

Please Return!

1957 (R.M. Jan. 11, 1957)

Val Morin, Dec. 30 1947.

Dear John, the Christmas rush is over at last and I can write you an account of it. First I must thank you and Mairsile with all my heart for the gorgeous parcel of wool you sent me. It came at the right time to and warmed my heart as well as providing future warmth for others! Our Christmas really began with the Wednesday luncheon for Father Littledale. He is now stationed at St. Anthony's parish, not far from ours, and rather overworked, though he gets no pay, only his keep. Pat and I went to hear his sermon on the Sunday before Christmas and it was beautiful. He speaks with utter simplicity and complete conviction. His topic was hope, a most neglected virtue, he said, and especially necessary in our modern world where despair is the keynote of so many lives. He stressed the fact that our hope must spring from a realisation of God's immense mercy, not from any illusion of personal goodness.

We, Phonsine, Pat and I had been worrying about his finances, so we got together and managed to give him a check for fifty dollars, not bad. Even Brigid contributed a dollar, and Mrs. Edwards gave ten! (Did I tell you that she is under instruction?) Pat had made a cake in the form of a Christmas tree, with little birthday candles on it, and icing-snow. We had it lit when we came in to our luncheon. I'd made it a complete Christmas dinner, turkey, plum pudding (burning, with holly in it) etc. We sang carols too, after dinner. I'd had the big tree ready the day before and we lit the candles and sang carols (Father Littledale admired Brigid's voice which has improved since she married and has a deeper note).

Father Littledale was deeply moved at our gift. I'd also knitted him some skisocks and Peggy had bought him a cigarette set, with lighter and holder as well as cigarettes, and I think that was what touched him most. Peggy was beaming. Father Littledale is her favorite of all the priests that come to our house. I had expected Father Vinny for that lunch, but he did not turn up till the day later... which was just as well, as it turned out, but I'll tell you about that further on.

First I want to tell you about Mrs. Edwards and how I almost spoiled everything for her with my stupidity. I think I told you about her bringing Dr. Edwards to our last luncheon? I don't know whether you gathered that I was a bit put out by it... I'd counted on a luncheon with just the women in order to discuss Father Littledale's party and, not being entirely free myself of racial prejudice, having Dr. Edwards is always a strain. I know it shouldn't be, but there it is. The trouble with trying to do good is that you find such a lot of pleasure in it that it is hard not to forget the good you intended by getting interested in the pleasure. The fact that Mrs. Edwards dared bring her husband in that fashion was a wonderful gift, if I'd had the grace to see it; and I did feel it dimly, but my main emotion was disappointment. Of course I tried not to show it, and Phonsine and Pat were wonderful, they carried the day and made Dr. Edwards very happy. But if I had not been so blind I'd have realised that I should telephone to Diane afterwards to tell her how much we had enjoyed her husband. I omitted this, and later, when I phoned her about Father Littledale's present, she asked me eagerly how I'd enjoyed her husband, and whether I understood her bringing him. I said yes, I had understood, "He must have been so bored..." I began, meaning to say "After his accident, staying home all the time, he needed a lift..." but unfortunately Diane cut me short, thinking I meant that I thought he'd been bored at the party, and jumping at the conclusion that I hadn't liked him. And of course it is very hard to get a thing like that straightened out over the phone. The

she asked me could she bring her niece, the matron of a southamerican hospital, to the next luncheon. I'm afraid I thought aloud then, and said: "Goodness, I hope there is room... Johnny will be home, and I'm expecting Father Vinny..." but of course I corrected myself and said "Do bring her, by all means, it will work out somehow." But the harm was done. On the morning of the luncheon Diane phoned me with her old, reserved voice and said she didn't think she and her husband's niece could make it, the niece had an appointment at a hospital etc. I realised what I had done then and I managed to convey to her how much I wanted her and her niece; so they came. The niece was a little negress with grey hair and a sweet, motherly face. She enjoyed the luncheon a lot, I'd put her beside Father Littledale, and at the end of it I noticed her eyes, beautiful luminous grey eyes. I'm sorry I did not speak to her more, I'm sure she is a wonderful woman. This time I phoned Diane right away to tell her how much we liked the niece, and I think everything is alright again now, but it shows you how unselfish you have to be if you want to help people! Souls are the most sensitive things in the whole wide world.

