

4504 West 2nd Ave  
Vancouver 8, B.C.  
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Dear Carolyn:

This is bound to be a scrappy note rather than a good, long letter like yours, but it is a time for me that is distracting; so I must ask for patience. I am, for one thing, not marvelously well.. nothing unusual for me really, but bouts of ill health of one sort or another have not taught me patience or excessive good sense. I rest better than I used to but still I guess not long enough, and at the time of a yearly check up, which is now, I am never given clearings on first tests, and doctors always mutter about dire solutions at first, which can usually be modified to medication, ~~or~~ diet, something. We've been invited by my parents to a week on the southern California desert at Christmas, a promise of sun too tempting to turn down, though I had thought to settle to work by then, but the doctor now mutters about surgery instead. More tests next week, the week after; meanwhile I'll make plane reservations in amiable defiance but without much steady energy. And it is a time of year for students to be restless, needy. Alan, who lives with us, has been on the edge of exhaustion for several weeks, and I paid not much attention to him for the two weeks my parents were here; so I had to settle in with him once they'd left, letting him talk through the melodrama of his tiredness into solutions of sleep, more regular meals, less high geared working, and fewer temporary drug solutions. Today I had to spend a couple of hours talking another kid out of losing his not very impressive shirt in a get rich quick scheme that is his fantasy solution to the illness of November. Helen buries herself in the library to fight off her own depression about work on the promotions committee, which is enough to shake even her stout faith in man. And it won't stop raining long enough for leaf raking or just walking out on the beach. We were to have week-end guests, friends who have rented a house on one of the gulf islands for the winter to save money and have peace to write but need to come into town for kids' dentist appointments, etc., but they all arrived day before yesterday because the wife's twin brother had killed himself in Idaho and they had to get there, the wife flying, the husband driving with the kids, and it was Memorial days, banks closed, gas stations to service the uncertain car hard to find. I always keep American cash on hand, having been caught by emergencies myself; so we could send Lee and the kids off with enough to see them down there, and we drove Lori to the airport, where the airline would take a check. Anyway, I've quietly put in an order for at least one sunny day this week-end so that I can at least uncover the front path of leaves, and I'm going to run the printing press, and Sunday afternoon I'm going over to our friends, the Korner's, first to help young Diane on an essay that's bugging her for a third year English course, & then to sit with her father's paintings to help him title them before they are shipped off for a show in Palm Springs. And all those things will make nourishment for the next week. And I don't need more energy than I have, only to ~~see~~ <sup>use</sup> what there is easily, gladly.

Note: a friend in the states wrote me about a couple of women who are starting up a private press in New York to get work printed that professional publishers aren't willing to risk. The first novel

A PLACE FOR US by Isabel Miller (apparently a pen name for a fairly well established professional writer) has just been sent to me. It isn't a marvelous book, the 'romantic' passages sometimes a bit cloying, but it's not dreadful either, and the attempt to set a Lesbian relationship in the historical perspective on 19th century New England is often done quite well. I also admire the attempt to set up the small press that will handle things the big pros won't. If you're feeling curious or generous or both, the book is obtainable from Bleecker Street Press, Box 625, Old Chelsea Station, New York, New York, 10011 for a money order of \$2.25 American funds, which covers also handling and mailing. I was both touched and a little taken aback when I had a letter from the editor after I'd sent a note ordering the book. I was their first 'international sale' and a 'distinguished author'. I don't suppose, unless they've got money to throw away, that they'll stay afloat long, but I do wish them well and would be pleased to encourage other 'international sales', though don't in any way mean to twist your arm; it's not a good enough book in itself for that.

I'm so very glad Mike is going to a psychiatrist, not because I think it's magic but because I have seen it really help so many people not to be different people but to cope with who they are more patiently and generously and good humoredly than before. And I do worry about anyone who is described as you have described Mike, so often in locked away depressions. Whether he talks to you or not just now doesn't matter as long as you know he is talking.

I'm glad Catherine liked Vancouver. It means your holiday out here is more certain, and I look forward to meeting you both.

