

La Cigogne
Mourmelon-Le-Grand
Marne, France.
June 1, 1948.

Dear family,

The trip to Paris was a huge success. In fact it was such a success that I'm just recovering today. We didn't seem to be in a hurry ever, but we didn't stop a minute from the time we reached Paris till we got on the train for Mourmelon Friday evening. We certainly covered a lot of territory.

When Maman and I arrived in the station, there was Hews, ready to wisk us off to dinner, with tickets to the Grand Guignol in his pocket. We headed down to Pigalle right after eating, and I wondered how Maman would react to the stimulus of one of the Grand Guignol's bloody dramas. I needn't have worried. Maman had come prepared to absorb as much of Paris as she possibly could in two days, and she reacted about the same to every situation- like a sponge. Apparently it was all so unreal to her that she couldn't react as she would to a situation in her normal life, but she had a wonderful time. She looked at everything, and she never mentioned being tired or having sore feet or anything else, but when I complimented her on getting used to the subways and buses so quickly and fighting for her seat like a real Parisienne, she just loved it. She was in a terrific good humor from start to finish of the trip, in a very quiet way.

Thursday morning we walked in the gardens of the Tuilleries, where the roses were in bloom, and every pond was surrounded by a circle of small boys with sailboats. Then we went over to the Madeleine and went thru that. After lunch we rode over to the Palais de Chaillot, where the carpenters are busy converting a museum into adequate quarters for the U.N. meetings this fall. From the terrace there we had a fine view of the Eiffel Tower, but it was hazy so we decided to wait till next day to go up and see if maybe the weather would clear up a little. Then we went thru the aquarium there, and then made a brief turn thru the Jardin des Plantes, away on the other end of town, where we saw all kinds of animals in the zoo, including six different kinds of alligators and crocodiles. There were some that were supposed to be from the Gulf Coast, but maybe they were Florida alligators. Their heads weren't quite the same shape as the ones in Audubon Park. They have a black cobra there, which was very interesting, and a fine collection of tropical fighting fish. They have some axomotls, too, which are far and away the strangest looking things I could imagine, with their short legs and their pre-historic-looking feathery external gills and tadpole-like tails. They look like inspiration for some of the Buck Rogers animals of Mars.

We just barely had time to take a look round the Pantheon afterwards, one of the two things Maman knew that she wanted to do, and then we had to eat and get to the theatre. Hews had tickets for a new musical -Plume au Vent. That turned out to be quite delightful. It was a small cast, very young, well costumed (la mode 'New-Look') that had a lovely time romping thru a not at all serious plot and some fine catchy tunes. It was really an operetta, rather than musical comedy. There wasn't ~~ex~~ a single dance sequence, not even by Agnes de Mille, which probably explains why it seems so fresh and different to me. The cast had a good time, and so did we. ~~Maman~~ Maman and I were both laughing out loud at the heroes' nonsense and the audience was singing with the cast before the evening was over.

The next day was ~~xxxxxxxx~~ our last, so in the morning we went thru a couple of the big stores, rather sketchily. We went to Bon Marché, but we thought their prices were high for the quality, even compared to Mourmelon. Then we went over to Printemps to see if there we could find the slippers Maman wanted to buy, but there, too, they seemed very expensive for the quality (which was stinking). We finally decided that she could do better right here, and ended up by buying each of us a food mill to make mashed potatoes, pureed soups, or baby food just by turning a handle. I also got a gadget I saw at the fair that I'd been longing for. It's like a grater, and has three disks with different size slots that make ~~gn~~ shoestring strips, chips thin enuf to make potatoe chips with, or ~~gny~~ grated bits that do beautifully for grated carrot salad or cole slaw. To operate, instead of grating all the skin off your knuckles along with the carrots, you simply drop the chunks of vegetable into the little well and turn a crank. The children are having a lot of fun with it. Me too.

After lunch we made the ascent of the Eiffel Tower, which was Maman's other dream of Paris. Up on top, we saw all the familiar landmarks all over again, and saw all the places we'd already been. It wasn't a very clear day, but with the help of Hews' glasses we saw a lot. There was an American woman up there with two small boys about seven or eight, who insisted ~~on~~ ^{that she} putting a two franc piece in the fortune telling machine, and when the ~~card~~ stopped whirling, she couldn't read the French. I happened to be standing near, watching the boys, so I read it for them, we smiled at each other, and went our separate ways. In the elevator, descending liesurely, we were standing next to each other, and she asked me if I had spent much time in the United States - my English was so good. Of course after that we talked all the way down, and by the time we landed we knew all there was, almost, about each other, except our names. She's an army officer's wife, who had been here only ten days (I felt so superior) and she doesn't speak a word of French, not even enuf to read a menu. I felt sorry for her until she told me that her husband had found them a furnished house since they arrived. It turned out that it was only for the summer, tho, so I relaxed and smiled again. That was a very cosmopolitan crowd in the elevator. Besides the Americans, there was a group speaking Dutch, a group speaking Italian, and even a sprinkling of French. By the way, one thing that really fascinated Maman about Paris was the occasional negro or negress that we'd pass. There weren't even as many as you see in downtown New York, but she was amazed that there were so many. She should see Rampart Street on a Saturday night.

From the Eiffel Tower we had just time to get back to the hotel, pick up our things, and head for the train. Gee, it felt so good to sit down!

