

AMERICAN CONSULATE
Lagos, Nigeria
April 16, 1942

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My precious darling:

How happy I am! Another letter ~~writ~~ arrived today - the one you mailed one April 1st, and I hope it's no joke that you love me, because I still love you just as completely and wholly, with my whole mind, soul, and body that I ache for you, and your absence leaves me in an absolute void. Practically every letter that comes I think is the loveliest I have ever received, but this one was so especially grand that it has inspired me to have my office opened up and here I am, starting in at 10:15 to write a letter. From the way the typing has been going so far, it looks as if my muscular coordination wasn't very good tonight, but my heart is still beating for you in its usual irregular rhythm.

My desk is a very depressing sight at present. Besides a pile of correspondence waiting in the basket for me to look at, there are three boxes just to my right. The bottom one is labelled "Anderson"; it is perfectly innocuous, containing only tablets and scratch paper. The second one is vicious. It is labelled "In Coming Mail", and has in it all of today's mail. I am supposed to look it over and take out what is mine; there will probably be five or six for me; it isn't much, but five or six a day can mount up very quickly if you don't answer it right away, and it frequently happens that I go for several days without having time to dictate a letter. The third box is just neutral, like its gray paper cover. It is marked "Out, Going Mail - To Be Initialled and Filed". There isn't so much hurry about that, as it is really just copies of letters which have already been sent. I can look at ~~when~~ after work tomorrow, if there is time; it doesn't matter except that after a while they run out of boxes and come around to see who is hogging them all.

The boys had quite a time trying to get this room open tonight. The key is kept at the back of a filing cabinet, and old Adamu, the night watchman, isn't supposed to know where they are, except that he does, and I know he does. Well, I sent Thompson down to tell Adam to open up, and I heard the two of them struggling around. After a little wait I came down (I used the time to read your letter over for the third time). There was Thompson, tall and ebony, dressed in his white steward's uniform. And poor old Adam, and short little man in a kahki uniform. Adamu is a Hausa, and he has been in the police for many years, and has finally retired. He was recommended to us by the Superintendent as a thoroughly honest and reliable man. He fought in the last war and has the "14" medal, as they call it. He also has the long service medal from the police, so he looks quite snappy in his olive-brown uniform which the Consulate bought him, with

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he brightly colored bar over the left pocket. But there isn't anything very martial about him in spite of his uniform and medals. He is little, and old, and barefooted, a simple, kindly, lovable man. He doesn't understand English any too well, and says, "Yassuh" to everything you say to him. But one thing is good. If you ask him if he understands, and he doesn't, he will say No. That is the police training. One of the officers told me they train the constables always to say so when they fail to understand, and the officers are supposed to be patient and explain it in words of one syllable all over again. Adam is a devout Moslem, and I have seen him several times praying toward Mecca. He, and the others here, have the simple childlike faith which Christ said was a prerequisite for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

I am sorry that letter seven hasn't arrived. It is all the fault of that good-for-nothing Cook, who was supposed to take it over. He assured me so earnestly that he wanted to meet you and would be so delighted to carry a letter that even his subsequent going off without it didn't entirely convince me that he was unreliable. Since there was a lot of information in that letter which you had asked me about, I will send you my copy, and I hope you will save it so we will have a complete set. Then, when we are old and gray we can look over them as the beginning of a life time of happiness spent in trying to make each other happy. What fun it will be, when we are together, to look over these letters and try to explain just how we felt and what we thought as we wrote them! O darling, I have a whole life time of pleasant things which we can do together, once we have the chance. I know we will never have time to be bored.

I was most happy to hear about your new job, and I hope you will continue to like it in spite of the irregular hours. That seems to be a feature of Pan-Am. All the boys here work the most horrible hours, sometimes for two or three days in a row with practically no sleep at all. They do not realize that they are killing themselves, but they are, because you can't do that in this climate. Being physically exhausted weakens your resistance, and then you catch any of the numerous plain and fancy diseases which are just waiting for healthy victims who think they can take it. Can't you persuade the company to send you over here? Jim Bledsoe said, in a very matter of fact manner the other day when he was here, "If you can get her a passport, we'll bring her over". Now don't get too optimistic, because I haven't the slightest idea that he could, but it would be wonderful. We will soon have an ally in Washington in the person of Mr. Jester. His successor has finally been appointed, so Jester will be going back in a couple of months, and I think we can rally on him to put in a good word with Ma Shipley. But Ma will be a tough nut to crack. I think your Congressman Uncle could probably be more of a help in turning on the steam than I or anyone in the Service could be.

