

art itself." He was only twenty-five when he wrote those words, and he was determined, even then, to join that holy gallery of Flaubert, Proust, James and Faulkner. "These last few pages!" he wrote Robert Linscott, his Random House editor, shortly before turning in his first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. "Every word takes blood." For his part, Linscott was the ideal editor for a sensitive young writer, warmly encouraging, yet critical when he felt criticism was necessary. "Wonderful wonderful wonderful," Capote wrote him after receiving praise for the first chapters of his second novel, *The Grass Harp*. But when Linscott expressed disappointment with the novel's ending, Capote was devastated. "I cannot endure it that all of you think my book a failure," he said.

In fact, Capote was his own best critic, as perceptive about his own writing as he was about other people's. Writing to William Shawn, the editor of *The New Yorker*, he said that he had finished a piece, "A Daughter of the Russian Revolution," but had belatedly realized that "it did not accelerate with the right rhythm" and would have to be reworked. Later he abandoned it entirely. "I seem to have lost faith in the piece, or at least in my ability to do it," he told Shawn. For any writer, novice or seasoned professional, his letters should be instructive, as well as inspirational. But nonwriters, I suspect, will find in them equal rewards.

"No good letter was ever written to convey information or to please the recipient," Lytton Strachey wrote. "It may achieve both these results incidentally; but its fundamental purpose is to express the personality of the writer." The letters that follow prove the justness of Strachey's observation. They convey information—and plenty of it—and they often aim to please. But, more than anything else, they express what otherwise would be inexpressible, a personality so buoyant and expansive that it defied the accepted laws of human gravity.

Gerald Clarke
Bridgehampton, N.Y.
April 1, 2004

An Editorial Note

Editor: Gerald Clarke

These are Truman Capote's letters, not mine, and I have made only minor changes to make them readable. Capote wrote most of his letters by hand, but in the dozen or so he typed he followed the bad habit of many typists: he ignored the capitalization key and typed everything, including names, in lowercase. Since a letter without capitals is awkward to read, I have silently added the necessary capitals. In all his letters, including those written by hand, he also rarely bothered with apostrophes—he seemed to have an aversion to them. He usually rendered a contraction like "it's" as "its," as if it were a possessive pronoun. And he almost never bothered with apostrophes to indicate possession; "Jack's book," for instance, might be written "Jacks book." If I were to flag all such omissions, his letters would be a jungle of "[sic]" marks. To avoid that, I have placed the apostrophe where it is warranted.

I have also corrected mistakes obviously made in haste, which I regard as the equivalent of typographical errors. On several occasions, for instance, Capote wrote two words, such as "the the" or "be be," when he clearly meant to use one. I have left out one of them. Or he might have left out an "o" in "Phoebe," the name of one of his best friends and a word he had spelled correctly many times. In such a case I have added the obvious "o."

In no sense have I attempted to sanitize the letters, however, and when Capote made a mistake that really was a mistake, I have left it in and followed it with the obligatory "[sic]." For the most part, Capote was a good speller, but there were certain words, such as "receive," "genius" and "disappoint," he could never get right, and I have retained his misspellings—"recieve," "genuis" and "dissappoint." Nor could he remember how many "n's" and "s's" there are in "Tennessee"—Tennessee Williams's name occurs frequently. I have left in his misspelling, but put the correct spelling in ad-

doubtless it is. What sort of person is Burford? I get no picture of him at all. And I wish you would stop teasing and tell me about Bill. For that matter, what has happened to the Boston Bill? You are very lax.

Have you heard anything about my book? It is so very strange—nobody mentions it, not even, in his letters to me; Linscott. I have the feeling that it has evaporated, or, indeed, was never printed at all.

Jack is fine: the most beautiful color. And he is learning how to sail a boat. We sailed all around the island this past weekend. Do you know anything about this boy William Goyen? His story in the March Horizon was, while a very bad story indeed, certainly well written. You ought to try and get him for D.M.¹ Best love, [unclear]

T

[Collection University of Delaware Library]

TO ANDREW LYNDON

Forio D'Ischia
April 20 1949

#1 Darling Baby—

Why am I a monster child? My love is with you every minute, watching over you brighter than an Easter star. You and Phoebe [Pierce] are all that I miss. Thank you, precious, for the Guggenheim list. Who are those people? It does quite turn my stomach. What a shame that George did not get it.² I really hoped he might; but as usual, sister, your prophecies bore fruit.

This is my new letter style—it all looks like blank verse: very blank. Or chicken-shit, as dear Biddy [Helen Eustis] would say.

That's quite tiresome about Arthur Miller; the only tragedy involved is that, good in some ways as his play is, we should be in a position where there is nothing very much better to applaud.³

I envy you Lee Wiley.⁴ The phonograph, alas, is broken, so I do not have even that solace. I am terribly bored with the Auden set here. They are

¹ Dodd, Mead, the publisher.

² It is unclear who the George was who was refused a Guggenheim fellowship.

³ Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* (1949) won the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

⁴ Lee Wiley was a singer who recorded songs with such jazz giants as Eddie Condon and Bobby Hackett.

really quite impossible. A good many dreary people have shown up in the last week, but we are going to stay on through May, for really it is a lovely place.

We are going tomorrow for a few days to a little fishing village near here called San Angelo. There are two German queens over there who run a delightful pensione.

Darling it is getting late and I do want to get this off to you. Love to Harold, and 57 varieties of love and kisses for my sweet sister

T

[Collection New York Public Library]

#2
TO CECIL BEATON

Pensione Di Lustro
Forio D'ischia
Prov. Di Napoli
Italy
May 1st 1949

Cecil, love—

Or Beaton, baby

What a joy your letter was; though that was stupid about your cold; but you are all well now, I'm sure, and up to great things, while here still am I languishing on this primitive outpost. I want to stay another month, however, then go to Paris for at least the better part of June: maybe somehow we will see you around that time.

Personally, I prefer imagining you among your roses and cows¹ than in either the Plaza or amid the plumbing facilities of Mr Maughm [W. Somerset Maugham]: also, it is a better place to complete your second-act surgery:² as for the absence of loved ones, that, dear-heart, can sometimes be a blessing. Especially if you are trying to work.

It looks as if I am going to be evicted by long-distance from my New

¹ Beaton had recently moved into a new country house in Wiltshire, a county west of London.

² Beaton had spent part of the winter at Maughm's house, the Villa Mauresque, in the south of France. An enormously successful playwright as well as a novelist, Maughm had suggested changes to Beaton's play *The Gainsborough Girls*. All for naught. The critics were merciless, and the play was a flop.

York apartment. The owners want it for themselves. Nothing could be more trying.

Dear Juliet Duff is quite right: what did Theatre Arts do to me?¹ Little [Richard] Avedon has proved himself quite untrustworthy.² But do give the ogod boy my fondest.

Has Peter Watson arrived back in London? With or without Waldemar?³ That poor tyke.

