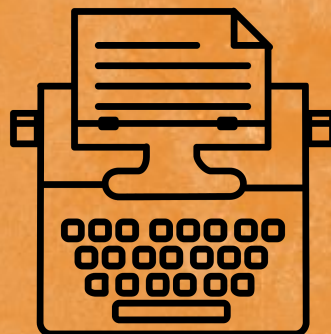


Title:

Author:

Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story
entry*



FORMAS



FINDING EMMA IN BOLOGNA 2200

By Lucia Tedesco

'A little puzzle my dad taught me when I was ten. When is someone you will love still going to be alive?' What do you mean?'

'You're twelve years old. When will you turn ninety?'

They jot down on a piece of paper:

$$2090 + 90 = 2180$$

'Now let's imagine your ten-year-old grandchild, born in 2170: when will that person turn ninety? When would they still be talking about you?'

They work out the sums.

'Would it be 2260?'

'Yes, can you imagine that? The person you'll love most in all the world will still be alive in 2260! Imagine your time. I was born in 2008 and you'll know a person who'll still be alive in 2260. That's the length of time you connect, more than 250 years. The time you can touch with your own hands. Your time is the time of the people you know and love, the time that moulds you. And your time is also the time of the people you will know and love. The time that you will shape. Everything you do matters. You create the future every single day.'

- Andri Snær Magnason, On Time and Water

Seven days. Seven very long days since I found in my father's secret hiding place the safe with my great-grandmother Emma's things. Several times I thought of not opening it, of ignoring this discovery, but I felt the need for answers. I hope that this trip will not turn into a nightmare and that my stay here in Bologna will go unnoticed at home. I've been thinking for a long time whether or not to tell my father about this trip. In the end, the least complicated solution for everyone seemed to leave without telling him. I know it is dangerous, that nobody would think of going over the border at the beginning of the Crazy Season, but I am sure that for my father the answer would have been the same at any other time: "Ophelia, no, you cannot go". Too many memories for him, I understand. Not to mention that in the Crazy Season the weather is extremely variable: some days it can reach 40 degrees and then suddenly there can be heavy rain for up to 72 hours straight. My grandmother used to say that it didn't used to be like this. There used to be half seasons, periods of transition from too cold to too hot temperatures and vice versa. The Crazy Season, on the other hand, lasts 40 days and for the rest of the time the temperatures stay around 27-30 degrees.

Ever since I found that diary, I can't stop thinking about it. I have fantasised for days about the idea of taking a trip to old Bologna, to the place where - according to my great-grandmother Emma - a city stood until not so long ago.

I have a hard time imagining a city. There hasn't been one for so long that I couldn't distinguish it from any other inhabited place. My grandmother used to say that they were born for the purpose of distinguishing human from non-human space.

My brothers and I did not understand at first: how is it possible to live while ignoring other species? How is it even conceivable to survive without being surrounded by greenery? I probably won't understand - we will never understand - yet my curiosity is now uncontrollable. I feel that I can no longer put off this moment. I feel I must discover my roots.

I just arrived on the aerotrain. The sky here is strange, constantly changing. I have Emma's diary with me, an acclimatising mask, and the satellite in case of emergency. I try to get my bearings with a map from 2023 that I found among Emma's things, but it's very difficult. There is tall grass everywhere, remnants of buildings from time to time, some clearly visible others less so because they are swallowed up by a strange form of ivy.

I open the diary and start reading again:

There is buzz in the city these days. 25 April is celebrated in a big way here. Via del Pratello is invaded by streams of people arriving from all over Italy. Few are the ¹ citizens of Bologna, many are the out-of-towners, mostly students. Friends from Florence came up. We sang "Bella ciao" in the square in chorus, as we do every year. Then we moved to the centre; at Pratello it was almost impossible to walk, talk, and breathe. We stopped in Piazza del Nettuno, still laughing at the statue's hand thinking of Giambologna. They wanted to whisper things to each other under the vault of the Podestà, but I was too tired, so I headed home.

Looking around, I see a perimeter of a strange dark stone. What's left of the marble, I suppose. I move closer to get a better look at it. I trample the grass to trace a path; I climb over the low wall and find myself in a pool. I begin to be more certain of where I am: it must be the fountain of Neptune, even though there is no longer any trace of the statue. Now that I have a point to start from

¹ Liberation Day, also known as the Anniversary of Italy's Liberation (*Anniversario della liberazione d'Italia*), ¹ Anniversary of the Resistance (*Anniversario della Resistenza*), or simply 25 April (*25 aprile*), is a national holiday in Italy that commemorates the victory of the Italian resistance movement against Nazi Germany and the Italian Social Republic, that is, the part of Italy under fascist control.

on the map I can orient myself better. I pick up the diary again and continue reading at the point where I had stopped:

I avoided Via Indipendenza. Everyone knows that on holidays it is a jungle. I preferred to continue on via Rizzoli and go down via Oberdan. I will miss all the side streets, all the red bricks of the buildings. I will miss peeking in the doorways and looking at the inner courtyards. I will miss the taverns, the people in the streets, under the arcades drinking and talking. When I can, I will continue to enjoy this. There weren't many people on Via Oberdan. Only a few tourists stopped at the Prosciutteria, unaware of the annual magic that is created at Pratello. Almost at the end of the street I noticed that the canal was full of water and the view was strangely crowded. People are usually unaware that Bologna's canals are visible in several places, so they queue up on Via Piella to get a tiny glimpse. They call it the secret Venice, but it has nothing Venetian or secret about it.

