

Three Days in Florence

By

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INT. HOTEL ROOM, GRAND HOTEL BAGLIONI - EVENING

A suitcase lies open on a double-bed in a hotel room, the contents inside spilling out having been rummaged through.

A woman's thumbs tap in a caption below a photo on a phone, then delete it again... and then type out another one.

LAURA, a woman in her mid-twenties, is leaning her elbows on a deep wooden windowsill, holding said phone. She's in shorts and a bra, caught in the middle of getting changed. She posts the photo to social media, before laying the phone down and resting her head in her hands.

She sighs herself into a daydream.

LAURA (V.O)

I often find myself reflecting on my three days in Florence, and continually struggle to voice the justification as to why I felt such a voyage necessary. I'd gone alone, at a time in my life when an unwanted career in retail had drained me of my ambition, and a passionless association with a boy from a dating app had failed to mold itself as I'd expected. Yet, *escapism* doesn't seem to paint the right picture.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP BAR - EVENING

Laura, now wearing a top to go with the shorts, sits at a table with a glass of sparkling water. She flicks through her phone, finds her post from earlier and deleting it.

She turns to look at impressive backdrop - the Duomo that imposes over the rest of the city.

LAURA (V.O)

Answers maybe frames it better. I'd gone to Florence in search of a answers.

THE OPENING TITLES START over the picturesque setting, Laura finishing her drink and making to leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIAZZA SANT' AMBROGIO - EVENING

The sun is low on Laura's first evening as she eats a pizza outside a busy takeaway, leaning alone on a wall nearby the eager queue. She looks about with wonder at her new setting and its bustling atmosphere. OPENING TITLES FINISH.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIA PIETRAPIANA - EVENING

Laura strolls leisurely down a popular street lined with bars and restaurants.

LAURA (V.O)

For a first impression, I decided to forsake the guidance of any map and lose myself in the city, absorbing all the cobbled streets had to offer in the glow of Golden Hour. Every bar, crammed as they were with the hippest of patrons, excited me with the prospect of fascinating strangers, the kind whose stories would leaving a lasting mark. I'd seen myself conversing confidently with all manner of characters when I'd booked the trip, and to that concept I'd sold my heart.. that and sizeable chunk of my savings.

Laura takes a look inside a bar.

LAURA (V.O)

Despite the hope aroused by that initial study, I felt myself surrendering to the draining nature of travel. Instead, I yielded to the call of the hotel, where I could enjoy a couple of strong drinks and have the pleasant warmth of the evening sail me to an early night. My social odyssey could wait another night.

Laura moves on down the street.

EXT. PIAZZA DEL DUOMO - EARLY NIGHT

Laura enters the square, dwarfed by the impressive nature of the Catterdrale di Santa Maria del Fiore. She strolls around the building, under the glow of the old streetlights that surround it.

LAURA (V.O)

On the way back, Florence's most famous landmark struck me for the first of many times. I'd passed it before, but somehow this second encounter had more of an impact. Maybe it was the unusual lack of a crowd, or the pretty lights that dotted it's perimeter. Whatever it was, it certainly made an impression. I suddenly realised how small I felt - the first of many solitary reflections that weekend.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - MORNING

Laura pores over a map during breakfast, the morning sun making a silhouette of the cathedral behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. GALLERIA D. ACCADEMIA - DAY

Laura hands a ticket over to staff at the entrance of an art gallery, before passing into the first chamber and taking in the first pieces - namely, the copy of Giambologna's "The Rape of the Sabine Women".

LAURA (V.O)

Whilst I'd determined my key pursuits to be either social or culinary, it seemed wasteful to not seek out some of the artwork which had marked Florence as the Cradle of the Renaissance. I therefore dedicated the daylight to sightseeing, beginning with Michelangelo's heroic David.

Laura rounds the corner and spots the statue of David at the far end of the hallway.

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LAURA (V.O)

The plethora of guide books I'd dug through urged me to admire the finer details. His glare towards Rome, the veins climbing his right hand and the ribs poking through his marble skin.

Having tried a few other angles, Laura heads around the back of the statue.

