Renato's Luck

by Jeff Shapiro



About the Book

Mi gusto questo gusto!"
"I want to taste this taste!"

Thirty-eight year-old Renato Tizzoni, in charge of the waterworks in the small Tuscan town of Sant' Angelo D'Asso, has always had a remarkable appetite for life. Indeed, sensual pleasures abound in the lush Italian countryside, from the hard, salty, tangy taste of the peccorino cheese he makes from the milk of his own sheep, to the soft curve of his wife's white neck as she bends down for a kiss.

But as autumn arrives this year, Renato finds his life changing in ways he doesn't want: a government dam project will soon inundate the town, forcing its inhabitants to move; his mentor and surrogate father, Aristodemo Vezzosi, has died; his teenage daughter is turning into a sullen stranger; and a British actress who needed his help at her villa has awakened a desire for a woman other than his beloved wife, Milena. Suddenly the waterworks man finds his taste for life vanishing.

Then Renato, who sees a significance in everything -- from the literal meaning of his own name to the finding of a inscribed water pipe beneath the piazza -- has a strange dream. Its message, as Renato interprets it, is that to change his luck, and that of the entire town, he must shake the Pope's hand while holding his own hand on his ass. *Un colpo di culo* is what they need: a stroke of ass, a stroke of luck. Who could not use a change of luck? Soon word spreads, and others learn of Renato's dream. He becomes a man with a mission, compiling a list of people who want their fortuna changed, among them the widow Vezzosi who is mourning her husband; his best friend, a broken-hearted American named Duncan; and his assistant Capelli, who makes blaspheming into a literary art.

Yet another sudden death, a surprise confession from his daughter Petula, and an object found while he and his wife take the Italian evening stroll called *la passeggiata* will have an unexpected impact on Renato's luck as he then begins a

wondrous, and hilarious, journey to the Vatican in Rome.

Combining the humor and pathos of *Life is Beautiful* with the rich sensuality of *Like Water for Chocolate*, Jeff Shapiro's extraordinary novel portrays a culture that embraces food, beauty, and passion with equal abandon as it resonates with the triumph of the human spirit in the face of death and disappointment. Shapiro's affirmation of life in an impermanent world makes this a fierce, bright gem of tale, set in the special beauty of Tuscany, a place that is more than a geography: it is a gift to the world.

Discussion Guide

1. In the opening chapter Renato spells out what is bothering him most: "How could a whole town just disappear? Why were people disappearing around him? Why did everything have to change? None of it made any sense." What answer does the book give to these questions? Do you find Shapiro's answer satisfying and true?

2. What are some of the qualities of Renato's relationship with his wife? Why is his marriage suddenly in trouble? What is your long-term prediction for their relationship?

3 What is the meaning of Renato's name?

4. Central to the plot of the book is Renato's dream. What do you think of his interpretation of his dream?

5. In the chapter "Culo" he discusses his relationship with water. What are some other things water can symbolize? How does the author's use of symbolism increase the richness of the reading experience of the novel?

6. Daily life and culture in Sant'Angelo D'Asso is much different than that of a typical American's. Discuss some of the differences.

7. One of the most wonderful parts of *Renato's Luck* is the compilation of his list. Do the sayings fit their character? Which is your favorite, and why? (The entire list is printed in the front of the book).

8. World War II comes up frequently throughout the book. Why? What was its impact on the lives of the people of Sant'Angelo D'Asso? Does the unexploded bomb have any symbolic meaning?

9. What does the final scene of the book say about life? How does the author tie the end of the book to the beginning? Why are the final words "For now"?

10. In the "Author's Note," Jeff Shapiro writes, "You know people better when you write them down." What does he mean?

Author Bio

Jeff Shapiro, who was born and raised near Boston, Massachusetts, moved to Tuscany in 1991. He works as an English

instructor in the Tuscany region.

Critical Praise

"With his sharp attention to detail and his ability to quickly engage us with his character's personal dialogues on meaty subjects such as love, death and the quest for spiritual understanding, [Jeff] Shapiro has delivered a charming novel that unfold with the vividness of a richly produced foreign film."

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