

Poetry Series

**Alicia Patti**  
**- poems -**

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## Alicia Patti()

I have been writing poetry for 50 years. I have entered some contests and three of my poems have been published in small press poetry books. In the early 1980's I edited and published Freedom's Child, a poetry journal dealing with liberty and individualism. It was a very creative time, and I met many talented poets in this manner. Freedom's Child last publication was December,1982, and it left a huge void in my life; however, I soon took up writing again and have been avid in this regard ever since.

# A Day At The Beach

I sit here in my cups wondering  
where it all went and why.  
Fishermen cleaning their wares along  
the decrepit pier seem to sigh with each

careless toss, unwanted refuse, fit only  
for seagulls and pelicans, viciously  
vying for their day's sustenance.

Blue and white sails, reflecting the morose  
sea, up and down the shore, remind me of the way  
the wharf smelt the day my sun went down:

decaying fish pickled in brine and all around  
the moaning of a ship far out on the horizon.

Alicia Patti

# Abduction

No one suspected such a heartfelt sight:  
father and child on a lovely summer day,  
puffy clouds painting a powder blue sky.

'Going to the beach, ' they would have said.  
A closer look would have shown her struggling  
to keep up, desperate to match his long wicked stride

as he half dragged her through narrow streets,  
gripping her trusting hand in his monstrous fist.  
Someone should have heard her cry out

'Mommy! '

But no one did.

Alicia Patti

# Accused

We'll never know who  
the culprit was.

The tamburo  
at the Palazzo Vecchio  
remains mute with age.

Would Jacopo have cried  
in shame while Leonardo  
full of rage and grim  
with purpose rushed him  
through the constringent  
alleyways of Firenze?

It's all lost in the sfumato now

though anonymous hate  
still slithers through hypocrisy.

Alicia Patti

# Ariamia

Born to sing music all triumphant thrall  
Mellow up mellow up my trumpets call  
My heart sings my songs my songs come  
Oh next refrain fill my soul take me home

So soft so soft strings strum a subtle hint forget  
The pain forget the loss forget it all and yet  
More to come more to come forget the day  
Too soon to come too soon to come kneel and pray

Music tells music heals soaring up soaring up rapture  
Comes joy comes palpate all thrumma thrumma capture  
Heaven hold on tight forget the night worship day  
Ring the bells beat the drums stroke the strings blow the horns that's the way

Alicia Patti

# At The Flower Market

At the flower market  
I found spice, holy water,  
cobblestoned obsidian dreams,  
but no flowers.

The blustery Tuscany day  
showed me its underlying graffiti,  
incantations of poetica esoterica,  
and yet another way  
to excavate the mystery.

Nostalgic Roman nights,  
Spanish palabras, Sicilian incantations  
of idyllic panoramas:  
promises enough to purchase the moon.

Such a foolish sacrifice  
to fresco up for portfolios  
in sanctuaries precious and profane.

Alicia Patti

# Bird Song

How I love the coo-coo-coo! of a dove,  
especially at dusk when the summer  
air is redolent with musk,  
and all around are the sounds  
of nature's wooing.

Add a tinkling brook nearby, echoed  
by a mockingbird, its splendid harmony  
a welcome counterpoint to the symphony.

And now I wait for the hoo-hoo-hoo! of  
An owl that visits me each night  
as though she knows I need her song  
to make my joy complete.

But then I am saddened,  
for my dove doesn't come this day,  
and I am left to ponder:

Perhaps she has found another  
to hypnotize with her wonder;  
if so my heart is gladdened,  
for who doesn't love the wooing  
and the cooing of a dove.

Alicia Patti

# Books

My favorite bookmark  
smells of cherry wood;  
each time I read, its smell  
compels me to proceed.  
Sometimes the words themselves  
take on the cloying scent,  
each page a trip to other worlds, where  
adventures wait and beckon me.

I bask in their exotic spices,  
the candied plums of each enchanting land.  
Golden days and warm Sicilian  
nights caress me tenderly.  
And now I see the vineyards of Tuscany!

