

April 4, 1968 (Maybe)

Dear Family,

Well as you can see by the postmark, I seem to be in non-other-than communist Bulgaria.

What's more I am on my way to either Teheran, Iran or else Kuwait. (& then Afghanistan)

What's more I am traveling in a Mercedes Benz with Charles Denne (the Englishman from the Heim) who is driving for a mad Arab who we call "Ahab", in a Peugeot.

Now that you've had a chance to let that sink in, I'll explain a little – but not much since I forgot to bring my airmail paper with me. Here's what happened. Remember I was to go to Istanbul with Ray? And Ray didn't leave then? Well, Charlie, who was working at Hertz carwash across the street from Teheran Export, quit his job so he could drive a car down to the Mideast before going to America. Since he indicated passengers were welcome, Laura & I volunteered to accompany him. Kitty didn't because she hasn't enuff money for the trip & must get a job. Also, after delivering the car, Charlie will visit Afghanistan & then hitch back to Munich, which we decided we would also do, rather than turning back at Istanbul. So we waited around at "the Persian parking lot," where the cars leave from, for days because every day the dumb Persians tell you, you leave tomorrow so every day you come back the next day. Anyway the Persian we ended up driving for turned out to be an Arab, not a Persian, & turned out to have a mad yen for Laura – so she made a last minute decision to stay behind in Munich.

So we left Munich Wednesday at about 5:00. At about 2:00 in the morning we got to Vienna. Next day, yesterday, we got as far as just north of Belgrade (200 K's) and then today we got our visas for Bulgaria – NEXT DAY – and went on to Sofia, where we are now staying at a pension.

Anyway, the whole thing is quite an experience, driving along with something like "Cold Sweat" by James Brown somehow on the radio, watching peasants plowing fields with horse drawn plows & balancing huge bundles on their heads. Some of the scenery is incredibly beautiful (the Balkans are black, just as you would imagine) & some of it is awful. Northern Yugoslavia & Bulgaria are incredibly poor (you should have seen me attempting to buy food in Bulgarian shops today).

Anyway, no more room so the rest must wait – God knows there’s enough of it. Don’t worry if I don’t write for a while – I don’t get much chance. Tif

Ps You can write to me at The Heim in Munich as we will be going back there. Please do!

Written on Envelope:

1 day later: Am now in Istanbul and hear via Turkish newspaper translated by friendly Turk of King’s death & fires & riots in D.C. Please write me with details care of me, the American express office in Teheran, Iran right away! Please! I will get the letter if you send it there. 14th

STREET BURNED TO THE GROUND?!?

Bulgaria

The fish are dying.
They are gulping patiently, patiently at the water’s surface for air
They hover and gasp below the narrow neck of the dank green jar all day, every day.
They have always done so and always will.
Two fish, one larger than the other, echoing each other’s movements in the dusky water;
They have exactly enough air in the narrow-necked bottle to remain alive for a time;
And they are patient: they do not know of fishes in oceans, lakes and rivers.
And why should they?

They have enough air to remain alive for a time.

§ § § § § § § § §

Charlie

I awoke in early evening and crossed the room.
From the other bed he beckoned mutely.
I came and we touched,
And when he had fallen asleep I sat on the floor by his bed and stroked his hair.
Stroking his hair and holding his hand in the tired gentle evening sun
That lapped mildly at the shadows of our room and hesitantly touched his hair
Outside the window children chattered and yelled in a rotten, heartless alley.
From far away I could hear the shocking sounds of

Revolution, and a woman across the alley ran into
her shack and bolted shut a bitter shutter
And still he slept while I stroked his hair.
My eyes filled and stung for friends I had left
And for him, who I would leave too, never understanding.
I wondered as I touched his hair how I could cry
and yet accept that It must be so.
And I smiled when his dreaming made his eyelids
flutter.
And I thought, if I could only believe utterly in him
whose hair I stroke -
And yet face his betrayal without surprise or hurt!
. . . but I am not Abraham.
The sunlight slunk quietly back through the window
And I sat stroking his hair for a long time.

