

9/14/67

Dear Belle-Socour:- Thank you for your letter. We loved having Sylvie on Whiskey; her presence took a bit of the sting out of what is always a painful moment; your departure from the dear River. I found her good company; she would help me with my birds and show some interest in my banding efforts, which none of my own children has ever done. Isn't it a shame that at this age one can get only little joy from one's flesh and blood? Personally I could wring my lovely daughter's stubborn little neck. When Sylvia left I came close to sending Jen right along with her and might have, really, if her passport had been in good shape. It would have been a relief to put a few thousand miles between her and that boy from Clayton. Now she's back at school and her wallet is full of the young man's blonde hair and she has a ring on her 4th left finger -- it belongs to Tom and is wound with scotch tape to make it smaller: a messy sight if I ever saw one. When Phil protested, Jenny said this was customary when "you're going steady". What is all this Going Steady thing? I've heard other people complain, but never realized this would enter our lives as a problem. Now I wish I had won the argument, back in 1965, over whether Jen would go to Farmington, an all-girl school, or Milton, where there are both girls and boys. Please don't tell Ma but this Tom wants to come here for Thanksgiving. I sort of hope he'll fall downstairs and break a leg or something, as Tom Marshall plus L.H. Carter and Dorothy Armour is a picture I cannot bear to contemplate. I haven't been able to tell the following to anyone, so you'll have to listen. The Sunday after Sylvia left there was a BB game, as usual. Contrary to the Sunday before, when there had been over 70 relatives present, the numbers this time were few, so few that even I got talked into playing. You can imagine my horror when from the direction of Watch I saw Bella White leading 3 large boys along the path through the woods and onto the baseball field: Tom Marshall, Tom Wilson and another whose name I didn't catch -- he had no chin and was enormously tall. Their boat engine had conked out somewhere off Watch and Bella saw them and invited them to the game; ~~MMH~~ they dropped anchor and swam ashore. Aunt Polly began to protest and the very air grew thick with embarrassment. Phil and I, not knowing at all what we were supposed to do, went up and shook their hands. They ended up playing and Aunt P. couldn't say anything because without them there would have been no game. On our side the field was held by Bella and me, just to give you an idea of the fix we were in. Bella just stared at the grass the whole time and let me race around after flies, one of which made me fall (and I've had back or, rather neck, trouble ever since). To compound my own idiocy I neglected the business of finding some kid to run bases for me. Tom Marshall was on first base and once when I came steaming down he said "You do all right...." (he didn't add "for an old lady"); "I'd like to see ~~my~~ mother run around these bases". At the end of the game Aunt Polly took Phil aside and told him not to let Jenny get mixed up with Clayton. Phil retorted that this was our business, and everyone went home in grim silence. About the River there has been a long complaint that there are never enough boys and what boys there are are relatives. The last 3 weeks of August the whole place was crawling with boys, and many of them were non-relatives. I thought this would distract Jenny's attention. No. She was Going Steady so she couldn't possibly talk to any other boy. They'd arrive at Whiskey, 3 or 4 at a time from different islands and when I said Jen wasn't there they'd just sit and wait for her. Kathy's two brothers came, the oldest of which had been Jen's true love during the month of June. She could hardly be polite to him during his visit and I am still cross with her about this. One night I found him sitting alone in our living-room, while Jen sat on the floor in the kitchen talking to Tom on the phone. "Oh you know how they are", said young Mr. Cushing, as if he were 60 years old instead of 18. "No, I don't," I replied peevishly and rushed out and hung up the phone.

I must shortly bring this diatribe to a close, there being already too much useless violence in the world as it is.

That beautiful cat of ours produced a family under the Whiskey house. Collecting the kittens took two days and was, a matter of fact, the only really peaceful time we had all summer. Jenny and 5 or 6 of her young men ganged up for the search. Nobody had shoes on, of course, and since under-the-house is mostly splintery old shutters and broken glass I issued sneakers from that noble pile we had in the hall the whole summer. What is this Moslem thing our children have no shoes? As a matter of fact I chewed out Jenny one day on the subject of going into Clayton barefoot and that very same day I got into Clayton myself and all the way to the doctor's office and didn't discover until then that I ~~MYSELF~~ too was shoeless. Anyway after a lot of giggling and scuffling around, we rounded up three most unappetizing kittens and brought the whole mess home. What do we do now?

Phil really enjoyed seeing Sylvia off. He loves telling the story of checking in at the International Hotel "with his niece" -- A JOKE THAT is as old as the world's oldest hotel. What he did not enjoy was viewing a crash landing just before Sylvia took off. It wasn't a crash, because the pilot very skilfully came in on his two hind wheels (nose wheel stuck). The whole field had been cleared, the "meat wagon" and fire wagon called out and every loose pilot in the place was elbowing his way to a front row view. The reason for this interest was explained by a subsequent visitor who had been a test pilot in the RAF; there is no way for a pilot to practice crash landings. Phil was quite unnerved by the whole affair. Did S. tell you about it? I gather her own flight was not so eventful. I hope not, anyway.

We have Sylvia's clock and some underpants and three plastic glasses which just could not be fitted in. Her tennis racquet is still at Whiskey (I got terribly behind schedule with the packing and I still don't know how we got back to Croton). I'll ask Mama if she will bring the clock and the panties. Could you wait on the glasses until 1968?

About next summer, could we please accept your invitation to Greece? Which month will it be? Is Sylvia going there with you? I don't know what to do with Jenny. If we bring her she might be impossible again, or else she and Sylvia will pick up with some local male. ~~Maybe~~ ^{we may} organize a job for her with the Quakers here in this country and she can join us at the River for the minimum time at the end (or the beginning, or whatever). I remember Mummy, after the Terrible Summer (1957) saying she didn't want David on Whiskey again until he was married and I can see now what she meant.

Please please don't tell Mummy about the possibility of the Clayton boy being here at Thanksgiving. This plan may never come off and it's enough that we're worrying without her joining the throng.

Much love to you and thanks for letting us keep your nice girl for that extra week. I'll send pictures as soon as we can get prints made.