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Letter, Sinclair Lewis to Ida Compton [March 3, 1949]

Sinclair Lewis

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Windsor



N. 210

ALBERGO WINDSOR SAVOIA

ASSISI

di fronte alla Basilica
di S. Francesco
vista sulla vallata umbra

DIREZIONE

ADDRESS REMAINS:
Hotel Excelsior
Florence

March 3, 1949

Dear Ida:

All our friends in Florence (and good friends and gay and highly literate, including Bernard Berenson, who at 83 is still the dean of all experts on early Italian art) screamed, "You can't leave Florence yet! Assisi and Perugia are mountain-high! It will be too cold." And by God they ~~are~~ were right, to this extent: we are in Assisi and it is snowing! But what they could not guess is that we don't mind. We see this shrine of the Francis cans not just in tourist-time sun, with the light caressing on old stone walls, with the Cook Tour busses unloading schoolteachers, and the post card sellers and guides pushing one another aside to get at the victims, but with the ancient stone walls pretty grim through the gray veil. And that's the way St. Francis in his scanty robe must have seen it so much of the time!

And tomorrow or the next day will be such another pair of gay spring days ~~such~~ as those in which we left Siena (which I love, with its cathedral and great square with the mediaeval tower slim and ~~erect~~ above it) and motored to little St. Quirico, Pienza (that lively poet-pope, Pius II, otherwise Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, build a magnificent square, cathedral and palaces and all, to celebrate his birth in that tiny town) Montepulciano (like an eagle's nest, high on a mountain; we spent the night in a tiny ~~inn~~ bare inn there), then Chiusi, and the high plateau on which Orvieto, with a fine Siennese cathedral as well as

noble wine and Etruscan tombs, perches
above the plains, and over a high mountain
chain, with two village-starred valleys
filling the world on either side, and here
to Assisi. When those good days come,
we'll skip up to Spello, Bevagna, Foligno,
Montefalco, and see Romanesque church
facades and pictures by ~~Don~~ Gozzoli, Memmi,
Pinturicchio, Signorelli. And then
Perugia, for a week or so, and head east
and north to Urbino, Rimini ("Pray us to
Rimini in the sun," said Selene), ~~Monte~~
~~Monte~~ Bologna, Padua, VENICE!

Yes, I think that, at any cost, you want to
get out of Williamstown. It is a mean and
snobbish and Baxter-ridden little college in
a pretty but dull town....Me, I suspect that
by next Christmas I shall be Over the Water
again -- though perhaps in England, Holland
or France, instead of Italy. We'll have
some good fires and talks next summer, tho.
Even if no crooked alleys up which, under
arches, you look up to the belltower of an
Italian cathedral, with the air of 1400
still in the streets (which may be much
less inspiring than the air of the Berk-
shires in 1949!).

Ever

Re L