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May 21, 1970

Dear Carolyn:

As I write this, I have no idea that it will be mailed. It's probably unlikely. Helen, in the east, is making arrangements with publishers and agents by phone to take care of urgent mail to be delivered to General Delivery in Blaine, Washington, where we can pick it up, but that doesn't solve any problems for those of us in Canada if the strike is on. Because the full compliment of copies to be sent to me still haven't arrived, some are being mailed to Helen in Rochester so that she can bring them back herself. We moan about the ~~xxx~~ problems with customs since, if you have more than one copy of a book, the others are probably boxes of LSD, but Helen's style with ~~xx~~ all officialdom is so grand that she usually managed without much interference. It's height and whitening hair and visible moral patience.

She's been gone only five days, but each of them has been ~~xxx~~ ten years long. They will get longer before the 30th. At the moment I have a friend staying with me, but it isn't really solitude that troubles me. All my days are lived in silence. And in the evening I often don't care about 'company'. Helen's absense is more like being temporarily deaf or blind or crippled than being 'lonely'. She called last night at the end of the evening for her, which had obviously been riotous, and almost immediately put her hostess on the line, a friend of hers whom I ~~xxxxx~~ adore. I should have said simply that I was sorry I wasn't with them, but instead I said, "I hope you realize how insanely generous I am." "Oh, I do, I do."

May 24, 1970

I don't know what distracted me, probably house guests. I intended to get back to letters yesterday afternoon, cheered by what sounded hopeful news of settlement of the mail strike. First, Alan was to take me to do the week's shopping. On the way home we had a fortunately very slow motion head on collision, nobody seriously hurt. I ~~xxx~~ Have a very badly bruised left arm, shoulder to elbow, eggs on both shins. The cars had to be towed away, but Neither Alan nor I misses his much. Since none of the liquor on my lap broke, and since, thought the car was filled with cherry tomatoes, no supplies were unsalvagable, we can eat and drink for a week without leaving the hill. Today I have fantasies of building a life where I never have to get into a car again, but I know it's only my taking space for my own nervous reaction to shock. Yesterday I needed to be calm and comic for Alan who, of course, felt simply awful. So much for feeling too tense and vulnerable to take the risks of traveling! My ownly practical problem now is finding very gentle jobs in the garden for the next few days when I had planned to work hard. Also I'll have to wear long sleeves so that Alan doesn't have to look at the vast bruises slowly turning green. I hope they are nearly gone by the time Helen gets home on Saturday.

A letter to the publisher from a librarian makes us think that perhaps the Library Journal will after all have a good review of the book. It's an important place for a good review for sales, and we'd written it off from the beginning since the last book was dismissed as 'lesbian' and 'academic' and therefore not suitable for library purchase.

I like the way you use a book, finding in it ~~maxix~~ what is important for you, enjoying its details. As for my having experienced feelings or being psychic, my own notion is that most of us have a great range of feeling. A writer's job is to keep the lid permanently off Pandora's box in himself so that he is aware of what he knows and also to be as perceptive as he can be with other people. The problem is that that very requirement usually makes him more vulnerable than is healthy in any public circumstance. It's why I make myself lead a particularly quiet life when a book is coming out, why I avoid parties and crowds of any sort when I can. It's so very important not to develop defenses. Yes, I know from the inside a good many of Kate's emotions, and those that I haven't known I've understood in people who have been close to me, her sexual ~~masochism~~ ^{masochism} for instance. When I was very young and proud and hopeful, I lived for some time with a woman who finally had to make Kate's choice. She was very different from Kate in many ways, but I learned to understand at the closest range possible what religious guilt and pride can do to sexual ease. And I've known ~~xxx~~ a number of other people who have found the price of such relationship simply too high. I suppose for a little while I thought so myself, though that was years ago, but unlike Kate I was tempted by marriage, I suppose partly because I really was in love with a young man who had known me all through that long, loving, heart breaking time, who was there to pick up the pieces. Or I thought I was. I lived with him for a while, long enough to see that it was a bad idea for both of us. When Helen came, fifteen years ago now, I didn't imagine she'd stay long, aware as I was of the inevitable strains, and I always have most loved those people who have deep senses of responsibility. But Helen is one of those rare people who move with easy detachment in the public world because private relationship is what matters to her most. She's never either fearful or indiscrete. And so what I know of how Kate feels, what she must choose, is years back in myself, in my knowledge of other people. I am grateful not to have had to be a Kate, not because I think her life is worthless but because ~~the~~ the climate of love is so joyous to live in. Still, I'm sure most people would find the way we live very difficult, very unprotected. It is. It has to be strong enough to withstand a good deal of social hostility. But it is strong in loving delight. For me and for Helen, too, no price is too high for that. And there is less hostility than most people imagine, except when books come out. We live in a very rich and various world of friends, in harmony with family, some of whom have learned to accept our relationship simply because it is obviously such a good one.

Now I must take my bruised self out into a beautiful day. I can't weed, but I can admire the azaleas and iris and roses.

affectionately,

Jane