

## Learning to Read

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# Learning to Read

by [dkwilliams](#)

## Summary

On the road between Verona and Florence lies Bologna, home of the oldest university in Italy. And, coincidentally, the current home of the oldest Immortal in the world.

## Notes

This is an alternate meeting story, based on bits of information in flashbacks. It is set shortly after the events in the flashback in "Star-Crossed", where Duncan and Fitz meet in Verona in 1637, and before the flashback in "Hunters" which takes place in Florence in 1639. Duncan talks about learning to read - and what lies on the road between Verona and Florence but Bologna with its university and its scholars? And we know from "Judgement Day" that Methos was in Italy sometime in the 16th-17th centuries. So what if that missing year (1638) was spent in Bologna, and what if paths crossed there?

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

*Duncan: "I have better things to do."*

*Fitzcainr: "Like what?"*

*Duncan: "Learning to read an' write."*

*Fitzcainr: "They don't pay us to read and write!"*

*Duncan: "They don't pay us to be stupid either! There's more to this reading an' writing than meets the eye."*

*from "Star-Crossed"*

## ***Bologna, 1638***

Adamo Sapienti was bored. So very, very bored.

There was no obvious reason why he should be so discontented. He was living a good life, as a research scholar at the University of Bologna, with access to one of the best libraries in the world. He had nice apartments in a good section of town, near the university but private and with two good escape routes. (Not that he'd had a challenge in the years that he'd been there.) He'd made friends with his current Watcher and they had a tacit agreement about what to keep private, even if that amounted to very little over the last year.

Boredom was part of the reason he'd accepted the invitation to this party, and for the last hour he'd been regretting this decision. The setting was truly magnificent, but then no one had ever accused the Rector of the University of Bologna of skimping on his parties. The food was delicious beyond compare and the wine was of the best. The décor was opulent and everything in the palazzo was of the finest quality.

And it wasn't that the company lacked appeal. The Fava family's patriarch hosting the event had gathered the finest artisans in Italy, the most learned scholars, and the most attractive men and women in the area. The musicians playing softly in the background were excellent. He could hear snatches of conversation about politics, about art, about the latest philosophies and theories. He could have stepped into any cluster and had his fill of intellectual discussions. Or he could have crooked his finger and had the most beautiful courtesan (female or male) at his feet.

It was all too excessive and predictable and *dull*.

He lifted a gilded glass from the tray of a passing servant and took a little sip, then grimaced. It was far too sweet and cloying, clinging to his tongue like crystallized honey. He set the glass down on a side table and longed for something like an honest beer to clear his palate.

And for the first time in nearly 100 years, Methos seriously considered abandoning the warmth of Italy and joining Darius in Paris, to live a simple monastic life.

Deciding to return to his own apartments where he could peruse one of his old journals (unearthed at the library), Methos slowly made his way towards the door. He would have moved faster but there were a few important people that he couldn't just ignore as he passed by them. He had nearly reached the doorway when he heard a voice that jarred him out of his *ennui*.

"I dinna ken why ye insisted we come here. Tha' are plenty a' books in England!"

It was like a breath of fresh air had blown into the overly perfumed room. Methos turned in place, looking for the source of the voice, and immediately located Hugh Fitzcainr. And standing at his side was one of the new Immortals whose name had begun cropping up in Watcher circles over the last dozen or so years: Duncan MacLeod.

He had heard that the younger MacLeod was attractive but words paled in comparison to reality. Duncan MacLeod was a feast for the eyes: tall and well-built with a glorious cascade of hair that fell to his shoulders, free of any artifice. And while he didn't particularly care for the cavalier mustache and goatee, both looked good on the Highlander.

"England? At this time of year?" Fitzcainr said, giving the younger man an aghast look. "Are you mad, laddie?"

MacLeod scowled. "Rather mad than dead, ye daft fool! Th' Prince's men are still after me."

"Relax, MacLeod! No one is going to look for *us* at a university." Fitzcainr looked around and his attention fixed on something – or, more likely given his reputation, a woman. "And now, if you'll excuse me, there's someone I need to meet."

"Fitzcainr!" MacLeod whisper-shouted as the other man slipped into the crowd.

Methos watched as MacLeod stood there where the Englishman had left him, looking uncertainly around before he suddenly straightened and began searching the crowd with intent. Their eyes met and he couldn't look away, and MacLeod cocked his head. There was a hint of a smile on his face and in his eyes, a little crinkle at the corner of his eyes. It was devastatingly attractive. *Devastatingly*. Methos had a feeling that he could be in big trouble. So he took the most prudent path open to him, turning away from the main room and slipping out of the long windows.

