

Undated

174 - 1st Street,
Observatory,
Johannesburg, S.A. 1000

Dearest Janet and Mary,

It's easier to write to you both than to sit down and write separate letters. I have just re-read both your letters, to get an idea of where to begin: both had good news:

Janet, I'm so happy for you, and long to hear more about your new home and your new husband. Please do write and tell me, because good news from abroad brings a faint reflected glow, and I want to share in your happiness. I've always been such a firm believer in being married - some people, a few, can be quite whole on their own, but I need someone else to be a whole person. It's something to do with companionship and communication and comfort. There's only one time in life to be completely alone, and that's when you're very young and want to shake off the clinging remains of family and supervision.

Mary, I dreamed the other night you were coming to visit us! What a wonderful dream. Your good news is that you're going back to school. Tell me more about it. And thank you for news of the Congress. I had received some snippets, mostly distressing. The worse things become here, the more remote all that seems - we get so deeply involved in our own troubles we seem to lift our heads less and less to take a breather and look at the world. How lovely to have Ben with you in the USSR. That's my dream-fantasy - go to with Rusty to Tashkent and Samarkand and all the other places. I cling to it, although sometimes in realistic moments picture myself - and him - at the bathchair stage taking healing waters in some horrible Soviet spa. Even though your letters are not frequent they always have so much interesting news.

I forget when I last wrote, and what I wrote about, so skip repetitions. Rusty and the others arrested with him are being charged, at last, after three unbelievably awful months. They appear next Tuesday in Pretoria (40 miles from here) and then we will know the full extent of the charges and what they involve. During all this time, he and the others have been in solitary confinement, kept entirely alone, not allowed to speak to anyone, without any books or anything whatsoever to do. Can you imagine sitting in a small cell, with nothing in it apart from a roll of bedding and a stool, for 24 hours out of 24, with nothing, nothing at all, for weeks and months on end? I have projected myself there every single day, making this the most unendurable thing of all. I made trips to Pretoria twice a week to take clean washing and collect dirty clothes. After a battle lasting the first month, the authorities permitted us to take food for them, so the twice-a-week visits were to leave fresh fruit and chocolate, and a form of contact. I spent horrible hours at Security headquarters here, pleading and fighting for the right to have a visit, which after a lapse of about three weeks or a month, I would win - a ten-minute visit with Security police standing all over us, between a thick piece of glass; its best purpose was to let Rusty see me, and know I was still O.K. I know every inch of that Pretoria road, and can see myself travelling up and down it endlessly for the duration of the trial - and afterwards. But the fact that they are going to be charged next week is the best thing of all, for then they become normal awaiting trial prisoners, not 90-day detainees, and must be allowed books and writing material. To be a normal awaiting-trial prisoner seems like heaven!

There have been lots of stories in the papers here and in England about the 90-day people being treated 'well.' What do they mean by that? They mean that the Whites are not physically assaulted - and in some ways such assaults would be preferable to the type of mental torture they've been giving them; but in any case, this applies only to the Whites. About the Africans we get trickles of news of the most horrible things, and can never know the real facts. One of

