shouting up to the first floor window. Children would be told off by their mamas. Even the dogs, lying in the cool by the houses, would rise to sort each other out.

When I think back it is as though someone turned the volume up on the soundtrack of my memories.

Life seemed to be louder on the street.

There'd be festivals and us kids would follow behind the clergy as they paraded the statue of the holy virgin and the other sacred relics. We were waiting for the end when the saints were prayed to and remembered in the sparks of the roman candles and Catherine wheels.

Even on ordinary days, if you were in the house working, your heart was outside in the light. You kept an ear cocked for the men walking past with their barrows. Everything was sold that way—kerosene, vegetables, bread, milk.

Most mornings, if the weather was right, the fisherman would come by with that day's catch. 'Carmelo, what does your mama want today? Barbun is good, fresh,' he'd say. I'd look at the little fillets, like sweet little pink tongues, lying neatly side by side in the tray.

Some days when the fisherman was away, his wife would bring the cart round. I'd watch her lift one of the bigger fish, the ones that came from the deep ocean.

She was deft with the cleaver. Chop, chop—and the head and tail were off. With a file she would roughly scrape down the flesh and wash the blood and scales off into a bucket of slops. She'd carefully slit the seam in the remaining trunk and pull the innards out. What strange shapes emerged—all little cords and silver and coral organs. She'd reach in with her hands, butterfly the flesh and peel off the backbone in one piece.

It was a compelling performance, watching her turn the animal into a chunk of flesh to eat. I used to look into the bucket where the fish blood and water and detritus were thrown. On the bottom was a sludge of grey guts. On the top though, you saw the delicate scales floating on the grey water like sequins, catching the colours in the sunlight.

'Tell your mama that should do for supper,' the fisherman's wife would say as she wrapped the fish pieces.

Tell your mama...tell my mama...?

Mama's long gone, I guess the fisherman's wife is gone, probably the saints and their relics are gone too.

I shake myself and come back—but not for long.

The pull of the past is stronger than reason. The longing to go back comes out in my dreams and rises out in my body. My arms, my legs, my backbone all nag me to return. They groan late at night. As I walk, bones grind into other bones. I hear them cracking. They are breaking down. Soon, they will be dust and my flesh eviscerated, just as though I'd been in the skilled hands of the fisherman's wife.

'Rubbish,' the young doctor says. 'It's just arthritis.' He asks if I have thought of moving somewhere warmer. 'Queensland is nice,' he says, a little too loudly. I'm not deaf, you know.

Yes, I will go. No more delays. But not to Queensland, not this country. I'm going back, to where the fish are plentiful and where the waters of the Mediterranean are as blue as the Madonna's robes that were once paraded down the hot, hot streets of my village.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kate Latimer.