July 25, 1920

Dear Pal, I forgot to tell you when I was writing last night about the Mus. that I belong wholly to the Vert. Dept. and shall have no connection with the Invert. Dept. Dr. Matthew1 himself arranged this with Dr. Hovey who seems to have been quite willing not to be bothered with having any research work done in his Dept. My mss. are to be turned into you and then go to Dr. Matthew but not to Pussy. The arrangement is far better than I had dared to hope for. And I’ll tell you this Pal. I was prepared to turn down the offer if I had to be in any slightest way associated with Pussy. I was prepared to put up a fight on the point that no paper of mine should be turned over to Pussy to “correct” and recommend. I would have been sorry to lose the opportunity to work at the Mus. but I had made up my mind not to concede in the matter of Pussy. So think how tickled I was to have Dr. Matthew offer the statement that I was not to be connected in any way with the Invert. Dept. I think it’s simply wonderful to be given such a chance at research by a depart. entirely removed from the field in which I specialized. After encountering the indifference to research which I have met among invertebrate palaeontologists, it is refreshing to be welcomed with open arms by vertebrate men. I have been rewarded beyond my furthest expectations for holding out for a full-time research position. I’ll soon forget the months of going hungry and all the other hardships. It was certainly worth waiting a year for.

Do you wonder at my extreme antagonism to Pussy? Of course as a scientist I resented working under an ignoramous (sic), but far more did I, as a woman, resent being associated with him. He is a contemptible sneak, treacherous and hypercritical and I found daily contact with him a great strain on my self-restraint. So long as he was my official superior I had to show him a certain respect, I had to make conversation with him and sometimes even shake hands with him. Some women would accept a situation like that in order to hold the job; they’d be agreeable and pretend to friendliness as a matter of good policy. But I have none of that sense of servility in my make-up. I reserve to myself my right as a woman to avoid any man whom I regard as beyond the pale of decent society and I would stand by that right even to the point of refusing to shake hands with a king if I know him to be contemptible. My individuality asserts itself pretty strongly most of the time but I see no reason for . . . (continues on p. 3, top) suppressing it. I could not be like Miss P. I cannot bow down in awe before every person who bears a title; I always see the man behind the title and I judge him as a man. Perhaps the reason I’m not awed and scared by titles is that I’ve associated for so long with men of high standing and have been treated as an equal and confrere, while the scientific secretaries I know are always in dependent positions working for, and taking orders from, men whom I meet as equals.

Probably you’ve noted by this time that the spirit of independence burns pretty strong in me. I have to be free to stand by my opinions and beliefs; free to treat a man like Pussyfoot with a chilly aloofness which he cannot fail to feel; free to tell the truth, to be myself as a woman and a scientist. I could never, never stand it to hold a position such as Miss P. has, to suppress my individuality completely, to allowed myself to be walked over, to kow-tow to everyone, never to express a preference or a deciding liking or aversion. Guess I have too much pep.

I vowed in a recent letter that I’d never accept a scientific position anywhere. What I meant was that I wouldn’t go to some other city, live in a furnished room, and devote myself exclusively to science. The present way is just about ideal. I’ll be able to support my home in a comfortable fashion, to have the housework as a recreation and an antidote for too much science; I’ll be able to see my friends, have a reasonable amount of recreation and lead a pretty all-round life. I don’t think there’s any danger of my getting into a rut so long as I can keep up all my interests. The fault I find with most scientific and professional women (including secretaries) is that they devote themselves entirely to the scientific or intellectual side of life. I know one woman college professor (geologist) who dresses like a freak and who says that one should never do anything that isn’t in some way instructive or intellectually beneficial. I know another college professor who is a dress reformer; she is very stout and always looks like a sack of flour with a string round the middle – she’s always separating at the waist and looks as though she’d spill out. Why do so many intellectual women think that they have to dress like freaks to show that they are intellectual? Why must they join societies for improving the conditions of their minds? Why must they become members of Browning Clubs? Why must they think that pink silk ‘jamas and intellectuality are incompatible? If they really are, then I’m done for.

Because – that is, I’m done for because recently in my spare minutes I’ve been making myself a complete outfit of pink satin and crépe de chine lingerie. I had bought the materials long ago so that I incurred no expense and I happened also to have on hand a lot of real, that is, hand-made lace which I’ve had for years. So I’ve been having a glorious time making pretty things for myself. I love to sew and I can have beautiful things that I could not afford to buy just by making them myself. I can put my money into buying good materials by not getting ready-made things. I have what some folks consider a very wicked fondness for silk and satin. Mother says that when she was a girl only one class of women wore silk underwear – but of course she supposes times have changed. She gives me a withering glance and returns to her practical, modest, commonsense, starched muslins – same kind that my grandmother used to wear. Then there’s dear lady Prim – you know whom I mean – she thinks it’s wrong to wear silk stockings and as for lingerie!! Don’t you think it’s a safe bet that she wears high-necked, long-sleeved, plain muslin nighties? O, but I’d like to get her into a pair of pink ‘jamas! What makes me have such wicked thoughts Pal?

Still I’m really rather serious about this intellectual business. I wonder why women who enter intellectual fields feel that it’s necessary to have their intellectuality stamped all over them; why do they think they have to be “different” from other women, why must they scorn all feminine pursuits as beneath them, why do they have to feel that a reasonable interest in dress is demoralizing, why must they always pose and talk learnedly and attend lectures every night? Why, why, why? Intellectual men aren’t like that.

