

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

June 2, 1932

Dear Harpo:

As to plans, no news. I think that the uncertainty in the business world is infectiously giving everyone a hand-to-mouth feeling, and making them hesitant to say at any time where they want to be two months later.

You will want to hear about Alice. She had a mishap at Manhasset on Saturday night. The George S. Kaufmans and the Edna Ferbers are slowly turning Manhasset into a gaudy ghetto. The Kaufmans, with their house-guests (including me) had gone over to the Pulitzers' for the evening where Alice, the Chotzinoffs and Frank Sullivan were installed. Along about midnight when Alice was playing ping-pong with Chotzinoff, she tripped on a rug, fell, put out her left hand to break the fall and broke the arm instead. It was a nasty mess. The local doctor said

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to bring her down there at once. Beatrice acted as chauffeur with her own car, and the Doctor, in his pajamas, did a temporary setting without an anaesthetic which must have been hideously painful. The sight of the pain was too much for Beatrice, who began to throw up, so I was rushed in as being too inhuman to weaken in that way. Then the Doctor plugged Alice with morphine and she slept like a lamb until next morning when we went in to Roosevelt Hospital, got your old friend, Dr. Cave, on the job, had X-rays taken, gave her gas, re-set the arm and deposited her at home. Her arm will be in a cast for another three weeks, and after that comes a siege of massage and baking to restore it to full use.

It's a daughter at the Fatios'. As she is named Alexandra, I felt I should call up Miss Lippincott's Sanitarium and felicitate the mother. I asked for Mrs. Fatio, and when the responding voice said "Who is this?" and I identified myself, there was a very shriek of pleasure and surprise. "Why"

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she said "I thought you were in Europe with Lilly and Paul." As I had had dinner with Eleanor only a few nights before, I decided that the pangs of childbirth had unsettled her reason. It soon dawned on me that I had got the wrong room and stumbled ~~in~~ by chance on someone who happened to know me. The voice rattled on as follows: "I think it's too sweet of you to have called up, but what gets me is how you knew I was here because it is a great secret and no one in New York knows I'm here." I kept putting in questions by which I might get a little light, but they were all a flop. "Where are you spending the summer?" I asked. "Oh, the same old place" would be the answer. All the time I was trying to think where I had heard that voice before, and came to the conclusion (I am not certain about it yet) that it was Josephine Forestal.

Island programs are a little vague due to the fact that Jenny is sick and a new cook is being rushed into the breach. I will probably go up and test her cooking before I recommend a general migration

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in that direction.

I heard an old masterpiece of F.P.A.'s the other day which happened to be new to me. It was at a poker game a few months after Swope quit the World. Some loser was going to send him a check and he was giving his name and address with great distinctness. "Herbert Bayard Swope, 135 West 58th Street." And F.P.A. added: "Occupation: Housewife."

I still have it in the back of my mind that I might do worse than come out and see you during July or August. Isn't it hotter than the hinges of Hell there then?

A.W.

P.S. I brought you a
present from France.
What shall I do with
it?

A.W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Oct. 3, 1932

Dear Harpo:

I have decided (about a half an hour ago) to sail on the Europa on the 29th, going direct to Berlin, joining Duranty there, and going back with him to Moscow for a month. Then London for a few weeks, and then home before the end of the year. This makes me think of California for either April, May or June. I want to go there when the Norrises are at their ranch.

My departure from these shores is sedate and premeditated compared with Alice's, who left Friday night on the Bremen for no ~~good~~ good reason beyond the fact that the Berlins were going and told her on Tuesday they thought it would be a good idea for her to go along. They will have a week in London, and another in Paris, and then come right back.

I should have written you last week to warn you that you had been elected to the island. By this time you have heard the painful news direct from Ray Ives. You may remember that your parting word to

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me was an instruction to do as I thought best about it. With several of the old guard members collapsing, it did seem to me that such of you non-members as have used the island, and will use it from time to time, ought to step in and shoulder your tenth of the cost. Anyway, Alice, Neysa and I decided to inflict membership upon you, and if you don't like it you know what you can do. What you can do is to refuse to join. It is as simple as that.

The George S. Kaufmans of Manhasset have moved into a large new house at 14 East 94th Street. The telephone number is Atwater 9-1466. I think Beatrice is on a still hunt for another baby.

Ottie departed for Princeton last Monday, attended by the entire family with the possible exception of Hennessey and May. It will take him a month with the freshman class to live that down.

Mr. S. N. Behrman and valet have taken an apartment at 277 Park Avenue where he can work disturbed only by the women's screams issuing from Ross's apartment. He (S. N. Behrman, not the valet) is in love with

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you. I remember the feeling.

I am just back from a week-end at Joe Cook's with Connelly, Ross, Chasen, etc. Very good time. Dinner every night at midnight, barbecued spare-ribs and the like, with a show before dinner in Joe's personal opera house. It seats nine people, including the chair in the box. I had that seat. It is the only seat that has opera glasses attached to it. It was not a restful week-end, as so many of the seats exploded when you sat down on them, but I had a good time.

Constance Collier has just arrived to rehearse in the Kaufman-Ferber play. The new Coward show in London is said to be the best he's done, with Romney Brent making a great hit, and Joyce Barbour suddenly jumping from third-grade worker to first-rate artist from all accounts.

There is to be a new baby at the F.P.A.'s by the direct method.

You might tell that swine, Lederer, that he owes me eighty-three dollars. I object slightly to this defalcation, but even more strongly to his lack of attention

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

to his aged friend. Out of sight,
out of mind is the way I put it.