Our new boss will be Mr. Harold Shantz, at present First Secretary of Embassy at London and a class III officer. He will be Consul General here, and is by far the highest ranking man we have ever had around here. He has served briefly in Africa before, in Monrovia and Nairobi. I met him briefly in London in November, and he seemed very nice. Mr. Jester knows him well, having served under him in Hong Kong many years ago. He says Shantz is a wonderful person, and so does Mr. Chipman, who was passing through at the time from Cairo

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and who was with him in Moscow. We are all very pleased about this, and most of all Mr. Jester, who has been trying to persuade the Department for some time that they ought to send a high-ranking man here to supervise all our activities on this Coast. It shows that the Department appreciate the growing importance of Lagos. Jester has also proposed that a Consul be kept here as well, to handle all the administrative work, thus leaving the C.G. free to travel all over the area as necessary. This is impossible for a man who is tied down with office routine the way we are. There is only one small cloud: Shantz is single, which will remove one argument in favor of bringing you out. However, it would be even more grand if you did come, as you could sort of function as official hostess, a job for which you are well qualified.

I am sorry to say that the rats got into your last letter. Some stupid censor, British, I think, undertook to open it and snipped out about 2½ lines at the beginning of the second paragraph on the third page. Anybody who would dare to mutilate one of the precious letters and cut out so much as one word is my enemy for life. We are saving the envelope, and if it happens again, we are going to kick. I am afraid, however, that this was done at Trinidad rather than here in Lagos, since we have the local boys very well in hand. They have promised on a stack of bibles not to touch anything addressed to the Consulate. But Trinidad is a long way off and we can't get at them very well. I haven't seen any letters from the U.S. censored by our censors yet. What do their stamps look like? Mr. Jester suggested that you might try sending your letters through the Department, as we have a regular pouch now. I thought you might try it first on a very brief letter, to see how it would work out. Address it to me, c/o the Department of State, and put down in the corner, "Lagos Air Mail Pouch". If it makes good time and isn't cut up, we might do that regularly. In case you don't know, you have been receiving most of my letters through the good offices of the Despatch Agent in New York. The Ferry Pilots are still the best bets, when available.

Please don't apologize about talking shop. I love it (and you) and I would like to hear more about what you are doing. Work goes on here as usual, and I am having a hell of a time trying to keep my nose above water. Tonight I was just telling the boss that I had managed to watch up a bit today when bang! in came a three pager from the Department. The boss was so touched by the irony of it all that he offered to stay and help decipher it. We finished at 7:00 p.m., and then he came upstairs and we had a beer and a nice friendly chat. Strange as it may seem, I rarely have a chance to talk to him in an informal manner and about things in general rather than some point of business in particular. It certainly was nice of him to help out. While we were having our beer, another one came in from London, but we decided to let that go until morning. And so it goes. I am enclosing a snap of the staff here. Mr. Jester is, of course, in the center. The tall man on the left is Erwin Watts, a special duty man who is theoretically attached to the Consulate. Next is Mrs. Haig-Wood, who rather pains me, and next to me is Mrs. Price, who left this morning for the States by plane. I am sorry my suit is so wrinkled. It is freshly pressed every morning, but this picture was taken in the afternoon. The ebon gentlemen in the rear have such long names I won't mention them; besides, they are hard to spell. You can meet them all when you come here.

And now, just one closing thought for the night, before I go to bed and join you in my dreams: I love you, awfully. I really mean "awfully", because the thought of our love fills me with awe. The idea that you love me and that we will one day be one is terrifying in its grandness.

Penciled note in left margin, WLK hand: "Usual 50¢ postage"

LAGOS

Lagos

April 17, 1942
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I find I can still get this in the mail tomorrow, or at least I hope so, and so I will add a few more random thoughts that I left out last night. First of all, I love you whether you can drive or not. So there. If you want to learn, I will try to teach you; if you don't, you don't have to.

I enjoyed very much Mr. Bliss'es limerick about you. He must be a very clever man; I have always admired people who could invent limericks, which have always been my favorite form of poetry, on the whole. I make mental exception at this point for the poems you have written about us, which are the highest form of literary expression. If they weren't so personal, they should be published, but as it is, I guess they will have to be content with resting over my heart during all my waking hours. I have just kissed your photograph again. I am afraid it will be worn out, but the original, I hope, will never be tired of being kissed by a most loving and affectionate husband, who loves her to distraction. I hope that my loving you so much won't bore you. I have never been any good at subtle love making. When I love a person, I like to express it, and I suppose that is why, in spite of my best efforts to prevent it from being noticed, Jimmie complained that I was too affectionate towards you. And I thought I was being very discrete and bearing my cross in hidden silence! I never knew that he had had any suspicions like that until the very end. I guess 'most everybody knew how I felt about you except you. Why, darling, what else did you think I meant that time I told you that if I had a wife like you, I would love her forever?

