

Kennarock, Virginia
December 27, 1950

Dear Margaret,

It is midnight now, and I cannot tell whether it is today or tomorrow. I wish I could go to sleep, but I know that if I tried, it would be in vain. I wish you were here so that I could talk with you, because I have done all the work I can do today, — and still it is incomplete. Writing to you is the next best thing, because while it will not make me relaxed, still it will occupy the time between now and sleep. — But it would be so much better if you were here. . . .

This has been a strenuous day emotionally and spiritually, — it has been too long, — and Margaret, as though it had not been long enough, is still listening to the Magic Flute. I wish everyone had gone to bed and left me alone with the palpable night. Outside the creek is humming just as it did last summer when I wrote you at this desk, — but much, so much has changed since then.

Beside ~~it~~ the creek, in the corn-field at whose edge black berry bushes used to grow a prison camp for Negro laborers has been built. — I knew it would be there when I came home, but it was too difficult to speak about in anticipation. Now that it is there, at least I can use ~~the~~ realistic description to veil my emotions.

Most humiliating of all is that the camp has been built on the land of the church, - it is a five year lease, and I believe the rent must be some multiple of thirty dollars a year, - in silver. Ironically, the prison is immediately adjacent to the new church which is being built, - but no one is aware of the irony. The camp consists of four gray barracks, a watch-tower and a high fence. The convicts are transported to and from work in wooden boxes mounted on the backs of trucks. There they sit on planks - like brown parrots in a cage. It is said that the prisoners are treated "well" - although the story is told that upon refusing to work some of the were once hung by their heels. —

You see, I write you of concerning all this, because I dreamt it last night and in writing of it ~~again~~ perhaps I can avoid dreaming of it again. Probably you will think my exposition tasteless and inappropriate, - I know of no one who would not, but then I am not asking you to read it. I am merely writing - . . .

Where the corn used to grow and where we went swimming ~~so~~ many summers many years ago the barracks stand now, and the smoke from their coal stoves drifts into the house. There is asphalt

paring, and all bushes - the black berries and the elder berries, - in the vicinity have been cut down lest they protect any fugitives from the guns on the watch tower. At night dim yellow lights glow behind the boarded windows and the roof of the huts ~~are~~ ^{is} silvery in the light of evening. Sirens are blown at various times during the day, - otherwise there is no noise from the camp, - except when occasionally, like tonight, the moaning of confused voices, - saying I don't know what, - mingled with the moaning of the creek. —

What shall I say else? Can you understand what I am trying to say. — I know of no one who does, although I like to think that perhaps Dostoevski was able to say what I feel, - and therefore he must have been able to ~~feel~~ understand it, - must he not? Have you ever read his notes from Siberia? If I were you I would say that they speak to my condition. The gray buildings of the camp against the bare trees and the leaden sky - what else would Siberia be? Why must I be in Siberia? Poor Dostoevski, how he must have suffered! Do you remember the story of the Grand Inquisitor in the Karamazoffs. I am beginning to understand

it now. — If Jesus lived today, where else would he be, if not among the prisoners. — But if you tell that to any one, they will laugh. — How naive is not human nature! They pacify their consciences either with the pragmatic arguments or with self-deceptions, — in the one case saying that it is the only possible solution in the other that it is the best thing for the prisoners that can be done. — I cannot even speak to my family about these things — they have too many more pressing worries.

But you see, I cannot go to church anymore, at least not here because since the convicts have come, God can hardly be expected to concern himself with the righteous, particularly since Church and prison camp are adjacent, and He surely cannot turn his eye away from the camp as lightly as do his most vociferous worshippers. For none of them loves him as do the convicts and any one prisoner loves him more than all the righteous put together. Not only is this ^{true} because the prisoner needs him so, although doubtless by this he has some relation to his love, but also because ^{he} suffers much ^{on account} because of ^{his} ^{humanity} and what ever a man does because he is human, he does because he loves God.

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The others love God only because he promised them eternal bliss, - and some of them even think that the "holy" life has earthly rewards. But which of us loves God enough to go through hell on earth for him? No, - who loves him enough to be willing to suffer Hell for eternity for his sake? Hell, they say, is reparation from God, - but that which one loves, - must one not love it, - and that which one would preserve, must one not throw it away? They who love themselves will desire eternal life for themselves. - But what can he who loves God as a more than eternal reparation from him.

Dear Margaret, - do you forgive my writing all these things, of which I do not know whether they are true or not. That decision I leave to you. I can only ask questions, and learn to ask them better. But the answers are in your power, and you must not despair or be unhappy over my helpless questioning.

Very probably I shall see you as we planned. I think of you very often, and I hope that my thoughts may not be too great a burden for you.

Good night. - I wish I knew what you meant to me, - I know only that it is very much for me.