I suppose I ask about why she marries because, again, your description (which you admit is biased, but still..) worries me. You wonder about whether some people are meant to go it alone', and I'm afraid I think everyone is in the sense that you ~~xxx~~ mean it. The greatest and most devoted love doesn't spare a person the isolation of being a person. The choice seems to me between coming to terms with that isolation or not. Those who do make good lovers when they love. Those who don't suffer always two inadequacies, their own and those of the people they try to love and be loved by. I am not as concerned as a number of people seem to be about the distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual 'identities'. As for relationships, each kind has its own social pressures, bearable and even sometimes entertaining for people who know they have to carry their own fears and inadequacies, that no other person can, even if he lovingly would, carry that burden any more than he can carry another's physical pain, that no social blessing can be a ~~xxx~~ substitute for personal responsibility any more than social disapproval can destroy personal commitment. To marry out of a need for protection against loneliness, social disapproval, for reassurance not only today but twenty years from now of another's loyalty and integrity.. well, it's a mistake, isn't it? Just as is the notion that there is another person with whom one can always 'be oneself'. It seems to me taking on a relationship hasn't to do with any of those things really. It is much more like taking on a job that offers the range of challenge to one's talents that would honor the energy spent, sustain in its own good purpose the inevitable ~~xxx~~ failures. I ~~xxxx~~ used to try to explain, when my professors urged me to accept my calling as scholar and teacher ~~xxxx~~ rather than writer, that I could bear better the idea of being a third rate writer than I could the idea of being a second.. or even first rate scholar ~~xxx~~ and teacher, not because I honored the one more than the other but because I loved writing enough to be able to bear often failing at it, loved its process. In the same

way, I suppose I could explain to people who find it baffling that I have chosen to live with another woman that I would rather be a third rate lover of Helen than a first rate wife and mother, not because I honor the one above the other but because I love Helen enough to be able to bear failing the relationship as often as I inevitably do, love the process enough to serve it in the ways that I can. If I had been ~~rejected~~ rejected a hundredth of the time as a teacher that I have as a writer, I'd have died of it. I cannot make the parallel in my relationship with Helen because, though each of us at times has asked very hard things of the other and certainly not always been able to answer well or at all, we've been.. or I've been.. remarkably lucky in her, but perhaps it never occurred to either of us that we could solve each other's problems, occupy each other's essential loneliness, ~~protect~~ protect each other from social pressures. What we probably most hoped is that we would be sensitive and loving enough not to add over much to those burdens the other carried. I enormously admire Helen. I find her charming. And I can still be caught, as I was at twenty three when I first saw her in a train station in Connecticut, by surprised and breaking desire.. I stop and think she was the age I am now, thirty eight. And she was married. Two years later, when I was leaving Concord where we both taught, I called on a little old lady, the 5th grade teacher, a prim spinster who lived at the edge of a graveyard by herself since her mother died. As we drank tea, she asked suddenly, "Is Helen really not going with you?" "How could she?" I asked, taken aback by both the frankness of the question and its assumption. "It's a ~~mistake~~ mistake if she doesn't." "For some things there's no structure, no way," I said. "You're going to the boy then, the young Englishman." I ~~nodded~~ nodded. "Do you love him?" "I don't know. I hope so." "It's a mistake." A mistake to hope that you can love and cherish? A mistake to hope that you can draw free breath? Yes, child, she would have said if I had asked those questions aloud. Better to offer nearly nothing where you know you love than to try to ~~offer~~ offer and ask for nearly everything where you are uncertain. I've often wondered how she knew all that, up there at the edge of her graveyard where all Concord's ~~great~~ great and dear dead are buried. She said of herself once, "I'm too good natured to live with anyone else because I also like my own way and I wouldn't get it." Anyway, I left. It had never occurred to Helen that she had anything to offer to keep me there nor to me that I had ~~anything~~ anything to offer to ask her to come with me. We had never even discussed it. Six months later she came to Vancouver for a visit. She didn't go home. So gradually we've made a structure, a way, not out of any sort of hope, ~~just~~ out of necessity rather. The Englishman married, had a son. He isn't happy, but I couldn't have made him happy any more than I could have made Helen happy. She ~~makes~~ makes that for herself, as I do for myself, knowing from the beginning that we had nothing to offer each other but the wonder of the other's independence acceptance of responsibility for herself. And we are fortunately not so good natured, either one, ~~to~~ to need to live alone.

I go on too long, trying, I guess, to try to answer a question or two that I put to you. They are hard ones, ~~important~~. But to serve them, even badly, is an important act of faith.

Yours,

*Jane*

