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Dearest Nell,

A little later today will be the day you begin your surgery. Right now it is only a little past midnight of a day that was the 10th. I am here alone tonight, since our god-daughter is in the hospital and Piedy took the children to their grandparents so she could sit with our god-daughter until the child's parents come tomorrow. Nothing very serious, I think; but the child is in the hospital for the first time and we did not want her to go there alone.

So I am in this wellplighted room, listening to the marvelous Corelli Variations by Michael Tippett - glorious music that pours in on me at full volume; even as I look at Gregory's lovely portrait of Michael Tippett which hangs here on the wall of my study (you hang right beneath Tippett!)

This has been an extraordinary evening. Some time ago a dear old friend of mine, a former spiritual director, Father George Curtsinger (fine concert pianist, man of great sensitivity and culture) went through a most difficult period, a near nervous collapse and began coming to see me. Seeing your books did for him what it has for so many. He simply began to see as he had never seen before. And his interest stayed. So I lent him a small camera and suggested he go out and shoot whatever interested him. Well, he did, roll after roll, and on each roll some exciting things. His eye is simply wonderful. He has always seen but could never reproduce what he saw and felt. He brings me the cleanest, purest and loveliest things I have seen in a long time. I have taught him to develop the negatives and am teaching him now to work in the darkroom. He brought some film this evening. We intended only to take time to make contact sheets, but they were so breath-taking that we printed until almost midnight. He left in a great elation, for we made some large prints of certainly some of the most beautiful photographs ever taken -- the kinds of things you would relish. It was a great evening, and we were close to you and talked of you and listened to tremendous music - the Monteverdi Sicilian Vespers, Stravinsky's Pulcinella, the Tippett Corelli Variations. I was so excited by the beauty of his work that I was constantly exploding oaths - but reverently - to his great amusement. I think he is now as far from a nervous collapse as a human can get. He is going to remember you at his Mass in the morning and I am going to offer my whole Mass for the one intention that God send you much music and beautiful music and images to stay with you through the wretched cutting: that He simply so overwhelm you that the cutting will be buried beneath the other joys.

And your note this morning with your zip code. Yes, awful, the very word zip and the idea of being numbered and codified. This is why your work is so terribly important. We will not die of nuclear burns: civilization will already have been sipped into

a soul-less kind of humanoid vegetation. Your work, this Tippett composition, these ravishing prints we made tonight - all of this is the counterweight to the whole symbolism of zipping and codifying. This was one of Gerald Vann's great insights in talking of the importance, the supreme importance of these "useless" things in men's lives. "The useless things (art, music, etc) do not save man's soul," he said, "but they make man's soul worth saving."

Now the music is over, the prints are almost dried, it is near one a.m. and I had better close this and go to bed. I have to get up very early in the morning to go to that special Mass for you and because I have guests coming from Belgium at nine a.m.

Great love to you, dear Nell. How I wish you did not have to go through this. Don't be brave. It is very bad to be brave. Yell and stump and screech and coddle yourself and make everyone coddle you; and enjoy that awful sedation which makes the views of things special, different, bad in a way, but special just the same.

Best love,

John