

Narrative & Poetry by Lee Foust

PIAZZA INDIPENDENZA

She's drawing in her Pink Panther elementary-school copybook. They sell them in big piles on tables at the Oviessa, along with the neon-colored Evicta backpacks. That's where she probably got the bleach too. But that was weeks ago, and the roots are well grown out. She fingers the tips of the tangled strands about her collarbone with her left hand while her right hand, drawing a palm tree, plows right through the paper.

She stops.

Her mouth twitches. She wonders if it twitches all of the time or only when she notices it twitching.

She flips to a further page and begins to draw a heart, remembering how cold it had been last night in the park in the fog. But there really isn't much of a point in going any further south. Rome is more difficult, and the weather's probably about the same as here. It's been winter in Paris for more than a month. Ha!

Her cappuccino cup has been dry for a while. She had gotten it up at the counter, paid first, and then taken the coffee over to a table and sat

down—as if there wasn't an extra fee for table service—but nobody had said anything to her about it.

The old hunchbacked guy comes in and goes around the counter and into the back room. It's more casual around here, off the tourist track, this side of the central market and in back of the train station. Via Faenza, etc.

She bustles around now, gathering up her papers and notebook and putting on her big yellow raincoat. No one pays any attention to her when she goes back into the other room.

The hunchback comes back around the bar and orders a coffee. He nods to everyone, drinks it off, pays, and leaves.

She comes back, after a while, and gathers up her belongings again, during a lull in business, when almost all of the tables in the café are empty. She goes and stands in the doorway for a long time.

It's just getting dark.

Her mouth is twitching again. She gets lost somewhere in the bright violet BAR PATRIARCA sign across the street.

She turns abruptly, then, to the pleasant couple standing at the counter, smiles and says, “Bon soir!”

“Buona sera,” the woman behind the cash register replies politely, cheerfully even, but without looking up.

The French junkie steps down off of the curb and wanders cat-a-cornered across the intersection.

10/27/1989
Florence

A Valentine

“Her body is the shape of my hands.” –Paul Eluard

My Galatea, smooth and warm
as sandstone against her palms
,firm fingers caressing,
sculpts me each and every
day with her curved and slender
presence. Venus has no auguries
,neither pearl nor rose, to prove
if I were worthy of her chisel
against my stony heart
not yet come to the apex
of the wheel.

2/14/2011
Florence

Boniface

Now that I have seen Boniface
in his niche at Orvieto
along the solitary thread of Italy's
Appennino, of Pasolini's imagined
homeland and its search for the meaning
of material history, of Dante's "*serva*
Italia," anyone's date for a buck...

Now that Edward Snowden's

contribution to free speech
has been eclipsed by dirty
cartoons (of the prophet's anus)

and Nietzsche has eaten
his own feces in the absence
of a living God, and the best of us
—in this first world bubble in which I travel—
are only marking time

'til things get better, putting
our faith in struggles so personal
they are all but invisible
on the outside—even in Orvieto
on its tufa-stone island
high above the floodplain of the Paglia

like a rudderless rock lost
in a sea of millennia, all
its secrets sunk in caves
hidden beneath the day-
to-day business of business...

Now that I know nothing
shows on the outside, nothing
is real—between the intention
and the act—I'm more or less happy
to lay down my belief
in the concept of "a future."

1/8/2015

Orvieto