

La Cigogne  
Rue Boileau  
Mourmelon-le-grand  
Marne, France  
Oct. 13, 1947,

Dear Family,

The children have just left for school, and now while the house is quiet, I think I'll just ignore those lunch dishes and the ironing that waits for me and all the other jobs and visit with you a little while.

We've been having the most wonderful weather. I know that's usually a rather dull subject, but here the weather makes a great deal of difference in our day, what with little girls walking to school and Mommy walking for milk and groceries every day. It warmed up quite a bit after that first cold snap, and we are having real Indian summer. The summer of St. Martin, they call it here. The days have been beautifully clear and sunny, and the children can go back to school at noon without even sweaters. The nights are chilly, but nothing like they were, and all the trees are turning the most beautiful reds and yellows. We pick branches of leaves to put in the house, and the children are gathering huge piles of horse chestnuts that we're going to paint and use for Christmas tree ornaments. The dahlias and asters have been hurt a little by the brief freezes we had, but they are still blooming. People are picking the last tomatoes and cucumbers, and the grapes and pears are all harvested. There are chestnuts and walnuts in the vegetable shops, but a few apple trees are still heavy with fruit. C'est kix l'automne.

For several days, Cile had been bringing home tales of a pond she found, down behind the City Hall, where the water was so low that the fishes backs were half out of water, and there were just lots of fishes. I tried to find it one day when Eliane Christelle and I were out walking, but we found only some soft mud and soggy grass in the low places. None of the Christelle's knew of there being any fish back there, but they all assured me that there was usually water there, and it didn't belong to anyone. Thursday, when school was out and all three in shorts and overalls, Cile volunteered to show the others where the fishes were. "You can just put your hand down and pick them up," she said, "the water's so low." So off they went, and I settled down to household jobs. About an hour later, Annette came caroling into the house in great excitement, calling "Look, Mommy! Look, Mommy!" in her hand she held something about twelve inches long, slimy, muddy, and still wiggling. It was a fish, all right, but a kind I'd never seen before. I washed it off, and still couldn't recognize it, and heard the whole exciting story of how she and Dorothy (and I) just hadn't gone far enuf when we looked for the place, and how she had caught him her very self, with her hand, and there was the mud up to her elbow to prove it, and she wanted to eat him for supper. She had also stepped in some soft mud and almost sunk all the way down, but Cile grabbed her hand and pulled her out. And there was a solid sheet of mud to both knees to prove that one, too. We wrapped the fish in a piece of paper, since he was now deceased, to take him over to the Christelle's for identification, and just as we were about to start out, Cile and Dorothy came running in with a basin, and some muddy water and five very much alive fish in it. We had a fishy procession over to the Christelle's. At the Christelle's, only Maman and Eliane were at home, and they were fascinated. They were pretty sure the fish were edible, but neither of them knew enuf about fish varieties to be sure. Maman thought the best thing to do was to take them down to the next corner where

I had wondered about the sign that read "Hairdressing", "Hunting Equipment", and ask M. Guidrot, because M. Guidrot knew all about fish. So Eliane, I, the three children, and all the fish went down to M. Guidrot's Shop. M. Guidrot wasn't in, but his barber was, and Eliane asked him. "Did he know the Different kinds of fish?" "Yes, pretty well." "Could he tell us if these fish were good to eat?" "Yes, they were good to eat, The big one was a young carp. Had they come from somewhere in the neighborhood?" She explained that the children had found them down behind the church, behind the Mairie. The man regarded the children a little quizzically. He thought it would be all right for us to eat the fish, but it was just as well that M. Guidrot wasn't in the shop, because he would be quite angry. M. Guidrot had a tank down there. They were his fish. We thanked the gentleman politely, and left, proceeding with what dignity was left us back to the Christelle's. Maman and Eliane were rather amused at the whole thing, and regretful that we had all bought herring at the fish shop that morning. For me it was a nice problem in morals versus expediency. I also had herring at home. We don't like herring very much. Carp is very good, and the barber had rather given us permission to keep the fish. But what impression would this make on my children? I sent them to put back all the fish that were still alive, with strict instructions to be more circumspect in regard to all fish in future. That left us with four herring, the one large carp, and one small one ~~xxx~~ that was no longer interested in swimming. I had no more trouble with my conscience, and supper was delicious.