Be sure to read a book called
"Black Mischief" by Evelyn Waugh
published this week, and remember
when you write me to tell me whether
you ever cleared up the little
mystery of the Hyannis telephone
call. I do not ask from idle
curiosity. Your last four communi-
cations to me have ended "What are
your plans?" You cannot say I have
not answered. I don't suppose you
would like to go to Moscow with
me.

A. Woolcott

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Saturday, May 19, 1934.

Dear Harpo:

It was ten years ago this evening that, thanks to an accidental detour to the Casino, I first laid eyes upon you. No other accident I have ever been involved in has contributed so much to my enjoyment of this world. Until this recent unfortunate episode at Bloomingdale's, I have had nothing to complain of. I love you dearly, and think the chances are that I will continue to do so until one of us dies. After you, Alphonse.

A.W.



FAIR HAVEN, VT.
230-2

NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.

July 24th
1935

TELEGRAMS % BULL
VIA POSTAL

Dear Harpo,

I am enclosing a letter which I found warm and likable and which I think you and Groucho will want to read. At any rate, its a far tidier document than I can manage unaided, what with being on an island and Brown on vacation. A secretary is like a wimpus and, after eight years of using one, I produce the weardest scripts when left to my own devices. So here I am pounding away on a letter only six or seven months overdue----Good God, something's gone wrong with the ribbon and I dont know how to fix it. There isnt any one here at all, for even Pip has just left for Poultney to visit the barbar.

Pip is full of charm and has learned several new tricks. When its time to turn in at night, I tell him he must first pick a flower, at which feined suggestion, he opens the screen door, vanishes into the darkness, presumably communes for a time with the petunia bed and returns with the relieved expression of one whose bladder has been attended to. His strong sense of private property has, if anything, grown more intense. He always objected to strangers landing on the island. Now he has undertaken to see that they dont even canoe or row around it. He is kept pretty busy patrolling

the shore and repelling invaders and single-handed has managed to spread on the mainland a report that we keep three bloodhounds to protect the privacy of the movie-actors, who-----as all Vermont believes---spend their Summers here nude.

Among the movie actors who have been here thus far----some of them so opposed to nudism that they even wear mittens---I might mention the following:

- B. Hecht.
- C. Lederer
- S. Behrman
- G. Backer
- D. Backer



FAIR HAVEN, VT.
230-2

NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.

TELEGRAMS % BULL
VIA POSTAL

N. McMein
P. Pulitzer (God knows why)
M. Fatio
E. Fatio
T. Wilder
. G. Eustis
A. Getman
R. Rudd
H. Dietz
H. Ross (with bride)
and others whom you dont know and wouldnt want
to.

I have never found the island lovelier than it seems this year. There has been any God's quantity of rain-enough to keep the lake a good two feet above its usual level at this time of year, but for the most part this has obligingly fallen during the night or in half-hour cloudbursts. Both badminton courts have born up nobly under the deluge---out of commission on account of wet grounds only one day. I play a little better than I did. Its like saying that a tongue-tied idiot can now proudly say "Boo" but still its noticable. In one game I was Neysa's partner. I wanted to be at my best and, for once, abandoned the moitonless dignity I usually bring to the game. Once I leaped a good two feet into the air and came down on ~~Neysa's~~ Neysa's fine wide foot. Another time I lunged at a quill, hitting Neysa in the head instead and knocking her out stiffer than a plank. I also upset her out of the canoe but only once, so she left in good humor and is due back here on August 21st.

If you think you are likely to get here at all this year, I wish, when you get this letter, that you would wire me a rough guess as to when you might be expected. I shall be doing some wandering and would prefer not to be away when you are here. My only fixed engagements at the moment are August 29th and October 6th. On the earlier date I am going to Williamstown to address the Jew-Christian Conference. I tried to explain tactfully that I was neither. A plague on both your houses! But Newton Baker is the head of the project and his word is as near to being law as any I recognize.

On the latter date, the old fool will



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NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.

TELEGRAMS % BULL
VIA POSTAL

begin broadcasting---every Sunday at 7.P.M.
Its a thirteen week contract,with the usual
option of renewal,but I succeeded in so wangling
it that I ,too,can back out after the first
thirteen. When December first comes I may
be yearning for liberty and might listen to
a proposition from someone who wanted to go
round the world,begining,say, in January.
I would be in favor of taking Lederer as a
luxury ,but would a little prefer that
Moss Hart be left behind. Also Clifton Webb
and Clare Boothe Brokaw.

Also when you actually know you are coming,
give me or the Bulls or Hennessey a weeks
notice,so that we can take your speedboat
out of drydock and attend to its repairs.
We got your amiable offer of its use,but
the kicker is all we need for getting to shore
and Howard Bull,that horny gnome,can ferry
all people headed this way.

I think I must say something about the
invitation to join you all in California. By
a strange accumulation of circumstance,most of
the people I like best were out there. But
when I am below par---so saturated with
postponed fatigue that I began to think I
would never get rested----the people I like
best are those I would go furthest to avoid.
I was pretty bum company in May,and I didnt
want to dump myself on any one. I might want
to see in some future and better life.

This letter has already run to an ungodly
length. I need only report that the new house here
is a considerable improvement. It was
occupied in solitary state by Behrman,whom we rarerly
saw as he either sat in his room writing a play
or rushed mysteriously off to Rutland and Poultney



FAIR HAVEN, VT.
230-2

NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.

TELEGRAMS % BULL
VIA POSTAL

and the like, explaining only that he had visited the House of All Nations in each town in Vermont. The food is better than ever. The wit has been crackling. Every time the score in badminton is ten-eight, some one says "A Hotel in Albany" and the rest of us roar with loyal laughter.

So long and God Bless you. I havnt seen you for nearly a year and thats the longest abstinence I have ever had to undergo. Hoping to have no more of same

and oblige

A. W. S. 11/10/14



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230-2

NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.

