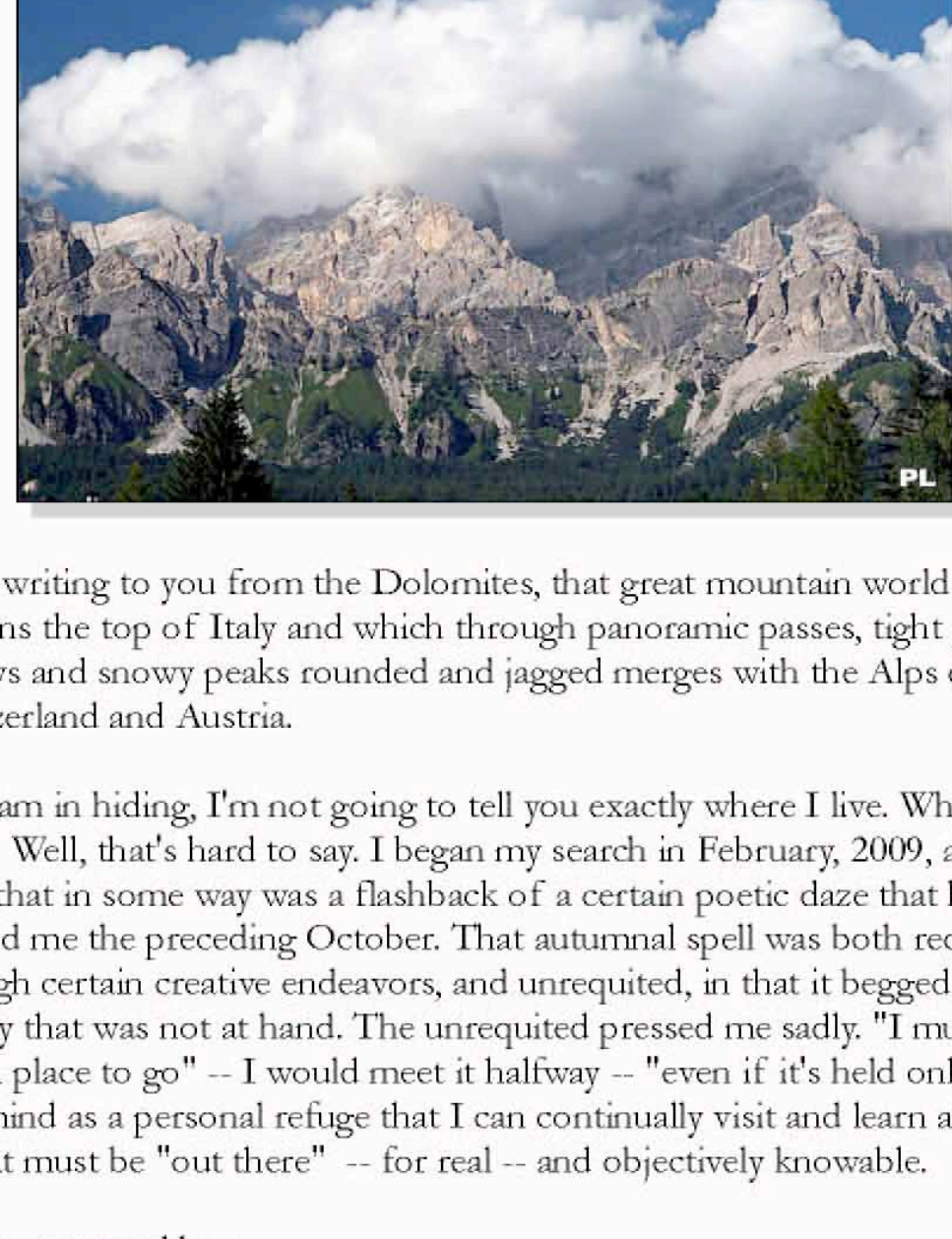


At home in the Italian Alps - Peter Lucia



I am writing to you from the Dolomites, that great mountain world that crowns the top of Italy and which through panoramic passes, tight green valleys and snowy peaks rounded and jagged merges with the Alps of Switzerland and Austria.

