

Katie Bain
A Few Last Goodbyes
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Dear Esselunga,

As far as grocery stores go, you have a special place in my heart. At first, like many things in Italy, you scared the hell out of me. Maybe I was taken aback by the escalators, the underground parking lot and how close I came to getting hit by all of the tiny cars heading there. Maybe my initial disorientation was a result of the four medications I was taking to cure the cold that caused me to sleep 15 hours a night during the first week and resulted in everyone knowing me only as, “the sick girl.” Whatever it was, it took awhile for me to cultivate a fondness of you. I soon learned however, that like most things in Italy, you weren’t so scary when I took my headphones off and actually paid attention to what was going on around me rather than blasting *Total Eclipse of the Heart* at full volume while trying to buy cookies and a blow dryer. Of course, we’ve had some setbacks. I think we both know that twelve euros is more than a bit ridiculous for a tube of mascara. And who knew I was supposed to weigh my bag of kiwis myself before checking out other than the 13 people in line behind me who had to wait while I ran back to the produce section to do it? However, despite these tough times, I’m willing to forgive and forget. You may not be open 24 hours a day, and you definitely don’t carry my favorite brand of peanut butter (it’s Skippy, in case you were wondering), but what you lack in convenience and stock, you make up for in location and in your vast selection of fine, two-euro wines.

So thank you Esselunga. Thank you for being smart enough to put the pharmacy and the post office, both of which I’ve spent considerable time at this semester, inside the store. Thank you for your huge packages of cheap and delicious crackers, which have saved me from starving on several Saturday afternoons. Thank you for your seemingly endless supply of Fidel, which works equally as well as a beverage, a door stop and a book end, and somehow tastes even better when it’s dyed green. You will be missed Esselunga, and yes, I would like a bag.

Dear Euro,

I'm going to be blunt; my life will be at least \$1.31 times better without you in it. At first I was fooled by your miniature size and your shiny, multi-colored façade. I imagined all of the shoes, plane tickets, and four course meals I could buy with the \$2,000 my trusty program handbook assured me would be more than enough to last me the entire semester. However, I soon caught on to your vicious exchange rate ways, and my checking account has been the victim ever since. You can try to blame the situation on me and my country's suffering economy, but the point is that every time I go to a Tyme machine, sorry, *bancomat*, I get the same sinking feeling in my stomach, frantically trying to convert how much money I've actually taken out and how much begging it's going to take for my mom to lend me more. You've added unnecessary stress to my life, and while you may argue that this was probably the only stress I've experienced in these four months, I say well yeah, maybe, but I still don't like you.

So good riddance euro. Maybe if you get your act together we can be friends the next time we meet, maybe I can learn to be more economical and not depend so heavily on the 50 euro bills that I spend like Monopoly money and the two euro coins that seem to work best as drink tokens. Either way, I'm not going to miss you, get over it.

P.S. Take heart, you're still better than the Swedish kroner, and even a fool would pick you over the pound.

Dear Villa Corsi Salviati,

I was nervous at first and I'm not ashamed to admit it. Despite your obvious beauty and *Under the Tuscan Sun*-esque charm, the thought of living in a dorm-like atmosphere, which brought back the nightmare of my crazy roommate experience freshman year, made me uneasy. While it's unfair to blame you for the sometimes claustrophobic feel the weather created during the first two months, there were moments when I was pretty sure I was going to go insane from lack of privacy, pre-set meal times, never feeling the need to change out of my pajamas and

being cold pretty much all of the time. These feelings, compounded by our distance from Florence and my unruly homesickness, (I was the girl at grade school slumber parties whose mom had to come and pick her up at midnight), made me uncertain if I had chosen the right program.

It didn't take long for these worries to dissipate as I started to realize that I was living in the easiest and least stressful living situation of all time. The only thing I'm required to do every day is wake up for class and make sure I leave my room 30 seconds before it starts to give myself adequate time to get there. I've never once had to clean or cook for myself, and even the meals composed of foods that are all the same color are better than the grilled cheeses that I would be eating every day if I did.

