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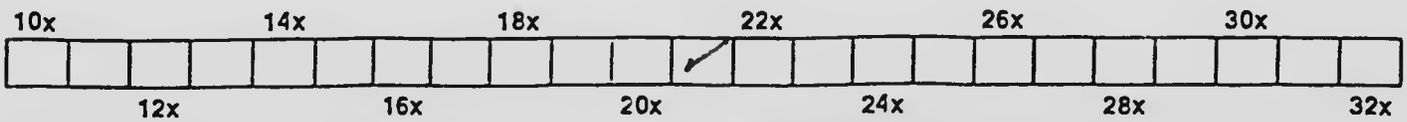
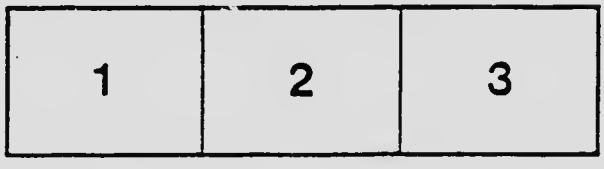
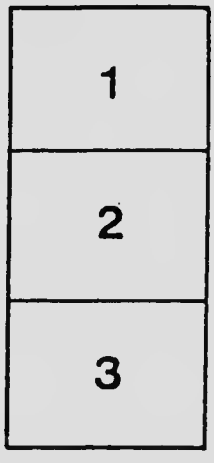
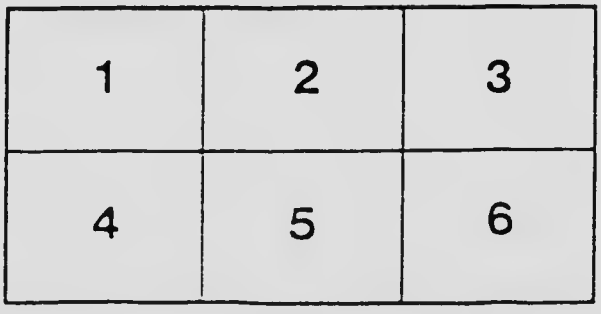


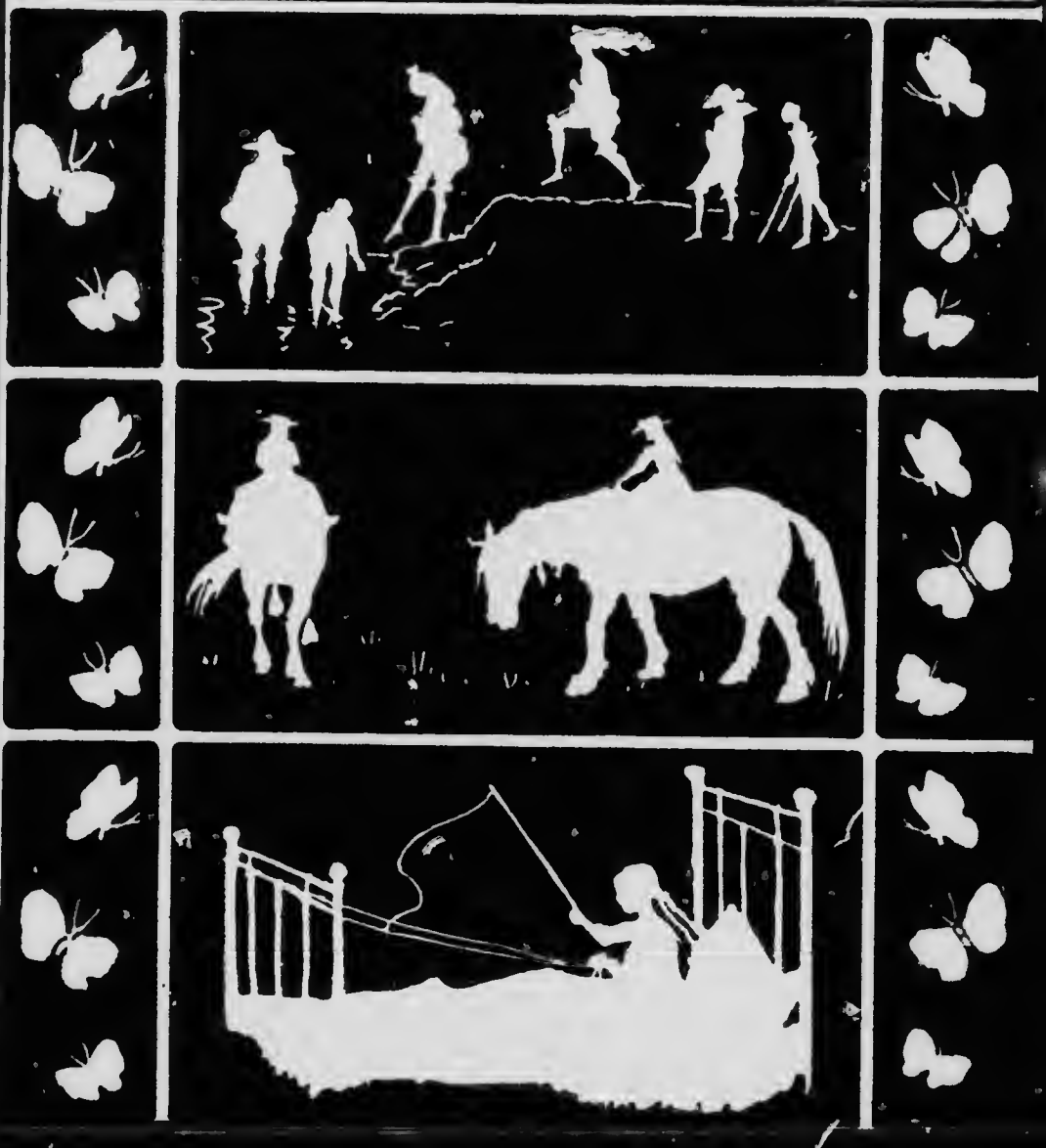


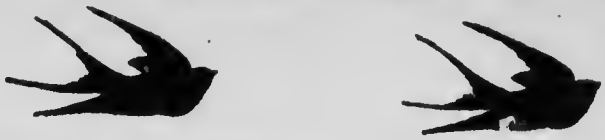




LETTERS TO PATTY

ROSAMOND NAPIER





LETTERS TO PATTY

To Evelyn

From Mabel

Xmas 1916

LETTERS TO PATTY

Le coeur d'une soeur est un diamant de pureté, un abîme de tendresse.

Balzac.

LETTERS TO PATTY

ROSAMOND NAPIER

WITH DRAWINGS
BY THE AVTHOR

Toronto
THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY
LIMITED

LETTER NVMBER I.

LETTERS TO PATTY

I.

BY all means begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year; even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push, and see what can be accomplished in a week."

I have just read these inspiriting words of Stevenson's, Patty, and though it is not easy to fancy myself writing a folio, yet there is no reason why I should not talk to you on paper, now that you have gone so far away north. Your Jim will laugh, as he always does when we get our heads together; for our conversations, however gallantly they start forth, like knights riding into an unexplored country, seem gradually to work round to that enchanted land of childhood in which you and I used to dwell.

What a brave, out-of-door sort of world it was! The wind blowing over the hills, the clouds dropping clover-coloured shadows, and everything bright and glittering as the gilt cock on the church tower!

Who is it that moves most vividly therein? Perhaps Clémentine, the bonne, Patty; Clémentine, with her hard-featured brown, yet freckled face, her circular cloak, and white muslin cap with its cherry loops of ribbon that made the natives of Somersetshire stare; dear, faithful Clémentine, who slapped and scolded, yet allowed herself to be pushed into the village shop in order to buy us goodies from her own pocket. Clémentine, who knew the notes of every little bird in the hedges, the habits of insects, and who, hidden away in France, had a mysterious little girl named Médécisse!

But of course the tall, large figure of Mother shines most sweetly there. Mother, with the big sorrowful brown eyes, and the comfortable lap, who called you her "little black and tan terrier," and me her "white kitten." Mother, who told such enchanting stories, and stroked one's face at the same time. "Here," as her fingers travelled gently down one's nose, "is a great chain of mountains, and away in the north on each side of these mountains lie two beautiful lakes of clear blue water. And round the edges of these lakes grow long rushes that wave in the wind," and here Mother was stroking our eyelashes. . . .

And then there was Father, with rows and

rows of boots, enormous sponges, and countless walking sticks. A much admired but awe-inspiring person this, who waxed enthusiastic over our childish drawings, yet never played hide and seek with us as other children's fathers seemed to do.

Whom do you remember best, Patty, Miss Hurdle, with the heavy, round, black ruler for you, and kisses and presents for me, or George, our little fair-haired brother, with whom you and I were always squabbling? He was neither flesh, fowl, nor good red herring, was he? For half his time was spent in the nursery, the other half doing lessons at the Vicarage.

Then there were two big brothers, one at Winchester, one at Wellington, and the rather alarming Big Sister. Big Sister used to appear suddenly in the most disconcerting fashion from France, Italy or Wales, sometimes bringing with her, it is true, delightful little wooden spoons, or tiny earthenware pots with handles, in which we put the milk for our dormice, or bran for our guinea-pigs; but also sinister plans for lying on the floor to straighten round shoulders, theories of porridge for breakfast and earlier bedtime, readings from books two little girls could not understand. Like a periodic comet she would soon vanish into space again, a space which al-

ways seemed to be called France, Italy, or Abergavenny, which last we had to look out on the map, and very carefully pronounce Abergenny.

Looking through the dining room window I see two little girls bending over the dingy atlas, the younger with a buffet on her chair to make her high enough. Patty, thin and brown-skinned, with hazel eyes, and enormous hanks of straight dark hair hanging past the limp bow of her sash, and Baby, with cream coloured locks only a little less thick and long, scraped back from a white face by a round black comb.

Why did we do lessons in the dining room, Patty, instead of the little schoolroom at the bottom of the stairs, where slates and books were kept? I don't remember. But I do remember lessons with both big windows very tightly shut, the smell of Father's cigarette mingling with that of bacon, sausage and wood fire, and I do remember the "sicky" feel of breakfast's cold milk and mutton dripping, somewhere under our pinafores!

I don't think we were particularly happy children, do you? Of course, it was a sun-coloured time in a way, but there are great black marks against it, too. In fact, it was rather like going to the Riviera, when one passes those long rows of cypress trees, and the dusty yellow light of

the sun flashes into your eyes between each tree.

My first cypress was the Cream Dress.

The Cream Dress you remember was sent as a present by Mrs. Carrington. It came from a shop in some unknown town, instead of being made by Mrs. Rowe, the village dressmaker, who lived down a muddy little lane, had no teeth, and used to hold pins in lips, thin and hard as a tortoise's. The Cream Dress had long loops of black satin ribbon, hard, stiff and shiny, instead of bows. The daring originality of this enchanted me. There were loops at the neck, and loops at each side just below the waist-line. But the real charm was that quite a large pad covered in cream sateen was secreted under the draperies at the back.

That bustle interfered with the prayers said at the end of my bed in the morning, and with "tables" later on in the day. Should I be allowed to wear the Cream Dress? At that time you and I were dressed in black nun's veiling, trimmed with crape, and black sailor hats with heavy bows of crape on them, pulling them perpetually over our left ears, for a grandfather dead nine months. Later on Mother grew quite daring, and dressed us in Turkey red, and even yellow, because "scarlet is Turkish mourning, and yellow

is Chinese!" But the Cream Dress was quite at the beginning of that long list of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins who died one after another "jest on purpus to keep us black," as we thought; and it was only after much heartburning that Mother let me wear the Cream Dress on the following Sunday.

I don't suppose I have ever been more happy, Patty, than walking up to church through the sunny fields, before a slow stream of villagers, conscious of my bustle, holding your little hand in its black silk glove, and whispering, "Let's pwetend we're sisters." I knew we were sisters, but even then to bring an element of pretence into facts was to sweeten them.

With the superiority of four years and a half you found the hymns for me from the brown frame above our heads. And then it seemed to me as though my happiness was too great to be borne. For in those days there were two kinds of hymns. "Hymns we knew the tunes of," like Once in Royal, There is a Green Hill Far Away, and Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand, and "Hymns in Church," which had no more meaning than tune. But there on the board were the magic figures ?22! And to this day I can re-capture the thrill of the Bustle and the Hymn, as I set the

figures down. I can shut my eyes and see the huge tomb in front of our pew, from which the damp perpetually trickled—"Corpse-juice," the horrible Winchester brother insisted—I can see the little side door standing open, showing sun-lit graves and a space of turquoise sky across which flickered a white butterfly; I can see the swallow which had got into the church darting madly in the rafters. The Swallow, the Bustle, the heat and 222 were too much. At the end of the litany it was—

"Patty, I feel sick."

Your eyes covered with the top of your prayer-book, just like Mother's, you took no notice.

"Patty, I feel so sick."

"Oh, Babs!"

"Patty, I'm going to be sick!"

And then to the triumphant strains of Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand, just as the people all stood up, the Big Sister on my other side picked me up and carried me out through the little side door into the churchyard.

We sat on a grave under the darkness of the old yew tree. She took off the heavy black "sailor," and the warm wind fluttered the hair on my forehead. Butterflies flickered in the sunshine, and greenfinches "cheed" incessantly.

But I could never wear my cream frock with the black satin loops and the bustle again; to this day I have never heard Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand sung in church, and I never shall now.

Do you remember what pious children we were just then? Somebody had given you a little book bound in grass-green cloth, with silver lilies of the valley and black leaves upon it. Nellie, the heroine, was in the habit of asking herself in moments of doubt, "What would Jesus do?"

Now you and I were far too shy to say this outright, so our favourite formula was, "What would 'J' do?" We even went so far as to laboriously print it out and pin it over our beds. (Can't you see the dingy little half sheets of silurian paper, th· faint, crooked letters, one here and there very black, after the desperate sucking of the pencil? And how the pins did bend and twirl helplessly r· und, as one tried to stick them into a hard wall!)

Ruthlessly Clémentine tore down the half-sheets. She had no idea what "J" was, but soon learned that "J" had most unfortunate results. So anxious were Patty and Baby to be unselfish like "J," that each insisted on the other always having the "muffin" off the loaf, or something equally desirable; and their firm mutual unsel-

fishness led to free fights under the nursery table. Finally separated, breathless and glaring at each other, the proper thing to shout was, "I hate and detest you. I shan't give you anything for Christmas! Not even a little speck of dust."

But I never remember asking myself what "J" would do, when sent from the dining-room at luncheon with a potato for the old white cockatoo in the drawing-room. "J" would not have eaten most of that potato going down the long passage past the pictures of Lady Godiva, and the Neophyte; but I did. And you used to pick out the nice, soapy, yellow potatoes when we took dinners to the poor people in a milk can with a squeaky handle; you know you did, Patty!

We were greedy, I suppose; yet our pennies were scarcely ever spent on sweets in the village shop, were they? No, you bought sheets of butter paper on which you drew really gigantic bullfinches, heavily seated on frail twigs with infinitesimal leaves at the end. And I laboriously copied you in this as in everything else. Twelve years later I went back to the old Manor House. Escaping from the hated usurpers, Patty, I wandered into our nursery—how small and dark! Was it really ours? and on into Clémentine's

room, unused now. There, still pinned on the wall, was an immense bullfinch, and next it a feeble copy. And all at once I heard Patty's voice singing scornfully down the years, "Little Miss Cop-y, Little Miss Cop-y, Little Miss Cop-y."

When you didn't buy butter paper it was a pennyworth of oatmeal. It really wasn't very nice, was it, and mice had clearly been there; but we played horses, and ate it out of the palms of our hands, pretending it was a bran mash. I suppose it was this same passion for reality that made us wrench the stands from our toy animals, that made us scorn the bells and scarlet woollen reins of our friends, the O'Beirnes—"the little O's," as we called them contemptuously, though they were older than we were! Do you remember our reins, narrow brown leather ones, made at the village cobbler's? (I heard he was asking after Miss Patty and Miss Baby the other day. Miss Patty, who has six little Patties of her own, and Miss Baby, who has only a month to write her folio in!) And our reins were buckled to a stick with the bark peeled off, which we held proudly in our teeth. D'you remember the nicest tasting "bits" were cut from the old fig tree that grew on the wall by the schoolroom window? There was a

climbing rose there—little white, frail, flat flowers it had, with pinky centres. It was always blighted; but I don't think roses ever smell so sweetly to me now as those did.

