

IN REPLY REFER TO

FILE NO.



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

## AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE

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AMERICAN CONSULATE  
Lagos, Nigeria  
December 24, 1941

My darling Philinda:-

After so many months I have finally arrived at where I am going, and I am suffering all the agonies I always go through in breaking myself in in a new place - meeting scores of new people, learning the local customs. This is what I tried to explain to you once when we were out walking on a Sunday in Lisbon, that I doubted my fitness for the Service for that reason. My dear, I have never needed you more than I do right now. Everything in me cried out for one familiar person, one old friend to unburden myself to. When we are together, I hope that these changes ~~xxxx~~ will lose a part, at least, of their painfulness, because there will always be you to be with me and to give me the moral encouragement I so much need. I do sincerely hope that this is the last transfer I will have to make without you. I never want to do it again.

You might gather from this wail that people have not been kind to me here. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Mr. Jester, the Consul, came down to the boat to meet me and took me to his own house, where I am still waiting for an apartment which they had engaged for me to become vacant. He has tactfully arranged for me to be invited to all the Christmas celebrations and parties to which he is going, and there will certainly be no lack of things to do. His home, which is furnished by the government, is lovely and he manages it well. I wonder if we will be able to do so well when our time comes? But it is a strain. Very so often I feel as if I had met all the people I can assimilate for a time and would like to be alone and withdraw into my shell for a while to recover my moral courage, but such time is generally lacking. Consequently, although I am having a good time at any specific moment, my nerves are a trifle frayed. The quarters which are being prepared for me are not especially nice. It is an apartment with two fair sized rooms which are supposed to be furnished. Actually, the furnishings are very scanty, and it is very difficult to buy more since such things are generally sold by the government. However, there is no choice, and I shall have to be content with it for the time being. Mr. Jester will help me to obtain some furnishings.

I am afraid that life here is going to be rather expensive. One hears a great deal about how cheap servants are in Africa, and this is, of course, true by American standards. However, Mr. Jester's steward gets as much a month as my maid in Italy did, and Mr. Jester has to have about five to do the work she did. The natives are lazy and extremely unintelligent. As Vice Consul Anderson said, "Even by negro standards, they're morons." It is bad to have them for servants, and you have to watch them all the time or they will steal the shirt off your back. Further, you can't trust them to carry out any job that

requires any initiative at all, and you have to check up constantly to see that they are continuing to do their routine tasks. Bad in houses, they are impossible in Consulates. All our clerks are natives except for one American lady who is married to a British police officer. Unfortunately, she and her husband are going on leave in a few months, and then we shall be completely at the mercy of the African race. Mr. Jester says you can have a job here any time you want it, but of course I didn't tell him you had more important things to keep you at home right now. Some of our native clerks aren't really too bad, and a couple of them have been through the local schools and speak English fairly intelligibly. Most of the natives and white people just a sort of "basic" English in talking to each other. Few bother to learn the native languages; it would be a hard job, because there are scores of languages and dialects in this area. Bush English is almost universally used in the back country. I have heard it on the radio, and, unless you know it, you can't understand more than a few words.

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The trip down here from England was, on the whole, quite pleasant. Here, in parenthesis, let me say that the cable you sent me to London was one of the big events of my life. When I got it, I could feel myself soaring through the air; I looked around to see if my face had expressed anything, and noticed Glenn Abbey looking at me in a strange way, so I guess there must have been something. I carried it on the ship with me, and in my worst moments, I read it over. Your words, "Haven't changed mind and won't" cleared away all the fears and doubts which raised themselves in spite of everything. My darling, you don't need to think that I will ever be too sure of you and therefore careless. To me, you are always a miracle, a dream of happiness too splendid to be true. After countless years I shall still think back to the revelation in Lisbon with wonder and amazement, and I shall feel very humble when I think of all you have and are doing for me.

Getting back to the trip again, I embarked in Liverpool on a troop ship on November 20th. I shared a first class cabin with another man, an interesting fellow who is second in command of the London Fire Brigade and who was on his way to the Far East to advise the local boys on how to cope with air raids. It was a small cabin, and the furnishings were old, but it was comfortable enough under the circumstances. After hanging around in various ports for several days, we got under way and arrived in Gibraltar about the first of December. I hope you got my wire from there. I thought perhaps you would like to know that I was still alive, although the wire could contain no indication as to where I was. According to rumor, we went through quite a nest of submarines to get into Gib, but the torpedoes, if any, missed their mark, and we had a very efficient escort. We spent several days there, and while in port I was taken around to see the battleship. The Commander had been in New York with the Malaya, and he took the occasion to repay some of the hospitality he received in New York at that time. I had dinner with him, and afterwards a very good chat.

After Gibraltar, the weather grew steadily warmer, and soon I was wearing the light gray suit which I wore several times during the summer in Lisbon. In due course, we put into Freetown, and I went ashore there for a couple of hours. That was quite long enough. I didn't see anything which would make me want to stay, although it is a very important place under the present set up. Finally, we started

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off for Lagos, where we arrived December 20th - exactly one month after I had gone aboard in Liverpool. From the personal point of view, it was a good trip. I met lots of interesting persons - army, navy and air force men, and even two American R.A.F. pilots in Gibraltar. Everybody, including the captain of the ship, were most kind to me, and very sociable, at least after the ice was broken. I have a much higher opinion of the British now than I did before. Certainly, the men I came out with were as energetic and as intelligent as any similar group of Americans could be, and I couldn't complain about being away from you very much, because every one of them was leaving his wife, children, and/or sweetheart at home. And they are going to be in much greater danger than I. I did miss you just the same, though.

