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Los Angeles.

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Darling Mummy,

It was very delightful to get your extra letter at Christmas time and on top of that your cable to us. It brought us all so close together at a time when our respective festivities might have seemed exceedingly remote. The spirit of Christmas here is totally different from the European spirit, as the more reflective Americans fully realize. The religious aspect of the day is barely touched upon, and that only perfunctorily - with the result that it retains a domestic significance only, drawing families around a common board but failing to turn their minds to wider or deeper issues. There is a great stress on parties, gifts, decorations and above all food; much jollity and good cheer; but little that distinguishes Christmas from all other holidays and lifts it above them all.

The Pinkhams, as I told you, invited us to an enormous meal at about 3 on Sunday afternoon, and as we drove through Beverly Hills we could see huge fir trees sprayed with blue and snow-coloured paint and decked with innumerable lights. In truth the Spirit of Electricity was better celebrated than the Spirit of Christmas. But the Pinkhams' party was delightfully simple, both parents, the two sons, the two daughters and the one son-in-law all being there. It is traditional on that day to drink egg-nogg, which is almost exactly the same as zambaglioni, and so we went on to another party with Ann Pinkham at the house of the chief counsel to the Standard Oil Co. This person, whose story Mrs P had told us, started life as a Western Union messenger boy and lifted himself by his bootstraps (as the saying is here) in the best pioneering manner. As he ladled out the egg-nogg, bellowing greetings across the room, with his hair and

collar rumpled and his cuffs projecting entirely beyond his sleeves, the telegraph boy was much more obvious than the man of affairs. The son of the house (considered something of a failure by his parents) does wood-carving of really remarkable excellence. But though much of his work decorated the rooms, no one was looking at it or even seemed to know whether its author were present. The showy assemblage consisted almost entirely of highly successful business men and their wives and daughters; and though some of them, like Mr Pinkham, showed real refinement and humanity in their faces, the majority were avaricious and cruel to a degree I have seldom seen paralleled.

As at home, we heaped our presents on the floor on Christmas Day and undid them together. Dinah gave me a copy of Science For The Citizen and a circular slide rule I wanted; I gave her the Phaidon Press new edition of the works of El Greco and a promise of some stockings as soon as she could choose them. We went to bed early because of the run we were taking next day - and indeed I got up at 5.15 to drive to a long-distance bus the niece of our manager who has one leg shorter than the other and so cannot walk far. This girl is a Canadian at present at UCLA who was so kind as to take us to the local television studio where a friend of hers puts on a programme every week. More about this if I have time later.

We started the run itself at 8.30, and it all went off according to plan. We covered 300 miles in the day, the car behaving excellently, and were only pleasantly tired at the end. The first 60 miles of the trip lay along the south side of the San Bernardino Mts. in which Mt. Wilson lies, and indeed we could see its gleaming buildings from far below. The day was deliciously warm (it shot up to 92 not long before Christmas!) but the mountains were covered with snow above about 6,000ft. Rising above groves of oranges where fruit was piled on the ground, the glittering peaks were wonderfully beautiful. Dinah had actually never before seen snow on mountains, and it was lovely to watch her excitement and enjoyment.

After going through San Bernardino the road rises slowly over the low and dreary San Gorgonio Pass, where the desert first begins to appear. This is the

main transcontinental highway which, though in parts excellent, is elsewhere narrow and indifferently surfaced. Criticism, however, should be tempered by the recollection that hundreds of miles in England correspond almost to thousands of miles in America. At the top of this low pass we turned to the right for Palm Springs and entered the desert proper. As I described this to you after I had been to Phoenix in April I need say no more here in general. Palm Springs is at present the wealthiest and most exclusive winter resort from Los Angeles. It is a small town at the foot of the San Jacinto Mts. (which lie across from those of San Bernardino) but contains shops and houses of the most exquisite elegance. The place is held almost in reverence by most of the people we know, and we had been recommended to several places for lunch. But for more than one reason we didn't stop at all, driving on instead to Andreas and Palm Canyons which lie in Indian Reservations and are artificially watered, so that the desert blossoms in extraordinary abundance.

Passing thence, we once more skirted the mountains until we arrived at the foot of the Palms-to-Pines Highway. This is certainly comparable in beauty to the loveliest road I have ever driven along - the coast road along the Gulf of Salerno. But while that rises and falls with infinite variety of scene, this road climbs swiftly, circling back upon itself with marvellously even gradation, steep banking and curves of steady radius. In this way the panorama of the desert enlarges much as if you were going up in a lift or an autogyro. The jagged mountains, blue and purple according to their distance, strike up everywhere from the unending desolation of the desert. As its vegetation recedes, the dust (which is not really sand) becomes increasingly opalescent and forms a silvery carpet to all this glorious scene, matched from above by the snow-bound summits. As the car swerves and rushes up the long ascent, you feel something of the gyrations of a dream aeroplane above the mountains of the moon.

In the twenty miles of its length, the vegetation about this highway goes through remarkable changes, and long before Idyllwild the only trees were snow-laden pines. We were afraid that the place would prove merely a Palm Springs in the mountains, and were enchanted to find it most unpretentious, lacking even

a hotel but making up for that deficiency by providing log cabins which you could hire for the night. After a belated meal we went for a walk in the snow which was deep and fresh. The sun was brilliantly shining and the air like wine. We were much amused to see one entire family standing on the sloping roof of their house to give it a coat of shingles. The mother was on the very edge directing operations while the hired man worked alongside the others. Returning to the car we set out on the long descent. The sun was now sinking, and as we reached the valley (which is fertile on this side and not desert) the mountains on every hand were lit with colors of breathless magnificence. Several times we stopped the car to gaze and gaze upon all these wonders which shone so impartially everywhere that they seemed to have little connection with the sunset.

Finally all the light was gone, and with Dinah helping me to thread my way through the racing maze of traffic when we rejoined the main highway, the last fifty miles went quickly past. It was the first long run we had done together in this country, but there are many more which we have already planned and will tell you about when we come to undertake them.

The bonus arrived all right just before Christmas, and added to your splendid present enabled us to have a real spread that day. (And still most of it went into the bank!) We had heaps of Christmas cards both from friends at home and people here, and our main difficulty has been avoiding invitations when we wanted to spend the evening quietly at home. New Year's Eve is the great time for intoxication in this country, so to get away from the general carousal we went over to Charlie Greene's with one or two other people and played gramophone records and talked. But we couldn't resist going into Hollywood for midnight itself, and were appalled by the mannerless din of motor horns and the drunken crowds which seethed in the streets. Then we went back to Charlie's and stayed till about 3. to-day we went for a walk in one of the remoter canyons in the Santa Monica Mts.

It is good news to hear of your steady recovery. I'm sure that the more you do, the more you'll be able to do, and I hope that your plans for Capri are going