*A Selection from June 13*

…Patrick and I weren't sure how much Craig actually told Sam.

We both hoped he gave her a "soft" version of the truth. Enough

to make her stay away. But not enough to make her doubt

everything about everything. Maybe it's better to know the whole

truth. I honestly don't know.

So, we just made a pact that we wouldn't tell her unless we

found out that Craig made it sound like "nothing big," and Sam

was ready to forgive him. I hope it doesn't come to that. I hope

Craig told her enough to make her stay away.

We drove around to all the places where we thought we might

find the girls, but we couldn't find them. Patrick figured they

were probably just driving around, trying to let Sam "cool off a

bit."

So, Patrick dropped me at home. He said he'd call me

tomorrow when he heard anything.

I remember going to sleep last night, and I realized something.

Something that I think is important. I realized that throughout

the course of the evening, I wasn't happy about Craig and Sam

breaking up. Not at all. I never once thought that it would mean Sam might start

liking me. All I cared about was the fact that Sam got really hurt.

And I guess I realized at that moment that I really did love her.

Because there was nothing to gain, and that didn't matter.

It was hard walking up the steps to Bill's town house that

afternoon because I didn't receive a phone call all morning from

Patrick. And I was so worried about Sam. I called on the phone,

but nobody was there.

Bill looks different without a suit. He was wearing his old

graduate school T-shirt. Which was Brown. The school. Not

the color. His girlfriend was wearing sandals and a nice flowered

dress. She even had hair under her arms. No kidding! They

looked very happy together. And I was glad for Bill.

Their house didn't have a lot of furniture in it, but it was very

comfortable. They had a lot of books, which I spent about a half

an hour asking them about. There was also a picture of Bill and

his girlfr when they were at Brown together in graduate school.

Bill had very long hair then.

Bill's girlfr made lunch while Bill made the salad. I just sat in

the kitchen, drinking a ginger ale, and watching them. The lunch

was a spaghetti dish of some sort because Bill's girlfriend doesn't eat

meat. Bill doesn't eat meat either now. The salad did have

imitation bacon bits, though, because bacon is the only thing they

both miss.

They had a really nice collection of jazz records, and they kept

playing them all through lunch. After a while, they broke open a

bottle of white wine and gave me another ginger ale. Then, we

started talking. Bill asked me about The Fountainhead, and I told him, making

sure that I was a filter.

Then, he asked me about how I liked my first year of high

school, and I told him, making sure that I included all the stories

in which I "participated."

Then, he asked me about girls, and I told him how I really

loved Sam, and how I wondered what the lady who wrote The

Fountainhead would say about how I came to realize that I loved

her.

After I finished, Bill got very quiet. He cleared his throat.

"Charlie ... I want to thank you."

"Why?" I said.

"Because it has been a wonderful experience teaching you."

"Oh ... I'm glad." I didn't know what else to say.

Then, Bill took this really long pause, and his voice sounded

like my dad when he wants to have a big talk.

"Charlie," he said. "Do you know why I gave you all that extra

work?"

I shook my head no. That look on his face. It made me quiet.

"Charlie, do you know how smart you are?"

I just shook my head no again. He was talking for real. It was

strange.

"Charlie, you're one of the most gifted people I've ever known.

And I don't mean in terms of my other students. I mean in terms

of anyone I've ever met. That's why I gave you the extra work. I

was wondering if you were aware of that?"

"I guess so. I don't know." I felt really strange. I didn't know

where this was coming from. I just wrote some essays."Charlie. Please don't take this the wrong way. I'm not trying

to make you feel uncomfortable. I just want you to know that

you're very special ... and the only reason I'm telling you is that I

don't know if anyone else ever has."

I looked up at him. And then I didn't feel strange. I felt like I

wanted to cry. He was being so nice to me, and the way his girlfriend

looked, I knew that this meant a lot to him. And I didn't know

why it did.

"So, when the school year ends, and I'm not your teacher

anymore, I want you to know that if you ever need anything, or

want to know about more books, or want to show me anything

you write, or anything, you can always come to me as a friend. I

do consider you a friend, Charlie."

I started crying a little bit. I actually think his girlfriend was, too.

But Bill wasn't. He looked very solid. I just remember wanting

to hug him. But I've never done that before, and I guess Patrick

and girls and family don't count. I didn't say anything for a while

because I didn't know what to say.

So, finally I just said, "You're the best teacher I ever had."

And he said, "Thank you."

And that was that. Bill didn't try to make sure that I would

see him next year if I needed anything. He didn't ask me why I

was crying. He just let me hear what he had to say in my own

way and let things be. That was probably the best part.

After a few minutes, it was time for me to leave. I don't know

who decides these things. It just happens.

So, we went to the door, and Bill's girlfriend hugged me good-bye,

which was very nice considering I didn't know her except for today. Then, Bill extended his hand, and I took it. And we

shook hands. And I even sneaked in a quick hug before I said

"good-bye."

When I was driving home, I just thought about the word

"special." And I thought the last person who said that about me

was my aunt Helen. I was very grateful to have heard it again.

Because I guess we all forget sometimes. And I think everyone is

special in their own way. I really do.

My brother gets home tonight. And everyone's graduation is

tomorrow. Patrick still hasn't called. I called him, but no one was

home again. So, I decided to go out and buy everyone their

graduation presents. I really haven't had time to do that until

now.

Love always,

Charlie