

## F R A N C E

27 October 1962

**P**aris! A small room on the second floor of l'Hotel d'Orient—ten new francs a day. I left London two nights ago in a drizzling rain, the first bad weather since I had arrived. I had spent a good part of the day at a London post office trying to send an insured package to America. The problem of insuring a package is formidable. The package must be securely wrapped with *one* sheet of paper as a final cover. *One* piece of string must then be wound about it in two directions; then sealing wax must be placed every three inches along all flaps and string and on the loose flap ends. The wax must bear a seal that is your own (no fingerprints). The address must have *no* initials; all must be in ink, no erasures, no tears (repaired or otherwise) or the package cannot be insured. Quite a problem!

I wasn't sorry to leave London. I had met many nice people and had been well received, but I still couldn't help feeling alone. Even talking with someone, no matter how friendly they appeared, I did not feel as though they were really revealing themselves. Only some outward appearance was allowed. I think of London as a vast city—bigger than Boston, which I know well; even bigger than New York, which I don't know so well. I feel as if I could have walked for days and never have left it. And I feel a kind of coldness, and when I think of colors: gray. Street after street an indescribable oneness, a sameness that is rarely broken.

I remember the Victoria and Albert Museum and a lovely canal with Sunday fisherman as breaking this pattern. Maybe it was the time of the year; more probably me, and I may well change my mind when I return.

The trip to France was long and hazy. A train to Dover—nothing but a sudden awakening by a falling suitcase and the sight of an old man who must have been seventy, with his nose bleeding and cut by the accident. He never complained; only smiled weakly and allowed a young girl with pale green fingernails to help him. And the boat ride. Sitting in a smoke-filled saloon—bodies sleeping—our table crowded and noisy. Trying to play my guitar. At their request at first, and then as their noise continued, to myself. Beer getting flat as I stood out on deck and watched the lights of France grow closer. Pale blue lights, brandy and cigars from Dunquerque to Paris, and in the early morning watching the flat lands of France roll by. I arrived at the Gare du Nord at eight-thirty and found a hotel. Accompanying three men I had met on the train, I half slept my way about about Paris. Leaving them at five I finally slept—for sixteen hours. It rained as I slept, and the morning was sunny and cool. So funny to hear everyone speaking a foreign tongue. And even embarrassing when I hear the children speak it. I went to the Louvre; wandered for two hours, and covered only one hall. So many beautiful paintings.

Looking for a painting by Vermeer, I discovered one. Copying it was a young artist who had studied under Richard Wagner at Colorado many years ago. We talked and he later sneaked me into a students' restaurant where for twenty-five cents I had a gigantic lunch. Then I visited his apartment and looked at his work. His recent things were rather uninspiring; pictures



of older work were better, although they showed a more than slight influence by Van Gogh and Utrillo (if one can imagine Van Gogh's color and strokes combined with Utrillo's subjects and, in one instance, color.) Leaving him I wandered through the Jardin du Luxembourg. The leaves were covering the ground, the trees and the air between. Browns and oranges, and the by the pool violets and reds, flowers and young boys sailing their small boats. And here, for the first time since I have been abroad, I felt life and the strong desire to create—anything! I wish that I could write, what I would write if I could I don't know. But every artist, no matter how good or bad must get this feeling and when he does he must capture it. Beyond this I still feel lonely; unable to communicate with those around me except in the most basic sense. Wishing, always wishing, that there was someone with me to share this experience.





30 October 1962

It is raining again—cold and damp; my shoes discolored at the toes from the wet sidewalks. I have been wandering around Montmartre in a vain attempt to find l'Atelier Lacourière. I was told that it was here, but no one knows where, and it is not listed in the *Annuaire*. Most of my time here has been spent wandering—through bookshops and printshops, the Louvre, and standing by the Seine watching the barges and cheap artists draw pastels on the bridges. But already I am discontent with Paris—not in the same way as London. I feel lost. I am unable to communicate intelligently. Whenever I do find something of interest, I can only observe, for my knowledge of French is hardly enough for me to engage in anything more than a basic conversation. There seems to be a great interest and much happening in the arts. One cannot miss it: students with sketchpads, wonderful posters advertising exhibitions, and many galleries. I find the advertising posters boring and repetitious, but the signs of shops and stores are fascinating, although generally crude. Since I have been here I have felt tired and have been going to bed quite early. I don't know why. I visited Notre dame today and, as expected, my interest in this beautiful gothic architecture was awakened. I could never get excited by photographs in art books, but I always felt that when I actually saw one of these churches I would understand its fame. I have attempted to visit a number of presses, but when I find that I cannot make my intentions clear I merely take a quick look around and then leave. I suspect that I shall leave Paris soon.