of them died. The police said he committed suicide - hanged himself in his cell, but nobody believes he would do such a thing. He was a strong, good, balanced and intelligent man with a wife and family, who had been arrested and threatened by the police before, and had never yielded. Such a lot of them simply seem to disappear. The only way we have of finding out where they are is by taking food parcels to the jails. When they refuse to accept them, we know the person has been moved somewhere else, and the search begins again. They move people around all over the country, and never inform their relatives, and sometimes weeks go by before the wives or parents find out where they are. They hold secret trials - they just had one in which 7 men got 20 years each - and the trial was held in secret, without any defence, without anyone knowing that it was going to be held. A woman who took clothing and a toothbrush to her husband was told she could not leave the clothes for him, and he was in no condition to be able to use a toothbrush. A note was smuggled out of one of the main police cells saying they don't even get enough water to drink. In one cell where a number of African youths were held, four of them teen-agers, they were kept for 87 days, during which time they were only twice given water to wash themselves. The ONLY food they had in all that time was hard porridge three times a day, literally all. An eighteen-year-old girl who was arrested in June could not be traced by her parents until August, when police admitted she was in cells in Pretoria. Next of kin are supposed to be informed, but sometimes it takes weeks to trace a person, and the relatives, poor as they are, hang around prisons in different towns and suburbs for weeks on end trying to find their near ones. There seems to be some sort of policy to move the 90-day people around to make it difficult to take them clothes or food. This task of trying to trace people is one of the most heart-breaking of all. We hear that in one town there are hundreds - even thousands - arrested, but nobody can get the names. We hear of cells where they leave bright lights burning all night long, and cells that are painted all-black. In most cases it seems that the African detainees get no exercise at all. Mrs. Sisulu, wife of Walter Sisulu who was arrested with Kusty, was detained for 47 days during which time she never once went outside - only into a small corridor outside her cell. All the 90-day people are not permitted access to anyone, which includes lawyers, and only the White wives, like myself, after a strenuous battle, have managed to get permission to see our husbands on urgent personal matters. Many of the 90-day people have served 90 days, then been immediately re-arrested (in some cases they let them walk a few yards down the street, then arrested them again) and a court has ruled that this is perfectly legal, so there is really no such thing as 90-day detention, only indefinite detention in solitary confinement for as long as the police wish.

I suppose I write these things to you to help take my mind off my own problems. And in a way, this is why I don't like writing to people any more. There is nothing that can be said from South Africa today that is cheerful or good news, and one can't keep on writing the sad and bitter things without an end. I feel that we have become now too deeply involved in our own problems and scarcely take a look at the world around us. Even the issues of peace that were once the most important thing of all to me seem to have shrunk. I loathed and hated force of all kinds, and dreaded 'necessary' violence in whatever form it took; and agreed that there were 'just' wars, and simply wished there need never be any kind of war anywhere. But today, this country is teaching me - with thousands of others - the unpalatable facts about peace and war and truth and freedom. One of the leaders - Mao or someone - once said that freedom lies in the barrel of a gun; and so it does in South Africa today, and force is the only means left, and violence the only language that the White despots understand.

In addition to all this are the extraordinary contradictions of South African life. This country is flourishing, as never before. Industry is booming, great new buildings arising everywhere, foreign investments increasing. For the Whites there is prosperity - everything. A glorious country, with a wonderful climate, rich natural resources, developed towns, beautiful homes, cars, servants. Visitors from abroad are amazed at what they see, and business men give interviews that favour the government. I surely must have written this all to you before, or to someone else. Underneath it is all rotten, the worms crawl, it is a hateful, deformed society. Sometimes at night I lie in bed and think the most wonderful thing on earth would be to leave South Africa and never, never to return. To live anywhere in the world except here. What an escapist dream! At other times it seems to leave now would be even more unbearable.

When I start writing like this, it becomes difficult to stop, and I think it better often not to begin. That is why I now write more infrequently to my family and friends overseas. So let me try to counteract this depressing picture with something about my personal life.

It goes on. Toni is in love and wants to get married next year - her young man is a University student without any money whatsoever, and lives in Durban, so she has gone there for a short vacation that falls now. Ivan - the lad - plans to come to Johannesburg next year, and Toni says when they are married they will live with me as long as Maddy is in jail. Patrick has turned 15, and is so absorbed in girls, pop music and his particular, superficial teen-age crowd that I think he misses Rusty least of all. Frances, who is now 12, brings home model reports from school, where she excels in everything, and is at the moment on holiday with some cousins. Keith is a plump and demanding 6, and I drop him - and then all. Summer has come, our pool is blue and beautiful, the sun shines all day, and everywhere smells of honeysuckle and early summer flowers. I go to University two days a week to paint - such heavenly relief from problems - fond running the home and writing and other things occupies more hours than any normal day could possibly possess; play records blaringly loud in the evenings and go to bed late.

