

La Cigogne  
Mourmelon-le-Grand  
Marne, France  
January 20, 1948.

Dear family,

I'm just back from a trip to Paris. Hews had to miss one weekend at home, because of a design coming due, and seemed to think that in that case there was just nothing for me to do but come in to Paris and spend a couple of days with him before he came out here. I didn't know how on earth I was going to make it. Eliane has a job, now, and my nice neighbor, Mme. Logeard had said she would be delighted to have the children stay at her house, but she just didn't have any beds. The children love Mme. Logeard dearly, so they liked that idea just fine. But how to dig up some beds? I decided that what I ought to have was some canvas army cots, but talking around, nobody had ever heard of any in the vicinity. Apparently we've been living right, because last week the Am. army surplus out at the camp scheduled it's final sale. I hotfooted it out there early Monday morning, and tucked away in one corner of one of the buildings, sure enuf, I found a stack of army cots. Gilbert helped me bring them home, and I spent the afternoon scrubbing them down with lots of soap and hot water. The rest of the week I had to spend getting a little ahead on my washing and ironing and mending and such, which is why there was no letter. Thursday morning, I moved beds over to Logeard's, gave the children lunch, washed the dishes, packed, dressed, tidied the house, said all my good-byes, and somehow got on the 2:45 bus for the station. I didn't waste much time. ~~NEWS~~

Hews met me at seven, in the station, and we headed for a restaurant and dinner before we even went to the hotel with my suitcase. He explained on the way that he'd only gotten my letter that morning, and had already arranged to eat dinner with Mashouda, an Egyptian who is in his atelier that he likes quite a lot, and another fellow, also in the atelier, whom he doesn't like at all because he's such a noisy guy, always throwing his weight around. However, the pest was working on the design with Mashouda, and couldn't be left out. They came in about ten minutes after we got to the restaurant, and I found myself rather confused for the first half-hour, until I finally realized that the dark, slender, intense young man was the Frenchman, and the quiet, heavysset fellow with the fair skin was Mashouda. The deadline on the design was Friday noon, so they all had to get back to the atelier right after dinner. Hews took me over to the hotel, where, having ironed till one that morning and gotten up at six-thirty to get ready to leave, I had no trouble at all amusing myself till he came in. I went to bed, even if it was only eight-thirty.

Next morning, Hews still had some work to do on his rendu, so he went back to the atelier. I promised to be in the court at quarter of twelve to watch the students' mad scramble to get their rendus in on time, and started off on my own. I had a couple of things I wanted to buy if I could, so I spent a blissful couple of hours wandering around in Au Louvre, mostly window shopping but actually succeeding in finding the pancake makeup and black cotton gloves I had been feeling the need of. After this long in Mourmelon, window shopping has become a fascinating pastime for me. One thing I saw in Au Louvre that was well worth the exertion of going there was the department of bed covers, where there was a very nice collection of fur bed spreads, full size, made of carefully matched catskins. There were grey ones with black tiger markings, and I remember particularly a tortiseshell one. There must have been at least twenty skins in each cover, and they were all very carefully matched. Do you suppose they bred the cats specially, so that they'd have enuf matching skins? I was completely fascinated by the ~~xxxxxxx~~ whole idea. They were really very lavish looking bed covers, and I expect they were quite warm. But I could n't quite imagine the proper decor for a room in which they were to be used. Perhaps a sort of sleek hussy room, a room whose owner was a little feline too.

At quarter to twelve, in the court in front of the Beaux Arts, the rendus were beginning to come in. About five of, Hews brought his down and took me

into the building where the exhibit room is, at the top of a long flight of steps. There were already about a hundred frames stacked against the wall, and more coming in every minute. I stood at the top of the stairs and watched them come while Hews went back to the atelier (no women allowed there) to get his tools. The boys just came whizzing by, sometimes two boys carrying five or six boards, often with pencils still in their hands. Hews had told me that it's always a mad rush at the last minute, and sure enuf, two boys came rushing up with a design, saw that the door was still open, flung the board down on the floor, and started erasing fingerprints just as hard as they could go. When the exhibit attendant came out to the door to lock it- deadline- they picked up the board and raced it into the room. After that lots more boys came up with boards, but the door was locked and they were out of luck. They stacked them in front of the door ~~anyhow~~, hoping to get a judgement on their work anyhow. After that everybody-me, too-went off to have an aperitif to celebrate.

