



ORVIETO

A NOVELLA BY DAN FINNEN

Orvieto

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Cover photo and design by Dan Finnen

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I

Edward arrived in Orvieto on a bright summer morning with a smile on his face and his dusty backpack slung over his shoulder. As he stepped off the train and watched it chug off to its next destination, he was blissfully unaware that he had left his phone on seat B21.

Standing outside the train station, Edward looked up at the great hill directly in front of him. The Italian town sat on a great plateau that dominated a lush Italian valley of vineyards and farms. Medieval stone works surrounded the village, giving it the appearance of a fortress floating in the sky. A lift was helpfully located next to the station to carry passengers up into the town above where they could shop, eat and gawk to their heart and wallet's content.

Edward thought Orvieto looked like something out of a fairy tale, although to be fair, Edward thought just about all of Europe looked like something out of a fairy tale. Looking up, he wondered if this place perhaps might finally be the location that would inspire him to write a poem. Edward was an American college student who had managed to convince his parents that a summer in Europe would be beneficial to his continuing education. Secretly, his parents hoped the trip would inspire him to consider switching to a decent, more sensible major such as international finance or industrial law. Even archeology would have been preferable to creative writing, of all things, especially for a son that didn't seem to actually write all that much. Yes, they thought, a change of scenery is just what their son needed to expand his mind and grow the hell up.

The lift station was empty except for a bored teenager selling tickets. She had black hair that was poorly dyed blue, a concert t-shirt for a popular American band, and a fake nose ring. Edward purchased a ticket and said 'bonjour' in thanks. He did not notice the teenager rolling her eyes at him as she returned to her cell phone. Edward proceeded to the lift.

The Orvieto lift itself was simply a large metal box with a few dirty windows and a handful of chairs scattered about. As he waited for the lift to lurch off to its destination, he noticed there was only one other passenger besides himself. This other passenger was an ancient man with a thick mane of wiry hair that caused one to wonder if his beard had colonized his entire head. He wore a faded blue suit and had a large audiocassette recorder slung over his shoulder. As he waited, he fiddled with an attached condenser microphone.

Edward thought it strange that the man was wearing thick sunglasses. It was dark in the room where the lift sat before making its way up the hill, far too dark to need protective eyewear. Edward reasoned that perhaps the old man had indulged in illicit drugs and wanted to conceal the fact from any authorities.

While he waited, he inspected some of the fliers taped to the wall. One featured a nude man happily riding a bicycle, and Edward wished he knew enough Italian to decipher its meaning. After exhausting the entertainment value of the advertisements on the wall, Edward decided to start some small talk with the stranger.

“Hello there! You from this town? One of the locals?”

The stranger snapped his head towards the sound of his voice. The old man appeared to look right past Edward. Or at least Edward assumed he was. He couldn’t tell where the old man was looking with those ridiculous sunglasses.

“Aye, an American boy speaks a greeting. Hello. I am the audio tourist.”

“Wow! How’d you know I was American?” asked Edward.

“I travel this world collecting sound. I have spent many years in America collecting the sounds and voices of the country. I recognize your voice as that of a student of privilege.”

“Hah! Close, but I go to Ohio State, not Privilege.”

The audio tourist looked confused. He cleared his throat.

“Regardless, young American, my travels have taken me to Italy, where I am continuing to collect the sounds of the world.”

“Why don’t you just take pictures?” asked Edward.

There was an uncomfortable pause.

“...Seriously?”

“Yes?” Edward responded, not sure what to say.

“I’m... blind. You can tell that, right?”

“Oooooh!” laughed Edward. “That’s why you have the glasses. I thought you were just high.”

The doors locked and the lift lurched forward. The audio tourist turned his attention away from Edward and busied himself with his recorder. The lift went much, much slower than Edward expected, but he assumed that was because it was going uphill. Things always went slower going uphill. It probably went crazy fast going back down.

As they cleared the station, daylight flooded the lift and Edward looked at the surrounding countryside. Little farms dotted the landscape, and a narrow highway streaked across the valley alongside the tracks of the train that had brought Edward here from Termini.

“Wow, look at this view!” cried Edward as he fished around his bag for a camera he had long ago.

Then, realizing what he had said, Edward looked over to the audio tourist.

“Oh, sorry... I didn’t mean... uh... the view’s not that great. You’re not missing anything, really.” There was an uncomfortable pause. “I can describe it to you if you would like.”

The audio tourist shook his head and returned his attention to the buttons on his audiocassette recorder. Edward sat quietly as the lift lurched towards its destination at the top of the hill and finally came to a stop. The doors opened and Edward stepped out of the metal box and into the town.

Like many a tourist before him, Edward immediately found himself wandering the park that surrounded the upper lift station. A series of turrets and walls capped the western face of Orvieto, and all thoughts of the unexpectedly surly blind man were banished from his mind as he soaked up the sights. Wisps of white dotted the bright blue sky, and the view stretched out for miles to the distant east. He found himself wishing that he had not lost his camera, but the past could not be undone, and he wasn’t the type to dwell upon it. Besides he always had his phone.

However, as Edward reached into his pockets to dig it out, he realized that the phone was now missing as well. The train seat. He remembered putting it on the train seat as he dozed off. He must’ve forgotten to put it back in his pocket when he left. He pulled out his wallet, passport, and train ticket from his backpack, and breathed a sigh of relief. He still had those. It was just a phone, he thought to himself, and besides, these views simply cannot be captured properly on camera. They must be *experienced*. He was content.

He tucked his wallet, passport, and train ticket into his back pocket and then spent the next hour happily wandering the ramparts pretending he was a knight from a fantasy television show he was fond of. There was almost nobody around. Growing thirsty, he sat down on a bench to take a sip of water from his canteen. And that’s when he saw her.

Riding by on a sidewalk that crossed from the ramparts to the park was a thief come to steal Edward’s heart away. The young woman wore a long, billowing skirt and a sleeveless white

top that revealed her skinny arms. She had shoulder-length black hair that perfectly framed a round face with a button nose, and eyes that were deep and intense. On the back of her bike was a small Italian flag waving in the air as she rode past. Even as Edward openly stared after her, his mouth agape, the woman took no notice of him. As fast as she came, she disappeared down the path and into the town. It all happened in less than the span of three seconds.

If Edward had a bike, a car, a horse, anything really, he would have followed. He considered running. Instead he just blinked slowly, as stunned as if he had just seen a vision of Italy herself on a bike riding past.

A joyous new sense of purpose arose within him. He *would* find that woman in the town. It was love. It had to be. All thoughts of castles flew from his mind. He may have arrived as merely a tourist, but now he was a man on a quest. Edward found the main avenue that ran through the center of town and followed it.

The road, like most roads in Orvieto, led to a square in the center of town. Dominating this square was a massive Catholic church that looked to Edward like some sort of architectural zebra with stripes of gray and black running horizontally across the whole structure. The locals simply called it the Duomo, and they insisted that it was worthy of the Vatican itself. The front of this church was covered in gold carvings and ornate paintings of saints and sinners, and was all generally incomprehensible to the young American. However, the beauty and majesty of the Holy Roman Church had nothing on the beauty and majesty of the mysterious woman on the bike, and thus Edward remained focused on his newfound quest.

He strode right into the center of the square and looked around. The square was wide and open, and Edward felt very close to the sky above. All along the edge of the square were cafes, closed restaurants, shops, and a tourist center. Beyond a smattering of tourists and a few locals, there were few people there. On one bench sat an old man wearing a black turtleneck staring up at the clouds. Striding past him was an elderly woman that looked as severe as a doctor announcing a death. Near the church, the audio tourist stood holding up a mic to the front door. A few bikes were tethered in front of these businesses, but none that had a small Italian flag attached to the back, none that were the bike of his angel.

Edward stood for a good five minutes scanning his surroundings, then lost himself in his own mind. It was a sight that the locals were quite used to: a tourist staring at buildings without a hint of self-awareness. The elderly man in the turtleneck was particularly fond of this expression.

When the American student returned to the present, with a new plan fully formed in his head, the man in the turtleneck was no longer sitting in the square, and the wallet, passport, and train ticket were no longer in Edward's back pocket.

Edward, unaware of their disappearance, marched over to the tourist center and entered. Inside, a peppy, well-dressed woman with white hair manned a booth. All around the counter were pamphlets advertising places of interest in the town in multiple languages. The rest of the room held a smattering wooden chairs and yellowing posters. The only other occupant was somebody in a heavy trench coat sitting in one of the wooden chairs, her face hidden behind a large newspaper.

"*Buon giorno*, what I can help you with young man?" asked the woman behind the counter.

Edward smiled at her. "How'd you know I speak English?"

"Because you're American."

Edward slapped his hand on the counter. "I *am* American! You Europeans are really good at telling that. Everywhere I've been, people always knew I was American before I even told them."

The woman stifled an urge to roll her eyes.

"Are you interested in visiting the caves?"

"I was actually wondering if you could help me find somebody? You live here, right?"

"Si."

"See what?"

"Yes. Yes, I do," said the woman.

"Okay. I'm looking for a beautiful young lady who was riding a bike. She had black hair."

The woman waited for Edward to elaborate. He did not.

"...Anything else? You know her name?"

"No, no, I don't. I just saw her ride by a few minutes ago and I am in love with her."

The woman squinted her eyes trying to read the face of this American boy. Was he somehow making fun of her? Was this some kind of game? She decided she had had enough of his nonsense, cleared her throat, and started opening up some brochures sitting nearby.

“I highly recommend the caves, and the pozzo, I mean, how you Americans say, Pope’s Well if you haven’t already...”

“Wait a second!” cried out Edward, startling the woman at the counter. He patted at his back pockets, his side pockets, and then swung around his backpack and began to dig around inside desperately. “My train ticket... my wallet... my passport... it’s all gone!”

The woman in the trench coat who was sitting in one of the chairs lowered her newspaper and watched as Edward dug through his backpack, throwing shirts, toothbrushes, books and other debris all over the floor.

“Oh no, oh no, oh no...” he muttered.

This sudden unpacking did not amuse the woman standing behind the counter with her arms crossed. “Please, *no*, sir, can you do that out of doors?”

Edward looked up at her. “Oh, uh, sure. Sorry. So you don’t know where the girl I’m looking for is?”

“No.”

“Uh... okay... thanks anyway! Er... Bonjour!”

Edward shoved his stuff back into his bag, stood, and left. The woman in the trench coat quickly folded up her newspaper and followed.

The American student stepped back into the square and pulled at his hair in the manner he often did whenever he found himself subject to stress. He took a deep breath. Taking inventory with himself, he realized it wasn’t the wallet, passport, train ticket, or even his phone that had him worried. It was the *girl*. He knew that he needed to find the girl. Once he had her, everything else wouldn’t even matter. He might never have to even leave this town. The sun was directly up above. He had hours of daylight left. He would walk every street of this town until he found his love.

A voice brought him out of his thoughts.

“Hey. You lost something?”

Edward spun around to find a young woman, a bit older than himself perhaps, wearing a large tan trench coat and a wide brimmed hat. She had long, curly red hair that spilled down her back and serious light-green eyes. For a moment, Edward was reminded of a children’s television character that was often lost somewhere in the world, but he couldn’t think of the name.