Amid these colorful bazaars,  
with their amazing images,  
their heady scents of frankincense  
and cherry wine, my head  
begins to swim from the wisdom  
in these pages wrapped in parchment,  
linen, lacquered leather:  
the passionate papyrus  
of all the literate gone before.

And I am humbled.

Alicia Patti

# Branded

It never occurred to me that I would see  
the end of us come so suddenly:  
a tornado roaring down the highway past  
101 and Grand would be the final brand.  
What fate played a hand in that phantom  
presence, planted there, etching in your name?

Destiny could have chosen another soul,  
unsteady, unworthy for the road ahead.  
Instead, in a moment of dazed scotomata,  
your gaze flew to the right. "No, " I whimpered,  
as I watched the wheels skid out of sight -  
as I still do each and every night.

Alicia Patti

# Circus

Oh my, how they caught my eye and  
captured my imagination, all decked  
out in fancy flash of purple, yellow, red,  
exotic birds flying in formation to the  
syncopation of the big brass band.

The Primadonna performed her final feat  
to the roar of the crowd: singles, doubles,  
triples; a balancing ballerina, flying  
high under the canvas sky.

Oh, how I thrilled to the ooh's and ah's  
rippling through the audience, as over  
the ropes she flew, her cape billowing high,  
like a misplaced purple parachute.

Now, when I feel bolted to the ground,  
full of doubt and desperation, I see  
once more in my mind's eye, a flash  
of royal purple flying high.  
My heart leaps up.  
I hear the roar in that big tent  
and I am born again.

Alicia Patti

# Committed

Why did Nurse Ratched think  
she had dibs on all the nuts in the bag?  
The little power she enjoyed pushed her  
over the edge. I was there, I know:  
brooding over maniacal technicians presiding  
over the hopelessly deluded, passing out their  
pitiful pacifiers. But not me. NO!  
I was completely sane.

Endogenous depression, they said,  
is all in the head:  
'Who is the President of the United States?  
Interpret Early to bed and early to rise...  
How about a stitch in time  
saves nine? '

I knew the answers, of course -  
but then came the shock treatments...

I was cured, they said,  
when they let me go.

Alicia Patti

# Common Time

When I think back upon my childhood fears,  
Rejoicing that those nightmare years have fled  
My soul to dwell in unknown realms instead,  
My heart leaps up with joy for future years,  
No longer dreaded as a blackened pit  
In which all terrors hide. No more the why  
And wherefore of lonely nights' woeful lie  
I once believed to be a gospel writ  
Of gravity, for you are here with me.  
My brave troubadour, hungering for new  
Horizons, thirsting to discover blue  
Lagoons steeping in music's mystery,  
Are now conducting love in twinning rhyme -  
The measure of our hearts in common time.

Alicia Patti

# Conjurers

Conjurers like us  
have no need  
of disappearing acts  
or card tricks  
that stun the gullible.

Our illusions are ghostly images  
wisps of ink  
floating across the page

spelled by  
a magician  
waving a magic wand.

Alicia Patti

# Crows

Bleeding heart flowers and  
cemetery vine. Gone forever now.  
Imagine never having seen an ocean,  
life like a haunted hospital with  
hostile curses since my wedding day.

Damn that clam bake in Revere when  
your scalp hunter friends came  
to bargain, their neck veins straining  
like sailors knots through grommets, as  
they cast lustful looks my way.

Cranes and doves mate for life.

I know

As does the sleek white Trumpeter,  
ruffling his feathers to tempt a Leda.  
But then again, so do crows.

Alicia Patti

# Deja Vu

a chance sighting  
eucalyptus trees  
up a slight incline  
a moment's gasp  
of recognition  
not close enough  
for the piercing smell  
nostalgia brings

when an owl hooted

I could not help  
remembering

Alicia Patti

# Departed

Would you think of me when the wind  
whips up the sand and the angry sea crashes  
against the crumbling jetty where our beach  
blanket used to lay;

and when you walk alone through those  
lonely shoals, yearning to call me back  
from that long, long night, begging for  
another solid look into my blue eyes,  
so full of love for you?