Your rose was by the tool-house, the stream and the pale blue door that led into the field. It was dark, dark red, almost black. You took to disappearing every morning, Patty, after breakfast. One day I followed you. There you were, standing on tip-toe in a passion of adoration before your red rose, your slim, sunburnt little fingers beneath the dusky petals, your great mane of straight hair hanging past your sash. Slowly and reverently you bent your head; you kissed the fresh dark petals, then drank the dew from the heart.

"It makes me feel good, Babs," you explained awkwardly.

You must have been a nice child, Patty.

Yet everyone but Mother thought you sulky and unattractive. Funny, thin, little dark girl who so often had sick headaches, and who needed much sleep—which, through me, you did not get! They said you were ill-tempered, and not "thoughtful," yet, when Clémentine was down at supper, and all the grown-ups were far away in the drawing-room, and the nursery curtains

bulged in the flickering firelight as though a man stood on the window-sill behind, it was you, Patty, who stole out of bed to punch them in with a shaking fist. It was you who reassured Baby as she sat up in bed, white and terrified, with her eighteen or twenty tiny plaits hanging over her nightgown like so many cream-coloured boot-laces! It was you, too, who when Baby could not sleep, used to patter barefoot across to the wash-hand-stand. There, with your sleeves pushed up to the shoulder, you held your arm in the water till it was numb with cold. Our little beds were at right angles in a corner. Thrusting your arms through the bars, you laid alternate hands on Baby's hot forehead, meanwhile keeping the other cool on the shiny, black bars.

"Are you getting sleepy, Babs?"

The darkness was like hot black velvet against Baby's face, her brain was full of hard, bright little pictures; she could have said her "tables" up to six times twelve without a slip; but something in Patty's weary little voice would prompt her to drowsily murmur, "Yes, fank you," or even answer with a loud snore. And tired to exhaustion, Patty used to instantly fall asleep.

Then terror fell upon Baby, smothering her in its most dreadful black draperies. For the

nursery was in a deserted wing of the old Manor House, long passages away from the drawing-room, where grown-ups sat. (Do you remember how we wondered what they did after dinner? It was as mysterious as "staying behind" at church!) And Clémentine was down at supper, the nursery clock "tick-tocked" with a loud, unfamiliar sound, bedclothes became like lead pressing Baby through her mattress—and suddenly she would begin to scream and scream . . .

(You will understand, Patty, for in spite of the six little Patties, it's only last summer when Jim was away that you begged me not to go to sleep very quickly for you were terrified of being "last awake!")

Then hurrying footsteps, lights, Father, Mother, Miss Hurdle, perhaps a brother or two; Clémentine, with her mouth still full; you, Patty, sitting up, talking excitedly; Baby, wild-eyed, hiccoughing, and gulping down a glass of cold water in which a lump of sugar was melting. How disgusting was the taste! But Mother was murmuring, "Eau sucrée—what everyone drank in France when Mother was a little girl, Kitten." And the "white kitten" gulped it down, too, hoping to drown her excited terror in its sickly flood.

Oh, Patty! How I remember all this, twenty-one years later; yet the very next morning it was always as though it had never been. At cock-crow I was awake, ruthlessly rattling back the flowered curtains, and drawing up the dark, glazed calico blinds very crookedly. The light streamed in on your sleeping little face, with its beautifully penciled eyebrows, its mouth with the curly corners, and on to the quantities of hard, glossy, dark plaits, whose ends tied with white tape were scattered all over the pillow. And if the light were not sufficient to wake you up, I chattered to you and scraped on a little very yellow fiddle, bought with its bow on a card for tenpence at Taunton.

Oh, yes, looking back I see I was the horrid child; but then, my dear, your hair was only brown and mine was palest gold, so grown-ups didn't guess.

LETTER NVMBER II.

LETTERS TO PATTY.

II.

YES, if it had not been for your wholesome discipline, Patty, I should have become unbearable. I thank you now, after twenty-two years, for measures which seemed a little harsh at the time—such as that of the mouse. There was a flower pot with a dead musk outside on the nursery window. In it we buried that mouse you had found in the lane, thinking to get his skeleton, just as they did in the adventure books we loved. A perfect skeleton for your museum! What happiness! But we forgot there was no tropical ants' nest in the flower-pot, and when we dug up the mouse a week later, our noses told us we were premature. He was hastily bundled back and patted over before Clémentine returned with the hot water to wash for luncheon. That afternoon I was sent out to play in the garden as usual, leaving you in the sunless dining-room, struggling with long division, smudging the white figures on your slate with tears. A heavy, round, black ruler was laid suggestively near your little

knuckles, already red, and the thought of this round, black ruler Baby carried miserably out into the sunny spring garden, although her own little fingers had never felt its weight.

With the extraordinary faith and patience of childhood, this little girl spent an hour or more trying to scatter salt on a bird's tail. Had not Mother promised her she could catch a bird if it had salt on its tail? It was a bright spring afternoon, with birds calling everywhere, and primroses, wallflowers and polyanthi in the flower beds; but Baby had left the tepid sunshine and was hidden in the cold draughtiness of those fir trees right at the bottom of the long kitchen garden. There were but few birds there, but you remember what a favourite haunt it was, chiefly, I suppose, because forbidden. For on the other side of the high corrugated iron fence the men from the "Swan" played bowls. The bumping and knocking of the heavy wooden balls, the mysterious oaths which we were far too wise ever to repeat, what delicious thrills they sent creeping up the spines of two little listening girls!

To me, listening there enchanted, you came flying down between the overgrown box hedges of the kitchen garden paths, hat slipping off the

back of your head, elastic in your mouth, hair streaming.

"Babs! Babs! Chocolate toffee!"

Birds and bowls forgotten, Baby scuttled out from the cold darkness of the fir trees. There, glistening moistly in the sunshine on a piece of broken blue slate, chocolate toffee. Baby recognized the slate as coming from the path by your red rose tree, for for some mysterious reason this path was covered entirely with broken slates, but why toffee should be on slate didn't trouble her, till it was in her mouth.

"Patty! Patty! You b-b-beast! It's earth!"

"And mouse, out of the saucer!" you cried, dancing round in ecstasy, forgetful at last of hot dining-room, long division and round black ruler.

And can't you see two solemn little girls playing horses in the field after tea, long blue shadows trailing after them? Can't you see the skinny young chestnuts, protected from the cattle by high iron railings? Up these, Baby, forced to climb backwards, till the top bar but one is reached, and she commands a fine view of the farm buildings, the back of the old Manor House, the pale blue door leading into the garden, all brilliant in the evening sunshine.

"Now, Baby, climb on the top bar; stand still while I count ten, and then jump down."

"I can't. I shall fall—Ow!" as the string tied to the elder switch that makes the whip circles lovingly round Baby's thin little legs, and forces her to mount that top bar.

Naturally, before one is counted, Baby has fallen flat on her face in the rough turfy grass, and Baby is roaring, even bellowing.

"You mustn't cry! Soldiers' daughters never cry!"

And to do us justice we very seldom did. Whitefaced and defiant you marched home from one of your lonely prowls in the fields, carrying a heavy, rusty gin in one hand, while the forefinger of the other was locked bloodily in its jagged teeth. You were white beneath your tan, but I never remember your crying, though your finger was bad for weeks.

Like a bullied schoolboy, who bullies back as soon as he is able to, I was remarkably stern with others younger, or with those I chose to consider inferior to myself, wasn't I? Not long after the "railing" episode, the youngest of "the little O's" had a cold, and as Mick, Nora and the two little boys were going out to tea, Clémentine took me over to amuse her. The moment the nurse had

left the room "little Miss Copy" hoisted Baby "O" on to the window-sill, which fortunately was very low.

"Now jump! You've got to jump, I say. If you don't I catch vis blue-bottle on ve window, and put him in your curls. An' you're fwightened of blue-bottles—you know you are."

Baby "O" had to jump. Worse. That time when Mother took me to London to see if the change would make me sleep, we went down one afternoon to Wimbledon to see the cousins. (Patty, I've never told you this before!) We went down to that most mysterious Underground, which in those days made one cough and wheeze. I remember someone had scratched out the "t" from the: "Wait till the train stops," which was printed over the door. I wondered how we should know when the rain stopped down in the bowels of the earth. I didn't ask. One never did. This had to be blindly accepted, like twice ten are twenty, or that "rebel" was sometimes pronounced one way and sometimes another, that Kings always had four figures after their names, and the figures were always different, that the man called Pharaoh lived such a long while.

One cousin was older than me, one younger. The two amiable little creatures showed me an

illustrated book of dogs. Now, thanks to Clémentine and Vere Foster's drawing books, you and I knew all the different breeds of dogs just as we recognized an American trotter from a Shetland pony, or a Suffolk Punch from a Clydesdale cart horse. And what contempt we felt for the little "O's" who did not! So it was to the cousins.

"Good Gway!" (This was short for "good gracious," you remember.) "Fancy a gweat girl like you, Mawy, not knowing that's a tewwier. Wot's vis?"

"A g-greyhound," suggested Mary, timidly.

"Gwayhound, indeed? It's a collie! I'll teach all of them to you, and then you and Susan must say them to me, and evwy one you says wong I smacks you."

Half an hour later, when the cab came round to take Mother and myself to the station, Mary was found weeping in one corner, Susan in the other. Stolidly I turned over the pages of greyhounds, mastiffs, pomeranians, etc.

What a little monster, Patty! Yet, it was the same child who could never repeat "The Death of Gelert" without tears. That last line, "Poor Gelert's dying yell," had the same poignant and incalculable charm for me as the chime of wind-blown bells, a sunset, and a certain bar in the

treble part of our duet, "Twickenham Ferry." And Patty, do you know, only the other day I came across a little battered hymn-book, and on the front page was laboriously pencilled in a child's uneven hand: "Poor Gelert's dying yell."

On occasions when laughter had to be stifled, such as church, or that delightful moment at the picnic, when stout, stately Mother, pouring out tea in her imposing fashion, suddenly lost her balance and rolled ignominously over and over, down the steep bank at her back, the memory of those four little words, "Poor Gelert's dying yell," sobered me immediately and stung my eyelids with tears.

What strange things made one want to cry in those days! But "soldiers' daughters don't cry," so it was only a bitten lip, and a desperate yearning somewhere beneath one's pri. t overall, which had little pink stars all over it, and was trimmed with jagged white braid. How upsetting was "We love the place, O God," when the bell-ringers played it on Sunday afternoons! Can't you hear the wistful voices of the old bells dropping from the hill into the valley, and right into the hearts of two little girls? Can't you see the aged church tower, that fragile blossoming of

grey stone scarcely less lovely than the pink and white apple blossom of the orchard which lay between it and our garden? Can't you see the flutter of fantails' wings, hear their pleasant throaty cooing as they sunned themselves on the roof of the old Manor House?

The particular emotion aroused by "Poor Gelert's dying yell," "We love the place, O God!" or trees etched blackly against a winter sunset, with cawing rooks and exclaiming jackdaws winging home, we called "Feeling it." Do you remember, Patty? It was as though we had some little spots within our hearts which God could only touch through the medium of certain things.

"We love the place, O God!" and "Poor Gelert's dying yell" left you cold, but "Club Day" made us both "feel it" most poignantly. On Club day the church bells rang madly, deliriously all the morning. There was a noisy brass band, there were banners of white satin, and men in billy-cocks and black broadcloth, holding black sticks with blue ribbons fluttering on them. The band and the men had blue ribbons round their arms, and they came tramping up the drive between the solemn row of Irish yew trees, and arranged themselves in a circle.

There was a smell of bad tobacco, the sun glinted on the brass instruments and the perspiring faces of the villagers, the band brayed, and the bells pealed out all the while like mad things from the old tower on the hill. Blue ribbons fluttered, the villagers cracked nuts and left the shells on the drive, and why I wanted to cry I don't know, unless it were for pure joy.

And then there was the Fife and Drum Band. It was winter then, and cold and dark, you and I in our little beds in the nursery, Clémentine down at supper.

"They're coming, Babs!" And you sat up shivering with excitement. The shrill fifes, the intoxicating drums were advancing nearer and nearer. They were in the drive! At last with an excitement hardly to be borne, we would realise they were in front of the house.

This meant Father and Mother would come to the nursery, and we two little trembling mortals, barefoot but wrapped in our scarlet cotton eiderdowns, which had little yellow squiggles all over them, would be carried down the passage into a front bedroom. I can feel the sharp edge of the dark glazed calico blind now, as peering down I beheld the shadowy magic circle below, standing in scrunchy snow. Lanterns, and here and there

lit redly, a face with twisted mouth and nimble fingers to the side of it! Oh the glorious thrill of it.

"Are they reel people from the village?"

"Real, not reel, Baby. Say real. These children are getting to talk like servants, Louise. Forbid them to go into the kitchen."

But this awful decree could not altogether quench my joy, for the band struck into "The Fairest of the Fair." This was the particular tune that sent icy shivers of ectasy chasing each other down my spine. I wonder if it would now? It seems as though an emotion so intense could not altogether die, merely because years had passed!

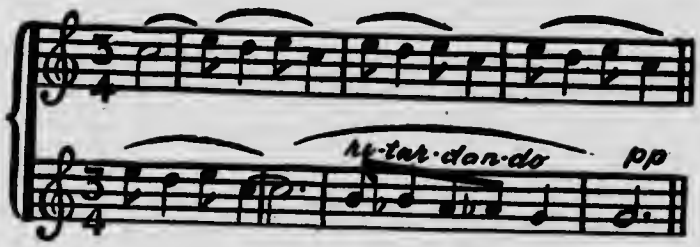
There was one "feeling it" I somehow never told you of, Patty. Three little words at the bottom of a column in the left hand page of the Maynard's spelling book wrung my heart. ELM, HELM, WHELM. I don't know why it was all I could do to look at them, to spell them out, without tears. I used to turn back, over and over again to those pregnant little words, till they were blurred in a crystal dazzle of tears. And even now it seems to me they have a sorrowful look, a sorrowful sound: ELM! HELM! WHELM!

Did "the little 'O's,' children of a poet, "feel it,"

do you suppose? Mick did, I think. Mick, that fresh-skinned little fellow with the squirrel coloured hair and eyes, who would eat spiders and hold revolting great lob-worms in his mouth to impress us, yet the day his mother died cried in a broken voice, "Look! Oh look! There's Mother's soul going to Heaven!" as a white butterfly flickered up into the blue sky.

Do you remember that little valley you christened "The Happy Valley," Patty? What an enchanting spot it was, haunted by wood pigeon, chattering jay and rabbit! There in the turfy glades loitered méhing sheep and their lambs. There tinkled and bubbled the little stream whose waters were so cool and sweet, flowing here over a sweep of golden gravel, dimpling and fretting there over bright pebbles or brilliant watercress! "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters." The little stream was never still, but I always thought this was written in our Happy Valley, didn't you, Patty? How we loved the fresh damp odour of moss, the great trees; and shining beneath, the clumps of primroses, and that frail carpet of windflowers glistening like silver stars in the sunshine, drooping delicate mauve in the shade! The

Happy Valley drew our footsteps more often than any other place we knew. It was more compelling even than the mill with its dripping mossy wheel, than the cowslip meadows so yellow with bloom, or the saw pit down the Stowey Road, where one could jump incredible depths without hurting oneself, and when hot and tired pluck the short stemmed wild daffodils blowing close by! But it was not for the flowers, the stream or the moss that we urged Clémentine to take us to the Happy Valley. Rather for the voices we heard therein. For on the hilly fields around were boys scaring rooks, and they had the most beautiful and moving cry.



Can't you hear it now, wailing sorrowfully over the sunlit hills, waking the echoes in the shadowed valley, exploring the hearts of Patty and Baby, till they forgot they were playing horses, and scarcely knew whether to laugh or to cry they were "feeling it" so!

And these two ridiculous little girls agreed that

with these poignantly beautiful "feeling" things Mother's "sad brown eyes" were always inextricably mixed! And this idea, Patty, must still have clung; for it was only last New Year's Eve I leaned from my window, and listening to the wind-blown bells, wrote:

I

The house asleep, and I alone; I fling the window wide.
In streams the wind, and sets the candle wildly flickering.
(The myriad ivy leaves upon the walls are fluttering)
Across the frozen fields the bells, borne on the strong dark tide
Of icy air, swell into royal clamour—swoon—and go!——
A few faint stars; and now and then a whirling flake of snow.

