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29/4.

(or it might be Xmas Day in the jungle - I wouldn't know).

My Sweeter than Sweet,

having gotten over an airograph to you today - I can now relax with the pad in hand & start to tell you some more about this country known in the Fairy Stories as "The Jewel of the East". (By the way, there'll be no more airographs because they've stopped issuing them).

This last week has been very quiet, interrupted only by an EASA show last night & a visit to John Beach this afternoon. All other nights we've just stayed in camp & moped. Let me tell you about the EASA show & John Beach.

The show was given in the RAF camp nearby & lorries take the Naval personnel down the road. We loaded up about 8 p.m., tottled off down & nipped into the Sergeant's Mess for a few quick ones. This Sergeant's Mess

is a typical tropical tap-room - all set out with enormous electric fans wicker work chairs, ~~at~~ cushions, gramophone & right in the centre a ducky little bar selling all the known English brands of spirits & a few unknown Indian brands - they take great care when pouring out a nip of Indian hooch, any spillage will burn the paintwork & it makes the place look untidy. These RAs people certainly know how to look after themselves - the mess is all their own handiwork & it exudes comfort & atmosphere. I like it - of course I like the gin too.

Just across the road from the mess in the open space they've laid out with stage & seats. The stage is a real slap-up do with drapes & floodlights & amplifying system & dressing rooms behind. We wait for darkness to descend & off we go. It's a wonderful setting, especially last night because the moon was full & silhouetted the palms & trees around the campus - 57

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course it's very warm & you don't have to worry about rain it's headline stuff if it rains out of season here. The show was excellent, really excellent. The artists were 1st class performers & their stuff went down well - no low comedians, no leggy ladies (sic) & no playing down to a low brow audience which is the popular conception of a crowd of service lads. I enjoyed it.

After the show we had another nip in the mess which meant missing the lorry & we walked the 4 miles back to camp. There's plenty to see at any time of the night or day in India - the natives seem to keep the queerest hours & at 1 a.m. this morning their lights were still blazing & their shops were still trading. We ran into a ceremony that I most fearsome to watch we found out later that we weren't supposed to watch. The drums were beating & the pipes were wailing - can't call it anything else & the ladies & gesses were kicking up a helluaword. An object that looked like any witch doctor you'd see in a Dorothy hamour

Epic pranced around doing the funniest antics altho' just as we thought it better to come away his antics got a little more personal. As we walked away from that din the noise blended into the normal night cacophony set up by the jackals + insects + village dogs that abound in these parts. It was a weird walk.

Sunday today, has been very restful + enjoyable. In the afternoon the trucks wait to take us to Juhu Beach which is just outside Bombay, about 15 miles from the camp. It was evidently the playground of the idle rich in peace time for the setting is a lovely + luxurious one - silver sands, a background of waving palms, expensive looking villas + a pounding exhilarating surf. The local lovelies show themselves off to advantage, + the vendors + hotels will supply you with any kind of fruit or iced drink, or, if you wish it, a snake charmer will do his stuff.

Of course the <sup>3</sup>swimmers are the main use of  
the beach these days & a good time is  
had by all. A most amazing sight  
is that of ~~the~~ Indian women bathing.  
It's evidently against their creed to wear  
the usual bathing costume because  
they simply walk into the sea with  
the clothes they're wearing, swim &  
splash to their heart's content, come out  
so dry in the sun. They continue to  
wear their jewellery, sandals, etc - in  
fact it's nothing unusual to see an  
Indian family walking along the beach  
& as the whim takes 'em, simply turn  
off & stroll casually into the sea,  
side 'n all. There is a class, a type  
of native woman who is very modern  
in ways & they wear European clothes &  
costumes - they don't look thoroughbred  
Indians but they're certainly not  
European. These women are gorgeous  
creatures & are usually the playthings  
of the officers & any men with respect  
to 'em. All along the beach, which

stretches for miles, couples are seen in the most abandoned attitudes - nobody worries about morals here. The troops undress completely in the open & it seemed to me that prudery would look indecent in these surroundings. The water is very warm & I could stay in all day - I had a go at surf board riding, not very successfully, & as time goes by I'll be astride these boards in the best native fashion. But, by golly, does that sun burn you!

The ride there & back is very interesting. What a race! If an Indian wants to get his head down he just gets it down, & the fact that he's in the middle of the road doesn't worry him at all - if it's a shady spot that spr'el do him. The shop-keepers just crash outside their stalls, & the cow keeper leaves his cows to wander into any one's front-porch while he indulges in a little siesta. "Mad dogs & Englishmen..." - "Howard was right."

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The Indian women as a rule are very good looking. Even the coolie class have a bearing & petite figure that many an English girl would envy, but the better class woman, with her gay clothes & jewellery, is a very exquisite creature indeed. They seem to enjoy a Sunday afternoon walk just as the English do, & the husband, the wife & the children stroll along the avenues in a manner that gives me the impression they're showing off their Sunday best to the neighbours. The wife always walks slightly behind the husband who very rarely deigns to speak - he appears to be more concerned with his children than with his wife. All women, high or low wear the same type of dress - they have a short jacket affair, with sleeves which button up in front, a bare midriff & then a long length of material which serves as a skirt, reaching almost to the ground, & then is a shawl over

the time of Shubell, there really wasn't anything to it, honey-bunch, just a mild attempt at humour - awful sorry I caused you all that bother, - I give you full permission to do me when I get back - there. Those letters (come to think of it you only mention one but I assure you there were at least three sent together), were landed at Suez at the other end of the canal, & that was the place I described where we had the dance & said goodbye to the girls. It's an awfully interesting trip along the canal - it's ~~60~~ miles long & takes all day. We entered it at Port Said & went through without a stop. At various points along the banks there are camps & stations, but mainly there's nothing but sand - nevertheless it was my first real taste of the East & I enjoyed it. It began to get really hot - there, too, which I didn't enjoy so much.