Well, there are other things I do not know how to express. Pity is a most destructive emotion, particular the self-variety. I know you will both feel sorry and helpless and want to 'do something.' All the little things you people do about South Africa are important. The boycotts are mounting, and are having an effect. Both Britain and America remain the last real props to the present regime here, because of the great investments they have and the enormous stakes. But publicly they are compelled to condemn apartheid, and the position is arriving where the public condemnation and private support are becoming incompatible. As Afro-Asian pressures step up, they have to step back. I really think one of these days there must be a break, and pin faith in the belief that it will not be too long, so that all the wonderful people I know, the decent, intelligent, courageous and honest people will come out of the jails.

Lots and lots of other things to say, but not the time to say it all! One last word. Whatever awful and unforgettable things THEY did in the USSR, in Czech, Hungary, etc, the injustices and mistakes, whatever the rights and wrongs of the systems and methods, the one sure thing I know is that individual Coms are the salt of the earth, and the beauty and poetry of their lives will eradicate so much else that was wrong or evil. I love them dearly - and you, too, my distant and loyal and unforgettable friends.

154 Regent Street,
Observatory,
Johannesburg, South Africa.
23 May 1963

My dear Janet,

I have an enormous batch of unanswered letters, that have been accumulating for many weeks in a big envelope - so many, that if it were not the fact that I sallowe getting letters that I greedily want more, I think I'd be tempted to bury them. Anyway, I draw your letter from the pile, and sit on cushions in front of the fire - it's winter here, and always cold at night, even if the days warm up - to renew my 'lifeline' to you. Because I do really enjoy hearing from you, enormously, and it is the personal news of yourself and your family that I devour. Your home with parents sounded rather dreadful for you, and I hope your writing provides you with some "wings away." Daily two lines of Stephen Spender's keep coming into my head from a poem I don't remember - and these two probably misquoted: "The city builds its horror in my brain/ This writing is my only wings away." With me, it is now "my painting is my only wings away" for this country, and what it is becoming, has built its horror into all of us. I can't remember what my last news to you and Mary covered; if this repeats, please skip: I lost my job - it was for a firm that publishes a magazine about photography, and I'm prohibited from working for any publishing firm, applied for permission, received the answer to "cease forthwith, as from today." This unrooted me, as the mornings-in-office were a pleasant and seemingly necessary routine. Impossible for me to get anything, as all my skills for the past decades have been in the field of writing and advertising - all barred to me. I go to painting classes two days a week, at the Witwatersrand University; what 'wings away'! It is another world, peaceful, sunlit and quite removed from the rest of our lives. While painting I think of nothing, nothing at all, except the painting and what I'm trying to do; and in the intervals when the model is resting (life classes) talk to the students and try to understand what they are doing, mostly incomprehensible to me. I take books on art from the library and only regret that this fascinating new world has been discovered so late. Other days are more than full with home chores - shopping, cooking, washing, and the endlessly repetitive things that all Moms do everywhere - some writing, but too little, and so on. Our activities are very limited. Rusty is more or less always at home, as he is not allowed out evenings, week-ends, holidays. I go out some evenings, not much. No one comes to our house any more. Our friends, almost without exception, have either left the country (quite a few went recently) or are prohibited from communicating with us. Social life is non-existent. We have had relatives and others pressuring us to go as well, the same old arguments, what good does it do, etc. At one stage, when the latest evil bit of legislation (the 'No-trial' Act) was going through, I panicked privately and seriously thought about going. But Rusty has a kind of integrity and rock-like calmness. He says not all can go. And my own motives being always so mixed and often so un-pure, I feel that I must stick with him. Anyway, I weathered the panic, and we've settled back again. The 'No-trial' Act allows arrest without warrant and solitary confinement for 90 days for 'questioning'; you can be held until you have answered questions satisfactorily and there seems no limit to the number of '90 days' for which you can be held. Rusty's name was specifically mentioned in parliament during the debate; but so far 30 have been picked up under this measure, and we are still O.K. Quite apart from the pressures of personal peril, it is the general way things have become here that often make it intolerable. It is an enormous tragedy with so many parallels with Nazi Germany and to sit and watch it all, becoming more and more tied and unable to act, often becomes unbearable. We are spared the worst excesses of Nazi Germany only because this is 30 years later, and in a different world; no gas ovens, nor yet mass deaths in concentration camps, but all the rest. The corruption, hate, cruelty, cruelty without end; and the master-race seeing it all and turning away - not my home, not my life, not my family. I have come to loathe and despise the white people of this country, with only the exceptions like ourselves who are pitifully few. They know what is happening, and they are turning their backs on it. I know now the answer to that grinding question about the German people: Did they know? Yes, they knew, like White South Africa knows, but they pretended they did not. They live with it day by day, it brushes against them through their servants, their employees, the people in the streets. But they have too much comfort, too many good things, and it is too hard for them to give it up. Does