When we walked into the kitchen where Papa, Alain, Michel and Roland were sitting round waiting for us, Maman really loosened up for the first time since she left home. Her eyes sparkled, and with an extremely satisfied air she told them where she'd been since she left home. ~~xxxxxxxx~~ The thing that really got them was that she had been up in the Eiffel Tower. There was a hint of wistfulness in Papa's voice as he remarked that as much time as he spent in Paris when he was recovering from his battle wounds, he'd never been up in the Eiffel Towers. And even that brash little Alain was impressed enuf to have nothing to say for once. That, says Hews, was a stroke of genius. It was worth fifty cents to give Maman that prestige.

I expect she had a lot more to tell them next day, but we didn't go

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to pay our usual afternoon call. Hews wanted to nurse a rasp in his throat by our own fire (we've got coats and sweaters out again), and I was interested in a nap. When I woke up I found I'd been asleep for four hours. I was even more tired than I realized. But I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Maman is still walking around in a mood of calm superiority to Mourmelon life. I went over there yesterday afternoon (It's Wednesday by now) and found her finishing up the washing. Madame Anne, who usually does it, had asked her to wait till next day, and Maman had just decided to go ahead and do it herself. ~~Then~~ I said, "My, haven't you been working hard! Aren't you smart!" And Maman, very much pleased with herself answered, "Oh, I like to wash!" That is the first phase of housework I've ever heard her express anything but annoyance with. She was quite proud of being finished at three o'clock in the afternoon, with only one piece left to rinse. Now, she had done the wash for the household and the five males of the family who are home right now. The girls do their own. The wash consisted of one shirt and one pair of socks for each - the week's allotment; two bathtowels, one kitchen towel, a slip for Maman, and the sheet that serves as a tablecloth on Sundays. My goodness, you didn't suppose they changed the beds every week, did you! In unsettled weather like this they might not dry for a couple of days, and besides, if the boys wash their feet before they go to bed, the sheets don't get too dirty. So Maman was very proud of herself for having done that much washing, besides cooking lunch, by three o'clock in the afternoon. The girls had tidied up the house (and I mean tidied, not cleaned) and washed the lunch dishes. Except for Papa, they're not a very energetic family, but we love them anyhow.

Now, Hews and I are beginning to think about vacation plans. If the international situation continues as much calmer as it has become in the last weeks, we'll probably go to Denmark for a month from the middle of July to the middle of August. Of course our plans are not at all definite yet, but whatever we do, we'll try to take Dorothy with us with the idea of taking one child each year, and leave the other two either in a Girl Scout camp if Simone knows of one we can trust absolutely, or here as pensionaires with Madame Logeard where Papa, also, can keep a watchful eye on them. You can be sure that we're going to be very, very careful what we do with Cile and Annette. I know Mme. Logeard so well, and her ideas of taking care of children, that if they were with her, particularly with Papa and Solange on the job besides, I wouldn't worry about them at all. To make us even more anxious to go to Denmark, I've just this minute had a wonderful letter from Joan giving us her schedule for the summer, hoping that we'll come while she's there, and offering us her flat to stay in whether she's there or not. Of course, we still don't know where we'll be next fall. So far we've had no luck in finding a place near enuf to Paris for Hews to commute, but we have till September or October before we give up hope. However, since we are so unsettled, I think you had better stop sending packages. The food situation is good enuf now that we're in no danger of lacking anything essential, and any packages sent from now on are apt to arrive after we've gone. We'll let you know as soon as we need anything and are located where we can count on getting things you send. ~~It~~ It will be about two months before we start traveling, so anything already in the mails should arrive safely, but don't send anymore till we let you know. Isn't that nice? Now you'll have a vacation, too, from that tiresome job of packing boxes and getting them to the postoffice. It's been perfectly wonderful for us to have them come, and I don't know how we would ever have managed without, but it's been an awful lot of work for you all, and I'm very happy to be able to offer you a little vacation from it.

(over)

June 2 1919

Mom & Pops, my dears.

What a wonderful long letter, Mom dear! I may not hear from you as often as I'd like, but how good the letters are when they do come! I wrote to Aunt Edith right away. I know what you mean about Aunt Felicia's going, even if I don't feel it as strongly as you do. She was ^{one of} your last ~~ties~~ ties with your childhood - a sort of emotional umbilical cord that has parted. Funny - I feel much less attached to New Orleans, too, with out her. You ~~two~~ are such birds of passage, and somehow I've never felt really close to any of the Aunts, good as they've been to me.

I hope that legislative bill to investigate the Port of New Orleans really means something. The heck with reform administrations if the pocket-lining politicians really shake the state up a little. But I'll bet that even if they are taking Pops' advice at least the dirt, so-and-so's won't give him any credit for it. ~~Approp.~~ Apropos of local developments, News & I are doing some serious wondering about the future of an architect-engineer in New Orleans. We don't have enough relatives who are politicians, and nobody else spends any money. Since we have cut loose like this is it worth going back? You certainly have bred restless children, Mom.

Your summer place sounds wonderful. I'd envy you if we weren't finding life here, with its unlimited possibilities, so exciting. I hope we won't have to leave Europe prematurely. Now that we're thoroughly soaked in trench provincialism

there are so many other things we want to see to do. About the furniture - with no unpleasant insinuations at all, but a desire to be practical would you make a list of exactly what furniture you put in ^{some of the} duplicate. If it would be possible to seal the fronts of the book cases that have things in them -

others' job to keep out a little dust but also the curious fingers of Mike & Mel I'd appreciate a few more stamps collected on these that do what you think best about other things, but please don't call the big bird. We love you.