

July 29, 1949

Dear Margaret,

It is 11:00'clock now, father is just listening to the news, and the crackling caused by a near-by thunderstorm is coming through much more emphatically than the oily monotone of the commentator. By your time it is midnight already, your birthday is over, and your party is going through the final stages of dissolution, - or not yet? Once or twice tonight my imagination visited you and Alex, your parents and Janet. It was puzzled by so many people and discouraged with so much conversation. It left early, before the party really got underway, without attracting any more notice than the gleam of light reflected from the window panes or the sound of a car going by outside.

I sit at the typewriter listening to the silence and watching the insects enchanted by the light, - poor fools. Father asks me when I will go to bed, and I tell him that it will take time to finish my letter. He misunderstands, - not because of the letter, but because of the silence which wants to speak, which is drowned out by the typewriter's noise. Even the creek that flows from the mountains and has so very far to go until it reaches the sea adds its own stillness to the murmuring silence.

A bug, perhaps protesting against this vein of thought, is crawling into the left side of my typewriter. I want to answer your letter which arrived this morning, to thank you first of all for coming, and then to tell you that your plans suit my family. Only one thing I wanted to ask about, the length of your stay. If the suggested "three or four days" are merely a precautionary, designed to make a premature departure graceful one, and if they are capable of being doubled or tripled, by discussion or persuasion, such discussion or persuasion ~~can~~ wait until you get here. If you were serious, however, about staying only three or four days, we might have to "compromise." I don't want to interfere with your family's vacation plans, but I should hope you would want to stay longer. As a matter of fact, I had thought if you wanted to we might spend two or three days in the Great Smoky Mountains; they are very beautiful and only four hours away.

I shall be neither disappointed nor offended

You and Alec must decide how long you want to stay. The calendar, I think, is only a refined ~~xxx~~ means of self-deception and the significance of days is certainly not in their number. But my sister Margrit will be very much bored when you have left and I have started to read Aristotle. I shall write her tonight suggesting that perhaps she would rather stay in Pennsylvania. Margrit will come anyway, I think, but she will blame me for her boredom unless I leave the choice up to her. My purpose in writing this is merely to give you an explanation if Margrit should decide at the last moment not to come.

Why don't you persuade Alex to drive the Skyline Drive from Front Royal to Waynesboro and the Blue Ridge Parkway from Roanoke to Galax and Route 16 from Galax to Marion, if you have time? The Drive and the Parkway are extraordinarily beautiful, but gasoline stations are few and far between. (NB. US 58 between Volney and Koma-rock is only an enlarged cow trail)

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If you arrive by daylight Alex should have no trouble finding the road or staying on it. If you want to, drop me a card telling me when you plan to be in Marion, and I would meet you in the lobby, or you could ask at the desk for a message. I should think that might be nice if Alec were tired, but again the decision is all yours.

Please thank Alec for getting the notes of the Brandenburg Concertos and the St. Matthew Passion for me. I shall talk to him about it when he comes. If he wants to he can bring the wire recorder and I would try to repair it. Ask him please not to forget my the books for me, Aristotle, Plato, vol. 1, Fieser and Fieser, the chemistry lecture notes, and his botany book. If he has time, I wish Alec would get me an "A" and a "G" string, - I sawed through both of them and had to patch.

Since I finished Stendhal I have been doing nothing but practicing violin, in particular the ~~an~~ accompaniment to Judas' aria "Give me back my dearest Master;" it is difficult and much fun to try to play. Tomorrow I shall begin rewriting the first 40 pages of my essay, but by the time you get here I hope to have it finished.

Now I could only find a worthy ending to my letter. But the hum of the dishwasher which is probably working overtime just now is not a worthy ending to a party either. Sometimes I have a strange desire to wash my hands after I have been writing. That is a night-thought and will look silly in broad daylight.

John

(* Hotel Lincoln)