

Monday July 25th

Dear John,

Papa has gone off to visit a patient and I am quite alone here. Alex and Mother return tomorrow. I will ask Alec then about routes etc.

Perhaps I have just finished reading a novel of Andre Gide "les Faux-Monnayeurs." Because I do not always underst and the meaning of a sentence on first reading, and because I linger a little over the sounds and idioms, the story and the ideas seize me more than many books. There is a good deal in it that I am not sure I understand; perhaps it is not meant to be understood; people and relationships are explored only delicately and partially.

I have been so immersed in the book and so solitary (except in the office, and that is also a kind of solitude) that I find myself talking French to the cat and the fish and the hamsters. And when I think of people whom I should like to see or to whom I should like to write, I begin my letter in French. There are things that I could say so much more easily in a language ~~the~~ the edges of which I had not carelessly worn off in saying things only half-thought or felt. And yet that is not the whole story. I also imagine myself free of some of the leadenness and awkwardness of the English-speaking self. Words are magic and as dangerous as most magic; Rilke says something about this at the end of the eighth letter.

I read most of the "Letters" over quickly again last night. When I first read them, about three years ago, there was much that was beautiful and that toughed me, but which I understand so much better ~~know~~. But the general tone still leaves me unsatisfied. I cannot explain it better than to say that I want a range that extends the complete distance between gaiety and despair but which rests most of the time in a serenity which is not melancholy. Some of Kierkegaard satisfies me in this way.

I feel very calm and peaceful. Working in Papa's office has been good for me. There is very little that I can do for him. If I answer the

telephone it is only to relay a message, to postpone something which he himself must do. He is not an easy person to work for; so many questions must be asked over and over in different forms until they get an answer. He takes the question in, meditates on it, and the answer may come just as one has gone on in despair to something else. The nurse who gives many of the doses is a gentle, sad, diffident creature who still finds it difficult to think in percentages and is terrified by the fact--or by him, I don't know which. He tries to soothe her with assurances, but she scurries away like the White Rabbit.

Many of the patients have known each other for years; they occupied beds in the Research Department or met in the Waiting room. The first couple of days I felt horribly awkward under their mild scrutiny. Now I perform the same tasks, probably with no more skill, and feel that I fit the pattern. The patients talk about baseball, the weather, their husbands, wives and children--very rarely about the only thing they all have in common, their sickness. Tuesday Aug

Days have passed, but very little has happened since this letter was begun. My party was pleasant and my friends were pleasant, but the event was not significant, nor is my life, "la vie intense" transformed. However, I feel calm and unstriving, something between resignation and happiness. The time spent with my friends last weekend showed me that I had changed a little, that they had also changed. I think that one of the chief reasons that I need to be with people--those that I know well and those that I know casually is that, ^{often} only in such relationships (as if in a laboratory experiment) am I sure what I am and how I have changed.

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My job at the hospital is over. I lead a different physical life and the emotional and intellectual content is also different - not so different as it would be if I had not the framework of ~~recent experiences~~ the weekend past and the week to come. Meanwhile Mother and I are cleaning the attic and cooking together. I am reading "Les Thibaults" de Roger Martin du ~~1914~~ 6

Your letter arrived this morning. Alex and I crouched on the kitchen floor to study the map. He groans loudly about the scenic and lengthy route, but I think a lot of this is for comic effect; we must play our roles. We think it would be difficult to plan to meet you in Marion since we do not think we can adhere to any ~~time~~ schedule - so we will simply hope to arrive Saturday afternoon or evening before dark.

Your sister writes a short, friendly, and indefinite letter. She says that she cannot come with us but that she is "looking forward" to seeing us at Konnarock. I am sorry that she can't come with us. A long trip makes a good background for conversation.

The idea of a couple of days in the Great Smoky Mountains seems beautiful. We will see.... It is possible that Papa will go down to visit friends in Orange, Virginia and will wish

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to be driven back Friday or Saturday. Our plans
are always so tentative when they involve him.
Mother is solitarily picking beans so I must
go to help her. I wish that I had the generous
-or perhaps it was simply nervous- élan that used
to make doing these household tasks easy and even
interesting. I feel useless and uninteresting because
uninterested - an empty pitcher. I hope I will bring
more than that to Kinnarock.

Margaret.