Magistrate's Court, Bamenda,
14th December 1961

Darling Mummy, Daddy and Jonathan,

First of all, what splendid news about Jonathan's appointment! I am so pleased and hope it will bring better things than the Savoy. Will you all be together for Christmas? In spite of blazing days and clear skies, we are beginning to feel its approach: Didy has put all the presents into one big trunk – the lid will barely close – and elaborate preparations are being made for two parties: one, on the 23rd, for the children – about forty little Africans – and the other on Christmas Eve for the elders – all the Europeans (comprising barely more than twenty), and all Big Pete's African friends. Wherever I go, on being asked with whom I live, Pete is looked upon with the deepest respect and love. It seems that, during the Plebiscite, he was the one member of the observation body who remained completely un-biased and clean politically. Everyone else tried to get a finger into the pie, and so forfeited their chances of being asked to return.

We have some excellent friends, and there is a fair amount of dining out and entertaining, which is nice. Our nearest neighbours are the Priestners', a very kindly couple: Orange-Irish wife and north-country husband. Both are wedded to Africa and have the plain-spoken, blunt good-humour that the country-people admire. There is George Kisob and his wife, the Senior District Officer, who is very useful to know as he comes to hear of all the excitements in the district. They came to dinner the other night with his Nigerian sister-in-law, a spectacularly beautiful, with the same kind of hatchings on the face as the Foulani women. Pete has many friends, and the custom is for us to go to the erstwhile Club on Sunday morning, where the bar, library, etc. are all under the supervision of one young African boy, and where the swings, shoots and see-saws in the garden are rotting under the trees. Happily there is nothing of the hard Colonial type to be seen, for every European who works here has been carefully chosen for his beneficent qualities. It is good to see such a mutually respecting relationship between the two races.

I have made some good friends with the Africans, both East- and West Cameroonians, so I have plenty of opportunities to speak French, which I find more easy to understand than pidgin. We have all opened out to this wonderful hospitality, in which, at every turn, one is hailed with a brilliant smile and 'Welcome!', a crossing of hands and an enquiry as to how long we will be staying in the country. The Africans are frankly curious about us, especially about the children, and we all have a jolly stare at each other. We often go down to the market in Mancon, the village that lies below us, and we have found that practically everything can be obtained there. There is also a big market up here on Sundays, and people bring things from all round. I have bought a broad, flat basket for fruit; a Foulani cap embroidered in green; a pocket watch for 9/-; and a hair-clipper. There is also a bookshop run by the Basel mission where we can get Christmas paper etc.

Our house is the most glorious, the most beautiful on the station. It was built by the Germans in about 1890, and has immensely thick walls of stone, like a Norman or Welsh farmhouse. It has large rooms, which are cool during the day and warm in the evening, and a terrace outside the dining room on which we sometimes eat and from where have this fabulous view. The food is very good, and we don't have to lift a finger. My 'folly' is the gem of the whole place. It is quite square, about 10', with windows on all but one of the walls, and a deep-eaved, stone-tiled roof, steep, which gives the tiny building the air of a miniature Chinese pavilion. It is sheltered by two tall trees from which leaves fall with a slight clatter onto the roof; and in front is a little terrace, or promontory, shored up with stones, from which falls the cliff. All around, tangled heaps and bushes, are morning glories, deliciously blue; and to make my island yet more secure there is a narrow by effective little moat into which the rains will pour and be channelled out to the head of the cliff. Odd-looking birds – like glorified robins, or rocketing shuttle-cocks with tail-feathers splayed in flight – sing about my little house, and lizards quaver and lunge about the walls. From my windows I watch the elaborate marbling of the sunsets and the distant circles of fire, like a picture by Hieronimus Bosch of Hell and all its engines, that mark the burning of the grass fields in the night.

[Account of visit of Little Pete and myself to the Foulani chief in Nkambe: transcribed to letter 2]

18th December

I had a most beautiful walk this evening round about the station, after poring for an afternoon over your letters. The Statesman has arrived, and so has your beautiful card, Jonathan. I've sent one film back to Kodak's, and I hope that it will come out alright. When you receive it could you please select all the pictures of the Africans and get prints made of them. This is rather important, as one imposing Foulani told Didy that if she didn't bring him his photo when she was next in Nkambe he would put a juju on us all.

The station, which comprises a number of widely dispersed houses belonging to officials, is situated, as I think I have described, all along the edge of this extraordinary cliff, three or four hundred feet high. Most of the houses, like ours, are old, German –built, and there is a fort, built in the 19th century as a safeguard against uprisings among the tribes. I walked past it in the shade of great eucalyptus trees – there are woods all about us in which horses graze – and skirted the camp of the French military, making towards the far end of the station, past the forestry reserve (pines, Christmas trees tangled up with heavy-smelling candle-trees0 in the direction of the bathing pool. This is far beyond the last house and there was nobody on the road. It is not in fact built by man, but is a deep pool formed by a mountain stream before it spills in a sickening leap down the cliff. None of us has bathed in it yet as the water is ice-cold, dark, and supposed to harbour snakes. From here you can see the mountains behind us as well as before, and the view is indescribable.