this sound all moralising and bitter? That is how we feel. Also, I am afraid, we become more and more concerned with South Africa alone, to the exclusion of the rest of the world. All the world's problems become a bit remote, and we (people like myself, I mean) tend to feel that our immediate problems are all that counts. I know it isn't so, but just the same that is somewhat how we are. The N. Guardian have had good coverage on S.A. - do you read about it? I have followed the US news that is of import - WSP, and now the de-segregation fights. And read the WCP bulletins to try and get proper perspectives on the world. I had a letter from Malviya (Delhi) that I found rather sad; it was a sort of indirect plea for understanding of their position, which seemed to have become terribly difficult.

Do you know any of your co-patriots who will be going to the Warsaw meeting? If so, ask them to make a point of contacting the SA delegates and speaking to them. When I reach this point in a letter-card, I realise how inadequate is everything that I have written. Next time, I think, I must be reckless and write an ordinary letter, without the limits of this blue square. Well, I'll do that the next time I hear from you, and you must then tell me what you most want to hear. Ask questions about SA, and us, and anything in which you are interested.

One of the things I haven't mentioned, and haven't room for, is the whole pattern of violence that is developing here (it used to come only from the government; now it comes from the liberation movement as well.) I hate it, yet understand it, and cannot see what alternative there is. If I were younger, I might even be a part of it, yet it revolts me. When you write, give me news of Mary, and of yourself and your sons. My husband read all the Lars Lawrence books that were available here, and I read only one, Morning Noon and Night. Do you maintain any contact with him? The books are epic. I can imagine living with the writer during creation could not have been easy.

Did your friends come back from Delhi? Shall we go there again - and to Chandigarh and Amritsar? Before we are too old?

Much love

Milda

Eerste vou—First fold

AIR LETTER
LUGGER
AEROSGRAMME



DAAR MAG NIKS BY 'N LUGGER
INGESLUIT WORD NIE. ENKEL
DIE WERKSTUK VAN 'N LUGGER
BROEF OF PER LANDPOS
AANGESTUUR WORD.

NAAM EN ADRES VAN ASENDEUR
SENDER'S NAME AND ADDRESS

AN AIR LETTER SHOULD NOT
CONTAIN ANY ENCLOSURE: IF
IT DOES IT WILL BE SURCHARGED
OR SENT BY SURFACE MAIL.

Tweede vou—Second fold

Mrs. Janet Stevenson,

112 Green Bay Road,

Hubbard Woods,

Ill.

U.S.A.

Sny hier oop—To open cut here

Sny hier oop—To open cut here

43 Frognal,
London, N.W.3,
England.
16/11/65

Dearest Janet,

I had wanted to get into touch with you again after this long silence, and when I met Kay Cole in London, she gave me this address. I took it down over the phone, and hope it is correct and reaches you.

It was infinitely saddening to hear the news of Phil's death so far away; illogically one feels that if he had been at home, it would not have seemed so distressing. I felt I was just on the verge of getting to know him, and looked forward very much to the opportunity of meeting him.

