ABSTRACT

A Bird With Two Homes
By Kaitlin Walter

This work of narrative nonfiction follows a senior journalism student from the United States as she travels to Cinque Terre with the intention of sightseeing for a weekend. *Rick Steves’ Italy 2010* guidebook acts as the diving board, pushing Kaitlin toward visiting the five towns. The weekend getaway soon becomes more than just a “mini vacation” when Kaitlin and Lauren are befriended by Ivo, a bar owner in Riomaggiore. At his insistence, Kaitlin puts the guidebook away and finds herself experiencing the place and people authentically. Through Ivo and other locals, Kaitlin participates in the real day-to-day lifestyle of residents and starts to shed the tourist’s idealistic views of the area. The first visit inspires Kaitlin to return to Cinque Terre twice more, and little by little Kaitlin moves from limited guidebook-knowledge of Cinque Terre to a habitué’s experienced understanding of the link between the land, the people and the community, and her place in the Cinque Terre’s fabric.

Woven through the narrative are the implicit and explicit tensions between the people of Cinque Terre and visiting tourists, as well as the ability of individuals to find their “true” selves through travel.
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Acknowledgements

It took three years to prepare for my trip to Italy, three hours to fall in love with Cinque Terre, three weeks to become part of the Riomaggiore community, and three months of writing to bring this narrative to completion.

During that time, I’ve accumulated quite a list of people who have helped me along the way.

A thousand thanks to Ivo, without whom this story could never have been written.

To the residents of Riomaggiore and Manarola, for welcoming me into your lives with such kindness and hospitality.

To Lauren, my travel partner: We will return!

To Dr. James Tobin, who has guided my learning and development as a writer, and in the process has become a mentor and friend. Thank you for helping me kill the adjectives; you were right.

To Mom, Dad, and Andrew, who had to live with me during my all-things-Italian obsession. Thank you for letting me leave you so I could find me.

To my extended family, who listened to my cash-only gift policy for years: Thanks for listening; you gave me the means to go and enjoy. I will never forget your generosity.

To Annie Laurie-Blair for helping me realize writing is my true passion; I am graduating in journalism because of you.

To Dr. Marguerite Shaffer for becoming part of my advising team and providing a non-journalism viewpoint—your suggestions helped shape the final product.

To Danny (Giovanni) Salti for acting as my Italian spell-checker for this narrative and sharing me with Cinque Terre more often than he probably liked.

Finally, to the University Honors Program staff for their belief in my success, flexibility with my atypical thesis schedule, and generous funding that made my study abroad to Italy possible.
Ringraziamenti

Ci sono voluti tre anni per preparare il mio viaggio in Italia, tre ore di tempo per innamorarsi delle Cinque Terre, tre settimane a far parte della comunità di Riomaggiore, e tre mesi di scrittura per portare a compimento questo racconto.

Durante questo periodo, ho conosciuto una serie di persone che mi hanno aiutato.

Mille grazie a Ivo, senza il quale questa storia non sarebbe mai stata scritta.

Ringrazio gli abitanti di Riomaggiore e Manarola, per avermi accolto nella loro vita con tanta gentilezza e ospitalità.

Per Laura, la mia compagna di viaggio: Torneremo!

Per il dottor James Tobin, che ha guidato il mio apprendimento e il mio accrescimento culturale come scrittore, il quale è diventato mio mentore e amico. Grazie per avermi aiutato a uccidere gli aggettivi, hai detto la verità.

Alla mia mamma, al mio papà, e Andrew, che hanno vissuto con me durante la mia ossessione ogni cosa in italiano. Grazie per avermi permesso di andare, così ho potuto conoscere chi sono realmente.

Alla mia famiglia allargata, che mi ha sostenuto durante il mio percorso universitario: Grazie per l'ascolto, mi avete dato i soldi per andare e divertirmi allo stesso tempo. Non dimenticherò mai la vostra generosità.

Ad Annie Laurie-Blair per avermi aiutato a capire che la scrittura è la mia vera passione, io mi sto laureando in giornalismo per causa tua.

E infine a te, lettore. Senza di voi questo sarebbe un file su un computer invece di un libro stampato.

Per il dottor Marguerite Shaffer per diventare parte della mia squadra consulenza e fornire un punto di vista—i vostri suggerimenti hanno contribuito a formare il prodotto finale.

A Danny (Giovanni) Salti per essere stato il mio italiano correttore ortografico per questo racconto e la condivisione di me con le Cinque Terre più spesso di quanto lui probabilmente voluto.

Infine, per il personale universitario Honors Program per il loro credo nel mio successo, la flessibilità con il mio programma teso atipico, e generosi finanziamenti che hanno reso il mio studio all’estero per l’Italia possibile.
Table of Contents

Page

ii   Title

iii  Abstract

v    Approval Page

vii  Acknowledgements, English

viii Ringraziamenti (Acknowledgements, Italian)

ix   Table of Contents

x    Preface

1-43 “A Bird With Two Homes”

44   Outline of “A Bird With Two Homes”
Preface

[Excerpt from my personal journal, May 26, 2010:]

“I want movement, not a calm existence. I want excitement and danger. I feel in myself a superabundance of energy which finds no outlet in quiet life.”—Leo Tolstoy

It’s been 15 days since I “graduated”. Technically, I have one semester to go. I’ll be returning to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio alone, my friends spread by the four winds to new cities with new jobs—and shiny new friends. It isn’t easy being left behind.

But rather than pity myself, I choose to see things with a glass that is at least 51% full, if not more. As my friends toil behind desks or pursue higher education at universities far, far away, I will explore la vita al sole. Life in the sun. The Florentine, Roman, Milanese, Neapolitan and Sicilian sun. I have one final, true summer, and I can’t wait to be emancipated from my Kentucky home.

Thirty-four days. That is all that separates me from the beginning. The beginning of an adventure I’ve dreamed of for two years. Michelangelo’s David. Il Duomo. The rugged, majestic cliffs of Positano. Cinque Terre’s charming towns connected by winding nature trails. Seven weeks of studying (my first priority, as I have been reminded dozens of times by my exuberant program director), with a fair amount of traveling, wandering, sightseeing, and eating (Oh the gastronomic delights! Gelato, gelato, gelato...) mixed in.

And between weekends (or perhaps during), I have a huge task to achieve: my Honors Thesis. A 30-page exploration of something Italian. At least, that’s the goal. I just need to find someone with a story. Who can speak decent English, seeing as the “Learn Italian” CDs haven’t exactly made me fluent. (If my car could talk, it would tell you that my Italian is, in fact, limited. Very limited.) Thirty-four days. Then the adventure begins.
I am two hours and 53 minutes into my three-hour journey, sitting on a damp seat for the seven-minute trip from La Spezia to Cinque Terre—Riomaggiore, specifically. Everything is black as the train speeds through the five-minute long tunnel. Fluorescent lighting flickers on and off intermittently. The train car is old, a little musty. My friend Lauren sits across from me, listening to her iPod. Months ago when I made my hostel reservation, I booked it for two, hoping I would find someone to join me. I was thrilled when Lauren—with her can-do attitude, easy smile, and corn silk blond hair—wanted to come along.

Italy has been on my radar since I saw a picture of Michelangelo’s *David* in middle school, but I had never even heard of Cinque Terre until a few months prior to leaving. Flipping through television channels one day, I stopped when I saw images of a coastal town with stunning cliffs. PBS had the amiable travel guru Rick Steves enjoying lemon *gelato* and discussing the local charm and beauty of Cinque Terre. I was riveted, hanging on to Steves’ every word. Enchanted by Steves’ description of a Vespa-free world featuring locally made *vino bianco* and views of the sea rivaled only by the cliff towns of the Amalfi Coast in the south, I went to my local library to check out every Cinque Terre travel item—videos, books, histories, novels, and even music CDs—the city of Lexington, Kentucky offered. In the end, After the PBS special and research, I decided it would be Steves’ *Italy 2010* guidebook that would lead me to the best sights and experiences Italy has to offer.

Looking down, Steves’ book is in my hands, poised and ready to direct me to the hostel’s realty company. It already shows wear after two weeks of city life in my temporary home city of Florence. The Cinque Terre section looks like a well-loved textbook:
highlights, circles, side-notes, and reservation numbers fill the pages. Suddenly there is a flash of light. I straighten and gaze intently out of the window. We are almost there.

Cinque Terre.

