May 26, 1961
Sophia, Bulgaria

Dear Judge:

You won't believe this, either. However, it illuminates my ethical problem: how far does one go for coexistence?

First Secretary Tudor Zhivkov of Bulgaria, whose guests we are in King Boris' old palace in Sophia while Cyrus gets an honorary degree here, is a kindly man whose wife is a doctor. We dined with them and other officials the other day at a gorgeous old (appropriated) manor where the Foreign Ministry entertains. An oil painting roughly the size of a small barn door, of a boy astride of a water barrel on a wagon drawn by a horse through a hay field, caught Cyrus' eye as we entered the dining room. It's one of those joy-through-work poster-art products so plentiful in Karl Marx's countries. When he said it reminded him of his Nova Scotia childhood, Mr. Zhivkov said, "It's yours," in Bulgarian, of course. We are to take it home with us - how, God knows.

That, however, is not the burden of this letter; it's just our burden.

At 7:30 one evening just after dinner in Boris' dining room, we had a message that Mr. Zhivkov wanted to see us in his office. We left immediately, with chauffeur, interpreter and assistant, wondering what international crisis was at hand.

Mr. Zhivkov received us with smiles and turned to me. Bulgaria is known for its neurological specialists, he said, and for a polio treatment which used, as nearly as I could understand, injections of pulverized Snow Drop petals plus physical therapy, over a period of three months or so. This was done at a sanatorium, in Varna on the Black Sea. (We're just back, staff and all, from a stay at Boris' place there. Lovely house built in 1883, same year as Cyrus.) Mr. Zhivkov wished to offer me this treatment if I was interested, and if the specialists thought it could help me.

I was quite touched. Cyrus looked stunned. Of course I said I was most grateful for his thoughtfulness - he handed me a monograph in French describing the treatment, with case histories - and would be honored to be examined by his specialists. Beaming, he arranged everything for the next morning at our place of residence.

King Boris' palace, a beautiful large house, really, is full of 1900's German furniture and decor. Nothing except attar of roses was manufactured in Bulgaria before the current regime. This little garden of a country was the farm for the Turks for 400 years, ousted them and got the Germans. Even the buttons say "made in Germany."

The house is on an estate of lawns and specimen trees planted by Boris' botanist Father. His greenhouse, gardens and peacocks are in good

repair. You and I have never discussed the cry of a peacock, but I'll report that it's shattering until you know what it is, and not soothing even then. It sounds like a child in real pain and terror.

The palace for all its turn-of-the-century middle-class charm, has no elevator, so my pretty interpreter and I decided I would be examined in the sun room on a chintz-covered day bed. Cyrus left to look at another farm.

My slip alone seemed the best apparel available, and as far as I cared to go for coexistence. I asked for a sheet. So I was sitting, thus attired, on the day bed when my four physicians were announced, admitted and introduced. Each kissed my hand. One spoke French; he was senior to the others and had a rather fine face. The other three looked like truck drivers in white coats.

They asked all the proper questions: how long ago, what initial involvement, iron lung, what treatment, for how long? and then began to examine. I lay down. A peacock screamed. After some discussion among them my interpreter asked me to remove my slip. I did. I don't know where the sheet went.

The first man pinched my leg, in a physicianly manner, of course, and asked if I could feel that. Of course I could; the absurdity of the whole thing ballooned, since any doctor in the field knows that polio doesn't affect sensory nerves. I began to wonder who they were. Another peacock answered. The rest of the testing: reflexes, range of motion, resistance and all the old routine, was the traditional.

They withdrew, in conversation. I dressed and we all had a festive, four-course luncheon with three kinds of wine, in the dining room. (I really don't know how the chef, butler and maids do it, but they're also having a great time. We're all off again soon for Boris' Hunting Lodge outside Plovdiv, which was Philip of Macedon's headquarters.)

During luncheon I asked the French speaking man about the pinch. He smiled appreciatively and said, "Madame, we wanted to be certain that in truth you had polio."

I was relieved. They believe they can help me, they beg me to spend three months on the Black Sea, they would be enchanted if they could be of assistance, they are grateful for the honor of meeting me, they wish me all good health and happiness, they kiss my hand and depart, bowing.

And that, your Honor, is how I happened to be stark naked on the day bed in the sun room of King Boris' palace in Sophia, Bulgaria, on the day in question.

So help me, Judge.