“Uh... yes, I think I lost my wallet, passport, and train ticket. It was just in the back of my pocket, and after I walked inside that place, it was gone.”

The woman in the trench coat grunted. Edward noticed the newspaper under her arm.

“Hey! You were the person with the newspaper inside the place I just walked out of!”

“Got a real Poirot on our hands don’t we? Yes, I overheard you inside the tourist center.”

She extended her hand. “My name is Helen Harvard Hump. I am a freelance private investigator.”

Edward shook her hand. “I’m Edward Mollendale. I’m an American.”

“Yes, I know,” said Helen.

“Everybody does! You don’t sound Italian. Are you Hollan-ese?”

“Are you asking if I’m from Holland? Do you know what that accent sounds like?”

“Yours?”

Helen sighed. “I’m from *London*. England, yes. Now, my fee...”

Edward’s face suddenly lit up. “Wait! So if you’re a private investigator... can you find that girl I’m looking for?”

“My specialty is lost items, not missing persons,” replied Helen seriously.

“Oh, okay.” Edward was visibly disappointed. “I guess I’ll need my stuff if I decide to leave. Sure, go ahead and find it if you want.”

“Great, as I said before, my fee is...”

Edward’s mind was already elsewhere as he rescanned the square for the girl who biked away with his heart. “There’s five hundred bucks in my wallet, you can have that if you find it.”

Helen remained composed and forced down a smile.

“Well... that should do... very nicely. I will get on the case immediately.”

“Sure, you do that...” Edward started walking towards a nearby alley.

Helen called after him.

“How should I contact you when I apprehend your stolen goods?”

“Ah, just find me, I’ll be around.”

Helen watched Edward wander into a narrow alley and disappear.

It was official. She had her first case. When she was sure nobody was looking, she allowed herself a great fist pump into the air.

II

Some people are blessed with a clear purpose for their time on this Earth, and Helen was one of these people. From the very first moments of her existence, Helen solved mysteries. When her parents tried playing peekaboo when she was an infant, she quickly deduced that they were hiding behind hands, a cheap trick at best. When somebody stole her doll from her backyard, she hunted the perpetrator down to his treehouse and attempted a citizen's arrest. As soon as she was finished with secondary school, she embarked on an apprenticeship with one of the Continent's best private investigators, Samwell Stockholm Steadman.

Samwell Stockholm Steadman was famous throughout the world for his impeccable record in hunting down stolen Nazi art. He was a bald, stringy old man with enormous energy and an exceedingly prickly demeanor. He could speak sixteen languages and could swear in eighteen. He didn't like women, but he didn't like men either, and animals were the worst. He traveled only by boat and train and was highly distrustful of any technology that emerged after WWII. Even in the warmest climates, he strode around with a large hat and a deep black trench coat. He was everything his adoring apprentice Helen aspired to be.

It was only one week prior to Edward's arrival in Orvieto that Helen herself came to the town. She had been riding the train from Roma with Samwell Stockholm Steadman, both of them sitting across from each other in silence, watching the countryside go by. As the train began to break for the Orvieto station, Samwell Stockholm Steadman turned to his apprentice.

"You have learned enough. Your apprenticeship is over. Get off at this station."

Helen stared back at him, dumbstruck.

"What... here?"

"Yes."

Helen could just make out the sign on the station they were pulling into.

"Orvieto?"

"Yes."

"But... I don't have any money... my parents live in London..."

"Too bad. Good day."

With that, Samwell Stockholm Steadman crossed his legs and turned his attention back out to the lush Italian countryside. Helen, not wanting to defy her master, gathered her bags and

fought the urge to question him. Questioning Samwell Stockholm Steadman was strictly forbidden. As the train stopped, she fought back tears as she turned to leave.

“Uh... goodbye.”

Samwell Stockholm Steadman did not look away from the window. “I will see you again, Helen Harvard Hump. Perhaps.”

Not wanting to break down in tears in front of her idol, Helen quickly disembarked from the train. She watched it as it pulled away, feeling as if she was in some sort of bad dream. But she wasn't. There was clear sensory evidence that she was very much awake, and also that she was not on the train.

Helen had exactly six US dollars, ten British pounds, and thirty-seven Euros in her wallet. In her bag that she kept stowed away inside her trench coat, she had three days worth of clothes, one toothbrush, six bones of South American ferret, an evil eye talisman, a Greek bible, a pamphlet on palm reading, and a set of keys.

It was an inauspicious start, but she knew she needed to start work on a case soon if she was going to make her way back to the Kingdom. The native population of Orvieto didn't seem too interested in the services of an amateur freelance investigator, and as a result, Helen's first week got off to a rocky start. It was during this week she realized the true benefit of a heavy trench coat. It provided her ample warmth when she slept in a corner of the park during the cool late summer nights.

It was this lack of work that led her to spending her days flipping through a paper in the tourist center, hoping somebody from out of town would drop in and find themselves in need of her services. She had been there for three afternoons when the American boy had stumbled in. Not only did Edward the American provide her with her first case, but the bounty was more than enough to get her home. After a rather discouraging week, events were finally turning to Helen Harvard Hump's advantage.

After she allowed herself a personal moment of triumph and Edward had fully vacated the square, she sat down on a bench to review her clues.

The American had lost his wallet, train ticket, and passport. These items were located in his back pocket upon arrival in the town. Upon entering the tourist center, the items were gone. This meant that the items had to have disappeared in the town somewhere... that is, if he was telling the truth. If these items had gone missing, that meant they had to either have been

dropped or stolen. The American seemed clumsy. It was not out of the question that he might have accidentally discarded the items. However, she had no evidence supporting this theory beyond personal judgments she had made. The other theory Helen had to consider was that of a theft of the goods from Edward's pocket. This theory was supported by evidence such as the fact that Helen had watched the old man in the black turtleneck take the items out of Edward's pocket as he walked into the tourist center.

Having carefully considered her case and the corresponding evidence, Helen Harvard Hump was fairly confident that the elderly man in the black turtleneck was currently in possession of Edward's lost wallet, passport, and train ticket.

The elderly man in the black turtleneck was sitting on the same bench that he had been sitting on when Edward first entered the square. In fact, this man was almost as permanent a fixture of the square as the bench he sat on, having spent nearly his whole life in Orvieto. He was nothing more than a curiosity to those who passed through the town, and nothing more than a bother to those who lived there.

Helen got up from her bench, walked across the square under the glare of the giant zebra-striped cathedral, and sat down on the bench that the man in the black turtleneck occupied. He took no notice of her, and continued to stare straight ahead. They both sat in silence for a few minutes, the man enjoying the lazy bustle of the square, Helen wondering how to start.

She cleared her throat.

"Uh... hello there sir, nice weather we're having, yes?"

"You're here for the wallet, aren't you?" said the man, still looking ahead.

She was taken aback.

"...Yes... how'd you..."

"Louis Valsance at your service."

The man named Louis extended his hand. Helen took it and noted his accent. French. She filed it away as potentially important information.

"I'm Helen Harvard Hump. I'm here to speak to you about a security matter. I have reason to believe that you might know something about the recent disappearance of a young American's wallet, passport and train ticket."

Louis nodded. "Yes. I would know of such a matter. I took those items out of his pocket as he walked by."

Once again, this was not how Helen anticipated this exchange would go.

“So... can you give them back to me?”

“No.”

“Please?”

“No.”

Helen stood up and put her hands on her hips. “You stole those items, you have to give them back!”

“I might give them back to the young American if *he* asked, but I don’t know who you are. You might just be another pickpocket for all I know.”

Helen was starting to get flustered. It was an aspect of her personality that her former master frequently criticized her for.

“I am not a pickpocket, or a thief, or whatever! I am a woman of the *law*! I am a private investigator! And I’m commanding you to give me the American’s wallet or I will have to arrest you!”

Louis laughed heartily.

“Oh, you’re too much young lady. Simply too much.”

Nobody laughed at Helen Harvard Hump and walked away from it. Growing up saddled with the last name Hump meant a lot of jokes on the playground, and it also meant that she had doled out more than her fair share of bloody noses.

“Okay, *now* you’re going to jail! I am arresting you! You are now under arrest!”

During training, Helen had been told that in moments of great uncertainty and confusion, it was best to be absolutely clear.

Helen fished out some old handcuffs from deep inside her trench coat.

“And stop smiling about it!” she barked.

Louis did not comply with the order to cease smiling, but gamely offered up his wrists so she could place the shackles upon them. Once Helen had them secure, he looked up at her.

“Alright, where to now detective?”

Helen had not thought ahead this far, and for a second she looked at the elderly pickpocket with nothing but a blank expression. She snapped out of it and hauled Louis to his feet.

“We’re going to the police station!”

Helen directed them towards the main road going east from the square, hoping desperately that the police station was in this general direction. In fact, for all of Helen's wandering around the town the past week, she had yet to scope out the location of the appropriate authorities. It was an oversight she was sure her former master Samwell Stockholm Steadman would not have made.

Walking down the road, Helen hailed a woman pushing a baby stroller. Helen leaned in close to the woman and spoke in a low voice, hoping Louis couldn't hear.

"You know where the police station is?"

"*Cosa?*" responded the woman.

Helen raised her voice a hair. "Where is the police station?"

Louis looked on, smiling impishly.

The woman leaned closer to Helen.

"*Cosa?* What you say?"

Helen sighed and spoke at full volume.

"The police station, where is the police station?"

"Ah, *police* station. Down the street, on Via Pianzola. But it is not truly police station. It is just mayor's office."

Helen thanked the woman and pulled the snickering pickpocket along by his arm. After a few minutes of walking, they arrived at the proper place without further incident. Helen Harvard Hump had successfully made her very first arrest.

III

The mayor of Orvieto was a portly man with short, greasy black hair. God had seen it fit to give him the name Davide Meta-Legge, and he could often be found happily waddling through his small kingdom, proudly observing all he ruled.

He came from a long line of bureaucrats that stretched back into the foggy ages when Italy was no more than a collection of warring city-states. Somewhere in this past, there was a warrior Pope with a Meta-Legge who wrote his letters. Somewhere else in time, there was a king who put a Meta-Legge in charge of his keep. Somewhere more recently in history, there was a Meta-Legge who spoke for the Duce until it became prudent to support the cause of the Allies.

Law and order was in Davide Meta-Legge's blood. The nature of the rules themselves did not concern him, only their enforcement. He and his ancestors believed the very existence of rules, and the consequences for flouting them, were what held society together.

Davide Meta-Legge held a precise morning routine that he followed every day. He woke at 7 a.m., drank two glasses of water, used the toilet, bathed, arrived at the cafe outside the main hall at 8 a.m., drank a single cafe while reading the front page of the paper (and the front page only), and then arrived at his office promptly at 9 a.m. He went to work every day, including weekends, including holidays, including even deaths and births in the family, for the government does not rest, nor do its loyal agents.

Davide Meta-Legge began the day by shuffling through his messages, then carefully sorting them into piles on his desk. This task, proving taxing, required Davide to take a nap from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., during which his secretary made sure nobody bothered him. Waking from his nap, the mayor took his pre-lunch walk to get the blood flowing once more in his legs. This walk would invariably require him to speak to any citizen he passed on the road, which extended what was typically a ten minute walk to one that lasted well until 2 p.m.