The translation is simple, direct: Five Lands. The name dates to before the fifteenth century, but evidence of civilization in this remote area of Italy’s northwest coast three hours from the French border dates to times before the ancient Romans. Steep, fertile terraces surround the villages with a lush halo of grape vines, olive and citrus trees. And for the past three thousand years, the Ligurian Sea has watched over the comings and goings of the area, bringing fisherman’s boats and pirates’ ships to safe harbor or a deep grave below the teal waves.

Cinque Terre is a vertical place. It is as if a sculptor from the Renaissance hacked at the coastline with his chisel without smoothing his work. Roughhewn pietra serena cliffs rise from the Ligurian Sea straight to the sky, with five narrow enclaves tumbling down to the water’s edge. Buttery yellow and fruit-colored houses are cradled in the safety of the valleys, not venturing higher than a particular point residents must have agreed upon decades ago.

The name Cinque Terre is the collective name for these five sea towns, but each town boasts a name that tells the towns’ unique history. The northernmost village, Monterosso’s ‘mountains’ turn a spectacular shade of red with the sunset—hence its name ‘Mount Red’. Vernazza, wanting to lay claim to its incredible white wine vernaccia, named the town in honor of its chief export—Vernazza comes from the Latin root verna—“of the land” or “native”. Then there is Corniglia, simply named after the prosperous farmer Cornelius who tamed this rocky terrain. The water wheel of Manarola’s mill inspired is
nome, morphing from the Latin *magna rota* to its current dialectical form. And finally there is Riomaggiore, named for the “Big River” the residents tamed to build their village.

Less than a mile separates Monterosso from Riomaggiore, but it takes six hours to hike that single mile—a testament to the extreme terrain of this place. It wasn’t until a train line was cut through the rocky cliffs that these quaint, picturesque towns became destinations on tourists’ agendas. Today, the untamed wildness of Cinque Terre has been reined in through marked hiking trails, easy access by Italy’s highway system, and ferries.

At the next flash of light, I am prepared to catch the view: dramatic and dazzling, the sea stretches out, robin’s egg blue with white caps rolling onto a rock beach just visible below. I hear the screech of the wheels as the brakes are applied. The train lurches to a halt and I blink as my eyes adjust to the light.

Lauren and I step onto Riomaggiore’s platform. A waist-high wall protects us from a precipitous drop into the waters below. I am finally able to drink in the commanding view of the Ligurian after the brief teasing glimpses on the train.

We smile, high fiving each other, then file into the crowd of visitors carrying cameras, toting official-looking hiking gear, and rolling bags that would never fit into an airplane’s overhead compartment bin.

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Riomaggiore is shaped like a V, with the train station at the point. The imported tourists split into two groups: one heads along the northern fork, and Lauren and I join those heading toward the southern half of the town. As we enter a tunnel, we are transported under the sea. Fish, seashells, waves, and coral decorate the walls in a mosaic of colored tiles. We admire the details of a jellyfish, reaching out to touch the tiles, even
taking pictures like the rest of the tourists. Daylight signals the end of the aquarium tunnel, and we are deposited like sediment at the bottom of a hill-mountain.

Mar Mar Realty is located on the bottom end of Via Colombo, Riomaggiore’s version of Main Street. Turns out the hill-mountain is Via Colombo. I am struck by how easily I can hear the ocean; there are no cars. A two-minute uphill hike to the office has Lauren and me out of breath. Amy, an American ex-pat with a friendly smile and cropped brown hair, welcomes us.


“Yes, the reservation should be under the name Kaitlin,” I reply.

Flipping through the reservations book (no computer booking system at this establishment), she looks up at me. “Ah yes! Kaitlin from Kentucky. I remember getting your reservation request. A pleasure to have you here.”

To reserve a room, I had to send an e-mail asking if they had room available, wait for a reply, then send another e-mail with my information. Only after a final confirmation e-mail was my booking complete. It was a four day process, but charming in an old-world way.

Amy reaches for a skeleton key and begins to escort us to our house.

“You are very fortunate,” Amy says. “The view from this property is lovely. You can see the ocean and the entire valley. You do have quite a few staircases to get there, however.”

Epic understatement. We traverse alleys, climbing one uneven stone staircase only to face another. My elbow grazes the wall as I climb—a ‘No Passing’ zone. How do people buy groceries here and navigate with no handrails?
We stop at the first door on the right.

“Now, it is very important that you don’t push the key all the way in or else it will go through to the other side of the door,” Amy explains.

She finesses the lock with the ease afforded by years of practice.

“Your house has four floors. The fourth floor has a balcony and clothesline. Watch your step coming down the stairs, since they are steep. And watch your head on the way up, you are both tall.”

All my exhaustion is forgotten when I open the door to the bedroom with the balcony. The green shutter doors are thrown open, framing a view of the Riomaggiore hillside.

Amy tells us to stop by the office if we have any questions and makes her way down the hellacious stairway.

Stepping out onto the balcony, I breathe deeply. The perfume of the earth meets my nose: salt from the sea, damp dirt, citrus, and a rising smell of hot stone from the warming buildings. The sun has risen over the hillcrest, eliminating all shade and promising a beautiful, hot day. It is magical like an adult version of Disney World.

Lauren and I change into bathing suits and descend from our house perched on the hill. Following my Day #1 plans formulated from Rick Steves’ recommendations, we go to the harbor.

A damp underground passage guides us from Via Colombo to the lower section of Riomaggiore. It smells of seawater and fish, the walls glistening from condensation. A kayak/snorkel/diving rental store is situated in the passageway, bustling with activity.
Emerging into the late morning light, a rustic harbor stretches out before us, flanked by multi-story houses and cliffs. A breakwater curves around the harbor’s entrance like a mother’s protective arm.

Fishing boats painted every tint of green, blue, yellow, and red bob in the water, tethered to the breakwater or a fellow boat. Half have a motor, half have oars. Either way, it looks like swimming is the only way to get in one. My suspicion is confirmed as I watch a man wade out into the water, hoist himself over the side of a dinghy-sized boat, and row to shore to get his fishing gear.

Lauren and I follow a path heading to the right and find boulders that have tumbled into the water. People are reading, napping or eating a late breakfast as they take in the sun. Lauren and I claim a rock of our own. I should read up on our next spot for the day, but the heat and sound of foreign languages lull me into complying with my heart’s desire to do nothing.

I reach into my bag to get my cell phone. I have a text message from Giovanni, my Italian boyfriend back in Florence. I almost wish I were back there so I could join him for a night out. Almost, but not quite. I text him back, telling him he’s missing out on the best sea views I’ve ever seen.

Soon, I realize I am baking. No, roasting.

“Lauren, I am dying. I am going to get in the water,” I say. “Want to come?”

She nods and we leave our stuff lying on our towels. After weeks of vigilantly guarding my material possessions in cities I visited, it is freeing to feel safe enough to leave them.
We maneuver off of our rocky tanning bed, and tiptoe down the boat ramp. The water is cool and clear as a cup of water from a faucet. I wade in to my knees, turn around and let myself fall backward into the sea. Lauren follows my lead, and we swim out until we can’t touch the bottom.

A boat with two young men enters the harbor, passing near us.

“Ciao, signorine,” one of the men says, smiling down at us. His teeth are strikingly white against his tan skin and dark brown hair.

“Ciao,” I reply.

It has taken weeks to garner a “ciao” with a smile from the man who makes my daily espresso in Florence. Here, all I have to do is be present.

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After cooling off, Lauren and I return to our boulder to air dry. Our travel gear is just as we left it. As we wait for the sun to do its job, three children are attempting to fish in the shallow water across from me.

The smaller boy clutching the fishing pole whines, “Non ci sono pesci qui.”

His friend (or possibly older brother) is fed up with the complaining. He grabs the fishing pole out of the smaller boy’s hands and moves toward deeper water. The others follow in his wake, chattering rapidly in Italian.

I am reluctant to leave my perch, but know we have to move if we want to follow the plan. Planning and organization are key to seeing as many things as possible. Even as I am enjoying Cinque Terre, I am already thinking of what I should do when I visit Cortona and Montepulciano next week. It is the tourist’s curse. Gathering our belongings, Lauren and I huff it back to the train station where the seaside trail to Manarola begins.
I’ve done my research about the walk: the path’s history dates to the 1920s, when it was built to connect Riomaggiore to its neighboring town, Manarola. Though the purpose for its construction was purely economic, the path soon acquired the nickname *Via dell’Amore*, or “The Road of Love,” as the path made it possible for villagers to easily date someone outside their hometown. Today, people close locks at places along the walk to signify their love for each other, and graffiti about love lost or love eternal in every language imaginable decorates the cliff face.

