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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: From all the books published each month the editor of *The Retail Bookseller* selects one which he recommends as the outstanding book of the month to booksellers throughout the entire country.

## Editor's Choice

AMID the fanfare saluting "Frenchman's Creek," "Bride of Glory," and other best sellers, listen carefully and you will hear a cockney voice saying "Things look to be moving now." It is Annie, the real author of a book you *must* not miss, "Respectfully Yours, Annie." The book is comprised chiefly of the letters of Annie, a London cook, to her American mistress in America. They are as Annie wrote them, breezy, cheerful, friendly—as British as Bruce Bairnsfather's Old Bill, or the more recent Mr. Wookey.

The letters are addressed to Sylvia Brockway, Annie's mistress, who returned to America on a visit and found she must stay for the duration. "Mrs. B" has done a marvelous introduction for the letters—an introduction that really brings us Annie and the Lamplighter and Annie's great enemy, the gardener, and Mr. B and dogs and cats and neighbors galore, and, of course, "the Babies."

Annie takes the war seriously, but not gloomily. She reports that she could not write last night because of the noise (an air raid). She refers contemptuously to "bangs" and "moaning minnies" and "a few sneaking in." "I don't seem to find much news these dys," she says. "We have had the Jerrys over most of the evening & spoilt a good Sat. night wireless program." She reports increasing difficulty in finding the "luzuries" she believes Mr. B needs (to keep up his strength for A.R.P.).

If you want to know how Britain is taking it, if you want to know who will win the war, read Annie's letters. Then you'll know. I repeat, *don't* miss Sylvia Brockway's "Respectfully Yours, Annie."

Francis Luellow



RESPECTFULLY YOURS, ANNIE



*Respectfully Yours,*

*Annie*



*Letters from a London Cook*



*Introduced by*

SYLVIA BROCKWAY

1942

NEW YORK

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Since Annie's views on some of the people mentioned in her letters are inclined to be prejudiced, I have changed a number of place names and all names of persons but one. There is no imaginable incognito for Annie.

**S. B.**



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INTRODUCING ANNIE



## INTRODUCING ANNIE

*It smelled cool and damp and milky in the little dairy in Burlington Road where I was buying a carton of cream about the size of a napkin ring, one sunny June day in London in 1935.*

*"Looks like it was going to keep fine for Ascot after all," the dairywoman said as she handed me my change.*

*"Thank you. Yes, it does," I said.*

*My mind was not on trailing Ascot gowns that might become waterlogged if it did not keep fine, but on my personal problem of the day. This was a house with two blonde lily-maids who posed as my cook and house-parlormaid, a haughty governess, two children, an outsize white Sealyham, a fat black cat, a six-foot husband and myself and no one inclined to scrub the tiled floors of the scullery and kitchen and the cork linoleum of the children's nurseries.*

*"By the way," I said, "do you happen to know of a good charwoman, by any chance?"*

*"There's a friend of mine, round in Victoria Road, what I couldn't recommend anyone higher, that is if she isn't all booked," said the dairywoman.*

*I went to see the friend in Victoria Road and the next morning at eight o'clock, Annie came trundling down the steps to our back door, black oilcloth carry-*

*all bag in hand, déclassé French model toque on head, and dun-colored coat stretched across her capacious midriff.*

*This is the story of Annie and how she ousted all others, took over us and the household, lock, stock and barrel, and now, with the War that "there Monsoor Daddles" (Daladier) and "our Mr. C." (Chamberlain) "cooked up between 'em," is with my husband the sole survivor of the happy occupants of Number 30 Clinton Hill, St. John's Wood, London, N.W.8.*

*Clinton Hill, since it is now Annie's habitat, needs to be sketched in lightly. St. John's Wood is a pleasantly suburban district situated, by miracle, within a tuppenny bus ride of Oxford Circus. True to its name, it is a region of gigantic trees, lush lawns and front gardens that are bright with flowering may, laburnum, acacia and lilac, tulips and daffodils in the Spring. Our street, like its neighbors, is wide and sunny with two-and-a-half to three-story cream-colored Regency houses set back behind low hedges, railings and garden gates, with here a door and window frames that were painted green, like ours, and here painted yellow or blue or, like our next-door neighbors', pillar-box red. It was a gay, friendly, family street in the years when Annie was there with us: twenty-nine assorted children in its sixty houses; the sound of lawn mowers in the summer and people having tea under the plane trees in their back gardens; Nannies gossiping together as they pushed their prams home from the Park; the door of a taxi slamming as the Major at Number 34 came home late to dinner from arguing with "old Kil-*



larney" at his club; and later, much later if it was summer, because dusk does not come in London until almost ten, the click of the Lamplighter's long stick as he rode from lamp-post to lamp-post on his bicycle. The Lamplighter is an important person in this account of Annie, so is mentioned now in the list of local color.

During that first summer, Annie was just someone who came and scrubbed and went three times a week, obliging and industrious, with a wide grin and bright, responsive eyes. It began that way and might have stayed that way if I had not come down the kitchen stairs one day and overheard a knockdown, dragout oral battle going on between Annie on one side and the lily-maids on the other.

"I ain't nothing of the sort!" bellowed Annie, whacking her teacup down into its saucer.

"Well, Ellen said you were, didn't you, Ellen?" Ivy's elegant voice replied stiffly. "Ellen said she wasn't going to have any old char making remarks about her cooking. Pass the jam roll, will you?"

"Char, my eye!" roared Annie. "I'll have you to know, my fine young miss, I'm as good as any of you. Our Father and Our Mother brought us up lovely, so they did. And what's more, I could show you a thing or two on cooking. I've worked in the biggest houses in London, I have. The Earl of Derby. . . ."

"Oh, pipe down on the Earl of Derby!" growled Ellen. "Perhaps you'd like to tell Madam all about it."

"All I can say," said Annie ominously, to the sound of her chair being pushed back, "if I wanted to tell

*Madam a thing or two what I've picked up with my own eyes around here, it would go hard with you two ladies, that it would."*

*It did, as it happened, go comparatively hard with the two "ladies" with both of whom we eventually parted company. It was never clear who suggested it, but when Ellen flounced out of the kitchen the following Spring, Annie came in by the day, every day, to take her place. "Ivy and me can manage, Mum. I'm a rare hand at cooking," she had said. This statement proved auspicious. For a couple of years, Annie and Ivy worked together, as oddly matched as Marie Dressler and Greta Garbo in a dual lead. When it became evident to all eyes, even mine that had been blinded by the wafer-thin bread she cut for tea, that the willowy Ivy spent more time with her toes to the kitchen fire peering over movie magazines and trying out a succession of fancy hair styles than she did on her housework, she also departed. A jolly-faced, sturdy successor named Rose took her place. Annie liked Rose, who was only sixteen and young enough to become her protégée. She would pad around after her, ready to sew up the side seams in her uniforms which were always splitting slightly as the result of an enormous appetite and a resounding laugh.*

*The governess had left at the end of Annie's first year as the children reached the age when they no longer needed her. I think that was why she left. It surely could not have had anything to do with the fact that Annie and "that Miss A." were at swords' points from the beginning. At all events, the woods were thin-*

ning, the decks being cleared for the ultimate establishment of Annie as the sole factotum, the major-domo, the General in command of Number 30 Clinton Hill. The last step in this campaign—looking back on it I should say that Annie and I were both working toward the same end—came in the Spring of 1939 when our son Hugh was to go away to boarding school and Rose and her “young man” were contemplating marriage.

“It would be a pity to get a new girl in now, Annie,” I said. “Couldn’t you possibly come and live in?”

“Well, Mum, I could and I couldn’t,” said Annie. “You see, it’s me sticks. It’s took me years to get ’em together and I couldn’t part with ’em, like. They’re all I’ve got.”

“Oh, your sticks,” I said, with a great effort to look knowledgeable but puzzled over a picture of a collection of broom handles. “Well, with Rose gone, there would be room for them here or you could put them in the boxroom. While we’re away next month at Steyning, couldn’t you bring them around here?”

While we were in Sussex, I had a note from Annie: “I got the greengrocer’s van to fetch them round. It looks lovely.”

*The deal was sealed.*

When we drove up to the door after our Easter vacation, Annie was at the front gate to meet us.

“You’ll be wanting to come down and see me sticks, I’ve no doubt,” she urged as I still had only one leg out of the car.

No “transformation scene” in a Christmas pantomime

could equal the sight that greeted me. The big kitchen with its yellow walls, blue tables, cupboards and chairs, which the maids had used as a sitting room as the cooking paraphernalia was all in the scullery, was, as Annie put it as she led me in, "a fair bower of beauty." Armchairs in brocaded upholstery flanked the fire and a huge, fumed-oak table held the center of the floor. Strips of cabbage-rose carpet that had seen other days flowered on the blue and cream linoleum. In front of each window stood rattan taborets bearing enormous aspidistras and, triumph of all triumphs, where a broom cupboard had once stood, there blazed into view a glass-fronted whatnot bursting with rank upon serried rank of ornamental red glass of every size and description and miniature white china mugs, vases, jars, saucers, each emblazoned with a fancy crest and "Souvenir from Blackpool," "Souvenir from Yarmouth," "Souvenir from Brighton," as the case might be.

"Worth a king's ransom, they be," said Annie proudly.

"They're beautiful," I said and then with perfect candor, "I never saw anything like it."

"Me bedroom's lovely too," said Annie propelling me into it.

It was indeed "lovely" for anyone who would not suffer from claustrophobia from the effect of what appeared to be a convention of photographs, framed and unframed, which occupied all available inches of wall and table space, an assortment of elaborate sofa cushions which covered the extra bed and a standing-room-

only effect of knickknacks which bedighted the mantel shelf and the tops of the two chests of drawers.

"Well," said Annie with deep satisfaction, "them's me sticks. Your tea's ready, Mum, when you are. I made some rock buns for the Babies. They love 'em. I don't suppose they've had many down at Steyning. You might send 'em down while you're having a wash. They'll be wanting to see me. . . ."

But with that the children came clamoring in and a chorus of "Oh, look at the teeny little jug!" "Oh, Annie, what a lovely orange cushion!" "Oh, Annie, are these your very own chairs!" echoed up the stairs behind me.

The children had been fascinated by Annie from the start. The first day that she appeared at the door of the day nursery, prepared to "turn it out" and scrub its wide floor, they had been loath to put on their hats and go off to Regent's Park with their fairy-cycles and their governess. They came pounding down the stairs, Kit was eight then and Hugh seven, and into my room, full of squeaky whispers about the new person and couldn't they stay and watch her. It seems, on looking back, that it was only a matter of days before they became Annie's "Babies," the which, even at their present dignified ages of fourteen and thirteen, they remain.

Annie's boisterous good humor immediately delighted Hugh. He would romp around with her in mimic pursuits and battles, screeching with joy and giving her, as Annie would happily put it, "a bit of his sauce. He's a one, he is, that boy!" The two of

*them would laugh uproariously together, Hugh pulling Annie's leg, figuratively speaking, of course, and Annie lumbering after him bent on administering a sound whacking. It was she, I am certain, who as the years went on, inculcated or surely encouraged the competitive spirit which brought a parade of silver cups into the house to which Annie proudly gave a weekly polish. It was she who went to the front gate to look for Hugh's crimson school blazer and cap as he turned the corner on his way home to the lunch she had ready for him and she who howled even more loudly than I, if such could be, when he went off in the Spring of 1939 to boarding school.*

*If Hugh was Annie's pet rascal, Kit was her particular friend and confidante. Kit was from the first utterly enchanted by Annie's appearance, her attire, and the highly flavored aroma of her humor.*

*"Do you know, Mummie, what Annie's got on under that flowered overall?" Kit would confide in me. "Two woolie jumpers right on top of each other and a vest that she knitted herself. She says she has to wear those funny slippers because she's got the screws so bad in her feet. What are screws, Mummie? Annie says she is younger than you are. Do you suppose she is?"*

*Perhaps it was the fact that Annie had lost all but two of her own teeth and, as she put it, "couldn't be bothered" to wear the snow-white set for which we gave her the money one Christmas that maligned her into being referred to as "Old Annie." If you came upon her of an evening sitting at the kitchen table poring over the Court Circular column in the paper*

through her "spyglass," as she called the glass off an old turnip watch that she held against her left eye, she might have been any age.

Annie, according to Annie's own view of herself, was a totally different age and a totally different vision from the one that met the eye. It was a trick done without mirrors. Annie never looked in them. I am not at all certain that she did not have a clue to contentment there. Kit, who sees things exactly as they are, used to come to me after a chat with Annie saying, "Annie said she hoped you'd give her your new hat when you've done with it. She said, 'It ud suit me lovely, so it would. Them tiny little ones without brims look sweet on me,'" or "Annie said, 'Of course anyone with a nice figure like I've got can wear these here new Spring styles.!'"

After Ellen and the governess and Ivy had departed and there was only Rose who, according to Annie, was far too young and inexperienced to lend a hand with "the Babies," Annie would come puffing up the stairs to sit on the seat in the bathroom while Kit took her bath, the while I was seeing Hugh through the secondary rituals of bedtime. Thus enthroned, she would entertain my fascinated daughter with the story of her life.

To judge from Annie's past history as it reached me, scrap by disjointed scrap, from Kit, she could hardly have bettered my age by many years.

"Do you know, Mummie, Annie said there were seven children in her family, four sisters and three brothers and they lived with 'Our Father and Our

*Mother' on a farm near Bathford. And when Annie was twelve, she left home and came to London and she was first a scullery-maid in the Earl of Derby's kitchens and she only got a shilling a week and her board because that was a long time ago. And she was there for years and she got to be a kitchen-maid and there were terrible long stone stairs up to where the servants slept and the footmen wore powdered wigs and she had to carry hods of coal and scrub like anything.*

*"Do you know, Mummie, Annie had to go in the hospital and she was there for ages and ages and when she was well, she had to take to going out to clean by the day. She had a friend in Burlington Road and that's why she came to this part of London to live. Who do you suppose she once worked for in Hartford Road? Reggie Fortt's mother! She knew him too and now when he plays the cinema organ on the wireless, she says, 'That's my Reggie, it is!' He gave her a picture of himself and his mother gave her that hat Annie wears. Annie says it came from Paris. Do you think it suits her?"*

*One night, when I went down to the bathroom door to hurry up the pair of them in the midst of one of their interminable chats, I heard:*

*"'E were in tears when I left."*

*"But, Annie, you said you were only one of the scullery-maids."*

*"Kitchen-maid!" retorted Annie, making a firm distinction.*



"Well, how did he know you'd left?" Kit persisted. "You said there was a huge staff."

"The Earl of Derby," said Annie sententiously, "were in tears when I left. You 'avent done your ears, miss."

*From all I imagine about that noble earl and his way of life, I should doubt that he had been aware that our Annie was working in the kitchens of his great house in Stratford Place. A pity that. He would have enjoyed her gamey, back-alley London flavor. Annie is not a Cockney. She was not born within sound of Bow Bells or in a London mews as she would seem to have been. She was born in Somerset. However, in her prolonged period of residence, she has acquired a strong savor of London Town. She is the stuff of which the crowds are made who stand around in the rain from dawn outside the church awning at a society wedding to have a glimpse of the bride, whose history they know as well as they know their own. She is the stuff of which the crowds are made who run a mile to get a whiff of a car that contains any member of the British Royal Family and know the relationship of its members, direct and indirect, as well as they know their ABC's; who follow its doings with a combination of worship and blunt criticism and make that Royal Family both the astounding and inspiring symbol which it still is today.*

*I learned a lot about Royalty from Annie through Kit. Not that Annie and I did not talk for hours about everything from how to get rid of the beetles which overrun the damp dark corners of London's lower*

floors, to Miss Ann's new flat off Berkeley Square for which that glamorous young lady had ordered special silverware all the way from Sweden at, to Annie, vast and shocking expense. Somehow, however, the juiciest conversational morsels fell to Kit at bathtime.

"Annie says Peel's man told her when he came this morning that he saw a Duke's car in Vicarage Road outside the same house where it's been lots of days. There's a lady lives there. I love Peel's man. I always try to be down by the scullery window on Saturday mornings so that I can hear him too. If only I didn't have to go to school, I could see him every day. He does tell Annie such nice things. He said that Mrs. Dunn at 36 fell and broke her hip and that the German, who lives at 49 and thought he had burglars the other night, is probably a spy."

Peel's man was a purveyor not only of groceries but of all the news and gossip culled from "the Street" and its environs. Even before Ellen left, Annie had fumed over the tradespeople and their weekly "books" in which they entered and submitted their accounts. It appeared, according to Annie, that we were dealing with the veriest villains of "the Street" who were "rook-ing us good and plenty." "The Street," better known as Burlington Road, where for the length of a block on either side rows of little rival shops faced each other and overflowed at right angles into Vicarage Road like an inverted T, was and had been, for an unknown number of years, Annie's stamping ground. Here, when their heavy iron shutters had been rolled up of a morning, were the open-fronted butchers and fishmongers,

*the greengrocers and oilshops and ironmongers, the provisions stores and tiny drapers, the chemists and wine shops, the pubs and the bun shops from whom we purchased our very being. The day we had moved into Clinton Hill, we had been met at our gate by what appeared to be a bicycle club on an outing and ten or fifteen eager young men, with order books in hands and pencils behind ears, crowded the steps leading down to the back door, each and every one bent on soliciting our trade. Ignorant of the special virtues of any of the particular shops, Ellen and I had picked at random and in all innocence had believed ourselves to have made an excellent selection. Annie, it appeared, knew better.*

*"Wastin' your good money something terrible, so you was, Mum," she announced with relish, the first morning Ellen left and her own status in the house had changed from char to cook. "It's a crime to let them robbers do you like that. I'll soon show 'em," she thundered as she popped the French toque on top of her head, grabbed the black oilcloth bag and went sternly off up the kitchen steps.*

*"You can't trust what you dont see," she called over her shoulder.*

*"You needn't fret over what to eat from now on, Mum," she said, as she grinned back at me over the gate. "I'll see you have something nice."*

*In this wise, Annie took over the entire question of our housekeeping and I got fatter by the minute, since I always approached my own table with an appetizing lack of knowledge as to what I would find upon it. As*

*to whether or not we actually saved money, it might be as well to draw a slight veil. Annie's extravagance, in those blithe, easy days, was sublime. Her idea seemed to be that only the best was good enough for us. We feasted royally on such delicacies as asparagus out of season, strawberries in January and only the best cuts of native beef. Her one concession was in the matter of Scotch salmon from which she cannily purchased a cut off the tail rather than the more expensive midway portion.*

*Food to Annie was an end-all and be-all and cure-all in itself. There was nothing that gave her deeper satisfaction than to peep in the dining-room door and see the four "B.'s," or any guests we might have, going at our dinner like a pack of puppies and scraping the patterns off our plates. No meal was ever eaten without one or all of us calling out, as we passed the kitchen door afterwards, "Ooooo, that was good, Annie!" "Ooooo, Annie, that was lovely!" "Ooooo, Annie, didn't you like it?"*

*"Me like it?" Annie would say. "I dont eat none of them things. If I get me tea and bread and butter and a dish of porridge for me breakfast and a spot of marmalade, that's all I want."*

*Once I asked her why she didn't finish off a succulent Spring chicken she had prepared for us.*

*"Chicken!" frowned Annie, "not if I see it first! Why, on the farm when us girls were young, Our Father and Our Mother gave us chicken one day and pork the next. Chicken one day, pork the next. Chicken and pork, chicken and pork, until I couldn't look a hen or*

*a pig in the face. Of course," with a perfectly bland expression on her face, "that accounts for us girls growing up with these lovely complexions we've got, but chicken—no, I couldn't eat none myself!"*

*Annie viewed food not according to its caloric content but in terms of who enjoyed what. She firmly believed that, as the music-hall ditty said, "a little of what you fancy never done you any harm."*

*On the Wednesday nights when "Mr. B." played squash after business, my special "titbit" was brought to me on a tray by the sitting-room fire and eaten while Annie beamed at me from the doorway, respectfully, anxiously, then with shining satisfaction. Hungry or not, I had to devour my trayful with loud smacking of lips and chase the last morsel of creamed sweetbreads or scallops or lobster around my plate. "Does you good, Mum," she would say. "Pity Mr. B dont fancy nothing messy like that."*

*Food was a weapon in Annie's hand. Her liking or disliking for some of the people who came to the house was evidenced in her choice of a dinner menu. Her favorites got what might be called Dinner A, one whose preparation was elaborate, lengthy but evidently, to Annie, more than worth the effort. For her special pets, nothing was ever too much trouble. The second-bests got Dinner B, whether I would or no; this being one which did not include Annie's special sardine savory. And woe be unto the ones to whom she took a dislike for any reason or for whom I ever carelessly evinced any lack of enthusiasm! Theirs was Dinner C, a meal which, though perfectly adequate and*

*filling, was as dull as ditch-water. "Annie, Mr. Black is coming to dinner tonight," I would say, timorously. "Oh him!" Annie would reply with scorn and I knew when we took our places at the table that Dinner C was in store.*

*It was on a basis of food that Annie managed to balance things off in respect to our beloved house-keeper, Mrs. Decker, or "Deckie" to us, who lived in our holiday house in Steyning, Sussex. Deckie had been a special member of our family for six years before ever Annie appeared. Born in the same year as my father, she was doting aunt to me and adopted grandmother to the children. She had been brought up in the purlieus of Windsor Castle where her father had been Keeper of the Gold Plate in three reigns. She left home as a young girl and with the sympathetic approval of Queen Victoria herself, got a position as ladies' maid and companion to the daughter of Earl Grey. From thence, via a happy marriage to a little baker in Steyning, she eventually ended up, at her husband's death, as Keeper of the "B.'s."*

*Annie's tales were of the below-stairs regions of Derby House, Stratford Place. Deckie's told of the more decorous upper floors of Dorchester House, Park Lane, in the days of barouches and ermine tippets, and of the sons of King George the V as she used to see them at play in the courtyard of Windsor Castle, when she peeped out of the window of the Gold Room ("Ada," her father had said to her, pointing to young Edward, "that one will never make a King"). Between them the children were filled with a vivid and detailed*

*picture of the Lives of British Royalty and Aristocracy. Though the distinction in class and relationship to us between Annie and Deckie was self-evident to Annie herself, it was a source of pathetic envy made more so, perhaps, by the perforce more elegant locale of Deckie's memories as compared to her own. However, due to Deckie's tender heart and tact and Annie's plucky good humor, they were good friends to each other. To us they formed a warm and irreplaceable cocoon of comfort and care.*

*The children and I spent a month at Christmas, a month at Easter and two months in the summer at "Deckie's House" in Steyning, with their father coming for week-ends and his summer holiday. Our departures thither were a matter of gloom to Annie until she hit upon a neat method of evening things up.*

*One time, a day or two before we left for Steyning, she appeared in the sitting-room door.*

*"I been thinking, Mum," she said, "what with Mrs. Decker being so old and not up to much these dys," (Deckie at sixty-five was as lively as a cricket) "it 'ud be a good idea if I sent a few things down when you go. Say a chicken and a boiled ham and a veal mould and a box of them rock buns the Babies love. I wouldn't like to think of them hungry or not having their good cake." (Deckie's cooking was as ineffable as Annie's. Her cakes like gossamer.) "It 'ud save her a bit of trouble, poor thing. I've a mind to do it."*

*"All right. Thank you very much, Annie. It's awfully kind of you." Being Annie's more than willing slave, I could make no other reply.*

*So it was that, on our subsequent departures for Steyning, the car staggered off laden with not only us, Toddie the Sealyham, Budgie the black cat squawking in his collapsing wicker hamper, boxes of toys, suitcases of clothes, extra blankets, golf clubs and cricket bats, but scraping on its axles under a load of packages, bundles and tin boxes full of food with which Annie would come clambering up the back steps at the last minute.*

*It was a grief to her not to have us at home for Christmas but Christmas with Deckie at Steyning was a sweet and sentimental ceremony repeated in minute detail year after year. We had to go, and, at any rate, Annie went home to Bathford for Christmas and Boxing Day. ("Oh, it were a sweet sight, Mum! All me married sisters there and thirteen babies there was. Five of 'em laying along on the settee and two in each chair, laughing and crying. Oh, it were beautiful, Mum! I'd have liked you to see it.") However, Annie evidently envied Deckie her major part in our Christmas fun to a point beyond endurance, but again Annie triumphed.*

*"I been thinking I could save Mrs. Decker making the Christmas puddings and mince tarts and cakes this year, Mum," gloated Annie one day, already half way out of the gate on her way to the grocer's with her list of ingredients scrawled on the back of a brown paper bag.*

*That Christmas and ever after, each of us would balance on his lap when the car drove off, a huge tin Mackintosh Toffee box out of which on Christmas Day*



would appear the most elaborately decorated cakes ever conceived. Annie would have been collecting decorations for them from the Kilburn shops since October. One for the children would have on top of it seven little red trees, two plaster robins half again the size of the trees, a purple and white fairy castle and a cotton-wool Father Christmas bogged down in inch-deep white icing. Ours would be a gloriously indigestible fruit cake, thick with marzipan under the icing, ornamented with sprigs of holly and tinted with the aid of cochineal to an exciting magenta. Deckie and I always sent notes back to Annie via "Mr. B." when he returned to London after Boxing Day, telling her how beautiful the cakes were and how much we had liked them.

Annie never could bring herself to believe that Steyning was a place where we could get enough to eat much less enjoy ourselves. One summer, thinking it would be a great treat for her, "Mr. B." brought her down to stay for a week's rest. We took a room for her down the lane and the children greeted her with cheers when she drove up. Annie caught the French toque on the door getting out of the car and while jamming it onto her crown again, took a look round at the South Downs, the meadows that curved away toward the ruins of Bramber Castle and the twelfth-century stone church.

"Looks nice but dont you find it awful dull after London, Mum?" she asked.

When she turned up at seven the next morning to get the breakfast so the sprightly Mrs. Decker "could

rest her poor knees for a bit," the children rushed to let her in.

"Oh, Annie, isn't it lovely here?" they cried.

"Lovely?" said Annie lugubriously. "Them cows kept me awake all night. Didn't get a wink of sleep."

Our always cheerful Annie was reduced to a mournful hulk who would venture no farther out of doors than to sit on the kitchen doorstep, and found the gay little shops of Steyning's medieval High Street totally inadequate. She would not even be cheered when Deckie nobly took her in to Brighton on the bus and treated her to winkles off a barrow under the Palace Pier, which is an approved means of entertainment for the charabanc "trippers" from London of whom Annie might easily have been one.

In dismay and despair, we sent her back to town before the week was up. She went grinning off to the train. As the guard's whistle blew, she leaned out of the window in the carriage door.

"I'll soon be knowing what 'e's been doing," she called to Kit.

And then we sighed a sigh of huge relief. It was not that our adored Steyning had been tried and found wanting. It was the Lamplighter.

