

PARMA

The first image:
Nicastro, Italy, 1910

Parma, Parma Matarazzo
Your granddaughter went to Italy
She went to Nicastro
To the place where you were born
And as she walked the *passeggiatta*
arm in arm with her cousin Rosie
She thought about you
She wondered if
in the early part of the century
You were one of the "white widows"
Who did the *passeggiatta*
Who strolled through town on Sunday
It used to be only the men did that
But in this particular time
These women who were called
white widows
were the women whose husbands
had gone to America
The men had left for America
and these women were there
by themselves
They for the first time
would walk the *passeggiatta*
Which was a men's thing
They wouldn't wear black like
married women were
supposed to wear
They wore white
And they didn't act like they
were sad
that their husbands were gone
They acted like they were happy
And they were extraordinary women
in this time
Because Antonio would have sent
you money
And you would have had
a little more money
than other women
whose husbands were
still there
And you would have had a sense
of independence

A different kind of responsibility
than other married women
The old ladies in their black clothes
would have sat
looking down on you
from their windows
And you felt proud because
only the strongest men
got to go to America
Because the steamship companies
only paid for men who would
come and work
in the steel mills
and coal mines
and those other places
And so when your granddaughter
walked in Nicastro
She thought about you
She also thought about how she
is the only woman
in her family
who moved someplace
very far away from her family
She realized that you had
done that, too
Except that you never went back

The second image:
The ship *The City of Berlin*, 1915

Parma, Parma Matarazzo
How did you come to America
Did you come like all those other
immigrants at the time
on a crowded
stinking ship
Did you come
of course you did
in third-class steerage
Were you riding one layer
below the deck
or two layers
below the deck
Was there even
a little bit of light
coming through
How did you feel when
you were
in the storms