

Dec. 194 1949

Bethesda

Dear Pop,

First, the thank yous, of which there are a legion. We decided to let Laurence choose his own Christmas gift from Abuelito, so with enormous urgings to hurry on his part we finally set forth on Saturday to Rogers Toyland in Bethesda, where we spent about three quarters of a silentlyx delirious hour looking at everything, trying everything out, playing everything, touching everything, moving everything, examining everything, although he told us in advance what he was going to want: a road grader we had once seen there months before. He rejected a small Fire Chief's car you can really sit in, and a speed wagon, and a power shovel. He still wanted the road grader, which is a delicious orange color and looks exactly like a real Adams road grader. Three levels, bulldozer-style, absolutely authentic, and terribly expensive. But that was exactly what he wanted, although he asked us if we knew what he wanted for the day after Christmas, and it appears he wants a cement mixer turned out by the same firm. We told him reluctantly that he could only have one thing, and he finally came forth with the decision for the road grader. He is very quiet about it, but each morning he wakes up with the deeply-felt words, "Is this the day I am going to get the road grader?" He is being frighteningly good, too. All we need to do is mention the road grader.

His mother is equally delirious. My years have not brought discretion nor a lessening of my original passion for new dresses and hats. I went to Mr. Garfinkels that same Saturday with fire in my eyes, and happily, happily looked over their entire collection of size ten dresses and suits, omitting nothing. I finally found the very thing, a Claire McCordell number I had seen advertized in Vogue and admired from a distance. How glamorous I am in it! How my spirits soar! How simply wonderful to have a fine new gorgeous dress! As if that weren't enough of heaven for one short afternoon, I invaded their hat department and saw two hats which both pleased me so much I had a delightful struggle to decide which one I would carry home with me in triumph. The one with the ribbons finally was settled on, and by the time William came with Laurence to collect me I had managed to spend my entire fortune and had a broad and ineradicable grin on my face which is still there today. I wonder if there will ever come a day when I'll be so old and sensible that it won't make me feel better immediately and cure any ailment I may have been suffering from, just to go down and buy a new dress?

Poor old William, as you might have guessed, got sort of left out, except for a beautiful part cashmere, part wool Scottish plaid scarf which he had hinted about. I applied the rest of the William fund to the road grader. It is a really lovely scarf, soft and warm and lush looking. He said that was all right by him, however, for he is going to use all his father's Christmas check on shirts for himself and a toy for Laurence (garbage truck!). His shirts are all in the stage where they are being cut off around the cuffs with that little combination knife-and-scissors you sent him last Christmas from Switzerland. Very handy for just that purpose.

-2-

His birthday went off splendidly, with all the traditional trimmings including the final up-chucking in the middle of the night from excitement and over-indulgence in ice cream and cake. As he was going to bed he said, "Well, it was a happy birthday, wasn't it mamma?" so I felt rewarded for the small efforts I had put out. Instead of a party, I had Betsy and Coit come over for supper with him, and he made all the decisions as to decorations. He wanted balloons, and placecards in the form of plastic Santa Clauses with packs full of candy, and a cake and ice cream and afterwards a reading session, but no games. He wanted the bright Mexican table cloth (rejecting utterly the plain white one!) and he didn't want the birthday cake with the roses on it. The baker put an airplane on it instead, and it was green and white, as he had directed. The children ate all their soup and salad like soldiers, and as a result weren't able to finish all their cake and ice cream- but Laurence did, with the above-mentioned results. He was very pleased with a model Coca Cola truck I had bought him, and delighted with the gifts Betsy and Coit brought, also. In the morning he announced: "From now on, Daddy and Momma, you must call me just 'Laurence', and not 'Laurence John'." So we have been trying hard to do so. He also asked tentatively if he were now old enough to be able to take care of himself without sitters, but he seemed more pleased than sorry to hear that I still planned to have someone in the house "to keep him company when we have to go out". He has been very uppitty with Brownie ever since he became four years old, and has often thrown it in Brownie's face that the bear is not even a year old yet, and won't be till Christmas!