It was during one of these walks that Davide encountered a distracted American who nearly got himself run down by car. After pulling the young man out of danger's way (Davide Meta-Legge wished that a voting citizen had seen charitable act, but alas), he asked what the young man was looking for. A strange conversation followed as the American student blathered incoherently about a woman on a bike, and Davide let the man continue on his way. He reflected that, sadly, a town could not pick the tourists that visited it.

As Davide Meta-Legge went on his way, he patted the large book that he carried with him. This ponderous, ancient tome was called the Orvieto Bible, and it was as old as the Church itself. The care of the Orvieto Bible fell to the mayor of the town, and Davide wielded it like a scepter granting him the ultimate authority of government and rule.

In the Orvieto Bible, the tales of the Testaments themselves were written in Latin, with ornate gold, blue and red drawings of the saints adorning every page. It was created in the days when books such as this were painstakingly written and drawn by monks living in isolation for the religious elite. It was an object that in most parts of the civilized world would be locked in a museum somewhere rather than carried around by a government official. But carried it was, as the mayor was bound to the great book by a gold chain that was sewn into the thick cover and powerful binding. It was the way the great Christian holy warriors of lore would carry a Bible into battle, and it was the way Davide Meta-Legge proudly bore his burden throughout town.

Besides the vanity of office, there was a political reason every mayor of Orvieto carried this book with him. Once, many hundreds of years prior to Davide's term, Orvieto was isolated in the countryside and surrounded by enemies. A cursed pope shivered inside the walls and communication between the great city-states was lost as the empire descended into chaos. In this disorder, one noble cardinal stood up and took command of Orvieto and appointed himself mayor and protector of the town. He fortified the walls, dug a well, and created the law. Paper was scarce, so he recorded these rules in the margins of his personal bible. This bible was passed down to the next mayor, and then to the next, and then to the next, and on and on for hundreds of years. Little by little, the margins of the bible filled with laws, court decisions, and precedents. As greater Italy was shaken through countless changes of government, Orvieto held fast to its own laws and traditions, all recorded safely inside of the good cardinal's Holy Latin Bible.

Needless to say, the Orvieto Bible, as it came to be known by the town, was a great source of pride for Davide Meta-Legge. Even though he often complained of its weight, he loved it more than any person he ever met. Through it he felt himself connected to the town itself, and all its history and magnificence. He was musing great thoughts of history as he stroked the book and walked down the street when a young woman and a very old man stepped into his path.

"Are you the mayor of Orvieto?" asked the young woman.

"Why, yes, I am," he bowed graciously. Tourists loved it when he bowed. "Davide Meta-Legge at your service. What can I do for you?"

“I am Helen Harvard Hump, private investigator, and I have apprehended a thief,” said the woman. “I... uh, went to the police station which turned out just to be the city hall and nobody was there. Your secretary told me to find you.”

Davide shifted his attention to the old man standing next to her in handcuffs. He recognized him immediately.

“Louis! What have you done this time?” groaned the mayor in Italian.

Louis smiled. “Oh you know, a little of this, a little of that.”

“He stole a wallet, passport, and train ticket!” cried Helen, not sure what the mayor and Louis were saying in a language she didn’t know.

“Is that so?” grumbled Davide, once more speaking in English. “Well, bring him down to the hall, and we’ll figure out what happened and what to do about it, all in the manner of the civilized beings we are.”

The trio briskly walked down the street and into the city hall. Orvieto’s center of local government was an ancient church, but one that was hopelessly outclassed by the medieval zebra-striped monstrosity in the town square. As such, it was relegated to serving the secular bureaucracy rather than tourists. It was a stone structure colored dirty brown by age and made a small impression on the skyline with a tiny dome. The slit windows let in little sunlight, and inside it was damp, dark and musky, not unlike the tunnels and caves that filled the ground below.

The mayor led them in and seated himself at his desk. The detective and the pickpocket sat themselves in the guest chairs on the other side. The secretary was the only other person in the place, and she sat quietly by the entrance at her own small desk, shuffling her own small papers.

Helen looked around. “Is there... a holding cell here?”

“If I have an unruly drunk, I usually just stick him in the janitor’s closet to cool off. Haven’t needed anything else as long as I can remember,” said Davide. Suddenly the mayor’s head jerked to Louis. “Hey! What are you doing?”

Helen turned her head to find the Frenchman holding a fountain pen.

“Put that down!” commanded the mayor.

“I simply was taking a closer look,” said Louis, smiling.

“Yeah, sure, said the mayor, snatching the pen back. “Look, Louis, just give back whatever you stole, and we can be done with this.”

“Perhaps if the man who is supposedly missing these items steps forward, I may be able to reunite him with his goods. However, I have no plans on giving this strange British woman anything.”

Helen stood up. “Can’t we just empty his pockets?”

Davide waved his hands at her until she sat.

“Look, I don’t know who you are, but there are *rules* here in Orvieto. You think this man has done something wrong? Then you have charge him with a crime and the town will hold a trial based on the rules. Our rules.”

To emphasize his point, the mayor dropped the Orvieto Bible on the table.

“Then I wish to take this man to trial!” Helen slammed her fist on the table with such force that she immediately wondered if she had broken her hand.

As she fought back pain-induced tears, she added, “...please?”

IV

Nobody in Orvieto was quite sure how or why Louis Valsance came to the town, but the remaining old timers could still remember the when. The Frenchman showed up shortly after World War II, when most of Italy was scraping up the pieces of the country that had been stomped over first by the boots of local fascists, then German fascists, and then finally the anti-fascists. The only tourists those days were families fleeing for more enlightened nations, Allied soldiers, and other people who weren't quite in the right place yet.

In this flux, Louis showed up, still a young man. He had no money and he had no home, but he never seemed to want for anything. His accent made his French ancestry clear, and it was rumored that he was a deserter from a Vichy France battalion stationed in North Africa. He wore an immaculate black pencil mustache and sported a black turtleneck and tight black pants. Many assumed he was a poet, but they never read any of his poetry, and others assumed he was a musician, but they never saw him play. He had a quick smile, and a sly look that charmed his way between many a young woman's sheets before she went on to find a more respectable man. This man spent most of his day sitting on a bench in the square outside the cathedral that was the town's main attraction. In this square, many a visitor, but never a local, would later find a wallet missing from a purse or pocket.

This man claimed his name was Louis Valsance, but he was known to slip up and introduce himself as Mathias on rare occasions when he partook in drink. Over the decades, he became a fixture of the town, a part of the landscape that was generally ignored unless it got in the way. The locals never developed any love for the man. They knew he was a pickpocket, and besides, he was French, which was one sin too many for their tastes. Occasionally, a tourist would catch him in the act, and he would be hauled in front of the mayor. In accordance with the law of the town, he was let go with a literal slap on the wrist. As long as it wasn't a local, petty theft carried a very light sentence in the Law of the Margins in the Orvieto Bible.

Louis kept careful track of the comings and goings of those who lived in and visited Orvieto. Everybody passed through the central square, regardless of where they were from. For the locals, it was an intersection to pass through, perhaps a place to meet somebody, maybe even work for a spell. For the tourists, it was the destination, the home of the majestic zebra-striped Duomo, the whole reason they got off the train at Orvieto station.

When Louis saw Helen Harvard Hump arrive in the square for the first time, trying to hide her tears from those around her, Louis thought he had seen a ghost. She was nearly identical to a woman who he knew very long ago, a woman who had once called him Mathias. When Helen Harvard Hump, freelance private investigator, had sat down on the bench next to him, he decided that he would spend as much time with her as he could before she left. Within a few short hours, he was literally handcuffed to her. Which was just fine by him.

Hauled in front of the mayor yet again, Louis watched with keen interest as Helen demanded a trial. There was something in her eyes, a spark or glint that seemed so familiar. It haunted him. It was as if the past was looking through her eyes at him. And she didn't even know it.

While all of this was happening, an American student who had no business wandering the cliffs on the north side of Orvieto was busy wandering the cliffs on the north side of Orvieto. He stood on an outcrop that had once been a terrace of sorts, but had long been reclaimed by trees and bushes. He was not impressed with the sloppy landscaping habits of the Italians.

From this perch, Edward could see vast swaths of the countryside below, as well as a meandering path that snaked down the side of the cliff. Parts of the path consisted of wood platforms and other parts were carefully cut into the stone. It led from the very spot that Edward stood all the way down to the valley far below, but it was a long, indirect path that would take a full day to explore. Two elderly Orvietians were pushing a stroller along a section of path. Past them, there was a woman on a bike lazily cruising towards the valley.

A woman on a bike.

The woman on the bike.

The bike with a tiny Italian flag attached to the back. It was her. It *had* to be her. He couldn't actually see her face from so high up, but he knew. He briefly considered leaping right over the ledge, but he decided that falling to his death in front of her was probably not the most romantic gesture at this point in their relationship. Edward instead tore down the path at full sprint, kicking up clouds of dust behind him as he stumbled forward. As soon as he left the outcrop, he lost sight of her, but he knew she'd be down there waiting for him. At least, he had told her to do so by screaming at the top of his lungs.

Edward's continuous screaming was drowned out by the tolling of great, ancient bells. Across town at that moment, the audio tourist happened to be standing just outside the bell tower. He had been recording the quiet patter of a caterpillar stepping carefully across the cobblestones, and the sudden clanging nearly blew out his eardrums.

The tolling of the bells was a sound familiar to Orvieto, and even children three hundred years prior to this story would have been able to tell you what it meant. A trial was being called for, and somebody would be facing justice that day before the Bible of Orvieto. It took several hours for the trial to convene once the bells quieted down and the ringing ceased in the audio tourist's ears. During this time, the sunny morning morphed into a cloudy afternoon. If Edward had looked up during his marathon sprint to the bottom of the cliffs, he would have noticed an army of stout, powerful clouds moving in from the horizon. A quiet electricity began to fill the

air, and the light took on an increasingly yellow tint. A storm was arriving, and everybody in the town could feel it in the animal part of their brain.

Trials in Orvieto were conducted by a panel of town elders led by the mayor himself acting as judge. The elders heard the case, heard the applicable laws as read by the mayor, and then handed down a sentence. Most trials in Orvieto were actually mediations to settle personal disputes such as divorces, questions of land, and which local farmer could claim the most succulent grape. The process was always the same, the same as it had been for many hundreds of years, ever since one good cardinal had the sense to bring some order to this corner of civilization.

The elders were a panel of landowners that came from ancient families that had resided in Orvieto as long as a town had existed. They were all old, serious men who spoke a particularly harsh and loud version of Italian, and when called for, they could speak Latin as well. These were men who were medieval at heart, lords of their land, and carried with them a humorless air of ancient wisdom that wasn't always all that wise.

The court itself occupied the old chapel portion of the town hall. This section was separate from the mayor's office, and took up the vast majority of the interior space in the building. The chapel was largely unchanged from its days as a church, with worn wooden benches filling the room and the walls covered with oil frescoes slowly fading to black. In front, facing the pews, was a set of tables where the elders could sit, with the mayor in the center. The conflicting parties sat in the front pew on either side of the center aisle.