He had written to Harry Carlisle who lives not far from me when he was very anxious about his South African friends, Jack and Ray Simons. I then wrote to Phil, as I had news of them, and subsequently wrote again when I had further details of where they were- and what they were doing. He replied, that was why I felt we had established some sort of contact and were on the verge of becoming friends. One draws what comfort one can from any situation, but it is not simply trite comforting to say that he had achieved what he wished with the completion of his set of novels. I believe them to be very important books, and that they will become increasingly important and recognised. Janet! I wish you can one day find the time and heart to write to me about him; I would like to know about him. I feel for you now, and know the desolation that must have seized you when you heard he was dead.

We seem to have settled down well in London, although now that it has turned bitterly cold the children express the view that we should emigrate! I was very miserable and depressed when we first came here, but after more than a year I have revived old memories and nostalgias, and I do love England and London, in spite of all its drawbacks. The children are happy here too, although I don't think they will ever become conditioned to the climate. They have reacted to the greater freedom, the easier life in the schools, the opportunities that a city like London presents to all young people, and of course to the feeling of personal security that has made so much difference to their lives. Toni and her husband and 4-month old baby (I'm a grandma!) live in a room beneath us, and eat with us and generally spend most of the time in our flat, although they do have a place to retire to themselves, so they can quarrel without being inhibited.

For some time now I have been trying to write a book about our last two years in South Africa. I do not find the writing so difficult, as the material conditions under which I write. I am still free-lance journalising, and contracted to supply a couple of European agencies as well as the occasional article to the National Guardian. This, plus various matters concerned with

South Africa, plus speaking at Anti-Apartheid Meetings all over the place (I have been to many towns in England, to Ireland, to Scotland twice, to Sweden) plus the enormous, time-consuming time-wasting business of living in London - incredible how difficult it is to do anything in this great big town - jam up every moment of my time. To squeeze in a few hours a week on The Book means avoiding being social, even friendly, and stopping writing letters - this is why I haven't written to you or to Mary all this long while. I found that if I made any exceptions, it was just endless, so I just don't write any more to people unless there is something very important.

It takes so long to write a book! Physically speaking. I have worked and worked, and still have only about one quarter written, which I want to send off to prospective publisher to see if it is what he wants. If so, there will be the incentive and excuse to get on with it, if not, I shall still get on with it because it is inside me and must be written out.

I suppose that is why at present I would like to be away from people, free of them, left alone; I would like to push off my whole family - wish they were grown and out in the world. I feel consumed by people, they all take great bites out of me and nothing is left for myself. I have too many friends in London, masses of them, and many of them are sad and lonely people and can't just be forgotten. I have sisters and sister-in-law who make demands, if I didn't love them dearly I could turn my back on them, but I can't. Well, this is just a bit of a complaint, for I'm sure you will understand it, but in between this feeling of wanting to be away from everyone and everything, life here is tolerable. If it were not for the great burden of what we have left being with us all the time, it would be very happy indeed. Sometimes I do feel wonderfully happy in a way I haven't felt for years, then I feel guilty at being happy!

Write to me if you have time. Do you see Mary? Perhaps you could pass this letter on to her. She was in London once, some time back, I tried to get in touch with her, but couldn't, and I don't think she knew where to find me. Next time she comes through, she must phone Hampstead 4541. I must see her again.

