

It was nearing the end second summer in Bedogno. Lillias was very happy in her new life. Or, as she was now able to say in italiano, *'sono molto felice, io, con la mia vita nouva, qui, in bell' Italia'*.

Lillias was not much of a talker, not really, but she had always been a very attentive listener. In her past life, that old life in Glasgow, she had found, more often than not, that she been left out of things, stuck by herself indoors for days, sometimes weeks, with almost no contact with others. She had never liked TV. If anything, radio was her 'thing', and, being a good listener, she just loved a good talk programme.

Over the years Lillias had built up snippets of knowledge and often, if she had chosen too, could have helped 'steer' many of the conversations she overheard towards 'the facts of the matter'. Instead she had stayed silent and smiled to herself, perhaps a wee bit smug, secure in her wider knowledge of the World. Lillias knew a lot more than people gave her credit for.

Most of all Lillias loved being outdoors, in the country, in company of nice people. She loved nature, and took great pleasure in watching wildlife and the changing of the seasons. Her new life here in in the tiny village of Bedogno, near Villa Minozzo, in the Region of Emilia Romagna, she thought to herself every day:

"You, Lillias Rosa, are one very lucky girl. You now live in paradise! Or, in italiano: *"Lei, Lillias Rosa, e' una persona con boun fortuna; lei vivo ora in paradiso!"*

Sometimes, as she thought this, she almost burst out laughing, remembering when she lived near a very different 'Paradise', or 'Celtic Park', to give it its official name. Almost all of her 'old life', before Bedogno, had been lived in the East End of Glasgow.

Of course Lillias Rosa was her new name now: *'il mio nuovo nome italiano'*. It was name she had given herself soon after she had arrived, almost two years ago now.

In her 'old life' she had been called 'Susan' or, what she really, really, really hated, 'Just Susan'; or worst of all, 'Poor Susan'. She had to admit in one sense she was poor. Throughout her entire life Lillias had never had much in the way of possessions, no fancy clothes or shoes or anything like that. This had never bothered her.

She had often heard some people say, in the passing: "Look at that poor, poor, lassie, somebody should tell the Social, it's just no' right! That lassie'll catch her death o' cauld. Whit's her name again? Oh aye, Susan somethin'. That's right, aw' poor Susan. Poor lassie. Poor wee lassie."

That was another thing that had really annoyed her! She had never, ever, been a 'wee lassie!' She was a fine big girl, well a woman now, with a fulsome figure, one that she was very proud of - thank you very much!

Back in Glasgow, seeing them shuffling along, often wrapped up as if they were Eskimos in Alaska, she had just laughed to herself. Lillias had never once in her entire life felt the cold. Never! One time in Glasgow, years ago, it had been at -21 C for days on end but she had been oblivious.

She had even spent a few nights one time standing outside in deep snow, naked, just to show off her body. Yes, that was some Hogmanay Party that one! She had been with Pheona, at the Youth Hostel at Glen Sheil. There had been a big gang of them. Absolutely Fantastic! Or, in italiano: *'assolutamente fantastico!'*

When Pheona had decided to make the big move to live here in Bedogno she had asked her: "Would she like to come too, and be their 'life model' for her new venture, 'Art Holidays in Italy'?" In reply she had blinked, holding back the tears, no need to say anything, she was just so, so happy! And that was that! Decided! And now here she was, *in paradiso!* In fact she would have given her right arm for the job. Pheona and David had always been so kind to her, so open-hearted and generous. They were her whole life, really; she would have been lost without them. She would never have made it here to *'paradiso'* without them.

They had given an upper apartment in an older, separate part of the big Villa. It was quite basic really but her needs had always been simple and she had no complaints. On the contrary, she was very pleased with her new accommodation. She loved standing at her big picture window looking out along the valley to the Apennines.

And best of all, Lillias now had cats of her very own. They had been quite wild at first but, by standing very still, which she had always been good at, they had soon overcome their fear of her. She loved it when they came close and rubbed against her ankles. The older cats that had been kittens when she first arrived were now parents themselves and their kittens, especially the smallest two, were very tame and spent hours playing around her feet.

One, which was almost completely white, she had called Bianca. The other one, a gingery marmalade cat, she called Tootsie, because it was always grabbing at her toes with its sharp little claws, which Lillias didn't mind a bit! It was quite tickly really.

And then there was Matilda! Everyone knew Matilda.

Although she was still completely wild, Matilda was very smart. And, although no one else seemed to realise this, Matilda was a hypnotist! She had completely captivated Pheona and David, putting her spell on them, and could make them do her bidding. Lillias had watched her do it, amazed at the power that one little feline can wield.

That first winter, she had arrived here with Pheona and David in November it had been very cold and snowy, with deep snow, much deeper than she had ever seen back in Glasgow. But every day there had been sunny, blue, cloudless skies and hardly even the whisper of a breeze. She had stood gazing out from her big picture window, for hour after hour, at the fields, the trees and the beautiful snow-capped mountains.

