15 July 1920

Boy Blue I must tell you the tale of the overshoe – it’s a long tale, but that’s the kind marmosets have. They are born that way.

 The early chapters of the story take us back a year to the time when Edna was on the scene. You remember that she had a passion for hats. I forget how many I bought her during the six months that I footed her bills, but she had seven or eight anyway. On one of the occasions when I was buying her a new outfit in the fond expectation that she would secure a position on the strength of it, she took a fancy to a white georgette hat. It was a delicate affair with a large, white, transparent brim which set of Edna’s face like a halo, and a big black velvet crown. Altogether it was stunning and Edna looked a picture in it with her lovely blonde hair and blue eyes and her face which still looked so childish. After she had seen that hat no other would suit her. It was the best one in the store, hand-made and on that account expensive. I bought it.

 You may recall last winter as a particularly severe one. You left town on the day that the blizzard set in so you missed it. But for a month the city was in the grip of snow and sleet and ice and bitter cold. That was when the flue was at its height. And I had no shoes and only half a pair of oversoles – the other half having been lost by Edna. Often did I pick up that lonely brand-new overshoe and wish for its mate. Every time I went out in my pumps I got my feet soaking wet and nearly frozen. I thought of Edna a lot those days.

 This spring I was engaged in the usual vernal house cleaning. Last fall when Edna left, I sent her by parcel’s post one of my suit cases containing all the clothes I’d given her and some additional things I thought she’d need. She put up at the Hotel Pennsylvania, you know, living in grandeur on the checks I sent her every day. At that time I didn’t bother to open the large hat box containing the white georgette hat; I knew what that hat had been through, what it looked like and that Edna wouldn’t want it anyway. I planned to throw it out a little later when my spirits would have been revived. But time slipped by and I just never touched the box which stared at me as a reminder of the ways in which I had squandered my money. Finally one sunshiny day this spring when the world and I were full of laughter, I hauled out the hat box to throw it away. I opened it up and there on the white brim of the hat was peacefully reposing the long lost overshoe! I rolled over on the floor hugging the prodigal gum-shoe to my heart and enjoying one grand good laugh. ‘Twas so typically like Edna either to throw her best hat on the floor amidst the shoes, or to elevate the shoes to the hat box. Shortly after she left I found on the floor with the shoes a $125 silk gown from Giddings. She had already told me she no longer cared for the gown so I kept it; someday you’ll see it.

 Moral: The moral of this tale is two-fold. First, if I’d cleaned out the hat box last fall when I should have I’d have found the overshoe then. Second, I pined for a pair of overshoes all winter and didn’t get them; when I stopped worrying about them lo! they descended out of a clear sky. Therefore, don’t worry.

 Pal dear I felt so sorry for the little boy on ship-board who had no one to dance with. But really did you expect all the women to meet you with open arms. You should meet me on ship-board; I’d at least be a pleasant person to have around as you approached the equator. I’d have such a cooling effect upon the atmosphere. If we had never met before and you tried to strike up an acquaintance with me on ship-board, you wouldn’t write to one of your pals at home that you had met a herd of Ankylosaurus on board – you’d say you had collided with an iceberg with fatal results. Of course, I’ve never been on a long cruise such as you had, maybe I’d melt a bit after a few days on the water. I’ve never been on a steamer more than thirty-six hours.

 Do men do funny things trying to get acquainted? I find that resorting to polite monosyllables and an air of frigid aloofness is the most successful way of making a man disappear himself in a hurry. If I’m dealing with the variety that likes to sit in the saloon and gaze at lonely maidens, I fix my gaze on a point in the wall just one inch above the top of the man’s head. Then I look at that point real hard as though there wasn’t anything else in the room. Better still I fix my gaze upon a point in the wall (an imaginary point, since I can’t really see it) right behind the middle of the man, and I look at it with profound interest just as though the man’s bulk didn’t intervene, just as though I could see through him as easily as an x-ray could. Or I look long and rather pityingly at his shoes as though there were something the matter with them. I look sort of pained and sad as though I were saying to myself “Too bad.” The man begins to shuffle, to look at his own feet to see what is the matter with them and finally when he can bear the strain no longer he gets up and walks away. The only difficulty I ever experience is in keeping my face straight long enough to have my gazing stunts work. It’s too bad I know you so well that I’ll never be able to try any experiments on you – I’d explode with laughter after about 30 seconds if I ever did try.

