

29 Oct 81

Joanna my love---

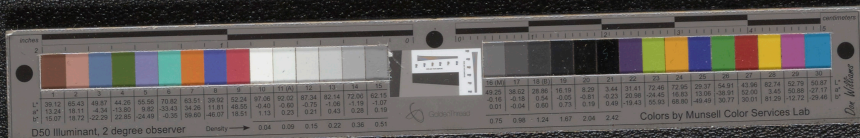
Thanks for the letter; I know what it costs to write them when you're really sick. Assuming you aren't bored out of your skull with talking about the illness, I'd like to know howcome you got to a pain clinic---if you recall!--- or rather, when you recall. What doctors do this kind of thing and how reputable?---No, strike that, with medical politics what it is, one can be recommended to a "reputable" imbecile. Well, anyway, why did you think they're good? Maybe they are---I'm just asking for info, because I respect you and we're so much alike. (If I had a dime for everyone who has remarked that my pain threshold is absurdly low...As a kid I went to bed crying about Carthage, and the destruction of the library at Alexandria can still upset me---psychic pain same thing. But actual physical pain---what others call "discomfort"---it sets in at the level of suffering from Muzak or a light in the eyes---and you know, I mean pain. So far with me the only painful area is my head; headaches and me were synonyms from age 10, I thought an ostrich egg was trying to hatch in my skull. I haven't things like your feet and back, which you uneasily suspect of being really busted or abused in some way. (God, think of a poor horse or burro trying to convey that his/her feet all hurt---and being beaten for sloth.) And after you get through all the available doctoring and everyone says there's nothing wrong, you still suspect there IS---because otherwise why'n hell do they HURT SO?

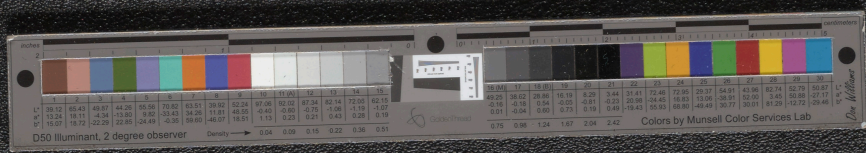
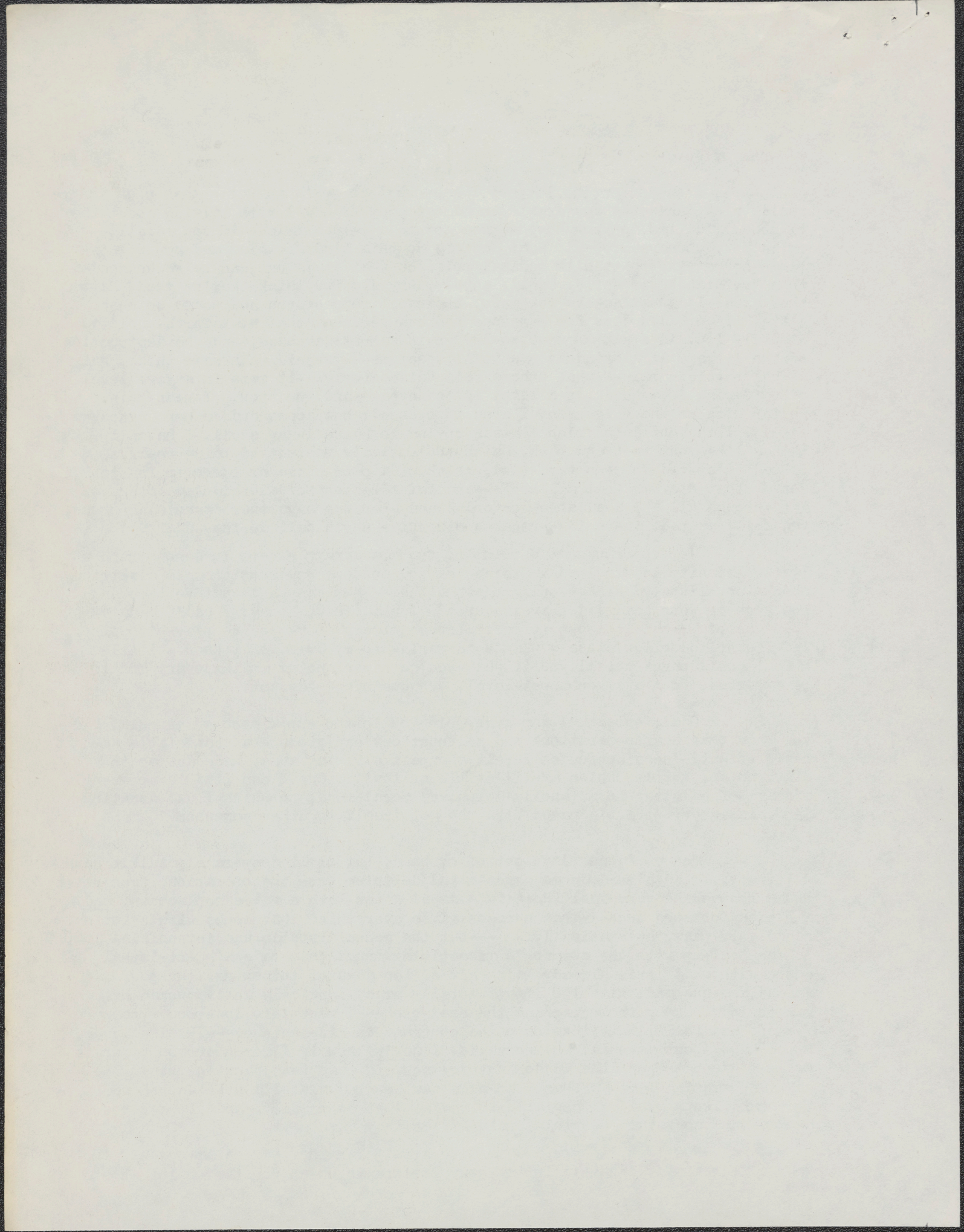
Jo, there wasn't a point to that paragraph except to demonstrate a little kinship. And to lead up to asking you howcome you submitted to electric shocks so blithely? Please tell me about them---how many and what voltage and how much of your head did they traverse? I mean this, Honey; I can't DO anything helpful, but it looks to me as though misery drove you to play with fire. And I want to follow closely what's happening to my Swan. If I knew a little more I could perhaps tell you if what you're experiencing is temporary and to be expected, from a given shock-level, or something aberrant.