LAURA (V.O)

However, I must admit, I found that the most admirable part of David was around the back.

A smirk works its way onto Laura's face as she takes in David's arse.

CUT TO:

INT. DUOMO DI FIRENZE - DAY

Laura stares up to the art lining the inside of the dome, an epic scene picturing heaven and hell.

LAURA (V.O)

At the cathedral my reflections were forcibly matured, as the epic tales of heaven and hell inside caused me to ponder my place in everything...

EXT. DUOMO BALCONY - DAY

Laura is now on the high balcony on top of the Duomo, joined by other visitors taking selfies.

LAURA (V.O) (CONT.)

and the couples, friends and families enjoying themselves around me made me ponder the empty place beside me.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIAZZA DELLA REPUBBLICA - EVENING

Laura crosses the square towards a cute carousel, taking a moment to watch the people enjoying it. A mother holds her child on one of the carousel's horses as the father follows them around taking pictures.

LAURA (V.O)

Eventually, having whittled away the day by standing in queues and thoroughly testing my appetite for art, the time came to prepare for the main course of the weekend.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATE EVENING

Laura gets ready for her night out, doing her makeup at the desk in her room. She wears a towel having just showered, and listens to music through headphones.

LAURA (V.O)

I recall the bright mood of the build up to that enlightening evening, indulging as ever in the ways I'd expected things to pan out.

Laura smoothes out her dress for the night in the bathroom mirror and checks out herself. There's a bit of rhythm in her movements as she dances to her music, exuding a confidence she's previously lacked.

LAURA (V.O)

I danced by myself, to music only I could hear, as I tried to form the person I wanted to be that night. I revised all the funny or flirtatious dialogues I'd imagined I'd be having, and armed myself with the lessons of previous disappointing nights.

Laura does her hair, and finally when ready, tries out a smile and a laugh in the mirror.

LAURA (V.O)

I'd resisted setting definitive intentions. I knew I wanted to be someone people enjoyed being around - a social delight - though I'm

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (V.O) (cont'd)
unsure if I was willing to extend
this in any physical capacity.

Laura puts on her heels.

LAURA (V.O)
I remember being uneasy with the
prospect of a stranger in my room,
my temporary sanctum where I could
retire from the effort of
maintaining a sociable persona.
Perhaps some barely conscious part
of me believed I'd find a stranger
who didn't require a mask.

Laura grabs her clutch bag and heads for the door.

LAURA (V.O)
Gripping to my fantasies, I headed
out to the hotel bar to get warmed
up.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP BAR - NIGHT

A bartender in a fine white tuxedo works his magic on a
cocktail as Laura watches him.

LAURA (V.O)
The Italian bartender seemed
friendly enough, and his apparent
passion for mixology gave me an
easy topic to try my voice with.

Laura continues to watch as he mixes. She looks like she's
on the cusp of saying something as he turns away for ice.
She backs down. He turns back, presents the drink to her and
immediately turns to the next customer.

LAURA (V.O)
Unfortunately I couldn't quite word
the opener - but I supposed he
wouldn't be the only barman I'd be
coming into contact with, and so
spared myself the criticism.

Laura takes a seat in a quiet corner besides a view of the
Basilica Santa Maria Novella, and sips her drink quietly.
Across from her, a smartly dressed woman gazes at a laptop
and routinely scribbles notes on a notepad. Laura looks
over.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (V.O)

The sight of a sharply dressed woman, potentially close to me in age and appearing to work, prompted me to consider my career choices. Namely, why hadn't I chosen a career that allowed me to work at a rooftop bar in Florence whilst sipping from a martini?

The woman catches Laura looking and does one of those greeting smiles. Laura quickly returns it and looks away.

LAURA (V.O)

Why instead did I select a degree that spat me out of university and into a part-time retail career? Maybe, like her, I could've had some employer foot the bill for this trip, instead of blowing my savings.

One of the waiters takes away the woman's empty glass, and she utters an inattentive "grazie", to which he replies "prego".

LAURA (V.O)

As was it's want, my head started to run away with ideas of what would happen if I went over and introduced myself. A hand-shake, a common interest, an exchange of numbers that would lead to employment. However, had I even the courage to try and make this a reality...

