

Sunday afternoon.

1941

Dear Sumner,

Laugh as you will and laugh as you must but then shed a tear of thankfulness that your Daddy had not been turned into a pillar of ice and heave a sobbing sigh of relief that he is able to type this missive with flexing fingers. The tale I am about to relate may sound as if it came, in part, from a Marx Bros. scenario and, in part, from an Arch Oboler, eery fantasy but the truth of the matter is that it came from neither. It comes from last night's experience.

Shortly after midnight I was riding home with Buddy Cohen along Brighton Avenue and as we neared Bolton Street we saw an automobile astride the Avenue and blocking traffic at the entrance to our street. Atop that car was a blue light, indicating that the police were in charge of the traffic. So we backed out, turned around, crossed over to Mass. Ave., up Elizabeth Road, then onto Bolton, where we observed a number of fire vehicles and a swarm of fire fighters. A quick glance assured me that everything was in order at 184. Exhilarated by the sight of the fire ladder trucks and engines (what normal being does not react palpitatingly to such a throbbing sight?), I stepped out to investigate and to discover that the Finkelman house across was internally afire. Less exhilaration and more caution would have prevented the first discomfiture. In my nosy eagerness to look into the situation personally, I failed to watch my step and the next thing I knew I had stepped into a puddle of icy water upto my ankles. The bubble of investigative excitement burst and I beat a hasty retreat to home and warmth. But there was no warmth. The house was cold.

I looked at the thermostat, fingered the regulating knob, and got no reaction. I went down to the cellar and saw the burner was out of order. The first thing, however, for me to do was to take off the wet shoes, socks, and pants and get into warm clothes. I put on heavy wool socks, pajamas over the underwear, a bathrobe, and over all a blanket draped over my head and body in Indian fashion. Oh yes, and the bedroom slippers. Keep those slippers in mind. Then I telephoned for the emergency repair man, only to be told that it would be some time before he would be available. I sat down near a window in Helen's room to a period of watchful waiting, with Duffy on my lap, watching the firemen and waiting for the repairman. At long last the expert(?) arrived and I watched him at his work. After a few minutes of tinkering, he wanted to check the oil supply; so I took him outside and showed him where the tank pipe projected out on the ground. That was Duffy's golden opportunity. He darted out before I could put the leash on him and the next thing I instinctly found myself doing was chasing him along Bolton Street in my slippers, red-striped pajamas, and blanket held tight about me with both hands. Paramount would have paid a fabulous price for a running movie of that sight; but I was too distraught to think of commercial ventures. Duffy was too fast for me and I had to abandon the chase. Freezing, I returned to the house to watch the workman.

By this time it was two o'clock in the morning. The expert was doing a magnificent job in proving his incompetence. From time to time, I went out to look and yell for Duffy, but to no avail. I shouted to the firemen and asked for information as to his whereabouts. You see I was desperate and was not at all averse to calling out not only the entire fire department but the police as well. I was freezing externally



and boiling internally. I left the back door open in the hope that the son of a bitch would voluntarily return. There was no concern about getting the house cold by leaving the door open. The house couldn't be any colder and, for the purpose of the record, it should be stated that the outside temperature was not at all balmy and spring-like. Well back to the cellar I went to watch the expert experiment at my cost and expense. Suddenly the front door bell rang and I tore up-stairs to find out who in hell was paying a visit at this unearthly hour. I opened the door and there in front of me was a sight to warm the cockles of a freezing heart. It was a begrimed and sooty fireman with the pooch in his arms. No person could at that hour look more attractive to me than that besmeared fire fighter. I thanked him profusely. The pup looked up at me with that sad look of an old man and I did not have the heart to strike him. I did, however, shove him into Doris' room so that he would be out of the way. I forgot to mention that the attendant excitement had awakened the lady and I had had several conversations with her from time to time seeking information about certain queries which the expert had put to me and which in my helpless ignorance I could not answer. But let it be said for her amazing equanimity that she did not stir out of her room. Wish I had her sang-froid.

(An interlude of 30 minutes to allow me and Duffy to taxi to the station to meet Helen)

It was three by the village clock and the expert was still fumbling. So I sent him on his way with instructions to send some one in the morning, meaning 8 o'clock. Then to bed, after taking a cold-preventive pill, dressed as I was, blanket and all, save for the slippers. At 7:30 I awoke and called for a good workman. An hour passed without the appearance of anyone. I phoned the manager and within 15 minutes there came a man who knew his work and in a half-hour he had done his job. I went back to bed and slept till noon. A warm bath, a warm meal, a good cigar and the chill has left me, I hope. There was a time when I conjured up pneumonia and sulphonylamide.

Here endeth the saga of a certain Saturday night and early Sunday morn. Laugh, boy, laugh but, if you have any regard for your Daddy, with a tear.

Many, many thanks for the dictionary which we certainly needed. It was very thoughtful of both Helen and yourself. Your Purim letter was a gem of filial devotion, beautifully expressed. Honestly, your phrasing is unusually fine and felicitous. With us you rank an A.

By the way, did you receive Uncle Louis' letter and birthday check? Have you written to him?

Please call Mother and inform her of the news herein contained, since it is impossible for me to type another such letter; and when you talk to her give her the love which I bear her so deeply and so constantly. I literally worship her. And how I glory in her accomplishments!

I am just beginning to thaw out.

Affectionately,

Daddy