As I am in hiding, I'm not going to tell you exactly where I live. Why do I hide? Well, that's hard to say. I began my search in February, 2009, a period that in some way was a flashback of a certain poetic daze that had visited me the preceding October. That autumnal spell was both requited, though certain creative endeavors, and unrequited, in that it begged for a reality that was not at hand. The unrequited pressed me sadly: "I must find a real place to go" -- I would meet it halfway -- "even if it's held only in my mind as a personal refuge that I can continually visit and learn about." Yes, it must be "out there" -- for real -- and objectively knowable.

And not around here.

Snow-palace -- not around here -- scattered in the lap of a sober mountain quorum. I am there and so are you -- right around here -- and festive folks we do not know -- wondering by the pine-fire warm and scented raging beneath the trophies and the unsurprising antlers. What halls and corridors lead to what and where? Do we face above us Sharp Peak or Old Smoothy, Double One -- the one that rolls -- or Strangely Notched? No one wants to know for sure or cares exactly. Look: the illuminated galaxy clock -- tiny colored lights sipped soundless in and out on infinite black -- knotty pine around the bar where more gold cups reside reflecting Christmas tree and garland in the darkish rustic rafters. Then outside under frozen stars on some bistro deck angled who knows where in relation to what: The dark summits for all we knew could have revolved without our knowing -- and so too could the lighted window levels above and below us change perhaps arrangement and shape