

Hawthorn Hill
Oakwood
Dayton . . Ohio

June 16, 1925

Dear Harry:

This has been the craziest day I have ever spent! It is now eleven twenty and I have just got home and received (over the phone) your telegram that your "Ohio trip has been postponed."

If you knew, Harry, what I have gone through this day. Now that I know you are not coming and the terrible strain of the last few hours is lifted, I want to laugh! It's a shaky laugh but a real one. I believe you have to begin younger than we are to arrange for these secret (!) meetings. This one certainly was torpedoed in the most unaccountable way.

I don't know where to begin. Yes, I'll begin with taking Orv to the train at about three o'clock this afternoon. Because I was not very carefully dressed, I did not get out of the car but said Goodbye to Orv in the car and when he walked into the station I drove away.

I came home and came right upstairs to get a nap. I did sleep last night well and for seven hours and nine but I had lost so much sleep while in Oberlin that I wanted to get rested as well as I could before you came. Well, I couldn't sleep. I had to read your Sunday morning letter (which came this morning) over about a dozen times and then I wasn't in any mood for sleeping! Finally however I did get to sleep, long after four o'clock. I woke up about half past five and was just getting my eyes open when I heard an automobile driving up and looking out of my window, I saw Anne and Frank. I called out to them and Frank said "Orville hasn't gone. He has been trying to get you." I was so scared I couldn't say anything but "Hasn't gone? hasn't gone?" I was sure he had met with some accident and they were breaking the news gently to me! But finally, from their voices I gathered that was not it and I found that he was at his office and wanted me to come after him. Well, I nearly had a fit as soon as I was sure he was all right for then I began to think how our chance to talk (which I had been looking forward to so eagerly) was all knocked up and I can never tell you what I've gone through since. My first thought was to tell you that Orv hadn't gone so you wouldn't come all this way for only the short talks we could get in between times. I wasn't dressed and Anne was waiting for me while Frank went right over after Orv. But, oh Harry. I nearly died with disappointment and uneasiness. As soon as I could, I got to the telephone and called Western Union. No answer. Called again. No answer. Called again. No answer. Then I tried the Postal. When I got them I got hold of a block head (man, of course!) who couldn't understand anything. Maybe there was a little excuse for you may be sure I was excited. My message said Orv "missed" his train—not quite correct. By this time I was expecting Orv and Frank and Orv might walk right into the telephone booth (in the hall) where I was. But all awful things do come to an end some way or other and I finally got some kind of a message through. I wanted you so much. I thought I could manage a good deal of this alone. Then I had to go out with Orv and Frank and Anne for dinner and have just got in.

Well, what happened was this. Orv got on the train for Xenia, where he had to change cars. When the conductor came for his ticket, little Bubbie discovered he didn't have any ticket—any sleeping reservations, any money, any of his correspondence giving the names of the people he was to see and where he was to go. He had nothing out of the pockets of his suit that he had been wearing. He could have got money probably but he didn't have any idea how to get in connection with the people at Philadelphia and I think he was too tired anyway to try to go on with everything out of kilter. He did think at first of going on but gave it up at Xenia. Then he tried to get me by telephone from Xenia. But I was upstairs and Carrie was out. No response. Then he came back to Dayton, to his office, and they kept trying to get me. I was sound asleep by this time. They then called Carrie and she had the good sense (as always) to call the McCormicks and ask them if they would come over to the house and see if I were asleep. They did—with the results I have told you about.

Harry, dear, the lies I have told today for you ought to be on your conscience. I regret to say they are not on mine!