Johnny was at that luncheon, and I was proud of him. He was modest, polite and joined only in the conversation when he had something intelligent to say. It is really a great joy when our children emerge from their crudities! Father Vinny arrived the next day. I don't know whether I told you about him. He was one of my few friends at my worst time ~~before and after~~ after the loss of my seventh baby. The children were all roaring around me then, Olga was thirteen when he came into our lives and Lizzie three. For two years he was a constant visitor at our house. He had just been ordained and was working for his degree at the seminary in Montreal. He was very young then, twenty two, and very lonely. I think he fell in love with the whole family. He wanted me to adopt him as a son. I said I would, but at the time I thought it was just a joke. He made us promise to say a hail mary for him every day. He promised to pray for us at his mass every day. At the time I felt he was a little sentimental, too much so for a priest, I worried about it. I used to tell him that he had a "sticky heart" and to try and get over it. To my amusement he has retained that expression, thinking it is current in English, and speaks of a sticky heart when he means an affectionate person. He left in '50, a year before we went to Ireland, and I've prayed for him ever since. As it happens, when you pray for people, the relationship deepens. (this is unfailingly true. I've noticed it recently with lady Flemming, the lady I met at Margot's two years ago. I've never seen her since, but I've prayed for her every day, and to my astonishment she sent me a most affectionate christmas card!)

Father Vinny must have made an ideal family of us during those years. Unluckily, when he arrived at the Montreal airport he phoned the house and got Johnny. I was out shopping. If he'd got Peggie it would have been alright, but Johnny woke out of his sleep (he slept all day these first days, he was so overworked) and was very cool. So father Vinny didn't come straight to us but went to the seminary. Only when he got me on the phone and found that he was expected and welcome, did he arrive.

It was a funny thing, he'd never kissed me, but when he saw me he flung his arms around me and almost cracked my ribs. Peggy died laughing at him. Then he went and touched the walls and furniture and cried joyously "It is real, it is real!"

He hadn't changed at all in those ten years, and it was funny to see all his old little mannerisms which I'd forgotten. But he is now the respected head of a school of five hundred boys and it has given him a certain sense of importance which he used not to have. Apparently it struck him as strange that I said "Don't be silly" to him several times, and I think he has packed the nor-

*Malin's influence of family*  
of a time ~~getting him out of bed.~~ at our church in the mornings, and we had the dickens getting communion all by myself with part of a big Host, it was like having a son a priest. It WAS having a son a priest. *Life He started five days ago*

It was all fine to start with. He told us what had happened to him and we told what had happened to us. But I think he preferred telling what happened to him. He also still bristled with theories and liked to expound them and I couldn't help seeing that they were exactly the same theories he'd had ten years ago.

I think thirtytwo is not the best age. You have lost the first flush enthusiasm and have not yet the softness of understanding.

I wanted to give him a good time and have him meet my friends. So I phoned Father Littledale if he could come to luncheon on Saturday. Father Littledale said he could. He was speaking at D'Arcy Mc. Gee high school in the morning, at the last of a series of lectures on imagination in religion. I said "Oh, I wish I could hear you!" I mentioned how pleased Father Vinny would be if he could attend such a lecture and Father Littledale said he thought he could sneak us in. It started at nine thirty. I invited Phonsine and Pat for the lunch.

*he* Meanwhile I had observed already certain things about Father Vinny. *he* had to say mass at our church in the mornings and we had the dickens of a time getting him out of bed. I enjoyed going to mass with him and getting communion all by myself with part of a big Host, it was like having a son a priest. It WAS having a son a priest.

The lecture turned out to be a discussion panel, with priests and nuns and lay people sitting round a table. We were told that we could enter the discussion if we wished. It started with a lay teacher reciting some poetry by Auden and T. S. Elliot. Then a famous Dominican, called Father Talmon, opened the discussion on imaginative truth and literal truth. They seemed to find it hard to define the difference and I could not help joining in and saying that the difference was best illustrated with fairytales and factual stories for children. That nothing was more false than the portrait of life given in these factual tales, full of perfect parents and sweet children without mention of death, disease or sin. "Children have to go to the fairytales if they want to learn the truth about life, if they want to hear of birth and death, marriage, love and hate." I said. This was extremely well received, which encouraged a lot of nuns to start speaking. They'd been silent before.

