

La Cigogne
Mourmelon*-le-Grand
Marne, France
December 13, 1947.

Dear family,

Well, what do you know. Everything seems to have blown over. No more strike, no revolution (and an awful lot of people here seemed to think we were in for one), no nothing. It's hard to understand, because nobody gained anything actually from the strikes that wasn't already in the books, anyhow. Apparently the strikes were just a political move after all. Whatever they were, I'm glad it's over, and I hope it's the last such excitement we see. Not that anything happened here. It was just disquieting not to know what was coming next. But I guess I shouldn't complain. It was just wonderful to have Hews here with us for a whole week and a half. Now he won't be back until the 20th, but then he expects to stay till Christmas, and maybe till New Years

This is going to be a strange Christmas, so far from all the family we love best. We shall have to try extra hard to make up ~~for~~ to the children for the fun they are missing. Hews is trying to get Herbert to come spend Christmas with us. I hope he can. There is to be a good deal of ~~festivities~~ here, but I don't know yet just exactly what. Pápá is talking about finding a turkey or a goose, and I've been hearing tales from Lucien about a custom known as reveillon- it seems that everyone goes to midnight mass, and then after mass there's a big feast, with lots to eat and lots to drink, and noone goes to sleep Christmas eve at all. That is the Christmas dinner, at one o'clock Christmas morning. I'm looking forward to learning just exactly what happens. Oh, yes, it's for the children, too. They do just as they do at the bals--if they get tired, they put their heads down on Mommy's lap, or a pile of coats, and take a nap. Then when they wake up, they go out and dance some more, and they wouldn't miss it for anything. Just like the fais-dodo's down on the bayou.

By the way, we've been to two bals since I wrote last. This is certainly the season in Mourmelon. The first bal was the St. Catherine's day bal, the night of my big lunch. By the way, my lunch was a huge success. Pápá has been needling Maman ever since about taking cooking lessons from me. But he also teases me about taking three days to cook lunch, so nobody's feelings get hurt I did, too, take three days. I cooked the rabbit Thursday night so I could take it off the bones, and made the fruit mixture that I used for dessert since that had to steep a while to develop the proper blend of flavors. Friday I made the aspic, the creole sauce for the rabbit, and the biscuits. I knew I'd hardly have time to do more than tidy the house before 11:30 Saturday, and I didn't. I just barely got the table set, the rice cooked, and the breakfast dishes washed before people started arriving. Hews was first, so I sent him out to buy the apperitif that I hadn't collected in time. He got Back and was in the process of changing his shoes when his friend, Chef Abdelli arrived, very slick and shiny in pale blue kepi and highly polished boots. Then Pápá and Maman came, and we settled down to a very nice time. And eat! You should have seen my biscuits dissappear! And everyone had two helpings of rabbit and rice, and when it came to dessert, they were almost too full to eat it, but the coconut topped cake was such a treat that they somehow managed to hold two pieces each. It's a good thing I had coffee and liquer to give us an excuse to sit around the table for a little while after. I think if we'd tried to leave the table right after eating, we'd have been unable to move.. I know that Abdelli told us later that he ate so much at lunch that he was still too full Sunday morning, and couldn't eat any breakfast. I think the rest of us recovered a little faster. There has never been an amount of food to fill the bottomless pits in this house for more than one meal in succession. The children were hungry again by supper time.

I'm afraid I'm not writing too coherently tonight. I did a large wash today, especially sweaters, socks, and skirts, trying to catch up on some of the work I let slide while Hews was here. That on top of all the regular jobs was a little much and I'm not thinking too clearly. However, the thought that I want to get a letter off to you is so strong that I'm hoping it will carry me through. Then, if I have this typed, tomorrow I can add the individual letters in the afternoon while the children go to a movie, and I keep Maman

company in front of the kitchen fire.

I have the sweetest children. They are such a help to me. Dorothy, in particular, has decided that helping Mommy is one of the marks of growing up in a young girl in Mourmelon, and she's just wonderful. She's knitting away at a great rate, and helping the others with their knitting. Yes, even Annette's knitting, and doing remarkably well. At least as well as Dorothy did on her first scarf that she made on the boat. Dorothy is starting a pair of socks. Dorothy is also turning into such a cheerful little whiz at dish drying that I sometimes have a hard time keeping up with her. And her bed is always the first made, and her shoes the first polished, and she helps Annette brush the dirt off hers thoroly because Annette just can't quite get it all off. And several times lately I've come on her doing multiplication problems in her spare time, just for the fun of it. I'm happy to report that she still gets them just as confused as she did in New Orleans. Otherwise, I'd begin to be scared that this might be some other child, somehow, and not my Dorothy. And she's growing like a weed. She's all the way up to my shoulder now, and so ladylike in her ways. There was never such dignity, that is, until until she suddenly forgets all about being grown up and leaps madly about her daddy like a young colt. She's getting very pretty, too.

