

Magistrate's Court, Bamenda
20th April 1962

Darling Mummy and Daddy,

It is strange to be addressing a letter to the Coach House, and it must have been really sad to leave the Close, no longer sit at home in the drawing-room but as a guest; and, after twenty years, to relinquish accustomed arrangements of chairs and tables, lamps and mirrors, for smaller rooms, on which, already, you will have started to stamp yourselves. But until you find your new home – for I don't believe the Coach House is anything more than a stop-gap – I can hardly bear to think that we will not be able to call our own the particular smell of cigarettes and flowers that greeted us as we stepped through the French windows at the end of each term, or on snatched country weekends. Do find somewhere far away, and soon; because I am sure that the proximity of a loved home will become oppressive and a drain on your feelings. Much better to build anew while you have the strength. Remember the gardens you can still create, and the friends to be made.

It is extraordinary to think of Daddy retiring – just about the same time as Pete will be taking his exam. I wish I could be there for the valedictions. I had a nice letter from Granny B., who, though sad not to be seen out by you, looks forward to the good it will bring you both. She told me the news of Mrs. Richardson's accident, but, in such a way as to make me laugh – in my reply I'm afraid I responded to the joke in the same tone. After all it was very ironical that somebody else should have driven her to her rest. I think I am like Daddy, in that I spare few regrets for all these poor waiting women, and rather sigh with relief when they go. It's a tragic generation, in that few of them were trained to do anything, let alone think, and when all the manifold shocks, which cut them off from their youth, died away, one is little surprised to see the dazed look in their eyes, and the rather trivial foolishness of their behaviour. I think the reason why the old can't be integrated into the modern structure is that the changes have been so volcanic that it is as if they were the remnants of a past century, ghosts. One enjoys the company of Granny B. because she still seems to have a zest for life; Liddy was the same, and of course V.W. Although both had long lives of experience behind them with which they could have upholstered themselves against the bleak years, they preferred to renew themselves until they died, visiting Salisbury floodlit, Tennyse Williams at Oxford, trying to squeeze in the reading of all Tolstoy's novels before the end. I think that probably more than in any other period of one's life one should be most practical in one's approach to old age: it is not enough to dream.

I've now got your second letter, Mummy, 7th April, and am so glad to know you're happy. Roll on June, when you'll both be able to know what leisure is! It makes me so excited to think that you will soon have time to look around, explore and listen. Simona Pakenham, a friend of Ursula's, like you Mummy, started tuning into the Week's Composer while washing up, and, by chance, heard a piece of V.W.'s which so intrigued her – she'd never heard of him before – that she decided to get to know everything she could about him.. She borrowed records from the library, sprinkled red circles all over the Radio Times, and after a year or two plucked up courage to write a letter to him and eventually make a book about it all. Won't it be fun to go up for concerts!

We've got a dance here tonight. The Women's Club, of which Didy is the secretary, is holding it, and about two hundred people are expected. On the invitation card (admission: 700 fr.) there is written 'Easter Bright Spot', and I am sure it will live up to its name. We have lots of little tables lit by Tilly Lamps ranged in the style of a nightclub about the floor; Fiona's room has been converted into a bar; and in the dining room is a piano (!) which will accompany the Cabaret, which consists of: 'Bless this House', to start the proceedings; 'The Raggle Taggle Gypsy' and 'Green Fields' (Solo by Miss Thérèse Até, Woman Education Officer, and mother of five); and 'On a Hill far away stands a Cross', to bring the evening to a sober conclusion. It will be interesting to see if everything goes to plan.

