

Pensione Isola,
Via dei Serragli, 109,
Firenze -
December 22 nd, '27 -

My own Laurie:

The days have fled & sped
by these past weeks, & Goodness
knows how long it is since I wrote
you last. But just now there's a wonderful
breathing-space, & I must take advantage
of it. "Vera" Birch & her father left recently
for the Riviera; my U.S. Christmas
gifts (such as they were) were purchased
& dispatched two weeks ago; I mailed
my English greetings on Monday, & my
various "Florence" this morning; nothing
more in that line to think about
~~except~~ delivering, on Saturday, the Teddy
Bear to my grubby little model in
the next street, two tiny bottles of
green liqueur to the two old sisters
who sell me this notepaper & such-
like sundries; and two other similar
bottles, tucked down at the base of

a jolly red cyclamen plant to be left at the door of my dear Signorina Gleri who took such good care of me from March to July last year, & who still call me their Bambina.

And of course, at the school, the inevitable crossing of palms with silve, at least to the porter, who always salutes me so gravely, *alà Fascist*, & to the "custode," who sweeps up the dried clay from the floor, & occasionally helps me with a heavy stand or a new cast.

I shall work at the school tomorrow morning, on a huge fat head I'm copying (Vitellius, I believe his Roman name is); and in the afternoon I shall go to the studio & chip away at Bauer, who's at last beginning to show a glimmer of resemblance to himself.

The baby is practically finished, but I won't have him cast until

Mother sees it. & can she won't like it much - will think it too stodgy - but that can't be helped. She is due in Trieste tomorrow, and if she crosses right over, can get here in ample time for Christmas. She had planned a little sightseeing (Venice, Bologna, etc) en route, but if it continues as cold as it has been these past five days, she'll prefer a through train with a heated bed-room at the end of the trip, to any wandering about the chilly streets of unfamiliar cities. It has been bitter! When the thermometer reaches 10° above in Florence, it feels just the way 10° below would feel in New York. O' course, no snow - but the ice was four inches thick in the gold-fish pool in our studio garden, and the poor fishies quite numb and petrified-looking under it. Very different though, my little warm

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room here, compared to the chilly barn
of last year! The food, too, is so good
& nourishing it keeps one warm. In
fact I'm being very badly spoiled here.
I shall never want to go back to house-
keeping again!

Which brings me to the first question
I've been wanting to ask you. Where
are you, and how are you settled?
Have you found a comfy place, & is
there a maid who can take the marketing,
cooking & dishwashing off your poor
shoulders? You have too much to
carry already, Darling, without
that added weight.

Also what about that Rabbit Farm?
I want to see that an accomplished
fact. Sooner it is, sooner there'll be
more cash in the bank so we can
play together more, instead of each
gubbling along alone at her job.

How is yours coming along, old Dear?
Been doing more brilliant portraits?
More work for Mr. Fisher? And how
did the slides of the Red Cross seals, etc,
come out, or haven't you yet finished

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that long job? You were at it last time you wrote, & making prints between sentences, so to speak.

I went to see the Sturgeses at last, & found them most comfortably at home in a charming apartment overlooking the river. She looked prettier than ever, & they were both very cordial and friendly. They're having ~~an~~ an idyllic time here, nosing about & making all sorts of quaint discoveries. The other day, in some small & obscure museum they saw a collection of old musical instruments, among which a Viols d'Amore particularly caught their fancy. So, having all that fine initiative that I so conspicuously lack (to my cost), they immediately engaged the custode in conversation, and asked if there were anyone nowadays who knew how to play these old instruments. The response was even more than they'd dared hope for. It appears that there is a musician here who plays the Viols d'Amore in a most masterly fashion. They were given his name & address, &

assumed that Professore Pasquali would be utterly charmed to demonstrate his beloved instrument. So off they trotted, straight to his house. Found him a perfect dear, only too eager to play for them. So then they went to see Canon & Mrs. Stinson, who have a fine house next the church, with a big music room & a fine piano — and before you could say Jack Robinson, the whole thing was arranged. Prof. Pasquali is to give a recital there on New Year's afternoon, and the Sturgis' are to ask all their friends. And they have kindly included me in their invitation, so I have a treat in store for me. Now, isn't that the way to do things? How mortified I am when I think of the way I bungled Paris for you — just because I hadn't the gumption to search out, to ask, and to do! The barrier of language, always so formidable to me — is nothing to them. They just plunge ahead, and get anything

