**PREFACE**

The dream of a journey often makes the mind drift away.

The images that play in my head make me «fly» wherever I want.

And the one who sets off can surely reach as far as anywhere ...

In a secluded corner west of the promenade Zattere in Venice, many years ago I found a bronze sculpture of three young women playing string instruments. And on the shelf a small sign with the text «Le putte di Vivaldi», Vivaldi's girls. Statues of women do not exactly dominate Italian squares, so I became extra curious.

What exactly is the story that connects the girls with the great composer?

The search for the answer was exciting. I found the little cotton sweater for the newborn Oberta, a museum with violins, lutes and violas from the seventeenth century, as well as Gloria Beggiato’s beautiful hotel, and they all told the story of the bronze girls who received music training from the master himself. It turned out that it was the *girls'* voices and games that attracted audiences from all over Europe for hundreds of years.

The meeting with the memorial to the girls became part of the inspiration for three books in the series «LE DONNE - women and the city». Because I want to tell stories - women's stories. And I have chosen to do that by letting women from the beautiful, fiery, complicated, wise, warm, ancient and modern Italy tell them. From the everyday lives to the spectacular ones. The low-key women and the loud ones. Those who had a story, something serious or a tale they would share.

I chose VENICE in the north. There I met a woman who must keep track of a diva, a professional dancer who just as easily performs in the city streets, and two sisters who creates glass jewelry. Exclusive and different, like Beauty.

In ROME in the center of the country, I ended up on a Vespa with one of the city's knowledgeable

hostesses who took me to the seven heights while I looked for the Truth. In a narrow street behind the parliament, I met a shoemaker who showed me clippings of herself in newspapers from all over the world, and who revealed why she dances tango once a week. In a small cafe I met the beloved author of many Italian readers, Dacia Maraini. She told about her favorite book and about a play she had written, which was beautiful performed by torchlight one dark evenings in the park Villa Borghese.

Finally, I traveled to SICILIA in the south, where Enza la Fauci grows grapes near Messina Strait, and was among those I met. I discovered how Franca Viola dared to say no to a forced marriage with a mafia perpetrator and received opposition from the local community, but massive support from the Italian people, the Prime Minister and the Pope. And I visited photographer Letizia Bataglia in Palermo. She showed me her pictures of the mafia's historical brutality - but in her cozy kitchen on a cold winter's day she told me a warm secret about what she's really most interested in.

In three books, I let fifty women tell stories from life and their local environment. In addition, I let forty historical women, nymphs and goddesses speak. These are not necessarily the most famous women, but simply those I met or heard about on my way.

I believe in visibility and promotion. Lifting each other up. Share courage and strength. I like when women take, or are given, space with fun, mischievous, wise and cheerful ways to deal with life. Around the water post and in the boardrooms. In storytelling and on guided tours. In scientific publications or as memorials - because they have meant something in the history of our lives.

The women have also "vaccinated" me against discouragement, given me strength to cope with the future and made me test out dreams. Because I do not want to be suffocated by constant challenges, someone's malicious will or broken promises. So, I'll keep looking ahead along my own path and let others find theirs. Not to be selfish, but to open up my senses. Not to look for what is the meaning of life, but to ask what gives life further meaning.

I believe that both the good and the bad journey can end with encounters that give meaning. They can be building blocks to the dream of the good in life. The journey can make us do something new. Change attitudes, thoughts and beliefs. Make the world and ourselves a little more generous. I have met new people, sniffed the smells where they live, tasted the food they

cultivate or retrieve from the sea and rivers. I learned that even the slightest trace of sensual

nourishment can do good, and that experiences tickle emotions and set the mind in motion.

I even think I have gained some self-insight in the process!

As I packed, my inner Saboteur swung his arms wildly and listed possible dangers. I could get sick, have my money stolen, find nowhere to live, be assaulted, lose confidence, long for home or be eaten by a large wild boar. But I looked away. I wanted to be overwhelmed by something new.

For what do I want with my life?

And what about Love?

Yes, Love, what about it?

The philosopher Kierkegaard wrote about how too many people stay for too long living in the basement of themselves. It was time to follow the philosopher's words about decorating and refurnishing the floors upstairs, where the view is wide and the perspectives are endless. I like the philosopher's thoughts on decorating new rooms to raise a higher sky over life.

That's why I put Dream, Courage and Will on top of the anorak in my little green wheelbarrow, pulled the zipper and set off to search «as far as anywhere ...»