

MARIA GRAZIA CALANDRONE

YOUR LITTLE MATTER

Translation from Italian by Antonella Lettieri

Her Name Was Lucia

Of my mother, I only have two black and white photographs.

Apart, of course, from my own life and some biological memories that I don't know if I can tell apart from suggestion and myth.

I am writing this book so that my mother might become real.

I am writing this book to tear my mother's smell from the earth. I am exploring a method for those who have lost their origins, a mathematical system of feeling and thought—so complete as to revive a body, as hot as the earth in summer and as firm.

I am starting from what I have, the two photographs that portray her, in the order in which they appeared in my life.

The first

was taken on her wedding day, Saturday, 17 January 1959. Lucia is twenty-two, she is dressed all in white and she is not smiling.

One day, as I stared at this photograph until the images disappeared and the reality that lies behind things and that I call poetry started appearing, I took notes on a newspaper cutting, writing four sentences that will become clear as I write this book: "Her name was Lucia. Few cared about her life. Today is her wedding day. Something of her doesn't exist any more."

The second photograph is the rectangle, only a few centimetres wide, glued onto her ID card, which was found in June 1965 in a handbag left behind in Rome. It shows a young woman, fairly good-looking and self-assured, in a black top and a black jacket, wearing gold earrings and a necklace. A simple elegance. Her gaze is sincere, open and remote. Although Lucia is barely smiling, her slightly protruding bottom lip gives the entire face a faintly sulky and childish expression. She looks a bit like Claudia Cardinale in Valerio Zurlini's *Girl with a Suitcase*. I don't know how old she is in this photograph.

FOUNDRY EDITIONS – BOOK PREVIEW

In the picture where Lucia is dressed in black, the word “photograph”, writing made of light, writing with light, appears correct.

In the photograph in white, the bride’s gaze swallows up the entire scene in a glassy absence of life. Lucia is putting on the smooth eyes of the prey pretending not to be there, she draws back into an impenetrable gaze, where the world is a landscape of jagged, dreamless beasts asleep outside of nature. And over those open eyes the world glides, it does not settle any more.

Saturday, 17 January 1959. The Bride

The bride has a split lip.

The bride still doesn’t want to. Slaps force her, but her will is unbent. Despite her determination, the deal is nonetheless sealed: the exploitation of the considerable potential for labour and reproduction of a young female in exchange for an increase in property. Apart from the neighbouring piece of land, the Grecos own several other fields, and even some cottages in the countryside. The body of a rebellious virgin in exchange for fields. Clouds are looming on the horizon. But that’s how things are everywhere. It goes without saying; this is the solidarity of the hungry, the logic by which every single body, every single life, is a tributary of one river only—the social ascent of the family. No need to get hysterical, just focus on enduring. The present still bears the ghostly shadow of the times when, at the end of a meal, breadcrumbs are collected from the tablecloths to be kneaded again and country girls have to sell their hair to the city ladies who can afford wigs. As soon as you are out of the gorge of destitution, you must consolidate a lasting possession, a smooth, flat financial surface on which to walk unperturbed towards old age. Every single action of the family is a strategic bridge towards this goal.

Today is the festival of Saint Anthony the Great, patron of pigs and all beasts, with the image of the saint taken in a procession together with farm animals, bonfires and chants. Lucia’s silent nuptials are surrounded by the musical bellowing of the celebrations. Perhaps they are taking advantage of the feast day to save some money.

In the only photograph from the wedding, the bride is confined between her father and her husband. A compact row, an army against anguish. The father, slightly taller than her and with rock-like shoulders, his face like a loaf of stony earth furrowed by rivulets of dry sun. The figure of the father, in a black suit and black tie, is a crack of still wind, stretched like a shadow of history over Lucia’s right shoulder. Lucia’s left hand is trapped under the groom’s right arm. The groom, in a grey double-breasted suit, has his left hand on his mother-in-law’s left shoulder. Delicately, just the tips of his fingers. Lucia’s mother is the figure closest to the lens and yet she is marginal. Puzzled face, raised eyebrows. A slow decline of strength, in her black dress with the round collar trimmed in white lace and the small buttons done up all the way to the neck. A month before Lucia’s twenty-third birthday, no one is touching Lucia. No one is trying to feign joy. The church is the one from their village and it will come back into these pages at the end.

FOUNDRY EDITIONS – BOOK PREVIEW

Lucia is wearing a tulle dress shaped at the waist: a voile skirt and a long-sleeved bodice. Below, white court shoes, with high heels. “High” meaning five centimetres. I heard about the shoes from someone because the photograph ends just under the groin, it’s a medium shot.

The bride is not wearing any make-up at all. And yet, she is altogether like a white clown in a line of animals. At that moment, she loses her balance, fails to foresee.