Would you stand like a statue at the end  
of the pier and stare at the waves echoing  
a long forgotten memory;

and would you think of me on  
all those gloomy days, begging for  
the sun to shine, as I think of you every time  
I dare to go down to the sea?

Alicia Patti

# Ellis Island Elegy

All the Old Timers are gone now  
gone with the babushkas and the mandolins;  
nevermore the tarantella or boring bocce games  
played by the devoted.

Sadly lost are summertime block parties,  
redolent of Italy's seasonings;  
scratchy records playing Dino and Sinatra:  
benevolent hymns to the glory of the homeland,  
ancient loudspeakers echoing  
in mournful nostalgia.

Colorful Saint Day Parades  
through cobblestoned streets, precarious  
at best, are passé too.  
The Madonna has been laid to rest,  
along with her son, never again  
to rise on Easter morning:

They have broken the backs of those old timers  
and, to the rest of us

Ellis Island is but a memory.

Alicia Patti

# Encounter

I saw you walking in the park today,  
And all at once my world came tumbling down.  
You looked as though you had not aged a day! -  
Although I noticed just the slightest frown  
As your eyes blinked against the setting sun.  
You raised your hand as though to wave at me;  
And my heart, foolish still, became undone.  
But you sought the shade of a walnut tree  
Close by, and didn't see me standing there.  
It seemed to me the birds had ceased to sing,  
As though they knew the sum of my despair  
And winter's cruel slaughtering of spring.  
Too soon you turned and quickly walked away  
And left me there with one more day to slay.

Alicia Patti

# Family Reunion

Two men dressed in gray  
asked us to leave the grieving room.  
The son is here, they said.  
Reluctantly I left my sister's resting place  
and, in single file, we slowly stepped  
while voicing our consternation.

He stood so still at the bottom  
of the ramp, all appendages clamped  
against a flight for freedom,  
although he would never choose  
to flee from this dark sight:  
his dear mother passed into night.

Like the funeral march to come  
we lumbered passed the orange form,  
each attempting not to stare, but none  
succeeding in averting angry eyes  
from shuffling feet and stiffened fingers  
bent in supplication. His guards, staring  
straight ahead, had eyes of dripping ice.

Charles ducked his head as I approached,  
As though he feared a slap of indignation.  
But I saw the fleeting years: his youthful  
smile, his innocence, the stolen dreams.  
Such mixed emotions as he held me  
in his muscled arms, this lost child fully grown,  
blood of my blood.

One moment more to kiss his  
hardened cheek before they rushed him  
up that unforgiving slope, their icy eyes  
still staring dead ahead. And then  
a blur of orange-blue, and all hope  
gone to let him know I loved him still.

Alicia Patti

# Gangs

Watch them stalking  
down the cobbled street

wise as tenements  
aging by the day

breaking for another chance

Cronus slays Uranus  
while the Titans slip away

castrated  
impotent with rage.

Alicia Patti

# Here Come The Clowns

Some say life is a circus,  
others, a beach;  
I say it's a parade  
full of clowns and trapeze artists  
swinging in and out of traffic  
jams, only to end up on  
an empty parking lot.

No way  
out, too late to try again,  
reading every map as if  
it were the be all and end  
all of our limited universe.

Forgetting our individual parade is all there is,  
we neglect to twirl our batons and kick  
for all we're worth, until that  
short winding road is but an inch  
of dust, and then what?  
Here come the clowns.

Alicia Patti

# Lingua Franca

speaking  
in tongues  
preaching  
for praise

reaching  
perfection  
blasphemy  
be damned!

how we suffer

Alicia Patti

# Memories Of Childhood

How they haunt me still  
like playmates' naughty taunts.  
The old church bell  
the lilacs' smell,  
the lilting daffodils.  
Narrow, cobbled streets,  
sidewalk market stalls;  
old crones bleating sales  
down at Fanueil Hall;  
Fish for sale along the harbor's  
rim dead eyes staring,  
sorrowful and grim.