Cile's about the same, only larger. She is still inquiring into everything that comes along, occasionally to my embarassment when I have to say "I just don't know, Cile," too often. Then she says, "But why don't you? You know lots of other things." How to drive a parent crazy! She's not quite as far along with her French as Dorothy, but she knows a lot that she can't quite say yet. As she told me this morning, the doctor spoke to her on the street in English- "And you know," says Cile, "It embarasses me to speak English to people, now, and when we came it used to embarass me to speak French." That's not bad for three months. They have a new teacher in school, and this one speaks English and keeps a closer tab on them. She also explains things to them, and I think they'll find that a big help.

Annette is another on that's groing like a weed. She's shooting up and getting leggy, just like Lee used to be, and losing a lot of her baby ways. She still lisps a little when she's very much in earnest about something, but she has developed a great deal of poise, and believe it or not, she's the only one I can really count on to come hame at the time she said she would, and not wander off.

Now shall I give you a report on me? I'm turning into a fairly expert bonne á tout faire, and I have at last become so used to dishwashing that I don't even stop to think about it anymore. Ironing is still something of an effort, particularly if I have a lot of Hews's shirts to do, but you should see me skate around on those foot brushes that are standard French equipment for waxing floors!

And it's midnight now, and I can't think of anything more that seems particularly important, anyhow, ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ so I'm for bed. See you tomorrow.

There was something else I wanted to add - I wanted to tell you about our electric situation. That's so strange. You remember I told you the newspapers had said we'd have no current anymore from 7 to 9 in the mornings, and none all day for two days a week (which we'd been having before). Well, for a week afterwards the lights dutifully went out, sometimes 7, sometimes 7:30 once (honors!) 6:30, and once (lovely!) 8:30. And came back on at 9. After that week, we heard no more about it, & since then we've had lights every morning except the usual Friday + Sat, when it goes off at - maybe 7, sometimes 7:15, occasionally 6:45 - comes back for two hours at noon, & then disappears again till about 7 in the evening. But on Saturday, since the next day is Sunday I suppose, the current stays on the rest of the day after the morning break. Don't ask why. That's just the way things

One of Dorothy's friends asked me yesterday- "Are you going to have a fete at Christmas?" And when I said that I really didn't know yet what we'd do for Christmas, she went on to tell me about the wonderful fete the American soldiers had had, for all the children in Mourmelon, with a toy and candy, and chewing gum for each one. It was the same airborne regiment that the parents remember with some distaste (Remember what the parachutists did to Shreveport, Mom? Well, they were even rougher here.), But to the children they were a regiment of heroes and a never failing source of chocolate and chewing gum. I just can't be that to these children, but they have a way of looking at me as tho I just might be, if they wished hard enuf. The tragedy of France is to see the things that are available here, for there is everything in the shops, from chocolate creams on up and down, and then see the price tags and know that for you they might as well be colored pictures. There are wealthy people who can have them, maybe, ~~xxx~~ but for these people, the ordinary little people of France, they are as hopeless a dream as that other they have abandoned of someday going to that wonderland - America, and having a toilet in the house, and hot water that runs, and maybe, maybe even an auto.

By the way, an interesting thing that developed out of my trip to Paris- I found that when I saw the little station, I actually felt as if I were coming home. And I was so very glad to see the Christelle's again. I seem to have put down some roots here almost without realizing it,