Which was why he was now hiding on the loggia, trying to plot a way out of the palazzo that didn't involve going inside. At least it was quieter here, not to mention the air smelled fresh and clean after the over-perfumed and stifling rooms inside. Methos took a deep breath to clear away the mental fog and then froze as he felt the tingle of an approaching Immortal.

"Ye waur starin' at me earlier."

And dammit to all the seven Hells, it was that voice with the attractive brogue, attached to the man standing between him and escape. Methos peered over the railing to gauge the distance to the ground, mentally cursing as he calculated that he'd either break his legs or his neck if he went over. And this would not be a convenient place or time to die, even if it wasn't permanent.

“I dinnae ken yer face but dae we hae business tae settle?”

Methos put his back to the railing and turned to face the younger Immortal. “I’m not looking to take your head.”

MacLeod’s face lightened with another of those attractive smiles. “Guid. M’ clothes are new an’ I dornt care tae buy more.” He bowed with a flourish. “Duncan MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod.”

Methos bowed his head in response. “Adamo Sapienti, at your service. And now, if you’ll pardon me, I must join my friends – “ He began edging around towards the other set of windows.

The other man shifted to block the way. “If yo’re nae lookin’ fur mah head, wa waur ye starin’?”

Methos shrugged and put on his most charming smile. “Does one need a reason to gaze upon so attractive a visage?”

MacLeod’s cheeks turned a little pink even as he snorted and said, “Yer flirtin’ words are e’en worse than Fitzcairn’s. Dae ye actually gie th’ lads tae bed ye, talkin’ loch that?”

That stung; after all, he’d been married many times, not to mention the less permanent liaisons with members of both sexes. “Compare me to Fitzcairn again and I just might take your head after all,” Methos retorted.

“Ye could try,” MacLeod said with a coy smile and he slowly blinked, his long lashes brushing his cheeks. Methos watched, fascinated, and drew in a shaky breath. Damn, but it had been too long since he’d last felt this strong an attraction.

MacLeod’s smile broadened. He stepped closer, within a few feet of Methos. “Ye dornt much loch a fighter ta me.” It was a provocative blend between flirting and taunting, and Methos didn’t know whether he wanted to run the young pup through or kiss him. Possibly both. “Mair loch a lover...a’ many things.”

“Looks can be deceiving,” Methos replied, trying to hold onto his wits. “I may be a scholar now but I was handling a blade long before you were born.” He loosened his sword in its hilt even as he checked again for escape routes.

There was an arrested look on the Highlander’s face at this, and he abandoned whatever flirtatious game he’d been playing. *More’s the pity*. “Yo’re a scholar then? Can ye reid an’ write? Wood ye be willin’ tae teach me?”

This was *not* where Methos had thought this conversation was going. “You want to learn to read?”

MacLeod nodded. “And write. I’ve tried tae teach m’self but I cannae gie th’ trick ay it.”

“You want me to teach you? Why?”

“Yo’re a teacher.”

His voice held a challenge and Methos stepped closer, tilting his head in a challenge of his own. “And this benefits *me* in what way, MacLeod?”

“Seems tae me ye micht need a wee bit a' practice, bein' a scholar.”

MacLeod smiled at him, an even more lethal version of his previously charming smile, then leaned closer to kiss him. Methos thought about asking just exactly what sort of practice the Highlander imagined that he needed but he was too busy kissing him back. And Methos knew that he was going to regret this, in the morning when his sober, cautious, and cynical side woke up. But for the first time in several decades he wasn't bored.

Methos broke the kiss, very reluctantly, but there were some things better done in private. “Very well,” he said, turning and leading the way back inside. “You may stay at my accommodations while I’m teaching you, MacLeod, and I expect you to earn your keep.”

“Then we hae an accord,” MacLeod said, following him. Then he added, “Ye dae ken tha' Fitzcairn will be wantin' lessons an all?”

Methos paused in his steps, sighed, and ran his hand over his face. “Wonderful.”

He looked over at where Fitzcairn was flirting with two, no *three*, young ladies. It would likely be days before Fitzcairn crawled out of their laps, and then he'd have to discover where MacLeod had gone. Although with Methos' luck, the English bastard *would* turn up and drag them *all* into trouble. But he'd worry about that later.

Methos had a feeling that the next year was going to be anything but dull.

## End Notes

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