

Dear Anna *(an attempt at writing in the second person)*

Dear Anna

Your letters are eagerly anticipated by myself. Your mother, on the other hand, is so strangely tight lipped when I try to speak to her of you, that I'm left wondering what must have occurred between you both at the time of your hasty departure. Your touring trip to Tuscany was a wonderful idea at the time but you do seem to have been gone from home for a very long time and your over hasty departure was somewhat unseemly. Your mother is still disinclined to speak of you although I know she too awaits your every correspondence. She does not seem surprised, as I am, that so many months pass between letters. Is the continental postal system so bad?

I know you will conduct yourself in a manner befitting of your social status. I recall your excitement those many months ago when you accepted Harrods's invitation to become exclusive fashion consultant to the elite of London. And Oh! The respect with which your fellow consultants viewed you.

Your tale of discomfort and seasickness aboard ship was graphic and to say the least harrowing .. and why do you persist in writing vertically and horizontally on your pages? .. as though writing paper was in short supply. Your news that you were aboard ship at all is most surprising. One was under the impression that Italian touring was a land based activity, albeit including the odd donkey ride to visit remote alpine lakes. Perhaps your sea voyage is to the Greek Islands where of course you will glean much valuable history.

You mentioned that you suffered a great deal from dysentery and the crowded damp of your quarters on board ship. Dear girl, had you only asked I would have happily given you the wherewithal to travel first class. What was your mother thinking of in letting you go in the first place.

Your description of the flogging of sailors was unbelievable. One would think that passengers would be carefully shielded from such practices. You do have a creative bent and I can only think that your imagination was running wild. Beautifully crafted in a literary sense but I worry that you may have been feverish and given to hallucinations. I quote, " His ability to absorb the horrendous lashings metered out by his fellow sailors was nothing short of unbelievable. His composure and genial spirit left us unified and more determined than ever to overcome any adversity placed before us." What are you telling us?

Ah! Here is Harriet with fresh flowers for the drawing room. I must away to help her.

Your confused Grandmamma.

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Dear Anna

It is a great relief to hear that you are safe and well after such a frightening experience. Shipwrecked no less! It is fortunate that the incident occurred so close to your destination where shipping is ever on the move. And fancy being rescued by our arch enemies, the French. I had heard from reliable sources that the French fleet had already left the Mediterranean. You say they were most civil and delivered you all to your intended destinations. You also tell me that your prowess as an educated woman was highly sought after by your rescuers, the ship's ornithologist sequestering your services as his assistant and recorder for the duration of the trip back to safety. I'm sure your skills as an artist were also most useful. There you'd be perched on your stool, biting your lip and sketching furiously. I do hope you will have some drawings of the birds of the Mediterranean when you finally set foot on home soil again. And to think that your own brother's ship may have come upon your rescue vessel and opened fire totally unaware of your demise.

The light is fading so I will end this letter now. Cook is poorly so Harriet has been filling in in the kitchen. Hence the gas lights have not yet been lit. Do take care my darling.

Your very relieved Grandma

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Dear Anna

At last! A letter after so many long months of worry. What is all this about "local inhabitants". We're all familiar with the peasantry of rural Tuscany and of course the Romani .. colourful people and no mistake but we don't refer to them as "indigenous" and they don't generally run about barefoot.

The township you write about sounds odious – water from a “Tank Stream”, pollution and rubbish everywhere, soldiers and “*ticket of leavers*” wandering the streets, no street lamps. In fact, from what you have written I could almost read that the term “*ticket of leave*” can be applied to yourself. What pray does it mean? Why is there such a strong military presence? And who are these felons you mention? I strongly advise that you come home immediately.

Your increasingly concerned Grandmother

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Dear Anna

Two years of worry but thankfully your mother appears now to be considerably more at ease regarding your life choices. I think she may soon feel that she can speak about you without sadness. You have obviously taken up land in Tuscany. Your description of your “*land grant*” was most uplifting.

“*Land grant*” – another strange term. It is almost as though the English language is evolving before my aging eyes. Oh and little Jimmy? James please Anna, You know how much I dislike shortened names. You refer to him as “a mischievous little chap with a sunny disposition. Quite like his father.” You wouldn’t wed without consulting the family would you? I realise that you no longer have a father figure but your mother and I are worldly people.

You say you have been picking up many new skills and learning how to cope in a very different environment. Do tell me more of this and of the interesting people you are meeting.

You also speak enthusiastically of your olive and orange groves and how much interest others take in your “ventures”. And sheep? I suppose Tuscany is as good a place as any to run sheep. What on earth are you doing?

Ah .. Harriet has arrived with my broth. My poor digestion causes me to eat carefully now days.

My thoughts are with you my Darling. Do take care.

Your loving old Granny

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Dear Anna! How really wonderful to see you again, to hug and touch you. You poor little soul. What a harrowing experience for you! ... Let me look at you. Well I must say that I have never seen you looking so well -- strong, sun tanned and obviously happy. And what a lovely silk scarf you are wearing. That you can present yourself so well in this alien place does you credit. You have lost nothing of your upbringing.

Thank you, I managed the sea voyage quite well. I’m a tough old dog remember. But to be truthful, I’m am very glad to put my feet back on terra firma after so many months. Do introduce me to this handsome man on your arm. And to think that I laboured under the misbelieve that you were settled somewhere in Tuscany and too absorbed in your own ventures to come home even to visit your family. But I have brought you a special wedding present; a salute to your life in old England. Do you see those woolly heads in the longboat yonder – Yes James my lad. A dozen particularly well bred merinos. They are very special since they constitute all you will be able to inherit from our life at home.

Dear Anna! Your brother is now acquainted with your whereabouts. He is hoping to voyage here himself in the near future. But you ask how long we can stay. Your mother and I are not going back to England. We have nothing. The banks have foreclosed on us and the house has been sold up. Here we are, with all that we possess. I think I will enjoy helping you build your future here.

You know I really did enjoy telling my snooty friends at the bridge club that I was forsaking them for a life raising sheep in the antipodes. Oh and should you be needing a few extra shillings for new shoes for young er .. Jimmy here ----- the hem of my travelling cloak Anna Dear!

Letters from the estate of Lady Muriel Hornseby-Campbell

Late of “Somerford Booths Hall”, Cheshire, England

More recently of “Merino Downs”, Parramatta, Australia

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