12-15-1917

Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1917-12-15, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

May-ling Soong Chiang

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Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1917-12-15, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

Transcription
491 Avenue Joffre
Shanghai, China
15 December 1917

[headnote]
Please pass this around!
This is a personal letter to each: so all answer
P.D.Q.

My dearest Kidlets:

Yum, yum, how I wish all of you were here for me to tell you how inexpressibly pleased I am with the Kodak book you sent me. I really feel that you are not far off, and that Wellesley is just next door. I need not tell you how the book brings back all the memories of the last four years, - and of you all. Dad last night told me this: "Daughter, I am thankful that you have such good friends, and I am sure that if you had gotten nothing except good friends during your college days, they are worth the four years." He was so pleased to get a "live view" as he expressed it, - of my friends. He said for me to write you all that nothing would please him more than have the whole bunch come for a "Summer End" party. I thought to myself [page break] that in all probability, we could have a pretty good time here. I know you would love to ride in the rickshaws except that perhaps Betty would feel as safe in one as she did when I steered her and the sled into a tree at the back of the Wood Hill.

I have written to each of you since I came home, and you have an idea of

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what I am doing here. In the mornings, I study Chinese with a tutor who has been teaching some member or another of our family for the past fifteen years. He taught me when I was eight years old, and if I remember correctly, he administered the stick on my palm once when he found out that I had been eating candy all the time pretending that it was the "foreign devils" cough drops. Now however he is so polite to me that I could write a whole Arthurian Romance a la Malary and Miss Scudder on the gallant phraseologies he showers on me when he politely invites me to hold my quill pen "comme il faut." You know, the conventional and polite form of Chinese conversation is nothing if not digressive and flowery. You kids use to scream at the way I handed out bouquets to Mrs. Miller - but mibi credite, beside the Chinese here at home, I sound like one of Dickey's 79cts bargain hats minus Dickey's air of wearing it a la Rue de la Paix. (For heaven's sake, don't let any of you let this out to Dickey) As I write this her picture on my desk seems to have suddenly assumed a censoring air.

Well, after my Chinese lesson (and since beginning to tell you this, you see I have digressed properly according to Chinese method of politeness), I practice on the piano. I bang, and trill, hammer and tickle the keys in the proper fashion. Then twice a week, I go for my music lesson. Yea, "go for" is the proper expression, because I usually am kept waiting in the cold, cruel outside until my teacher's "boy" (i.e. not son, but the [garcon]) sees fit to shuffle me in with a blushing "Mawning, Missie." Then I give a dive up the stairs lest the garcon should fall asleep while in my presence, and go into the Studio. Here a finely formed, i.e. buxom formed a la Dickens' Peggotty, snugly fitted, quadrupled chin lady greets me and says (this is absolutely inevitable) "And now ze seales, - ok, you haf got them right? no?."

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After an hour during which I am made
to feel the utter uselessness and stupidity of
my ten digits while hers (stubby as they are)
fly and twinkle like
"Twinkle, twinkle little star,"
I am once more ushered out to the front door,
where if the garcon has had his usual quota
of some vile strong-smelling stuff, he offers to
open the door for me. Should he however be in
a "purple" humor, minus the cheerful red
glow, I wrestle and struggle with the burglar's lock-proof catch until I am ready to buy
a burglar's jimmy myself.

When I get home, it is about luncheon time,
and usually, I find some petticoats (I mean skirts) for women here wear long trousers under
their skirts, to tiffin. Usually the company
is either my uncle's wife's second cousins
or my Mother's uncle's grand-daughter, -
or some equally complicated and distant relatives. We exchange the polite
disagreeableness of the day: i.e. talking
about weather and health, and of course
I answer the usual number of inquiries
regarding the ways and manners of the "foreign devils" among whom I have been
residing the last ten years. I wonder
if that is the reason why I feel so "devil-ish" since I came home! Is it, Ted?

After luncheon, I usually practice a couple
of hours more. And then I teach my little brother
for an hour. Really, I have learnt more about
Geography and Afghanistan and Burma
teaching him than taking History 15 in spite [page break]
of all the cramming I did during the
Finals. After teaching him, there is usually
some kind of Committee meeting to go to -
either for censoring pictures or see about
subscriptions for the famine sufferers or even
Red-Cross. Yes, the bandage rolling
craze has even reach Ah - Shanghai
the Mecca of China - according to
Higgins. The afternoon usually rounds
up with a tea somewhere or tea
at home.
And if we don't go out somewhere to
dine with friends, and if one of the cooks
is not ill, or has to go home to see how
his wife's newest baby is getting along, we
stay at home and dine. Sometimes
my brother brings home somebody to dinner
or some friend or aunties drops in. After
dinner, we usually go for a spin
in the car and carriage, or else take [page break]
a walk, or go to the theatre. The
"theater" in Shanghai means either the
"Movies" which has the dignified name
of "Cinema Performance" or else some
show by a travelling company. Or
it may mean the Chinese theatre.
If that is what it means you will
hear first
"Bang, Bang, Thum, Tum, Rang!"
And then some arpeggio trilling
and finally some more brassy in-
struments while the actors implore
each other with "tooth and nail"
cries in their voices. Then
some more bang bang! If you
can, remember the sort of noises
we made when Reno made her
"temperance speech" last fall. Well,
the music in the Chinese theatres [page break]
is of close kindred to the beatings of
the chafing dish tops.

You must, however, take a grain
of salt in reading what I have written
here, for the family says that I am not
at all musical, having absorbed the
Western ideas regarding that matter.

