

May 19<sup>th</sup>

*My dearest Margaret,*

I WON'T SPOIL YOU WITH DULL PLEASANTRIES; rather, I shall be blunt: By now, I'm quite sure you've heard about my sudden departure. I do apologize; it couldn't be anything but given the circumstances and frankly, love, it's better that I departed without fanfare. I am writing partially to let you know that I am indeed still of this mortal coil, and partially because someone has told me that the epistle is dead and I vainly think I shall single-handedly revive it. There is something far less transient about a letter, its physicality in ink and paper, than perhaps the more sophisticated communication mechanisms of our day and age: The email is heartless; the text far too insubstantial; the chat log so soon subsumed by its own immediacy; and a phone call suffers that shortcoming of all vocal interactions—it is effervescent, ephemeral, floating on the air for but a second in time, then vanishing altogether, so that it may have been naught but a memory or a dream. No, the letter, antiquated as it may be, is vastly superior and nearly as intimate as the phone call; after all, I have taken the time to sit and compose my words for you, perhaps blotting ink here or scratching out a word there. In my hand, you can more intimately know my state of mind: Do the letters run small, kerned tight with anticipation, or are they large, loose, and flowing, as though I've not a care in the world? The slope of the 'r' or perhaps the jut of a 'p' or 'q' lends something far more personal to the letter than any machine-made typeface can ever hope to replicate, Comic Sans be damned; it conveys nothing but the static emotions instilled into it when it was first conceived. It cannot vary; it cannot tell you a damn thing about my state of mind. My handwriting, you'll find, varies in intensity; it moves, it flows, it changes and evolves. It is organic. Oh, call me frivolous for wasting so much on post, and wasting so much time, and murdering all the precious forests, but darling, I think you understand as well as I the rush of receiving a letter in the mail. The thought that someone has wasted their time and money, and gone so far as to kill a living thing all for the quaint gesture of commu-

nicating with you is something like romantic, perhaps even charming.

But enough of that, my dear, I shan't bore you with my nonsensical talk of letters and typefaces; I know you well enough to know you agree on such things. You are probably more concerned to hear about my circumstances and how I came to be writing this letter from a stuffy hotel room in Nice, rather than listening to me wax poetic about the lost form of epistles! Don't throw the letter away yet; the story shall come, by and by. I cannot tell it right away, you understand; to do so is to give away the plot, and I don't see how I can tell you such a thing when I don't even know it myself.

Now, I have been in Nice for about a week—a week! you say, well, there's a fine lie, my love, because you know that I have been gone nigh on three weeks now, but you see, I've only just made my way down here. I flew to Paris and I passed a week there, but gay Paris is not the place for me, as I soon discovered, and I have made my way from that gaping tourist trap into another, albeit more benevolent, sort of trap. I am quite sure that the people here are aware that I am very much a tourist, for I have that glassy look of wonder about everything; it all seems quaint and charming—even cows in the field as I came down by train caught my fancy, and that's something indeed, considering, if you will, where I hail from. Cattle! Yes, there is something charming about bovines in a place that is foreign to one; they are at the same time familiar, an extraordinary comfort in a place where so much is so vastly different, and somehow so much more graceful, more lovely, more charming than the loutish things we have back home.

But I am sure I weary you with this kind of naïvety; you might well remember it from the days when you first went abroad, although I will admit you were much younger then than I am now. And how much the better you are for it! I wish I had taken your advice and gone much earlier than I have; alas, how much time I've lost, how many marvels I've missed, spending all this time in that dull and dreadful place! You are probably sipping tea and shaking your head at my utter stupidity, and you would not be wrong to do so. I am an idiot; if only I had taken it into my head to come away sooner!