I had the darndest letter yesterday from Hews. You know how he acquires people. Well, on the way back to Paris, he made the acquaintance of a French army sous-officier (master sargent), an Egyptian, found out that the man was practically in charge of the American surplus stocks that are still herein large quantities, ended up by inviting him to have lunch with us Saturday, and being invited to dinner at his house for the following (Monday) night. They had ~~cous-cous~~ for dinner, and grew very friendly, and what do you know, there are just lots of empty villas in that suburb of Paris where they live, complet with yards and fruit trees, and the owners just don't like to rent them to the ordinary working class French family. And the Mayor is very pro-American, and he, says Hews, is definitely The boy around there. So, we are working on it from that angle, and I am instructed to turn out a very supper lunch, New Orleans style for exotic effect. I rushed right out and bought two bottles of good, 85 franc, wine. The menu will be fish aspic (imported canned tuna fish gelatine, and olives) creole rabbit (creole chicken being ~~maled~~ out by the absence of chicken), rice, green salad, and a dessert I concocted with stewed prunes, apricots, canned pineapple, and rum that is really good. With that goes the coconut topped cake that I made the same time that I made the layers for Annete. You can see how important those boxes are, practically everything except the salad, rabbit, and rum being lifted right out of them. And if we get a nice house near Paris at a moderate rental out of all this, where we can actually live together as one family, you know how much cause for gratitude we'll have. Never, as it seems to me someone else once said, a dull moment. Papa and Maman Christelle are coming to lunch, too. It should be quite an experience. Oh, yes, I'll also make biscuits.

My very dear Mom & Pops-

I was all set to get huffy tonight & inform you that I just wasn't going to keep you on my mailing list unless it started getting letters in reply to mine, but this morning arrived a wonderful long & chatty letter that was just what I'd been dying for, and now I'm all softened up. Enclosure too. Speaking of enclosures, every letter that was marked, had one in it, but letters have been so scarce maybe there was one that didn't arrive. Have you a list of dates? Not that I suppose it would be any use to know. We also got a very nice package from you this week, with this paper in it and the Hershey chocolate powder. The powdered eggs sound wonderful. I hope they're in a can. It was only the can that kept the chocolate from being lost entirely. The bag shook around & split open. Sugar came thru perfectly. No corn starch? I need that so I can sign Hews's shirts decently, as well as for good. I had a letter from Joan Jacobsen in this mail too - very nice and much more personality than she allowed herself to show as the good guest. She's quite a gal. I hope to keep up with her & see her again sometime. When I got back from Paris I found a swell letter from Zoila waiting for me too. Please tell her I enjoyed it very much, & she'll hear from me soon. Love, Cecile

are done here.

Mom & Pops, my very dears - we will really miss you dreadfully this Christmas. Even tho we made such a habit of Sheveport for Christmas day, we were always so much with you during the holiday season, and you did so much to make it a happy time for us all. You still do, but I sure would like to see you once in a while, even tho we've gotten the package of books in plenty of time (yesterday) to reassure me that we will be able to make the kids some kind of a decent Christmas. I bought some gold paint, too, that we're going to use on walnuts and sweet almonds, and the ~~peanuts~~ wrapped in silver paper look quite gay. And I think some little packages of candies will give our tree an air of being laden with delicious surprises.

Now if I can just get a few cookies made - But Christmas, above all, is a time for family and close friends, so think of us up in Chilton, won't you, and know that we're think of you all and loving you and missing you very much indeed.

The package of candies from my darling Pops came just before the books. It came thru perfectly, and you don't know what it means to have five boxes of candy arrive at one fell swoop. With that & the two boxes in the book package (I haven't even peeked at titles, and it was such a terrific temptation that I feel quite noble) we'll have quite a gala time.

Pops, dear, it was so good to have those letters from you & Sandy. Your letter, mailed November 20th arrived here December 11th, so I guess it got caught in head winds or the strike or something. We certainly do enjoy hearing from you, and I'm looking forward to more letters. Has Sandy any interest in run-of-the-mill French stamps, or is he still strictly a Western Hemisphere boy? That was a swell letter he wrote.

I've also recently had a rather sad little letter from Gretl. She & Ralph are awfully glad to be together, but they're finding these first months in New York the same sort of bad time I had ~~arriving~~ in Mournelon. And while I could cry mine out into my pillow, knowing we'd come for a very useful purpose and would go home again after, they aren't at all sure it was wise for Ralph to come. And they haven't even any financial security, nor are they getting the encouragement they need so badly. Apparently someone - probably a dealer who didn't want to be bothered - has even managed to convince Gretl (ergo: - Ralph) that his type of painting is obsolete in the U.S. Imagine trying to buck that!

Mom & Pops, I did so want to send you something nice for Christmas, but we finally realized we just couldn't send any presents this year. It wouldn't have been to say we love you, because you know that without anything else. It just would have been because it's such fun to hunt for things that will give you pleasure. But that's another luxury we've given up. Our hearts will be visiting with you Christmas day, especially, ~~and~~ as they often are anyhow.

Now I must stop if this is to get in the mail. I hope your Christmas will be just wonderful, and the New Year full of nothing but good for you both.

With all my love,
Ceils