As the bells rang and Edward raced down the north side of Orvieto, he was blissfully unaware that this particular trial required his presence. However, he was very aware that he had reached the bottom of the trail only to find no sign of the woman on the bike. Had she left Orvieto all together? If so, where would she have gone? It was all just so hopeless.

Edward collapsed onto a bench and it began to rain. Soaked and cold, he realized that he had neglected to eat anything since the previous day, and his stomach was howling in protest. He sat in the rain feeling sorry for himself, also feeling impressed with how sorry he felt for himself, and also wondering if there was a poem in any of this. A little messenger boy rode up on a red bicycle as Edward was lost in his thoughts.

“Sir! Are you Mister Americano Edward?” he cried.

“How'd you know I was American?”

The little boy stepped off his bike and handed Edward a soaking wet piece of paper. “You are summoned to a session of court in the town hall immediately!”

Edward looked at the paper, which now resembled a watercolor painting more than a letter, and looked back at the boy. “What for?”

The little boy shrugged.

“I guess I have nothing better to do. Maybe she’ll be there...”

“Do you have a bike Mister Americano?” asked the boy, looking around.

“No, I just ran down here.”

“Why?”

Edward stood up and patted the kid on the head.

“Someday when you’re older you will understand.”

The boy gave Edward a strange look and got back on his bike.

“Follow me to the town hall, Mister Run Americano.”

Edward was not somebody who considered himself an athlete, so when the boy kept a brisk pace as they went up the hill, Edward struggled to follow at a jog. The rain intensified and Edward slipped and fell in the wet gravel.

Whenever he did, the boy would look back and cry out, “Come, Mister Run Americano! The trial is started!”

Edward grumbled curses under his breath and they continued this way all the way to the town hall, where he promptly collapsed at the front door. Helen did her best to clean him up and feed him before the trial began as Edward asked anyone within earshot if they had seen the girl of his dreams. They all shook their heads no, and more than one wondered if he was drunk.

Thus, the members of our tale filed into the chapel-now-courtroom and took their spots. Louis sat by himself on one side, Helen and a still-wet Edward on the other. The elders, with the mayor in the center, sat up in front, looking them over.

Edward leaned over to Helen and whispered, “What are we on trial for?”

“We’re not on trial, *he* is.” She pointed to Louis, who was lying down on his pew, whistling contentedly.

“What’s he on trial for?”

“Stealing your wallet, passport, and train ticket.”

“Oh! Really? You didn’t find that stuff already?” asked Edward.

“I *did* find the items, but he has them. We can’t get them until he’s found guilty.”

“Huh. Well... good job, I guess,” said Edward.

The audio tourist was the last to arrive before they closed the doors, and he settled down towards the back, picking away at his audiocassette recorder. With everybody seated in their places, the mayor picked up an ornate gavel and pounded. The judges, contestants, and small smattering of locals all quickly hushed. Davide Meta-Legge cleared his throat and began speaking. Helen briefly felt disoriented and realized then that she couldn’t understand a word he was saying.

She leaned in to Edward and whispered, “Do you know what language he’s speaking in?”

“Definitely Latin.”

Helen had not actually expected an answer.

“...Really? How do you know?”

“My parents made me study it for years. They said it would help me learn other languages, but I ended up only learning Latin. Strangely enough, I still haven’t yet encountered a single country where everybody actually speaks it. I mean, I know they speak it in Latin America, but I still haven’t been there. It’s strange, I thought Latin came from Europe?”

The mayor stopped speaking, and now one of the town elders was saying something in a deep, gravelly voice.

“Can you translate for me?” asked Helen.

Edward did as best he could, only getting a few major meanings completely wrong. For the reader’s sake, we shall use a translated account of the trial, as written and provided by the mayor’s secretary.

“We’re here to hear the facts and judge the case of Louis Valsance, who stands accused by Harvard Helen Hump of stealing Edward...” the mayor looked around. “Do we have a last name?” His secretary nodded no. “Oh, okay. In that case... Edward the American’s wallet, passport, and train ticket.”

“May God lead us to judge wisely,” the elders said in unison.

“Now, Helen Harvard Hump, you claim that you saw this man, Louis Valsance, steal the this man’s wallet, passport, and train ticket,” said the mayor.

It took Edward a minute to translate, and then Helen replied in English, “Yes.”

The mayor turned to Edward. “Your wallet, passport, and train ticket were indeed stolen, correct?”

“Yes,” Edward replied in Latin.

Davide Meta-Legge turned to Louis, who looked half asleep. “Louis Valsance, did you take this man’s wallet, passport, and train ticket?”

“Oh, most certainly,” Louis said in English. He rummaged through his pocket and held up the stolen items. It took Helen every bit of willpower she could muster to not leap over the pews and snatch them from his hands.

The mayor proceeded. “The defendant has pleaded guilty. Now, we consult the Holy Bible of Orvieto for guidance.”

“Praise God in Heaven,” said the elders in unison.

With a great thump, Davide set the ancient bible on the podium in front of him and flipped it open. After a half-hour of shuffling through pages, reading a bit, turning back a few more, checking something, then flipping through some more, the mayor finally found the bit of text he was looking for written in the margins of Exodus.

“We have on record that Louis Valsance has been found guilty of pickpocketing foreigners a total of sixty-six times during his stay in the town of Orvieto.”

The elders nodded in unison. “You say true in the eyes of God.”

Another half hour of flipping through the bible followed.

“The penalty for pickpocketing shall be a fine...” Davide’s finger found the passage he was looking for and read, “...until the sixty-sixth time that one is convicted of the pickpocketing. Upon the sixty-sixth offense, the criminal is to be thrown off the northern cliffs.”

“As God wills,” said the elders.

Louis rolled his eyes.

It took a moment for Edward to translate the sentence to Helen. To make sure she heard Edward correctly, she made him repeat himself three times. After Edward assured her he had heard correctly, Helen leapt to her feet.

“Did we hear that right? Is he going to be executed for pickpocketing?”

The mayor, startled, responded to Helen in English. “That is the rule of Orvieto law.”

“To *kill* him? For a minor crime?”

“Not kill him. Simply throw him off of the cliff,” said the mayor. “Which historically results in death.”

“I just want him to give back the wallet, passport, and train ticket!”

“You will be allowed to retrieve the items from the pockets of his corpse at the bottom of the cliffs,” explained Davide patiently.

“What?” Helen was now screaming. “What kind of law is this? That’s not fair! The punishment doesn’t fit the crime!”

“You brought him in and asked for the law of Orvieto to judge him!” responded the mayor heatedly, tapping the bible. “Law *is* justice, and it does not matter if you like it or not! You do not get to pick when the rules apply to you!”

Helen marched up to the mayor’s seat. “What about Italian law? Surely, we can appeal...”

The mayor stood up this time, and he roared.

“No! Orvieto has always, *always* obeyed its own set of laws! As long as the mayor carries this sacred bible, it shall always be that way, and it shall never revert to any of the chaotic laws of the so-called country of Italy!”

“God be praised,” chanted the elders.

“This isn’t right! I take it back, he never stole anything...”

Davide Meta-Legge, the mayor of Orvieto, and presiding judge, slammed the gavel down.

“This case is concluded and justice has been served. The sentence shall be carried out the day after tomorrow at sundown.”

The audio tourist considered the groan that Helen Harvard Hump emitted following this sentence one of the finest ever captured on tape.

VI

The mayor was incorrect when he had previously informed Helen Harvard Hump that Orvieto did not have a jail. Orvieto did, in fact, have a small cell, a very good one at that. It was built deep within the underground tunnels that coursed through the earth below the town like one giant anthill.

Orvieto, having been settled at the very dawn of human society and enduring more than its fair share of invasions, sieges, and attacks, was militarized right down to its very foundation. The great hill it sat upon was over three hundred meters above the valley below, and great walls were built on every side to raise it further. At the base of the surrounding cliffs were wild flowers and grasses that carefully hid away jagged, impassable rock.

Even more important than these walls and the safety of the high ground was Orvieto's system of underground tunnels. The Etruscans were the first to discover a natural set of caves set into the surface, and quickly moved into them, covering the walls with primitive paintings. Later Roman civilizations tunneled deeper and farther, finding safety and water in the ground. During medieval times, a particularly unpopular pope in hiding went further and created the legendary Pozzo San Patrizio, a massive well that bore deep into the guts of the planet. This pope also oversaw the construction of several underground dungeons and cells for those who needed some time to get to know their gods on a more personal, less voluntary basis.

It was in one of these cells, helpfully provided by one of the elders from an ancient family of Orvieto, that Louis was stowed away in while he awaited execution of his sentence. It was a damp, dark place, lit by only a single yellow bulb that was decidedly not up for the task of illuminating three cells and the holding area outside them.

Visitors were not allowed down into this area of the caves primarily because they were a historical site, secondarily because there was a condemned prisoner interned inside them. At midnight, long after the city had gone to sleep, Helen slipped past the single guard posted at the entrance of the caves, sneaked through the section open to tourists, ducked and hid as the janitor passed by, found the employees only door that led to the lower caves, commandeered (stole) a flashlight, navigated the unmarked paths, and finally arrived at the holding area.

The holding area was a large medieval room with walls of sandstone blocks. Some rope and old detritus was scattered around the room, but other than the tired lightbulb halfheartedly

throwing out dim yellow light, the space was completely empty. Helen spotted Louis in the center cell of the three and rushed over.

Louis was lying on an old wood bench in the center of his cell, his hands behind his head and his legs crossed. He had an unlit cigarette that he was chewing absentmindedly as he watched water drip from cracks in the ceiling.

“Louis! Louis, it’s me!” whispered Helen.

“You don’t need to whisper, there isn’t anybody down here except for us and the rats,” replied Louis, still looking up at the lines.

Helen adjusted her voice. “Uh... I... I didn’t mean to... to... you know...”

“You can say it. *Kill* me. You want to apologize for killing me, right?”

The young detective blushed.

“This isn’t all my fault! You’re the one who stole in the first place!”

Louis turned his head towards Helen and smiled.

“But you turned me in and demanded a trial, and now, because of *your* actions, an old man is going to be tossed off of a cliff tomorrow evening. Just imagine it now... the satisfaction you’ll feel as my skull makes contact with the hard rocks below, crumpling together before the skin tears and my sinuses and teeth and brain are splattered across the...”

“Stop it, STOP!” Helen cried. She took a deep breath before continuing. “I’m here to help you.”

“Oh, thank the heavens, I’m saved!” said Louis in a thick sarcastic tone. He sat himself up with a grunt. “So what are we going to do now?”

“Uh...”

Helen gripped the bars and pulled. She looked around for a key but saw none.

Louis laughed. “Those bars have been around long before your great-grandmother ever walked this earth. Why do you think they didn’t even bother with a guard?”

“I’m going to get you out of here. You deserve to go to jail, but you *don’t* deserve to be executed!”

Louis rolled his eyes.

“The good judge knows all.”

Helen collapsed to the floor on the other side of the bars.

“I’m a private investigator. I found the wallet. That was my job. In a sane place, that’s all it had to be! This isn’t my fault! I just needed to make some money to get home, I never asked to be here!”

