

or to buy the absolutely necessary - like modelling stands, shelves, tools, wood for our little stove, & the making of tea, which will become a necessity here, as lunch is at 12.30, & dinner not until 8.

If you were only here, my darling, to have a cup with us this afternoon! Eva's working hard on a composition & I ought to be, but I'd rather be talking with you. I'm sure this letter will never go into one envelope, so I'll fast it string on over another sheet of this magnificent paper, & send you two at once. (Sense this pencil scrawl - I was demonstrating a suggestion to Eva). She & I are going to ~~begin~~ begin on anatomy tomorrow. And in a few days I hope we can have some Italian lessons in the evenings. She's heard of someone who's very good & charges only 10 lire a lesson (40¢!).

We do need it! I have the funniest & worst agonizing time in shops & walked about. Though somehow here I don't mind it quite as much as I did in France. The people here are perhaps more kindly & more humorous. One's own pleasure at finally making one's wants understood is just eclipsed by their pleasure at their own astuteness in discovering what you mean. Result - smiles & congratulations on both sides of the counter.

And living is cheap. For board & lodging at the Pensione Firenze, I shall be paying just about a dollar a day, while this studio comes to 8 dollars a month apiece!

You would adore Florence, Laurie. It's so different from Paris, and both so different from anything we have. Here, the buildings are tremendously massive, mostly old palazzos, built to withstand sieges & all kinds of attack. They are built of huge blocks

Our Studio

5, Via Farinata degli Uberti,
Firenze, Italia,

November 8th, 1926.

Laurie Darling:

Does that heading give you any kind of a thrill? It does me, even though you're not here to share it, and all the daily experiences of this new life. But maybe you will be here, before it is over, if, as you say, you've been able to start with a little nest-egg in your bank. Your great letter, all about the trip, was a perfect joy. It greeted me here, when we arrived on the 28th. What a trip it was - unforgettable, I should think, with the snow and all the marvelous fall coloring. But I shudder to think of all those close shaves! You certainly have a head on your shoulders, dear old thing.

You mention of Bauer, & of his sending you that complimentary clipping was no news to me. I saw the dear in Paris, you see, & he was so pleased he told me all about it. Said he'd been in Holland the week before, at some little out-of-the-way place where there was nothing to do but read the papers. Queer he should have come across you in an English paper in Holland, wasn't it? But I am glad you got such a good notice. Save it for me to see, won't you.

Seeing him was one of the bright spots in our rather drab week in Paris. Heard him play the evening before we left. He felt France infinitely depressing, just as I did, & was equal looking forward to getting back to New York again in a few weeks.

We saw the Cornelius', and their pleasant little blue-eyed daughter, aged about 10 months. He is doing some very fine new work, but he didn't have these things I most wanted to see - to wit: his illustrations for Oscar Wilde's Ballade of Reading Gaol.

I had rather hoped to "bum" around a bit after we left Paris, going to Bourges and other nice Cathedral towns, but it meant so many overnight stands & changing of trains, and waiting for trains, that it would have been more than Mother was equal to. So we took the train - the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranean express, from Paris to Avignon. The country was beautiful, though not as scenic & picturesque as the Western route which the Genos had described. We came down the Rhone valley, though, & got a very fair idea of the lay of the land. Stayed two nights at Avignon - a lovely old town, nestled at the feet of the steep rocky hill that holds the massive & frowning Palais des Papes. Such a glorious old pile it is!

In a tiny shop under the ruins of the famous old ~~bridge~~ bridge "where one dances", I saw a post card of a statue of a dear & somehow familiar old man. I looked again, & saw that it was a portrait of our beloved Jean-Benoit Fabre. His home, Seniguan, is only a few miles north of Avignon. I asked the old crone where this statue was to be seen, & she assured me it was in Avignon. So then started a weary search for me.

