

Alicia Goshe

Ohio is a very flat place. Over the glimmering soy fields stretches a horizon that extends languidly in every direction. You can turn on one point and, with that singular axis, feel like you're greeting the entirety of the sky.

I grew up with this vast openness of the rural Midwest. I have learned, I have loved, I have leapt in faith beneath this sky. I have spent a full twenty years here, and I am grateful for this time, but my heart of hearts has ached fiercely to explore beyond this horizon. I have always known that there is so much more sky to see and I have always felt it calling to me.

I am blessed to have had the opportunity to board a plane on the advent of my twenty-first year, to create a new home here in Florence—this immaculate Renaissance city with its animated citizens and its impossible trove of art and architecture. For the past three months, I have loved and been charmed by Firenze and her neighboring Italian cities. Overwhelmed by the beauty of the Mediterranean waters, I have spent a few precious hours in its arms. I have found my heart anew in the gleam of so many Byzantine mosaics, in so many sacred spaces.

My time here has been different from my experiences in Ohio in just about every way possible. I am immersed in this new culture, surrounded by this new language, living in a globally significant city, and engaged in academic disciplines that are completely separate from my undergraduate degree. This is, truly, a foreign experience.

Among the human virtues I value most highly is the willingness to open oneself to the world, to swallow experiences whole and let them shape you. This is a lesson I learned early—at age fifteen with the death of my father—and one I have strived to abide by ever since. I have done my utmost to approach my time in Italy with this perspective, and I could write pages upon pages of the ways this city and her people have inscribed themselves upon the reaches of my heart.

I could tell you how I've learned about the communal power of an evening meal between friends, how hours can dissipate in the face of hearty food and open conversation. I could tell you how I've learned to take things slowly, to relish what is rather than rushing toward the future. I could tell you how I am learning the language, and yet learning that shared language is far from necessary for shared kindnesses. I could tell you how my heart has learned to smile when my host mom says, "I find this to be wonderful," and she stretches out her vowels as though she's holding an entire grape in her mouth.

Among these and many other treasured gifts is an understanding that I find myself coming back to as my weeks in Florence come to a close—the knowledge that this beautiful, impossible new world *is*, in fact, possible. And it is possible within my own reality. Here I am, living out a dream that began as a little nugget of thought—a mere hypothetical—six years ago under an Ohio sky. This dream's actuality has led me to realize that, with a nurturing support system, we have the ability to choose just what it is that we want in this one precious life and to bring it to fruition. We are not confined to the places we grew up in, or to the expectations of ourselves or the ones we love. We need only to ask ourselves, to delve into the vaulted spaces of our hearts, and to uncover our own truths about how we want the future to unfold.

I have learned much from Firenze, and this is perhaps one of the most important lessons she has given me: we get to create our own horizons.