

La Gigogne  
Mourmelon-le-Grand  
Marne, France  
February 10, 1948.  
(Mardi Gras)

Dear family,

I'm still not quite recovered. What a weekend! Whenever I go to Paris, there are so many things we've been wanting to do, so much to see, that we run like crazy from the time we get there till the time we fall onto the train to Mourmelon. It's amazing, tho, how much ground can be covered in two days and still get a little eating and sleeping done.

For me, the trip started Thursday morning. Papa has two nieces in the Ardennes (near Belgium) who are to be married in a double ceremony the 3rd of April. Eliane is to be maid of honor, which requires a long dress- the first she's ever had. She and Lucien went into Rheims Thursday morning to see what they could find, and I made arrangements to join them at noon, in front of the cathedral. That was the only place I was sure I could find. When we met, I learned to my disappointment that they had already found just the dress- light blue watered taffeta with huge puff sleeves and a full, full skirt. It cost almost two months of Lucien's salary, but they both considered it a good investment, something Eliane could use for years. We had lunch together, and after, Lucien headed back to Mourmelon and Eliane and I poked around in Rheims. We spent a couple of hours looking in every shop window we passed, having a lovely time deciding what we wanted, but not buying anything. Then we went thru the cathedral, which I hadn't seen from the inside before. That is absolutely the biggest thing I was ever in. I've never felt so like an ant. In my mind, I brought Napoleon in to receive his crown, Joan of Arc, and all the procession of French kings who were crowned there. It is easy to see them there, and to understand why they choose Rheims for the setting of so much royal pageantry. Empty, the cathedral is impressive. Fill it with the gorgeous robes of the nobility and I'd almost begin to believe in the divine right of kings myself.

I took the late train to Paris because it has a dining car, and Hews met me at ten in the station. Next morning we planned to go out to Versailles, walk around town a little, have lunch, and then look up Vander Kemp. We waited for Herbert, but he didn't show up, so at last we just went on out anyhow. We had a wonderful lunch, finding to our pleased surprise that the restaurants in Versailles seem to be both cheaper and more generous than the ones in Paris. Bigger portions.

Out at the Palace, it took us a little while to locate Van der Kemp's office. There are so many doors out there. Finally we did, almost by accident, and found that he and his wife were in Italy. They hadn't even had Hews letter telling him we were coming out. That was a disappointment, but when his secretary heard that M. Van der Kemp's sister-in-law had been visiting Hews's mother in Shreveport, etc., she asked if we'd like to see the palace, and arranged a special guide for us to show us the small, private rooms where the king and queen really lived as well as the great rooms of state. We walked all afternoon, thru doors that didn't seem to be there until the guide opened them, thru tiny little rooms that were mostly fireplace, to keep the queen warm in winter, thru the great galleries and salons and council chambers, thru the library, which had the books and a little furniture in it so that it was possible to imagine it as it had been, thru the two bathrooms, from which the tubs had disappeared, but where there were two holes for the water pipes showed where they had stood. Great lockers there, for the royal garments, and everywhere, behind the walls, tiny winding staircases and little passages giving secret access to the private rooms. Such gold and marble and decoration of painting and sculpture! But we liked best the little winter rooms of the queen, with their white walls and the delicate gold vines outlining each panel. There was a cold, cutting wind blowing outside, and all the gardens were

I wanted to watch how dress buying is done here.

quiet, with the waiting emptiness of turned earth neatly edged by green hedges, and no movement anywhere except the ruffling water in the fountain pools. From each window the composition was different, and from the center window in the galerie we looked the full vista of the garden, all the way to the grand canal and the mountains beyond it. When M. Van der Kemp returns from Italy the last of March we plan to go out again. By then the gardens should be full of bloom, colored with full spring.

When we got back to Paris, we phoned Mme. Dorian, the wife of the architect who wants Hews to work for him in his spare time. Or should I say spare (?) time? They've been very friendly to Hews, and took him to one very swish party already, and Mme. Dorian, who is an ex-WAC, had asked to meet me the next time I came to Town. She was home alone, expecting her husband back from an inspection trip (the brothers Dorian have charge of the preservation and restoration of all historical monuments in two departments.) about twelve, and she was very pleased that we could come over. We arrived, as requested, about nine-thirty, which in France is right after dinner. Mme. Dorian turned out to be a long-legged Pennsylvania girl with prematurely white hair and no intellectual abilities that were particularly remarkable, but with such a sweet, unaffected, honest attitude toward everything that it was a real pleasure to be with her. The other brother, Charles, was there, and an American girl who is a friend of Mme. Dorian's. Charles, who is tiny and slightly humped-backed, is quite a boy. He's very alert and very interesting to talk to, with a really good face-kind and tired. Hews says he seems to be the moving spirit of the Dorian brothers. I saw some of their new work on the boards in the office, and they're doing first class modern architecture as well as the restoration of monuments. At the moment they're working on a school with teachers' quarters attached, and it's very good- outdoor classrooms as well as indoor, and very nice built in kitchens and baths- as least as good as anything I've seen at home. We talked and talked, had coffee and talked some more, and at twelve Jean came home. He's tiny, too, and he and his wife are so sweet and funny together. He comes just about to her shoulder, and they are so obviously very much in love, even after a year and a half of marriage. We didn't stay long after he came in; it was late and everybody was tired. But it certainly was a satisfactory sort of evening. Charles also said something in the course of the evening about our going with him in May in his car when he makes an inspection tour of the Chateau region. Gosh I hope that comes off! Imagine our getting a chance to see that section with someone who knows as much about it as he does!