The Lamplighter, better known as He or Him, was, because of his association with Annie, an important person in our lives. An agreeable, round-faced gentleman of no particular age, in spectacles and a peaked cap, he rode his rounds of an evening on his black bicycle. The continuous motion of his journey was in-

interrupted after he had lit the lamp in front of 28, wheeled his bicycle along to rest it against our front railings, and disappeared for ten minutes and a nice cup of tea into our basement kitchen. On the garden level at the back, it was only a semi-basement, so through the upper half of the kitchen windows Annie would have been watching for his wheels and then his legs and then up to his shoulders and peaked cap as he came in the gate. She had the kettle on and the tea all ready in the pot and something fancy in the way of a bun which she always conscientiously purchased for him herself at the baker's shop. Annie and the Lamplighter were friends of long standing. "I dont ask nothing better," Annie once said to Kit, during one of their nightly séances in the bathroom, "than to set on the floor by the fire and 'im telling me about the lamps. They're putting in newfangled ones down Marylebone way." All the years when Annie lived out in her own room in Victoria Road, she would bustle back to it after our lunch was eaten "to get 'im 'is bite of dinner."

If Annie thought of the Lamplighter's comfort, it may equally be said that He thought of hers. There was her account of one New Year's Eve when he took her down to the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral to see the New Year in. They were not the only persons present. As was customary, a crowd of many thousands milled and swayed and pushed together. "Gor, what a jam!" Annie described it. "They was shoving me 'til me 'at went round on me 'ead like Hugh's cap at the King's

*Funeral. I'd 'uv' been mashed if 'E 'adn't 'uv' put me up a lamp-post. 'Eld me up all the time the chimes was going, 'E did. I could see lovely from there."*

*Our children adored Him. Kit, intent and round-eyed, absorbed information from him about London's lighting system and discovered through him which of the lamp-posts in St. John's Wood bore the crest of G R IV and which V R for Victoria Regina. Hugh would prance about the kitchen making saucy remarks to Annie about her "young man," which ended in excited squeals as Annie made as if to box his ears.*

*Him, or the Lamplighter if you prefer, had very definite uses to our family. He was a handy performer of odd jobs. It was He who rode by once of a morning just in time to be called in to rescue Hugh who had locked himself in a toy cupboard in the day nursery. It was He who always took our bets round to the pub on the day of the Grand National or the Derby and placed them for us: "A shilling each way on Midday Sun" or "a shilling to win on Blue Boy" or "a shilling to place on Galleon." The Lamplighter would take the money and return that evening with the winnings, if any.*

*For days, for weeks in fact, before the day of the Race, the kitchen would have been cluttered with newspapers. Annie was a great authority on "Form" and "Past Performances" and "Hot Tips." She would pore over the lists of "'orses" by the hour through her spyglass and with undoubted results. If anyone won anything, it was always Annie. With a gleaming eye, she would count over her neat little pile of shillings and sixpences, while the rest of us ruefully contem-*

*plated not so much the shillings we had lost as those we might have won, if we had followed Annie's advice and put our all on the rank outsider she had fancied. Annie and the elderly Major at Number 34 had this knack of winning on the horses in common. As a young man, he had ridden in the Grand National himself. Being half French, half Irish, he had been brought up among the very fetlocks of the winners of the Grand Prix. It was not strange, therefore, that the gallant Major Charles Patrick Fortescue was successful in the placing of his bets. Annie's success must have been due to some seventh horse sense.*

*The Major, a retired Indian Army officer, under whose green-lined, cream-colored Poona umbrella I used to stroll up Clinton Hill of a sunny June morning, he with his Pekinese, I with my Sealyham, was always referred to by Annie, in spite of his venerable white mustache, as my "young man." So also, however, she dubbed the foreign architect, a Mr. Janecka, whose new house of modern red brick, built across from ours where an erstwhile Regency villa had stood, was the nine days' wonder of Clinton Hill. Mr. Janecka, the soul of chivalry, once clicked his heels and bowed from the waist when I called to our Sealyham as it was bounding up his front steps. Mr. Janecka had evidently mistaken my call as being for him. It was particularly chivalrous of him to have bowed so handsomely, as I was shouting "Come here, sir!" in a furious voice. Annie, witness of the episode from halfway up her kitchen steps, never failed to refer to Mr. Janecka in future as "your young man," although he and I were*

*total strangers. She attached this term to any male creature from Tucker, our ancient gardener, to the down-trodden violinist whose wistful melodies, as he wandered up the middle of the road, never failed to send me scurrying for a sixpence.*

*When Annie referred to Tucker as my "young man," it was in a tone of scorching sarcasm. Tucker was her pet hate. A midget, bowlegged old man, only slightly taller than a good-sized lupin, "Master Tucker" would come shuffling in at the gate under the burden of a gigantic hand-me-down overcoat which swept the sidewalk behind him like a royal robe. Twice a week, he spent a morning pottering in the toolshed among the boxes of bulbs or poking about among the borders or sweeping leaves off the lawn with a huge besom (a veritable witch's broom of a thing which nearly had him off his feet). We inherited Tucker from the previous owners of the house. From the beginning, I realized that his usefulness was questionable but, since we actually kept the garden in order ourselves, I did not need his services from a practical point of view. From a story-book point of view, this antiquated gnome with his quick gesture to touch a forelock that was no longer there, his tiny pinched face with its watery blue eyes, pointed nose and ragged mustache, his hooped legs and worn baize apron and his tales of St. John's Wood in the days when, as a boy, he ran at will among meadows, was more than worth the half-crown a morning that I paid him. He could remember when "the Street" and the back alleys leading off it, in one of which he now lived, had been part of a farm. From his*

*appearance one might suppose that he could remember the days when our neighborhood had been the domain of the Monastery of the Monks of St. John. I would listen indefinitely to his tales while he and I would be debating whether to move "him," as he called any plant, over against the sunny wall or to leave "him" under the shade of the big plane tree.*

*Tucker had, however, no such romantic appeal for Annie. To her he was an exasperating creature who "makes more mess than he's worth, that he does," and who, according to her tales, could be seen any evening at Closing Time "toddling out of The Fox and Grapes with a bowler hat on the back of his head, tizzy enough so he dont know which way's his home. I pity his poor wife, Mum." There was always tea going about ten of a morning. I would pass the door and see Annie at her sink on the inside and just the top of Tucker's head on the other side of the bars of the scullery window with his teacup precariously balanced on the outside sill. Thus haughtily relegated to the yard, he would pour out a steaming saucerful and suck it up through his trailing mustache while carrying on a fierce argument with Annie as to whether it was he or Toddie the Sealyham who had "tracked that there mud into my clean passage."*

*The one thing that cumbersome Toddie and Annie had in common in those days was an outspoken scorn of Old Tucker. Tod seemed twice Tucker's size and would bound barking at him like the puppy in Alice in Wonderland when Alice was only as high as a grass blade. Annie and Toddie had had little to do with each*

*other in the days when he was a nursery dog and was hauled out of the kitchen by his hind legs if he tried to scuttle in and lick crumbs off the scullery floor. After Annie took over the household, however, Tod would occasionally go lumbering along with her to "the Street," matching her gait as if the two of them had been trained to double harness, neither of them knowing how important they were to become to each other.*

*Though Tod never grew to tolerate "Master Tucker," Annie put up with him on one ground and one ground only. She was spellbound by his lurid and detailed accounts of the illness which ultimately overtook and carried away "his poor wife." The children gaily suggested that Annie take her place. Annie dealt with this suggestion with suitable contempt but she had, as she put it, a good look at the funeral and reported gloatingly that the wreaths could have been more plentiful and that the horses attached to the hearse had only negligible black plumes on their trappings.*

*With all her amazingly cheery and resilient nature, Annie had a taste for the gruesome and revelled in anything lugubrious. Nothing appealed to her more highly than a rousing calamity. Wrecks at sea, typhoons, fire, flood, havoc and major operations were her favorite fare. My father, who came nearly every summer from New York to visit us, still chuckles at the thought of Annie's versions of the weather report. Weather is an absorbing matter in England, as undependable as it is variable. I would call down the kitchen stairs after the nine o'clock news program,*



*"What's the weather forecast for tomorrow, Annie?" and a sepulchral voice would reply with evident satisfaction, "Dont sound too good, Mum. Glass is fallin'. Deep depression centered over Iceland movin' north-east. High pressure system movin' off. Gale warnin'. Showers for sure but there might be a bright interval or two, though I doubt it."*

*The deep depression centered over Europe, which hung over our skies during the years preceding the War, held little if any interest for Annie. She preferred not to look in that direction. To Annie, who thrived in an atmosphere of peace, plenty and parties, any thought of a break in our smooth and delightful existence was anathema. Parties particularly were the breath of life to her. If a week went by without guests of some sort in the house, she would say invitingly, "What about them Palmers? We ain't had them in for a meal in a dog's age." The next evening she would be contentedly polishing up the best china, glass and silverware and popping a pheasant into the oven. She all but went to the parties we attended, thumping up the stairs to see that I looked "nice" in my evening dress, always trying to urge me into the best one however simple the occasion, picking a bit of lint off "Mr. B.'s" tail-coat when his back was turned and waving us gaily off from the front door when we drove away. She had a passion for parties, she who had gone to so few and would never even take her half days and Sundays off. I used to urge her to go to the movies occasionally. "Oh them!" she would say. "I went one night,*

*Mum, three years ago, over to Myda Vyle and they put me out because I took to snorin'. I dont want to go nowhere."*

*With the approach of the ominous dark clouds which were to break up our parties, not to mention our entire existence as one of Clinton Hill's contented families, Annie listened to any talk of the possibility of a war with courageous scorn. Her confidence in the invincibility of the British Empire and of London in particular was supreme. Though, since the Battle of Britain began, they have been the very backbone of British resistance, in that pre-war period it was Annie and her like who were the willing dupes of the appeasers. In the 1937-1939 days, Annie was part of the chorus that whistled in the dark, battenning onto bits in the newspaper that said all the German tanks were made of papier-mâché, that the German people would at any minute oust their unsavory leaders, that the air defenses of London were impregnable, that Parliament could move at a second's notice into a specially prepared stronghold under the lake in Regent's Park, and that, even if there should be "a spot of bother," Roosevelt would step in and settle the whole thing out of court.*

*Although she appeared to share the Chamberlain Government's pretty trust in Master Hitler during this period, she could not quite stomach the idea of the 30,000 German servant girls who were sent over to England, presumably to fill the jobs the English girls would not take. She was vituperative about anyone who employed them. They were supposedly recalled*

*in May, 1939 by their loving Fuehrer, but Annie, perhaps with some justification, expected to find one of "them foreigners" lurking behind every bush. Austrian and Czech refugees had also flooded London and were looked upon by her with great misgiving. Foreigners were safe only if they stayed at home.*

*The outcome of the Munich Crisis renewed her confidence in "Monsoor Daddles" and "our Mr. C." which had been momentarily shaken by the children's and my hasty retreat from London to Steyning on that black Wednesday in September, 1938. She fell very readily for "Mr. C.'s" promises of "peace in our time" and scolded us heartily on our return for being so lily-livered as to go running away like that. She had flatly refused to come with us on account of Him and "Mr. B." and the house, on which it seemed that she might be planning to sit protectingly like a broody hen.*

*When the Government began to take a few belated steps to prepare London and its people against the war that they had been assured would not take place, Annie, confused and angry, defiantly concealing any doubts in her heart, laughing off disturbing rumors, heaped coals of fire on all official heads. She refused loudly and positively to be fitted for "one of them pigs' snouts." She dismissed as stuff and nonsense the orders which made the Lamplighter work overtime seeing that curbs, street corners, lamp-posts and hydrants were striped with white paint against a blackout. She nearly knocked down the innocent young government inspector who called to ask what arrangement we would make about evacuating the children "in the event of."*

*She carried on a running commentary, half in raillery, half mournful, as we followed an official order in detail and cleared our boxroom of all superfluous and inflammable objects, making an enormous bonfire of them at the top of the garden.*

*The only official notice which interested Annie at all was one suggesting that housewives get in a fortnight's supply of non-perishable food. She peered with curiosity and approval into the great box of tins of condensed milk, sardines, salmon, egg powder, bully beef, porridge oats, biscuits and jam which I ordered at one of the big Stores and, with a fair show of enthusiasm, ranged the things on the shelves of one of the several store cupboards in the passage outside the kitchen.*

*It was only a fair show of enthusiasm because she immediately spotted an outstanding omission. "No marmalade, Mum!" she said in horror. Thankful to find her willing to take any part in this to her depressing procedure, I agreed to the ordering of ingredients and for days Annie hummed to herself and produced fifty odd pounds of handsome marmalade.*

*"This here will see us through," she said with gusto; and then, shamefaced, "We'll be eatin' it for years. You'll see, Mum. Who ever said there was going to be a war! That old Hitler, he can't do anything to us."*

*When she found that I had also purchased a case of White Rock, a supply of candles, a small oil cooking stove, large tins of Glucose D, mammoth jars of cod liver oil and malt, and rolls of brown paper to paste on the windows, her spirits sank but she commented valiantly, "Anyone would think you was settin' up a junk*

*shop, Mum. Whatever will we do with all this here truck?"*

*Annie was highly entertained when I attended a London County Council evening class in First Aid. Looking back on it, I do not blame her. Had I been called upon to make actual use of the certificate I obtained, I might not have made a much more adequate member of a First Aid party temperamentally than a fussy old body Annie heard about from someone in "the Street." The day after obtaining her certificate, the fussy old body witnessed an accident from the top of a bus. She rushed down to the street, pushed her way through the crowd bleating, "Make way! Make way! First Aid! First Aid!" took one look at the mangled victim, fell across it in a dead faint and had to be taken off with it in the ambulance to the hospital. Of just such flimsy stuff might Annie's Madam have been made.*

*Annie had only praise, however, for "Mr. B.'s" training as an Air Raid Warden, which he started in the April before the War began and which has kept him busy since. "If there should be a dust-up, and mind you there won't be, we'll feel nice and safe with 'Mr. B.' taking care of the neighborhood. 'E isn't one to take on over things," she would say, and quite rightly.*

*When we planned a trip to the United States, while the going was still good, to see my parents and show the children the place from which I came, Annie was dismayed and then delighted.*

*"The Babies will have a lot to tell me when you get back," she chortled staunchly. "I'll wager the little man*

*will see things none of his friends at school 'ave seen, and Kit 'ere will like them fancy shops in New York. She's a one for style, she is!"*

*We left England on the 22nd of July, 1939, "Mr. B." to return within the month, the children and I to sail from Quebec on the 9th of September. He arrived back two days before the declaration of war and on that day cabled to us to stay in this country. We are still here, living in a small town in New Hampshire's White Mountains.*

*Since the day we left London over two years ago, Annie has written to me every week. I have written far less frequently to her than I should. I banked on "Mr. B.'s" reading excerpts from my letters to Annie, forgetting that alone together they would "come over all British" and reticent, he not reading, she not asking. Nor did it occur to me in the beginning to keep her letters, though I have, as it happens, the one that was written on the actual day that the War began.*

*One of the prize letters of all is missing. It was written back in that September when, with all our plans to discuss, I was mercifully able to correspond with "Mr. B." by rapid transit airmail. We had come to Littleton at the suggestion of a friend and found ourselves a furnished apartment. I had evidently described our arrangements in detail to him for Annie's well-remembered letter said, "Mr. B. has told me about how you was going to live. It sounds lovely. I says to him who was going to do the cooking and he says to me you was and I says to him even if it's a war, it's got its funny sides to it." From that point of view, it had.*

*In one of her early letters she says in reply to some picture postcards from us, "I hope you and the children are all well and that you have settled nice and comfortable in new temporary abode. It looks very pretty there."*

*It is very "pretty" where we are. Our four-room apartment is made out of the old kitchens, sink room and dining room of a tall white house which sits high above the town, aloof behind its own wide lawns and dead-end driveway. From the porch we look over a sea of tops of elm trees which hide the houses of the town, and a white church steeple to the rising wooded hills and beyond them to where, spread across the sky, are Cannon Mountain with its ski trails, Lafayette, the noblest of them all, Mt. Garfield and the Twins—a reassuring barricade between us and the world. If we run up to the room under the peak of the roof on a night when there might be an afterglow, we can see a still more formidable defense works, the huge distant grandeur of the Presidential Range. We have wood stoves for heat, an oil range for cooking, pine trees and a wild wood outside our kitchen windows, a shed full of "collateral" accumulated over three generations and a red barn above us on the hill where we keep the firewood that can be trundled down on a toboggan when winter comes. It is New England for the children and as new and absorbing to me as to them, since I had lived my life prior to London in New York. This is our present background in contrast to the old one which Annie holds ready to slip behind us again, as one might hold a coat for a child.*

*Everything about their present environment has seemed amazing and miraculous to Annie's "Babies." They have been like two youngsters let loose in a toy store. Mountains in themselves were something entirely new to them, as were porches and hammocks and screen doors, frankfurters and maple sugar and outdoor grilles, houses with no hedges or walls, red wooden barns and silos. They fell delightedly upon the radio with its commercials and thrillers, and the movies with hair-raising Westerns every Saturday when they can stamp their feet and catcall with the other children of the town. They have been charmed by being able to go to the same school, by fishing picnics up at the base of the mountains, by summer camps, by the roar of the high noisy trains that infrequently go hooting through the valley. Above all, having come from a land where the winters were mild and held little possibility of much snow, they have been entranced by the New Hampshire winter, when monster snowplows come through the Notch with lighted eyes like dragons, when every car has its ski rack, and the town and its neighboring continental world of Sugar Hill and Franconia are a land of ski lodges and ski tows. At fourteen below zero in a mist of flying snow, they can come down the slopes like navy-blue birds or choose, according to taste, to fall in a hundred heaps on the ice-skating rink in the town park.*

*Annie would find all these things queer because they are unaccustomed and different. She would be as darkly suspicious of them as dogs are of strangers. The children are chameleons who have readily taken*



*on the color and accent of their new community. Annie realizes this and is disturbed lest her "Babies" find the Old World dull when they return from the New.*

*We sit by our stove of an evening wondering how Annie would fit into this picture. Hugh questions whether she could puff up these precipitous hills in the winter. "Ooooo, me poor feet!" she would say. Kit contemplates Annie in the First National demanding digestive biscuits instead of graham crackers, tins instead of cans, pots instead of jars, and staring along her nose when she could not find Demerara and castor sugar, a cottage loaf or a butter-muslin bag of head-cheese. I remember that, like so many of her kind in England, Annie pictures the New World in terms of Hollywood's marble halls and would be surprised to find the white-painted clapboards, the stark steep roofs, the stiff simplicity of this New Hampshire town. She would find here hearts as warm as her own, but it would be unfair, even if such were possible, to transplant so indigenous an oak. Annie's roots grow deep in England. In any case, she would never leave the Lamplighter.*

*During our first winter here, Annie's chief concern in her letters was the thought that her "Babies" would grow up beyond recognition and that I, whom she had preferred to believe could only sit on a cushion with a fine seam in hand, might dwindle away as the result of my amateur efforts at cooking and housework. Annie mistakenly cherishes the idea of me as a frail flower and would be shocked if she were to see me stamping up the icy hills in a pair of Hugh's old rubber boots,*

*carrying home bulging bags of provisions. Ladies in her world did not carry parcels. Ladies in her world certainly did not shovel a pathway through the snow or scrub out garbage cans or chop kindling. Perhaps, after all, in her terms, I am now no lady. Perhaps after all, when the War is over, Annie's world, in which we were all so happily unaware of realities, will, like Toy-land, never return again.*

*The whole question of rationing has hit one of Annie's attitude toward food and its virtues right in the solar plexus. "Feeding people up" is the breath of life to our Annie. It will be noticed, however, in the course of the letters, that she has ingeniously contrived to keep the one steady and many transient occupants of Number 30 Clinton Hill a long way from starvation level, though it has meant "trotting her toes off," and going in for a little looting here and there.*

*Another absorbing matter to her has been the people in Clinton Hill who have "done a bunk," in other words, fled from London for the Duration, leaving their houses empty and forlorn behind them. A series of letters covers the eventual departure of the gallant Major. Clinton Hill is empty and deserted but, whatever the catastrophes, Annie and "Mr. B." and the house and Annie's new absorption, the animals, are still standing and intact.*

*Annie, jovial but intolerant, with her droll humor, her ripe humanity, her fierce jealousy for her "ain folk," her pluck and her patience is not just a person but a rare personage. I take great pleasure and pride in presenting her letters so that they may give as com-*

plete a picture of her and of the life they describe to the American public as they do to me. As Annie puts it, "the little bits I tell you keeps you in touch with home and exactly how things are." Her "little bits," whether they be about Toddie and his "scrounging," the lady from the "dug-out" who asked to practice on the piano, the paying guest and his dog who drives her nearly "skatty" or the weeks during the Big Blitz when she never took her corsets off and "dossed" on our kitchen floor, snatching "nods between the bangs," are a kaleidoscopic picture of household existence in London during the past two years. They contain, I am confident, much that would be interesting, much that would be amusing and much that would be inspiring to other readers as well as to "Dear Madam."

Annie writes just as she talks, with a style that is invariably trenchant and graphic, with a vocabulary that is miraculous for a person who had had so few advantages and had been as buffeted through life as she was until she came into such safe harbor as our home provided. There is no punctuation whatever in the letters as they come, bar a comma after the word "Madam," but I have put in a minimum to clarify matters. I have sometimes spent a half hour myself decoding a letter, what with the scratchy handwriting and baffling lack of periods, commas or capital letters. If I have added some it is only that others might be able to see our Annie plain. I have not touched the spelling, which is, with one or two funny little flaws and inconsistencies, wonderfully accurate. I would like to serve up Annie un-garnished but my interpolated notes are only such as

*I would put in were I reading her letters out loud to anyone who did not know her or our backgrounds.*

*Through thick and thin of U-boat warfare, even when "Mr. B.'s" letters have been hopelessly delayed or lost, Annie's letters have turned up as regularly as she has written them.*

*"It's just as if Churchill sent over special boats for Annie," the children said.*

*"Perhaps he does, at that," I said. "Mr. Churchill and Annie are fighting this war side by side. They have a lot in common, you know."*

*With which final comment, may I present*

RESPECTFULLY YOURS,  
ANNIE.

S. B.

## ANNIE AND THE ‘‘SPOT OF BOTHER’’

*“Well, this is a nice little kettle of fish,” says Annie on the day that War is declared. She proceeds to concern herself with the problems of the black-out, with the annoying checkrein of rationing that has been put on her lavish ideas about food, with the many little readjustments which even so inactive a war brings to a London household. What Hitler may be doing or planning is as nothing to Annie. She finds more absorbing problems than that, such as how to see the Lamplighter when there are no street lights, how to picture what her “Babies” are doing in the ice and snow of their “new temporary abode,” how to get on without a Lord Mayor’s Show and how to cope with Christmas without its cakes.*



Sunday Sept. 3rd, 1939.  
(*The day War was declared*)

Dear Madam,

I am so sorry to hear your father has been so ill but I do hope he is getting better. It was a blessing you where there or you would have been very worried. Well this is a nice little kettle of fish but I hope and pray it will soon finish. It was a blessing Mr. C. (*Chamberlain*) got busy and kept it off so long for we are prepared (*We, you note, being Annie and Mr. B., not the Empire*). We have our windows papered up & a nice trench dug. I don't hardly see the colour of mine (*the Lamplighter*). He is so busy with everything. I don't know what your plans are but one blessing you and the children are safe there & you need not worry over Mr. B. for I'll promise you faithfully I will do everything in my power for him to make him happy and comfortable till you do come back. So don't worry over that. It was a funny thing I had planned a nice party for Mr. B. (*for his birthday*) & then I thought you could have it but it seems I am to be done but never mind when things get settled & you are back, we will have a beanfeast then anyway. If I do not see you or I do not write, I'll wish you now a very happy birthday when it does come. He (*Mr. B.*) started for Steyning & turned back again. I think we are as safe here as anywhere. Give my very best love to the dear Babies & please take care of yourself. With kind regards.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

September 15th, 1939

Dear Madam,

I felt I had to write just to know if you & the children are all well & I hope your father's better. You seem so far away & I don't hear much about you. I don't like to keep worrying Mr. B. for news of you but I thank God you are safe there at any rate & you haven't the discomforts to put up with. All this black-out business, you can't see anything & you won't have to put up with rationing. The children always been use to the best & plenty of it. We went down (*to Steyning*) & cheered Mrs. Decker up on Sunday & I took a nice fat cooked chicken which pleased her immensely. Mr. Palmer is home for the dy & Mrs. Palmer is up with the children. (*The gay Palmers, our next-door neighbors, were far younger than we, with one little boy and one little girl and an outrageous old car named "Mo." Peter, now in the Anti-Aircraft Gunners, wrote books under the damson tree in their garden and Sally was dark and lovely and full of fun.*) She is going near Reading because of the petrol restrictions. You can't go too far. Mrs. Niles (*a precise older lady who lived next door on the other side of us*) is having a trench dug now. We have to go along with our gas mask slung on us. I hardly see the colour of mine (*the Lamp-lighter*). He is always on. Toddy can't quite get use to things. He thinks they are very funny. Well I don't think I have any more news so will close. Give my very best love to the two Babies. With kind regards to yourself. I don't think it will last very long though.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie



Wed., 4th Oct., 1939

Dear Madam,

My usual weekly one to let you know how things are here. I hope you & the children are all well & that you have settled nice & comfortable in new temporary abode. It looks very pretty there & the school looks nice too. Mr. B. showed me them. I told him you won't want to come back to dull Clinton Hill except it is Home Sweet Home. Mr. B. seems very well despite his irregular hours (*At that time his hours of duty as an Air Raid Warden were 8 p.m. to 12 a.m. or 12 a.m. to 4 a.m. or 4 a.m. to 8 a.m.*) & he seems happy. I have made the puddings & mincemeat so there will be a bit of Xmas fare & I have the stuff for the cake. I wish you would all be back here. I miss you all very much. It's very lonely & somehow you feel gone completely. I feel quite shut away from you all although I realize it's the best thing. Mr. & Mrs. Strong (*contemporaries of ours who used to live in Number 31*) was here last night & I was talking & she agreed Kit & Hugh have always had the best & how Kit enjoyed her tidbits she took to school. She says the children will get thin with a quarter of butter a week & only a pound of sugar so even there nice cakes would be cut down. I have a nice bit in hand & I made a lot of jam as you know & all that marmalade I made is another great boon. The strawberry jam is lovely, ever so stiff, not runny a bit. I had a letter from Mrs. Decker. That fall seemed to have crocked her up. I sent her some anemones to cheer her up. (*This is Deckie's favorite flower. She used to wear artificial ones on her hat.*) Well it will be very wonderful & lovely to see you all again. In the meantime the

only thing to do is to keep smiling. It's remarkable how Toddy has fallen into everything. He is quite a kitchen dog. (*His "room" used to be on the children's floor of the house.*) He missed you all but now he thinks something is wrong but don't quite know what. He is nervous of these black nights though like myself. The other night Mr. B. slept at the business. (*He has been on duty down there once a week. It is in the East End of London, a heavily bombed commercial district.*) So when I am alone I go upstairs to sleep with him (*Toddiel!*) but it was so cold I decided to stay down and put him to sleep in the kitchen. Oh the disgusted way he looked at me the next morning & yet the next night he wanted to stay. We haven't had any bangs yet but all the windows are boarded & plastered up round. It's quite creepy to look at. I have taken up knitting to pass the dark hours away. If we had a bad raid in the night & I am alone, the dog & I are trotting down to the Major. (*My "young man," the courtly, old Major Charles Patrick Fortescue.*) He has told us to. Well I do hope you will look after yourself & not worry. I know it is difficult but I'll do my very best for Mr. B. to keep him fit and cheerful till you return. Please take care of yourself. Toddy & Budgy (*the cat*) send there love to you. My very best to my dear Babies. Tell them not to get too grown up will they get back. All my best wishes to you.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Oct. 11th, 1939