Hews almost didn't get here this weekend. He got down to the Metro at six-thirty as usual to start for Mourmelon, and no Metro. There was a strike on, and all the gates were closed, and nobody knew nothing. About ten minutes later, a train came along and a lot of people had to be let out of the gate, so the guard let in people who were waiting, including Hews. After about half an hour, another train came along, going to the station. Hews barely managed to squeeze in, and got to the station too late to take his usual train. He says he thought about getting back to Paris Sunday night and having to walk the five miles to his hotel and almost didn't come, but he was already at the station, so he caught a later train and came ahead. Good thing He would have had wife trouble if he hadn't!! This Saturday, the ~~xxxx~~ radiators having been duly checked for leaks last week when we essayed real honest-to-goodness running hot water for the first time, it was only necessary for Hews to help M. deLange put the hot water tank ~~x~~ back on it's rack and chop wood for half an hour or so- which is not exactly his idea of the best way to spend Saturday afternoon- before we had a fire going and assurance of all the hot water we wanted for that night, at least. Baths were pretty important, because we were all going to the opening event of Mourmelon's social season (!)- the Bal desfamilles, a benefit for local charity. This was to be at the Alcazar dance hall, just like the regular Sunday dances for just everybody, and there would probably be the usual contingent of soldier from the nearby camp, but tonight it would cost 30 francs instead of 20, and all the families of Mourmelon would be there. Perhaps I should spell that Families- capital F. At the insistence of Hews and Lucien, I dressed myself very carefully in long black file skirt, blue wool jersey blouse, gold belt, my best hairdo, and to complete the picture, now that I was in a dressing up mood, long black gloves. I have seldom looked better, if I do say so. We got the children spruce and I flatly refused to wear my fur coat, since it really wasn't cold enuf, and anyhow I wanted to save something to startle them with next time. All ready, we walked the half a mile to the Alcazar, and I carefully brushed off my shoes with the clothes brush I brought for just that, and we walked in. There was practically no one there, and



we decided the Christelle's must be waiting for us at home. The children wanted to stay and let Daddy go get them, but a group of air cadets came in, giving my costume considerable attention, and I was in no mood to be thrown to the wolves ~~xxxxxxx~~ just then. I went back to Christelle's en masse. Sure enuf, they were wondering what had become of us. Eliane and Yolande had on the same short dresses they usually wear, which was no more than I expected since they don't own anything else. Lucien was more dressed up than I had ever seen him, in a dark blue suit News had given him and a white shirt. Then his date came into the room. She was a large, flatfaced girl with frizzy light hair and a ~~strick~~ cast in one eye. She had on a short red and white cotton dress, flat brown shoes, and red bobby socks. He walked back to the Alcazar, and this time there were more people there-- and more cadets-- and I was still the only costume in the room that wouldn't have been perfectly at home behind a counter in Woolworth's. News kept saying "Keep your chin up! You look wonderful. Everybody's noticing you!" Husbands are such a comfort. I said "At least I will take off these gloves. They hardly seem a necessary touch." But no, he thought they were perfect. I smiled sweetly, and wished I could cut his ~~xxxxxxx~~ throat. The children started dancing and Lucien ordered a bottle of champagne, which I needed badly by then and we all danced. I was a sensation, I assure you. Lucien remarked that he couldn't understand it, this was supposed to be a Bal des familles, and of all ~~xxxxxxx~~ there were only about three "families" there. "Many times," he said, "there are thirty or forty long dresses on the floor." That was supposed to make us feel less conspicuous. Then the children began to get sleepy, and cross because there were so few little girls for them to dance with, and the big girls they usually danced with were all too busy to bother. Lucien and his date, who spoke no English, and as far as I could see, practically no French left to "try a very good liquor that Lucien had just bought". Annette fell down on the floor, and came crying to put her head in my lap and say she wanted to go to sleep, and why didn't we go home! And finally, it was eleven o'clock, and News decided we had done our duty by the Bal, and could leave without looking as if we were running out on it in ~~xxxxxxx~~ disdain, and cold, tired, and with one of us at least thoroughly disgusted, we trudged back home. News assures me that everybody regarded me as the main attraction of the evening, which I suppose is something, tho I'm not sure just what, or at least would rather not say. However, as we both remarked, if the attention I got is any indication, when word gets around they'll all turn out for the next Bal, just to see what I wear. And all in long dresses, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~. I think I'll wear shorts, and tennis shoes.

The children are getting along quite happily at school, especially Dorothy, who begins to follow French conversation a bit, tho she still is not really speaking. And both the others sprinkle their ~~xxx~~ talk with French phrases all the time. It won't be long now.

Dear Mom & Pops

Seems like a very long time since we've heard from you. Not since before the storm. Is anything wrong, or is it just the moving? Has Sandy left for the East yet, and when do you leave, and what's Janie going to do, and do you think we'll ever get the other five dollars for the radio from her, and has Specinza ever sold my chest, and do you think may be that's enuf questions for one sentence?

I was very much interested to hear that you'll be in New York for the winter. It'll be nice to be near Lee, and God! what a break for Gretl to have you there! How did you all happen to decide on that?

There must be a million and one interesting details connected with all this. Please try to find time for a long letter.

None of the packages have come thru yet. I'll let you know when they do. The food situation is still good here, but the grocery man explained the scarcity & cost (17 cents ea.) of eggs to me by saying that the farmers weren't getting any grain to feed the hens and as a result they are moulting longer than usual. However, he says, in a month they should start laying again.

As for the shortage of wheat, they never have anything but ~~black~~ dark rye bread (kind of heavy) in this section, anyhow. What will happen before the next harvest is hard to tell, but I'm afraid it won't be good. The local paper, even, is beginning to talk about France's acute need for food & fuel, etc. of course in nothing like the plain language I read in Newsweek or the London Times Weekly. After all, the dispatches in the papers are good & releases, & there's an election next week. It'll be interesting to see what happens.

We love you dearly, but we won't much longer if our mail doesn't pick up.

Cecile

P.S. The bills were okay. That was stuff we bought before we left.