Wystan Auden has arrived here in Forio accompanied by an entourage of rather dismal youngsters—some of them not so young. And, except for Wystan, they are not very matey, but remain grandly aloof. I understand, too, that the horror's horror, and I do mean Brian Howard, is on his way here.⁴

So I daresay that by the end of May we shall leave without regret.

I am attending to my work with a fair degree of concentration; that makes me content; and so does Jack, who has proved to be a really astonishing person—of a perceptivity too rarely encountered and a strength almost never.

He says you have beautiful eyes—and they are, Cecil dear: tender, blue

lovely as you

much, much love

T

[Collection St. John's College, Cambridge University]

TO ANDREW LYNDON

Forio D'Ischia

[2] May 1949

Andrew darling—

I've had a premonition you were in Macon; well, at least I was right in one particular: someone was away: Harold, according to our beautiful PP

¹ Lady Juliet Duff, daughter of the Fourth Earl of Lonsdale, was a friend to writers, politicians, and artists.

² Richard Avedon was one of *Harper's Bazaar's* lead photographers.

³ Peter Watson was a British millionaire and patron of the arts; Waldemar Hansen, an American writer, Capote's age exactly, was his lover.

⁴ Though both his parents were American, Brian Howard, a product of both Eton and Oxford, was quintessentially English. One of the flamboyant Oxford aesthetes of the twenties, he was the model for some of Evelyn Waugh's characters, including Ambrose Silk in *Put Out More Flags* and Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited*. Borrowing a phrase once applied to Lord Byron, Waugh described him as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know."

[Phoebe Pierce], has been in California: why? Give him a kiss for me, and tell him I'm glad he's home again—I don't like to think of him out there in the land of strawberry-flavored coffee.

Elinor M's party sounds as though it were at least a little amusing: that precious Lee Wiley. And Phoebe says Jordan [Massee] has been in town: how did he seem and why was he there?¹ I had two accounts of MLA's soiree; Phoebe's, and another from Malcolm—he was full of praise for you both—says you are charming and intelligent—calls Phoebe "wonderfully keen and wildly attractive." Poor Malcolm. His romance has busted, and he is very unhappy.

I think the title of Phoebe's new story lovely: A Fall of Rain. And you, sweet magnolia, what are you working on? If you have done a new story, please send it to me.

My book has changed somewhat since I outlined it slightly to you.² I feel very much that my writing has grown (though this may be a delusion), and the time has come when I must shoulder some real responsibility; that is, I want for once to pose a problem and provide an answer, too. I do after all profess to some sort of style, and that is something I can hope only to improve upon; but the material and my own view toward it are different from anything I've attempted before. God, what a revolting mess it could be. And may.

I had a letter from Newton yesterday: midway in the text, and with his usual cunning, there were inserted a few lines to the effect that he was dedicating his book to David Lillienthal [Lilienthal].³ Pretty extraordinary, when you think how often he has inferred the honor was to be mine. Our present circumstances have nothing to do with it; I realize now that he never intended to dedicate the book to me: honestly, I don't care about that, but somehow the symbol is so profound I can't dismiss it. Poor man, he is a true coward; and what is worse, a moderate coward. Moderation is the key to his character. I should be a fool to despise him: so I don't: but I would be a greater fool if I did not despise myself: how pitiful it was of me to have put that vast love into such feeble hands—hands that never closed over it but let it dribble through the fingers like water.

Have you glanced at the new John Horne Burns book?⁴ Seen South Pacific, Detective Story or a movie called The Fallen Idol? Did Diabla Au

¹ Massee was Carson McCullers's cousin.

² *Summer Crossing*.

³ Arvin dedicated his biography of Herman Melville to his old friend David E. Lilienthal, chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission from 1946 to 1950. Capote, by contrast, had dedicated *Other Voices, Other Rooms* to Arvin.

⁴ *Lucifer with a Book* (1949), a novel about postwar life at a coed American private school.

Corps ever open?¹ Did you get Christopher's letter from Leo? What did he have to say? Tell me about these things. Life is so circumscribed here. On top of which I've broken my glasses and so am staggering around absolutely blind.

Jack is fine and sweet as pie. He sends you his best, and Harold, too. I've already sent Harold a kiss, but here are several million more (for which I will have to pay extra postage). I love you, precious baby, darling child, and in my dreams frame your mad adorable face with a wreath of roses

T

[Collection New York Public Library]

TO ROBERT LINSCOTT

Pensione di Lustro
 Forio D'ischia
 Prov. Di Napoli
 Italia
 May 6 1949

Dear Bob—

Your letter was too brief a treat, but a treat all the same: there is only one excitement to my day, and that is when the postman comes. Ah, what a joy it is when he has a little something for me: so, even if you don't have time to write, just send me a lot of old circulars.

Except for the customary anxieties [*sic*], and a stomach that has finally revolted against Italian food, I guess I'm fine. When I finish the chapter I'm working on now I will have done ½ of the book—which is making very good time, don't you think? If I can finish a draft of it here before going home, then I probably will have it all polished by the first of the year, which means you could publish it the following June—that is, if you have a mind to. But we will see what happens—it is by so far the most difficult thing I ever tried to do.

Other Voices has appeared here in Italy and has had very good reviews. Did you know it has been banned in Ireland? Marion tells me Tree has sold

¹ The French film *Le Diable au corps* (1946) opened in the United States in 1949 as *Devil in the Flesh*.

6300: neither good nor bad; maybe it will sell more.¹ I rather liked the review Leslie Fiedler wrote of it in *The Nation*.

I hope you are well Bob, enjoying your elegant phonograph and having good weekends on the farm. I shall probably be leaving Ischia around June 6. Write me before then, and give my best to the Messrs Haas, Cerf and Cummins.²

Always,
 Truman

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO DONALD WINDHAM

Pensione di Lustro
 Forio D'Ischia
 May 7 1949

D dear—

A joy forever is a letter: thank you, baby, and for the clipping, too—though that good old standby, the *Rome Daily American*, had given us a few of the facts. Had a note from 10 [Tennessee Williams] saying he was London-bound: it never occurred [*sic*] to me that Britaneva [Maria Britneva] bitch might be the cause. Maybe they'll be married yet. Ugh.

Auden's [W. H. Auden] arrival has thrown something of a gloom over Ischia. He is furious because anyone other than himself is here—seems to feel the place belongs to him; and is, in fact, downright rude about it. Such a tiresome old Aunty. I'm glad I don't have to see him. But there are quite a few people here now, most of them very nice—though I suppose it is beginning to look like a Mediterranean [*sic*] version of *Fire Island*. I gave Jimmy [Schuyler] your love and he sends you his and says he is going to write you when he gets a grip on himself. I think he feels rather sad. I like him, too. But Jack so dislikes the Santa Lucia set (Chester's word)³ and is so disagreeable to them that we don't get together often. Oh dear, I sup-

¹ Marion Ives, his literary agent. Linscott replied that sales were actually 6,500 and still moving.

