

6-18-05

Dear Oisin,

I spoke to you and Niall and mommy a short while ago on the phone. It's Saturday evening around 8 and the sun is still quite bright outside. It was a really beautiful day today, all blue and shiny and fresh. However, I didn't go outdoors much because I was talking about mathematics essentially every moment since yesterday with my student Juncue Suh who was visiting. He left just a few hours ago on the bus to Cologne airport. You met him many times by now, in Korea a few years ago, and then in France in the last two summers. He first started studying with me during that year in KIAS, and now he is a student in the US at a place called Princeton University. This year he was once again visiting France even though I wasn't there, so that he could discuss his work with some of the people at IHES and Orsay. One of the people he wanted to talk to there was Luc Illusie, whom I'm sure you remember. Do you remember how friendly he was, and how kindly impressed that you could tell him what was in that French history book? You had a hard time pronouncing his name last year. In fact, they have a conference in Bures-sur-Yvette later this month to celebrate his 60th birthday. I hadn't planned to go because that's about the time I will be going back home, and I do feel now like I've traveled too much. But I felt a bit bad because Juncue told me that when he met him, Luc asked if I would be coming to the birthday conference. But I'm sure it will be OK since so many of his other friends will be there. Anyways, while Juncue was in France, he found out I was here in Germany, and he flew over just for one day. It's nice how many cities are close to each other in Europe, so that one can fly very easily from one place to another. It was a fun visit, mostly because it was nice for

me to observe how much he has progressed. When I first met him in Korea, Juncue was just beginning, and he knew very little of advanced mathematics, but now we can discuss many topics without any difficulties, and he's actually made some very interesting discoveries for himself. He is studying the nature of geometry in a part of Plato's world where 3 can be the same as zero. In another part, 7 or 31 might be zero. In such a world, something that has a very complicated shape like a doughnut can become quite similar to a simple shape like a sphere. He's obviously been working and thinking very hard about such mysterious things. He's a very humble boy, and says just the things he needs to say, so it is very pleasant to talk to him and to try to answer his questions.

I don't think I'll be writing a very long letter today because I need to get ready to leave for the Black forest. But I did want to comment about something mommy told me. You see, even if you and Niall feel jealous of each other, I don't think I'll send exactly the same things to both of you. There aren't too many days left, but I think I'll send you a few more letters and send the postcards to Niall. Think of it this way: if I send the same things to the two of you, together, you will only have half as many things. But if I send different things, you can each enjoy a bit of the other's letter and postcards. So if you just figure out how to be patient with each other, I think you'll much prefer it the way it is. I hope that makes sense. I think in school you sometimes learn about how nice it is that everyone is different. If everyone just wrote music like Beethoven, then there would have been no one to draw pictures like Raphael, or to make interesting gadgets like Archimedes. And then, because people speak in many different languages, we can enjoy poems in English or Korean or German or Japanese. To realize this is what it

means to appreciate diversity in the world. Even when you aren't in the same family it's nice to realize that other people have different things and to enjoy a bit what you can share with each other, whether it's a talent or a toy. Imagine how boring it would be if everyone drew or sang or thought just as well as everyone else. This is a very obvious point, but no matter how much they teach in school about diversity, most people forget it most of the time and make the mistake of envying what others have. Now when it's just between brothers you should know how easy it can be to enjoy the differences. So that's how it will be. I hope you can explain this is a very patient way to Niall and share with him whatever you receive. (Of course it will be harder for him.)

OK, I'd better get going now. I'll try to write to you from the train. In the meanwhile, you might enjoy the following poem by Mr. Christian Morgenstern. I didn't do a good job of translating it, but I hope it's fun anyways.

The Mousetrap

Palmstroem has no bacon in his house
instead he has a mouse.

So Korf, moved by his complaints,
builds for him a room out of fences.

And equipped with a fine violin,
inside the room he puts his friend.

It is night and the stars are twinkling.
Palmstroem makes music in the dark.

In the middle of the concert,
comes the mouse, strolling in.
Behind him, in a secret manner,

falls the gate, so light and soft.

In front of him, fallen fast asleep,
Palmstroem's quiet figure can be seen.

In the morning comes Korf and loads
that very useful device

Into the very next, so to speak,
middle-sized furniture van

pulled by a strong excitable steed
who brings it into the forest.

There in the deep loneliness,
he sets free the unusual pair.

First the mouse walks out,
and then Palmstroem, following the mouse.

Joyfully the animal enjoys
with no apparent fear his new home.

While Palmstroem, transfigured with happiness,
Drives home together with Korf.

There is another pair that the poem reminds me very
much of. Can you guess which?

Good night Mr. O.

Mr. D.

