

TUTTE LE STRADE PORTANO A ROMA

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FICTION

I trip on an uneven cobblestone, blinded by the sunlight piercing the sky. The Circus Maximus—once the largest arena for games and festivals, the circus has been humbled to an empty green space dotted with yellow wildflowers. I close my eyes and try to hear the cheering of 100,000 Roman spectators, but all I hear is the whining of *vespe* flying by.

I walk away from the circus, climbing the nearest hill. The mosquito-like traffic gives way to a few pedestrians. Cyprus trees intermittently block the sun's rays, casting shadows on the Roman path beneath my feet. Colors of bright orange and suntan peek out on the old buildings that are entangled with vines.

The scent of rich espresso captures my attention. It floats out of a loud bar, packed like an American club on Latin night. I squeeze between the locals taking a mid-afternoon break and flag down the man behind the counter.

“Che cosa prendi, signora?” His thick Italian accent and tanned skin sends a cool shiver up my spine.

I tuck a piece of hair behind my ear. “Vorrei un cappuccino, per favore.”

“Certo, bella.” He turns to the cappuccino machine, its polished silver façade tall and proud.

I take my cappuccino to an outside table, avoiding a puddle on the ground from last night's November rain. The delicate foam on top forms a heart. I take a sip and the shape stretches apart, its love dissipating into the bold coffee itself. My heart feels the same, melting in the face of Italy's charm and richness.

Women dressed in exquisite coats, hats, and shoes pass me. They aren't dressed up for anything special; fashion is their art form, their new Renaissance. I become very aware of my jeans and simple top. I must go shopping today, at the stores on Via Condotti or Via del Corso: my favorite kinds of museums.

Cigarette smoke twirls around my chest and into my nose with that unmistakably European smell. The source: cigarettes in the fast-moving hands of Italian men. Their conversations just look loud. Grandmothers carry bags of fresh produce and bread from the nearby market, uttering

“Mamma Mia” and Hail Mary’s under their breath.

I sip the last of my cappuccino, licking foam off my upper lip.

My feet take me further upward, away from history - the Forum, the Colosseum, the Circus. On one of Rome’s seven hills, I arrive at a park that overlooks the city. Green grass adds a freshness to the tan color palette of the city below. The ancient construction is peppered with industrial buildings, a visible blending of old and new. Perched on the nearby wall, a couple is more interested in each other’s eyes than the city in the distance. I hear the *pop* of their bottle of prosecco, the “Salute!” as they raise their glasses.

Italians need no reason to celebrate. Every day is a chance to embrace happiness, love, excitement. I wish my feet would melt into the cobblestones, that I would be forever instilled into this moment, this city.

But even Rome’s eternal glory faded.

“Ciao,” I say, because
I cannot decide between
hello and goodbye.



I am a senior English major and creative writing minor, graduating in May 2021. I am preparing for a career in editing, travel writing, and food journalism. The piece I have submitted is a haibun, which is a form of poetry that includes a prose poem and a haiku. A haibun typically traces a journey by combining the external images observed and the internal images of the traveler’s mind during that journey. More than just musings of setting, the haibun is intended to explore awareness and to evoke emotion. During my junior year, I studied abroad in Rome, Italy. My time abroad has served as an inspiration for much of my creative writing, including this non-fiction piece. The title is Italian, and translates to "All Roads Lead to Rome." I hope that this haibun conveys images of the beautiful city of Rome as well as the sense of longing that I feel for Italy as a whole.