² Robert Haas, Bennett Cerf and Saxe Cummins, Linscott's colleagues at Random House.

³ Chester Kallman, American poet and librettist, W. H. Auden's longtime partner.

I have got nearly a third of my new novel done—to celebrate this I've had myself a most beautiful suit made: grey raw silk. I look almost presentable in it.

Honey, you can see how skimpy my news is—but God, what can you write from this forsaken island? We've been here nearly three months, and our contacts with the real world have long since dried up. I only wanted to send you my love: here it is—LOVE.

Truman

P.S. It is best to write c/o American Express, Paris. Please do.

[Collection St. John's College, Cambridge University]

HS TO CECIL BEATON

British Post Office
Tangiers, Morocco
[July 1949]

Cecil dear—

Was heartbroken not to have seen you again in Paris—alas, you were always "sortie" when I called the Littré number. The trip through Spain was ghastly—trains that took 9 hours to go 112 kilometres, food that tore my stomach apart etc. But I like Tangiers, a marvelous city really. We are living on the mountain at a place called Farhar—I should not recommend [*sic*] it to anyone, but it will suffice. Your friend Jessie Green has rented her house to someone else—which makes me wonder, are you still coming? I very much hope so. We've had a few adventures—the most dazzling of which happened between Granada and Algeciras when suddenly everyone on the train began to scream and throw themselves on the floor: bandits! Bullets flying through the air. Only it wasn't bandits—just a group of Spaniards who had missed the train and were firing on it to make it stop: one old man got hit in the head. Lovely country. No doubt by this time you've seen George D [Davis]. He said he probably would see you in England. Isn't his rise in fortune spectacular? And I know the new magazine will be very good indeed.¹ It is an excellent

¹ The magazine, *Flair*, had a brief life, beginning publication in February 1950 and ending a year later.

day here, cool and the water crashing on the rocks and the sky classic in its clearness: just below me there is a quite beautiful Arab standing stark nude on a rock. And what a joy it is to be writing you this little note, Cecil dear—for it is almost like talking to you. What do you know about a young English writer named Angus Wilson? He has just published a book called The Wrong Set—and I think he is quite good.¹ Which reminds me—when you come, oh please could you possibly bring a copy of My Royal Past?² Do drop me a line, dear, and let me know if there is anything I can do for you here. All love

T

[Collection St. John's College, Cambridge University]

TO ROBERT LINSCOTT

Capote
British Post Office
Tangiers
Maroc, Africa
July 1949

Dear Bob—

How long it has been since I've heard from you—or, rather, how long it has been since you heard from me. Someone writes that it has been terribly hot at home; however, remembering your nice air-conditioned office, I haven't worried about you. Speaking of heat, look where I am: Africa, no less. Don't assume what I'm doing, for I haven't the faintest notion either; at any rate, I have a nice place to live, and am getting on with the book.

I came here by way of Spain (dreadful country), a trip I would not readily undertake again. I was in Paris a week, and had lunch one day with a friend of Bennett Cerf's—Fleur Cowles, who, in conjunction with George Davis, is starting a new magazine—something on the order of *Vanity Fair*—and I may do a piece for them. Anyway, if you know anyone who is looking for a job, you might send them around there, for I understand they are about to assemble a staff.

¹ Angus Wilson's *The Wrong Set* was his first book; it was a collection of short stories.

² Published in 1939, *My Royal Past* was Beaton's parody of royal memoirs.

Perhaps this little note (just to let you know I'm alive) will find you in the middle of your vacation; if so, have a good time, dear Bob—and know that I miss you. Love

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

#6

TO ANDREW LYNDON

British Post Office
Tangiers, Maroc
Africa
[6 July 1949]

Darlingest one,

I've written Phoebe about the journey through Spain, so maybe she has told you; it was, in a word, ghastly. Such a beautiful country, though. I even went to a museum: The Prado, natch. But am mad for Africa; life in the Casbah is quite my cup of tea. I don't think Jack is so crazy about it; he says it is no fun to live in a place where you are frightened to walk in the streets alone. All the shadiest people are gathered here because it is an international city. The most extraordinary people. It's the most exciting place I've ever been. If you and Phoebe were here we could all take a house in the Casbah and go native in a great big way. There is the most divine nightclub here called Parade—La Pierce would lose her mind. The nights are very cool, but the days are fearfully long and hot and mosquito-ridden: a few miles inland it is 137 in the shade—the heat stings your pores. We are living on a mountain in a little tiny house with a fabulous view over Tangiers and the harbor. So I'm settling down and starting back to work. Jack misses Ischia, but I guess he will get to like it here.

Saw George [Davis] in Paris; I think his new magazine sounds marvelous. A letter from Phoebe yesterday said some woman was going to act as fiction adviser to the Bazaar. If she still doesn't know who it is—I do: Marian Ives. But why did Pearl say that was a secret? Or maybe they have decided to make it one.

I'm all a-jitter: a doctor is coming in ten minutes to 1) give me a shot for cholera, and 2) see what he can do about my stomach, which is torn to pieces: god, he's here. (Later) Well, that wasn't so bad, though I nearly

fainted at the sight of the needle—like a tiger's tooth it was, magnolia. You should have been here to hold my hand.

I miss you, little bird, it seems a century since we parted. I wish you would write me a 75 page letter. Give my love to your husband; mine sends his best, who loves you?

T does.

P.S. Also saw [William] Saroyan in Paris—in a gambling joint where he was drunk and losing thousands. He has a brain the size of a b.b. bullet. Said he was washed up avec Carol. The only intelligent thing he said.

[Collection New York Public Library]

TO ANDREW LYNDON

Tangiers
[15] July 1949

Blossom-child—

Angel, by this time you are doubtless back in New York, so am writing you there—for some reason I don't trust the Macon mail dept. But what a bore your journey must have been. Still you must have got some good things to eat, and that I envy you. Food. I seldom think of anything else. Arab cooking is the worst of all. No, precious, I'm not visiting Paul Bowles, and yes of course Jack is still with me—shaky in the legs though he be.¹ I haven't the faintest notion what brought us here, but it is quite an adventure and well worth the effort. I work in the mornings, and sleep in the afternoons (it is too hot to do anything else) and carouse around the Casbah in the evening—which I don't think half so frightening as, say, an American town. Paul & Jane [Bowles] are both here, and we see them fairly often. Cecil Beaton says he is coming in August. Darling, isn't this ironic about Christopher [Isherwood]? I told you so. But surely you have written a let-

¹ A writer and composer, Bowles lived in Tangier with his wife, Jane, who was both a novelist and a playwright. The Bowleses had an unusual marriage—he was homosexual and she was a lesbian—but were nonetheless devoted to each other. Capote was particularly fond of Jane Bowles; he praised the surrealistic style of a novel like *Two Serious Ladies* and placed her close to the top of his list of favorite American women writers, just below Willa Cather and Edith Wharton.

ter by now. There is so much I would like to say—but I'm never sure who reads these letters. Anyway, I think Ch. is rather a shit—for a good many fairly valid reasons. To get off on another subject, do you remember Waldemar Hansen? I saw him in Paris, and he is a wreck: the poor thing has been ousted by Peter Watson, and it is one of the most fabulous stories you've ever heard. A letter from Newton, who has finished his book, and is going to the Cape.¹ Phoebe seems very happy in her new home—entertaining and whatnot. Tell me, is she still going around with [unclear]? She never mentions him. And is she writing anything? Where are you going in Maine? Are you going to stay in a pension? I've always wanted to go to Nova Scotia. I may go to Timbuktu in a couple of months—you cross the Sahara in a truck: takes three weeks. It all depends. Of course, I am really only thinking of my book: all this travelling seems to be done in a dream. Then, too, I suppose I must think about coming home. I miss you and Phoebe terribly—but that is really all that I miss.

