

Cambridge, November 13, 1949

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Dear Margaret. I seem to have stumbled upon a beautiful idea. I think of you often, without even though it is so late at night. Only the rumble of trolleys in the distance and the timid whisperings of rain falling break the silence of my Sunday evening. The children are all in bed now, and Aunt Priscilla has gone out. Today was one of those futile and endless Sundays of which I told you. The children were in the house most of the day, and I was Aunt Priscilla's last resort at entertainment. I got very little work done, but I had really none at all to do. Biggs played an all-Bach program this morning. He repeated the first trio sonata which we heard him do in Bethlehem and the chorale prelude "A mighty Fortress." As usual I was suffused with a feeling of reverent happiness for the music, but Nicky, who listened to it over the radio, thought it "stunk." . .

Now the rain is falling, gently falling. I suppose it is washing the coal dust from the top of the bird-feeder, whose installation was part of the day's entertainment. Now you will tell me, as you did two weeks ago, - and your words are still echoing in my ears, - that this is a fair division of labor. Quite so, but what has it to do with me? I wish that some day the hour might come when I would do or be, - the two are after all synonymous, - when I would do something valid, something tangible, something meaningful. My present activity is painted emptiness. The better part of me is like sand trickling through some unknown hand. (That is a poor rhyme.) If only someone could collect me, and unify me. But you see, few people know how scattered I am, and it is more through blindness than through malice that they whose footfalls I so eagerly attend, pass by me without finding me, and in the passing grind me underfoot.

I don't know whether I should write all this. I am getting tired and in danger of being carried away by a momentary mood. But, I reason with myself, if you do not understand, then my letter will be equivalent to being unwritten, and if you do, it is well that I wrote. Tomorrow begins another week. How thirsty I am after work! I think the possibility of losing oneself in activity is one of the greatest blessings. If only the activity had meaning and dignity in itself! Then every hour spent in work would be spent in molding symbols of beauty and truth.

You will not believe me, when I write that every phase of life is a symbol of something greater. Nothing we do is meaningless, nothing is separate from the infinity from which we come and into which we go. You err when you seek to distinguish unimportant from important things or surface from depth. Is not every candle a phase of that infinity of light for which we long, and every shadow a finger of the infinity of darkness in us? And every flower in bloom a symbol of divine beauty, and every flower faded a symbol of the death within us? Are not the animals with whom we deal so arbitrarily, symbols of the incomprehensible complexity of life? What is all our activity if not transgression; can we live without the death of something else?

You will not believe me, and you need not. But if you consider patiently all those things which you spurn as insignificant, perhaps someday they will begin speaking to you and teach you their mysteries. But first you must love them. To become aware of a thing in its smallest phases is to love it, because we cannot love a thing as a whole, but only in its details. The details become a symbol for the whole, which we would like to love if we had love enough. But he who tries to love a thing as a whole without first loving its insignificant facets, deceived himself, for what he loves

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Good night. I seem to have stumbled upon a beautiful thought after all, even though it is so late at night. I think of you often, without understanding you, and many things which you have said come back to me often to make me happy and sad.

John

Now the rain is falling, gently falling. I suppose it is washing the coal dust from the top of the bird-feeder, whose installation was part of the day's entertainment. Now you will tell me, as you did two weeks ago, and your words are still echoing in my ears, - that this is a fair division of labor. Quite so, but what has it to do with me? I wish that some day the hour might come when I would do or be, - the two are after all synonymous, - when I would do something valid, something tangible, something meaningful. My present activity is painted emptiness. The better part of me is like sand trickling through some unknown hand. (That is a poor rhyme.) If only someone could collect me, and unify me. But you see, few people know how scattered I am, and it is more through blindness than through malice that they whose footsteps I so eagerly attend, pass by me without finding me, and in the passing blind me underfoot.

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You will not believe me, and you need not. But if you consider patiently all those things which you scorn as insignificant, perhaps someday they will begin speaking to you and teach you their mysteries. But first you must love them. To become aware of a thing in its smallest phase is to love it because we cannot love a thing as a whole, but only in its details. The details become a symbol for the whole, which we would like to love if we had love enough. But he who tries to love a thing as a whole without first loving its insignificant facets, deceives himself, for what he loves