

Dear Reader,

The story of this novel began with a lady on a roof. Every morning, I head over to the Hudson River Park for fresh air and a run (just found out the exhaust fumes of the West Side Highway could kill me more quickly than lack of exercise, go figure), and I became obsessed with a woman living on one of the last small buildings facing the river amidst the “progress” of glamorous high-rises and hotels. I’d wonder, “Why does she stay?” Most summer mornings she was in her housecoat tending to tomato plants that line the fence of her rooftop. I never waved or rang her bell, but I connected to her. She reminded me of my grandmothers, who had their own gardens, and for most of their widowed lives, lived alone. I began to look for the woman, and when I saw her, I felt relieved, as though life wasn’t really racing by, and that the past was somehow, in the form of this lady, still alive.

This lady, whose name I do not know and whom I have never met, brought me to the story of Carlo Bonicelli, my grandfather, a shoemaker. I keep a photograph of him on my desk to remind me of the artisans that came before me. (It’s a crowded desktop; those of you who read *Lucia*, *Lucia* know about the seamstresses in my family!)

My grandfather Carlo died when he was thirty-nine years old. My grandmother told me that while he repaired shoes and built them, his dream was to design them. He did not live long enough to see his dream materialize. With my grandmother gone, I asked my mother about him, about his work. This wasn’t easy, as my mom cries whenever she talks about her father. As those of you dutiful children out there know, when our mothers cry, it’s like somebody’s plunging a knife into our chests. But this time, I asked her not to cry, and she told me the story of the Bonicelli shoes. Then I went to Italy with my dear pal Gina Casella, (with our five-year-old daughters in tow) to learn how to make shoes. I met a few of the great ones, who became the inspiration for the shoemakers in this novel.

The trip changed my creative life, but it also changed the substance and course of this story. I come from people who survived by the labor of their own hands in a glorious country of their choice (our United States). I always knew this, but now I *understand* it. I only live as an artist because they gave me their stories, and because you read them. So, Dear Reader (love it—so Jane Austen!), *Very Valentine* is for you. It’s about all of us: our family dynamics, our dreams, our luck or lack of it in matters of the heart, and how we negotiate going forward, in a world that’s moving so fast, even a stroll is now a blur. This is the first of three books about Valentine Roncalli and her family of shoemakers. When I wrote it, I wanted to bring you old world craftsmanship, Greenwich Village today, in a contemporary family saga of scope told in vivid detail. I hope you enjoy it, and please, let me know your thoughts at adrianatrigiani.com.

xoxo

Adriana