Darling, I am going to do a little work now (the days go so swiftly, and there is so much to be done) so, with love to Harold and the most staggering number of kisses to you, my precious friend, I will fold this particular tent and, quite unlike an Arab (the noisy heathens) silently steal away.

Love

T

[Collection New York Public Library]

TO CATHERINE WOOD

British Post Office
Tangiers, Morocco
Africa
July 28, 1949

Woody darling—

Don't scold me, dear: I've been absolutely awful—but, since I left Italy, which was around the middle of June, I've been in almost continual motion: a week in Paris, and then to Spain: traveled all the way down through Spain, stopping off in various cities—Madrid, Granada, Seville, and smaller

¹ Arvin's book was his biography of Herman Melville.

places: a beautiful country, but not at all pleasant to travel in, too many restrictions, too much red tape, too many men in uniforms—in fact, almost everyone is in uniform. It is a war-time atmosphere there. At Algeciras, which is at the southernmost tip of Spain, I took the boat here to Africa. I do miss Italy, but it is quite strange and beautiful here, and I like it enormously. I am living with Noel Guinness [Loel Guinness], who has a wonderful house in the casbah; it is really great fun, and promises to be more so, for Cecil Beaton and Greta G. [Garbo] are coming here week after next to stay with us into Sept—she is going then to France to make a movie (Balzac's "La Duchesse de Langeais.")¹ Perhaps I will go back to Paris with them. Meanwhile, I got on with my work, and now have half the main book finished—or almost half. *Other Voices* came out in France, with an introduction by Maurice Coindreau, in which he mentions you. I will bring you a copy.

It is hot here, but it is a dry, not too unpleasant hot, and there are excellent beaches nearby—though I must say I don't go often.

I bought two parrots; one is pink-headed and the other gold; they are fine company—they twitter and laugh and sit on my shoulders. I also have a little gazelle, which I brought back from an excursion to the Atlas mountains. He is adorable and—he is called *Woody*!!!

I suppose Margery is in Maine—send her my best love. And oh such a lot of love for you, darling

T

[Collection New York Public Library]

TO LEO LERMAN

British Post Office
Tangiers
Aug 8 1949

Leo, dear matma

I couldn't believe my eyes: a letter from Myrt: practically wept, my pet—and know you must be bored stiff, or you would never have taken pencil in hand.

¹ Garbo did not make the movie.

TO ANDREW LYNDON

Fontana Vecchia
Taormina Sicily

[Late August or early September 1950]

Lover Lamb,

A good thing for you that I had a letter from you yesterday: it forestalled the posting of a time bomb. I don't understand why you haven't recvd any letters from me, certainly I've written them. Phoebe says she hasn't heard from me either, but that must be because she is jumping around just two hops in front of the law.

I suppose you know that Newton has had a crackup and is in the McLean hospital, Waverly, Mass. It happened very soon after his weekend in New York . . . though I doubt that there is any connection. He is well enough, however, to have written me a letter. He speaks of spending the winter in New York. Poor dear, he was not ever made for this world. I have no idea what to do; or suggest. The Morton he called is, I suspect, another of those cockteasing kikes he's so fond of; I'm afraid he's had just too many thoughts about this one.

Yes, I've been snowed under by that cartoon you enclosed. ¹⁰ has really gone to pot; imagine writing a piece like that . . . more vulgar than Mary McCarthy. The next time I unfold my Bronzini scarf it's going to be to wrap around his neck. Incidentally, unless things have changed, they sold you-goosed-me for fifty grand, not a hundred, and out of this Windham gets 6 thousand.¹ They, Donny, Sandy and Butch, are all in Sirmione together. You know that Pippin and Melton are no longer sympatico . . . and that Wi-l-I-burr has gone off to be Edward James's secretary: at last the fate he deserves.

I'm surprised to know that Goyen is going to Chicago. I've just had a letter from him saying he was off for Houston, and returning to NY late in the fall. He wrote very tenderly about you, said you were the sweetest, most sensitive person he'd met in a moon's age. I second that. But do you mean he has a lover in Chicago? And so attractive?

Have sent you-all a copy of Local Color. Haven't seen it myself, and don't know when I will, as they undoubtedly sent it regular mail. So let me know how it looks.

¹ "You-goosed-me," a play on the title of *You Touched Me!*, the 1945 romantic comedy by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham.


Oh it is ironic about Phoebe. But I think it might turn out for the best. Standing on her feet in Bloomingdales might finally plant them in terra firma. Would love to see her new stories. She writes that you have done two Video scripts. What about it?

No, I'm not making the grand tour en famille. They are coming here for a few days, then Jack and I are going to Venice around the 15th, planning to be back here the 1st of Oct. Wish you all would lay hold to some cash and come here for Christmas etc. It would cost you nothing except the passage; you would adore the house, and could stay as long as you liked.

Masses of love for that sweet Harold. Jack and Kelly send love. And did you see that shooting comet last night? That was a kiss I was blowing to you

T

[Collection New York Public Library]


 TO ROBERT LINSOTT
Venice
Sept 21 1950

Dear Bob—

Wonderful wonderful wonderful: to have your lovely cable and to know you liked the chapters. I hope you are going to like the book. I suspect it will be a month or two before I send any more. Marian wants to sell the 1st chapter for a story—but I have written saying no; because I don't [want] anyone (outside the family) to read any of it until the day it is published. So please don't show it to anyone, will you, Bob? Had such a sweet cable from Bennett; he was really nice to send it.

Monday night had a glass of champagne to celebrate Local Color. It really is a beautiful book, couldn't have turned out better.

Do ignore Cyrilly Abels.¹ Poor thing, she is simply hysterical with inferiority feelings. Lord knows, she has good reason to feel inferior. Leave me to settle her hash. I will so much enjoy the job.

¹ Cyrilly Abels was the managing editor of *Mademoiselle* magazine. She had complained that her magazine had not received credit for one of the photographs in *Local Color*.

