November 7, 1930

“You take this as a proof of love, don’t you?” The train’s rhythm scanned this sentence incessantly. I was cold; I was trying to sleep, tensely balled into a corner. —I was so cold!— Why had the train left? The anxiety you feel when you’re making a mistake tightened in my throat; I had left a fragile happiness to return to this sanatorium; it was stupid. I had experienced a modicum of joy these past few weeks; surely, I was about to suffer a great sorrow in return.

“You take this as a proof of love, don’t you?” Once again I saw the tormented face that uttered this sentence to me the night before. And once again, superimposed, I saw this same face, close to mine, eyes filled with heavy tears, saying: “Marry me, you will betray me…” I wished the scene would begin again so I could kiss that face and say: “I will not betray you.” But things do not begin again; and I must not have pronounced those words, for I don’t know how to speak at the right moment or with the appropriate tone. I am too sensitive and I harden myself to avoid giving in to emotion. How to convey the full sense of turmoil produced by an emotion at the precise moment it occurs? Let us fall asleep to this lullaby of a sentence: “You take this as a proof of love, don’t you?” I am sending you a kiss through the air. If you love me, I will be cured.

And when I am cured, you'll see how everything will be fine. I like speaking familiarly to you now that you are no longer here. I’m not accustomed to it, and feel it's forbidden: it’s
marvelous. Do you think one day I'll really be able to speak to you this way? When I am cured, you will no longer find me bad-tempered. I am sick. You told me the sick force themselves to be sweeter with those around them: and you cited some beautiful examples for me. I do not love you when you are delivering sermons; you make me want to yawn, and if you reproach me, it means you love me less: you are comparing me to others. The sick are sweet, but I am exhausted; it takes all my strength to carry on and say “thank you” to those who do not understand. But you, why did you need a “thank you”? You didn’t understand because you don’t know. I asked you what kind of mood you’d be in if, for a mere eight days, you were unable to sleep. You replied such things never happened to you, but that it had to be unpleasant. Of course you don’t understand. Anyway, I know: when we were in the country, you weren’t happy; you wished you were in Paris, where your girlfriend was. So you were in a hurry to get back and found me annoying. You see, this was another thing that turned against my desires: I thought my asking you to come would make you happy. You are much kinder in Paris... and you find me much kinder: she is there. In any case, you don’t like the sick. I think you would be of a mind to have them locked up, eliminated. You should try being sick.

“You take this as a proof of love, don’t you?” What is one to make of this sentence? I know you no longer love me. It's comical, the care you take to avoid saying: “I love you”! You will have made me no promises. And yet it would be so good for me, alone, going far away, to be able to cradle myself in your love with confidence. I need it: I would want to find it again when I return, cured. The certainty that someone continues to love and to wait, someone for whom all the rest is but a temporary, meaningless distraction, is a great joy for a sick person: he feels the life he left behind has taken note of his absence; he cannot imagine a brand-new future; weak and suffering from a brutal break with the past, what he asks of “later” is that it continue, and
improve on, what came before.

I would like to keep the memory of last night like a talisman inside me. Let us close our eyes so the illusion can return. It’s the same as when you’re dreaming; you mustn’t move. I love you.

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Tenay-Hauteville!

I am afraid. I don’t want to get off.

I want to squeeze myself into a corner where people won’t be able to see me. I want to forget myself. How happy I would be to keep traveling on this train, far away! I waited in vain for a sign from fate: everything seemed to spur me to leave. What was I to do? Now I must get off and go into that sad house. But why must I? I sense in my legs the almost erotic hesitation that keeps you immobile when you have just one minute to make a decisive action. You say, “I will not move, I will not move…,” and at the last second, with incredible speed, in a sort of mad panic, you perform the act you were hesitating to commit. I am brave; I got off; I filled out all the forms methodically so as to prove to myself that I am strong. Someone in Paris loves me: I will be back. It’s raining and foggy; four o’clock, the day is almost over. Tea with him at this hour in a small, well-heated apartment would be so nice. We would talk about the time when we were children. It’s raining, and it’s dark. I look intensely at the sanatorium to absorb in advance all the suffering I’ll experience there. Perhaps I will feel less pain. Men and women in dressing gowns, their eyes hollow, coughing; I can feel myself becoming sick again. Why did I
come back? And then, in my bedroom, I sink into a chair; a pasty coat of boredom, of sickness and despair, heavy on my shoulders: I am cold. My beautiful dream leaves in pieces. I can no longer hear the voice, I am no longer enveloped in its love. When, in the morning, daybreak awakens us from a dream, we close our eyes and remain still, trying to recreate and continue the scene. But the day’s light has destroyed everything: words are without sound, gestures without meaning. It is like a vanishing rainbow: some hues survive for an instant, disappear, seem to return: there is nothing left. This is how my beautiful dream disappears. Can there possibly be nothing left? Stupidly I repeat: must get away from here… and I try to gather up the pieces so as to bring yesterday evening back to life. But it is a mirage; it breaks.

