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October 1, 1970

Dear Carolyn:

We seem to be having an unusually long Indian summer, the same one only milder that has brought the devil winds to L.A. I am tan again from determined lying in the sun with books for a couple of days early in the week, a way of recovering silence after a week of house guests, first a young couple from Toronto and while they were here the unexpected arrival of Helen's niece, husband, and little girl. The couple from Toronto aren't officially coupled, and Helen's niece is a prudish and generally uptight character for fairly good reasons. Anyway, we rather dreaded what would happen, not counting on the strength and grace of the kids from Toronto. Actually we didn't know them before their arrival. I'd been writing to Don for about 16 months, ever since I'd ~~been~~ been a judge for a national writing contest for prisoners and he'd won it. He was in for ten years for bank robbery, but he was released after four. Since he's been out, he's had a number of short stories, articles, and poems published in Canadian magazines, Saturday Night, Canadian Forum, and the like. His wife and two children had found saner ways to live while he was in prison; so he's in the process of getting a divorce. While running a writing workshop at the Christian Resource Center, he got to know Anne, who says they graduated from Kingston about the same time, he from prison, she from college. I imagine when ~~his~~ his ~~divorce~~ divorce is through, he'll marry Anne; they seem to me very good together. Anyway, when niece Mary, with husband Clay, and child Sheri arrived, you can imagine that Helen and I were uncertain of the outcome. Mary is Helen's older sister's child, badly crippled with two club feet and deformed hands. She spent the first 18 years of her life in and out of hospitals, but she finally got trained as a librarian and went overseas to Germany as an Army librarian. She came home a couple of years later, claiming to be married and obviously pregnant. The baby was born with crippled hands and one club foot, and about 18 months later ~~the~~ Clay came back from Germany and said they should 'reaffirm' their vows since they hadn't had a chance before to be married in church. It was all very elaborately explained in these terms to the family, who of course all assumed that Mary had used the traditional method of getting her man and were angry-sympathetic. Mary's way of dealing has always been to be holier than thou, know it all, smug. Anyway there they were, having intended a holiday in Seattle which had turned out badly (fights with relatives), with no money to stay longer on their own but a need for a last couple of days before they went home; so Aunt Helen would cope somehow. She did by footing the bill for a motel since, though we could have managed technically, we couldn't face that many people in the house with everything else on our plates. So they settled to drinking, and Clay began to talk about religious wars with his family until he was drunk enough to explain that he and Mary hadn't married until Sheri was 18 months old because they wanted to be sure the baby wasn't the reason for it, particularly since the baby wasn't his. Anne said brightly, "Don and I ~~are~~ aren't married." Mary sat ~~xxx~~ frozen and later whispered at Clay, "But Aunt Helen didn't know." Since Aunt Helen

couldn't have cared less and was in fact enormously reassured by such facts and since Mary had been drinking as well, somehow it finally came to her that she didn't have to feel defensive. Don and she ~~talked~~ talked for hours about how to get beyond conventions to find out really who you were. Clay talked with Anne about solitude and independence, and they all thought everybody was wonderful. I don't know that another 24 hours would have held, but Helen and I liked Mary and Clay without reserve for the first time, and that was a real present. Young Sheri is a delight, and since doctors know a good deal more ~~than~~ now than they did, she's not having to have the long series of operations. Her hands are already perfectly functional. She will limp because only one foot is affected, but she's a very bright, happy, capable child, and her parents are going to adopt another baby next year. ~~Only~~ Clay has had himself sterilized

Anyway, after they all left, I needed to read and ponder for a little the extraordinary ordinary living of people. And get the house settled to some quiet for Helen who is teaching and spending long hours in committee meetings and having to have various meetings here at the house for new staff and the like. A week from tomorrow we have a friend coming up from California for a week, the head of the drama department at Mills College who's on leave to explore theatre in North America. I've set up one dinner party with the head of the drama department at UBC and then will let her explore on her own. The day she leaves, Pauline Oliveros arrives with a friend. Pauline is a remarkable and gifted composer of electronic music, who stayed with us about five years ago when she was here for a festival, which also involved her good friend John Cage and his crew. We spent a week climbing over tape recorders, listening to the marvelous, strange sounds of that world. Now she's giving a concert in Seattle and has written to ask if she could come up for the week-end afterwards with Lynn ~~and~~ Lonidier, a poet and short story writer whose work I know only ~~slightly~~ slightly from the LADDER, not reading the range of other magazines she publishes in like EVERGREEN and SAN FRANCISCO REVIEW. Anyway, Helen and I are devoted to Pauline and assume we'll like Lynn. After they go, the winter must settle to winter if I'm going to get the work done that I've planned.

I still haven't had the proofs of AGAINST THE SEASON, and I suppose they'll arrive just as guests do. It's always the way. Once those are done, my desk will be really clear for the new work.

I find I am delighted not to be teaching, partly because there's so much else to do, and the house is filled with students and staff whether I teach or not. I will be even more delighted when we are less richly peopled and there is the quiet of my own long days.

I grin at your commenting that you're 'conservative' and therefore find THE LADDER a bit much. But I'm not sure I know what you mean-- edgy about the insistence on better status for Lesbians and women in general? I'm getting minorly involved with Women's Lib here, partly because I'm tired of my own stance of "I'm all right, Jill." It's a curious collection down in town at the main headquarters with everyone from professors to mill workers, middle class housewife to unwed mothers, and the projects vary from high school counseling to Marxist revolution. At UBC it's mostly graduate students so far, but there have been only two meetings. Copies of SEXUAL POLITICS appear everywhere.

About to shop, so I won't begin another page. Happy fall.

*affectionately,
Jane.*