[back of first page, labelled 2] . . . agreeably with women of all kinds and I have found out ways to make even the humblest and poorest woman I meet feel at her ease. I used to be a little proud of the fact that other women didn’t like me, now I’d feel ashamed if that were true. I would not like, for instance, to be so unpopular, so universally disliked as a mutual acquaintance of ours was. I like to be loved. Several of the women treat me as confidants and tell me all their troubles and family difficulties, asking for my advice or for my rules of happiness. I like to have them trust me as they do. One of the typists in particular, a girl whose mother is dead and who doesn’t have a happy home, used to come to me at least once a week. Then she left the Mus. but she writes to me and I had her come to see me and take dinner with me; it just happened that she was visiting the Mus. today and she unburdened her heart of the confidences of the last three or four months since she visited me.

Pal it was just like going home to return to the Mus. and now that I’m to be in the Vert. Dept. I think I shall be very happy. I’m in the right pew at last.

Then, to fill me (sic) cup of joy, came a letter this morning from Edna’s only other friend. You know I have heard nothing since Edna was committed to a sanitarium on Long Island in January. She is still there, not daring to leave because she has no money and she has been all right all these months. Now one of the doctors is going to give her a position in the sanitarium as an attendant and she will remain there. Of course it’s not a glorious career, but in time the drug habit may be entirely outgrown and in the meanwhile she is safe and well and able to earn her own living. She is so sweet and lovely when not under the influence of drugs, and I shall like to think of her helping others along the way. I’m going to write to her because I think maybe she feels a little embarrassed about writing to me and yet I know she’d like to hear from me – she always liked my letters. Won’t it be wonderful if she comes back entirely? I’m beginning to have dreams for her future again, but I hope she won’t ever try to go back to the stage. I’d like to adopt her if she weren’t so expensive.”

NOTE: There seem to be several or many pages missing. The next page is labelled “8” at the top and was apparently part of a letter written on 28 July 1920.”

I’d feel so sorry for her that I’d hug her and kiss her and say that we’d start all fresh again. My feeling toward mother is much the same. For many months I felt that I could never forgive her for the things she said to me a year ago, yet now I’ve forgotten most of them and those that refuse to be forgotten are at least forgiven. All that I think about very much is that mother has had a hard deal from life and if there’s anything I can do to make the last years of her life happy I want to do it. I manage to find lots of little ways to give her pleasure and now that I’m going to be making more money I’ve thought of a number of things that she wants and can’t afford that I can get for her. I’d like to see her happy and content. It’s a form of selfishness on my part, for I myself am always so happy if everyone around me is happy, and I’m unhappy if others are troubled.

Pal, you needn’t think that there’s any real danger [words redacted]. But I know I’m going to have lots of [words redacted] next month feeling [words redacted]. I’ll be right glad [words redacted].

Dear Pal, do you notice what a [words redacted]. And it’s so curious [words redacted] and jolly and trying so hard to be agreeable. Yet I begin to [words redacted] as soon as [words redacted]. Then I call myself names and say “Smile”, and I smile and try to feel cheerful but I don’t succeed. I don’t often think of the fairies [words redacted] and I don’t feel over much joy in the sunshine and butterflies and blue skies. I think it is most strange. Did you ever have anyone affect you like that? I just seem to sense a subconscious emanation of [words redacted]. I am very susceptible to the atmosphere or ether that persons radiate.

It is just that indescribable “something,” invisible, intangible, partly but not wholly included in one’s idea of “personality” – that baffling thing which we may call a person’s aura, which serves to repel or attract individuals. Some persons have faint, weak, hazy auras but others have vibrant, magnetic, thrilling ones. There are some persons whose presence you feel as soon as they enter a room even if you do not hear or see them. They radiate something which fills the room. Some persons radiate irritation, other frigidity, or warmth, fear, geniality, hatred, deceit, jealousy, insincerity, and so on. There are persons whom you instinctively trust the first time you meet them; or you dislike them or fear them, or they make you button up your coat, so to speak, or on the other hand, they make you feel like opening your heart to them at once.

Pal dear, it was this aura, or whatever you want to call it, which emanated so strongly from you, that so completely captured Marjorie Daw in the very beginning. So powerful is this strange something that I feel it even when you are thousands of miles away. It makes me feel cozy, and comfy, and chatty, makes me feel that I can talk to you as freely as though we had known each other from childhood, makes me feel happy, makes my thoughts to run in pleasant channels; it fills my heart with warmth and cheer; it makes me glad to be living on the same earth with you even though we are half the world apart. Your aura is like a wonderful tonic compounded of love, sympathy, and faith. It has helped Marjorie Daw a great deal and she hopes that she’ll be allowed to enjoy it always.

Good night, Boy Blue. I’m very sleepy and must go to Dream-land at once. See how happy I’ve grown while writing to you. It’s always like that. I must stop right now for the sandman is tugging at my eye-lids and I’m sure that if I begin even one more sentence I’ll tell you some of my thoughts which belong only to Dream-land, and if I did then you’d know what only the fairies know, which is, how much Little Boy Blue means to Marjorie Daw.

NOTE:

1. William Diller Matthew, 1871-1930: Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology at the American Museum of Natural History from the mid-1890s to 1927; he specialized in fossil mammals, especially the evolution of the horse.
2. Edmund Otis Hovey, 1862-1924: Assistant/Associate/Curator of Geology at the American Museum of Natural History beginning in 1894; he specialized in volcanoes, earthquakes, and meteorites.