I should think the implication would have been pretty obvious that if someone "like you" would be loved by me, YOU certainly would be. As it is, I do love you, and I will love you forever now that you are my wife. I would say, "My wife in the eyes of God" if that phrase were not so often abused to mean something entirely different from what we have experienced.

Loving you has been the most profound emotional experience of my life. I had gone so long without love that I didn't know, and frequently doubted, whether I was capable of knowing love as it has been described by people who have known of it. I tried at one time to convince myself that I was in love with Beth, but I never had any success. I used to argue that she was a fine girl, good family, good education, taste and manners, that she was devoted to me and would make a fine wife and mother. All those things were probably true, but even with so much tinder, the spark was never ignited - I don't know why. It tempts one to believe that Destiny was aving me for you. Certain it is that if I hadn't met you, I would have gone on more and more deeply in the same rut, until the conviction that love was not for me would have become so unassailable that I would not have recognized love if it ever did come along. Like any old maid school teacher, I would have been forced to sublimate my emotions in my work, and find the only expression of myself in the usually thankless task of trying to help the unfortunate people who come within my sphere - and there are always plenty of them. But it would have been a sad, lonely life. I need your sympathy, your affection and your love so much that I know - even knew before - that I could not be happy living alone.

So now you see what I mean when I say that life would be

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hollow without you - an ever declining plane, as illustrated by the last line. You have brought me a hope of happiness which I never dared to entertain before. I never allowed myself to hope that I could ever find or win anyone like you. It seemed to much to hope for for a gauche, shy person like me. There would always be a bold, forceful person who would cut me out, before I ever had a chance to get started. Perhaps you can get a vague idea from this what you mean to me. When I say that you are the world and the sky to me, the cry of hope and a spear of lightening piercing my innermost being, that is a bit of the idea I am trying to express. But, as I have often complained, I cannot tell all of what you are to me; I can only scrape a bit off the surface. I just stopped to think what I would do if you ever broke off and left me. My first impulse was to say that you should go far, far away, where I would never see you again, so I could think of you as a vision which once appeared to me, pointing the way to a new life, and then leaving me to find my way alone in the black. I do not think you would have to flee my wrath; it would affect me that way. There would be no anger, only misery and sullen despair, the hopelessness of a man who has seen the vision, but lost the way.

Well, this wasn't what I started out to write about. It was to be random comments on things I forgot to mention before. It was stupid of me to mistake Stewart's name, although, on the other hand, his only significance in my life is that he was the cause of our having two shorts minutes together, and one kiss which otherwise would never have been. Now he fades into the background of memory. Just a pink, boyish face under a mop of blond hair. That was a great kiss. You must ~~xx~~ forgive me for being surprised - after all, how could I know that you wanted to kiss me? I always was wanting to kiss you, so the sensation wasn't new, but I lacked the courage to face the expected repulse. Oh Philinda, I loved you so much, and I felt so hollow at the thought - which I never allowed myself to forget - that you were separated from me by a vast, uncrossable chasm. My, how I would like to see you now, sitting on a sofa across the room, and suddenly get up, come across the room, bend over and kiss me. If you hear a "whoosh" behind you, that is my spirit sighing in your ear, as I have sighed just now. I will hold to my vision, and I will follow it as long as strength lasts. You must be mine; no other possibility exists in life for me.

And now from the sublime to the ridiculous: the remark Ginny Moesmang or somebody made about my keeping warm at parties. I'm afraid you don't have to worry much about me over here, for, as I have said before, it's hot enough here for anybody. Then of course, I just haven't happened to find anyone here with whom I wanted to keep warm. If I did, the climate wouldn't stand in my way. Now who is teasing who? I don't mind teasing in moderation, but I don't think I will tease you much. One doesn't toss a Ming vase around even if one is a very good catch, which I am not. Darling, my warming days at parties are over; from now on, I'm devoting my energies to keeping you in a constant state of conflagration. There.

It's now 8:00p.m. - time for dinner, and I haven't even had my bath yet. So it's good-bye till the next Clipper. Don't forget to look out for McSweeney, and don't forget that I love you and am yours for life or as long as you will have me, whichever is longer.

I love you I love you love you so much and there goes the paper. *Mr. Man*