Everything You Would Become

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At first, Florence was my great escape. It was the beginning of my future. No more high school, no more seemingly too-small town, no more familiarity. I was in Florence because of college, nothing more, nothing less. I didn’t know a soul and home was hundreds of miles away. I liked that.

I liked that I didn't know anyone. I could be anyone I wanted. Somehow I ended up being myself. I was myself...by myself. My roommate was merely that—someone I shared a room with. I’d always romanticized the idea of moving away to college and making tons of friends immediately. The kind of friends I’d have for life. It was not easy. Most people I encountered on campus seemed as cold and as stiff as the bricks that formed the surrounding buildings.

I met my first friend by accident, but I suppose that is how friendships occur once you enter this so-called adulthood. No longer are you thrust in a sandbox or a classroom with people predestined to befriend you. I was in the mezzanine of the dingy old dorm that I called my new home. I had been in Florence a week and finally decided to wash a load of laundry. The laundry room in the mez was small and the machines accepted quarters. Well, I suppose some people’s quarters were accepted. Not mine. I could not figure out how to work the damned things. Finally, I asked a girl for help. She seemed to have no trouble load-
ing her running washer with clothes and detergent. I asked her for help because I assumed she was an upperclassman, wise, all-knowing...at least when it came to dorm washing machines.

The girl was a freshman like me, but unlike me, she had figured out the washing machines a few days before. After successfully beginning my wash cycle, we talked for hours. In one move I had defeated my laundry and friend dilemmas. Like those machines, our friendship seemed old...yet unfamiliar. It didn’t always work, it tried my patience, and soon enough, the cycle ended.

My knowledge of Florence began to expand, as well as my social circle. I learned street names, I made new friends. We’d pile in someone’s car and drive around, or pile as many chairs as we could around one table in the student union building. We couldn’t get enough of each other. I was a little less myself, and a little more like them. I snuck into their dorms or stayed past curfew. We took the same classes in the same brick buildings. Some of us got tattoos. Some of us hooked up. Some of us got in fights. Some of us stopped speaking for no good reason. Some of us got mixed up in the cycle and our friendships were never quite the same. Florence seemed more like home.

After a year, I realized what Florence truly was – a tar pit. Once it got a hold of someone, it didn’t let them go easily. It seemed to me that people who were from Florence (locals, townies, whatever you want to call them) didn’t seem to leave. Or if they did leave, they came back. I suppose this can be said for lots of
places...but I found it to be very prevalent in Florence. At first I was attracted to people like me. People from out of town, new freshmen, kids who saw the town the way I saw it – a temporary home. A tiny spot on the map of our huge futures. Then I started to meet locals. Some still lived at home with their parents. Others had merely moved a few miles across the river into a new city. I was oddly drawn to these people... almost by accident. I didn’t know where they were from when I first met them, of course, but it seemed more and more of my friends and acquaintances were rooted nearby.

These people already knew each other, they had circles and cliques formed. I intruded with other out-of-towners – we never quite fit in. But I liked that. I didn’t know who so-and-so took to prom, and I didn’t care. None of them knew what I looked like in 8th grade, no one was familiar with my hometown. It was like I had little secrets, I had a past, and so did all my friends.

The past didn’t matter here. It was the present that mattered, but looking back, I thought only the future mattered. My mind romanticized the friendships I would make and the places I would travel to by the time I was this age. Instead, I am here, in Florence, stuck in a little tar pit...at least until graduation, when I will reach the end of the cycle, cleanse myself of this place, and leave. I don’t mind it. I know I can move on, and once again romanticize my future. The back roads through neighborhoods will be forgotten, good friends will lose touch, and I will look back and make Florence something beautiful.