

PAGE SEVEN: Carson McCullers letters to Sidney Isenberg

Letter IV:

same addresses, written by CMC
postmark dated May 6, 1948

Text:

Wednesday

Dear dear Signey,

I wrote you like a hurt, offended child, and now your answer, so brilliant and calm and wise, has altogether comforted me, and settled the "proud and angry dust" that Payne-Whitney had only further disturbed.

It is extraordinary that you should quote Houseman,-- I got out his poems from the library a few days ago. I had read the lines you cite only two evenings ago. Such instances make me wonder if there can be some sort of inexplicable telepathy between persons whose spirits are akin. I had read before the Mann quotation.-- I reviewed it with a dearer perception now that it comes from you.

Indeed I am ~~xxx~~ overjoyed about Streetcar's Pulitzer. Tenn is still in Rome. I had a cable from him saying that ~~ix~~ Joshua Logan, whom I have asked to direct my play, had delivered the latest version to him. Tenn and Logan will talk it over and Tenn will give me detailed suggestions about the script--he and Audrey Wood (his agent and mine) still think it needs work, I believe. The wire said "Script a thousand times better"; Tenn would not have used a ~~an~~ comparative expression if he thought the play finished and ready for production. He wants us to have a place together, working in "adjoining trances," where he can advise me on the last work on the play. His comments are invaluable to me, Tenn takes ~~the play xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ this play as anxiously as though it were his own.

For a long time I did not write Tenn about Payne Whitney. This is not because I would withhold anything from Tennessee, or because I could doubt the most perfect understanding; for years he has been like a very near brother, and the mutual understanding has been complete and unblemished. But you see Tenn's beloved sister has been mentally ill and in an institution for the last 10 years. It is the sorrow of his life. And I know that in his heart his sister and I are related. So you can understand my unwillingness to burden Tenn with that knowledge when he was away. When I was home, I began to worry for fear he might discover it somehow, and I mentioned it in a ~~ix~~ letter.--impressing it on him that I am quite all right now. It is fortunate that I did, because Tenn wrote that Janet Flanner had seen him in Rome

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and told himx I was "psychically disturbed." Well-- it's all over nowand Tennessee knows he has no reason for anxiety. His last letter is radiant and full of plans. He wonders if perhaps we can have a ranch in Mexico or the West where we can live and work secluded from the world's disturbances. He wonders if we can have his sister with us and assume the responsibility for her happiness. The last reports from her hospital report improvement. I want very much to share with Tenn this responsibility that has weighed on him so long and painfully. I do believe that the tenderness and love we would give her would help x in the restoration of her health. But I realize that in any decision involving her we need expert, professional guidance. For years she had the fixed delusion that Tennessee had set himself against God, and was ~~grixi~~ writing plays against god. So you see, Sidney, unless we are careful the situation is not without danger to both her and Tenn. I mean the danger of further ~~grixi~~ grief or relapse and disappointment.

Now let me tell you some good news for a change. The New Yorker has bought a story that they will publish later in the year. They are not only paying me about \$1,000 including bonuses--but have offered me a most advantageous contract for future stories. The contract includes lovely bonuses that will nearly double the original payment. That is really fortunate; as my long illness plus other financial responsibilities had left me penniless and in debt to my mother. I have a series of stories planned. I hope to have some pennies in my pocket--that wi ll be nice, won't it?

Also, my husband, Reeves McCullers, visited me this weekend and told me he had a job. It is his first job in many years.--since the war, in fact. We are separated, no longer married except ~~in~~ legally--but his well being is greatly important to me. For a long time he was morally sick, alcoholic, and most unhappy. Now he has got hold of himself, in a way that is almost miraculous. He is like a youngster in his pride about the job.-- He called yesterday to tell me with great delight that he had a dictaphone and a secretary. Part of my temporary breakdown had been due to the prolonged distress I had suffered in this relation. Nothing is sadder than the death of love, the drop-by-drop deterioration of a marriage.

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I feel that the dark cloud on my life is lightening. I am impatient for health. I wish some doctor ~~was~~ could cure this mysterious malady. I walk much better and even my hand is more adroit. But I long for bodily vitality and confidence.

Forgive me the length and intimacy of this letter. My only justification is that I feel so remarkably close to you. There is so much I would like to talk with you about. I look forward every day to our meeting. Until then, know that I send you all the dear happy wishes that you~~th~~ can have use for.

Fondly,

Carson

(over)

The charming snapshot is stuck in my mirror. I had not imagined you as so good looking. Because I know that you are good, I thought that surely the Lord had shaped you carelessly. I saw you as a bit on the ugly side to make up for your other qualities. It's ~~my~~ obliging of the Lord to make you so handsome, too, I must say.

Do write me about ~~yourself~~ yourself---about your contract to the army. Let me know about the Washington plans.