According to Rick Steves’ guidebook, the trail should take twenty minutes to traverse. After lingering too long at the harbor, Lauren and I are conscious of the time as we arrive at the trailhead and walk around the first bend. We both stop.

The view is breathtaking, with the sea meeting the cloudless sky in the distance. Stones the size of cars are visible underneath the water as if they were at the bottom of a bathtub. Clinging to the crags and ledges around us are agave, cacti, and hearty shrubs, coating the cliff’s surface with varying shades of green. It is an Eden of simplicity; nature’s most basic elements combining with sophistication brought about by age.

The twenty-minute walk turns into thirty as Lauren and I stop to take dozens of photographs: an agave bloom, graffiti, the sea, a pale green lock, an elderly couple holding hands. It is impossible to put the camera away.

Manarola comes into view around a final bend and we are once again at the bottom of a valley. Steves’ *Italy 2010* says the best-kept secret of Manarola is a vineyard walk around the northern valley wall. On the hike up, we pass Manarola’s water wheel
and walk through the shade of a family’s laundry; the father’s dress shirts and mother’s
dresses next to a child’s camisoles and t-shirts.

These signs of daily life energize me. I wonder what it would be like to set my
laundry out to dry from my own window. *As if someone will let you into their home to try
out their clothesline. Right. They’d think I was crazy.*

We find the path easily. The land here above the hustle and bustle of street life is
quiet and fragrant. Gardens of locals flank both sides of the path. Zucchini vine and
sunflowers peek out from behind a low garden fence. Some gardens have a weathered
lean-to, sheltering shovels and spades that appear to have tilled the same earth for
decades. The need for quality food may be a reason for nearly every house having at least
an herb garden—*Madonna* forbid an Italian has to purchase basil.

The *campanile* of the church clangs the hour in the distance, but the sound of the
sea wind and the waves crashing onto the rocks below are the real chorus.

*I want this life. The scenes of domestic peace layered with nature. I could write,
read, and study here so easily. Inspiration right outside the window everyday.*

The grape vines take over the scenery. Miles and miles of them! Layered one above
the other in neat terraced rows. The not-yet-ripe grapes hang heavily on the vines, shaded
by a canopy of leaves. A final curve reveals the cemetery of Manarola.

Lauren and I survey the cemetery landscape from afar, not wanting to descend from
the path and enter the land of the dead. Everything is so alive here that facing the
unavoidable reality of death is an uncomfortable thought. Perched on a grey stone outcrop
surrounded almost entirely by the sea, the white marble crypts and graves of Manarola’s
departed have sea views hotels would dearly love to offer paying guests.
The modern world appears in the form of a white sign with bold, black letters: “SENTIERO PERICOLOSO ACCESSO INTERDETTO—Dangerous Path. NO Entry.” Sure enough, the path we had been following crumbles into nothingness ahead; it looks like a rockslide is the culprit of the missing handrail and path.

We run into no one on our return. I am glad tourists are missing from the scene, but as wonderful as the view was I am restless. Rick Steves’ itinerary hasn’t been what I expected. I’ve seen a lot of beautiful views, yes. But honestly I can’t say I’ve had fun. I’m actually exhausted from following the day’s To Do list.

We head back to Riomaggiore, ready for a nap and some dinner.

The sun is setting as Lauren and I walk up Via Colombo, working off the pasta and bread from dinner. We pass numerous trattoria stores, fruit stalls, and souvenir shops, all looking somewhat deserted.

“Where is everyone?” I say under my breath. Apparently I wasn’t very quiet.

“I have no clue,” Lauren says.

I hear it before I see it. It sounds like a full restaurant on a Friday night. We round the bend in the road. A covered patio is ahead, raised above the sloping street to make a patch of flat ground for fifteen or so tables. Occupied chairs surround all the tables, creating islands of chatter and laughter.

Lauren and I note the name of the establishment as we enter: Bar Centrale. Central Bar. And judging from the full patio, the name isn’t a lie.
Bar Centrale looks and feels like a dive bar. A handmade sign stating “Order a Mojito… and NO we don’t have cigs so STOP ASKING,” makes me confident Lauren and I are about to experience something (good or bad, who knew).

A man with a goatee and “I choose to be bald” head expertly flips glasses and mixes cocktails. He is wearing a boyishly inappropriate shirt that borrows the brand name Hello Kitty and turns it into Hello [insert female body part that rhymes with Kitty]. Even with that, he exudes authority, and there is no doubt he is the man in charge. The music at the bar is eclectic, yet appropriate. Classic Aerosmith is followed by a song about pictures on the wall and the Rastafari movement. No matter what comes on, the bartender is singing; it’s a good thing he sings well.

“Ciao, mio amore,” the goateed bartender says to a little girl. She is probably three years old, and clings to her father’s neck as the bartender extends his hand over the bar to give her the change from an order.

“Che le dice?,” her father says to her. “Che le dice?”

“Grazie,” the little girl says, eyes never leaving her father as she reaches out for the money.

The bartender smiles and places the Euros into her hand. As soon as they turn to leave, he is shaking a martini shaker, pouring the contents into a tall glass, and heading out the door of Bar Centrale to deliver it to the patio. He shouts over his shoulder, “Hey, Aussie! I haven’t forgotten you,” which gets him a nod and grin from a young guy.

The bartender’s fluent American-style English and Italian has me curious, as does the self-ingratiating sign about the mojitos, so I approach the bar with a conversation opener in mind. After helping the Aussie as promised, he turns to Lauren and me.
“I’ll have a **mojito, per favore,**” I say, and after a brief pause, follow it with, “What made you come and stay in Riomaggiore?”

“Just because I speak English better than an American doesn’t mean I’m not local,” he says, with a hint of humor. But not much. “Sucks when an Italian can talk better than you, eh? I was born here in Riomaggiore.” He says Riomaggiore “Reeyohmadjoreh.” It sounds natural coming from his mouth, not like a tourist trying to pronounce a foreign word.

“What’s your name?” I ask, enjoying the banter.

“Stick around and I’ll tell you,” he says.

Lauren and I take our drinks and sit at an inside table. Australians, English, Chinese, Italians—all are given the same brisk treatment, drinks served up with a side of sarcasm and a smile.

I reach into my bag and get out *Italy 2010.* I quickly flip to the Riomaggiore section, specifically “Nightlife”, and read:

“Bar Centrale, run by sociable Ivo, Alberto, and the gang, offers ‘nightlife’ any time of day…. Ivo, who lived in San Francisco and speaks good English, fills his bar with San Franciscan rock and a fun-loving vibe…. At night, it offers the younger set the liveliest action (and best **mojitos**) in town.”

“Lauren, I think we just met a local celebrity,” I say.

“What?”

“Mr. Bartender. I am pretty sure he is Ivo, the owner. And he has met Rick Steves,” I reply. Lauren laughs. My obsession/devotion to all things Rick is the talk of the study abroad trip back in Florence.
Apparently having my nose in a guidebook is unacceptable bar behavior. The man I believe is Ivo saunters over and plops down in a chair. The jean loop on the hip of his pants holds a bar towel, which he uses to wipe his hands before putting them on his knees.

“Whatever you need to know, I can tell you,” he says to me.

“I needed your name, but you wouldn’t tell me, Ivo,” I say.

Lauren chokes on her drink, stifling a snicker. Ivo looks over at her, then back to me.

“Smart ass. What is this, my life story?” he says, grabbing the travel guide.

“Better, it’s Rick Steves’ Italy 2010. Much more interesting,” I say. “We are planning out what to do for tomorrow.”

“Nah, you are on vacation! Go with the flow,” he says in the most serious tone he has had all evening. “I close up the bar at one-thirty. Afterwards a couple of us are going back to my place for drinks on the terrace. Stay and come with us.”

“Full legal name?” I ask, smiling. “You promised if I hung around, you’d tell me.”

“Ivo is what I go by, and I’m the only one in town, so you don’t need the full legal. What are you, a lawyer?” he asks, his brown eyes lively.

“Close enough. I’m a journalist. We’re even nosier,” I say.

He leans back and laughs, a deep rumble.

