9-9-1919

Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1919-09-09, Shanghai, China, to Emma Mills

May-ling Soong Chiang

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Dearest Dada,

If thoughts were letters during the past few weeks your postman might have reasons to complain of his load to be deposited at your door every morning, but as facts are facts, I have neglected writing to you these past few weeks. I know you are wondering what the cause or causes might be, eh? Well, a little of everything, being busy, being the chief one. I know you want to hear what I have been doing, so here goes.

First of all Tsliang my younger brother sailed for America, with of course the usual hustle bustle common to such occurrences. Then a lot of students returned from America, most of them being our friends, my brother and I entertained and were entertained incessantly. During that time, the returned students had a conference lasting for three days on the order of those summer conferences we had while in America. Among the returned students was Ling Sing. As her home is in Tientsin and as she was anxious to get home, she spent only a few days in Shanghai, and spent only one night with me. But what a good time we had! I gave a dinner for her that night. Afterwards at about midnight all the guests went for a midnight ride. We reached home about two in the morning and talked until three, then had to get up at six the next morning for her to catch her train. It did seem good to see her after all this time.

Well, after things subsided a bit, Mrs. Kung, my oldest sister gave birth to a little girl. They have named her Jeanette May, the May after me, and Jeanette after one of my brothers. As the baby was some two weeks overdue, we were very anxious for a while, but now both Mother and baby are doing well. The baby is a perfect beauty, with wonderful eyes and mouth. The two other children Pauline and David are staying here with me, and it certainly is a job looking after them. They are hungry from morning till night in spite of the amount of food they eat. As sister gave strict orders not to give them rich food, I think that is the reason why they feel the need and insistent craving for candies etc. all the time. Lately I have been giving them one piece of candy each day.
and that seems to allay some of their perpetual demand for food between meals. The children are still here and will be for the next three weeks. I am very glad to have them as Joie has passed the St. John's examination and is now in school, and can come home only once a month. Just after Sister's baby came, I had to get Joie off to school. As I had not prepared for him thinking that he would never pass the exams, I had to hustle around the few days between the notice that he had passed and the opening of school. Mother of course was with sister and so could not do much. I just received a letter from Joie. It is rather funny but pathetic as this is the first time he has been away from home. He spoke of being lonesome and "inpplesent", poor little chap.

Now things are a little more settled except that some old friends of mine from America[,] seeing that I have not become engaged as they all though I was, have taken on a most irritating and aggravating turn of falling in love and bothering [page break] me, and just at a time I thought I was all thru with all that sort of tommyrot and can settle down to being good friends with everyone. You do not know how this sort of things aggravates me, as I do enjoy having friends and have people drop in the house for a good time. But knowing that they come for a particular purpose sort of spoils things. I have not decided how to deal with this matter, for while nothing has been said, I know the symptoms fairly well, and right now, I am sure of three of them ready to pop the question. They are all nice fellows but with nothing special to recommend them out of the ordinary, I mean in ability except one who really has a wonderful mind, and will be somebody five years from now, but as I am not in love with him, what is the use?

A rather funny incident might perhaps amuse you. One of the Chinese students whose father is a multimillionaire asked permission from his parents to become engaged to a girl whose family lives in Honolulu but who was studying abroad. As this girl has no family to speak of, socially speaking and absolutely without any dowry, his father refused. Therefore this couple came to China, the girl being older than the man. The Man's family refused to have the girl, but luckily the girl had a sister who had married and was living in Nanking. The Man's family is as conservative as they are rich and not being christians, they believe in all the old superstitions. For instance altho they are worth millions, they live in a very crowded part of the city and have a huge house consisting of over a hundred rooms all beautifully carved, but to enter which one has to go thru a narrow and dark alley way, just because the mother believes that that particular part of the city and that house brings them good luck. And this woman also never goes out of the house without first consulting her family fortune teller to ask

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whether the date is propitious or not. The man’s family finally asked for the date of the girl’s birthday, and asked to what family of animals she belongs to. Now everyone in China is born under an animal family, something like the western idea of belonging to a certain constellation. The girl’s brother-in-law therefore found out from the prospective groom what was his birthday, the year, the animal kingdom, etc. and then consulted a professional fortune teller, asking him to work out a birthday for the girl which in every respect would be favorable when put alongside of the man’s birthday. For a few dollars the fortune teller worked out a fictitious birthday for the girl, making her some years younger than the man and changing the month and day. Then the brother-in-law went to the man’s family and told the family what the fictitious birthday was, and so when the mother-in-law consulted her own fortune teller, she found to her surprise that from every point this match could not be better. She therefore relented, and so the couple are to be married this Sunday, and as the groom has not finished his studies they are to sail for America in October for him to continue his studies. This wedding will be very large, over four thousand people are invited. I think I shall go as I am quite well acquainted with both the man and girl. Please do not repeat this as people will know immediately who this couple is as they are returning to America so soon. It is lucky the girl is going to sail with her husband for his family is so old-fashioned that they would make her live with them, and with all the secondary wives, sister-in-laws etc. it would certainly be hard to get along.

With love,

Daughter
30 Seymour Road,  
Shanghai,  
9 September, 1919.

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With love, Daughter