TELEGRAMS 7/8 BULL
VIA POSTAL

P.S. I shall now go back to sleep, too
enfeebled by this effort to write to Alice, too.
So will you show her this letter and give her
my love. Show her the letter after throwing
away this postscript, which I have appended
on the bare chance that you have all forgotten
that her birthday is the 28th of this month.

On that occasion, you might tell her that she gets
the Parliament Clock for another year. 19

AW

NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.



FAIR HAVEN, VT.
230-W2

TELEGRAMS 1/6 BULL
VIA POSTAL

October fifteenth

Dear Harpo,

If your new address was in that last letter of yours, I cannot tell now because--- fortunately after I had read it----I was airily tossing the envelope into the fire when, by mistake, I threw the letter itself in, so that if the Life and Letters of Harpo Marx are ever published, the book will lack at least that one item. As I vaguely recall, it would have made good reading. Too bad.

This communication is being typed on the end of the dining-room table as the island is being shot from under me, or at least sewn up for the winter. The stone house is boarded up, the flower-boxes have been emptied, the dogs are even now being ferried over to Bulls where they are going to board for the present and the contents of ~~the~~ ice-box have been distributed to the local poor. I finished the last bottle of Dubonnet at lunch. Last night I told the young Democrats assembled in the Fair Haven High School why I was going to vote for Roosevelt and an hour from now I go over to Castleton and take the freeman's oath before the Town Clerk, which will entitle me to vote & by mail from wherever I happen to be on Election Day. Incidentally, the old Town Crier is going back on the air for one night only on Tuesday the 20th---I think at 9.45 P.M.E.S.T. but I'm not sure about ~~this~~, just to tell whoever happens to be listening why he is voting for F.D.R.

I am slowly coming to realize that this spot is the only one on earth I care anything about---the only place I'm always sorry to leave and the only one I'm always glad to get back to. I must have been way in arrears in the matter of rest to have had the long one I've been taking here work such a real restoration. I've just had a clean bill of health from the doctor for the first time in years and I feel better now than I have since the war. The peeling off of something more than twenty pounds has helped, I suppose.

I'm lecturing in Troy tonight, visiting a sick friend in an Albany hospital tomorrow and

NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.



FAIR HAVEN, VT.
230-W2

TELEGRAMS % BULL
VIA POSTAL

then going on to New York, where---for the nonce and perhaps even longer---I shall be lodged at the Plaza. That will be my address until further notice. Just what I shall be doing between now and May and just where I shall live during this and the next few winters I cannot tell until a few more bits of information come in. By December first, I'll know. Ask me then. Or maybe I'll tell you anyway. At all events, I shall have to be in or near New York until the middle of December because I'm lecturing once a week on journalism at the New School for Social Research in Twelfth Street.

I suppose you know that Ruth Gordon is the toast of London. The production of "The Country Wife" at the Old Vic, financed by Helen Hayes and Gilbert Miller, I believe, has had such a sensational reception that the engagement there has been extended and Edith Evans, who intended to play her part only in London, is coming on over to New York to go the whole hog.

Tell Alice the Fall here has been lovely and lively----lovelier to look at and feel and smell than I've ever known it and lively because the house was full of hunters up for the bird season and up at my stone house Hecht and MacArthur were busy grinding out the screen version of Wuthering Heights. I never enjoyed the hunting season so much. They would all go out at the crack of dawn and freeze till dark and come back without a God Damned thing. I used to make it all the pleasanter calling them the Audubon Society for the Protection of Our Feathered Friends. Then, at the rate of one a day, they did proudly accumulate four partridges and these were hung high on the wall of the house just outside the kitchen door. The cook was just going to pluck them for our dinner, when she interrupted the Black Duchess, my German shepherd dog, in the act of polishing off her third. We call her the Bird Dog of Old Neshobe.

For the past week, the coloring here has been something to dream about---the whole lake quiet as a church, nothing stirring save the slow fall of golden leaves through the windless air, no motion of any kind save

NESHOBE ISLAND
LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT.



FAIR HAVEN, VT.
230-W2

TELEGRAMS % BULL
VIA POSTAL

from Gummo trying(in vain) to get me to indorse
Fleischmann's Gin for five hundred bucks.

Harpo,has Calinformia got you for good and
all? Shall Vermont never see you again? I suppose if
Idid go to California for Christmas,you'd start
East just as I was passing 125th Street. That's
what you did last year,you sweet little son-of-a-bitch.

The Prince Chap

THE COPLEY-PLAZA BOSTON
THE GREENBRIER
WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, W. VA.

NATIONAL HOTEL OF CUBA
HAVANA, CUBA

TELEPHONE
PLAZA 3-1740
CABLE ADDRESS
PLAZA NEW YORK



HENRY A. ROST
PRESIDENT AND MANAGING DIRECTOR

THE PLAZA

FIFTH AVENUE 58TH TO 59TH STREETS
AT CENTRAL PARK
NEW YORK

November sixth
1936.

Dear Harpo:

Well, everyone came up to me out of the audience after my lecture in 12th Street the other night and told me you were married. All last week such visitors as Beatrice and Moss insisted on discussing with me the burning question as to whether you would ever be married. Each explained to me carefully that you never would be, and I having to sit and take it with a blank expression which is very difficult for me because my face even in repose is as full of expression as George Kaufman's in the crisis of a croquet game.

I am glad you are married and that you have married someone I like so much. Indeed, I think you are incredibly lucky. Give my love to Susan.

It seems to be grossly improbable that I will venture West at Christmas time. I am spending this week in a welter of radio offers and trying to get up the gumption necessary to say no to all of them. I think it likely that I will collapse and sign up for a series to begin in January in which case I would need all the intervening time to get my desk clear in advance.

Meanwhile I am being moved into my new apartment at 10 Gracie Square. I am taking Hope Williams's place for three years. Perhaps I ought to explain that she is moving out first. It will be my address until further notice and I will send you the telephone number as soon as I know what it is.

F. W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

March 6, 1937

Dear Harpo,

I was greatly tickled at the news that you had hung on every word of what you happily called my Anne Mansfield - Helen Keller broadcast. Her name was Anne Macy, you son-of-a-bitch. I adore you. You're a genius. I think Helen is going direct to San Francisco and sailing from there April first on something like the "Asamu Maru". I'll get the right name of the ship and also the name of the hotel where she will stop in San Francisco and send them to you so that you can make a **pass** over her with flowers.

It might be convenient if I knew where you lived. Even if I wanted to call you up sometime without reversing the charges, I wouldn't know how to do it.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Confidentially, the sponsors now seem inclined to keep me broadcasting until July seventh. God forbid! When they commit themselves to this in writing, as they must next week, we'll have to discuss the advisability of a trip West. I think it is probable but not certain that I will land in your vicinity around the end of April. I presume that in that event you will come East.

If you plan to spend a month or any part of one at the Island this summer, I do hope that month will be either July, August or September. I would like the place in April and November, but after all I'm irrational about it and don't really like any place else. I have some apprehension that the mess the builders must be making getting ready for my house will not entirely have been cleared up until the end of June. I do hope I shall have enough spirit not to go around feeling guilty about this.

I suppose you know that F.P.A. is, at the moment of writing,

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

without a job. His contract ran out and The Herald Tribune wanted to cut his salary twenty-five per cent. and he quit. This has caused considerable stink and when you get this letter I hope you and Groucho and anyone else who could do it honestly will write or wire The Tribune the expression of their deep regret, if any.

And now, Marx, old man, I want to talk to you about a delicate matter. You may recall I once affected you to tears by telling you that I had put a paragraph in my will giving you any picture in my possession. I couldn't have foreseen then that I would ever go crazy and buy the new Grant Wood. I must remember to rewrite my will.

Love to Susan if you ever see her. I was glad to read your joke about Lederer. I had forgotten there was such a person.

A.W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

May 13, 1937

Dear Marx,

I'm broadcasting until July sixth. I'd like to do one broadcast about you, a propos of your picture coming on. This will give you a rough idea of how hard up I am for material. Can you wire me any guess as to how soon I can see a print in New York and how soon the picture will be released?

You never answered the exquisitely witty letter I wrote you some time ago. That's all right with me, but I am kind of sore at this report that you won't come near the island this Summer. My own new house will be ready for occupancy by October first and then you can all go to hell, including Susan to whom I send my love.

The Prince Chap.

NUMBER TEN GRACIE SQUARE, NEW YORK CITY

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

July 2, 1937

Dear Harpo,

I'll be looking for you on the
twenty-first. The sooner you
come, the longer you stay, the
better. The surgeons don't
seem to think I'll have an
arm for croquet or badminton
as soon as that, but I can
swim and be witty. I'll have
you in stitches.

The Prince Chap

NUMBER TEN GRACIE SQUARE, NEW YORK CITY



11-11-39

The Roosevelt
NEW ORLEANS

Dear Harpo.

I shall be landing in
your neighborhood or
thereabouts at the end of the
first week in December
and I am giving your
house as a forwarding
address but don't be
alarmed. By that time
I shall know at what
home the hunts are to
stop and it will be
kind of Tennessee,
The Governor and I put
up there for the week.
I am booked to lecture
at Pasadena on the
9th and at Los Angeles

your entertainment whether
or not you ever join the
cast,

If you want to answer
this or tell me any of
your little, boyish
troubles, you could
catch me at the
Hotel Driskill in Austin
Texas on the 17th and
18th or at the Hotel
St. Anthony in San Antonio
on the 25th.

Uncle Winsome

on the 11th. If you and
Susan are sufficiently
delicious to attend either
of these, why not make
it Pasadena? I would
prefer that.

It seems that after
launching the Chicago
company ~~at~~ Christmas,
George will proceed to
the coast and await
my return there on
January 18th to start
rehearsals of the
third company which
is booked to open
at Santa Barbara
on the 9th. I intend
to play it solely for



November 18, 1939.

Dear Harpo:

There is some thought of my doing one or two broadcasts in California, but they will be after I have lectured in your vicinity, and I see no reason why I should not be free as a bird on the night of Sunday December tenth. Why can't I have a party that night? I know just the kind of party that I want. I want dinner with Alfred and Lynn (whom you will find lodged after December third at The Town House in Los Angeles), Susan, Alice, if she is there, and Lederer, if he has come back from Nyack. After dinner I would like a projection room at the Disney studio where we could see, among other things, Who killed Cock Robin, The Old Mill, Mother Goose comes to Hollywood, Water Babies, and above all The Little Hiawatha.

Your comment, angry or otherwise, on this superb proposal will catch me at the Hotel St Anthony in San Antonio on the twenty fifth, or at the Hotel Skirvin, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on the twenty ninth. During those first three or four days before I start for San Francisco I shall be lodged at The Town House in Los Angeles in order to avoid slipping on your icy door step, but I will head straight for you first to pick up my mail. You might ask Rachel to keep her eye out for a competent stenographer I can use at the hotel for two or three days. He, or she, must bring his or her own typewriter.

Last night before a startled audience at the University here I was introduced by the Mayor who looks like me, only fatter. He surprised even me by reading from my works, quoting from what he described as the most beautiful piece I ever wrote, ~~was~~ an obituary of the wife of the Four Marx Brothers. This made it hard for me. As a gag man I could not top him.

A.W.