She punched the hard floor, a move she immediately regretted as the floor was quite unforgiving. She held her hand, trying to hold back the tears. The last thing she wanted to do was cry in front of this awful man.

Louis watched this young woman for a minute, and then cleared his throat.

“Once, I was your age, young lady. I know old people say this a lot, but they do because it is always true, and true in the way the young hardly understand. I don’t know what your story is, but you’re a stranger in a strange place, and often people in foreign lands tend to find themselves in these kinds of situations.

“You will take myself as an example. Once, very long ago, when I was a young man that went by the name of Mathias, I lived in a town south of Paris. I worked in my family’s vineyard and I had a fiancé named... well, it doesn’t matter what her name was, does it? Life was simple, fulfilling. But the demon that had haunted so many of my ancestors came for me. War. Violence, opposition, oppression. The Germans cut through France like butter, and even her army was captured and turned into a tool for the Nazis. I had just been drafted into the good Army of France when the country gave up, and suddenly, I found myself in the decidedly bad army of Vichy France.

“Helen, right now you are tasting the bitter fruit of one’s good actions turning against oneself. Serving Vichy France meant that no matter how good my intentions were, everything I did turned to evil. We told ourselves otherwise, that we were saving our families back home, but when we were shipped to Morocco there were no illusions. I was no better than a Kraut.

“I don’t hear much about it these days, thankfully, but when the Allies first invaded Africa to take back Europe, the first people they fought weren’t Japanese. They weren’t even Italians or German slaves. They were the French. They thought we would stand down, join them like the allies we were supposed to be and help drive the Germans back. But good intentions, honor, all that nonsense got in the way. And when the Americans and British boys landed on the shores, we fired. And we killed them. So they fired back, and they killed some of us.

“I was there, it was the first battle I had ever been in. Late at night they landed, the tide going all wrong and sending the landing ships all askew. I was in a hole with another man

operating a machine gun. He told me to imagine they were Germans, that it would be easier that way. And when the commander ordered us to open fire, that's just what we did. It was a massacre. Later, after the French reluctantly returned to the right side, I even got a medal for it. For killing our own allies. I threw it in the ocean.

"After all this, I couldn't return to France. I went AWOL from my unit before the war even ended and I made my way across Africa and eventually to Italy. I could understand Italians. They made a deal I understood, and their country was paying for it. In this chaos I traveled, and eventually I found this charming place and never left."

Louis took a deep breath and looked away. Helen looked at him.

"What happened to your fiancé?"

To her surprise, Louis laughed. "That's always the first question any woman I tell my story to asks me. She was fine. Probably better off. She inherited my family's whole damn estate, and after I was gone for seven years and declared officially dead, she married a wealthy and kind gentleman from the city. Found this out about ten years ago when her daughter had somehow found me and we exchanged letters."

Louis stood up.

"I don't tell a lot of people that story, but dying has a way of allowing one to blather about the past."

Helen stood up as well. "You're not dying! At least, you're not going to die by falling off of a cliff."

"It's not the worst way to go. Probably will be pretty quick. That is, unless I land on my lower spine. Then I'll just have to slowly bleed out..."

"Shut up! I have an idea." Helen grabbed the bars and leaned in close to Louis.

"What is it, detective?"

"You're going to teach me how to pickpocket."

Louis gave her a puzzled look. "Right now?"

"Right now."

"What are you going to steal?"

"I'm going to steal the damn Bible of Orvieto. Right out of the mayor's hands."

VII

Louis let out a great laugh.

“You? You’re going to steal the bible the mayor carries?”

“Yes, *me*,” replied Helen angrily. “Who else is going to save you?”

The old pickpocket smiled his toothy grin. “The noble detective elects to save the lowly villain with villainy. I find myself truly blessed.” He cleared his throat. “Now what good is stealing this bible going to do me? Are you planning on saving my soul before I perish?”

Helen spoke quickly. “I did some research and apparently the Orvieto Bible is the only source of the old laws of the city. If something was to happen to the bible, like if it disappeared, the town would be required to revert to normal Italian law.”

“So you steal the bible from the mayor...”

“And Orvieto reverts to normal Italian law, with all rulings made under the old rules voided,” Helen finished.

“I assume that under Italian law, the penalty for pickpocketing isn’t death by cliff, am I correct?”

Helen nodded. Louis stood up and paced the length of his small cell, Helen watching him closely.

“Davide clings to that bible like a child clutches his favorite blanket... it would be tough for me... all but impossible for you I’m afraid.”

Helen stood.

“Want to stake a wager on it? I’m a fast learner.”

“Young lady, I’m afraid however this shakes out, the gamble is for my life.”

“So you better do a good job teaching me old man.”

Louis let out a great laugh and shook his finger at the young detective. “I like you, Helen Harvard Hump. You may have thrown me in jail and gotten me sentenced to death, but I like you.”

“Okay, if we’re going to do this, then you need to shut up and teach me your secrets. Or you’re going straight off that cliff.”

Louis walked back to his bench and sat. He fished the cigarette back out of his pocket and put it in his mouth once more, still unlit.

“My secrets... my secrets about the art of pickpocketing,” he mused as he took a second to collect his thoughts. “I guess the big secret is that there really isn’t one. You just... do it. If you have the guts you can pick somebody’s pocket, but I’m afraid most people just don’t. Which is why it works. When people assume they can’t do something, they also assume nobody else will do it either.”

Helen had fished out a notebook from her pocket and was quickly scribbling down notes.

“There have to be techniques. You can’t just go grab something out of somebody’s pocket.”

“But you can. People *think* you can’t, so you can. I could say that pickpocketing is a form of seduction or something pretentious like that, but it isn’t true. You just do it, and sometimes you get caught. Most of the time you don’t.”

Louis blew out smoke that wasn’t there from a cigarette that wasn’t lit.

Helen crossed her arms. “I’m not interested in the philosophy of thievery. What do you actually *do*? Walk me through a normal target, or whatever you call it.”

“A mark.” Louis took a moment. “You watch people. It’s easy to spot a tourist. They’re just... staring. At everything. They’re so busy looking around they have no awareness of what is actually going on. That big zebra-striped Duomo does most of the work for you, hypnotizing anybody who walks by. All you have to do is reach into their pockets.”

“But Davide isn’t a tourist. He’s the mayor of the town. And he’s literally attached to the bible that we need to take.”

Louis didn’t respond for nearly a minute. He put out his unlit cigarette and turned to Helen.

“Tell you what. First thing tomorrow morning, go up to the town square and don’t come back until you have five objects that aren’t yours to show me. Then, and only then, can we worry about the mayor.”

VIII

Edward did not sleep well that night, mostly as a result of the stone stairs of the Duomo serving as his bed. After the trial, everybody had hurried off to his or her business, leaving him standing outside the town hall alone. It had thankfully stopped raining, but it was dark and Edward had no money on him. His first thought was to continue his search, and he wandered up and down the streets looking for his lost love. However, as time wore on and he became increasingly aware of his sore feet and aching legs, he realized that he needed to find a place to sleep that night. He ducked into a hotel, but he had no money. He tried lying down in the pews at the Duomo, but they kicked him out. He thought about sleeping on the train, but he had no ticket. It was a fine predicament, and Edward ultimately arrived at the same solution as Harvard Helen Hump had: sleeping under the stars. As he made a nest for himself out of clothes in his bag, Edward, ever the optimist, thought that lying on the steps in the main square would be perfect for spotting the woman he loved if she happened to ride by in the early morning.

Edward woke up with the shadow of a man hovering over him. He was pointing a black cylinder towards Edward's head, and for a second, Edward thought he was about to be shot. Then his eyes adjusted and he recognized the surly old man. It was the audio tourist.

The blind old man took a step back and pointed the mic towards himself. "That was the sound of a homeless American in Italy." He clicked a button on his recorder and locked the mic back into place.

Edward sat up. "Hey, remember me? We talked on the lift!"

"Yes, I remember you, young American boy," said the audio tourist, looking out over Edward's head.

"Hey, let me ask you a question, have you seen a woman on a bike with a little Italian flag on it?"

The audio tourist took a moment to respond.

"...Are you serious?"

Edward slapped his head.

"Sorry, I keep forgetting! That could be anybody in this town."

"That's not what I mean..." started the audio tourist.

Edward interrupted him.

“I’ll describe her to you. Oh, let’s start with the face, she had the most wonderful face you’ve ever seen. Her face was round and she had just a tiny button of a nose. Her eyes are deep caves that I’m sure one could lose themselves in completely, wandering their dark paths and marveling at the light reflected about them. She was tall and skinny, and she wore a long billowing skirt and a white sleeveless shirt. I saw her upon a bike, riding by, a small Italian flag on the back waving in the wind, a signal for all to follow, as if she was a goddess herself leading men into battle.”

Edward finished with a sigh and looked off.

“Are you a studying to be a writer, young man?” asked the audio tourist.

Edward sighed once more and shook his head. “I would like to be, but I can’t seem to find any inspiration.”

“Well... what about what you just said?”

“What about it?” asked Edward.

“Never mind. Forget it,” said the audio tourist.

“So... have you seen her?”

The audio tourist turned his head straight towards Edward.

“I’m blind you boneheaded fool.”

The audio tourist stomped away as Edward noticed that Helen was standing just a few feet away, unsuccessfully hiding behind a narrow light pole.

“Hey! Helen! What are you doing back there?”

Helen took a step away from the pole. “Oh... hello there, Edward.”

“What are you doing here?”

Helen walked slowly towards Edward, looking everywhere except at him. He thought she was acting a bit strange.

“I’m just... taking a walk,” she said.

Helen slid up next to Edward and put her arm around him. *Now* he understood. She was in love with him. Of course, this *always* happened to Edward. Too bad he was already in love with the woman on the bike, or they would have made a fun European hookup. But alas, it was not to be.

“Oh, a walk... I see,” he said, not sure what the proper response in this situation was.

Helen patted him on the back. “Yup.”

“It’s a nice day for a walk, but you see... I can’t walk. With you. Right now. There’s somebody else... that I need to walk with.”

Helen ignored Edward and took a step away.

“Well. See you around,” said Helen, not looking Edward in the eye.

“Yes. I will,” said Edward as he watched Helen quickly walk away. He sighed. It was a tough talk, but he had to have had it. Now she would know how it had to be. However, what he failed to realize was not only was Helen not in love with him, but that a tiny Buddha trinket he kept in his left pocket was now in her left pocket.

Helen smiled to herself as she walked down an alley. She had successfully picked her first pocket. After stealing Edward’s little Buddha (she promised to herself that she would give it back later, but never quite got around to it) she circled back around to the square to look for other tourists. It was the looking that was the hardest part. It was a weekday morning and there were few non-Orvietians out.

Four thefts remained. As the sun rose, Helen picked a pack of cigarettes from one rather rotund Canadian woman’s fanny pack as she snapped a picture of the Duomo. Following that, Helen nabbed a candy bar that was sticking out of a Greek teenager’s back pocket. She figured that both of them were healthier for her having taken the items. After running out of tourists, Edward became Helen’s fourth and fifth victim in addition to being the first. She cleaned out the remaining contents of his pockets, which amounted to a stale stick of gum, a business card for a psychic medium, and a whole lot of lint. Edward explained Helen’s frequent appearances and strange behavior as the irrational symptoms of uncontrollable love. Cupid’s sickness indeed, he thought as Helen walked away with the last of his belongings.

