

EXCUSE ME, BUT....BLEECH!

München (still)

Or is it Persia again? Once again I am in a state of “leaving for the East” and have been for 3 days now. On Monday morning I washed my clothes, mailed my stuff home, packed my knapsack, dressed, and dashed over to the Bahnhof with Kitty. From there we approached the infamous Persian parking lot, which hasn’t changed at all since I left for Teheran in April. It was just as I remembered it and it seemed as tho I had been there only yesterday. Even Bijou was the same (I told him what Ahab did to us and told him to tell Ahab that Charlie was dead). If anything there were more Persians this time and more cars and less being accomplished. We waited two hours and then walked back to the Bahnhof where we found Peter, Bob and Ingrid. All of us back to the lot where we waited for more hours (“You go now,” they said. “In half hour.” “Morgen.” “Today.”) Finally Bob contracted to go with a private car to Teheran, not driving but letting the guy use his passport for registration. “Morgen, 10:00,” we were assured. “Tee trinken, then – go.” We arranged to meet the Persian at his house on Hormanstr. (sp) near Landshutter Allee (and Rot Kreuz Platz and the Columbia) next day and returned to Mathelene’s. That night we went back to the Bahnhof to see Peter off to Amsterdam, and went over to Mathäser with him to pass time before his train left. Well, he missed his first train so we killed 2 more hours at the Bahnhof, where we ran into Susy with a friend from home. Susy of course launched into the latest of M.A. (Michael’s atrocities). After she left, we finally got Pete on a train heading for Köln and dragged ourselves back to Mathelene’s for sleep.

Then yesterday at 10:00 found us at Hormanstr. 30. When the Persian finally showed up, he (a) informed us we would be going after “essen” at about 5:00 and (b) ran the green Peugeot we were taking into the curb, causing an immediate tire blowout. So while we all ate Persian pistachio nuts, Bob changed the tire. With promises to return at 3:00 for essen, Bob, Kitty, Ingrid and I then set off on the tram for Joseph’s to kill some more time. At Joseph’s we found Emil and Yamahla, the two Czech’s living with him till he goes back to Israel next week. We conversed vaguely with the Czechs in feeble German (except Ingrid, who is German) until Joseph appeared with his latest amour. We told him we saw Susy – “that bitch,” Joseph cackled – and that she wanted to buy his car. He received another \$50 bill in the mail. (Emil &

Yamahla, incidentally, are down to their last 20 DM, tho they don't seem worried. They are sexy blonde creatures, both of them, with an air of cynical amusement and worldly wisdom. I cannot connect them with the Czech crisis, somehow. They seem too giggly and detached from anything political. As Kitty says, they are like 2 other Josephs) We amused ourselves with Bob Dylan, smoking, a set of false teeth with fangs in them, and a camera that shot a clown on a spring out of the lens when you clicked it. We discussed Russia and how it is even harder for a Czech to travel there than an American. We discussed prices of flats in Toronto, Guy, and where were the boys in the blue bus. We shook hands all around, said "See you in Tel Aviv" to Joseph, and the 4 of us came back to Hormanstrasse 30. We sat around for an hour waiting for the Persian and drinking tea with his brother. The Persian arrived, served us rice and vegetables, and then informed us he wanted to sleep off a headache so we would have to wait till 10:30 p.m. to go. He disappeared into the bedroom with a prosperous looking German woman and we read, slept and played cards for a few more hours. He appeared again, the woman left, we argued awhile, he disappeared again, and then we found ourselves carrying our things out to the car. Well, 2 immense suitcases, 2 huge plastic bags, 4 knapsacks & sleeping bags and 5 people just won't fit into a Peugeot. We all scratched our heads. Kitty & I moaned a little, and then Bob, Ingrid and the Persian drove off to a tankstelle to look for a roof rack for the luggage. Kitty and I returned to the flat, agreeing that Bob and Ingrid should go & we could hitch to Istanbul.

"Except if we hitch, we won't have enough money to get into Turkey by the time we get there," Kitty pointed out.

"Oh, yeah."

"Well, we can still go to Greece and Italy."

"Yeah, and we can get a boat to Israel from Athens instead of Istanbul. We could even make a desperation hitch down Yugoslavia to Salonika and across to Turkey."

"Oh, no desperation hitches," Kitty said. "Anyway, when we get to Greece, we can try to get into Turkey, since we can't lose anything by trying."