behind our minds. This formation-thrill enthruses music and incites: we climbed from the rambling central scheme and circuitously through moon-lit mountain snow-paths and their trellises of holly -- the spattering of chat and song fading fading nearly out. Then -- listen -- "Joy to the world" elsewhere down the zone and now up -- dainty as snowflakes -- up? -- could it be? -- bells. We felt that all -- or much -- was in our power -- so on a whim back we were in another angled who-knows-where: white-tiled white-countered white-curtained little girl's soda shop I guess or some such mirrored place brighted against nighttime windows.

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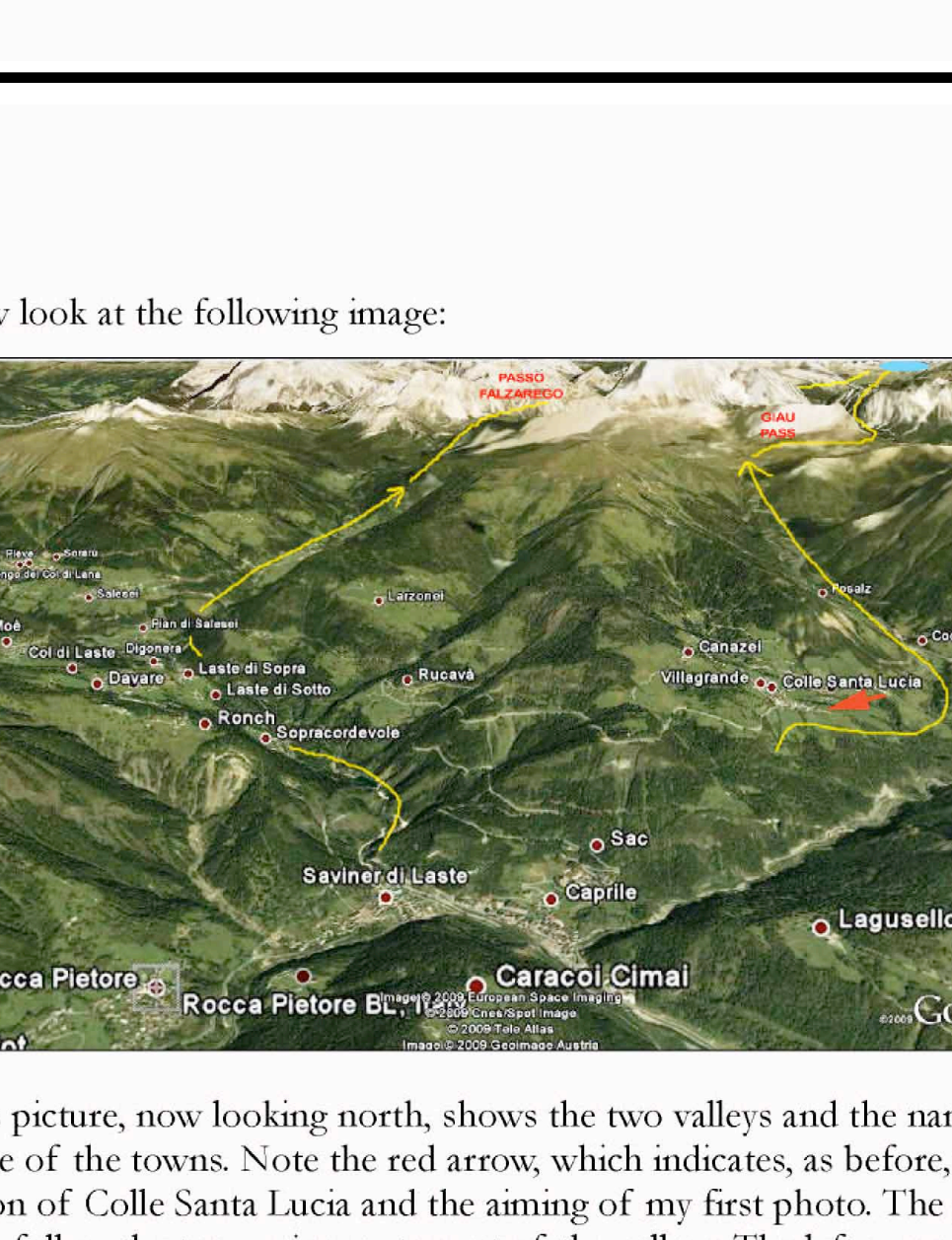
Why we half expected Rodgers Astaire and a corps of chorines to take the place. Might well they have -- had we stayed -- and so with thoughts of our rooms all comfy notwithstanding -- back to our mountain ways we dashed -- could very well have dove through a breach or something: graceful canopy above the platform -- eggshell lamps on Corinthian posts lining silent silver rails -- with everything half-lit but sharp and clean like a plastic model -- deserted too -- hushed. It's here we must have disembarked -- who knows when? -- where all had disembarked. Remember that nearly toy-like antique train? ...had disembarked. But where? Listen: "God rest ye merry gentlemen" -- far away -- beyond the overlooking shoulder -- the dark rolling ridge looming behind the vacant depot. Yes... Let's climb back now. Let us find again some secret corridors to crawl through -- warm with windows to undiscovered rooms -- not around here.