IX

Helen dumped the motley collection of stolen items at the foot of Louis' cell. The stick of gum, business card, candy bar, scrap of paper, and Buddha made for an unimpressive pile. Louis remained lying on his back, staring up at the ceiling of his cell with a cigarette lazily smoldering in a one of his hands. Somehow he had gotten it lit.

Helen clapped her hands on her hips as she stood.

"Okay. What now?"

"Now you steal the Orvieto Bible, of course," replied Louis.

"That's it?"

"This is *your* plan, remember?"

Helen crossed her arms. "Is there something else I should know about pickpocketing? Is there another test I have to pass or something? I'm under a lot of pressure here!"

Louis turned an eye to the young detective on the other side of the bars.

"Nope. Good luck! Now, go get that bible!"

Louis turned his attention back to the ceiling. Helen wondered what was so interesting up there and let out an impatient sigh, Louis didn't get the hint, and the both of them sat in a frustrated silence. Eventually, Helen gave up, stood up, and walked back towards the hallway. Just as she was about to leave, she heard Louis call out to her.

"Watch him. See what his routine is. The mayor of our dear little city is a rather predictable man."

Helen walked out without any further response, but she couldn't help but agree with his advice. Observation was the key to success in any endeavor. Even the youngest apprentice investigator knew this.

It was quite late in the night when Helen finally left Louis in his subterranean cell and headed back to the surface. She looked up at the night sky above, speckled with stars that seemed closer in Italy than they ever did in England, and couldn't hold back the unpleasant thought that if she failed, Louis would be a crumpled corpse by this time the following night

Helen wrapped herself up in her trench coat underneath the mayor's window and began her watch. She didn't have time for a redo, so she was going to make sure she had the mayor in sight from the moment he woke. On the other side of the wall, Davide Meta-Legge was happily slumbering away, his arms hugging the Orvieto Bible as if it were a teddy bear.

Much to Helen's consternation, the mayor woke only five short hours later. It was 7 a.m. sharp, and the sky was gently brightening. Low blue clouds shrouded the sky, but no rain fell and the wind felt clear and brisk. Periodically, she woke and checked the window, and it was during one of these checks that a groggy Helen was surprised to find the large nude form of the mayor splashing in his morning bath. The Orvieto Bible sat next to the table, wrapped inside a clear plastic bag. The chain connecting the man with the book was the only thing that covered an inch of Davide's skin.

Helen long felt that the uncovered human form left something to be desired, and the lumpy, rather hairy blob that was the mayor, with all his ancient wrinkles and uneven tans, was more than she could take. Despite her urgent need for information, she tore herself from the window and tried to forget the image, and in the process, could think of nothing else. She sat herself below the window, biding her time until the mayor could fashion himself in a more presentable manner, or at the very least, a more clothed one.

It was during this wait that Helen's head began to nod. She slowly drifted back off to sleep, and it was only the slap of a door closing that brought her back to consciousness. Across the street, Davide Meta-Legge trotted to his favorite cafe and sat himself down at a small outdoor table. Here he briefly spotted Helen, still sitting in a heap below his window, and gave her a slightly concerned glance before transferring his attention to an espresso and sandwich placed in front of him.

Helen took advantage of this temporary distraction to place herself somewhere more advantageous. Knowing that caffeine would provide the stimulation she needed, she sat herself down at the same cafe, carefully positioning herself behind the mayor where he couldn't see her unless he turned around. If that case were to happen, she made sure to have her handy newspaper ready for a quick disguise. People rarely noticed that the paper was written in Egyptian and had a date on it that had passed into history several years prior to this particular tale.

The mayor wolfed down his meal while Helen analyzed his grip on the Orvieto Bible. Davide ate with only one hand, the other gently resting atop the great tome. It seemed that he did almost everything single-handedly, and in those rare times when both hands were called for, he still had a stout chain linking his wrist to the good book. Currently, Helen couldn't imagine any scenario where she could get a hold of the Orvieto Bible without the grisly aid of an axe.

After consuming his meal and the first page of the paper, the mayor stood and walked to his office. Having expected the mayor to pay for his meal before leaving, Helen was not prepared for this abrupt turn of events. Davide spotted her and the two made eye contact. Helen, trying to appear as normal as possible, attempted to prevent herself from blinking. This resulted in her eyes watering uncontrollably, and finally she broke down into a fit of blinks. Davide did not understand this odd behavior and decided it was best to leave quickly. He reached the town hall without any further incident and settled himself down at his desk.

Once Helen recovered from the fit of blinking, she took her position at the window of his office, boosting herself up on a large potted plant. Once again, there seemed to be no opportunity to pickpocket the bible. For maximum comfort and space, the mayor had cut a large hole into the top drawer of his desk in such a way that he could place the Orvieto Bible into the drawer with it still chained to him through the hole.

The hours were melting away, and Helen had only until sundown before an elderly man would be tossed off a cliff on her behalf. However discouraged she was growing, she kept up her vigil at the window. Unfortunately, all she watched was the mayor shuffling papers around his desk. First, he created three piles, then changed his mind and separated everything into four piles. This task proving exhausting, Davide then laid down his head and dozed off to sleep. Watching him sleep, Helen was reminded that she was also rather tired. Her troubles were no match for her exhaustion, and she was quickly fast asleep, her butt firmly planted in the soil of the pot she was standing on. To passerby it appeared as if somebody has mistakenly planted a person and a small tree in a single planter.

This time the slap of a door was not enough to rouse Helen from her sleep. As he always did after his 10 a.m. nap, the Mayor of Orvieto set out for his walk. As he stepped outside, he noticed Helen sleeping in the tree pot and shook his head. Tourists were always making fools of themselves in the town, and if the wine didn't make their wallets so loose, he would've thought it well and good for the town to be rid of them entirely. He continued on his walk, pushing the young British woman from his mind.

As Helen slept, the clouds overhead cleared and a stern blue sky broke out. In the distance a small army of gray clouds marched, but above, the sun shone unimpeded with only a smattering of white jet trails and cirrus to accompany it. It was this sun that finally woke Helen. Unlike the plant she shared her pot with, Helen's body was not fond of lying exposed directly to

mass amounts of ultraviolet light. The young detective-turned-amateur-pickpocket forced her mind to her mission, and she sleepily climbed back up to the window to find the mayor gone. Then she suddenly found herself quite awake.

Helen rushed into the entrance of the town's government offices, and found the secretary diligently pushing papers into five stacks on her desk.

"Where is the mayor?" grunted Helen.

The secretary was startled by the unexpected appearance of bleary-eyed, sweaty woman with tangled red hair covering her face.

"He is not here," she said, hoping her answer would rid her of the unwelcome visitor.

"I know *that*. Where did he go?"

"He's out... out for his walk," stammered the secretary.

Helen nodded, turned around, and left through the door she came in. The secretary breathed a sigh of relief, and only later that day did she realize that the frightening figure was Helen from the recent trial of the elderly pickpocket.

Helen guessed that the mayor probably would be heading towards the main square, as all things in Orvieto tend to do, and took off at a trot. As she passed, several civilians wondered to themselves why a young woman would ever choose to go for a run on a hot day in a trench coat, but young women these days were strange, especially the tourists.

Her guess was correct. The mayor had in fact headed towards the square, where he was regaling a small class of elementary school students who were visiting the Duomo with his favorite historical stories, including one about a saint who was murdered when his captors stuffed a hot iron down his throat until he choked to death. The teacher did not find this story appropriate, but the kids all agreed it was one of the finest tales they had ever heard.

The great square at the center of the town had a strange quirk in regards to the alleyways that fed into it. They came at the square in such sharp and abrupt angles that people were constantly running into each other as they exited and entered. This poor city planning was in evidence as Helen emerged from the square right next to where Davide Meta-Legge was sharing his story, and she nearly ran right into him. While trying to dodge him, her foot caught on a loose cobblestone and she fell straight into a puddle. Muddy water splashed all over the mayor and a few kids unfortunate enough to be standing nearby. The rest of the class were equal parts

laughing and staring in shocked silence, and this event, combined with the mayor's story, instantly elevated this trip to legendary status in their minds.

"What in the name of the gods..." sputtered the mayor as he checked to make sure the Orvieto Bible remained unscathed even as his clothes were soaked in mud. It was. Some would say miraculously, but such behavior was typical for such blessed books.

The teacher insincerely thanked the mayor for his story and herded the children off. Helen flopped in the puddle like a dying fish, hopelessly tangled up in her wet trench coat. A few muffled apologies could be heard coming from the mess, but the mayor did not wait to hear them. He stormed off in the direction of his office, furious that his story had been interrupted. He didn't even get to tell them the part about when the saint's toes were cut off and fed back to him.

When the mayor reached the office, the secretary did not dare ask him what was wrong. Between the mud and the expression on his face, she knew that something grave had occurred. The mayor changed clothes and reappeared in the front entrance with his backup traveling coat. The secretary's heart fluttered. This was not in the routine. This was an exciting day, indeed.

"I am going for a soak. Hold my calls. And my letters. And faxes, if any happen to come in. Do we have a fax machine? It goes without saying that you should not answer that question, for I am going to soak and I do not care." He turned and left, heading towards the town's one and only underground steam bath.

X

Since ancient times, towns tucked into mountains and hills have claimed healing powers to draw the gullible from nearby major cities, and Orvieto was no different. Weaving through the caves and tunnels, there was an elaborate steam bath that had been built and remodeled repeatedly since the days when only cardinals and popes patronized it. The steam bath operated utilizing a complex series of copper pipes, underground aqueducts, stone tubs and steam rooms. It claimed to use only pure mineral water harvested from the springs under Orvieto itself. Nobody thought to dispute this claim, despite the fact that the springs had gone dry many hundreds of years prior. Even the great Pozzo di San Patrizio contained hardly enough water to fill a single tub.

The Orvieto steam baths were a vast network of ancient stone and brick structures, and the countless archeologists, historians, and government officials who had requested the place be excavated and turned into a museum were promptly turned away by the woman who ran the place. This woman was a skinny, stern thing with a severe face and a crown of wispy white hair. She was the latest in an old family that had owned the baths deep into the mists of the past. Even in the fog of history the family made their claims, as their deed was one of the first items ever inscribed in the margins of the Orvieto Bible. The family always maintained a full staff of what they considered immigrants, although the servants were now as ancient as the family itself, even maintaining their own traditions and language as if they had just emerged from Vietnam that year. The old woman, the last of her line, stood at the front desk every day, greeting each visitor with a stern welcome. The elders of the town were exceedingly fond of this woman, believing that she was one of the few who were brave enough in this modern world to turn away somebody she didn't feel had enough class to use her facilities. Her name was Cinzia Mollafalope, a woman with no living family or children, a soul as permanent as the rocks around her.

One rule (among many) that Cinzia Mollafalope insisted upon was that no foreign objects were to be introduced into any of the soak or steam rooms. Patrons were required to leave behind all personal clothing and effects in exchange for a single, rather small white towel. Even glasses were banned, which had resulted in more than one incident where a hopelessly lost elderly patron would have to be fished from a remote corner of the baths.

