

La Cigogne
Mourmelon-Le-grand
Marne, France
March 16, 1948.

Dear family,

It's spring. It's real, honest-to-goodness, unmistakable spring. Ever since that snow storm, it's grown steadily warmer. We had over a week of shining, sunny days, when the children played out without coats in the afternoons, and the earth froze hard enuf each night to keep the mud thick on the roads. The last three days, it hasn't even frozen at night. There's been thick fog in the mornings, clearing away a little earlier each afternoon, and when the sun finally gets thru, it's hot, actually hot. The mud is drying in front of our house, and everybody is sorting seed packets, clearing away dead weed stalks, and turning the earth for gardens. In the tree in front of my window here, the birds are singing their hearts out. It's just wonderful to have them back. Honest-to-goodness, it's spring!

Last Thursday, afternoon, when the jobs were finished, the children asked special permission to go down to the meadow. Dorothy's Jackie, whose father owns that land, had made a point of their coming out, and all the other little boys they like best were going to be there too. They promised to stick together, and not any little girl go wandering off all by herself, and I said I'd bring some sandwiches out later and maybe we could eat supper out there. About five o'clock, Annette came back to get me. We went down thru the little wood, and she showed me the best place to cross the brook. We followed the brook, then, till we came out in the meadow, and over across a little rise we heard the other children's voices. When the boys saw me, they started heading for home (French children are terribly shy of grown ups), but Cile and Dorothy led me to the fire so we could eat the sandwiches, and the boys, seeing me sitting quietly with them, gained enuf confidence to come circling back and start playing again a little way off. In this particular corner of the meadow, there are some old machine gun emplacements and shallow trenches, half filled in and grassy. They give somewhat the effect of sand dunes. In one of the hollows, the boys had built a fire, around which we sat. The sun was low, but still warm on our backs, and the birds were calling. The children ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in great contentment, and I told me all about their day. The boys had gone off with their slingshots and killed several crows, and plucked them, and roasted them over the fire. They tasted awfully good, said Annette. And the girls sometimes went into the little thin woods with the boys to hunt crows, and sometimes stayed and put wood on the fire, and sometimes just ran in the meadow and played, ~~dabbling~~ dabbling their hands in the brook, or hunting treasures like the piece of cow's jawbone that Cile found that actually still had four teeth in it. They were tired, now, but there was such happiness in their voices as they told me about their afternoon. When the sandwiches were finished, we went over to the boys, and shared our dried figs with them, and then wandered slowly home, stopping now and then so they could show me where Cile found the cow jaw bone and where the boys cut branches for the fire, and the best place to wash your hands in the brook. Small towns are really wonderful for children.

The sun sets late, now, even tho it's not yet the spring equinox, and at six-thirty when I call the children in for supper, it's still bright day light. Even at seven-thirty it's not yet full dark, twilight lingers so long. Papa Christelle tells me that in June it's still bright daylight at ten ~~xxxix~~ o'clock at night, and the sun is up again at four. I can see it's going to be hard to keep to our eight o'clock bedtime, but at least the children will have plenty of time to play after school.

I'm feeling the impact of spring myself. This weather makes it hard for me to stay in the house, and when I got a notice from the station that there were some packages for me, the other day, I set out to walk the three kilometers

reach

from Mourmelon-le-Grand to Mourmelon-le-Petit. It was perfect walking weather, not hot and not cold, and the sun covered by thin mist. Only trouble was I got started a little late, and I knew that if I didn't get to the station before the train got in I'd miss the bus back and have to tote my packages. So I started off, walking as fast as I could go, up and down hill, and keeping a weather eye out for trucks that might want to share the road with me. Just about five minutes from the station, the bus passed me, and then I really got worried lest I miss it back. When I did the station, I was blowing something fierce, and my legs felt as tho they didn't belong to me any more. But I made it, and after all that, there was a good fifteen minutes to wait til the train came in and the bus left. One of the packages was twenty pounds, so I guess it's just as well I didn't miss that bus. Next couple of days my legs were pretty sore, but it's such nice weather to be out in that I've taken several other walks since, tho not in such a hurry. One day I went down to the woods behind the stadium, and brought home a huge bunch of pussy willows to put in the house. Pussy willows here have huge grey pussies, not the little white ones I'm used to, and they are real trees. Now they've put out their anthers all yellow with pollen, and they're just lovely. The lime tree in the front yard is covered with swollen buds, now, and I guess the next thing, there'll be flowers everywhere we look. No wonder the poets sing of spring.

By the way, there's something I want to explain about the French school system. It's quite true that Annette, who would have been in the second grade at home is in the first here. And Dorothy and Cile are in the second. But the courses of study just aren't comparable at all. In the first grade, Annette, besides reading, is getting simple arithmetic, including some multiplication. In the second, Dorothy and Cile have arithmetic which includes long multiplication, grammar, history, geography, drawing, and sewing. Oh yes, and hygiene, and science (which is what Cile wanted the cow jawbone for). The history, of course, is French history, but that should be useful. And the grammar is French grammar, but since the parts of speech are the same in all languages and French grammar is, if anything, more complicated than English, they're just that much better off. So you see, I don't think there's any danger of their being retarded in ~~xx~~ their school work by their time spent over here. The most important thing of all is that all three are learning to apply themselves to their school work in a way they never dreamt of doing at home. School is taken very seriously here, and the children really work at it. They have developed habits of study that they will use all their lives. Dorothy shows the most change. She's no longer the flighty little thing she was, by any means. She gets out her books and really goes to work, and is apt to do multiplication problems, when ~~xxxxxx~~ she's finished, just for the fun of it. Remember Dorothy and arithmetic? She is so obviously happy and poised that it's a joy to watch her. If coming to France did nothing for us but bring Dorothy out like this, it would still have been worth all the effort and expense. She's turning into the loveliest young girl any mother could wish for.