Dear Madam,

My weekly gossip. I don't know whether you get them but I send a line every Wednesday. Well we are still here. I don't think we shall get any raids much. We seem to well protected. I hope you are getting settled now. I can just picture you all but how I would love to have just one peep at you all, you studying your cookery book, Hugh helping Mummy get the soup ready. Kit's letter was so grown up but both very interesting and amusing. I can see them both getting Americans later in life. They will make so many friends. There school sounds very nice. If you could have got back there schools would have been alright as Kit's has gone in the country & you would have been alright & if things had got bad you could have gone to Steyning. However the time will soon go. Things will be very tight when rationing starts. Its been awkward getting lots of things but the messy things you like (*Annie refers here to my fondness for shellfish and for "offal," as she and Mr. B. called sweetbreads or chicken livers*) is alright here. Mr. B. seems well & happy. The Palmers (*our merry young friends next door*) were here at the week-end. They look well. I think Mrs. Palmer seemed more settled but its awful to be parted like that when you are not sure what is going to happen. One blessing we haven't that uncertainty here. Mrs. Decker said her knee was bad again. I wish she could pension her teacher off a week & come here before the rationing starts. She could get a good rest & a good feed. Both would do her good. (*Deckie had a*

*schoolteacher billeted on her when the Government sent children to country areas.*) You know that lady up the road. She is very fond of Budgy, use to buy him cream. They are away now but she came back yesterday to pick something up & came down to see him. He wasn't home but she came again at dinner time & brought him a titbit. He did make a fuss of her. I saw your young man yesterday. (*The Major, I presume.*) He enquired after you all. Tell the Babies not to get too grown up till they come back & give them my best love & tell them I would love just to peep at them. Its beginning to get wintry here but it sounds very cold where you are. I know a girl in Dalton Hill. She knows where you are, New York, Canada & all round there. She was there several years. Well I had better close. My very best wishes to all & please take care of yourself and don't worry. I'll do my best to keep the home fires burning till you get back.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

17th Oct., 1939

Dear Madam,

My usual weekly bit of gossip which I am afraid isn't much this week as I haven't gathered much. I hope you & the Babies are all well and settled now. Tell them Him (*the loyal Lamplighter*) sent His love to them & to say He misses them. So do I & a big miss too. I think every dy I miss them more. (*Annie generally spells "day" exactly as she pronounces it.*) Just to hear a little of the big man's cheek would be a real tonic to me these dys. It's very lonesome without them. Clinton Hill is very deserted. Goldens (*opposite us*) took nearly all there furniture away the other dy. I told you Palmer's Nanny was working there. That silly one is gone. She likes it & your young man's place (*This time it is Mr. Janecka, the architect over the way.*) was a proper waste of money as they never had any happiness or pleasure from it & the turf in front is just a grand place for dogs. He is gone. The house is all boarded up. I don't suppose they will ever come back to it. Mrs. Decker turned down my offer. She is too nervous to come. Mr. B. had his uncle from Worthing for the night. It would do him good if someone come like that occasionally. He seems well & happy. We have had a bit of rain & last night lightening stuck a barrage balloon & brought it down in Greencroft Gardens quite near here. I shall be glad when things get settled. I am afraid titbits now would be out of the question. Everything is very dear. (*To Annie "titbits" are not morsels of food but anything in the way of a delicacy: lobsters, hot-house grapes, etc.*) I'll tell you

my latest episode. I have been pinching flowers in the gardens. Might as well have them as leave them to die. There is very few houses occupied in this road. I don't know why people fly away like it but this black-out is depressing these long evenings. I don't put my nose out unless I am absolutely obliged to. I am too nervous. Inside is certainly the best place. I have taken up my knitting again to pass the dark hours away. I have made myself a grand jumper (*sweater*), navy blue with puff sleeves. I can just picture it's meeting with Kit's approval. (*Annie and Kit used to pore over fashion magazines together and select the slinkiest models for themselves.*) I hope they like there school still. Your other young man the Major asked me this morning how you was getting on. He always enquires so tenderly. Perhaps he misses you. How I would love a peep at you all to see what you are all doing. It must be very cold there. (*It was balmy Indian summer with us at the time. Chilled by the tales of the girl in Dalton Hill, Annie imagined us already in a perpetual temperature of 30° below zero.*) Well I think I must close. I got some bunny for Mr. B.'s supper tonight. My very best love to the two Babies & my best wishes to you & please look after yourself and don't worry. With love

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

23rd Oct., 1939

Dear Madam,

Just a line hoping you are alright & I hope Hugh's leg is better. (*He had experimented with an axe in the pine wood behind our apartment with gory results.*) I am glad you are settling down but it will be awfully nice when you all get back here. How is your cooking getting on? I was told it's easier there than here as there is a great more variety to have. It's a job here just now. Meat is scarce, so is fish, bacon & butter & it's all going up too. I think we shall have to put a few fish in our dug-out as the rain has gone in. Mrs. Niles' is full up to the top. (*These raw holes in the ground were going to prove about as useful as a doll's parasol in a deluge, as Annie wisely foresaw.*) We went to Steyn-  
ing yesterday as you will already have heard. I think we cheered Mrs. Decker up. I took her a small chicken & a few titbits & I told her to have it herself, not share it. Her school teacher isn't very cheerful. These religious people never are. (!) Mr. B. is very well & cheerful. He had a little cold last week but it is better now. How is Kit & Hugh getting on at there new school? It's a novelty for them if nothing else & they make such nice friends. Mrs. I forgot her name (*one of Annie's unfa-  
vorites*) rang up last week. I expect she would like one of our large meals now things are dear. Miss Wil-  
loughby rang you up too. (*Birds of a feather to Annie.*) Your young man asked about you tenderly, the Major. He seems very interested in your doings. I can't tell him very much but I just tell him you are well. Tucker is putting the bulbs in tomorrow (*with Annie going*

*scornfully from window to window to check on the activities of her tiny antagonist*). Everything is being kept & done exactly as if you were here so you can just picture all we are doing & exactly how things are. I can't picture what you are doing. I just imagine. Sometimes I feel so desperately lonely I put my hat on & hike out. It would be nice in fact lovely just to hear a little of Hugh's sauce or to be able to collect a few titbits for Kit's lunch but it's no use to dwell. Let's hope it will soon be over & you will all be back again. I am quite sure I shall end up by having a night in Marylebone (*police station*) with this black-out. Even mornings they come after you. A policeman did on Saturday. I am frightened to go to the door at night if the bell rings in case they have spotted a crack of light. Mr. B. goes out at twelve tonight till four in the morning. I always wait & give him a nice cup of cocoa so you know he is alright. Well I think I have said all. Please take care of yourself & don't worry over things & give my very best love to Kit & Hugh. All best wishes to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie



29th October, 1939

Dear Madam,

I was so pleased to get your letter, ever so pleased & to hear all your doings. Your cooking is very interesting. We cook on oil home. It wants getting use to but it's nice afterwards. The only thing is it is very smelly. Tell the little man he must be more careful. I don't like him chopping himself about like that. You want to put a pinch of bicarbonate of soda in your carrots. That will soften them. We shall have to do some scheming when rationing starts. 3 oz. butter each per week, that's all I live on. I have no meat or vegetables only weekends. We shan't get any raids here. (*Annie's faith in Mr. Chamberlain was still sublime.*) I feel safe anyway & now our dugout wouldn't be any use. Mr. B. does that job & I wouldn't go in it with my cough. I could picture them if they were here having some games with their Daddy's tin hat. He looks fine in it. He spent the night with Mr. Hawkes for golf this morning but it has been raining cats & dogs. (*The Hawkes, also much younger than ourselves, come into Annie's picture more and more as the letters progress. They lived down in Essex and were lighthearted, and good company.*) The weather has been dreadful. It's been cold enough here. I shouldn't like to be where you are. Anyway, I hope you will look after yourself. I took Toddy to have his toenails cut. They were hurting him. She has hundreds of dogs all sizes & the noise! She told Mr. B. she is taking a place in the country. That lovely chow at No. 10 they had put to sleep. Shame I call that. He was only a young dog. (*Annie had never both-*

*ered much about our four-footed friends but the War has developed latent talents in her as an animal fancier.*) Over the road where the dogs are, you know the black and brown, the gentleman is gone to the War. He is an architect & he has moved his staff & office over there. The lady sleeps in the dining room & the maid, she is a German, in the kitchen & it's all sandbagged up. I think it's silly the way people have run away & left there houses & yet it was people that had no money. Budgy & Toddy had a terrific scrap yesterday. What over I don't know. I think Budgy pinched his dinner & Tod, being a bit crotchety like all the old men get, turned on him. His fur was flying all over the place. I never hardly see mine (*the Lamplighter*). I go down but it's not the same. Mrs. Decker was pleased to see us & she ate every little bit of her chicken herself & didn't she enjoy it! That's my war job, taking care of Mr. B. for you & Mrs. Decker. He is very well & happy. One thing he doesn't get down-hearted. You talk of keeping a meal hot. (*Did I?*) The other week when the Palmers was in it was an hour & half waiting; roast beef & Yorkshire at that. I don't think it (*the War, not the Yorkshire pudding*) will go on long and whatever America has done it seems to have pleased everybody. Your young man (*Major C. P. Fortescue*) hasn't been well. He has been in bed a few dys. He gets his tummy bad. It was a funny thing how I agitated about the old box room as they are now asking people to clear them right out. I expect the Babies are liked everywhere. One blessing they fit & adapt themselves to anything. Hugh seems to be very useful to you. There

is as you say a funny side. I must tell you a funny one. The other night, He (*the Lamplighter*) thought He would come up. Well by the time He waited for buses etc & got here, the time was gone & He took a taxi back & didn't get here at all. Excuse this bit of paper but I can't get a pad. Paper seems very scarce. I expect the children will enjoy the winter & it's certainly an experience for them. Well give both my Babies my very best love. Toddy & Budgy send there's. They are lying on the mat side by side like two little angels now. Don't worry and please look after yourself. Your young man said once about your charming figure etc. so you mustn't worry then you won't lose your beauty. (*Annie views the B.'s through rosy spectacles!*) All my best wishes

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

5th November, 1939

Dear Madam,

My Sunday night epistle with the doings of the week. I was so thrilled at the newspaper & the snaps you sent Mr. B. (*The children and I, as refugees from London, had inadvertently made the front page of the Manchester, N. H., "Union" along with a headline, ARE THE TURKS STOOGES?*) They look very contented & happy but I think Kit is got thinner. Mr. B. said she can afford to go thinner but I can see my Babies gone when they return. They seem to be growing up. I am glad you are getting such an expert cook. (*This is wishful thinking on Annie's part.*) Of course you & the children like these tasty morsels & it's more interesting. I always enjoyed getting your titbits when he (*Mr. B.*) was out. We have to go along very carefully as everything is very dear but that's easy as long as things eventually return to normal & the old happy dys I enjoyed with you all here before you went. I try to save in every way. We haven't had a window cleaner since you went. I keep them going so that saves a bit & I only send the big stuff to the wash with Mr. B.'s shirts and hankys. We are supposed to be going to be rationed with 4 ozs butter & 4ozs bacon a week. Not much, is it, but I haven't got much bacon lately as it has been so dear. Now I'll start another subject. Mr. B. is very well. Last night he was out till four but he didn't get up till 11.30 so he had a nice rest. He went to Mrs. Strong to tea. I told him pheasants was good now if he was having anyone to dinner (*Here is Annie, true to form, thirsting for a "party."*) so he asked them

and his other ladies for Friday so I must get a nice fat one for five. Toddy has been a very bad boy. He doesn't like these dark mornings & so he has been too lazy to get up. Consequently things happened. I forgave him when Mr. B. said he had done it first. I forgave him a second time but the third he had a whipping. I suppose he thought I didn't mind as I said nothing. All the houses are empty in Clinton Hill. Those people at the bottom that had the garage built have cleared there's. 40 has and so has 37. I suppose they will all empty eventually. Silly I call it. We are quite safe here, as safe as anywhere but Mr. B. says we shall have somewhere to go if our house tumbles. It seems such a relief to know you and the children are not restricted. This black-out would finish you. It's just awful. The other night Mr. B. was out. I went to bed at 11.30. I was just getting in bed after pulling up the blind when a light flashed across. I looked across to see two bull's eyes shining on me. It didn't half give me a fright. I heard from Mrs. Decker yesterday. She had heard from Miss A. (*our erstwhile haughty governess*). She is working in a canteen at Woolwich scrubbing, serving meals etc. She said what about her hands. He (*the Lamplighter*) was awfully interested in the paper (*with us in it*) as well as myself. It's very lonely at night. People won't come out to see you these dark nights. I don't think I could face such cold as you will, although yesterday a man from Canada was telling about skiing. I don't know how to spell that word & he said you look forward to your winters there as much as we look forward to our English summer so per-

haps it's not so bad. I have thought a lot about the Babies today, bonfire night. What a bit of fun we have had other years! (*It was Guy Fawkes Night, of "gunpowder, treason and plot," when we had fireworks in the garden and all Clinton Hill used to be a-roar and a-glitter with them.*) Well I think I have said all. Please take care of yourself and don't worry too much. One thing, you sound more cheerful but don't worry. Keep smiling till you can come back & be a lady again and don't have to study cookery books, etc. (*It is the "etc." that worries Annie most. I might play at baking a cherry pie but let me brandish a floor mop and I am lost. Her attitude is typical of the old-fashioned servant class in England.*) All the best wishes to you.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Sunday, 12th Nov., 1939

Dear Madam,

What a queer week! No fireworks, no Lord Mayor's Show, no Armistice Service. Very queer. I hope you and the Babies are very well though. We had a lovely party Friday night. Only one snag, you should have been there. You would have enjoyed it. Mrs. Strong was in very good form, very jolly. You can imagine six round our table. Everybody helping so it was got nice & hot. We had mushroom soup, pheasants, the usual accompaniments, trifle & mince pies & coffee. They enjoyed it. Mrs. Palmer is up again with the children. He has a week's leave & they are staying at his mother's. She seemed very happy & cheerful. I feed him (*Mr. B.*) more than when you where at home because I think as he is not use to odd hours, it keeps him well & that is the most important thing. He seems well and very cheerful. Toddy & Budgy are both well. The weather has been very close, worse than the cold winds we had. (*It is essential to Annie that the weather be at one extreme or the-other.*) You know I told you I sent you some roses & carnations on the boat. Well, the girl was going on holiday & forgot all about it. Anyway we (*Annie and the Lamplighter*) wasn't letting them get away & so we kept at them. Consequently we had some lovely flowers for the sitting-room Friday. I wonder how you will survive the cold there. You will want special clothes for it won't you? I have got awful screws in my feet & legs. I can hardly hobble or set down. I saw Ivy (*one of the lily-maids who were in residence when Annie first came as a char*) the other

day. She has another job. She doesn't stay long in them. She says the jobs are no good nowadays. I am not cooking a joint today. You see we have a bean feast for a party, then we economize. It's the only way to do but it makes a nice change for Mr. B. to have someone in. I wonder where you will spend Xmas. We will spend ours when you come back. We will have such a spread and such a set out you ever saw. I get very depressed over it all sometimes but I shake myself & think it won't be for long, although I know our Babies will be grown up when they get back. I do hope you will keep well. I wish I could do something for you. Well I think I have said all. My best love to the dear Babies. Love from Budgy & Toddy. He is as black as night & he had been rolling in something. His coat is all stuck up but he is happy & well. My best wishes to you & please look after yourself. Don't get too tight with your meals.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



19th Nov., 1939

Dear Madam,

My weekly epistle to you to let you know how things are going & to keep you in touch with Home with a big capital letter. I shall do my best to do this every week till you return & keep the kettle boiling. The clocks go back tonight, or on, I don't know which really. (*Many delightful misunderstandings have arisen in our house, owing to Annie's being unable to fathom this mystery.*) & Mr. B. has to trot out at twenty minutes to four in the morning. No nice little Sunday sleep for him. These dark dys are dreadful & you dare not show a light even in the morning till after eight. I spent half of Friday morning registering for our rations so we shall be alright but one thing I didn't bargain on being difficult & which we use a good bit—macaroni—I had to tour the town to get some. In the week things are very dear but we shall weather it. I have always been careful. I am more so still now. I don't make much now, just a few buns for Mr. B.'s tea, Sun. & Thurs., & his evening snack before he trots out at twelve, my War ones, 21 for 7½ (12 cents). I can endure anything as long as I get you all back soon. So Mr. Morris (*an American friend*) is gone! Another relic departed! I have sent your parcel with him, all my own work. (*It was a marvelous pink knitted bed-jacket.*) I hope you like it. I have something nice for Hugh but Kit I don't know what to get. Perhaps she will enlighten me with a line when you get this. Mr. B. said they must go by the beginning of December. Well I have a very sad piece of news to tell you. I have lost my chance with

Old Tucker. She is just like him, bow-legged, a spinster, wants to get married, with plenty of money, about 60. The only snag is he is afraid she will want to be boss. I told him I shall expect a piece of cake or a currant. She must want a man badly. (*This is a message for the Babies, who used to tease Annie about this gnarled and to her detestable little gnome. Every time he raises his head in the letters, Annie is ready to whack it with a verbal poker.*) Mr. Pierce's (*the green-grocer*) wife died today. It's a happy release. I thought he was going to crock up. He looked terrible ill & had asthma bad yet he nursed & done everything for her to the last. Did you hear Mr. Churchill's speech? Mr. B. said I can see Mrs. B. rubbing her hands at it. I don't think it (*the War*) will go on long. Toddy & Budgy are very well. That vet done him good when he was there. I am going to take him home Xmas. He will enjoy himself chasing rabbits. They run round the door. I have such screws I can't set down. Mr. Percy was here to supper. He said he enjoyed it. He always does. I know he does. You can see it. (*Mr. Percy is a vague family friend of Mr. B.'s. He will reappear in the letters much later on as a bit of a problem to Annie.*) Mrs. Decker don't seem well. I told Mr. B. I don't see why these people should go down there. There is no need for her to work, not like myself, except to keep Steyning dusted & do for Mr. B. when he is there. I sent her a few flowers to cheer her. She said it made her feel you was here. The Palmer family (*next door*) been up for a week. She has now gone to her mother for a few dys before she goes to Cornwall.

That old Mrs. F. is a curious creature. (*The Major and Mrs. Fortescue lived next to the Palmers.*) She had them to tea. It's only to gossip (*in other words, find out what they were doing*). The bulbs are all in at last so we shall have a flower. They are all in the front this time. I separated up the lilies a bit as they say they grow bigger blooms. Mrs. Niles (*in the house on our left*) enquired about you. She is doing a bit of War work, bandage rolling or something, I think, at St. Mary's Hospital. Do you ever hear that song on the wireless, "We shall meet again no matter when"? I always shut it off. It makes me want to weep. It's such a lonely place without our Babies. Mr. B. seems very well. I always watch his face to see whether he looks tired. Well I must close. My best love to the Babies. Tell Kit I hope her romance is still blooming (*Kit had gone once to a barn dance with a boy in her class, who was from that moment to be, in Annie's mind, nothing less than a faithful suitor.*) & please take care of yourself & keep smiling. My very best to you

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

25th Nov., 1939

Dear Madam,

We seem to have had an exciting week. Mr. Hawkes came on Monday night, then he came back Thurs. & stopped Fri. as well. Then Mrs. Hawkes turned up quite unexpectedly for the night. He wasn't well & she was worried about him but it made quite an interesting break to the tame existence of today. He is very nice. She loved your bed. Fancy her two children at boarding school & the youngest only 4½, quite a baby, but she said they are awfully happy & they are in a play for Xmas & a child of eight couldn't say her part & this mite stepped in & said it for her. I wonder if Kit is doing anything at her school or Hugh. (*"Anything" means speaking pieces or taking the lead in plays or winning prizes. Annie's pride in her Babies sets a high standard for them.*) We seem so far away to hear much of you. They (*the Germans*) have had several tries this week but so far no success but a lot of ships gone down. The old Irish had a go last night. I heard a few bangs and nearly woke Mr. B. up as I thought it was a raid. Clinton Hill is about the same. 31 have come back as the gentleman have come back from Africa so I expect they will stay now. All the other houses are mostly empty. The two gossips are still here. (*Mrs. Niles and Mrs. Fortescue are gossips to Annie because of the active, if assuredly kindly, interest they took in the Palmers and ourselves. Their houses flanked our pair of houses on either side.*) Toddy & Budgy are both well. Mrs. Hawkes made an awful fuss of Budgy. She loves cats. I haven't heard anything of Mrs. Decker

this week so I don't know how she is. I wish I could just peep at you all. I should so love to see you. This blackout business is very depressing. It's so long, the evenings. I don't seem to have much news this week so I will close hoping you are all well. Please take care of yourself. All best wishes.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

7th December, 1939

Dear Madam,

Here is wishing you all a happy Xmas & better luck in the New Year. I hope you will have a nice Xmas despite being so far from home. I wish you were all back here but still I hope it won't be long before you are. It's dreadful how the houses are emptying. Mrs. Golden (*across the road from us*) told me they are storing their furniture. She said if John was older she should send him to boarding school & come back here with her husband. I think we are as safe here as anywhere. I have the funniest little cake to send to Steyning this year, such a little fellow. It looks very sad and lonely without the Babies' one with it. I am going to send what I can down as she (*Mrs. Decker*) doesn't seem well. One thankful mercy we are going to have some lights so I shall see Him (*the Lamplighter*) a bit more. Mr. B. seems well & Toddy & Budgy. They are both going to Steyning for Xmas. Without you to keep him in order in the car Toddy will be stealing Budgy's rations which is a problem to get. Xmas won't be Xmas though. Things are so upset. We can only get a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of butter now. Mr. B. has the Stork (*margarine*) as he likes a nice bit of hot toast for his tea & next week only a pound of sugar. I am glad you are not here for the rationing. One blessing, Mr. B. doesn't set down & worry. I see he has a good meal when he goes out at night so he doesn't hurt. I had a surprise today. Rose (*the jolly young maid we last had with Annie*) turned up. I hadn't seen her for weeks or heard. She is working in a tin factory at Southgate. Somebody said the other day about you

being in Devonshire. I wish you where. I shouldnt feel so completely shut off from you. It's raining cats & dogs & the wind is howling round. Please take care of yourself. Give my best love to the Babies. How is the school getting on & Kit's young man? All the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Thursday, Dec. 22, 1939

Dear Madam,

My letter is being written early this week as we go off on Sunday & I must not miss it as I am afraid the one I wrote last week wasn't very interesting as I had such awful screws. They were driving me skatty but I am taking some pills which has eased it a bit. Enough of myself. How thrilled I was at getting a line from you, no extra, & the Babies' cards! They were lovely. Please thank them & tell them I'll write later only I am rather busy gathering up the bits for Steyning. I want no Xmas gifts. My best Xmas gift would be to see you & the Babies come walking in. I am glad they are not growing too much but Kit in your costume! (*This was one which, because of its color, I used to call "the un-ripe tomato."* I had had it made over into a very becoming winter outfit for blonde Kit. Annie had pushed it into the last inch of space in my trunk.) I said you may find it useful knowing you disliked it but I didn't think of Kit although your clothes fit her & that colour would suit her. I really had to shed a tear. I don't shed many but the poor little cake compared to the huge ones of other years. It's a nice little cake but so tiny it looks. I have got them a turkey, only a small one. They are very dear this year. So is everything & butter is a job to get even if you are registered. Last Sunday the gas started its annual game. Went right away & I had the men till 11.30 at night putting a new metre in. I really had an exciting evening. Mr. B. was at Strat-



ford but I was waiting for the midnight news to hear about the Graf Spee. I was so excited over it. Anything with the Navy thrills me to the marrow, more than the Army. Toddy is snoring like a bull on the mat in front of the fire. He sleeps there these cold nights & loves it. He went off on one of his razzles Sun. morning. Four hours he was gone & the result was he was sick all night Sunday. Serve him right, I say. I gave him a whipping for it which didn't please him at all. Mrs. Niles was saying old Budge goes in at night, rattles the handle of the door where her son sleeps. You know his room is up those steps in the garden. When he has warmed himself, he rattles again to be let out. He got a cheek. Those ladies up the road say he is handsome but no gentleman. He has the best of there breakfast, then, without a thank you, clears off again. Your young man (*the Major*) enquired about you & ask me to remember him. You know I think he misses you. I don't know what Goldens are doing but I shouldn't be surprised if they don't let there place furnished for the duration. All there furniture have just gone to be stored. What a road! I wish I could make a pudding & cake for your Xmas. You tell Hugh an inch is a good bit to grow. I am glad you liked the coat (*the bed-jacket*). It will keep you warm. I am glad I haven't forgotten my knitting. These dark nights when I am alone I am a quick knitter. I have made two jumpers, a nice blue one for the house with a roll collar. It looks nice & a fancy cardigan for my best frock & also a pull-

over. I am going to make one more for the Spring. Knitting keeps your brain clear & your nerves steady. Please take care of yourself. All the best to you & much love to my Babies & love from Budgy & Toddy.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Sunday, 31st Dec., 1939

Dear Madam,

The last day of the old year. What a lot seems to have happened! I am longing to hear how you spent Xmas. I thought of you such a lot & wondered what you were all doing. Mr. B. had a nice rest. I went home (*to Somerset*) Sunday. It was so foggy it took all day to get there & I had to come back Tuesday as I couldn't get nothing to come in Wednesday morning but still I had one nice day & enjoyed it. We are having very sharp weather & quite a fall of snow. The tank is froze in the roof. I went to have a bath. No water running, so I hastily rang Mr. B. up as he wasn't coming home tonight. He is spending the night at Hawkes'. Toddy & Budgy were both very bad boys yesterday. Budge stole Mr. B.'s breakfast, a nice fat kipper, & Toddy refused to budge out either on the lead or on his own & I had to carry him home most of the way. He saw Mr. B. going off with some blankets & he thought he was going away without him & so he sulked all day. Here is an amusing bit. Some lady in Clinton Hill what number I don't know, she was talking about you & what a lovely figure you had & about Kit being so nice looking & about Hugh, then it suddenly dawned on her he belonged to Mr. B. so she said does he belong to that tall charming gentleman in the A.R.P.? I really had to laugh. I told Mr. B. & I told him I was telling you. He smiled too. Rationing starts soon.  $\frac{3}{4}$  sugar,  $\frac{1}{4}$  butter,  $\frac{1}{4}$  bacon or ham. I don't know about the meat. That don't worry us as we have so little. Butter pinches me but Mr. B. likes the marg. & he told

me to have his bit. A  $\frac{1}{4}$  don't go far if you feed on it practically as I do. I rarely have anything else but we shan't starve. I have to put a form in for sugar for marmalade. I must make a bit more. You can eat that with no butter. I hope you will get some snaps of the Babies in there funny snow clothes. I should love to see them. Major & Mrs. F. have both been in bed, the cook said. I knew they would when that cold weather set in. It's a good place there if you can do it, nice & warm. There little dog is a scream (*the Pekinese*). He sets & cries with the cold on his feet. Him & Toddy are great pals. Well I hope you will have a happy New Year & let us hope for better luck then. Once the New Year, the time will go & we shall be altogether again. In the meantime, take care of yourself. My best love to the Babies & all the best to you for 1940.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Sat., 7th Jany., 1940

Dear Madam,

I was so pleased to get your note which Mr. B. gave me. Even a tiny one like that cheers me tremendously. Your Xmas didn't sound as if it would be too bad with your father coming up, although it would be much nicer to be here altogether. I expect Hugh was pleased with his flying machine. I can picture Kit curling her doll's hair up. I hope they got my little presents for Xmas. So you are writing a book. That should make a good bit of cash if you do. All good authors composes around the pots & pans so it should be a success. (*This is one of Annie's choicest remarks. I was not writing a book at the time, nor did I dream then that Annie and I would be collaborating on this one, nearly two years later. If we succeed, my coat of arms will have pots and pans rampant all over it.*) I can just picture the Babies revelling in the snow. They would love it. I have had an awful cold & cough. I felt quite sorry for myself. Due I think to the frozen tank, the house was like a barn but I am thankful to say Mr. B. seems well & happy & the animals too. They are both lying on the rug in front of the fire, not too close together or else there will be a fight. I don't know what Budge will do when rationing starts. His food is a job to get & dear. (*Budge lived on a revolting diet of lights. Annie never quite accepted him since he came originally from Steyning.*) I never thought we should come to this (*rationing*) again. We had your favorite Mr. Black in last night (*Annie and I do not like Mr. Black.*) & a couple of wardens the night before. That takes Mr.