Most of the passersby had never seen or heard of it, but I kept on enquiring, & finally got my directions. I purchased a pen'orth of flowers, from

you & me, rang the bell at the Ecole Normale, & in the enclosed garden, surrounded by buildings swarming with high-school boys, there sat Fabre. I placed our humble tribute at his feet. (much to the astonishment of the youths), and sent up a little prayer of gratitude to him.

Next day we went on to Nice, hoping to find sunshine & balmy weather for a change. It's rather a dreadful place, with its masses of pinky-white hotels, and its "Atlantic City" promenade along the waterfront. There were some beautiful spots, though, & the sea mysteriously kept its wonderful blue although the sky was overcast most of the time. We stayed there five days & almost froze. Then across the frontier to Genoa; and on to Florence, & Eva. The dear came around to the pensione that evening, and hey! but I was glad to see her. She's so charming and appealing as ever, & doesn't look a day older.

She is living at a humble pensione across the river (near this studio), but while Mother is with me we are at the Pensione Piccioli, in the heart of town. As soon as Mother goes (when Mrs. Philbin arrives in about a week), I move over to a room in Eva's pensione. Here's the address, for I shall be there by the time this reaches you:

Pensione Firenze,
7, Via del Cristo di San Martino.

This little studio is neither old nor picturesque in itself, but it is tucked between two villas in a perfectly lovely garden, with big trees all round, & we like it immensely. It is very empty, just a work-shop, but we've managed to cither rent

of gray stone, walls 3 ft + more thick, & machicolated battlements at the tops of many of them. Inside, they are perfect rabbit-warrens - corridors & stairways branching off in every direction, & always marble floors, even in the bedrooms. As in France, the streets are almost side-walk-less. At most one finds a strip about two feet wide, so the houses & shops seem very close as one walks down the centre of the street. One misses, terribly, the Gothic architecture in the churches. Most of the facades, with their stripes & spots of variegated marbles, are simply hideous. But it's the odd bits of sculpture at every turning: an escutcheon over a doorway; a madonna in a niche at the corner of a building; a quaint old grinning lion on a gate-post; it's these that fascinate me. I hope to do a lot of drawing here. Pray for me.

Peasant costumes, which I saw here eighteen years ago, have entirely vanished, but the little old donkey carts, with their top heavy loads of wine bottles encased in straw, are everywhere, & one sometimes sees selectable groups in the older & narrower streets.

As for the galleries, I'm steering rather clear of them at present. I want to digest slowly. Mother & I did go to the Uffizi one day, though. And what do you think was the most vivid memory I brought away from there? Not a piece of sculpture, & not a painting, either. Just the profile of a lady copyist. A frail, tired, undernourished, eager, infinitely wistful woman, with a mass of

dark hair skinned back from her thin face & braided in a great bun that stuck out behind. The light happened to fall just right. I longed for you & your camera. In a day or two I think I shall go back again, & if she's still there, ask her if she'll let me sketch her as she paints. Her painting, by the way, is very bad.

Haven't met anyone interesting here - except of course Eva. But she is quite sufficient. It's nice not to be seeing people, for a change. There are quite a lot of old boxes at the pensione, middle-aged females who sentimentalize about pictures, but with this blessed little studio to flee to, one can readily escape.

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Next morning -

I really must get this off to you, Laurie dear! When I think how long it'll be before you see it, I'm ashamed to have waited so long.

We had a most torrential downpour last night, & it must have been even worse up in the hills beyond, for the usually placid old Arno is now a roaring torrent of muddy water, seething & swirling under the bridges. Our corner room here overlooks the river and one of the nicest bridges, and we spend lots of time at the window, watching the sights, & feeding the pigeons, who flock to our window-sill to eat the bread which Mussolini says is good for us, but which the birds appreciate more than we do. The crazy old church-bells are clanging from every campanile, & telling me to get to work.

Here's a p.c. of the Fabre statue. Nice, isn't it?

No more now from your own Brendie -

Eva sends love - She asks much after you -