

May 25, 1943

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Dear Family,

I'M afraid I've been somewhat lax about writing. We have been having quite a session what with new men arriving and thousands of telegrams -at least they seemed like thousands to Anita and me, who do the coding. The young man who just arrived totake our place for a while during our vacation up north, has proved to be a very good type indeed. Tall, glasses, earnest but not too much so. He is not "of career " but can sign things. While he was consulting at the Department he met a friend of mine from the old Paris days- daughter of a vice-consul named John Wood. Evelyn's mother is French, and Evelyn herself speaks English with an accent and had never lived in the United States before she went there last June- no, the June of 1941. Now she has an interesting job in the personnel division of the State Department. She and I both worked on the desk in the Paris Library for six months, and used to walk to the buses together. Then while I was in Lisbon she and her family passed through on their way home, and Evelyn and I had a good bull session at the Casa de Santo Antonio. Working in the Personnel department, she soon found out that her old friend Philinda Jones was a clerk over here, so that she was looking for someone going across. Bill Bruns was her man, and she sent me a nice long letter full of all sorts of feminine gossip and news. Very nice to hear from her it was, to be sure, and as soon as I get a moment I shall try to answer in kind.

Bill Bruns had cocktails at our house the day before yesterday, and pleased us all by being so favorably impressed with our surroundings and household arrangements in general. They haven't found him a house as yet, so he is still staying with Mr. Lynch at the residence, which is no hardship either, you may be sure. But naturally he must have some place to call his own where he can entertain guests. Proceedings along those lines are cooking. My Bill says we may be able to get away finally to the north for a nice rest in the hills, perhaps at the end of three weeks or so when Bill Bruns knows the ropes a bit better. We have had a nice invitation from an old friend of Mr. Jester who lives up in that general region, but although we have accepted for a short visit we are afraid to impose on them in the first place, and that we won't find them simpaticos in the second. Their are nice hotels with little housekeeping cottages in that region, also. But I'd like to see that old city I was telling you about in a previous letter. We can probably get a nice compartment by ourselves on the railroad, but sad to say it takes anywhere from two to three days to get up there. Still, it will be interesting to watch the countryside roll by, and there are modern dining cars, etc.

In the compound next door a radio is playing "Give me One Dozen Roses", as merry as can be! The eighteen children are all screaming at once, too.

The rainy season is really upon us now, in full force. Every once in a while it doesn't rain, but the rest of the day and night it is coming down in tropical abundance. I rather like it, myself. We don't have to leave the building to go to work, and we have a built in garage and enough gas to take us to any outside places we happen to want to go to. When the sun does come out, it makes noble but ineffectual attempts to dry up the mud puddles in the little alley by our side entrance. The boys are all complaining bitterly about the unaccustomed cold, and all blossoming forth in mufflers and cough medecina. William has had a slight nasal congestion himself, which I am striving to avoid.

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Now the radio is playing, of all things, "Why Did I Kiss that Girl?" which we used to have on the old Victrola at Madison Avenue when I was a mere chit of a child.

Well, we finally got to go over the border on the trip we told you we were planning to take whenever convenient. The journey wasn't long, and it only rained once (which was a good thing condensing the mud roads in the region around us.) Otherwise the sun shone down hot and happy on the green valleys and hills(!) en route. We hadn't seen so much as a hillock in quite some time. The police officer who lives in lonely splendor on the border took us in and let us eat our cold chicken and drink our wine on his table, while he talked to us about his life and work there. He likes the region and the lonely life there, even all alone without a wife, and he claims there is a lot of activity since he is on a main road. We were in that village six hours and didn't see another car in miles. Just bush, thick and lush, with plenty of babies playing in the middle of that same "main road". On the other side of the frontier the man was equally nice to us, and tried his best to put a call through to the capital to find out if the man we had come to pick up on the border had arrived there yet. ... We couldn't find our man, and it was gettin late, so home we went, with a partying Camel visible in the mouth of our foreign friend. All the women tried to sell us pawpaws and avocados, to no avail.

When we finally got home the telephone rang and it was our man, who had crossed the border ten minutes after we left our friend smoking the Camel. He had been delayed by a huge luncheon party in the capital, with champagne and speeches. Since he had been up since five that morning, traveling in an uncomfortable plane for three hours, and had another two and a half hour automobile trip ahead of him, he was in no mood for speeches. When the poor man arrived we found him very gentlemanly and suave, but dirty and tired too. We gave him a pickmeup and let him take a quick bath in Mesweeney's old bath room, then sent him on his way. He had been invited (ordered) to come as soon as he arrived for an interview with the Big Chief in these parts, whose name is so distinguished all over that one mentions it in whispers. My Lord graciously received him and Mr. Lynch. They had a confidential talk and arranged to have another one, informal this time, at Mr. Lynch's place over a good dinner.

