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Dear F----,

I find myself thinking about you today, thinking about things in the past, thinking about what it will all be like in the future. You've changed so much in this time, and I feel that I'm partially responsible for this change. There were a lot of us then, 13 years ago, when I first encountered you, but there are so many more now. Year after year, more and more young bodies came streaming into your borders. You didn't ask for us. You certainly didn't need us.

That stream turned into a deluge.





I've also been aware, somewhere in the recesses of my being, that I'm partly to blame for this flood; I'm at least an active participant in it. The veil was pulled back that night in 2015, when I was woken up by shouts from the street below. A group of American boys, drunk and wild, were screaming at no one in particular, and so were also shouting at one another, at the empty shops on the ground level with the lights turned off, the people sleeping in the closed apartments above...
they were ultimately shouting at you.

I remember waking with a start and in a deep haze shuffling towards the large glass window, pulling it back, opening the heavy wooden shutters outward, looking at the street below. It was only then, when I was leaning out the window, with my chest against the cold stone windowsill, that I woke up fully. And it was only then that I realized I was not in Ohio, but rather in you.

No matter how hard I tried, how long I spent with you, how hard I dreamed and wished and longed, I would always wake up with a deep-rooted instinct that elsewhere was my home. Pretending otherwise, as I had been doing for so long, was, perhaps, as ugly as those shouts, which had finally dissipated as the boys disappeared into an alleyway.



I had, at various times throughout our relationship, inhabited and tried to embody your essence, and that night I realized I had to stop pretending; there was some small part of my actions in the actions of those boys. Their shouts were an attempt to command, control, reach out over you. Mine had been an attempt to enter and dissolve into you. Both actions were solely about those who were enacting. They were not actions that are conducive to two distinct, whole entities being in relationship with one another. They were actions that in some way negate; they do not allow *you* to exist as you are.

There aren't easy answers to this. I think that's one of the reasons I've stayed away for so long.



I've been looking at old pictures of you online recently; scanned postcards, videos from the flood, the Alinari photos. It's comforting to see you as you were a hundred years ago, with your streets empty and wide, and the sun hitting nearly every inch of you. It makes me feel good to know that at least, some hundred years ago, there were plenty of moments when you were alone with yourself.



I want to come back, I want to see you.

There is one postcard, it's an old black and white photo looking out over you. The lens used must have been a strange one, as the whole of the foreground is distorted, billowing up to swallow the viewer whole, leaving you protected in the background. I can remember moments like that, when you would expand or contract as if in conversation with me. Those were times when I wasn't trying to be anything other than myself, and so you could do as you wished. And I was there to simply bear witness to your magic.

I miss that. I miss you.