Father Littledale's speech was very good, but no one took it up, which annoyed me. He spoke of the necessity to see the imaginative truth in the scriptures instead of literal truth; and the foolishness of being scandalised when some literal fact seemed to contradict a minor statement in the bible.

"The apostles were inspired to tell us the truth of the redemption and the nature of Christ, they were intent on that message and sought ways of bringing it to us. The literal truth of each minor detail did not interest them, as little as it would interest us if we were telling about the exploits of a great friend. We would not worry about the jug which he washed himself were grey or red. If we could not remember and the colour of the jug entered into the story, we'd invent it." He said too many people held to the truth, to revealed truth, as a kind of magic moola, capable of saving if just repeated. On the contrary, truth is a living thing which we must make our own and use to shape our lives. It is creative and shines in hundred different ways according to the circumstances. He gave instances of the wrong use of truth when a boy with an adolescent problem comes to the priest and merely is told this or that is wrong, is forbidden. The boy departs more crushed than before. The right thing is to enter into the boy's difficulty and find with

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him the way to bring Christ's words alive in his life." Father Salmon led the discussion away from Father Littledales there, but I noticed various schoolteachers brought it back: one said that a pupil of his had asked him "Sir, do we have to believe this," about some statement or other. "Is that what we are doing to our children?" he asked "Bringing them up to swallow capsuad truth instead of letting them think for themselves?"

I felt these questions were very important but there wasn't much response. Rather Vinny then entered the discussion in his naive english. He made an endearing little spech on the necessity of making your pupils love you if you wanted them to learn from you. This was misunderstood by the more sophisticated audience who scoffed at him and said that if all you had to teach was love you might as well close your schools. (I disagreed there, if you could teach love, schools on it should be opened everywhere) A miss Watson jumped to Father Vinny's defense very nicely. She was a jolly looking girl in her twentys with a lot of good sense in her face. I made rather a fool of myself defending him too, and trying to explain what he meant with love. It was brushed aside as irrelevant.

Later Sister Miriam of the Temple came up to me and said she had enjoyed my remark about fairytales, and remembered ~~meeting~~<sup>meeting</sup> me with Mother St. George. She is a very intelligent nun, and I heard her say afterwards to Father Littledale that I'd be a good one to have on their discussions for married women, as I'd done what they were all trying to do, bringing up children with enquiring minds and independent, creative action. I asked her how she could possibly know that and she smiled and said that one visit at our house had been enough, she had seen what was there to see. I was naturally very flattered and it came as a balm after my previous humiliation.

I was afraid that Father Vinny and I had embarrassed father Littledale, who had sponsored us, with our talk on love. At least father Vinny was a priest but who was I to talk to a lot of holy nuns and priests on their chief subject?

Miss Watson also stopped to talk to me. She had met me at the Campion Bookstore before and she talked so strongly on education, and how much her protestant school in England had taught her and done for her that Catholic schools don't seem to do, that I asked her to the lunch also. She was very astonished but accepted immediately. She was delighted to hear that father Littledale was coming too.

The lunch was a success. Lizzy was at it and behaved as well as Johnny. She made two intelligent remarks, very to the point, and kept quiet for the rest of the time. Phonsine had met miss Watson at other lectures and was delighted to meet her. So was Pat. Miss Watson turned out to be most interesting. She had entered the Sacred Heart convent but after taking her first vows she was sent home. They told her she had no vocation. Since then she has been feeling unsatisfied and looking for a vocation. She works at the Bell telephone co. She noticed the good behavior of my children and remarked on it as such a contrast to the usual American child.