I shall have to leave the Léla, the great dance rites , until my next letter. I am still trying to sort it out in my own mind, two days of astonishing colour and excitement, and I would hate it to go dead on me.

New Year 1962

Darling Mummy and Daddy and Jonathan,

I thought of you such a lot of Christmas, and it was sad that we could not all be together for the last time at the Close. Didy, bless her, did everything possible to make me happy, and we had a very jolly and exhausting time. The night of Christmas Eve, we went out to dinner with the Kisobs' – the SDO and his family – and a party of carol-singers came round which reminded us all of home. When we got back we found that Father Christmas had called on all of us, and we steeled ourselves to wait till the morning. Little Pete came down to the Folly at six the next day to wake me – we had got to bed at 2.25 – and we trailed up to the house with our loads to open the presents in Didy's and Pete's room. Heaps of presents, Christmas paper, ribbon etc. I found in my stocking a picture from a French book of Hours of St Catherine, framed simply by the local carpenter in wood; a Thermos flask; a colour film; biscuits; a propelling pencil; and a gorgeous Foulani robe, blue, which suits me very well.

I must get this lot [Letter 2?] in the post. So much love –

The Spectators have arrived, as did all your cards, which we value.

Magistrate's Court, Bamenda
January-February (?) 1962

Darling Mummy, Daddy and Jonathan,

Thank you for all your news. You seem to have had a ghastly winter, and none of us is able to conceive what such a thing entails. Here, where the Harmattan is like powder-puff being shaken in our faces, and the grass is almost entirely consumed by the sun or by the fire spreaders, the whole landscape is composed of alternating expanses of charcoal-grey and hazy coral-pink. Today we are all going to the Santa coffee estate, run by a very nice Dutchman, to bathe and hunt for baboons in the surrounding hills. This man, who was in Singapore at the start of the war, and who suffered under the Japanese, is one of our best friends. He is without his wife at the moment, so is somewhat bereft. He has a lovely house, with a splendid garden, and last time we visited him we came away with armfuls of passion fruit, grapefruit, parsley and cabbages. We are still waiting for the beginning of the rains to put <u>our</u> garden into shape: Didy brought masses of seeds from England, and soon we will have wallflowers etc. quite apart from the lilies, jacaranda trees, cannas, bougainvilleas, tree orchids.

We are faced with a considerable menace in the person of Mumbo our baby chimpanzee, who has a taste for rose leaves and has left barely a tree with its foliage intact. He becomes more adorable every day, climbing trees and swinging on ropes, and one regards him more as an intractable child than as an animal. Though he is only a foot high, he is very strong, and when nervous is apt to climb up to one's chest, there to lodge himself with his limbs tightly clutched about one; and it is only by dint of prising open each one of his fingers in turn that he can be extracted. He has a limited repertoire of noises which he uses with expression and at times with blood-

curdling élan. When roused he sounds like a ratchet and, with his hair bristling, his eyes turned a light honey, flecked with madness, and his lips stripped back in a frightful toothy grin, he is a truly alarming spectacle. But we all love him, and have games with him under the peach-tree where we have tea, tickling him and giving him milk, and he has a nice way of kissing us.

Little Pete and I have started to learn Bridge and are very much enjoying it. We also have madly extravagant games of poker – Didy, Big Pete and ourselves – and the other night I managed to win 23/- . Do you know how to play Analogies? One person thinks of somebody known to both – (it doesn't have to be a public figure) – and the other has to ask what style of architecture, what poet, what vegetable, what landscape, music, etc. he brings to mind. Do try it out; it's best between two people, and once begun is very difficult to stop.; What else do we do? Didy and I go up every Saturday morning to the Meat Club, a little thatched hut just outside our compound, in the shade of which Adelaide Priestner (whose forebears were butchers) and ourselves (less confidently) weigh out the meat on glistening stone slabs, careful to ignore the still lively warmth of the freshly slaughtered cow as we rend it to piece for the delight of our customers. It's very jolly, and I being the only male present am thankfully consigned to the business of accounts, there being little trust in women's figure-sense, and none in an African's.

