7-15-1968

Letter to Pat Grean, July 15, 1968

Patricia Goedicke
Dearest, dearest Pat:

I read your letter walking barefoot back to my studio between rows of lilly-of-the-valley, Indian paintbrush, and (only you know the names for such lovelies) with the sun warming, sweet smells rising, pine needles drying, hay fields mellowing... And I got duck bumps because it was such a nice letter. Then I sat down in my chair on the screened porch and read it all over again, word, image, idea, funniness, feeling -- and got duck bumps all over again! So you see why, instead of going right to work, I am sitting down immediately to write to you instead. I have been wanting to write to you both, anyway, but things have been happening so fast that I just haven't had time....

But migod, smelling honeysuckle indeed. WOW! You just wouldn't believe. I am absolutely the most luckiest person in the whole world. I think maybe I'll just be drowned in goodness before that old pattern lets up. What's happened is that, at absolutely the right time, place, everything, I have met an absolutely darling, darling, lovely man. Who is GOOD to me all the time. Who is incredibly GOOD himself. Who is funny funny funny. Who is tender, who is sweet, who knows more about the way people work than almost anyone I know; is wise but not bitter, not defensive; an innocent who just walks around the world loving people. I keep looking for a grain of malice, but can't find a one yet. (I've known him for 5 days). Now add: he writes poetry, well. His public vocation is writing short stories for the New Yorker and others. He is a journalist -- magazines and documentary type books. He has just finished a novel; is working on another. He used to be fiction editor of Colliers. Then he was an executive director editor at Holt. Then, 15 years ago, he just quite everything in order to write full time. His name is Leonard Robinson. (His brother, dead now, was Henry Morton Robinson, of the Cardinal. Sold his soul for success, says Leonard, who adores him.) He is Irish and Jewish. His son just graduated from Columbia.

Pure plus, nicht? Now for some unplus. He's 55. He's been married three times: for 12 years very unhappily, then another time, most happily and lengthily, to Marie Nyswander (wrote a report on whose experiments with substituting methadone for heroine addiction were profiled in the New Yorker last year maybe). But all of a sudden she broke it up, upset by fame, a scarring cancer operation, a sudden lover. He was desperately unhappy, and returned on the rebound, even marrying her, to what the first and only (he says) love of his life, one Betty Ryan, a pal of Durrell and Miller, who appears prominently on the first page of the Colossus of Maroussi as the girl who could invoke Greece so beautifully. But the marriage (about three years old) is very unhappy; she can't live with him, and insists on living in Greece by herself, where she is now. Though he loves her (the way I would love Richard) just the same as ever. The first night we met and went out (to see a charming performance of The Taming of the Shrew, with adorable petrachio and Kate to ride) we discovered all these parallels (Richard and Betty) and talked and talked and talked. Since then
we haven't gone back to that much, but he understands everything; especially the way I felt about Victor and how I'm feeling now.

Now add: He is wild about poetry, and recites reams and reams of it, in French, English, what have you, at the drop of a hat. He has been thoroughly, and for my money, beautifully psychoanalyzed. He is an ex-Catholic, but a believer still. You have to watch him every second, or rather listen, because he is also a mad mimic. We sit on a beach and all of a sudden he becomes a Boston plumper worrying about taking a night school course so he can buy a beach umbrella to put up beside the rich guys across the way in East Egg. He strides into the water, plump belly first, arm upraised, proclaiming himself Poseidon, the far-darter. (I chortle and snicker and gurgle so hard I can't keep afloat).

Which brings us to his appearance, which is utterly, utterly mad. He comes nearest, of all things, to Cecil! (And in many ways other than the physical, too, though he is infinitely, infinitely more aware, intelligent, empathetic, and withal sophisticated about people than Cecil ever was.) O my. His belly, as I have said, bulges. He is only an inch or so taller than I. He has one chin too many. But he is on a diet — doesn't even drink (!) (Which does marvels for my little excesses. Besides which, sober as a drunk judge, I feel drunk with delight all the time I am with him) And he has a fine, fine forehead and nose and eyes, and tough, strong arms and legs. And dances well, too, though not quite so maniacally as I. (He says all poets are hysterics, and doesn't mind at all...)

As you have perhaps observed, I am finding it very hard to stop talking about him. And even now, there are so many stories I want to tell you: funny things, sweet things... Well. Last night, in between reading poetry aloud to each other, he told me, very carefully, that he wanted me to be sure not to feel confined, constrained by him; not to get "coupled" with him only, as so often happens in small groups like this, because he doesn't want to interfere with my freedom, and I have such a short time here... What's more, he wasn't saying, "I don't love you" under cover of saying, as so many do, "I don't want to get involved; don't make too many demands on me" — No. He really meant it, I verily believe. He was really thinking about me!