First I told Orv you were coming because Carrie came into the dining room when we were at breakfast and said the Western Union had a telegram for me. So I went in and got it. When I got back to the table I said "Harry's coming tomorrow night." Orv said "He is? How does that happen?" So I said "Going East." That struck him as opening a chance that he might see you in Washington so he says "Going to Washington?" "No," says I, "New York." Stupid lie. Of course I might as well have said I didn't know but I was playing a new role of "creative artist." So that passed with Orv expressing regret he could not stay home to see you. That was the end of it until the telephone rang while Anne was here (before Orv and Frank came) and she answered. "Western Union for you" she called out. That was the message which said something (I was too excited to hear straight) about some other message being reported "undelivered" and saying you would come Wednesday night. Then when we opened the door on coming home tonight the bell was ringing wildly and I made haste to answer it. This time the Western Union again with the message saying you wouldn't come now. So as casually as I could I told Orv you weren't coming after all. I felt as if he could see I had been deceiving him all day. I would have told him you were coming even if Carrie hadn't come in with the message of a telegram, at the breakfast table. I can't bear to begin doing what I have never done—doing things in a way that isn't frank—when we have always been so frank with each other about where we are and what we are doing—in general. Orv wasn't with me at Oberlin but I just couldn't go up to Chicago to meet you when I would have to do it in an absolutely secret way. It would have been all right for us to do that but if it ever came out Orv would never have understood it. He never interferes with what I do but I have always liked to tell him just as he tells me all such things. I knew I couldn't live with my own secret—not one of that kind.

Really, Harry, I almost believe it was best that Orv didn't get off to Philadelphia for he looks so tired and his voice sounds so weak that I was worried about him anyway. It was weariness that made him forget all about his tickets and so on. This Smithsonian business gets on his nerves, in spite of a real confidence he has in the invincibility of facts. He doesn't say much and he beats them all to pieces on argument when he says anything for publication but it is a great strain and he is going to have little support from the "scientific" crowd—at first, at least. I wish you could see the whole "report" of Ames and

Taylor. Really, it is too ridiculous. Contrary to our first idea of the report as published in our paper, they defend the H. [Hammondsport] trials and say the queerest things in the name of science I have ever seen. Your editorial was rich!

So I am seriously concerned about Orv—as I have been much of the time since Will died. At times, especially in the last two or three years he has looked so much better but he looks thin and worn and tired and old now. However he is one of your “patient” men, in the sense of President King’s “patience,” in his baccalaureate sermon. He is steadfast—if ever any one was.

Altogether, Harry, my world is in a state of great disquiet and uneasiness. But I am not discouraged or unhappy. In the background there are all the things that are “true and lovely and of good report”—the real things that Will and Orv did and what they were and Orv is. Nothing can touch that and I am going to get along with this awful trouble as well as I can. Of course, it is only Orv’s troubles I can’t stand. I can stand my own always. You know all about that.

But what an unbelievable thing it is that you are not coming tomorrow night, after all I’ve thought about it and imagined. Since I am home and in my own room and look at your picture, I am over my wild desperation about you. I am myself again. I don’t know who that person was that walked around there in Oberlin in my shoes. I couldn’t recognize her!

I hope you got the letter I wrote yesterday afternoon this evening. In it I told you I didn’t know where affection ended and love began. I hadn’t considered “loving” you and you really gave me a great shock by telling me you loved me and had loved me from those far-off days in Oberlin. I couldn’t know any of that, dear. Don’t you see I couldn’t? You may be very sure that if I had suspected it even vaguely I could never have thought of writing to you at all—much less of writing as I did from 1914 on. I couldn’t do anything like that. I have always thought (forgive me, dear, for talking about myself this way) that I was not an “upsetting” person, that men were not the least interested in me, except as a friend. I didn’t formulate it just that way until in these last years when I have allowed myself to be rather unconventional. There were two reasons why I fancied I could be as good friends as I wanted to be with men without involving a thing but interest in common interests. One reason was that I had Orv who was more like a lover than a brother (in some ways!) [written above, between lines of the letter: “someone else said that of him”] and the other was that my experience and observation were that men were not inclined to have “feelings” about me. I felt so sure of that and I never tried to have it different.