It's raining here, as though Venice were not watery enough. Am going back to Sicily in five or six days—and the monastic life. I do feel like such a monk living on that mountain.

Bought here a copy of the New Yorker with the Hemingway profile.¹ Thought it very entertaining—goodness, he's a fool.

Miss you: Write me. Love

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO BENNETT CERF²

Venice
Sept 22 1950

Dear Bennett—

It was wonderful having your cable; you were sweet to send it, and it made me so happy to know you and Phyllis liked the chapters. I hope you will like the book. Am going back to the wilds of Sicily next Wednesday, for I'm very anxious to get on with it (the book). Meanwhile, am having a lovely holiday here in Venice: so beautiful this time of year. Don't you think Local Color turned out well? It is marvelous looking, I want to thank all of you. You are so good to me: I hope you know how much I appreciate it. Have not seen Herbert [Wise] after all; I wanted them to come and visit in Sicily, but guess they just couldn't face the primitiveness of that.³ You and Phyllis would love it. I would almost pay your passage if you would spend your winter holiday there (have a wonderful house, and the climate is better than California or Florida). I am practically the Grand Seigneur of Sicily: there was a contest for the schoolchildren of the island to write an essay on the classic Greek theatre—and, though I protested that I couldn't read Italian, I was supposed to be the Judge; the house is filled with manuscripts, the authorities are awaiting a decision, and I am very nearly

¹ In "Portrait of Hemingway" Lillian Ross followed Hemingway and his wife, Mary, around New York for two days, meticulously recording the writer's incessant drinking and sometimes foolish comments. ("I beat Mr. Turgenev," he says at one point. "Then I trained hard and I beat Mr. de Maupassant.")

² This letter to Bennett Cerf and the one that follows to his wife, Phyllis, were written separately, but included in the same envelope.

³ Herbert Wise was Bennett Cerf's uncle.

in tears. Phyllis wrote me about your house (or houses) in P-Town.¹ It must have been fun. Hope you have a good winter, interrupted by a trip to Sicily

Love

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO PHYLLIS CERF

[Venice]
[22 September 1950]

Phyllis dear—

Have got the gondola shoes, and am sending them by regular mail. My mother, who was just here, was supposed to take them but forgot. However, I did send you a little trinket by her. She will leave it by Random House when she gets back to N.Y. next month. I loved your letter, and wished I could have helped with the painting of those shacks. I don't think I will be in N.Y. this winter (though one can never tell); but I do think of you and miss you—how I would love a long four hour lunch. Write me, honey. Love et mille tendresse [sic]

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO ANDREW LYNDON

Taormina,
Oct 1st, 1950

Darling—

Had your sweet letter in Venice, and today, arriving back here, found another letter mailed the 10th of Sept. Of course your news saddens and

¹ Provincetown, Massachusetts.

TO ROBERT LINSCOTT

Taormina
December 2nd, 1950

Dear Bob—

You write so briefly—I like details: what you're doing, who you're seeing; but, poor lamb, I know you must be snowed in.

In a week or so am sending more chapters—it will be the halfway mark then. That is, I am half-finished. Longing to know what you will think then. If Bennett or Bob Haas want to read the new chapters that is fine; but I really don't want anybody else to. Also, am sending you a small Christmas trinket—so see it doesn't get lost in the mailroom.

Newton writes that he dropped in on you while in the city. Did he seem better to you?

I wrestled with a Thanksgiving dinner and it came out pretty well—except the turkey was too tough.

I grow increasingly alarmed about Phoebe—not only the incident with you, but several other odd stories have reached me. It seems so out of character. Of course she is in a terrible situation—living in one room in some hideous hotel with that crazy mother. Still, most of it is her own fault—she's thrown away two very good jobs. It's so maddening, because I think she has a wonderful talent—but it's as though she's suddenly lost all sense of self.

Mt. Etna erupted last week—a catastrophe that continues still; every day there is a new explosion.¹ I can see Etna from where I'm sitting now—there are seven rivers of fire flowing down from the crater, an astonishing sight, quite beautiful, especially at night.

I miss you, Bob.

Always,

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

¹ Mount Etna's volcanic eruptions from November 1950 to December 1951 produced one of its most voluminous lava flows in three hundred years.

TO BENNETT CERF

Truman Capote
Fontana Vecchia
Taormina, Sicily
December 5, 1950

Dear Bennett—

I understand that in the new musical "Guys & Dolls" there is a song called "A Bushel and A Peck" (I love you a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck).¹ On page 84 of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, you will find this: "I love you; Joel, I love you a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck." It is quite my own line. And though Oscar Wilde may have gone into the public domain, I've not. In other words, depending somewhat on your view, I intend to bring suit. To what extent would such an action involve Random House?

Several weeks ago a lawyer called Gilbert telephoned my agent, Marian Ives; he said he was the legal representative of G. Schirmer, Irving Berlin etcetera. He wanted to know: where did I get the jingle a bushel and a peck etc. My agent told him she thought I'd made it up: why? Oh just curious, he said.

Now of course I don't think I should let them get away with this. It is so complete a case of plagiarism that I don't even see why I should have to take it to court. But perhaps I am naive about such things. What do you think?

Please show this letter to Bob.

By this same mail I am writing to my lawyer; in the event the Random House lawyer would like to speak with him, he is: Nathan Rogers, 511 Fifth Avenue.²

My love to Phyllis; with much affection

Truman

[Collection Columbia University Library]

¹ *Guys and Dolls* opened at the 46th Street Theatre in Manhattan on November 24, 1950, and was an immediate hit, with a run of 1,200 performances.

² The matter was dropped when Capote's mother called Cerf to tell him that "A Bushel and a Peck" was an old Southern rhyme and that she distinctly remembered singing it to him when he was a baby.

when I finish the next chapter, I'll take just such a 'vacation'. Jack hasn't written any stories either. I do think you will like his new book. Nor have I read any good new stories. Nothing happens here—or nothing interesting unless you are familiar with all the characters. I guess by the time this reaches you Pearl will be home; I hope, in her new job, she will have time to work on her own writing.

Honey, do you see Phoebe at all? I know the mess she's in is a good deal her own making—but there are, as you know, so many extenuating circumstances. I understand, though I've not heard from her in some three months, that she has had a kind of breakdown. The way some people have deserted and slandered her is shameful. I wish you would have lunch with her. She respects you, and you just might be able to give her some encouragement.

It's really beautiful here now, and I'm getting quite tan again. Poor Pearl, I'm afraid she got the worst of the month. But even where you are, darling, winter is very nearly over—I hope you have a wonderful spring. I hope that because I pass over your terrible problems you [don't] think me indifferent to them: it is only that I feel that, like this winter, they are in the past, and will grow more so: put out new leaves, you can, it is in your nature. I love you tenderly. And love from Jack.

