

Letter for B.
By Cecilia Cipullo

Sunday, March 14, 1989

Dear B.,

I'm here - in Perugia. I'm sorry it has been so long since I last sent a letter. I arrived last night from Florence, and our train got in very late at 10:30 pm, so I only had time to check into the hotel before I fell right asleep. I visited the cemetery first thing this morning, and this is the first chance I have gotten to sit down and write. I hope you are well. I miss you. I miss spending time with you.

So I don't leave you wondering, I'll get straight to it (although, since I didn't mention it first thing straight away, you probably know what I am going to say). I couldn't find the grave. I'm sorry. I tried, B., I really tried. I walked up and down all the streets of that town of the dead, I read every name, I went down into the underground area of the graveyard to check the graves there, I even walked all the way past Perugia herself and the graves from the First World War. There was nothing - not even any evidence that your Great Grandfather has ever been buried here. And even if he was, I think perhaps he has been moved to another graveyard.

I promise you that I will do as much research as I can on the subject before I leave Italy on the 29th. I will go all the way up to Venice and all the way down to Sicily if I have to. We will find out what happened to him.

Otherwise B., I wish I could have shared the experience of the cemetery with you. That may sound strange, but just listen. On a Saturday morning at 7:30 am (I woke up to the sun, so I woke up early), the place was entirely deserted except for a very old man paying a visit to a grave right near the grave of the Spagnoli family. The Spagnoli were the ones who began the

Perugina Chocolate company in 1907 - that is the company Leonard was describing at Marcy's dinner a week or two before I left, when we told him I was going to visit Perugia. The Spagnoli grave was truly moving. It is the color of cream and pictures of a mother and a baby, but while the baby is gazing up at his mother, the mother is looking straight ahead, with seemingly dead eyes. The old man nearby told me she died in childbirth. Seeing the statue representation of the terribly sad story elicited an emotion in me that I am unable to perfectly put into words. An immeasurable sadness. Thinking of that small baby growing up without a mother, and the family who lost the amazing woman that she must have been, I was brought to tears. And I thought of you. I love you, B.

Walking amongst the graves, I realized another thing about the cemetery - something rather extraordinary and rare. Although almost deserted, the Cimitero Monumentale is the opposite of quiet. Yes, there are no human voices to be heard, but I never stopped listening to the sound of natural life around me, while I strolled through the resting places of the dead. There were birds chirping loudly and the sounds of small rodents scuttling through the ground. The wind, however, was the running soundtrack to my visit. It was so loud. The trees were leaning over from the power of the wind - I thought the smallest one was going to tear right in two. But that's not the most extreme of it. Being in that graveyard when it was windy, there was a sense of joy around me. I felt the souls of the deceased dancing with each other in the air, being blown from side to side in the wind, with an air of contentment and pride in their eternal home.

It truly was an experience I'll remember forever, and although I could not find your Great-Grandfather's grave, the sounds of natural life among the homes of the dead was an interesting juxtaposition I would have expected to be discomfiting yet was instead welcoming.

I miss you, my darling. I will send you another letter when I reach my next destination
(most likely Rome or Rimini).

Sending my love.

From,

E.