There's only one thing wrong with all this spring weather. I can't sit still long enuf to finish a letter, and I'm afraid my knitting is going to be neglected for a while. Right now, I think I'll just have to get out in that sun for a while. Maybe I can finish this tonight while I sit up waiting to see if Hews is going to be able to get in tonight towards ten o'clock, or if he's had a conference at the atelier and wont be here till morning. Everybody is out to "faire une promenade", and I'm going to join them. It's so beautifully hot.

I'm really having a terrible time trying to get this letter off. Here it is Monday again already, and I still don't feel as if I'd said ~~anything~~ anything worth spending postage on.

As Sundays go, yesterday was pretty good. Roland is home on furlough, so Maman spread herself a little on the dinner. Instead of the inevitable roast beef (scanty), mashed potatoes, salad, and coffee, we had a hors d'oeuvre of pickled beets, beans, roast beef (still scanty), salad, and coffee. But it was very nice in the dining room with the spring sun pouring in the window, and everybody was in a fairly festive mood. The food and the talk were both good, even if there was more variety in the talk than in the food. Roland has a ^{brand new} fiancée, and she is coming to visit the family Thursday. They have no idea of getting married anytime soon - after all Roland is still in the army serving his compulsory military service. He may get out in July. There is much anticipation of the marriage, which is getting close now. The third of ~~xxx~~ April isn't far off. We are all buying wedding presents together, and we haven't picked out anything yet. Maman talks about going in to Rheims on Eliane's day off next week, and Eliane is supposed to come over here Thursday morning to sew the new buttons on her dress and see if any of my jewelry would look nice on her. None of the armoires in their house are tall enuf to hang her dress in, so she brought it over here and we wrapped it in a sheet and hung it in the back of the children's closet. Her first long dress. You can imagine how much she's looking forward to the wedding and the chance to wear it. After dinner we went back to the house and Hews packed his bag with the clean clothes and malted milk and canned orange and grapefruit and the other good things I had set out for him from the week's packages. Lucien went to the station with us, since I had received a package notice and we hoped there would be more packages than I could easily carry alone. There was only one, however, but I was glad of his company. I just hate coming back here by myself after seeing Hews off to Paris. As we turned up the alley-like Rue Basse, we met Yolande, who was watching for us. Lucien's young lady guest had arrived. He hadn't said a word about her before, at least not to us. She turned out to be the girl of the red bobby socks that I remembered so well from Christmas, but she was dressed in pale green, with stockings, and her hair a little less wild, and she really looked very nice in spite of the eyes. They went off to the dance, and the children came back from the picture show, and Dorothy and Annette went chasing off to the dance, too, while Cile and I settled down to a game of horse race, something like parchesi. Alain and Michel came in. Alain has a new suit, a tweed, and the first suit he's ever had that didn't belong to somebody else first. He was in a glow all day, as you can imagine, and Maman was worried to death he was going to get a spot on it before the day was over. Every time he started to eat anything, she'd call "Attention!" and at dinner he was carefully instructed to put his napkin in his collar, for all of his fifteen years. Alain informed me that he had had great success at the dance in his new suit. Michel regarded him all the time with ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ satisfaction. He is to have a new suit himself, either this week or next, and meanwhile he gets considerable vicarious pleasure from Alain's.

There hasn't been quite so much sun today, and the breeze is definitely chilly. After all, it's really been very warm for March. We can't expect to have nothing but warm sunny days from now till June ---- but it would be nice.

Maybe something interesting will happen before this time next week, and I'll be able to write you a good letter. Hews generally brings home a good story or two from the week of rendu. And Friday he finishes a design and we start some serious house hunting. There is an unexpected four hundred pounds of coal in the cellar that Papa arranged that helps me realize how much we'll miss them, but I do want to live near Paris, and with Hews.

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Dear Mom & Pops.

Got some wonderful packages from you all last week. The thing that's so fine is that you approach ~~at~~ the problem of eating with so much imagination. I never know exactly what's going to be in a package from you, but it's ~~always~~ always something good, and a little unexpected. Anchovies are pretty plentiful here, & goose liver. But there are no sardines or ripe olives. And date bread is wonderful, and do you know, I'd love an occasional box of soda crackers or Holland rusk. This bread gets tiresome, & electricity costs so much I can't use my oven to bake.

I've been making marmalade with the extra sugar you sent, - to my family's great delight, but the oranges are about gone. Guess the next fruit will be strawberries in May. I can't wait to go hunting wild strawberries in the woods around here - or any other woods - and snails & mushrooms to hunt next month. Yummy!

What kind of politicking are you all doing? I'd like to hear details. And do you ever see the Baucrofts? They should be coming over here with the U. N. in September.

Much love -

Cecile.

P.S. - I got a letter from Jill asking what we thought about her coming to Paris this summer. Can you picture us touristing around with her? I don't believe she'd like it. Much, much rather do it with you.

What about getting a copy? Ever hear anything from them?