(Write To You) Another Letter

Dear Gabe,

After your phone call last night
I was able to picture you
on the train, a little past rush hour.
The train had sounded empty,
& you were able to talk freely,
so I pictured ‘no-one-about’. We heard
the regular chime—
& the automated voice declare
‘Southern Line’.

Because we know a summery London
I saw light, & pale sun,
on empty, clean, railway stations,
shrubs, an easy air—
 tho I realised later, if it wasn’t
snowing exactly, it was at least cold
& liable to rain. Our most recent
pictures of you—of you & Stace—show you two
on a pleasant day, at an
outdoor table with Greg & Jen. You
both look relaxed & self-possessed,
amusing & amused. Stace is mugging
(a term from mid-century—or earlier—
the comedian’s equivalent of vamping, of
pulling old tricks shamelessly like a musician

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finding conventional patterns
to make up an accompaniment,
improvised,
sufficient to the moment
he has been thrown into).
(Why use this term?)
(Ken—revise!)
Stacey—beautiful, lovely—is smiling, bats
her eyes for the camera, & defers to you
who amusedly acknowledge
that same camera—or
the situation—tho resisting
the imperative brought with it—
to smile, to pose. It makes
you both seem cool & sophisticated.
The best ways to seem, surely.
#

Greg & Jen’s kids
think you are both those things,
to the nth degree, & you won’t
have let them down, which is important.
Anyway, I love the photos—there are two—& another pair
showing you with the boys, & Greg & Jen,
all crossing the novel bridge across the Thames—
what is it called, ‘the walkway,’ the ‘moveable bridge’?
So maybe you were at Tate Modern, or one of the
pubs or coffee shops further along. That we ourselves
have been to, so I can imagine them,
tho maybe you were elsewhere.
I guess you had us pegged—
Cath had one receiver & I the other, to take the call: we were
at home
(& it is the house you grew up in). It
changes regularly but you’ve seen it in its
current conformation, even the latest painting,
Kurt’s ‘Eurydice in the Underworld—or Debbie’
—some beautiful powdery pale blues, &
hilarious, cartoon, thirties cubism, of
the Return to Order period. It sings away,
trills almost—against the blotchy
muted salmon pink of that wall, the wall you know.

Not that you’d have pictured us under it

or near it, even, probably. The lounge room. Funny
what one does picture—or think—
during phone calls—but one does it more,
that I am certain of, for overseas calls—
because they mean more.

So I saw you in the train.

It would be good to have you back home—
or to be over there with you is the
alternative. That would be good too.
Did you like my poem about the San Calisto?
Maybe we could have a drink there, a
drink & a natter. A few weeks in Rome,
with you—& Stacey there, too—would be good.
Not necessarily at the San Calisto. Tho it
is easy to find. I see us at a San Calisto table. (You look
very much as you do in this photo—surprise,
surprise—as does Stacey, & as I see it from my point of view I do not see myself.

*Two Weeks In Another Town* was a not very good novel & a bad & unintentionally funny film: an American in Europe, up against all its shocking amorality, venality & corruption: Kirk Douglas playing a guy brought in to save a failing director, get the movie back in production, on budget, & quickly in the can. Italy. You can imagine. Well, you can’t. I can. The world is spared, today, much exposure to Kirk at full throttle. It was possibly an attempt to make something like *La Dolce Vita*, but understandable-for-Americans, & with a ‘clear moral point of view’—as they used to say, the duller critics. America has slipped a bit in the innocence ratings. But Italy… Berlusconi might have stepped right out of Kirk Douglas’s nightmare.

That said, Shall we go?

It may be that we won’t. The duller critics are back! One of the dullest now runs things in the Australia Council—so, *no money for me* in the foreseeable future. No travel. No Italy.

There is no news. I mean, you’re up-to-date—nothing to tell of news from here. It seems so ridiculous to be my age that, tho I feel okay, one can’t help thinking about it. I would certainly like
to see you more,
partly to draw light
from your energy & attitudes,
or to feel more myself, as I do
when there is someone like you around—
to explain myself to.
Tho did I, do I, ever do that? No,
fun is all I want. Old movies, too. Notionally.
(Would I watch them?)

What I am doing now, is sitting up late,
with an old tape, of older jazz—Coltrane, Miles,
Dolphy, Jimmy Forrest’s ‘Night Train’ etcetera—
while I write.

I picture the room
in its many guises, over the 20 or more years
I’ve sat here fooling round—time running out,
but slowed by the process, checked, slowed
right down—me & the room, the house adjusting
as the night cools—an insect butts
the window occasionally. I decide to turn the tape over again,
or don’t decide but listen & write, alone, close, in a way,
to you in London, SE14—5NW, UK
as the first buses of the morning
probably, roll past your house, at about this time.
And school kids soon will start walking up Jerningham Street
& young mums will appear & you will play guitar a bit,
& then get to work

Ken Bolton