

[Holding, A.D.]

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Manuscript by
Laurie R. King, 1962

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Dear Mike,

Herewith the White story on Chambers' old man, which seems to me now to have more possibilities than when I first read it: the old boy was a mystificateur in his way, too, but a chubby, amiable, ineffectual one that Chambers couldn't help being like and yet probably despised - the old man's harmless masquerading took a sinister turn with the young one. It interested me, too, that he had an exhibit of his toy models of classical buildings at the Public Library in just the period when his son was working there ^(at the Public Library) or very near it. I have marked a few points that struck me. The last paragraph I have marked is a ~~defixx~~ reflection of Andy White himself. He hits and then says "I didn't mean it," because he doesn't want to stir up any hard feelings. Actually, I am sure, he detests advertising.

On the Wagner anecdotes, my notes are sketchier than my memory. The first one is that Chambers, while talking with Wagner and some other students in a dorm room at Columbia, started to jump out of a window, but Wagner, who was a tramp football player, made a flying tackle and downed him.

Chambers
2. ~~Wagner~~ once invited Wagner and another student out to Lynbrook for dinner. When they got to his house he told them to wait while he went in and ~~xxx~~ made sure everything was all right.

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They waited quite a while, and then he came out and said that something grave had happened and they couldn't go in. So they all went back to New York. (Lynbrook, in case you don't know, is about 45 minutes out on the Island, in Nassau County.)

Wagner, who takes a melodramatic view of life and writes very badly, but is a thoroughly nice fellow, thought of Chambers (this was in 1948) as a formidable fellow, who would come around and kill you if he said he would. He had, of course, never known Chambers to do anything in particular. (Or had he?) Perhaps if I had known how things would turn out, I would have pressed Wagner harder. Maybe he did know something specific.

[Jean, my wife, contributes another secondhand Chambers story that she heard, at the time of the trial, from a reformed Leftwing novelist named Edwin Seaver, a New Masses literary light in the 1930's. Seaver said that he had met Chambers at some Leftist powwow in the early thirties, and Chambers had invited him to dinner at Chambers' digs in Newark. Seaver was so broke that Chambers had to provide him ~~xxx~~ with round-trip fare on the Hudson Tubes - two nickels. When Seaver arrived at Chambers' squalid apartment, he ~~was astonished by~~ a large, almost lifesize portrait of Hitler hanging in the most prominent spot. S. expressed astonishment, and Chambers said: "Oh, that's just to throw them off the track." Wo the hell them was he didn't specify. He was always, in his own fantasy, being pursued.

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After a scanty meal and some talk, Seaver started to go and Chambers asked him to take some letters with him and leave them ~~inx~~ at some address in the Village, to save postage. Seaver ~~xxxx~~ said he deliberated the letters and so, unwittingly, became a "courier" himself. (I discount this part of the story - these types are all deluded and obsessed with the need to alibi themselves for something nobody gives a damn whether they did. But the Hitler bit, which Seaver had no motive for inventing, is echt Chambers.]

I'm looking forward to your "moonlight" notes. All the best.

(A.J. Liebling)

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