Tons of love to you, and Benson,

Mildred

43 Frognal,
London, N.W.3,
Sept 5th 1966

My dear Janet,

I didn't really deserve to get a letter from you at all - 'dittoed', as you call it (I would have said 'duplicated') or otherwise, so it was what South Africans would call a 'bonsella' - an unexpected extra gift. Yes, I did not write for the same sort of reason. I had to get my book finished, and in the end there was only one way, which was to withdraw from the world, as it were, for a period. I found that to make any sort of exceptions - personal correspondence, speaking at meetings, social entertainment - was to open the door to the flood once more, so I kept it almost closed. And finished. At the two-thirds completed and utterly despairing stage, when you know it is all rubbish, not worth writing, no one will want to read it, etc, etc, I took the manuscript to Heinemanns on the suggestion of a friend. The man there, Birch, said he would read it, but wouldn't hold out any hope for publishing as the company's policy was NOT to publish any more books about SA for the time being - no market, no interest. Five weeks later he phoned me to come in, and said 'Finish it - we'll take it.' So I worked really hard, and by the first week of August took in a mutilated manuscript that Rusty had edited, covered with deletions and additions on each page, signed a contract giving them world rights, and went off for two weeks 'package tour' to Yugoslavia with Rusty and Frances and Keith. I have never felt so relaxed! And happy! And proud! I suppose others feel the same, what appealed to me in the contract was simply the words 'Hilda Bernstein, hereinafter called The Author' - luvverly. I feel like a proud mother and can't wait to see the thing, which won't be out until next year. It's called 'The World that was Ours' - it is from a line of a poem by Lawrence Binyon - 'The world that was ours is a world that is ours no more.' Please tell me my naive reaction to having finished a book and found someone to publish it is not unusual? And I DID receive your book - I should have at least dropped you a note to thank you, but have not read it yet. Toni read it, and so did Rusty, and both of them liked it - Toni more than Rusty, he has very limited tastes in novels. I will read it now, that I have my own book off my shoulders. It's good of you to have a copy sent to me, and I hope the English edition is a success - I will look for the reviews. How is it going in America? Do you get as little for books there as the author does here? The problem is, how to live while writing books. Yugoslavia was marvellous - hot, hot, hot, which was what we wanted, and we went south, past Dubrovnik, on the Adriatic coast. I loved it all. Although it was very touristy - a package tour is a wrapped up complete job, from airport back to airport, hotel, etc, all booked and included. This way one doesn't see anything much of the country or people, just little bits. Dubrovnik is out of this world, a dream; a complete walled city, from which traffic is excluded, beautiful beyond words. I like the Yugoslavs - handsome, friendly, independent is the impression one gets. We came back to face all the unsolved problems of London, the biggest for us being accommodation (due to move in October, when our lease expires, and no sign of an alternative) The trouble is that one cannot afford to live in London any more. I have spent most of my time since

returning trailing around to house agents, and seeing all the big, small, dirty, old, impossible, expensive houses and flats, and clinging to the absurd idea that I MUST be able to see a tree from my window, otherwise I won't be able to live. The cost of having a tree is prohibitive, but I haven't given up hope. Meanwhile, we will stay on in this flat until evicted, so if you write again, this address will do. I am sending this to Grambling - Grambling! it sounds like something from a child's story book - although I do not know when you will be there. You say you will be teaching there 'next year'. In South Africa the academic year starts in January, but in England it starts of all things in September, so I am not quite clear what you meant. I know you will be too busy to write at first, but do another duplicated letter when you can - we don't mind, your friends, I mean - I have a friend in Copenhagen who only writes that way, to people all over the world. I hope you will find it absorbing and worthwhile; challenging, I am sure. Are you in touch with Mary still? We had a lovely meeting in Geneva - I mean, meeting her again was lovely, the rest was rather ghastly. I met an Indian who says he is going to arrange for me to go there in November. Don't know whether he means it. Much love

Hilda

FIRST FOLD HERE

Sender's name and address:

AN AIR LETTER SHOULD NOT CONTAIN ANY
ENCLOSURE; IF IT DOES IT WILL BE SURCHARGED
OR SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL.

SECOND FOLD HERE

BY AIR MAIL
AIR LETTER
AIRCARGABLE

3 - PM
3 - SEP



Mrs. Janet Rotstein,
c/o Grambling College,
Grambling,
Louisiana,
United States of America.

43 Frognal,
London, N.W.3,
England.

27th December 1967

My dear Janet,

The longer one leaves it, the harder it is, the guiltier one feels. In other words, I could hardly bring myself to write to you because I had not written for so long. Long, long, ago I had a terrific circular letter from you from Grambling. And meant to write. Then Kay Coles was here, and I heard you'd left Grambling, and I couldn't write to you because I didn't have your address. Kay sent me a postcard with the address. It's been lying in my basket for weeks. Guilt, guilt. I felt guilty because I hadn't sent you a copy of my book, when you so generously sent me yours. I sent a copy to Mary, heard nothing (she was in Vietnam); heard from another Californian friend (Ruth Cowan) that Mary's son was very ill with cancer, then Ruth wrote and told me he had died. I wrote a note to Mary.