II

Such poignant, passionate appeal in ev'ry crying bell
They somehow make me think of brown eyes bright and large with tears!
They stir the sleeping echoes lost in long forgotten years,

And as I slip to other days my heart and spirit swell,
And dim mute strings within me tremble into song again,
Sharp, silver sound I scarcely know is ecstasy—or pain!

III.

Swept by the clamour of the bells, the glassy night-dark wind,
And straining trees! Oh, Christ, if but my spirit could remain
Awake on these keen crystal heights, a harp for Joy or Pain
To play upon! If but the drug of Care might never bind
Me down to that grey numbing world where no heart ever hears
An answer to the haunting questions of this Life but tears!

LETTER NVMBER III.

LETTERS TO PATTY.

III.

I WONDER if all children live in a bewildered state of mind, Patty? Our minds seemed to have been planted in queer patches, with no connecting paths, and the way grown-ups could instantly find the way from one patch to another was, I thing to both of us quite marvellous. For instance, you won't have forgotten those two horrible little stories at the end of the Reader, for by your care for me you got the round, black ruler on your knuckles again.

One began, "I grow at the bottom of the sea," and ended with the paralysing question, "What am I?" The other started off, "You see me every day," and then at the end of a page and a half demanded, "And what am I?"

Poor Patty. You sat there stupefied, pinching your fingers in your lap, staring at the awful printed letters, "What am I?" till slowly they became blurred with tears. What the answers might be, you had not the remotest idea. Had the stories been written in Arabic you could not have felt more mystified. One large round tear

overflowed and rolled ticklingly down your nose. And then the ruler fell sharply on your knuckles. "Here is something to cry for now. It is I who ought to cry, at having to teach such a little idiot, not you," exclaimed Miss Hurdle, in cold anger.

Dear Patty. How you cared for your odiously spoilt little Babs. What a splendid little sister you were. It must have been months and months later when I arrived at these fatal stories, but you had watched my progress like a little lynx, and when the time drew near, insisted upon me day after day the answers—coral and sponge, coral and s[illegible]ge. Alas, Patty, you coached me too well. For when "Hurdy" picked up the Reader and began conversationally, "Now, ducky, "I live at the bottom of—" I interrupted, "Oh, I know, Hurdy! Cowal, that means!"

Poor Patty! The ruler for you. I, as always, untouched, unscolded; but snivelling and lamenting miserably on my high seat at your hiccoughing sobs that would not, could not, stop, in spite of, "Now stop at once, Patty. You're to stop crying, I tell you."

How a grown up knew when R-E-B-E-L spelt rebel and when rebel was as astounding to us then, as wireless telegraphy is to me now; and

when "the little O's" spoke of Aunt Lily sending them presents from Tewkesbury, where she lived, we didn't hesitate to call them "liars." For I had been by underground, in a carriage with "Wait till the rain stops," to see Aunty Lily at Wimbledon, and smacked Mary and Susan there. That "the little O's" might have an Aunty Lily of their own somewhere else never occurred to either of us! And oh! why should the answer to that riddle, so popular in the nursery, "Why is a whipped schoolboy like an engine?" be received in stony silence at a grown-up picnic? Why was a usually adoring and very tiny grown-up so furious because I asked one day: "Are you a dwarf?" Everything was very full of mystery. Why was God Holo? Night and morning our prayers began Holo God. Was it the reverent way of saying Hello? I was nearly fifteen before it occurred to me I was trying to say, "O Lord God," but to this day I say, "Holo God." Do you?

We could talk about "J" freely to one another, for in the little books we had given to us, all the children discussed Jesus with gardeners, coachmen, old sailors on the beach, or stone-breakers on the road. But "God" was another matter. God was wrapped in awful mystery. Did

the thought of Him fascinate you as it did me, I wonder? I never went to sleep without praying I might see God, till that night when I did see Him in my dream. D'you remember, Patty, how I awoke, shrieking and screaming in terror, a terror so real it makes one's heart beat a little quicker merely to think of it? I dreamed that you and Clémentine and I were walking up the Stowey Road, going to the saw-pit to jump, and after, pick daffodils. It was a blowy spring afternoon, the wet roads drying palely, the lingering puddles full of blue sky and white cloud. Starlings called, and the hills and valleys, dotted with baaing sheep and their lambs, gloomed with purple shadow one moment, only to burst into unearthly brilliance the next. We came to that muddy little lane which ran twisting down to Mrs. Rowe, the dressmaker's cottage. (Do you remember the two wild cherry trees in the bottom there? How lovely was their bloom, how disgusting their miserable little cherries we used to pick up surreptitiously and eat.) By a heap of broken grey stones on the right hand side of the road there was a tree—an oak, wasn't it? By this tree against the hedge, just above the grey flints, I saw God hanging in space. God had no face, Patty; no body. He was exactly like pictures one

has since seen of Fujiyama, and He terrified me. To this day the word "God" makes me think of little Japanese sketches in sepia of Fujiyama, the sacred mountain, and so I prefer "Almighty." When we played ghosts it was always with a sheet draped over an oblong carpet broom, looking like Fujiyama, and I suppose God was associated with ghosts because of the Holy Ghost. I only write all this, Patty, because I was too frightened to confide even in you at the time, and wonder if your little Patties get such mixed-up ideas in their heads.

What extraordinary literature children were given in those days. Do you remember that old gentleman who sent us quantities of large paper books all about little boys and girls who urged their fathers or mothers to wear bits of blue ribbon? The blue ribbon had something to do with a glass of beer, but why, we never knew! There were delightful serial stories, of course, in Sunday Little Folks and Chatterbox; but oh why were the mothers always ill? They lay on sofas, poor darlings, or else were sent abroad, leaving their large families to spend the winter with uncongenial cousins! We grew to think it was an essential part of motherhood to lie on

sofas. Ours did, and "the little O's," and one or two others, and all of them in books.

After "boy's books," like "Off to the Wilds!" and "The Dog Crusoe," our favourite books were those on Natural History; at least yours were, and, of course, "little Miss Cop-y, little Miss Cop-y" deceived herself into thinking hers were, too. Do you remember little Miss Copy complaining in an aggrieved voice, as she held out a volume of Ouida's, "Muvver, I've wead pages and pages of this book called 'Moths,' and I can't find anything about moths, or butterflies either"?

It was something of this same spirit I expect which made little Miss Copy take her "pale tea" without sugar. Tea without sugar seemed the height of "grownupness" to six years old. "Little Miss Copy" drank it for a week, perhaps, and then decided to have a lump of sugar "jest for a change." What a cruel and unexpected blow to find that now tea was nastier with sugar even than without! Truly a self-denial worthy of a better cause. Little Miss Copy deserved all she got, but, Patty, I have since seen grown-ups themselves, so used to sorrow that when joy comes they cannot sun themselves in her shine. So long have they lived in darkness, their eyes

cannot bear the light! Few things seem more pathetic to me than the miserable légionnaire who has served his five years slaving in the Foreign Legion, only to find himself stranded in France, free, but penniless, utterly incapable of earning his living. A few weeks of destitution, and then perhaps he drifts into a recruiting office and binds himself for another five years of hated slavery.

How strange that our love for Natural History, and the real knowledge you, Patty, at least possessed, could not take away a secret loathing of all insects. You made yourself tolerate spiders, I remember, by looking at one in a cobweb every morning while Clémentine brushed your hair, and saying over and over again to yourself: "Perhaps she has big, sad, brown eyes, like Mother's."

But my halting imagination could never follow you thus far, and you know you never got accustomed to earwigs yourself.

Oh! the "spider sling" and the "earwig sling." I had forgotten all about them till this moment. What a ridiculous couple we were! At the words don't you feel yourself back in your little bed again, fragments of Beethoven and Chopin wandering up from the drawing-room, Clémentine down at supper, firelight dancing all over the nursery walls, as the flames licked and flapped,

showing the rows of stoats and weasels you had skinned yourself and tin-tacked thereon, revealing and hiding alternately the big square table in the middle of the room with its red and blue check cloth, the bulging curtains of the two windows, the bath and the can of cold water put down ready for the morning, and then, just beyond the oblong blackness of Clémentine's little room, with its door standing open! The "spider sling" and the "earwig sling"! That same spirit which impels a child—and at times a grown-up—to think "something" is under the bed to catch at their toe as they leap in, drove us to think where the tucked-in sheet formed a sling, must lurk an earwig for you, a spider for me. And so, when we wished to "show off," a small, reluctant foot would explore that part of the bed, and a proud, if apprehensive voice, declare:

"I've got my big toe in the 'earwig sling,' Babs!"

"And mine is in the spider sling."

"My whole foot is in the earwig sling. Oh, I'm sure I felt something tickle!"

Mutual shrieks, shivers and giggles!

The dazzling joy of the "Holidays" and the "Boys coming home" was clouded by the certainty that we would be pursued with insects,

wasn't it? Daddy-long-legs, whose horrible kicking legs would be made to play delicately over our cheeks; spiders inserted with a horny schoolboy fist between our necks and collars till we were half throttled; cockchafers, with their waving little golden fans, entangled in our hair, till the poor creatures became almost as frenzied as ourselves! And then the other torments to be faced. Don't you think the worst was being stood on one's head in a clothes-basket too high to upset, and left? I can feel the blood thundering in my ears now, and the basketwork eating into the top of my little head now; can't you? And how bad for you, you poor little Patty, whose head ached so often, anyhow! That was "Wellington" you remember. "Winchester's" specialty was to seal your eyes up with hot candle grease when you were asleep. I escaped this, but Winchester once made me eat a whole cake of soap. But the worst of all the tortures was "The Little Princes in the Tower" I think, don't you? Clémentine at supper, Wellington and Winchester stealing into the firelit nursery in a sinister crouching attitude, moaning and snarling to themselves, "We're coming to s-s-smother you—to s-smother you." Suddenly, with a yell, the bedclothes swept over our heads and held immovably

down, while we kicked, plunged and screamed in a paroxysm of terror, rage, heat and suffocation. That awful feeling of impotence, Patty! It was bad enough when we were naughty, and Clémentine seizing us by the arm hurried us along by sheer force, so that we were running to keep up with her long steps! But this was a hundred times worse, for real terror overmastered even the impotent rage, the stifling heat!

But the "tortures" were but spots on the sun, weren't they? "The Boys" were very good to us really. Winchester taught you to skin and stuff, to tickle trout into ecstasy, to make wire nooses and tweak them on to the bank, to play any tune you liked on a penny whistle from the village shop. And there was the glory of going out fishing, bird and dormouse nesting, newt catching; of running across fields with an aniseed rag, to be tracked by and bye by Tarquin and Osric, the great black and tan bloodhounds; of being shown how to slide down the rope from the granary (how it skinned our poor little palms, and how we pretended it didn't hurt!), of jumping from a height into hay and turning a somersault in the air before alighting. At my first attempt I received a great ovation from all you five brothers and sisters, for, not being quite quick

enough, I alighted sitting down, with my knees firmly fixed in my eyes. Oh, the exquisite pain! But the "Bravos" of Wellington, the pattings on the back of Big Sister, together with the glorious prospect of real black eyes, atoned for my pain. Winchester was singing lustily, "Two lovely black eyes; oh, what a surprise!" that song which had just come out, and you and George were applauding me. It was the triumph of my life. I was "feeling it" to such an extent, "The Fairest of the Fair," "Poor Gelert's dying yell," the boys in Happy Valley, and "We love the Place, O God" seemed combined in one delirious whole. For I was so immensely proud of being included in the Other Ones, as I thought of you all.

You know I lost you, Patty, to a great extent in the holidays. You became a wild, unfamiliar creature, with excited bright eyes, torn stockings and tangled hair, who disappeared on "expeditions" with the boys, which I was considered too young to share. And though I knew I never could have walked those distances, yet, still, it remained a grievance that I was not allowed to try. It was just the same on half holidays in the term time, when you and George for a treat were taken enormous walks, returning in the cold darkness after I had finished my lonely

tea. Not only had you the excitement of the long walk (which I believe you secretly hated, didn't you?), but you both had "meat for tea." I can see it now: large slices, pinkish in the centre, and the edges overlapping the small tea-plate! The two pleasures were almost more than the heart of the small child left behind could bear; for a boiled egg for luncheon, or meat for tea, on a small plate, had the supreme delight of the unusual.

But how I loathed our ordinary morning and afternoon winter walks, Patty! Looking back, it seems to me it was always muddy and warm, and one's legs ached and ached.

I can see a pale sky overhead, and a ragged rook flapping wearily across it. Beneath winds a very muddy lane which goes uphill all the way. There is a ditch on one side. Its clear water is sliding over the motionless mud-coloured leaves and sticks in the bottom, just as one sees some brave spirit unsuccessfully striving to stir those with whom it comes in contact from their enchained sluggishness! There is silverweed at the roadside, and there are draggled grassy banks, from whose summit the naked silvery wands of ashes shoot into the tepid air.

Everything is very damp and still. Nearly as

far ahead as Athos the poodle, Tarquin and Osric, the two bloodhounds, darts an alert little girl in a flying mantle of straight dark hair. A scarlet tam-o'-shanter is crammed on to her head. Her brown face is absurdly eager, her hazel eyes shining. She is teeming with plans. What a different little creature to that snivelling over Rithmetic and Jography half an hour before! She is here, there and everywhere; one moment pouncing on a dung beetle labouring across the road, the next discovering a dormouse's nest, or perhaps a perfect specimen of a skeleton leaf. Then some hairs from a horse's rubbed tail catch her attention. She collects these, and has bunches of them at home. A little farther on she discovers the jawbone of a sheep with all the teeth intact. With a radiant face she wraps it tenderly in her handkerchief to carry it back to her museum.

Far, far behind the intervening grown-ups, toils a small, wheezing, fair-haired child, whose scarlet tammy makes her white face whiter still, and in whose eyes is the tired, vacant look that often causes her brothers and sisters to call her "Dead Eyes." Baby never finds birds' nests except in the winter, or skeleton leaves except those with holes in them. Her contributions to the museum are only a shining bit of quartz, a fragment of

blue glass picked out of the stream, and so on. Baby is horribly conscious that these treasures are on a totally different plane to the rook's skull, the many fossils and bits of alabaster Patty picked up that memorable day spent at Blue Anchor, the mole skin, the thunderbolt, and all the other interesting things so neatly arranged and labelled on the shelf. But, as Patty is magnanimous enough to pretend they are, she tries to think so, too.

This little girl was not "Dead Eyes" when she started on her walk. No. She pranced ahead with the wildly excited dogs "riding." A fig-wood "bit" was between her teeth, its reins were held in her left hand behind her back, while with her right Baby switched her own legs with a hazel wand so vigorously as to surprise a cry from herself at times.

But the little horse soon grew hot and weary. It asked to undo its coat and was not allowed. It got out of breath, and desperately thirsty. The fig-wood bit and the hazel wand were both dropped, and with them all imagination. It is just a guilty little girl now, who loiters behind till she can unseen kneel on the wet grass, make a cup of her hand and drink from the little pellucid stream that babbles here over gravel and pebbles,

slides there over dead, mud-brown leaves. This is, not unnaturally, strictly forbidden. And the grown-ups ahead grow smaller and smaller, and Baby lags farther and farther behind, pretending to look for old nests, or to pick wood-sorrel from the hedges and chew its tiny acid stems; but, at last, in a kind of desperate bravado, she stops altogether and leans up against a gate. How hot she is, how out of breath, how her little legs ache and ache!

From every side, and above the sound of her own breathing comes the cool trickle-tinkle of those little streams and rills that are one of the charms of Somersetshire. Baby peers through the bars of the gate, and somehow the tender green of the hills and valleys, the steep orchards, the old thatched bartons, the distant coppices, pure violet against that silvery sky, bring rest to her aching legs and ease to her wheezes. She thought yesterday she could never be unhappy again if she had a pony of her very own, but now she feels if she might just lean her forehead against the lichened bar of the gate, shut her eyes and listen to the trickle-tinkle of the water, the kar-kar of the rooks as they squatted like so many coals in the plough, she would be quite happy for ever and ever, Amen.

"Baby! Baby! Where are you?"