I stop at this point, I want to get back on track. Above all, I am curious to see what a canal is like. The temperatures are beginning to rise. I look around for nearby shade, I don't want to risk walking for too long in the sun's harmful rays.

The streets are not so well traced and visible now, but I realise I have to go north because before leaving I read something about the morphology of Bologna and apparently the northern part of the city is lower than the one to the south. I spot a building with a tower and choose it as a reference point to shelter from the increasingly hot sun. I hear a noise, a strange thud in the distance, but I decide to ignore it. I admit that I am starting to feel a little scared, but I am used to sudden encounters where I live, and above all I have not travelled so many kilometres to run away at the first doubt.

I keep walking and arrive at the spot where my great-grandmother said there should be an overlook to the canal. Yet, of the canal, no trace. A wide clearing now opens up before my eyes, which I decide not to enter. At this point, according to my calculations, I should not be too far away. I consult the diary again:

Via delle Moline welcomes the university area. It still makes me strange to think that the canals have been covered over and that I live in a house that long before had been a mill. The first street on the left, leaving Via Oberdan behind, is Via Capo di Lucca. There, amidst new buildings and brick houses, my nest emerges. A mansard flat far too big for one person. I will never forget the first time I saw it, the sense of home I felt; just

as I will never forget when I no longer felt safe. That time when the rain came down for three long weeks incessantly. That time I was forced to sleep on the sofa in the kitchen, the place most hidden by the skylights, fearing that I would end up with water everywhere, just as was happening in the bedroom. Everything that used to give me security, peace, serenity now frightens me, terrifies me, generates anxiety. I no longer feel safe even in my own home. I feel I will soon leave this city.

Emma's diary stops here. Or rather, what remains of it. The tears make me suspect that there is a part of her story that I will never know.

I set off again, but after a few steps I am forced to stop: a not too large pond prevents me from turning into via Capo di Lucca. The pond *is* via Capo di Lucca. I look around to see which way to cross it. Among the reeds I glimpse a roof and something tells me that I am close to what I am looking for. Suddenly, a strange animal emerges from the water with a hairy, matted coat, a long tail that they wave slowly and gills on his sides. They become aware of my presence and remain motionless for a few seconds. You don't see animals like that in my neck of the woods, so I can't quite make out what I'm looking at. Something about them reminds me of a feline: their moving silently, their attentive, cunning gaze. Felines in my neck of the woods are not amphibians, so this confuses me. I keep looking around in search of a support to cross the body of water, and so I spot an old abandoned *bottega*.² But as I try to make my way inside, the animal makes a dash for it and disappears back into the water.

The inside of the bottega is partly covered. On the uncovered side, the sun illuminates an object I have never seen. I decide to curb my curiosity and concentrate on finding the stand; also because it is getting warmer and soon I will have to shelter in the shade for more hours. Behind me, I notice that the door is not quite firm. I try to pull it off with some force and, after a few attempts, I find it in my hands, heavy enough to make me lose my balance. I drag it to the shoreline of the pond and try to climb on it a little awkwardly. I try to push the water with my hands to move from there and realise that I make this gesture spontaneously. Tired and on the verge of giving up, I stop for a few moments, when again the noise from before calls my attention: there, among the reeds in the middle of the pond, I glimpse a small house half submerged. Again, instinct tells me that I am close to my destination. I am about to pick up the pace, when a force under the door takes over and pushes me

² An old shop.

there: I see its tail, I suspect that it might be the creature I encountered just before. I am frozen with fear, I cannot make a sound. When we reach the front of the dwelling, they stop. I breathe a sigh of relief. I try to figure out how to reach the interior of the strange island, but my heart is still pounding. At this point, the animal starts moving more slowly again. I have the feeling that they have not come to harm me and that, on the contrary, they want to help me in some way. Like a spirit guide. We pass through a semi-underwater arch and walk down the long corridor. With my hands I grip the raft tightly. Slowly we approach a more or less walkable staircase. I take courage and jump onto the first accessible step, hoping it will hold my weight. Now I can see my helper. Our glances cross. I nod my head in thanks, I've seen this gesture in some sci-fi movie, I'm not sure they will understand. They give me one last look and disappear beneath the surface again. I am alone again - I think. I start to move from step to step, avoiding the gaps and trying to feel the condition of the structure with my foot first. The temperature is different now: it is still very hot, but something seems to be obscuring the sun. I can't see from there. I continue up the last three steps and at the sight of the floor, my stomach closes. I have the feeling that I have already been there, that I have already seen this place. I pick up the diary and hurriedly try to open the pocket inside the cover. I hear a loud bang outside, but I don't let myself be distracted. I knew it. I could hear it. Among the notes stored in the secret pocket, a picture of Emma's house pops out. The house she loved so much and then hated as well. I'm in the right place. Now I just have to look for something, to look for *it*. Now I can reconstruct my story. *Her* story. A heavy drop falls on my head. It starts to rain



Psychogeographic map of Bologna made by Ophelia