"Yeah, that's true. Only if we go thru Italy we won't possibly have enough cash."

“Yes,” Kitty pointed out, “but basically we’re free to go where we want. We don’t have to go to Turkey. We could spend more time in England, see Amsterdam, maybe go up to Scandinavia.”

“Yeah, that’s true, we’re completely free, aren’t we?” I agreed. Freedom.

“... but I really wanted to go to Istanbul,” Kitty finished mournfully.

Well, the others came back with the information that we would spend the nite at the Persian’s & get a roof rack and leave in the morning. Maybe we would make it to Istanbul after all? While Bob, Ingrid, & the younger brother went to the Bahnhof for food, the Persian ascertained that Kitty and I desired to go to Israel and tried to persuade us to go to Teheran and from there to go to Israel. “Teheran, Tabriz,” he chanted like how many Persians I have heard chanting, “Kermanshah, Khosravi, Baghdad, Jordan, Israel. Zwei tage.” Oh God. I care to make no comment on that route.

At any rate, it turned out the Persian knew David the Teheran carpet merchant who wanted to “make marry” with me, tho he had nothing to say about him (perhaps they are economic enemies). The others returned with food, and after essen and tee trinken we all sacked out in the living room (except the Persians, who, I guess, used their own bedrooms). And now, this morning, we have washed and eaten and are waiting for Bob and the Persian to get back from buying the roof rack. Maybe we will leave today. It doesn’t really matter much, since our clothes are already dirty and we haven’t even left Munich yet.

Bulgarian-Yugoslav Border

We have reached here from Munich in about 30 hours – after driving all last night. We are now in the garage where customs men search suspicious-looking cars – and, apparently in this case the suspicion was well-founded. Our Persian seems to have most of the selection of the Teheran bazaar in his luggage. They are searching his 2 huge suitcases and all the boxes and bags, and are turning up banlon shirts, new socks, cigarette lighters, and electric razors as though they are going out of style. The pile on the bench grows higher, the guards’ tempers grow shorter, and our Persian becomes more defiantly morose in his defensive protestations (keeps

shouting about the Persian “catastrophe” every other minute) every minute. Meanwhile the guard makes new clucking noise with every new discovery. It’s rather pitiful anyway, though I know he is breaking the law. After all, it’s them and us, isn’t it? These are strangers going through his possessions, contraband tough they may be. And their self righteous triumph is the same, the same, as when they caught Charlie and tho this is Bulgaria and not Germany, tho this is clothing and appliances and not hash, I still hate, hate, hate them. They are all shouting now in mixtures of German, English, Persian, and (I guess) Bulgarian. And now it’s my turn,

Sofija

The last time I wrote something in Sofija, it was “Bulgaria” and “Charlie.” And, oh, the fish are dying. I thought perhaps I had remembered wrong, I thought that no city on earth could be as bleak and drab and miserable as my memory of Sofija, Bulgaria. How sad that I was right . . .there is the smell, the Communistsmell, everywhere you go, you may be thinking as tho you were in any city, you may forget where you are outside your own thoughts – and then out of nowhere you will catch a whiff of that smell that penetrates inside your own thoughts and you are back in Bulgaria again. Bulgaria. How I hate the very sound of that word, how ugly it is. The smell, at any rate, may be something in the food; it is especially strong in grocery stores.

But it isn’t really the smell that does it so much, it’s the dying fish, the people. These people in their shabby, faded clothes, in their shabby, glum secondhand expressions, with their pompadours and little pink eyes, all talking Bulgarian. How can they have lives, I mean how are they living a sphere of consciousness, covering a span of maybe 70 odd years here in this place? It strains my credibility that people can live so, and I find myself unable to believe them human beings . . .

We spent the night in a young Bulgarian student’s flat. We picked him up in our search for something to eat and for a cheap hotel, and in broken French he invited us to sleep in his flat. With some misgivings, we accepted. It was in a building in downtown Sofija. We took an elevator up to his floor, an aged, creaky, dirty, busted down elevator that held 2 people at once. His flat consisted of 4 or 5 very large rooms including kitchen, toilet, and bathroom, and was furnished in its entirety with one very threadbare rug, a single bed, and a table covered with

newspaper. The rooms were spacious and smelled, the paint was faded and grimy, the wood on the windowsill was rotting. It was like something of another age, even to the half-filled schnapps bottle, sausage and hunk of bread on the table. It was like Raskolnikov with lots of room. But this guy, whose name was Simon and who punctuated every sentence with a drunken “Comprenez?” did have a transistor radio featuring Western rock, and did have a telephone. So much for the workers paradise . . .

