November 25, 1964

I believe this is the last time I shall thus impose. I must write the last chapter of the tale I recounted in my two previous communications. When I wrote on the other two occasions I felt a compelling need to talk to someone whom I could trust and who was detached and impersonal. I probably made a mistake in saying anything to anyone. I suppose I would somehow have pulled through alone, being very self-sufficient. In retrospect one never knows how things would have turned out if one had followed a different course. I did what seemed best for me at the time. As I explained earlier, I have never asked anything for myself from the medical profession until I asked you for a little of your reading time.

I’d like to explain that my life has been singularly one of being alone, though not necessarily lonely. Throughout my childhood my mother was out most evenings on professional business and my invalid father would not speak to me. I served him in his room and ate alone with my cat and doll right through my first year in college when I left home. My husband was an invalid during half of our 33 yrs. of married life. We did not entertain or visit others. During the last five yrs. of his life I sat alone every evening at this typewriter or at my work table reading, studying, writing. My husband, very frail, retired early every night. He was a fine man of great integrity, a good friend, and companionable. I did not feel lonely.

Before my marriage I had had two very dear friends. They were world-renowned scientists. We worked together, published jointly, and had much in common. I have never had a close woman friend. I like men – their wide range of interests, their stimulating minds, their trustworthiness, and their capacity for friendship. In three instances I enjoyed their love. I married one.

Twenty years ago I began to make friends among physicians all over the country. After my husband’s cancer operations in 1946 I was increasingly confined to my home. No social life and few human contacts except at medical meetings or on speaking tours. Even these (ill.) tours stopped in 1955. I depended more and more on my correspondence with physicians. Today I count my friends by the hundreds. I enjoy a rare and unique position with respect to your profession. I am loved, respected, and cherished by physicians. During the past 20 years I have had a close inner circle of ten men with whom I have worked very closely. They are men at the top of their profession, the men who shape policy and represent American Medicine. At one time or another, for one reason or another, each of these friends has seemed dearest and nearest. They are quite different in character, but, with one exception, they are men of integrity, dedication, high purpose, and of great professional worth.

Let me illustrate. By all odds the late Louis Orr was the friend who meant most to me. He was such a wonderful person, so gifted, so charming, so brilliant, and so dedicated. He was the one AMA President with whom I felt in perfect rapport. We understood and respected each other. I was of tremendous help to him. He thought so much of my paper that he had it forwarded to him all around the world because he used it in his speeches. We met only three or four times – at AMA meetings and similar large functions. But that didn’t matter. We talked many, many times long distance. During 1959, 1960, and 1961 till Louis’ death, I used to send 3-way memos to him, Milford O. Rouse (then Vice-Speaker) and Bob Robins, then Trustee. Each of them answered me singly. I sent them information I could not publish. Confidential stuff. I made recommendations and prepared special reports. My material got straight to the Trustees for consideration. I doubt if any lay individual has ever been as close to the top policy-makers in your profession.

Dr. Rouse made a great deal of use of me. He asked me to testify before House Interstate on a bill for international medical research to which he, as well as I, was opposed. He had my testimony reprinted and mailed to all Members of Congress. The bill died in committee.

I was of particular service to Bob Robins because he was National Committeeman from his State and worked on national platforms. I prepared draft statements, suggestions, and lines of argument and even published a couple of issues especially for his use at one of the Conventions.

In one of my most difficult periods – 1951 when my husband had 5 wks at Memorial and $10,000 medical expense – a dear friend sustained me with letters and kindness. He even wrote to some 75 or 100 of our mutual friends telling of the horrendous expense I was under for surgeon, internist, and hospital expense. My good friend sent me a gift of $1,800 toward the hospital bill, money contributed by friends. I accepted gratefully.

Another friend has been a tower of strength to me for many, many years. I’ve been his house guest and met his wonderful family. He has arranged speaking trips in his State and personally has put on a letter campaign among his colleagues every year to gain subscriptions for me. For my part, I have prepared special reports for him to use in his State society and have sent him material for speeches at medical meetings.

For many years one of my dearest friends was a physician in Oregon who worked day and night fighting the Government. But he spent so much money on the fight that he got into trouble with his wife who wasn’t sympathetic toward his $3,000-a-month bills for telephone calls and telegrams. He suddenly stopped everything and retreated into himself.