Garlic and spaghetti  
and East Side corner gangs;  
weddings and confetti  
and ancient streetcars clang.  
Ivy-covered walls  
and painted leaves in fall;  
ghetto street kids playing  
kick the can; old Italian vendors  
touting crabs and clams.  
Windows full of mothers  
staring at the view;  
a house chock-full of brothers,  
drinking home-made brew.

Memories of childhood,  
how they haunt me still,  
And though I ponder all life long  
I guess they always will.

Alicia Patti

# Mirabile Dictu

So wonderful to relate the main  
event of the big tent, a sideshow,  
frangible as a chrysalis longing  
to pull a Lord Lucan.

Show Me Your Bona Fides –  
I'll show you my philosopher's stone,  
breathing life into my troglodytic bones  
once again.

No screeds for me, just simple  
alchemy, short and to the point, with  
a big bolus of veritas. Mirabile dictu.  
Bless me and Amen.

Alicia Patti

# Misery

It makes no difference now  
that the sun has set on western ground.  
Time will toll the age-old tale for posterity  
and frown, as sad old men daydream  
on park benches, drinking coffee

redolent of rank desperation.

And of their dreams, what are they to me?  
My dreams flashed by with the sun in a second  
or so, then settled deep down into misery.

Alicia Patti

# Mother Mine

Nevermore her sweet caresses  
Nevermore her soft blue eyes.  
Heaven-blown her ebon tresses,  
Smiling lips I idolized.

Sing farewell, farewell forever,  
Child of the wind-blown sea,  
Tender heart and soul unfettered  
Garlands in eternity.

Fleeting soul transcends the sparrows,  
Soaring with the snow-white dove;  
Sad of soul all my tomorrows,  
Grieving for her purest love.

Sweetest voice a loving whisper  
On the wings of memory.  
Tender canticle of sisters,  
Song of all maternity.

Child am I to my dear mother,  
Evermore her child to be.  
Child is she to yet another,  
Sisters in eternity.

Envoi

Nevermore her sweet caresses  
Nevermore her soft blue eyes.  
Heaven-blown her ebon tresses.  
Mother mine I eulogize.

Alicia Patti

## Muses Nine

I wander through these woods alone  
at night, when all the world is still  
and not a light to guide me.  
To my left, careening cliffs of tangle  
weed; my right bears brooding  
wisps of winter trees.  
Surrounded by the mist, I long for home  
as one would long for shooting stars  
to melt the frozen snow and dare the fires  
of hell to intervene, their incandescent glow  
a flaming laurel to Apollo.

At last I hunt astride the winged horse,  
perchance to find the legendary muse  
who haunted all my nights and filled  
my days with dreams of fortune and success.  
And, crazed, I wander still, my burning brain  
transfixed by the wonder of the written word.

Hold fast! Ahead I see the faintest glimmer,  
a pinpoint light, a spark, a silvery shimmer.  
My breath blows cold and crackles in the frosty  
trees, as once again I face the Hound of Verse.  
Are you really she, allusive muse,  
or do you mean to heap abusive scorn on all  
my shining rhetoric, to make of me  
a proud but lonely heretic?

So, late! How I long to fly ahead to  
greet my ladies nine, to dare to wed each  
one in turn, to pledge my fevered soul to their design.  
Oh, Muses, make me whole!

But wait! Is this the spark now turned star?  
I see it glowing in the glen afar.  
I hear fair Euterpe's tender song,  
Erato beckons. But am I saved?  
How long before my muses make me  
all their own...

no more to wander through these woods alone.

Alicia Patti

# Nostalgia In F Minor

I remember  
cobblestone streets,  
tough kids using their own brand  
of rhetoric, sweet-talking me down  
dark alleys. Gang fights.

Fourth of July handouts - New-Deal  
cookies for the underprivileged:  
badges of honor for social workers.

Mosquito fires flickering in gutters,  
double parking, hide and seek,  
kick-the-can, stickball; old crones bickering  
on tenement stoops.

Hard knocks from the University of Despair.  
And then I graduated.