Dear Kitty and Laura -

We are now in Belgrade and have just got our visas to Bulgaria. Charlie and I are waiting in the car across from the train station for Ahab (the Arab) to come back from wherever he's gone. Tomorrow we spend a day in Sofia, Bulgaria when I'll mail this letter.

We are alive and well but very tired of driving and not getting enough sleep.

Spent last night in bed with Charlie although Ahab was in the same room.

Write more later.

Yugoslavia is a drag.

Heard Summer in the City on radio.

Love,

Tif

Sophia, Bulgaria
April 5th 1968

Dear James,

We have got as far as Sophia now and we are staying here a day. Then we move on to Istanbul. Ahab is a really bum driver and he is also a bum in many other ways. I am sick of eating corned beef and bread which is all he gets. Last night – Thursday night – we stopped at a motel and Ahab went to get a room for us. He came back and said there was only one room free. Anyway, I got to achieve my lifelong ambition of sleeping in the same bed as a girl with an Arab hanging out in the bed next door. We drive a long way each day and night driving is a bit of a bind because the lights have practically stopped working and we drive till about 10 p.m. usually. The brakes on Ahab's car don't work and he always slams them on as hard as possible when I am close behind – it must be his idea of a joke.

Now to get to the main reason for this letter – I have left my Youth Hostel card behind, in my leather jacket. I wonder if you could retrieve it and send it to the American Express in Tehran.

Don't bother, I have found it.

Yugoslavia and Bulgaria are really very modern countries – they have got to such a state that they now have the technical knowledge sufficient to hitch two horses or cows together and then – wait for it – put a plough behind to plough the fields. We haven't seen any people pulling the ploughs yet but we will no doubt.

Show this letter to Jim, and tell him that I will be sending him a few letters or postcards fairly soon – maybe 2/3 weeks.

Yours,

Charles. (Denne)

Ahab: Istanbul is fine city. . . . too much cheap.

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At Abdullah Given's

A bright new white Impala in Istanbul.
I approached it mutely.

§ § § § § § § § §

April 7 Istanbul

Now Charlie's tobacco is so wet from the potato peelings he put in it to keep it from drying out that any cigarette rolled with it won't even stay lit. And I left two pairs of decadent Western underpants in Sofia – my groovy colored European ones no less. And Ahab is making me pay my own way. And I can't sleep with Charlie tonight. And I nearly turned back today at the Bulgarian-Turkish border, for an hour I smoked in the car in the hot sun and frowned and thought, listening to the (wonder of wonders) non-Communist German radio in the car next to ours, thinking, Oh God, can I compromise my damned dignity enough to put up with Ahab? Can I cop out on Charlie? What is Charlie to me? Do I really want to go to Afghanistan? Do I really want to eat corned beef and humble pie for another 4 or 5 thousand kilometers? How I envied the purity (do I mean purity? What do I mean?) of the 3 English hitchhikers on their way to Nepal waiting patiently there at the border station, their knapsacks and their dignity well in hand. And perhaps I decided to wait till we got to Istanbul, or perhaps I decided it would be worse to turn back for Munich, or perhaps I didn't decide anything at all. But now I'm there in Istanbul in a dreary 5 x 8 room with a sink and faucet but no water at the Hotel Stop, and tomorrow I am going to Ankara, if Ahab's word is to be trusted, which is doubtful.

Tonight we wandered into a greasy spoon, Turkish style. "Soup?" the waiter said. "Yes, soup," we mumbled, wondering what the pasty-looking oily lumps the cook was hacking up behind the counter were. We soon found out because it was in the soup the waiter produced. So we ate our bread instead. We then blundered into another, less greasy, spoon and got meat and rice wrapped up in spinach, which was highly palatable after "soup." And while we ate, a smooth and smug brown-grey-and-white cat curled up on a stair and watched us, forever. I think she is still watching us. From a café somewhere in Istanbul a sleek Turkish cat with lice is

watching me now, watching me in my tiny blue and white room, watching the thermostat on the door and the faucet that doesn't work and even the pair of bedroom slippers that come with the room and, yes, she sees also the $\frac{3}{4}$ length mirror with a crack $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way from the top. Now I'm tired and will turn out the light and sleep.

