



Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

When John and I returned to Europe in 1949, we carried letters from half a dozen editors expressing interest in articles on the post-war recovery there. We found a one-room apartment on Paris's Left Bank. And it was in that city that I had another of these intimations of heaven, the significance of which I would only understand later.



The Bridge

On January 1, 1950, the rent on our room had doubled. We'd just mailed the last of a series of pieces on the black market in various countries. Perhaps it was time to go home? On the tenth, payment for the series arrived, enough for two off-season boat fares back to the States. Bundling up against the cold, we set out on foot for the Cunard-White Star ticket office on the Right Bank.

It was on the bridge crossing the Seine that the experience occurred. In the middle of the *Pont Neuf*, I suddenly knew that "home" wasn't Scarsdale, New York, or Louisville, Kentucky. We *were* home.

This was a very different phenomenon from that vivid sense of "homecoming" on the deck of the *Queen Elizabeth* three years earlier. That had been an inward experience -- today I'd call it a spiritual one -- a mysterious "belonging" that I couldn't account for.

Belonging

But in Paris we did belong. We loved it here! Living was cheap, we knew lots of people, to John's delight, and I had lots of museums to go to. I was studying Egyptian art at the School of the Louvre, and as long as John was enrolled at the Sorbonne, the G.I. Bill covered most living expenses. Europe provided endless story material. We'd meet after classes in the little park at the foot of the *Tour St. Jacques* and, over a lunch of salami and crusty bread, plan the next material-gathering trip from this rail hub of the continent. Paris was the obvious place to settle for good.

And with this realization, the world in my head reassembled itself. Like all American school kids in the 1930s and '40s, I'd grown up gazing at a Mercator Projection wall map of the world: the United States at the center, symmetrically framed by oceans, Europe off on the right, Asia on the left. Now I felt geography come apart, slide, and shift like the ice breaking up on the river beneath us.

Redrawn Map

When the motion stopped, Paris was at the center. I felt the vast Eurasian continent stretching eastward thousands of miles to the Pacific. Saw America somewhat as I'd always thought of Australia, far away across an endless expanse of sea. I felt the ache of those many-times-great-grandparents when the sons and daughters who were my ancestors left the farms and villages that had been home time out of mind.

All this just crossing a bridge.

"Can we walk a little faster?" John said. "My ears are freezing."

We strode briskly along the *rue de Rivoli* while I wondered how to explain that, suddenly, I didn't want a berth on a boat. The ticket office was just ahead. But now it was John who slowed his pace.

"Honey," he said, stopping in the middle of the sidewalk, "I don't know how to put this. I know you want to go home, and I thought I did too. But just on the way here, all at once I knew -- this is home."

This is the way perspective changes, the saints tell us, when we make heaven our homeland. What was central moves to the edges, while something that was only a name becomes the place from which we measure every distance.

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