Baby opens her eyes and begins to sing to herself. She pretends she is not afraid, but she hopes the wet on her stockings, where she knelt down to drink, won't show. Still humming, she stoops to pick up a twig, and with the ends of her flaxen hair trailing in the wet grass she scrapes the mud off her little square-toed, buttoned boots. Then round the turn comes Miss Hurdle.

"Are you so tired, darling? Poor little thing—"

A soldier's daughter tired! Never. "Good gway, no, Hurdy. I was—was jest looking at the view and cleaning my boots." And Baby straightens herself and throws away her twig.

"Well, come along, then. Don't lag behind like that."

"Don't lag."

Even now the words have a desperately weary sound to me. The policeman's "move on" to the poor sleeping wretches on the embankment can hardly be very much worse than

"Don't Lag" was to Baby.

But the walks were blackest when after attacks of croup I was made to wear a respirator. Mother crocheted them, you remember, in double white Berlin. A large oblong of idiot stitch to muzzle me, and two long chains to encircle my ears. Few

things have I hated so much as those respirators, Patty. It was not so much that they became wet and hairy the moment I got out of breath, which was at once, but the village children stared at me, and their curious looks were real torment. I used to turn hot and cold going through the village street, trying to hide my face behind you, behind Clémentine, or whatever grown-up we were with. I implored Mother to work a red mouth on the white, thinking it would be less noticeable! She never did. I wonder why, for she always entered into our troubles with such sympathy.

Poor Mother! Hardly a day passed but Clémentine was asking for new respirators.

"Mais Clémentine, je vous en ai donne quatre le jour avant hier."

"Oui, Madame. Je le sais bien, mais j'ai cherché partout dans le tiroir, et il n'en reste pas un seul!"

It was the following Christmas that the nursery was re-papered and painted. Do you remember the heavy chest of drawers which was somehow fixed to the wall had to be removed. Behind it lay a soft, dusty, grey pyramid—a pyramid that when stirred showed glimpses of white—a pyramid of crocheted respirators.

LETTER NVMBER IV.

LETTERS TO PATTY.

IV.

THE six little Patties, you say, have electric tram lines on one side of the house, and a railway the other. Their nursery windows look over the line to the Cheviots and a great expanse of wild Northern sky. I can't think that that nursery can be half as delightful as Patty's and Baby's in the old Manor House. (Can't you hear Mother saying, "You must have much better manners than other little girls, because you live in the Manor House, where, of course, Mr. Manners lived?") It seems queer now to me that the Manor House, with its many windows and gables and chimneys, its long passages and large, white panelled rooms, its dear old gardens, its darling little round windows peering from ivied gables, should be joined on to a farm house—that its back indeed made one wall of the farm-yard. Our nursery windows looked down into the yard, and what happy moments we spent on the mud-colored window seats, flattening our noses against the glass and watching the hurly-burly of farm-yard life. The farm-yard

sloped steeply up from the Manor House. It had bartons, and stables all round it. Through open double doors one might catch a glimpse of a great heap of cider apples shining in the chestnut shadows; over a black barred door a horse's head would be suddenly thrust, or perhaps a bull's, with curly fringe, ringed nose and little wicked eyes.

Our farm-yard had turkeys, geese, fowls, ducks, guinea-fowls, bullocks, cart-horses, a dung heap and Ben-ur-ralps. Till this moment, Patty, I had forgotten Ben-ur-ralps, that large brindled mongrel with the smiling topaz eyes, the squirming body and the very doggiest smell I've ever smelt in my life, a smell that clung after Clémentine had scrubbed one's fingers into scarlet with a nail brush. Did you know, Patty, that his peculiar name originated in an inability to decide whether he should be Ben or Help, so he enjoyed the richness of both names? How Ben-ur-ralps adored "Lawkes a mussy deear," as we called the old farmer. Can't you see the latter now, with his round, smiling face, its grey hairs sprouting out from unexpected places, his dingy old green-black coat and still dingier felt hat! "Lawkes a mussy deear" let you and I eat as many apples as we liked in his orchards, let us rob his nuttery of

filberts in the autumn—Oh, Patty, the nuttery! It catches my breath to think of it. The frail snowdrops springing from the polished ivy leaves on the top of the nuttery hedge; later the short stemmed white violets that nestled under the nuttery's trees; the cheery babble of the swift little stream in the next field, as it chattered and dimpled over bright pebbles and little fragments of broken china, and blew into crystal bells, which burst on rocks under whose shadow lurked bullheads and sticklebacks, then slid away over a smooth stretch of golden gravel, by and bye straightening long green weeds in its limpid tide, and then slowing down, deepening, till from its darkness, that darkness of glass, glimmered back the fair reflection of the steep bank starred with primroses, hazy with dog-violets and long, loose trails of periwinkle!

How we loved our little clear stream, and blessed it for flowing through the yard and then through our garden, quiet and broad there, as though, after its black sleep under the low bridge and the granary it had awakened to the responsibility of turning the mill wheel, two miles farther down.

Looking back, it seems to me that the little stream seemed the beginning and the ending of

the farm life, as it were. There it was that the ducks wakened us by their loud prack-prack-prack that went on throughout the day (that sound that for some reason or other even now reminds me of a quarrel I had with you about a black paint I was using in your paint-box). And there it was, in the evening the great cart-horses trooped down of their own accord to drink. Captain, Colonel, Prince, Shortback, Blossom, and the strawberry roan with the wild eye, who never had a name. Rough and mud-stained, with their sticky coats drying in tags, they came down the shelving rock of the farm-yard in a loose, sloppy trot. Great patient creatures, with shaggy frills hiding their clumsy hoofs, and long curly manes, and tails much the worse at the root for rubbing on gates. Dear fellows.

Wasn't it bay Captain and black Colonel who made the cider? The cider-press was just opposite the nursery windows. Can't you see the "dung carts," as they were prettily called, creaking slowly into the yard, brimming over with golden and crimson apples. For days these apples had been lying in immense sun-flushed heaps in the orchards, each apple dew-wet and cold, with little blades of grass sticking to it! What a very lovely thing a sloping West country orchard can

be, Patty. A little picture of ours in the blue autumn weather is shining in my heart, and will linger there as long as life itself. The twisted grey old trees, a robin singing on a lichened twig, that dips against the turquoise sky with his tiny weight. Somewhere in the wet grass a great heap of apples lying, a glory of rose and gold, lemon and crimson; and not "our little stream," but another, just as limpid, as sweet-voiced, winding and hurrying between turfy banks, till ecstatically it hurls itself in green whiteness into the deep basin where sheep were washed in spring.

From this orchard of cider apples the dung carts brought their glowing freight, and emptied them into the secret fastnesses of the cider-house. Outside, Captain and Colonel, harnessed one on each side of a pink painted pole, plodded round and round and round and round and round and round, till our little heads reeled to watch them. There was a revolving bar half hidden in the mud—do you remember?—and it set our teeth horribly on edge to think Captain or Colonel might sometime forget to avoid it. But the wise great beasts never did. With swaying head and tail they moved patiently round and round, like creatures in a dream. Old Johnny Bickam, sitting on the centre of the pole, his hobnailed boots dangling,

had a brass-bound whip across his corduroyed knees. He never used it. He never spoke. What did he think of, Patty, as he moved incessantly round that tiny circle, his old clay pipe in his mouth, his turquoise eyes vacant, a lock of silver hair dangling across his creased red forehead. What did he think of?

Do you remember how we loved winding wool over two chairs? Grown-ups praised us for being "helpful little girls," but we knew we weren't little girls, but were "Cap'n an' Col'n maakin zyder."

Writing of Captain and Colonel, a little sentence flashed into my memory.

"THE HORSES ARE IN THE FIELD."

Does that make you see things, Patty? Is "The Horses Are in the Field!" a little candle carried into a dusky recess lighting up all kinds of long forgotten treasures? The candle flickers, but oh, look! Here are emotions fresh, tremulous and lovely as life itself. Such unclouded joy! Such overwhelming disappointment! But then again such thrilling hope! Is "The Horses Are in the Field!" a little magic candle to you, too, Patty?

Lessons done, after tea two little girls breathlessly rushing up the stairs, along the narrow

passage to the nursery; two excited little girls climbing on to the putty-coloured window-sills, squeezed into the right hand corner till the knots where Clémentine had mended the parrot-green blind-cords ate into their cheeks—two little girls sick with suspense till they espied over the glistening blue slates of the coach-house the—yes, the horses are in the field. Captain and Colonel, Blossom, the Strawberry Roan, Shortback and Prince, all there, turned in after the day's work, tearing hurriedly at the coarse, tussocky grass in "our field," switching long rough tails where brambles lingered, kicking horse-flies off their sunlit stomachs; or standing head to tail, nabbing each other good-naturedly with yellowed teeth, their shadows, long and violet, stretching away towards "the little O's' " "ha-ha" on the other side of "our field."

We had been wont for long to feed these cart-horses with sugar from rigid little palms, but to ride them bareback in the field, ah! that was a new delight, planned, of course, by your matchless brain, Patty, carried out by your ingenuity.

The Strawberry Roan had too wild an eye. We used to leave him alone. And black Shortback would trot heavily off every time we drew near, and if we persevered with outstretched hands and

coaxing "coup-coup," you remember how he would fling his shaggy cream-coloured heels in our faces, gallop away, stand still, whinny, and then thunder across the field towards "the little O's' house," till we were terrified, old "Lawkes a mussy deear" would come to see what it was all about. But Captain and Colonel, Prince and Blossom, how good and patient the great creatures were! Can't you see them now, their hair all dark and stuck into tags wherever the heavy farm harness had been during the day; the corners of their poor mouths, that should have been suède-soft, cracked and leathery from chucked rein! But there was no bit there now, and they were hurriedly tearing at the grass; but ruthlessly we caught them by the forelock, and have you ever noticed, Patty, what a distressed look it gives a horse to lift his forelock? It makes my heart ache to remember how we used to drag the poor overworked, reluctant brutes to the palings round those chestnut saplings, from which you made me jump that summer evening. How difficult it was to push and press Cap'n and Col'n near enough to the palings to clamber on therefrom! I can feel the unmoving mountain of Captain's huge wet side beneath my two hands now! And when we were each mounted and pacing ponderously

about the field, how amazingly sharp and painful were Cap'n and Col'n's backbones, considering the breadth of their sides; how impossible it was to tug up by the coarse mane the ugly old fiddle heads that reached down to graze; how difficult later on to rub the betraying "powder" and dirt from one's stockings!

To painfully bestride sweating bareback cart-horses, to force the reluctant creatures to pace solemnly about the field while an anxious eye was kept the while on the little hedge-sparrow blue door that led into the Manor House garden for Clémentine or other spoil-sports, seems a sorry enough pleasure perhaps, but to Patty and Baby, who scarcely ever played games but "horses," whose favourite book was "Black Beauty," in whose ears the creak of the saddle, the chink of the bit, was as the sweetest music, who but seldom snatched a canter on some child friend's pony, the hours of "The Horses in the Field" were of surpassing joy; and when, through Mollie and Lottie Daubeny they came to an end, life was black indeed.

We had been so excited when the "new clergyman" proved to have two little girls, hadn't we, Patty; yet before a month was out we had the greatest contempt for them both. They were

older than we were, yet we called them "The Little Daubenys," and they were afraid of you—afraid even of me, I believe.

Yet Lottie and Mollie were far more clever than you and I. They did amazing things, such as sing in the choir in church, read music they had never seen before, not "Happy Peasant," "Twickenham Ferry" kind, but real grown-up "pieces" with lots of black notes, and "ped" marked, and little stars where "ped" was to come off. They had many fowls of their own and sold the eggs at a profit to their mother, and talked wisely about "broody" hens. Yet I can see and hear you crying out scornfully: "Don't you know, Mollie, a slug is cold-blooded, and when you pick him up you burn him with your fingers."

Mollie didn't know, but Mollie, with facile tears promised to remember.

Why was it always Lottie and Mollie, when Mollie was fourteen and Lottie only ten? Because Mollie was fat and a cry-baby, I suppose, and Lottie was so sharp and superior. Dear me, Patty, how we hated her.

Can't you see her now, very neat and trim, with a clear pale skin, green eyes, and an immensely long mouse-coloured pig-tail, tied with a large bow of black ribbon that never got lost,

like other children's? And oh, Patty, that little swing to her petticoats as she walked, that made us hate her still more furiously! Now, poor Mollie couldn't have swung her petticoats to save her life, could she? She was large and fat and awkward, with a fizz of honey-coloured hair round her good-natured pink face. She laughed easily, and cried easily, especially the last when she and Lottie played duets, Lottie, of course, taking the difficult treble and counting out, "one two, three, four," in a clear staccato voice. We almost liked poor Mollie, in contrast to Lottie, till that evening with Captain and Colonel.

"The Little Daubenys" had come to tea. And the Horses were in the field. Oh, the agony of the decision! Would the little Daubenys "tell?" Nearly sure to, but oh! how could we waste a whole evening of "The Horses in the Field," when any day haymaking might begin?

You remember, Patty, that we swore the little Daubenys to secrecy? They were excited. In our gratitude we promised they should "get on" first. You caught Prince, for, as you remember, he had the broadest back. He was the easiest to "keep on." By the forelock you led him plodding up to the iron railings, up which Mollie was

laboriously climbing, regretting already she was the eldest, I'm sure.

"But Prince is looking the wrong way," she cried, turning a pink and piteous face upon us, the rust from the railings coming off on her palms, the branches of the chestnut catching in her frizz of hair.

"You get on stride-legs, so it's all right."

"Stwide-legs you has to wide—"

"*Straddle-legs?*" from Lottie.

"But that's rude!" and Mollie's pink face went slowly crimson.

Now "rude" meant putting your tongue out at Clémentine and calling her "sale cochon," or not getting up to open a door for a visitor, or being too shy to say "Good-bye and thank you very much for asking me," when you went out to tea. What could it have to do with a bareback horse?

However, Mollie and Lottie insisted "straddle-legs" was rude, so much precious time was lost in pushing, pulling and cajoling Prince close to the railings, his head looking the "right way."

Fat Mollie was hoisted and heaved (what a multitude of petticoats she seemed to have!) on to Prince's dusty back, and there she sat "sideways" for thirty seconds—not more, for at the first step, fat Mollie fell. And as it was on the

off side, I'm afraid, Patty, the fall was even "ruder" than the "straddle-legs."

How funny we must have looked! Prince trailing indifferently away, already grazing, Lottie scolding, Mollie only half righted in the grass, whimpering and with both fists in her eyes, you and I begging and imploring her to stop crying, distracted and terrified that "The Little Daubenys" would "tell," and so get our pleasure forbidden.

"I'll give you my 'British Bird' book, and a rook's skull, and my second best snake's skin—"

"An' I'll give you my little black horsehair horse I rubs the vaseline on to make him shine—"

"What a great crybaby you are, Mollie! Crying in our duet because you couldn't keep time. Crying at dinner because Patty teased you, now crying because you fell off a horse—"

But Mollie lamented on and Baby for one realized the uselessness of trying to stop her. A little horrid memory flashed into Baby's mind and made her grow hot and pink to the roots of her pale hair. Once someone had implored Baby to stop crying just as fervently as she and Patty were now imploring Mollie to stop. And Baby,

though unhurt, had cried on, just the same as Mollie was crying.

It was more than three years before, Patty, that winter we spent at Boulogne. Do you remember Clémentine had brought George and you and me each a *baba* at Cavin's for our tea. It was dusky in the nursery and Clémentine had gone downstairs for the lamp. Our hands were pink and cold from washing, our heads sleek from the brush dipped in the jug, our chairs were drawn up to the table. Tea was already laid and there was a *baba* on the little plate by George's turquoise and gold mug, there was a baba on the little plate by Patty's Rose du Barry mug, and a *baba* on the little plate by Baby's dark blue mug over whose rim the delightful white china cat peered and hurt Baby's nose so every time she drank. I can't have been four, can I, Patty? But how well I remember George turning from the nursery window and finding Baby biting his *"baba."*

The small boy smacked her and no wonder. She was not hurt. She remembers that, but she remembers, too, opening her mouth, screwing up her eyes and roaring. And the voice of Clémentine came shrilly up the stairs.

"Qu'as tu, *Bébé* cherie? Pauvre p'tite ange! Ma p'tite mignonne—!"

Terrified George was kneeling by Baby's side.