OLYMPIC HOTEL



FRANK WHOLE

Vice President and General Manager

SEATTLE, Washington

December 26, 1939

Dear Susan -

I have reason to fear that a box of candy may have been sent me in your care. Please open all packages and eat the contents of those which lend themselves to that practice.

Tell Starpo we sold out the Opera House in San Francisco, which was so nearly true as to make no difference. When Kathleen, looking like the Queen of Proumama, introduced me, she told of the day when her small niece said Charlotte was coming over to play. "And who is Charlotte, dear?". "Oh, she's that friend that I hate"

On Friday I am off by train to spend five days with Annie and Marie at Sun Valley. I am due in

Stallwood on the morning of
January 19, which is my
birthday in case any one
asks you.

Tell Starpo I have no
words to tell how
desolate I have felt since
I got the news of Skywood's
death. A part of me died
that day past all hope
of resurrection. I am
beginning to suspect that
life is a succession of
such fractional deaths.

Maybe, after all, its only
an unimportant remnant
that gets burned at the
end.

My love to the three
of you. Good luck in 1940.

A.W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

July 31, 1940.

Dear Harpo:

I got back here in the late afternoon of May tenth and every day since I have tried to write a letter to you. In good times and bad, whenever I could lure a stenographer within reach of my voice, I've dashed off notes to an enormous correspondence list ranging from the Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt to Betty Blythe, but for some reason, which I believe you will be able to understand, I could not write to you or to Booth Tarkington. There was so much I wanted to say and it was so important to say it right that I kept waiting for the day when I would be in perfect shape to do a good job. As you will see before you get much further, I've given up waiting and will just do the best I can.

After all, I have never learned any technique for answering inquiries about my health. I've invented dreary little routines for such occasions but they never made sense. If someone asked me how I was, I would have to reply that I did not know but if they happened to ask me how I felt, I could honestly say "Lousy!"

BOMOSEEN, VERMONT

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

This was true for a good many ghastly weeks and then suddenly I began to feel perfectly elegant and when Dr. Getman arrives this evening I expect to wring from him the permission to go in swimming. If you will remember my swimming you will recall that it involves less exertion than the ordinary person employs in getting out of a chair.

Not only the Doc but practically everyone else arrives this evening including George, Moss, Beatrice, Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh and a few others. In fact, I think our social standing on the mainland will reach its peak this summer. Olivier and Leigh are pretty good for that purpose but the real hotsy-totsys were the two G-men who came to see me earlier in the summer. Ruth Gordon and Neysa tried to remain for the ensuing conference but were asked to leave and I've never seen anything funnier than their slinking exit. Then we have word that Walter Winchell is arriving Tuesday and if Mrs. Roosevelt pays her promised visit in August our social position will be made. Incidentally, Walter feels that the time has come for a Profile on Ross and is coming to me for a few details. Hot cha!

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

The joint arrival of the Doc and the playwrights is timed to decide the only immediate question and that is whether I can resume the tour of the play in October. I have my own ideas on the subject but will keep my mouth shut until after I feel out the situation. My suspicion is that the Doc will say No, but the fact that it is even being considered shows that there is life in the old boy yet. It is not a matter of great concern to me because I don't think of anything morning, noon and night except England and I would be only too pleased to drop dead at the end of a broadcast if it could be a knockout on the subject of England.

I should like to tell you something about Joe Hennessy. I was so full of morphine that first week in San Francisco that I had very little idea of what was going on. And then on Friday, through the fog, I heard Steve Sandes say, "Look who's here." I looked up and there was Hennessy's battle scarred face coming through the fog like a harvest moon. I suppose I never before in my life felt such a relief and immediately gave up all care until further notice. He had flown from New York to take charge of me. I would have to go back to when I was fourteen to name a time when anyone took care of me or when I wanted anyone to take care of me.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I always knew that Joe was the Rock of Ages to which I might cling but I never expected to do any clinging in my life. After I got back here I tried to tell someone how extraordinary this experience was. I started to say that I did not deserve such friendship and then I realized that nobody does. It comes to rich and poor, to the deserving and the undeserving. Such loving kindness is rain from heaven; it is the quality of mercy. I think I could have been no more than ten when I first recited that speech in school but I had to live to be fifty-three to know what it meant. Slow but sure, that's me. I tell you all this now because I want to put it in writing before I get so goddam sore at Hennessy I could sock him in the jaw.

Island News: When I was good and sick many of our dear friends rushed to my bedside. In particular, Alice and Beatrice hurried here but instead of smoothing the brow of the frail little sufferer, they propped him up in bed, played cribbage with him and beat the living bejesus out of him. There has been a great change in Alice's cribbage manners. She doesn't squawk any more. Of course, that may be because she has not lost a game this summer.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Her birthday was celebrated night before last. Sixty-six if she's a day - and she is. And for the first time in years nobody got really tight. Alice didn't even fall in the lake afterwards.

Ruth Gordon has paid four visits thus far and will be back in September. She's opening - you might like to remember this - at the Berkshire Playhouse, Stockbridge, Massachusetts on Monday, August fifth, in Shaw's new play "The Millionairess", in which she will be as funny as a goat. She will probably play this later in New York (but confidentially, she is being starred by the best of all possible managements in a new play which I have not read but about which she is drunk with rapture.) She has been very dear to me this summer and is better company than ever before which is saying about as much as I know how to say.

Howard Bull and I have a new boat which is like a majestic launch and is filled with red cushioned wicker chairs and in a pinch carries fourteen. It will have paid for itself before I get used to feeling that it belongs to me. There is nothing left for us to buy now but the Bremen.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

On the first wing of my screen as you go in the door is the picture of Woollcott Marx with his teddy bears and with you three thousand miles away I indulge in a good deal of proprietary talk about him. If you don't hurry East and do some corrective work I will have subtly created the belief that I picked him out for you and trained him musically.

