

Letter Four

Worpswede, near Bremen

July 16, 1903

About ten days ago I left Paris, tired and quite sick, and traveled to this great northern plain, whose vastness and silence and sky ought to make me well again. But I arrived during a long period of rain; this is the first day it has begun to let up over the restlessly blowing landscape, and I am taking advantage of this moment of brightness to greet you, dear Sir.

My dear Mr. Kappus: I have left a letter from you unanswered for a long time; not because I had forgotten it – on the contrary: it is the kind that one reads again when one finds it among other letters, and I recognize you in it as if you were very near. It is your letter of May second, and I am sure you remember it. As I read it now, in the great silence of these distances, I am touched by your beautiful anxiety about life, even

more than I was in Paris, where everything echoes and fades away differently because of the excessive noise that makes Things tremble. Here, where I am surrounded by an enormous landscape, which the winds move across as they come from the seas, here I feel that there is no one anywhere who can answer for you those questions and feelings which, in their depths, have a life of their own; for even the most articulate people are unable to help, since what words point to is so very delicate, is almost unsayable. But even so, I think that you will not have to remain without a solution if you trust in Things that are like the ones my eyes are now resting upon. If you trust in Nature, in the small Things that hardly anyone sees and that can so suddenly become huge, immeasurable; if you have this love for what is humble and try very simply, as someone who serves, to win the confidence of what seems poor: then everything will become easier for you, more coherent and somehow more reconciling, not in your conscious mind perhaps, which stays behind, astonished, but in your innermost awareness, awakens, and knowledge. You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for

the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. Perhaps you do carry within you the possibility of creating and forming, as an especially blessed and pure way of living; train your for that – but take whatever comes, with great trust, and as long as it comes out of your will, out of some need of your innermost self, then take it upon yourself, and don't hate anything. Sex is difficult; yes. But those tasks that have been entrusted to us are difficult; almost everything serious is difficult; and everything is serious. If you just recognize this and manage, out of yourself, out of your own talent and nature, out of your own experience and childhood and strength, to achieve a wholly individual relation to sex (one that is not influenced by convention and custom), then you will no longer have to be afraid of losing yourself and becoming unworthy of your dearest possession.

Bodily delight is a sensory experience, not any different from pure looking or the feeling with which a beautiful fruit fills the tongue; it is a great, an infinite learning that is given to us, a knowledge of the world, the fullness and the splendor of all knowledge. And it is not our acceptance of it that is bad; what is bad is

that most people misuse this learning and squander it and apply it as a stimulant on the tired places of their lives and as a distraction rather than as a way of gathering themselves for their highest moments. People have even made eating into something else: necessity on the one hand, excess on the other; have muddied the clarity of this need, and all the deep, simple needs in which life renews itself have become just as muddy. But the individual can make them clear for himself and live them clearly (not the individual who is dependent, but the solitary man). He can remember that all beauty in animals and plants is a silent, enduring form of love and yearning, and he can see the animal, as he sees plants, patiently and willingly uniting and multiplying and growing, not out of physical pleasure, not out of physical pain, but bowing to necessities that are greater than pleasure and pain, and more powerful than will and withstanding. If only human beings could more humbly receive this mystery – which the world is filled with, even in its smallest Things – could bear it, endure it, more solemnly, feel how terribly heavy it is, instead of taking it lightly. If only they could be more reverent toward their own fruitfulness, which is essentially one, whether it is manifested as mental or physical; for mental creation too arises from the physical, is of one nature with it and only like a softer, more enraptured and more eternal repetition of bodily delight.

"The thought of being a creator, of engendering, of shaping" is nothing without the continuous great confirmation and embodiment in the world, nothing without the thousandfold assent from Things and animals – and our enjoyment of it is so indescribably beautiful and rich only because it is full of inherited memories of the engendering and birthing of millions. In one creative thought a thousand forgotten nights of love come to life again and fill it with majesty and exaltation. And those who come together in the nights and are entwined in rocking delight perform a solemn task and gather sweetness, depth, and strength for the song of some future poets, who will appear in order to say ecstasies that are unsayable. And they call forth the future; and even if they have made a mistake and embrace blindly, the future comes anyway, a new human being arises, and on the foundation of the accident that seems to be accomplished here, there awakens the law by which a strong, determined seed forces its way through to the egg cell that openly advances to meet it. Don't be confused by surfaces; in the depths everything becomes law. And those who live the mystery falsely and badly (and they are very many) lose it only for themselves and nevertheless pass it on like a sealed letter, without knowing it. And don't be puzzled by how many names there are and how complex each life seems. Perhaps above them all there is a great

motherhood, in the form of a communal yearning. The beauty of the girl, a being who (as you so beautifully say) "has not yet achieved anything," is motherhood that has a presentiment of itself and begins to prepare, becomes anxious, yearns. And the mother's beauty is motherhood that serves, and in the old woman there is a great remembering. And in the man too there is motherhood, it seems to me, physical and mental; his engendering is also a kind of birthing, and it is birthing when he creates out of his innermost fullness. And perhaps the sexes are more akin than people think, and the great renewal of the world will perhaps consist in one phenomenon: that man and woman, freed from all mistaken feelings and aversions, will seek each other not as opposites but as brother and sister, as neighbors, and will unite as human beings, in order to bear in common, simply, earnestly, and patiently, the heavy sex that has been laid upon them.

But everything that may someday be possible for many people, the solitary man can now, already, prepare and build with his own hands, which make fewer mistakes. Therefore, dear Sir, love your solitude and try to sing out with the pain it causes you. For those who are near you are far away, you write, and this shows that the space around you is beginning to grow vast. And if what is near you is far away, then your vastness is already among the stars and is very great, be

happy about your growth, in which of course you can't take anyone with you, and be gentle with those who stay behind; be confident and calm in front of them and don't torment them with your doubts and don't frighten them with your faith or joy, which they wouldn't be able to comprehend. Seek out some simple and true feeling of what you have in common with them, which doesn't necessarily have to alter when you yourself change again and again; when you see them, love life in a form that is not your own and be indulgent toward those who are growing old, who are afraid of the aloneness that you trust. Avoid providing material for the drama that is always stretched tight between parents and children; it uses up much of the children's strength and wastes the love of the elders, which acts and warms even if it doesn't comprehend. Don't ask for any advice from them and don't expect any understanding; but believe in a love that is being stored up for you like an inheritance, and have faith that in this love there is a strength and a blessing so large that you can travel as far as you wish without having to step outside it.

It is good that you will soon be entering a profession that will make you independent and will put you completely on your own, in every sense. Wait patiently to see whether your innermost life feels hemmed in by the form this profession imposes. I myself consider

it a very difficult and very exacting one, since it is burdened with enormous conventions and leaves very little room for a personal interpretation of its duties. But your solitude will be a support and a home for you, even in the midst of very unfamiliar circumstances, and from it you will find all your paths. All my good wishes are ready to accompany you, and my faith is with you.

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke