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Lagos, Nigeria
November 17, 1943

Dear Family,

Saturday night I am glad to be able to report that we went to the beach as early as possible. I should have said Afternoon- it was about four when we got over there. Spent the time coming over in the canoe perfecting our rendition of various songs in two parts. We are, as perhaps I have modestly mentioned, simply wonderful at it. Or rather William is- he's the one who does the harmony, of course, because I never could except on "Noel", in which case I can sing the descant part. We got there, anyway, and waded across the breakwater since the tide was too high to walk normally. At six we were invited to go to the Barber Line shack, where Mr. Lynch and a bald man with beautiful blue eyes named Mr. Hardy were staying for the weekend. A Belgian major and his South African wife were over there, as well as Don Huse and Maureen McCauley. Don got started on his chickens again, I regret to report. He goes on forever about the layout of his hen house, and what he feeds them, and how much he sells the eggs for, and how they are laying, and the inferiority of the other hens and their eggs in Nigeria, and so on and on and on. He gets very excited about everything. The Belgian major is an old hand around here, having spent a good many years in the Congo- around Matadi. He is a regular Army man. His wife, who calls him sugar, is a Miss Oppenheimer, of the South African diamond Oppenheimers, and therefore well off along material lines. She is also well-endowed physically. She got started on some old Paris friends with Mr. Lynch. I talked to the Major, who seemed like a good type, surprisingly mild in his conversational tone, anyway. Went home early, sat watching a perfectly splendid moonrise between the palm branches, heard the sound of the sea, and felt as good as you might expect we would under those circumstances. A beer and cheese party when we felt hungry. I forgot to say that while we were at the Barber Line place we heard some magnificent drumming at the camp a little way down the beach. The soldiers were having a celebration of some kind, and wild singing and tom-toming accompanied it. Just like the movies. William and I have adopted that expression - "Just like the movies" from an article in the New Yorker about a dashing and apparently not enormously clever Air Corps major who took part in many exciting air battles and dog-fights. After each recital of one of his fascinating duels-to-the-death he would comment extatically "Just like the movies!" We find it a very useful expression.

Sunday morning we awoke at the crack of dawn- but literally, because the light shines in your eyes and wakes you up. It was a beautiful morning and I got a fairly good tan out of it, until about eleven, when the storm clouds began to gather. Our guests (there were eight of them in one canoe, plus three paddlers) were seen tossing in the waves, and arrived only five minutes before the rain started. We couldn't get any surf bathing in, but just the same we had a good time. John Houser and Bill Bascom were there, plus a little man named Evans, who is supposed to be a tantalite expert. Mr. Evans is a very matter of fact man who doesn't believe in idle jests or chatter, which means that he has to be eliminated from every conversation. The unfortunate part

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part of the matter is that he has a habit of breaking in on a conversation of the airy and Fantastique variety with some extremely down-to-earth remark- a habit that has the same effect on conversation as a pin has on a balloon. The other OEW men are kind and polite to him, but very bewildered as to what to do about him. They seem to have rounded up a rather mixed group of men in that organization. Well, to continue my fascinating tale, we went home after a sound sleep and just had time to go to the movies, which turned out to be rather awful.

Monday night Mr. Lynch had a dinner party for Colonel Foley, who was going up to Acera the next day to re-join the army. He is 59, and in a very strategic industry, but he insisted on going. He comes from Tasmania and I asked him if he had ever heard of Pop's and my Governor Browne (1862-1864). He said he had! I never thought I'd ever meet anyone anywhere who had ever heard of good old Governor Browne. Not a fantastically interesting evening, but we got home fairly early, so it was not wasted at all.

Tuesday afternoon I was feeling very gloomy, because my binding of the 1942 correspondence was going badly in the hands of the [person] who is doing the job. So John Houser and Bill Baseom offered to take me to see their little wood-carving man. We now have quite a collection of these little figures, which we consider very interesting and well done. They are made from an enormous peice of thorn that grows on a certain tree in these parts. The wood is very light and easy to carve. The figures range from two to three inches in height, and are light and very breakable, unfortunately. He sometimes glues two little peices together and makes ensembles. He did a nice one of a small fisherman's boy in a native canoe, with a paddle in back of him as though it had just been put down, a basket of fish in the prow, and a bag of fish in front of the boys feet. The boy (whose little toenails and fingernails are all portrayed) is putting a fish he has evidently just caught, into the bag in fron of him. All very nice indeed. We have one of a Yoruba woman carrying a basket of something or other on her head, and a baby on her back in the usual precarious manner. All only two and a half inches high, or so. No, as a matter of fact I think they are really shorter than that- two inches, maybe. Well, John and Bill took me to their woodcarvers shop to cheer me up. ...

William and I just had time enough to persuade them to stay for dinner before we had to rush off to a cocktail party at the Bremmer-Roberts establishment, which was given in honor of Cappy Roberts return from leave in the United States. Cappy is a thorough-going old Massachusetts gentleman, the dean of what American Society there is in Lagos. He has a Congressional medal for some feat of daring in the last war, but not many people know exactly what he did, for he is reticent.