While I'm on the subject I must tell you that he is continuing his writing, and is also learning to read the numbers. I don't teach him, he just asks me or seems to figure them out himself, somehow. Also, the other day he was extremely bad, really maddeningly naughty, deliberately doing all sorts of frightful deeds. I said all right, I won't speak to you again till your father comes home this evening, and I didn't. This hit him hard. He followed me about meekly and tearfully for about an hour, and then finally ran and got Brownie. He sat down near me with brownie in front of him and sobbing bitterly, cried "Speak, Brownie, speak! Speak to me, please, dear Brownie! Noone will talk to me, so won't you please just speak to me a little?" Well, that nearly broke my cruel heart in twain, hard as it is. So I relented to the extent of talking in my Brownie voice, which is the one Brownie regularly uses. Brownie scolded him also, but Laurence admitted to the bear that he had, indeed, deserved his punishment. That bear is a great comfort to him, and has come to be a very real personality around the house. He is being a good bear so Santa Claus will bring him some honey for his birthday.

Let's see, what have you missed on the social front? Well, I lived through the tea party, of course, and was only half bored to death. I poured, too. Then the next event was a reception or cocktail party at the Colombian Embassy in honor of a departing staff member, and after that we went on to have dinner at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wheelock of the Canadian Embassy. The only other guests (Helen Wheelock being maidless at this point) were Romulo Betancourt and his senora. The Ex-president's lot is not a happy one, and I feel sorry for them. Everything was very pleasant and social, and Don Romulo confided that his young daughter, aged about thirteen, is currently

-3-

having the time of her life correcting and deriding her father's management of the English language. I imagine you will be able to remember a similar if not identical phase in my youth, and will be able to shed a tear for Don Romulo's plight.

I had Catherine Breuer and Virginia Davis over for lunch one day, and last Friday I had the Fishburns and the Parkes over for dinner, plus a visitor from Montevideo who of course knows the Hoovers and whose mother comes from Newark Ohio. His name is Krebs, and he is ~~on~~ leave previous to being transferred to Bogota, which is why, for another reason, we had him over to dinner. I am currently busy with preparations for Christmas, and the cards have been keeping us busy every spare moment.

The Davises had a largish cocktail party last night for the Venezuelan "Foreign Minister, and old friend of theirs, Sr. Gomez Ruiz. Bain is now on the Venezuelan desk since William took to being Officer in Charge of North Coast Affairs. By the way, I wish they would hurry up and give us a raise commensurate with his new dignity so we can start living within our income and saving something for transfer-time. William is now getting a little less per annum than two of the men under him, which would be all right if they got a little more than they do. Well, the party was a great success, I think, and I talked to everyone like a good girl. Mr. Eddie Miller, the Assistant Secretary for Latin America, complimented me on my Spanish (which is, sadly, a bit atrophied recently) and I did the same for him, only to learn that he was born in Puerto Rico and thus comes by it naturally. I am beginning to be very fond of Mr. Miller for several reasons: ~~1) the above,~~ 2) he was kind enough to say he was amused by my article, 3) he was kind enough to say on the occasion of the Colombian party that as long as he was Ass't. Sec'y. of State for L. A, he was going to see that William stayed right there; "We need more like Bill", said that perspicacious man. You can see, therefore, why I think Mr. Miller is just about the smartest man we've had ~~has~~ head of ARA for a long time. Viva Miller!

Oh-oh, I hear the boy coming (or rather, the bulldozer, for such he has been all day) and he isn't going to approve of my writing to you in the afternoon after his nap! But I have a little more news: cousin Susan sent mother an announcement of her marriage Nov. 28 to a Mr. Thomas Basil Douglas, in Washington, D.C. Mother then called her on the telephone, and learned that he is a chemist who works for the Govt. here in some capacity, and that Susan is pleased with him. (L.J. has found a puppy friend, and is temporarily happy with him). Sorry to hear about your letter from Dona. As I said, she seemed pretty "bitter" to me, also, when I saw her. But it's hard for me to fathom her especially on such a brief occasion. I just kept having the feeling she was in a resentful stew about nearly everything you could mention, and it worried me. I wished I knew her better, so I could possibly do something about it. She seemed like a time bomb the length of whose fuse I didn't know. She would certainly classify as something of a neglected wife, and I can't agree that she knew what she was getting in for at seventeen. I'm grateful that my own seventeen-year-old wishes weren't granted by an indulgent providence, for example. The Westfield situation preys on my mind, but the worst of it is I'm afraid there's nothing anyone can do about it. I have repeatedly invited her to come down here. I wish she would, but John says she won't. Well, anyway, all my love,