

La Cigogne
Mourmelon-le-Grand
Marne, France
February 18, 1948.

Dear family,

My last few letters have all been written with some idea pushing to be expressed- a trip to Paris, the exquisite luxury of having someone to help me with the house work, Christmas--. Now I'm at the typewriter again after a routine week and I can hardly get started writing. I'm spoiled.

Solange is absolutely the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. Can you imagine what it's like to have someone who, without a word from me, decides that the windows aren't clean enuf, and sets about washing them as soon as she gets thru with the laundry? Who sweeps the kitchen, sees some grease spots on the walls, and the next day washes down all the walls with javel water (the local version of chlorox), moves everything on the floor so that she can wash and wax under it, and wipes off all the boxes and pans before she puts them back? I still don't believe she's real. I'm scared to death I'll wake up some morning and find she's just evaporated or disintergrated or whatever it is good fairies do when they want to get away in a hurry. Her ironing isn't quite as good as her cleaning, but she does a very good, quick job of mending socks. Not only that, but she's cheerful all day long, and thinks my children are just about the funniest things she ever was around, with which I am often in agreement. And best of all, she actually thinks her way thru her work. That is the one thing I don't believe I'll ever get used to. I don't have to think for her. I can't turn everything blindly over to her- wouldn't want to anyhow- ~~but~~ and she turns to me for direction constantly. But she uses her head in carrying out general instructions. After these months when nothing was done around here unless I personally did it- from laundry and mopping to cooking and dishwashing- you can imagine what it means to me to have someone like Solange here. Why, I may even get caught up on the mending one of these days. I asked her if she would want to go with us when we find a place to live near Paris, and she said she'd be very glad to, if I thought her work was all right. "All right !" Fancy ! And my swollen fingers, the result of too much time spent in cold water, are almost well already.

It's cold again. One clear day, with no clouds to hold the warm air near the earth and a stiff North wind, and the temperature dropped down to twenty. Another clear night tonight, so the puddles should be solid again in the morning. I wonder what this will do to all the plants that are up, and the little new leaves that are showing. The natives don't consider this a hard freeze yet, just down to twenty, and it's true that I've seen plants here withstand cold that would ruin everything that grows at home. There's stock blooming in some of the gardens, and in the mornings the flowers and leaves are stiffly frozen, and by noon the sun is on them and they aren't even wilted. There are some amusing attitudes toward weather here, too, which are very well expressed in conversation. When someone says, "Il fait beau." that means that the sun is out. If he says "Il fait bon." that means it's warm. I've even heard "Il fait beau maitenant, presque bon." Which made me smile. They're quite right. In this foul climate the only kind of weather that's really good is warm weather, and there is never the kind of exhausting heat that makes us doubt that all warm weather is, therefore, good weather.

Time out while I got the breakfast oatmeal boiling. With a wood stove that is not too dependable for quick heat, I find it a good idea to cook breakfast the night before. It warms up quickly enuf then. Praise grannie for oatmeal and raisins and milk !

We fete Cecile and Hews this week. I had hoped to get them both in on the same fete, but Cile has very definite ideas about the kind of party she wants, and even if Daddy is to share it, it's got to be just so. I may yet be able to work them both in on one Sunday afternoon. I'll have to see how many glasses and plates I can round up. We started out with Cile wanting to invite nobody but the five "big" boys she considers the most glamorous, but we finally worked away from that idea. Now she has her mind made up for four of the little girls in her class, which is a little more practical. And there would be six or seven Christelles, and at least five Logeards, and we'd have to ask our landlord and his daughter up, which makes eighteen besides us. This room is apt to be a little crowded. Maybe some of them won't come. But on the other hand, maybe some I haven't counted on will show up. OH, me! And the Christelles always want two pieces of cake. I wonder if the patisserie would bake it for me if I brought them the flour and sugar and shortening. I don't have big enuf pans, even.

Annette brought home her first notebook for me to see this afternoon. Her class has started to write in ink now, and do sums. Her writing is quite good; and she loves doing it, but more than half the time she can't read the word she copies so carefully, just can't say it, and if she can, she usually doesn't know what it means. Poor child, she has a hard time. But she has begun to talk French, and there are a lot of words she does know, too. They have recitations, too, and you know how Annette loves to recite. Since she's begun to understand a little French, her reading has improved a good bit, but it's complicated for her by the fact that she's starting to read in both English and French at the same time. We try to give her lots of encouragement. My goodness, but she's getting tall. She looks more and more like Lee. Or was Lee ever that skinny? Annette's not too thin; she just has no width to her at all.

Only one package last week, so I suppose the flood has been reduced to a trickle. I hope they come more steadily now, but if they don't, at least I've got a certain amount of stock to draw on, until the next flood. This package came from New York, postmarked Jan. 9. It had a box of cornstarch in it, and I was certainly glad to see that. So was Hews. It's for his shirts.

Dear Mom & Pops -

This was the first package from you all in New York - postmarked Jan. 9. Thanks, my darlings. But no letters. What's the matter, Mom? Are you healthy? Or is it perhaps that you hate to tell me you haven't been able to solve Grett & Rolf yet? Don't worry about that. I know you can't do it all single handed, & it's comforting to know that you're all there doing what you can. Please write.

We love you -
Cecile