Alicia Patti

## On The Way To Sicily (Prose Poem)

The ruins of Pompeii held no charm for me, so full of ruined rocks and the dead it made my heart hurt. How the tour guide waxed eloquent on that ancient holocaust, almost revering the disinterested volcano that overtook so many innocents under the hot Pompeian sun: children at play, mothers nursing their young, fathers planting olive trees, the elderly gazing at the volcano that never ceased its warnings. They refused to believe Vesuvio's ranting was the bellow of things to come.

How the tourists speculated as they gesticulated, full of awe and sympathy...

The tour ended with the spectacular showing of human remains, fire-frozen in the grotesque rictus of the dead: backs arched, appendages akimbo; all lovingly encased in glass for the entertainment of future generations. Then we clambered onto the bus and thought no more of Pompeii and what we saw that day.

Lunch was wood-fired brick-oven Margarita pizza, made with tomatoes grown in the rich loam nearby. I received a special little gift of lava rock from the young son of the owner. "Something to remember us by," he said with a wide grin. Just before boarding the bus, I tossed it on the ground, to mingle with the monstrous pile that was once a polished Mediterranean jewel.

Alicia Patti

# Parmesan Days

My mother made pizza on weekends,  
in the days when we had little else to eat.  
How else to pacify a horde of ten?  
Pasta every day drained us,  
though my mother's attempts to 'kick it up a notch'  
smacked of culinary genius,  
even though the broccoli was full of bugs.  
Such a far cry from the spectacle of the  
present-day pasta craze, elite gastronomes  
notwithstanding...

Emeril and his ilk could never  
hold a candle to her simple Sicilian crust,  
with all its blessings of plump organic tomatoes,  
heavenly Parmesan, and homegrown basil  
that would make your mouth sing.  
But that was long ago,  
when I was young.

Alicia Patti

# Raven Kings

Capistrano and its swallows held  
no joy for me. That thaumaturgy was  
as rotten as the Wormwood Tree

blooming in an acrobatic circus act.

Poetry as politics; who would have thought?  
Contra mundum.

Let's jeer it for the spin doctors, with their  
film noir auguries: Bungling Cassandras,  
spouting inanities, ex nihilo, ad nauseum.

Alicia Patti

# Sicilian Revenge

In summer they sat on their front stoops  
clad in black, chattering and bemoaning  
their disenfranchised state, like crows hovering  
over unwanted prey.

Long gone now, those old crones;  
their strong presence on the Sicilian-  
American landscape a stark memory, like the great war  
they always groaned about, their adoration of  
Mussolini notwithstanding.

Rolling their black knowing eyes  
whenever we walked by, hand in hand, with our beaus,  
Some would sign the evil eye and spit three times,  
for bad luck to befall us.

One day I strolled by with my sailor brother,  
home on furlough, all decked out in crispy white,  
cap at a jaunty angle, shiny black shoes clicking on pavement.  
I was so proud.

Then, the bomb fell: As though on signal,  
three crones spat three times and signed.  
I whirled around, ready for battle;  
but Louis took my arm, bent and whispered  
in my ear, "You're better than that."

Then he turned my cheek and planted a big one.  
I took a peek as we walked by and saw all  
three crones signing in rage. I smiled and blew them  
a kiss. But my brother never saw my inbred Sicilian  
revenge in the form of a gleeful two-handed evil-eye.

Alicia Patti

# Signing

Mother and child signing.  
I couldn't stop staring - so  
full of mystery and knowledge  
of words unspoken.  
The language of love  
is never so poignant  
as in such moments of revelation.

Tiny fingers fluttering at ducks  
parading around the pond; eyes  
wide, attentive. Then hand to heart  
to eyes, and a grand sweeping gesture  
to signify wonder and delight.

Mesmerized I gazed  
as she lightly tapped the child's cheek,  
then took her hand and led her down  
the path; leaving me to ponder why  
I'd never forget that scene  
and the look of love in a mother's eyes.

