DOPPIOZERO

Chapter Three

Alessandro Raveggi

15 Agosto 2015

Massimo—as the boatman tells us to call him—unsluices a spiel that spans the city's whole history. Astutely, he uses the bridges we're crossing under, or are about to cross under, as cunning bookmarks.

Here comes Ponte Santa Trinita. And he plucks anecdotes off its parapets.

Meanwhile, the embankments bloom with twinkling electronic devices. A crew as motley as ours must warrant somebody's snapshots.

Massimo dredges up the aquatic life of the Florence of yesteryear. Intense, channeled by necessity. And in his telling, the Florentines are immediately tricked out as Hindus performing ablutions on a Ganges out of some nineteenth-century farce. Just the ticket for my Dane. Who is lurching from one side of the boat to the other, bent on capsizing us.

I turn to the bridge. And note the reckless swooning of students along the parapet, a bikini flopping corpse-like over the side, a glittery parasol. Today anyone off the bridges does not exist, they're swept out of the field of vision. As for the buildings, they get lighter, like the city: two pages motionless in the wind, holding us, a possibility.

Translate for me, come on now, grunts Massimo.

Translate for the lovely lady, come on.

He barks at me from the back of the boat as he rows. He sees that I'm young, book-learned, he thinks that for me translation into some universal foreign language is like wearing athletic socks with your boots, something that comes naturally with the age bracket. Like his own hammy palaver. When I talk to him, he answers with interjections, as if he were deaf—I've seen lots of older people do this deaf act out of diffidence.

So, sweetheart—and I translate—the Germans bombed everything (: sighs). And nobody could find the head of Spring, that statue there on Santa Trinita, it was shot right off (: feigns dejection). Lost in the depths. Till one fine day in ’61 a *renaiolo*, dredging for sand... (: mimes clownish surprise).



Francesco Natali, Narrarno

Looking at the statue, we search for the trace, the fissure of decapitation. She’s a gorgeous model disfigured in a car crash, permanently despondent. My translation loses poignancy, turning insipid, this heat makes me listless. It’s my own head, severed, cooling, that lolls on the riverbed. Down there, maybe its blind marble can see the objects of my past, nostalgic memories of life before exile in the UK.

The Dane, her stiff cheekbones sunglazed and dazed, isn’t listening to me, she smiles at Massimo like an old flame, a blend of pity and pleasure. Looking from his squinted wrinkles to the cracks and details of the bridges: the arches, the cutwaters, which, the renaiolo tells us, once even had chapels on them.

A city with too many bridges, Andrea had said, at that first dusk of ours by the river.

Andrea’s bare toes in the weeds under the water, which seemed like a drunken, mosquito-ridden memory, a mnemonic footbath. I was chasing after a friend’s dog to which I was playing nursemaid. It had crashed straight into her.

A city with too many bridges, meaning a city with lots of solitudes, she added. If it weren’t for the bridges, people would make more of an effort.

You must not be from around here, I say. But you’ve got one thing sort of right.

The dog is tugging toward the water, attracted by that cerebral algae. I grip the leash to keep him from diving down in.

I’m passing through, Andrea murmurs, on my way to that big rally in Austria in the fall, which is a must-see, you know. I decided to stop for a little breather.

She has Medusa-like hair, a boxer’s slightly flattened nose, pale almond skin, the sad eyebrows of a Jewish girl. She keeps making as if to brush back an invisible lock of hair. I don’t know what big rally she’s talking about.



Francesco Natali, Narrarno

Everybody dreams of her own alter ego on the other side, peeping out from behind the curtains of some building, she says.

The colors and flavors of the one would mirror the colors and flavors of the other.

The winter on one shore would cool the summer on the other.

(Goddamn dog already splashing around in the water... Major shouting necessary to retrieve it... I act like a hysterical city dweller... then flee.)

In the days that follow I come back several times, drawn to the embankments. She isn’t there, or rather, she’s never on my side. She’s always waving, from the opposite one. She shades her eyes, brushes back the imaginary hair. Maybe it’s a game. But she’s right, I think: it does make me really anxious to run into her. I remain seated on my bank, at dusk. Without the bridges, this city would be divided in half. But one shore would be what the other desires. No envy, no superciliousness, no reciprocal shit-flinging. Two stories dreaming of each other would be better than just one, however well-rooted.

I’m roused by a commanding fortress: over 100 glaring windows, 200 seething sweaty heads, a vast, dull murmur above us.

We’re face to face with Ponte Vecchio.

It looks aimed and ready to fire, a galleon bearing down on our little anarchic bark.

We resign ourselves to battle, certain of defeat.

(3 - *To be continued*)

Versione italiana

Chapter I

Chapter II

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

