





# She would catch herself walking through the piazza and feel the inexorable passing of time stop.

LEORE WORRIED ABOUT TIME  
BY FLAVIA BRUNETTI

**L**eore worried about time. She worried about it almost constantly, jumping ahead to what she could be doing in an hour, in a month, in a year, with her lifetime, or rushing back to consider what she could have done differently with that chance, with that day, with that boy, with that place. Sometimes, walking aimlessly, worn out from the rivers of time rushing by in her head, gushing every which way, she considered what she should be doing with this moment, right now, and the sound of ticking clocks made her nervous and unhappy.

Only occasionally was she at peace, and then only when she felt that there was no time at all; this occurred only in the dead of night, when she woke up with her heart thumping (she tried not to think about her heartbeat too often), or when she swam in the waters off the Tuscan coast, head under the breaking point, where there was such a muffled silence that she was sure she could hear anything coming, that she would know. She spent a lot of time this way, swimming, head under for as long as she could keep it that way, resisting the urge to break the surface and breathe. Breathe in, breathe out. Don't look up, there is no sky.

As Leore worried about time so relentlessly, it tended to escape her, flit away, like the fish she loved, or something winged. Walking through Rome or Florence, she did wonder if it wasn't the fault of these old, old cities, the ones that twisted time, took people's years away from them, entire decades, adjusted the concept of wandering minutes to fit their own, much longer, slower, scheme. She always got the distinct feeling that Italy was largely biding its time, that fallen empires do not, after all, forget everything that they have learned.

04

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Leore walked through parts of Rome that felt much like passing through water, and if she wandered too far into some of the hidden piazzas, it felt as though movement forward stopped entirely. She would catch herself walking through the piazza with the fountain of the frogs and feel the inexorable passing of time stop. One tick would hang in the air, and though one would think this would prove reassuring to Leore, the truth was that she always felt as though she could no longer breathe, and, suffocating, she would run away; to find a passing car, a motorino, a gelateria (especially a gelateria, as nothing soothes like gelato, no matter what the season), anything that would mark the passing of time in the city of the ancient. It is its fault, she made up her mind one day when the humming around her made her feel both oppressed and heavy, it's the fault of these cities, marked by time but timeless, it doesn't make any sense. No sense at all.

So Leore packed up her things and did the most modern thing she could, she moved to Milan. Of course, time here seemed awfully of the speedy variety, everything running into each other, and she fought the urge to march determinedly into the middle of the street and yell, stop it, everything, just slow down. She did not do this, mostly because she feared it would do little, that time would pay her no attention at all. In this way Leore did not see the beauty of this city, just as she did not see the beauty of the others, so concerned was she by erosion. Leore waited for time, and was always hurt when it did not return the favor.

**I**n Villa Adriana of Tivoli, the earth shook, as though something underneath it desperately needed to get out. Something did demand release—time. It spurted out in bursts and savage spouts and covered all the land with centuries past, forcing it to former glory, compelling it to future wonders. Do not say that you have wasted me, peninsula, time bellowed, and then, suddenly, it was gone.

The dust settled quietly over one of the pools that still holds water in this Villa of Hadrian, a mighty empire of a once-mighty ruler. In the air hangs the smell of rust and rosemary, of blood, of perjured promises.

05

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## FLAVIA BRUNETTI

Rome is my city. It took me a long time to come to grips with that, since I grew up bouncing back and forth between Italy and California, and though I've been lucky to live in various parts of the world, all it takes is a stroll to realize that it's true what they say: there's no place like Rome.

Italy plays with time, the way that it passes, sometimes in long, slow swaths of sunlight and other moments in slivers, smoky and dark. You can fall in love a thousand ways throughout the day and night. Piazza della Rotonda is an alternate world in the cold blue of the morning, the Trevi Fountain newly baptized in the ocher fire of evening light. The country has disparate concepts of time also within itself, from the molasses slowness of minutes in Rome, delicious and golden, to the more European, modern Milan, and the thousand eras and places in between.

Time, perhaps, is the same for nations and humans alike, sometimes a friend to greet with open arms and then an unseen enemy, one we worry over constantly. In my head, this became Leore (Le Ore in Italian being "the hours"), a young Italian girl so worried about time in the modern age that she spends her life running from it, and from her country. I wrote Leore Worried About Time while minutes slipped away in rustles of silk, thinking of how my country personifies the passage of moments, sliding Colosseum-first into today's world while clinging to its glorious past.

When I was wee, I wrote a story revolving around the fact that I deeply deserved to have more than one cookie for dessert after dinner, and I've been writing ever since (sometimes with better results, sometimes not so much). I eventually left San Francisco to make Rome my home base and to finish my master's degree, and decided I loved gelato too much to move away again. Of course, I did move away, and today I get to country-jump a lot for work, which leaves me both excited and always slightly melancholy. When I am back in the Eternal City I delve into writing for my city blog, [younginrome.com](http://younginrome.com), and have fun writing articles for various online publications (which you can check out at [flaviinrome.com](http://flaviinrome.com)). In 2014, I won third place in the Memoirs/Personal Essay category of the 83rd Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition, and it convinced me to finally try and write down the idea in my head, a coming-of-age story about an Italian-American girl adapting to the culture of her birth when returning to Rome after her father's death. I wanted to write about memory-making in different cultures, about people who feel more at home in an airport than they wish they did, and these days when I'm not working, traveling, or searching for the perfect espresso, I'm seeking representation for what turned out to be a book after all. You can find me on my blog's Instagram or Twitter (@younginrome) or via email ([younginrome@gmail.com](mailto:younginrome@gmail.com)).

