

September 14, 1954

Darlings:- Thank you for your letter, Daddy, which just arrived. Many thanks to you for attending so promptly to the Groton bill of which we will handle the loose ends, and for writing to Porcelainor. Their verbal estimate of the cost of crating and sending the china was something like 7,000 francs, which seems to bring the total price up rather high but is still a good deal below what we'd have to pay here for things we like (and need). Adelaide Johnson gave us the name of a shipper with offices in Paris and NYC. Unfortunately ~~the~~ the scrap of paper on which Phil scribbled this bit of information got thrown out by mistake. It would have been convenient because the thing was possible to arrange from either end - as Adelaide herself has done. I'm sorry if my English seems to be going back on me. I'm anxious to get on to the topic of the Shirleys, ~~think~~ think about whom I was sitting down to write to you just when Lindy came in with the mail. Anyway, Daddy, please let me know what La Rancheraye and Porcelainor say, and wherever possible please get them to communicate with me direct, as you have quite enough to think about and I hadn't meant to go off leaving a bunch of untied knots for you to deal with.

Phil and I drove up to Middletown on Sunday, visited for a while and then drove back down to Bedford with our car full of Carter belongings, plus the dog. Betty followed us, ~~in~~ with the Bedford community gardener as chauffeur, accompanied by Barbara and Tim. Mom Ada was due to arrive that night to take over, with the help of sitter, while Betty returned to the remaining Carter men (Anne has gone to Pittsburgh to visit friends of Faith's). I talked to Mom Ada this morning and the latest news is that John and Shirley will be ready to come home Friday. Shirley was sweet and courtly as usual, acting as if we were conversing at a cocktail party rather than in a hospital room. He looks peculiar because of two black eyes and the still-visible four stitches which were taken on his temple - suppose those will disappear in time. I couldn't tell if he was in pain or not but imagine he was. I had got so many versions of their accident from different members of the family that it was a relief to hear the story at first-hand. Apparently ~~they~~ they left Yarmouth around five, driving convoy as usual, with the Cadillac and a Chevrolet (?) belonging to the maid Dorothy. After stopping for dinner somewhere around Providence, they switched around so that Betty drove the Chevrolet with Anne beside her, followed by Shirley at the helm of the Cadillac, John in the front seat and Dorothy and the two babies in back. Approaching Middletown around 11, they passed through a violent thunder-storm. Shirley's version is that they'd just left the rain behind them when one second he was discussing something with Dorothy and the very next second he was being picked up and put into an ambulance. There's argument as to whether he skidded on the wet pavement or fell asleep at the wheel (S. thinks the latter is true). Anne, in the car ahead, happened to turn around just in time to see the Cadillac go off the road and snap a telephone pole. Betty did not herself go off the road into a ditch, as I had heard. She turned around and came back to where the Cadillac had descended into a culvert and found it ~~knocked~~ sitting facing back towards the Cape, with the horn jammed and the doors stuck so she couldn't get any of them open at first. The babies and John were drying and Dorothy seemed all right though dazed. With the help of a truck driver and then some State Troopers she got the babies and John transferred to the other car and the care of Anne. Shirley came out of his faint slightly just as the ambulance arrived for him and Dorothy. You've probably heard all this story from several different people by now. If so, please excuse me. What bother Phil slightly is that Shirley told the policeman he'd taken either Benzadrine or Dexadrine or one of those things which keep you awake, and the man has it down on his record looking as if he'd been driving under the influence of drugs, which is silly since it's a fairly wide-spread practice for people who have to drive by night. By the way I agree with you that making that trip in the darkness is not a good ~~idea~~ idea. When Shirley told me of his suspicions that he'd dozed off at the wheel I ~~immed-~~ immediately through back some umpteen years to when he had the weird ability to fall asleep standing up at the railing of his pen. He probably still can! Getting ready to leave any place with a large family is exhausting and in this case they'd worked extra hard battenning down for fear of what the much-heralded Hurricane Edna would do (putting tar paper all over the tennis-court among other things).

I don't know if Betty has cable you or not by now, but I'm sure you've heard details from Auntie Do, whom I simply cannot succeed in reaching by phone (hope she hasn't had to go to Florida to attend to Aunt Mary just at this moment; she was in Middletown for 4 or 5 days and must have been of considerable comfort to poor Betty). The latter seemed in quite a state of shock when I talked to her on the phone last week and also on Sunday. It must have been a frightful experience, and the follow-up was not restful, with all the details and decisions. One of the details was a telegram from Aunt May offering to come to Middletown and help! Uncle Tommy was the one who broke the news ~~to us~~ ^{to us}, the evening following the accident. He called here for details without realizing that we didn't even know anything had happened. He and Auntie V. very sweetly stopped to see the Carters on their way down to New York to meet Timmy and transferred a few suit-cases to the house in Bedford.

Since my conversation this morning with Mrs. Wills I've been tapping my fingers on various window-panes and admiring the view, all the while trying to figure out whether I should or shouldn't call Morgie or somebody and ask that a trained or at least practical nurse be provided for when Betty brings the two remaining invalids home. I don't want to annoy her by being a "bossy woman", and yet it would seem that more help should be ~~provided~~ ^{at hand} than Mom Ada and the sitter (who is 19, looks about 12 and has a baby of her own also residing in the Carter mansion). Tim, I guess you've heard, was discovered to have a fractured leg just above the ankle and is wearing a cast. It's a mystery how that could have gone undetected for 3 days or more in a child who already knows how to walk.

On the legal aspect of this thing, difficulties will be taken care of by a lawyer from Hartford recommended by Mr. Alexander. It's a shame they didn't know of Mr. Murray Taylor, who lives right near the scene of the accident and probably knows all the local constabulary. Poor Mug has to do something about a reckless driving charge, which seems rather like the last straw when they've had so much to cope with.

Darlings, I'm sorry for being so incoherent and repetitious. I thought it was better to run the risk of telling you things you've heard already than to go on the good old assumption that just because you're a member of the family you'll have somehow ~~been~~ been made aware of every detail.

Jenny started attending Nursery School at Scarborough on Monday. 3½ years does seem a rather tender age, but the dearth of playmates in the immediate neighborhood and her great eagerness to learn made this seem like a good idea and we're giving it a try. She didn't even give me a second glance when I left her in the teacher's care at school the first day and when I came back to fetch her at noon I was told she'd been so deeply absorbed in the problems of applying bright red paint to a large square of paper that she couldn't believe it was time to go home already. She's terribly proud of "my school".

I want this to get off to you right away, so I'd better bring it to an end.

Much much love and please let me know if, from the vantage point of your greater wisdom, you have any lucid thoughts on how best to help the Shirleys.