

July 2, 1942.

My dear Mrs. Priestley:

Many months ago I had such a dear letter from you. I was deeply grateful for it and would have answered at once, but I was suffering from a very serious injury to my right hand - a broken tendon of the thumb. And now I know why thumbscrews were used in old prisons! Nobody seems to know how a 'crooked' thumb can hurt, except John Masefield, who does such adequate poetic justice to it in "The Everlasting Mercy". Those dreary days are past, but my hand is not yet very strong.

The story you told me of your war emergency nursery made me feel more than ever humiliated that so many of us seemed to be sitting idly by. But now I have a little more spirit to write to my English friends, because in our clumsy way we are really trying awfully hard to be of use. We don't get around very fast, and <sup>we</sup> waste a good deal of time and effort. But our friends in England will remember that a drowsing lion can spring to its feet and take position much quicker than a recumbent elephant can perform the same act.

July 3<sup>d</sup>

Last summer, while my hand was still in a metal brace, I had to go to San Francisco to be with my brother who was critically ill from a heart lesion. The heat was terrible, the journey difficult. But one day paid for it all. I went by the Santa Fe <sup>(railroad)</sup> and when I awoke one morning at Las Vegas the whole world seemed different. All the way from Vegas to Albuquerque, on either side of the

From Willa Gather  
570 Park Avenue  
New York City



Mrs. J. B. Priestley,

Broxwood Court Hostel,

Leominster,

Herefordshire,

Great Britain.

The "Rose Acacia" (*Robinia hispida*) was in bloom. For miles west of Vegas, <sup>(before the sun got hot)</sup> the silvery, gray-haired foliage still held the dew drops - they trembled with the thrust of the train. Last winter brought rains to New Mexico and Arizona such as they had never known before. The Rio Grande was full. All the Indian Villages, Santo Domingo, Isleta, Laguna, had been newly whitewashed, and the Tamarisks there were green and violet as I had never seen them in the light years when I used to go there every summer. What I saw for the whole day, from Las Vegas to William, was a sort of apotheosis of the whole country, where I made horseback and wagon journeys before the days of cheap automobiles. That day did me in for a week, but it was a grand way to be done in - made one feel like the burning bush. I never go back to that country now any more - haven't been there since 1927. Santa Fe and I now have become self-conscious and "literary" - and dress the part. Several quite decent-seeming women whom I knew there have divorced their husbands in order to devote themselves to "writing". Americans are sometimes disarming - especially the women. Almost any "attitude" pleases them more than any reality. Perhaps some day I can put on a white wig and a black goggles and take a long automobile trip through the Southwest. Since 1927 I have spent many summers on an island in the Bay of Fundy, where I have a little cottage, only fishing people there - bass + lobster fishing.

This is a rambling letter, but I thought you would like to hear news of the Southwest, where God is still good to trees and little adobe towns, and only woman (Enterprising Woman!) is vile. — I never got to Rainbow Bridge, remember; you have it over me there. I expect you've been to lots of places I don't know. But they are all lovely + good to remember in grateful honor, aren't they?

Faithfully yours Willa Cather



ASTICOU INN  
NORTHEAST HARBOR  
MAINE

August 23, 1945

Dear Mrs. Priestley:

I wish I could really tell you how much pleasure your letter gave me -- still gives me. I first read it on the train when I was leaving New York after an exhausting month of heat -- and I have read it many times since.

It gave me a better idea of V-E Day in London than all the printed columns by our best journalists, and told me several things which I particularly wanted to know. I was so grateful for a word about Casals. None of the musicians in New York (and practically all the musicians in the world have been here for the last few years) seem to know anything about Casals and some of them felt that he might have been liquidated in the Franco regime. I wonder if your daughter knows the Victor record of Beethoven's Archduke Trio, directed by Casals. He has made so few records that this one stands out as the richest phonographic record of the cello ever made.

ASTICOU INN  
NORTHEAST HARBOR  
MAINE

August 29<sup>th</sup>

I began this letter by dictation, near Mr. Priestley, because the right hand which was hurt so badly five years ago had succumbed to a long spell of damp weather and gone stiff on me. I can never write anything - not even a letter, except I do it with a pen.

It will be wonderful if you can come, here, to New York this ~~winter~~ winter. But here, too, you will find a changed world. To be sure there is "plenty" of everything - except good food - but so long as there is plenty of gasoline and hideous clothing and millions of cocktails, our people can be quite cheerful with bad food. I am afraid New York has become just the most dreadful city in the world. It has become



ASTICOU INN  
NORTHEAST HARBOR  
MAINE

The vomitorium of ice-got and  
juice-got money. I would leave  
it if I could.

Arizona, I do believe, has escaped  
all the horrible transformations.  
Many of the places I loved in New  
Mexico ~~are~~ were made hideous  
in the process of manufacturing  
the unspeakably frightful atomic  
bomb. Miles and miles of hideous  
windowless cement ~~and concrete~~  
buildings, four to six stories high,  
lighted by electricity, ventilated  
by electricity. In these hideous  
places they brought forth a hideous  
birth. Now the government experts  
are trying out new modifications  
of the atom-bomber, in the deserts  
of Idaho and Utah. They must have  
"deserts" to work in - they are quite  
as ~~unavoidably~~ necessary as "heavy water".



ASTICOU INN  
NORTHEAST HARBOR  
MAINE

The destruction of matter seems to require <sup>a</sup> technique <sup>different from</sup> ~~than~~ the destruction of form or substance. Every bomb is an experiment: - will it be effective in an area of fifteen square miles, or twenty? Only experiment will tell. So we need the deserts. Maybe that war what deserts were made for. These experiments are getting dangerously near the Rainbow Bridge Country. As for the "weapon" - Good God, to call that a weapon! - it hath the eldest primal curse upon it. The victory it produces is not a victory of arms, and the result of it will be that your people and my people will have to police a hundred islands for a hundred years - and ~~on~~ on one of these islands, you may be sure, the Japs will be making atomic bombs, most efficiently.

ASTICOU INN  
NORTHEAST HARBOR  
MAINE

I write you these ugly details  
because you and I truly loved  
the Southwest. I thought its  
beautiful barrenness would  
always save it from commercial  
enterprises. And now its very  
unproductiveness may be its doom!  
But at any rate you and I have  
had it and loved it. That is a  
strong bond between us.

Faithfully yours

Willa Cather

570 Park Avenue

after September 20<sup>th</sup>



Willis S. Cothren  
ASTICOU INN  
NORTHEAST HARBOR  
MAINE



Air  
Mail

Wm. J. B. Priestley

B 3 Albany London W.I  
England