"Oh, Baby, do, do stop. Please do. Please, please! You shall have all my white narcissuses, every one if you stop. Oh, Baby—"

He was pressing the lovely silvery flowers into Baby's little hands, but she let them drop on the floor, roaring still louder and stamping her little feet, in their white socks and strap shoes.

Poor little fair-haired boy of eleven. Do you remember there was nothing he loved so well as the Poet's flower. Someone had made him happy that afternoon with a bunch—and now they lay strewn anyhow about the nursery floor.

And here was Clémentine with the lighted lamp, her green eyes flashing from her hard, freckled brown face.

"Je vais vous donner une bonne giffle, Monsieur Georges, pour taquiner la petite, et tes *fleurs* peuvent aller au feu." And then in a totally different voice, "Viens, ma mignonne!"

So Monsieur Georges had his "bonne giffle," and you one, too, Patty, just to make things even, the narcissi were pitched on the fire, and *Bébé* sat on Clémentine's lap instead of her own

little chair. *Bébé* ate her *baba* between hic-coughing sobs, and sips of warm, sweet tea from Clémentine's cup, and *Bébé* had her hair pushed back with tender fingers, and *Bébé* had one hot cheek pressed to Clémentine's heaving bosom and was too shy as always to say she didn't like the "going up and down of it."

I remember all this as though it were yesterday and I remembered it, Patty, that evening in our field, when you and Lottie and I tried to heave Mollie to her feet. She made her thick legs all limp like bits of ribbon and we were forced to let her subside in the grass again. It was then she sniffed:

"I think it's only right to tell Papa and Mamma what dangerous games you make Lottie and me play when we come to tea."

Our secret and most precious joy in life would be taken from us. There would be nothing now to satisfy the sick envy that gnawed when we saw other little girls riding, even hunting. As you realized this, your little face, Patty, turned white beneath its brown; there was a stricken look in your hazel eyes. Then pride rushed to the rescue.

"Come along, Babs!"

You caught me by the wrist. We ran stumb-

ling over the rough sunny field, past Captain and Colonel, Blossom, Shortback and Prince, who leisurely raised their heads to stare after us. We ran, two despairing, half blinded little creatures turned out of Paradise, singing shrilly and defiantly as we ran:

"Tell-tale Tit
Your tongue shall be slit,
And every dirty dog in town
Shall have a little bit."

Oh, Patty, was it only breathlessness and the uneven ground of the field that shook your voice? But I deserved it all, for even "The Horses Are in the Field" was perhaps no more to me than the silvery loveliness of narcissi had been to "Monsieur Georges."

And to this day, Patty, I feel hot when I look at those flowers with their shining candid eyes, and remember how once I dropped them anyhow upon the nursery floor, and roared and roared.

LETTER NVMBER V.

LETTERS TO PATTY.

V.

I CAN'T leave Cécile out any longer, can I, Patty? I want to, just as Loti wrote "India" without the English. Not that I hated Cécile. Patty, I tell you now, I adored her in my humble silence, no less than you did on your talkative equality.

What a captivating child was Cécile, with her clear light eyes, her cropped dark hair, and the few faint freckles on her nose. Cécile, who hunted and had ponies of her own, in addition to two rocking-horses, one covered with a real pony's skin. Cécile, who wore the shortest and most delightful brown holland pinafores, elaborately smocked in scarlet; who went to Switzerland every summer as a matter of course, and one winter to Spain, bringing back therefrom the then uncommon scarlet *beret,* which she wore stuck jauntily on her dark curls, riding and walking. (Do you remember striving to turn your commonplace tam-o'-shanter into a *beret?* How you routed for Clémentine's scissors in her big work-box and feverishly pared

away the tuft, till the miserable thing fell to pieces in your fingers?)

Cécile was a very princess amongst children. Everything about her, including her numerous naughtinesses, had a wonderful glamour and shine, something like the string of clear amber beads she occasionally wore around her neck, those beads that one thought of when one was thirsty and longed to suck?

The walls of Cécile's house were not as the walls of other houses. The very routine of Cécile's life, her books, her lessons, her meals, her punishments held some hidden, but vital spark, just as now a chance song, a poem, a passing smile may hold us enthralled, why we scarcely know.

Cécile was the only living creature who could insert herself between Patty and Baby. On half holidays she not only came between them, for the time being she absolutely obliterated Baby's colourless little presence. And Cécile was Patty's "p'ticlar friend." And to this day the name Cécile gives me a bleak, dog-miserable, jealous feeling inside; brings back to me the recollection that the moment Cécile arrived at the Manor House, escorted by the old black butler, who once had been a slave, you and she would run off whispering, leaving me quite alone.

Hitherto you and I were all in all to each other, weren't we, Patty? A little self-sufficient company of two. It was Cécile who drove me to seek a "p'ticlar fwiend" also.

That afternoon you had both disappeared as usual, and "Hurdy" or some grown-up or other coming across disconsolate me, kissed and declared: "They're very naughty, rude little girls, but never mind, ducky. They shall be made to play with you after tea."

Made to play! Oh the insupportable bitterness!

With a swelling heart I left the sunshiny garden and toiled up to the nursery which was always so gloomy and sunless in the afternoon, you remember. I sat on the floor, Patty, and got out my little family of white china rats, and Clémentine doubtless thought her "p'tite chérie" was playing, but her "p'tite chérie" was furiously planning she must have a "p'ticlar fwiend."

The little Housemans lived too far away. Besides Nettie as well as Rose liked Patty best. There remained but "the little O's" with their coughs, their pink cheeks, their shining long-lashed eyes and blue veined temples. Red-haired Micky, who ate live spiders and knew the names of the stars? But then he was four years older than Baby and he, too, alas, liked Patty best.

Baby clashed her white rats together and one of Papa's pink ears dropped off. Desmond and Pat? They were dull and small and were too often ill. Yes, there was nothing for it but Nora—Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea, as we always called her for a reason I've long forgotten—have you too?

Who could find any glamour about Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea?

She must have been a pretty little girl, with her heavy brown hair, her great Irish eyes and their curling lashes, but you remember all we noticed was she had "fat legs that overflowed the tops of her boots," and those boots had very high heels, pointed toes, many buttons loose and often one off altogether. They had very large loose fancy scallops to them. "Servantified" boots we called them, didn't we? And no doubt they were, for hadn't poor little Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea's mother coughed the last of her life away a year before?

Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea would have been the very first to admit she could not compete with Cécile. She had not a rocking-horse, much less a pony. Her hair was not boy-short, but ordinary thick long hair like ours and she had an unpleasing habit of pensively sucking a long strand of it. Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea was so sweet-tempered

one could not even quarrel with her. Grown-ups, you remember, thought her "helpful, and quite a little 'mother' to Desmond, Pat and Baby." Worse, her "Fath-ur" as she always called him, said she was his Sunbeam. Yes, Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea's sole asset was the fact that if she giggled much she ended by sobbing and shrieking with laughter at the same time. We liked this, didn't we, Patty? We used to make her giggle and giggle, till at last "Fath-ur" would not let her come to tea at all.

As gloomily I played with my china rats in the sunless nursery, I realized if I did have a "p'ticklar fwiend" it must be a Sunbeam of fat legs and servantified boots who musn't be made to laugh.

At tea you and Cécile were ordered to play with me, and not to leave the front of the house. Over the rims of your tea-cups you giggled and winked at each other, and I smiled nervously, pretending to enjoy the joke; but as I plodded through my flour and water cake, twisted into a snake with two burny peppercorns for eyes, my heart was sinking, Patty.

It was a rosy-golden evening, the Irish yews throwing violet shadows across the pinkish gravel of the drive, and the white fan-tail pigeons were

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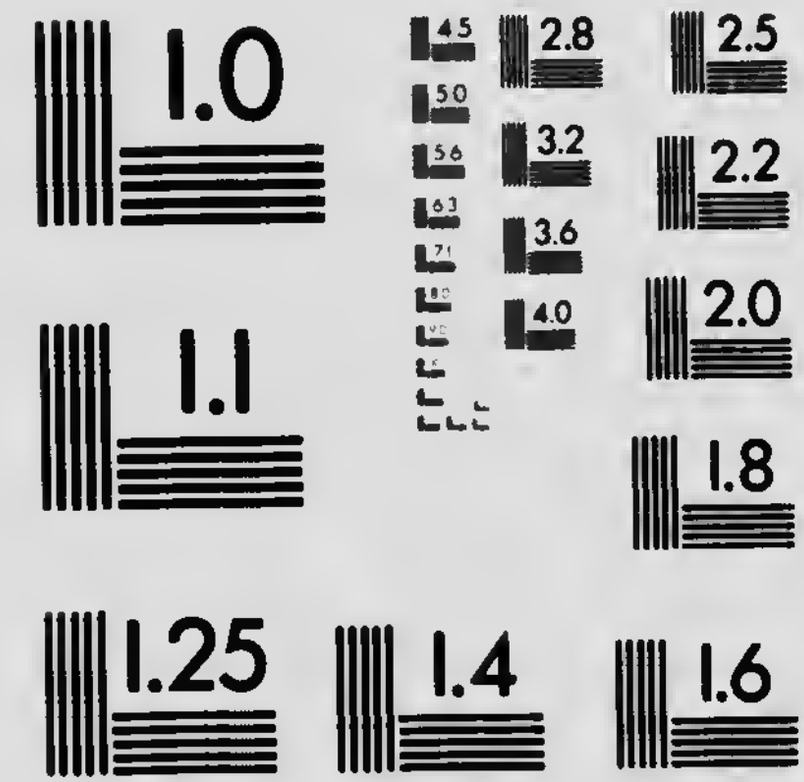

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tinged by the sunset as they bowed and roo-coo-cooed to each other on the roofs of the old Manor House. Screamingly you and Cécile played "Catch who catch can," and I, too, screamed, darting in and out of the standard roses and the yews, and over the flowerbeds. Yes, Patty, I screamed, but I knew quite well nobody was running after me. And presently, crimson and breathless, you both paused to ask each other in innocent fashion:

"Why does she scream, when nobody ever runs after her?"

This final wound decided me to have Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea for "p'ticklar fwiend."

Cécile to tea in the summer was bad enough, but Cécile to tea in the winter was infinitely worse. For then the Patty who a few hours later would steal out of bed to punch the frightening, bulging curtains in, who would hold her hands in the jug to make them cold for Baby's forehead; the Patty who once held a gate against a murderous drunken woman brandishing a poker, and screamed to her little sister to run on; this same Patty, aided and abetted by Cécile, hustled Baby into a dark room, held the door and moaned and groaned in blood-curdling fashion through the key-hole.

In a frenzy of terror Baby beat her little hands on the door, tugged at the handle, which Patty and Cécile would suddenly release.

And then that awful evening when Patty rushed in with a lighted match in her hand! The match went out, leaving a glowing head.

"You're little Prince Arthur. I'm going to burn your eyes out," shrieked Patty wild with excitement, making darts in the darkness with her match.

She thought Baby was safely by the door. Poor little Patty! Did her heart stand still when she ran full tilt into something, when the match went out, when shriek after shriek tore the darkness!

"You've blinded me! You've blinded me! You've blinded me!"

Baby wasn't blinded, but to this day, Patty, she bears a little white patch in the corner of one eye and down her nose.

Poor little girl! How broken-hearted you were. After all, had not Baby done far worse playing hide and seek one day. Clémentine wished her to stop playing and go to bed. She held the nursery door against her, as "Cuckoo" sounded invitingly near. Carried away by excitement Babs whipped out her blunt little old knife and began to saw at Clémentine's wrist. Her sudden horror at what

she was doing must have equalled yours, Patty!

Punishment always followed Cécile's departure at seven o'clock as inevitably as night follows day. I believe you knew this, Patty, and that this and this alone drove you both into ever wilder and more reckless mischief as the fatal hour drew near. You lost your head. You were naughty, not because you wanted to be, but because some wild, terrifying thing was whirling you where you would not.

Do you remember my completely destroying George's newly bound "Sunday?" It was just the same thing.

George had gone to the Vicarage for lessons, Mother was taking you and me to pay calls. Clémentine had dressed me first, and while I waited for you I picked up George's "Sunday" and tore a page by accident. "But I only did jest this," I told myself aggrievedly, and—tore another. And then, like some small thing mesmerized I tore page after page, page after page out of the book. It was terrifying, yet exquisite to hear them come ripping out, Patty. At last I put the brightly covered book back in the cupboard, and guilty and excited started out in the fly. Of course I told you, and of course you tried to comfort me, but oh, Patty, the misery of that afternoon I shall never

forget. The eating of rich, black cake, the drinking of strong tea with lumps of Devonshire cream floating greasily in it, and wondering all the time if George had got home yet. Would he read his Sunday—and so on. Did you have this feeling every half holiday Cécile came to tea?

It was Cécile who found a story in her Aunt Judy's Magazine about a small affected child called Elaine. Of the meaning of "affected" we none of us had the faintest idea, but it was clearly something horrid, and as it was printed it must be right. The book said Elaine was affected. My name was Elaine, therefore I was affected. Do you remember how it became the fashion to exclaim "Oh Baby don't be so affected!" Even Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea implored me one afternoon not to be "affected." Patty, I hated you all when you called me affected, but, such is the human heart, Cécile the original offender least!

Sometimes I was asked as well as you to Cécile's. All the way there you would declare across Clémentine's back or front "Cecile is my p'ticklar friend, not yours!" You hated my coming and no wonder. For on these occasions there were no long rides for you two, from which you at least, returned drunk with happiness. No, grown-ups made us throw bean bags in the pass-

age, beat the big gong or play with the rocking-horses. I used to thrill with the glory and excitement of "going to tea with Cécile," but in my heart I knew that you knew that I knew it was an empty glory, just as I knew that you knew that I knew Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea could only be a "pwetence p'ticklar fwiend."

Of course I was not there when you two pulled all the radishes, scrunched them in your strong little white teeth and then carefully stuck back the green things.

I wish Patty, I'd seen that gardener's face, when with stupefying ease he pulled the little robbed stalks from the ground.

Perhaps it was not altogether wonderful, "grown-ups" disapproved of the friendship. No doubt Cécile heard disparaging remarks of you, just as you heard disparaging remarks of her. What did this bring to Cécile? I don't know. It brought bed to you, Patty, didn't it? For at the merest hint against Baby or Cécile your loyal little heart, always on the smoulder, was ablaze in an instant. Do you remember stamping your feet in their strap shoes, blurting out denials, half choked by furious tears? Do you remember sitting mute in your chair, every feeling outraged, your eyes on your lap, your delicate,

glossy brows knitted, and obstinately refusing to say you were sorry? Poor Patty, you were all heart in those days. Is there so much head now then?

You were sent to bed in the nursery, and Clémentine was told to shut the communicating door to her room. The dark calico blinds were lowered, making a green twilight of the nursery. Outside there was the usual hurly burly of the farmyard, and the squeal of the little rusty iron gate, as the baker with the white beard, the alpaca coat and the big basket over his arm, brought the daily loaves. At the gate he stood chatting with the cook, and every word was audible in the nursery. What awful and terrifying things you heard, Patty, and confided to me afterwards. We both of us knew that the little O'Beirnes would "surelye be took the same way as their pore mother and Master Desmond'll be the first to go." We knew of the unfortunate Emperor Frederick's throat disease, we knew the horrid details of Jack the Ripper in Whitechapel. Did Mother wonder, when she took me to London, that I breathlessly asked: "Shall we go through Whitechapel? Shall we?"

But there must have been hours unenlightened by butcher or baker. And what did you think of

then, Patty, as you lay in your little bed, staring up at the rows of stoats and weasels skinned by your nimble brown fingers, and tin-tacked to the wall? Tin-tacked did I say? No, they were little ominous black nails we called "coffins" because Clémentine had assured us they were used to nail down the coffin lids. Yes, what did you think of, Patty, you passionate wild-hearted little child? Of Bill your greenfinch, showering seed and spurting water upon your upturned face as he hung on the wall? Of the Injustice of Life which seemed so often spelled out to you in crabbed letters of sorrow against a background of pain? Of Baby sorrowfully doing lessons downstairs, poring over ELM, HELM, WHELM, hearing nothing but "Poor Gelert's dying yell"; seeing nothing but your defiant little back marching up to bed?

