

**Patrick Bizzaro**

***Early Lunch***

In a story my grandfather liked to tell  
he sits at a table  
at the front of the sandwich shop  
counter. He's hungry, though it's early,  
well before noon, the lone sandwich-maker  
mistakenly early for work,  
picking scraps of yesterday's lunch meat  
from the floor, looking angrily  
out the kitchen door  
to see who's gotten so hungry so early.

Grandfather tries not to look  
as hungry as he is  
or to stare in sudden jerks  
at his train-conductor pocketwatch.  
The worker turns and my grandfather can see him  
throw some loose meat onto a table and more of it  
into the garbage. Again he glances at grandfather.

Needing a place to look, grandfather gazes at  
a sign in front of the cash register:  
"We can no longer accept  
expired coupons."  
In a shop so accustomed to  
dishonorable demands,  
how comforting to be asked,  
as grandfather says he did  
in his crumbled syntax,  
"please make a number 6,  
turkey and cheese, with mustard."  
The person behind the cash register  
points at the sign in front of her  
slowly and loudly repeating its message,  
"We don't take coupons anymore, capisce?"  
Grandfather nods and smiles through his misunderstanding  
and hands her several bills  
and a crumpled coupon instead.  
She looks at the coupon and then at my grandfather.  
"Okay, sweetie," she says softly to his eyes.

I think of this as newsworthy  
in the early twentieth century,

news as it gets told during down time  
before the noon rush  
at this grimy luncheonette.

“An expired sandwich,”  
the man shakes his head,  
still cleaning up, pausing to look  
at the kind woman standing at the cash register,  
as he makes grandfather's sandwich,  
“for an expired coupon.” Grandpa smiles  
his not-quite-understanding. “No capisce,”  
he wants to say.

Moments later, on a bench at the station,  
Grandpa cannot resist leafing  
through layers of meat  
looking for floor droppings  
he knows must be there,  
a history he tells  
of his early lunch  
at this last place to eat  
on the only road  
winding out of town.

***The Dance of Their Lives***

*Certain discourses have come to 'adhere to English' – to construct  
how we define and relate to the language*

- Rochelle Kapp

For immigrants, learning English  
is to accept the invitation  
to dance slowly with a sticky partner.  
Men and women learn  
how to be led,  
and, being led, defines  
the dances of their lives.

It is no wonder my immigrant parents  
danced with their hands  
as they tried to sing  
clearly in English  
what they were thinking  
in Italian. My father learned

to keep his hands  
in his pockets long enough  
to appear intelligent—  
a linguist knuckle deep  
past the binding ridges  
of his seams.

Sometimes after having said too much  
and giving away his language roots,  
he'd laugh and say he needed tighter pants.  
My mother would tell him,  
"If your pants get any tighter,  
you won't be able  
to dance at all."

*Railway Home*

Each morning my immigrant grandfather  
carried his grease-stained bag  
of sandwich and peach  
to the tracks  
where he built his railroad.  
His job seemed simple enough:  
he lifted steel rail  
onto slotted wooden shafts,  
spiked them down,  
and moved along.  
In a whole day he'd travel  
fewer than a hundred steps.

I imagine a halo of heat  
radiating from the rails he handled,  
sun a layer of oil  
lubricating his skin.  
Over time I found out  
how complicated his job could be.  
He was building a railway, he'd say,  
back to Italy. Just barely

understood, he'd gesture to me  
with all his strength,  
shaking his head,  
then his hands and arms  
until his whole body spoke.

And as he moved two steps  
down the line, he built this railway  
back to Italy, unaware of how far  
he had come to imagine  
his escape, the great  
unbuilt railway before him,  
the kettle of his sweat,  
the soup of his body  
flowing into steam,  
leading him home.