

[] Jane [Dawson]

Bethesda, October 16, 1949

My dear Jane,

You know how we love him and honor him and respect him. You know we were glad and proud to have such a fine and lovable man as friend. So you know the light is out on our lives today and the sunshine is meaningless. How can such a good man be gone from a world which so badly needs him? I'm sure there are all sorts of saints, not only the monkish kind, and I'm sure that Allan is a kind of saint- a man who is eager to give himself completely to anything or any cause he considers worthy, the kind of man of good will for whom there should be peace on earth. How much untheological kindness and generosity he had! He was gentleness itself, and his gentleness was even more lovable because I'm sure he never thought of himself as kind and gentle. It stuck out all over, and he wasn't aware of it. Such unself-conscious goodness is rare and delightful; it's a subtly powerful inspiration to other people.

It's hard for William to understand how it happened. It isn't hard for me, because I can think back to the state of my own thoughts and emotions when I tried to cut my throat in 1944. Now there is only a faint scar, and a few equally faint memories. But I know that one can suddenly find oneself in a strange, moonlit world, very real and terrible, with a logic and set of values of its own. I was firmly convinced that the only courageous course for me was to set William free by my death. I struggled with myself in that different world, to make myself do what I truly thought was the right thing- I didn't want to die, I only thought it would be the best thing for William and my family, and my strange new conscience told me that I must do what I thought was right. It's hard, if not impossible, for anyone who hasn't visited that world to comprehend its differences from the normal one. Even the psychiatrist who worked with me afterwards obviously couldn't understand that it was because I loved William that I had tried to die, and not because I never had, or had ceased to love him. I tried to tell him that I had been so afraid to burden William, whom I loved, that I had made an effort to prove that mine was the "greater love" which no man has, when he gives his life for his friend. But I don't think the psychiatrist understood, and I don't think it's easy for anyone who hasn't been there, to understand.

Oh my dear, if there were only something big we could do to help you! All I can do is cry and wish we were near to try to comfort you. You know, you surely must know, that it would be a help to us in our grief to be able to help you in your far greater grief.

Transcription of last paragraphs:

Oh my dear, if there were only something big we could do to help you! All I can do is cry and wish we were near to try to comfort you. You know, you surely must know, that it would be a help to us in our grief to be able to help you in your far greater grief.

If you have to come to Washington, I hope you will stay with us who love you for your own dear sake as well as for his.