

Read this first

May 28, 1943

Dear Janie and Norman,

Your very welcomed letter of April 29 arrived here this morning. It's not bad time for these days. Letters from my family take more than that usually, so that by the time they finally arrive I sometimes have reached the conclusion that my family planned to disown me!

The pictures were shown to practically everyone around here this morning. Anita Price, the other girl who works here, said that Janie's eyes and nose were just like William's, only pretty instead of handsome (my addition). One of the men asked if Janie couldn't come out here to work, but his hopes were immediately dashed when we said you were happily married and expected to stay that way. William liked the one of Janie in the chair reading, but I liked the one of the two of you together in Newark. Everyone said about that one taken in Newark, that the town looked like the epitome of Home to them. In a way it reminds me of the Oranges- lots of trees, big old-fashioned houses, driveways, and all the rest. The opposite of here, in short! Everyone sat around eating some fudge I made last night, and commenting on the pictures.

The dog is the saddest and cutest thing we've seen in years. No wonder you forgive him for minor accidents about the house. People always do- for dogs and babies. You should see my two year old niece in the process of eating. Some of it goes into her mouth, the rest gets thrown anywhere, usually moist and gucky, half digested. A gruesome sight to everyone but her parents, but she makes up for it by having platinum blond curls and a charming language all her own.

William has been telling me about Aunt Vonie and Aunt Ninnie. We hope the latter is better from her fall, and William was pleased to learn that Aunt Vonie is still the same rarin' teamin' woman she always was. In a way it's a good thing I didn't know they were in Florida, because I wouldn't have had the faintest idea what to say to them and what not. Did William tell you about the time he went to see them with beer on his breath! Being an old soak from way back, I probably would have fortified myself for the visit with a glass or two of purely medicinal dutch courage. Anyway the only free hours I had in Miami came at very queer times of the day, like six AM to noon, or from midnight on. Probably not the times they "received".

We have a new man working here- two, when it comes to that. One is our boss, and the other is a young man just starting out. William's work has been getting less and less strenuous, and now he's shifting all the dull jobs onto the broad shoulders of young Mr. Bruns, while he does Important Things. It's a great system. My work is rather dull, and has been getting less confidential week by week, due to the fact that we just aren't getting any secrets here at all any more. Also, I've been sick for the past two months, first with something quite unmentionable, and then with malaria for good measure. As a result I've read all the Improving books, and all the mysteries that we and our friends possessed. Also William has been going to bed early for a change, for which I am thankful. The hectic social life has calmed down, we haven't had a party in our house for months, and I hope William will put on some weight. Thank goodness I've lost about eight pounds, which pleases me enormously. They say you either get enormously fat here, or else go home a living skeleton. I can't claim to be a skeleton, but Will-

iam will soon be one if he doesn't gain some weight pdq. However, I am turning a nice chartreuse yellow from taking atabrin for my malaria and for the prophylactic dose. We hope we will impress our friends with the rigours of life in West Africa by the time we get home again. Every time some one leaves we put him on bread and water and atabrin for a week, so he can astonish the home town boys and we can get plenty of home leave!

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We took an interesting trip about two weeks ago, to the border of Nigeria and Dahomey. The man we went to meet didn't show up, but we stopped at a Police Officer's house deep in the bush, and had a picnic of fried chicken and red wine to cheer us up. The policeman told us all about his life there as the only white man for miles and miles around. He said he had seen fresh elephant tracks and had plenty of monkeys around the house (all we saw were chickens, which ran in and out of the house investigating the strangers), but that actually he wasn't in the real bush, because he was on a main road. In two and a half hours of driving both ways we saw about four cars, and none at the place where he was, so we took his main road with a grain of salt! On the other side of the customs barrier we talked to the Frenchman in charge there. It was funny to see the difference the customs barrier made: on one side the little black babies shouted "bonjour madame!", while half a mile away if they spoke anything but Yoruba, it was "Dash me mister!" - in their own version of Bush English. They were the same old natives, however. Not very bright on either side of the frontier. The French Customs officer was delighted with some Camel cigarettes we gave him, commented on the fact that we both spoke French "so that one can understand you" (not very high praise, but strictly fact), and tried unsuccessfully to put a call through to the capital, Cotonou. What with a recent tropical storm, and the apathy of African telephone operators, we never did get to talk to someone in Cotonou about the arrival or non-arrival of the man we were looking for. Still, we had a wonderful trip, actually saw some hills (!) and came home pleased and tired. The next day I had a fever of 104° and was deep in the heart of malaria. I liked it for holding off till after the trip, just the same.

Now that Mr. Bruns has arrived we may be able to get some local leave. William needs it badly after seventeen months in Lagos, and we are very interested in seeing some more of Nigeria

We haven't a victory garden, although we could use a change of vegetables now and then. Carrots for lunch, beans for dinner, and the next day vice versa. But we get more meat than you do, and enough dreadful tasting butter to suit us. AND it's nice to have a two door black chevrolet with white walled tires (only four of them, but very new) to drive around in. It was expensive, but one can always realize the same money one spent on a car over here - especially now that they simply don't send us any more at all. Say what you will, it's wonderful and peaceful to have two boys and a cook to do the work. One thing I hate is to have to clean up after a late party! I'm going to be very spoiled unless some rich uncle (unfortunately non-existing) dies and leaves us a sizable fortune. However, I've managed to make some curtains and succeeded in buying some new lamp shades of the same material - the work of many months. The house is said to look less like a big barn.

I'm not leaving enough space for a word from William, so love and happiness to you.

Phyllis