After lunch Father Vinny met Pats children and Phonsines Michael. He is very good with children and immediately made fast friends with Michael. I think he felt disappointed in mine, they had grown so. He made a fuss of Lizzy, who was very glad with another brother, and he made friends with Johnny over

philosophy. Johnny arrived in a very nervous state, fidgety and biting his nails. I was happy to see that after some days sleep these symptoms vanished. He'd had a series of difficult exams. He goes along with seventeen year olds and that is not quite fair to him, for his teachers unconsciously

expect a maturity in him he could not yet have. In his reports several teachers are quite nasty and speak of his rudeness. I am sure he is tactless, but another teacher remarked in his defense, he is not intentionally rude. I have warned Johnny against hurting peoples pride, he is too apt to despise others mentalities and he takes it upon himself to correct his teachers. I've told him that is entirely out of place. I think he listened to me. He listened before, when he had got into trouble with his housemaster and was criticizing him. I said "You must row with the oars you've got or get nowhere." he saw the point and there's been no trouble since. I know he'll go back now and behave more modestly. The headmaster likes him and has defended him, saying it was unfair to say that he was content to be mediocre since he carried a heavy schedule and acquitted himself well. Johnny is already looking towards Harvard. He is writing an essay, a rather clever essay, based on his own experience last summer: a character study of an engineer he met there... very amusing. It had to be shortened and he wanted advice, which he took very intelligently and meekly. I do not think he is conceited.

Father Vinny was in on these discussions and one evening Johnny enlarged on his theory, based on Greek philosophers, of male and female virtues. He was very eloquent and described the male as outgoing, adventurous etc. "The male is a vagrant, but the female must not be. A female vagrant is immoral, like a streetwalker," orated Johnny. Father Vinny was so amused at this, he kept repeating it to everybody. From then on Johnny had a place in his heart. Randal's return was not so successful. First of all he is twice Father Vinny's size (and still growing) which is awkward. Then he is a species of clown. He cracks incessant jokes (I think it is partly because of a sense of inferiority and embarrassment at taking up so much space, and partly real humor.) Father Vinny's sense of humor is limited. When he does see a joke he laughs at it uproariously and repeats it many times, but he has a disconcerting habit of suddenly taking a light remark with deadly gravity, brooding over it and making it worse and worse. Randal had been Father Vinny's special pal in the old days. Father Vinny taught him to serve mass. He also came with an essay he has to write on Aquinas and father Vinny wanted to help him, but Randal kept making jokes and not accepting the help. In the evening we went to Brigid and Benjy. Randal made a hilarious thing of the bus journey with cracks at Spike's driving which amused even Spike. (Spike and he get on excellently despite Spikes disappointment at Randal's lack of genius.) It would go like this. Spike back up in the dark and Randal was to warn him if he was allright.

"Fine, fine," said Randal. "Go right ahead, no, that was only the neighbor's little boy, don't worry, he's a nuisance anyway, we won't miss him. Yes, go on, that ashcan was only in the way, it's better flat." etc.

Brigid and Father Vinny had a happy reunion, but Brigid is so absorbed in the coming event, and her little house, and the crib she made (beautifully, with colored paper and plasticine) and the cookies and cakes she had baked for us herself, and the lovely eggnog and apple punch, that she didn't give Father Vinny the attention he expected. Then, Randal in his hilarious mood infected Johnny, Allan and Benjy, so that it was entirely the wrong moment for Father Vinny to start on his theories about love, and an explanation of how he treats the boys in his school. Benjy and Allan went to a tough protestant boarding school in Dublin with a homosexual headmaster and they scoffed at Father Vinny's belief in the goodness of boys, which hurt Father Vinny deeply. He was heard to mutter afterwards in a brooding way "They think that if you trust a boy he won't respond."

He was still brooding about this the next morning. He was to say mass at ten at our church, and Lizzy tried to get him there in time and even went so

far as to say it was selfish to keep people waiting, which annoyed father Vinny so he went to walk on the other side of the street. We waited for him after mass until I found out that he had gone to have breakfast with the priests without telling us.

From then on relations became strained. It was obvious that Father Vinny found it hard to find the old family back in the new. In the old days I had been absorbed in the children and in my mother, who was ill. There had been little entertainment and Father Vinny was the only regular visitor. He was revered by us all and the children felt that every word he said was true. Now they're grown up and used to priests and we have many friends. I had to ask people as it was Christmastime and naturally they wanted to tell me how they liked me for the same reason. There were gifts exchanged and many people kissed me. I can see that Father Vinny must have felt one of a crowd.

He decided to take us out to lunch, at Eaton's, of all places (Montreal's largest department store). He was very proud of this idea. I had been debating whether I could squeeze out of it; it was Christmas eve and I had a million things to do, but his childish delight in having thought of this TREAT for us made it impossible.