Or something like that.

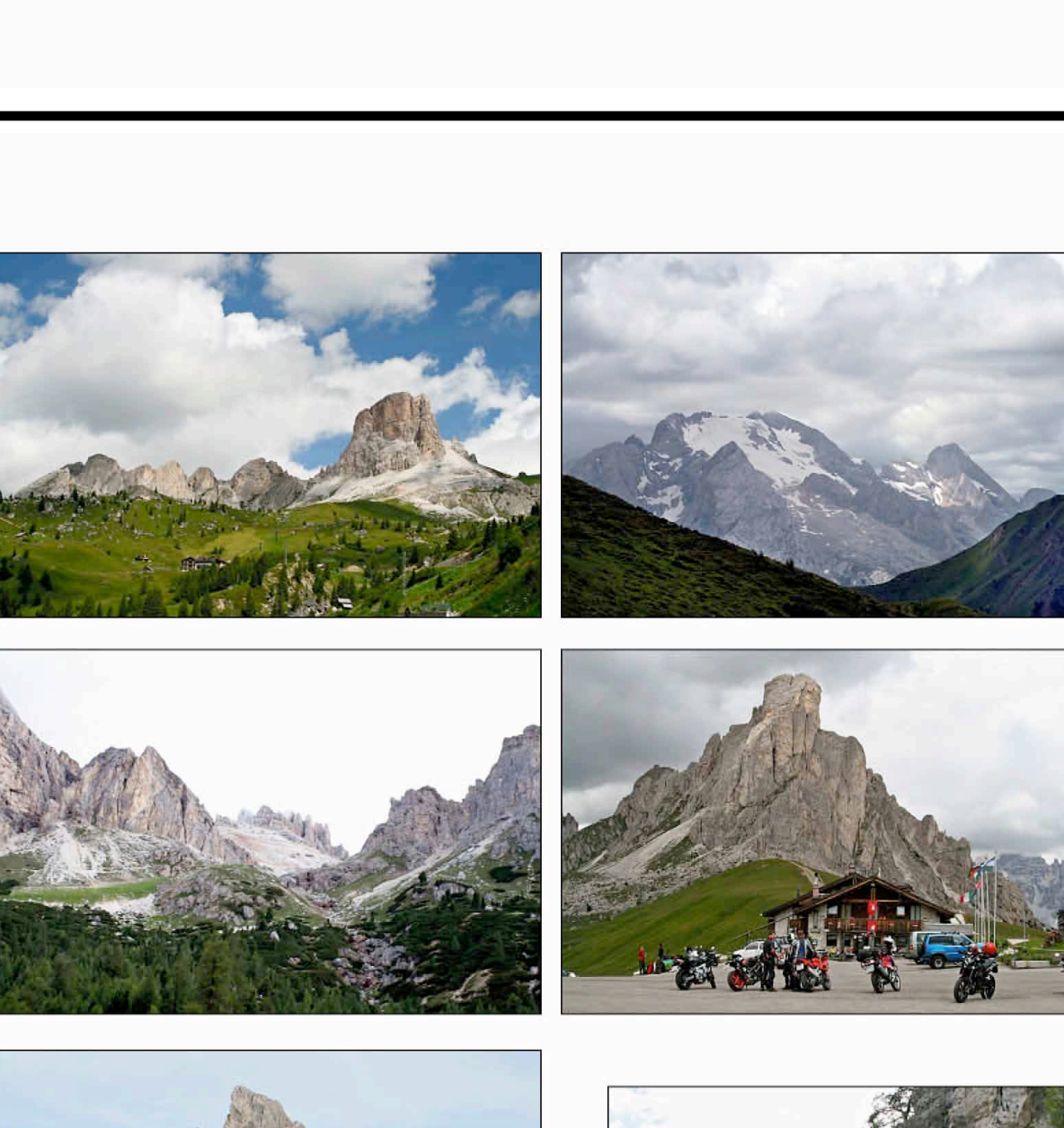
The poem as a particular American quality, a certain magical Christmassy comfort, which I like; but in reality I was looking for something farther away. I knew it had to be Italy, since I have many soulful connections, including language, to that country. Ah, yes, the Dolomites! Different, this zone, from the usual "O sole mio" Italy and for that reason all the more fascinating and removed, but still Italy. "Right around here; not around here."

And so I studied the satellite maps. I compared one place to another, as if choosing a tie, formed little competitions; looked at images side by side over several weeks. Then I chose. At last I had my mental refuge. This was my place, my new home.

Have a look at the following photo:



