

10 April 1817  
11 Berkeley Square

Dear Cecy,

If you've been forced to listen to Reverend Fitzwilliam on the subject of the emptiness of worldly pleasures for hours together, I feel I ought to write something bracing to cheer you up. (As for the Vanities of Society, it would take a confirmed cricketer to fully understand them -- and I trust once the weather turns fair our good reverend will spend his afternoons out on the pitch where he longs to be instead of indoors boring the earrings off harmless young ladies.) But after three days of a London Season I find it hard to come to the defense of frivolity with any spirit. Perhaps it will make Rushton seem more amusing to you if I complain vigorously. (Don't worry, I haven't said a word to anyone else, not even Georgina.)

First, there was our arrival in Berkeley Square, a very welcome event after a day spent in the coach with Aunt Charlotte complaining of her migraine and Georgina exclaiming, "Only look, a sedan chair!" at every opportunity. It was very late and we were very tired and soiled with our travels, too weary to feel the proper emotions on entering such a grand house for the first time. (Horace Walpole is by no means Aunt Charlotte's favorite author, but the opportunity to hire his London town house for the Season has given her a new appreciation for him and his works.)

Make no mistake, it is very grand. On the outside it is a high, narrow, polite looking house built of brick. On the inside there is a high-ceilinged entrance hall with a marble staircase winding up two flights. On either side of the hall are reception rooms. The one on the right is called the blue saloon. It is very comfortable with a bow window overlooking the Square. On the left side of the hall is the drawing room, much grander than the blue saloon, furnished with lyre-back chairs, delicate sofas and a spinet. There are velvet drapes in the windows and a highly polished marble floor, upon which I slipped and sat down hard as we were being shown about the house. This was my first piece of clumsiness in London, but I suspect it will not be my last. The general effect of the marble floor and ivory drapes is almost arctic. Only touches of primrose and black relieve the whiteness. At the top of the two flights of stairs are the bedrooms. Georgina's looks out over the Square and mine faces back into the lane behind the house. If I crane my neck I can see down into the kitchen garden -- but there is nothing much to look at. Nothing to compare with the gardens at Rushton.

It seemed like a dream to me, following Georgina up and up the stairs -- she like a kind of angel climbing to her proper place, her golden hair bright in the light from the lamps -- me like a ramshackle shadow lurking after her, shedding hairpins and stumbling over the hem of my skirts.

The bedrooms are lovely, but that night they seemed grand and cold and I was a little dismayed to find myself in my own room all alone -- can you credit it, after I schemed for years to get a room to myself? So I slipped in to Georgina to say good night and get my top buttons undone. Georgina was sitting at her window, trying to guess from the darkened glass what direction she was facing so she could say her prayers toward home. I turned her around and

didn't tease her, even when I saw the lock of hair she had clenched in her moist little palm -- Oliver's, tied up in a bit of pink ribbon. Can you believe it?

Well, as I say, I got her pointed in the right direction and she got me unbuttoned and told me that I had a smut rubbed clear across my forehead and a spot coming on my chin. (As if I hadn't been driven half mad feeling it coming out all day long in the coach . . .) So we parted, she to her prayers and I to my bed, the highest, hardest, narrowest, dampest bed on four lion's paws (London would be grander still if they knew how to air their sheets.)

Our first day in London was spent shopping, which means I kicked my heels while Aunt Charlotte and the modiste went into raptures over Georgina. The second day we were taken to see the Elgin Marbles, which was interesting, and to listen to other people see the Elgin Marbles, which would make the eyes roll right back in your head with boredom. The third day we went back to shopping and I was able to get gloves. Please find enclosed a pair which I think will suit your pomona-green crape to perfection. I bought a pair for myself and have spilt coffee on them already. So you see London hasn't changed me yet.

I feel quite envious about Lady Tarleton's dance. Aunt Charlotte has spoken of Almack's but never yet without looking at me and giving a little shudder of apprehension. She intends to call on Lady Jersey tomorrow. If their acquaintance has been exaggerated (and you know that sometimes people do not care quite as much for Aunt Charlotte as she thinks they do) I don't know how we will obtain vouchers. It is plain, however, that without vouchers for Almack's Assembly, Georgy will never truly shine in society, no matter how lovely she is. For my own sake, I hope I get to go too. It would be a shame to have trodden Robert Penwood's feet black and blue learning to dance and then never to get a chance to put it to the test.

Do you think a wizard's installation would be a lady-like thing to attend? We passed the Royal College on the way to the Museum and I'm sure I could find my way.

Do tell me all about the dance and mention Oliver a little so Georgina doesn't sigh herself away entirely.

Love,  
Kate