they want. If they espy, on one of their many walks, a vista of lovely villa & garden behind the bars of a closed gate - why, they just ring the bell. And when the portiere appears, he usually proves only too happy to show them all over the place. Now I couldn't do that, for the life of me! Something wrong somewhere. If only I possessed such a gift, I've no doubt I could long ago have broken through the wall of Andreotti's reserve, & consequently squeezed infinitely more out of these last months than I have. If he'd started to walk away (as is his disconcerting habit) just as I was trying to talk a bit about myself, my aspirations, etc., I'd just have hooked my arm in his, or otherwise buttonholed him, & made him listen til I'd said what I wanted to say. As it is - I begin, tentatively, I hesitate for a word, I try again in the other of our two mutual languages, I try to express by a gesture what won't be put into words, I look despairingly at my work to see if

there's anything there that will make my meaning clearer - I turn to him to see if he's getting anything of what I'm trying to say - and find him already criticising another student's work, or slowly vanishing through the door!

Truth is the poor man is just now absolutely overwhelmed by the big work he is himself doing. For the time being that, to him, is the only reality. We others are nothing but shadows. He has, in common with dear Eva, a mind that runs in a groove that is narrow, though very deep. He can only think one thing at a time, and such a creator must necessarily appear egotistical and selfish to those about him. It happens that I've chosen the very worst year in which to study with him, for with this work on his hands, he can't give adequate attention to the class. Last year was quite different; he was in the class-room daily, + helping the boys, & sometimes modelling quick portrait busts of them. This year, so far, he has been almost invisible, though the last time I saw him he

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promised that after the first of the year he would be able to give more time to the students. Well, we'll see. I'm still convinced that he is the man I want, if only I can get close to him.

I'll stick it out through January & February, anyway, and if, by then, I still seem to be making little or no headway, I believe I'll pull up stakes & go up to Paris for two or three months. There are so many sculptors there whose work I admire - Bouchard, Despiau, Pompon, & Bourdelle - I believe I'd learn a lot just visiting their studios and talking with them, even if I didn't do any work myself.

But then comes the complication of family. Shirley, Eliot and the Babes may be heading for Italy in February. And if, as they now plan, they come to Viareggio or some other nearby seaside place, it will be in order to be near me. And I'd hate running away from them just as I was offered the chance to get to know the adorable Desmond &

precious wee Nancy! Yet there are only these few precious months more out of which which to squeeze the most that Europe has to offer in the way of inspiration and instruction. I can't afford to waste any of them. Some fundamental principles I have learned from Andreotti just in studying his work. Those are invaluable, but as far as what he's actually said to me himself so far—why, any good and intelligent sculptor could have told me such things. They're true enough, and I'm working awfully hard to overcome my weaknesses. But I have grave doubts as to whether copying plaster casts is my particular road to bigger & better achievement. What say you? I think I need a real upheaval—something violent, like Carbin or something, to lift me out of the literal rut, & set me down somewhere else. Maybe I'll go back to little old New York & study with Archipenko for a bit! That would be a case of "longest way round shortest way home", wouldn't it?

Just before this cold wave came upon

us - (and upon all Europe, it appears), I had
resolved to do a lot of very intimate drawings
of myself (nude torso, mostly), in my big
mirror, every evening. Now - no thank you!
Even if the room is warm compared to
outside, it's no place to pose "naked"
in. That'll have to wait. But t'other
day I did a cubist self-portrait, all
straight lines & circles done with a
compass, that was really not half
bad. Queer, certainly, but I am sure
more like me than any literal portrait
I could have achieved. I shall try it
again very soon. It's great fun!

Yes, my dear, your Maillol back is
just what I want - and I'd do
it, the moment we get together again!
I believe I'm ready for it now - or
ready! But I don't want to imitate
Maillol. I just can't see that he's one
of the great ones. Solid & simple &
substantial, yes, but what else? It
doesn't seem to me that his work expresses
anything but just that - physical mass.

There's more than that to be said in my medium. And by Gum! Some day I shall learn how to say it. I may not have done much, this past year, Laurie, but I have weeded out a lot of the dross that so cheapened my previous work. So that's something.

Darling, you'll fall asleep if I don't stop this interminable rambling.

I'll be thinking of you, hard, on Christmas Day, & do hope you will have some children with whom to share it. I suppose the Sutters are all pretty much grown up by now, but there must be others. I hope it will be a happy day, for you, dearest, in spite of heart-aches. You'll know I'm with you.

Goodnight, dear -

your Brendie

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