T

[Collection Aswell Family]

H/10
TO ANDREW LYNDON

Fontana Vecchia
Feb 28 1951

Darling lamb—

I could shake you, really I could: nearly 2 months and not a peep. Whatever are you doing? Which reminds me: two letters addressed to Phoebe at the Hotel Seville have been returned. Where, then, is she? She hasn't written me since early December.

All goes quietly on this front; I work along steadily, though the going grows more difficult. It is so very difficult to sustain. I have about sixty pages more—but they face me like Kilimanjaro. I wish you were here to encourage me.

I've started myself a new wardrobe—a foolhardy enterprise considering my finances. First off, I sent my measurements to Ferragamo in Florence

and he has made me the most beautiful pair of black shoes. I'm afraid to wear them—and anyway Jack won't let me: says I must save them, I don't know for what. Then I've had three suits made out of a strange kind of flat velvet—to die, honey. Trouble is, I've no place to show off this finery.

You remember that famous wooden chandelier, the one Harold bought from me. Well tell him I've bought two exactly like it: \$25 a piece. Now if he wants me to buy one for him I will do so.

What happens with your job? It's so mean of you not to have written me any of this.

I read Finisterre, Mr [Fritz] Peter's [sic] latest drivel.¹ Mechanical, so poorly written, so predictable—couldn't bear it. And you? Or did you bother? I had a letter from Marylou, who said IT² was living in Arizona and getting a divorce. She doesn't know how lucky she is—just to be alive.

We've got to wash Kelly today—it's nice and hot so he shouldn't catch a cold. I'm getting back my tan, which never quite went away. Well, I guess it's almost spring in New York too.

Oh—I had a note from Herr Isseyvoo [Christopher Isherwood] asking your address: that's all he ever writes me for. I obliged him for the umpteenth time. But honey, I wish you would keep your lovers better informed. It's so hard on mother.

Jack sends his love.

I miss you, sugar, and love you always

T

[Collection New York Public Library]

TO ROBERT LINSKOTT

Fontana Vecchia
Taormina, Sicily
Feb 28, 1951

Dear Bob—

It seems a long time, Lord yes, since I've heard from you, oh Wondrous One.

¹ Peters's novel was *Finistère*.² Fritz Peters.

Well, darling ones, I'd best climb back into my China tree. Kisses,
heart's love, et mille tenderesse [sic]

Your own
T

Forgot to include my most favorite IDC: Cab Calloway to Hitler. Cab
Calloway to Marquesa Casamaury to Carol Reed to Unity Mitford to
Hitler.

Get Moss and Kitty to play this game; I bet they'd be wonderful at it.¹
If you get any good ideas, please send them along.

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO WILLIAM GOYEN

Fontana Vecchia
Taormina
April 19, 1951

Bill dear,

How good it was to have your letter; but what I don't understand is—
did you ever receive [sic] a long letter I sent you about Horan et al? I'd
rather wanted you to reply to it, but since you don't mention it I wonder
whether it reached you. It was not anything I would care to have had fall
into the hands of a stranger.

So glad that you've been happy at Yaddo. I loved it too—though I'm
afraid I didn't really get much work done there. I'm delighted that "Ghost
and Flesh" is nearly finished. Bob thinks it's wonderful, a real achievement.
I'm mad to read it. Will it be published this fall?

I read Spender's autobiography.² What a spurious book—him and his
homosexual affairs that were only "undertaken in a spirit of opportunism."
I'll say. Seriously, though, it makes me hopping mad. But Henri-Louis de la
Grange, who was just here, says that you and Signor S. are friendly as ever.³
Surely it isn't true.

¹ Moss and Kitty Hart.

² Stephen Spender's *World Within World* was published in 1951.

³ Henri-Louis de la Grange was to become the world's foremost Mahler scholar.

I'd advise you strongly against the Gulf coast. I've lived in nearly all
those little towns along the coast. They are flat, ugly as tin-roofs; the water
is grey soup, the beaches are filthy and so are the people. From May
through September all the middle-aged ladies in the South are holed up
there. But if you really want to go, there is only one possible place to stay—
Pass Christian.¹ Why not one of the little islands off the coast of Georgia?
Ask Andrew about those.

I don't know that I will come home in July. In fact I'm pretty sure I
won't—maybe in August. But I do want to see you, precious. Of course we
will. Write me: much love from

T

P.S. Give my love to Elizabeth Ames

[Collection unknown]

TO ROBERT LINSCOTT

Fontana Vecchia
Taormina, Sicily
April 21, 1951

Dear Bobolink,

Am in heaven with your praise—you can't lay it on thick enough,
honey; cause I just **LOVES** it. Only hope the last chapter doesn't dissa-
point [sic] you. Could be.

Am enclosing a little picture you can use if you want—don't I look
healthy? Only Bob please let's not use that same biography again—about
river-boats and fortune tellers and god knows what all.² So I suggest: "Tru-
man Capote was born in New Orleans; he is twenty-six. A first novel,
Other Voices Other Rooms, established him in the front-rank of younger
American writers. His stories, eight of which are collected in *A Tree of
Night*, have appeared in the better periodicals here and abroad, and are
frequently anthologized. Last year Random House published *Local Color*,

¹ Pass Christian, Mississippi.

² The biography Capote wrote for the dust jacket of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was mostly fic-
tional, claiming, among other things, that he danced on a river boat, painted flowers on glass, and
studied fortune-telling "with the celebrated Mrs. Acey Jones."

a book of Mr. Capote's travel pieces. His work is widely known in Europe, where he has lived the last several years."

Trite—but in the right way. But as for a blurb for the book I give up. Poor Bob, you'll have to do that. Newton could, only he hasn't read the book—or I'll bet Pearl Kazin could do a good one. Ask her. Anyway, it shouldn't claim too much. As for the back flap, I think you should list my other books, allotting [sic] for each two quotes from the reviews. Blah Blah Blah, N.Y. Times. Incidentally, for *A Tree of Night* you should quote something from the Christopher Sykes review and from Leslie Fiedler's review in *The Nation*.

Marylou sent me a beautiful cable about the book. Everybody's being so nice. Oh lord, all I've got to do is finish now.

Had a letter from Goyen. Am so glad he got the Guggenheim—I'll bet you are, too.

Bob, is Random going to be good about advertising this time? I mean in this respect you-all have not done such a lot for your child's last two books. I'm not unrealistic; I know they were not the kind of books it repaid to greatly advertise. But with the *Grass Harp* I certainly am not expecting to be third-down in a list ad. No sir. I'm expecting to bask in the sunshine of a few full pages. And on that ungrateful note I bid you adieu. Except to say that I love you lots

T

P.S. Will airmail the last chapter soon as finished. Did you change the word "folks" to "people"?

P.P.S. Look inside.

P.P.S. Here is a suitable quote from the Sykes review of *A Tree*.

"Prose at its best. Mr. Capote gives his readers an exhilarating experience—the classic mark of excellence" Christopher Sykes, *London Observer*.

Also Leslie Fiedler in *The Nation*.

