

★ **The Road to Urbino**

Roma Tearne

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The Road to Urbino moves between Sri Lanka, the UK, and Italy, illuminating how each locale touches and irreparably changes its cast of characters throughout their lives.

Ras is in jail. His crime: the theft of *The Flagellation of Christ*, painted by Piero della Francesca. The crime mystifies all who hear about it, and Ras suspects that includes the whole world. In order to form a sufficient defense, his attorney, Elizabeth Saunders, takes an in-depth approach to her frequent visits with Ras. Instead of just hearing about the moment Ras committed his decidedly stupid act, Elizabeth forms her defense by learning about Ras's childhood, love affairs, and, most of all, his broken relationship with his daughter, Lola. At the forefront is Ras's brother, Sam, who became a social activist after the horrific killing of their mother.

Details spill out from the viewpoints of Ras and of writer Alex Benson. The two men were in each other's company for a brief time in Italy, but Alex might hold the key to Lola's secret life. Ras and Alex's differing personalities and thought processes making their narratives and interactions appealing.

The narration develops in a singular fashion. Some of its dialogue is signaled with traditional quotes; some goes without. The technique is intriguing and reads in a beautiful, fluid way. Tragedies burst out from the page, as colorful as a bright painting, and emotions layer on as if delivered by skillful brushstrokes. Love and knowledge of art is apparent, making Ras's internal draw to *The Flagellation of Christ* clear.

The Road to Urbino is an original literary experience that begs consumption in moments of quiet relaxation in which it may fully cast its spell—and it *will* cast that spell.

TANISHA RULE (January / February 2020)

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