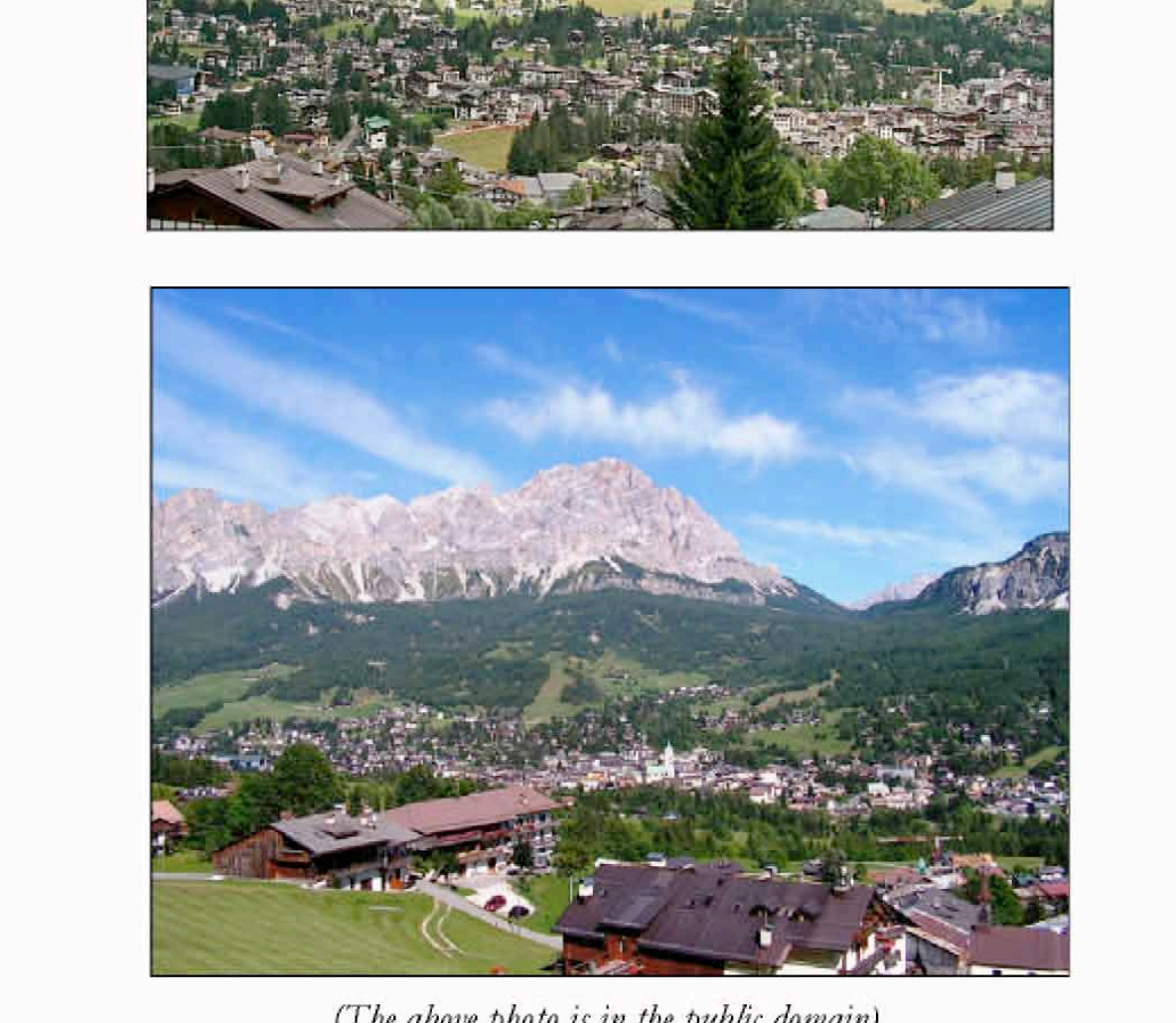
This enthralling little town is called Colle Santa Lucia (don't assume that the name reveals where I am stationed). I include this photo not only because of the beauty it demonstrates, but to introduce the valley below, which is just beyond the grassy hill you see in the photo. Here is that valley:



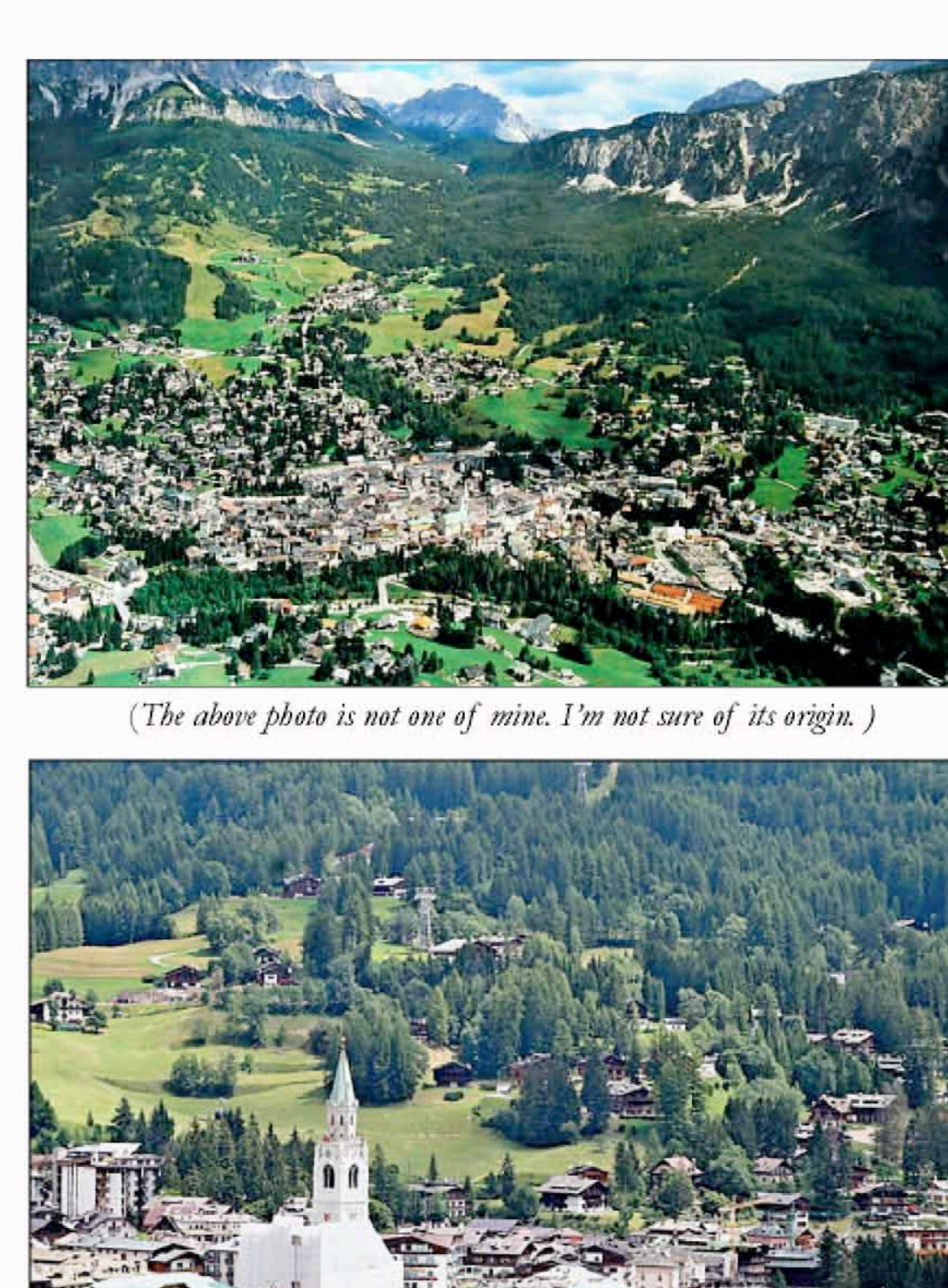
The image above shows the Val Pettorina (Pettorina Valley), looking west. The red arrow at the lower right shows where I was (and how I aimed) when I took the photo of Colle Santa Lucia. Dozens of little towns pepper the valley and the neighboring hills: Capile, Rocca Pietore, Saviner di Laste, Bosco Verde, Cot, Ronch, Laste di Sopra and Laste di Sotto... At the end of the valley there is the Serrai di Sottoguda (the Gorge of Sottoguda) which is fascinating to explore. The light-colored mountain in the background is la Marmolada, the highest peak in the Dolomites.

You can just make out a second valley, slightly hidden in this image. It is the Val Cordevole, which crosses the Val Pettorina from north to south (or from right to left).