So I want to say thank you villa. Thank you for your gardens, in which there are multitudes of ghost in the graveyard hiding spots, my favorite being inside the hedge maze because it makes me feel like I'm in *Alice in Wonderland*. Thanks for your creepy dog statue that scares me whether it's day or night. Thanks for you one palm tree, which is enough to make me feel tropical. Thanks for your terrace, on which I have spent many productive hours tanning, reading stolen copies of US Weekly, sleeping, and watching "adults" try to jig and drink green wine at the same time. Thanks for providing me with the opportunity to go home and brag about living in a 15th century villa for four months. Thanks for being the type of 15th century villa that has a DVD player and wireless internet. And you know what, thanks for being six miles from Florence. You have been my place of refuge when the smog, tourists, smell, men and expense of the city became too much, and if we had never met I would have never known Mt. Morello, Esselunga or La Mula. You have been my escape, not only from Florence, and the rest of the outside world, but from the Wal-Marts, strip malls, 30 minute walks to class in sub-zero temperatures, grueling work schedules and other everyday stresses of America that I'm not looking forward to being reunited with. Maybe I'm being overly sentimental because I have only

11 more days of the phone schedule, the basement smell and the erratic water pressure, but truly, there's nowhere else in Italy I would have rather called home.

Dear Down Comforter,

In this frigid and lonely environment you are the thing I look forward to most when going to bed. If I knew I would suffer no consequences and could fit you in my suitcase, I would take you home to Wisconsin with me. I miss you already.

Dear Dirty Italian Men,

It's sad that when I look back on this experience you will be the ones who represent an entire half of your country's population. Although I have encountered plenty of decent males in Italy, you, unfortunately, will be the ones I remember. I'd like to clarify a few things. Just because I'm an American female does not mean I'm easy. It doesn't mean I like it when you yell obscenities at me from your car. It doesn't mean you can touch me when I walk down the street or sit by you on the bus, and it certainly doesn't mean that I plan to get anywhere near your bedroom, ever. I don't want the drinks you send; I don't want to dance with you. If I'm rude when you're trying to hit on me, it's probably because I'd like you to stop hitting on me. Several of you have told me, on different occasions, that my teeth are too straight, that my Italian is "appalling" and that I'm boring. You then seemed shocked when I got up and walked away without taking your number or giving you mine. For a group of people who seem to think they're so smooth, your game is pretty pathetic. It's sad that I often find myself scared of you, but there have definitely been times when my fear hasn't been irrational. So get your act together guys. Show some respect. I know you still live with your mothers, and I know you wouldn't talk to them that way, so don't do it to me either.

Dear Italian Cuisine,

The quickest way to my heart is through food, (I'm not joking, my boyfriend's a chef), and in the culinary department you have never ceased to amaze me. It seems that after every dining experience in Italy I walk out of the restaurant proclaiming that the meal has been the best I've ever had. Gnocchi, pesto, pizza, gelato, the tightness of my clothes is a testament to how much I love eating here. And although I'm not thrilled about the weight gain, I refuse to stop this mass consumption, because I'm in Italy, the food is amazing, and it's not like I ever have to change out of sweatpants anyways. I'm not going to lie, I am excited about going back to America, land of chimichangas, hotdogs, and yes, McDonalds which I refuse to feel shame for loving, (sometimes there's nothing better than a #2 value meal), but which I've managed to avoid this entire trip. However it will be hard to beat anything I've eaten at the villa or at any Italian restaurant. So while my waist and thighs don't thank you, I most definitely do.

Dear 28 Bus (A or B, although I'm partial to A and don't care if B knows about it),

To be honest I often felt like you were my punishment for my not reading the program's fine print well enough. Some days it's as if you were saying "okay Katie, you don't care that this isn't an immersion program, well then have a seat next to this man who smells like an onion and who will very likely breathe heavily on you for the next 30 minutes, and then see how you like living so far away from Florence." Point taken. There were some moments when I simply got fed up with dealing with you on such a regular basis. You actually made me miss my car, and considering I drive a '92 convertible Lebaron that's been hit more than once and floods when it rains, that's saying a lot. To be brutally honest, you're crowded and slow during the day, and often fairly creepy at night. And while it wasn't right for me to ride you so often without scanning my card, it did feel like a type of sweet revenge for all the wasted hours I spent taking you back and forth from Sesto to the portal to hell that is the urine covered bus stop next to Santa Maria Novella.

We did have some good moments. Every time I saw you rolling down Via Gramsci towards the bus stop I knew I was that much closer to art history class or to the overpriced drinks at Angels. You provided me with shelter from rain, snow and harassment from Italian men on the street. Whenever I rounded the corner at Santa Maria Novella at 12:28 a.m. and saw you sitting there, driverless and not running, I knew I was only 30 minutes and one hard, dirty plastic seat, if I was lucky, away from the opportunity to check my email for the eighth time that day. And when, late on Sunday nights, and even on some very early Monday mornings, I dragged myself back to Florence tired and dirty from that weekend's trip, seeing you was every bit as thrilling as getting a cornetto after dinner.