We came at one thirty, towards the end of the lunch period. Overworked waitresses were rushing around with flushed, harried faces. We found a table and sat down, Father Vinny between the two boys, Lizzy and I facing them. There was trouble about choosing an entree as it was a fast day and Father Vinny doesn't like fish. He was annoyed that it was a fast day because it isn't a fast day at San Salvador. But he muttered virtuously that he had to stick to the rules of the place he was in. He takes his food seriously, and so does Randal. The unfortunate waitress was waiting, so Johnny grabbed the menu and started to order things. Father Vinny looked up and pointed at me, which the waitress interpreted as a rebuke, so she snatched the menu out of Johnny's hands and gave it to me, saying jocularly "That's right, ladies first." This was interpreted by Father Vinny as a rebuke of Johnny, which he resented. He sat glowering and simmering for a while, his eyes dark and smouldering. Then he addressed the waitress severely, saying:

"You must not mind him, he is only a child."

The waitress had no idea what he was talking about. She wanted him to order his lunch, but he sat speechless, looking more and more brooding, so she went to serve other customers. I tried to help Father Vinny choose something but he said he could not eat, he was too angry.

"She criticised Johnny," he said. "It was not right. She should not criticise. It is not her place."

He was paying a lot for this lunch and had sacrificed much needed time to come to do him a pleasure so I felt I must rescue the situation and I suggested a hail Mary for the waitresses' souls, hoping that would solve things. We solemnly said the hail Mary (meanwhile people at neighbouring tables were watching us curiously) but it was not enough.

"We will say another hail Mary that we may be merry again," announced Father Vinny sombrely. "This was done, and with a sigh Father Vinny applied himself to the menu. Lizzie, Johnny and I had chosen shrimp salad. Randal had ordered an egg sandwich. He'd just finished breakfast and wasn't hungry. It took Father Vinny a long time but at last he chose fried scallops with a regretful look at the nice roast beef entree. The waitress, who looked about ready for a nervous breakdown, served us butter. She skipped Randal. Father Vinny took this as a personal affront. He gave Randal his own butter and beckoned the waitress.

"Why did you not serve me?" he asked severely, indicating his empty plate. "I did serve you, sir," she defended herself hotly. "It was him I didn't"

serve," and she indicated Randal. "He ordered a sandwich and we don't serve butter with sandwiches."

"I will pay for it," said Father Vinny loftily. "Get the butter." Now there was a male chorus of vituperation of the unfortunate girl. Both my sons felt affronted and sided with father Vinny. They criticised her serving. "She takes away the plates on the wrong side." said Randal. *Father Vinny* Lizzy defended her. "I've read Emily Post, and you can take away on either side." she said. It was female against male. The waitress had got so nervous of Father Vinny that she handed him the menu for the next course at arms-length and scarcely dared address him. Father Vinny noticed something. His eyes widened. "Perhaps we hurt her feelings," he said, as if he had discovered America.

"You bet your life we did ." I told him. Father Vinny's goodnature struggled with his anger. "We must explain," he said. When the waitress came again they had it out. Father Vinny acknowledged that he had been angry and the waitress explained that she had not meant to be rude. Forgiveness lay heavy in the air. Trying to change the subject I asked after her christmas, but the waitresses feelings had to be relieved. She told us she was so tired that she was spending it in bed. She could sleep for a week. They'd taken waitress' off the beat to serve in the store. It was inhuman. She'd had more than she could bear. Lizzy and I gave her what sympathy ~~we~~ we could, faced with a wall of disapproving males, who realised that the tirade had been partly directed against them and who'se forgiveness did not yet stretch that far.

"A horrible woman" was the concensus of their opinions. Lizzy and I said she was only tired, that was all. Father Vinny aired his theories on what waitresses, ideal waitresses, should be like. The lunch ended on a subdued note. After that everyone wanted to do Christmas shopping. I said I'd meet Father Vinny and Lizzy at the book department. The boys were off on their own. Lizzy duly arrived but told me she hadn't succeeded in getting father Vinny to come. "I told him you were waiting, but he said "Don't rush me." she explained. Then she told me that she had tried to dissuade him from buying a corkscrew because she knew Spike had bought one for him, but he didn't take the hint. Then she had told him not to buy a box of chocolates for everyone, as some of us didn't like chocolates. She had advised him to buy a present for Sheila, knowing that Sheila had sent one for him, but he said he wasn't going to buy a present for someone who wasn't there. We waited for him for a while but then I really had to go home, so I told Lizzy to wait for him and went off. When I arrived home the first words that greeted me were Peggy's: "That Father Vinny is a terrible man." "What's the matter?" I asked.