Mashouda ate lunch with us, and we made an ~~appointment~~ to meet him later so Hews could pick up the tools he'd left in his room. Hews had an appointment with a dentist to have a filling put back in, after which we found Mashouda again and decided that we'd all go to the play that Hews had read such interesting reviews of. The costumes were by Maggi Rouff, and they and the sets were supposed to be quite remarkable. They were good all right, but the play, it turned out, was awful. Nothing to it, and as stiff a set of actors as I've ever seen. I went to sleep in the first act and Mashouda went to sleep in the second. Poor Hews had too much coffee for dinner and had to watch the whole thing.

Saturday morning we tried to get tickets for the opera, but there was such a line we decided to go to the Grand Guignol instead. Getting tickets for that took us down into Pigalle, which looked very much like ~~the~~ Bourbon Street, only much more so. No French Quarter commission to restrain them, and the fronts of the nightclubs were decorated like Ponchartrain beach.

After lunch we went over to the Louvre, where I still wanted to see those Egyptian exhibits. We saw them. We saw the Egyptian, the Assyrian, the Greek, the Roman, and a whole series of middle eastern civilizations I was entirely unfamiliar with- from Cyprus, and Iran, and some places I can't even remember the names of. When we came out, I had sore feet, an aching back, and a deep and abiding respect for the ancient sculptors. Hews and I were both struck by the obvious line of progression, from Egyptian, to Middle East, to Greek, to Roman that showed so clearly in all the art forms. One flowed right into the other, from the first, stylized figures, gradually loosening up more and more, until they reached the intense naturalism of the Romans. I still like Egyptian sculpture best. The sophistication of their approach to sculpture and their wonderful, sensitive handling of the stone are things that excite me. I found I was so used to thinking of Egyptian things as existing only in the flat- the profiled ~~figures~~ figures in the wall decorations and statues that I knew only as photographs- that ~~it~~ seeing the sculptures in the round made them completely new to me, even the ones I had studied in art classes. And much as I had liked the photographs, I found they ~~hadn't~~ hadn't nearly done justice to the sculptures. Golly, there are certainly some wonderful things in that museum. It was very interesting, too, to see how little our conception of sculpture has changed, and how little we've improved in handling materials, even in two thousand- no, three thousand- years. I had always thought of Egyptian sculpture as being completely stylized, but there were some portrait statues that ~~looked~~ looked as tho they must be very accurate- they were men, not just figures. And it was interesting to find inside one of the stone sarcophagi a beautifully carved female figure in bas relief that showed her in full front, not the conventional profile. We certainly are lucky to have access to a place like the Louvre. I hope I'll be able to spend enuf time there to grow familiar with all their exhibits. I know that's an ambitious project, but just the same--

The Grand Guignol more than made up for the other dull play we saw the night before. To begin with, the theatre is an old chapel that dates from about 1600, and still has the ceiling and doors and a lot of the old



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woodwork. There are five singing ~~xxxxx~~ cherubs attached to the main ceiling arch- the heavenly choir. The ceiling is all beautifully carved, and the doors on either side of the stage leading back into the wings came up into a Gothic arch at the top, crowned by a fleur-de-lis. They, too, are intricately carved. Our seats were in the last row of the balcony- that is, about fifteen rows from the stage. It's a small house. To get to our seats we went up the only stairs and crawled over a long string of knees, finding ourselves wedged in near the far wall with no doors or windows or any other means of getting out in a hurry - only that one narrow stair over on the other side. I gulped and told myself that the theatre had been there for a long time, and there was no reason for it to catch fire just ~~before~~ because we were there. Once the show started, I forgot all about things like that. It was wonderful. The actors did such a beautiful job, and their material was swell. The program alternated a horror play with a comedy- four one act pieces. You know, they do things like carving out eyes and slicing off hands on the stage in that place, with lots of blood, and the first play really got me. It was the story of a factory whose owner employs only blind or mutes, in an effort to help such people ~~adjust~~ adjust. A woman brings her mute son in, and the director takes her out to show her the kind of work the boy will be given, leaving the boy in the office. While they're gone, the blind secretary comes in and hears the boy moving about. He calls to him, but the boy is very much interested in the window, and doesn't even know he's there. Several more blind men come in, hearing the boy, and think he must be a thief because he won't answer. The factory malcontent decide the boy is the man he hates, the man who took his girl away from him. By this time the boy sees them and begins to whimper, but they've blocked the doors. They seize him, and the malcontent pulls out a knife and ~~xxxxx~~ slices into one of the boy's eyes, as he screams. It was completely horrible, specially because it seemed ~~ix~~ something that could actually happen. Fortunately, after a very short entreact they gave us a hilarious comedy, and I recovered.

