



A Case of the Bad Boys, No Known Cure

Eleonora Mazzucchi (June 29, 2008)

One of these days, the phenomenon of the Italian bad boy will have to be thoroughly studied and elucidated. His appeal, plainly irresistible to so many women, eludes me. The only “bad” Italian I ever dated turned out to be gay—and that was by way of Proust, 70’s folk singers and homo-erotic fantasies of the Socratic kind—but never was I intoxicated by the smell of a leather jacket or the throttle of a moped. Which brings us to what may be the most important question this week: how could Anne Hathaway, a darling of the silver screen, have fallen so hard for the recently arrested Raffaello Follieri?

On paper Follieri seems highly respectable. As a developer and chairman of the Follieri Group, the company he runs with his father, he isn’t exactly the bad seed your mother told you to steer clear of. Ever since his arrival in the U.S. in 2003 he has made a name for himself, both in the business world and society pages. But because his financial dealings revealed themselves to be nothing but an embarrassing series of empty promises, notably the ones for which he was carted off to jail, his biggest success to date has been bagging the milky-complexioned Ms. Hathaway.

Follieri might have presented himself well, always in a suit and exuding the confidence of an Italian Mr. Big. Not quite what one would call handsome (despite looking a bit like a cross between David Duchovny and Zach Braff, a flaccid neck, rotund frame and unremarkable features do not handsome make), he had managed to charm a pretty actress who became his permanent arm candy. When mumblings of his shady business practices surfaced a year and a half ago, Hathaway, who was long the smiling, virginal face of a Disney franchise, also helped lend him an air of legitimacy. The skeptic in me was temporarily appeased when I thought, if Anne Hathaway wants to be seen with this sleazebag, he must have some redeeming qualities... Right?

As it turns out, not so much. He was arrested for fraud and money laundering last week, the culmination of a complicated web of lies he told over many years. Follieri had parlayed supposed Vatican connections into profitable business relationships with, among others, the California billionaire Ron Burkle. They turned out to be profitable only for Mr. Follieri. He squandered funds from investors, including over \$1 million from Burkle, for personal use—or more specifically for a lavish lifestyle complete with, as the court complaint stated, private jets, gifts for Hathaway, a nearly \$40,000 a month apartment in Manhattan, vacations and “dog-walking services”. Those must have been some Grade A, trained-in-the-Dr.Doolittle-school-of-animal-psychology dog-walkers (what did they offer, to escort pets on fur-lined, diamond-studded rick shaws?).



Originally, Follieri ingratiated himself into the inner-circles of powers through Doug Band, a close aide to Bill Clinton. Clinton in turn, is a personal friend of Burkle's and an adviser to his Yucaipa investment company. The Italian entrepreneur befriended both Clinton and Burkle, even pledging \$50 million to the Clinton Global Initiative (the pledge money never materialized). Yucaipa would later put down \$55 million for an investment venture with Follieri, on the grounds that he could secure church properties on the cheap. Follieri had led all his American investors to believe that he was the Vatican's financial officer, with an inside track to its affairs, when in fact his ties to the institution were flimsy and contrived. He had paid some Vatican administrators, and the relative of a former Vatican official, to create the appearance of connections. This is the most significant charge against him.

All of this makes me wonder if this isn't perhaps the same road Follieri took, at least in part, to his now ex-girlfriend's heart. Seeing as Anne Hathaway could have had her pick of the glietterati litter and instead chose our man Follieri, settling down with a nice Catholic boy might have been exactly what drew her to the native of San Giovanni Rotondo. Unusual as it may seem to pick a significant other for his "Catholic-ness", the actress has always wanted to be close to the Church. Raised in a stringently Catholic family, up until she was fifteen she dreamed of being a nun. She didn't abandon her aspirations to the ascetic life for lack of devotion, but because when she discovered her older brother was gay, she wanted to dissociate herself from a gay-bashing institution—which she is, however, still loath to speak ill of. When she recently stated that most of her friends are gay men, she was asked if it made her uncomfortable that her fiancé was closely linked to the Vatican. She responded by saying that she'd "rather not comment on the Church. They've done wonderful deeds all over the world".

As for her romantic life, she once spoke in a tone that betrayed a certain girlishness and wide-eyed naiveté: "Kindness is really important to me in finding my own prince—so are patience and a sense of humor. Without those qualities he's no Prince Charming!" Hathaway had always spoken gushingly about Follieri, even up until a month ago, and was often pictured clinging to him and looking very much in love, but there is no amount of sense of humor, or willful blindness, she could muster to get over the scandals that riddled his professional life. And she was no quitter: she plodded through months of humiliation, not least from cast mate Kate Hudson who, according to *Star* magazine, called Follieri a "loser" back in April when he was arrested for bouncing a \$215, 000 check. Hathaway finally chucked her Princess Diary niceties, faced reality and dumped him three weeks ago.

Anne Hathaway wasn't the first girl, and won't be the last, to be beguiled by a naughty Italian. But Hathaway was duped. My question is, what's their excuse?

Maybe if you asked them, they'd say it was well worth the wild ride.

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