Whatever you thought of there in the nursery, with Clémentine's door shut, and the cracks of light glinting round the dark green blinds, it generally brought on a sick headache, didn't it, Patty? The next day was a muddle of darkness, eau de cologne, sleep, waking up and not knowing what the time was; dry toast for tea, and as the day darkened, gradually emerging into the light of normality and forgiveness once more.

All this for an hour or two of Cécile's companionship! It was worth it. About that clever green-eyed, white-skinned child with her mop of dark hair, her little shrugging shoulders, was a shimmer of glory dazzling to both of us. There was wanting but one thing to crown her Princess of our lives. It came. Cécile WENT TO SCHOOL. And instantly Wish-Washy-Pale-Tea fell from "p'ticklar fwiend" to the abysmal depths of one of

"the little O's."

LETTER NVMBER VI.

LETTERS TO PATTY.

VI.

THE ducks quacking loudly in the little stream, the church clock striking eight, hobnailed boots clattering in the rocky yard below, Clémentine's door open, and Clémentine gone downstairs to fetch the bath water. And oh, Patty, your turn to have it first!

Lazy Clémentine. Do you remember how she made us tub in the same water? How our fastidious souls loathed that; with what shrinking, with what sense of degradation did we step into each other's "dirt." It was even worse than sharing the tumbler of milk at bedtime; for, you remember, we invented our own remedies for that. At first we each had a little bit of paper, and when your turn came you carefully fitted this on the rim and drank over it, and when my turn came I did likewise. But our bits of paper so soon got pulpy—and then came the glorious inspiration; was it yours, Patty, or mine?—to drink through our handkerchiefs. Clémentine made no objection, and so each evening through our handkerchiefs we drank.

But it is morning now, and Baby, who has been sitting up in bed since half-past six, "driving," a real whip in her cold little right hand, those string reins fastened to the black bar at the bottom of her bed in her left, is asking anxiously:

"Is it a 'happening day?' "

"No, Babs. It's only one of the 'grey days.' "

Patty's voice is desperately gloomy. She is lying flat on her back, with her numberless hard, glossy brown plaits spraying out on the pillow like the legs of an octopus. She is staring up at the bottom of Bill the greenfinch's cage, as he hangs on the wall above her head, and every now and again Bill gives a "wheezh" and scatters a shower of canary seed down over her pillow.

Yes, it is only a "grey day," a day to be seen from beginning to end before it is started upon. Lessons, walks and meals.

"Happening days" meant the arrival of some new pet for our menagerie, going out to tea, being allowed to paddle in our little stream, driving into Taunton to have our hair cut; perhaps, oh fearful joy, sitting "on the box" and driving—a joy only marred by the paternal "taisez vous" in the villainous accent from behind when one made confidences to the "Swan" driver! But now that "The Horses are in the Field" was for-

bidden, every day seemed but a grey day; every day seemed to taste of bread and milk, or eggs without salt. And then, Patty, do you remember, "the little O's" tricycle came, and the sunshine of its presence lit all our "grey days" into "happening days."

Of course, the tricycle was immediately brought round for our inspection; for all the children round about considered us superior beings. Why was it, Patty? We were quite plain; we had scarcely any pocket-money, few toys, and we never went to the "sea-side" like everyone else. Was it because we had the farm-yard to play in (when grown-ups weren't looking), the orchards and the nuttery to plunder? Or was it because of Clémentine—Clémentine, with her cherry-coloured streamers, and her entrancing tales? Clémentine, who, on finding an egg in the manger, would then and there knock the top off and suck down the yolk; Clémentine who, flinging her circular cloak over her shoulders, would kneel down in a field and milk a cow straight into her open mouth if she happened to be thirsty; Clémentine who, in spite of her real knowledge of the ways of beasts, birds and insects, yet insisted a cuckoo changed into a hawk in August! Or was it perhaps that when you wanted a dormouse you

were not, like "the little O's," the little Housmans, the little Daubenys or Cécile, forced to spend a precious twopence on an Exchange and Mart? You were not obliged to send a yet more precious three and sixpenny order, and then live through days of torturing excitement till the terrified litle creature finally arrived in its small deal cage with the wheel, that it never went into. No, Patty. With your scarlet tam-o'-shanter pulled down to your ears you went for a solitary ramble. Your sharp eyes peered in this hedge and that, till presently you found the little dormouse nest you sought. Then back you would come, a glow on your sallow little cheeks, a bleeding bite in your finger, and—the dormouse in your handkerchief!

Well, whatever the cause, we really were looked up to, weren't we, Patty? If a swing were put up, we had to show the owners how to "work," and when the tricycle arrived the "little O's" hurried round, as a matter of course, to ask you how to "ride" it.

Had you and I ever been on a tricycle? Never. I doubt if we had ever seen one. But what did that signify? We took such pains to teach "the little O's" to steer, to teach "the little O's" to ring the bell, to teach "the little O's" to back-pedal; we were so patient, never minding how

many times we showed them, that really they very seldom rode their tricycle at all.

Don't you know, Patty, how other people reading this would think what odious children we must have been! But are they any better themselves? Haven't you seen the father who takes his little boy's spade, "just to show you, old man, the right way to set about makin' a sand-castle." The mother who gathers up the new baby-doll. "You must hold her like this, my precious. No, let me show you again, darling." The uncle who sends up the kite, and when it is poised high in the airy blue forgets to hand the string to the wistful-eyed, fidgeting little boy beside him; the auntie who teaches little girls to knit, but keeps on saying, "I'd better do one more round before you take it, ducky!"

Yes, Patty, the child is most certainly father to the man.

"You must sit upwight!" I declared one warm evening as I pedalled furiously down the Bishops Lydeard Road, where the puddles were shining back at the daffodil sky. "Look stwaight in fwont of you, an' keep wight to the left side of the woad."

Shrieks from the "little O's" and you, Patty, for Baby was spluttering in the muddiest, deepest

of ditches, the tricycle on the top of her, pedals barking shins, handle-bars digging into soft parts. Whatever you may have said afterwards, I am sure you made loyal and plausible excuses for me at the time; for even at ten years old, Patty, you were the defender of the fallen, the espouser of lost causes. You and "the little O's" helped to heave the tricycle off my poor little body, and wiped and smeared the mud on my face and hands and clothes. (Can't you see the look of mud on black-ribbed stockinged knees?) And I am sure I was very dignified, and had a thousand excuses to give for the mishap.

Even this "regrettable incident" did not seem to shatter the faith of "the little O's," did it? I well remember, now Mickey was gone to school, they did not feel themselves capable of cleaning their own little tricycle, and looking after it at night. So the tricycle was usually left in our tool-house, that queer smelling little place where no tools were ever to be found! Delightfully handy, wasn't it? (Oh, the few breathless minutes after breakfast before lessons began! The frenzied getting out of the little tricycle, and the wheels catching in the doorway. The sun in one's eyes and winking on the bell and pedals, the jolly wind in one's hair, as one tricycled down the short

drive between the Irish yew trees and standard roses! Turn at the front gate by the big snowball tree, back again facing the sweet old house as it stood there half smothered in jasmine and ivy and honeysuckle—and then, "Patty—Baby—Lessons!")

You remember our Snowball Tree? I had forgotten all about her, till I found myself writing her dear name. There amongst the laurels and other stuffy evergreens, she reached up and out, tossing her hundred creamy balls tinged with the lightest green up into the blue sky, like some happy fairy child! And when she let her shining playthings fall they burst into fresh loveliness, into a scattered purity that altogether hid the dank, dark ground where the grass didn't grow!

I have never seen another guelder-rose like ours, Patty, have you? Oh, there was something magical about her! Perhaps that is why, as I stare into those fallen petals lying there in my memory, they seem to stir and clear, as the pool of ink stirs and clears for the clairvoyant.

And now the little picture is coming.

Here is a small, earnest child, whose hanging hair is nearly as pale as her face, whose striped scarlet and white skirt beneath her blue serge fishwife frock is very skimpy, whose toes to her

little buttoned boots are square as boxes. This little creature is quite sure that the birds think these heaping ivory petals beneath the trees are breadcrumbs. The birds are not eating them. No; but then there are so few birds in this dank overgrown corner by the front gate, you see. So, trustfully the child scrapes handfuls of petals, and fills the old green gauze butterfly net with its bamboo handle. She scuttles up the drive, past the alternate Irish yews and standard roses, through the beautiful little wrought iron gate to the left, past the tool-house, her own neglected little garden, the asparagus bed, the strawberry beds; over the rickety little bridge that spans the now sluggish mill-stream, across the path littered with pale blue broken slate, so handy for playing ducks and drakes, over the tennis lawn, where the Big Sister had attempted to teach two alarmed little girls to play tennis the evening before, with a hard, red penny ball from the village shop that hurt dreadfully when it hit you. Past all these she has hurried, clutching her butterfly net in both hands; but now in the long sunlit cabbage-smelling kitchen garden, where the white butterflies flicker, where straggly box hedges are casting uneven blue shadows on the bright velvet of the mossy paths, Baby drops the net with its pearly

freight. The birds will surely think these petals are bread crumbs. They will fly in to feed, and Baby, too, will have a bird called Bill, who hangs on a nail above her bed, and scatters canary seed down on to her pillow. So up and down the long, straight paths Baby goes, pushing the net before her as though she were shrimping, chanting over and over again in a high, thin voice:

"Please, God, let me catch a bird—ple' Go' le' me catch a bir'—plego' lemmecatchur—bir' " etc.

It was under the Snowball Tree my hammock was to hang. The Big Sister had come back from Italy or Abergavenny, and had learnt how to net a hammock. Already we had been to the village shop, where the oatmeal to play horses with, the butter-paper to draw bullfinches on, and the penny surprise bags with popcorn and never any surprise in them were not even glanced at. The Big Sister bought little penny balls of string, red and blue and green, any amount of them.

"An' will it twuly be a weal pwoper hammock what doesn't bweak, like sailors' hammocks. Honour bwight?"

Oh, Patty, my hammock, my very own hammock! I was to lie in red and green and blue string, and stare up at chinks and spaces of bright blue sky gleaming between the leaves, and the

shining white balls. And in the blossomy orchard just across the lane, the waterfall would ever plunge headlong with its melancholy pour; and from the fragile loveliness of the old church tower on the hill would wander the haunting sweetness of, "We Love the Place, O God."

"And if you are a ver-y good little girl, perhaps some day it shall be slung between your bed and the chest of drawers, and you shall sleep there!"

Oh, the ineffable joy of Life! Its infinite possibilities!

But what happened really, Patty? It had been raining all night, the sky was still a grey blanket of cloud, and under the Snowball Tree chanced, you remember, to be the shadiest, dampest corner in the garden; a corner shunned by birds and haunted by midges and gnats in summer. "You mustn't lie in your hammock for more than five minutes, Kitten dear, or you will get croup again." Only five minutes, and the sky was grey, and the pale petals on the ground were stained with mud, and it wasn't Sunday afternoon, so there was no "We love the Place, O God!"

The Big Sister deposited my trembling little body into my red, and my green, and my blue string hammock. Instantly the red, the green

and the blue string flew apart! I bumped heavily through on to black, wet earth and soiled petals. My petticoats completely extinguished me, but my legs still waved over my head, the buttons on their boots hopelessly entangled in Mrs. Cridlan's red and green and blue string.

Oh, the bitterness of Life. The shattered faith in the Infallibility of Grown-ups.

And wasn't it under the snowball tree that disillusion wrapped her clammy draperies round you, too?

Yes, I remember, Patty, there it was that you used to sit nursing the little white hen someone had given you. There it was, while your little brown fingers passed lovingly over the cold rosiness of her comb, down her smooth white neck and back, that she laid that memorable egg in the lap of your Turkey Red pinafore.

Eat the egg for breakfast! Patty's eyes flashing infinite scorn. Who but Clémentine would eat what in twenty-one days would be a live, peep-peeping, bright-eyed chick?—a chick that in its turn would grow up and lay eggs in Patty's lap.

"May I keep the chicken when it's hatched as well as Little White Hen?"

Yes, Patty might keep the chicken, too!

No tricycling now. Every available moment

Patty lifting Little White Hen and her egg from the hutch, and nursing both in her lap under the Snowball Tree, Patty crooning and passing her hands lovingly over Little White Hen's comb and neck and back and tail, as she built who knows what enchanting castles in the air. One could sell eggs and chickens. Some day a pony! Perhaps two! A chestnut, for Patty, to be called Ginger, after the luckless mare in Black Beauty, whose fate never failed to bring the stinging tears. A little fat, grey pony with a long mane and tail for Baby—Merrylegs, from the same incomparable book. Oh, look at the spark of light beneath Patty's lashes, see how her tanned fingers tremble.

She has pored over the first plate in the Bird Book, till she can draw the embryo chicken in its various stages by heart. She has collected feathers from the farm-yard in case the chicken should develop gapes. Then she will nimbly thrust and twirl the feather down its throat, just as she has watched old "Lawkes-a-mussy-deear" thrust and twirl so many times.

And so, day after day, Patty and Little White Hen sat and sat and sat. The twenty-first day comes, passes—and nothing happens!

Patty, did you feel sick and cold and bewildered

as you rushed round to "Lawkes-a-mussy-deear" to tell him this incredible thing?

"Lawkes-a-mussy-deear" looks on the ground, raises his dingy old felt hat the better to scratch his head, clears his throat, and then spits violently, just missing "Ben-ur-alps."

"Well, you see, Mis-sy. Tes natral-like. Thee bain't got no cock. Her'll never have no chicks without no cock. Why lawkes-a-mussy-deear, doan't 'ee taake on so, Missy!"

For above the scarlet pinafore with its Toby frill, "Missy's" small brown face is slowly turning very white, and in "Missy's" hazel eyes is a stricken look that vaguely reminds old Lawkes-a-mussy-deear of Ben-ur-alps after a beating.

"I'll give 'ee a cock, Missy, if so be as the Colonel'll let 'ee keep 'un."

But Patty never hears.

No chicken. No Ginger. No Merrylegs, with the long mane and tail. What is she going to say to her excited little sister? Still with that dumb suffering look in her eyes, Patty turns, and very slowly walks away.

LETTER NVMBER VII.

LETTERS TO PATTY.

VII.

LAST night I dreamed, Patty. In my dream I asked you: "Do you like my letters, Patty?" and you said, "Yes."

"But do you like them without saying 'not' before it?" I persisted. Solemnly you nodded your head. "On 'my dyin oath' I like them without saying 'not' before it."

Do you remember that little word "not," silently inserted when we were desirous of lying? It was a little private arrangement just for you and I, and looking back I cannot think why it was so popular. For both of us invariably owned up when the other asked if "not" had been used.

"Baby, did you take my paint-brush? I can't find it anywhere."

"I—I don't know."

"But did you, without saying 'not' before it?"

"Yes, and oh, Patty, I've lost it."

"Not" somehow reminds me of a certain school I know where the rules of silence in corridor and dormitories are strict. At the end of each day the girls are supposed to own up how many times

they have "broken silence." Patty, the governesses must think their pupils perfect marvels; or do they guess, I wonder, that if a curious kind of Pidgin English, with "um" inserted between each word, is used, it is not considered "breaking silence"?

"Um play um tennisy um with um me?"

"Lendy um me um buttony um hook," etc.

To grown-ups we were very truthful, I think. Of course, to deny that one was tired or had a headache was not a lie; merely the proper spirit of endurance necessary for a soldier's daughters. Do you remember how Mother used to tell us of the little Spartan boy, and the fox gnawing at his vitals as he went to school? Poor Mother, how miserable she would have been had she guessed how frequently Patty and Baby acted the story in their own little lives!

All at once, Patty, I see a very little girl seated under the lamp at the big round table in the drawing-room some winter's evening. On immense sheets of butter-paper she is laboriously drawing horses of every size and breed, from impossibly slender thoroughbreds to colossal Shire horses. She is taking the tiniest of breaths, that grown-ups shouldn't hear that ominous little

wheeze; and then follows a little conversation something after this fashion:

"Kitten, darling, are you quite sure you haven't got a little cold?"

"Yes, fank you."

"Is your chest uncomfy?"

"Oh, no."

"Not a teeny, weeny little bit?"

Violent shakings of Baby's head.

"But I thought I heard you wheeze just now?"

"P'waps my injun wubber on the paper squeaked." And Baby makes desperate efforts to silently clear her throat and make her "injun wubber squeak."

"You'll tell 'Muvver' if you feel croupy, Kitten dear, won't you?"