Alicia Patti

# Tarot Reading

You have cursed me  
with your wormwood  
and now I drift down  
The River of Despond  
hovering

in a sinking boat

No longer will The Six of Swords  
pilot me to that distant shore;  
I bow my head to its power,  
Immured in its fractured prism,

and pray for a philosopher's stone  
to release some alchemy  
or other magic imagery to transform  
this rusting derelict to gold.

Perhaps the Four of Wands  
waits on the horizon  
with all its promise of freedom  
from despair.

But wait, I think I see The Magician  
waiting just around the bend;

or will he be just another charlatan  
playing me along  
right up to the end of the game?

Alicia Patti

# The Gardener

Intent on her task, she gazes  
at the earth, stooping.  
Raking parched leaves, she scoops  
them up with gloved hands,  
the black plastic bag protesting  
against the wind.

See how she removes a glove  
and wipes her brow,  
the back of her hand riddled with  
the sands of time.  
See how she turns her weathered  
face to the warming sun:

a lover's kiss.

Wrinkled as the leaves  
beneath her feet, she tells the tale  
of a life well-lived, wise eyes  
blinking against the noon-day sun:

A day of bliss.

And now her eyes scan  
the horizon and back again  
to her precious garden, pride  
in her achievements shining through  
like an emerald crown,  
lighting up the orchard:

too keen to miss.

Watch as she walks  
to the nearby shed,  
dragging her heavy black burden  
over the pebbled landscape.

The years have served her well:

strong, still willing to carry on...  
marching down her golden days...

and more like this.

Alicia Patti

# The Last Refrain

I used to think our love was here to stay  
And wanted to approach you one more time,  
Before you took my hopeful world away -  
Another chance to breach the shoals and climb  
Into the frigid regions of your heart.  
I thought I heard you whispering my name  
And then I saw the flimsy curtain part -  
A jolt of hope beyond the window frame!  
Those chording tones that hypnotized my soul  
Were but the remnants of a melody  
Too dear to sing again and thus console  
The title song long lost in memory.  
For though the last refrain was overdue,  
I looked into your eyes and then I knew.

Alicia Patti

# The Messenger

The night my younger brother died  
my father sat like a hunchback, moaning  
an old Sicilian dirge.

My mother tore her hair and wailed  
as visions of her beautiful boy assailed  
her anguished brain.

I saw him lying on the ground, his skull  
splattered on the killing street, like a ripe melon,  
as the dastardly car sped by.

My father did not even notice  
the forbidden cigarette dangling  
from my trembling lips, my dilated  
nostrils snorting fire, like a raging young dragon  
spitting in the Face of Death.

When he finally raised his tearful gaze to mine,  
I saw a flicker of recrimination.

I bowed my head and shuddered with a sigh.  
Why does the messenger also have to die?

Alicia Patti

# The Wedding Picture

Within this antique-crafted frame  
They glow in effervescent light,  
No trace of future pain proclaimed  
On faded faces in black and white.

A garland for her holy head,  
Suffused in saintly silver ray;  
A perfume-scented posy bed  
Nestled for her love bouquet.

Between that day and this  
What joy and pain they shared.  
Would they live again such bliss  
At present being thus compared?

Long and long their wedding vows  
Waned naught for fortune's sorrowing.  
He gave her all that love allows;  
She gave her all-in-all to him.

He was the dreamer of her dreams;  
She, the singer of his songs.  
She was the helpmeet of his schemes;  
He, her arbiter of wrongs.

Now, in this faded, tinted guise,  
They still abide in my soul's eye:  
My loving parents, idolized,  
For love like theirs will never die.

Alicia Patti

# Venetian Serenade

One would think purple and green couldn't  
work well together, unless you're in Venice where,  
tucked in at eventide, gondolas slumber in colorful  
array, anticipating the new day, while the setting sun,  
low on the horizon, lulls the lagoon to sleep,

lapping waves caressing, like the susurrus of  
a Venetian lullaby. Royal purple tints the water,  
as though The Master had dipped his brush in  
Imperial Blue and with broad strokes blessed  
the Grand Canal in benediction to the Medici.

