

# The Red Kite

May, 25, 1927

My dearest, you were right. While London is indeed the throbbing heart of commerce, it can be stifling in its intimacy and I long for air and light and space. It is all very well for you to tell me to settle down and persevere when you have the lulling waves of the idyllic Mediterranean coast and its soothing lullaby to comfort you.

And what have I? Permanent drizzle, the incessant noise of traffic, and the paper thin walls of a lacklustre apartment (a lurid combination of colours and textures with furniture that appears to have been rescued from a crumbling mansion - my love, I daresay you would be quite horrified by its lack of attention to detail).

It is better for you to be a bloated creature than like I in my present state; a shell, a husk, a vessel waiting to be filled. I lack shape without you, a half of a whole, incomplete and obsolete. I occupy my time with meetings and small talk, while at night I dream of your fingers and the ocean and of those little almond cakes from the patisserie (currant buns and jam tarts cannot compare - believe me, sweetness, I have tried.)

There is one small thing, however, that has brought me some joy in your absence - a memory from many weeks ago I thought would fade but which has instead grown strong like a sapling straining for the sun. It was during the train journey up to London, the carriage shuttling past endless green valleys, the sky above heavy with white and greys, light and dark, like the surface of a silver birch tree. A shape caught my

eye out of the window - it was a Red Kite, a glorious specimen, and the first I had seen since childhood.

I would like to write that the bird soared and swooped and swung on the breeze like an acrobat, but it did not. It hung in the air as if on an invisible wire, quite miraculous in its defeat of gravity and most calming to watch in its patience and solitude. It had, of course, been instantly recognisable by its tail, shaped like an angular arrow chiselled from flint and balanced by an immense wingspan. Its plumage was not red but deep chestnut with white patches that appeared as two glaring eyes - a quite terrifying sight for its prey below.

I had reached into my satchel to retrieve a sketchbook and pencil, taking one or two minutes only, but when I looked outside again the bird had gone. I tried to draw its outline from memory but something was not quite right, as if I could not remember its true form, only a version of it - too sharp and too rigid. It had seemed so distinct, so vivid, its symmetrical silhouette dominating an otherwise barren abyss, yet it had managed to vanish like a raindrop absorbed. After it had disappeared, I blinked into the space for as long as the journey allowed but the vision did not resurface.

Do you think there might be such birds in Port Vendres, my dear? Do you look to the sky and see wild things floating as if by magic? Can you remember their outlines or are they too fleeting? I know what you are thinking - that I should already have had my sketchbook on my lap. Rest assured, it has now taken up a new home in the front pocket of my blazer, though I know I shall never see my feathered friend again.

Instead, I dream that he is travelling to you just in time for your birthday, so that you can see him from the wide bay window of our sitting room and wonder, as had I, how such beauty can exist. Do you think Red Kites enjoy almond cakes? I would think that they do. Even you cannot resist their sticky crumb.

Stay true to me, my bloated creature, and when you miss me the most simply look to the sky - paint me in with your imagination, suspended by a thread, as perhaps I had done with the Red Kite that day.

Ever yours, Margaret