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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE FOREIGN SERVICE
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P1
origAMERICAN CONSULATE
Lagos, Nigeria
February 6, 1942

My dearest love:

Two more of your grand letters have come in since I wrote last, but they were both old ones, though none the less sweet for that reason. They were the letters that you sent from Vermont via Lisbon. The letter of November 21st came February 4th, and the one of November 28th, January 27th. Now that I have most of the letters from that period, a lot of things are becoming clearer. I am inclined to think that you really do love me, for one thing thing. For another, I love you more than ever, if possible, and miss you more all the time. My only darling, I honestly don't know how I am going to stand this long separation. The worst of it is that every day that goes by makes it look longer and longer. Around the first of January, we got a letter from McSweeney, who is coming here as Vice Consul, that he would leave on the first available Clipper in January. So we expected him everytime we heard there was a plane coming in. Now we have just received a wire from the Department saying that he should arrive here about the 20th of March, which means that they have not been able to find a place for him on the plane, and that he is coming by boat. I immediately shuddered, thinking that probably if he couldn't get a plane, you wouldn't be able to either. And I definitely do not want you to come by boat. Besides the obvious danger, the boats are very small and very slow and do not have decent accommodations, especially for lady passengers. It would take at least six and probably eight weeks to arrive here: my trunk left New York on December 17th, and it hasn't arrived yet. You see, shipping is subjected to terrible delays in the various ports along this Coast, because none of them really have adequate facilities to handle the volume of business they are now called upon to carry. You would stay perhaps weeks in these wretched places, in the awful heat of a blacked-out ship, and your health would probably suffer even before you arrived. However, we can cross this bridge when we come to it, as well as the hurdle of Ma Shipley's approval to your passport. The situation may improve, and we may see the way clear.

Oh darling, I can't help but wish that you weren't married, because then we might have been married at once in Lisbon, or I would have insisted on coming to Lagos via the U.S., and have picked you up on the way. But then ----- I love you just the same, or more. I am so glad you didn't follow the advice of all the people who told you to be coy and play me like a fish on the end of a line. I think you know me better than that, sweet. I am so utterly in love with you, I dream and think of you so often and the time when we will be together, that I couldn't bear such tactics. When the time comes

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that one of us has to use a "technique", then we will know that something is definitely wrong. I am just as hungry for your love as you are for mine, and I want you to give it to me without hesitation. The night Jimmie walked out, I said I told you to be my wife. I therefore consider myself just as much yours and you just as much mine as if the ceremony had already been performed. No empty formula of words, no sanction of church or state, can make you mine any more than you are already. Although I think it is right that, loving each other, we should be married, nevertheless, I can't get over the idea that we have done a wrong, and therefore must pay for it. If we did not pay now, we would have to later, and so I think it is better that we pass through the fire of this separation, even though it costs us much sorrow now. When we have suffered enough, the barriers between us will fall, and we will be united physically, as we now are spiritually.

Really, dear, I have got more religion, or philosophy, or something, out of our love than I ever dreamed of before. It proves that I am not a complete man without you. Like Alison in "The Fountain", I must have you to ignite my spiritual fire.

Do you remember writing the letter of November 21st, which I have just received? I think in many ways it is the most satisfying of all the letters you have written me. You had just received three of my letters from Lisbon, and I guess you felt rather as I did when I got your cable in London. What a consolation that was on my 30 day trip! I can't imagine what the trip would have been like without the assurance of your continued love. And it took a little nerve to write you those letters from Lisbon. In my worst nightmares, I could imagine your shaking yourself after the boat left Lisbon, and saying, "Have I been mad? What is this foolish infatuation which has been gripping me?" And then Mrs. Parry would give you some sage advice about forgetting this strange love, and at the end of the voyage, you would fall in Jones's arms. I didn't think that would happen, but it was Heaven and all to know! And you wrote this letter sitting in front of the fire, as you ~~xi~~ said, weeping for joy and sorrow. Darling, I hope you haven't changed your mind since then.