B.'s mind off things a lot. Goldens have let their house for three years to some Austrians. He was put in prison for something but got over here. Supposed with no money. They none of them have but they can take the places. There is some German refugees taken that big house at the top of Hartford Road which that millionaire had built. (*Annie would peer at them with baleful eye.*) Mr. Golden got a flat in town. The others are in the country but he says he got too much work to go very often for weekends. I told him he was lucky. We have had some frowsy weather, first snow, fog & today it's filthy out. It was very slippery this morning. I had to laugh at Mrs. Niles. She didn't see me. She was carefully padding along with a stick, then she had a little slide, then she went in the road. She didn't know which way to go & she looked so worried over it. (*Mrs. Niles, spare and fussy, minced neatly along on the driest days.*) Mine (*the Lamplighter*) is still very busy but little cash at the end. I had two pieces of matting nearly new when I left Victoria Road. They have been round His mother's place. He got me another piece, quite a good match, so I have got it in the kitchen. It's very comfortable & looks nice. The plates have gone back (*on the kitchen dresser*). I took them out in case of bangs but it looked so cold & bare. Well I hope this will find you & the Babies all well. They will be able to lecture there experiences at school when they get back. Give them my love & Budgy & Toddy's. My best to you and take care of yourself & the same wish for the New Year as you said in my note.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

## H O M E I N T O C A R A V A N S E R Y

*Bit by bit, as the letters go on, one notices a continuous stream of friends and relations coming to Number 30 Clinton Hill, some for a meal, some for overnight, some for longer. Annie, who always craved company, is in her element. One pictures her thumping up and down stairs with arms full of sheets, rejoicing at the sounds and laughter in the lonely house, and creating dinners out of bacon rinds and cheese parings. "You certainly want your head screwed on the right way these dys to do housekeeping," she says, cheerfully. Absorbed in the goings and comings of her guests, and aware that nothing much is happening in the War in London, she places her bets not on the Grand National but on our soon return.*





Sat., Jany. 20th, 1940

Dear Madam,

My little bit of weekly gossip to you. Mr. B. is at Stratford tonight. He tells me you had a marvelous Xmas. I am afraid life will be very tame here when you come back except it's home. We are having the most awful cold weather I have ever known. Somebody said it is 35 years since we had such frost & cold. Twice we have had the tank frozen. (*It lives in the attic. English plumbing is not prepared against below-freezing weather.*) So now Mr. Pierce (*the carpenter brother of Mr. Pierce, the greengrocer*) has lengthened the electric heater & it's setting by the tank keeping it warm & the tank in the kitchen sprung a leak & what a mess it was! Rusted not busted. Everybody is the same. Your young man (*the Major*) had one burst in the hall. Clinton Hill is full of refugees (*suspicious foreigners to Annie*). Mr. B. will have to watch there lights. 56 has some going in there. Mr. Palmer came home on seven dys sick leave & now Mrs. Palmer is in bed with a cold so the children & him have come in here for there meals as Mrs. Tullitt (*their charwoman*) has crocked up. (*These are the little Palmers next door who used to be so gay.*) Mr. B. seems well & the animals. One blessing he goes no more out in the middle of the night. He only goes about twice a week & his long night he generally brings one or two wardens to supper. I am glad I foresaw the weather & made a nice thick jumper. (*Annie gets great satisfaction out of pre-seeing things, as who does not.*) At least I am warm but I have had a terrible cold. I lost my voice. I hope you

& the children are well. How I should love to see you all come in! If only we could go back to those happy dys before old Hitler got too big for his boots but I am afraid it will be a long time but as long as we do, it will be at least something to live for. I do hope you are looking after yourself, not doing too much. I set here like tonight, one of my long lonely nights, & think about you all & try to picture what you are all doing. I did use to get somebody sometimes to see me but I don't now only very rarely. People won't come out in the black-out but I am get use to being alone now & I can always find plenty to do. Well I don't seem to have anything else to say. Give my love to my Babies & all the best to you & please take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Sunday, 26th Jany., 1940

Dear Madam,

I was so thrilled to get my letters from you & the Babies. I am afraid Hugh is a big flirt. (*One of us must have told her that Hugh had a very best girl, aged eleven.*) I'll write them next week. I am rather busy. We are having dreadful weather. Today is inches of snow & a blizzard blowing. I wonder how much longer it is going on. They say it's the coldest since the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 & the first time the Thames has frozen since 1814. Well now I will start. I am busy making marmalade. We shan't starve if I have my way & if we can't get fat later, we will have bread & marmalade. I stayed up till 12 cutting them up. Six hours I was cutting. Everybody laughed at my jam. I can laugh at them. Mr. B. was at Stratford. He seems to keep well. I am touching wood. The Hawkes (*our friends from Essex*) are coming here Wednesday week for a couple of nights. They are very cheerful & liven us up a bit. I have still the Palmers coming in for meals. I think they enjoy there food in here. They do eat well. She said they didn't eat much but I think that is there trouble. They don't eat enough. I do lots more potatoes than he brings in. It all goes. You know what I am for feeding people up. I think the children are looking better for it too. They are going back to Cornwall after this. Now her mother is dead, they have nothing to stay around for. He has had a long leave, nearly a fortnight. You know Tiger (*a monstrous great Dane who lived at Number 33*). He is dead. He had paralysis. I

saw her trying to drag him home one day & the next he was put to sleep. One worry off my head. He always fought with Toddy if he had a chance. He (*Toddy*) is funny in the snow. Mr. B. says it's the salt they put down. He lays on his side, shuts his eyes & howls. Then he licks his paws. The other day I had to carry him. He is no light weight. The one over the road had to bring her spaniel home in a taxi. I fell down the steps, cut my hands to pieces & nearly Toddy. I fell on top of him. He did howl. (*Nobody involved in this episode is lightweight.*) Mr. B. has to do six till twelve tonight but he says he won't be out much, one blessing. Then he brings a girl back for supper. She is very nice, eats anything & eats it up. She is plain, got glasses but no swank like the majority have. (*Annie is bent on calming any fears on my part.*) My word, you had a lovely Xmas & it was lovely for you to have your father & to see him. Well I expect he enjoyed it as much as you. Compensations in all things it seems. I have to waste a dy tomorrow going to the Town Hall to get my paper to get my ration of sugar for marmalade. (*Marylebone Town Hall is a long trek from Clinton Hill.*) If I don't I shan't be able to get it. Oh it's a game but we shall get over it I suppose. As long as we win the War that's all that matters & we all get settled again happy & comfortable as we where before. Even if we haven't much, that's all that matters. All my best love to the Babies & tell them I'll write to them & all the very best to you & please take care of yourself & don't overdo it.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Dear Kit,

Feb. 3rd, 1940

*(This letter is tucked in as an example of the several special ones Annie's Babies have had from her.)*  
Thanks for your note. I hope your cold is better. What a wonderful Xmas you had & a stocking too! I am glad you liked my little brooch. I saw a sweet one but when I went to get it, there had been a fire so it was gone. You won't want to come back to this tame life but to me it will be just wonderful to have you back & see your dear faces again. Tell Mummy not to worry about Daddy's little bit of extra weight. He still has his lovely figure & what is more he is wonderfully well which is marvellous considering the shocking weather we have had & he is out in it all but I think Mummy isn't eating enough. She doesn't want to get too thin. Perhaps she is like me. When she has cooked it, she doesn't want to eat it. (!) My very best love. I must add a line to Hugh.

Dear Hugh,

Thank you for yours. I am afraid you are an awful flirt. How many girls have you got? You will be an expert skater by the time you come back. You want to be here with the snow & ice. It's been awful. Daddy has gone to Steyning. Toddy is with me but Johnny has gone with them. Do you know that little dog, Mr. Wallace's, a little black fellow? All my love & best to both. I got those little planes right back in Aug. thinking you would be home. My sister was here & I went snooping round & saw them. I thought to myself just suit you.

All my love to both my Babies

From Annie

X X—From Toddy with a big hug to both.

11th Feb., 1940

Dear Madam,

My bit of Sunday news for you. One blessing the weather is better although it is still very cold but all the snow is gone. I seem to have been very busy this last month. First of all the Palmers was in here for nearly three weeks for breakfast & lunch. Just as I got use to them, they went but my word, the children looked better & was. Even Mrs. Palmer said so. I don't want to crow but good meals have done those children a marvelous lot of good. Then Mrs. Hawkes came on Wed. with him. I like having them ever so much. I miss her now she is gone. She is very jolly, sees a joke like you can. I hear on the wireless we had three (*German planes*) down. They ought to do something the way they go for shipping. You know that young lady from Bristol in the Air Force (*Betty Peters, a cousin of Mr. B.'s*) she came last night. She is tired of uniform but they mustn't keep it in there digs as the head ones goes round. Now we got her here & Mr. B. seems awfully well & happy. He had a liver. Worried me to death as he ate nothing one day & had to go on duty at night & if there is one thing I like it's for him to have a good meal when he is going on duty. However he is fit again & is very busy on the bricks. My word, I thought Jerry is here! You never heard such a noise as it was & the funny thing there was an aeroplane buzzing over & made it more uncanny but one blessing it was daylight as I was alone. (*Mr. B. had written that the ancient*

*wall between our house and the Palmers' suddenly took it into its head to fall over into our garden. We had often laughed and said it would tumble some fine day because Sally and I leaned our chins on it so frequently, chatting together and the children and Peter and Mr. B. were always climbing it.)* Food is a bit of a problem but I manage to keep the books pretty steady every month. I get a bit extra every month in case things get very tight & I am looking ahead for your coming home as well. It doesn't matter where you shop now, local or otherwise, prices are controlled & everywhere is the same. My little appetite is a boon now. I really eat less alone. I don't have any baker call as one loaf does Mr. B. a week & I get that from my milk shop. I generally get myself two rolls & with my bit of porridge that does me. I don't have any meat only when Mr. B. is home on Sunday & I don't care for fish & the vegetables with the awful snow isn't worth eating now. I always go down (to "the Street") as soon as breakfast is finished or you would get nothing. I have some funny tales to tell you when you get back. Censor wouldn't pass them. (*Oh, alas and alack!*) How are my Babies getting along with their skating etc. & Kit with her sewing? I think Palmers must be giving up as a man rang up yesterday to view the furniture so they must be selling it. It seems queer to live right up to every penny like they must have. (*The Palmers were hilariously improvident in the days when nothing mattered.*) I can't see Mr. B. doing it, can you? Well

I hope you are looking after yourself till I see you again. My best love to the Babies & all the best to you. Toddy sends his love. A fortnight today daylight saving starts. Then it will be light at night till nearly seven o'clock.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



18th Feb., 1940

Dear Madam,

A little scratch to you hoping it will find you all well. I wonder if you are getting my letters still as they don't seem so easy to come. (*What with the delays of the censorship and the ship sinkings, my letters had already begun to be delayed or lost. It has continued to be easier to get letters out of England than into England.*) I write every Sunday & Mr. B. posts them for me. I shall write every week a line till you come back as although Mr. B. tells you all his personal affairs, little bits I tell you keeps you in touch with home & exactly how things are till you get back. I am going to make a bed-jacket for Kit's birthday. Perhaps they will be back. I hope so but I am wondering if she has expanded in her chest much since she left. You & I could manage very cheaply. (*As it was still, in those days, a "phoney" war, there was some talk of our coming back to London in the spring.*) The books are small now. I don't know what Mr. B. thinks. He never says but they keep very level despite rising prices. I am keeping all the docketts for you to see. They are no higher & we have a lot of company as you can here which I like very much as it keeps one going these awful days but it's a job to know what to get for them. Mr. B. is staying the night at Mr. Hawkes. She is very lively. It cheers me up to see her. We had Miss Peters last week end. How she revelled in her hot bath, bang full to the top & her breakfast in bed & then I gave them apple tart. Thrilled she was as she gets it home. We had an air warden Wednesday for dinner. It's a

queer world. I set & wish we could go back to our peaceful dys we enjoyed last year although it was hovering over our heads all the time. I started this rather early as I had someone for supper Thursday & Wednesday & Miss Peters comes again on Friday night for the weekend. (*Miss Peters had, according to Mr. B., most of the British, Polish and American fliers in London dancing attendance on her attractive self.*) It's such a job with the food. Three times I trotted down last week to get the meat to get exactly what I wanted. You know they can't palm me off with anything (*I do indeed.*) & I have been doing a bit of Spring cleaning between. I have never seen the curtains get as black as this year. I think having the shutters so many hours with the black-out, the fog has eaten in them & it's been such a dirty winter & a lot of fog. Another deep fall of snow today. Since a fortnight before Xmas we have had this awful weather. It gets wosser & wosser. I am so pleased to hear the children are doing so well at school. It's a change, as I expect like everything else they teach differently. I hope Hugh's ankle is better. I expect he was swishing the girls round (*the skating rink*) & not noticing. You have to bring everything home in your hand now. They have no paper to wrap up things. As I said to Mr. B., it's a good job we can be good tempered & cheerful these days. I thank my lucky stars I have never been one to mope & now I am alone so many hours, it's a good thing. Still every dy brings us to something (*which is Annie's encouraging philosophy in a nutshell*). If you have plenty to do, it keeps your mind

occupied. Well when you get tired of reading my rubbish, say but if I scratch a line & Mr. B. gets stuck, you know things are alright. He is so busy with his A.R.P. Three letters waited him Fri. night. I laid them all in a row for him to see when he come in at night. Well I must close. All the best to you & love to the Babies. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

25th Feb., 1940

Dear Madam,

A little scratch to you hoping it will find you all well. I have been busy helping Mr. Palmer to pack up. He can't do it alone. Of course I don't know whether I have done it right but I have done it. It's awful packing up to store. He is selling some of his things if they go. I sold the pram easy but I may not these. (*The Palmers were like animated toys. Mr. Adolf Schickelgruber owes a heavy debt for breaking them and turning their merry doll's house into a dank haunt for mice and beetles.*) We have Mr. & Mrs. Hawkes coming again on Wednesday for a couple of nights so I have to get it finished. Old Toddy has been on his jazes this week. Sunday he went off & Thurs. again & Fri. he went off all dy from seven till six & he was as black as night when he came back, covered in mud, plastered up from head to tow. How is your cooking going? I can sort of feel we may see you soon now. The nights & dys are getting brighter. Mr. B. went to the theatre with Mrs., I always forget her name, who done your foot. She had some tickets given her. (*Since Annie does not like Mrs. M., she always purposely forgets this lady's name.*) Your young man (*the Major*) hasn't been well. He had a pint of blood taken by leeches the other dy as his heart has been bad. It's three years last Tues. since you went off in the ambulance. I always remember it. It was two dys before my birthday. Well I certainly can't find much to say but it's a line to let you know everything is alright here. Clocks go on today. We lose an hour's sleep. I don't go anywhere

to get any news these dys. Well I hope you are all well. My love to the Babies. I forgot one bit of news. I have lost 15 lbs. I weighed in Dowsons (*the chemists*) the other day. He said I got thinner. I don't eat anything so I shouldn't get fat. Well take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

2nd March, 1940

Dear Madam,

I am glad you still find my letters of interest to you. I am afraid last Sunday's wasn't very interesting. I was so tired I couldn't keep awake & what I wrote I don't know. I was helping Mr. Palmer to pack up most evenings & after you have done a dy's work, you are tired & it was so cold in there. I was thrilled at getting your letter & the Babies' post cards. They are very pretty & nice. We have had Mr. & Mrs. Hawkes here since Wed. & they where going to see there children today but instead Mrs. Hawkes is in bed with flue & we have had your friend in (*Annie did not care for our doctor either.*) & he has ran a nice little bill at Dowsons for her. We had Miss Peters last night & today she has gone to Swindon for the week-end. Mrs. Hawkes brought her dog, a black Scottie. Toddy & him are real friends, sleep side by side on the mat & they look so pretty. Last night he commandeered Toddy's bed & slept in it all night. I have been busy selling up for Mr. Palmer. If you want to sell toys or anything, advertise in the Nursery World. Thousands of replies. The bulbs are coming up lovely now. I wish you was here. How I would have loved to have been behind Hugh when he read his papers. I can just picture him. I must get him another set of those (*miniature planes*) for his birthday. They are nice in the boxes & there is a lot of different kinds & you, I can just imagine you doing your speech. (*This was the first time I had ever opened my mouth in public. Once open, it so remained for one hour and three-quarters which must have been*

*a bit devastating for my long-suffering audience.*) Oh dear, you would laugh at the enormous piece of meat I have managed to get for Sunday.



That's about the size. A bit of best neck. It's awful. You certainly want your head screwed on the right way these dys to do housekeeping. Tell Kit not to get too grown up. She was getting so when she left last year but Hugh always keep what I called his little baby ways. (*It is as well Annie cannot hear him growling, "So you wanna get tough, do ya!"—in the approved gangster fashion.*) Our worst job is the coke. You can't get it and Mr. B. said they where only allowing 2 cwt. when it does arrive. Don't think I am personal or rude but I don't wonder at all the ladies in St. John's Wood thinking Mr. B. so charming & lovely. Last Sunday when he went off to Stratford I couldn't help looking at him. He had such a twinkle in his eye. His hair was all sort of curly & I don't know whether he had a new suit on but he keeps quite calm with it all & he is well, one blessing. Your young man (*the Major*) is better. I saw him the other dy. He enquired very sweetly about you. Perhaps, as you say, by June we shall know what is happening (*We did indeed, after the fall of Dunkirk!*) & you will be able to think of coming home. Once get home, you won't starve & we can still live very cheaply when we want to. We do now when we

have no company. Thank the Babies for there cards & give them my best love & tell them Him sent his love to them. It doesn't look as though I shall have the pleasure of making a birthday cake for them this year. Never mind, we will have such a party when you get back we ever had here. Well I hope you are all well. Please take care of yourself & don't overdo it. All my best to you. I am glad you get my letters so regular. It keeps you in touch with little homey bits.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



11th March, 1940

Dear Madam,

A little scratch to you hoping it will find you all well & happy. Well we still have Mrs. Hawkes here. She had the flue very bad, nearly pneumonia, but she is better & hopes to go home Monday. We had your beloved friend calling, Dr. J. That is one thing I pride myself on. I can nurse people & get them well without relapses. I know it knocked me down. That's when I lost my 15 lbs. Mr. B. has had a nice weekend. Sat. he went golfing with Mr. Hawkes & Sunday he told me Mrs. Decker had had the flue so perhaps that's why I was so fortunate in having him here when he has spare time. Like the children, if nothing is wrong I don't get him. If you can give up with it (*the "flue"*), it's best but I am afraid the animals & Mr. B. would have been in a bad way if I had done so. The Palmer's furniture are going on Monday & I have to see it out. That's the last, I hope, as I must do some spring cleaning. The winter has been so dirty & long. Mrs. Strong is having a run of bad luck. (*The Strongs were contemporaries of ours who lived on Hampstead Heath.*) First Dick, now Mr. Strong has German measles. It's awful about, old and young. I should like you to see Toddy & Jock, that's Mrs. Hawkes' dog, the black & white. They agree very well & at night he sleeps in Toddy's bed & Toddy on the mat but if he starts doing tricks like dying for the King, etc., Toddy pitches into him. He doesn't like it. Your young man (*the Major*) is getting better. His heart has been very bad. She will have a shock Monday as she keeps asking me what the Palmers are

doing. (*Annie would relish gentle little Mrs. Fortescue's concern when the clumsy pantehnicons hauled away the Palmers' furniture.*) Meat rationing starts on Monday. 1/10 ozs. a week each person but it won't worry us. You should see our huge shoulder of lamb. You can hardly see it. Salmon is the cheapest. It goes farther than anything. I don't think we shall starve with it all, though. How's my Babies? Still enjoying themselves & well? I wonder if they long ever to come home as I to see them. It's a queer war, is it not? I have enclosed a little crocus, the first flower in the garden, for you to see. (*It is still in the envelope of the letter wrapped in a bit of cotton.*) My very best love to the Babies & to you & take care of yourself till you come back which I hope won't be long. I wonder if you have started any plans for returning yet.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

25th March, 1940

Dear Madam,

Well, here is Easter Sunday. I wonder how you are spending it. One thing I can't make the children a nice cake & rake round for some chicks & eggs for it, sad to say. Mr. B. has gone off to somewhere near Southend for the week-end so I am spring cleaning the sitting room. I have washed the covers & wasn't they black! Three years nearly they have been on & the winter has been terrible. My heart dropped in my boots when I asked Mr. B. the other day if the children would be home for there birthdays. He said no, not till June. Well, unless Mrs. Decker comes here, you will want to see her first so by the time I see the Babies & you it will be nearly Xmas. Awful, isn't it, to think of? (*Annie mournfully imagined that if we came home in June we would go first to Deckie at Steyning for the summer holidays.*) I wrote her the other day & told her to get some British pluck & come here for a week. It would do her worlds of good if she would. It's just as safe here as any where is. Kit looks fine in your tomato (*my old suit*). The snaps are good if small. She certainly looks more grown up. I went up on the heath with Mr. B. on Friday afternoon to get a breath of air. My sister had another boy, a disappointment. We couldn't get any coal at home & she got a cold & had pneumonia but she is getting on now. I sent some chunks & coalite what I could get but it has been a job with firing. If we get very hard up when you come back, you will have to try what a lot is doing, let a couple of rooms to a business lady. It pays a maid's

wages. (*I do not often shed a tear myself but this wistful remark nearly floored me.*) There is lots doing it but things are not too bad. Of course you can't have a lot of luzuries but you can have plenty of other things. The only thing is you must go shopping before there eyes are open, then you are alright. It was very nice to see your faces if only on a snap of a recent edition. Mr. B. enjoyed his dy home pottering in the garden Fri. There are some daff.s coming. All the wall-flowers are dead with the frost. Well all the very best to you & my love to my Babies & please take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

30th March, 1940

Dear Madam,

I'll start this letter today as I have two from the dug-out (*the Warden's headquarters*) for lunch Sunday & I may get stuck & lose the post. He is a very nice man, very quiet. Mr. B. & him seem great pals. Churchill is speaking tonight. I expect you will be listening in. Oh dear, you will laugh when I tell you. The wall at Tanners' has fallen in the Major's garden. I think more than ours have. (*The Major and the Tanners were not very happily suited as next-door neighbors. The Major's Pekinese once dug up the Tanners' dahlias; the Tanners' cat once frightened the Major's budgerigars into what, in bird parlance, would be an apoplectic fit.*) 40 moved out the other dy. Real rubbish. I wouldn't have it myself. Mr. B. looks grand in his dug-out suit. He should have a snap taken for you all. The bulbs are very scraggy this year. You didn't put them in. I think Old Tucker must have frightened them. (*Annie aims another swat at the head of her ludicrous little enemy.*) I am getting lovely & slim. I have lost 16½ lbs. You won't know me when you see me. I must write Mrs. Decker. I think Mr. B. said she was going to Worthing again only it's her birthday Wednesday & I generally send her a few flowers. You know the only thing that made me feel there was a war on, I had no card at Easter or egg from Home. The first I ever remember & I never had one present for my birthday. I didn't want it but it's just the feeling. (*Annie never revealed either her age or the date of her birthday to any of us, but that does not minimize the pa-*

*thos of this remark.*) Well how are my Babies? Still enjoying themselves & how are you? How is the cooking? I don't hear. I was pleased to see by your snap you looked practically your old self. We are having a lot of lamps fixed so next winter it won't be such a black-out if we are still here (*and the Lamplighter will be able to make his rounds again*). I have had a good spring clean this week. I washed the dining-room curtains. They washed lovely but too big to dry out of doors & I have washed the nursery ones, so it's saved a bit. I done them in Lux. (*This is a free testimonial for Lever Bros. It would be fun to see Annie's picture opposite Lady So and So's for Pond's in the advertising pages.*) We have some new chairs in the dining-room, two small ones & an armchair, a small one. The small ones are a hundred years old, rather big seats. 31 has gone, furniture & all. There is another baby coming there & I think there money is got short. They are funny people. Rose (*Annie's buxom protégée*) rang up today. She had gone home for the weekend & then her sister & her young man developed German measles so she trotted back feeling very nervous in case she got a germ. She rang up & said do you think I have? I had to laugh. Well I had better close. My love to the Babies. All the best to you & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

