

Monday evening

Dear Folks:

If the ingrained newspaper habit of placing important facts in the lead were not so strong I could weave suspense into this and build up to a climax. However.....

I am newly and happily engaged to Senorita Clara Ysabel Alegria y Vides---and you, I imagine, are stunned.

First of all, let me assure you that it was not ~~mean~~ an unpremeditated, spur-of-the-moment happening. I have known Claribel (the Spanish pronunciation is much more musical) for more than a year now. As I related in my last letter, I didn't date her for ethical reasons until Jerry announced his engagement, but during all that period we saw each other often and became friends. (Philosophical note: I honestly think I know her better for that reason than if I had been dating her during that time because physical attraction was kept out of the picture by virtue of the situation.) We have discussed world affairs, books, music etc. and argued politics, philosophy and religion over many a beer at Cahill's during that time.

I've dated many other girls back here, but never bothered to make more than passing mention of them in letters home because I never had very much in common with any of them and had nothing interesting or enthusiastic to say. And besides, I decided a long time ago that I was looking for a girl like Claribel.

So....I started dating her when Olson cleared out.. Matter of fact it never occurred to me to cut him out, although I knew they were just good friends. Thinking back on it now, I can't understand why I didn't. I made up my mind that I wanted to marry her after the second date..

Mores of the Salvadorean upper classes are considerably different---and the courtship ritual considerably more restrained

than is our rough and ready U.S. technique.. Daughters of the upper classes down there would think it shocking to let a man kiss them unless they were engaged. Claribel, though rapidly becoming Americanized, is no exception to that set of restrictions. Consequently I visualized a long, slow road ahead and schooled myself in patience and fortitude.

As I said before, I had already made up my own mind--had no doubts or disturbing questions floating around--and had decided it was merely a matter of wearing her down. (Didn't write you about the campaign because--as you mention in your last letter, dad,--I am often prone to give easy assurance that I will complete a difficult project and then have to eat crow.) I sensed last week that Claribel loved me and thought as much of me as I do her. I decided there was no need to stall around any longer. I asked her to marry me. She said yes..

As simple as that..

To calm your nerves, mother, I will insert here, the statement that we will not be married until next May when Claribel graduates from George Washington University.

And now, by way of introduction to your future daughter-in-law:

Claribel is completely vivacious--the happiest person I have ever met. She is very brilliant--frighteningly so (I'll have to grow rapidly to keep pace with her). She graduated from high school at 15--just as I did. She loves music--detests jazz, unfortunately--art, literature, and her special craze, of course, is poetry. She is better read than I in English and American literature, has an equal or better command of Spanish and French classics (she has spoken French since she was a baby. All her family want to

Washington for four months this summer with Claribel and her sister Anoushka. (Anoushka is Anna Maria's nickname. Claribel's mother was reading "Anna Karenina" just before Anna Maria was born. These impressionable Latins!) Anyway--Senora Alegria is probably the most beautiful woman I have ever met...and I'm not being disloyal to Claribel, because she will look the same when she ~~g~~ grows older. Anoushka is 16. Senora Alegria brought her to the United States to study music. She is in a Catholic school near Baltimore right now learning English. Next year she will go to Jouillard school of music. She is a talented pianist--her teachers at her present school refuse to play the piano in front of her because she is so much better than they are. An amazing family.

La casa de Alegria has evidently always been a salon for the great artists and thinkers of Latin America. I believe I mentioned that Claribel and I went to a recital at the Pan-American Union last Sunday (a week ago) and Claribel introduced me to (I think it's Raoul) Cabezas, the concert violinist who performed. He is a great admirer of Anoushka's, but his Spanish was too fast for me to get much else out of his conversation.

I don't know why I should be wandering away from our central topic, Claribel, here, except to illustrate what wonderful and amazing friends and family she has.

Claribel is a year and three months younger than I. She has been in the United States for four years now and speaks English with a delightful accent. She wants me to help her get rid of it, but I flatly refuse to do ^{so} it. She of course, is teaching me Spanish, and I am improving quite rapidly with such an incentive.

