



The Accidental Voyage

Discovering
Hymns
of the Early
Centuries

Douglas Bond

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1

So This Is Rome?

Shepherd of Tender Youth (Clement of Alexandria)

Christ, our triumphant King,
We come thy Name to sing;
Hither our children bring,
To shout thy praise.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA
(TRANSLATION BY HENRY MARTYN DEXTER)

"Pizza" thought Drew, breathing in the savory aroma of herbs, tomatoes, fresh-baked pizza crust, and heaps of melting mozzarella cheese. He licked his lips and rolled his eyes in anticipation as he raced—rather, putted—along the Via di Borgo on his blue moped. He inhaled again, and promptly sputtered and coughed as his lungs filled with the diesel fumes of a passing bus. Steadying his moped, he blinked several times, trying to see Mr. Pipes and Annie riding ahead of him through the smoky gray haze.

"Hey! Wait up!" he called, trying to coax more speed out of the tiny electric motor.

They raced on, unable to hear above the din of the city and the frantic buzzing of the electric bicycles. Drew pedaled furiously. He must have slowed down back there at the pizzeria. Glancing back over his shoulder, he decided it had to be pizza—pepperoni pizza.

A new scent filled Drew's nostrils as he raced around the next corner, still trying to catch up. Lining the streets under cover of rows of white canvas awnings, vendors waved bunches of colorful flowers and shouted at people to stop and buy. Though eager to catch up, Drew slowed down for a better look.

Without warning, a yellow Fiat coughed past him on the left, and with a squealing of tires and a sharp blast of his horn, the driver cut Drew off, narrowly missing his front tire.

Drew clawed at the brakes on the handlebars and swerved. His eyes wide with fright, he desperately tried to avoid a large bucket of carnations in his waggling path. With a *crash!* and a *splooosh!* water from the bucket drenched him from head to toe, and he landed in a sodden heap surrounded by limp flowers, an empty bucket, his crashed moped, and a stomping-mad Italian woman.

"*Imbecilio!*" cried the woman, her black hair tied back in a red scarf, and her brawny arms on her hips.

Drew sat up and cleared a mangle of soggy pink petals from his face. In spite of the language barrier, he detected from her bulging eyes and expressive hands that the woman was less than happy with him. Something about her reminded him of an Italian opera he'd once seen on television. Had he understood the spoken part of Italian, he would have heard the following:

"Do I look like somebody who can afford to have a bucket of flowers wasted? No! My precious, *precious* flowers. What on earth are you doing in Rome, anyway? You came for the driving, no? I know, I know, you're a tourist—probably American."

Drew caught the word "American." But it had an "o" at the end; in fact, it sounded like most of her words had an "o" at the end.

"Whatever, whatever, I don't have to like the way you drive your moped. All right all right, anyway: I know, in Rome tourists are our bread and Gorgonzola. La, la, la. You come to see all our old stuff—we have the best crumbling old stuff in the world! And you come to eat our food—we have the best food in the world! And I had—had, mind you—the best flowers in the world until you smashed them into this heap of rubbish! Anyway, we have the best everything else in the world, right here in Rome (well, maybe not the best tourists)! Do you think I don't know all this? No. But why did you have to ruin *my* flowers? Why? Why not Luigi's or Signora Pellagrino's? Why me? Why?"

Drew stared dumbly back at the woman and wondered how she could say all that without taking a breath. She probably wouldn't understand if he apologized. But maybe if he spoke really slowly—

"I a-m s-o s-o-r-r-y," said Drew, speaking as loudly as he could. She just stared. He tried again, this time holding his hands, palms up, and shaking them for emphasis with each word.

The hands seemed to help. She answered in Italian:

"Yeah, yeah. So sorry, are you? Lot of good that does my poor flowers, no?"

Drew wished he could make her understand, but after another pleading look into her angry face, he fumbled in his pocket for a handful of lire—Mr. Pipes had told them that it took lots of lire to buy anything. He thrust the money into the flower lady's fist and disentangled himself and the moped from the flowers and bucket. Dripping wet, he yanked red carnations out of the handlebars and spokes, clambered back onto his moped, and urged it after Mr. Pipes and his sister.

So *this is Rome*, he thought, frowning and wiping a flower petal off his wet cheek. He strained to see Mr. Pipes and Annie through the weaving traffic. His sister's blond hair flashed in the sunlight as it streamed from under her helmet.

Italy. Drew wasn't so sure about Italy; why not just go back to Olney and have another summer of adventures on The Great Ouse, sailing and fishing and exploring the countryside with Mr. Pipes and the Howard children? He did miss Bentley and even his sister Clara.

Ah, but then Mr. Pipes had mentioned Italian food. *It'd better be really good*, he thought, *after all this*. Then he remembered the wonderful smells of that pizza. *Give Italy a chance, give it a chance*, he told himself.

Meanwhile, Annie held on tightly behind Mr. Pipes and gazed from left to right at the bustling city. Her imagination raced back in time at the sight of an ancient arch or crumbling column, and the next moment she felt a smothering uneasiness at the chaos of surging, perspiring bodies and impatient motorists blaring their horns and hammering with their arms out open windows against the sides of their cars. Everyone seemed to be talking and gesturing at once, and traffic seemed to go round and round without ever getting anywhere. The racket was deafening.

Mr. Pipes had said that Italy involved some inconvenience to the foreign adventurer, but he assured Annie that they would not be disappointed and that perhaps the greatest adventure ever awaited them in the land of the early Christian saints—and martyrs.

Mr. Pipes rounded a corner, and Annie closed her eyes and breathed in the fragrant scents of carnations, gardenias, and a variety of roses. Row upon row of flower stalls lined the narrow street. She nearly turned all the way around on the back of the moped, taking in the heavenly panoply of color as she and Mr. Pipes rode past the flower market. She caught sight of Drew at the far end of the street and tapped on Mr. Pipes's shoulder.

"Drew's pretty far back!" she shouted next to the old man's helmet. She hoped he'd slow down or even stop so that she could look at the flowers—and Drew could catch up.

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