Immediately after we heard on the radio of the hostilities against the United States, I thought of you and wondered how it would effect our plans. Naturally, it can't have a good effect. The war, together with the personnel situation here in the Consulate, make it, I fear, impossible for me to come home this coming summer, as I had hoped. Mr. Jester is due for leave and a transfer; Anderson is going to open up an office in Accra, Gold Coast, as soon as another V.C., McSweeney, arrives from the States, which will be about the end of January. Anderson will be due for leave also in a short while, and, after Jester's successor has arrived, I will probably have to go to Accra while Anderson is at home. He wants to get married, too, so I can't claim any priority on that score. I may be able to get away after he comes back, but one can't know what the situation will be. I haven't been here long enough to be sure, but perhaps, after you are free, we could persuade Mrs. Shipley to give you a passport and let you come over. You could stay a year or so, and then ~~we~~ could go home on leave and possibly get a transfer. That's the way it looks now, but I guess we shouldn't begin to count days yet, like Dr. Paget. We will just have to wait and see how things turn out. I hope with all my heart, darling, that it won't be long, but no matter how long it is, I will always love you. As long as you are mine, time is secondary. Without the hope of you, life would be unlivable; with it, I can "carry on".

To my immense satisfaction, the first thing that was said when I arrived at the Consulate was that there was a letter for me - you guessed it - it was yours sent by air mail December 2nd. It had come in the 11th, with the first batch of mail from the States. Believe me, it did me a world of good to have something from your own hand. The cable was wonderful, too, but it had never touched you. I'll admit about half the letter was Greek, because you mentioned all the other letters you had written which have not yet arrived. But I did learn that you were in touch with Janie and that you like each ~~xxx~~ other. That means a lot. If Janie likes you, you must be O K. I will love you on and on, no matter what, but I'm glad the rest of the family approves. I couldn't figure out what your Dad was writing to friends for. Is it character references? If so, he will get good ones, and they will be all wrong. Obviously, no person of character would have allowed himself to fall madly and completely in love with his friend's wife, so that's that. If financial, he should get in touch with the cashier of the Park National Bank, Newark, Ohio, Mr. Carl J. Ankele. However, I should like to know before anything is

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undertaken in Newark, so I will have time to warn the family. Janie has doubtless told you about our step-mother; for this reason, and also in the hope that I might be able to come home next summer, I haven't written anything home yet. I am ready to at any time, for we have no special reason for concealment. But it is hard to sit down to this typewriter and bat out something of this importance. I'd really prefer to tell Daddy personally, if it could be arranged. Now that there is air mail and I am fixed here, we can communicate more freely. When your other letters arrive, as they should in a short time, I will know more of the background, and if I have made a false deduction, please excuse me. The main thing<sup>64</sup> that I want is you. You are the Everything, and everything ~~else~~ else is nothing.

My sweet, I am such a bad letter writer. I know am not telling you what I want to. I can write "I love you" a hundred times, but if I could only say to you myself and see your answering smile, it would be infinitely more satisfying. Although you are much better than I, the same thing applies to a certain extent. Your letter is good and balm to the heart, but it's not the same as you. Darling, please don't go analysing my letters, for they don't really express me. On the ship on the way down I read "The Fountain" and "Sparkenbroke" by Charles Morgan. If you haven't read them, I suggest it, especially "The Fountain", which has the merit of being the shorter of the two. If you read it long ago, I think it will have more meaning for you now. And the author really can use the English language. I wish my letters to you were as expressive of my longing and need for you as were Alison's to Julie. After tons of more or less abstruse philosophical discussions, they finally decide that they must be together, for better or worse; either would be incomplete and lost without the other. I am not capable of long analyses of how I feel and why and whether it is or is not consistent with my philosophy. I came to love you so gradually that I was hardly aware of the process. You wrote in "our" poem, "Long ago it started to grow and form itself like a star seems to form itself. When the sun is growing dimmer. The star was always there, but it seems to have been created in the few moments that you watched it." I always carry the poem with me, by the way. It now has a little celluloid case, so that it won't be blurred by the perspiration. On the ship, it was always in the pocket of the vest I was going to wear if the ship were torpedoed, so that I could have had it with me always. I thought about you very, very often. I liked to walk around the deck, alone, envisaging you in all your various manifestations: as a personality, as a good companion, as an intellect, and as a ~~xxxxx~~ beautiful woman. I never got tired of it, but I did wish I could see you again. I still wish that, more and more. I guess it's love, that's all.

Please give my respects to your father when next you see him. I am looking forward to seeing him. I'll bet he hates me for causing so much trouble; I probably would in his position. I also am anxious to see your mother and brother. Please give my love to Janie, and tell her that I shall write her soon; perhaps on this plane. I also want to hear from her and get her version of all this weeping which you describe. I can't believe I caused it all; I'm not that good (or bad). I would prefer that your love and mine should make us strong and serene. A calm smile, hiding the inner lack. I can't go on, my dear. It's only that I love you; no matter what other words come out, that's what they mean.

I love you.

Bill