I don’t know whether you know anything about Arthur Cunningham. I was engaged to him for nearly two years. Then, by a miracle, not my own wisdom, I saw that he really didn’t care much about me—not the way I have to be cared about if I am going to care so much. He didn’t do anything wrong but he was evidently relieved when I pretended I thought we had better give it up. I was horribly unhappy for several years, all the time glad I had done what I had but broken-hearted over the failure of a great ideal with me.

I haven’t wanted to marry any one since. And, as I get older, I realize that the chance of making even what one could call a “reasonable success” of marriage grows more and more unlikely. But I couldn’t get along with a reasonable success. I don’t know how to

say it without sounding melodramatic or cheap. I'd have to have a very beautiful thing. One minute I am all my years and know that no ideal can ever be realized; the next minute, I have the feelings of a girl and believe that an ideal can be realized—but all the time experience comes in to temper my dreams with reasonableness. I can't be a girl again, of course. And I'm glad of it!

I have had a happy life and I haven't wanted to be married, frankly. Circumstances have been so unusual with me in so many ways. I have never been in a place where I was not very much wanted and needed. I have never lacked plenty of interests. But that does not mean that I have never thought of wanting the experience of having some one to love and to love me in a way, I suppose entirely outside of my experience. I have thought of it and, in general, I have been quite willing to miss some things in order to escape others.

But, in particular. Ah, that's different, Harry. I am not sure I ought to write any of this, for I do not now see any way to give you what you want. My conscience is after me so hard. If I can't finally give you that, I ought perhaps not to open my heart at all. What I have been thinking today is this. It can't be worse for you to feel that I do not respond, at least in some fashion, to your dear telling me that you love me, no matter how it turns out later, than to have you think I don't care. For I do care very much.

“At least, in some fashion” isn't what I meant at all. I see that. For I do respond now that I am home and myself again, in a good deal more than “in some fashion.” But I am so afraid to care as much for you as I naturally would if I didn't feel that terrible conscience after me all the time. For one thing, I can't be free to think as much of you as is natural (or at least it's hard) because I can't bear to think I worked my way into your heart when you were in trouble and were needing comfort and sympathy. I despise that. It is one of the commonest tricks of my sect. (Now, please don't begin defending Miss Farmer. I'm not referring specifically or even in general to her so let's let that go. I'll just say for her, and that's an end of it, that she is the cause of my having two of the most strenuous weeks of my life!) But you will say, of course, that I didn't. You are so generous with me. That almost makes me weep, speaking of cathedrals and such. You are so dear with me. I don't know what to make of all you say you feel about me. It ought to make any woman solemn. I am solemn now, but not too solemn, for I am very happy, or would be if I could see my way out. I could not have cared so much for you twenty-five years ago but I might have married you then if you had wanted me to. I didn't have it in me to love you then as I may come to love you now, but the way would have been easier then to think of marriage. Even then I was worried nearly sick over the thought of leaving the family without a woman to take care of the things a woman only can look after very well.

You spoke, in the letter that came today, about my having the same right to satisfy my own heart that Orv would have had and that everybody would have thought it all right if he had married without considering me. But, dear, there are two things to be said about that. Orv didn't want to leave me and he has planned everything with a view to sharing everything with me. Another thing, you will find women always more responsible about not leaving any one they feel left to their care. It is a part of us. Look at the Leonard family in Oberlin. The two brothers married when they wanted to and did it knowing just what would fall on Kate. I am not maligning your sect but you can see that in dozens of families among your friends. There are certain traits more developed in one sect or the

other. That faithfulness and unselfishness in this one line is more pronounced in women than men, though men are often splendid, of course.