Tomorrow I will write you and no longer know how to address you this way, I will write and won’t know how to tell you everything I tell you in my heart. You who have remained over there among the living, can you understand I am a prisoner? I no longer know how to speak. I am here, stupefied, and like a cold and certain truth I feel that, when one is here, nothing is possible anymore: you cannot keep on loving me.

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December 10, 1930

I have a lot of letters today: I will read his last. Perhaps it will say the things I am waiting for.

Since my return, his letters have disappointed and worried me: really, I think he no longer loves me. I have been sick for two years, and often absent; as for him, he has kept on living; I wanted to believe that he would wait for me; but in truth, has he? Did things appear temporary
and incomplete to him? Was he waiting for my return to make them blossom? Or did these things die without any regret on his part, certain as he was to find more beautiful ones once I was here?

It is true that I am clumsy: I don’t know how to express feelings; as soon as I have said a few words, I start to ridicule myself, to ridicule the other; with one ironic sentence I destroy the impression I have created. It’s a mistrust of myself; it’s the shock of hearing myself reveal what I feel, the way everybody else does. I listen to myself as if another person were speaking and I believe I am no longer sincere; the words seem to be inflating my feelings and turning them into strangers. And then I imagine someone will smile at me the way one does at a child speaking of things she knows nothing about. It can’t possibly be me saying: I love you. What if someone believed me, but I’d made a mistake! So I have to end my sentences with a pirouette that seems to say: “You, sir, you love me, since you say so; but as for me, I’m afraid that loving the way I do—it isn’t the proper way to love: others must know better than I how to love, must know better how to say it.” I am afraid to discover one day that I do not love, and so I create doubts about my feelings in advance; I dread that someone will come to accuse me of insincerity; and so I imagine a thousand circumstances in which I presume my love will fail. I state that I will not be faithful when in fact, in order to avoid displeasing, even in thought only, the one I have told I do not love, I turn down another man’s offer to accompany me to the theater or kiss the tips of my fingers. And thus, in denying that my heart loves, I become more attached to the one who says to me: I love you.

I would like to be found out: but all that others can see are pirouettes and irony. He too must have seen only those; I did not show him anything else. Could it be I demanded too much of his waiting? Still, these last few days, he wrote me letters shot through with jealousy. Surely,
he must still love me. Perhaps this letter will be sweet.

“I am getting married… Our friendship remains…” I do not know what happened. I kept absolutely still and the room swirled around me. In my side, where I hurt, perhaps a bit lower, I felt as if someone were slowly cutting my flesh with a very sharp knife. Every existing thing underwent an abrupt change in value. It was like a movie brought to a standstill, the unscreened reels of which would have shown only frames without images; on the reels that had already been viewed, the characters remained frozen in their poses like articulated dolls: they no longer held any meaning. They had been filled with me and my waiting; I did not know what was going to happen to them, but I had lent them my soul. Since nothing is happening anymore, the previous action empties out and breaks; I feel as though I have given my self over to an armature whose stiffness makes light of my anxiety: I cannot blame it. The gestures sketched in the last printed reel hurt; they were full of promises: the empty reels keep those promises.

When a form of suffering is unknown, you have more strength to resist it, for you are unaware of its power: all you see is the fight and you hope a fuller life will resume later. But when you know, you wish you could cry for mercy with raised hands and say, with tired stupor, “More!” You foresee all the painful phases you will have to go through and know that what
comes after is the void.

There will be awakenings at dawn, when the pain is there, still powerless, and you pray to the Lord to let you sleep some more. It’s like a tumor wrapped in cotton: and a violent stabbing pain suddenly makes itself felt. It’s a small, precise image that would have seemed harmless two days earlier; it’s a gesture, a glance, barely noticed in the past, which, pictured in the mind’s eye, stops the heart beating with a painful spasm. It’s a project devised in secret to please “him,” the uselessness of which reveals itself in a brutal grimace. During the day or in the evening, there are moments of calm during which you are surprised not to be feeling anything; and you keep waiting for the sentence, the sound, the perfume that will abruptly bring the pain back to life. The least little thing is a pretext for crying; a stupid sentence read in a newspaper which some other day would have elicited a shrug, now precipitates you into an abyss of pity. And the other one, what is she like? You endow her with every possible quality and see the two of them together, forever jubilant with an extraordinary happiness; before the news, that happiness seemed harmless. But now you are very miserable and you feel like saying timidly: “I too could have made you happy; you told me so.” You rebel, you curse, you want revenge. Revenge doesn’t come or comes too late, when you have forgotten. It would be good right now, for it would allow the love you still have to give of itself, and perhaps triumph. Our love doesn’t have any power over “his heart” anymore. But were “he” to suddenly suffer as we do because of the other, or else, thinking it is too late, were “he” to regret us, rushing over to comfort him would be a joy; in comforting the one who pushed it away, love comforts itself.