You remember that bar at Frank Craven's that I took you to see. I don't know if you were listening, but he proposed that I send him a picture of myself- preferably an earlier one. So I got Dick Wood to reproduce the old family photograph of which I enclose a copy. It was taken in 1889 at a time when you were still at the breast and I was going on three. Amateur theatricals were going on in the tribe at the time but I am not sure whether I was in the play or merely tricked out in one of the costumes. If they didn't use me with a fine built up entrance they were fools.

Goodbye now. I have to write to Mr. Tarkington. Give my love to Susan. As for answering this tid bit I think you would be entitled to drop me a brief note along about Thanksgiving time but you might send me a wire telling me it reached you and that you know that I love you if - and there's always been

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

a nasty doubt on this point - I love
anyone on this earth.

A. Woolcott

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

June 6, 1941.

Dear Harpo:

Your letter to Henessey reserving beds and croquet mallets for mid-August threw me into a tantrum. Whatever became of your winding up by the middle of June and coming East at once? Go to hell.

On receipt of this letter please telephone Mankiewicz and convey my respectful admiration for the writing that went into "Citizen Kane" which interested me more than any picture I have ever seen.

Ruth Gordon is finishing an engagement at Ann Arbor tomorrow and leaves next day for Hollywood where she is to work under Cukor in the new Garbo picture and will be lodged at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Her guarantee is for four weeks. Her agent was bustling around trying to buy her way out of the Marblehead contract but I thought, and so did she, that there was a good chance of her being through in Hollywood in time to fulfil it. If you will remember that her part is virtually a single monologue, she could delay coming on until

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

the dress-rehearsal and still make the grade. It was my suggestion that the whole question be left open for a month. I think we probably have a good Daffodil.

I expect to be on the island through most of June and July.

A.W.

P.S.

You might also tell Mank how much I would enjoy getting a letter from him with a first hand, honest-to-God account of all those didoes that preceded the final release of "Citizen Kane". Did they really waver about releasing it and, if so, what made them finally decide to do so?

aw

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

1-21-42

25214 W S

Dear Mary, 209292180

you can't hide anything from me. I know you so well I can read between the lines of your foolish letter. You won't come right out and say so but what you mean is that you are willing to do "The Yellow Jacket", if at all, only with me as Chorus. Since you could stand them up without me, it must be sex. On this subject, more hereafter.

On Sunday, Jan 25, at 1.30 E.S.T. over the Columbia network, I am putting on and taking part in a Red Cross broadcast which you will see if, as it may, it turns out as I hope it will. I return to New York Friday and shall be at the Gotham

until ~~Monday~~ February first
when I go to West Point
(to speak, not to enter as a
cadet).

I am staying here with
some mighty nice people
who would probably send
their love to you if they
knew I were writing and
if they weren't busy all
day long about something
that seems to be going on.

Alexander W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

April 13, 1942

Dear Harpo:

It seems that between them Hennessy and Frode Jensen saved my life, but I want you to know that they meant well.

I am up and in another two or three months will be about. I wish you would let me know when you will play in eastern camps and when I can look forward to seeing you here. I am under orders to sit on my can here at least until June and probably for most of the summer. Looking ahead last Fall, I thought the place would be closed; but it looks now as if it would turn into a convalescent camp with George Backer, Alice, Neysa and myself all undergoing repairs. Alice is now sunning herself at the Arizona Inn in Tucson. George, having tried to enlist as a private in the Army, was just about to be accepted when the Army doctors pointed out the trifling difficulty that he had t.b. He is now undergoing that heroic treatment of having the lung deflated three times a week in the hope of getting into the Army six months from now. You must have known that Neysa, walking in her sleep last January, fell down stairs and broke her back. She has such an appetite for life that she was able, at my age, to break all records for speed in recovering from that operation.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Though she is still wearing a plaster of Paris cast, enough to weight anyone to the ground, she walked through the snow the other day to see "Dumbo", which she had already seen eleven times.

Only the other day, out of the rats' nest of papers which are always on my desk, there came to light a snapshot which gave me great nostalgia. It was a breakfast scene at Marblehead-- you and Susan, me and Benrimo. I heard from O'Malley that he was magnificent to the last. Rex used to go and see him every day in the hospital. One night as he was leaving at eleven o'clock, Benrimo was being roguish with his nurse, wearing a red rose behind his ear and seducing her flagrantly. When Rex got back to his own apartment the telephone was ringing. It was news from the hospital that Benrimo was dead.

God knows when I will get a chance to see "The Gold Rush". Have you seen it and how does it stand up? I think the dedication to me was not only the most surprising thing that ever happend to me but one of the three greatest honors that have ever been paid me. One was the dedication of "Our Town" to me and the other was your giving Billy Marx the middle name of Woollcott.

I enclose one of the letters I got while I was in the hospital. I thought you might like to memorize it for your next curtain speech. Give my love to Susan and telephone Lederer that he need not think he can

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

kill my affection for him by stony
silence.

A.W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

May 25, 1942

Dear Harpo:

I am pretty bitter at you for throwing away the copy of "Going To Pieces" which I must have given you when it was first published. However, I can send you another. It has that piece I wrote about your mother and the boys for the Saturday Evening Post shortly before the Spanish American War. But that was not the chapter I wanted you to read. I myself had picked up the book for the first time in many years and stumbled onto the chapter beginning on page sixty-seven.

I am also a little bitter or at any rate disappointed that your Island visit is now off until September, as I have no idea

B O M O S E E N , V E R M O N T

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

whether I'll be here then. My plan for dying in the early Spring has been slightly modified and I now think I may get well enough by Fall to go to work-- directly or indirectly-- for the Government.