"He invited ~~the~~ a friend from the seminary to lunch here and never told us." said Peggy. *He* phoned here to say he'd got permission to come and then he found you were all out. He was terribly disappointed for he does not often get leave and now he can't get any for ages and ~~the~~ it was all wasted."

I was really upset about that. Father Vinny had mentioned the man but said nothing about lunch. He was a lonely fellow from Columbia, terribly home sick. We waited in vain for Father Vinny to turn up. Finally Liz turned up. She'd WALKED home, having no bus ticket and father Vinny never came *to the book department*

Finally Father Vinny arrives with the seminarian, a very interesting man of thirtyeight, who has started to become a priest after working with juvenile delinquents and earning a living writing copy for medical journals.

I invited him up here for this weekend but he never arrived.

He was only able to stay a few minutes, ~~as~~ his leave expired.

What struck me was the way he asked for Father Vinny's blessing and kissed his hand after the way he'd been stood up.

"I said to father Vinny: "Really, you have NO sense of time."

"No," said Father Vinny complacently. "I on purpose don't carry a watch

"I don't believe in being a slave to time."

He thoroughly enjoyed an evening we spent with Pat's kids. We did a rigmarole, and I opened the story by saying that one day ~~Stuart~~ Stuart Graham got out of bed and someone bit his toe. It was father Vinny, hiding under the bed because he was afraid of the bishop. "Giggles and protests from father Vinny: "No, no I wasn't!" It was easy to go on from there and give Father Vinny the vicarious experience of the most shocking adventure which went off very well.

On the other hand, he did not take to all my friends. Mrs Lescure he did not like at all. Unfortunately I had asked the Lescures for our Christmas dinner. Or rather, Mrs Lescure had invited herself, saying that she missed her home and could she please visit us, her husband didn't like to go anywhere else. Father Vinny said she gave him a stomach ache because she was always complaining. We had the Beausangs one evening (I've sent you some snaps Randal took of that evening. He is press photographer now and sells his pictures to other papers) and played charades.

On Christmas eve Father Vinny went to the seminary to say his three masses while we went to our own church for midnight mass. The next morning, father Colford, of our church, woke me at eight to ask if Father Vinny could say the ten! I told him I wasn't going to wake Father Vinny and that he'd probably said his masses. Christmas morning was a hurried time, as I had to prepare for the Lescures, and the boys got rather in my way, so I said irritably... "Men... Men... I hate men!"

"No you don't," shouted Randal. "You love them. You even flirt with priests."

Unfortunately Father Vinny heard him and chose to take this remark seriously. He began brooding.

"Your mother doesn't flirt," he told Randal.

"Oh, doesn't she," said Randal, laughing heartily. Unfortunately, as always happens, circumstances confirmed Randal's remark. Brigid and Benjay phoned that they were bringing father Duclos, as he had nothing else to do for Christmas, and the first thing father Duclos does as he comes into the house is to give me a hearty kiss and say "Marry Christmas Mother." I could feel the cold blast of Father Vinny's disapproval. All evening he gave me brooding looks, full of suspicion.

It would have been tragic if it hadn't been so funny. (Incidentally, Randal apologised to me afterwards, and asked me if I minded. I said I didn't, I had quite understood how he meant it and in his sense it was perfectly alright, but father Vinny looked it up in the dictionary, and that was fatal. All the same I told Randal that it might be better to keep private jokes private.)