Finally, your Christmas card. There you are, looking about thirty at the most (only your skirt's not mini enough) and that was the final prod that has driven me to overcome the guilt barrier

I wanted to send you a copy of the book; the publisher only gave me six to disburse, they all went to family. Then I had to buy, half-price, it's true, but it's expensive, and I sent so many to SA because they can't buy it there . . . excuses. I'm trying to get an American publisher, so far unsuccessful (Monthly Review were about to do it, then the directors had doubts about profitability, and finally turned it down). Shall I ask Mary to lend you her copy, or is that ultra-mean? I wonder what you are writing now? I haven't found being published much fun; disappointing, even humiliating, although the reviews I had were good. Yet in spite of all the work, discipline, pain and suffering, it's the next one that occupies my thoughts. The problem is time.

Our biggest problem has been that of housing. We are too old and too poor to be able to ~~arrange to~~ afford to come and re-settle ourselves in a centre, like London, with nine million nine hundred thousand and ninetyseven others all pressing themselves into houses-converted-to-apartments at inflated rents. We've had a desparate hunt for nearly two years, been on the verge of getting a house five times (plus all the English expenses of surveys, lawyers fees, and lord knows what) and we are now on the verge of the sixth, which looks as though it will come off, but is too big and too expensive, and not the nicest house in any case . . . but our flat has gradually silted up with the occupants and their work and hobbies, doors won't open because of painting boards stacked behind them, you can't sit straight at tables - sideways

like Victorian ladies on horseback, because of the cardboard boxes filled with 'things' underneath. I make a very worthy contribution to this unspeakable congestion with my increasingly absorbing painting, woodcutting and picture-making out of cloth scraps, it's like an incurable disease, and I think I also suffer most from the tensions generated by too many people in too small a space, with no place where anyone can really settle down to do anything, without being stumbled over, cursed at and told to clear up, we need the table for supper, or whatever it is. This has been the major problem, and it affects everything I do, my work, my relaxation, such as it is, my relationship with distant friends. If it is solved in the next few weeks, I'll be deprived of all the excuses, but much happier I'll be, without a doubt.

The physical conditions, both in our personal lives at home and in general surrounding circumstances, make London very difficult for me; I'd be much happier in a smaller and quieter place, but neither Rusty nor the children will contemplate anywhere else at the moment (except Frances - she'd go anywhere in Africa like a shot.) Rusty wants Frances and Keith to finish their schooling here, without any new moves, and he has a point, for they've adjusted well from that point of view and it can't help to uproot them again. Patrick must also finish being an apprentice and earn enough to leave home and get himself a wife to do the mending and other chores, how I hate and resent them, more and more. And Rusty surprisingly seems to like London much more than he ever expected, and shows no inclination to go anywhere else. So I'm the one who is most dissatisfied, with a kind of underlying impatience at the compelling routine that London and family thrusts upon me, and a longing to be free of all the endless demands of family and comrades. There's a sort of ex-patriate South African community, and I know them nearly all, and love them mostly very dearly, and could not tear myself away from them for anything in the world, and find the kind of activities that we go in for increasingly unfruitful and frustrating.

This letter sounds like one long grumble - it shouldn't be! Lots of compensations, some productive activity among it all. Also, in spite of what I've said, London is marvellous, stimulating full of good things (among so much bad); splendid theatre, marvellous concerts, art shows, museums, everything. I love it's messy old streets and buildings. I'd like to visit it once a year for a good season, then leave it alone.

From time to time, through a peace conference or anti-apartheid activity of some kind, I get a trip away from home, often quite often abroad, and this helps as well, breaking up the insistent routine. Last August I went on the British Peace Committee's holiday cruise, as a staff member (and hard work it was, too) and met some more Americans, peace-niks. We 'did' six places in the Mediterranean, and it really was like the cruises you read about, you know, 'that must have been Cyprus because it was Thursday'. Still, the places were fabulous, even if only glimpsed.