I spend a lot of time with Godlove, whose picture I enclose. The photo was taken at the New year Dance, or 'Highlife', an evening that was not entirely successful as the girl we had taken out, called Rose, proved to be a dud, and a very expensive one. She is what is termed a 'Tankard' – that is, one who has a seemingly insatiable thirst – and unless the girl is exceptionally charming the habit soon becomes tiring. Rose wasn't, and in fact had acquired, in the course of her dubious travels, a basalt exterior with a core of agate. Godlove was outraged, and said afterwards that I should have made a scene. I refrained, not through decency, but through fear, remembering that, only the day before, Godlove himself had been severely bitten in the arm by some women, trying and failing to extricate a quarrel, and that another friend, not long ago, had his right ear sliced off with a knife in similar circumstances. Later, Big Pete informed me that I was well clear of Rose; for, in the days before the Plebiscite, Rose had been a canker in the heart of the European community, feeding upon the flower of its youth (the Grenadier Guards), and almost bringing ruin upon the heads of Pete's predecessor who fled into the Nigerian hinterland, only to be pursued by the ravening succubus.

Godlove has been untiring in his efforts to find me a girl-friend,, and has at last lit upon a real beauty, Mary, who comes from the Banso region, and I try to send you a picture of her too. She has lovely face markings, very delicate, and with the example of the Fulani women before us, it no longer seems a desecration to score the body over, though I can't say that the tribal signs – usually a varying lozenge shape heavily embossed in the region of the collar-bone – bear any qualities of adornment. So far we have seen any costumes such as were illustrated in the 'Parures Africaines'.

Over the Christmas season we were visited by several parties of juju dancers, mostly children, the leaders of which wore curious masks fashioned by calabashes, and painted luridly, with eyes crudely slit. They were draped with mantles fringed with rope or straw, which flounced rhythmically in a sinister sway. Masks are very alarming, it is useless to tell oneself that there is a human agent beneath it. Heaven knows what our response will be when we encounter the real thing. The nearest to it were some youths, well lit up with Mimbo, who had streaked their bodies with white lead, and who kept up a running set, weaving amongst each others though a spring were loose, cretinous, blank-faced, and making an unearthly row with the tins and sticks, so that one wished to goodness they would go away.

I never told you the weird event of Christmas Day. The roof of my folly contains a loft, unused but accessible to a large variety of lizards, birds, snakes and rats etc., whose nocturnal and crepuscular antics produce a lively scampering, not entirely attractive. On Christmas morning they seemed a little quiet, but I did not notice anything unusual as I went up the path to the house. After breakfast, however, while returning to the folly, I happened to glance down to my feet, and was shocked to see a dark brown stain, like moving caviar, making is way in the direction of my dwelling. I followed its liquid course, and found the whole place was islanded by ants. I've had them before at night, and have had to take the precaution of pouring libations of paraffin upon my threshold and window ledges; but I've never seen such numbers as in the Christmas Day Assault. Everything living is swallowed up: a little rat, hysterical with fright, his features obliterated in seconds, until a merciful foot despatched his life. A black snake from some outpost of the garden coming in haste, and showing the extent of the ants' realm, almost escaped, but made the fatal move of trying to cross the main artery. The current consumed him; and flagging, his length was quickly run over; useless to coil and recoil himself, helplessly drowning in the ravenous flood. No check to their primacy – nothing will rob them of their grist.

It's lovely out this morning as, during the night, we had our first spot of rain. This isn't actually the heralding storm of March come forward, but the Christmas rains very much delayed. Meteorologically every thing is hay-wire: the harmattan arrived early and is thicker than usual; people put it all down to the atomic tests in the Sahara, and one can understand how the Nigerians were so upset b them, with this canopy of dust hanging over West Africa, day in day out.

I have gathered together a little class of Africans (average age: 25) for English lessons, and I hope that I will be able to get one or two of them through General Certificate. I have been helping Didy to supervise this year's sitting in the Community Hall, and it is very touching to see all the dusty black heads bent earnestly over their papers, knowing that only a few will scrape through. Most of them study through correspondence courses which seems very unsatisfactory; but education is the one thing the African will not stint himself in. I'm also going to give one or two French lessons. I feel it is very important.

[I've started work scoring *Arbor Vitae* and making out a complete piano score. Not have a gramophone that works, nor a wireless, the occasions on which I can hear music are doubly precious. Mozart Quintets, Monteverdi Madrigals, Beethoven

Quartets, on a neighbours tape-recorded appear fresh-minted, and I find I listen with more wonder than I have a for a very long time. I'm also reading 'Moby Dick', a towering piece of writing, and Mallory's 'Morte d'Arthur'.

No mail for almost a fortnight. In your letters tell me all you do: what films, T.V., books, people, you come across. I love to hear what you think of music: isn't the Shostakovich Cello Conc. A fine work? One of his best and less frenetic than some of his others; but it still contains that terrible urgency. I'd love to hear Jonathan's Fauré record – No more now – (What did Ursula send you?) – lots of love from Jeremy. xx