6th April, 1940

Dear Madam,

My usual bit of gossip. I am writing this today as I have someone for supper Sunday & I generally cook the joint as it's a bit of a job to provide luzuries nowadays. (*"Luzuries," spelled with a "z," please, is a synonym for "titbits."*) You would smile at me. I wanted a bit of beef. It's very scarce. I went down Friday at seven o'clock before I opened the shutters & got it. Hugh & his Nellie! It will be like the song "Goodbye, Nellie, I am saying goodbye" when he comes back. There was a wedding at 18 today, a daughter. Did Hugh make anyone a April fool? I thought a lot about them & wondered. I had no flutter on the Grand National. I was hard up but it was a good winner who did. (*This is a dreary thought. Other years, with the kitchen wireless blaring the running commentary from Aintree, Annie, with her bets well placed at the pub, all but came down the home stretch on the winner.*) All the trees are coming out nicely but oh how our bulbs disgust me! What he (*Old Tucker*) has done with them I don't know. I saw an A.R.P. demonstration today. How I laughed! They brought out a woman out of those high houses in Greville Road, slid her out of the top window, stretcher tied on a rope & down she came. She turned over & over like a meat jack. There is a lot of pictures about (*obviously not A.R.P.!*) or rather they are doing it a lot, having women naked. They pirouet round & round that however much you look you see nothing. Mr. B. got lumbago from his gardening. He went along to Mrs. what her name is & got

it rubbed. She would do it good if nothing else. I have heard no more since. We had Mr. Wallace (*a cousin of Mr. B.'s*) here for the night Tues. He told me it cheered him up. He went off very merry. I was surprised to see him have a real good laugh. I was pulling his leg about him and Mr. B. going out prowling the night before. Really they went to the pictures. I gave them some curry & did he lap it down! I like to see people eat as you know. Budgy now has only one meal a day. I can't get it & other things are too expensive. One week last month his food was 2/6 (*50 cents*). Toddy is also slimming as he is too fat. I have heard nothing of the Palmers since they left. I told you Mrs. Hawkes went to the same school as she did. The world is small. Well I must close. All the very best to you & I hope you will take care of yourself. My love to the Babies & tell Hugh I hope Nellie is well. How is Kit's Tommie? I hear nothing of him.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



13th April, 1940

Dear Madam,

I hope this will find you all well. The weather still keeps chilly, & I can't shake my cough off. When I get to bed my chest starts wheezing & I can't sleep. Then I come out & have a good catch of beetles. We seem to have made a start but poor Norway & Denmark. I think they will get the same fate as Poland & it seems to me they are after the Royal Family. Oh, you would smile! One of the ladies from the dug-out, the one with glasses I told you about, she asked Mr. B. to practice on the piano. It will do it good but she thinks she can sing. It's a noise like that woman at the back use to make. I told her she wanted to attracted Weldon, that's the one that had the big dog, Tiger. He does look comical in his suit. Like a sea scout. He wants one of those little cocked hats to finish him off. I believe half of them would run away if there was a raid on. Good job Mr. B. is here. We had a Miss Marshall here for supper the other night. I don't think it's the one that usually come. I don't know whether there is another one. (*Annie passes on this bit of suspicious information to no avail. Mr. B. and I have known the Marshall sisters for seventeen years.*) I have been in Palmers' & dug up the chrysanthemums & put them where the wallflowers where. They all died with the frost. (*Annie's little bit of looting grows in dimensions. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody no good," she chuckles, as she culls treasures from deserted gardens.*) I am watching to see how the lilies come on. How are my Babies getting on? I shouldn't call them that, what

with Nellie & Tom. What did you do for Easter? Did you have anything like home? (*Say a chicken hunt in the garden and a highly decked Easter cake for tea?*) What will you think of our snaps! I look a real crow but Mr. B. looks nice & the animals has come out fine & the dug-out too. Don't that little damsell look coy? (*This is the one with glasses who practiced on the piano.*) That new house at the top has there usual lovely flowers. Barratt seems to put new bulbs in every year. They must have a lot of money. They are Americans & was there when War broke out & came back in the Yankee Clipper. The house with that lovely chow they had killed when War started. I went down to see Him today (*the Lamplighter*). I saw a little Peke. I had to laugh. Two great bobbies taking him to the station. I suppose he had strayed. Well I don't think I have much more news to tell you. We can still get plenty to eat. I have a good store cupboard in for emergencies. You know our tails of salmon. We fall back on them. They are cheap, real cheap to other things & everybody enjoys them. Curry is another thing I fall back on. People enjoy it. You like that. I wish you was here to enjoy some. Mr. B. has just gone up to the post, then we have a nice cup of tea when he returns. Well all the best to you. My love to the Babies.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

“THINGS SEEM TO BE MOVING NOW”

*Annie sees the end of the War around the next corner when Hitler grabs Norway and Denmark and the British go into action in their Norwegian campaign, but she comes up undaunted, at the count of nine, when France collapses and real danger becomes imminent. There is a lot to shake her confidence in these months—our decision to stay here for the duration, more people leaving London, children of our friends being sent to the United States; home life, which she values above anything else, being broken up right and left before her eyes. “We do lead a life now!” she says. Mercifully, Nigger, who is a “sweet little cat” who digs up other people’s nasturtiums, arrives in the nick of time to divert her.*



20th April, 1940

Dear Madam,

My little scratch to you hoping it will find you well. I have just sent Kit's birthday off. I'll make sure she gets it in time. I can just imagine her taking the class at school. She is a scream. Her school is at Royston. It must be that farm where they camped. I had Mrs. Hawkes & her two children for lunch Wednesday. They went to see Pinoche. It's in place of Snow White & to the Zoo in the afternoon. It was so funny. Toddy never let that oldest one alone. I think he thought it was Kit. He was so excited. Thursday we had Mr. Weldon & that girl (*the coy "damsell"*) for supper. He did enjoy it. Friday night we had someone you are very fond of, Mr. Black (*one of the ones who used to get Dinner C*) & tonight we have someone from the dug-out & they are going to pictures after & next week we have Mrs. Gerald coming for a week. He (*a young cousin of Mr. B.'s*) is going in Middlesex (*hospital*) for something with his nose. She doesn't like being alone so is coming here. (*"As pretty as paint she were," Annie said, the day she wedged herself into the crowd on the pavement outside St. Margaret's Westminster, to have a good look at Mrs. Gerald in her wedding dress in June, 1939.*) Things seem to be moving now. (*You will note that when Annie uses this expression she is always referring to British action. This time it is to the landing of British troops in Norway and the apparent victory at Namsos.*) I wish it would finish. I don't know how Mr. B. stands but if he ever says he

can't afford my wages, I'll gladly do as I use to, get a job afterwards. There is plenty to do here but I am use to hard work. I don't have no food off the books & I don't have any washing so that is the only way I can save him, only he has Steyning as well & he cant cut there. Mr. B. will take Mrs. Gerald to keep your wedding up. Do you remember last year? You spent it at Steyning. What a lot happens in a short time! To go back, I would do anything to keep intact here as we have always been so happy together. My friend lost her boy in the Huston. He was only 18, an only child. It seems hard to lose them at that age. The weather don't seem to warm up much. It will soon be Midsummer & we are still going on with winter. Did you like your snaps of the family? (*The prize one was one of Annie and Tod reclining incongruously on the Palmers' wicker garden chaise longue, with the heaped dirt of our dugout as background.*) Next door is still empty. It's a nice house inside. The basement isn't as nice as this but upstairs is nice & a nice bathroom. Mr. Palmer was up here last Sunday. He is at Aldershot training for an officer. Well I think I have said all. I hope you & the Babies are well. Please take care of yourself. Toddy is snoring the kitchen down, his head reposing on the fireplace kerb.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

22nd April, 1940

Dear Madam,

I have to go against my principle. I had such a blow yesterday. Mr. B. says you are going to stay for duration & there was I feverishly counting the weeks to seeing you all again! (*Mr. B. wrote: "When I told Annie what you said in your letter, she groaned and said, 'What she done that for?' and then, 'I think someone out there 'as been getting at 'er, that's what I think!' So you'll probably catch it from her in her next letter. However, she saw the point about the children. She's a good old scout!"*) Of course I can understand your view. You have heaps of friends there. Here everybody is gone, & another thing you have the children with you now whereas here you would be afraid to keep them in London. Well there is one thing. Mr. B. is well looked after. You know I'll do my best. I told him yesterday if he couldn't afford my wages I'll get an afternoon job. I also put the paying guest idea to him. Lots are doing it. There is only one person who don't feel the pinch. It seems the Fortescues (*the Major and Mrs.*) They have their two maids and char every day. I had a good job offered me today if you had been home at Tussauds (*the famous waxworks*), 6 till 10 in the morning, then I should have been all day here & could have done it fine. Just a few shillings, a great asset. He said he may have to give up Steyning. Well that may prove a blessing in disguise for I honestly don't think Mrs. Decker is well enough for it & if we are going to have another winter like last. You can't

realize what a terrible winter we had & the black-out as well. If she was like she said she was, it wasn't safe. I have worried terribly over her this winter but I couldn't do anything as she wouldn't come here & yet honestly I don't think we shall have any raids & if you ask my opinion, this war isn't half as bad as the other. There isn't the job with food. You could queue up & get nothing. You don't now & if you can't get one thing, there is heaps of other things if you got any idea of making a nourishing meal. It's a good job we got a photo to look at. I put that one out you had took together for your passports. Old Budge jumped in my window last night, nearly killed me with fright. Well I shall live to see you all again some day. In the meanwhile, look after yourselves.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



28th, April, 1940

Dear Madam,

My usual line. Mr. B. & I are just recovering from the effects of last week's shock. I don't know which of us took it worse. I went down the road to a wedding today. Such a pretty one it was. They had just gone back when there was a terrific thunder storm. Tod & I was like two drowned rats. (*Reading from left to right, on the curbstone, two very wet wedding guests, but Annie would consider a peep at a bride worth it even in a cyclone.*) Hugh would love to be home. There is a bird sitting, five little bald heads, mouths wide open. I looked to see if the rain had washed them out but they are alright. Next week we shall have to put 3d (5 cents) I can't see it coming down again for a while. One thing I shan't get many letters from Home. They have a job to find 1½d (3 cents) now. The lilies are coming up nice now (*If you remember, Annie saw to these herself.*) but the bulbs are a sorry mess. Five daffodils, to be exact, we have had out. (*Master Tucker's doing.*) We are going to plant some runner beans next week, our own beans. I hope the Babies are well. They will certainly have changed when they come back. People seem to be coming back again, yet today they (*the Government inspectors*) were round examining basements to see whether we had a hose, etc., indoors. We have had some nice little lights fixed up in Vicarage Road & they are coming up this road later. Tell Kit Norman, Peels' man, has registered today so he will soon be off. (*This is the one who brought such*

*tasty morsels of gossip to the scullery window.*) Can you hear Toddy snoring? He is driving them home. Give the Babies my best love & Toddy's

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

May 5th, 1940

Dear Madam,

My little scratch to you. I hope you are all well, I hear you are going visiting. A nice change. We still have Mrs. Gerald here. She is very pleasant. If he has to go in the Army, she could come as P.G. here. She said the other dy she would love it. He has had a bad time with his nose but he is going on alright. It's his birthday today. She went off with several parcels for him. (*Annie gets her fill of sentiment and romance out of people rather than paper novels.*) Mr. B. is at Steyning. Him & Mr. Hawkes went off just like a couple of schoolboys. They came home & had tea in the garden. Then off they went. Mrs. Gerald got a couple coming tonight to keep her company & she had her lunch in the garden & thoroughly enjoyed it. Mr. B. and her went out Monday night (*"to keep our wedding up"*). They seem to have enjoyed themselves. That was a nasty thing at Clacton, supposed to be a safe area (*one of the first raids on London*). I hear you had some more snow. You enjoy it more than I do. The bird's nest has gone. The cat got at them & killed one. Then the old mother covered them & left them to die. Cruel, wasn't it, but it's so easy for a cat to get. I don't seem to have so much news this week. I expect there will be a letter tomorrow as a mail was in yesterday. All the best to you. My best to the Babies.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

11th May, 1940

Dear Madam,

I hope this letter will find you all well. Things look to be moving now. (*They were, indeed, and right towards the catastrophic collapse of Holland, Belgium and France but Annie refers to the fact that the British and French were marching to do battle. Her heart leaps up every time the British move.*) Mr. B.'s letter was opened this time but one thing I never say anything to cause alarm. This is a funny holiday (*the long Whitsun week-end*). All cancelled. Shops opening as usual. Mr. B. was going to Steyning but he isn't now but he got Mr. Wallace coming for the week-end. I was going to have a grand clean up after the visitors but that's knocked on the head. I had a beautiful chicken for him to take, a nice cake & a bit of ham. We shall eat it here now. I shall think of Kit on Tuesday & just wish I could see her blow her candles out. Mr. B. had to get up the other night, rather a disturbed night he had. He hadn't long been in bed when the phone went. Out he had to go again. It was a false alarm. Our visitors are gone, went yesterday. I was sorry. It's a treat to see anyone so happy & they are happy. It does Mr. B. good to have visitors like that. He (*Mr. Gerald*) looked very pale when he came out of the hospital. I should think he would with all this going on. What do you think of Churchill put out old Chamberlain? I felt so sorry for him. He seemed heartbroken. Mind you, he had an awful time & he is old for it too. (*Annie is reluctantly loyal to the last.*) They are going to build

several air raid shelters round here but you can't take dogs in so I couldn't go. Poor Tod depends on me if there is a noise of any description. Mr. B. had a lovely week-end last week. It was just like summer. Good job he did as this happened. (*By then things were not "moving" so well in France.*) Well I don't think I have any more news. The wall is nearly finished. The lilies are good. I thinned them last year & they are better. My love to you & the Babies.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

May 18th, 1940

Dear Madam,

A little line hoping you are all well. How I would love a line from you! Of course I realize when you have wrote to Mr. B. you have no time & post is expensive but if you just put a little line in Mr. B.'s for me, it would cheer me up immensely. Times are very depressing just now. One wonders just what will happen before it is all finished. Everybody is being armed for parachutes. Mr. Pierce (*the greengrocer*) joined up. I am just longing to hear how Kit spent her birthday, if she had a nice birthday cake & party. I expect she was thrilled with her cable from her Daddy. She must be huge. Mr. B. had the Marshalls the other night. He told them she was 32 bust. Where is she getting? Whitsun was a proper upset. Mrs. Decker was upset at losing her lovely chicken. I got a real beauty. I thought it wouldn't get finished but the Marshalls made short work of it. I pickled 200 eggs for next winter. They will be very scarce & expensive. Mr. B. has a bicycle. (*He had had to put up the car.*) Thursday night he had his supper & then went to a meeting of A.R.P. I thought as it was late, 10 o'clock, he wouldn't go. Imagine my horror, he went off on that byke to Strongs' (*on Hampstead Heath*)! I was worried over him and very relieved to hear him come back. He said he enjoyed it as it was a lovely moonlight night. Your Mr. Janecka (*the architect over the way*) is home again. Apparently he is doing something as he is in London for a while. They are living with the windows all

boarded up. It must be awful not to have any air in this weather. They have a refugee, a poor little thing. A lot of people will have them just to get their work done cheaply. (*It is amusing to note, later on, that one of “them foreigners” becomes a pal of Annie’s.*) All my sisters’ husbands has to go & my youngest brother, the only one left. Two went in the last war & I suppose this one will finish it. One blessing, we are going to get rid of Old Tucker. He has got terrible. The bulbs got my back up. Where he raked those old bulbs up from I don’t know but they where no good. Five daffodils, one tulip was the bloom & now the dahlias have nearly all vanished. The burglaries was in at Campbell’s last Sunday. They had to have a new door put on so I am very careful now to see all bolts & chains are on at night. My love to the Babies & all the best to you. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

May 26th, 1940

Dear Madam,

I hope this will find you well. It's a long time since Mr. B. heard from you, actually a fortnight yesterday. I expect they have got hung up with troops. (*Annie is evidently anticipating an A.E.F. to the rescue.*) Mr. B. was going to Steyning today but as he is waiting to hear from someone that may take it for several months & may have to bring back some of his things, he has decided to go next week. (*Nobody ever took it as Steyning became part of the twenty-mile prohibited coastal defense area.*) Mr. Wallace is here & we have Mr. Strong sleeping here. Quite a crowd arrived last night late. Mr. & Mrs. Gerald & two or three nurses with them. It's a grand job to be able to smile these dys as Mrs. Strong was dreadful the other night. What is the use of going about like that? It doesn't make things better or help to win the War. Mrs. Hawkes rang up the other night. She wants to come here for a while but only on condition Mr. B. lets her pay for her food. She has to take her children away from the school at St. Leonards as it's not safe. They are finding another place & the other night a bomb dropped within two miles of her place (*in Essex*) & scared her a bit. I think we are pretty safe here. Mr. B. had to go out Tuesday night but it was a false one. I expect they will come on Wednesday. We got a new gardener coming Tuesday. He is different to Tucker & Mr. B. says he knows what he is talking about. (*At this point, Old Tucker makes his scuffling exit from Annie's scene.*)



*There will be no more “pistols for two” through the scullery window.)* The raid the other night where a lot of chickens was killed is where Mrs. Golden’s mother has a house. I think I shouldn’t like to live along the coast now but although things are bad, I think we shall squeeze through. Wasn’t the King’s speech marvelous? It’s wonderful to think he has conquered his stuttering. Mr. B. is very well & cheerful & the animals. There is a lot of refugees in Dalton Hill (*and every mother’s boy of them a spy to Annie*). Mr. Wallace has joined the Parashoots. He is in Epping Forest tonight, not a very bright spot, is it? and it’s come over very wet today. Well, I think I have said all so I will close, hoping you are all well & please take care of yourself till I see you again if it’s my luck to do so.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Saturday, Jun. 2nd, 1940

Dear Madam,

Mr. B. has gone to Steyning today. He has taken his dug-out friend for company & Toddy but I shall be very thankful to see him again. Tonight he has to go on duty but the coast is very far from safe & Brighton they seem to be on at a lot. What did you think of the Belgium King? We all thought him so wonderful & to think he is a traitor. Takes some believing but of course he was got at by Mussolini. (*This is a novel "out" for one of Annie's past heroes. The kitchen was festooned with pictures of King Leopold when he visited London and Annie and Ivy stood hours in the rain at Victoria station for a glimpse of him.*) But the way our troops have got away is a truly marvelous feat. Mind you, you are better where you are but no one will live again in such times & happenings as we have had this last  $\frac{1}{4}$  century. I am longing to hear how the children spent there birthdays. There was a spy caught in Clinton Hill, stacks of rifles in the basement. It's full of foreigners. They want turning out. We only got  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. sugar now, not much, is it? I never have sugar but Mr. B. likes a nice bit. We live in some times! Will they ever be the same again? I doubt it. I expect when we hear what we lost over that treachery it will break our hearts. We lost a lot of war material. We have some strange lights fixed up. They never go out, just a glimmer. They are on the big ones & small ones as well. I sent a nice fat chicken to Steyning & a few

other bits to cheer her up. It's a grand day for them. I hope you & the Babies are well. Give them my best love.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

8th June, 1940

Dear Madam,

Well, according to what Mr. B. says you have had rather a grand time lately. I hear you have had a nice holiday at the seaside. That will do you good especially if you had nice weather. Mr. B. is at the dug-out. Last night he was rather hectic. He just got in bed when the phone went. Out he had to get. Three times that happened. By the time we eventually settled down, daylight was dawning but he stayed later in bed. It happened Wednesday too. I think that German girl across the road went this morning. The Government took Pierce's lorry for the coast defense. We live in some times! You have to carry things home with no paper on unless you take it. Now to get to (*palatable*) facts. I was so thrilled to hear the description of the May Ball. (*This ball, held at the Opera House, is the big annual event for Littleton's younger set from two to twenty. It is an evening of frills and Sunday suits and Grand Marches. Annie knew that it was the Babies' first ball.*) How lovely! Hugh with his Nellie. Kit with her dashing cavalier. Oh how I would love to have been there with them & seen them but you must have a snap taken of Kit in her party frock & send me one as well. I would like one of those of you like Mr. B. had last time. I am glad Kit had such a nice birthday & a nice cake. I hope Hugh has such a nice one as well. Give them both my love. I am going to get a little long haired black kitten if he is the right sort. His mother is a good mouser so he may catch some. They have

eaten all the bulbs I had in the cupboard. We have a grand lot of beans & lettuces coming along. They are very dear. Well, all the best to you & take care of yourself. Toddy is laying right on my toes. He is rather frightened of thunder.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Sat.night, June 15th, 1940

Dear Madam,

This letter may be short as I am rather busy but it's a line to let you know all is well & Mr. B. well & happy. We have Mrs. Hawkes & the children here. They came last Monday & are staying till the 24th when the children go to a school at Torquay as Hastings is a danger spot now. We do lead a life now! Mr. Hawkes is at Clacton. She was very miserable at first but she is cheering up here. There is a man at 23, a Facist. He has been writing on the walls at Lord's & now he is having a rest & time to think it over. There was a wedding on the Hill tonight, six o'clock (*with Annie and Tod at their old stand at the curb having a good look*). An airman home on leave, one of them at 48. Tod has gone to the vet till Tuesday. He has worms & the powders we gave him done no good. He has too many meals from peoples' dust-bins but they will starve him for 48 hours. Poor old Tod, I expect he is feeling very sorry for himself. I think Mr. B. likes having the children. It makes him feel homey. They go down every morning to call him & there is always a squabble as to who should sit by him at breakfast, so now I make them sit one one morning, the other the next morning. Mr. B. said today Mr. Percy is giving up his flat in the autumn & wants to come & live here for the duration. He will pay but the snag is his housekeeper. He doesn't want to lose her & suggests bringing her. I don't like the idea at all. (*Nor did I and cabled at once to say so. Mr. Percy's Gladys was painfully "refaned" and was*

*not needed in our establishment.*) After all it's my home here as I have my sticks here & I am afraid I shan't get Him (*the Lamplighter*) or any of my friends, come to that, if they find a stranger here. I don't see why Mr. Percy can't pay her & let her get something temporary for the time being. There won't be anything for her to do here in any case as I mustn't get out of running it alone as I shall have to do when you get back if you ever do & he is out all day so that's easy. We can't have many cakes. The sugar won't allow it. One blessing, you will never understand what it is to be rationed or to have to go without but as long as we keep them out & win, that's all that matters. (*I am glad Annie cannot see her Madam poking around in the basket of half-price, day-old cakes at the First National Stores like any old scavenger but I know the children and I live in plenty here compared to what Annie has to forego.*) Give the Babies my love & all the best to you & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Sat., 22nd June, 1940

Dear Madam,

I am writing this line on Friday. We have Mrs. M. coming to tea on Sunday. She wants to ask Mr. B. something. (*In Annie's opinion, "Mrs. I don't remember her name" needs an excuse for existing as well as one for visiting Number 30 Clinton Hill. Mrs. M. is so jolly; I do not know why Annie does not like her.*) I had better write while the opportunity arises. Mrs. Strong rang up Mr. B. Holmbury (*the boarding school to which Dick Strong and Hugh went*) is going to Canada & Elizabeth is going with them. What will she do? It does seem queer idea letting children go like they are doing nowadays. I can't understand it. One blessing, you will never realize or understand what we have to put up with now but we shall get over it & wonder presently why we ever worried ourselves at all. If you could see the Air Raid Shelters round here, all on the pavement. You seem to have had a wonderful holiday & the children wonderful birthdays. There birthdays here will fade in insignificance to all the grandeur etc. there. I was so disappointed the other day, Thursday. Hugh's letter came. Mr. B. gave me mine in the garden just as I was getting tea for them. I put it down & lost it. I have never found it since but Mr. B. said he liked his planes & loved his knife. I hope Kit's little jacket fitted her. I shall feel very lonely when Mrs. Hawkes' children go. It's been like old times again. The dogs had a terrific fight tonight. It's been brewing all day. I separated them with the water-



ing can & the hose. While all the excitement was going on, Budge caught a bird. Jock chased him up & down the road to catch it from him but he ate it in the end. Thank Hugh for note which I didn't read. All the best to you. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

30th June, 1940

Dear Madam,

Things are still the same here. Mrs. Hawkes went Tuesday but Mr. was supposed to be having a week end off, instead of which he only got one night & so she was left stranded & has come here for the week-end. She said he had had no bath for three weeks now nor hot water for shaving so it was a treat to get here for one night & get one. Mr. B. had a dy off Sat.the 29th. It was a lovely dy. He took his bicycle & went up to the Chilterns Hills & seemed to have enjoyed it. Such a lot of places you can't get in now without a permit. Mr. B. can't go to his golf house. I suppose things will settle presently. We hope so any way but one thing this war is going to do more than anything is to break home life. Mothers won't want their children back & husbands & wives separated so long will still want there freedom. You see it in lots of cases round here. I think we are pretty safe here, though, whatever people say, I saw them chase one across the sky the other night. We had a warning. He *did* go! Mr. B. has been out several nights but he has had a couple of real good nights this last two. What about this for patriotism? We had a rough field home. It's been split in allotments & Our Dad is helping to clear it, 82 in August & crippled at that. That's pluck if you like. Your poor old Major's heart is broken over the French. He went to bed last Sunday & hasn't got up since. He cried bitterly Sunday about it all. Well, I must close. My best to Kit & Hugh & all the best to you. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

July 6th, 1940

Dear Madam,

Just a line hoping this will find you well. I wish you could send a nice photo of yourself & the children just for to get a glimpse of your dear faces to see exactly how you are after a year away or nearly. Mr. B. is well & happy. We have his cousin from Bristol coming for the weekend. She is in the Air Force at Wembley. You know her & we have that gentleman coming Monday night who Mr. B. went at Easter to stay with. He thinks he will try to let Steyning for duration. It should be easy as everybody is clearing out of Brighton. It must be changed down there, in fact all the sea sides are the same. We seem to be safest. It's been awful at home (*which is near Bath and Bristol*). Of course there is a lot of aerdomes there. Dr. & Mrs. Harmon (*old friends of ours*) came to tea. Christopher has grown. He is a dear little chap. It was nice there spending there last Sunday here but I think it is silly everybody running away. (*Mrs. Harmon and her two boys came to the United States.*) That's what this war will do more than anything else, break home life. Parents won't want there children back. That's the awful part. I have a sweet black kitten. You would love him. He is so clean & he loves Mr. B. Budge don't like him nor Toddy didn't but today they lay side by side on the rug together looking so pretty together. Nigger is his name. It's a funny thing. Last year it was so rainy. This year no holidays & it's lovely weather. Over at Goldens' house was some Austrians. They have interned the father & I seen the police come the other night (*Annie*

*goggle-eyed, behind the sitting-room curtains*). I get very depressed, but then I cheer up. This one year has flown since you left. Mrs. Harmon said the only crumb of comfort she will get going is she may see you. I don't think I have very much more to say. Mine (*the Lamp-lighter*) is very busy. I never hardly see the colour of Him. Everything is the same as usual. I try to put everything in the exact spot so as to imagine you are here. We have nets stuck on the windows upstairs, downstairs paper strips, in case of a bang. All the best to you & my best love to the chickabids.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