Oddly enough, I can even join you in the experience of amnesia. Did you know that heart operations and malfunctions can produce a respectable amnesic effect? In my confusion I felt the past slipping away, made desperate diary notes, most of which are illegible or lost....One I can find is apparently a draft of a letter to a (wholly delusive) "crab-fund," to which I was donating \$500. in memory of "a big^{one} named VIVA who got itself together somewhen."

---Scary. I was clean out of my head, but still desperately talking and writing....I had already some amnesia and delirium from the operation, from which I was recovering very fast (Home in 4 days! After both a valve replacement and a bypass for good luck---that surgeon gives everything that comes within knife range a by-pass, automatically.) ---But the mental trouble was intensified 1000 0/o by the foul-up with the surgeon's prescribing drugs that made a heart-lethal combo with what I was already being given. Ten days of poisoning. (My poor friend and husband, with 130 lbs of totally crazy lungingly active woman he was trying to keep from cracking the head open---I went into low-blood-pressure syncope and fell like bricks onto the concrete in mid-sentence---19 times.) So, I too know about amnesia. The worst is, I don't know if I remember how to write yet---I haven't been able to do anything new. Is this fear haunting you? The most encouraging part is that I at once saw how bad what I'd written before the operation was; I've been able to revise, but so messily. And I'm a bit hooked on a morphine-containing pain-killer they gave me.

Now look, if you are in dire straits trying to recall yourself to yourself, remember I have a lot of your letters in which you told a lot about





how you were feeling, and it might not be too silly to have me Xerox them and send to you. You could at once see contrasts. Of course you're one of those rare people who have a hundred facets, and who "change" daily---and sometimes hourly, so that any past diary must seem writ by a stranger, so that seeing a load of past glimpses might panic you. (This is poorly put but if true you'll know immediately what I'm fumbling at.) Anyway---would you like? Doing the work involved would be a comfort to me, I could kid myself I was helping you...Tell me?

(You note I do NOT offer to put the originals in reach of your match-happy paddy paws, No-no-no.)

On the other hand, from what you tell me about "the jollity goes as the past comes back," it might be a mistake to relearn your past self too completely. You may have to sacrifice some exactitude of memory to stay rid of the associated pain.....It's up to you, I certainly would not send you such a hunk without your considered Yea.

I find that a "respectable" amnesia---I mean, one not due to any messy neural or psychological cause, but a nice "mechanical" amnesia which can be entertained without losing macho respect---is a social blessing. I can use it cover my normal forgetfulness of uninteresting people's names, conversations, and all the junk that turns up reproachfully bleating You forgot Me. (So sorry, that unforgettable event you precipitated must be one of the things that dropped out of the computer, they don't tell you that heart operations give you amnesia often for quite important things Hah-hah-hah.) I find that the conventional mind is quite susceptible to the Things-they-don't-tell-you gambit. If they live awhile, even the dimmest light gets conscious of conspiracies of silence...Maybe because they participate in them towards others...Recently, e.g. in New Zealand, I've run across a lot of people whose proudest boast to be engraved on their tombstones is, I DIDN'T TELL NOBODY NUTTIN. Conversely, they get slowly conscious of being on the receiving end of the nuttin' from their peers...

This sounds as if scraps of a dimly planned Handbook of Female Tactics (lousy working title) that I urged Vonda to write and may end up writing myself are getting into this letter. I have a quasi-military mind, you know, or perhaps ^{am} an old-fashioned apparatchik, and whenever I get my face slapped with a wet fish I always try to figure out what would have worked better, and what actually happened. Know your enemy, the handbooks in Basic Training said. Be prepared...It could be fun, and if it grows may get some title like The Female Agenda. If it ever grows from the status of cloudy notion to words on paper---actually there are some 1st-draft words writ in 50 places---I was planning to solicit you. My attitude is, Get up off the floor, stop pounding your fists and seething, and Do Something. (Advice to Vonda.) It seems to me we have no handbook, do we? No manual of tactics a mother could hand her girl, or one sister hand another. What, You Should Know Before You Mix It. Or are there some? My impression is, we have heaps of raw data, angry or weepy complaints, outrages---but we're left to infer courses of resultant action for ourselves.

Oh---a nice item to tell you. A really novel book. A getting-together-in-one-coherent-story-of-things-you-didn't-know-you-were-puzzled-by. Called, THE RETURN TO CAMELOT, by Mark Girouard, Yale Univ. Press, recent. Expensive, like \$30., because lavishly---pricelessly---illustrated. I wish you would read at least one chapter. It will tell you all, or 90 o/o of Tiptree. Me...We come from neighboring provinces, you know, you with your Jewish background and me with my diluted watered-down atheist/ Protestant/Transcendentalist one---to end in the same place, crying such similar tears and consulting the same shrinks....End of paper coming---but tell me, what anti-depressant have you picked? I want to know, seriously.

Remember, love, somebody feels with you and cares.

Don't piss all your water on "Ladies." Save some for the real enemy.

Betty-bye time. G'night, love.

♡ ETT

