

7, Shepherds' Close
Shepherds' Hill
London. N. 6

July 16, 1969

Dear Carolyn:

Nearly a month since your letter arrived just before I left for England with a more eventful last few days than I had anticipated because I had news from my New York agent that a book I finished three years ago and had pretty well given up hope of publishing for years to come had been sold in New York. Since I wasn't intending to take a copy of that manuscript with me, it was fortunate to have the news before I left, though I wrote back fiercely that I would have nothing to do with editors, etc. until this new book is out of the way. It would be terrible to have to stop just at this point and go back to a book which was hell to write in the first place and is completely different from the one I'm working on now in technique, vision, the lot. So far I haven't even seen a contract; so there doesn't seem to be great pressure about it. Skeptical from years of experience, I'll not only wait for the contract to be signed but for the actual book to be in my hands before I'm sure of the process. I signed a contract for the American edition of DESSERT and waited two years and through a buying off of publisher before I even got hands on the galleys, and in England the book was within a month of publication when the publisher's lawyers stopped it for fear of libel suits, and that involved months of correspondence and nearly a year's delay. Still, I admit to some hope now about this one. And when I arrived at the hotel in London where we stayed for three days before escaping to the Dorset coast, I had a letter from my London agent, about to leave for the continent but wanting to let me know that foreign rights are beginning to sell for individual short stories, none of which pays much but collectively present me with a surprise bank account here.

Dorset was a godsent, friends with an old but really comfortable remodeled cottage determined that we would eat, drink, swim, walk, search for fossils and otherwise entertain ourselves without pressures of either a business or social sort. A bit baffled by the time change still and anyway urgent about the book, I got up most mornings around five and went to the top studio of the house with glorious views of the channel and the coastal hills and mostly reread what I had so far written and took notes for work to follow. But early rising didn't seem to get in the way of fairly late evenings of brandy and good music and talk. I can take rest from the air at times like that, and most days we were in it, picnicing on the shore or high hills in Austen and Hardy country. It gave me energy for what I knew would be a hectic first two weeks in London because there were so many people to see on their own way across the ocean.

Our English friends throw up their hands in comic despair at the house we are in, which isn't five years old and could as easily be in California as in London, except for the minute fridge. We grumble amiably about the beds which are short and narrow, and at first we were baffled about the kitchen, so clearly set up for single

living, but the informality required both by the size and limitation of the place are just what we need. There is a tiny garden, but it backs up to a large lawn and huge trees; so the view from my study might be country, the leaves alive with owls and squirrels and wind. And Highgate itself is charming. I know Hampstead Heath from other years, but Helen doesn't, and we have had lovely walks, I remembering, she discovering, along the ponds up to Kenwood House (what house parties might have been given there!). And we're discovering together the Highgate side with its various woods and lovely pubs. There will be more time for that now than there has been because of our preoccupation with people. Actually the first week back, because we had colds, we spent some time simply settling and I working like a lunatic, but last week I took off entirely to spend long days with friends and even longer evenings. Margaret Laurence was with us for a marathon talk which lasted 24 hours with short break for sleeping. I've spent hours and hours with a friend just out of a silent, enclosed order after five years. Also with another friend from college who has just had a third child. She and her family leave for the States tomorrow, ending a five year stay in a beautiful house in Chelsea where we've all had curious and glorious times. We met for the last time last night, we providing a crazy fried chicken picnic in their very large, formal dining room, served by dumb waiter from the kitchen a floor below. And we've had a raft of students with us as well, hungry for home tasting food and appreciative audience for all their European adventures.

But that all closes down now, during the day anyway. I am back at work and determined to finish the book before we leave. We'll see friends and go to the theatre two or three times a week, and we've promised a couple of week-ends in the country as well. All that is workable at this stage since I think I'm within thirty or forty pages of the end with lots of notebook work done on them already. Still no title and nothing in mind. Since publishers are notorious about title refusal anyway, I am not concerned. (Though I think the book that's just sold will keep the title it has: THIS IS NOT FOR YOU).

Helen spent all day at the Tate today, a freedom I won't ~~xxx~~ envy for a while. She says she'll go every day this week, move to the national gallery next week. The weather is so glorious that evening walks are very tempting, and by then I'm ready for a break. In fact, it's so hot that I think of wandering down to the ponds for a swim. One of them is for ladies' only, locally referred to as virgins' retreat but I'm told it might be more entertaining than I have either taste or time for.

I know I haven't many weeks of the geared energy I have now. It's always a problem for me to pace such things. ~~xxx~~ People interrupting are a help in a way, but the friends we are seeing now, many of them after a gap of four years, are not the same experience as old shoe evenings at home in Vancouver. Actually the kids are best. I'm very fond of the scruffy boys and their appetites, and I can be fairly mindless with them. Also there are the human diversions of the neighborhood, which is filled with enchanting children; all the boys seem to be seven, and all the girls four. Speculation on how that has come about is probably not a good idea. Two lady academics at the end of the road are friendly, but we were warned off them as chatters and time wasters by the woman who owns this house. We met her just before she left and got on marvelously well, as I rather suspected we would, and we've had letters from her since she arrived in Vancouver as happy

about the arrangement as we are. I don't suppose Vancouver will pull her as often as London pulls us, but this is so convenient a circumstance it would be nice to think of doing it again in several years.

So far we've managed the theatre only once to see Hadrian VII. We have tickets for HAIR which ~~xxxxxx~~ our more conservative friends simply don't understand, and we are about to get tickets for the two new Pinters and the Arthur Miller. I simply don't look at the concert schedule. Eight weeks suddenly seems nothing. We are good about not being too distracted about things outside London since we do get back often enough to save some things for another time. Not people. In a way, our best friends are here, those we count on in a deep sense, and they are never disappointing except that the two or three times we can meet are never enough, and there are always new friends of theirs, new children, new manuscripts to read, paintings to look at, adventures they save for us.

We go week-end after next to a cottage on a sailing river. The arrangements were so casually made that I didn't find out which river. Fortunately we're being picked up and driven to it. We have a car sitting in the garage, but Helen is not interested in driving in London when tubes and buses are so easy and not in need of being parked. If we were staying longer, I think she'd put up with the beginning tension of driving on the wrong side of the road and sporting habits of london drivers, but she's never liked it, and I haven't been behind the wheel of any car in any country for years, part of my taste for being marooned, I suppose.

I hope by now your old-new dinghy has proved a fine sailor. What a gorgeous place it sounds. I will need a two week retreat when I get back to Vancouver and will have not a minute, but I think I may manage another few days in Dorset at the end of our stay, and, if the book is finished, I should take some real ease from that. We'll probably go to one of the islands in the gulf for a long week-end soon after we get back, depending on Helen's lecturing schedule. Anyway, once term begins and I am organized, I'll sleep. Until then it's not really necessary.

A happy summer to you all,

Paul