When I came home last night, Orv told me right away about needing my advice while I was gone on what to give out to the papers on the Manly proposal. He always wants me for everything like that and he needs me so very much just now. He has told the editor of Liberty Magazine (who can't understand a man who doesn't grab the chance for publicity and money but who respects the man very much evidently) to submit the article he wants to write about Orv to me. Mr. Buell, or whatever his name is, was here again today, also the editor and the owner of the Columbus Dispatch. I'm not able to do much but I'd never forgive myself or be able to live in peace, if I failed Orv now, after all we have been through together and after all he has been to me.

Will it keep you upset to let me love you a little? I am so concerned over this past week for you. I was paralyzed in Oberlin. Yes, I was just that. Fancy my sitting talking calmly with your sister and Mr. Stetson with that letter, whose contents I did guess somewhat before I opened it, in my pocket-book. I stuck it there so they wouldn't see the handwriting. Oh, Harry, such a time. All the time I thought of you waiting for a telegram and there I sat rooted to the spot. And Kate Leonard sitting in my room while I opened and read the telegram about my coming to Chicago. With my heart standing still, I tossed it over on the dresser and said, in answer to Kate's kindly anxiety, that I might have to leave before I had planned but that it was nothing serious! I shall be a "gifted fibber", if I keep on. But the worst was yesterday morning when I got that heart-breaking "It's all right" etc. I thought I couldn't stand that but I couldn't get an answer off for nearly an hour because the telegraph office closes from 12 to 1!! So I talked composedly enough to Dr. Wager for nearly an hour while I waited.

I haven't any idea what I said in any letter last week—in particular—and not much in general, except that I feel that the letter you may have got tonight was different from the others. I know I told you then that I couldn't tell, or rather I asked you how I could tell, where affection ends and love begins.

Couldn't we try loving each other for a little while? Will that be too hard for you when I can't promise anything ahead? Please let me comfort you with my love. You have comforted me with yours. So much there is in one's heart that struggles for expression. For so long I have wanted to comfort you and now I partly fail you and make things worse than ever perhaps.

Harry, this thought comes to me again—maybe I ought not to say so much when I see no way to do anything. If this is too trying, let's stop right away and go back to our old letters. I mustn't keep you any more unsettled than you are and maybe—well. I haven't the nerve to say it for you will feel now that you don't want to think of any one else. Maybe you could if I were definitely out of the way. I am afraid I do love you! But as I have already said it a dozen times and have taken a fiendish delight in saying it too, I might now think, at least, of going to sleep. It is exactly three a.m. by my watch. Goodnight and God bless you, dear. Please don't mind that. It means something sweet and lovely to me.

Katharine

Do so many letters at the office embarrass you? Shall I send them to the house or will Ollie talk more? K

Wednesday morning. Your special delivery letter came last night when we were out. There was a notice left which I didn't see but Carrie did and Carrie went down to get the mail and had the letter on the breakfast table! Such a time as I put in at the breakfast table and unless Orv is a good deal "stupider" than I think he saw that something was wrong. However my telling him yesterday that you were coming helped out. Lies are always a mess, aren't they? But as things are, please don't send any special delivery letters or telegrams unless you have to, not even to satisfy me. I want them but I can't manage it.

I'm going down to the P.O. with this right away now. It will go by Piqua if I put a special delivery stamp on it; otherwise it won't go well before night—they told me that once when I wanted to get something through quickly.

Could we go on just naturally and say the things that come up to be said, or shall we go on a strictly pre-explosion program? I worry so over the effect on you of having your feelings stirred up so, and not being able now to do anything more than just telling you that I find something in my heart that may be love. I am not sure what love is. I can say this honestly. If it were not for Orv I would go recklessly ahead and see what is in me. But I worry so about you both and, I guess, love you both! Sort of a polygamist attitude. Please don't be unhappy. Surely we can have what is right. I want to put my arms around you once and let you see what you can in my face.

Katharine

P.S. I tried to get a photograph for you but the woman is in Detroit and it may take some time. I'll get it.

I almost forgot to say that Orv isn't going East at all now. Too bad not to be present for his medal tomorrow. Maybe we can see each other before too long. K