During that same period I worked very closely with a mid-West physician, serving as a special consultant on a fee-for-service basis. I kept him instantly informed via telephone about developments here in Washington. I did political research for him on voting records and attitudes of some Members of Congress. I got him out of hot water when he made rash public statements, as he frequently did, saying things he couldn’t back up with documentation. We corresponded at length for years on professional matters. He was president of this and that and he arranged speaking engagements for me. I was his house guest and met his charming wife and children many times. I terminated that friendship on a matter of professional ethics and I sure was cut up over it. The break is final and irrevocable – just over professional integrity. I’m sure a stickler on that score – intransigent. I can’t help it; that’s how I am. I think a professional man should never betray his profession by word or deed. I’m harder on myself in this respect than on anyone else. One simply must have integrity.

As you see, my inner circle of friends comprised and still comprises men who are out of this world. We are very close and they know they can count on me to be available at any time for whatever needs to be done. I never spare myself. I work ungodly hours. I volunteer the information I know they need. I clip for them routinely and send them books and reports. I lend them material from my research files. We know we can trust each other absolutely. One friend writes long, long letters in long-hand on the most confidential top-policy matters. All my friends know each other so that we are like a small and very exclusive club. To save my time I often send carbons of my letters to these several friends to keep them informed. They know I won’t ever reveal anything I shouldn’t. They don’t have to say “Don’t publish.” They know I won’t. We trust one another and when legislation reaches the danger stage we keep in touch by long distance so that each of us knows what the other is doing.

These close friendships have warmed my life and filled it with rewarding activities. They have brought me great happiness and during my husband’s final years these friends sustained me with their thoughtfulness and kindness. You can’t imagine what it was like. I have been exceptionally blessed. Our correspondence was always professional. We enjoyed the nearness and understanding of close friends and in time we got to know a good deal about each other personally, but the friendships were just that and nothing more.

Sixteen years ago Dr. X started to write to me for things he wanted. He hadn’t risen high at that time; certainly far below the upper echelon. To me, he was just one more physician who needed help. I had them by the hundred, wanting this and that – even material for their children’s school papers or stuff for a wife’s speech. You’d never guess what requests I receive! By late 1959 I had about decided to close my business and move to Florida as my husband wished. We bought seven acres on the Tallahassee Highway, sold all of our real estate but our home, and picked a trailer to use until we could build. I was terribly blue at the thought of stopping what I had been doing. And I hated Florida with its endless sand, old folks, pines, and palms, and bum grass.

That fall of 1959 Dr. X, with whom I had corresponded for over a decade on a purely impersonal basis, wrote me a sad and tragic personal letter. He was blue and miserable. His wife had been insane for years and was institutionalized. One of his two adopted daughters had died suddenly. He had been driving his mother, had rammed into a car, his mother had been thrown clear and killed. He was in great financial difficulties. All told, he was miserable as he sat alone in his big house to the emptiness of which he returned each day. Well, I was sorry for him, but I was up to my neck in my own worries and didn’t answer for ten days. I tried to console him and cheer him up.

The following month I decided I just couldn’t give up my work. I was utterly miserable at the thought of pulling up states and retiring. I told my husband I simply couldn’t go, and he agreed, saying later my choice had been wise. I was greatly worried about him and didn’t see how I could establish new physician contacts for him. He had a GP, two internists (friends of Dr. Rouse), his surgeon at Memorial, and his oncologist and ophthalmologist. Frail, nearly blind, and down to 95 lbs., he had had one coronary and suffered severe lung congestion round the clock. AMA had cancelled its subscription, thinking I was going to retire, and I was living on capital. Louis Orr urged me to hold on and, indeed, before the Miami meeting in 1960, had put on a big fight with Trustees to restore the AMA subscription. That was done at Miami.

My husband died shortly afterwards and I sure was glad I hadn’t gone to Florida. The business was shot, my debts enormous, and I myself a physical wreck. Worn out from months of nursing around the clock. I had been awfully busy, too, with a hard fight on a Social Security bill.

Everyone was kind when my husband died. Dr. X telegraphed, wrote, and telephoned. He was thoughtful in many small ways and I especially appreciated his long-distance calls. His letters changed in character and he started sending small gifts. He asked me to be his guest at several Washington functions and at various medical meetings we attended. I noticed that he drank a lot, but many physicians do at meetings and I didn’t think too much about it. He was in and out of Washington on business and always called me to do something together. We were both lonely, had many interests and friends in common, and moved in the same professional set. By that time he had become a real big shot – president of everything in sight, chairman of endless committees, part-time professor, speaker, etc.