Meanwhile I had one of the nicest Christmases I've ever had. First the dinner with the Lescures was lovely. Mr. Lescure asked Father Vinny about doctrine and Father Vinny is never so happy as when he can talk about religious truths. ("You see, people ARE interested in spiritual questions," he told me afterwards)

When the Lescures left Spike rubbed his hands and said "Now lets get ready for the next batch." the next batch was the Okleys with Alan, Teddy and Winsey and Father Duclos. In the middle of the evening Jan Eylard Wendland walks in, Hilda's son (Peter's brother) The giftgiving was lovely. All the presents were heaped under the tree. Peggy at first wouldn't come on account of Father Duclos, who made her shy, but I persuaded her and she wore my gift, a new dress

She was the star of that part of the evening. She must have spent three weeks wages on us. Luckily the Oakleys and Alan anticipated that and managed to give her twenty dollars (she had been doing their wash all winter) Brigid had been ingenious. Not having much money she'd made delightful gifts with little. She'd made Lizzy a lovely box with a picture of herself writing on it and calling it "Elisabeth the Author" It was full of the things you're always out of, staples, drawing pins, glue, pens, pencils, a stapler etc. Lizzy was delighted. For me she'd dressed brushes and retouching varnish up as a doll, very amusing. But her prize present was to Johnny. She gave him large sheets of different color paper with all sorts of figures and letters drawn and cut out of paper, so that Johnny can make his own posters at school. Peggy had bought us magnificent presents: a carving set for Spike of real Sheffield steel, and for me two slips AND a blouse.

"But that's TWO presents," I cried.

"As long as its Mammy I don't care." said Peggy doggedly. Randal was sweet when he got her present to him he went up and kissed her. I don't know what

Father Vinny thought of it, but Peggy was deeply touched. Sheila had overwhelmed us with presents. They had kept on arriving for the past two months and they were very thoughtful presents. Lizzy got a diary with a picture Sheila drew of her Akademy in it. Johnny got a loose leaf diary he says is the best in the world. Brigid and Benjy got a bed lamp. Peggy got a lovely chess set. And she sent Father Vinny a present too. It crushed him.

He really had a bad time of it, for he'd only given Liz mits and me and Spike each a bottle of men's perfume. (He'd been embarrassed about it and changed the "Men's perfume" into "Women's" with ink, on the bottle, so now I can't even change it and it's an after shave cream I really can't use!) He'd not thought of Peggy or of the boys even. And everyone had presents for him. It was, I admit hard on him. Father Duclos was very touched that I had presents for him and Teddy and Binsey too. Randal and Johnny were very funny, every time I gave them one of my knitted presents they went into paroxysms of joy and rockwd the room while they cried: "However did you THINK of it, mother, JUST what I wanted, THANK you..."

After supper we had lit the candles on the tree and sang carols. It was beautiful. They all did their best (Randal was not there, he'd gone to visit a friend, so the mood got more serious) Johnny and Brigid sang two part songs. Johnny has developed a voice, but while he sings, and brings forth nice tones he pulls the most ridiculous faces. Father Duclos was in fits looking at him. Jan Eylars plays both the guitar and the recorder. He and Johnny did duets. (on the recorder) Spike was very funny singing some of the camp songs Jan had and emphasising the ridiculous words. ~~Randal played the violin and did duets with Dacey on the cello.~~ I felt that it was a harvest. I thought of all the Christmasses when everything had gone against me, the children quarreled, Spike was bored or irritated and I seemed to be the only one who tried to keep up the Christmas spirit. But it had taken. They could carry it themselves now and Brigid was bringing it into her own home now.

The next morning I got up early to accompany Father Vinny to his last mass. He was still brooding over the FLIRTING. "Why did Randal say that?" For the umpteenth time I tried to explain that Randal hadn't meant it, but I was getting a little weary. I decided I wouldn't bring Father Vinny to the airport and let Spike do it alone. Lack of sleep was tugging at my eyelids. After a cool handshake Father Vinny departed and I must confess that I breathed a sigh of relief. Perhaps his idol is shattered, but maybe it needed shattering. Lizzy said a funny thing. She said: "Mommy, I didn't get so very fond of Father Vinny. At the end I did not really want to be with him." She thought for a

That was another evening

moment."Mother," she said"It's much easier to be holy all by yourself than to be so that other people want to be with you, isn't it?"

And I must add that it is easier to pray for some people than to live with them. Not that I shan't welcome father Vinny very gladly if he decides to come back next year, which is a big IF.

Now we're here, amid the snows of Val Morin, and I am slowly recuperating from a most hectic season!

Lots of love from all of us.