

Nov 17 very likely

Oh Peter dear, no no, do not denounce Aziz Khan to Sturdy or anyone; he is not a charlat^an; he is very good and I am grateful to him. You did not read the dementi in my last letter. You see, he prescribed what is called a "sun filter", to wit: bear grease to rub on the face before going into the sun. That was an error, but may easily be due to the fact that I am very peculiar about medecines and never react as expected. Anyhow, then my face broke forth again into the sun measles. But I stopped using that stuff, and returned to my old known sun filter; and since then, taking Aziz Khan's anti-histamine pills religiously, I would say I am 90% better. He said he could not cure me. If I would really stay out of the sun, I would probably be perfect; but I will not. It is madness to renounce present sure pleasure for some possible future benefits. I have failed to live in the present for too many years; the present is the only time we have and that is where I am going to live.

And besides that, he cured something he was not even asked to fret with. Again for innumerable years (and in the course of them, innumerable doctors) I had another rash; it really looked like a sort of sore red sunburn, on my back and beneath my bosom. Everything was thought about this; and no one got much excited since it did not hurt and wasn't killing me, but I hated it, being a perfectionist and having as highly developed an aesthetic sense about the body as about houses. Aziz Khan said confidently, "You are allergic to pressure." (You bet I am, but it is odd that one can be allergic in the body as well as in the spirit) and he said, this will disappear. And it has. Just like that. I can now wear evening dresses cut all the way down to my bottom which is a pleasure. So you see. Put your money on A. Khan. Do not defame him.

What a lovely day it has been; beautiful as they all are now but

also full of lovely mail. I was so glad to get your letter as I feared your silence meant you were in some sort of smouldering rage about me, for I know I am not the ideal house guest. Now I feel relieved and also charmed; you write spiffing letters and I fervently hope you are going to be my pen pal.

About your house; the small round jardiniere is not right but will do for now and must sit in the corner, not along the wall. Have you got the plants as I told you, they will make the most difference; that and covering the ^{small} sofa in orange cloth like the curtains. The green sofa cushions are only to prevent your lady guests from lying down in a ribald or embarrassing posture, otherwise not needed. I am glad about the books. Though I do see that if you are never at home, it matters less. But really, not. Houses are like climate, you know; they give off a feel, and one feels that oneself. My house next to Virginia's in Chester Square was a beauty but I hated the feel of it always; and love the feel of this one. See?

That Russian Grand Duke will probably come to no good end. I have a harsh idea of why: he really inwardly does feel that the world owes him a living, which is pure Grand Duke. You will always be kind and loving and helpful to him, and it will never be quite enough. I hope Betsey Whitney answers my mad letter, written for him; but doubt if he would play in the end. I'm sorry for him, not as deeply as you are of course; but I think, toughly, that people are how they are; and nothing ever really changes them. Failure is always relative and introspective; I don't believe in it myself.

In the Observer, at last, I think I found out about that parliamentary leper; or maybe in Newsweek, they are all I read. It seems he got elected on the tasty slogan: Vote Labour if you want a

Nigger neighbor. Which is more like Alabama than England and I must say I would not care to sit in the same room with him. He also looks like a cheesy coiffeur's assistant which is not the best way to look.

What a good father you are; imagine playing Dads and Kiddies cricket. I never did a single decent thing like that and see myself now as a terrible Mum, hard and always demanding of my poor fat little boy that he make greater efforts and strive to be more and better. It is sad and stupid and I grieve for my own lack of heart and wisdom. You will do better by your sons. Peter, on no account break your neck in Austria; what would I do without you as a pen pal? If you find Austria awful or snow-less, go to the Rhone Valley, Crans or thereabouts. I've got an old dear chum called Countess Dobrski (pronounced Du-brov-ski, if you are not used to the way Poles omit vowels) who is Norwegian, gay, pretty and kindness itself; she lives ay Crans and would look after you like a mother, but even better look after your children as she has a golden thumb with the young, and is the adored intimate friend of my Sandy. I cannot abide Austria myself, never forgiving those smarmy charming Austrians for being hearty Nazis and murderers on their own. Nor do I forget Mauthausen. I have such a bad memory that it is almost impossible for me to be a writer, but remember some things fiercely and forever. The Austrians bought their way back a bit by being decent to the fleeing Hungarians in 1956, but would they have been so good if people were fleeing from Fascism not Communism. In my book, no one is okay who does not despise all cruelty and all police state regimes and befriend the victims thereof, irrespective of the ideology of the tyrant. No one gets very excited about Spain, which is as ^{wicked} ~~bad~~ a tyranny as any Communist one.

(Les Sapins Rouges, Crans-sur-Sierre, Suisse)

Sandy

It's much more normal not to like being alone than to like being alone, Peter. If normal is majority. I've been so lonely, when

5

supposedly accompanied, that it is a rest and relief not to have confusion. Now I am alone and that's that. I need it for work, as a start; and then too I do like it. Ideally, one ought to like both states and be harassed by neither. I am working towards that.

Meantime I am working. Today I drove to Kalifi to look it over as it is the size of a town I have invented on the Tanganyika coast south of Dar. I realised I had to make my imagined town bigger, after seeing Kalifi; I need more shops. So am doubling my population. Have drawn a sloppy map of my town and environs and done drearly the chronology of my hero. But yesterday I decided I was going to write five pages a day (which is too much really), not giving a damn about whether they were good or bad, but to get cracking and see if by writing, I could find the tone and form I want. I shall no doubt chuck months of work into the wastebasket but at least I now feel more self respecting because it is quite hard work even to write badly. So I returned from Kalifi, cooked my odd lunch at 4 p.m. and have been writing for the last four hours. Now it's eight thirty and I am going to have a delicious whiskey; it has been a good day.

I really love Africa; isn't it odd, coming so late and knowing so little. Driving to Kalifi and waiting for the ferry and watching the Africans, I knew I could not leave this place for good until it became impossible for whiteskins to live here. I must find a cheaper house, out at Mtwapa Creek, and somehow arrange my finances so I can spend seven months a year here; the rest outside, partly earning money. My finances are fascinating. I get \$20,000 a year alimony and figured out that when I am through with all my dependents and my income tax on that money, I will be lucky if I have \$1000 left for myself. But that is okay; as long as my dependents are cared for, I can look after myself.

Come down and see me (although the cooking remains a problem) after you get back, safe and sound, from ski-ing. Love, *Martha*