"But I'm quite, quite well."

For there was something shameful in being "croupy," and it seemed to this youthful Christian Scientist if she denied her wheezes hard enough she would keep both croup and bronchitis far away. And the subsequent choking in the night, and all the horrors of ipecacuanha and linseed poultices never taught her any better.

Anything to do with health made us bitterly ashamed, didn't it? Now, if Mother had made us wear brown leather knee-caps strapped on, as all

"the little O's" did, even fourteen-year-old Micky, because they were forever falling down and cutting their knees and their stockings, we should have loved it. It would have been so "real" for playing horses! But the white balloons instead of the coloured ones, because the latter were "poisonous," the hot, horrible feel of spirits of wine poured into boots before we went out in the snow, the box-like shape of the said boots, and worst of all, scarcely ever being allowed to paddle!

With streams and rills on every hand, naturally we disobeyed. Oh, Patty, do you remember that afternoon in the Easter holidays? Mother was away, Hurdy was away, Father had taken the many dogs for a long walk, Clémentine was ironing, and the little Housemans had come to tea. Lint-haired Rose, and Netty with the wild-rose cheeks, "Hip-disease Georgy," with his little white face, cheery grin and his crutches; Jimmy, brown as a berry, mischievous and nimble as a monkey.

How warm, bright and delicious it was in the orchard, where the sheep and their lambs were feeding, where the short, brilliant turf was patterned over with intricate shadows that swayed in the breeze; where the chaffinches sang in the old lichened boughs, where the little stream, clear as glass, but too full to babble, swept and swung

between its turfy banks, blue as the spring sky itself. What child could resist such sweet invitation? In a moment we were all, except "hip-disease Georgy," sitting on the ground, forgetting inevitable grass stains on drawers, unbuttoning boots with never a thought how to button again, unclipping difficult suspenders, peeling off stockings. And now there were five pairs of little legs glistening like silver in the sunshine as they twinkled ecstatically over the turf, and "hip-disease Georgy," with his new sailor hat sailing down the stream, was as happy as anyone! A spark of excitement in his grey-green eyes, he on his flying deal crutches went hopping along the banks with uncanny rapidity, shouting encouragement to the bobbing hat that had already begun to fill.

(Oh, Patty, the sound of our voices and the lambs', the thunder and boom of the waterfall in our ears, the tiny, vivid spikes of early April grass poking between our toes. Oh, the warmth of that turf, Patty!)

The water was icy cold. Our sunlit feet and legs blanched to deathly white in the crystal tide; but the first brimstone butterfly was flickering ahead, there were newly-arrived chiff-chaffs in the hedges, and it was against a sky of purest blue

that the old church tower rose in lovely blossoming grey stone.

"Here's a bit of mud," shouts Jimmy.

"Come and stand in it. It's so scrumptiously warm, oozing between my toes," screams Netty.

But the stretches of golden gravel, the little sharp rainbow pebbles, the vivid cress lured one from the soft mud. We stepped therefrom, to pause and smilingly watch our feet whiten, and the last trace of mud sail away in powdery brown clouds.

How deliciously happy we were, with our bare heads in the tepid sunshine, our feet in the chilly, sweet, swinging water! Of course it was a shame "hip-disease Georgy" couldn't paddle; but then had we not sometimes found it great fun to borrow his crutches and stump along on one foot? If poor Georgy had wearied long ago of limping, at least he never told us so. The little chap hopped about us with that everlasting cheery grin on his queer, plain little face, as though always to "look on" was the best fun in the world. Bravo, "hip-disease Georgy," you were as game in the orchard as years later, when you fell in action in South Africa.

It was some time since the church clock struck four. The lowering sunshine was growing almost

daffodil, the shadows of the apple trees olive coloured.

"It must be tea-time. Clémentine will come!"

"Jimmy, I'll box your ears if you splash me again like that."

Laughing and chattering we clambered out and joined "hip-disease Georgy" and his limp hat on the bank. We would dry, and then patter quickly down to where boots and shoes had been left. Drying with inadequate handkerchiefs, wringing out wet grey frills of petticoats and drawers, exclaiming at the rosy chilliness of our toes, at the impossibility of getting all the tiny bits of gravel off, we were suddenly struck dumb, immovable.

"Children—"

We looked at each other. And the church clock struck five.

"*We've* never been told not to paddle!" exclaimed the little Housemans simultaneously.

"Children, where are you?"—at the other end of the orchard, close to where our shoes and stockings lay, advanced two legs in rough, browny-yellowy trousers, a dog-skin hand and a walking-stick. Father's—the rest of him hidden by branches.

He passed our shoes and stockings, and evidently failed to notice them.

We breathed a little easier, and squatting on bare legs, called, "Is it tea-time yet?" with a brightness we were far from feeling, as the trousers lengthened upwards into Father's body, face, and the squashy black felt hat he always wore.

But to sit on damp grass in early April!

"Get up, children. Get up at once. And Clémentine is looking everywhere for you."

Very slowly we got up.

. . . . . .

Do you remember the grown-ups' "Don't be so silly, children," when we declared letters and figures had colour as well as form; that names were always either horizontal or vertical? Yet who in their senses cannot hear that Hester, for instance, is vertical, while Edith, though shorter, runs horizontally along?

Every sensation or thought presented itself as a clean-cut little picture in those days, didn't it? It does to me now! I wonder if other distracted novelists ever draw a plait, of which every strand is a character, and every pattern in the plait a chapter? Foolish I! but Patty will understand, and Patty shall now compare her alphabet, which I know must still be coloured, with mine!

Patty was so obstinate over the T. She insisted

it was brown. Dear Heart, it's as red as a pillar-box. After all those years will you own it, I wonder? Or shall we still squabble as we used to, when Clémentine had put out the lamp, and gone down to supper?

A.	Transparent.
B.	Ivory.
C.	Deep Cream.
D.	Burnt Sienna.
E.	Paynes Grey.
F.	Prussian Blue.
G.	Gamboge.
H.	Brown, flecked with green (sort of hazel-eyes colour).
I.	White.
J.	Indigo.
K.	Neutral Tint.
L.	Yellow Ochre.
M.	Indigo.
N.	Ivory Black.
O.	Madder Brown.
P.	Crimson Lake.
Q.	Cream.
R.	Purple Madder.
S.	Green Bice.
T.	Vermilion!
W.	Raw Umber.

X. White.
Y. White.
Z. Indigo.

The paint-box epithets will amuse you, Patty, and remind you how we should no more have dreamed of calling anything just "blue" without the qualifying cyanine, ultramarine, cobalt or prussian, than we should of speaking of a "Newfoundland" just as a "dog," a "wryneck" as a "bird," a "bullock" as a "cow." What contempt had we for those to whom a bird was just a bird, a dog, a dog! Contempt? They were beneath contempt. They were, in short, "unanimalified."

Oh, dear old descriptive word! "Unanimalified" were those children who forgot to feed their animals, to keep them clean; those children who could not stroke a dormouse's back with the requisite butterfly touch, those children who knew not the way to lift a rabbit, and refused to leave an animal alone when it was ill, but "mauled" it in mistaken kindness.

Writing of pets, Patty, what numbers we had! Birds, beasts, reptiles and insects! Do you remember the cockchafers, with their waving golden fans? How fascinating they were as they devoured rose petals; how awful when a black crack suddenly split up their backs, their wings be-

neath their wing-cases spread, and they blundered and buzzed into our faces and hair! And then my twenty immense corrugated black slugs I enclosed on the lawn with a lidless box upside down! Not even I could find a black slug very interesting, but they were collected one evening in great bitterness of spirit, because the number of your pets so far exceeded mine!

Those pets! I can't but smile as I think of them now. Our happiest moments were spent poring over the Exchange and Mart, weren't they? Some of the queer, magical terms therein come floating back to me now; and even yet they have not quite lost their old thrill. "Grand Yorkshire terrier bitch fo sale—Brown linnet, full fierce song, suitable for muling, and so on!

It's years and years ago that all these "pets" found the way to the happy hunting grounds, but sometimes in dreams I can find it too, Patty. And then, bounding across the turf, the asphodel and amaranth; rustling and creeping through the woods; fluttering through the warm, bright air, come all our old friends to greet me, Patty. Osric and Tarquin, the bloodhounds, put their huge paws on my shoulders, covering me with slobber, giving me great blows with their wagging sterns, half knocking me down with their boisterous wel-

come; and here is Flash, the cocker spaniel, with his piteous amber eyes, his squirming body and maddening trick of running home; and Athos, the dear black poodle, just back from hunting, his dew-claws torn and bleeding, a plaster of mud on his nose, his brilliant eyes starting out of his head, and the perspiration falling in great drops from his lolling tongue; and Charlie, the mongrel. Just the same old Charlie, Patty. His iron-grey coat as crisp, his creamy ruff as spotless as ever. His ridiculous stump of a tail looks for all the world like a fir-cone stuck up on the end of his back. He trots along as though on hot bricks, stiffening and swearing softly to himself, and pausing a moment to spurn great tufts of grass from his scraping hind feet. And now I can hardly see for this cloud of fluttering birds, can hardly hear myself speak for the musical beating of many wings. Here is the flickering flash of chaffinches', greenfinches', and brown linnets' tiny wings, the noisier fanning of Jack, the wood-pigeon's purple grey feathers; and everywhere doves, doves, hovering and alighting on my head, my arms, my hands and neck with outstretched rose-pink feet, and a giddy little "hein-hein-hein-hein" of laughter. Those doves whose cooing voices filled the old Manor House garden so many years ago,

those doves who sunned themselves on the high garden wall, where stonecrops and snapdragons grew, lying almost on their sides, and lifting first one silver-gold wing in the sunshine, then the other; those doves that made Sunday and the Psalms on the thirteenth of the month a delight. "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, that is covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold." Those doves who flew in and out of Mother's bedroom to and from their nest in the sponge basket, and reared so many families therein!

And here paces Ram, your dignified black Persian cat, with the golden eyes and slowly waving plume of a tail, and my poor Foxy-face, the furtive, mangy tabby everybody hated; a lopping Belgian hare, timid, ruddy little dormice, guinea-pigs innumerable, shriekir.; and squealing as they twitch themselves off the ground in their excitement, and then rumbling, purring and nibbling all at the same time. All are here, Patty. Even the newts are crawling from some weedy pond. Newts, smooth and olive-coloured with brilliant flame-coloured stomachs; larger newts of spotted indigo, and ragged combs down their backs and tails. Newts that years ago held like grim death on to worms tied to a string, and so were hauled

out of the water by two excited little girls. Newts who were taken home in pickle-jars to live in an old iron cauldron under the elder tree, till that most dreadful day when the eel was put in for company, and apparently preferred the cauldron to himself, as the next morning he was found very stout, very lethargic, and quite alone.

But what is this sudden silence amongst the birds? There, hanging motionless in the blue above, the sinister forms of the two sparrow-hawks, Guinevere and Lancelot, who were fed on "lights," that tiresome word we always forgot was not to be said "in front of people."

And here—is it?—yes it is, Patty. Labouring slowly and patiently over the ground comes dear Nicodemus, my one-eyed tortoise.

I thought we had laid him forever under the fir trees where the long grass waved and the wind chanted sorrowfully in the larches, the spruces and firs. Here slept Athos and Tarquin. (Oh, that terrible morning when Father came out of the coach-house, blowing his nose very noisily. "He's gone, poor fellow!" Tarquin dead! Rough, slobbery Tarquin dead! Tarquin with the flopping ears, the noble domed head, the blood-shot, triangular eyes half hidden in wrinkles, and the incorrigibly puppyish ways! Tarquin, whose bay-

ing chilled the blood, yet who could flee ignominiously, his tail clapped between his legs, from a child beating a tin kettle! Our Tarquin dead?

Yes, Tarquin, Athos, Nicodemus, and sundry mice, guinea-pigs and birds all slept between my toy "farm" under the Wellingtonia, and George's churchyard. Our George, not "hip-disease" Georgy. George's churchyard? Till this moment I had never given it another thought. What a funny little boy George must have been! Do you remember how, not content with the real graves, he had made himself a quantity of miniature sham ones? Can you see again his cleverly constructed little crosses of matches and lichened twigs, his wreaths of beads and scraps of slate for tombstones? Here, when he had returned from lessons at the Vicarage, one might come upon this fair, solemn little boy reading aloud the service for the dead, declaiming a sermon to the sobbing fires, or perhaps pacing up and down, swinging imaginary censers. An old rug would be tied round his legs, his rapt eyes turned neither to right nor to left. He was the acolyte at Clémentine's church.

Was it a sinister sign, Patty, that neither you nor I ever cared to play "church"?

LETTER NVMBER VIII.

LETTERS TO PATTY.

VIII.

WE had rebelled at "Grey Days," but "Happening Days," when they did come, brought us heart-aches, just as they so often do to grownups, didn't they?

A stir of excitement in the air, servants whispering, and then:

To leave the Manor House.

Patty to go to school.

Baby and Mother to go to Italy.

("Italy. But aren't you excited, darling? I thought you'd be so pleased!")

("Oh, but having to say, 'Thank you very much' when I come away!")

Miserable little egotist who could think of her shyness at such a moment! But it was but for a moment, and, Patty, even now I don't want to think too much about that bleak morning in January, when for the first time your great mane was plaited into a long, long pigtail, and Mother took away an odd, unfamiliar Patty to school.

That evening there was no one to punch in curtains, or thrust cold fingers through the bars.

I had been tucked up in bed some time before Mother got back. Poor Mother, she must have been tired as well as sad, but she toiled up to the nursery at once and laid a large parcel in my skinny little arms.

"I hope I didn't wake you, Kitten, but Patty made me promise you should have this to-night."

And then Baby was hopelessly snivelling again. For all Patty's little tips had been spent on this large baby-doll. It was bad enough that Mother kept on repeating, "It took up all her money, poor little girl," thus unconsciously driving the knife into Baby's flesh; but what somehow added to the poignance was that Baby had never cared for dolls, especially baby-dolls, and that Patty, knowing this, had sent the abject little message:

"I'm dreadfully sorry, my Babsie, but I couldn't find any shop in Bath that sold your little horse-hair horses."

I can fancy the alarmed and over-excited little pig-tailed Patty, so soon to be one of those one hundred and twenty at the big school on the hill, unable to eat the promised tea at Fortt's, dragging Mother from toy-shop to toy-shop for "little horse-hair horses," and then the final desperate buying of the very thing she knew her little sister didn't care about.

I can fancy her thinking miserably of this, thinking of the firelit nursery, the noisy "tick-tock" of the clock, of Baby scared and wretched, too frightened to sit up and too frightened to lie down. Yes, I'm sure she thought of all this, as she lay that night in her pitch-pine cubicle, and heard the rustling of many bed clothes, the stifled sniffs and loud nose-blowings of homesick little girls lying in the darkness about her.

How long after you bloomed into a schoolgirl did we leave the Manor House? I don't know, Patty. It was a horrible frightening time to a child of nine. The solid earth seemed splitting and opening beneath her little square-toed strap shoes. Was it possible Life itself could continue with no Patty, no Clémentine, no nursery, schoolroom or Hurdy? With Baby's four chaffinches given away—to perish, as she afterwards learned, of thirst—with independent Charlie growling and swearing to himself, despatched to an uncle in Wales, Osric to his breeder, Flash elsewhere, the doves captured and caged, and all the smaller fry of pets disposed of?

Baby did no lessons now. She could play horses all day, or wander away to the fir plantation at the bottom of the kitchen garden, and hear the men at the "Swan" play bowls and swear. There

was no one to stop her. But she did neither of these things. For the ordinary child is orthodox to a degree, and there is something frightful about liberty when it is given with both hands.

Straw was littered everywhere. Horses, their noses buried in their bags, stood at right angles to the great, gilt-lettered furniture vans that had corrugated the gravel of the drive so cruelly. And these vans hungrily opened their black mouths, and men fed them from the porch till they were full.

And then the last day came, a bleak, grey morning of rigid hedges, sour yellow-green fields, and the spring songs of the birds stopped in their little throats.

The stark, unfamiliar nursery, with the lighter squares and oblongs on the walls where furniture had stood, this unfamiliar nursery looking on to the familiar farm-yard and its gobbling turkeys, this had been left. Red-eyed Clémentine had crushed her sobbing *Bébé* to her bosom, till the bone buttons of her bodice were imprinted on *Bébé*'s white cheek; and now the station fly grittily lumbers past black-green, rosy-berried yew trees, and bare standard rose trees, and Mother is half laughing, half crying:

"Oh, my little Kitten, you are a real little Pussy Cat to love a house so much."

