

Chapter Two

Alessandro Raveggi

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She'd make a fine basset hound, the classic mug of an elderly Nordic tourist come to fry her skin on the Mediterranean as if scattering her own ashes in advance. She comes up to the desk. Asks if we have tours here.

I offer the Vasari Corridor. Popular, but pricy.

The secrets of Palazzo Vecchio. Hard to say no.

A walk with monks at San Miniato. Overly sophisticated.

A historical reenactment at the Bargello. Too extreme: Florentine history steeped in gore.

She's dissatisfied, distracted: eyes roaming to the hair around my face, frizzy from my night out in the open.

I tell her: listen, we're here to make your tour—your *spiritual experience*, I slyly say—something off the beaten path. She's not biting.

This restiveness is something we have in common, though: me sleeping out amid the flora of the Arno, on a bare mattress, weeks away from home. Her seeing no point in a prepackaged tour. So there's a bond. To be instantly broken.

Is that really all?

Florence is what it is, I say. Which sounds like: my city, a soggy sandwich.

In a good way, I add.

All this history, all this stone, and not a soul who can squeeze something new out of it, she concludes.

And walks off.



ph. Francesco Natali

My morning rolls on, with something buzzing in my stomach, some fly she left there. I rip tickets, check terminals, herd children, their sweat-addled teacher on the point of slapping them silly in the hallway. Rushed meetings, bosses trying to stare me down. Breathe, rip, repeat, and: ah, lunch break.

In the courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio I run into the lady, who's giving me a Danish vibe now.

What about the Arno? Along the river, know anything?

She pronounces *Arno* like *Henry*. Lost in her mouth, ineradicable urge to.

I don't know if I know anything. My only link is Andrea, who's camped there for some time, running the very real risk of a cop showing up to take the tent down. I'd never thought about the river before. It was suddenly piped into me. Now my breathing bobs over it at night, a stranded boat. Calm, but always unsure what comes next, supine but suspended: my existential itch, two naked shoulderblades sending morse code to the ground, restless wing-stubs by day.

The Dane explains she read about somebody reopening a mysterious historic tunnel from shore to shore, something like that...

At most, I say, what with the damp and mildew, the ambience down there would be Conan Doyle, not Benvenuto Cellini.

So you don't know anything, she says, disappointed. But then, shut up in your museum, what could you... she scoffs.

At which, livid – this smug Northerner in my city, nemesis of anyone just back from perfidious Albion!—I decide to take her to her precious river. But then and there: under the beating sun. An experience as hot and dusty as the Speedos on some Florentine office worker sitting on the bank. I'll give her, as we say here, a good rinsing. And wash away all that Amore Pizza Pazza Espressi Baci Toscani Divino Vino Allegro Amico Mio Arrivederci Ciao.



ph. Francesco Natali

We swelter through the streets. I make her walk, I take her where it's most howlingly obvious: the long weir of the Pescaia di Santa Rosa. The milk-white

bodies of students from Michigan mingle with the wood-veined bodies of San Frediano craftsmen sunbathing for lunch. A few brazen dogs run up to sniff them. People on bikes swerve around us. We're both dripping sweat. The air brings news of food wrappers, slathered sunblock. But the fauna has also changed: no more resin statues, those tourists with swollen faces and legs, gigantic and immobile. It's a different world. Who cares about the smell—sometimes fish, sometimes rotting plants—or the rustling of rats in the tall grass: this is Andrea's world, this is like making an official entrance into Andrea's house (though maybe through the back door).

We silently walk up the bank to Ponte alla Carraia, heads ablaze, amid paper trash, tin cans, sketchy-looking plastic. I'm ready to chuck it in, but what does my great Dane come up with? She flags down a passing *renaiolo*. With sweet talk or sweeter cash she somehow convinces him to pull up alongside the bank. She forces me to jump, pushing, I almost fall into the gummy water. All I know is that we somehow end up, sopping wet, on the boat with the oarsman, who gives a little bow.

The Dane is somewhere between heat exhaustion and ecstasy, a smuggler on the Congo who's just swallowed a psychotropic leaf.

I gaze around: we'll catch sight of Andrea. That'll be my *Land ho!*

What the latter does when I'm not around is beyond me.

Maybe Andrea's only around when I am.

Nice thought, pretty childish, Andrea would say. That the world disappears if we're not there.

But my world is here, because I'm seeing it again, I'd shoot back.

With a shove of the oar, we head off toward the mountains.

(2 - [To be continued](#))

[Versione italiana](#)

[Chapter I](#)

Se continuiamo a tenere vivo questo spazio è grazie a te. Anche un solo euro per noi significa molto.

Torna presto a leggerci e [SOSTIENI DOPPIOZERO](#)