She is majoring in philosophy at GW and will receive her A.B. in May. She had several years of junior college in El Salvador, but started as a freshman here because she was learning English.

She and I have more identical interests, a more similar viewpoint and more equal aspirations ^{and ideals} than any two people I have ever ~~met~~ met. Honestly, she's completely wonderful and I only wish you could meet her right away. I can sit here and write about her in my awkward fashion, but if you could see her and talk to her for five minutes you would wonder why I'm willing to wait seven months before marrying her.

I know the religious question is bothering you, but there is nothing to worry about. If Claribel had not been born a Catholic she would be a good Unitarian today. In fact, she is a good Unitarian who goes to church every now and then because her woman's nature demands the mystery and the ritual of religion. I've talked with her about it and made my position clear. I was worried about it, as a matter of fact, although there was no need to be. Here is the way it shapes up. We will be married in the Catholic church-- at the side door rather since I am not joining the church and since she has never expected me to. The trade name for it is a mixed marriage, and it is necessary. She would be living in sin otherwise. I understand. The children will be baptized into the church also, and that will be as far as it goes. Those two concessions are the only ones that need be made, and they are being made only to keep her relatives happy. As for herself, it doesn't make any difference. All the men in her family are free thinkers who, apparently, never go to church. The women observe the forms. She had one grandfather who was a lusty old atheist--the kind of guy who kept a set of Robert Ingersoll's lectures at the bedside--but nobody in the family tried to save him or worried unduly about his soul. Claribel, herself, never went to a Catholic school--a most unusual circumstance in Latin America as you must realize. One of her free-thinking uncles

We hope we will have found a decent apartment by that time, and we are both embarking on a strict economy program in an attempt to make the initial payments easier if we have to furnish it ourselves. I am beginning to realize that these things cost a gosh-awful amount of money.

(Note in passing: Claribel is insistent that I get my M.A. degree. She had planned to get hers, but will postpone it until she's ~~skipped~~ steered me into a cap and gown. No rest for me, I can see.)

Mother--you remember making the statement that your golden sapphire would go to the first fiancée in the Flakoll family. Unless Cub has been awfully busy in the past few months and has nosed me out, I'd like to put in a claim for it. I know Claribel would be very thrilled to have it. She's a little worried because she knows what a narrow view many American families take towards having a "furriner" in the family, and receiving the ring--your engagement ring--from you would mean the whole world to her. Please let me know about this as soon as possible, huh?

Right now I am awfully tired...~~and~~ completely broke (what with the new savings plan)...and completely happy. I have introduced you all to Claribel via the snapshot method, and she says hello and that she wants to meet you soon. She will write you first chance she gets (midterms are here, and when she isn't working or at school, or with me, or writing her numerous relatives about the big doings, she is studying.) I have to dash off a letter in impeccable Spanish in the next day or two, formally requesting her hand. An old Spanish custom, you know.

This is all much more interesting than marrying an everyday,

insipid, stereotyped American girl. I'm an incredibly lucky guy and I have a staggering amount to live up to. If there is to be any disillusionment, I fear, I'll be the one to supply it; I'm afraid she has some pretty extravagant ideas about your eldest son. Hope she never wakes up and takes a good, objective look at me....although I have leaned over backward to keep from misrepresenting myself. Best I can do is try to keep the dream living, I guess.

Guess it sounds ridiculous, but I've tried to be objective and reportorial in this account....and I haven't overstated anything. I know you'll love her when you meet her, and I hope you don't have qualms about my judgement. This is a surprise to you, but it's been developing slowly and solidly at this end. It's my greatest accomplishment to date, and, by golly, I'm proud of it.

(I'm sending along a few not-very-good snapshots made last winter when we were wading around in the snow.)

Late now, and I work tomorrow.

Write with reactions

(favorable, of course)

bud.....

P.S. - We plan to make a joint phone call to you people sometime in the next week or two. It will have to be on a Friday, Sat. or Sun. nite, so let ~~me~~ know when you will be home.

Chambel's address is 1708 R st., NW

Rud