Now this letter, I know, Best Beloveds,
is as crazy as the March hare in "Alice
in Wonderland." In other words, I have
not yet assimilated to the things Eastern
and Oriental. When I have, you
will once more hear from "The
Mecca of China."

Goodby, and do not forget me,
and remember that I love you
all - even to “Ting Ting Bubble.”

Mayling.

Hope you have all received the souvenirs I sent you.
My dear Kodell:

Yum, yum, how躯际 are all of you.

I sure know for me to tell you hard to enjoy.

I am into the Kodak book you pleased. I am into the Kodak book you sent me. I really feel that you are not far off, and that it is just near door. I need not tell you how the book brings back all the memories of the last four years, — and of you all. Dad last night told me this: "daughter, I am thankful that you have such good friends, and I am sure that if you had gotten nothing except good friends during your college days, they are worth the four years." He was so pleased to get a "live view" as he expressed it, — of my friends. He said for me to write you all that nothing would please him more than have the whole bunch come for a "summer end" party. I thought to myself
that in all probability, we could have a pretty good time here. I know you would love to ride in the rickshaw except that perhaps Betty would feel as safe in one as she did when I steered her and the sled into a tree at the back of the wood hill.

I have written to each of your sister's home, and you have an idea of what I am doing here. In the mornings, I study Chinese with a tutor who has been teaching some member of another of our family for the past fifteen years. He taught me when I was eight years old, and I remember correctly, he administered the stick on my palm once when he found out that I had been eating candy all the time pretending that it was the "foreign devil" cough drop. How however he is as polite to me that I could write a whole Arithmetic Romance à la Molang and Miss Skudder on the gallant
Phrasesology he showers on me when he politely invites me to hold my quill pen "comme il faut." You know, the conventional and jocular form of Chinese conversation is nothing if not digressive and flowery. You kids are to scream at the way I handed out forfeits to Mrs. Miller—but microbiology beside the Chinese here at home. I sound like one of Dickey's 79 cts bargain lotto numbers Dickey's air of measuring it à la rue de la Paix. (For heaven's sake, don't let any of you let this out to Dickey) As I write this here picture on my desk seems to have suddenly assumed a censoring air.

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am kept waiting in the cold, cruel outside until my teacher's "boy" (i.e. not son, but the gargon) sees fit to shuffle me in with a blinking "Mauntry, Missie." Then I give a dink up the stairs lest the gargon should fall asleep while in my presence, and go into the studio. Here a finely formed, i.e. buxom, formed in la Dickens' Peggoty, snuggly fitted, quadrapled chin lady greets me and says (this is absolutely inevitably)

"And how ye scales, — oh, you boy got them right? No?"

after an hour during which I am made to feel the utter uselessness and stupidity of my ten digits while hers (sturdily as they are) fly and twinkle like

"Twinkle, twinkle little star!

I am once more ushered out to the front door, where if the gargon has had his usual quota of some vile strong-smelling stuff, he offers to open the door for me. Should he however be in a "purple" humor, minus the cheerful red glow, I wrestle and struggle with the bulge's
lock-proof catch until I am ready to buy
a bungalow for my own use.
When I get home, it is about luncheon time,
and usually, I find some pretzivati (I mean
skirts.) Women here wear long trousers under
their skirts, to tighten. Usually the company
is better, my uncle's wife, second cousin,
or my mother, uncle's grand-daughter,
or some equally complicated and distant
relatives. We exchange the polite
disagreeableness of the day, i.e. talking
about weather and health, and of course
I answer the usual number of inquiries
regarding the ways and manners of the
"foreign devils" among whom I have been
residing the last ten years. I wonder
if that is the reason why I feel so "civil-
ized" since I came home!! Do it, Ted?

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of hours more. And then I teach my little brother
for an hour. Really, I have learnt more about
Geography, Geography, and Afghanistan and Burma,
teaching him than taking History 15 in spite
Of all the crowdfunding I did during the finals. After leaving him, there is usually some kind of Committee meeting to go to—either for censoring pictures or see about subscriptions for the famine sufferers or even Red Cross. Yes, the bandage rolling craze has even reached Shanghai—the heart of China—according to Higgins. The afternoon usually winds up with a tea somewhere or tea at home.

And if we don't go out somewhere to dine with friends, and if one of the cooks is not ill, or has to go home to see how his wife's newest baby is getting along, we stay at home and dine. Sometimes my brother brings home somebody to dinner or some friend of another drops in. After dinner, we usually go for a spin in the car and carriage, or else take
a walk, or go to the theatre. The
"theatre" in Shanghai means either the
"movies" which has the degenerate name
of "cinema performance" or else some
shows by a traveling company. Or
it may mean the smallest theatre.
If that is what it means you will
hear first
"Bang! Bang, Tinnn, Tann, Bang!!"
And then some exaggerated yelling
and finally some more brassy instru-
ments while the actors implore
each other with "tooth and nail"
cries in their officer voices. Then
some more "hing hongs"! If you
can, remember the sort of noises
we made when those made her
"temperance speech" last fall. Well,
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is of close kindness to the heating of the chafing dish topper. You must, however, take a grain of salt in reading what I have written, as I am not at all musical, having absorbed the western ideas regarding that matter.

Now this letter, I know, Bert Beloveds, is as crazy as the March hare in "Alice in Wonderland." In other words, Shave, you and Oriental. When Shave, you will once more hear from "The Heero of China."

Goodbye, and do not forget me, and remember that I love you all—even to "Jing Jing Bubble."

Hope you have all received the souvenirs I sent you...

May Besy.