2 November 1962

I have just spent two days in Tours on the Loire. A small town surrounding a university; a nice respite from Paris. Youth and the strong university camaraderie are confined to a small busy area in the center of town. A few minutes walk and one finds himself in another century. High stone walls and worn cobblestones; the chapel, battered from war and age—or both. Much of its décor missing, but inspiring within. Sitting stolidly by the Loire which is now low with frothy green moss clinging to its embankments. The Musée des Beaux Arts—silent, with a high pine in the courtyard—its lower branches spreading seventy to eighty feet along the ground, propped up by stubby wooden posts. A garage door left open reveals the decayed and musty frame of an elephant which died in Tours and was donated by Barnum and Bailey to the city. No doubt a convenient method of disposal. A link and memory with the past—sad, dusty, but formidable.

I left Tours on a gray, drizzly day for Dijon, where I hoped to find two Dartmouth students. Arriving at nine p.m. I approached a taxi driver for information telling him that I wanted a hotel near the university that would not be too expensive. Muttering back “Je comprend, Je comprend” and punctuating this with the word “gastronomique” which I didn’t quite understand, but presumed it had something to do with the stomach and eating. He took me on a whirlwind ride through Dijon, pointing out buildings and telling me interesting facts about the size and age of the town. And there is a church I should see...and on and on. Arriving at the Cité Universitaire—three years old—he pulled up at one of its buildings. I asked him if it was a hotel. He muttered “gastronomique” again. I repeated my needs, and off we went again, still further from the center of town. Now I began to

wonder just what in hell was happening, but before I got too far in that vein, we finally arrived at an inn. For seven francs a night I got a double and single bed in the same room. Shaking hands first with the innkeeper (from whom he no doubt received a small *pourboire*) then with me, he left. I should add that on the way he offered to pick me up at seven in the morning—“But I will be asleep!”—then at nine to take me to the Universitaire. But after I explained that I had limited funds he repeated, “Je comprend, Je comprend,” and saying good night to the rabbit eating God-knows-what in the courtyard, I went to bed.

5 November 1962

I found Dijon a rather unexciting city. Bigger than Tours; many students and visitors due to the thirty-third *Foire Gastronomique!* So that is what the taxi driver was talking about. He must have thought that I wanted to go to this *Foire* which, I gather, is a gigantic food and wine exhibit and one of the main annual attractions of Dijon. I did not find either of my two friends, but I did run into an ex-Dartmouth student who was kind enough to show me around and take me to the university restaurant (strongly government supported) where again I ate all I wanted for twenty-five cents. We wandered into a University dance that evening and met two French students who saw my guitar and introduced themselves. A fortunate occurrence. Both played the guitar, and they offered to drive me to the station where, while waiting for the train, I played a number of songs for them. Their reaction was wonderful: “*Formidable!*” For one of those rare moments I felt that someone was really enjoying folk music—without cynicism or prejudice, here just a love for the sound and words. So I reluctantly left them for Rome, an eighteen-hour train ride from Dijon. I slept little, being interrupted by customs

#### CHARON'S QUINCE

men and conductors. Italy was a most impressive sight early in the morning. The Pyrenees and later the Mediterranean Sea. A landscape far more varied and exciting than the flat vineyards of France. The sight of snow high in the mountains awoke my desire for skiing—as had a newspaper report a few days earlier which reported six feet of snow had closed three Alpine passes. And finally Rome—no photographers, but hundreds of people trying to carry my luggage, and sell me on a hotel or taxi. I hate that; particularly after a sleepless night! But I found a hotel near the Vatican and, with one last burst of energy, managed to climb the steps of Saint Peter's and walk through the church. A magnificent sight, particularly now, due to the special conference of the Pope.

There was some sort of ceremony in one of the rooms: a chant between three groups, and its music was especially beautiful to my tired ears. Outside crowds were gathering by one of the exits. A procession? So I walked over, and after fifteen minutes of waiting I began to feel as I had in Paris at the Place Pigalle. A man stood on the sidewalk—barechested, brandishing a torch while his assistant passed the hat. After fifteen minutes of hat passing and endless chatter the torchman looked in the hat, threw the money in a chest and walked off. The crowd wandered off, and then the man returned with the same routine. I never did see the act. Here there was no hat; only six motorcycle cops and the Swiss Guard to attract the crowd. Finally a car came along—a huge black limousine. In the back was the Pope. He was slowly driven by the crowd and off into the distance. *That* was what everyone was waiting for: a moment's glance through a car window at the Pope.