There were, of course, some embarrassments. Every time I asked an older woman if she wanted my seat I was met with a look of disgust and bewilderment. Apparently my "old, but not old enough to take the seat vs. probably won't make it the whole way if you don't give her your spot right now" radar is not very good. And your dirty floors, that are suspiciously wet even when it isn't raining, don't mesh well with girls who, in an effort to look good for their boyfriends on the day they're arriving in Italy, throw caution to the wind and where three inch heels on the bus. As if it wasn't enough that thanks to the wonders of Italian transportation the flight never arrived, slipping on a puddle into a group of Italian men who, for once, seemed to have no interest in the opposite sex was enough to make want to never ride the bus again, as if that were an option.

I guess, what I'm trying to say, good ol' 28, is that we've had our ups and downs, literally, Italian roads are uneven and your shocks are not good. And while I'm not really going to miss you, you've been an integral part of my Florence/Sesto experience, so thanks.

Dear Male Students of the Villa,

As a female representative of some, not all, of the girls here, I'd like to issue a sincere apology for giggling when you walk by and staring at you a way that I'm sure, at times, has

become creepy. The thing is, we miss our significant others and our male friends, and since you guys are pretty much the only Y-chromosoned people we've seen in the past four months, most of the time we can't help but act like 13 year olds at a middle school dance when you're around. So sorry if we made you feel uncomfortable, but you really should take it as a compliment.

Dear Italy,

Italy, Italy, where do I even begin. There were some days when I hated you. Some days when I couldn't deal with your disorganization, your smells, your weather or your language. But I think what was indicative of the greater situation was that through all of my complaining, pessimism and angry journal entries, I never wanted to go home. This desire to stay came from the days, although somewhat sporadic in the beginning, when it hit me that you are the best place I've ever been, and I've gone to South Dakota. Lately, those days of clarity have been every day, and as April 29th looms closer, I know that while I miss egg rolls, driving, a consistently warm bedroom and Conan O'Brien, I'm not ready to leave you for real life in America.

I'm not saying that I appreciate you only because you have provided me with what has essentially been a four-month vacation. I love that no matter what I want to do, you can accommodate me. I want to snowboard, you have mountains. I want to hike, you have a surplus of rolling hills. I want the sea, you have the whole darn Amalfi coast *and* Capri. I want more churches than I've ever been to in all of my 21 years, you're happy to accommodate. The beauty of Italy, whether it's the incomprehensible historical grandeur of Rome, the Disney World, if Disney World were Italian and drunk on red wine, feel of Venice or the "this place is good enough for George Clooney, it's good enough for you too," sense of Lake Como, is actually pretty ridiculous. What I'm trying to say Italy, is that you've grown on me, I still have some issues, specifically your erratic weather patterns and the punctuality of your mass transportation system, but I'll most definitely cry when I have to leave.

So, have we made our peace? Yes? Good.

Dear Computer Lab Printers,

I'm not sure why you never seem to be working correctly, but the way you often refuse to print anything but lines of code and documents other people sent to you hours before is really getting on my nerves. Maybe it's my fault. If I had been better able to keep up with your perpetually ravenous desire for paper, maybe you would have cooperated. I'm not saying I didn't enjoy digging through the bin of used paper, searching for sheets that had not yet been printed on both sides, but I can't say it's something I'll miss.

Dear Villains,

Is it overdramatic to say that I love you guys? To say that the four months we've spent together have contained some of the best moments of my life? Absolutely, but it's true. Sorrento would have been nothing without Justine's mad karaoke skills. I probably wouldn't have enjoyed climbing St. Peter's as much if Linda had not been there to remind that it was indeed "copula time." Italian class would have been 25 percent less entertaining without everyone's last names for Lucrezia to pronounce. I could fill a whole paper with these examples. Whenever I think back to this experience, for the rest of my life, you guys will be there in all of your tag playing, villa soccer league organizing, club room eight partying, Fidel drinking, hacky-sacking glory. It's hard to imagine that anyone besides us has ever lived in this villa and it's incomprehensible that in a few short weeks we're going to be replaced by a new group who will live in *our* villa, have *our* house fellow and eat *our* dolce. The whole idea makes me sad.

I'll confess that in the beginning I made a few incorrect assumptions about people. But as we've gotten to know each other, in some cases on an almost *too* personal level, I can honestly say that there is not one person whom I'd replace, unless of course Jon Bon Jovi showed up, in which case Mike North would be out. The villa wouldn't be so entertaining, so

academically unproductive, or so fifth grade summer camp-esque without each and every one of us. A place can only be as good as the people whom you experience it with, and for me, you guys have made Italy one of the most amazing, overwhelming, beautiful, (insert your own cliché here), places I've ever been, so thanks.

Are you happy now villains? You've made me, the Italian pessimist, become outright sentimental. Now if you'll excuse me, I must go find something to complain about before I tear up again.