

June 2, 1949, Bethesda

Dear Pop,

I include herewith a picture of the young man with his two best friends, Coit and Betsey Meleney. The last named is looking most unnatural, since her usual costume is blue jeans and a T-shirt, Mrs. Meleney felt that posterity should know that she was a little girl and not "one of the boys", as she usually is. Betsey, as I told you, has made a tentative arrangement to marry Laurence John when she becomes a lady and he becomes an engineer. Nothing more has been said regarding these plans, so I suppose they continue in force. Our friend Betsey is the outdoor type, and quickly tires of reading, as well as playing indoors. "Let's go out and get some fresh air, Lawrence John!" she often shouts, in her delightfully high-pitched voice. She is a butterfly, flitting from one pursuit to another as if borne on an invisible and erratic current of air. Her brother Coit is a steady, responsible young man, fond of reading and other indoor sports. He is likewise a kindergarten scholar and a junior gentleman, altogether a fine little boy. Laurence John prefers playing with Betsey, who is about a year older than he is but closer than the other children to his own age. He follows them all about indiscriminately, though, with devotion and tenacity. It takes something large, important, and mechanical to lure him away from the gang now—say a garbage truck, or a road roller. He is much, much better about not going too far away or on the dangerous streets, though still not a model of perfection in those matters. I thought he was entirely cured of the habit until a few days ago, when he was reported following the garbage truck onto the Georgetown Road. Since then he has vowed innumerable times not to repeat that error, and as far as I know he hasn't. However, since I hardly ever see him any more, I can't be sure. He leaves his home early in the morning, and is to be seen only now and then, as he and the other children whizz past the windows, up or down the street, in and around the houses. Now that I have a slide, a sandbox, a "swimming pool", and a large enough play area in which roads can be dug, rivers channeled, holes drilled, etc., we are rather popular ourselves. Especially on a warm day, when the children start coming to ask me if they may bring their toys and bathing suits to play in our fenced area. Our next acquisition must be two sturdy metal swings, which would lure them in the spring and fall as well as during the summer. It is always comforting to know that the children are within earshot, but it doesn't happen often. Each and every day L.J. comes home, or rather is fetched home, with his blue jeans encrusted with mud, his shoes sopping wet, and various wounds on his body. He thrives on this, however, and is as large as Betsey and Coit (who are four and five) and heavier than either of them. It is, however, hard on his shoes. He mimics everything they say and do, much to their annoyance. Betsey once said "If you say everything I do Lawrence John, you'll be a copy cat!" But Laurence John, unaware that this was a term of opprobrium, was delighted: "I'm a copy cat, a tiny little baby copy kitten, and I say meow, meow all the time!" Betsey comes to have lunch or supper with us quite often, and always wants to go on our walks and rides. On these occasions a continual merry conversation is carried on with a chorus of giggles. L.J. and Betsey make up fantastic jokes and plays on words which set them off into gales of laughter. One time I told them they were "neck and neck" in the consumption of their meal, and the occasion has never been forgotten because of its enormous humor. "Neck-and-neck is a bone!" shouted L.J., and Betsey could scarcely eat

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for laughter at the uproarious quality of his comment, and still to this day "neck and neck is a bone!" will send them both into helpless gales of laughter. Betsey is a stern and practical realist, whereas Coit and Laurence John (especially the latter) are both boys who like to be things. "Why do you always BE something, Laurence John?" asked Betsey in disgust one day. She herself will always answer, when asked what she is pretending to be, "I'm not anything 'cept a little girl." She and Laurence John like to suck on the "honeysuckem" flowers that now load the vines, and are not deterred by my telling them about the germs, bacteria, and microbes that haunt the little blooms. "I want to see them. Show me the germs," says Betsey, a spiritual citizen of Missouri. "Are they so little that not even a MOUSE can see them?" asks L.J., who appeared intrigued by the idea but still dubious as to the malevolent character of such small phenomena. For several months after we moved to Bethesda he would not admit that this was his home, but all that is changed now. The other day William and I were discussing possibilities for selling or renting our house when we are transferred, and L.J. was horrified. His lower lip sank and began to tremble. "But this is MY house with MY bed in it. Don't sell it eventually, Daddy!" He is becoming quite fond of the word eventually. His intellectual life has been in abeyance recently, due to the outdoorsy nature of his recreation. He seems to want to learn how to play with the other children so much that he has ceased to be interested in reading and writing and solitary pursuits in general. However, once in a while he will practice writing on the typewriter, and I find he can still remember which letters are which.

As for us, we have been busy in our dull adult ways, also. I've almost finished with the porch. William is taking a vacation beginning today, and we hope to paint the woodwork on the porch and at least the front of the house, as well as give a cocktail party for Jane and Allan Dawson next Thursday, June ninth. We are driving up to Flemington tomorrow to deposit L.J. on grandmamma's lap for the week, poor thing. I made a slipcover for the mattress of the porch chaise longue, and covers for the seats and pillows of the other two chairs. I am astounded at myself. We have been having our usual weekly dinner parties. We had the Skardtvedts and Holmeses the week before last, the Dawsons and Jane's parents last week, George Stone and his new wife Antonieta Tovar Stone plus a man from William's office who roomed with George down in La Paz Bolivia, this week. Antonieta Tovar is Dr. Guillermo Tovar's sister, as perhaps you remember. She and George Stone (who directed most of our big plays, remember) were married in January in Caracas. He is now working for the Cultural program, and is assigned to Lima. Antonieta became an American last month, and seems to be looking even prettier for it. He says that Cynthia Tovar is going to have baby no. 2 in July, and adds that another grandchild in the Tovar and Meyers families is much needed in order to relieve the press of adulation encompassing little Amelia Tovar, Cynthia's first beautiful baby, now two years old. Tony is a very nice girl as well as a pretty one, and I might add that she herself did nothing whatsoever to disabuse little Amelia's very natural opinion that she was the center of the universe. It was good to see those two, and we didn't talk exclusively about Caracas, for George and his friend Spence King told us some interesting things about the pre-Inca ruins in Bolivia, a subject that fascinates me.... I called Gertrude Hager recently to ask her for supper, but she was leaving to attend Dick's graduation exercises at Columbia. I hope by this time you have seen Walter, but she said he had been very busy in other parts of Germany up till then. Love,