The recovery process seems to me hellishly slow, but I think I am better now than I was two weeks ago and if this rate keeps up I may have gone off to work by September.

A. W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

July 12, 1942.

Dear Harpo:

I am writing this on Neysa's urgent recommendation to tell you something you may already know -- something told me over a month ago under seal of strictest confidence. Since then I have had evidence that down in New York the secret is pretty widely known. I am oppressed by the fact that you might not forgive me for keeping it from you. Alice Miller is dying of cancer. The growth removed in January has returned with ~~avengance~~ and is growing rapidly despite the racking course of X-ray treatments she has been taking at Roosevelt Hospital for a month past. When she wrote me this in early June she thought she might have anywhere from six months to five years to live but I have reason to believe the picture is much darker than that estimate implies.

If this is news to you it is probably news to Lederer and I wish you would pass it on to him but before acting on it or revealing to Alice that you know, you must first telephone her apartment in New York where Henry Miller and Denning take turns in being on-guard and get the facts

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

for yourself, never by any hint suggesting that you learned them from me. I may be wrong in telling you but I did think you would want to fill her room with reminders of your old affection and I thought it conceivable that if it were a toss-up when you would come East this might affect your decision.

As a matter of secondary interest I report that another old friend of yours (myself) is so considerably improved in health that by September I shall be able to beat you in croquet if, as now seems improbable, I have the heart to play at all.

a.w.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

July 17, 1942.

Dear Harpo:

I have a note from you dated July 14th by which time you should have received a letter I wrote about Alice. But as you merely speak of being "quite concerned about her" I must assume that mine had not yet reached you.

I wish when you get this you would sit down and clear up several points for me.

1. Am I to assume that you want all your mail and telegrams, too, directed to the address which of late you have been putting at the top of your infrequent and unsatisfactory communications? I've asked this before and got no answer.

2. Will you tell Miss Linden (or whoever now handles your mail) that she merely infuriates the Vermont postal authorities by addressing me at Neshobe Island, Bomoseen, Castleton Corners, Vermont. The proper address is the one given at the bottom of this notepaper.

3. When last you mentioned the matter you ventured the prediction that you would be

BOMOSEEN, VERMONT

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

here during the first two weeks of September. It would help me a lot in making my own plans if I could learn whether this is still your plan and, if not, what the prospects are of your coming East.

4. An unidentified horror, identifiable only as an enlarged copy of a photograph of me, by one John Decker who, judging from this sample, I should classify as a painter slightly inferior to you and Heywood, did arrive in May when I was barely conscious but still with enough spirit to fight back. At one time Howard Bull seemed to want it to adorn his garage but not enough to carry it over to the mainland so it is still hidden behind the screen in my house. I thought it might have been sent me by the artist himself and guessed, if you ordered it, it was because you knew he was hard up and good to his mother. If this acknowledgement seems at all ungracious, put it down to the fact that I am still exasperated by postoperative aches and pains. My incision, which is as long as your you-know at its best (hearsay), still issues a horrifying twinge every time I move. Even so I am hoping to get away to New York soon for a visit with Alice. Meanwhile write me here and don't address the envelope with such details as "Near Rutland" or "A little East of Lake Champlain" or "Care of Will Bull". You may, if your local telegraph-office proves difficult, add "Via Rutland" when you wire.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I long for another look at Billy but I suppose he will be a football captain before I see him again.

Have you any feelings on the subject of a "Yellow Jacket" tour this fall?

aw.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

July 29, 1942.

Dear Harpo:

About Alice. On Thursday I went to New York and stayed there four days so that I could make a daily visit to her bedside. It was rushing things a bit with a drastic operation less than five weeks behind me and with me still weak on my pins or, to be more exact, my ankles. But I could manage it and was haunted by the idea that I might bitterly regret it if I delayed.

What the doctors think I can determine only from what Henry tells me they tell him, which leaves considerable room for error. Alice knows that her number is probably up but, particularly after she has had a good night, thinks that she may have another shot at normal existence. She would like to have one. You would find her blissfully happy at seeing you and ruefully amused at her predicament. She is very, very weak and very frail but never prettier in her life. Visitors exhaust her and I am pretty sure the doctors would not let her have any if they thought the jig was not up anyway. She is not supposed to do any talking at all but she is tempted to ask questions or tell a few jokes with what is left of her voice

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

and this starts her coughing which brings on nausea and a need of hypodermics.

I am so constituted that I cannot possibly feel sorry for anyone who, after a full, rich, creditable life, has arrived, with an adult and fearless mind, at death's door. I feel sorry only for the ones who get left behind. I feel sorry for you and Charlie Lederer and myself, for example. It is inconceivable that anyone can fill that gap in our lives. If you think there is anyone in the world who could take over and fill up your place in mine, you're a goddam fool.

Alexander W.

P.S.

Alice gets great pleasure out of letters. Tell Lederer and Brackett that. Reading seems to present no difficulty to her. I had discovered a two-volume Trollope novel which was new to her and brought it down at her request. She read both volumes during her spare moments of my short visit.

A.W.

P.P.S.

No one imaginable could do a better job than Henry is doing. His care is constant and it is guided by an infallible delicacy of understanding. I have the best reasons for knowing that all through her illness he has been a delight and a satisfaction and a wonder to her.

A.W.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

P.P.P.S.

All of the foregoing -- or something roughly like it -- I had meant to write to Lederer. Next I thought I would ask you to pass this letter on to him. Finally I hit upon the ingenious idea of sending him the carbon. As I don't know where he is living now I am sending it to MGM.

aw

The Gotham

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NEW YORK CITY
CIRCLE 7-2200

The Gotham
NEW YORK CITY
The Drake
CHICAGO
The Blackstone
CHICAGO
The Evanshire
EVANSTON
The Town House
LOS ANGELES
Bellevue Biltmore
BELLEAIR, FLA.