For *Local Color* there is that James Hilton review in *The Herald Tribune*—and that one in the *Sunday Times* (pretty grey it was, probably nothing there). I can't seem to find these, or I would do it myself.

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO ROBERT LINSCOTT

Fontana Vecchia
Taormina, Sicily
April 24, 1951

Dear Boss,

As near as I can calculate, the last chapter will be between 8 and 10 thousand words. The mss. as a whole should run to about 172 pages—which, if properly arranged, could print out to 180–190 pages.

I'm told that Tallulah Bankhead has a radio program on which she sang a new song, composed by Joe Bushkin, called "Other Voices, Other Rooms." Surely that is an infringement. I do seem determined to sue somebody.

Love (molto)

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

ALC

TO MARY LOUISE ASWELL

Fontana Vecchio [sic]
Taormina, Sicily
April 24, 1951

Precious heart—

You were the dearest of angels to send the cable, and now your sweet letter is here. I am so happy and relieved that you liked the book; I wanted you to, I guess more than anyone. A good deal depends on the last chapter—unfortunately I am very tense with it; I feel as though I were holding my nose under water: when I'm finished, I'm going to take a long gulp of air and do a mile of handsprings. I hope *La Neige*¹ lets you buy the chapter—I'm more broke than little Orphan Annie.

Of course I can see why you are upset about Fritz returning to N.Y. On the other hand I don't think it likely that your paths will cross—surely no one is going to invite you to the same place. But it is an incompatible feeling, God knows. At any rate, I hear you have sublet a heavenly apartment

¹ Carmel Snow, editor of *Harper's Bazaar*.

for the summer. We expect to come home early in August, and we will see you in it. Oh I long to see you—it will have been nearly two years!

Tell me, what is Jane [Bowles] doing? She is so tiresome about not answering letters. I hope she is working on the novel she was writing in Tangier; it seems to me it should have been finished by now.

Darling, Jack sends much, much love. Please do write me, precious. I love you always.

T

[Collection Aswell Family]

TO ROBERT LINSCOTT

[Taormina, Sicily] }
[May 1951]

Dear Bob,

A quick, quick note to let you know that I do want a dedication.

FOR MISS SOOK FAULK
IN MEMORY OF AFFECTIONS DEEP AND TRUE

All is going well, I think, I hope. It won't be too long now. Thanks. Love
T

P.S. Sook Faulk is Dolly in the book. She died in 1938. What happiness it gives me to dedicate this book to her!

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO ROBERT LINSCOTT

413
Taormina
May 3, 1951

Dear Bob,

As far as I'm concerned, Polly is free to use her own judgement: separate or run-together whatever words she wants.¹ However, I would prefer

¹ Polly was a copy editor.

that "Sheriff" and "Judge" remained capitalized. Also I have what are probably incorrect, but certainly very definite notions about punctuation, and I think that, except in cases of blatant misusage, my colons and semi-colons should stay as they are.

The check arrived for Anna Mayerson, and I have given it to her. Molto gracias.

Several problems have arisen in my last chapter, problems of technique; but with a kind of slow anguish I am unravelling them. I guess I'd best get back to it.

Love,

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO CECIL BEATON

Taormina, May 8, 1951

Cecil darling,

Wonderful to have your letter; and am as happy to know you at least have the theatre, if not the cast. Franz Werner, the fortune-teller, is back and I asked him if July was going to be a good month for you,¹ and he said yes, but that something astonishingly good was going to happen to you in late August; also, that you are soon going to receive a letter or a long-distance phone call making a proposal which you must accept. It's amazing how many of the things he's told me that have come true already. For instance, he told me that in April I would receive a prize of some kind. And I did: the O. Henry Memorial Award (for "distinguished work in the short-story"; it's the third time I've won it).

Jane Bowles is in Paris—much sturm und drang because she doesn't know where Paul is, and hasn't heard from him in several months. I don't know what will happen to Janie; she shouldn't be floating around this way, especially with all those loathsome Paris characters.

Yes, the E. [Emlyn] Williams' [sic] did rather suggest that they were friends of yours. But there were several little things that made me decide

¹ *The Gainsborough Girls* was scheduled to open on July 16.

they weren't; one was, that every time I mentioned you they immediately would begin to tell me what a wonderful person Oliver Messel was.¹ But I made my love for you quite clear to them; so to give them credit, maybe that is why they pretended to be fond of you. But they are a fishy pair. Please don't repeat this, because they would know where it came from, but they were asked to leave their hotel here, were, in fact, thrown out: I don't quite know the reason why, and those who do are singularly reticent. He, Emlyn, sent me a play of his called "Accolade." I must say the corn is very green: such incredible trash.²

Saw your pictures of Jamaica in Vogue. Liked the one of you and the one of Bea [Beatrice Lillie] with a pickaninny on her back. [Noël] Coward and [Graham] Payn look too "Greenbay Tree" for anything: only you couldn't cast either of them as the young man.³

Spring is long since over and it's summer here. But I'm working too hard to enjoy it. But how I wish you could come for a flying visit before we leave. We both hope to be finished with our books in another month, and then we're going to Venice and, early in August, to America. But as soon as the boat docks I'm going straight away to Wellfleet on Cape Cod where I've taken a house through the middle of September. I hope you come to New York sooner than usual this fall.

Tell me, darling, do you know anything about a young man called [Arnold] Saint Subber? He had something to do with producing Kiss Me Kate etc.⁴ What is his reputation—professionally, I mean. Because he has made a crazy proposition; wants to give me option money—just in the event I ever do write a play. It's rather mad. I'm tempted only because at the moment I do need money. Should I? What do you think? Is he at all a person to respect?

Jack sends his very best love. I do miss you, little precious. Write me. Much love

T

[Collection St. John's College, Cambridge University]

¹ Messel was also one of Britain's leading theatrical designers and one of Beaton's rivals.

² Emlyn Williams's best-known play is *The Corn Is Green*.

³ A South African, Graham Payn was Coward's companion. Mordaunt Shairp's play of the thirties, *The Green Bay Tree*, had recently been revived on Broadway.

⁴ Saint Subber was, in fact, the producer of Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*, which was a huge hit, running for more than two and a half years on Broadway.

#14

TO ANDREW LYNDON

[Taormina, Sicily]

May 16, 1951

Honey,

'Twas about time you wrote me: you owed me two letters. I don't understand why Phoebe hasn't written me (or perhaps I do); still I've had 2 letters returned from addresses where she was Unknown.

You mention so many people that I never heard of. Who is Gene Price? Tell me everything about him. At any rate I'm very glad that Rita [Smith] is having this affair. Oh dear I hope it is a really good thing, and that it makes her happy. And who is Ruth Randall?

By the way, speaking of affairs, did you know that Goyen and K. A. Porter have been doing it for quite a spell? I do like Bill, but he is, as more and more I've discovered, an opportunist nonpareil. Anyway, having got what he wanted from KAP, he now has given her the air, and she is eating her heart out. All this I get from a very informed source—don't pass it on, please.

