

Chapter Six

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Apparently, there are discrepancies between the me before I drowned, the me drowning, and the me fished back out.

I don't know what version of the software is most recent.

What the link is to Sandra Jorgensen, retired nurse, 18:40 Göteborg – Florence flight, July 28, temp. residing Hotel Ritz (pressing charges against me, against the boatman, even against the museum).

What the link is to Massimo Ciatti, electrician, amateur *renaiolo*, residing on Via Milton, previous arrest for brawl at 1997 Calcio Storico tournament (pressing charges, plus seriously foul language, against me and the Swedish ex-Dane).

I haven't lost my memory: I remember the sad outing under the sun, the terrible fall, the water that never goes splash, if you fall wrong.

That's what I said to the carabinieri who insists on walking me to the hospital exit.

The shivering, of course, I remember the violent shivering. Andrea's name repeated between shivers.

I explained that my act wasn't intentional, that stuff like suicide is furthest from my mind. I have witnesses. (But the flexible flood of tourists will have changed eyes, during my night in the hospital, hence no witnesses: the ocular tape wiped clean.)

He asked me why I was talking about a tent when I was fished out. That's what the cop reported, he said: my savior, my snitch.

Because there *is* a tent, by the Arno, I said.

They think I'm crazy, maybe I've betrayed Andrea (they'll go check if there's really such a thing).

How could there be a tent by the Arno? the carabinieri nonplussed at me. Watch it now, explain carefully, he threatened me.

You must think, I told him, that I missaw from the heat, that the water got in my head, not just my lungs, and that I hallucinated that green thing pitched by the river...

You want us to contact him, this Andrea of yours? he goes, trenchant and charitable.

You don't get it, I shot back: Andrea *is* in the tent. You have to look for it to find her.

Not only have I conjured up in his mind, as well as mine to some degree, a phantom tent, but the phantom of ambiguous sexuality.

So Andrea's a woman?

I nod. I get out of bed, pull on my leather jacket.

And what is this Andrea's main occupation?

I dunno, I said, befuddled: to look after me, offer comfort. And started packing up the kitbag that mom must have brought.

No fixed abode? he pried again, and I signed the form to check myself out.

More like somebody who creates a bunch of them, depends how you look at it.

Your relation to Andrea?

Lovers, of course. Roommates too, if you like! Write that in your report. But where is all this leading?

Ever say anything about Vienna?

Who, Andrea? She did say something about a big rally there. An excuse to make our relationship seem shakier, thus more engrossing. Why, is it relevant?

This morning, during a short break at the museum, I went on a stroll through the Room of the Elements, looking at Vasari's Allegory of Water. The handling of the planes is godawful, you have to admit. Almost nobody gives a crap about the birth of Venus. Everyone seems to have showed up for the wrong scene, five

minutes late, out of breath. Or they're like fishermen waiting for their bite and gazing every which way, albeit hopefully. Neptune has lost his horses, the tritons are bearing weird, inappropriate gifts. Allegorical snafus.

And now what is my relation to Andrea, I wonder, Andrea who disappeared in Florence January 10 while traveling with friends, showed up again at parents' house Vienna September 4, reported missing, who vanished into thin air, but surfaced just for me, then went back to her normal Viennese life? (No note, no complaint, no recrimination for having missed yesterday evening's rendezvous, darling Andrea! Just an identikit that cracked me up.)

And yet she's like that Venus, maybe more awkward, unstable, a police record on the recycled paper of the Florence carabinieri. No one noticed, knee-high in the shallow waters of life. Maybe everybody gained something in wonder. Me, I gained something in wonder.

Completely restored to this city in its most pandering view of the river – the one from Piazzale Michelangelo – as if restored to a sappy Viennese embrace with parental tears, I retrace my steps to the car. Welcoming how the bluest part of evening spurs a drink stand to turn on its neon lights, like a courtship where each draws her own benefit, with different ends in mind.

THE END.

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