. . . and then there was the Balkan Hotel, which was a real trip. Like something out of a 1930's Dracula movie. Magnificent, seedy splendor, the grandeur and aristocracy of 50 years ago: huge overstuffed worn red sofas, massive pillars, great chandeliers, impossibly wide hallways and high ceilings, massive curved carpeted staircase dated dated dated, musty and old, unchanged and remembering, alive with people who were young and charming and clinked cocktail glasses a long, long time ago, all heavy with a dead atmosphere, black & shadowed with the blood of murdered capitalists, a place of frayed brocade draperies, a place out of time . . . Sofija is a ghost town where the people who died long ago are more alive than the people now walking the streets . . .

Postcard of Blue Mosque dated 21/9/68

Arrived today with Kitty & are now at youth hostel but move into Gulhane tomorrow. Write to me c/o American Consulate in Istanbul until further notice. We left Munich the 17th in a Persian's car, but he got caught on the Bulgarian border with 4 dozen pink banlon shirts, 5 electric razors, 5 cigarette lighters and a bunch of gaudy scarves (for the Persian “catastrophe victims), so we bid him adieu in Sofija (which is just as hideous as I remember it & smells as awful) & took the train here, since hitching in Bulgaria is impossible. Incidentally, I met the American friend of Charlie's, Peter Scanlon, in Munich & also ran into him here on his way to Teheran. Will write a letter soon. Hope you receive box I mailed home reasonably soon. Love to all. Tif

24 September 1968

Dear Mother,

Well, here I am in an awful grungy hotel room at the hotel Gülhane with my tortoise well satiated with half a tomato after a week's fast, curled up (yes, it's true – a tortoise CAN “curl up”) under the bed. It's about 9:00 in the evening, derelict Turks are making grunting noises in the alley under our window, the grunts are blending with music from someone's radio across the way and distant horn-honkings of taxi drivers, the cockroaches are crawling across the grimy blue linoleum floor, a slight breeze is wafting thru the hole in the window and the hole in the curtain and across my bed . . . outside the people are changing money, selling chestnuts, making lewd remarks at Western girls, peddling hash, ogling belly dancers, arresting Persians, reading the Koran and painting 4,000 portraits of Ataturk. . . this is Istanbul, where people say Güle Güle (“Love, love”) for goodby and also knife people in the street. And there is something about this city I like very much, something vulgar and loud and vital and enthusiastic and total. You just can't get these people down, they're already so down and they don't give a damn. It's odd, Istanbul is much dirtier than Teheran, much more crowded and old, and yet I much prefer Turks to Persians.

Sofya, Bulgaria was, incredibly, as awful as I remembered it. Communism to me is tangible. It has a smell, the smell of Sofya, smelling of bad cigarettes, rotting apartment buildings, tasteless food, lifeless, uninterested, hopeless faces. When you say “hopeless faces” it tends to sound like a positive EXPRESSION, like “anguish” or “sorrow.” But that's just what it isn't. It's a nothing expression, the look of people only half awake, half living. They revolt me, like zombies or the very insane. It's impossible to describe this as it is. You don't really believe the way a place like Sofya is until you experience it and feel the deadness and staleness. It's a dying thing, a city in a coma, a country held just on the verge of asphyxiation. But it must be seen to be believed.

We will be in Istanbul till October 7. Write to me till then to the consulate here. After that our address will be c/o Joseph Zwaigenberg, 30 Rains Street, Tel Aviv, Israel. We're taking a boat there from Izmir, Turkey on the 9th. Love, Tif

Ps Tell Jenny, Robert (the tortoise) has not replaced her in my heart! Did she get Peter's card?

Postcard: antique black-white photo of mopey long-haired woman (silent movie queen?) labeled "THIS IS ME NOW – THE ARCH FREAK"

Istanbul

Is it safe to drink the water in the Gülhane?

Before I came to the Heim . . . I couldn't tap dance.

The Grand Bazaar: - "But I don't wanta buy a coat."

Kitty is pretending to be a fece inside someone's colon. "Here I come!" she calls from under her coat draped over her head, "I'm sliding out of the anal opening!" And bang like a sudden blossom at dawn her curly head pops out of her coat like – yes – like a turd appearing from someone's asshole. Now she is making gasping, panting noises.