Your food parcel has just arrived, for which I had to pay 50% duty! However the contents are so rich and wonderful that it is fully worth it. How clever of you to realize about the tea. I am going to put it on the table at Easter as a present for Didy and Pete. The herbs, too, are very useful. The food, actually is very good. Occasionally we go short of butter, and the only meat we have is beef, slaughtered before breakfast on Saturdays, on the other side of the garden hedge, and quartered and sold by the Bamenda Meat Club. No fish. Some of the African chop is delicious; I told you of 'Fou-fou', (a test of whose quality is to throw a lump up in the air, and if it sticks to the ceiling it's good. The other day at the Cowans', the host flicked some up with a spoon, and it returned with a thud onto the lap of his neighbour). 'Agousssi' (crushed melon seeds); peppered chicken; palm oil stew (wonderful – Daddy probably had it – meat stewed in rich copper oil derived from palm kernels, with spices, powdered stink-fish, mangos, coco-nut, orange, grapefruit, pepper, bananas, paw-paws, and rice); groundnut soup; soy (wafer-thin slivers of beef fried in palm oil, and spiced with pepper). We can get most vegetables – masses of avocado; okra, a kind of courgette, very small, with widely celebrated aphrodisiac properties; oranges and grapefruit from the tree (they are in blossom now), and of course fresh coffee.

I feel very depressed at the moment as I have just been given a glimpse of the canker that lurks beneath the halcyon covering. You might remember the scare of terrorists that arose last October when the decision was taken to link West ~Cameroon to the East, rather than become a satellite state of Nigeria. We had thought them legendary, or at any rate had been suppressed when the government brought home its majority. But rumours of guns, burnt out houses by the roadside, queer intimations of unease as one catches sight of a chain-gang – literally bound in chains – disappearing among the trees, or a shadow passing over the face of an official: these have been confirmed by tales of our friends from the French side, a Dutchman in charge of a large coffee estate, the African principal of a college, in which are described raids and campaigns on the outlaws' refuges, (smoked out of caves like the wild beasts which, with their squalor, nakedness, and appalling maigresse, they so closely resemble).

Our growing disquiet has been further intensified by an encounter with a young soldier attached to the Division based on the station. I met him yesterday afternoon as I was climbing the hill from Mankon, a young fresh-eyed boy, whose voice took on no colouring of outrage as he recounted the activities of the 'Security Forces' whose offices I can see on the hill from my window. 'It is trying', he said, 'since a lot of 'terrorists' will assert that they do not understand their English-speaking inquisitors –

(more often than not the former come from the French side) – but, in order to drag from them the whereabouts of other cells, the names of collaborators, those who carry them food, it is often necessary to persuade them into speech'. With what unconcern the boy put his fingers in his ears and passed a hand over his groin, marvelling at the efficiency of his superiors – Lt. Meno, who went to Sandhurst, and who came to dinner the other night – or perhaps at the miraculous powers of electricity.

We find ourselves faced with an odd moral problem. It is clear to all of us – to Pete especially, who knows Africa well, that it is only a matter of time before the whole continent founders. Kenya is clearly marked for disaster, for besides anti-colonialism, there are the factors of American arms sunk in Abyssinia, terrible rivalry between the latter and the Somali, the growing assertion of Islam versus the neo-paganism of the smaller tribes, and all sorts of other confusions. Pete foresees South Africa as becoming eventually a White State with a boundary at the latitude of the Zambezi. But before this artificial barrier can be erected, wars will burst on the heads of the people, the Congo will expand like a whirlpool, engulfing all its neighbours, missions flattened, schools laid waste. For the fall of the Congo, once the most advanced of all the African states, will, Pete believes, usher in the Dark Ages, which may not arise before five hundred years are spent. This may seem a melodramatic picture, but it is unrealistic to view the development of the country in terms of decades. Tribalism is still passionately fostered, and any incidental trappings of civilization superficially imposed are chaff before the hurricane. For that reason Pete feels that his responsibility in prolonging the example of true justice and incorruptibility until the last possible moment is more important than throwing a beam upon inhumanities which are still but vaguely hinted. Sooner or later evidence will come before him which will mean our immediate return to England. But after the knife has fallen he would like to feel that in the midst of chaos the memory might remain. It is a very strange sensation to have alighted on so lovely a land, and yet to see so clearly presaged its upheaval and future struggles. At the moment the Cameoun Republic is a Fascist State (with the fasces as part of its device). Three weeks ago Dr Goyanes's driver was beaten up in the town.