One reason I managed to get down to writing to you is because we've just finished with Christmas and I haven't put on my workaday harness properly yet. England does Christmas in a big way, and they need it here. It is so grey, gloomy, damp and dark, that all those coloured lights and sparkling decorations, and that fattening filling food has some sort of purpose. We always used to have a picnic lunch on Christmas day! I still think of it with windows flung wide, and a branch of the tree from the back garden stuck in a tub in front of the fireplace. Sun pouring down. The kids in the swimming pool all day long.

Dear Janet, what are you doing now, you and your husband? Build a little boat and sail across the Atlantic to London. We'll be in our house at Primrose Hill by that time, I hope (typing with crossed fingers) and they'll be room for you both, even if the boat will have to anchor somewhere down-Thames. I'm a double-grandmother now, by the way. Toni has two sons, one seven weeks, one 2½ years. They're lovely, but I don't really want to be bothered with grandchildren, other than a visit once a week. I still have too many other things to do.

Love to you both. I hope I'll be forgiven, and you'll write some time.

*Happy 1968 - wish I could
pray for peace in Vietnam*

Hildi

5, Rothwell Street,
London, N.W.1.
England.

27th Jan 1969

Dearest Janet,

My heart goes plonk at the thought of writing to you - please let me explain. I want to keep in touch with you, want to communicate. But if I start on the business of keeping you up to date on me, it would be pages and pages. I haven't the time, I don't think I even want to start, so I'll summarise in a brief, distorted sort of fashion:

1. We are all well (my family, I mean and me) and living in a house which is incomplete and sometimes the disorder and lack of cupboards gets me down but mostly I have learned to ignore it. It is in a very good position, next to Primrose Hill, close to Regents Park, town, transport, etc. I wish I didn't live in London. It's too big, too noisy, and too difficult and people make too many demands on me.

2. I've had an emotionally disturbed year, although you wouldn't think it to look at me. The events of the year just seem to be too much, and I can't take them in my stride any more. For the first time I found a great, fundamental political rift opening up between me and Rusty (over Czech) and it is still there, and will of necessity grow wider and wider. So as not to tantalise you with guesses, let me say I am on the brain-washed-by-bourgeois-press-Tv-radio side into ridiculous beliefs about liberalist democratic ideas, while Rusty (and all the South Africans, who know what side their bread is buttered) support the saviours of socialism.

3. THIRTY YEARS OF BLOODY BORING MEETINGS AND LOOK WHAT A MESS THE WORLD IS IN! I might just as well have stayed at home and painted pictures and wrote books - at least there would be something to show for it. Therefore, through my own disatisfactions at what life has done and what I've done to life, arises an intense resentment towards those around me, family, political associates, friends, who still try to devour me and leave nothing of me to be me. I am sure you understand.

4. I'm green with envy at your project. How about you coming here to live with Rusty, and me going round the world with Benson?

5. Never mind, It's not all so awful as I've made it sound. I'm writing a non-political novel about a very original subject (love) it is going quite well, and I go to art classes, and do woodcuts when no one is looking. Please keep in touch!

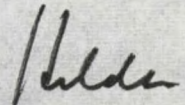
I'm adding this belated reply to your last letter - goodness knows when that was.

There is a four-way colour system in South Africa: Black Africans, Coloureds (mulattoes, half-castes, what you will) Asians, Whites. This is embodied in law, and the most terrible and tragic cases are the borderlines between white and coloured and coloured and African.

Don't think the heart transplant case has the slightest bearing on apartheid. The doctors and all the whites concerned look upon it as they would if they accepted an organ from a healthy animal (their due and right to live) and a new law is being promulgated to prevent the names of donors being published so there can be no more discussion about hearts from blacks going into whites, etc. And so they can take them without asking the family.

Apartheid is just the same, only more so, and the whites get more and more prosperous and rich.

Much love

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Helden', written in dark ink.

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