July 13th, 1940

Dear Madam,

I hope this will find you well & the children. Can't call them Babies any more. I hope Kit has got alright. It was very unlucky for her when she was enjoying a nice holiday. The camp seems very nice they have gone to. Have you gone back where you was or where are you going to for the summer? (*We had to vacate our apartment just for the summer months that year and lived in a tiny two-room cabin, high up on the mountain. Annie would have been "orrified" by its inadequacies but we enjoyed it. There was a stone table in a circle of birch trees, where we ate with the chipmunks.*) I try to gather news from Mr. B. but don't succeed much. I am afraid you will smile. All of our alimum pots & pans has gone to make planes. They broadcast for all pots & pans. They have got shoals. Mr. B. is bringing some enamel ones back on Sunday. He is going to Bristol for a couple of nights next week. That is where they (*the German bombers*) keep going but he seems to want to see one. It's too peaceful here for him. I suppose you know the awful tragedy, rationed 2 oz. tea a week! Somebody done it who has a glass of whisky to go to bed & a glass of wine for their evening meal, not who makes tea do food & drink as I do. It's awfully small. (*Tea punctuates Annie's day from dawn till dark. There is no pain that "a nice cup of tea" cannot alleviate; no catastrophe that cannot be met more bravely with a cup of Life's Own Liquid. Annie's resentful attitude toward the High Ones is not*

*from disloyalty or unwillingness to put up with still further discomforts, but a cry of honest agony out of the soul and stomach combined.*) You can't have cakes now. The sugar doesn't allow it & eggs are scarce, so that's another offense to me, having to buy a cake, me that had so many baked every week. Next week we only get 6 oz (*sugar*) and 2 ozs. cooking fat, but we shall survive anything so long as we knock the stuffing out of Hitler. We have got some of his aeroplanes down. Your old Major don't get any better. I don't think he is going to either. He has been ill weeks. I think that French affair upset him. Our Mother said my letters cheered her up & did her good to read them, so I hope these cheer you likewise & gives you a little home news. It's a year next week since you sailed. I never realized you would be gone then & yet I did for I never felt so terrible in my life as that dy. It seemed as though something dreadful was happening which it was really. I hope the censor enjoys reading my rubbish but sometimes I feel so lonely & depressed & then I shake myself & think things are bound to come right & we shall be all happy together again. I hope they won't choose tonight for a few rockets. I am alone and He (*the Lamplighter*) is on the top guarding. If you saw his collection, hatchets & everything! I think he is got fed up with not doing his proper work. He is always asking about you & the Babies if you are well. I tell Him all I know which isn't much. Mr. B. is very fit. One blessing, like myself, he keeps cheerful with it all. My new kitten, Nigger, is chasing the pen. He is setting on my lap. He adores Mr. B. Directly he hears

him come in, he rushes up the stairs, Tod bringing up the rear. He is very jealous. Well I had better dry up. All my best love to the Babies & please take care of yourself. You looked better in your photo.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

July 26th, 1940

Dear Madam,

How quickly the time flys these dys! It's no sooner the beginning of the month than it's the end again. Last Sunday we had Mr. & Mrs. Strong for supper. She seemed happier but she said the children had arrived in Canada. It puzzles me people letting there children go. We don't know how long this will last & boats won't fetch them back at once & look what you are losing. It breaks my heart when I think of Kit & Hugh & they are not mine but it's lovely to see them grow. I am thinking out a plan for Mr. B's birthday. (*It was a month hence.*) Must make something for him without you. He is going to Steyning Sunday. I got a nice chicken for Mrs. Decker & some scratch eggs for them & of course his week-end rations. You have to take that. You can't use other people's rations. There is a lot of people coming back to town. I wonder Mr. B. don't do as I suggested & let most of the top. I am sure he would easily & they wouldn't interfere with us up there. They have some lovely crab apples at 34 in the front. I will have some for jelly if I had some sugar to spare but alas I haven't. The three animals are well. We just took there photo together for you to see. Tod is still a bit of a ragged robin. He has never been right since he swallowed the stick of wood last year. Your young man (*the Major*) don't get any better. He doesn't seem to want to since France gone in. (*This is not unnatural for one who was well over seventy and half French.*) I have been looking for Mine all day



but no sign. I suppose He is busy inside. It's a queer world these dys. Well I will close. My love to the Babies & my best to you & please take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

3rd August, 1940

Dear Madam,

A line hoping your all well. We are having it very warm again & I think by the papers you must be too. It's funny, here is another holiday (*the August Bank Holiday Monday*) with the shops all open. Mr. B. may take it off & go golfing or something. Mrs. Decker may come for a day or two next week if she is not too frightened. Do her good & it's safer here than at Steyning, I think. So Hugh is catching fish, his latest hobby. He will be able to take Nellie some for her breakfast. I think trout is horrid. I can't imagine Hugh liking them. They are a dirty fish. (*Annie must have had some other fish in mind, as nothing could be more immaculate than a brook trout.*) A little boy rang him up today Master Burton. Does he remember him? I hear you got a dog. (*This was "The Beeb," short for "Little Black Beastie," an eight-weeks-old spaniel puppy.*) Well old Toddy has got very ancient since his illness last year. Don't laugh. I have made some Xmas puddings. I found some eggs cheap. Presently they will be an awful price & our pickled ones we shall want & they are better for keeping. I am pickling some beans. We have to do like the squirrels & dig in for the winter, for food will be difficult. Our beans are doing well in the garden & carrots are coming up & we shall have some cabbages. Budge has usual has been disgracing himself. (*Annie does not often slip up on an "h" when writing, though she scatters them freely in conversation.*) He stole the Sunday joint at No. 4 & left

them with nothing. They seen him stalking out. It isn't that he doesn't get plenty. The best part of the month's book is for him, now our confreres allow us 1 lb. 10 ozs. (*of meat*) a week. My kitten is growing. He has driven the mice away. Dr. Harmon came up for Sunday. He said they got there safe but had an awful voyage. I never knew anyone educated as he is so pessimistic. That's one thing nobody can ever say I have looked on the black side of things. I just live dy by dy for the War to end & for things to return to normal & we all happy again even if we haven't much left. There are new people at 40. There is a little girl like Kit. She pops on her bicycle to the butcher. We have the Places & there little girl for tea Sunday. I don't know whether you know them. (*The Places live over the wall at the back. I regret never having met them, as they have become firm friends of Mr. B.'s. Their names often appear in his letters and in a different light in Annie's later on.*) Then Mr. B. goes on duty. There is talk of them (*the Wardens*) sleeping one night at the post. I certainly don't fancy Mr. B. sleeping in that smelly hole for smelly it is. (*It was under a Pub in Landon Road.*) He is sleeping at Stratford tonight. How did Kit enjoy her camp holiday? Well I don't think I have any more to say except take care of yourself. Hoping it won't be long before we are all happy together as we where before the War.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie



## ANNIE AND THE 'MOANING MINNIES'

*When the Battle of Britain really begins, Annie takes up her stand on the kitchen floor with her clothes never off and "one or two nervous ones" to keep her company. She lives through the next months of terror when the "Moaning Minnies," as she calls the air-raid sirens, piped the tune. Her descriptions of raids, the accounts of which in the newspapers took the hair off the head, are a shining example of the British knack of understatement. She is as deeply concerned with the behavior of her animals or with the Fortescue's "doing a bunk" as she is with the possibility that a "screamer" might land on her at any minute, and calmly writes her letters with planes right overhead.*



11th August, 1940

Dear Madam,

A small line hoping to find you all well. We have Mrs. Decker here. Marvelous! She came at last. I told her to be British & she was. I had my sister & her husband & little boy for a couple of dys. It was a nice change & they enjoyed it. It was the first decent night's rest they have had since war started. It's been awful down home. Every night as soon as they get to bed, it begins. Mrs. Decker's spots are still bad. We went round Westminster yesterday & in the morning she went to John Barnes & had her usual, an ice. (*Annie always laughed at Deckie's craving for American ice cream.*) Mr. B. had a dy off yesterday & went out on his byke. I cant seem to think of much news today but I'll write more next week. All the best to you & love to the children.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Saturday, August 17th, 1940

Dear Madam,

I had better scratch a line tonight just to see if you are alright as I seem to have a busy dy tomorrow. Mrs. Decker went off this morning. I took her to Victoria to see she was safe & a strange thing, she met a friend going to Steyning so I left her as they could see her off at Redhill. She seemed better for the change. Anyway she had a good rest but it was funny how we had no sirens & then got three. (*Annie had advertised London to Deckie as being the safest place of all. When Deckie finally did set timid foot in it, it would have to be just as trouble began!*) We had two yesterday & one the night before. They bombed Croydon & last night I heard it was Raynes Park near Wimbledon. I went along to Selfridges with her & she wanted to look at Evans but I wouldn't wait as I felt another one was coming. (*The pot calling the kettle black.*) We had just got in when they started. Wasn't I glad we came on! She heard from Steyning today ten parachutes was captured at Lancing College so they knew there way alright. (*It was assumed that these were some of the young Germans who had come over to Lancing College to be "educated."*) Your young man (*the Major*) is getting out a bit now so he is getting better. Him (*that most staid and solemn and worthy gentleman, the Lamplighter*) has gone off for a few dys holiday. He was going to spend it in London but seeing I was going to be busy He decided to trot off. It will do Him good, a change, but I feel like a lost fish without Him. He is my only bit of pleasure. I don't jazz round any



way myself. I am quite content to stop here if I have Him so you can imagine I am feeling very, very lonely. Mr. B. looked very well after his couple of dys, quite sunburnt. He is lucky in his dys. He always manages a fine time with nice weather. I do hope the children are well & you & still enjoying yourselves. Norman, Peels' man, has gone. He went Thursday. They all will be gone.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

26th August, 1940

Dear Madam,

I was so pleased to get Kit's letter. It did me good. I'll write to her shortly. I thought I had better start today this letter as I seem to have a lot to say & tomorrow we shall be busy. We are having a grand tea party (*for Mr. B.'s birthday*) about eleven as far as I can gather, including Dr. Hartmon and Mrs. Gerald. I have got a nice walnut cake with white icing on & I am putting a few candles on it & some crackers (*snappers*). I have a fruit cake, a jam roll, chocolate biscuits & I have tomato sandwiches & paste ones, bread & butter & some buttered buns so you will know all about it. It's to be swell for him. (*How Annie manages all this, with sweet things so difficult to obtain, tickles the imagination. Fired by the thought of a birthday party, she forgets the raids and browbeats the denizens of "the Street."*) Of course he doesn't know about the candles & crackers but it will make a good laugh. He is on duty tonight but Dr. Harmon is stopping for supper tonight. We had an exciting night Thursday. Mr. B. had been called out two or three times, then at three the phone went again. I didn't get up that time but intended to just before Mr. B. came back so as to have a cup of tea ready, when I heard an awful drone of planes, one sounding very like old Jerry, so I hopped out & dressed & had just got to the door when the guns started & a bomb dropped shaking up the windows. Then about a quarter of an hour the siren started. They went right over here but Mr. B. was as excited as a school-boy to think he at last had a real chance of running round

blowing his whistle & seeing in the distance bombs dropped. We certainly got no sleep that night. Last Sunday we had the dinner just ready when they started & it was quarter to three before it was ended. (*This is an obvious outrage to a good cook, who would be torn between the necessity of survival and the irritation of having a nice meal kept waiting.*) Nigger is a sweet cat. He is the right sort. At night he purrs all round at the door looking for him (*Mr. B.*). Old Toddy & him are more friendly now together. Mine (*the Lamplighter*) went off for a few dys last week. I persuaded Him to as Mrs. Decker was here & I was busy & couldn't get out. He got a great bite which closed both his eyes & He hasn't got back yet so it wasn't much of a success. Give the Babies my love. All the best to you & take care of yourself. Mr. B. is looking forward to his birthday party. (*To Annie with a birthday party in the offing, Mr. B., in his forties, seems Hugh's age.*)

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

1st September, 1940

Dear Madam,

We have plenty of excitement now. Seven warnings we had yesterday & another one has just gone so we have started. Thursday or rather Friday it was too close to be comfortable. They fell on Kilburn opposite the State cinema. Two shops burst out & another damaged, one the American shoe shop where that screamer come down & I quite thought it was our house. (*Although this is over a mile away.*) Mr. B. is sleeping peacefully. He is having his breakfast dinner time. If he gets a few good rests like that, he doesn't hurt. He done it Thursday the same way but it's been 4.30 (*in the morning*) most of the dys this week before he come off duty but we get use to it now. We have that R. A. F. young lady, Miss Peters, here the week-end. She had her young man yesterday & I had Rose last night. (*This is the plump little maid who worked for us with Annie.*) She slept here & it's not safe going home late. She is getting married in three weeks. She wishes to be remembered to you all. We had a lovely birthday party. Everybody enjoyed it. I had some candles & some crackers. There was ten & Friday night we had a farewell dinner for Mr. B.'s warden friend. We certainly do some queer things these dys. (*The new friends from the Wardens' post are still suspect to Annie. They are as much strangers to her as to me.*) Nigger is lovely. Toddy is a rogue. Mr. B.'s friend has a brown spaniel named Jane. Toddy went mad over her. Several nights I had to fetch him home & every time the door was open he flew off to see how she is.

He is slow in the ordinary way, but my word, he could move then! It is very hot & we want rain badly. It would keep the Jerrys away. There are several planes down round about. Wish Hugh was here to inspect them. Don't worry. I'll look after Mr. B. for you as far as I can. I never settle till I see him safely in. All the best to you & my love to the children.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Saturday, Sept. 8th, 1940

Dear Madam,

Here is a tiny present to wish you a very happy birthday. It may be a little late but I forgot it last week.

*(Here a portion of the letter is cut away by the censor.)*

. . . yesterday a girl what use to work in Pargetter (*next to Peel's shop*) she works in Storey's now, the postoffice, was killed. Those snaps was nice. Your dog is such a huge fellow you can't see him or her which ever it is. (*Annie is joking here. The Beeb was tiny enough to be held on my hand.*) Rose was married Tuesday by special license. She rang up from Waterloo to say she was off on her honeymoon. It's very funny. She has no money saved, neither has he but still they do it. Janecka (*the architect across the way*) spends these times in

*(Here the censor's scissors got busy again and cut off half a page. The raid Annie was trying to tell me about was "right overhead all night," according to Mr. B.)*

My Nigger is so sweet you would love him. He has grown. He is a cat now not a kitten. Toddy had his whiskers cut. He looked quite handsome. That is a place! There is about 200 dogs there & the noise is awful. Budgy is at the vet's. He has catarrh or something. He was wheezing like an owl. I have that girl from over the way. She is alone & nervous. It makes a bit of company as Mr. B. is always out. He manages

to get rest between when he hasn't to be on so much. I don't know where Mrs. Hawkes is. She has flown somewhere. We can't here. Well I hope you have a happy birthday & if it is a little late, it's better late than never. I hope you will have as nice a party as we had here on Mr: B's birthday.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

14th Sept., 1940

Dear Madam,

I hope this will find you all well & still happy & contented. We have had quite an exciting week. In fact, I haven't taken my clothes off. The girl from over the way comes across when the sirens go. She has brought her camp bed & I have a camp bed which we put up in the kitchen & there we rest till the sirens go at dawn. Of course the lights is kept on because of beetles. Mr. B. had a night in the dining-room last night, slept very comfortable too. It's the only way to get rest although it is very soothing to hear the guns going & know you are safer with them. Vicarage Road is in a good mess with a bomb bursting the water main. Toddy didn't like it at first but he has got more use to it & Nigger flies to cover when the sirens go. Baker St. is a chaos with Madam Tussaud & the shops round but it's only the cinema gone there (*not the waxworks*) Mr. B. seems very well despite his bad nights. I have picked a lot of damsons there in Palmer's garden, ever such a lot. We have some gardeners doing it & a lot of cabbage plants, plenty to help the winter. I have tried several times at this letter but I seem so sleepy it keeps running together. Sunday. Another dog fight just fought & a plane has come down. It made an awful noise but I didn't see it. I think Hugh would be very thrilled if he was here as he likes looking at things like it. We have been asked to take refugees so I am getting keys to the doors as you don't know who they send & as Mr. B. isn't here much I don't want anything to happen here. Nigger keeps sitting on this letter. He



is a very sweet cat. You would love him. He has just visited Fortescue's house & scratched out the nasturtiums (*a very sweet cat!*). I don't seem to have a lot of news. They had the windows & doors blown in Home so it's no better anywhere. Please take care of yourself. What a glorious day it will be when you all come home! Give my love to the Babies & all the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Sunday, 22nd September, 1940

Dear Madam,

This will be just a tiny line hoping you are all right but I got a bad bilious attack (*which is certainly not surprising under the circumstances*) & I can't concentrate on anything. I hope you had a nice birthday. Mr. B. is very well. He looks alright & he doesn't hurt. We have the Strongs for supper early before the Moaning Minnies get going and the fireworks start. They get earlier. I sleep on that camp bed in the kitchen. At best it is nods between the bangs. Well I'll write more next week. Look after yourselves. My love to the Babies & all the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Dear Madam,

29th September, 1940

I'll try & write a few lines. We had Dr. Harmon here for lunch today & the gas vanished. They had a little at 34 so between running up & down there and the oil stove, I managed to cook the meal but it's no easy matter. They (*the Major and Mrs. Fortescue*) have gone and there furniture goes this week, I am sorry to say, but they couldn't stand it & so they went and got a house at Torquay. I don't think they will find it any better as everywhere is the same except they won't get the guns so much but it's been awful here this week. I think people expect you to have no nerves. It's alright if you are on the go outside but if you are in it's awful & Thursday was the worst. Two great bombs, I thought on this house, but they got the tunnel completely at Landon Road (*a railway tunnel a quarter of a mile from us*), & brought three houses down to the ground. Lucky only one occupied & only three people in there but Maida Vale was awful. They fired a gas main which lit up, Sunday, & they could see everywhere. I made up my mind to go Home yesterday for the weekend to make a change. No trains was running. They had buckled up the line. I never take my clothes off these dys & there is one or two nervous ones comes over to sleep. We all keep on the floor in the kitchen. Mr. B. seems pretty well. I do my best to get him to have a rest whenever it is a chance so I think he will be alright. I hope you & the children are alright. All the best to you. It seems farther off than ever to seeing you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

2nd Oct., 1940

Dear Madam,

I'll start this letter in the week for everything is sixes & sevens & when Sunday comes I seem to have so much to do & one is always tired. You can't seem to get it written. We never go to bed now, at least, I don't. I lay on the camp bed in the kitchen & with the guns going you can sleep. I have only took my corsets off once since it started & I was so tired I thought I would & try to get some sleep but I put them back quicker than I took them off for all those fire bombs fell down & everywhere seemed afire. (A "*Molotov breadbasket*" came down on our road.) It was pretty noisy again last night. A bomb dropped outside Eyre Court & another in the St. John & Elizabeth Hospital. Mr. B. takes an occasional morning off & so he gets a good rest as you can rest in the day. He seems well anyway but he doesn't say much nowadays. I suppose it gets him down. You can't get any pleasure at all for you are afraid to go very far at all. What I would give to go back to a year ago, everything I got, to have you & the children back & things normal & we all happy together as we where. Whether those happy dys will ever come back I don't know. We hope & pray so but they seem so far away at present. It was a good job I done my puddings for we have no gas at all now. Occasionally a glimmer comes through. Fortescues are gone. They have a house at Torquay. The furniture is supposed to go next week. I shall miss them. (*They, with Annie, had been for so long the only members of the Old Guard to cling to Clinton Hill's burning decks. To have*

*them "do a bunk" was a last straw.)* Mr. Pierce told me the cook won't stay. She told me she didn't want to go so I don't know. I know she was very frightened. They wasn't but she would have come round as she would never get another job like that anywhere. She may be fidgetted but she get very big wages & very little to do & I think like this, if anything is going to happen to you wherever you go it will & they will get it just as bad presently & not the defenses like here & food is short there. *(If it was any comfort to Annie, the Torquay area did get it.)* Wellington Hill looks dreadful. There is about ten houses no good at all, three right down. *(Mr. B. said there was a hundred-foot crater where these houses had stood. It was within a hair-raising ace of Clinton Hill. The extraordinary thing is that, during the raids, it was as if a tiny, charmed circle were drawn around Annie and Number 30.)* Will I think this is all now. My very best to you & love to the children. Toddy & Nigger send there love.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

13th October, 1940

Dear Madam,

This is a line to let you know everything is alright. I am writing this while Mr. B. is spending a morning in bed after a whole night on. He gets a few like that & it keeps him alright. One thing, he seems to thoroughly enjoy it all & if a few incendiarys fall, he comes popping round putting out the fires. (*Annie adopts a light touch here for my benefit. The Wardens had fought all night with stirrup pumps and axes until the hard-pressed Auxiliary Fire Brigade could come to their assistance.*) The Major's place caught the other night & although he (*Mr. B.*) had to come in here for the ladder to get in the loft, he got it out. Several have passed the remark what a smart piece of work it truly was. They (*the Fortescues*) got frightened & bunked to Torquay. The furniture goes on Tuesday but what a filthy mess to take! Nothing was packed or anything. It's an awful mess. (*Annie had evidently been in and had a scornful snoop around.*) We had a few bombs down yesterday morning. I was coming up from shopping when they came over. I laid down in Tanners' garden. I think they was trying for the Electric light. He (*the Lamplighter*) was just coming away when it dropped. He said it was awful. He was all white & shaky with what he saw. Another lot went on Clinton Court. A nice lorry of beer is burned in the crater. Mr. B. was at Stratford the other night & the noise was terrific. They must have been whoppers. Will you please congratulate my Babies on being made treasurers of there school (*of their classes in school!*) They seem to

get on there. So you still got your little dog. Like my Nigger you have got fond of him. If the trains are running, we may have a weekend off next week. Mr. B. said he might go near Guildford. Miss Hunter will have Toddy. Her place is bursted out but she takes them in the country & Nigger I shall take with me. I told you Rose was married. She nearly got killed on her honeymoon. Her husband has gone to Egypt so she didn't have him much. Xmas will soon be round again but it's not Xmas without you home. Perhaps next year things will be different. It can't go on like it. If ever you get a chance write & tell me something they want for Xmas so I can get it, something I can send, not expensive for you the other end. (*It is hard to imagine thinking ahead to Christmas in such an October as that was.*) Give my love to the children. All the best to you & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie





## P R E T Z E L   H A S   C O M E   T O   S T A Y

*Bombs or no bombs, it takes a lot of scheming to run a house on a diminishing income in war time. Annie had suggested a paying guest. She gets one who adds to her family of animals, Pretzel the dachshund, who "wont put his leg up" even when our Sealyham shows him what to do. As a counter-irritant, however, the guest and his dog see Annie through the worry over the Lamplighter's eye, the problem of how to cook without fuel, and the bedlam of nights when "the Jerrys" were paying their calls.*



Sunday Oct. 20th, 1940

Dear Madam,

Just a line hoping to find you all alright as it leaves us all here. We have had an exciting week. A time bomb dropped in Dalton Hill. (*This was only a few hundred yards from our house.*) We have two here who was evacuated. It's not gone off yet & it dropped a week tomorrow. Mr. Weldon had a small one through his roof, tore up his garden, knocked his walls down & ceilings. We had a hole in the sheeting where an incendiary dropped. However we are still here but I think we have got through the worst. There was a bit last night but the barrage was terrific & so it was alright. Mr. Percy is here. (*The paying guest has arrived.*) He says he is happier here than at Henley. His dog is a nuisance. He whines all the time he is out but you can't help feeling sorry for him. (*Mr. Percy's dog is an unattractive little dachshund named Pretzel.*) The sirens have just gone so they have started their daily wailing but I don't notice in the day time. Fortescues have gone as well. Well I don't seem to have much news to tell you this time. I had to stop. Three bombs just dropped rather too close to be comfortable. Only, as I was going to say, it's just to let you know everything is alright. (*"Alright"?!*) My love to Kit & Hugh. Tell them I long to see them & have them again.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

27th October, 1940

Dear Madam,

Just a line to let you know everything is OK here. I think Mr. B. enjoys these bangs more than I do, especially weekends. It's awful, as fast as one finishes, another starts. So they go. Still we shall get over it. I am glad to hear Kit's cooking. I am afraid we can have no icing on cakes now, I am sorry to say. (*Annie's nostalgia for pink icing sprinkled with "hundreds and thousands" is an antidote to the fear of what the next siren may portend.*) I can't get material to make them & the gas is awful. It's really a nightmare cooking. It takes all day to do it & what I use to do sometimes, it falls to mixing it all together & cooking on the oil stove (*the little one from what she called my "junk shop"*). Still we might be worse off with that. We can get heaps of food without luxuries. I always see Mr. B. has a good meal before he goes on duty & if he comes in, a nice hot drink. I'll do my best for him & see he comes to no harm as far as possible till you come back. One place is a nightmare to me when he is at Stratford. I worry till I see him come back or hear something. (*He was in charge of the defense of the business premises in the East End of London and had to spend one night there every week on duty. It has been a sore point with Annie.*) I am glad you liked the hankys. It was small but they are good. That Nanny that was at Palmers' has hooked a man. She badly wanted to get married & has got an airman. She rang up the other dy & asked about you. Fortescues have gone. They have a house at Torquay. (*As we have heard before, but the*

*thought preys on Annie's mind.*) They say it is peaceful but very lonely & food scarce too. How is your bow wow? Toddy is well & Nigger is lovely. You would like him. He is a home bird not a prowler & eats anything. I don't seem to have a lot to say but I know my little bit of news eases your mind. Give my best to the Babies & the best to you. Look after yourself till we meet again.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Sunday, 3rd Nov., 1940

Dear Madam,

A little scratch hoping you are all well. I was so pleased to get your letter the other dy & hear you had such a lovely birthday party. Fancy cutting my letter like that! (*She refers to the one of September 8th, the only one of her letters that the censor ever cut.*) He must have been a bachelor or something hardened not to see the human side. It being Mr. B.'s first big raid, I was just trying to enlighten you that he was perfectly well. It hasn't been bad lately, the weather not too good. Our evacuees goes on Tuesday. They took the bomb away today but the place is deep. It will be three weeks. First I shall miss them. They where good company. Mr. Percy seems to be settling in. He does eat & the dog! I heard from Mrs. Decker the other day. She said her daughter's husband (*who suffered from heart trouble*) has to go somewhere where there is no raids. That's a job to find for they are a very few about. I think it is silly to let your nerves go like that, especially a man. They want to be here. I haven't taken my clothes off since it started. I doss on the kitchen floor & the "all clear" is too late now to go to bed afterwards. We all go on the floor. No one sleeps on the top. It's not safe. Miss Peters has gone to Herford to have her officer's duty, (*in the R.A.F.*), then she gets a commission & Mr. B. tells me Mr. Hawkes is in Blackpool & she is with him. Nigger is getting a lovely cat. He never stirs far but is very clean. Mr. Percy's dog is very stupid. If you take him out, you can't get him to put

his leg up. He keeps it till Mr. Percy takes him. Toddy showed him what to do but he took no notice & the way he turns his nose up! Remember Him (*the Lamp-lighter*) to the children. Tell them He is always talking about them. His job is a funny job nowadays. The wind is very rough & it is very wet but still they come. I wonder when we shall all see each other again. Toddy is a real warrior. As long as he can hide his head in bed, he is very brave. He doesn't like the swishing of the bombs coming down. Give my love to the Babies. I was saying to Mr. B. they are just the same to each other. I thought meeting others they wouldn't be. All the best to you & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