Well. It is just absolutely the loveliest timing in the world, for this to happen to me right now. What it does is to give me the new perspective on Richard that I so desperately need, give me breathing space, help me to see the real depths and/or shallows of my feeling for him. It is even possible that something serious may come out of Leonard and me, but for the moment it doesn't matter at all. Nobody is pushing anybody; everybody understands (that is to say, the two of us); we are just great, good, dear friends. Cherishing each other openly, honestly, naturally, with all the freedom in the world. There is no centrality, no fixedness about it either -- yet -- just enormous tenderness and fun and understanding.

Now how can all that happen in five days? I must be mad. Especially when you consider that two of those five days I spent in Hanover. (More of that later).

As for Richard, the pressure is all, all off. We had a couple of phone talks before he left on his latest trip, to Tortola as captain, this time, of a 60 foot something or other. This was
all before I met Leonard (who has so many of the same things I love in Richard, but who is so much surer of himself, so much less hostile, so loving, so easy, that he brings all Richard's poor Richard's weaknesses and -- inadvertent -- cruelties out into glaring relief). I went through the usual hell (I dimly remember) thinking the weekend in New York had ruined everything, and then was terribly relieved to hear that it had not. Probably he will fly up here from Tortola in a week or so; I view his coming with complete peace, equanimity, curiosity, and pleasure. I am a trifle concerned about possible strains with Leonard, but he knows about Richard already, and I'm sure he'll understand. If we are still seeing each other then. (That's a ridiculous thing to say, but I have to keep pinching myself to make sure I'm not making this all up.)

Anyway, what this latest idiocy means in terms of Richard is, I think, that now I am completely free of the neurotic side of my attachment to him, which means in turn that I will be able, really, at last, to let him be free, too. Which means that whatever decision is made (if indeed there is one to make) will be free also. For him and me both, and no guilts on either side.

0 I am a featherbrain, a lightweight, a weatherveane... I love the whole world and everybody in it. There is nothing in my head but fluff. But listen listen listen: I'm free of Mother and Daddy, too! The visit was marvelous! They were both as sweet as they could be, and I told them as much as I could about Victor and me (not what you told me, because I was afraid, in their concern for me, they might turn against him), and though Daddy's nastinesses were much less than usual (Mother and I decided he was making a special effort), nothing he said or did could hurt me. Nothing either of them said or did. I just enjoyed them, and when I couldn't, I just smiled, held my own hands, and waited. Or spoke sharply (but not too sharply) to them, and told them to be nicer to each other. (Poor things, imagine having that for a daughter! But they didn't seem to mind; even kind of giggled and hung their heads and stuck their fingers in their mouths. Daddy, that is. One doesn't do it twover so easily with Mother, because her hostilities are less accessible to her, and, because she really wants to love, are based on much more real and furious rage.) But she and I had several long sessions in which she got lots of things off her chest (apologizing for talking about herself all the while) and so did I...... She is, with all her blind spots, a most wise and loving woman...

About Victor there's been no change. I wrote a long letter to Carrie about him, but finally I couldn't send it. I think if I ever see her again, maybe... I was so shocked and sad when you told me about it, but the shock has worn off now, and lately I am only sad for him, in no new ways, just more of the same. I only hope he'll be all right. It still seems so, though. His last letter spoke about the centrality of his sexual difficulties and needs, his regrets about them, and his determination to face up to what they make of him as a person. So perhaps he is beginning to open up with Baas a little more.

Next day. (I had to stop because a young composer-poet-friend appeared unannounced, wanting to share his lunch basket with me, so, heeding Leonard's advice, I spent the afternoon swimming with
him, doing a little work, and so on. Before dinner we had drinks, then I was supposed to go out to dinner with Leonard, and since it was so late, brought Bob along...