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*meaning Daddy

While at the party I had a chance to talk to Captain Bappert for a while. He comes from Lansing, so I told him you went to Michigan to college, which put us on a firm footing. He has not yet remembered in time to bring your letter in to me, Poppa. We left as early as we decently could, and returned to find John and Bill spread out on the floor looking over their papers or something. We had a perfectly hilarious evening, a good part of which was spent in detailed explanations of just how I came to have a half uncle on both sides as well as a most respectable family. I gave them till ten thirty, then sent them home, because I was sleepy. Poor Tom and Josiah were in a dither, because we had only told them two hours ago that there would be two more for dinner.

Last night we decided to go to the movies by ourselves, and did so. We saw a very good picture full of excellent cracks, plus spies and thrilling adventure. "The Lady Has Plans", which we recommend in case you haven't seen it and it isn't too old to come back to your local cinemahs.

I keep forgetting whether or not I have asked pop how much I owe the Campbell ménage for the clothes they bought me so kindly and helpfully. I do very much want to pay you back before Christmas, to avoid the possibility of your being short at that expensive season. Perhaps you could take what ever it cost out of a check for fifty dollars. I'll ask William what he thinks of that scheme, and enclose a check if he approves, he being my private financial secretary. You could leave the rest, if any, in a trust fund for my future use.

We are giving a party for the new Army officers tonight, so I think I'll finish up, at least for tonight.

FFMagg, Nov. 19

It occurred to me last night that I haven't told you the impressive little verse they always tell newcomers in this part of the world. It is from an old sailor's song, or something:

Beware and Take Heed of the Right of Benin
Where few come out though many go in!

A horrible warning to the early pioneers of Nigeria and French Equatorial Africa. Some one in those days called the First British Consul here a square coffin containing a dead Consul once a year. The first consul was appointed in 1856 or so, and died in 1857, the next came out in 1857 and died in 1858, the third did the same as the one before, and promptly died the same year. I think the fourth, who must have been either 1) courageous 2) kept in ignorance of the fates of his predecessors, managed somehow to get out before he died. The first British exploration ship up the Niger from the Right of Benin carried about 100 men in its crew, of which about twenty got back. But they were lucky, compared to some that came after them. One ship succeeded in sending back home a substantial portion of its crew by putting out to sea again every two months or so for a good two or three weeks rest from malaria and the other delightful scourges of early KINSHASA days around here. All classes of people around here, including those that just don't like missionaries, have a great deal of respect and admiration for a Scots woman named Mary Slessor who took it into

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her head to become the first lady missionary in Old Calabar, or anywhere else around the West Coast, too. She came out sometime in the early 1870's, when there were only ten or twenty white men who dared to risk their lives by living here a few months out of the year, and she stayed for twenty years or so until she died. The natives in the Calabar area took a dim view of her god, and her juju medicine, and her presence in their land.. and tried several times to kill her. ... Finally she won their confidence, and they used to come to her from miles around to settle disputes and get their diseases nursed. What is perhaps even more, she also won the confidence of the white traders who came to Calabar, who were from all reports about the crummiest and most anti-missionary lot imaginable. I suppose just the fact that she stayed in that pest hole year after year when they didn't even have the strength to stay more than a year or less was enough to make them respect her, even when she was preventing them from treating the natives as badly as they usually did. All this info comes from a book I borrowed from the Navy boys' mess some months ago. They had all read and admired, so I did too. Actually, all those early people were pretty persistent. Why they were so anxious to come here when they must have known only too well that their chances of getting out alive were less than fifty-fifty, I haven't been able to fathom yet. Nor has Sir Alan Burns, the ex-Governor of Nigeria and the Gold Coast, who wrote the best history of Nigeria.

Friday, Nov. 26

This is a fine thing! I had to leave the office on Saturday last (pouch-closing day) and forgot to tell Harriet to put my letter in the pouch. In fact I forgot to finish it, if the truth be told. We have been having some very busy days lately, with the additional code work of the navy, lots of visas, and just general piling up. My precious binding seems to be coming along very well after all my worries. This will be the first year in the history of the Consulate that we have had the correspondence actually bound, rather than put in open-shut prepared binders without glue and sewing. These have lovely black covers, have been gotten to gether with loving care by me, checked and re-checked for order and painfully glued and sewed- and to top it off the titles are done in gold! Wheel! If future generations don't bless me for this I shall be very disappointed. Every time I look at the past years' binders, I scoff. After a month, we are just beginning on the third volume. There will be about twenty.

You haven't missed an awful lot by what I must leave out of the diary for this week. Usual round of events. Last week we had a perfectly delightful time, going to bed early practically every day! I feel gaught up on my sleep at last. This week also. We had to go out with the Denton's (Information Office) last night, and had a very restrained British evening. I met Mr. Denton's boss, a Mr. Miven, who used to be a Resident (high-muckimuck) in the Northern Provinces before he was seconded to the Ministry of Information. He seems to be a drily witty sort of a person. We had to accept his invite for Saturday after next, although we had wanted to go to the beach that night. Call of duty. If this attitude on our part keeps up we will be hermits before the end of our lives. However, we have a good time out of just about everything. We are, I am delirious to report, going to the beach tomorrow at twelve thirty and staying there in seclusion overnight, with figuratively speaking, fierce hounds at the gate to keep away visitors. I enclose a picture of me taken at my most advantageous. It was at the party at Gov't. House given for the RAF boys.

Love,