

May 4 1944

Dearest Eleanor,

My fingers are a little cold and stiff. The wind is blowing the flaps of the tent about. I am seated on a box with the typewriter on a field table. The hour is eight p.m.

Your letter written April twenty-fourth came tonight, and your nostalgia about our place on the Ridge was contagious. I remember that rain that came from behind the mountains and across the valley. I must say that it is a good thing that I never caught you going to the Grocer's in ~~xxx~~ those hateful shoes, for you should surely have felt my fury.

My advice would be that you sign no contract at Newton for next year. My wish is that you go to Memphis sometime in June and take the place with the library there. If you like it there (and I hope and think you would) you could stay on through next winter. There are several reasons why I'd like for you to be in Memphis. (I won't divide the sentimental ones from the reasonable and logical ones.) You would be in a city with the advantages of good libraries, opportunities to hear some good music, and the companionship of such congenial folks as Nadine, and Tom, and Sarah, and Annie Rosé. You would have my family as your family, and you know how much it would mean to them to have you in their house or in the town. I'd like for you to stay in their house and pay room and board, but if you think that wouldn't do, you could stay elsewhere. You and I don't have to consider conventions as far as where you live is concerned. But, anyway, all of that would have to be worked out on the spot. This summer I'd like for you to take piano lessons at the music school connected with Southwestern. It is no more than three blocks from 311 Stonewall. You might even like to go to the Art Academy. Those are the possibilities of a year in Memphis, which are a good deal richer than those offered by Newton.

Further, it would give me considerable pleasure to think of you there and to follow your adventures through your letters. So at least give my plan full consideration.

I have written this letter on the typewriter because one is accessible and because your letter reminded me that it was time I sent you more of "The Observation Car." Here begins the second paragraph:

"But in the summertime when the other children were playing on the porch or in the yard I would go to that upstairs room, roll back the rug, and peer down from this singular vantage point. Either I would gaze in wonder at the strange perspective which was allowed there of the big, quiet, old pieces of furniture with their marble tops and anti-macassars or I would be held there as though hypnotized by a miraculous view of my elders, sometimes the whole family group, sometimes only two of the ladies with their heads together over a piece of sewing. I shall never forget the sight of my grandfather's ~~xx~~ bald head down below and how I jumped back from the ventilator one summer night when he arose suddenly from his chair. He rose up so swiftly and so straight that I felt his shining pate would surely come right up to my peep hole. ~~ixxx~~ After a moment I was able to laugh at myself, but I did roll the soft, heavy rug back over the vent and I went down myself to where my elders were sitting.

"On the way down I met my brother and one of my cousins on the stair, and we all went down to ~~xxxxxx~~ the parlor together and seated ourselves, without a word, on a certain leather couch that none of the grown-ups ever liked to sit on. I sat between the two other children and I felt over them an undeniable superiority simply for knowing how we all must look from the ventilator. But also I suffered while we sat there from the same sense of guilt and shame that had made me roll ~~back the rug a~~

~~xxxxxx~~

the rug back in place a few minutes before. I knew that after that indecent and ridiculous view of my grandfather's head I could never again think him quite so dignified as they did.

"When I was a little older, you know, I did not make such a secret of my passion for views. And it seems to me that before I was big enough to go about the world alone I must have added many a step to those that would normally have been taken by negro nurses and hired men as well as my own parents and my brother. If we walked no further than around a city block in Memphis I could always spy a flight of steps on a high, terraced lawn. I would cry out, "I want to see how it looks from there." One time when I was eleven - we were in Nashville at Grandmother's again - I pulled out from the cellar a ladder and placed it against the fanlight of the door of the old house. Just as I looked between the leaded strips in the window my grandmother came into view descending the stair inside. The sight of my face in the fanlight gave <sup>her</sup> such a start that her little hand slipped on the bannister, and as she fell she received an injury to her hip that caused her ever afterward to walk ~~with~~ one Grandfather's black walking canes that he had cut down to her size. But at the time I did not realize that it was the sight of me that had caused her fall; and I only considered how strange it was that ~~xxxxxx~~ this view should include the sight of my wise, gentle, little grandmother tumbling foolishly down the flight of steps that did not even seem so very steep through the fanlight."

This was three paragraphs instead of one. My fingers won't do any more now. I love you, my sweet, but it is beginning to rain and I must go to my own tent and go to bed.

Goodnight, Darling.

Peter

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