

113 Lakeview Avenue  
Cambridge 38,  
September 28, 1949

Dear Margaret,

The seven days which have passed since I said good-by to the ocean at Mantoloking seem more like seven weeks or seven months, and as I sat down to write you I asked myself how it could be that I had not written you earlier, and then I remembered that only four days have passed since Sunday. I look forward to the next seven days, because they will seem only half as long, and the succeeding fortnights will shrink to such dimensions that I need no longer fear them.

I have been thinking now and again of our conversation about the Magic Mountain and your revulsion against the idea that there is a repetition and a parallelism of events in our lives. I imagine our journeys to be like spirals. The motion is circular, but a third dimension prevents our return to the spot from which we started. That third dimension is time. But we arrive at positions equivalent to earlier ones already passed through. Life is a spiral staircase, and we ascend it painfully and with much moaning, uncertain of the destination, and dizzy from the caverns below. It pleases me occasionally to lean over the banister and look down at the spot where I stood once, to think that if I were now where I was then I could spit myself on the head.

Excuse the vulgarity; I should have avoided it. In this case it is merely an indication of inadequacy to express myself. There is so much to say, and no means to say it. The past days have been very lonely, and thoughts which are eloquent in unspoken soliloqui are coarse and stubborn to be written. I am shamed of those qualities in me which might be called weaknesses, but which are, nevertheless, as much a part of me as qualities of strength. I cannot write about them. What should I say: "I cried a little bit last night," or "It was very depressing," or "I was very gloomy?" The expression of feeling is always sentimental, and yet our feelings are much, much more than sentimentality.

It is better then, that I should not write much. My thoughts travel great circles, and when they have traveled very far, and have seen many strange and fearful sights, and are very tired from all they have seen, they visit you, and are refreshed and happier. There is still much peace about me, and I cherish it. I want it to grow until it covers all things about with a soft white blanket of tranquillity. I thank God for every hour of every day, and the more difficult it is, the more certain I am that it is his. These days that seem interminable, what can they be if not the raw material from which we shape our lives. And their heaviness shall enhance the beauty of the product, its value and its validity.

I think of you often and wish only that your life might be both beautiful and happy. But if it cannot be both, it is better to sacrifice happiness for beauty. Sadness and beauty go well together. There is a way which leads from sadness to solemnity, to serenity, to gladness and ultimately to happiness. I am trying to find it, and I like to think of you as going in the same direction, although I know that this cannot be. The path is inward and very lonely. We must learn to pray, and when you have learned, will you pray for me?

John

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