Saturday morning we just didn't get up at all. We had tickets for the opera that night, and the train for Mourmelon that we wanted leaves at seven in the morning, so thinking of that, we just rested. In the afternoon we did something we've both been wanting to do ever since we got to Paris. We went out the marche des poux. That's something it's impossible to describe. The first thing we saw was lines of booths, like at the market in Rheims, but one against the other, on both sides of the sidewalk, both sides of the street- four rows, stretching for blocks and blocks. There was everything you could imagine for sale, with more textiles- yard goods and clothes both new and used- than anything else. The quality of the things was surprisingly good, and the people behind the counters didn't have that ratty look I had expected. There were lots of very pretty girls, and taken as a group, the people of the booths looked better fed than any other group of the same size that I've seen in France. They probably were. The booths had yard goods (all of those were mobbed) and knitting wool for sale- with or without tickets- and its with tickets, if you can find any at all, in all the legitimate shops. I found the frying pan Eliane had hunted fruitlessly all the afternoon in Rheims, and because I didn't have the "bon" I should have had from the mairie it cost me 240 francs instead of 220. Then thru an opening in the booths we saw another market spreading out and realized that all this time, all those booths were only the fringe

of the real flea market. This was a series of islands of open sheds, so many that we couldn't see where the market ended. And in those open sheds we saw the antique furniture, the silver, the glass~~xx~~ and china ware that I had really expected to see. Some of it was junk, and some of it was stuff to make Royal Street writhe with envy. There was no end to it. And all seeming to be casually thrown into these open sheds until I wanted to protest to the merchants that their things were too good to be left out in the open like that. There were some of the most beautiful chests of drawers I have ever seen- empire pieces- made of fruit wood, with beautiful brass drawer-pulls, waxed and polished till they shone, and in perfect condition. They stood on the damp ground with a light drizzle ~~bl~~ blowing in on them. And the market was full of American tourists getting skinned. We had our share of that. Hews saw a beam compass, the kind every architect and draftsman longs for ~~xx~~ from the time he first puts pencil to paper. It was old, but made with such precision there wasn't the slightest play in the screws. Now beam compasses aren't made any more in the U.S. When you can find one, they're very expensive, and often not too accurate. We asked the lady how much. 3500 francs. I told Hews that was entirely too much, and he agreed, and we walked out. When we had gone a hundred yards, the look of ~~suffering~~ <sup>yearning</sup> on Hews' face was so intense that I couldn't stand it, and we began ~~yearning~~ talking about just how much we could spend on a beam compass. I kept explaining that we could probably get it for much less if he didn't seem to want it quite so much. I can't do that, he said miserably, "Do you suppose anybody else has bought it yet?" So we turned around and went back, Hews having decided to see if she'd take 3000 cash. I told him that if he wanted it for 3000, he had to offer 2500, and she hadn't paid more than 500, if that, in the first place. But Hews longed for~~x~~ the compass so intensely that he wasn't capable of dissembling, and when he touched it again, he asked the lady if she'd take 3000~~m~~for it. So she answered in high good humor that he could have it for 3100, and that was more than he could stand, so we bought it. And under one point was her price slip- 3200 fr. But we both knew that even if we had paid a sucker price, the instrument was worth far more than that to us, and that if Hews hadn't gotten it he would have regretted it for the rest of his life. We carried it back to the hotel in our hands, scared to death someone might lift it out of a pocket, and Hews told me he was awfully glad he was married to a woman who had done enuf drafting to realize what a truly precious thing a beam compass is, and what standing it gives a man to own ~~xxxxx~~ one.