10th Nov., 1940

Dear Madam,

Just a line to let you know everything is all right here. I hope it is the same with you. Mr. B. is going to Steyning on Tuesday till Thursday to see how it is but as he is going most of the way on his byke, I can't send titbits as usual. They (*the Jerrys*) started very early tonight. In fact they have been on most of the day. We have a coal fire now in the sitting-room. It's a lovely burning fire & the room gets so warm. We have a very posh copper coal box with a lid of Mr. Percy's & some pretty fire irons & the gas heater from the kitchen has gone up there. I never used it & it does nicely up there so we are O K now. Fortescues seems to have a huge house at Torquay. I should think it's been a boarding house. When she (*the cook*) wrote she said a little house. It's got six bedrooms, three sitting rooms apart from kitchen etc. a carriage drive & two front doors & a great billard room underneath the ground. It's right up on top of a hill with trees all round & only hotels & boarding houses near so it doesn't sound cheerful by any means. You will say what they went for. (*No I won't, Annie. It was a great relief to me to hear that the little brokenhearted Major got away from London, if only to be bombed at Torquay.*) You will say what the Babies want for Xmas. Just scratch a line at the bottom of one of Mr. B.'s letters. He (*the Lamplighter*) is very busy again. I don't see Him much now again. Mr. Percy seems quite contented here. He went & saw Dr. Johnson today as his weight was low. He has to take cod liver oil twice a



day. He eats enormous so he should feel well & chirpy. Tod is a real character the way he strolls about. The only time he moves is if the guns start. I expect you had some exciting times with the Election. It was lovely you getting all that clothes for your birthday. Very useful as you must have been getting short. Here is a snap of Nigger & me. (*It showed Annie beaming in the front garden with shiny black Nigger clutched to her wide bosom.*) It was taken a while back & he has grown a great deal since. He was furious with rage when this was taken, fought & scratched like a tiger. He is a grand mouser. He goes out & catches them & brings them for me to see but he is a real good home cat, not a wanderer, but he is rather fond of coming to the shops if I don't look out & I am afraid of losing him. It's pouring with rain so quieted Jerry a bit. Well give my love to the Babies & the best to yourself. The war will soon be over & we shall all be together again.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

17th Nov., 1940

Dear Madam,

My usually Sunday epistle hoping to find you all well as we are. Friday I sat in the chair all night. Mr. B. was at Stratford & I think it was the worst. I was afraid of something coming on the house. (*In the course of the raids, five "somethings" dropped on the business at Stratford but it is still functioning somehow or other.*) Nigger had a game with my pen while we were unstopping the roof of the bathroom & I can hardly write with it. I think Mr. Percy seems settled, anyway he seems happy & contented. I don't think he had enough to eat. I didn't think he could smile but he does a bit. I don't seem to have very much news. I never go anywhere now. Him (*the Lamplighter*) still has a very bad eye. They said it was a septic ant bite at the hospital. It's all swollen & inflamed, in fact it is closed. He is feeling very sorry for himself. That was a nice present, the coal, wasn't it, 3½ tons of it. They (*the Fortescues*) were very grateful, getting their house & furniture saved. I have two more babies to see if I manage to get home Xmas, both boys. We had a very sharp frost yesterday. The roads were slippery, ice on them. Mrs. Niles (*our next-door neighbor who found slippery roads so hard to negotiate*) is talking of going away. There won't be anybody left in Clinton Hill, even Mr. Pierce (*the greengrocer*) is thinking of getting married again. It's a year tomorrow. I didn't think he would look at anybody else but he has & what's more she is a pal of mine. Oh dear I wish I could wave a fairy wand & have you all back for

Xmas & baking two lovely big cakes & all the little bits they loved! Wouldn't it be wonderful? We haven't started the malt yet as you said. We are waiting till it is colder. One thing we can get good food even if the luzuries are not about so they (*her two gentlemen*) don't hurt so much. Give the Babies my love & all the best to you & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Sunday, 23rd Nov., 1940

Dear Madam,

Just a line to let you know we are all O. K. here including the animals although their behavior isn't so good. I mean the dogs. One does it, then the others follow & Toddy went in his bed last night. Of course there last walk is so early now. How is your young lady behaving (*our spaniel, "The Beeb"*)? We got Mr. Wallace coming Sunday for three nights. He is bringing some onions & lemons, two things I can't get for love or money. Things hasn't been so bad this week. Mr. Percy has taken up warden's job so my night companion has once more vanished & the German girl as I told you have gone over to Mr. Pierce so she spends more time there than here, so I have lost them all. Our gas poker has come in useful after all. I use it to light the sitting-room fire. Wood is very scarce just now. Mr. Percy seems very contented here. He loves spreading his things out. He never seems to have enough room for his things, whatever you empty for him. Clinton Hill is rather empty but I would sooner be in London than in the country. You get more protection. My poor old dear (*the Lamplighter*) has been on the sick list for a fortnight. He was completely blind. He has the sight of the right but whether He will get the left back I don't know. He got three great open gashes. It looks terrible. It started in his left eyebrow. It's very worrying as it makes Him irritable & you can't do nothing. However, must hope for the best. It's truly marvelous, nearly eight & so far no Moaning Minnies have wailed

out. Well I hope you & the Babies are all well. Tell them how I would love to see them & you. All the best & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Dear Madam,

1 Dec., 1940

Just a line to wish you all a happy Xmas. I'll send you something later when I have investigated. I wish you were all back here. I was fortunate in making my puddings & mincemeat so long ago. People laughed but I can laugh now as things are short just now. I am going to try & make a cake next week but turkeys are dear. What we are doing I don't know. I hope to go home. I should like to see them as they have had a dreadful time lately. Last Sunday was very bad there. I am still sleeping in the kitchen & so far I haven't risked taking my clothes off. It's a bit risky to do so. Mr. Percy is joined the A R P but unlike Mr. B. I am afraid he isn't very punctual. He seems very happy here. He is a bit of a muddler, must spread his things out but I feel sorry for him for I think he was treated pretty bad at Henley. I think his food was short like the dogs & they didn't trouble much about him. I had a letter from the cook at 34 the other day, you know the Fortescue's. They can't get marmalade or jam at Torquay, in fact things seem to be very short there. That won't suit them (*and, says Annie to herself, "serve them right!"*). They are having a queer air raid shelter built at the bottom of the road. It's very cold & foggy tonight so Jerry perhaps will not pay us a call. We have Mr. and Mrs. Strong for lunch today. I haven't seen them for some time. People don't like coming out in raids & black-out. Well I do hope this will find you well & keeping cheerful. Look after yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

15th Dec., 1940

Dear Madam,

My few lines to let you know all is well here. Mr. B. is sleeping at Stratford tonight & I was so thankful to hear that all was clear for that is one place I hate him to be. I hope you will get my little parcels I sent. It is only small, just for remembrance. There is something strange tonight. It's nearly ten, wireless all the evening, no Moaning Minnies all day. I am going home Xmas Eve till Boxing Day morning. I don't like going & leaving my two boys here but Mr. B. is anxious I should go & I feel I should as I haven't been since last Xmas & with things as they are if anything happened I should never forgive myself but the cook at 34 (*the Fortescues'*) is coming for the week from Torquay & is sleeping here so she is getting there breakfast the two mornings & looking after the animals so they will be alright. We had a grand party Monday night, went off with a swing. The crackers caused great fun. They had fireworks in, funny ones. (*Annie, in a protruding, starched smock, would have maneuvered herself around the crowded long table, guffawing under cover of the general laughter.*) We had an awful fog & frost yesterday, the first this year, really bad and it's raining in buckets tonight. That is why Jerry has buzzed off. Mr. B. isn't going to Steyning for Xmas but I don't know where he would sleep as it seems pretty full down there. It's company for her & makes much less work with her daughter there. I don't know what the shops are like this year. I haven't been to see them. (*The Christmas shops were a source of vast delight to*

*Annie and Deckie and the children, and were visited in an annual pilgrimage.*) I don't know, the dys fly. It's dark so late in the morning & so early at night & the shopping takes ages to get. With Mr. Percy, the work is more to do, much more. Well I hope you are enjoying life and will have a nice Xmas. Give them my best & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



Dear Madam,

Friday, Dec. 20th, 1940

I am writing these few lines today as I shall be rather busy Sun. & Sat. & I must let you know everything is alright & Mr. B. well. We have Mrs. Gerald coming for the week-end. Mr. Gerald is joining up. She empties her flat on Saturday. I expect she will feel very sad over it. We are having the first pheasant of the year. Birds are too much of a luxury with Mr. Percy about as he has rather a big appetite. I shall think of you all Xmas day, the second away from us. How I hoped last year you would be back this one! No need to say I hope you will have a nice one as I know you will, a very nice one. Nigger is sitting here waiting to spring. He has took to sitting on the table as he is a bit scared of Mr. Percy's dog & he comes down to the kitchen. It's not much like Xmas this year, no dates, no figs nor tangerines & soon no bananas. It's funny. Your bank is no more. They have put paid to High Street. (*This was High Street, Marylebone, the district in which we had lived prior to St. John's Wood. It was all but wiped out in the raids.*) Toddy is better but he was only foxing most of the time. When he found I wouldn't take him round the shops that cured him but one day I really thought he was dying. It upset me very much. Every time he moved he moaned & groaned. Then when I got Mr. B. to say he would take him along to the vet, he ran along beside him so he brought him back. Well I hope you are alright and taking care of yourselves.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Sunday, 29th Dec., 1940

Dear Madam,

Here is another Sunday come & Xmas gone. Things was very quiet. It didn't seem like Xmas a bit & two nights quiet as well. My biggest disappointment was Mr. B. having no letter from you. It's a month since he has had one. (*That was the time all American mail posted during three weeks of November was announced later as having been sunk.*) I didn't expect one myself as I know you have a lot to do but just to get a few titbits of your doings would have been very cheering. I know he had a cable & you had a turkey & party. We have had quite an exciting week. I'll start from Sunday. We had Mrs. Gerald for the week-end. She seemed very happy & contented although she missed him. We had a nice bit of beef for lunch with sprouts & potatoes, apple tart & chocolate mould. (*I fear I agree with Annie's spelling of it. Molds are favorite English "sweets," sometimes called "shapes." I say it's blancmange and I say to hell with it!*) Then we had our Xmas cake for tea which was very good considering all things. At night we had five for dinner Monday was quiet but I was very busy. Tuesday I went home & left the two boys to themselves. (*Since Annie refers to herself and her sisters as "us girls," it is only natural that Mr. B. and Mr. Percy should be "the boys" to her.*) Anyway although he (Mr. B.) didn't get away, he had a right jolly Xmas & enjoyed it. Sat. he went to Bramley till Monday morning. I had a nice time Home. It soon went as I came back Thurs. morning but it was quiet those two nights. They have

had a lot down there & don't get much rest. All the babies are lovely. Two more I had to see. You would have been amused at the welcome the animals gave me. First Toddy met me waggling along, then Nigger came pushing between my legs, then Pretzel brought up the rear. The first time I have seen him wag his tale. It curled up like a little pig's tale (*which is quite an accomplishment for a dachshund!*). Mrs. Decker isn't well. She wrote & told me she had a cough & cold. I spent 6d (*10 cents*) on an express letter & told her to look after herself. She could have done but she will have her own way. I sent her some anemones. They cheered her up. Mrs. McKay said she was sending some bacon (*from New York*). It will walk before it gets here. It's ages ago she told us about it. Well I think I have told all. I must in any case stop because of the censor. (*People had been asked, for the censor's sake, not to write long letters. Annie obediently complies and her letters become markedly shorter from now on.*) I forgot to tell you Mr. Percy spent the dy at Henley on Thursday. He got up at half past seven so as to get there early, had his breakfast at Paddington. Can you imagine him getting up early? He isn't fond of it. Well all my love to my Babies & my very best to you. Wishing 1941 will see the return of you all again to Clinton Hill & home.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

4th January, 1941

Dear Madam,

My weekly line to let you know all is well as I hear it is with you & you had a lovely time. I am also glad to know our little bits got safe to you. Ours have arrived. Will you thank the children for there's. I'll write to them in a dy or two. I am glad you sent the snap. As you say they are growing up but I expect when they get back here they will still be our Babies. Life will be dull a bit but it will be home & all their little treasures will have to be explored. Mr. B. said Hugh was like his Daddy, an eye for all the pretty girls & I agree, don't you? They are growing too fast for me. I wish they would keep Babies till they come back because if God spares us to meet all again, I shall just want to eat you all. It's awful to be parted so long. If I dwell on it too long, it gets me down & that won't do. Mr. B. has had a lovely time this Xmas. New Year's Day he went out in a dress suit first time since the War broke out. (*Riding off on his bicycle to the Dorchester in top hat, white tie and tails.*) We slipped back a few months. It was so lovely to see him & he enjoyed himself. I sent Mrs. Decker some flowers this morning. Such a few too. They are very dear this year. Well give my love to the Babies & look after yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

11th January, 1941

Dear Madam,

I'll write this line tonight. It's a bit noisy so I shan't go to bed too early. I hope this will find you & the Babies well. I can't picture Kit with her hair permed. I feel rather sad about it as it makes me feel she is no longer our Baby. (*Poor Annie would be astounded if she could see the glamorous young lady who has taken the place of her little Kit, as the result of a Christmas present from a devoted hairdresser in our town.*) Mr. B. is going to see Mr. Palmer tomorrow. It was funny. The other dy I was busy making marmalade, no Se-villes, scratching everywhere to borrow a bit of sugar to make enough, when she turned up. She said it was like old dys with no war on to see me at it. It is very good & it has set lovely. I have it with grape fruit, lemon & sweet sugar, all very scarce. We have Miss Willoughby sleeping here tomorrow night. I must put some salt on the front step before she comes in case she brings her usual bad luck. (*Hapless old Miss Willoughby was, in Annie's opinion, a witch in disguise. Misfortune invariably befell us with her arrival in the house. This was obviously coincidence and not witchcraft but one never felt quite sure.*) Toddy, Nigger & the Brown One (*Pretzel*) are all well. Toddy keeps going over the road after his lady love & Nigger goes to see Twinkle, that's Mrs. Place's cat, over the back wall. Even Mr. Percy goes looking in the windows Sunday mornings at the ladies. Mr. B. is very well. (*Annie delicately refrains from making any comment as to which path he is treading but, as the letters pro-*

*gress, she tucks in absurdly funny, veiled warnings to me of her dark and entirely unjustified suspicions.)* He has just gone out on his bicycle to see where the fire is. (*A raid had been in progress, to judge from the first sentences of this letter.*) I am anxiously waiting to hear about your Xmas & there plays (*at the school*). All my best to you & my love to them.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

I don't see Him very much. He has such a lot of voluntary work to do apart from His work.

14th Feb., 1941

Dear Madam,

My weekly line to let you know all is O.K. Mr. B. is remarkably well. He has gone off for the weekend to Bramley. I dont think you know those people. He is at the (*Wardens'*) post. A jolly man. He has a red round face. Their daughter is a very nice girl, not stuck up like the present dy. Mr. Percy's dog gets me bad tempered. He is dirty, really dirty. It doesnt matter how you beat him. It makes no difference. He has never been trained & Toddy tries to copy him but he gets some hidings for it. I hate dirty animals. We had it very bad here three weeks ago but things have been a bit quieter. A few sneaking in. I always listen to the children in casè our Babies get on the air. The snaps were lovely but oh dear I feel I shall weep to see them long legs shooting up. I dont seem to find much news these dys. I never go anywhere except hunting for food. Three times I went down the other dy. I heard there was some cheese. Three ounces I got. Well I will close. Take care of yourself & remember every letter you get from me brings one nearer to your coming home & we want you back, all of you, exactly as you went. Give my love to the Babies & all the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie





‘ ‘ W E H A D A L O V E L Y B L I T Z ’ ’

*As the months pass, more and more of Annie's familiar places and people are wiped out. Little shops of her stamping ground, "the Street," are reduced to rubble. It is more important to Annie, however, that our sheets escaped damage than that the laundry to which they were sent was "burstled out." There is, apparently, nothing that she cannot take with equanimity and her valiant thumbs well up. "We had a lovely Blitz the other night," writes Annie of the worst raid of the year.*



Dear Madam,

23rd February, 1941

I am afraid Mr. B. has beaten me this weekend for mine will not go till Monday. Sat. night when I eventually finished I was much too tired to write & today I have been so busy I never found time before the post went. It goes early now. Everything is O.K. here. We had quite an hectic week what I enjoy & after Mr. Percy's dullness it's been good to have someone bright about the house although one has to do a bit of raking to get enough to eat for them. Tonight the Jerrys are hopping round. They done a nice bit more damage at Fairhazel (*ten minutes' walk from us in Hampstead*) the other night. There isn't many shops left but thankful mercy they where pretty quiet when Mr. B. was at Stratford. I have sent another couple of comics for them (*the Babies*). I have to take the ones He (*the Lamplighter*) can get. They are not very plentiful. It was my birthday yesterday. The German girl what used to be over the way (*and went over to Mr. Pierce, the greengrocer*) gave me such a lovely black cat marvellously made with a big fur tale. They are very clever how they make them. (*Adversity makes strange companions. Before the emergency atmosphere of the raids, Annie would have scorned this eventual "pal" as "one of them foreigners."*) Mrs. Harmon (*who brought her children to the United States*) is coming back. I never thought she would stay away long. She won't find things so easy to get when she gets back. Well I'll dry up for this time. I'll write more next. All the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

Sat., March 8th., 1941

Dear Madam,

A little line to let you know all is well. We have had the Jerrys over most of the evening & spoilt a good Sat. night wireless program as it always goes off & the only one I get is Haw Haw. (*Mr. Churchill is known for his gift of understatement. As I said before, he and Annie have much in common. Could there be a more pleasing example of it than this?*) We have Mrs. Gerald here for a few dys as it has been so quiet lately. Mr. B. got a sweet little lamp for the spare room. The other one got knocked down in the black-out. It's nice. It's this weekend as Mr. B. is home. Tomorrow is his Sunday night off but tonight he is on duty. We have some lovely crocuses out in the garden, mauve & white & yellow. We are going to put some lettuces in & radishes next door. Mrs. Harmon coming back has spoilt a little of there fun. I think they had some high old times together. The animals are all very well. I don't like the Brown One, nor do the animals. He is so dirty he stinks. Well I think I have said all. We are having the sitting-room carpet up to go to the cleaner's. I never seen it so dirty not even when the children where playing on it. It's black. Mr. Percy is so late up you never get much time for cleaning. (*Kindhearted, lonely Mr. Percy means so well but is an ingrained bachelor.*) All the best to you & the Babies. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

16th March, 1941

Dear Madam,

Just a line to let you know all is well. Mr. B. seems to have thrown his cold off now. He had a bottle of Scott's. Now he is taking your cod liver oil & malt. (*Just part of my "junk shop" to Annie when I bought it in the spring of 1939. It was a relief to hear that somebody benefited by it.*) A whole week the Jerrys have been paying nightly calls. I had just begun to feel a bit rested from the last. Now I am just as tired. I don't take my clothes off & they have to be very quiet before I lay down at all. That was very nasty, the Cafe de Paris & Buckingham Palace again. A nice dance band they had there. All gone now. It was funny. Miss Peters (*Mr. B.'s cousin in the R.A.F.*) was there the week she was here & I asked her if she wasn't nervous & she said no it was too safe. Well it don't seem like it. Here is two more comics for them. I am glad they like them. Tomorrow we have Mr. and Mrs. Strong coming. It *would* be Mr. B's night on! Nigger & Toddy are a funny pair. Nigger adores Toddy & I think Toddy likes him. It's funny to watch old Toddy try to roll over like Nig does for you to play with him. He (*Nigger*) will soon be a year old. I shall have a job getting the cleaning done this year as Mr. Percy is always here for meals. He never goes out for a cup of tea. Last year I done it the nights Mr. B. was away. Now I never seem to get a minute. There is much more work than when you & the children were here. Our phone hasn't been right all the week. Thank goodness it's put right. Mr. B. had to stay out all night each night whereas had the

phone been working he could have been called & he could have come back after four hours. I hope the children are still well & happy & that Kit has found her party dress to suit herself. I suppose she wants that for the May Ball. Give them my best love & look after yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

23rd March, 1941

Dear Madam,

I am afraid this will miss Sunday's post this week. The box is cleared so early these dys, four o'clock. I generally write Saturdays but I had a bilious attack & didn't feel like writing yesterday. Everything is still O. K. here. Mr. B.'s cold is better. I see he has his malt regular & I think it has done him good. It takes a bit of scratching these dys to feed people but we always manage to get enough but the ½ lb. of jam or marmalade each month is amusing. It's a good job I made a bit myself, else the boys would be very short. We had a lovely Blitz the other night. (*On the night to which Annie cheerfully refers the Jerrys bombed London for six hours in the heaviest raid of the year.*) Thank God, Mr. B. wasn't at Stratford that night! I think Toddy is getting jealous in his old age. Yesterday he met a dog coming out of Peel's with something in his mouth & of course he always gets something when he goes in. That was too much for him. He pitched in it. There was an awful fight. Everybody looking on as surprised as myself to see old Tod fighting but since the brown fellow has been here, he is got very jealous. Of course Nigger & him are two good pals & they don't want Pretzel at all. Mrs. Harmon is pleased to be home but I am thinking she will miss the children, but still they have the money to dash back again. It was a pity you didn't see her. Well I think I have said all. All the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

29th March, 1941

Dear Madam,

All is O.K. here. I have sent them (*the Babies*) another couple of comics. The War will soon be over now. (*The lull in March had been pitifully deceptive.*) I feel we are on the turning point now. You will all be home soon. I am afraid the children will be sorry to come back here. Mr. B. went to Bristol yesterday so I took the opportunity of getting the bedroom carpet up & beating it in the garden & done the dressing-room so those three rooms are clean for five minutes. What do you think of our big ration of cheese, one ounce a week, enough to bait a mousetrap? I have managed three ounces this last few weeks & I thought I was going to do better. Oh well, we shan't do badly as long as we get this blessed war over & things settle down again to the good peaceful dys before all this happened. Old Toddy is a disgrace the way he shams. I take him to the shops every day. This morning we went to Peel's. He gets a biscuit there so this morning the manager & a girl where busy, so the man that delivers gave him one. Believe it or not, he came out limping & could hardly walk & he looked at the girl as though he was going to die so she went & got him a biscuit. He forgot his lameness & ran like a hare. They did laugh at him. He goes to the butcher & gathers a bone, on to Peel's for a biscuit then on to Pierce's for a drink of water to wash it down. He certainly is a star turn. If he doesn't go down, there is many enquirers for him. When Mr. B. comes in, there is real rivalry between him & Nigger. He tries to roll



over like Nig. It is too funny. Well I think I have told you all the titbits. Love from Toddy & Nigger. All the best to the Babies and don't get too thin.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

5th April, 1941

Dear Madam,

My usual to let you know all is well here. Mr. B. went to register today but I told him he can't do any more war work. He does four nights in the cellar of "The King's Head" (*the Wardens' post*), then a night or two on fire-watch at Stratford as well as his dys' work as well & he is always punctual, unlike Mr. Percy. Things seem to be moving a bit now. (*Things are "moving" because Annie and the British troops had gone into action in Greece.*) I hope you & the children are still well. You would like the messy meals we have now. The children wouldn't. (*Annie refers to my fondness for gravies, sauces and stews. Her choice of an adjective is not appetizing.*) The other night I couldn't get hold of any meat so I grated a carrot, about a lb. of potatoes, likewise an onion & half pound of sausages. I took the skins off & made some thick gravy. It was really a delicious mince. You would have enjoyed it. They seem to have had it bad down home lately. This last nights have been awful. They (*the Jerrys*) go over Home on there way to Bristol & if they are chased too much, they drop them before they get there. The animals sends there love. We must get a snap of them altogether including the two black cats over the wall. They all set together & talk. Give my love to the Babies & take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

9th April, 1941

Dear Madam,

I am writing my scratch today in case I get busy this weekend as it's Good Friday tomorrow & Mr. B. is home. He isn't going away Easter as he has to be on duty. Everything is alright here. He is over the wall for supper tonight. (*The Places "over the wall" have been a boon to Mr. B., but Annie, bent on a swig of melodrama, becomes increasingly suspicious.*) Mrs. Harmon looked very plump but somehow I don't think she looked very happy. Perhaps she misses the children. She must. Between you & me & the gatepost, Mr. B. and him had a real rollicking time together. I wish you would have a really nice snap of you & the children taken with you showing just for us to see whether you are slimmer, plumper or what. It will be a funny Easter, most of the shops open Good Friday. There are only a very few (*Hot Cross*) buns about & they are such a price too & just one or two Easter eggs here & there. I am sending a tiny present for Kit's birthday. You can't send much in an envelope. Mrs. Decker's pet clergyman is living in one of the new houses at the top. The wireless has been gone off a long time. I suppose Jerry is somewhere about. No warning yet though. I have got a lovely lot of eggs pickled. Someone got them for me from the country. I think presently we shan't get any at all. All the very best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

19th April, 1941

Dear Madam,

A little scratch to let you know all is well here. We had a lovely raid on Wednesday. (*It lasted from 9 p. m. to 5 a. m., according to Mr. B., and came near enough to Clinton Hill to send the huge freight station near Lord's up in flames a hundred feet high, not more than ten blocks from our house.*) I began to wonder if we should see daylight again & they are over again now. (*But their presence does not deter Annie from penning her "usual scratch".*) I was hoping they wouldn't come tonight as it's Mr. B.'s midnight turn. Mr. B.'s aunt from Oxford is supposed to be coming on Tuesday (*a lady of ninety*) but if these are starting again she had better stay where she is, don't you think? They done a lot of damage round here. I hope the Babies are still enjoying themselves. I guess they are looking forward to the May Ball. How the time flies! Poor old Tod hates the raids. He gets so nervous & upset. Our nice milkman was badly hurt Wednesday. His house was struck. I was very upset about him as he was so obliging, always ready to do all he could for you. We where going to have Mr. Porter for lunch tomorrow & Mr. B. going to golf afterwards but he isn't coming now. I had a nice lunch for him ready. (*Mr. Porter's business premises in the City near St. Paul's were completely wiped out.*) It will be truly lovely to have things normal again & you all coming back. We are going to have vegetables in three gardens growing now the houses are empty so I hope to see a nice lot to use. I don't seem to have very much news this time.