Ivo doesn’t look like the straight-nosed, proud ‘pretty boy’ Roman often envisioned when one thinks of Italian men. Instead, Ivo has a rustic appeal that makes me think of how people must have looked back when times were harder and rougher—when the threat of pirate attack was real, and only goat and donkey trails connected the Five Lands. On
second thought, his silver hoop earrings, groomed goatee and tanned skin probably represent the pirates more than the citizens.

“Ok, journalist. Give me an hour. And go talk to people. They can tell you more than a guidebook can.”

Ivo was right. The people at the bar told me more than my guidebook. I spoke to the group of Australians, laughed with Canadians, had a mainly hand gestures conversation with Chinese girls. They all said a lot, but nothing about what to do in Cinque Terre. Instead we shared how we came to be in Cinque Terre, how long we were travelling for, who we missed (and didn’t) from back home. All the while, mojitos, wine, and beer were pouring out of the bar onto the patio, keeping tongues loose and patrons happy.

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When late night becomes early morning, Ivo gathers the remaining ten guests for a shot of tequila on the house. The sense of community between those of us who’ve stayed until the end is almost tangible. We clink our glasses, swallow the chaser and begin to file out into the cool night air of Riomaggiore, our social, cultural and physical thirs****

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When late night becomes early morning, Ivo gathers the remaining ten guests for a shot of tequila on the house. The sense of community between those of us who’ve stayed until the end is almost tangible. We clink our glasses, swallow the chaser and begin to file out into the cool night air of Riomaggiore, our social, cultural and physical thirs satisfied.

“You girls are coming back to my house with the crew tonight, yeah?” Ivo says.

Back in the U.S., going back to a stranger’s home at one-thirty in the morning is not a good idea. In fact, I have already dealt with a pseudo-stalker I met during my first week in Florence; he called upwards of ten times a day until Giovanni told him to leave me alone. But I feel safe here in Riomaggiore, and I already trust Ivo. Thus, the proposal seems perfectly acceptable.

We say yes, then realize we haven’t paid for our drinks. Ivo dismisses our attempt to pay with a hand gesture.
Instead, Lauren and I offer to help clean up. This is an accepted method of payment, and we are put to work restocking the bar for the next day. By 1:45 a.m., everything is in order.

“What will you girls want to drink?” Ivo asks.

Lauren pipes up.

“Vodka cranberry would be great, thanks.”

Ivo reaches into the mini refrigerator, procures the required items, and leads us into the night. A guy named Gianluca joins the three of us; he has been recently dumped by his girlfriend and Ivo thinks he “needs socialization to get over the woman.” Ivo’s voice takes on an almost Jamaican cadence once the bar’s doors are locked tight. It is as if he’s locked “business” Ivo inside with the bottles of rum and whiskey.

The moon is a mere sliver as we climb a final stone staircase of death that delivers us to Ivo’s house.

No. Not house. Tricked out bachelor pad is more accurate. Though the exterior is lacking (a piece of chain link acts as a gate while his wrought iron gate is being forged in Monterosso), inside Ivo has the expensive essentials: leather couch, washing machine (a huge luxury in this country of exorbitant electric costs), king size mattress, and shower spa he got for the bargain price of €1,200 (“EBay Europe,” Ivo says).

“I just moved here a few weeks ago so everything is a mess,” Ivo says. “I may not have a kitchen yet, but you can’t beat the view.”

Stepping back outside, we are met by a sky littered with stars. Ivo’s elevated garden is next to a hillside lemon grove, gently scenting the air with its fruit. The patio is lined with terracotta pots of herbs, tomatoes, passion fruit, peppers, strawberries and aloe.
“I already have two flowers on my strawberry plant,” Ivo says with excitement.

“After the flower comes the fruit, si?”

We sit down on some old milk crates and lean against the side of the house, taking in the view and sipping our drinks in peace.

Ivo breaks the silence, telling the three of us about his plan to put a hot tub above the house, where he has another large plot of land that overlooks the sea.

“And I’m puttin’ in two air conditioners in the house so it isn’t so fucking hot,” he says.

“Why haven’t you already?” I ask.

“You know this is a national park and UNESCO heritage site, yeah?” he asks.

“Well, you have limits once you live in a national park. Almost everything is protected; you have to ask permission for everything. Right now when it rains the water gets the whole door wet. And downstairs, the water is running off of my roof and into my neighbors’ house. I talked to the guy doing my housework, and he tells me I need to write and ask for a permit so he can put up an awning—do any work—and that he doesn’t know how many months it could take to get permission. They have to send my request to Geneva, and Geneva has to approve it, according to the laws of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Then it has to get approved by the national park committee. Oh bullshit—fuck it’s my house. Almost everyone has one already—why do you need to know if I have one or not?

“ Italians, especially to me Cinque Terre people, we don’t like this constriction. We come from descendants of families that have been here over a hundred years, two hundred
years. We know how to live peacefully with the land. It is the tourist who comes and tramples our home that needs to be monitored and be given permission. Not us.”

Ivo stops and I am given a moment to absorb all that he said. As beautiful as it is, there is more than the ocean and a lot of grape vines here. I thought this was a slice of paradise with no worries, but it isn’t as carefree as Rick Steves paints it in his guidebook. But even with all that the people are so welcoming. And I never imagined meeting a man excited about strawberry flowers.

Holding his glass in his hand, Ivo turns toward me.

“With the introduction of tourism, the balance between the land and the people, it was disrupted, you see? We were able to survive independently before. Now, we need you to make it.”

***

Saturday dawns clear, bright and hot. A rooster—no joke—wakes me up too early for my taste, but I go ahead and dress for the day. It is too beautiful outside to sleep. Lauren is apparently of the same mind; I find her downstairs brushing her teeth.

“I was thinking we should go back to the harbor again today,” I say, leaning against the doorjamb.

She rinses before responding.

“Sounds good to me. I am looking forward to relaxing and doing some light exploring,” she says.

Leaving the apartment, I decide not to tote Steves’ book with me. It is heavy and unnecessary. I am going to discover Cinque Terre my way, not his way. Since neither of us had brought breakfast food to stock the kitchen, we stop at a fruit market and then at a
The focacceria. Focaccia bread originated in this region, and I opt for a slice with pesto, another local gastronomic specialty. Cinque Terre’s tourism is partially driven by travelling foodies who want to taste the localized food products the area has to offer: focaccia, traditional basil pesto and “red” pesto, and many varieties of vino bianco. Tourist food shops sell dried pasta, jars of pesto and bottles of wine in bulk. The quality of the goods is somewhat circumspect—with multiple tourist shops chock full of souvenir edibles, who knows how long it has been sitting there?

Though untrained in food science, I savor my simple handmade local breakfast. Lauren and I multitask, eating while walking up Via Colombo. We gravitate toward Bar Centrale, and I hope that nothing has changed in my few hours away.

Ivo is just as gruff and sarcastic as the night before, smiling when we enter his business.

“‘Ello, ‘ello! What can I do for you ladies, eh?” he says leaning on the bar. “Have plans for the day?”

“We are going down to the harbor to tan and go swimming,” I say. “It is so pretty and quiet down there. We want to see more local people, and it seemed full of them yesterday.”

Ivo wrinkles his nose and shakes his head.

“Amiche, no, no. That is raw sewage down there! If you want to go swimming with the real local people, you need to go to the beach.” He grabs a cocktail napkin and draws a little map. “I normally don’t bother telling tourists not to go to the marina, but you girls are too nice.”
“So why were people swimming in the water to get into their boats yesterday?” I ask. I hadn’t swallowed any water yesterday, had I? Gross.

“It is not harmful, just not where we go for relaxin’.” He looks at us carefully, then says, “If you need a proper shower, you can use mine to disinfect.”

I laugh. “Thanks, but your bathroom doesn’t have a door yet. Will you be here later?”

“I get off at six thirty,” he says. “If you want to meet here for dinner around eight, I will take you somewhere.”

***

The hot pebbles of the beach press into the soles of my feet comfortably, like a free foot massage as I walk to the water’s edge. I find pieces of sea glass buffed into pearls of color first made by man and reclaimed by nature. I collect a few pieces—sea foam green, deep blue, and beer bottle gold.

Further up the beach, Lauren is moving rocks around to make her sunning spot. She lies down, then sits back up with visible frustration. Reaching under her towel, she pulls out the rock that had been digging into her back.

