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Travel and Adventure Writing

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*Abroad*

“Cara, wake up, we’re here!” said my sister Courtney, gently shaking me from my nap.

I could hardly scrape through the thick groggy substance that filled my brain, to remember our last flight from London. I am delirious. I had never known this feeling, flying more than ten hours at a time, really did a number on me. The rest of my family ignores my sluggish movements, not entertaining the complaints I spewed about how tired I was. They were just as exhausted. My mom put a firm hand on my back and guided me through the hell that is customs.

My consciousness finally broke through the fog and I saw that we were on a small beautifully crafted, glossy wooden boat, headed into the city. For a while we cruised through a wide expanse of dark green water. Up ahead in the distance I could finally make out a cluster of a buildings that looked to have shot up through the water and taken root in the middle of an ocean. “Venezia,” our boat’s captain bellows.

Through the Grand Canal and down another smaller canal, that seems too skinny for the likes of our boat; we squeeze through towering buildings and dock in front of our villa for the next week. That was the best taxi ride I could’ve ever imagined. I burst through the vine covered entryway and saw twinkle lights strung up in a zig zag fashion across the open aired ceiling. I resisted the urge to plop down anywhere for an, oh so peaceful, sounding nap and explore the home.

It’s so foreign; the layout of the house made no sense to me. The sitting room was at the entrance, crowded with a couch that spanned the width of the room. The kitchen was adorned with mirror walls that were distressed with gold flowery details. Further into the house, up a step was the spiral staircase. The entire room was made with light colored limestone slabs and the staircase would tightly around the black wrought iron railing. The top floor had three bedrooms, each with at least ten foot ceilings and dark wood armoires. Olivia, my other sister, raced past me to select the best bedroom. We bumped into each other and got caught in a skinny doorway, leading into what turned out to be the best bedroom. Olivia elbowed her way in front of me and jumped on the bed. “Dibs!” she shrieked. I rolled my eyes and chose another room, fairly equal in size but lacking the bigger bed Olivia had won. My bed was small and firm but the windows were tall and came to a point at the top. I looked around my new space and felt as if I had traveled back in time. The window draperies were a heavy velvet material dyed an indigo blue hue. The wood floors were a deep brown and mostly covered by the oriental rugs that were spread all throughout the top floor. My nightstand held many porcelain figurines crafted with such excruciating detailing on their faces that I immediately hid them so I could sleep without their eyes watching me. I gave in to my drowsiness and laid down on my stiff bed drifting away into my new Italian dream world.

After, what turned out to be a fitful nap in the middle of the day, my family awakens. Despite our incredulous jetlag we hurry out the door, heading deep into the city for food. I lazily walk among the ancient, weather beaten buildings, I later learned were built in the 14th century. The architecture was the most unique I had ever seen. The venetians were Italians but their buildings were absolutely not. “The architectural style is really a combination of gothic and Islamic elements. They figured out how to structure homes that were not too heavy so they wouldn’t collapse” Jack, my sister’s boyfriend said looking up from an informational pamphlet. They were geniuses, I thought, I can’t believe it’s all still standing. I felt so far away from home at that point; everything was different. The buildings were ancient, the people were slower, more relaxed and the sound of music was everywhere. It was a lot to accept at the moment; and I was so hungry. I pushed away my thoughts and drowned myself in the aromatic scents of heirloom tomato and fresh basil in my margherita pizza.

The next morning, I followed my family to the café around the corner. I stood like a zombie, vacantly looking towards them. I felt bad I was no fun; I knew I needed something that could cure my soul crushing exhaustion. My dad shoved a hot paper cup in my hand and I accepted, too tired to consider refusing. Foamed milk and bitter espresso fuse together on my first sip of a cappuccino. The hot velvety liquid is sent directly to my bloodstream. I’m hooked.

Walking throughout Venice, taking gondola rides and stopping at the famous scenic view that is the Ponte dell ‘Accademia bridge; I fall quickly in love. The floating city! I’d never seen anything like it. The buildings fronts were veiled in roses and ivy, the balconies sprinkled onto the exterior, holding up local venetians who turn their already bronzed faces towards the warm summer sun. So much color, so much sunlight and movement and texture... I could hardly take it in fast enough.

At the edge of the city, on our final night, we ate our dinner al dente, a mere foot from the Adriatic Sea. I tried to remain calm and hide my shocked face as a rich cranberry colored liquid was poured into my glass. I am only thirteen years old, I thought to myself, and I’m unquestionably being served Italian Chianti? My family eyed me and laughed. I taste the wine, smile and feel years older after my first trip to Europe commences.