This rule caused much disagreement between the mayor and Cinzia. Davide Meta-Legge never parted from the Orvieto Bible, not even in the bath. Cinzia would not, under any

circumstance, allow the Orvieto Bible to pass into the soak and steam rooms. The mayor had a lifelong affection (some would say addiction) to soaking, and this establishment was the only place that catered to this need. Even against the iron will of Davide Meta-Legge, Cinzia prevailed, making the ancient place the single location where the mayor and his beloved book parted ways.

Helen Harvard Hump did not know it yet, but her opportunity had arrived. The reason Helen was not aware of this change in fortunes was because she was still back in the square, and she had only just managed to extricate herself from both her trench coat and the puddle. The woman from the tourism department took pity on Helen and helped her to her feet.

As Helen brushed herself off, the woman spoke. “You should go down to the steam baths and take a soak. Don’t want to catch cold from the mud water. No good, no good.”

“The steam baths?” asked Helen, who had a hand tangled in a dirty mat of her own hair.

“It’s where the mayor likes to go. I bet he is there right now. He does not like the mud.”

Helen yanked her hand from the knot and took a step towards the woman so aggressively she nearly fell back before Helen caught her hand.

“Uh, yes, it’s just down Via della Cava,” sputtered the woman.

Helen repressed the urge to kiss this poor, startled woman and took off running in the direction she had pointed. Once more she was tearing down the streets of Orvieto like the apparition of an insane jogger. The ancient bathhouse was not hard to find. Like the Duomo and the Pozzo di San Patrizio, it was one of those mysterious structures imbued with the power to draw people to them. Those headed on their way often found themselves inexplicably taking the long way, passing the squat stone structure that was simply the tip of a stone iceberg that descended deep into the hill below.

The detective came to a sweaty, panting stop in front of the building. After gathering up a bit of breath, she heaved the heavy wooden door open and stepped inside. There she found a tiny room with no windows save a skylight that looked as if it might have its origins in an errant incendiary from World War II. The walls were formed with thick stones that were smooth with moisture and age. Cinzia stood behind a thick wooden counter, straight and erect as a statue. Without moving an inch, she beat Helen to speaking first.

“My dear little English lady, you are in most dire need of a bath.”

Helen Harvard Hump looked down at herself. This was a statement based in sound, observed fact. She couldn't imagine what she smelled like after a week of sleeping outside and no showers.

"Yes. Yes, I do."

Cinzia waved her hand. "On the house."

"Oh, great, you don't have to do that..." Stammered Helen, who along with Cinzia, was painfully aware of the fact that she had no money. The ancient woman's arm extended abruptly, a small white towel in her hand. Helen took it.

"Uh, thanks. Now, where do I go?" asked Helen.

"Disrobe please," said Cinzia

"...Excuse me?"

"No foreign objects past this desk. I will take your clothes and keep them for you, although burning them would be a kindness to all."

Helen simply blinked, still holding the towel. "You speak very good English."

"I speak very *well* in eight languages. Clothes please."

"Right here?"

"Would you prefer to go outside?"

Helen looked around. "There's not a room or anything?"

"You *are* in a room," said Cinzia, growing irritated.

The noble detective sighed. She really, *really* hoped the mayor and that cursed book were in this place. Helen Harvard Hump was not the immodest type, and nobody had caught her sans clothing since the days when she was fresh out of diapers. Most of her associates couldn't even recall a time she wasn't covered by a trench coat.

The quest is all there is. It was something her former master had taught her, and it was what she told herself as she peeled herself out of her slimy clothing. When down her to her undermost undergarments, she attempted a clever switch between the towel and her underwear, but ended up dropping everything on the floor. Cinzia paid no attention to these antics and delicately placed the detective's clothing and items into a bag and rang a bell. Promptly, a squat, elderly servant that seemed faintly feminine popped up from behind the desk and bowed to Helen, who finally had the white towel wrapped around her and was tugging at it, willing it to be larger than it was. Cinzia motioned for Helen to follow the servant.

“Enjoy your soak,” said Cinzia.

“Uh, thanks,” said Helen as she left the old woman and followed the servant into the tunnels beyond. As they descended, Helen briefly glimpsed another servant duck into a room holding her clothes. She made a note of it on the legal pad of her mind. It grew even warmer and certainly wetter as they descended into the stone maze. She was eventually led to a square room with a large tub in the center of it. There, of course, was no door separating the room from the hall. The servant gave Helen a curt bow and disappeared into the dark, wet haze that hung over the place. The few scattered light bulbs were no match for their task, but Helen was not complaining about the lack of illumination.

There was nobody else in the room, and Helen didn't get the chance to ask if it was going to stay that way. Despite her desperate need for a bath (already significant portions of the white towel were no longer white), there was no time for a soak. There was a mayor and a bible to be found.

Helen stepped back into the hall and realized she did not know which direction to go. There were no signs and she couldn't see farther than a few meters through the dark haze. She let instinct take over, turned to her right, and padded down the passage in her bare feet, careful not to slip. As she went, she peeked into a few rooms, finding most of them empty with an occasional servant scrubbing or polishing a stone bath. After going up an incline and passing into what felt like an underground cloud, she poked her head into another room, and for the second time that day, was greeted by the gigantic nude form of Davide Meta-Legge. She had just long enough to register both the unpleasant crevices of his body and the fact that the Orvieto Bible was not in the room before ducking out. Davide sensed nothing more than a little movement in the thick mist, and he wondered if perhaps these underground corridors might be haunted. He drove the unpleasant thought from his mind.

After several minutes of hurried searching and hiding from passing servants, Helen finally came across the room she had been looking for. It was the same room she had watched a servant drop off her clothes in, a simple square cell that served as a closet. Ancient wood shelves lined three of the walls, largely empty except for a wadded up pile of clothes that Helen recognized as her own, one other ball of clothes she did not recognize, and a massive bible connected to a chain, all encased in a plastic bag. Helen breathed a sigh of relief.

At last, a damn break, she thought to herself as she grabbed the bag.

Then she heard a clearing of a throat, and her stomach dropped. Helen, clutching the bible with an expression like a child caught with a hand in a cookie jar, spun around to find a more-severe-than-usual Cinzia standing in the doorway.

The only sound in the silent stand-off that followed was Helen swallowing.

“That was quite a quick soak, my little British friend,” said Cinzia without a trace of humor. “It appears as if you forgot to wash your hair. Or anything.”

“Uh... I just got lost... I was... looking for shampoo,” stammered Helen.

“I see. I assure you, that book you hold does not contain shampoo.”

Helen looked at the bible. “I see that...”

Cinzia sighed. “Don’t waste my time. You came here to steal the Orvieto Bible. Why?”

This old woman terrified Helen so much that she found it impossible to lie.

“If I get rid of the Orvieto Bible, the town reverts back to traditional Italian law, and my... uh... friend won’t be executed for a minor crime.”

Cinzia stepped aside. “Very well. Our dear mayor is on his way up, so you had best be on your way if you wish to succeed.”

Helen blinked. “...What?”

Cinzia snapped her fingers. “Get going!”

“You’re going to help me? Why?”

“As the head of the most ancient family of the town I should be *leader* of the panel of town elders, but they won’t even let me on the board because I’m a woman. So, how you say, fudge them.”

Helen almost corrected the woman’s English, but Cinzia grabbed the young detective’s arm and pulled her out of the room with uncommon strength. “Now, go, you fool!”

Helen wanted to grab her clothes, but the combination of the terrifying old woman and the sound of the mayor walking up towards them compelled her to move. She ran up the last bit of the passage and emerged at the entrance. A great roar was heard behind her. The mayor had discovered the absence of his precious book.

XI

One might say that the mayor's general lack of activity and the large amount of sleep he gathered every day was simply his way of saving up his energy for an emergency. One would be particularly inclined to say this if they had witnessed him upon finding the Orvieto Bible missing. The same man who limped around the town and spent half his day in naps was the same man who charged past Cinzia and sprinted up through the labyrinth like a man running the Olympic 100-meter.

Helen instinctively knew what was happening behind her, and she knew she didn't stand a chance if she was caught. She emerged into the light of day and found it quite blinding after her time in the tunnels, and proceeded to stumble around with her hands over her eyes. As she blinked to encourage her sluggish eyes to accept the new environment, she spotted a small gray bike with a tiny Italian flag leaning against a wall across the street. It wasn't locked, and Helen saw nobody around. A private investigator might frown upon petty theft, but Helen was in pickpocket mode now. Helen tossed the Orvieto Bible, still wrapped in plastic, into the front basket and quickly mounted the bike. She didn't know where exactly she was going, but she took off down Via della Cava anyway, knowing that wherever her next destination was, it certainly didn't involve staying where the mayor was bound to find her in a few short seconds.

Helen turned a corner and disappeared from sight just as Davide Meta-Legge emerged from the steam baths, himself also temporarily blinded by the sunlight. The mayor, only half dressed in his boxers and his dress shirt, took off running for his office. As he raced by the audio tourist on a side street, he was recorded and would later be mistakenly labeled as 'Italian Athlete in Training.'

As she rode on the bike, Helen's mind was occupied by two things. First, she struggled to maintain her modesty, as the towel was vastly insufficient for the task of a bike ride. Second, she wondered what the heck she was going to do from here. Through all of the events of the past two days, she had neglected to create a plan beyond finding the Orvieto Bible and stealing it. This was a mistake her former master Samwell Stockholm Steadman would have certainly frowned upon.

Both of these concerns were quickly eclipsed by a new third: Helen was being pursued. She could only get a few glimpses, but there was definitely somebody following her on another bike, and the person didn't appear to be the giant form of the mayor. Did he somehow see her

and send somebody after her? Was it an officer of the law? She didn't care to find out, and quickened her pace.

The person chasing after Helen was not a deputy of the mayor, nor was the person after the Orvieto Bible that she carried. No, she was simply being pursued by a lovesick American student who had mistakenly identified Helen as the woman Helen had stolen the bike from, the woman who he was desperately in love with, the woman who he thought he had finally found and was in the process of chasing.

As Helen veered down a side alley and out into a path that traced itself along the northwestern edge of the town, an idea came to her. Helen had spent quite a bit of time in the Orvieto department of tourism, and while she waited for a case to fall into her lap she read all the pamphlets printed in English. One of the many fun facts that she learned was that the Pozzo di S. Patrizio was an absolute must-see. One of the other fun facts was that once a cardinal had lost a finger to a donkey bite in 1698, but this factoid was not currently pertinent to her plight.

The Pozzo di S. Patrizio was a massive well built for the sieges the town often found itself subject to throughout history. It was a wide cylindrical structure that bore straight down into the heart of the hill, past the caves and into the abyss beyond. It was a perfect place to dump the Orvieto Bible, and she knew right where the gigantic well was located. She just had to get there before whoever was chasing her managed to catch her. Whoever this person who was following her was (it was Edward), he was sure determined to get the Orvieto Bible (he was not), because she could not lose him (this part, at least, was correct).

Edward borrowed a bike in his desperate hurry not to let the girl who captured his heart escape him once more, but he had not made a clean getaway. A third party joined the chase: the angry owner of the bicycle Edward stole. The man had spotted Edward through the window of his apartment and had run out and initiated pursuit in nothing more than his boxer shorts. Edward took no notice of the man, as he was busy squirming out of his own shirt. Chasing was hot work, and the mid afternoon sun was roasting them all.

