23 June 1920

Dear Boy Blue,

I am lost in wonder and admiration at all your exploits. You can guess how proud I am of my Pal but perhaps you don’t know how happy I am over all his good fortune. I always feel so buoyant and joyful when something really splendid falls to the lot of some one who is dear to me. Your good news came at a rather trying time just when I needed something pleasant to think about.

But none of these good things came to you because you were born under a lucky star. A successful person seldom owes very much to sheer luck. It’s work, hard, grilling work that brings success. You’re worked hard on the Cuban venture; you knew your ground and could speak with authority and assurance. You have behind you years of experience in the field; you know what you’re talking about and I’m sure, though I’ve never heard you do it, that you have the none too common gift of conveying your scientific knowledge in a readily understandable form to the uninitiated. Moreover, you get at the meat of the problem without tiring your audience with a mass of detail. I thought your Cuban report was so sensible – it contained the essentials but not a cumbersome account of the scientific details which would be of interest only to a specialist. I can see so clearly why you are a success with business men, but it isn’t luck, dear Pal, it’s first of all personality, then your general ability and scientific knowledge and prestige. Then you have something else in your favor and that’s your general bearing, your presence, the thing which strikes a person even before he speaks to you. You know as well as I do that the majority of scientific men fall short in their bearing; they may know a great deal but their development is frequently so one sided that they are like fish out of water when set down in any other habitat than a study or laboratory. They do not carry themselves well, they grow round shouldered, they become absent-minded, too introspective. In the over-development of the intellectual side of life they lose the art of living and dressing; they neglect their bodies, they take insufficient exercise and recreation and the result all told is the development of a brain not a man. I know so many of them. They lack the savoir faire, the savoir vivre of the man of affairs; they simply don’t impress you. They might have a perfectly good proposition and yet not get a business man to take any interest in it simply because they wouldn’t know how to present it – they would not know how to “get it across.”

I’ve been following the activities of the Standard Oil closely in the paper and know of their recent statements of a shortage of crude oil in the fields already known in this country. How very opportune your Cuban offer was! But even that seems to dwindle into insignificance beside the Abyssinian venture. The trip alone is worth having, as you say, even if nothing comes of the oil situation.

Little Boy Blue, I do envy you your trip to the land of sphinxes. Abyssinia wasn’t just a name to me. Ever since the days when I first began to study ancient history I have had the keenest longing to go to Egypt and travel up the Nile. In later years I have read of that most interesting of all rivers which has its headwaters in the mountains of Abyssinia, where the torrential rains pour down their annual quota, but which then flows for a thousand miles through the Nubian Desert with not a single tributary. Yet so plentiful is the supply of water at the source that the river is able to survive its long journey through the desert deploying at last on its magnificent flood-plain with its load of rich silt brought from the far away mountains to the south. Egypt, “the gift of the Nile,” the cradle of civilization, has fired my imagination always. And the Pyramids! When I was a little girl their antiquity aroused my interest; now that I am versed in palaeontology I would gaze on them reverently because of their antiquity which antedates antiquity, for the hand of man which reared those monumental sepulchers five thousand years ago, built them of nummulitic limestone which measured its age by millions of years.

I’m glad you gave me your itinerary, for the places you mentioned were familiar to me and I like to be able to imagine you at the different stages of your journey. Did you see the Bitter Lakes of Suez? It seems to me that in my varied reading I’ve read about everything in the world, but I wonder if I shall ever see a single one of the things I’ve learned about from books.

If I was tempted to hide myself as a stowaway on the “Philadelphia” only think how much greater would be my temptation to hide myself away in your caravan. But I suppose there’s no room for a stowaway on a “ship of the desert” – one can’t hide between a camel’s humps any more than a camel can get through the eye of a needle or a rich man enter the Kingdom of Heaven – back to the Bible by jinks! How did we get there? Pal how I wish I were on just that particular trip with you. It must be so different from other trips – the people, the scenery, the traveling by camels, the unparalleled opportunities for new discoveries. It all seems like a tale from the Thousand and One Nights and you – you must be the Prince of Abyssinia.

And what, what, ***what*** can this little marmoset have to say to the Prince that will be of any interest to him? The facts of my daily life are such stupid inconsequential things. My existence is particularly monotonous at present, bounded by a narrow routine and a narrower income.