The woman snaps shut the laptop, grabs her things and hurries off.

LAURA (V.O)(CONT.)

The opportunity soon took its leave of me. Never mind, I thought, for I simply had to wait for the alcohol to kick in and the confidence would soon come to me.

Laura watches the woman leave before turning her attention to the drink next to her.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIA DELL' ORIUOLO - NIGHT

Laura walks alone down a street bustling with revellers, some smoking outside bars, others traveling between them. She looks intimidated, exposed.

LAURA (V.O)

But walking by the heaving bars -
the very ones I'd expected to be
dead centre of - I quickly awoke to
the reality that no drink could be
strong enough to make this come
naturally.

She looks to a bar but continues on as she notices the crowd blocking the doorway.

LAURA (V.O)

Not once had I envisioned rejecting
a venue based on the crowds, yet
here I found myself doing it time
and time again, until I finally
found a bar quiet enough to
brave...

CUT TO:

INT. JAZZ BAR - NIGHT

Laura stands awkwardly to one side, bottle of beer in hand, looking on as a tight group discuss something deeply around a tiny table. Elsewhere there are either couples on smaller tables or men sat smoking entirely alone - and looking like they want it left that way.

LAURA (V.O)

Yet even there, the fear of
imposing on a quieter vibe kept me
withdrawn, and there was only so
long I felt comfortable standing
there alone, looking pitiful.

EXT. JAZZ BAR - NIGHT

Laura exits the Jazz bar, and immediately has to halt to let three American women - deep in conversation - pass her.

AMERICAN

Sorry!

Laura notes the english, hesitates, then replies:

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

That's okay.

But too late, the Americans fail to notice.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE BAR - NIGHT

Laura timidly asks for a drink at a loud bar. The bartender leans in, ushering her to repeat. She asks again, he gets the request and passes over a beer, which she pays for - the whole transaction nothing more than a formality.

She sits down at an empty table in a dark corner, the blasting music and flashing lights juxtaposing her look of defeat. Nearby a group banter loudly in Italian.

LAURA (V.O)

After a view brief stops elsewhere,
I eventually found a place with
maybe the right vibe for me to get
started, and at least a seat to be
uncomfortable in...

Another person joins the other group, though with no chair he looks about for one spare. He spots Laura at her empty table and comes over.

LAURA (V.O)

Though by this point I'd lost all
confidence in my capability to hold
a conversation, let alone start
one, and the pursuit was beginning
to seem redundant. I was beginning
to feel ridiculous in Florence, the
idocy of this whole expensive
excursion slowly making itself
apparent.

The man gestures to one of the chairs by her and shouts something in Italian unheard. Getting his meaning Laura nods. He drags the chair away and over to his group.

LAURA (V.O)

All it felt like I was doing now
was postponing an inevitable white
flag, avoiding adding to my
humiliation by calling time before
it had even reached midnight.

Laura takes a massive gulp of her drink.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (V.O)

Though by the time the bottle had emptied I'd come to reality that there'd be no one would notice anyway.

Laura rushes to her feet, a bit of anger in her, and hurries out.

LAURA (V.O)

It was half-eleven. I condemned myself to a period of...
(exhales)
self-reflection.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Laura enters the room, turns on the light, drops her clutch on the bed before lowering herself onto it. She resists it for a bit, before the tears begin to force through.

Later, Laura stares at herself in the mirror, the makeup she'd perfected just hours earlier now ruined by the tear trails. She seems disinterested in taking it off.

Almost reluctant, she takes her dress off in the mirror, allowing it to drop to her feet. She looks at herself, then past herself, into some painful thought.

Laura hugs her legs in the bath, the bottom of her hair hanging into the water.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

A thin slither of light falls across a sleeping Laura. Her eyes flutter open on it, then she turns away from it.

LAURA (V.O)

Despite the unintended early ending to my night, I decided to go ahead with the planned comforts of a late morning...

A while later, Laura rolls reaches out for her phone.

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LAURA (V.O)(CONT.)