There are a couple of points which you have brought up from time to time, and I would like to put your mind at rest. As to health, I am taking my quinine regularly, five grains a day. By the time you get here I will probably be as deaf as a post and all my hair will fall out. Also, quinine seems to make the ladies' hair turn gray very young. You also asked me, very nicely and with due regard to possible delicate sensibilities, not to drink too much. I am very happy to say that I have been very good on this score ever since I left Lisbon. Christmas Eve was a pretty tough party, but outside of that, I have been extremely moderate. I drink no wine with my meals, and only once or twice a week, perhaps, one or two whiskeys. One reason for this sobriety is that whiskey and gin are pretty scarce, being rationed to two bottles per man of whiskey and one of gin a month. At this rate, it is not considered polite to drink more than a couple of anybody's liquor. I don't think you need to worry about me at all. I am much more afraid you will have too gay a time in Miami and meet somebody who ~~are~~ be all the things you think I am but I'm not, really. I'm just a poor, ordinary guy who loves a Goddess.

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 Saturday, February 7th.

I gave up last night because of darkness and because my eyes were hurting. You remember that I broke my good glasses in Lisbon and that I wrote immediately to the doctor at home to have another lens sent to Lagos. Well, around the middle of January the new lens finally arrived, and, with great glee, I took the frame and rushed out to the best place in town for glasses, which happens to be the Kingsway Chemists. The optical department is run as an adjunct to the drug store business. After one look, the man in charge said very definitely that it would be impossible to attach the lens to that frame in Lagos, since it required some kind of special apparatus which they don't have here. Specifically, it was because the glass is held onto the frame by rivets instead of screws. I was so disappointed I could have stamped with rage. Finally, I decided to send the whole business back to the States, and I persuaded a passenger on a Clipper to take them for me. I therefore hope that they are already being repaired; I have asked for them to be sent back by air mail.

I often wonder if you like ants and lizards better than you do flies. I hope so, because they are the inevitable accompaniment of life in Lagos. Ants are everywhere. The first meal I ate here, I noted a couple meandering across the table cloth and tried to flip them off unobtrusively. Mr. Jester saw me and smiled. "You'll soon get used to them," he said, "they're everywhere". And it was all too true. Usually I take it very quietly, but once in a while I still rebel against my fate and spend five minutes or so breaking up an ant-convoy trailing across the bathroom floor. But it does no good. The houses are all so open that you can't keep them out. The lizards are almost as ubiquitous, although they are less likely to come into the houses. Some are beautiful fellows, with orange heads and blue and white bodied. Others are brown and green. It is forbidden to kill them, since they eat insects. On the whole, I rather like the lizards better than the ants. Another annoyance is present right at this moment: the natives who live next to the Consulate are playing victrola records of native music - all monotonous clicks, chants, and discords. It disturbs my concentration. *They call them on being caught singing "The Last Round-up."*

I am passing this letter to a Miss Hilary, who formerly worked at the Embassy at Ankara and elsewhere in the Foreign Service. She should be leaving either tomorrow or Monday, and so I hope you will get this fairly soon. I will ask her to call on you if possible while she is in Miami and tell you that I am well. She can also give you a first-hand picture of Lagos. I don't think she likes it very much. However, to be sure that you get this, I am going to send a copy by another route yet to be determined. So don't be too disappointed if you ~~it~~ get another letter and find it is only a copy of this one. I don't want you to have to go any longer without reading once again about how I love you, even if words are inadequate to say how much. You are to me like the full moon in the sky, washing out by its brilliance all the paler stars. You ensilver the world, making all its ugliness beautiful, hiding the defects. My life with you is like a moon-lit world, dim and distant and incredibly lovely. My darling, we have known little of the joy of love, and much of its pain; that to me is the surest sign that happiness will come, just as sure as the pendulum of the clock will swing back. I love you.

Bill