

American Consulate General
Lagos, Nigeria
March 16, 1942 = 1943

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Dear People,

It seems to me that I left off the chronicle some time last week before the great occasion on which we had all the big shots in our circle of acquaintances in to dinner. What an enormously bustling evening that was for Thompson and his legion of cohorts! What with the normal complement of servants and the two or three extra boys that Thompson imported for the occasion, one could hardly move in the pantry. ... Well, the party was informal, that is to say that the men wore business suits although of course the ladies wore the usual long dresses, and after an ever-popular old fashioned, everything was merry as can be. Mr. Grantham the Chief Secretary is very funny. Mr. King the Police Commissioner has a raucous laugh, and I like his wife. Mrs. Grantham, from Nebraska via Honolulu and Hong Kong, is one of the smallest and nervousest ladies I've ever seen, in addition to being very nice. Cap Roberts the Barber Line Representative is a New England Bachelor, replete with stories. The Boss is dreadfully nice, as I've mentioned previously. So all well.

Friday we went to see Johnny Weaver who was sick "in hospital" with malaria, but well on the road to recovery, since he was out the next day. I finally succeeded in enticing William on to a bicycle, so we rode over there on our iron horses with the speed of two rather feeble winds. Bill always makes me feel like the athletic ytp~~e~~, he is so completely loath to wiggle strenuously. Friday night I felt fine, but towards morning I awoke with a terrific tummy-ache, which lasted all day Saturday, but got a little better towards evening when I got terrifically bored with staying around home. So we didn't have to cancel our engagements for the evening, which luckily consisted of a quiet dinner with a few English friends, and then a movie- Lionel Barrymore in "On Borrowed Time", which was almost as good as the stage play, I'm glad to say. The cause of my tummy-ache was and is unknown, but it was a heck of a tummy-ache.

Sunday was as usual, that is to say, the usual delight. I do go enjoy those excursions, from beginning to end. It is always cool and breezy at Tarqua, and the boat ride to and from is interesting. Little Sunday had had his hair completely shaven off, sad to say, which made him look like a little billiard ball. I got mildly stung ~~from~~ by small jelly fishes in the water, and the wind that blew across the beach was so strong that we had to take our sun b~~at~~h on the terrace of the shack, on the army cots.

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Monday afternoon I got a feverish feeling and took ten grains of quinine. We spent a quietly happy evening at home talking up a storm, and because I didn't feel like eating dinner, Bill had his on a table in the bedroom while I took my ease. This morning I got up feeling fit as a fiddle and rared into the files with a purposeful glint in my eyes, so that seems to be over.

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I forgot to say that on Monday morning Mr. Shantz and I attended the opening of the Nigerian Legislative Council, presided over by H.E. the Governor, Sir Bernard Burdillion. It was quite an honor for me to be invited. Bill never had before, and it was only because we mentioned that fact at dinner on Thursday that a card was sent to him. However, as it turned out he couldn't attend any way, because some one had to stay in the office. The affair turned out to be a gigantic bore, which fortunately only lasted an hour. I sat in the Ladies Gallery, next to Mrs. King. Her husband had recommended to me that I bring along a pea-shooter to liven things up, but I didn't, which was perhaps a mistake. H.E. (as he is always referred to here) gave away various orders of the British Empire to assorted black and white worthies, referred to as "trusted and loyal subjects" by George VI, by the Grace of God, etc. etc. Then H.E. made the opening speech, which was rather difficult to hear from where we sat, behind him. One or two items were of universal interest to followers of the local problems. One remark that H.E. made was quite humorous, to wit: "Of the blood, sweat, and tears which ~~make~~ the British Commonwealth of Nations must endure, Nigeria has so far contributed her full quota only of sweat". After the close of H.E.'s address, the ladies trooped out, and Mrs. Grantham invited me over to the Chief Secretary's Lodge, which she has fixed up beautifully in admirable taste, for tea. I went, and six or seven of us sat around enjoying tea and a wonderful American chocolate cake, on which we gorged, so that my lunch was spoiled completely. Mrs. Grantham has rugs made in Peiping which all the ladies threatened to steal. They are beautiful thick wool done in plain pale pastel shades- rose, lime green, cream. Gorgeous! The room we sat in was mainly sunny yellow, with French Impressionist copies on the wall, and satin upholstery, plain, in pastel shades again. The rooms are all open to the nice wide gardens, and cool as smug cucumbers. That and the chocolate cake just about did me in.

I have decided that it is high time I told you people some of the more widely-used West African expressions, so as to be able to use them in future.

bush: meaning anything outside of Lagos; also, "corny", as in the expression "So-and-so is terribly bush". The country in general. Wherever an inhabitant of Nigeria lived originally, if it wasn't Lagos or some large town like Kano or Abeokuta or Ibadin, (which latter town is, by the way, the second largest city on the continent of Africa, believe it or not.)

Go for bush: Run away; leave town, as for example the night-watchman at the Consulate before our present one, who resigned in a very hurried manner, in fact without notifying the Consulate, on the occasion of winning a local lottery to the extent of ninety pounds. He went for bush one time.

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Chop: breakfast, lunch, dinner, food. ...

Small chop: Sandwiches at tea time, hors d'oeuvres, cocktail canapes, peanuts with one's highball.