It is hard to think he no longer needs me.
Perhaps all this suffering is but a product of the imagination, which engenders concrete images and exaggerates feelings? Yet when I read, “I am getting married,” although no image appeared, I hurt, I simply hurt, without any idea forming.

It was natural that you should tell me about your “friendship,” a purer friendship for being free of desires, of jealousy, of waiting. One must give something; and so one thinks of friendship, “love’s nobler sister,” and offers it, with an attempt to show how much better it is than the love one gave before, and now gives to another.

You are quite persuasive; but then, one is never as persuasive as when in your position. Because one must first convince oneself, one discovers ingenious arguments and a sincere tone with felicitous effect. And once the demonstration is over, one is so happy to have accomplished something that if the person being addressed is not convinced, it can only be a result of her own bitterness.

Do you know what friendship is? Do you believe it to be a more tepid feeling that contents itself with leftovers and the small favors one cannot avoid? I believe friendship is a stronger and more exclusive form of love… but less “flashy.” Friendship knows jealousy, waiting, desire…

You were my friend, you wanted to marry me; this must have amounted to a lot of love…

And in the first letter I received from you a few days after I arrived at the sanatorium, you wrote: “I know you are seriously ill. But it is certainly not out of devotion to someone else that you contracted this sickness.” Others did not owe me anything, then, because the rule of any friendship in the world, the rule of your friendship, was: “Give and take.” I asked often; I did not always give: I was not to look elsewhere for causes of what appeared to me as your loss of affection.
You wrote me love letters, you wrote me jealous letters; you were unhappy for an entire evening because a friend had remained between us for too long, and your last letter spoke of such suffering that you were unable to finish it. Then: “I am getting married… our friendship remains.” I am not saying you were putting on an act: only that it took more than one day for you to stop loving me.

You called me “honey”; I was the one who was supposed to know everything and you were the one who was supposed to hear everything. But you did not speak. Don’t tell me that it is my fault and that I should have interrogated you. A friend doesn’t need to be questioned in order to confide.

Our friendship will be a very pretty thing in the future; we will send each other postcards during our trips and chocolate bonbons at New Year’s. We will visit with each other; we will inform each other of our projects the instant they come to fruition, so as to provoke each other a little and not have to endure commiseration if they fail; we will pretend to be who we believe ourselves to be and not who we are; we will say many “thank you’s” and “excuse me’s,” kind words people say without thinking. We will be friends. Do you think that’s necessary?

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December 14, 1930

Some ballads begin as your letter does: “You, whom I loved so much…” This past tense, when the present is still resounding so near, is as sad as the ends of parties when the lights are turned off and you remain alone, watching the couples go off into the dark streets. It’s over: you
have nothing left to wait for, and yet you stay there indefinitely, knowing that nothing more will happen. You have a few notes on guitar; it’s like a recurring chorus: “I would not have been able to give you happiness.” It’s an old song from yesteryear, like a dried flower. Can the past become an old thing so quickly?

Happiness? It’s a term of complaint. You, you embody it, you identify it, you define it. Can one really speak about it as you do?

When a perfume is appealing, you try to hang on to it, to find it again; you do not let yourself become completely intoxicated, so you can analyze and soak it up little by little, until the mere memory of it provokes its physical sensation; when the perfume returns, you inhale it more slowly, more softly, in order to perceive its most tenuous emanations. A brutal whiff of perfume makes your head spin but leaves an irritatingly incomplete, unfinished sensation. Alternately, this whiff can be an unpleasant suffocation you want to get rid of so you can breathe freely, or a brutal intoxication, over too quickly because all it touched was the nervous being. Happiness is being overwhelmed and no longer knowing anything. But hanging on to a small corner of consciousness that always knows what’s happening and that, because it knows, allows the entire intellectual and reasoning being also to enjoy, each passing second, something of the happiness that is happening—hanging on to this small corner that languidly appreciates the evolution of joy, that follows it to its most extreme ends, isn’t that happiness? There’s a small corner that is not stirred, but this small corner remains as a witness to the joy being felt. This corner is the one that remembers and can say: I was happy and I know why. I don’t mind losing my head, but I want to seize the moment when I lose my head, and push my knowledge of an abdicating consciousness as far as it can go. One must not be absent from one’s own happiness.

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