You can bet your boots on me being back within a year baby, & you're right about time flying - it really does that - yep, before we



know where we are there'll we be  
checking of like a couple turtle doves.  
I dream about having plenty to do -  
I've got to start playing rugby in  
the monsoon season to keep fit, & for  
the same reason I took miles every  
week-end to get a swim in.

Speaking of pictures I intend  
to visit the Bombay 'cinemas' in the  
near future for they tell me that they  
have some of the most luxurious in  
the world out here. The big one is  
the Metro, & you need to book seats  
there. They show English speaking  
films, altho' the majority of the 20 or  
30 cinemas show Indian films - & I  
go to see one of those too. A lorry  
from the camp takes us every Friday  
& Sunday to the local super - the  
'Ananda' - but there is showing "Dragon  
Seed" & I don't fancy that. Films just  
continue showing in Bombay cinemas  
'til they wear out or something - it  
seems to be the same programme  
week after week.

No. 6 tells of summery weather,  
but rumour has it we're getting

snow! Course it may be only a buzz  
alcohol if I know the English weather  
it could be tone - but if you're  
asking me, I'm telling you I'd  
take England weather 'n all in  
preference to the thing that everlasting  
sunshine can bring. Still, I like to  
hear you're getting your quota of  
ultra violet rays. Sweetly, because  
when I roll home I want to see  
those dear little cheeks glowing  
with health.

NEXT DAY

Tonight I'll try to finish this letter  
& send it off. There's a film show in  
the camp & I think I'd like to see it.  
Like everything else, the show is in the  
open air & they wait for darkness to  
come before they start.

I'm getting very friendly with  
an Indian C.P.O. working with me - his  
name is Singh & he comes from the  
Punjab. These C.P.O.'s are very well  
educated, speak English, & are very  
anxious that you should go back to

England with a good impression of India & they make it their business to see that you get the right slant on Indian matters. I shall go around with Sindh later & he'll show me the Indian side of Bombay. He has a flat & I shall meet his friends talk with them & I hope to gain a lot of genuine information that way. Again, I can get goods at a cheaper price by buying them through an Indian - Sindh offered me a carpet today 3' by 4' Indian of course, for 50R. which is about £3-15!! The trouble is I can't get it home, or at least I know of no way of transporting goods of that size - I'll have to enquire from the shipping companies. It is another Indian friend - ~~an~~ Anahar - who is trying to get a camera for me through various closed channels - they really are helpful.

Have been in this camp just a

last week today & it seems like we've  
been here a year. I'm settled in now, taken  
in everything they have to offer (which  
isn't much) & started in to look for  
improvements. I'm running for President  
of the mess tomorrow - our draft is in  
the majority & at the last mess meeting,  
the old President resigned & an election  
became necessary. One crowd here  
found plenty of things to complain  
about & we found that the old boys  
here had gotten into such a rut that  
they were either disinclined to do any-  
thing about anything, or they thought  
that, compared to what the camp  
was like when they first came 2 years  
ago, the present conditions are luxuries.  
We are the new brooms trying to sweep  
clean & against my real inclination,  
they're putting my name forward in  
the hope that fresh blood can  
inspire some enthusiasm among  
the welfare officials to make out  
at a little easier - well, maybe.

Today or yesterday, should have been  
 payday for us, but, as yet, nothing has  
 happened. I've never before seen so many  
 blokes in such a hopeless financial  
 position - they're all broke. I've  
 still got about 80R left, but if  
 I've got to go another month (we're  
 paid once a month), without pay  
 I shan't last long - anyway, even  
 if we are paid tomorrow we'll  
 only get a casual, about 2 weeks'  
 pay, & that's not enough. The  
 trouble is, living is so expensive -  
 even if I stay in camp all the  
 weeks I have to pay for my tea, (the  
 victualling in the mess is done by a  
 private contractor & his tender does  
 not include any canteen for tea at 5pm)  
 & cups of tea through the day  
 cost 4 annas (5). The quantity  
 of the food is small & hungry men  
 have to pay 1R in the mess at night  
 for an extra meal. But there's one

thing, when you haven't any money you've  
nothing to worry about.

It's May 1st today & F. de Gave's  
birthday - I wonder how that sun-f...-guy  
getting along - hope he's o.k. Will  
you send me his address, darling,  
I'm afraid I can't remember what  
it is - hopeless, isn't it? I think  
he'd be a dope to take on a permanent  
commission - I wouldn't stay in the  
Service for all the tea in China.

Tonight, before going to the flicks,  
I shall listen to the news at 8.30, Indian  
time (1400 G.M.T.), & if the news is what  
I hope it is, I'll go into a quiet corner  
& do a little high-pressure thinking  
about you & I, & I'll say a little prayer,  
too. We've come a long way, we two,  
& I can't see a flaw anywhere.

I love you, sweetheart

R

On Active Service

(15)

received  
10.5.45

Mrs. ~~her~~ ~~Western~~ **A I L**

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Kent,

England.