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Marriage by Motorcycle

By Beth Howard

Marcus picked me up for our first date on his Suzuki Bandit. It was not a typical first date: He lives in Germany, I was living in Seattle, and our date was in Milan, Italy.

I had met Marcus six months earlier at Crater Lake National Park in Oregon where we talked a total of 15 minutes in the parking lot of the lodge—enough time for me to give him my e-mail address. We exchanged a few short e-mails over the course of a month or so, but then stopped. I had nearly forgotten about him when, five months later, my phone rang—hearing his British-German accent again made me smile. “It’s funny you should call,” I told him. “I’m going to be in Europe next month

for a friend’s wedding.”

“Come visit me in Stuttgart,” he said.

“Come visit me in Italy,” I replied.

And so our first date was arranged.

The wedding was a weeklong celebration in Tuscany on an estate outside of Florence. I flew into Milan’s Malpensa Airport, arriving a few days early to meet up with Marcus for the weekend, but I made it clear I would be going to the wedding alone.

Marcus lives seven hours and an Alps-mountain-range away from Milan. He said he would come by car if the mountain conditions looked bad (a likelihood in April) but would ride his motorcycle if the weather was clear. If he was expecting a protest from me, he didn’t get one. I prayed for sun.

I arrived in Milan and didn’t know if I would recognize him, but when I saw a man walking confidently, dressed in full black leathers (*bellissimo!*), and carrying a helmet, I knew it was him. After saying a nervous hello, I changed into the full set of gear he brought for me and hoisted my duffel bag on my back. We accelerated onto the highway for the six-hour ride to Tuscany, and as the cold wind hit my face, I impulsively screamed with joy toward the sky.

Our weekend in Florence passed quickly—gelati on the Piazza San Giovanni, sunset on the Ponte Vecchio, dinner next to the Duomo—the perfect romantic ingredients to fuel a new relationship. I didn’t ask him to stay for the wedding, the bride and groom’s mothers did that for me. “Please, Marcus, please stay.” So he did. (It seems I had casually suggested he pack a suit.)

We filled the week touring the surrounding countryside on the Bandit. Our nights were packed with wedding festivities at local restaurants, followed by talks lasting late into the night over glasses of the Zingale vineyard’s own red wine.

When the week was over, he took me to the train station in Florence and we shared a tearful good-bye. We had made no plans to see each other again: I left for Switzerland to visit a friend, and he was heading north back to Germany. The next night during dinner—less than 24 hours later—my friend’s phone rang. It was Marcus. “I’m at a fork in the road,” he said. I interrupted him, squealing, “You’re coming here!” My friend smiled when I hung up. “There is no fork in the road,” she said.

He showed up an hour later, cold and tired, and we fed him a plate of pasta. “It was lonely riding without you,” he said. “That’s never happened to me before.”

Three years later we are married and living in Stuttgart, the friends who were married in Italy just had a baby, and the Suzuki Bandit was recently traded in for a Ducati ST4S. To this day I wonder if things might have turned out differently had he picked me up in a car.