But this blessing can't last - this tribute to the gold  
of Italy's finest hour, this shimmering ideal reposing  
in the dusky twilight of an age long past its glory,  
hovering on the brink of a long summer day.

Too soon dawn will come clamoring, dragging  
along the multitude: buyers and sellers  
crashing through the pungent streets, snatching  
at her life's blood, scattering her precious jewels

like so much refuse until, at last, exhausted  
and disillusioned, she folds her purple and green  
into another sunset, sighs in weak submission,  
and falls asleep once more to her Venetian serenade.

Alicia Patti

# Vineyards In The Distance

My father told me he ate rats  
to stay alive during the First World War,  
and while he lay in the rotting fields,  
he thought he saw vineyards in the distance,  
glistening in the sun.

He could not reconcile why he should  
die for a cause he did not understand  
or why they came for him while  
he was tending his grapes so far away  
in Sicily.

His mother wailed when they  
took him away, while his father's bony  
finger traced a purple cross in the air, bare  
feet never ceasing, stepping  
to the beat of the drums.

Alicia Patti

# Vino Rosso

My mother said Mussolini  
was a good man because he made  
everyone throw their pigs out  
of the house and made sure  
everyone got pasta every day  
but no meat.  
By then the pigs had all been slaughtered  
to feed the army.

In the garden behind her shack,  
broccoli withered in the hot Sicilian sun,  
water doled out like vino rosso to alcoholics.

'One liter too much and Il Duce's soldati  
might die of thirst, ' the peasants would hiss,  
rolling their eyes, huddling in dark cellars  
where wine presses used to dwell,

because the purple grapes that once graced  
the countryside had all been razed,

the culls remaining  
just so many  
rotting raisins.

Alicia Patti

# Viva L'america!

They were told the streets were paved with gold.  
I remember the pain and pride in my father's eyes as he pounded  
the kitchen table, his big fist like a hammer of God,  
and my mother's sighs in measured counterpoint,  
singing a mournful Italian opera.

Verdi and his trumpets were my best friends then,  
late at night snuggled in a four poster with my older sister,  
miming Caruso and the Great Adelina.  
My father's tenor would match her heavenly soprano,  
the ancient radio trembling from their symphonic ardor.

So long ago. The taste of ragu still caresses my tongue,  
memorized forever from a big bowl of pasta, passed  
with reverence around the rickety kitchen table.

Ellis Island was paradise to them, and after  
the big war was over, my father never stopped  
reminding us, forefinger raised to the sky,  
a passionate glow in his blue Sicilian eyes:

"Mussolini e muorta. Viva L'America! "

All the Old Timers are gone now;  
gone the babushkas and the mandolins;  
nevermore the tarantella or endless bocce games  
played by the devoted.

Sadly lost are summertime block parties  
redolent of Italy:  
scratchy records playing Dino and Sinatra -  
benevolent hymns to the glorious homeland,  
ancient loudspeakers echoing  
in mournful nostalgia.

Colorful Saint-Day Parades  
through cobblestoned streets, precarious  
at best, are passé too.  
The Madonna has been laid to rest,

along with her son, never again  
to rise on Easter morning;  
they have broken the backs of those old timers  
and, to the rest of us  
Ellis Island is but a memory.

Alicia Patti

# Where Life Began

Times are when all I want to hear is the sound  
Of the surf pounding against the shore, and all  
I care to see is the ocean's vast horizon  
Careening into oblivion, erecting supreme  
Monuments to all the ages past.

What joy to listen to the song of the sea  
Sounding against the shore; to run and play  
And laugh in childlike glee at earth's design;  
To sanctify the sand with my mortal Clay;  
to be one with the sea and the heat of the sun.

But then I hear oblivion's cry, shrieking  
High, bounding across the great expanse  
Of sea and sky, rounding the edge of tears.  
It comes as no surprise, but signifies,  
In mocking tones, the pain of youth's demise.

Times like these – when spring is but a dream –  
I drink the vintage of the ages: of sea  
And sky, of all the wonders of the world  
Caught here where life began, and wonder why  
The final gift of life is endless silence.

Alicia Patti