 But you mustn’t altogether blame the women for presenting such crusty exteriors. There have been many circumstances when I felt impelled to enter into a friendly chat with a man, but nearly always when I followed the impulse I regretted it. A man so often takes a mean advantage that a woman in time learns to follow one general rule – never to unbend. I think it is too bad that men and women just meeting casually cannot more freely enter into conversation; there are many times when one has to spend a lonely evening that could just as well be spent with some one in a similar plight on board a ship, at hotel or theatre or dinner. Men have spoken to me at times when I felt sure that all they desired was a little companionship, someone to pass an hour or two with, but I gave them the cold shoulder. And two or three times when I let down the barriers a bit and tried to meet them on terms of camaraderie I couldn’t get rid of them; they stuck like a postage stamp, they wanted to call; to take me to dinner and the theatre and the Lord knows what not, and of course they tried to kiss me. Really Pal, all joking aside, if a woman allows some little incident to be used as an opening for a conversation with a stranger he’ll get down to love-making before an hour has passed; usually of course, he won’t be serious, he’ll want some kisses and caresses simply to wile (sic) away the trifling with love. Men do such unsolicited things. I think I told you before about the man who spoke to me at the Endicott. I was writing to you and a man came up to the desk at which I was seated and said something. I thought he was looking for a pen and paper and I looked up at him with an air of ordinary politeness and willingness to help him out and he called me “Dearest.” What makes a man do a thing like that? I dropped my eyes and went on writing to you. But he didn’t go. He started in talking as though he had known me always and you’d have thought we were engaged, to say the least; the way he called me dearest and darling. He was so agreeable and chummy, not at all fresh in his manner, that I really was tempted to talk to him. He had a deep, musical voice, refined and altogether charming I’ll admit. He drew up a chair beside me with an air of sweet patience remarking “That’s a very long letter you’re writing, Darling.” He seemed to be waiting for me to finish and while I wrote – for I continued writing just as though he wasn’t there – he poured an amorous rhapsody into my ear in a low and caressing tone. As I say, he did it so well, I really was tempted to answer him and find about what it all was about. But I didn’t have my courage with me. Instead, I picked up my things and without even looking at him walked into the crowded main waiting room. What makes a man start something like that with a woman who has not even invited him with her eyes or been conscious of his existence? You see Pal it gets so after a while that a woman dare not even look at a man long enough to size him up – she just rebuffs all men on general principles. It’s the men’s own fault isn’t it? But I should think that on a cruise like yours things might be different. Every man is presumably a gentleman in the first class on a steamer like that and a woman, I suppose, might take a chance and be human. When I go on a cruise on the Mediterranean I’ll think of your sad experience and I’ll be nice and chummy with all the young men.

 Pal dear, the sex which you so charmingly represent arouses my curiosity. Men make me speculate a lot. Are they really so frivolous and inconsequential as they seem? Why are men willing to play with the words and actions of love, to make love to any woman who gives them half a chance or even none at all? Is it New York that gives one a perverted idea of men or are they like that everywhere? Why is it that hardly a day goes by that I am not spoken to, molested, or followed by some man who is a total stranger to me! Don’t men ever think of keeping themselves fresh and pure for the one woman as a woman keeps herself for the one man? Why do men pour out the wine of love by driblets along the wayside so that when they come to marry they have only an empty flask to offer to the woman who gives the fullness of her love? Are men as I seem to see them or are they different and better? Tell me Boy Blue.

 These questions cannot be answered tonight – not with you a whole month’s journey away from me. In the meanwhile till you tell me just how wicked your sex is I’ll go on liking men on general principles. Your sex will ever be a puzzle to me just as mine is to you and wouldn’t it be terrible if either puzzle were ever solved? ‘Twould take all the joy out of life.

16 July 1920

I must come to a temporary halt because I want this letter to catch the next steamer to Africa. Dear Pal will you give me some advance warning of change of address so that I won’t be writing to Africa long after you’ve left? Just think, it takes two months for a round trip in our correspondence – that is for a letter from you to reach me and my answer to be written and get back to you. And such a lot of things can happen in two months.

 Dear Boy Blue are you very, very careful about your health? Typhus and the bubonic plague are running riot in Europe and the East, and Africa is a particularly unhealthful place. It isn’t so much the risk one runs in having one of the deadly fevers, for one may pull through, it is that the after effects go with one all through life. But I won’t be a doleful raven croaking at the feast. You seem to have a charmed life and I find it difficult to imagine any harm coming to you. I would appreciate it if you’d send me postal cards from time to time just so that I could know you are well and safe. You needn’t write anything on the cards if you’re too busy – the address in your handwriting would tell me all I wanted to know. I miss you a good deal but I’m glad you’re having this wonderful trip. All this good fortune which has come to you makes me very happy.

 Good-bye for a little while Boy Blue.

 Always your devoted

 Marjorie Daw