But, Pal, even if there’s nothing worth recounting from day to day, even though I spend long hours on elevated trains and in an office, even though Fortune isn’t smiling on me, yet I feel that I have much to rejoice over. I am living a very secluded life just at present, putting in, as a rule an eighteen hour day at hard work. I have no recreation because I can’t afford even the movies; I’m not seeing my friends because I can’t entertain at all and I’m ashamed always to accept hospitality. Truly it would seem to be not an ideal modus vivendi, yet I find that it is doing some wonderful things for me. As outward circumstances become more unpleasant, as Fate piles up disappointment on disappointment, as I find myself spending the greater part of my waking hours in surroundings which offend every one of my senses, I find that my inner life grows more happy and beautiful in proportion. One cannot always direct circumstances, one cannot always control the forces and influences which are at work on each individual, but one can have complete control over one’s thoughts and soul and spiritual development. For instance, there seems at present to be no escape from the long ride on the elevated at night when I have to stand sometimes for an hour and a half amid a crowd of evil smelling foreigners who pollute the air they breathe with their language and their great “unwashedness.” I might let the intolerableness of the situation eat into my soul but instead I make my thoughts so beautiful that I forget all about all my surroundings. I recite poetry to myself or I close my eyes and allow exquisite pictures to pass before my mind’s eye. I recall the glory of ten thousand tulips I saw this spring in the Botanical Gardens, or the image of a full blown rose or a perfect orchid. Most frequently I go off to the land of make-believe just as I used to do when I was a child and I imagine myself doing all the things I want to do. Do you ever just pretend, just make-believe that your dreams have come true? I suppose not. You don’t have to, for you have realities. But it’s surprising how well one can get along on imaginings if you become accustomed to it. I can eat a meager, common place meal with gusto by making believe it is delicious; I can blot out ugly, unpleasant surroundings without even closing my eyes just by imaging that I’m in the midst of a beautiful scene. Not only am I thus able to blot out the disagreeable elements of my environment but I can eliminate by very much the same process everything disagreeable in my thoughts. If I catch myself feeling discontented about something I immediately switch my thoughts to something that I have to be thankful for, if I find myself harboring mean and critical thoughts about someone who has injured me I skip off to thinking about someone who has been kind to me. If I find a certain trend of events is causing me to become blue I stop thinking about them and turn to events the course of which makes me happy. By thus at first consciously replacing mean, unworthy dissatisfied thoughts by generous, beautiful, contented ones I am cultivating the habit of cheerfulness and happiness. I find now that I am more often happy than otherwise even when there is no specific reason for my being happy. I wake up full of the joy of living and even the most trying day seldom has any marked effect on me. One of the women where I work said that I was the most cheerful and good-natured person in the office and another one said that she admired my ability to keep sweet no matter what happened.

Sweetness, to me, is the keynote to all spiritual striving. One cannot help having bitter experiences and often one cannot help feeling a temporary bitterness over some wrong, but the important thing is not to let the bitterness sink in, not to let it touch one’s soul.

This past year with its ups and downs, its uncertainties and hardships has somehow succeeded in giving me a better balance, more equilibrium and equanimity. I’ve learned to take hard knocks with greater calmness and not to be perturbed every time Fate nabs me by the nape of my neck and gives me a shaking.

I figure that at my present rate of development I’ll just about have learned how to live by the time I’m a candidate for a six foot hole in the ground. When I sit down and count up all the bad points in my character that have to be remedied and try to calculate how many years it will take I grow dizzy. Why couldn’t one be born good instead of full of faults? Just think how much one could accomplish in three score years and ten if one didn’t have to use so many of those years in simply learning how to live, how to get along with one’s fellow beings, how to bring weak, sinful, erring flesh under the control of mind.

But enough of my embryonic soul! You probably wouldn’t be able to discover a trace of it even with your high power lens.

No doubt you will be a good deal more interested in the fate of your fossils than in the evolution of a thing the existence of which is still not certain. That is, my soul.

In one of my other letters which you may have received if it followed you to Africa, I told you that I had seen Matthew, that he took my address and promised to write in a few days. I felt at the time that I would never hear from him and nearly two months have passed without a word. After I spoke to him and realized that he would do nothing about the Cuban material, I decided to start in on it at once. I found that, thanks to the daylight saving plan, I could get in considerable time in the evenings by natural light and that it was possible to do the rougher work of preparation by gas light. So I’ve been working about three nights a week. I manage to get in at least four hours in an evening if not more – and every Saturday afternoon. I am making better progress than I thought would be possible and have already worked out a fine series of ammonites. I have not attempted any writing as yet. I trust that you really meant it when you said that you wanted the fauna worked up because my chief reasons for doing it is that you asked for it. If you expressed a wish for the moon and it were at all in my power to obtain the fair luminary, I would toddle off to get it for you.

