

How I Became a Reader

Antoinette, my mother
and mother of five
housewife and part time world leader
ruling your Fulton Avenue crew
that diapered, mutinous lot
surrounding you on every front

Home alone with no car and no money
and no relief in sight,
till our father came home at night
exhausted and needing his dinner

Antoinette, how did you do it?
“She’s bothering me!”
“He took my stuff!”
“I’m thirsty.”

Two decades of raising kids
with rarely a vacation in sight.

A bowl of plastic fruit
sat on our dining room table for years
At different times yellow bananas, red apples,
and golden pears would fly through the air
Or the occasional pink slipper
would become airborne.

“Madonna! Give me one hour of peace. One hour!”

You’d shout at the ceiling, beseeching the Great Mother above.

Two filterless cigarettes burned

in two different ashtrays

One in the kitchen, and one in the living room

The smell of nicotine burned my nostrils.

One night you announced you weren’t cooking dinner

“That’s it! Chief cook and bottle washer is off duty,”

you declared from the living room chair

We stood in the kitchen

watching Daddy spread mayonnaise on sandwich bread

We had three choices:

roast beef on pumpernickel,

ham and provolone, or peanut butter and jelly.

“Mommy’s on strike,” he said, explaining the situation.

Antoinette you now have three girls and two boys,

grown and raised.

Five adults with jobs, careers, degrees, and homes,

the occasional husband,

and a few bank-worthy FICO scores.

When I think of you today

I remember your solid body planted in the living room chair

I remember you disappearing into a really good book.

And the solace it gave you to read

and the words you shared with us later
explaining the world beyond our lives
a world of presidents and wars
and politicians full of lies.

I remember the tower of books you stacked by your side
a fortress protecting you from us,
and our frequent trips to the library
everyone piled into the car
and Daddy driving us downtown.

You dealt out library cards from a black leather purse
like a blackjack at a card table,
quick and sure
teaching us all the game.

- **Giovanna Capone**