“I don’t know how they do it!” she says when I get close. “I am being bruised by these suckers.”

I chuckle. “I like it. Much better than sand getting everywhere and in everything.” I put my free glass souvenirs in my bag and lay down. “Plus, why pay for a hot stone treatment at a spa when you can be here?”

Lauren tries to glare at me, but she is too nice to pull it off. When I giggle she rolls her eyes and puts her shirt over her head.
Children nearby are stacking stones into columns. *When you can’t make a sandcastle, build a rock fort.* The *pietra serena* cliff above me has holes cut into its face—the reason for the brief moments of light and striking vistas I had seen on the train journey to Riomaggiore. The earth below me vibrates. Looking closely, I see the train speed by the ‘windows’.

*Strange how yesterday I was looking out from the train, and now I am down here, part of the scenery. It feels like fate—that it was inevitable for Cinque Terre to suit me. Way to be a sentimental sap. You are here for the weekend. This isn’t an extended stay. Don’t get attached.*

With that, I close my eyes.

***

Lauren and I arrive to Bar Centrale around eight in the evening. We take a seat. Ivo hasn’t arrived yet, and we are able to watch the colorful sky change slowly from blue to raspberry.

Ivo walks up to the bar’s patio in garb unlike anything I have ever seen in my life. I say nothing. Lauren says nothing. Apparently not all Italians wear Gucci.

He looks like…well, Jesus.

He’s wearing an oversized cream-colored tunic and pants with side slits to his mid thigh. The pant legs billow as he walks. The best part: the tunic is paired with these red, brown and orange tribal patterned, billowing pants.

“Ciao, Lauren! Ciao, Kaitlin!” he says as he walks toward us.

We do the typical two-cheek-kiss greeting, something that I have become used to.

“Are you hungry? Ready to go?” he asks.
“Definitely hungry,” I say.

“I was thinking actually of visiting my brother in Manarola tonight, and he has good food,” Ivo says.

We’ve known Ivo for about 22 hours and are already being welcomed into all corners of his life—it’s like we are substitute daughters or distant cousins. As the three of us walk down Via Columbo, women, men and children of all ages stop Ivo.


This is followed by a fluid stream of Italian my single semester of Italian class couldn’t prepare me to comprehend.

Ivo pauses at the back doors to a few restaurants, drawing busy sous chefs and assistants out for a quick hello. I must have had my question written on my face, because Ivo says, “I stay friendly with the cooks and kitchen staff. That way, when I go, I can ask what’s fresh and they’ll mix me something. Menus are for people who think they know better than the chef. Trust the kitchen—they know what’s good.”

“So what? You are nice to them and then they hook you up with goods?” Lauren asks. Ivo gives us a half grin.

“We have a saying here—una mano lava l’altra. One hand washes the other. It is how it is done. I do for them, and they do for me.”

We get to talking about food along the Via dell’Amore.

“Alfredo sauce,” he spits the words out like they’ve left a bad taste in his mouth.

“That is not Italian. When I was twenty and in San Francisco—never eat cheap Italian, it
always is shit—but anyway, my friends, they were poor young people. Since I am Italian they asked me what good alfredo sauce is like. I had no idea what they were talking about. ‘Alfredo is a name, not a food,’ I told them. Then, when my carbonara pasta came out, it had black olives in it. Fucking black olives!”

He says all of this as if it is a mortal sin not to know alfredo sauce is a figment of Americans’ imagination, and that carbonara is egg, prosciutto, cream, and parmesan cheese.

***

The three of us reach the Via dell’Amore at dusk. Tourist couples walk hand in hand or relax on one of the many stone benches meant for romancing and stargazing. Ivo doesn’t seem to take note of the couples as he greets Manarola neighbors heading to Riomaggiore as we meander along. I am struck by the contrast: for locals the path is a way to get to where you’re going; it’s the tourists who are keeping the romantic past of the trail alive.

Instead of turning toward the vineyard walk, Ivo takes us down toward the water. A railing at the end of the road dead ends at a plunging cliff with a deep-water grotto below (‘You should not swim there—it is sewer water from the streets,” Ivo tells us.)

The trattoria is on the right, a few steps leading down into the building (a very typical technique here; like having a split level home to minimize long stretches of stairs). The sign above the wooden door states the name of the establishment: Cantina dello Zio Bramante. Loose translation: The Wine Cellar of the Coveting Uncle.

We enter the bar and people engulf Ivo. The double kiss greeting is used as Ivo takes the time to talk to everyone, some in English, some in Italian. As I wait, I check out
the decorations, especially a two-gallon fish tank sitting in the corner. One of those
goldfish with buggy eyes and puffy cheeks stares at me. A note on the tank asks patrons not
to tap the glass.

A man wearing traditional African clothing, glasses and sporting a shaved head
comes out from behind the bar. His skin is the rich color of cherry wood.

“Gabriel! Mio fratello!” Ivo says, embracing him.


There is no way they can be biologically related, and after sitting down at a table
for three, I ask Ivo what’s up.

“We are blood brothers, Gabriel and me,” he replies.

Within five minutes, Ivo’s years of ‘hand washing’ with Gabriel has our table set
with antipasti and glasses of the local white wine. Olives, bread topped with salt-cured and
lemon-cured acciughe, and soft goat cheese sit on a wooden board worn from years of use.

As Lauren and I begin to eat, Ivo reaches behind him, grabs a guitar, and starts to
play. He’s good. His fingers play four chords in an order familiar to me, both visually and
audibly.

“Is that ‘Hotel California’?” I ask.

He lifts his eyes to mine and starts to sing, “On a dark desert highway, cool wind in
my hair…”

A guitarist and singer myself, I join in—the first time I’ve sung in public since the
recitals of my youth. The single guitar, Ivo’s rum and whiskey voice, and my gentle alto
harmony fill the small space. The world feels clearer, simpler. As if this is what evenings
are supposed to be like.
People from the patio migrate inside. Locals watch, tourists take photos. All my inhibitions about singing for people and being a public spectacle disappear. As the song reaches the chorus line, I realize that Gabriel has picked up the bass, a Londoner is playing a ukulele, and an older man is singing tenor.

Candlelight shines off of the lacquered instruments and infuses the room in a golden glow. The song ends to a smattering of applause and comments of encouragement and appreciation.

The barista comes over to refill our wine and says to me, “Avete una buona voce, signorina.”

“Grazie, mi chiamo Kaitlin,” I reply.

The woman gives me a surprised smile, and Ivo looks at me with approval as she walks away.

“They like it when people at least try to speak Italian, and not many Americans do,” he says. “You speak it well. I think Italian sounds more natural coming from your mouth than English.”

It is an unexpected compliment I never thought I would hear, and I thank him happily.

I meet tourists throughout the night, and am introduced to Amy and Tim from Australia. They are young (upper twenties), and are dressed fashionably, yet comfortably. Tim works in Denmark and met up with Amy here for Amy’s vacation.
“It takes about twenty-four hours of travelling to arrive here from Australia, but it is so worth it,” Amy says. She is at the tail end of her four-week vacation and is heading to Rome in the morning to see the sights and catch her plane.

“I told Amy that Cinque Terre couldn’t be missed, so I offered to come down for the week to see her and show her around,” Tim says. “I have visited Cinque Terre over and over. All kinds of good things happen here.”

“For sure, for sure!” the older tenor singer says. His name is Grey Martin. He tells us how he married a local girl and comes back with her to Manarola every year, usually in the summer when “the evening crowds are larger and full of characters.” His daughter is here as well, a 24-year-old gorgeous mix of the dark Italian hair and light Canadian skin. Though Grey likes Vancouver, an invisible force pulls him to Manarola.

“This place—this place is the center of the universe,” Grey says. “People from all over the planet convene here and magical stuff happens.”

*I feel it, too. I want to say it out loud, that I’m experiencing the pull, the magic, or whatever you want to name the sensation. But I don’t have the right to feel it. These people have spent time here—it’s not your turn.* I try to discount the thought to a fantasy brought about by the wine, but the mental itch won’t disappear.

Ivo and I take a walk down to Manarola’s pier. The bar sounds fade behind me as nature’s voice takes over: crickets, waves lapping at the breakwater, wood creaking. We sit along a ledge.

“So, how are you liking it?” Ivo asks.
The answer comes straight from my gut. “I love it here. I never want to leave,” I say. “You are so lucky to call this place home.”