Though I was ushered out of bed by the realisation that the free breakfast did have an *end* time, and that there's as much reassurance in food as there is in a duvet.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - MORNING

The restaurant has few customers, and is more populated with waiting staff clearing tables. Laura sips coffee over a plate dotted in crumbs. She's still staring into nothing.

LAURA (V.O)

It took a while, but I had to persuade myself not to blow the remainder of my time by wallowing in misery.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA - DAY

Amidst a scene dominated by sculptures and the tourists there to see them, Laura sits by a fountain eating ice-cream. She does a spot of people watching.

LAURA (V.O)

Throughout the day I repeated my new pasttime of people watching. Whilst treading the same paths as the previous days, looking for careers to envy or friendships to wish for, I also seemed to have a new conciousness of what it was I was looking for. I was looking for myself in others. What was it that was making me jealous? What frightened me? What made me feel warm? Inevitably, I sought attraction, trying to refine my type and wondering what part this had to play in my unhappiness. I even spent a few moments considering the adventures of teenage parties and whether or not they signposted something more significant... though it seemed unlikely.

CUT TO:

INT. QUIET RESTAURANT - DAY

Laura sits, in front of a pasta bowl, unenthusiastically shovelling it in whilst scanning a book. Her body-language is not good.

LAURA (V.O)

Convinced my holiday was a failure,
I retreated to a quiet little place
I'd read about, reluctant to
further linger in the midst of
people I felt inadequate around. I
thought I'd reflect on how things
went so wrong, unaware that what
I'd actually find here was
something to somewhat rectify
matters.

Laura looks up and spots an Asian woman of a similar age, also eating alone and reading a guide book whilst listening to music. Unlike Laura, she seems content.

LAURA (V.O)

I found myself looking across the
restaurant at somewhat of a
doppelganger, not in appearance,
certainly not in mood, but in
circumstance. There she sat, quite
alone, thriving in her isolation,
her guide book giving her away as
tourist. I waited anxiously for
someone to join her and ruin the
moment, but after she'd polished
off her starter in the company of
none, I grew confident in our
comparison. Unlike me, the
figurehead for sad loners by now,
the stranger seemed to thrive in
her solitude.

A waiter brings the woman a drink. She looks, smiles, but makes no sound.

LAURA (V.O)

I briefly considered reaching out
to her, starting some kind of
communication through a likely
language barrier, but I thought
better of it. We'd both come alone
for our respective reasons, and it

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (V.O) (cont'd)
would be wrong of me to interfere with that. Regardless, I felt grateful for her company. Her presence, something about it... I suddenly realised I'd spent the whole weekend looking to others for guidance on who to be, longing to be someone different from who I really was. Yet now I was looking at someone resembling myself as I was, and finally seeing that here, in this incredible place, it was *acceptable* to be that person. The validation I'd been missing was my own.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIAZZALLE MICHELANGELO - DUSK

Laura pushes her way to the stone balcony lining the square, finding herself before a magnificent view of the sun setting over the city. She takes a picture of the view, looks at it, and puts her phone away.

LAURA (V.O)
That morning, I'd thought my final glance over Florence would be resentful. Instead, I felt a gratitude. I hadn't quite received the answer I'd initially expected the city to provide, but maybe I hadn't realised what I was asking of it. It had facilitated a much needed spot of soul searching, as painful as that had occasionally been.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIAZZA SANTA TRINITA - NIGHT

A street performer casts huge bubbles on the edge of the square. Nearby, a busker plays a saxophone rendition of "Over the Rainbow".

Laura takes a minute to watch the bubbles, and smiles as a child joyfully chases them down.

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LAURA (V.O)

I concluded my adventure with a positivity that had been lacking in the hours, days and maybe weeks prior. I can't proclaim to have felt happiness, as I seem to remember a rather large lump in my throat claiming otherwise.

Laura begins to slowly walk down street, away from the square and the bubbles. Her eyes are welling up.

LAURA (V.O)

But I did feel as though, having thoroughly wrestled with my character, I'd broken free from my state of despair, and that sense of freedom had been worth every penny.

Laura wipes away a tear.

FADE OUT.

THE END.