

Cambridge, Nov. 18.

Dear Margaret . . .

But for a persistent consciousness that I must get up, I would have fallen asleep on the sofa just now. It is late, after midnight; and if I want to hear Biggs tomorrow morning, I must go to bed soon. I do very much, as a matter of fact; he is playing a Haydn organ concerto, and Bach. Your letter came as the climax and anti-climax of some few days' waiting to hear from you. As usual I managed to distill from the simple process of anticipation a complex pattern of emotion and thought. What mattered was the potentiality, the possibility, and the flux of emotion that flooded about the tangible perhaps.

You need not be burdened with any undue sense of responsibility if I tell you of the central place which your image, for better or for worse, has taken in my life. It is a picture at which I look whose purport I cannot understand, but nevertheless can not cease looking at. Knowing you is like reading in a book. My mistake is that I always read the last chapter first, as though foreknowledge would take the sting out of reality. Yet I must go back and read the chapters one by one, and experience them as though I did not know the end. I must taste their bitterness and sweetness as if the end were not yet in sight, as if the author were still at work on the outcome, and as if I might influence his verdict. Perhaps, I must say to myself, there might yet turn out to be a happiness ever after.

Have you ever thought when reading a book what you would have written, if you had been the author? Are we the authors of the books we read? I think not, I think there is a greater One who writes them. But if I were ever to write a book, would I not have to write the last chapter first? Would I not, in the final analysis, write the whole book as a preface to the last chapter? I would endow the characters with hope, with confidence and faith, although I had already condemned them to desolation and despair. Their joy and happiness, in other words, would only be a literary device* for making the denouement more effective. You are like a book to me. Who is its author I do not know. Perhaps you and I are collaborating. How many chapters I must do before before I reach the end, I can not tell. But before I started with the first page, I glanced at the conclusion. Now over every chapter through which I toil hang gloom and sadness and foreboding.

This analogy of mine is satanic and puerile, à la the unreformed Kierkegaard. You must take it with a few grains of relativity. Why don't you laugh at me? The sublime is not the only thing which can be ridiculous. Perhaps you will have too much work to read it carefully enough to glean all its implications. If I had more work, doubtlessly I should not find time to write it.

Whether I shall leave Cambridge for Thanksgiving, I do not yet know. If I do, most likely that I shall go home. In that case I would be in Philadelphia or New York late Wednesday afternoon and evening. If you had time for me, I could take a train to Virginia early the next morning (2 a.m.). Otherwise I could take a 6:30 p.m. train from New York. It would help if you

* I ask myself, whether ^{whole} my life is perhaps nothing more than a literary device.

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would let me know in time where you will be on Wednesday evening, in New York or Phila? If I don't hear from you, I will try to telephone you in New York, when we get there, and be together with you that evening if you are there and have time for me. Otherwise I would go on to Philadelphia with Alec, and take a Washington train from there. All this is hypothetical; I cannot make plans until I hear from home, and you must not be disappointed or worried or angry if you do not hear from me.

Good night. I think of you very often and very fondly. I would say more about that if only I had not read the last chapter. Perhaps that is a curse which can be lifted only by a miracle. My task now is to believe in miracles. I know when I am with you that I have not lost faith altogether. For this I am thankful.

John

You need not be burdened with any undue sense of responsibility if I tell you of the central place which your image, for better or for worse, has taken in my life. It is a picture at which I look whose purpose I cannot understand, but nevertheless can not cease looking at. Knowing you is like reading in a book. My mistake is that I always read the last chapter first, as though foreknowledge would take the sting out of reality. Yet I must go back and read the chapters one by one, and experience them as though I did not know the end. I must taste their bitterness and sweetness as if the end were not yet in sight, as if the author were still at work on the outcome, and as if I might influence his verdict. Perhaps I must say to myself, there might yet turn out to be a happiness even after

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This analogy of mine is satanic and queer, is it the unreformed Nietzschean. You must take it with a few grains of relativity. Why don't you laugh at me? The sublime is not the only thing which can be ridiculous. Perhaps you will have too much work to read it carefully enough to glean all its implications. If I had more work, doubtless I should not find time to write it.

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* I am myself, whether my life is passing waiting here
than a literary device.

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