

## **The 15th of August – Brigitte Ryley**

**It would have been one of those perfect summer afternoons, at the house by the sea. Her name was the Villa Mona, and being there felt like being held under the spell of the Mona Lisa's smile.**

**The 15th of August is my grandmother's feast day.**

**She was given the name Mary after the Virgin.**

**The entire Family gathered around the massive farm table in la sale the jeux to celebrate the glorious day of the Assumption.**

**This would have been after the ritual of the aperitif, in the small salon, where the photograph of my grandfather, naked in the pose of a Greek athlete always caught my eyes.**

**At the head of the table, my grandfather and grandmother glowed for the occasion.**

**All around, my parents, uncles, cousins, aunts of all ages.**

**The wine was overflowing and I was allowed a small glass.**

**We all ate a three course dinner with great gusto and jokes and stories went round.**

**A perfect day for a ten year old and my grandmother alike.**

**Infused by visions of the Virgin Mary being raised into heaven.**

**To add to the heavenly feeling, dinner ended with chocolate éclairs from Flandria, the best bakery in town.**

**After a Siesta, we would all walk to the beach , me carrying my buckets, spade and fishing net.**

**We ate pear syrup and brown sugar sandwiches trying hard not to drop them in the sand.**

**That day me and my cousins took home our small buckets full of shrimps for my grandmother to cook.**

**To our great dismay when we got back to the Villa, we all knew something was terribly wrong.**

**My grandmother had disappeared, she was on the run.**

**Suddenly, the perfect day had turned into a nightmare.**

**How could my sweet grandmother, turn into a mad woman, wandering alone across the sand dunes.**

**The grown-ups organised a search party, led by my grandfather looking sheepish.**

**Me and the female contingent followed.**

**Inevitably, my grandmother would be spotted.**

**In these days I didn't understand that she was a woman with nowhere else to go.**

**Little did I know that inside my gentle grandmother lived the harridan who had chosen to erupt and scare us all on the day of the Assumption.**

**(Brigitte Ryley is the artist's mother. She is a UKCP registered psychotherapist and a writer. She is currently completing an MA in Creative Writing for Personal Development at the University of Sussex)**

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