July 18: Days and days later! And having spent the WHOLE of last night talking to Leonard (he decided to go off his diet for once, as a result of which I guess we must have consumed at least a half gallon of Gallo) I am very tired, but still want to go on talking. Because of course, natch, things have changed and changed and changed... By now we are at the stage where Leonard (who has had the same "turning off" of his feelings for Betty as I have had for Richard) is saying, "Let me take you to Greece," (and he means it), is describing, in great detail, the lovely farmhouse and 5 children we'll have; is telling me that even if I begged him to marry me - (which I haven't and am not -- yet! -- certainly -- about to do -- I think -- anyway he'd be asking me, has practically done so already) he'd think long and long before he'd ever let me do it, he is so afraid I'd be hurt (age differences, etc. etc.) and, most seriously of all, is totting up assets and possibilities for starting our own Artists Colony in Maine or wherever. (He knew the one in Woodstock, the owner of it, from earliest days, and loved it, and wants to combine a wish to do something for others with literature, his true love, and me, though he says he'd go on with this idea even if I didn't go on with him...). My reaction to the artist colony idea is, of course, WOW, GEE, GREAT! My reaction to the idea of spending the rest of my life with Leonard is, you'll be glad to hear, considerably more moderate. I am considering it, however... But for his sake and mine, I certainly wouldn't let us get married right away. What I'd like to do is to try livin with him for a little while. I think he'd be most amenable to the idea, and I'm almost certain that, if it should end badly, he'd be more than able to take it. As for me, he'd help me all he could...

What bothers me, of course is a) the age, and b) the rapid turn-over in my feelings lately, which makes me wonder if any of them can be trusted. (Leonard, with whom I've discussed this, thinks they are, needless to say, and professes to be quite content to have me see Richard again and find out. If Richard comes up, in fact, he says he'll go away for a few days just to be sure not to interrupt...)

But holy moses, he is SUCH a wonderful, wonderful, sweet, charming, passionate, intelligent, honest person. With an Irish accent, yet. We see all the same things about people, we act towards them the same way (though he much more sweetly and perceptively than I -- and rougher too, when the need arises); we adore the same things, we adore each other. You and Stanley would be wild, wild wild about him... There would be nothing you could find to fault him for... As for me, it's like finding a real true "soul brother", only one who is so much nicer than I....

Well. We keep talking about being up on the Magic Mountain here, and of course there is a great deal of unreality about the whole things... So we will not, we will not make any decisions until we are back in the valleys of reality....

But I wish you could meet him. (You will, too, someday, because even if we never even live together, we will never part...)
But my time here is almost up! (He stays through August). I don't know what I'm going to do, either. I've asked for an extension, but I don't know yet whether it will come through. If it doesn't, I'll probably stay in Peterborough a few days after the end of July, if only to see Ann Cameron. Or maybe I'll whisk down to see you just before you leave, and then come back up here... You couldn't possibly come home via Peterborough, could you? You'd love it here, and you could meet Leonard, etc. Another possibility is if Victor is away from Athens in August, maybe I'd come out for awhile.... Or maybe I could bring Leonard to Southampton to visit you? But he says he knows an awful lot of people there, and since he's still not officially separated from Betty, (even though she is in Greece)...

Tell you what. If you want to, why don't you, as soon as you get this letter, drop me a line to tell me you'll call this number at such and such a time on such a day. Don't call the other numbers I have you; they're too public and difficult to get through to; this one is in the library, and I could just go there and wait. Charge the call (since you're in a phone booth) to ours in Athens - 592-2042, giving my name and address... It would be wonderful to talk to you a little about all this, and we could make more definite plans about meeting somehow or other...

Dear things, it is so wonderful to have you for friends. I love you both very, very much. And I do know, Pat, that there will be many many Caesar salads and gabfests (while Stanley's in the bathtub) for us for years and years and years to come.

Go on adoring Southampton as much as (if that's possible) I am adoring it here...

My dearest love,

P.S. Meanwhile, incredible as it may seem, I'm working very hard. Book nearly done. Seven new poems begun -- several finished... etc. etc. Also, lest you think Leonard is the only oasis in the desert of my squashed self, I should mention that, in this female-poor society, my ego is WLOOMING under the devoted attentions of several male artists...

July 21: Just got back from a weekend "off the Mountain", investigating possible Colony-sites, with Leonard. Lovely lovely lovely, though no real leads yet. He's much more complicated, of course, than I thought, but things grew sweeter and deeper everyday. I swear, it's another miracle. I must be mad. I'm sure you and Stanley will be afraid I am, but don't be. I won't do anything definite for a good long while. Meanwhile it's a second sprintime for me, all over: poetry, art, love, intellect, dance, swim, flowers, friends -- even a dream to plan for: uniting art and life, yet! Imagine if we could actually do it! And we might, we might! Leonard is no starry-eyed idealist, and neither am I....

I WILL SEND THIS LETTER OFF TOMORROW MORNING SHARP !!

Love love love love love.