

Konnarock, Sunday evening.

July 16 1917

Dear Margaret, May I go to bed now and try to sleep? Writing to you is taking off the heavy armor and breathing a purer air, but it is ~~not~~ like the am not used to be myself. Let me crawl back where I belong. Like the

My mind has traveled many roundabout paths before it led me to the typewriter to try to write you a letter which will help you, or at least not be painful for you. Tonight I did not go to church; mother was probably too tired to persuade me, and I would never go without persuasion. Instead I listened to "Der Friede sei mit Dir" again, and having become aware of my own uncleanness and weakness, I decided to take a shower and wash my hair. That done I looked at various books, Rilke's letters which I have read so often, and Lessing's Laokoon which I have never had time to read with diligence. Please do not be grieved that it is difficult for me to write to you and that when I write I express many things in such an awkward way. I am very much oppressed by the responsibility, the burden which the words I write or speak place upon me; my character and my actions are very inadequate to balance my thoughts, either because the former are too frivolous or the latter too ponderous, I cannot tell. But then my words are like jewelry, ornaments on the clothing of the soul, not yet safety pins to keep it from falling down. In the end I would become too extravagant, the ornaments would tear the clothing and their weight would drag it ~~to~~ earth. Naked, how could I speak to my parents or tell them good night. You know that with you I would not be ashamed. I would talk at great length, and very confusingly until everything external had been removed. If only you would learn to look at me as I am instead of regarding the disguises which are so painful to wear. Please try very hard.

Now it is but a few days until we shall see each other again. It will be like ~~awakening~~ from a dream to a reality. Even the dream has its value, however unpleasant the various phases of it might be, and if it were broken off in the middle, might not reality seem frightful and strange? It would be better ~~to~~ ~~awaken~~ wake gently and gradually. At the moment I feel anxious that this period in my feeling and thinking should not be broken off prematurely. I must prepare myself to meet you, and I am ashamed of my poverty. What do I have that I might give you? --- Father is listening to loud war news and I have difficulties concentrating. --- I had so many things about which I wanted to write only enough to let you know that I was thinking of them in relation to you. Most of things about which I think concern you, but sometimes I have the feeling that they are doing their best to crowd themselves between us and sometimes they almost make me lose sight of you. As much as anything, ^{when I am} the disguises behind which I hide, the indifference which I show toward ~~my~~ many things because I care for them so much that I do not know what else to do. All my affected indifference toward things you do, toward my prospective medical studies is a result of insufficiency. (and toward other people - - -)

Finally I become so accustomed to my role that I begin to fear the costume, particularly when your letters begin to concern themselves with it and to criticize it. The fact that my parents can see nothing else is difficult enough, but cannot you try to see me as I am? Or has the costume fused with my skin, and is the endless criticism really applicable to me? It were terrible if true, and yet, I cannot think that it is, otherwise I could not be myself anymore. I pray that it is not. If only you were here, I should have a better mirror in which to see myself.

May I go to bed now and try to sleep? Writing to you is taking off the heavy armor and breathing a purer air, but it is ~~very~~ painful, and I am not used to bed myself. Let me crawl back where I belong. Like the proverbial groundhog, I vainly look for the sun. How long is it yet?

How long must I wait?

- Dein
John

Not be painful for you. Tonight I did not go to church; mother was probably too tired to persuade me, and I would never go without persuasion. Instead I listened to "Der Friede sei mit Dir" again, and having become aware of my own uselessness and weakness, I decided to take a shower and wash my hair. That done I looked at various books, Rilke's letters which I have read so often, and lessening a lack of which I have never had time to read with diligence. Please do not be grieved that it is difficult for me to write to you and that when I write I express many things in such an awkward way. I am very much oppressed by the responsibility, the burden which the words I write or speak place upon me; my character and my actions are very inadequate to balance my thoughts either because the former are too frivolous or the latter too ponderous. I cannot tell. But then my words are like jewelry, ornaments on the clothing of the soul, not yet safety pins to keep it from falling down. In the end I would become too extravagant, the ornaments would tear the clothing and their weight would drag it from earth. Asked, how could I speak to my parents or tell them good night. You know that with you I would not be ashamed. I would talk at great length, and very contentedly until everything external had been removed. If only you would learn to look at me as I am instead of regarding the disguises which are so painful to wear. Please try very hard.

Now it is but a few days until we shall see each other again. It will be like waking from a dream to a reality. Even the dream has its value, however unpleasant the various phases of it might be, and if it were broken off in the middle, might not reality seem frightful and strange? It would be better to wake gently and gradually. At the moment I feel anxious that this period in my feeling and thinking should not be broken off prematurely. I must prepare myself to meet you, and I am ashamed of my poverty. What do I have that I might give you? -- Father is listening to loud war news and I have difficulties concentrating. -- I had so many things about which I wanted to write only enough to let you know that I was thinking of them in relation to you. Most of things about which I think concern you, but sometimes I have the feeling that they are doing their best to crowd themselves between us and sometimes they almost make me lose sight of you. As much as anything, the disguises behind which I hide, the indifference which I show toward many things because I care for them so much that I do not know what else to do. All my affections and toward other people. -- (and toward other people --) is a result of inadequacy. Finally I become so accustomed to my role that I begin to fear the costume, particularly when your letters begin to concern themselves with it and to criticize it. The fact that my parents can see nothing else is difficult enough, but cannot you try to see me as I am? Or has the costume fused with my skin, and is the endless criticism really applicable to me? It were terrible if true, and yet, I cannot think that it is, otherwise I could not be myself anymore. I pray that it is not. If only you were here, I should have a better mirror in which to see myself.