Behind a gay exterior, Dr. X revealed himself to be moody, unhappy, and worried. His finances were in a terrible state. He seemed to get some consolation when he talked to me about his multiple difficulties. One time he was reduced to tears, literally. Then, later, he spent the better part of a day really unburdening himself. It wasn’t his superficial troubles that had bogged him down, but his lifetime of rotten living. I was shocked beyond words as he told me of his dissolute living in med school, his unfaithfulness to his wife, his mistress, his drinking which had ruined his practice and periled his hospital post and honorary positions. He was traveled with his mistress, introducing her as his wife; he had lied, deceived, betrayed.

I was untterly taken aback and disillusioned. Here was a long-time friend whom I thought I knew and with whom I had fallen in love. I felt as though I had been dragged through a sewer. I had never encountered anyone like that before. He was one of my close inner circle of dear friends – trusted, respected.

I wrote him a terrible letter. Then I repented and felt sorry for him. Early in 1961 I received a substantial legacy from a classmate, the only friend I had made at college. I had no idea she was so rich. I gave most of the legacy to my printer, but kept enough to take a trip around the world. I was terribly tired and needed a good rest and change. I corresponded with Dr. X, his letters following me around the world. In time I accustomed myself to his terrible modus vivendi. He was horribly upset and seemed to be striving to make his life over. Perhaps he was just talking for effect, but I thought he was sincere. After my original outburst I didn’t scold or preach. It wouldn’t have done any good. There’s never any use arguing with an alcoholic and it is certainly impossible to persuade a man to avoid sexual excesses and promiscuity if he has decided to follow the primrose path. I forgave, but did not condone. Dr. X’s wife, who did not recognize him and was reduced to the condition of a vegetable, died. He was moody, bad tempered, ill, and drunk much of the time. When sober, he was charming. He made love expertly. My own love was something quite different. My heart was committed before I had any idea of the kind of man he was. After I found out I was decidedly upset. I can do a lot of forgiving, but Dr. X was a real trial. He didn’t seem to have any moral sense at all. He’s the only completely amoral man I’ve ever met. I broke with him several times this year, but he always wrote after a while just as though nothing had happened. Unfortunately, perhaps, my heart, once committed, refused to listen to reason. Hearts are like that. Generally I know what I ought to do and what I want to do. This time I didn’t.

Dr. X has been in serious financial trouble this year. His mistress has bled him white for many years. $50 a throw. She threatens his life and he lives in an abject state. He didn’t even dare let his office nurse answer the phone, but always answered himself because his mistress used to call him and give him what for. Did you ever?

I blamed myself for having gotten involved, but don’t see how I could have avoided it. The situation developed gradually and naturally. I had no slightest reason to distrust an old friend, especially one who was so greatly indebted to me for so much, so long. This past spring, as his difficulties increased, he wrote he would never marry, but – I have a high regard for the sanctity of marriage and am not modern enough to accept extra-marital arrangements. Love and sex are beautiful within the framework of marriage where they belong.

I urged Dr. X to marry someone even if he didn’t want to marry me. I felt that marriage and a home might possibly give him an incentive for decent living. But I must say I felt dubious about the outcome. He’s far gone down the dead-end road of alcoholism. He’s a physical wreck. Moody, ill-tempered, erratic, unstable. He has never been a one-woman man and I doubt if he was ever faithful to his wife. So-o, what chance would he have of making a success of marriage? I could tell myself these things, but I’d have taken the chance – like a dumb bunny. He knows loads of women and I thought he might settle for someone around 50 who would be reasonably forgiving.

This summer he was in a dither. Money worries and loss of practice and other things really had him down. He set afoot feelers for a salaried job and tried several large cities. For the life of me I couldn’t see how he would dare to practice medicine any more because of his drinking and immorality. Well, in Sept. he wrote in great glee that friends had found him a part-time job in a big city and that he would start up practice, too. I was dumb-founded. How could an aged alcoholic start up a practice in a new city? He hadn’t been able to hold the practice he had established nearly 40 years ago where everyone knew him. But he was tickled pink and wrote about his plans. He had shed all medical connections in his home town and was taking an apartment in the big city. He continued to write until the end of last month, telling me where he would be and when as he kept speaking engagements and traveled around. He had given me his schedule for years so that I could write to him wherever he’d be.

