

**To Walk a Mile in Mine**

Welcome.

It's one of the first words you see when you enter a new place

And that's the first thing I wanted to feel.

But at times that was the last thing felt.

I feel like such a disgrace walking these streets as a million daggers

From a million eyes, pierce into my experience.

Not to generalize, but I have no idea what actually lies behind their gaze

I just know it fills me with grief.

Just one more place where my skin is the issue, never can it be cells and tissue

Instead it's the reason I don't like to walk around alone.

Those eyes look at me as if I should be selling them Kleenex –

Or perhaps something even more sinister.

Am I that evil? I'm just an American. But apparently not at first glance,

Not until I open my mouth to speak my broken Italian with my thick American accent.

Sometimes in crowded places I call a friend just so people can hear me speak English,

And unasked questions can float away – like my comfort.

This is the issue no one ever wants to talk about; there was no orientation session for this.

Quietly it gets brushed under the rug because racial tensions are supposed to be left in America,

And I wish it was left there too.

It makes it much harder to enjoy the glories of Florence.

The Duomo. Gelato. The Accademia. Fiesole. Narrow Streets. The Uffizi. Pasta. Exclusion.

You're supposed to find yourself when you study abroad,

Instead I find myself trying to find somewhere to just *be*.

But I've realize that no such place exists.

America is a melting pot and I am that pot.

Who knows how many ingredients flow through my veins?

So it's in vain to go searching for a place composed of me.

It is more important to search for understanding.

It's hard for most people to fully comprehend the journey of someone else.

Hard to imagine the wind against their face,

The tears sliding down their cheeks,

The pain in their hearts.

But what has meant the most to me are those are *try* to comprehend.

In America racial tensions are like a birth right and you learn how to live with it.

But here in Italy, it's much too strange to arrange in a neat little box,

And so I aim to piece together as many letters of acceptance as I can.

Now the wind on my face becomes sunshine,

And my tears have stopped flowing,

And my heart knows no emotion but joy.

Struggle of any kind is hard to deal with, but it's especially harder in a new place.

Two crimes of the same spine – judge and be judged.

But I would much rather live, much rather embrace the differences than hide from them.

Every day is a struggle to integrate myself into Italian culture,

But every day the pieces of this puzzle come closer to forming the bigger picture,

Welcome.