Truly I am better pleased that Matthew made no move. I meant it when I said that I didn’t want to work in the museum again. I prefer to be a free-lance, to finance my own research and carry it on according to my own standards. If you can be patient with me I will get your whole collection worked up and I know I’ll do it better, more carefully than anyone else would. Even under the adverse conditions of work, I turn out as much as, or more than, others do who have free time for research. My paper which I turned in a while ago is now being set up and I’m sure I’ll be able to present you with a copy when you return.

Last week I received a most friendly letter from Dr David White, Chief Geologist on the U.S.G.S. He said he had just heard that all was not going well with me and he asked me if I would like to come to Washington and make connections with the survey. David White has always been very kind and pleasant to me and I thought it exceptionally good of him to go out of his way to offer to help me. The general situation being as it is, I suppose I should have considered his offer as a gift from Heaven sent at the psychological moment. I tried for a day to make myself think I might consider going to Washington; I tried to convince myself that a big salary, a good position, prestige, and the pleasant life in the capital were sufficient inducements to make me leave home. But when I looked around my apartment I felt just as I did when President McCracken wanted me to go to Vassar and Dr. Clarke called me to Albany. I impolitely waited a week to answer David White, thinking that I might change my mind, but in the end I wrote him and said I wouldn’t give up housekeeping and that I didn’t approve of women pursuing careers. I tried to tell him as nicely as I know how but I made it quite clear that I would accept no scientific position anywhere. I suppose I’ll get him down on me same as I have everyone else who has offered me good things which I’ve refused. But I didn’t find any fault with what he had to offer I only called his attention to the fact that I’m a woman and so of course am more interested in keeping house than in science. I told him I didn’t mind doing some research on the side if it didn’t interfere with my domestic duties, etc. etc.

I’ve hit upon a pretty good plan. I try to go to the Museum on alternate nights, then on the off nights I come home and amuse myself with the apartment. I have do to all my work now, even the heavy cleaning and washing because the laundress wanted $4.00 a day for washing and $5.00 a day for cleaning together with luncheon and carfare and wanted to cut the day from 8 to 7 hrs. I said that if I were a millionaire I wouldn’t pay $5.00 a day for that type of work and that I was quite capable of handling that kind of profiteering. So I just do everything myself. My laundress was born in slavery but she’s come a long way, no? She goes south in the summer, one year went to the Bermudas, goes to parties in a taxi, has a $75.00 phonograph and a savings bank account. And I’m earning $4.00 a day without carfare and luncheon. The situation is about on a par with that of the imbecile who came to our clinic; he was 16 yrs. old with a mental age of 6 yrs, he could not read nor write – and he was earning $125.00 a month, while I humbly took in a $100.00 a month for the privilege of gazing on his success. Who wouldn’t be a laundress or an imbecile?

Well, Boy Blue, I must stop soon so as to send this letter on the steamer which sails on Saturday for Africa. You are more than half the world away from me. I’m not so independent and cold hearted as you who care only for things – for dinosaurs, dogs and donkeys – and who never misses any one; frankly I miss you lots and sometimes too I’m anxious about you. Africa is a treacherous place, with deadly fevers and none too friendly natives. Yet somehow I never worry about you for you seem so capable of taking care of yourself, so competent to cope with every situation that might arise.

Pal, I hope you’ll make a point of sending lots of picture postcards to Frances [Barnum’s daughter]. A little girl cares so much for things from foreign lands, and you ought to pick up lots of odd and curious gifts for her just as her mother would do if she were traveling in strange countries. Some day I’m going to read you a real lecture about Frances. I think you aren’t half so good to her as you ought to be. You could be quite the most wonderful daddy in the world so you haven’t any excuse for being anything less.

Of course I’ll look after your mail. I don’t think it’s worth while to forward anything. Had you given me permission I’d have been glad to open and answer the ones from oil companies. Quite a number came from out west and recently one from South America. Mr. Grange has kept the recent letters he opened – it was only some in the beginning he left there. But you know how things go the rounds at the Mus. with embellishment.

Dear Boy Blue I’m thinking of you often and praying for your safety and success. Always your devoted Marjorie Daw.

Did you ever receive the cable I sent to London? I sent you a steamer letter and four letters to London.