

V.T.

Sept 9/37

My dearest one,

This letter is likely to be short and listless, for it is written after a not-so-good night, from which I have woken, as so often in London, more tired than I went to bed. That will never do in this glorious place. So perhaps I had better begin with some prosaic description - that of the house, say. It is built on a flat piece of ground scooped out of the side of a very steep hill, so that there is a large difference of level between the front and the back. On the Via Tragara stands a large iron gate, never opened, from which a long flight of marble stairs leads straight to the end of the loggia on the ground floor. But this stairway is not used, for to make it possible for B to come down to the entrance, a gently sloping concrete path with hairpin corners has been built from a little gate near the main one to the entrance of the house, and beyond it as I will tell you later. The loggia runs the full length of the building, and is approached, as I have said, at one end - that is, the south-west corner. The front door, in the middle of the loggia, gives onto a large, empty hall, to the left of which lies the kitchen. The other end of this room, as you will see, opens onto a small area of concrete at the top of both ways up to the house. On the right of the hall is the dining-room. These are all the rooms on the ground floor, but, like all the rooms in the house, they are very large indeed by English standards.

A staircase ascends round the farther side of the hall. Banisters are not used in Italian country architecture, and are replaced by a parapet of the same height, whose upper surface is often decorated with

tiles. The staircase at the Tragara ends in an open space almost as large as the hall, called the "Public Gardens", I think because B puts plants here to protect them from the cold. On the right of this space, and extending over the kitchen and the section of loggia in front of it is the largest room in the house, the Salone. The walls and the tiled floor are egg-shell blue, and the height of the room is immense. It is not very much used. On the left of the Public Gardens, as you come up the stair, lie successively two smaller rooms, which give off a short passage. The first was my grandmother's bedroom, and is now used only to house the sacred frangipani; the second is the most lived-in room in the house, B's sitting-room, the ~~Salotino~~ Salotino. In front of these two rooms is a terrazza, built over the loggia below, which also extends along the eastern side of the salotino, and ends in a small tiled square outside B's bedroom, which lies behind the north wall of that room. The terrazza is fronted by pillars which support, not a roof but a kind of thatch, in which grow bougainvillaeas and other climbing plants set in tubs on the terrace.

From the passage I have mentioned ascends a further single flight of stairs, leading towards the back of the house; and at the head of this is a door giving onto the curly path, which has by now ascended to this level, passing the Villino on the way. The staircase leads back to the front once again, and at the top, on the left side, is Hilda's bed-room, covering most of the eastern side of the house. A door at the head of the stairs opens out onto a large area of roof, used as a catchment for water, and to the right is a small room, called the roof-room, where my mother sleeps when she is here. The salone being so high, its roof rises above the other. The whole house is white-washed.

Now we come to the Villino. It is quite a long block, one storey high, for it starts with a cistern outside the door in the Villa I have mentioned. Then, sloping down the hill to the left as you face it, come two boxrooms, through the lower of which I pass to my own room. That forms the end of the building, and is the largest room in it, though not large compared with the big rooms in the Villa. The door is set in the eastern wall, where also is my bed. The ceiling is curved, and the shape of the room is made rather beautiful by a central arch, which divides it into two. The arch projects no more than a yard all round from the wall, so that the parts of the room are in no sense separated; but, being of unequal size and shape, their partial division gives the room ~~an~~ unusual degree of variety. The eastern part is lighted by a double door, with glass panes, which opens merely upon the air; for the concrete path has here sloped down, and lies an easy jump below it. The western part has a large window, with a latticed blind within. It can also be closed by wooden shutters; but the space behind these forms the residence of two favourite geckos, who must not be disturbed by the removal of their protecting walls.