Ivo grunts, pulls a box out of his enveloping Jesus pants—it holds dry leaves and rolling paper. He starts rolling a cigarette.

“It’s sort of a relationship of love and hate. I was born here, you know. Either you like it or you don’t. This is your home, and when you say home you mean your house, the place you were born and grew up,” he says.

He pauses to lick the rolling paper. Lighting it, he takes a long draw and continues.

“And actually, you want to know something nice? Yesterday, I was off and I decided to take a moment out in the garden. I was under the sun, relaxing. I took my Sudoku and started doin’ one of the little things. And there, all of a sudden, were these two beautiful butterflies. Big. One floating around the other, and vice versa. I saw them coming and I was just thinking, ‘God, I wish I had a camera. I gonna go in and get a camera.’ But then, just the idea of missing out…it just made me stop. I was there. I couldn’t move. All of a sudden they come around… Kaitlin, I swear… They come around my face. I hear them and I feel the wind from their wings. I can hear the butterflies’ wings. It was one of the most beautiful experiences I’ve ever had. I stared at them for about five minutes, just moving around the garden. And then they fly away. It was amazing. They were right there.” He holds his hand up two inches away from his face. “You can’t imagine the sensation of feeling the wind of butterfly wings.

“Something like that just doesn’t happen anywhere. I think there is magical stuff everywhere, but probably we are in one of those magic points they say are scattered all over the world. Cinque can call you.”
Without any cue he managed to tell me what I wanted to know, answering my unasked question. I have permission to feel the pull of this place. After a drag on his cigarette, he continues.

“Growing up in a small town is one of the most amazing things for a little child. Because you live freely. You have few restrictions. This is such a safe place, and such a huge playground.

“I never had a boat; I wasn’t that lucky. I don’t know if it was lucky…. My parents always worked so we never had time for a boat. In the summer, that’s when our job was—and is—most busy. Everyday, seven days a week. You don’t have time off. You don’t have a day to say, ‘I’m going to take my boat and go on the water.’

“So when I was young I used to go fishing with a spear. You are in the water. You have more contact with the hunting than being in a boat with a fishing line. On a boat you are still in the world, so you still have those problems in your mind. Once you go under the surface, you just stop thinking. And you just start living in an amazing foreign world. Everybody changes there. You are on your own. Even if you’re with other people, you are on your own.”

As Ivo falls silent, I think of the little kids I saw this afternoon, fishing off the pier together. Even with the changes created by tourism, people here still manage to follow established life patterns.

And I understand what he means about going under the surface. I feel like I am being slowly submerged into all things Cinque Terre; I’ve walked around “in the world” for two days here, focused on taking pictures and wanting to see the world through a camera
lens. Now I have a sense of what it means to be from Cinque Terre. Well, from Riomaggiore. These towns aren’t a unit like guidebooks suggest.

I want to ask Ivo questions, but his cigarette is finished and he is ready to head back to the Cantina dello Zio Bramante.

The bar has begun to shut down, and my newly made friends are milling around in the street saying goodbye to each other.

Grey comes over.

“Time to say ciao, my girl,” he says. “Now, we are going to do three kisses. One for me, one for you, and one for the shadows on the wall.”

His stubble grazes my cheek as we execute our farewell, and I am surprised how sad I am to say goodbye to the Canadian.

“You, Lauren, Ivo—you all really made the night special.” He gives me a hug and walks into the night, his wife on one side, daughter on the other. Grey fell in love with the people and the land, Grey’s wife is tied to the area by blood, and now their daughter is beginning her own love affair with Cinque Terre. I wonder if she will fall in love with a local, with the land, or with both.

***

With the closing of the bar, a group of us (led by Ivo and Gabriel) walk along a cliff-hugging path overlooking the ocean. We stop at a wide point that juts out over the water. There are no lights, only stars. I notice a new face. He is young, mid-twenties, and beautiful. Not handsome. Beautiful.

“Ciao, I am Paolo,” he says.
“Kaitlin,” I say in response. I am so struck that I forget the pleasantries as I engage in the two-kiss greeting.

Lauren looks at me with wide eyes.

When Paolo moves out of earshot, Ivo gives me the low-down: Paolo is from Manarola, and is a harmonica player who travels the world at whim. He failed to comment on Paolo’s impeccable wardrobe taste. Light blue t-shirt, dark form-fitting jeans and Italian shoes. The Greek god Apollo would be jealous.

Everyone is already settling onto the ground at our impromptu gathering place as I head for a spot next to Lauren. Ivo takes the guitar first, launching into a rock tune I’d never heard before. Paolo unzips a pouch and pulls out a harmonica. He improvises harmony song after song, as Ivo and Gabriel pass the guitar to one another between sets.

We are a motley crew: Ivo with his Jesus pants, Gabriel in African costume, Paolo in contemporary Italian casual wear, and Lauren and me in American sundresses.

As 3 a.m. approaches, we have become a group of friends. Lauren and I are treated as if we’ve always been here. Friendly punches and jokes are exchanged, especially at my expense for my lack of classic rock knowledge (“What do you mean you’ve never heard this song? Mamma Mia.”) We pack up the instruments and start to walk back toward civilization.

“Let’s go home,” Ivo says.

That tingling itch in my mind from earlier stops. I am home, aren’t I?

***

Our last morning here dawns beautiful as usual. Lauren and I descend the steps from our hostel as if to our execution.
A simple and brilliant idea strikes me.

“Lauren… what if we come back next weekend?”

Navigating the alleys to Mar Mar Realty, we both have our fingers crossed.

Amy, the American ex-pat, is at the counter.

“We want to come back next weekend. Do you have anything open?” I ask.

Amy opens the ponderous book, scanning the handwritten reservations.

“I do have one bungalow with an ocean view and balcony for Friday night. Would that work?”

I have thirty minutes before our train departs to find Ivo and tell him the good news. Lauren declines my invitation to hike up to Ivo’s house, so I trek it alone.

“Buongiorno, Ivo!” I say, seeing him through the glass door. He looking the worse for wear after the late night out.

“Ay, you woke me up, amica,” Ivo says, stumbling back from the door. “Come in, come in. You want an espresso?” He rubs his salt and pepper stubble sleepily.

“No, grazie,” I reply. I’ve noticed I am using Italian more often these days. “Not big on coffee. It is noon. How is it possible I woke you up?”

Ignoring my question all together, he grabs the water bottle from the corner of his doorstep and heads out to the terrace.

“Why do you keep water bottles on either side of your door?” I ask. I had seen bottles positioned all over Cinque Terre’s doorsteps and was starting to think maybe it was for good luck.

“Cats like corners. If you put the bottles there, they don’t piss on your door.”
After watering the fledgling plants, the bottle is refilled and placed back in its piss-preventing location. I dig into my bag and reach for my notebook.

“I’m afraid of that little black book,” he says as I pass my Moleskine to him to write his e-mail down for me. It is the book I’ve been whipping out during my entire stay, scribbling down anything that will help me remember Cinque Terre.

He hands the book back to me. I laugh.

“Why Evil Ivo?”

“People used to think my name was Evil when I would introduce myself to them,” he replies. “EEEE-Voh. It is not that hard. So this is my little joke for them.”

I shove the pad back into my bag, heading for the door.

“You don’t have to go. You and Lauren could stay here tonight,” he offers.

“Thanks, but we’ll be back,” I say.

“In a few years when you are on your honeymoon,” Ivo says. He means it as a joke, but there seems to be a touch of sadness in the way he says it. “I hate the goodbyes. There aren’t enough times I say hello again.”

“I’ll be back next weekend,” I reply.

“For real, ragazza?” he says. His whole body seems to reanimate. “Very good. I am glad. It will be nice to have returning visitors.”

He opens the door for me and I turn for the two-kiss goodbye. He touches my shoulder.

“Well, a presto, then,” I reply.

As I walk down the garden stairs, I can’t stop smiling.
Lauren and I walk through the mosaic-filled tunnel to the train station, bags in tow. Our train pulls into the station and we hop onboard, taking the first available seats on the less-than-crowded afternoon train. As the train lurches forward, Lauren and I make eye contact.

“We’re coming back,” she says.

“We’re coming back.”

***

A week goes by in Florence in a flash of activity: classes, museum tours, journalism assignments, dates with Giovanni. He had hoped I would stay in Florence for the weekend, touring the city and enjoying the abundant nightlife I’d been missing. As tempting as his offer was, I had to decline. I tell Giovanni I’ll see him on Sunday.

