

Thurs. May 11, 1950
5208 Glenwood Road, Bath.

Dear John,

You got it all wrong- it was up to the end of May that I said would be convenient for Leslyn to come down here- ~~My~~ my exact words were "before June". Laurence would then still be in nursery school in the mornings, and father would still be here to ferry us about to the zoo, etc., in the afternoons. However, it's too late now. As for June, the first two weeks are out because we are preparing for a huge cocktail party on the sixteenth. It's just possible that William would be willing to take Leslyn back here from grandmamma's farm (where ~~he~~ Laurence will be staying the week before the cocktail party) when we go up there on the seventeenth to collect our boxes. I don't see any strenuous objections to that plan, unless you do. If you could deliver her at grandmamma's on the eighteenth (Sunday) and pick her up again the next weekend down here, we could work it out that way. I know you're very busy, but William isn't twiddling his fingers much either, and I wouldn't think of asking him to drive up to Westfield the second weekend. If you think you could come down here the weekend of the 24th and 25th of June, we could probably do the rest. I'm afraid that's the only time we could do it, now.

I was glad you took my Dutch Uncle advice in such good part, for I had been a bit worried about what might well have seemed unsolicited meddling cum tactlessness, especially now when you have quite enough worries on your mind as it is. But on the other hand I think it's good now and then to get an outsider's viewpoint on ones children. Seeing the forest amid the trees is very difficult. Father tells me I'm being too prissy on the subject of comics and television, though. I agree with you that they are now a part of American childhood. I still maintain, however, that the well-educated woman of 1970 is going to be the daughter of people who put good books in her path and violently restricted television and comics, by fair means or foul. In the long run good books will amuse an intelligent child more than the other things.

Now as to mother's taking the children in August: in the first place, there is no reason on God's green earth why she should do it, and especially no reason why she shouldn't do it at the time she wants to and how she wants to. She is under no obligation whatsoever to take my children or your children for any length of time whatsoever. You say she is apt to get sick at the last minute. Stronger souls than she have refused to take other people's children under their wings for so much as a day, and most people would fall sick automatically at the prospect of having two young girls for a month. You have done nothing lately to put her under the slightest obligation toward you in that matter, and if she occasionally comes there to Westfield to help out and see how things are going it's all a free gift, as it were. You are mistaken in saying that she has always failed me at the last moment- on the contrary, while she has once or twice had to postpone a trip down here on account of Jimmy's or her own illness, she has been fairly dependable considering her age and their joint infirmities.

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I know about one occasion on which she failed Dona at the last moment just as she was about to depart for the weekend, and that was the time Jimmy got a nail in his foot and had to be nursed. Naturally she couldn't take the children then, and she was very sorry to disappoint Dona, whom she was trying hard to help and please. But it is being perfectly silly to call that deliberate or psychosomatic. It is also monumentally childish to hold it against her. Once more I must remind you that grandparents are not required by law to take care of their grandchildren when their parents find it convenient. Luckily for us, grandmamma rather enjoys doing it, and loves her grandchildren, but that is no excuse for us to assume that she should do so whenever we happen to want her to, nor is it any excuse for us to fail to be properly grateful when she does.

Frankly, I find it extremely difficult to get along with grandmamma peacefully for periods of more than a week, and I have to control myself a good deal during that week, too. But I feel very sorry for her financial plight, and her personal plight as well, because she is constantly beset by the horrors of feeling she has made an utter failure of her life. At times when she is around I would like to say or do something violent, because she irks me so very much. When I'm alone again I realize that nothing could be more senselessly cruel than abandoning her now, or even simply hurting her by words. You say she is childish, and I'm afraid I agree with you. I am childish, you are childish, she is childish, he is childish, they are childish, and so on ad infinitum. We have to get along with ourselves and the other childish people in the world until dianetics take over, old boy. In short, judge not lest ye be judged, and be grateful for all favors. If you can completely discount mother's personality and look at it from the point of view of an outsider, you are an exceptionally favored young man: after almost completely ignoring your mother for many years, you get in a jam and she comes forward to help you as best she can. AND THAT'S THE WAY AN OUTSIDER WOULD LOOK AT IT, whether you think it's the true picture or not. Not only that, but you are lucky enough to have a stepmother with such a remarkable sense of duty that she is willing to sacrifice her peace of mind and body to the extent of taking your two children for a month. What a woman! And what good luck all around for you!

Send on a note as soon as you can about the matter of Leslyn's coming down here via Flemington on the 18th of June and returning under your aegis on the 25th. I have to make plans in advance.

With much love, my dear,