

is in misery. (In Grimmenstein there is a department exclusively for such diseases.)

Again I'm thinking about "dashed to pieces on me," it's just as incorrect as, say, coming up with the opposite possibility.

This is neither my defect nor one of other people. It's just that I belong in the quietest quiet, that's what's right for me.

I clipped this story for you. Leviné was executed by a firing squad in Munich, wasn't he?

[Prague, November 1920]

Today is Thursday. Up till Tuesday I was honestly determined to go to Gr., though I did occasionally feel something menacing inside me when I thought about it. I also realized the continued postponement of my journey was partly caused by this, but I believed I could easily overcome the whole thing. Tuesday during the day someone told me it's not necessary to wait in Prague for the residency permit; it can very likely be obtained in Vienna. With that the path was clear. I then agonized on the sofa for a whole afternoon; in the evening I wrote you a letter but didn't mail it—I still hoped to be able to overcome my feeling, but I spent the whole sleepless night virtually writhing in agony. Two people were struggling within me; one who wants to go and one who is afraid to go—both just parts of me, both undoubtedly scoundrels. I got up the next morning like I did in my worst times.

I don't have the strength to leave; I can't bear the thought in advance that I might be standing before you—I can't bear the pressure in my brain. Your letter itself is one vast, inevitable disappointment in me, and now this as well. You write that you have no hope, but you do have the hope of being able to leave me completely.

I can't explain to you or to anybody what it's like inside me. How could I begin to explain; I can't even explain it to myself. But even this is not the main thing; the main thing is obvious: it is impossible to live like a human being around me; you see this and yet you don't want to believe it?

[Prague, November 1920]
Saturday evening

I still haven't received the yellow letter, I'll send it back unopened.

I'd have to be horribly mistaken if the idea we stop writing one another doesn't prove to be a good one. But I am not mistaken, Milena. I don't want to talk about you, not because it's none of my business—it is my business—I just don't want to talk about it.

So I'll only say this about myself: What you are for me, Milena, beyond the whole world we inhabit, cannot be found in all the daily scraps of paper which I have sent you. As they are, these letters do nothing but cause anguish, and if they don't cause any anguish it's even worse. They can only evoke a day in Gmünd, produce misunderstandings and shame, a shame which almost never passes. I want to see you as clearly as I saw you the first time on the street, but the letters cause more distraction than the entire Lerchenfelderstrasse with its noise.

But not even that is decisive; the deciding factor is my increasing (letter by letter) inability to go beyond the letters: I am powerless toward you as well as toward myself—1000 letters from you and 1000 desires from me will not convince me otherwise—and (perhaps as a result of this powerlessness, but here all causes lie buried in darkness) what is equally decisive is the *irresistibly strong voice, literally your voice* calling on me to be silent. And now everything concerning you remains unsaid; of course it's mostly found in your letters (maybe in the

yellow one as well, or more correctly: in the telegram you sent—naturally with good reason—demanding I return the letter), frequently in the passages which I fear and avoid like the devil avoids a consecrated place.

Strange, I also wanted to send you a telegram. I played with the idea for a long time—in bed this afternoon, at the Belvedere this evening, but it would say only this: “Request explicit and affirmative reply to underlined passage in last letter.” But in the end that seemed to contain an unjustified and ugly lack of trust and I didn’t send it.

So now I’ve been brooding over this letter until 1:30 at night without doing anything else, just staring at it, and through it at you. Sometimes—not in a dream—I see in my mind: Your face is hidden by your hair, which I succeed in parting right and left, your face appears, I run my hands along your forehead to your temples and now I’m holding your face in my hands.

Monday

I wanted to tear up this letter, not send it, not answer your telegram, telegrams can mean so many different things—but now both the postcard and the letter have arrived; this card, this letter. But even when faced by them, Milena, and even if I have to bite my tongue to shreds, it wants to speak so badly—how can I believe you need my letters now, when the only thing you need is peace, as you have so often said, half unconsciously. And these letters really are pure anguish, *they are caused by incurable anguish and they cause incurable anguish*. Moreover it’s even getting worse—what good will my letters be this winter? The only way to live is to be silent and still, here as well as there. With some sadness, fine, what difference does that make? It renders sleep deeper and more childlike. But anguish pulls its plow through sleep—all through the day, too—and that is unbearable.

IN THE MARGIN: If I do go to a sanatorium, of course I will write you.

