

April 12, 1950

Dear John,

For the past hour I have been trying to plan assignments. If I could I would finish the job and write to you when that unpleasantness was behind me. But I have again reached the stage of complete confusion and painful indecision; I cannot decide how to allot time and small decisions involving a few pages have reduced me to a state of ridiculous and painful anxiety. My day seems to have consisted entirely of small, impossible decisions, made in a state of complete confusion and in which the only clear thing seems to be my inadequacy and unreadiness. Yet the evening has been spent in small simple things that should have put me together again; I thought that they had: I took clothes to the laundromat, exchanging the usual jokes with the manager; I bought food and cooked supper for Janet; and then we went shopping together; and then I came back and bathed and washed dishes. But in spite of all these simple, patterned things, my mind and spirit and emotions are troubled and confused. If I could collect all the confusion in an envelope, I could send it to you. But no. You do not arrange anything for me; you only look at it sadly and somewhat disapprovingly and tell me that it is a question of attitude, and that the attitude should be changed.

If you were here, it would be quite simple. I would put everything aside and sit quietly beside you, passive except when I could do or say or be something that you wanted. But I am alone, and therefore I must find my pattern somewhere else, and I cannot.

Do you remember that when you typed my 7th grade reports I occasionally hesitated and wanted to leave a blank, to postpone a comment. You would not let me. I leave so many blanks in all the many small things I do every day; I do not know enough; I must look up a book or a mark or something. The smallest things are scattered over days and weeks, and nothing is ever finished. Even now, I would like to leave this letter until I could find the exact and precise words to express all the things that trouble me.

There is so much that I would like to talk to you about, and when I am with you it is so hard. I cannot simply dump the box of fragments at your feet, and sometimes I do not even want to open the box and look in; I just want to be quiet.

Letters do not help much. You told me once how different all my letters were, one from the other, that they might have been written by different people; and you asked me whether yours were not fairly consistent. I think they are, but they are very different in their effect on me than your actual presence. They make me far more anxious; yet that anxiety is far better than the anxiety I would feel if the letters did not come.

I have thought often today of your letter and of the mood in which it was written. It makes me want to be with you, to do whatever I can for you. Yet at the same time, I know that what I do for you is sometimes also what troubles you. And sometimes I feel that I should not be there at all, that

you would prefer to be alone and that it would be better for you to be alone. Yet, at the same time, I know that I probably will not go unless I am told to. Do you realize how well your dream represents to me my own dilemma? If I think I am needed somewhere else, I must go, since I do not know what you need- to have me stay, or to have me go.

It frightens me as much as if it were my own dream--perhaps more. More because I do not know how to find the words to tell you not to be afraid when I am so afraid myself; there is the added fear that accompanies a responsibility. More because I do not know why you tell me such things; is it done to frighten me? or because you are so frightened that you must tell someone how you feel.

I have thought about Matthiessen, but your dream is more real to me than he or his death can be; the man himself is a dream because I do not know him as immediately as I do the dream. If I could pray, I would. When I can, I will.

April 13, 1950

Meanwhile, I can only do what I do now--dress myself neatly and go out into the cold rain and into the confusion. I will mail this letter which expresses nothing that could help you, and which, perhaps, will only make you feel more helpless because of my helplessness. Last Sunday when I saw you tired and confused I did not know whether I could do anything for you, but at least I could be with you, and at least I could try. Now, at such a distance, I feel completely inadequate. The more so, since what I write so often creates more confusion than that out of which it is written. And because you will perhaps say, as you have said before that this letter is not written to you. I do not know; perhaps it is not, and perhaps I am wrong again. I become so tired with my mistakes and the foretaste of my mistakes. If only I could feel right and certain about something. I do not expect you to create to such certainty. I wish only that your clarity and logic could help me to perceive something besides my own confusion.

Margaret