Best of all was watching for the wildlife, which she did day and night. There were deer, rabbits and hares, and various birds. One time she had seen a wild boar sow with her piglets. It was remarkable what you can see if you just stood still and silent. Sometimes she had been so happy that she had almost wept. This made her feel, a mature woman like herself giving way to her emotions.

Lillias had made a special friend in their nearest neighbour, a mature man called Arthur, or in italiano, *'il mio vicino, Arturo'*.

Unlike Lillias, Arturo was a big talker, but in a nice way, spending many hours standing looking up, admiring her figure and talking to her. Sometimes he brought other neighbours with him, the ones who had not realised that she was there. It was nice to be the centre of attention, and Lillias enjoyed listening to their conversation. That was how she had picked up most of her Italian.

She had learned that Arturo was retired, so he must be a bit older than her. But he was still vigorous, a busy guy, always on the go, always helping people. And he was helping his son Marco to build a house. She could see that Arturo must be rich: he had an enormous shed full of tractors and equipment, mostly new. Arturo had every kind of tool anyone might need, and he was happy to lend them to friends and neighbours.

Yes, Lillias had to admit, she *really* liked Arturo, and she knew he fancied her too. It was such a pity that he was already married. But that's how it goes; all the best ones have already been 'nabbed'. But, to be fair, his wife Bianca and her little dog Rocky were very nice. Bianca always called up "Salve!" when she passed taking Rocky for a widdle walk. And like Lillias, Bianca was quiet too, seldom saying much, nearly always staying at home, indoors, just like Lillias. Maybe that's why Arturo fancied her, Lillias thought, because she looked like a younger Bianca?

'Anyway', or in italiano, '*Allora*', Lillias would just have to wait and hope that her own 'Mr Right' or '*Signore Guisto*' would come along soon, and sweep her off her feet.

In the meantime this was such a great place to wait. The conversations that she overheard every day were absorbing. The folk that came to enjoy the 'Art and Sculpture Classes' with Pheona or to go 'Walking and Climbing' with Pheona and David were so nice, always waving and calling up "Hello" or "*Buongiorno*".

It was like having a large extended family visiting you. A lot of them were from Glasgow or other parts of Scotland, so she could keep up to date with all the news from back there, although, to be fair, nowadays she did not really think of 'back there' as being home, or miss a single thing about her old life.

Well, maybe just the odd sing-song. She had always loved a good old fashioned sing-song and some nights, often after David had cooked up one of his famous barbecues, he would get out his guitar and his big pile of song sheets and off they would all go singing their hearts out. The cats loved it too and always joined in, singing along to their 'own words', in Italian of course. What a laugh!

And she, Lillias Rosa, was a part of it all, just standing there in her big picture window, singing along with the rest of them, but quietly.

One night, a few weeks ago, after they had all gone to bed and it was quiet again, she had stood gazing up at the night sky, looking in wonder at the stars, at their brightness and their countless numbers. Then she saw showers of shooting stars, thousands and thousands of them. She had never seen anything like it before; they just kept coming, until she must have seen millions of them.

For some reason it had made her think of Perry Como and she had started to sing quietly, into to herself:

*'Catch a falling Star  
And put it in your pocket,  
Save it for a rainy day....'*

Then, almost without thinking about it, she found herself singing out loud in italiano:

*'Prenda una stella cadente,  
E metterla nella tasca,  
Conservarla per un giorno piovoso....'*

She started giggling, just a little at first and then it became a huge belly laugh. She could not stop herself! Here she was in Bedogno, where it had not rained for over four months so she would hardly need to catch more than a few stars! But back there, in Glasgow, she would have needed to catch every one of all of those millions of stars to cover all those rainy West of Scotland days.

Yes, Lillias Rosa had to say it again: she was so, so happy in her new life! So happy that she could not stop herself and she suddenly shouted out loud, to a startled Bianca and Tootsie,

*'Questo luogo e' splendido!  
E siamo vivere qui!  
Mi piace moltissimo vivere in Bedogno!'*

Then she closed her eyes and imagined the last few hours over again. She had really loved the bit when they had all stood up during the barbecue sing-song and, turning towards her, had raised their glasses to sing:

*'We'll drink a drink a drink to Lilly the Pink, the Pink the Pink.....'*

She had noticed that Arturo always turned up on barbecue nights, standing quietly in the dark, with little Rocky beside him, looking up at her and smiling.

Then Matilda had rubbed against her legs and Tootsie tickled her toes!

"PURRFETTO!!



*Written for Pheona and David (and 'Susan').*

*Thank you for one of the best holidays of our lives!*

*Gianni Bontroni e Margherita, settembre 2011.*