And then, as the fly passes the snowball tree, the wall where Patty and Baby had once waved good-bye to George, as pink and puffy he was driven away to school, Baby is seized by a fresh paroxysm of sobs. Does something whisper that things will never be quite the same again, that in saying good-bye to those old chimneys, those ivied gables with the little rose windows, and the pale, frail church tower on the hill, she is saying good-bye to something else; that henceforth she starts on a new phase of existence?

Oh, that journey to London! The woman who asked, "What is the little girl crying for?"

This shamed the "soldier's daughter" into silence, a silence only broken every moment or two by long, shuddering, and totally unexpected sobs. Baby drove her teeth in her under lip, and stared out at the flying country, the flat large fields, the low broken hedges, the far away hills purple against the pale sky. And as she stared she tried to nurse the little china baby-doll Clémentine had secretly been dressing for a week past; but the doll was too small to nurse. It had thick, wrinkled, yellow china hair, instead of a proper bald head, and Clémentine had made it a cherry-

coloured satin cloak and hood. Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea would have loved that thick yellow hair and the cherry satin hood and cloak, but Baby thought it wasn't "real" for a baby to have either. Baby would play for hours with five stripy marbles pilfered from "Pigs in Clover." To her they were live pigs with grunts and cloven feet, wicked little eyes and whisking tails, and even piggy smells, but now her imagination jibbed at a baby with yellow curls and a cherry satin cloak. And anyhow, the sound and feel of woollen gloves catching on to satin was as horrible as when the gardener's broken nails groped in sand for the co too's cage. And then came a hiccoughing sob at the thought, they would not grope again.

That night was spent in a private hotel in Jermyn Street, Patty. Baby had a little bed made up in the sitting-room, and here, wakeful and round-eyed she listened to the chink of the knives and forks, the voices of Father, Mother and some man who had come in to dinner. And Baby the following morning forlornly asked the chambermaid to kiss her; Baby drew her a picture of all the lost pets on half a sheet of silurian paper, and Baby promised to write to her from Italy.

Patty, how merciful it was that neither you nor I guessed at those months that were to pass be-

fore we met again. You spent your Easter holidays with Cécile, while I was still with Mother and Big Sister and Granny in Italy, and it was not till the beginning of August that you came to the lodgings at Dover.

You came back a rather leggy, colt-like Patty, whereas "the boys" said I had "grown downwards like a cow's tail." There was now as vast a difference between our heights as there was between our relative importance, a real schoolgirl of fourteen, and a very ignorant little girl of nine, who had "done no lessons" for seven months. You were very dear, Patty, but the first five minutes at the station showed me things were different now, that our pleasures were no longer to be measured by the same rule. For I had a reefer jacket with bright brass buttons on it, and clox on my new stockings. For a week or more I had thought excitedly of your envy. I should have been miserable had you been envious, yet such is the human heart, it was worse still to hear the careless, "Awfully nice, Babs. I've got clox on all my stockings, too."

What a frightful summer that was, Patty. No nursery, no Clémentine, no animals, no garden, orchard or nuttery ever again. All the little "horse-hair horses" stored in a London Depos-

itory. Only five "Pigs in Clover" marbles and one doll to play with. Mean little rooms, stifling heat, and oh! the fleas we caught on the beach! We used to pity Cap'n and Col'n with the flies in the old days, but they at least could tail-flick and shudder, or knock them off their stomachs with a quick hoof, while our poor little devoured tummies had chemise and vest, white-ribbed piqué stays and bands of petticoats, a tightly buttoned frock and a sash, between them and relief. They tell me Dover is a delightful place now. It was the abomination of desolation to us children that summer, wasn't it, Patty? The very name Snargate Street, how sneery and snarly it sounds! One can't even pronounce it without wrinkling one's nose.

There was no Clémentine now to look after us, so we were not allowed out of sight of the lodging-house windows; we were not to go near the sea. Do you remember the squeezing under the boats to try to get a little shade? The boats were drawn up where the tide could never reach them, so there the beach was dirty, smelling of fish, and more "fleey" than ever. Do you remember the watching other children paddling and not being allowed to paddle oneself, or even take off one's shoes and stockings? Do you remember

turning from the sea, only to watch other children jogging screamingly along on rat-like seaside ponies, and not having the pennies to ever ride ourselves? True, it was some comfort to exclaim witheringly to each other, "They can't even rise!"

We had no friends, had we, Patty? Wistfully we thought of "the little C's" running wild down in Somersetshire, of Cécile in Switzerland, of lint-haired Rose and Netty, and "hip-disease Georgy," always on his back now, but still smiling cheerfully, I'll swear. We thought kindly even of the little Daubenys, for at least we could have quarrelled with them, couldn't we?

It was too hot to play horses up and down the esplanade; our eyes, accustomed to woods and orchards and dark old barns to play in, ached with the glare of the sun on the oilily heaving sea and on the beach. We squeezed under the boats, and played listless games with hot, dry, fishy, smelly pebbles, that looked as though they had never been wet in their lives. One shut one's eyes and guessed what kind of a stone the other put into one's hand. They were all dogs. A long, thin, yellow one would be a dachshund, a spotted a Dalmatian, and so on. Each had twenty dogs to guess, and whoever won gained the supreme privilege of throwing twenty stones at the other's

ankles as she stood meekly up to receive them. But even the stones scarcely hurt, did they, Patty? For that summer we moved in a swimming glassy, glary dream, with smells of stale fish and bad tobacco meandering through. We wondered whether we should ever be happy again; wondered, and thought not.

What family rows and squabbles there were in that little house on the Marine Parade! It was hardly to be wondered at, with but one over-furnished sitting-room for a squawking cockatoo and eight people to live and eat in, two of the eight being children! No doubt the hateful lodger underneath made us all the more irritable, for you remember, Patty, she played "The Soldiers' Chorus" from Faust morning, noon and night, till in sheer desperation Big Sister would drown her with Beethoven's Pathetic Sonata, or the fire, the sweetness, the suffering of Chopin. And this familiar music, flowing from Big Sister's fingers recalled the spacious white-panelled drawing-room, and a host of joys perhaps really less happy than they seemed, yet joys that rhymed and chimed most poignantly in the hearts of Patty and Baby.

Do you remember the match-box episode, Patty?

I think Big Sister must have had a row at dinner, don't you? for afterwards she flounced upstairs into the room she shared with you and me, so mutinously as to wake us both up. And then somehow we were all three hanging out of the window, the night touching our faces like warm, dark velvet.

Beneath, in the faintly flickering gas-light, young men, and girls in white dresses passed with a fragment of conversation, a laugh, a whiff of tobacco, the scraping of footsteps on the pale pavements. Beyond the Parade the waves broke with a plash, and that melancholy withdrawing of pebbles that drags so at the heartstrings. From out of that hot violet darkness which was the sea, flashed Grisnez in red and green.

And now in the little room under the roof, twenty-one, fourteen and nine years old are conspiring, their heads close together. There are chuckles of laughter heard; a candle is lit, and an old empty match-box is carefully wrapped in innumerable papers, and sealed. On it Big Sister prints in exquisite letters, EXPLOSIVE. CAUTION. The candle is blown out, three heads pop from the window, and when the pavement is deserted Big Sister deftly throws the mysterious little parcel just under the lamp-post. It falls

with a little pop, and lies there in the light, asking to be picked up.

One or two engrossed lovers pass, and then those three watching in the dark overhead are rewarded. Big Sister grips a night-gowned arm on each side of her. For there below in the street a man is pausing to poke with his stick; he stoops, finally picks up the packet, stands under the lamp and gingerly turns it over. First one wrapper is undone, then another. There is quite a little litter about his feet as he opens the match-box and reads in clear, black letters:

"O YOU GREAT FOOL."

And yet another memory shines out from the past. That little shop, Patty, where a fat, pleasant-faced woman sold newspapers, plums, cherries, last year's nuts and Fry's chocolate creams in bars. Do you remember how we, who had always had the run of kitchen-garden, orchards and nuttery, craved for fruit in those burning seaside days? We knew the grown-ups had no pennies to spare, and to do us justice we never asked for any, did we? But do you remember one afternoon waiting in a nonchalant way outside this little shop, while I sidled shamefacedly in and laid something very small upon the counter?

"Would you be vewy kind, please, and give us

some fwuit for this? It's a mewikan cent. A mewiken lady gave it me in the twain coming back from Italy. P'waps it's vewy ware. It's got a wed Indian's head with feathers on it."

I have forgotten the fat woman's face and name years ago. I don't suppose I could find the shop now, but whether she be alive or whether she be dead, I shall always think kindly of her, who smiled and handed a little bag of cherries with the treasured cent to the cream-haired child on the other side of the counter.

It was Big Sister, I think, who suggested we should be taught to swim. How we adored our lessons! How the sea, and even the glimmering green water of the swimming baths, where our voices rang hollow and loud, washed away the memory of those hot, thirsty, fishy-smelling stones by the boats! Swimming had nearly as great an attraction for you as riding; for me even more. I remember at four, lying on my tummy across a chair in the nursery and working my fat little arms and legs in mid-air. And, Patty, I do think our aerial swimming helped us, for, if you remember, from the very first the red-faced old fellow at the baths had us swimming like little frogs. How proud he was of us both, teaching

us to dive, to save life, and all kinds of fancy swimming for nothing.

The one blot was that Mother would not let me bathe if I were pale, and as I was always pale this was a serious thing for you as well as me, wasn't it? For it was an unwitten law that if I was not allowed to bathe you would generously give up your bath, too. And this meant "dachshunds" on the beach. Happily for us we found that Patty's stiff hair brush applied briskly to Baby's cheeks just before going in to Mother to say good-morning as she ate her breakfast in bed, made Baby's cheeks quite marvellously pink. It was very painful, but, of course, the bath was worth it, and there were some glorious days when petals of scarlet geranium or roses could be found. After I had spat on these you rubbed them on my cheeks, and if we had been quarreling as we dressed, you spat on them instead of me, and then I hated you. I don't think many little girls of fourteen could have persistently rouged their little sister's cheeks and never be found out. But you did, Patty.

It was not often you who spat, for day by day we drew nearer to that impenetrable black wall —the End of the Holidays. I remember the last evening so well, don't you? Oh, the despair!

Mother had let us go to Semidini and have tea by ourselves, for a great treat. But cornets and éclairs alike stuck in our throats, and soon, hand in hand, we wandered forlornly away to the rocks on the other side of the pier.

It had rained in the afternoon, but the evening was soft and shining. Beneath the towering cliffs the rocks were dark and slippery, the little stretches of sand drying palely in patches. And there, under the bright evening sky, the helpless little cry of the tiny, far-off waves sounding ever in their ears, two sad-eyed little girls drew with their forefingers rather lopsided hearts, each pierced with an arrow and dripping blood. Patty, the sand was wet and cold, and now, as I think of its grittiness sticking to those little pink, chilled fingers, I feel again a desperate choking in my throat, and a despair appalling in its entirety.

Did anyone pass that night, and seeing those lopsided, stricken hearts, smile in tenderness for the lovers who had been there? They might have laughed outright, had they known these were not the laborious tracings of man and woman, but those of two little straight-haired girls who liked

to "pwetend we're sisters." So let us hope the only passerby was the pitiful tide, who crept up, and washed over those wounds, that bled on for so many days in two living little hearts.

LETTER NVMBER IX.

LETTERS TO PATTY

IX.

OH, Patty, I wish you were here. I am tingling with excitement. I want to laugh and cry. I want to talk to you so. Did you know I had another nurse? A pretty creature with fine, wavy hair, Irish eyes and long-fingered hands. She delights in Walter Pater and William Morris, and quotes Keats to me. And this morning as she was making my bed she exclaimed:

"How your name suits you! I have only met one other Elaine in my life. And that was years ago when I was quite a child. And do you know she was a little like you!"

"Tell me about her."

"Well, I was staying for a day or two with some little cousins, and Elaine, a very fair, very pale little girl came to tea, bringing with her the biggest poodle I've ever seen——"

(Patty, how it made me think of dear Athos.)

"His hind leg was bandaged, and little Elaine was so unhappy about the poodle she would not play, would hardly speak to us in fact."

(Oh, Patty, do you remember that torn and too tightly bandaged dew-claw that eventually killed our fuzzy-wuzzy darling?)

"What were your cousins called? Where do you say they lived?" I could hardly get out the words.

"Oh! but you mustn't get so excited, you know. The O'Beirnes. I expect you know and love his poetry, don't you? He's my uncle."

Oh, Patty, Patty! I have been hearing about "the little O's" all the morning. Micky still has his girl's cheeks, though he is thirty-three. He is in Egypt, writing poetry and trying to heal a lung. Does he ever remember scrunching up a spider in those square, wide-apart teeth of his, do you suppose? Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea has three little girls. I wish I knew if they wear brown leather knee-caps, as their mother did, and I do hope they haven't got fat legs, and servantified boots with loose buttons and big fancy scallops. Master Desmond was never "took" after all. He and Pat are doing well in the Indian Civil, and that ridiculous "Baby O" who had to jump or have the blue-bottle in her curls, is just engaged to the curate, if you please.

I can't write any more. It was all so real and interesting; and now so dull, so stupid! Have

you ever read a love scene, and thought to yourself "How true! How fine!" And then perhaps the door opens and Jim has come in. And at his first word, at his familiar grin, all those long, glowing descriptions, those fine words pale into worthless grey ashes.

Patty, I wish I didn't know Micky was writing poetry in Egypt. I like him much better scrunching a spider in the nuttery. And Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea, why isn't she shrieking with laughter as she rolls convulsively on your bed, the tears pouring down her cheeks. "Fath—ur—says—I m-must-n't—l-l-laugh!" It is simply silly to talk about Desmond and Pat as though they were men. For it is only last night that I was drilling with them in the Southside nursery, and they couldn't even lunge properly. The furniture had all been moved aside, leaving quite a large space of cocoanut matting; the opaque white glass lamp stood on the high chest of drawers, and the Sergeant from Taunton with the crimson sash that swore so horribly with his tunic was hoarsely shouting "'Tenshun!"

You, of course, Patty, were at the School of Art in Taunton, for it was Wednesday; but Cécile, with her dark mop, her clear light eyes and shrugging little shoulders, was pulling frightful faces

at Micky to try to make him laugh, immediately assuming a serious and very intelligent look as the Sergeant turned; Rose, Netty and Jimmy were there, and Wishy-Washy-Pale-Tea, earnestly sucking a strand of her brown hair, till the Sergeant glared, and hastily she let it fall. And presently we were all marking time as loudly as the cocoanut matting would permit, and led by that alert squirrel-haired Philip, marching round the nursery, shouting "The Men of Harlech" at the top of our voices. (Desmond behind me just like a bee in a bottle, and treading on my heels too.) Our cheeks were flushed, our ears burned, and with the singing and the marching came an excited exhilaration that lasted all the evening; through milk, and biscuits of animals' heads and letters of the alphabet, through the buttoning on of boots, quarrelling for the button-hook and losing the paper the shoes were wrapped in, and through the being smothered in knitted jackets that made the sleeves of one's coat too tight, and on into the sharp, still winter night. Overhead glittered a myriad stars, underfoot broke the frail ice that reached from rut to rut, and the voices of the little Housemans came ringing through the darkness.

"Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

And when Clémentine and I came to the village what a flood of bright, warm light like golden water poured from the "Swan" door, Patty! A little farther on the village shop beckoned so invitingly with its trays of nuts and oranges and apples its lights shining behind the tall, greenish glass bottles of sweets, its chains of tissue paper, its frosted Christmas wreaths of snowy churches with lit windows robins sitting on the very iced flower-pots. [illegible] one and I lingered a moment despite of the cold.

Well, I suppose it was a dream. Desmond and Pat are in India. I'm awake and "It's only a Grey Day to-day," Patty. But sleep must come by and bye, though there is no Patty to touch her fingers through the bars; and when Baby does wake bewildered by the rushing of waters, rainbow mists and white fire of bells when Baby does falter "Is it a Grey Day?" Someone will answer:

"It's a Happening Day to-day!"



LETTERS TO PATTY