

Personal: Lex Mebane

12/21/78

Dear Sylvia:

Sorry I didn't write earlier! The 3-room apartment here is cramped after our spacious quarters in NYC, and the kitchenette in particular was difficult to get accustomed to after our real kitchen there (though even so, it's bigger than yours), but we are settled in now and the situation no longer feels so unreal and lost as it did at first. I've done nothing about learning to drive (or looking for a job, either), but there are two supermarkets about 3/4 mile away, which isn't too much of a walk, especially as the weather is practically always fine (today, with a slight rain, is only the third wet day we've had since moving in, and I didn't have to go to the market today.) Another 1/4 mile on is a Chinese restaurant, which so far I've visited only once. It's not as good as the one that supplied our well-remembered dinners at your place, but good enough for the purpose. I am now cooking 2 1/2 meals daily (the 1/2 is a "snack" at 4:00) without finding it too much of a burden, but I admit I'm not doing much else. There is a good library within walking distance (though my mother has to sit down and rest at two places on the way) and we visit it every 3 or 4 days, she to take out mysteries, me science-fiction, of which there exists more than I had been aware.

It is difficult to believe that it's almost Christmas, in spite of the gaudy decorations that have been up ever since the first of the month ("Christmas" has become identified with the whole Christmas shopping season.) Beside the streets here, growing in a soil of sand, there are palms of half a dozen kinds, most of which I can't identify - a row of particularly tall ones, like mops, runs in front of our building - as well as other flowering trees (such as the magenta-flowered "Orchid Tree", *Bauhinia*, and the vermilion-flowered "African Tulip Tree", *Spathodea*) and bushes. Some of the palms have snaky cactus stems climbing high up them, and others have ferns or clumps of gray "ball moss" growing on their trunks. Rags of Spanish moss hang from some of the pine trees. The temperature remained summery - in the 80s - until 2 weeks ago, when we had just one chilly night, then days in the 60s, now back again to the

# Happy Birthday

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

'70s. Nothing has dropped its leaves, so far as I can see, and rose bushes are still blooming. It certainly doesn't seem like winter. (Of course, with no winter, there will be no spring either.)

I wish I still had a camera, to photograph our kittens. We got them at an Animal Shelter some distance away from here, more than two weeks ago: two orange-tabby males, one ("Mittens") with white feet, the other ("Purry") with a loud purr which he turns on at the least caress. They are most affectionate and will come onto our laps and purr in our faces, a great difference from poor little Agate. They spend much of their time tussling with one another, hugging, biting, and kicking, until they tire themselves out and lie sleeping in each other's

embrace. When I am cooking they are always on the counter in the kitchenette, and when I am washing up Purry sits beside the sink, gazing in fascination at the running water. Although they seem so full of life and healthy spirits, when I took them to a vet 10 days ago for their distemper shots, he told me they had hookworm. He gave them an injection that was supposed to eliminate the worms, but since I can tell from their pan that one or both is still suffering from diarrhea, I may have to take them back for more treatment. Certainly they don't seem in the least sick. Just now they are showing entirely too much interest in our Christmas decorations. Purry is on the bed beside me as I write, lying against me & purring. — With best wishes to you & Mimi — Lex.

ORIGINAL CHRISTINE CHAGNOUX

