

November 4 or 5
Bethesda, Maryland

Dear Mamma,

I was so sorry to hear that you had been sick with a toothache and stuff. Such a darned old nuisance! Likewise, sorry that you were worried about our health and safety after only a week's silence. I had been terribly naughty and not written my letter to you when I should have. Instead I wrote on a silly old article that could have waited much better. The only good thing I did was write to Aunt Queenie, including a picture of the boy. I also should have written to father for his birthday, and to William's ninety-year-old aunt whose daughter died of cancer a few months ago. If I only had a little more time free! Then I would do all the things I should do at the time I should do them, and father would have a letter more than once a month, and you should have your weekly letter on schedule. I'm afraid my schedule is too apt to be changed by circumstances. I have a whole hour free in the afternoon after lunch, and if I were at all efficient I should be able to bat out at least two letters during that hour. Somehow I never seem to be able to do it properly, and in any case it never fails to take me at least an hour per letter, no matter how long or short. But when you don't hear from me on schedule, I hope you'll realize in the future that it's probably inefficiency and not ill-health. I'm only sorry that you didn't have the usual letter from me to console and amuse you during your nasty old toothache period, and I know how much they can hurt! It annoys me that I should dash around like crazy day in and day out and get so little accomplished that I really want to accomplish. Now the boy is back on my hands completely during the afternoon. He has announced that he has "given up going to play with Betsey", and he sticks to his point. He wants to stay with me every moment of the afternoon, and play in the same room I'm working in, with the result that it takes me twice as long to get anything done as it did before. I save the easy work for the afternoon, when I'll be able to devote my entire attention to him. He won't even let me telephone any more. I suppose it's a passing phase, but I hope it will hurry up and pass. I suppose it has something to do with the fact that he is going to nursery school in the morning, but when I think how I used to be worried all the time because I didn't know where he was, it amuses me! I know where he is all right now - under foot!

We called on the Mann family on Sunday last. Poor Nancy is looking pretty well, and is as pleasant and cheerful as ever. She claims she is all cured of her amoebic dysentery and the fungus that was plaguing her stomach. We had them and the Skartvedts to dinner last night. Much scuffling and bustling about to prepare dinner, which consisted of beef paprika, the usual vegetable salad, rools, noodles, chocolate ice cream and coffee. The boy distinguished himself more than usually by breaking the bottle of salad dressing all over the kitchen floor, spilling the bath water all over the bathroom floor so that it leaked down on the staircase, and telling Mrs. Skartvedt that he didn't want her to read him a story when she kindly offered to do so "Be cause you aren't very pweety!" Shortly after making that statement he took exception to going to bed, and rolled on the floor kicking his

-2-

legs in an old fashioned tantrum. We were delighted with him. Fortunately Mrs. Skartvedt has two small children of her own, and knows the worst. He has promised me he will tell her, the next time he sees her "Oh, how pretty you look today, Mrs. Skartvedt!" I'll do something desperate if he doesn't.

The Foreign Service journal came out a couple of days ago with the article of mine, and since then I have been receiving a whole lot of calls from friends. They always call either when the boy is hesitating about eating any more lunch or when we have given up, put him to bed, and are sneaking around as quietly as possible while he goes to sleep. I have never seen anything like it for timing. The only times they call when he isn't at some crucial stage is when he is bored

with watching me trying to cook dinner, in which case he has a field day sabotaging my telephone calls in person. "Oh, don't worry, Mrs. X, that's only my little boy hammering on the sink with his toy hammer- he hasn't broken it so far, ha ha!" or else it's "Just a minute, darling- I mean Mrs. X- Now please don't bring the fire engine in the house, angel, because it's bound to track that mud in." Whereupon he has a highly audible tizzy while Mrs. X frantically tries to explain that she only called me up to tell me how much she enjoyed- pardon me, yes, do see if you can stop him from crying- well, how much she enjoyed the charming article--Oh, what was that!?" The only thing that boy dislikes more intensely than a telephone from one of my friends is the sight of me sitting down to read or type a letter. He doesn't really mind if I cook dinner, it's just that he likes to use the sink for blowing bubbles and won't let me wash things out. Nor does he mind if I rake the leaves, although he loves to flop in the heaps I have raked and scatter them to the four winds. And he doesn't mind if I clean his room or any other room either, just so I don't disturb any of his vital objects, such as old rusty tin cans and antique oatmeal boxes. In the midst of all this I've been inspired to write another article, and of course that has complicated things enormously, because like a dope I go around thinking of that article all the time instead of doing my duty. I have twice forgotten to put the coffee in the coffee pot before pouring the boiling water in it! I imagine that the best