Soon three partially clothed people of various ages were racing on a winding path through the town, and a few fellow bikers soon joined them, taking off their own shirts to match the strange parade. Orvietians were no strangers to spontaneous bicycle rallies, and there had been rumors of an impending naked bike ride. With the new additions, they hit critical mass. Word quickly swirled through the town that the naked bike rally was finally happening, and

people with time on their hands scrambled to join. Only a few were ready to immediately take part in the procession, but it was enough to swell the size of the pack to over ten people. Helen couldn't understand why so many people were behind her, and assumed that the whole town was turning out for a manhunt to find the Orvieto Bible. She had not anticipated its local popularity.

Helen had meant to go directly to the pozzo, but had quickly gotten herself lost in the town and had ridden in circles. She was growing exhausted even as her pursuers showed no sign of tiring. She found herself wishing she had taken her former master's physical training regimens more seriously. However, she wasn't alone in her exhaustion. Edward had quickly tired and slowly drifted to the back of the pack. Eventually, he lost everyone on an uphill climb.

As said before, some structures and landmarks weigh heavily upon the unconscious mind. All things in Orvieto go to the Duomo at the center square, and even a spontaneous mad chase/pursuit of love/naked bike rally obeyed this law of human nature. Helen sped through a narrow alley and suddenly found herself in the bright light of the square.

And there, the mayor was waiting.

XII

Helen saw the mayor and clamped down on her brakes, her pursuers be damned. To her surprise, they flowed around her and out into the square, circling the mayor and laughing. Davide Meta-Legge was momentarily distracted, and Helen grabbed the Orvieto Bible from the basket to hide it. Finding only a formerly white towel in the space that her trusty trench coat occupied, she ended up shoving it between her thighs. It was a hiding place that featured several major disadvantages, the primary being that it prevented her from walking anywhere without a penguin waddle.

Helen scanned her new environment and found the mayor and his posse standing on the steps in front of a handful of tourists and a growing gaggle of partially nude bicyclists. To Helen's surprise, she found Louis, still in that turtleneck, standing next to Davide Meta-Legge. She wondered what was going on. His execution wasn't supposed to take place until nightfall.

"Citizens of Orvieto!" boomed the mayor in Italian, "I stand before you with a dire announcement. The Orvieto Bible, the keeper of our laws, and my sacred trust, has been stolen. Until it is found, we must follow standard Italian law. I apologize deeply for my failure and promise to find the thief and bring him to justice!"

The mayor bowed with an expression of utmost sorrow. The Italians in the crowd looked at each other and shrugged. Orvieto or Italian, it didn't matter to them. This business was holding up the naked bike rally, which was growing by the minute as more and more people showed up with their bikes in the square, all thinking the mayor was there to give them a speech of encouragement.

Davide Meta-Legge straightened back up. "Likewise, as a result of the Orvieto Bible being lost, I am forced by Italian law to release this convicted criminal." The mayor stood aside and pointed to Louis, who smiled and waved at the crowd. "I warn you now of him! For be assured, as soon as Orvieto law is restored I will have him cast off the cliffs!"

The crowd was now greatly confused and looked around for somebody to lead the rally out of the square. It was then that the mayor saw Helen across the square and his eyes went wide.

"You!" he roared. Davide Meta-Legge strode towards her, the crowd parting with their bikes to let him through. Helen wanted nothing more than to run, but she was glued to the spot with the effort of trying to hold the book between her legs.

The mayor raced up to Helen and pointed. "I've been seeing you all over the place today!" he roared in English. "You've been acting suspicious, following me all around, haven't you? Perhaps you were following me just to steal something? I see you're wearing a towel from Cinzia's bathhouse, perhaps you were there as well?"

"Just what are you accusing me of, sir?" asked Helen, trying and failing to sound confident.

"You stole the Orvieto Bible!"

"Me? I've been in... this bike rally," said Helen, slowly realizing the reason for the crowd forming around her. "Even if I did take a soak, where would I possibly keep a book on me?"

"You took it! I know you did! Give it back you... you thief!"

From the corners of her vision, Helen could see Louis sneaking between onlookers, but she didn't have time to wonder what he was up to.

"I don't have it! Look, my bike is completely empty!"

"Let me see under the towel!" roared the mayor.

"No!" said Helen, blushing.

The mayor put his arms on his hips. "You're in a naked bike rally, right? What's the big deal?"

Helen drew up her chin, trying her best to look as confident as Cinzia.

"You, sir, are *not* a gentleman."

The mayor was taken aback, and Helen thought that she might just make a clean getaway after all. It was during this thought that Edward finally came crashing through the crowd on his bicycle, coming straight for Helen. The need to not get caught mashed into her instinct for survival, and she ended up standing completely still as Edward and his bike snagged her towel and then promptly crashed into a heap. Everybody turned towards Edward, lying on the ground and letting out a groan. In that moment, Helen realized that she was now towel-less.

Everybody else realized this a moment later and turned their attention to the detective, who was looking down where the Orvieto Bible once was and was no longer. Helen and the mayor looked up at the same time, almost equally perplexed.

"Well," said Helen, "See? No Orvieto Bible. "Now, if you excuse me, I have a naked bike rally to attend to."

With that, Helen grabbed her bike and hopped on.

“Join me, my fellow Orvietians!” she cried as she took off through the crowd. They cheered, threw off what remained of their clothes, and followed. When they left, there was only a seething mayor and an unconscious American remaining in the square.

XIII

By the time they reached the western edge of the town, Helen found that she was enjoying herself. Despite losing everything down to the shirt on her back, the day had been saved... somehow. She still didn't know where the Orvieto Bible had disappeared to, and didn't particularly care as long as it stayed that way. Louis was free, and if he didn't take the time to get away before the book was found again, well, that was his own stupid fault.

However, the case had not technically been solved, as Edward had yet to be reunited with his wallet, passport, and train ticket. However, she found it impossible to brood upon details while a laughing mass of bicyclists followed her under the bright summer sky. Rather than dwelling on the case, she wondered if she had enough of a layer of dirt going to prevent sunburn.

As the sky slowly darkened and the clouds took on a shade of pink, the rally began to thin out and gracefully came to an end just outside the Pozzo that had been her original objective. As the final stragglers went on their way, Helen rode over to the well to take a look. It was covered by a squat cylindrical shed with a single door. The young detective looked at it and thought it might be time to go get her trench coat back. She was just about to hop back on her bike when she heard a familiar voice and a slow clap.

“Mademoiselle.”

It was Louis, striding towards her with a wide grin. He offered her a coat. “The breeze is chilly.”

Helen took it and tossed it on. “A pickpocket *giving* somebody something?”

“You had nothing left to steal.”

Helen crossed her arms. “So, how about that? Got the Orvieto Bible and saved you from being tossed off that cliff after all.”

“Correction, we *both* saved me from being tossed off that cliff.”

“What do you mean?”

Louis flashed her a sly smile, reached into his jacket, and pulled out a large book. Helen gasped.

“How did you get that?”

“You were in a dire little situation when the mayor cornered you in the square. If he had found this particular bible under your towel, you'd be locked underground instead of biking around in your birthday suit. So I thought I'd lend a hand and make off with the evidence.”

Louis handed Helen the Orvieto Bible. She took it, looking at it and then the elderly Frenchman with wonder. “But how? I didn’t even see you... nobody saw you take it, I didn’t even feel you there!”

Louis bowed. “A master never reveals all his secrets.” He straightened back up and cleared his throat. “Now. We had better get rid of that thing, shouldn’t we?”

Helen smiled. “I know just the place.”

The pair entered the Pozzo di S. Patrizio together, walking all the way down to the darkness at the bottom of the well. With a great grunt, Helen tossed the ancient book into the inky blackness that led into the void below the town, a void that hungrily ate it up. They waited for a watery splat, but there was no sound. After a few minutes, they assumed it must have fallen into forever, and walked back up to the entrance.

When they emerged, they found the sky a dark blue and could see a sprinkle of stars beginning to peek out as the orange sun slid below the mountains in the distance. Helen and Louis took a moment to look out over the valley, where a train chugged away from the Orvieto station below on its way north.

Helen broke the silence. “You still have something you really should give me.”

“Check the pockets of your new coat,” said Louis.

Helen fished through the pockets, and her hands folded around a small smooth object and a few stiff papers. She pulled them out and smiled.

“A wallet, passport, and train ticket.”

“Your ticket out of this little town,” said Louis.

Helen carefully tucked them away. “What about you?”

Louis looked back out towards the countryside.

“You remind me of someone who was once very important to me. I am old, and it is time for my final journey. I set out for France on foot.”

The old pickpocket gave Helen a kiss on the cheek.

“Good day mademoiselle.”

“Better get walking. France is a long way.”

Louis winked at her, and Helen briefly glimpsed the young man who arrived in town decades ago, the handsome Frenchman lost in the tides of war. She watched him go and

wondered if she would see him again on her travels. But that was the last time she saw Louis, watching him as he walked away under the darkening sky.

Helen returned to the bathhouse to collect her things, but not before taking a well-deserved soak first. Cinzia insisted. Outside the bathhouse, Helen found Edward staring at the bike she had ridden there. She waved hello, startling him. He looked at her and smiled.

“Hello detective! I have found the bike of my beloved. I almost had her today, but I had a little crash and she got away. I wonder why she left it here?”

“Perhaps she misplaced it intentionally, and is waiting for you to give it back to her.”

Edward scratched his chin, “Yes, yes...”

“By the way, I found your passport, wallet, and train ticket,” said Helen as she handed him the items.

“Oh! I completely forgot about these. Did I promise you a reward?”

“Just the money that was in the wallet.”

“Sounds fair. Here.”

Edward fished out a few dirty hundreds out of his wallet and slapped them in Helen’s hand without counting them. His mind was already elsewhere.

“Did you see where the girl on this bike went?”

“Nope, you’ll just have to keep searching. Or just wait here until the owner comes to get her bike.”

Edward’s face lit up and she slapped Helen on the arm.

“That’s brilliant! That’s why you are a detective.”

As Helen turned away, Edward called after her.

“By the way, sorry it didn’t work out between us. As you can see, I am already in love with somebody else.”

Helen had no idea what the American student was talking about, but nodded and continued on her way.

That night, Helen rode the lift down to the train station, her only companion a blind man with a microphone. It was a clear, windy night, the kind that signals change in the air. She stood on the platform and waited patiently for the last train to arrive. There were few lights, and the Italian countryside was dark.

Orvieto was pleasant enough, indeed, but Helen was eager to make her way back to England. However, this narrator is obligated to admit that Helen Harvard Hump did not make it to England as planned, for there were many more adventures and trials in store for this young detective, including the one where she faced off with her old master Samwell Stockholm Steadman over a bust of Copernicus inside an abandoned underground Nazi fortress... but that is a story for another day.

For just then, Helen was content to let the wind of a late summer night blow through her hair, listening to the rustle of the weed that grew in the tracks, her mind, for once, as peaceful as the darkness that surrounded her.

The Audio Tourist Will Return

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