So here at length you have some account of the place where I am living, the place to which above all I should like to take you. See if you can visualize it in ~~the~~ mind, and tell me if any parts remain obscure. It remains to tell you about the garden, but I will not weary you in this letter with further detailed description, and will leave it to another. But I will tell you a little about the view from the house. I have spoken for simplicity as if its walls were foursquare to the points of the compass, but this is not exact. It is twisted round so that it faces south-west, that is to say towards the Piccola Marina and the east-

ern face of Solaro. That mighty wall of rock is the largest single thing in the view, but it is sufficiently distant to show the cliffs falling away beyond it, and a great expanse of sea. Despite the fierce heat and the long-continued drought, the colour of the land wherever vegetation grows, is brilliantly green. It is a green which constantly varies as the eye passes over vines, olives, ilex trees and grass on the hillsides; and it is broken by the gleaming white of villas emerging from the plantations which closely surround them. There is no room for the leisurely cultivation of an English country house, where fifty feet of lawn may stretch away before any attempt is made to plant flowers or trees. The narrowest path is all that divides a Capri villa from thick vegetation of mimosa or vine; and the lovely climate forces a luxuriance of growth with which the gardener has scarcely the power or the will to contend.

Thus from the Tragara the land falls away ~~to~~ down the side of Telegraph Hill and climbs upwards a little to the right to Castiglione. This, and the castle growing from the rock on its crest, seem almost attached to the face of Solaro behind, though really separated by a considerable space, in which the road from the Piccola Marina ascends. And so Solaro towers up to the tiny hut built on its summit. But splendid as is this scene, it is the sky, the sea and the sunlight which you would think of most. It is not surprising that the worship of the sun is the most ancient and lasting of all religions; and in the South it takes on a pervading nearness which is sometimes benign, sometimes terrifying, and in art is perhaps only captured in the pictures which Van Gogh painted under the influence of its splendour, when he was being blinded by its violent rays.

As I try in these feeble words to paint the things I see, I know how little of the reality they can convey. But perhaps your imagination will fill in the obvious gaps and failings, and your love bridge all but the physical distance which prevents ~~you~~^{my} sharing my life here perfectly with you.

To-day with Hilda I paid my first call - on Mgr. Ferraro, an old priest whom we all love, and who for a long time has remained in a single room of his house, paralysed as he is from the waist down, and now going blind also. But his interest in life is intense, and he remembers Nigel and me from childhood, and indeed still thinks of us as children. I am going to see him longer another time, for this morning I had to meet Catherine and escort her to the Piccola Marina, where she wished ~~to bathe. After a perfunctory farewell (I cannot help it, darling) I~~ left her, and climbed upwards through vineyards to the foot of Solaro. My goal was that cave which I described in my first letter about Capri as looking like "a sunken Polyphemian eye". It is indeed immense, towering up three hundred feet or so, but it has little or no depth at the base, where the rock rises steeply and slopes back very slowly to the great dome at the top. Once long ago I climbed this rocky face with a girl called Harwood Brewster. We were both terrified, each afraid to let the other see, and so we reached the top and sat under the dome, and laughed at one another for getting there against our wills. To-day I started to climb up alone, but soon remembering your admonitions and B's, desisted and came down.

Just beside this cave is another, called the Maidenhair Grotto, from the ferns which grow there. It is formed of the cavity left by a huge rock, perhaps sixty feet high, which now stands a little way from the

cliff, still upright, like an oyster-shell prised open. The view from ~~at~~ this point is the reverse of that from the Tragara; and the air was so still that the very words of the bathers were carried up from the Piccola Marina, half a mile away even as the crow flies. I wondered idly whether Catherine was enjoying herself, left so unchivalrously to her own devices. So I strode back in the burning sunshine. I notice that in Capri, despite the heat, I walk much faster than in England, for the climate here induces a matchless sense of well-being. A pale ~~pink~~ yellow butterfly was chasing a green companion in my path, both large and most delicately marked. Their wings were drowsed by the heat, and they fluttered, half sinking half supported on the lazy air, like falling leaves, one autumn and the other spring.

~~I never leave more than just enough time to catch the post, darling,~~
 when I am writing to you, and perhaps, indeed, I miss it for there is no indication on the box. So it is now, and I must be off, for there is a ten minutes walk before me and the sun is blazing down.

Good-by, my love, and if you can, write to me every day till as my life is love, you occupy a great part of my thoughts as long as I am with you. So my love be with you, as always,
 Thekla



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INGHILTERRA.