

Cambridge, October 11, 1950

Dear Margaret,

Just now I have been looking over next week's dissections, appalled by the amount of work that remains to be done, and a little bit afraid that my nightly pilgrimages to Widener will have to become less regular. I find hardly any time to play violin. Tonight, however, I was playing the first three movements of the first violin and harpsichord sonata together with the records. Although the quality of tone is still very poor, at least I am able to keep up with Schneider's speed, and if I practiced more, I think I might learn to stay together with him quite well. My attempt to keep some sort of diary of each day's events has also suffered from lack of time, - I think the best thing will be to write down all the things that happen to me in my letters to you, and to keep carbon copies for future reference.

This morning, I got up about five minutes later than usual. Alex complained that it took too long to wake me. He has a cold and is in a very poor state of mind. We had neither bread nor butter for sandwiches and decided to take cheese, peanut butter, and mayonnaise along and to go by the other things during the lunch hour. It was a beautiful day. Yesterday's rain had stopped, the sun was shining, and the sky was colored a hazy blue. The dissection was difficult, but Poskanzer and Kahn as well as Alex and I had learned the material more thoroughly than usual, and we made no serious mistakes.

The body seems to be decaying rapidly. Alex, relying on automotive terminology, says it is "falling apart." The superintendent of corpses came to inspect, and insistently asked us to appreciate and value the injections of embalming fluid which he had made the previous day. In spite of his efforts, the body continued to smell very strongly, particularly about the legs which are enclosed in greased cellophane sacs. Embalming fluid seeps from the tissues carrying organic matter along with it, and leaves the organic matter deposited on ~~xxxxxx~~ the inside of the sacs and inside the drain groove of the table. This organic matter decays and fills the surrounding area with an almost unbearable stench. Alex was happy enough to have a cold. The supervisor of the corpses tried to encourage us by telling us that the "fellows across the hall" had found maggots. Apparently the windows had been opened too far, flies had come in and laid their eggs. He told us that the department was unwilling to spend money for screens. Nor was ~~xxxxx~~ there anyone to do the cleaning. One man comes in twice a week, but since he belongs to the union, he will not do anything but sweep. What ever drops from the dissecting tables ~~xx xxx~~ remains on the floor, unless it is tread under foot, where it forms a sticky, slippery film.

Today I brought a bottle of Lysol, thoroughly cleaned the table, and disinfected the drain groove. This considerably improved the smell. Alex was unwilling to admit any improvement. He insisted he had a cold and could smell no difference. I was reminded of the wire recorder and its distortion. Monday morning I intend to make history by cleaning our corner of the dissecting room, perhaps for the first time in 8 years. The superintendent of the bodies told us that since before the war there has not been sufficient help to do the cleaning.

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It is one a.m. now, and I must go to bed. Good night. I think of you often. I wish we could be together more. I wish I could come to see you in N.Y., but the possibility seems slight. Whenever you decide to come to Cambridge, I will be very happy to see you. I have begun to waver in my decision to go away for Thanksgiving, but I do not yet know what I will do. I will write again soon.

Dain

John

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