I should have finished my book in another few weeks—but it only makes me nervous, so the least said etc. It's been one long pull, and now I'm collecting breath for the final climb.

When do you plan to go to Macon? We expect to be home the end of July/first of August. I hope you will have found an apt. by then.

I have a line on a wonderful job for you, and maybe it will work out: American Editor of *Botteghe Oscure*. Princess Caetani is looking for someone, and I think you would be perfect.¹ It would pay reasonably well too. I expect to see her in Rome next month, so will find out more then.

The weather has been wretched here the last week—sirocco every day. It really is as oppressive as Agatha Christie claims.

I want to know what Harold is up to—give him a kiss.

Are you in love? I sense a reticence in your letter.

Jack is well, and sends you his love. Kelly is covered with ticks and burrs: scratch, scratch. Myself, I do a lot of scratching too—I seem simply to breed crabs.

¹ Princess Marguerite Caetani was the editor of *Botteghe Oscure*, a magazine published in Rome, in the authors' original languages.

Write me immediately, darling—as I expect to leave here some 3 weeks hence.

Love
T

[Collection New York Public Library]

TO ROBERT LINSKOTT

[Taormina, Sicily]
May 29, 1951

Dear, Dear Bob

I finished the book! Two days ago—and then promptly came down with intestinal grippe, so have not been able to type it yet, but expect to get at it tomorrow. Anyway, you will have the manuscript very soon—in about 10 days.

Have no news at all. My story "House of Flowers" won an O. Henry prize.

But feel so weak—wanted just to tell you the glad tidings; at least I hope it is a glad tidings. By the time you get the chapter I probably will have left here. Let me know at once what you think—c/o American Express, Venice.

If all goes well I'll be seeing you in early August. Have missed you so much

Love
T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN

Venice, c/o American Express
June 24th, 1951

O Radiant One,

Although it was addressed to Jack, I will stoop to answer your letter. Darling, you are a creature of habit; Yaddo, yadddooooo . . . through the

ages; don't you ever get just a wee bit weary of going there? You're going to end up like Leonard Ehrlich.¹ All the same I can't wait to see your sweet lollipop face. Which is to say you must come to Venice before July 25th. We are taking a piccolo palazzo and so can put you and Bill up . . . or at least I think we are going to get the house; as usual, the landlord is crazy, and things have not got quite straightened out. But please do come quickly because you'll be going back to Paris anyway. Venezia is more wonderful than ever, the weather is heaven . . . though some of the current inhabitants aren't. All the rich international queens are here en force. A thrill of horror ran through me when I read about Indiana. I don't think it's at all a suitable proposal . . . of course everything like that tempts you, so probably you are all set to go. But I hope not. By the way, I never got your book of poems. I'm so happy about Farrar Straus taking Jack's book. He sent them the last third of it but hasn't heard. Jack sends love; love to Bill. Now hurry on over here, my sweet . . . at least do let me know whether to expect you before we leave Venice.

heart's love T

[Collection University of Delaware Library]

TO ROBERT LINSKOTT

Venice, June 27th, 1951

Dear Bob,

I was under a strain not hearing from you, a neat little understatement, but your letter came yesterday and of course it only made me feel worse.

I cannot endure it that all of you think my book a failure; I am stricken by such an overpowering trinity of opinion.² The vagueness of the criticism makes me feel even more helpless.

Perhaps you are right about the last chapter. Yet I don't see what could have been done differently. You describe it as tapering off . . . which is exactly what I intended. When they leave the tree-house, that is the climax of

¹ Ehrlich was a writer (*God's Angry Man*, 1932) who had several stays at Yaddo.

² The trinity was Linscott, Bennett Cerf and Robert Haas. "We all had a slight feeling of let-down," Linscott wrote Capote, "of the story tapering off a little, with the ending coming too soon and lacking the profusion of delight that had so entranced one up to that point."

the book; but what point would the book have unless the last chapter were written in exactly the mood it is: the destination of each character has been prepared from the beginning. Then there was the enormous technical problem: having already had my narrative climax, speed seemed to me of the essence . . . what I had left on my hands was a great lot of information, and it seems to me that I arranged this well. I think the end very moving and right. But of course at the moment I am too near to it really to know.

So I wonder if we should go ahead with a fall publication. I wonder if I shouldn't see what improvements I can make.

The proofs still have not arrived. I did not cable this to you because I sent a cable to Rome asking whether they had arrived there and if so why the hell hadn't they forwarded them here. I can't believe they were sent airmail.

I am leaving here July 16th and will be in New York August 1st.

I'm sorry I dissatisfied [sic] you, Bob. I know you are leaving now on vacation, so forget the whole thing and have a good time.

Love

T

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO BENNETT CERF

Truman Capote
c/o American Express
Venice, Italy
July 3rd, 1951

Dear Bennett,

Your letter only just today arrived, for it had been sent to Sicily and forwarded.

I do deeply appreciate what you tell me. Bob had written me about your combined reservations . . . which came as a shock because I'd been so certain that what I'd done was right. But there is no point in going into any of my arguments; obviously there must be something wrong or you would not all feel as you do.

By all means we must postpone publication until I can make improvements.

You say several times that the first half is better than the last half . . . do you really mean "half" . . . or just the last chapter? I can rewrite the last chapter but I don't understand what the criticism is of the other chapters.

As for Verena, it is essential that she be a sympathetic person in the end. In one sense, she has never NOT been sympathetic. The central emotional situation is between herself and Dolly . . . not between Dolly and the Judge. It simply would be psychologically untrue if Dolly did not go back to the house.¹

But these problems are all mine. Anyway, is it only the last chapter that disturbs you?

I cannot make any basic change in the chapter . . . as to the events and outcome, I mean. What I can do is make it more gradual. I was consciously [sic] using the synopsis [sic] method as a technical device; but if it reads like a synopsis, then it is on my part a failure in style.

Thank you infinitely, Bennett, for writing me so frankly what you feel.

Please let me know quickly about postponing the book etc.

Give my very best love to Phyllis, and love to you.

Truman

ps. I am sailing the 16th from Genoa, and will be in NY the first of August.

[Collection Columbia University Library]

TO BENNETT CERF

[Telegram]

[Venice]
[9 July 1951]

HAVE READ PROOFS AND PREFER PUBLISH BOOK AS IS?
LOVE TRUMAN

[Collection Columbia University Library]

¹ Verena and Dolly, two old-maid sisters, were loosely based on two of the three female cousins, the Faulk sisters, who lived in Monroeville, Alabama, and who took care of Capote as a child.

² Capote did not make the changes suggested by the Random House editors, and Bennett Cerf gave in with his usual grace. "If it is now in the form that you wish to keep it, it's good enough for me," he replied. The critics took Capote's side, and *The Grass Harp* was widely praised.