Near the end of October he wrote in a completely casual fashion: “On October 3 I married . . . “ I was stunned beyond belief. He had given me no warning and had written before and after his marriage just as though nothing had changed. Well, it was a cruel way to treat me, but I got off easy compared to what he did to his bride. I won’t tell you the sort of woman he married, but I simply wouldn’t have believed he could have done what he did to any woman. I suspect it was a sudden, unplanned move on his part. That’s how he married the first time. He was an intern, living on a rich woman’s money. One night when drunk he proposed to a nurse. She kept him to the proposal and they married. I gathered he didn’t love her.

I put in a bad ten days at the end of Oct. and early this month. I reasoned with myself and now I am back on the beam, working hard. Dr. X gave me a great deal of happiness for a while and I enjoyed corresponding with him. Now the book is closed. Knowing myself, I think I shall go right on loving him, despite all his faults. I won’t write. It is the first time in 55 yrs. of adult life that I haven’t had a close and dear friend to whom I can write on a personal basis. There isn’t a single physician in my inner circle to whom I feel personally attracted or who is personally interested in me. All is professional. I really need a friend in my own age bracket for my final years, but think I shall have to make do without one. I’m shy and don’t make friends easily. I won’t say that disillusionment would keep me from making friends, but it takes time and that’s something I don’t have much of.

I am tempted to tell you about the woman Dr. X married, but I won’t. He shouldn’t have played such a scurvy trick on her. If he had a spark of decency left in him he’d get a divorce pronto. He sure married under false pretenses and he’ll make her life hell on earth. I’m more sorry for her than for me. Life has taught me to be philosophical and to pick myself up.

Believe it or not, I am quite all right. I have set about remaking what is left of my life. I went to Silver Fox for luncheon yesterday and plan to go there about once a week to see Helen, the pianist, and to get a good meal. My nutrition has been rotten. I don’t like eating at home alone. My appetite is OK if I eat out at a good place. I am also picking up some strands of friendship with women I’ve known for many years, but haven’t cultivated. I’m taking one to see “My Fair Lady” on Dec 9. Do see it! I saw it on stage in 1960. Dr. X treated me.

I am in a good frame of mind and feel just fine. Lots of work to do. And here’s something else. I love the medical profession too much to hold a grudge against it because I had one sad and disillusioning experience. Life has taught me that all experience serves a purpose. You may not see it at the time, but eventually you do. Experience enriches and leads to the full life. Certainly I would not hold aloof from life solely to escape being hurt. And there are always compensations. I have found for every hurt there is a joy and they are rather evenly balanced in the long run.

I have a happy disposition and find that I am again awakening each day with a song on my lips and in my heart. It’s a wonderful world. I told you I had found peace and that I live on a high plateau of equanimity. That’s true. I’ve had some hard jolts this year, but I’m all right now. It seems as though I always revert to early training and to my life’s philosophy: dedication, determination, devotion, discipline, and duty. Keep within these boundaries and you can’t go far wrong.

Thanksgiving Day, 1964

I’ve read over what I wrote a few days back. I’m not too well pleased, but I did feel I ought to tell you the end of the story which came very suddenly and really hit me hard. I would compare it to the death of Dr. X, but he’s very much alive and so am I. We move in the same circles, have hundreds of friends in common, and inevitably we meet. It’s difficult. Here is a dear, close friend who has made love to me and whom I’ve loved for a number of years. We corresponded until the end of last month, I unaware he had married on Oct. 3. He wrote to me two or three times a week, sometimes every day. When I tried to break with him he asked me not to and said he hoped the life he led wouldn’t interfere with our friendship. That was a lot to ask of me, but I really did think he still might want to break with his hideous past. I should have known he wouldn’t change, but I’m perennially hopeful and most unwilling to admit that a person is beyond redemption. It all depends, of course, on what the individual himself wishes to do. Dr. X is a church member, but not at all religious. He simply doesn’t have a moral code, an ethical standard, an awareness of right and wrong. I never met anyone so devoid of a sense of morality, of fitness, and of decency.

Yet he did seem to be striving toward a better life. He asked me to get him Marcus Aurelius’ “Meditations,” and he spoke of seeking the Aurelian City of God. Who was I to say he couldn’t change if he really wanted to? Who was I to stand in judgment? The situation was complex. I felt always I was dealing with a tortured man. I couldn’t be sure if he ever felt guilty. He wrote of a desire to do serious reading and he asked me for books – philosophy, history, politics. I am a voracious reader myself, in many fields. Always have been. I thought I could help and he always seemed most grateful for the books I sent.