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I got two more lovely letters from mamma the other day. The farm house certainly sounds just as nice as can be. William and I are anxious to see it, but I don't like to think that you're no longer in the surroundings I can picture you in, in my mind's eye. I was sorry to hear about Aunt Amelia's death, and of course glad that I had formed such a nice impression of her the other spring in Miami. How strange to think that Uncle Charley should survive her, when he was the one who had a bad heart! I still have only received one letter from Daddy since I left last December. It's almost June, so perhaps I'll get one some day this year.

William and I have been varying our dining procedure by eating off of a small table which we either have put in the cosy, screened bedroom, or in the living room part of the big main room. We like to look out over the gardens next door, and up at the big sheltering trees in our compound. The Royal Poincianas, which are called "Flame of the Forrest" here, are now in full scarlet bloom. Mother will remember how beautiful the one that was outside the library in Coconut Grove was when it had all its red blossoms out. After it rains and the sun comes out again the jasmine bushes give off all their perfume (geez, I'm becoming lyric!), but they usually save the scent for the early evening. It's so strong that we can smell it way up on the second floor when the wind blows our way. It's enough to make a turtle sentimental. That and the hibiscus that our gardener, Aliu the old hausaman, has a way of training up the wall...

Last night we had a lovely visit at Anita and Penry's. Penry told a really true murder story that could easily be worked into a fascinating defective story. The locale is Jerusalem, the characters a British District Officer, his lovely daughter (in love with a brave RAF boy who is supposed to be the corpse, due to the fact that the headless corpse was dug up from the garden wearing an RAF blazer identified as belonging to him). The Egyptian cook comes to Penry at the police station, and informs him that his master has murdered some one. Investigation reveals no body, and the British Officer is incensed that he should be accused of murdering anyone. They finally decide to dig up the garden though, and find this headless body with the RAF blazer. The British officer admits that he didn't like the attentions that this boy had been paying his daughter, and had gone so far as to threaten to shoot him if the RAF boy reappeared at the house. Must a threat, however. Penry soon discovers the Br. Officer's gun, from which two shots have been fired! The officer claims he had been shooting jackals only. The RAF boy is not found in his barracks, and his companions don't know where he had been in the last few days. The decomposed body is buried, and Penry tried to get up his courage to arrest the Br. Officer for the murder of his daughter's hopeful suitor. But one morning the Egyptian cook rides past the police station on his bike, going to market. Penry stops him and he asks how the investigation is progressing. Penry tells him, and in turn asks him how it happens that there is blood on the back fender of the Egyptian's bicycle. "Oh, probably blood from the meat he carries home from the market every day.", answered the cook. But Penry, too good a policeman to let it go at that, has the blood analysed and learns that it is human, not animal blood! Just as Penry enters the British Officers house to do some more questioning, the beautiful daughter rushes out to tell Penry and her father that the RAF boy has returned from a strictly confidential mission, complete to his head. The father allows the RAF boy to come to his house for questioning, and Penry finds out ~~that~~ that the blazer had belonged to him, but that the RAF boy had given it to his steward boy, a man from the desert country of Trans Jordania. They call in the Egyptian, who says that he had known this Transjordanian, but that he had recently gone to his village across the aforementioned Jordan. But again Penry is not satisfied, so he had the body exhumed, and more garden dug up. At long last their gruesome job was rewarded, and they found the bodyless head of a Transjordanian! The Egyptian cook was taken off to the jug, the RAF boy takes the beautiful daughter in his arms, and the father looks on and sadly but wisely shakes his head. Third act curtain.

Well, you can imagine how Bill and Anita and I hung on every word the intrepid Penry uttered. We then had some delicious cheese savouries and some daiquiris, and finally went home completely satisfied with our Saturday evening! The only flaw in the story (Which was an actual case, and no made-up parts at all!) was that Penry says the daughter wasn't as pretty as all that.

Thompson is about to bring us our curry dinner, so I had better stop this letter before it gets too long.

Much love, and do send me some pictures of PEEDEE. The one we have is so inadequate.

LP KAISE