Persia

Memories of Turkey are all of grinning, look-alike children and appalling flea-trap "otels" that I wouldn't stay in for a million dollars but that I stayed in anyhow. The children were everywhere. Little brown creatures with big ears, the boys all with shaven heads and the girls with heavy stockings or trousers under their dresses, even in the heat, they flocked the roadsides to wave at us as we went by and descended upon the car to stare and jabber when we stopped. They were usually dirty and ragged (excepting the black-clad, white-collared school children we saw along the road) but children always seem so much like children everywhere, so happy and so free. Their elders may be stern-faced, weary, hollow-eyed and alien specters, but the children are not foreign but only children. They often begged cigarettes from us when we were stopped somewhere, or just giggled and smiled; two little girls along the road by the Black Sea handed us a tight little bouquet of daisies and dandelions, which I threw in the road by the roadworks further down. Some of the little boys are severe, officious looking people with military hats on; they remind me of communist border guards and speak in clipped and cold English if you talk to them. I suppose they are Turkey's aristocracy. But regardless of time, place or type, the children in Turkey all wave, even if the wave is immediately followed by the throwing of a rock at the car. They all get this feverishly delighted, almost desperate expression on their faces as they wave; they seem to crave a respondent wave more than anything in the world.

It's such an effort to live this way. I'm so tired. . . .

- A day Later

Where am I? God knows. I am in a Mercedes in the passenger's seat with an Arab and an Englishman, both asleep. It's 7 minutes after seven and I am in the middle of a huge mass of dirt bordered on the east (I know it's east because the sun's over there) by the railroad tracks, the west by a highway, and the north and south by blank, dirt colored walls. On the other side of the railroad tracks is (of course) a huge pile of dirt and, miles beyond that (of course) another mountain range. The car faces east (how very Islam). It's cloudy and birds are chirping somewhere, like early birds everywhere. Somewhere is Teheran, but I've become convinced now that I will never get there, and I'll certainly never get back to Munich. I'm tired, I'm sick and tired of the gross inefficiency of this journey. I'm filthy; I haven't bathed or washed my hair for a week and haven't been out of these clothes for 6 days. My head itches. My stomach hurts from indigestible Persian bread. I don't even care anymore. I have \$145 plus a handful of German, Austrian, Yugoslavian, and Turkish change. Yesterday we drove 800 kilometers – at 60 k's an hour. But we are still not in Teheran, and we left Istanbul 6 days ago. I'm sick of filthy, lumpy beds in the same room with 2 men, of appallingly dirty sinks supplied with water you can't drink, of curtainless windows and hallways that stink and are grimy. I'm sick of not knowing where we are going and when and how we will get there, and I'm sick of not being mistress of my own day. I'm sick of mountains and dust, dirty fingernails and itchy hair, and of the clinging, plastic feel of the car upholstery on my back and face. And I'm utterly without hope that it will ever end, any of it. I am even without hope that Charlie and Ahab will ever awaken.

(POST CARD, possibly dated 4/18/68)

Dear Family: Arrived in Teheran last Friday after 1 ½ weeks of travel via the cars. After Sofia went thru Istanbul, Ankara, Samsun (on the Black Sea) Trabzon, across Turkish-Persian border and down to here. Have been here 5 days now, with next stop Abadan, then Kuwait & then either back to Munich or on to Abadan. This journey will be unforgettable as we see how the very poorest of the people here live. Write more later, all is well. Tif

(The following letter is a damaged air letter with about 1/3 of the first page torn off. Unsure if this damage occurred enroute from Lebanon, or later after it was received.)

