

Chapter Five

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Now my dimension is vertical, my borderline above me.

I can go no further forward, the verdict is resounding: the Dane waving her arms, clinging to some dim panic. The buildings are wrenched onto me, the parks of Florence wash over, iffy algae. The sun eclipsed, beyond the murky water. For a moment I see the dingy hull of the boat, and Massimo, rascal unmasked, reduced to childish kicking legs.

You ok? Andrea prods me.

Scared of a little tent?

Try seeing it as a temple, our temple.

So what do we hope to obtain from this temple? I reply, fretfully stowing away the clothing brought from home.

It's where we're the gods, and we're the worshippers. And the offerings are what we do here every day.

I stare at the walls of the tent, the shadows unfolding on the green fabric as if conjured by the light of a bonfire. Who could those shadows be, how far away from me? I am a magic lantern that moves the figures out there. True act of worship.



Francesco Natali, Narrarno

At the same time I look up, as the surface of the water above me is beginning to stretch out again, taut as the faces of the people on the embankment who must be quivering about whether to jump, shout, run away, pray maybe. Then the cramp of light over the river seen from below, fierce canoes passing over this strange ceiling, a cluster of rusticated Florentine facades peering cloudily in. Or maybe it's my lantern getting fainter.

We'll see each other every evening here at sunset, below the park, Andrea decrees. She means that accessible area sheltered by the trees between Ponte San Niccolò and Ponte Verrazzano.

Does this sect have any special rules? I gibe as I undress her.

Don't talk about what's out there. Plus: hold tight to everything in here.

Sheesh, what is this, some cheap vengeance on the world? A picket line?

I told you not to talk about what's out there.



Francesco Natali, Narrarno

All in all, she holds no grudges. She pulls off my dress, kisses my hips, achieves my surrender. Just as I surrender to the depths, deducing the sky through swamped eyelids. Because I'm still in our tent, or maybe I'm already drowning. And as I drown every statue-tourist on this afternoon is doing the same, but in reverse. Letting go of tension, lifting their gaze to a border: not just squinting at the muddled Last Judgment on the cathedral dome, drinking in the moonlit night of the Baroncelli Chapel, struggling with Taddeo Gaddi's Tree of Life, bending before the polyphemic eye of the rose window in Santo Spirito. But straining further up, to the implacable summer sky. As if to gain recognition. And letting their lungs fly.

Everything seems to rise up then gird itself to sink like a stone into this valley. I vanish, the city vanishes. I go down, it goes down with me, with the chill that seeps into my head. Buildings, parks, bronze doors, all of it.

How you feel, little eel?

Andrea calls me "eel" because I writhe around in the sleeping bag at night. I listen to the scooters buzzing along Lungarno Colombo for hours, aimless demons

playing tag. She tries to quiet me, twines her legs around mine, squeezing.

I wish this night would never vanish, I whisper to her.

But the morning means getting dressed, contortions and fakirism so as not to wake her. Then merging with a wall of sunshine, speedwalking towards the center of town, eyes shaded from the morning glare, back bent.

I wish that back would never bend. That this night would never vanish. Though I'm afraid that, if it never ended, this green night, clamoring out there, compressed, icy, mirror of the city's own cynical reflection on the river that swallows me up, that's just it: it would swallow me up. That this tent, would swallow me up.

So I make dire forecasts.

You know, I say while scraping tuna from a can, that one day they'll drag us away like two heretics? Maybe burn us at the stake!

And that's indeed what happens, one day: the tent collapses, a nasty lurch, the movie we project outside speeds up like crazy, arms tugging at us. You pass out from the sudden chase, in the attempt to flee.

And your body finds itself laid out like a sacrifice in the courtyard of the Uffizi, in a cop's arms, entertainment for a horde of Russians.

How you doing, little eel?

Which is really an Everything ok, can you breathe, ma'am?

As if I didn't hate it hate it hate it Jesus Christ when someone calls me Ma'am.

Go ma'am your sister, I mutter to my savior, who's dripping wet from head to foot.

(5 - [*To be continued*](#))

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