Then we had to clean up in a hurry and get something to eat, because the opera begins at eight-thirty, and if you're not there on time, you can't get in. We made it, and I just had time to settle down in those red velvet armchairs and gasp a little at the amount of decorations all over ~~xxx~~ every exposed surface when the lights dimmed and the overture began. They gave Thais, of which neither of us knew anything but the meditation. The whole presentation was just wonderful- the sets, the staging, the lighting- it was all perfect. And Hews, in a burst of extravagance had bought us seats in the second row of the orchestra, so there were so few members of the audience in our~~line~~ of vision that it was as if the opera were being performed for us alone. None of the singers' names meant anything to us, but they were all excellent artists, and pretty to look ~~xxx~~ at besides. During the intermissions we walked around in all the marble and gilt of the galleries- flamboyant rococo, Hews called it- and enjoyed ourselves hugely just looking. That ~~xxxx~~ auditorium is an ~~xxx~~ amazing sight. There isn't a square inch of surface in the entire place that isn't painted or carved. Even the decorations are decorated. And everything your hands touch is red velvet, even the doors. It is really an outstanding example of just how far you can go with decoration to obscure structure. Without ~~xxx~~ feeling the slightest sympathy for that approach to architecture, we found the opera house ~~xxxx~~ so definitely the quintessence of its particular style that we really enjoyed seeing it.

Of course, from an accoustical viewpoint, all that decoration is very fine. There is nothing that even resembles a flat surface, to send sound echoing back to annoy you. And that vast auditorium loses all feeling of size because all the surfaces are so broken up. It even seems cozy. But on the other hand, there are other ways to achieve those ends without spending so much money on gold leaf. I'll bet there was some painful economizing done on the singers' dressing rooms.

We got back to Moumelon next morning on schedule, finding that every thing had gone very quietly in our absence. Hews got permission from Cile to share her birthday with her, since he had to get back to Paris without celebrating his.

Today being Mardi Gras, I've fulfilled French tradition by making a huge batch of waffles, which all the children in the neighborhood are eating in front of the window. They eat them dry, so it's not very hard to supply them. It's a regular Mardi Gras day, cold, grey, and damp. Some years, I understand, there is no school and the children disguise themselves and race about all day and every house is supposed to hand out waffles or pancakes to all comers. But with the present shortages of everything it takes, I don't suppose there's much being distributed. Tonight the two dance places- the Chatelet and the Alcazar- are both having costume balls, with prizes for the best costume. We wont go, tho. There's school tomorrow, and I don't like to keep the children out late. And the weather isn't anything to make that half-mile walk a pleasure. The children are a little disappointed, specially Annette who loves makebelieve so dearly, but they are used to staying in at night and the waffles help ease the pain considerably. Besides, none of their friends are going. As for me, I'm sleepy still.

We've been getting the most wonderful things in boxes. They're still comin this week- eight since last Sunday. However, the Shreveport boxes have late December postmarks on them now, so I suppose the sudden rush will settle down to the routine it should be now. We got Christmas boxes from Jean Brock Howard and from Lee and Eli this week, which was awfully nice of them..

Dearest Mom & Pops-

Now I sit, cozy & snug in ski pants & my beautiful fuzzy pussy cat slippers, wondering how you all are getting along in this awful winter that has hit New York. When I think of the nice wool pants you gave me, Mom, to keep me warm over here, I feel positively guilty. I hope you've found some more. What do you do to keep warm? Have you had any trouble with heat in your building?

We've gotten another good good package from you this week, & some more magazines. The dried eggs came, & I'm certainly glad to have them. Fresh eggs here are now down to 18 francs a piece, after having hit 1d high of 30, but it still makes me hesitate to use them, as often as I should. By the way - that's a very tricky arrangement for shipping magazines - rolled with a cord thru the middle. And they arrive in much better shape than in the envelopes. However, there are a couple I wish you'd just burn these. They are forth - that church thing & Parents - which I don't find worth wading thru.

all the adds. I enjoyed those issues of New Republic  
& Nation very much indeed, & would be happy to have  
more just anytime. And thanks very much for the  
theatrical section of the Tribune! What a nice surprise  
to see Sidney's picture. I had an impulse to write &  
tell him so, but I looked at the stack of letters I  
owe already & throttled it. Please give him my  
good wishes if you ever see him, & tell him we wish him  
lots of luck on his way up.

What is the matter with Rolf? Gretl said  
something about a psychiatrist saying he'd better not  
have a change of surroundings, right now, which is the  
only thing she's said about his ever seeing one. I can't  
seem to get the picture straight in my mind at all,  
& we're really very much worried about them.  
What is it that's the matter with them, Mom?

And what is the news of you all, now? What  
are you working on, Pops, while Mom goes gadding  
off to her art exhibits with other females? I have  
the most uncommunicative parents. Too bad we  
don't have thought transmission developed to a  
higher state of efficiency, but things being as they  
are I guess you'll just have to sit down  
with pen in hand one of these days. I imagine  
this from me to you. Never thought I'd  
have to jockey you up on letter writing!

Much love,

Cecile