It may sound strange that I’d have anything to do with Dr. X after I knew the sort of man he was. Age has ripened my philosophy and I have learned to hate the sin without hating the sinner. I am not a Christian in the narrow meaning of the word, but I am very religious. Thomas Huxley pointed out that religion need not be based in theology, but in philosophy and ethics. I believe in individual responsibility for one’s mistakes and think it is impossible to shove that responsibility off on Jesus. In the case of Dr. X I felt he would have to wish sincerely to live a decent life and I was willing to give him friendship and love while he was working his way out. You can’t make people do things. They’ve got to have an inner urge, a determination, a will to do. But when the chips are down, it’s the individual who decides, each day, and each hour, and each minute what he is going to do. He makes his choices for better or worse. And if the choice is for the worse, he pays – at once or in time. Dr. X has a heavy, heavy burden to bear. I don’t know anyone who has lived a more sinful life, never seeming to learn from experience, never seeming to repent. His face in repose is very sad. He is ill often, in very poor health, unstable, and pathetically drunk far, far too often.

As late as September he was searching frantically for a job, having given up his practice and having lost a part-time job he did have. He was worn out, ill, and in a financial jam. But he kept jumping around on speaking engagements. His expenses were paid and he always charged up his booze as an expense item. Once he ordered a case of bourbon, picked up a bunch of strangers, and drank all night long. This was at a medical meeting where he had commitments which he didn’t keep, but he charged up the booze anyway. He showed up next day looking like the wrath of God, bleary-eyed, and nauseated. He seemed everlastingly to be trying to run from himself, which, of course, he couldn’t do.

Suddenly in mid-Sept. he landed a part-time j ob. He was ecstatic and wrote all about it. He didn’t give the slightest hint he was thinking of marriage and from what he later wrote I rather think it was a sudden pick-up. Anyway, he kept up a busy travel schedule, and he sent me his speaking dates as usual. There was no interruption for a honeymoon as he dashed here and there. I had come to think that he accepted speaking dates primarily so that he could be free to drink to excess and engage in other activities that were difficult to enjoy at home where everyone knew him. He told me the local police looked after him when he drove while drunk, but even so he cracked up several cars and himself in the bargain.

Obviously I was jolted when he finally wrote in the most casual manner about his marriage. It was incredible – all things considered. It’s what you’d call a helluva marriage, for he surely has made a travesty of marriage once again. I’m out of the picture in a way, but I’ll hurt for a long time. And I’m the last person in the world he should have hurt.

It’s very late on Thanksgiving Day. For the past four years we’ve done something special on Thanksgiving. Last year when he couldn’t get here he ordered dinner for me at a good restaurant downtown, but the year before we spent the day together and he was sober. Today I accepted an invitation to dine out. I didn’t want to, but I’m not going to sit around moping.

I doubt if I shall have occasion to write to you again. Don’t begrudge the time I’ve taken. I really needed to talk to someone and there really wasn’t a soul I felt I could trust. I think you’ll not reveal a word I’ve said. If you were 20 or 25 years older, I might try to cultivate your friendship, but you seem so young. We are more than a generation apart. We have grown up in different worlds. I’m old-fashioned and adhere to the old verities which have been discarded in our “brave new world.” I’m rather at sea finding myself without a close friend or confidant. I had my husband for 38 years – 5 yrs. before marriage and 33 yrs of marriage. Before that I had my two scientists. After my husband died, I had Dr. X. Now I don’t have anyone and I doubt if I’ll have time or opportunity to cultivate a new friendship in my age bracket. There are times when it is most helpful to have someone with whom one can discuss matters. However, I’m more self-dependent than most people and fortunately I have much work to do.\* Work cannot fill my life, but it helps.

I do want you to know that I’m not making the mistake of generalizing about your profession just because I’ve had one disillusioning experience. I think Dr. X is the exception, not the rule.

Thanks very, very much for your time. [Not signed]

[Handwritten postscript] \* This isn’t strictly true. I don’t know that I can go on. Work is not enough and actually I have no further incentive to live. It’s exactly as it was over 40 yrs. ago when I terminated my scientific career because of a broken heart. I tried 10 yrs. to reconcile myself. I couldn’t. Now I don’t have the 10 yrs. nor do I have any expectation at all that I can remake my life. I’m too old to adjust to this broken heart.