

Città è La Mia Chiesa

The smell of day-old tacos lingered in my nostrils outside in the parking lot, where I sat on the hood of my car downing Taco Bell's new combo meal. It was two o'clock in the morning, and life was just fine in my quaint little village outside of Washington D.C. I had just gotten off work and was fulfilling my regular before-bed-bullshit. I finished up my meal and tossed the crumpled up wrapper into a nearby overflowing trashcan. I suddenly felt my left pocket vibrate and I pulled out my iPhone, expecting to see a text from a friend or maybe an invite to a nearby party. What I really saw completely changed my life. "Congratulations on your Admission to The College of Arts and Sciences as well as to Discovery Florence". I longed for some sort of response to equate these words, but a scream was all I could muster: it rang from the nearby McDonald's all the way to the capitol, as my body shivered from Euphoria; I was Florence bound.

Upon arrival, the first thing I remember seeing was a church. Not one with an extraordinary façade, but a particular church. It sat pleasantly on a hilltop in complete harmony with the river in front and the sun above. I couldn't fathom why this church had such an impression on me, so I simply ignored it and focused on immersing myself into Italian culture. Fortunately, I had quickly discovered my crutch: my beautiful host mother Laura. Within my first few weeks we attended authentic Italian folk festivals, countryside parties, and soccer matches where I cheered for my team with pride. It felt good to be a Florentine. I learned of a culinary world beyond the drive-thru menu; one that consisted of fresh Sicilian pasta, tender cow stomach, and cured meats topped with sliced cheese. I discovered a social atmosphere rich with diversity and language, an atmosphere without beer pong tables and keg stands but with late-night piazza parties and walks down the

Arno. I discovered a world that had existed only in my wildest fantasies: the mystic world of Florence.

I could hardly remember my life back home and eventually my old friends gave up on calling, slowly they began to fade away. Admittedly, this was due to my own self-intentions: I did not wish to be pulled back into my former American life. My days were now rich with masterpieces from Giotto to Michelangelo, my evenings with Chianti wine and laughs with Laura, and my nights with brightly lit clubs amidst the cool breeze that ushered in newfound feelings of youth and freedom. My jeans began to cling tighter to my thighs, my hair slicked up with gel and my hood grew a layer of fur. I found myself mimicking hand motions, ones that I intuitively understood but could not express through words. My transformation was near complete, but something still remained: that church. There was a certain air of stillness about it as it stared quietly from across my balcony. On one cold Sunday morning, I took for the hillside.

I climbed until I reached the peak and took in the sight before me: crimson rooftops engulfing the magnificent Dome of the city. Dark clouds swirled into a cluster as rain began to fall. I let it drench my face and clothes as I stood with arms extended in both directions. For just a moment the city was mine, the world was mine. I turned toward the church and more than ever felt its power over me. I hesitated for a mere moment before swinging the door open and being overwhelmed by the stain-glass windows that layered the walls of my mind. I sank to my knees and for the first time truly realized where I was. I had been here before; this place had been conjured from my early bedtime stories. It was this place that I thought never truly existed; now I knew that it had always been my destiny. "Thank you" I said aloud, I was finally home.

