

OMAHA LETTER.

The S Ranch, Wyoming.
August 31, 1901.

Dear Eleanor:

If any one ever again lures me into the solitudes of earth, it will be because I have lost my mind.

This experience has discovered me to myself, in several ways.

I had an idea that I longed to flee from the "maddening crowd's ignoble strife;" that I fane would commune with Nature in her far-off sanctuaries of worship. I full oft said to myself that the pagan soul within me sickened under the bands and bonds of conventionality.

In short, I had a number of theories, tended to demonstrate my superiority over the average human being, but they are gone, evaporated like mist before the swinging censor of the soul.

I thought my life at home was monotonous. I believe I have waited to you of the deadly dullness of the ordinary rounds of existence, as I found it in Omaha. Now, if I could but see an express wagon from there it would possess all the glory of a coach and four.

I am a bit ashamed and would not have the family know for the world what durance vile I find it.

I suppose the fact that I rode down horseback to the little town and back yesterday, a distance of ten miles, all told, accounts for some part of the indigo hue of my spirits today, if the general truism that mind has a great effect over matter, is reversible.

I have taken my paper and pencil far up the trail, back of the house, and have found a nice mossy place to sit, and far enough away so Mother can not hear my bones creak as I shift, for she did not wish me to take the ride, asserting as positively as I denied it that the distance was much too great for one unaccustomed to riding. I would go, and today I feel that I appreciate the Spartan style of endurance in a way I was never capable of before.

Summer seems to hold her own here, with a gloomy grandeur. I think the year is never young here—everything is big and strong and sad, and has no youth.

Summer sits in uncrowned state upon a rocky throne and broods by day and by night, and seems to lock within her soul some secret sorrow, of which she mourns continually.

She is very different from the flower-wreathed, golden-clad, lightsome thing I have called summer in other days. There seems to be nothing wee and tender here. One day I happened to spy under the shelter of a huge grey rock some tiny nestling flowers, swung on tender, green stems, like drops of heart's blood. They looked so out of place, like little laughing children about the feet of old age.

We expect to go home soon, almost any day, in fact, as Papa may at any time receive a telegram which will necessitate an immediate move. Gertrude and her friend are trying to polish themselves up or down, as the case may be, for a return to the vanities of this world. They have not apparently the least desire to take home a coat of tan or collection of freckles. They rub down at night with lemon juice and wash it off with buttermilk in the morning. Mother says she thinks they will pickle their beauty rather than preserve it. Not bad for Mother, is it, considering how literal she is as a rule?

Mother remonstrates with me once in a while about my dissatisfaction here, and she said a day or two since: "I should think, Penelope, the beautiful view would be enough."

This was adding insult to injury, and I said: "Mother, how can you imagine 'view' would satisfy one was brought up on it?" You know we lived in the country until two or three years ago.

"Now." I continued, "I desire to spend the remainder of my life where people are so thick I can not see through."

Mother sighed. A provoking way mothers have, which leaves you entirely in the wrong and feeling a beast.

I remember that particular sigh, although a very mild one, succeeded in blowing me out of the house and over into my tent. O! I believe I did not tell you that there was not quite room enough in the house and one person was obliged to sleep outside.

I insisted so strenuously on being "it" that they yielded perforce. It is the one thing which has been an unalloyed pleasure to me in this land of voluntary exile. At first the continuous murmur of the forest in its perpetual insomnia, and the never-ceasing cry of the river as it leaps in wild glee from rock to rock, disturbed me and kept me awake for hours in the stilly first watch of the night. But now it is all as a mother's lullaby to her babe.

I like the pine-scented wind to sweep through the tent from sunset to sunrise. I like to hear the far call of strange night birds.

Sometimes in the magic of the moonlight strange shapes seem to steal from the depths of the forest and sit in grave council on the huge rocks rising sheer above the foaming water.

Sometimes the white mist rises and floats away, as if these grave warriors had but gathered to smoke the pipe of peace.

One day last week Rob, Jim and I went over the mountains on another excursion. We have done that quite frequently of late. We had no particular object in view this time, save that the road, Jim said, was a pretty one, and if we found we had time to go far enough we would stop and call upon a friend of his.

We rode along, Indian file, rather silently, save for Rob's chatter, until Jim told us, by the position of the sun overhead, that it was high noon. We dismounted and opened our lunch. Jim is very expert in making a gypsy fire and swinging a coffee pot, so before long an alien odor mingled with the cedar and pine. It was very grateful to our civilized noses and our demoralized palates.

Jim talked again and even more fully than before of the bitter disappointment of his life, the disappointment which had not tarried long, but met him on the very threshold of his manhood. Then he spoke of the girl on whom he had lavished the wealth of a passionate first love.

"No life is all one dreams it should be before the stress is on," he continued. "The friend I spoke to you about, the one I wish you to see, has every good gift the world can bestow save only one; but the withholding of that one rendered well nigh worthless all the rest."

"She is beautiful," he continued, while dexterously scattering the dying embers. "She has a husband who adores her, she has every luxury wealth can procure for her, yet everything she treasures most she is obliged to leave, and in this far-off country set up her household gods."

"What is it?" I asked softly as he paused; "ill health?"

"Yes." Here he touched his chest significantly. "Yes, the old wide-spread curse which has blasted life's bloom for so many of us. Only a year ago began the exile which must last so long as she wishes to endure life."

"Is she there all alone?" I asked.

"Oh, no. She has servants and everything money can buy to mitigate the sentence. Her husband comes as often as he possibly can—but, good God," he exclaimed in sudden bitterness, "think what she must endure."

An hour later we were shaking hands with her. If I live to be an old, white-

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