But, as you'll understand in a moment, there was no reason for me to come away earlier, nor did I believe I had the means. You know I have always been deadly serious about success of sorts—in all my schooling, I was determined to finish whatever I began, and in these last years, since university is but a memory to me, I have worked very hard at becoming something one might describe as a “professional,” but all that came to a rather grinding halt three weeks ago Thursday. The day was innocuous enough but, as you know,

things have taken a bad turn at home. I ought to have anticipated this, but it was still a rather nasty shock for me—I was no longer needed at the office, everything is quite over with that. The manager was most apologetic about it, but I do think he was probably happy to see me go—we never quite got along, so it is all probably for the best in the end. But what a dreadful thing! I have always been a hard-working individual, determined, perhaps even obsessive (I have been branded a perfectionist and a workaholic, both things governed by my astrological disposition—and don't lecture me, dear, on divining of any nature being a load of crock; you know I read the things mostly for amusement, rather than blind belief), and now I've naught to do! Oh, I know you'll say that I am overreacting and I rather agree, but I have poured my heart and soul into my career, so it's not as though just any job will do, and, as I said before, things did seem to take a rather frightful turn for the worst there, just before the news came out. It does not seem a sure thing that I should find another position, neither easily nor quickly.

You will ask me now whether I have lost my head; taking an expensive trip to Europe is not exactly a rational course of action when one is ousted from paid labour and has no prospects of income in the foreseeable future. I am inclined to agree with you; I am not sure whether it was a fit of insanity, impulsiveness, or sheer stupidity, but I booked the next flight I could, packed a few things, and within hours, I was on a plane, out of the country, across the pond for the very first time.

I ought to have gone to England, you might think, but much as I am enamoured with the thought of England, I must say I do also believe it to be a dull and dreary place—always raining, from what we hear, and I thought, 'I am dull and dreary enough, I ought not go to a place that is so well-matched, or I shall be doubly dull.' You will disagree with this logic, I know, as you have been to England and were quite taken with it, but this is why I first went to Paris. I must say, it is not at all the place for a dull and dreary girl; everyone is so very fashionable and their lives are much too glamorous for me to feel anything but sorely out of place, so I have left the city and retreated to Nice, which is still far too glamorous for a dullard such as myself. I am thinking I will remove myself as quickly as I can, perhaps to a villa in the Italian mountains, somewhere north of Florence, somewhere more remote, where there are not a lot of famous sorts of people or at least people that dress well enough that they seem to be famous sorts of people, or people that wear the latest fashions, or people that have glamorous lives, or people at all, really. I will perhaps take out a typewriter—that's a queer and quaint sort of thing

to do; all writers have this sort of nostalgic longing for the past, for tradition, and what is more traditional than the image of the harried author, frantically banging away at the typewriter keys, a steady *click-click-click* into the night as the yellow light of the barren bulb burns down, illuminating all the smoke from the chain of cigarettes being smoked.

Gracious! you say, why on earth would I take up such a dreadful habit? I've never smoked before, and fret not, dear, I don't intend to take it up—nasty habit that—but I dare say the people here make it almost fashionable, and if I want to be any sort of existential French writer, I ought to invest in a beret, a typewriter, and a package of cigarettes. Image is certainly important here, perhaps even more so than at home.

The point of the matter is that I don't believe I will be stopped over in Nice very long, although the weather has been lovely and the atmosphere is much quieter, more relaxing than the busyness of Paris, so I think you will find that my next letter comes to you from the solitude of the Alps, although it is not necessarily solitude I am seeking. I have enough of that no matter where I go—I do love it, so this is not entirely a complaint—I am more seeking to find a place where a drab girl like myself can spend some time without seeming very much out of place. It is rather disheartening to look around oneself and think that you don't belong at all, like a cloud on a cloudless day.

Mainly, my point is that I shall continue to write to you, although I do not have very much exciting to tell you, I'm afraid. Don't feel it necessary to reply, of course. And please do me a favour—don't tell the old woman of this; if I intended for her to know where I am, I should have told her myself. You know as well as I that if she discovers my hideaway, she will be upon me in no time and she shall drag me back. I see no reason to return as of yet—in due time, when I come to my senses, or perhaps to the end of my bank account, but do not tell her that I've written you or that you know where I am. All you need say on the subject is that you have not heard, or, if she presses you and you must tell her the truth, then say that you had received a letter, but I am traipsing about the place, with no set address, and that you could not guarantee that I will be in the same place today as I was yesterday. I shall tell her when I am good and ready—you know that may be never, or not perhaps until I am ready to return home and know I must face her wrath—but do be a dear and keep this hushed up.

*With much love,*