thing for me to do would be to give up completely writing articles until I get back to the field, where I can turn the kiddies over to a nursemaid and settle down to writing! But I keep having these marvelous thoughts, and wanting to write them down while they are fresh in my memory! I'll just have to cut it out, because there are too many obligations which have to be taken care of. You can't do two things at once, and running a household and keeping up with things in general are a full time job in themselves. If I try to write at the same time I obviously will do either the one or the other only half-heartedly. Your telephone call reminded me how I should have been doing ten or a dozen things which I hadn't been doing, and made me feel like a perfect cad. I can't imagine how I could have wasted all that time on non-essentials and details when I should have guessed how much you and father wanted to have letters from me- let alone the elderly aunt. At least I did take an afternoon off to write to Aunt Queen, poor thing, and sent her

-3-

both a picture of Laurence John and a copy of the Foreign Service Journal. I also urged them both to come here if they finally do take a trip east. But that doesn't excuse the fact that I didn't use my other available hours-per-day for writing to you instead of frittering my time away on that stupid article. It takes me about an hour to give birth to a single paragraph of an article, so you can tell what a lot of time I am able to waste on the things. Let alone going around all day thinking of better phraseology for that single paragraph when I should be thinking of more important things. But it just seems as if I have to get the article out of my system before I can settle down to doing anything else in the least constructive. I could kick myself for my own silly behavior. You know I would rather know that you are happy and comfortable than have a dozen articles all finished and published, but I seem to be so one-sided that I can't do more than one thing at a time. After all, it had been a week since you left the house after kindly staying with the whirling dervish while we galivanted around! I'm ashamed of myself. What I should try to do is set a definite day for writing to you, and make up my mind that nothing on earth shall keep me from writing to you on that day, then you would never feel neglected. In the old days, in Caracas, I was able to do that, but somehow my life isn't so beautifully organized as it was then. If it were only a matter of one letter a week or so, it would be different and easier now, but instead of having less letters to write, I have more now that I'm in the U.S. I used to have one letter, nice and long and comprehensive, which we sent to you and to father and to William's daddy and to Annie as well as to the elderly Aunt and her daughter and any other people we wanted to keep informed as to our movements. Now I have to write separate letters to each and every one, and it is keeping me in a constant state of behindness. I haven't written to William's father since last Christmas, to Nanie since September, to father since that letter I read to you, to the elderly Aunt since hearing about her daughter's death, and to you since a week ago Thursday! Fortunately, most of the people don't seem to expect such frequent letters, but I would really like to write more often to the Elderly Aunt, who is in the pitiable situation of having survived her elderly daughter and being completely alone in the world except for a few relatives and a trained nurse. She is ninety, cannot go out in public due to a frostbitten nose in her youth (which is now horribly sunken in, as in leprosy). There is also no reason other than inefficiency why I shouldn't write more often than once a month to father. I also feel sorry for William's father, who is suffering under the handicap of having a rather dreadful wife, and who should get more letters from both of us. All in all, it's enough to make me give up housekeeping, cleaning, cooking, boy-tending, reading, article-writing, leaf-raking, planting, entertaining, and even eating. In any case, from now on you can be darned sure I won't neglect your weekly letter to you, personally. I have been a horrid girl, but I'll try to reform. I really, really, will, because I can't understand myself,

Much love and affection from all of us,