

The Cloud-Swing

Eithne Gallagher



Margherita sighed, another day without school. In the beginning she was thrilled to stay home, but slowly she had started to miss the alarm clock, rushing her breakfast and doing the last bits of uncompleted homework. Life was no longer normal.

She looked out of her bedroom window onto what was once her busy road, via San Gratiliano, the sun warmed her face and shoulders as she admired the clear blue sky that held only a couple of clouds. It was a day for going to the park, only there was no hope of that. She wasn't allowed out of the house. Mum wasn't going to school either. She now spent most of her day interacting with the children from her computer. Dad had to go to out. He worked in a chemist's. He had to be



there for the people. He stood in the doorway of her room and air-blew a kiss at Margherita from his masked face. She blew one back and then returned to her window.



Margherita wondered what all the other people in Bassano Romano were doing cooped up in their apartments. Her thoughts were interrupted by a cloud blowing its way towards her. Two long wispy strips holding a seat together. 'A swing, how beautiful,' she exclaimed. Her window blew open and a blustery voice said, 'Hop on!'



Before Margherita had a chance to reason and be logical she climbed out of the window and sat down. 'This is madness,' she said, 'I am sitting on a

cloud.' The breeze whisked her above the large beeches on via San Gratiliano. Yes, she was looking down at trees; dendritic twigs with unblossomed leaves tickled her feet before she rose above them.



'Where to?' the blustery voice whispered.

'To the seaside,' she replied.

The sea was a sad kind of calm and the beach empty except for a solitary, stray dog sniffing the sand. On a normal day there would be walkers, joggers, paddlers, even a brave swimmer or two. Loneliness engulfed Margherita.



‘Let’s go to Cortina,’ she ordered the breeze.

Suddenly wisps of cloud were wrapping themselves around her. In no time she was wearing a beautiful, cosy shawl. The



mountains were below her. They wore their snow proudly. She swung through the gigantic fir trees that lined the empty slopes into the middle of the

town. The chalets looked warm and inviting. Here too people were indoors leaving the snow abandoned, secluded in its sadness.



Margherita gave a sorrowful sigh.

‘Where to next?’ murmured the Blustery Breeze.

‘Venezia, please,’ Margherita replied.

She waved goodbye to the doleful Dolomites.

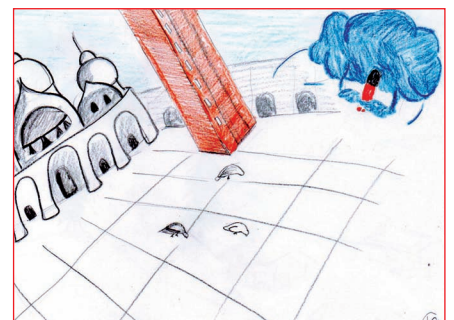


Soon they were flying in the middle of The Grand Canal. They swung under the Rialto Bridge there were no boats to block their way. The fish market was open and Margherita saw the first people of her trip. There were about ten in front of a fishmonger's stall standing in a queue each one a metre apart from the other. She waved and shouted hello but no one looked up.

The cloud turned left and they travelled down a little canal. All the gondolas were parked on the left abandoned by their gondoliers. Two



swans swam proudly past them reclaiming their ancient waters. The cloud swung around the tower in Piazza San Marco. Margherita wished she had some bread for the pigeons that strutted pompously around knowing they had the big square all to themselves.



'Enough of Venice?' asked the Blustery Breeze.

'Yes,' said Margherita.

As they pulled out into the Adriatic Sea, Margherita spotted dolphins spinning in the air before surfing an incoming wave.

She waved and shouted, 'Arrivederci.'

'Shall we stop at Florence on our way home?' whispered Blustery.

'I'd like that,' said Margherita.



Majestic cypress trees welcomed them to Tuscany. They sailed over fairy-tale castles and old farmhouses that clung to the steep sides of the Apennine

Mountains. They blew right into the centre of Florence. Margherita marvelled as she looked down at the terracotta dome sitting below her. She remembered looking up at it on her third grade field-trip to the city. Then she was one of



hundreds of tourists in Piazza del Duomo. But now the square was empty. The cloud drifted up over Giotto's Bell Tower. It was time to go home.

There is no point in beautiful scenery and beautiful places if there are no people. People are what makes the world go round. These days all people are staying indoors, keeping away

from each other. It was necessary but it was sad. Margherita thought of the voices singing from their balconies at 6 o'clock every evening, on via San Gratiiano. Voices of hope against the invisible enemy. Right now, all Margherita wanted was to be with her people.

'Please take me home,' she said.

The Blustery Breeze gently blew the cloud all the way back to Bassano Romano and soon Margherita was home. Hopping off her cloud-swing at her bedroom window, she blew a kiss



to Blustery, climbed in through the open window and ran into the kitchen where Mum was preparing breakfast.

'Buongiorno,' she beamed.

Life is about people.

Without people even the most magnificent places are lonely and sad.

Margherita hugged her mother tightly. She hoped that soon, very soon, her beautiful Italy would be alive and well again.



Eithne Gallagher 13/3/2020