



# The Light in the Piazza & Other Italian Tales (Banner Books)

*Elizabeth Spencer*

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Elizabeth Spencer is captivated by Italy. For her it has been a second home. A one-time resident who returns there, this native-born Mississippian has found Italy to be an enchanting land whose culture lends itself powerfully to her artistic vision.

Some of her most acclaimed work is set there. Her American characters encounter but never quite wholly adjust to the mysteries of the Italian mores. Collected here in one volume are Spencer's six Italian tales. Their plots are so alluring and enigmatic that Boccaccio would have been charmed by their delightful ironies and their sinister contrasts of dark and light.

Spencer is grounded in two bases-Italy and the American South. Her characters too, mostly Southerners, rove in search of connection and fulfillment.

In *The Light in the Piazza* (a novella which has become both Spencer's signature piece and a Hollywood film) a stranger from North Carolina, traveling with her beautiful daughter, encounters the intoxicating beauty of sunlit Florence and discovers a deep conflict in the moral dilemma it presents. "I think this work has great charm," Spencer has said, "and it probably is the real thing, a work written under great compulsion, while I was under the spell of Italy. But it took me, all told, about a month to write."

In *Knights and Dragons* (another novella and a companion piece to *The Light in the Piazza*) an American woman in Rome and Venice struggles for release from her husband's sinister control over her. Spencer sets this tale in the cold and wintry dark and here portrays the other face of Italy. In "The Cousins," "The Pincian Gate," "The White Azalea," and "The Visit," Spencer shows the exceptional artistry that has merited acclaim for her as one of America's first-class writers of the short story.

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