We had more interesting experiences before we got back to Mourmelon the next day. We came back here by way of Rheims, as Hews hoped to get some pictures if we were lucky enuf to have sun. We caught the express that goes East from Paris, and it even had a diner on it, so we started the day with some bread and jelly to go with our black coffee. There was an amusing character at our table- a man shaped so much like humpty dumpty that we couldn't tell where his neck was at all. It just sloped gradually up to the top of his head. I was thinking what a teutonic type when he spoke to the steward in an American accent. Apparently he'd been in England quite a while because his suit was idubitably English tailored, and he smoked Players and read a London paper instead of the Herald Tribune. He didn't know one word of French, and ~~h~~ ~~when~~ his idea of making the waiter understand his English was to speak a little louder each time, until he practically bellowed. It was effective in a way, because they brought him something to eat, but I noticed it was not what he asked for. Most of those boys understand a good deal of English, if it's not shouted at them. He was quite something. I thought that type of American traveler only existed in books.

The sun came peekin up over the edge of the lovely French landscape as we drank our second cup of coffee- ersatz, of course, but hot, and it stayed with us almost all day. Hews got some pictures of the cathedral that ought to be just about perfect, and we found Helene, the Christelle sister that works in Rheims, and walked all around. Sunday is market day, and the street where the market is held was lined with little booths for about a mile. They had everything for sale- vegetables, cheeses, clothes, jewelry, pots and pans, live ducks, - everything. It wasn't as gay as I had expected that sort of market to be, but it was very lively, and lots of the farmers' wives were shouting their wares at the top of their lungs.

We finally got back to Mourmelon a little after dark, ate fried eggs with the Christelles (Maman's hens are beginning to lay again, and eggs only cost 20 franc each ( 1.0 now), and collected our children. They had had such a good time that I think if it hadn't been for the prospect of loot they wouldn't have

come back to us at all. We bought each one a hot water bottle, a bright elastic automatic pencil, and a stick of candy. They were ecstatic. You should have seen that procession heading for bed, each one with her hot water bottle clutched to her stomach. The one family hot water bottle has been a subject of some regret.

Another thing that made us feel very much happier is that the packages have finally begun to arrive again. I got six Monday, including Dorothy & Cile Christmas package from Shreveport and my lovely furry slippers. Also the box of clothes from Dora. Her things fit Mama very well, so that's fine. Then Wednesday we got the first regular food package that's come through ever so long. It was postmarked October 25. I just hope that whatever we do bring them up it's all brightened out now. I was down to my last pot of coffee, and I sure was glad to see that box.

in all the fruit stores now - at 100 fr. a kilo, which figures about twenty cents a pound, and about 40 cents a pound if you want to be legal about it. I've both an egg and a hen. The contents of the 3' box are good. I got a can of Wesson Oil. I found I'm very glad to see. Our fat ration is fairly generous, but Lord how we eat it up. We're all so darned active here. Thanks, ever so much. It was just wonderful to get that long chatty letter from you, Pops, darling. And I would also like to compliment you on your style. It felt as if I were listening to you talk reading your letter. Must have been a good Christmas. I also found myself evaluating your command of English and wondering if I will ever, ever, be able to write such fluent, idiomatic French. Heck, it's all I can do to be coherent in English. Hope you'll find time to write again once in a while. Oh, we've also had two more packages of magazines, which are always very welcome, and there was something else I wanted to ask you all about. Each of you enclosed a one dollar bill in your letter. That's two of them. Does it have any special significance I don't know about? So far as I know, there's not a darned thing we can do with a dollar bill here. That package from Bloomingdale's looks wonderful, Mom. I found myself reading the contents & gasping "Not bacon!" But on soberer thought, I don't think all of it's worth 8.95. If you can send us rare delicacies like bacon and butter once in a while, yes, & I find if I have extra sugar I can make my own marmalade, so sugar, too, after all, that would be better. And anytime you feel the urge to send a package I just can't get you together, a little extra cash will even get us a few extra delicacies here. For instance, oranges are over

The tin box of fruitcake came in this batch, also the can of Wesson Oil which I find I'm very glad to see. Our fat ration is fairly generous, but Lord how we eat it up. We're all so darned active here. Thanks, ever so much.

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P.S. I can't tell you how thankful I am to know that you all are trying to help Gretl & Rolf. I know you, Mom, when you adopt a project & I feel like cheering. If you can get them started so that Rolf will feel like working again, you'll really have done a very big thing, a worth-while thing that you can be awfully pleased with yourself about. Lord, how they need just the sort of encouragement you can give. It's such a relief to know you're in New York too, now. We so very fond of Gretl & Rolf, & so helpless to do anything at this distance. Well, I know if anybody can pull them out of this, it's you, & you sound as if you've made a wonderful beginning. Hallelujah for Mom & Pop!

Love again — Me