Friday dawns. Lauren and I slosh our way to the train station. All of northern and central Italy is blanketed by a rain-dumping storm. We hope for a sunny miracle in Cinque Terre.

The view from Riomaggiore’s train station is dramatic. A slate grey sky meets a stormy sea, white foam capping every wave. This week, tourists tote umbrellas and don rain gear as they exit the train.

Amy is working the front counter again. She smiles at Lauren and me, a flash of recognition on her face as she welcomes us.

“We had been hoping for sun again,” I tell her.

“Riomaggiore is like any other place—it rains sometimes,” she says brightly. “But it will clear up soon. It always does.”
By upgrading our accommodations for this weekend, our apartment is on the main road. Amy explains the quirks of the place, explains how to use the A/C unit, and then leaves us.

Standing on the balcony, the view is worth every Euro. The piazza is below, with the harbor visible just beyond and the green hills just visible in my peripheral vision. Banners and chairs dot the piazza as men set up audiovisual equipment. Amy had been right—the rain is clearing, and a weak sun is starting to burn through the cloud layer.

“Scusi, signorine!” I look down at two men trying to get our attention.

“Ciao! Io parlo inglese,” I reply.

“Not a problem,” he replies, to my relief. “Could we come and hang this up from your balcony?” He gestures at a large white sheet.

I hurry down the stairs. Am I really about to let two men into my apartment? Anywhere else, this would not be happening. I swing the door wide.

“Mille grazie,” a man with glasses says. His companion smiles. See? They aren’t whackos. When I get back to the States, I am going to stop watching CSI.

As they carry the sheet up, they fire friendly questions at me about my nationality, age, marital status, area of study, reason for coming to Riomaggiore, etc.

“What is the occasion?” I ask.

“We are introducing the new football players at a big party—everyone in Riomaggiore will come,” Glasses Man says.

After using all of the clothespins on our drying line, and using Lauren as an extra set of hands, the sheet is firmly attached to the balcony.
“Do you want me to take the sheet somewhere tomorrow?” I ask as the men head for the door.

“Oh, no, just leave it here. We will tell Amy and she can get it from housekeeping tomorrow.”

Ivo was right about the small town atmosphere. Everyone knows everything! These men knew my apartment was a Mar Mar property, and they knew Amy would be the person to contact. Talk about interconnected. I can see myself living here, becoming part of the community fabric. I could do my writing, then travel to Florence when I want some city action. Amy has done it. So can I.

***

I text Ivo. He tells me he is at work and I should come visit, but I want to visit Vernazza first, so we make plans to meet up later.

The sun is blazing and the humidity is thick when we arrive after the five-minute train trip. A welcome board lists hotels and rooms: Martina Camere Rooms, Filippo Camere, Eva’s Rooms, Mamma Rina Camere Rooms, Giuliana Camere Rooms, all with descriptions in mixes of Italian, English, German, and French. Dozens of them!

Walking down Vernazza’s main street, I better understand Ivo’s complicated relationship with tourists. Rolling suitcases, hikers, and strolling tourists clog the entire street. A resident shakes his head as he dodges people taking photographs and consulting maps. Two stores selling pizza and focaccia bread are right next door to each other, selling more bread products than locals could ever eat.

Lauren and I pass one of many Italian food stores. The sign says, “LOCAL AND BEST ITALIAN WINES, Pesto, Acciughe, Acqua Bibite—Soft Drinks, Shipping Service.”
Outside, baskets are filled to the brim with dried pasta, amaretti candies, jars of pesto, and bottles of sciacchetra. People stand shoulder to shoulder inside, jockeying for space as they grab edible trinkets.

Tourist junk stores become more frequent as we approach the waterfront. I wonder what the buildings had been used for before the tourist boom. *I wish I had been able to see this place before the tourists showed up.* Even with that sentiment, I stop in one to buy a wine stopper. The owner is a German woman who immigrated to the area years ago. She is welcoming and talkative, but her eyes are always scanning the crowded room in an almost greedy way.

Lauren and I purchase gelato, jewelry, and art, ending our financially draining walk at Vernazza’s post-card perfect harbor. I have enjoyed the day, but am glad the effects of tourism are less visible in Riomaggiore.

We take the train home and Lauren heads back to the apartment for a nap. Not tired, I decide to go talk to Ivo. The bar isn’t terribly busy; the sun lured tourists away to the hiking trails, beaches, and Vernazza’s shopping district.

The same Rastafari picture-on-the-wall song from last week blares from the bar’s sound system. Ivo tells me to go outside to a table. When he joins me, he hands me a cloudy beverage with lime in it.

“*I think down south you all have a thing called lemonade, sì?*” He takes a seat and starts eating his lunch. A young boy stops at our table and Ivo talks with him for a bit, ruffling his hair as he walks away. “He’s my cousin,” Ivo tells me.
Relationships, especially familial ones, are simplified here. There is no second cousin twice removed—they are simply called a cousin. The lineage of the person is remembered (such as a sister’s husband’s brother or mother’s brother’s daughter), a detail American culture doesn’t emphasize.

“Can I ask you something personal?”

“Of course.”

“Why aren’t you married?” I ask. “You are so good with children, and I can tell you want that life.”

“I just haven’t found the right woman, ya know? And I’m not going to settle down until I know for sure she is right for me,” Ivo replies. “It will happen when it happens.”

It will happen when it happens. What a different attitude than what I face surrounded by my peers back in the States. Time has less of a demanding presence here.

I change topics, telling Ivo about Vernazza: the flood of tourists and how commercialized it felt compared to Riomaggiore.

“It is so busy, I guess,” I say.

He nods vigorously.

“The type of tourist we get, it is not the same as the past. It’s not that it has changed. It evolved. The walls, the monuments, the homes, they are the same, but the people here have changed because of the tourism. Before, I remember times when I was five, eight, ten years old Riomaggiore was a very relaxing place. It was quieter. When I was a little kid in the 70s, I remember my father commenting on the number of Germans, and how many of them were soldiers coming back with their families to visit. And a lot of people just kept coming, for years and years.
“Now, it’s very chaotic. Rio has changed according to the people who arrive. Back then it was more families coming, staying for longer—15 days, a month. Now it’s people who come in—backpackers—and they come for one day, two days it’s just a... boom! Like grasshoppers or locusts—voom! They arrive, they hike, swim, eat, and split.”

“Maybe I am more like the butterfly then,” I say. “I’ve fluttered in and out a couple times.”

“Nah. You are a migrating bird,” Ivo says.

“I just gotta keep coming home?” I ask.

“Ah, but which place is home for you?” he says. “See they have a house in the mountains and a house at the beach. Maybe you wouldn’t appreciate here if you didn’t come from there, you know?”

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Bar Centrale is packed after dinner. Ivo is running orders from the bar to the patio, chatting up the customers same as last week. When his shift ends, he grabs his guitar from behind the bar, and the lot of us (Paolo, Lauren, Gianluca, and myself) go to Riomaggiore’s harbor. Two friends of Ivo’s have flown from random points around the world to visit for the weekend.

“You know so many people from so many places,” I comment as we walk.

“That’s one of the most beautiful things of my job. Every once in a while you have messages from people that remember you. The e-mail or whatever will just say, ‘Hey man. I’m gonna be there in a couple weeks.’ I get to see people I never thought I’d see again—people from ten years ago sometimes. Showing up after so much time, but it feels like time hasn’t passed. Kind of like you. You are one of those people who I can tell will come back.
You meet good people in my job; not always, but when you do. Man. It’s something great.”

It is a reenactment of last week, except this time the ocean is playing its own song. Waves are crashing over the breakwater, and the boats of the harbor are sinking as they fill with seawater. I listen to Ivo sing Bob Marley behind me, and Lauren comes to stand next to me at the railing.

“It isn’t like last time,” Lauren says to me. “But I think I like it even more.”

I know what Lauren means. I thought I would like Cinque Terre for the food, the ocean, for all the reasons Rick told me to like it. I do. But Riomaggiore doesn’t feel like a vacation spot anymore. I am a string being woven into the town’s fabric, a different color integrated into a long-standing pattern.

Ivo starts playing Hotel California again, and the group calls me over to repeat my performance. I sit on the ground and sing.

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One more visit. After getting on the train to leave and starting to cry, I send an e-mail labeled “Urgent” to Mar Mar as soon as we arrive to Florence. I have a reply from Amy within hours, telling us she’d see us in two weeks.

On this final return, Lauren and I bring Amy and Eliza, two girls from the program. After hearing Lauren and me rave about the splendors and delights for weeks on end, they were thrilled to join us.
Cinque Terre puts on its best show this afternoon: the sky is cerulean blue, the waves are calm, and the train is less damp than I remember.

Mar Mar’s Amy isn’t at the desk today, so another woman checks all of us in. Amy and Eliza’s room is a mini apartment, complete with a kitchen and huge patio on the roof. Lauren and I have a smaller room in the historic district, two streets away from Ivo’s place.

Our first stop is Bar Centrale, of course. Ivo refuses payment from any of us.

“We should have a dinner together, all your friends and some of mine,” Ivo says.

Ivo still doesn’t have a kitchen, so Amy and Eliza offer to have the dinner party at their place.

Sitting on the patio, we arrange a menu—*insalata caprese*, penne pasta and *pesto*, *focaccia* bread, *vino bianco*, and watermelon for dessert.

“Amica, you go buy this at the markets and we will pay you back tonight,” Ivo says.

His shift at the bar ends at seven, and we decide to meet at Mar Mar’s office at eight. His new bartender and two other guys will be joining us as well.

Lauren and I go take care of the shopping as Amy and Eliza go to enjoy a short nap. I’d never gone to multiple stores to buy groceries before. We went to a general store for the *pesto*, pasta, mozzarella and *focaccia* bread, then to a produce store for the tomatoes and watermelon. Ivo said he would provide the wine, naturally.

The atmosphere is lively and boisterous as the eight of us try to set up dinner. Ivo’s iPod plays Bob Marley on a borrowed stereo system. Ivo quickly establishes himself in the kitchen. He is wearing the Jesus pants again. Amy can’t resist saying something.

“Ivo, what the hell is up with the pants?” she says.
“Ay, what the hell is up with the dress?” he counters. Amy laughs and backs out of the kitchen.

Ivo is at ease in the kitchen. He slices tomatoes, arranging and seasoning them swiftly, a towel tied around his waist as a mock apron.

“Amica, can you start the water to boil?” he asks.

“I would if I could figure out the stove,” I reply. It’s an old-fashioned gas range with a gas release valve. The last thing I want to do is blow up the apartment.

Ivo’s bartender comes in and fiddles with it, finally getting the lighter to ignite the gas. In the living room, I can hear Eliza and Amy orchestrating the moving of the table and chairs from the roof down to the third floor—quite an operation.

When we finally all sit down to dinner, it is a loud, energetic gathering. The room is warm—a result of the kitchen stove and the three bottles of wine we’ve split between the eight of us. One of the guys doesn’t speak much English, and Amy and Eliza don’t speak any Italian. With the rest of us fully or decently bilingual, we are able to talk over each other, translating jokes and sarcastic remarks. When a song comes on that Ivo likes, he sings and everyone else pitches in; if he doesn’t like it, he skips it, sometimes to protests from the rest of us.

Ivo turns to me and smiles. He has a huge piece of basil placed on his front tooth. Everyone laughs, and he repositions it to cover his entire tooth as he poses for a picture. I rise to start cleaning the dishes.

“I can help,” Ivo says to me.

“The cook is not going to clean,” I reply.
Lauren is finished with her meal, and joins me at the sink. I’ve never hand washed dishes before; the process is relaxing as I scrape, scrub, rinse and pass the dishes to Lauren for drying.

I hear the guys rolling cigarettes at the table then walking up to the balcony to smoke. The open window lets in low, rumbling Italian and occasional laughter from above.

With the apartment set to rights and Amy and Eliza needing to go to bed, the four men, Lauren and I head to Bar Centrale. Paolo has texted Lauren and is going to meet us there on the patio.

“Ciao, Kaitlin, Lauren!” Paolo says when we arrive. After the kiss greeting, I give him an American hug. I can tell Lauren is nervous so I take over to give her time to settle in.

“I have missed you,” I say. “Come stai?”

As Paolo tells me about his past two weeks, Ivo is working the crowd, saying hello and being introduced. He works his way my direction.

“Kaitlin, I need to do laundry, so I think I am going to go home,” he says. “I know you have more work to do for your paper, but if you could talk to me there…”

“Bene, bene, not a problem,” I reply. “Give me a few more minutes.”

My stomach seems to flip. I have to say goodbye to Paolo. The first goodbye. We talk a little longer, joking about my thesis project and the likelihood of Lauren and me returning next weekend (even though we know we’ll be on a flight to the United States).

I give him a hug goodbye, tell Lauren to call me if she needs me, and find Ivo.
“Andiamo,” I say. “Let’s go.”

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I flop belly side down on Ivo’s black leather couch, propping up on my elbows. His Jesus pants billow as he tornadoes through the living room gathering laundry and sorting it. Sheets, towels, colors, whites, darks. Tiny piles to fit in his 5 kilogram (12 pound) maximum load washing machine.

“Ay, amica, you thirsty?” he asks.

“No, I’m good.”

It is 2 a.m. and I’m buzzed from the post-meal grappa I’d had at Bar Centrale. On one hand, I’d like to be in bed dreaming of Giovanni and my upcoming trip to Cortona. But this is my final night in Cinque Terre. No. I know better than to lump these places all together now. It is my last night in Riomaggiore.

Feeling guilty for lounging, I get up to start hanging king-sized sheets on the clothesline outside. I unlatch the single pane window, swinging it inward, then push open the shutters. Ivo comes and stands by me, leaning out into the night.

“Smells good, clean,” he says. “When I lived on the main street I dreaded doing laundry. Everyone would talk to me so it would take forever. I love the peace back here. Unfortunately, in a small town, you either want or don’t want to know everybody. My sister, parents, cousins all live in Riomaggiore. I have one cousin who lives in Paris now because he met a girl—she’s Basque—but, ah, she works in Paris, so he moved to Paris with her. And they have a baby—fantastic baby—boy, fucking stubborn, as Basque people are. They’re fucking hard headed as Italians are. Imagine!”
As I hand clothespins to Ivo, I remember the clothesline I had seen in Manarola before starting the vineyard walk. Someone did let me into their house after all. My first day here feels as if it happened so long ago. I was clutching my Rick Steves guidebook like a lifeline, as if that book would show me reality. Ivo has shown me local life—has let me participate in it. I know what it means to live here and feel like I belong here. I am the migrating bird after all.

“Ivo?”

“Mmm?”

“Thank you.”

He acknowledges me with a head nod. Working as a team, we finish the laundry listening to the distant crash of waves in the harbor.
CINQUE TERRE THESIS OUTLINE—KAITLIN WALTER

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TOURIST

1. Why Cinque?
2. Arrival
3. Harbor Sunbathing
4. Via dell’Amore **Realization: I want to experience local life**
5. Vineyard Walk **Desire for social interaction**
6. Meet Ivo/Bar Centrale culture **It’s not the place it’s the people**
7. Ivo’s apartment/1st exposure to local life
8. “We need you new”
9. Breakfast the way the locals do it
10. Ivo’s invitation
11. The Rock Beach **1st feelings of integration**
12. Walk to Manarola **1st exposure to local-local interaction**
13. Cantina dello Zio Bramante
14. ‘Hotel California’ **Locals accepting of me**
15. The pull of 5-Terre revealed **Pivotal Understanding—the Magic**
16. Paolo & the Cliff **Feel integrated as a visitor**
17. Re-book/Goodbye to Ivo **Emotional toll of the revolving door**

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TRANSITIONAL

18. Re-arrival/the Balcony **1st unsupervised interaction with community**
19. Vernazza **Experience tourist’s influence on the culture**
20. Talk w/Ivo @ Bar Centrale **Evolution of the tourist & myself**
21. Repetition of activity **5 Terre as a real place w/ real ppl**

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TRAVELER/HABITUÉ

22. The sharing of 5-Terre with friends **I know the place**
23. Dinner for 8—4 Americans, 4 locals
24. First Goodbye **High level of integration achieved**
25. Full circle **Hanging laundry, as I had hoped to do. See myself as part of a global community. A dual citizen—concern**

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LANDSCAPE >>> INDIVIDUALS >>> COMMUNITY/CULTURE

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LEVEL OF INTIMACY WITH CINQUE TERRE ------→