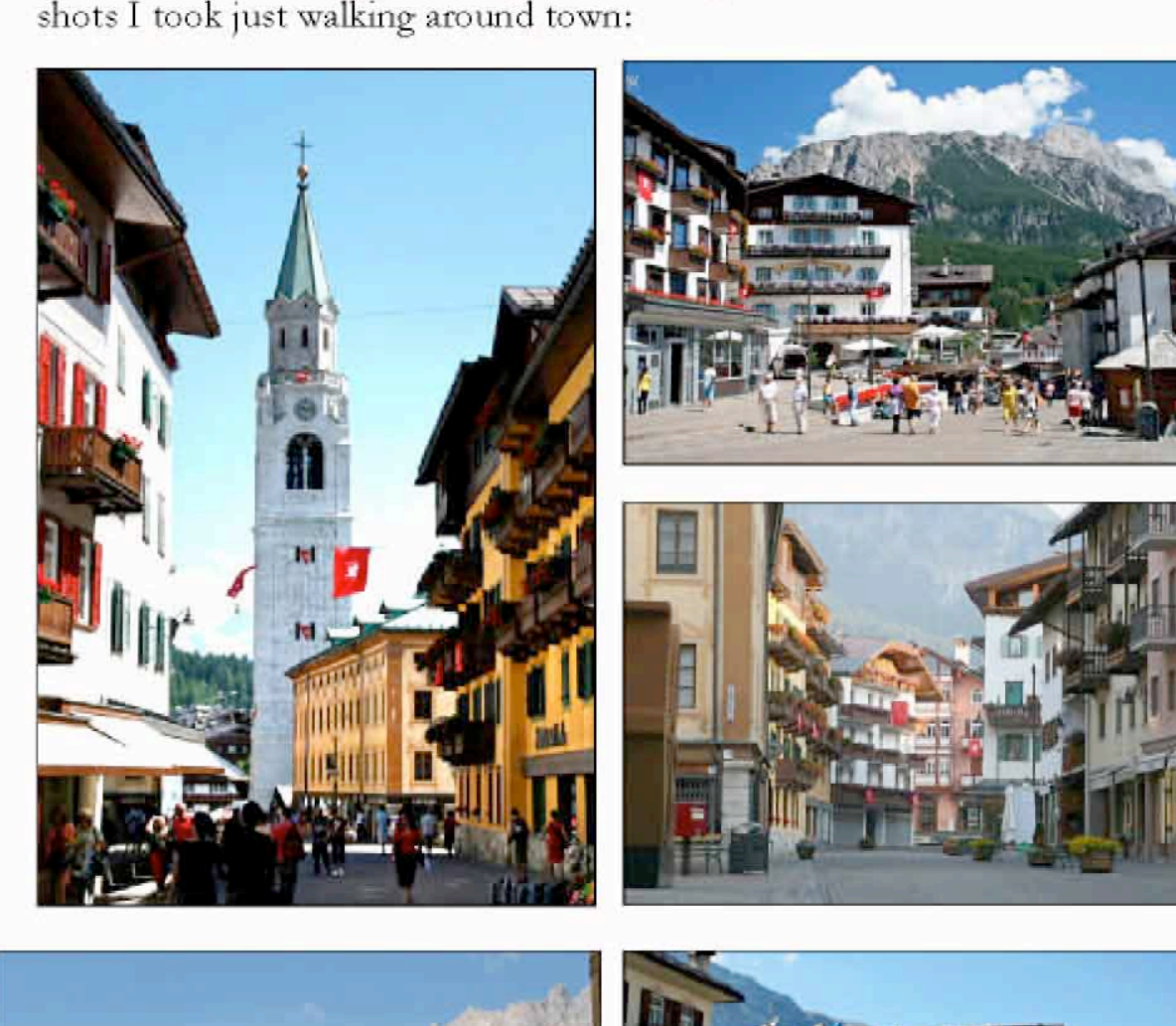
Here are a few photos I took of the area:



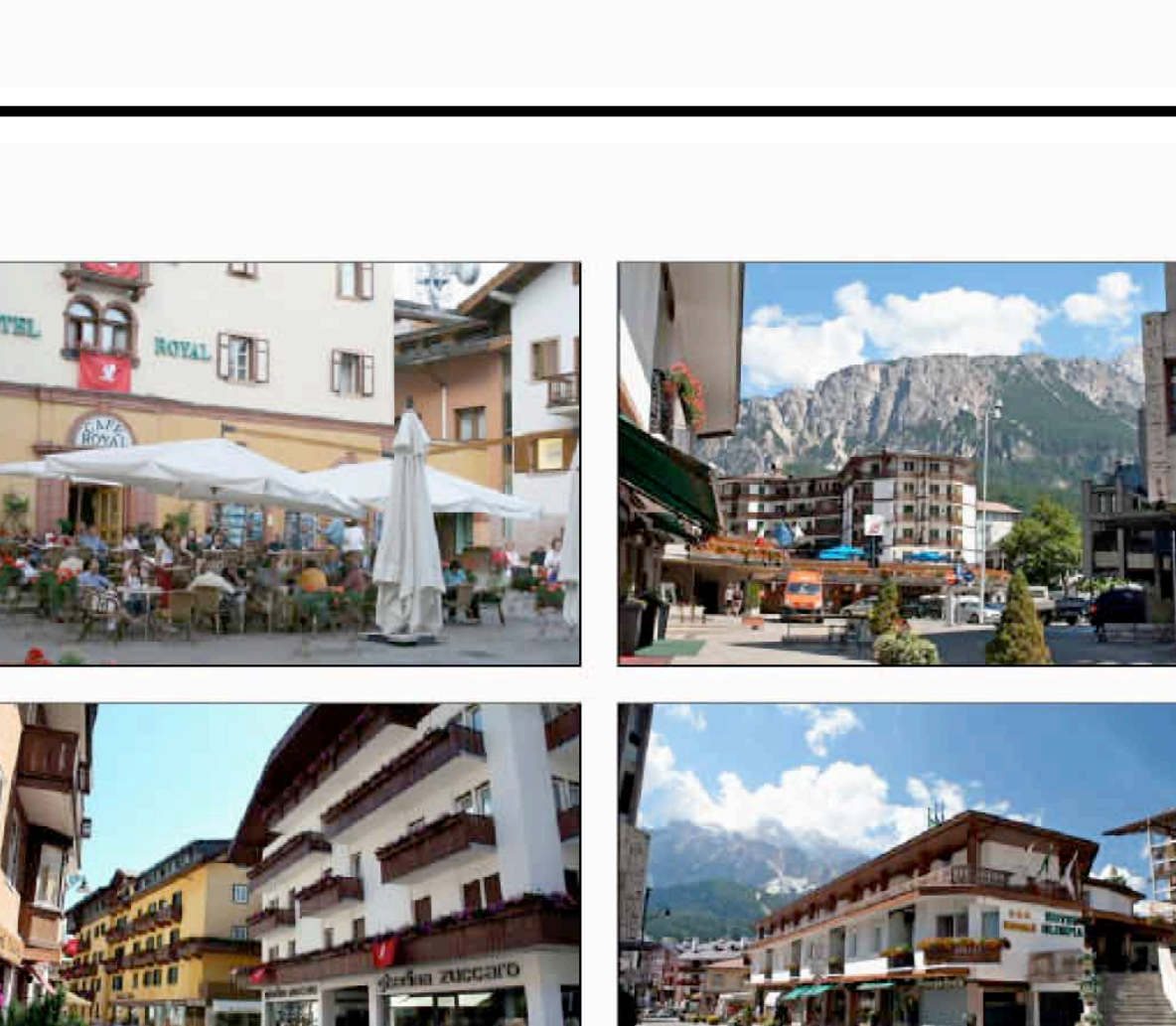
Now look at the following image:



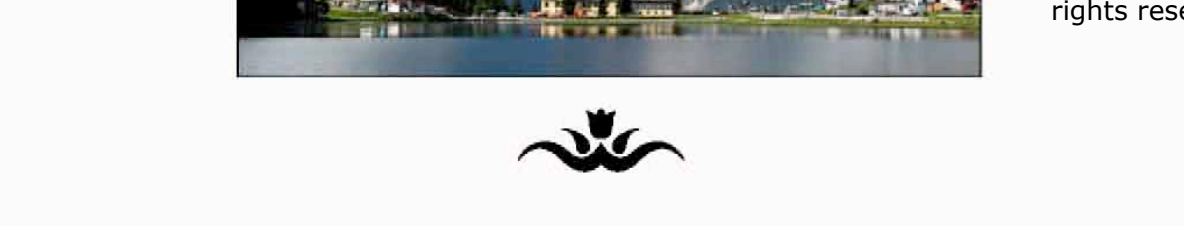
This picture, now looking north, shows the two valleys and the names of some of the towns. Note the red arrow, which indicates, as before, the location of Colle Santa Lucia and the aiming of my first photo. The yellow lines follow the two major routes out of the valleys. The left one eventually crosses the Falzarego Pass and the right one the Giau Pass. Both can get you to the same place -- Cortina d'Ampezzo, the well-known ski resort (light blue oval). Here are a few photos I took while traveling the routes:



As I said, either of the two routes I indicated can lead you Cortina d'Ampezzo. This town rests in the Valle d'Ampezzo. Its elevation is a little over 4,000 feet and its population is a little over 6,000. Mountains completely surround it and for this reason it has become one of the most famous ski resorts in the world (it hosted, in fact, the 1956 Winter Olympics). Approaching it, you encounter the following views of the town:



So that's the way it is. I am currently ensconced in the world I have just described (though I'll keep to myself where I am exactly). This is my new neighborhood. Because of the way I found it, I have to regard it as my new spiritual home, one that functions less in memory and more in the present. Yet, as ever, the mental flashes come from all of time, both personal and universal -- fleeting chips of days remembered and unremembered, each charged with the fullness of life and something of Eternity.



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