A. S. KIRKEBY
MANAGING DIRECTOR

December 11, 1942.

Dear Marx:

Let me begin with a matter on which I need your immediate comment. On December 27th, from 9 to 9.30 p.m. E.S.T. on a program called Radio Readers Digest which floats around in Campbell's Soup, I am going to do a star spot in my best manner which will serve its purpose if, here and there, it persuades a lonely house to open its doors and take a child in. It will be my privilege to mention the fact that a few days ago, at the apartment of Edward Sheldon in New York, I attended the christening of a great gentleman -- James Gordon MacArthur, aged four, the adopted son of Major Charles MacArthur (no kidding) and Helen Hayes. It would also be useful to the broadcast if I were free to say (as I would like to do but only if you also would like it) that one of the two most highly prized honors that have come to me in a long life is the fact that you named your adopted son after me. I would like to say of him first, how old he now is (will he be seven or eight in February?), that when you found him he was a waif left on the cold and windy doorstep of the world and that, in my judgment, he is the greatest success you have ever had and is likely to have the longest run. If for any reason whatsoever you and Susan would rather I didn't say this, tell me so, preferably by wire here to the Gotham. If it's all right, will you then tell me how old the youngster will be in February? And that's that.

Speaking of words of one syllable, I boasted to Frank Sullivan the other night that I was just back from St. Paul where I had spoken to ten-thousand women. He said, "What did you tell them? 'No'?"

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A. S. KIRKEBY
MANAGING DIRECTOR

12/4

On my way to St. Paul I spent a day at the Hotel Ambassador East in Chicago and was just settling down before a vat of coffee when the door burst open and in bounced Lt. Lederer on his way from somewhere to somewhere, full of wild excitement about the work he is doing and reminding me afresh that there is now no one left alive in the world whom I like quite so much, except you. In Boston, where I recently spent four or five days in hospital for a check-up, I saw something of Freddy Hall and we talked much of you. I was enormously popular because Irving's show was playing there in the big Opera House and seats were unobtainable. Nurses who had taken care of me when I was there last summer would stand in front of the box-office for hours and then would have to go away because their free time was up. I just took Irving by the scruff of the neck, removed a fistful of tickets from his pocket and distributed them among the deserving. Freddy, who had been trying his damndest to get tickets, got a pair in this fashion, went out of his mind and sent a large check to the Army Relief Fund. He also gave me a tiny glass jar of great antiquity -- Egyptian or Babylonian, I believe -- which he said Susan would like if I didn't. As a matter of fact I do like it but my house, having been shut up as no longer practical, I feel foolish wandering around with this fragile treasure. Would Susan like to have it?

It is a wonderful thing to be in a town -- this has happened to me three times -- where Irving's show is playing. It does something to the town. When he comes into a restaurant the whole God damned restaurant gets up on its feet as if he were Douglas MacArthur. Week before last they played to \$67,000 in Detroit. This week they are playing

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12/11

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A. S. KIRKEY
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Cincinnati and if my deep-laid plot has worked, Irving, even as I dictate these words to you, is on his way to Gus Eckstein's laboratory where he will spend several hours with the canaries and then take Gus to the show. Those two won't have to be explained to each other.

Speaking of Irving's show, you probably know that its cast is also a military detachment which must be paid, drilled and disciplined like any other. In Boston they were having a short-arm inspection and out of one fly emerged a whang of such magnificent proportions that the doctor gasped and the entire company burst into applause.

Did you ever know that wonderful guy Charlie Codman who married Alice's niece and was, like you and Lederer, one of Alice's boy-friends? He's in North Africa. So are Ted and Quentin Roosevelt. My own Freddy Jensen is en route. About Private Alan Campbell I could report many good things but I will save my breath by enclosing a copy of a letter I got from him.

Speaking of Alice, I see a good deal of Henry Miller who is sad and lonely and was never more charming. I have also had several visits from Alice's sister Eleanor. With considerable ingenuity I have thus far avoided seeing Denning but several times I have felt his hot breath on my neck.

About my well known health it will be sufficient if I report that I now sadly recognize that I can no longer do the work of ten men and have agreed to do the work of only five. Some of this is important and all of it is violently interesting and I may be able to give you details at a later date. On Wednesday next I am going back to the White House but only for forty-eight hours. Between now and the first of the year a letter would find me here at the Gotham.

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A. S. KIRKBY
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Tell Miss Linden to note in her records that henceforth my most dependable forwarding address will be 18 East 48th Street and that anyone (you, for instance) wanting to know my whereabouts in a hurry, could always find out by asking Miss Strassman at the Viking Press, also at 18 East 48th Street. Telephone: Plaza 5-4330. In return, I would like to know for my records whether there is any prospect that either you or Groucho or both of you will be in New York between, let us say, January 15th and June 15th. I need to know in connection with an all-star radio series with which, for my sins and under pressure from Washington, I may be connected.

In Katharine Cornell's production of "The Three Sisters" which opened ten days ago in Washington and will be playing in Philadelphia next week before coming to New York, I hear that Ruth Gordon is having one of her few great triumphs which I can well believe from the rehearsal I saw here in New York. You probably know that while in Washington she was married to Garson Kanin, so that she is still Mrs. G.K., as ever was. Since she was minded to marry a man sixteen years younger than herself it is just as well that he looks older. For this venture both of them sought and received my blessing. I think he is a wonderful guy. You might call that a snap judgment but when have I ever made another kind? I think I knew all about you that I now know after the first act of "I'll Say She Is".

I could go on like this indefinitely but you are probably already exhausted.

Alfred W.