

Waguih - you say 'don't say I know', but how can I not say it when you have told it so plainly? You've put it all down in that painful letter, so unless I suppose you to be lying, which you obviously aren't, I know. I know that you're a tragic person, not a beastly one - and yes, I am sorry to have precipitated this horribleness for you. I am sorry.

The condition you describe is a horror, and it isn't possible for anyone who hasn't experienced it to feel it in their bones - they can only look at it from outside. And one of the worst things in it is that it makes friendship in any ordinary, mutual, give and take sense impossible, at close quarters (as you have often said before now, with your talk of 'no one can stick me for more than three weeks'). I would like to say 'Because you have told me, and because I've understood what you've said, and because I am sorry with all my heart, stay here.' But I can't because I'm not up to it.

It is not possible for two people to live under the same roof for a long time unless each of them is able to allow the other space, so to speak - give the other a certain amount of attention and consideration. And at anything but surface level you, except during your better times (like in the first three months you were here) can't do it because you're so deeply bogged in your own state. The worse shock you gave me (worse than the diary) was driving home from that evening with Anne when you said savagely 'You're in the position of power' at a time when I was so far from thinking about you, so deep in something completely removed from that and so painful and important to me that it seemed absolutely incredible that anyone should have so little of the ordinary sensitivity of friendship that they couldn't be aware of it and allow for it. It was that night that I realized that you couldn't be a friend except from time to time, only someone I wanted to help because I was fond of him and he was in a mess, which is different.

I've got a bad vanity, which is the vanity of wanting to feel that I'm a nice person rather than a nasty one. Therefore I wanted to go on being the same in spite of that, and I've tried hard to do so. But it's bloody difficult - too difficult, it turns out, for me - to do that when you can't help seeing that the person opposite you is seeing you all the time as stupid, wildly irritating, displeasing. Do you know that it's months since you have been able to look at me except in fleeting, hostile glances, while you talk to me? I expect you do. And months since you've been able to prevent yourself from snapping a contradiction to even the lightest thing I say? Yes, of course you know it, because you know your own symptoms so well, but you may not know quite to what an extent I was aware of it, and how extraordinarily lowering it is as an experience, whatever the reason for it. I could say to myself till I was blue in the face 'This is only Waguih being as he can't help being, it's what he means when he says people can't stick him for long, it's the dreadful thing which happens to him, not something he can help' - and I realized enough of it to say that to myself many times, long before reading this letter which has made it even more clear. But however much I said it, it didn't prevent it from being depressing and unpleasant

to go through, so however hard I tried your presence here stopped being the very real pleasure it was to begin with and gradually became something to endure.

Probably the person who could live with you through the bad times as well as the good would have to be totally unselfish - make no claims for his or her self at all - which God knows is far from true about me. I should loathe to lose my affection for you, but I could if this went on, however wicked and unjust of me that would be. That's why I felt it was a good thing the diary had tipped me into saying you must leave. The whole thing was becoming ~~fix~~ false on my side and obviously more painful on your side, so to have something ~~xxx~~ happen which made it violently obvious that this was happening, would at least end it.

I don't in the least want my friendship for you to be impaired. I want to withdraw onto neutral territory, so to speak, have a rest, and let everything I value in you come up again into my mind, and my concern and affection for you come alive again. I'm a poor thing to be the only thing you have, as events have ~~proved~~, but I don't want to stop being at least something you have, for the reason that you have been a lot for me too, and I liked having you in my life so want to go on having you there. If the strain is taken off, I'm perfectly sure that this will happen. It's really a matter of hoping for practical ways of taking the strain off, such as the BBC providing you with a job - because if you don't go I shall fail you hopelessly, Waguih. It's appalling to know it and to say it, but I can't not, because it's true, as you must realize from the extent to which I have failed you already. I've already reached the stage of well and truly not being able to meet the claims that you, because of what you describe in your letter, inevitably make on people at close quarters, and I can't patch or cobble up my resources for more than a very little longer.

So that's how it is. You are burdened with something terrible, and I'm not up to it in these circumstances. 'Sorry' is a bloody silly inadequate word for what I feel when you show me your abyss - it's more like misery, and self-loathing because I'm not able to work a miracle on myself and become someone who can be unaffected by everything you do or say, and doesn't want to live her own dim existence in her own dim way, alone. It's a nightmare that anyone should suffer as much as you do without someone else being able to take off at least part of it, and I am ashamed of not being able to.

J.