Tod is stretched out snoring his head off. He is a real kitchen dog. He lays on the mat & his head on the kerb by the fire.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

11th May, 1941

Dear Madam,

I hope you are all well. Mr. B. had a letter yesterday but I didn't hear much. We have had quite an hectic week. We had Mrs. Hawkes & her cousin. Mrs. Hawkes went on Tuesday, her cousin on Friday. She has never had to do anything but she is nice & cheerful. (*Somehow, this comment on Mrs. Hawkes' cousin does not fit in with Annie's usual theories about "ladies".*) I love having someone bright around. Mr. Percy is so dull. Oh dear, the duties have changed & he was out till 5:30 in the morning, a real change. He may take on full time. It would do him good as he doesn't know punctuality. It's still very cold here. This two hours daylight saving shivers me up. I hate these awful long nights. You can rest the dark ones but not these. Things are scarce. It's a great game hunting for them for the animals. There is no fruit only rhubarb & that takes too much of our ration of sugar. Today I tramped all morning for eggs. Got two. There is no dried fruit for cakes, but still although there are no luxuries we have plenty of plain food. Toddy had some wool off the other dy. He looks very handsome now. The young lady we had here adored him & is going to send him a packet of titbits next week. I hope Kit & Hugh are very well. Give them my love and take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

I have had to open this. We had a big blitz last night. Poor old Quick the baker is flat to the ground you will

be sorry to hear. Pierce (*our greengrocer*) is burnt out too but we fetched a grand lot down so they didn't have it all their own way.

17th May, 1941

Dear Madam,

Just a line to let you know all is O. K. Mr. B. is sleeping at Stratford tonight so I hope & pray it will be quiet. I hate him there. We feel so safe with him here. Mr. Percy has gone has a full time warden now. It's been a bit quieter since last Saturday. That was a nasty night, severe damage. Martin's our washing place is gone too. I thought the washing would have been gone but it was safe & having two staying here, there was a good number of our sheets gone this week. I write this on Saturday, as we always have someone Sunday when we have our marvelous large joint! I don't think. (*I can picture Annie's look of scorn as she put this flea-sized object in the oven comparing it with the monstrous ones she used to turn and baste and do to a turn in our day.*) That's the only thing I am glad you are not here. There are no titbits for them nowadays. Tod has been on the tiles this week. He looked so nice after his pluck last week. Now he is as black as soot. I tied up the gate to keep him in, then I found he got through the hedge as the railings is gone to the War. It has been nearly two years since you went. I wonder when it will all end. Mrs. Decker says she lives in a dream these dys. I seem to live in a whirl. The dys are not long enough. The bit of shopping take all dy & if you see a thing going you have to pounce on it or if you don't it's pinched under your nose. Give my love to the big Babies & all the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie



25th May, 1941

Dear Madam,

I hope this will find you all well as it leaves us all here except Toddy. His greediness have led him in trouble this week. I was up the best part of Thursday night. I think he had a very bad stomach but it won't teach him a lesson. Things seem to be moving a bit. (*The British were in Crete. Once more, Annie's heart would have leapt up. Once more, she would have to accept momentary disappointment.*) It's been quiet since that awful night (*which bombed out Annie's little people of "the Street"*). I have sent the Babies two comics this week. I have also enclosed a few pictures from the newspaper (*of devastation*). Mr. B. says they will go through as they where in the papers. Some of the places are a real mess. I had a letter from Fortescue's cook the other dy. They were wishing themselves back as they say it is getting as bad as London there. (*Annie hands on this piece of news gloatingly.*) It's pouring tonight so it probably will be quiet. Things are much the same here. Most of Clinton Hill empty. I hope you are looking after yourself, not banting (*dieting*) too much. It's not fashionable. All the best to you & the Babies.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie



## GUNS AND JAM

*There was a book before the War on the choice that confronted the German people—"Guns or Butter." They made their decision. Annie makes hers. It shall be not guns or butter but guns and jam. This last series of letters, free from the daily torment of raids, concentrates on the subject dearest to her heart. She had learned to save her meat coupons till the end of the week "like the King and Queen do." Now, by dint of a little looting here and there in the empty gardens of Clinton Hill, by beating the other customers to the shops, by ingenuity that calls forth the deepest respect, Annie "digs in like the squirrels" against the coming winter. "The censor," says Annie, half apologetic, half triumphant, "will say we think of nothing but our tummys." But armies are supposed to travel on their stomachs, and Annie is a whole army in herself.*



31st May, 1941

Dear Madam,

Well once more here is Whitsun. It's no different to me than another dy. I had great hopes of getting rid of Mr. Percy for one night but it was too wonderful to mature. I get so tired of him always round. Mr. B. goes out too much. He not enough, in fact he is never out. Mr. B. has gone to Steyning till Monday. He has taken his A. R. P. equipment. A London warden tired & in need of a rest & change may get through. (*The coastal defense area had been closed to all outsiders.*) I sent along some butter, tea, bacon, cheese, sardines, cakes, some asparagus & a couple of tiny chicks which I trotted my toes off to get & a pound of sausages so I think they will be alright, not short. She (*Mrs. Decker*) isn't able to run round like I am to gather a few titbits up. We shall have our Sunday joint on Monday night. I always keep our coupons till the end of the week like the King & Queen do & then get a nice bit at the week-end. We can always manage, one week a nice bit of beef & the next a small leg like that & you would be surprised how we scraped through till nearly the end with it with a little bit of camaflogging. I suggested to Mr. B. as he couldn't take his he could ride Hugh's little byke round Steyning. Wouldn't you like to see him? We had the Marshall girls on Thursday. We had some sparrow grass (*a very fine thin asparagus*) which always makes me sad as it was always such a treat to the children. It really is great. Fortescues & a few more flashed to Torquay. They (*the Jerrys*) have started there now & the Tanners or

what there name is at 36, you know the lame one, got such a fright & I think the old mother got bruised with the blast from the bombs. They have flown to Edinburgh. Why should they be able to run away to save their skins? We can't. Our jobs are here. Well all the best to you. How I should love to see you all again & to go back to our happy dys again. We shall, never fear, perhaps sooner than we think.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

14th June, 1941

Dear Madam,

Fancy it's nearly two years since you went. Seems like ten to me so much has happened since & everything so up side down. I hope every dy it won't last much longer & then I think one dy less. We had a surprise the other night. At least I did. Mr. B. was at Stratford when the phone rang about ten & it was Mr. Hawkes. He had come down from Blackpool as the police wired for him as they thought his house had been burgled but it was only children have been in raking out everything. I am going to a wedding Monday if I don't alter my mind, It's only at the bottom (*of the road*) but very grand for war time. (*No curbstone this time. Annie was to attend this wedding as "among those present."*) I may stay out all night. I nearly fainted this morning. 1 lb. of onions I got, three oranges & some new potatoes. I haven't seen an onion for months or an orange. Nigger will be a year next week so I told Mr. B. we would have the two cats over the wall. They are great pals & Toddy & have a party for him. We shouldn't include the brown fellow. He isn't friendly enough. How is your little dog going on? That garden at the top, No. 12, the new house you know what beautiful flowers they had, they now have cabbages & tomatoes planted. I have planted three geraniums, two daisies, the big white Marguerites & some pansies just to make me think you are home. They should come out nice. Our dug-out is full of water. If we have to go down, we shall have to take our bathing costumes. I am always afraid the

animals will fall in & get drowned. Nigger fell in once & got out like a draggled rat. They are all out tonight. Mr. B. on duty. Mr. Percy have to go on at twelve. I have got him in the big nursery. I have been longing to get him up there as he is so untidy & the dressing room use to look like a rag shop & that old dog smells so. (*The thought of Pretzel smelling up that wide, sunny nursery made me want to urge Annie to give away all the deserted toys and books, but I dare not, lest it upset her. Part of her stalwart courage depends upon keeping everything exactly as it was.*) I think I have told you all the news. Tell them I am longing to see them again. All the best.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



21st June, 1941

Dear Madam,

I hope this will find you all well. I am glad my little present for Hugh arrived safely & that he liked it. Mr. B. said you had your father coming up. Please remember me to him & tell him it will be nice when he can get across to Clinton Hill again. I have had an awful cold. I thought Sun. & Mon. I was going to pass out. It was just like somebody putting their hands round my neck to choke me & my chest, I couldn't breathe. I was afraid of pneumonia. Mrs. Place over the back wall was very good. I don't know what I would have done. Of course she comes over here for a good many meals & when she went to Brighton at Whitsun I looked after her cats, so I think I can pay her back but it's awful to be so ill & know two men & three animals depend on you. The doctor said it was bronchitis & congestion. I couldn't lay down for several nights. So much for my wedding. I wondered what would happen. Something always does if I make my mind up to go out. (*It is ironic that poor Annie, who never would go out even in peace time, should miss the one "grand" party I have ever remembered her planning to attend in person.*) That dog of Mr. Percy is a perfect pest since he has taken up this A.R.P. He is in & out all dy & so upset the dog he doesn't do nothing but whine all the time & he has taken to getting on the wall & getting in the street so I told him I wouldn't hold myself responsible if he got run over. I have too much to do to run after him. The shopping takes all dy. It's a perfect pantomime.

We had Mrs. Hawkes turn up unexpectedly. She has let her house. I would like to have had her another night. She is very jolly. I heard from Rose (*our former maid*) today, the first time in months. She asked about you & the children. Her husband is in India. We have had some quiet nights lately which is something to be grateful for. Tod has just gone for a walk with Mr. B. to Mr. Blackstone's. He likes going along there. He gets a biscuit. He is a rare one for his stomach. Well give my love to the children. All the best to you. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

28th June, 1941

Dear Madam,

A line to let you know all is O. K. here. The only trouble is these very long dys. You can't get any rest. It keeps so light so long but it keeps the Jerrys off. Toddy is lovely. Mrs. Blackstone took him to a grand place in Baker St. They trimmed his toe nails, scaled his teeth & he is beautiful & white right through. He is really lovely but it won't last long. That syringa in the corner by the sitting-room is a mass of bloom. The man says it was cut wrong. (*Here is one last dig at Tucker, just for Old Times' sake.*) I managed to get some gooseberries to bottle. I done about a dozen pounds. The fat is a job to get to seal them down & the fruit is a job to get. Directly the price is controlled, it vanishes. I managed a small bit of strawberry jam with a few scrappy strawberries I got hold of. It's really a game gathering up food. Eggs are being rationed next week. I don't know whether we shall have one a week or one a month! That crab apple tree at 34 has some ordinary apples as well this year, so if I get a bit of sugar I'll do a bit of jelly. We got double rations of sugar this month for jam. I wonder sometimes how much longer but I am glad you are not here now. You are use to getting all the luzuries going & you can't get them now. All the animals are well. I dislike that dog of Mr. Percy's. Of course Mr. B. goes out a good bit or I don't think he would stand him but he has to do something to help along expenses. There is Steyning still going & everything is gone up, light, coal, everything has. Give my love to the two

big Babies. Please look after yourself & don't turn yourself into a slave. (*Annie clings to her pet idea of me as a "lady" living on "luzuries."*)

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

July 12th, 1941

Dear Madam,

A line to let you know all is well. It's been terrible the heat this week & these long nights you can't get proper sleep. I have some strawberry jam, a little bit more as we may have to have bread & jam later. It's only two ounces of butter each & I have a lot of sandwiches to cut for Mr. Percy when he is on nights. I wish this wretched war would end. Mr. Percy said the other dy it will last 18 months. He don't care. But if it was to last as long as that you had better come back for we shall forget what you look like. It's awful. I have just been doing our new ration books. What a game! I trotted up & down before I got them right. Tomorrow we have our usual five, Mrs. Place over the wall & the two that was bombed out in Dalton Hill. The roses are lovely in the front. There is a lovely yellow bush next door like a tiny sulphur, very pretty & such a sweet smell. I am going to get it in our garden next year. It has had hundreds of blooms. The more you pick the more they come. (*I have a horrid feeling that when I see our garden again it will contain the pick of all the other gardens in Clinton Hill. I am torn between concentrating on how nice such a selection will look and on dropping lines to the departed owners warning them of their impending losses.*) I do hope you are all well & you are looking after yourselves. My love to the big Babies.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

Dear Madam,

July 19th, 1941

All is well here. Fancy two years on Tuesday since you went! These dys are very lonesome. Mr. Percy trots round to see a young lady in Dalton Hill when he has finished his supper & Mr. B. isn't very much in so it's very lonely at night. Mr. Wallace got married the other dy. He made me very envious, said he had enough vegetables for the winter. They have been very dear & scarce. I made  $3\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. of cherry jam. We have got a nice little bit in hand. We had Dr. & Mrs. Harmon on Thursday night. (*In the old days, they would have had Dinner A.*) I gave them a humble veal & ham pie but they enjoyed it, that was something. There children have had chicken-pox. The camp looks lovely where Kit is going. How I would love a little line from them. I don't hear much from Mr. B. but if I know he has had a letter I say are you alright & sometimes I hear a little news. Oh dear it will be lovely when you get back. It's not home now. The War have upset everything. You have to keep your eye on the shops now. Something comes in & it's pounced on before you see it. You can never finish ever these dys. I made a bit of jam. You just have to wait your chance to get what they think they will give you but still we can't grumble. We don't do so bad. Things I miss most is the apples & oranges. I don't see any chance of making marmalade next year. Toddy & Nigger are both well. Those two admire each other. When there is a thunderstorm, Nig lays on Toddy & holds his hand. All the best to you. Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

August 9th, 1941

Dear Madam,

A line hoping you are well & my Babies, big ones now. Mr. B. is gone off for a week on his byke. Where I do not know. He went last Wed. & is coming back next. Mr. Percy is supposed to be getting a holiday from the 20th to the 27th. He talks of leaving the mongrel here. What a dog! Yesterday when I called him he came at me with his teeth bare. He isn't like my other two animals. They are a couple of characters. I am the envy of the neighborhood. I have made over six pounds of black currant. They are very difficult to get this year as they are using them for the children for juice as there are not any oranges. I also have a couple of oranges soaking for a bit of marmalade, two whoppers, 6d. each. I must keep my supply up or my lads will have to eat dry bread as the fat isn't too plentiful & I must see my lads have enough to eat. The biggest problem to feed is the black & white boys. Rations are short for them but Tod pays his daily visits to the dustbins to ensure his daily ration. He does well now as they wrap the bones & leave them at the side of the dustbins. I expect the old censor thinks we only think of our tummys but we have to this year. Mrs. Strong rang up tonight. She asked to be remembered to you. She doesn't hear a great deal of her children (*in Canada*). I told her it will soon be finished now & we shall have the flags flying. I am glad the Russians have started at Berlin. I am getting another party up for Mr. B.'s birthday. I don't expect I shall find any candles this year nor crackers so we

must do something else. I was thinking of going out for the dy tomorrow & leaving Mr. Percy to get his lunch at the post but I thought perhaps I had better not. I'll wait till this war is finished. Then I'll make whoopee if I am spared. I'll go mad for a bit. We all shall when it don't take all dy to do your shopping & have to dodge corners to see what is going & what is hidden up under the counters for a few of their special ones. Well I don't think I have any more to tell you except to take care of yourself & not do too much. Give them my best love. All the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie



16th August, 1941

Dear Madam,

A line hoping to find you all well. Mr. Percy is off to Torquay Thursday till Tuesday. He is taking the dog. It's a guinea a dy & the dog 5 shillings (*over \$5.00 and about \$1.25*). Nice price, isnt it, but he travels free. He is lucky. The only people that don't drop lucky is the ones that keep house & there job is worse than any. I am up & down the Street all dy long. It's the only way to get anything. The milk ration is the worst, 2½ pt.s a week. What can we do with that? I don't eat very much, in fact very little but I like my cup of tea & drop of milk in it. The ones that do that is the ones that drink there glasses of whisky & there champagne, etc., & dont value there cups of tea & what will my lads do without there cups of cocoa which I make them take before they go on duty & made with milk too? It keep the cold out & keep them well. (*Here Annie flares up again at the High Ones. It was bad enough, a year previously, when tea itself was rationed. She could steel herself to cut down on quantity from, say, twelve to six cups a day. To be asked to cut down on quality as well is a body blow. Tea would not be tea to her without that "drop" of milk.*) Well I made some plum jam yesterday & I have bottled some too & today I have been salting beans. Last year I done seven pound jars out of our garden. I shan't this. They are not so good. Mr. B. came back last Wed. Thursday I had a great treat. I had him in the whole evening, never went out. I thoroughly enjoyed it, as it's a rare treat nowadays. Oh if only this

wretched war would finish how perfectly glorious it would be! (*And Annie would know just where Mr. B. was! His actual accounts to me of these evenings out would make very dull reading to anyone with an imagination like Annie's.*) Did you hear him on the wireless? It was very nice. (*Mr. B. was interviewed as a typical London Air Raid Warden on an American program.*) All the best to you. Don't you think this photo of Princess Elizabeth is like Kit? (*There is no possible resemblance but it is typical of Annie to liken her Babies to Royalty.*) Give them my love and look after yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

23rd Aug., 1941

Dear Madam,

Hoping to find you & the Babies well. Mr. B. is in so little I never get time to ask. He is always on duty or over the wall with his friends (*another storm-warning for me.*) I get so lonesome sometimes as now I never seem to have anyone here in the evening after supper. We are having a grand birthday party (*with Mr. B. pinch-hitting for Hugh as the "birthday boy" and Annie performing miracles to produce a "grand spread"*). I have made a cake, only a plain one with a little icing on & his name with some candles on. I have some crackers as well. Then I have a jam roll which Mrs. Place has made. I was going to make one but she wanted to do it so I let her. I have some small cakes, chocolate biscuits, sandwiches & buns buttered so they will have a nice feed. We have eleven or twelve. There is Dr. & Mrs. Harmon, the Strongs, the Blackstones, someone from the post. I don't know the others that is coming & of course the Places & Mr. B. That is nine but the others I don't know at all. Just one missing, or rather three, which makes me feel awfully sad, that is you & my Babies. It rained in buckets today. The garden is just a river. Our tomatoes will never ripen & our marrows are doing nothing this year. Last year we had heaps. Mr. B. got some very nice snaps of the animals. (*One of them had Tod and Nigger starting off in opposite directions. The effect is as if their tails were tied together. Annie appears, rear view to the camera, bent double in an attempt to make her pets "look at the birdie."*) Nigger looks just what he is, a

fierce tiger, but what a ratter! He has caught nine from that hole. Brings them in & lets them run round the dining-room. The other morning one bit his tale but after licking it for ages, he went out & brought one in. He also catches some fine pigeons. He costs me 2/6 (*50 cents*) a week to feed. I put that by for him every week but he is worth his keep as he lets nothing get away when he is about. Mr. Percy is coming back Tuesday but what a treat to have him & the dog out of the house for a while! Even the animals are enjoying there freedom. They look at each other as much as to say "He is gone. Now we are alright again." And last night I had no dinner. Mr. B. was over the wall for his. What a treat! It's a year ago since I had a treat like that. I'll be able to see better next week what I am writing. He (*the Lamplighter*) is treating me to a pair of spectacles. (*O noble Lamplighter! But I grieve at the passing of Annie's "spyglass."*) My eyes have got bad. I can't see at all to read anything. I suppose all this have upset one's nerves a bit. Well I don't think I have any more news to tell you. I know you like to hear all the home news & titbits. All the best. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie

29th August, 1941

Dear Madam,

I was thrilled to the core to get a letter from you. Thank you so much. I am going to send this Air Mail just to be sure of wishing you a very happy birthday & I hope the next you will be home with us. I am awfully vexed with this coupon business. (*This was the new Government order which controlled purchasing of any kind.*) I can't find anything to send you, so all I can send is my love & best wishes. We had a wonderful party for Mr. B. I think even better than last. Since we had all these scaffold poles in the kitchen (*by Government orders to make one room raid-proof in every house*) my table has gone in the dining-room. There is no room here & I put that at the bottom & it wasn't so cramped up. Even the weather cheered up for the dy & the cake was lovely. He had quite a mail & yours came actually on that dy. Very clever, wasn't it? I think why my letters are so regular, strictly between ourselves, it doesn't matter how busy I am or how I feel I always write Sat. & see it goes on Sunday. I know you like to hear of home & that makes a bit of difference. You see Mr. B. doesn't sometimes get his off till Tuesday. I should love to read the children's letters from camp. I hope they had a nice time. It sounds as if they had but I don't like to hear of you working so hard. It's not right. (*I had begun to transcribe these letters at the time and was wishing I had been treated to a pair of spectacles.*) The scullery looks lovely. The walls has one coat, the ceiling two, very nice light paint, nice shiny paint. It was in an

awful mess & very soon we shall have no men to do anything. The rat hole is dug up in the side garden. They where sewer rats. A large pipe was broken. It was a wonder we wasn't flooded out. (*The hole and its rats caused consternation in the old gay days. Sometimes it appeared on the Palmers' side of the front wall, sometimes on ours. We spent one lively June evening when it was on the Palmers' side, filling the hole with fumes from the exhaust of our car via a long hose. We and they were armed to the teeth with everything from tennis rackets, cricket bats and golf clubs to their Nannie with a poker and Annie with a meat chopper, prepared to give the rat a clout on the head when it staggered forth. We all missed it.*) I have sent two more comics today. I think Mr. Percy does appreciate me looking after him. He said he has never been so well looked after or fed as here nor his dog either (*which makes everything "alright"*). He does eat enormously. I expect Mr. B. does see he pays his share. Well I think I have told you all the news. My very best love to my two Babies. All the very best to you & please look after yourself. He (*the Lamplighter*) was just as pleased to hear a little news of you as myself & once more a happy birthday.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

September 20th, 1941

Dear Madam,

I think I had better write this tonight as we seem to be inundated with company & then we shall be alone. They all come together. I am very upset to hear you havent been well. You should make up your mind to leave the children & come home. They wouldnt hurt as you have heaps of friends. They have all there lives in front of them. You & Mr. B. dont get younger. Two years is a very big gap from your life. (*At this, I dangle a tentative toe in the grave.*) Make up your mind to do what I say. I'll look after you. There will be no need for you to worry about food. I can do all the scratching etc. as I do now. You are too far for me to come and nurse you & we can only have your word that you are better. I am glad you like (*the pictures of*) the animals. Didnt you think Nigger is a nice cat? He adores Toddy. Everybody laughs at there going for there walk together. Nigger does a little run, then he has to wait for the old man to come up. Tod has had a bad foot. Three legs he has been going on this week. I have it bound up & a leather boot on it. Mr. B. has gone over the wall to supper tonight. She is fire-watching so they cant come over here. (*"Ah ha!" as Piglet would say. Now we see why Annie cries "Lady bird, lady bird, fly away home!"*) I can do everything for his comfort & welfare but not what you can & men are different to women. I would do everything like I do now so you could live a lady's life. (!) What a problem & worry this war causes! I do hope you had a nice birthday. I thought a lot about you & wished you

was back & things were settled down. Give the Babies both my best love. Mr. B. tooth dropped out. He looked so funny without it. All the best to you. Take care of yourself.

Respectfully Yrs.  
Annie



Oct. 11th 1941

Dear Madam,

A line to let you know all is well here. How pleased I was to think my letter reached you on your birthday. We had great discussions at the Post Office & so I went & told them & they were very pleased to. I don't mind you using my letters if they are any use & will bring some cash in. Mr. B. was concerned about the personal matters where I said about him going on the tiles etc. so I told him these things wouldn't go & I really believe he was disappointed not to be able in big headlines to see a grass widower wasn't sitting at home pining. You wouldn't say so had you seen him with three charming females fussing over him last week, not myself. I have made ten pounds of mincemeat this week, not the usual Xmas standard but I think it is nice. Did I tell you about the party I made up for Miss Peter's birthday? (*She is the gay little cousin of Mr. B.'s in the R.A.F.*) We promised her one last year for her 21st but the blitzes was so bad it didn't get carried out so she was here this time. I made a cake, quite plain but nice, only dried eggs in it & a tiny bit of icing with her name on. She was thrilled & Mr. Black dropped in as well so we had quite a party. I am glad you had such a nice birthday. I should like to have sent you something but it's difficult coupons dys. Did I tell you what a marvellous pr. of slippers Miss Peters gave me, coupons & all? I never have had a pr. like it, red with fur. Over 10/6 (\$2.50) they were. I am afraid to wear washing up or cooking the breakfast in case I get wet or fat on them. I do hope you are

feeling better. I wish you would come back & put your feet up & let me look after you. It's such a long time to be away. I am glad my Babies are well & happy at school again. They always where one for each other like Toddy & Nigger. One can't go out without each other. Well I hope this will find you all well. My love & best wishes to my Babies & all the best to you.

Respectfully Yrs.

Annie

“DEAR ANNIE,”



*Littleton*  
*November, 1941*

*Dear Annie,*

*If a copy of this book should reach your hands and you peer at it through the Lamplighter's spectacles by the kitchen table, forgive me if I have attempted to present to the American public not only your letters but your indomitable, pungent self. You are the essence of the English spirit. You have the calibre of unquenchable courage and good humor which makes the British Isles invincible. You are the prop on which rests the broken framework of "them happy dys when we where all together."*

*Very respectfully yours,*  
*Madam*



















30 Clark Hill  
St Johns Wood  
2nd N. W. &

Dear Madam,

I'll start this letter in the week  
for everything is over & over & when  
Sunday comes I seem to have so much  
to do & one is always tired you can't  
seem to get to written & a new go  
to bed now at least I don't I  
lay on the camp bed in the  
kitchen & with the gun you  
can sleep I have only took my sheets  
off once since I all started & I  
was so tired I thought I would  
try to get sleep but I felt then  
that much then I put the off  
for all these five hours full then  
I a eye was rubbed after it was  
fully noisy again that night  
I think dropped outside Eye Land &  
under in the St John & E by the  
hospital of a takes an  
occasional morning off & so he gets  
a good rest as you know rest in the  
day he seems well any way but he  
doesn't say much no adays I suppose  
he gets down down you can't get

3

she may be fudgitted but she gets  
very busy ways & a very little to do  
& I shall like this if anything is  
going to happen to you whether  
you go to work & they will get it  
just as they shall presently & not  
the defenses like here & friends  
very about there I hope you had  
a nice birthday I heard you had  
my & Mrs. Borch. ay. there. & you  
will be happy my. Well look  
dreadful that is able to know  
no good at all. then right down  
I all I think this is all now  
my very love to you  
& love to the children

Respectfully yrs  
Annie

Daddy & Nipper  
and their love

#### ANNIE STAYS IN LONDON.

RESPECTIVELY YOURS, ANNIE—Letters from a London Cook, with introduction by Sylvia Brockway (Dutton)—The indomitable English spirit knows no class distinctions, as is revealed in these letters from a London cook, the ex-"char" Annie, autocrat of the Brockway kitchen. When her mistress and the children come to America for the duration, Annie continues to keep house for the master, more concerned for her cakes and puddings than for the blitz. "You certainly want your head screwed on the right way these days to do house-keeping," she writes with cheerful confidence. Annie's platonic is