"What are you now, Kitty?"

"I'm a giant far getting worked up to it."

What do turds do?

THEY LIE IN WAIT.

THEY ARE WAITING FOR ME AND – YES – YOU!

Inhuman voices haunting the skies above Istanbul five times a day, every day, but no one looks, none of the brown people in the cobblestoned streets. No one prays. No one goes into the mosque. Even though the voices are the voices of men in the minarets crying in Arabic for belief. No one listens. No one answers. No one.

I wish I could transfer my entire self onto this paper. Would there be anything left for me, then, I wonder? Why can't every word I write be inexpressibly beautiful? Then there would be a reason to write it.

We are shut out of the life of Istanbul because we are women. And that's a pity.

They're doomed, the little girls in black dresses with white collars, with their pony tails and book satchels. They are doomed to wear long coats and head scarves, buying fruit from vendors in crooked alleys, or doomed to wear chic minidresses and dance beautifully and gracefully with young Turks in half-lit night clubs. To "Kumbyah."

But they love music, these people. Everywhere music. Their life is like a ritualized folk dance in the streets, here they dance in the streets on roots of garbage and phonograph records from a high window, and the taxi horns are keeping time. Because here, who else will keep It?

Will I ever have the brilliant, unexpected originality to write unreal analogies and flowing incoherencies that mean undeveloped, raw genius? I would like to express everything that is my mind but I am not honest enough and am too lazy.

Writing is funny. It's like the outside world, the inside me, meshing. What I write is a never-never land between subjectivity and objectivity, because even though it is me that writes it, I do not feel that it comes from me, nor that it comes from the objective world but somehow from the source of both. How mystical: As tho I were not myself, but only a sort of leak in the dam of objective reality thru which flow, occasionally, the waters of Truth.

When I was a child I wanted a quill pen. I wanted to dip it in an inkwell, like Thomas Jefferson, and place it on fine, white paper, and write. There would be no blots, just a smooth, flawless, rhythmic scratching. Timeless. Dip, scratch, dip, scratch, with a bar of sunlight hanging over my shoulder. Like Thomas Jefferson. The letters I formed would be effortless and perfect.

Signed,

THE FREAK

Why do I skip lines between the days? It is because I am a logical, methodical, orderly person at base, like a German. I like to think I am more human than a German. But I am a struggle between my desire for classical precision and exactitude and my desire for feeling, for

love. I want to be an outline and I want to be flowers. All feeling is based on love. To be unable to love is inability to feel, to surrender oneself to feeling. Hating is, at base, love because it is vulnerability and surrender. I could hate Robinson so much because I loved Charlie so much. When I gave my love to Charlie so completely, I opened myself up to unexpected realms of feeling, positive and negative. I didn't know what I was doing. We don't. We just feel this stumbling, coltish compulsion to touch without knowing why because that is the way things are. And when we touch, we destroy the children we once were and become something else that hurts and is afraid of what it has done, but must accept it only because that is the way things are. What have I given up? we cry, I didn't know I was giving anything up. But if we knew, if we knew what we would have to give up, we might never touch and remain blind and uncompleted always . . . we are never entirely human beings until we are first animals.

I will give you all the times I looked, but
did not speak.
And, most of all, I will give you all the times
I never even looked.

A burning feeling. "Do you know what I want?"
"No. Do you?"
"No." A pausing time. "I was hoping you would."

Kitty: My sleeping bag could rule the world if ¹it had a mind.

"There was no Dugald anymore; there was only this pain like the pain of the phantom limb that goes on haunting the imagination, haunting even the perceptions, of those who have undergone an amputation."

- Island, Aldous Huxley

Today I touched this city. 'Today' means last night, too. Today this city moved me and I saw the center of the world when the sun sets on it. I have fallen in love with this city as I fall in love with a person; it's like a mother and a lover, and I couldn't speak. I sat, reverent, in an

¹ Kitty's sleeping bag – a hand-me-down from Peter – was mummy-shaped, with arms and a hood shape for the head. It really was disturbingly human-looking. I only wish we had taken a photo of it.

outdoor café on the Bosphorus and absorbed and worshipped Istanbul. A half-moon made the water white. Across the Bosphorus was Asia, dark and twinkling with many lights. Below and in front of us a minaret reached upward. Haya Sofya brooded on a hill across the Golden Horn to our right. The skies receded, into pinkness. And there were boats.