

Week ending Dec. 22 1963

Oh what a shame that the part of your letter written when you were boozey (I like your boozey better than boozy) was interrupted. It was building up to some enchanting adventure with the merde-woman, and you were going to do it justice. But the rest of the letter was good. I read it in the street, walking to The bus, & people gave me Looks when I got to the conversation between The Major & the Captain because I laughed so loud. Darling, I believe you make them up! Insurance business & all. Oh how can we forge you a British passport, because this, clearly, is an army in which you could almost instantly become a General if only you were the right nationality.

Not to worry about old Pan. I may be soft, but NOT so soft as That! I wouldn't dream of meeting him, less because of your intuitions (I think intuitions need more to work on - at least the sound of a voice or a sight of something written, tho' not necessarily anything specially significant) but because I know too well what he'd be like. I suffer lots of kinds of fools as gladly as anyone, but a particular kind, to which I'm sure he belongs, fills me with a sort of RAGE OF BOREDOM. And I smell them a long way off (I smelt that Canadian in the pub before you did), & never would I meet one if I could help it. The Canadian was a bit different from the pure Pan-kind, but he had in common with it that he was a pathetic self-deceiver - he thought he was subtle and shrewd and could floor people by disconcertingly seeing through them.

I don't know what you base your assumption of my naivete on, unless it is that I invited you to my house when I barely knew you. Personally I should have thought that an indication of remarkably sound judgment.

Barry left for Jamaica last night - I suppose. He was so cross & rattled (he hates going anywhere) that even yesterday lunchtime he was saying "I may not go - I'll telephone tomorrow if I don't". He hasn't called - & anyway he couldn't not go, as I kept on telling him, because he'd have lost his passage-money if he'd cancelled at the last minute, & his mother would be all alog for his arrival. He couldn't bear spending all that money, even tho' it was mostly his aunts, on such

a short visit, & he couldn't bear the people who were chartering the plane, because they kept messing about & have already cut five days off the trip by postponing departure, & he couldn't bear the thought of all his bitchy friends in Jamaica seeing him still so poor & shabby instead of coming home Rich & Famous (Jamaica's a terrible little island in that way — all the West Indies are. They munch up each others failed ambitions like salted almonds). So he was ruffled & miserable yesterday, & I felt as though I were sending an unhappy little boy off to a party: "Go on darling, don't be silly, you'll love it when you get there." I do hope he does.

Barbara was a bit better this evening, because Adam had got a fair amount of food down & wasn't crying quite so much. Yesterday I couldn't see how she was going to manage. The physical exhaustion is formidable, & the anxiety worse. She's looking like a ghost, & the few minutes sleep the poor baby allows her are instantly filled with terrifying anxiety dreams — that she's found him in his cot with all his guts spilt out, that she's drowned him in a bowl of water. I can't help, because the actual looking after of Adam she has to do herself (she's breast-feeding him, tho' has to prepare bottles as well, poor girl, because he must be tempted with them if he loses interest in the breast — it's so vital to get as much into him as possible). And in other ways Anthony has taken over. This seems to me excellent, but of course he does things like washing pretty badly, & she's in such a ragged state of nerves that she seems more aware of the shortcomings than of the virtue of his attempts. He goes into a melodramatic sulk at any offer of assistance, so I'm steering clear & maybe when she's recovered a bit it will bring them together. After all, it's only ten days since Adam was born, so there's quite a lot of recovery still to be done. I must say, I wish I believed in God — I'd like to pray that this baby will be all right soon.

I thought it was only in England that pipes freeze as soon as it turns cold. By a sort of miracle they don't in this house — or don't

in last year's Great Cold, which ought to mean never, I think. Poor you - such discomfort & misery. And I'm sure you haven't got enough warm clothes -

I should have said that there are exceptions to my cooking law - The really greedy. They get it both ways, because they enjoy cooking for themselves and they are also extra enjoyable to cook for. It's frustrating to feed someone who'd just as soon have an apple & a glass of milk. But do you really enjoy eating the food you've cooked alone as much as you enjoy cooking it? The few times I've had a solo cooking urge I've quite enjoyed the preparations, but there's been a distinct sense of anti-climax when it ended by just me eating it.

A parcel came from Scotland today. "HONEY - WITH CARE" it said. Somehow the way the word HONEY was written, so big & innocent, made me know at once it wasn't. And sure enough, it was a bottle of Famous Grouse Whisky - a rare & precious whiskey, never seen south of the border. But beautiful! I can't say I feel seriously frustrated at consuming that by myself. Altho' it is sad to think that it'll all be gone by the time Barry gets back, because he does love whiskey.

Last weekend my lodger had a party - sixty people, with dancing. So I went away for the night (she's such a good child - every single trace had vanished when I got back, & only one thing broken). I went to stay with my American poet friend, Donald Hall, & his charming wife, who are living a year in Thaxted, an Essex village. A ravishing village, every house but two medieval, & the two Queen Anne, & the most lovely church. I was rather surprised when they said we were going to church, because I didn't expect them to be gothic, but as it turned out they were dead right & I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Thaxted has an Eccentric Parson. First of all he's very High Church, which means that his service is all incense & tinkling bells & dipping & swooping & processing in rich raiment (of rather grubby but very prettily-coloured artificial silk) which looked beautiful in that marvellous church, &

had an extra something because of the big muddy shoes & flapping corduroy trouser-legs of the solemn Essex farm-hands who were his acolytes. The choir was lovely, too, very rare in an English parish church, because the old man used to know Holst & understands music. And then, after all this decorative medieval ritual, up he went into the pulpit, & began to preach — and turned out to be a Marxist! An impassioned lecture on economics, he gave us (he is a most talented & dramatic speaker), thumping the pulpit as he declared it was the first duty of every Christian to study economics & to understand that famine & injustice were no acts of God — No indeed, how could God will such things? — but the direct outcome of Capitalism. Needless to say his congregation is small, & includes none of the squirearchy. It was sad really — This good & sincere old man exhorting 25 Essex villagers (he's done more effective rabble-rousing in his time, I gather, in more important parishes) who were only there because they like the music & are used to him. But it was also funny, & curiously moving. I almost clapped him at the end — but then back we went to tinkling & sprinkling (I thought of your Copt priest serving his Kyria Eleisons — can't remember ~~the~~ how Ram spelt them), & the whole thing was like an odd dream. Perhaps it would only seem odd to someone brought up to the usual English very Low church (as plain & austere as possible, to avoid all taint of Papacy) & know how solid it normally is behind the Establishment.

I shall be lost now, for a time, in Christmas messiment (how am I going to get all those parcels to Norfolk, & Wichee too, because B. can't cope with her?). So goodbye goodbye, & hundreds of loves — most special ones.

Hurray! André is lending me his Triumph because he's going to New York for 2 weeks. By the way — I keep forgetting to ask: will it be all right for me to send Betty a copy of your book, or would it be considered a Treasonable Work? And have you done anything about that hospital job? And about getting proofs from Rossetti? X X

Jiang