[Prague, end of March 1922]

It's been such a long time since I've written you,* Frau Milena, and even today I am only writing as the result of coincidence. Actually I don't have to apologize for my not having written, after all, you know how much I hate letters. All my misfortune in life—I don't want to complain, just make a generally instructive observation—derives, one might say, from letters or from the possibility of writing letters. People have hardly ever deceived me, but letters always have, and as a matter of fact not those of other people, but my own. In my case this is a particular misfortune which I do not want to discuss further, but it is nevertheless also a general one. The easy possibility of writing letters—from a purely theoretical point of view—must have brought wrack and ruin to the souls of the world. Writing letters is actually an intercourse with ghosts and by no means just with the ghost of the addressee but also with one's own ghost, which secretly evolves inside the letter one is writing or even in a whole series of letters, where one letter corroborates another and can refer to it as witness. How did people ever get the idea they could communicate with one another by letter! One can think about someone far away and one can hold on to someone nearby; everything else is beyond human power. Writing letters, on the other hand, means exposing oneself to the ghosts, who are greedily waiting precisely for that. Written kisses never arrive at their destination; the ghosts drink them up along the way. It is this ample nourishment which enables them to multiply so enormously. People sense this and struggle against it; in order to eliminate as much of the ghosts' power as possible and to attain a natural intercourse, a tranquility of soul, they have invented trains, cars, aeroplanes—but nothing helps anymore: These are evidently inventions devised at the moment of crashing. The opposing side is so much calmer and stronger; after the postal system, the ghosts invented the telegraph, the telephone, the wireless. They will not starve, but we will perish.

*Here Kafka has reverted to the formal *Sie*.

I'm surprised you haven't written about this yet, not in order to prevent or achieve something with its publication, it's too late for that, but at least to let "them" know they have been exposed.

Incidentally, "they" are also exposed by the exceptions, for it sometimes happens they let a letter through untouched, and it arrives like the light, kind handclasp of a friendly hand. But probably that also merely appears to be so; such cases may be the most dangerous of all, and should be guarded against more carefully than the others. On the other hand, if this is a deception, at least it is a complete one.

Something like that happened to me today and that's why I thought of writing you. I received a letter from a friend whom you also know; we haven't been writing each other for a long time, which is extremely sensible. A corollary of the above is that letters are an excellent antisleeping pill. What shape they're in when they arrive! Desiccated, empty, and provocative, a single moment of joy with long suffering to follow. While one is reading them and forgetting oneself, the little sleep one has gets up, flies out the open window and doesn't return for a long time. This is why we haven't written one another. But I often think about my friend, even if too much in passing. All my thinking is too much in passing. Last night, however, I thought about him a lot, for hours and hours; I spent the deep night hours in bed—these hours which are so costly to me because they are so hostile—using the same words over and over to keep repeating certain things to him in an imaginary letter, things which at that moment seemed extremely important to me. And in the morning a letter from him actually arrived, containing moreover the remark that for a month, or perhaps more correctly a month ago, my friend had had the feeling that he should come and see me, a remark which strangely coincided with things I had experienced.

This letter incident induced me to write a letter and as long as I've begun, how could I not write to you as well, Frau Milena, since you are perhaps the person I enjoy writing to most. (Inasmuch as writing can be enjoyed at all, which I only

add for the ghosts surrounding my table, who are waiting and lusting.)

It's been a long time since I found anything of yours in the newspapers except the fashion articles which—with a few minor exceptions—have recently seemed happy and calm, especially the last one on spring. But it's true I hadn't read the *Tribuna* for 3 weeks beforehand (I'll try to find the copies)—I was in Spindelmühle.

[Prague, September 1922]

Dear Frau Milena,

I must confess I once envied someone very much because he was loved, well cared-for, guarded by reason and strength, and because he lay peacefully under flowers. I'm always quick to envy.

I think I was right to conclude from the *Tribuna*, which I read often although not constantly, that you have had a good summer. I once acquired a copy in Planá at the station; two women, summer guests, were conversing with each other, one was holding the supplement behind her, in my direction; my sister then borrowed it for me. If I'm not mistaken you had a very funny article attacking the German spas. Once you wrote about the happiness of spending the summer in places far removed by rail, that was also nice; or was that the same article? I don't think so. As usual when you appear in *Národní Listy* and leave the Jewish (fashion) school behind, your article about the window displays was grandly superior. Then you translated the essay about the cooks—why? Your aunt is peculiar: one time she writes how people should stamp their letters properly, next how they shouldn't throw things out the window, all matters beyond dispute—but hopeless struggles nonetheless. Occasionally, however, something lovely, moving