Small-small: general word for anything short, brief, small. Examples: It only go for rain small-small today; That man be very small-small; I just want chop small-small(i.e., a little)

Wait small: Just a minute, please.

Small wife, or Small Boy; the second of two, a most unimportant person. An amazing lot of people turn out to have small boys here. For instance John, Sybil's Steward, has a private Small Boy to wait on him in his leisure hours. Muslim Nigerian wives practically insist on their husband's acquiring a Small Wife so that the Small Wife can do the heavy work.

dash: to give, or as a noun, a tip, or gift. Example: Let me dash this to you, old boy. (Used widely by Europeans) ...

That's about all I can think of this time, although I suppose I'll dig up a few more for you soon. The one preposition is "for", which means everything- to, on, around, in, everything. For example, "Go for get my mosquito boots, they're for closet."

Thursday, March 18

I re-read the first letter I have received with avidity every once in a while. From Mamma, dated February 14, and an excellent letter indeed, full of the old stuff. From allusions to things I know nothing about, I assume that it is not the first one she has written to me, but I have received no previous ones as yet. One passage has me

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baffled. It says that Ruffs will probably go to Chapel Hill with "her young man" as planned. Well, in fact well well well. 1) I didn't know she had an official young man. 2) I can't imagine who it can be. 3) I certainly didn't know that she was planning any excursions to North Carolina, with or without young men. Please explain.

RE the matter of mother's worrying over our food supply, allow me to assure all and sundry that it's pretty good- and probably will soon be better than the supply in the United States, by default. We do, however, lack certain things which might be termed "important luxuries". Such as mayonaise and Angosura bitters. We would like breakfast foods, too, and tomato juice. Of fruits we have aplenty, and the same is true of vegetables, except that there is little variety. We very seldom have lettuce. We have no olive oil, and our supply of peanut oil is small and about to be non-existent due to the fact that it is all going to be requisitioned for shipment to the U.K. Sugar, coffee, and butter are rationed quite strictly, but we have been managing very well due to the fact that we had supplies of them on hand. Let us hope, to get back to the oil situation, that we can use palm oil for salad dressing. I haven't had any of it yet, but the Africans use an enormous lot of it. Speaking of which, we have been invited to one of the local doctors' house for Saturday lunch, which is to consist of palm oil chop, a Nigerian specialty. I am going to get and send to you the recipe for another local specialty, "ground-nut soup". One wouldn't think that peanuts would make a very good soup, but they really do, and I think you'll like it. Saturday lunch is a favorite time for entertainment here in West Africa. Exotic menus are the rule. Here at home I'll and I always look forward happily to our Saturday lunch, which is a nice hot curry with lots of small chop along with it. Cap Roberts always serves chicken chow mein, some people's cooks are good at palm oil chop, but in the main it's a curry for Saturday lunch, after which everyone in Lagos except the staff of the American Consulate General goes to sleep for several hours, exhausted. It's not at all a bad life here in West Africa.

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Tuesday night we had a fine big going-away party for John Weaver, held at Mr. Shantz' house. A great big crowd came, and a most fine feathered uninhibited time was had by all. A buffet supper was served, with cranberry sause. There must have been thirty guests for the cocktails, but

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for the supper aonly about ten guests stayed- all Americans except one man who was somehow left behind. Anita and I were the only women that evening. After dinner we all sat out in the garden 'neath the moonlight and sang harmonies of all the old songs from Bell Bottom Trousers to Swing Low Sweet Chariot, while Mr. Shantz accompanied us on his guitar. Boy, were we schmaltz! We certainly did have a good time. They say it was the best party since that which is commonly known as The Party, because it was a first-class, unexcelled, wonderful roaring Wow. The Party was in honor of MaSweeney, on the occasion of his departure for Accra, and they are still talking about it.

Yesterday Anita was sick and the boss was gone on a trip to Accra by automobile (a very interesting trip through French territory), with the result that Bill and I had the Consulate all to ourselves. I enjoyed very much all the busy-ness of it. In the Afternoon we learned that my old ship was back in port from censored parts, more or less on its way home. So we invited the Captain and officers over for drinks and a good long talk about old times. A good time was had by all. Mr. Sokal, who if you remember was one of my fellow passengers, got very bored with the War Shipping Administration in the Near East, and what's more very homesick for his wife, so he is turning back and plans to go home with the same ship he came out on. He and the Captain will have quite a time all by themselves, I imagine. After that we went out to the Army Camp in Apapa to see an American movie, which turned out to be very poor indeed. The only nice part of the thing was that they played the Star Spangled Banner after the show, which was a welcome touch after hearing God Save the King for so long. We got home early and had eight and a half hours sleep. Fine!

Tonight we are going to have seven in for chop, as Thompson would put it, and then going out to the Ikoyi Club Thursday night Dance. We have managed to cop three ladies for the affair (including myself) which is really going some.

I wish you would go out and see John and Dona and the baby for me, then come back and report on how she is. The three pictures of her are still my pride and joy. Two of them have fine native leather frames, and one sits on my desk and the other hangs on the wall. I repeat my request that a second large wall size picture of her be sent me. I should like the one of her taken in the bath tub, immersed in soap suds. It is just a head. William thinks she is as lovely as I do, and is forever making people get up from comfortable chairs to look at the picture. A much appreciated baby.

Love to all! 1 PK