

12 Collingham Gardens  
SW5

16-11-60

Dear Wilfred,

Having visited Poppy on Monday and learned of the last letter you received from me, I hasten to send my sincere apologies. When I can get all our unanswered correspondence & hefty Christmas letters sent off to friends in different parts of the world & so get things straightened out again, the other half of your letter will turn up together with the P Order. Shock plays tricks on one; nevertheless I trust you will have understood what the missing page had to convey.

Poppy described in detail Albert's birthday party, which she, and I am sure all else thoroughly enjoyed. It all sounded a most interesting and happy gathering at an equally enjoyable household.

It has just occurred to me that perhaps you do not know the origin of Clara's nickname, Poppy. I am responsible for that for when she was a child and I a schoolgirl, the Rex family always lived in Mother's house and Poppy was like a younger sister. I had a younger brother who nicknamed her Poggy which I resented very much, always horrified at the thought of her growing up as Poggy. So in my childhood way, I thought the only way to stop this Poggy business becoming a habit with everybody was to get as near to it as possible with a more civilised name, so that no one would even notice the change was taking place & at every opportunity I would Poppy her. It worked beautifully. I don't suppose anyone ever remembers Poggy or how Poppy came about. It was very cleverly done I thought particularly since Bertie, the brother who invented Poggy had no intention of her being anything but his chosen name for her. Bertie was killed when he was 16 years old in the First World War having given a false age when he joined the army. He was older than I. So somehow I always think of her as Poppy being so young when I named her that.

Ninnie for myself that you mention Wilfred was also my invention, but that was kept strictly for the babies in the family who couldn't talk. I somehow thought that the 'N' was easier than the 'L' for them. Anyway, I always used to peep round their respective doors on my arrival and just say 'it's Ninnie'. I needn't to have said anything, just a peep and they knew and the welcome they gave me was unforgettable. They and I adored each other. Particularly baby Alma, your sister whom you never saw, but who was indescribably too lovely. May & I at business together during the day and I seldom let an evening pass away from your parents and Alma, we were all four so very happy together and the shock of losing Alma was too awful.

That is why I have always thought of my sister May as being the most courageous person I have ever met, for to have personally experienced as she did, so much grief with such undaunted courage.

During previous such tragedies in her life, starting with World War One, when I was a schoolgirl and she at business and alone. I always joined her when she left business and stayed nights with her to ease her unhappy loneliness and because I was always so happy with her. The same thing happened when I grew older and we were at business together. It was during this period that Alf Eldridge used to visit your Mother and I at Mother's home in John Street. I always have such vivid memories of his visits which we enjoyed so very much. Alf was so kind and so amazingly human.

He would cook a meal for us and thoroughly spoil we two girls. He would do anything and everything, bless him.

Poppy told me that Alf Eldridge was at Mother's funeral. I was so glad.

After Alma's death came the lovely little Ivy and three very sad people became happy ones again and later you followed Wilfred and the Finchley home of your parents was indeed everything to be desired. A very happy home of four and so it remained until eventually I sadly had to leave it for Australia and later immediately after our arrival back in London for Sheffield twenty years away, with occasional visits to London during which time I have experienced the very happy companionship of Eddie in the same happy atmosphere of our home as I experienced in your Mother's and which judging from my observations and experience on my various visits, exists throughout the whole large family which is rather wonderful and I should think record breaking – so many problems can be overcome by living under such harmonious conditions.

In case the missing page contained the Dickens Xmas Story, I promised to tell Mother which might set you wondering always what it was. Here it is, only Mother knowing my Mother's disposition would have enjoyed it with me more.

My Mother as I remember her always was extremely generous. As a child in a very large family and the majority of such families very poor nevertheless I remember neighbours and the like forever being given this or that by Mother who also arrived at the stage, when my school prizes almost on my arrival home, were given away to some child or another. I had never told anyone at all that prior to my arrival home with my precious prizes. I was always spanked en route home, by Sunday school children for being the winner and they the losers. So that I had it both ways, but never felt resentment. Although I loved the prizes, my chief concern was that I got through my exams, although I shall never know how, for I was Mother's right hand man "The little Mother" as the district called me and had to be at home from school so much and never time for study which I should have loved. But from the time I entered that school they made up their minds that I would make up for all previous Binks who had passed through their hands and who have told me of the capers they performed at school. I have never understood that either, for it was the strictest school imaginable. I was terrified of not being right up to scratch in every way and capers I never could imagine there. They must have been very plucky Binks before me at school and if Mother enjoyed giving my precious prizes away so did I and the spanking kids and I always remained friends.

Then one day a prize happened to be Dickens' "Pickwick Papers". I adored it with its gold leaf and beautifully leather bound cover. I loved Dickens, what I had learned of it, and could not possibly part with it. I hated doing it, but my Dickens had to be kept a secret from the family and I was to tell Mother the story, the first one ever to be told and here you are-

I used to steal odd moments to read it and hide it scared of it being seen. They would of course have understood and allowed me it, but I couldn't take any chances and the moment I finished it I very reluctantly gave it away.

Dickens has always remained a favourite together with such book bindings. Eddie as a child had five such works of Dickens given him which I have always treated with the utmost care and respect. We share the same love of Dickens, and here ends my childhood Dickens secret. We two girls, May & I would have enjoyed the joke together. Oh yes, the funny part too was that in my childish way I even chose the right atmosphere for enjoying it more. My Mother always had the loveliest window boxes and potted plants in her area. (The window boxes were everywhere). So it was always the beauty of her area that I chose surrounded by potted plants to read my Dickens

and THAT grew up with me also; an intense love of nature and must live with it always in view outside or be very sad without it.

Poppy described beautifully Albert's birthday party which she thoroughly enjoyed and I know everyone else present would.

Now I conclude with every good wish possible for your success in business. That also needs courage in these days of keen competition and monopolies to contend with. You certainly have what it takes Wilfred.

With Love to all,

Lily