

Fred & Edie

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Extract

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WIDOW'S STORY IN ILFORD MYSTERY

QUITE HAPPY TOGETHER AND NO QUARREL . . . I DID NOT
SEE ANYBODY ABOUT AT THE TIME

'I heard him call out "Oh!" and he fell against me . . . We had no quarrel on the way; we were quite happy together . . . I did not see anybody about at the time.'

In these words Edith Thompson (27), widow of the stabbed Ilford shipping clerk, told the police the story of her husband's death. Her statement was read at Stratford court yesterday, when she and Frederick Bywaters, the 20-year-old ship's steward, were remanded on the charge of murder.

Mrs Thompson, said the police, made other statements, and Bywaters also made a statement, but none of these were put in yesterday's hearing.

A large crowd had gathered around the police court in the hope of seeing the couple, but they were brought

from Ilford in a cab, and manoeuvred into court before the waiting people knew of their arrival.

WOMAN'S COVERED FACE

Bywaters, who entered the court first, is a tall young man of striking appearance. A plain clothes officer stood between him and the woman, who was helped into court by a woman attendant.

Mrs Thompson was wearing the clothes in which she went to the theatre on the night of the tragedy.

When she entered the dock she covered her face with the deep fur collar of her coat until the magistrate asked if there was anything the matter with her face. She was requested to put the fur collar down, was provided with a chair, and demanded a glass of water. During the hearing she sat with her limbs trembling and hands clutching at her garments.

Divisional Detective-Inspector Hall stated that when he saw Mrs Thompson on Wednesday morning he said to her, 'I understand you were with your husband early this morning in Belgrave Road and I am satisfied that he was assaulted and stabbed several times.'

Mrs Thompson then made this statement:

'We came along Belgrave Road and just past the corner of Kensington-gardens I heard him call out "Oh!" and he fell up against me. I put out my arms to save him, and found blood which I thought was coming from his mouth. I tried to hold him up. He staggered several yards towards Kensington-gardens, and then fell against the wall and slid down.

'He did not speak to me, and I cannot say if I spoke to him. I found his clothing wet with blood. He never moved after he fell . . .

wrists did become tiny, maybe they were slim as two sheets of paper and maybe she thought of breaking the glass and slipping a hand right through. But to what avail? She could only have held the bars and stared out. She would have had no strength to do more. Just a thought that crossed my mind, Freddy. A random thought. No doubt you have wondered, too, at who might have slept in your cell before you. It helps, doesn't it, to keep the mind on other matters and not to expend ourselves worrying about our own predicament.

It was the young wardress who brought me my breakfast. She has pale skin like a freckled brown egg and she finds it impossible to meet my eyes. I can tell she is curious about me. (Judging from the crowd yesterday at Stratford, it must have been in the newspapers by now.) I think she would love to stare outright, but she pushes her lank hair behind her ears (they all wear such strange caps, I cannot see that they are use or ornament) and she scuttles out again, with almost – I'm not joking darlint – almost a curtsy. I'm cheery and in fine spirits and I hope this letter finds you the same. I'm still groggy with sleep and last night's crumpled dreams and the dress I slept in.

I wear my prisoner's number on a yellow cloth badge on my own dress, which I've been allowed to keep until tomorrow, as they were not quite prepared for me and have had some delay in finding my prison garments. As long as I don't think about the last week, if I concentrate instead on the small details: the shelf, the stool and pail in the corner of the room, the scratchy grey blanket, the white egg-cup painted with a black arrow and the words *Prison Commissioner* on it, the beaker of milk and the dry roll on a tin plate, the pillow which is surely stuffed with something akin to straw (when I mentioned this to the wardress she *snorted* at me), I feel fine. I have found I am in possession of an astonishing capacity to not

think, if I so desire. For instance, I believe I have not thought of Percy, not for one moment in twenty-four hours. Is that not remarkable?

I have asked the Governor if I could send this to you and he has kindly replied that I might not. It was an odd experience, stepping out of my shoes and my wonderful crepe de chine in that small office that they call the 'Reception'. I'm now wearing some unspeakable items of underclothing which seem to have been constructed from the sacks used to carry coal.

The officer taking down my details asked: Where were you born, do you know? That might tell you something about the kind of ladies they are used to in here!

I can apparently visit the library – accompanied by a wardress – as often as I like and whilst on remand I won't be put to work and may remain in my room. The Governor has supplied me with paper and plenty of it and a pencil, but no pen, so I am writing anyway in the hope that you can read these words at some time in the future, when this dreadful mess is cleared up. I am so in the habit of writing letters to you that I find it impossible to stop. Always in my mind, a conversation with you, with my Great Pal, continues. Knowing that your situation is so similar to mine only increases this tendency.

I am not allowed a fork or knife and, of course, you must be in the same position. It will be hard, won't it, to have to eat everything with a spoon? But then again, since twice a day we are given porridge without salt and with a great hunk of bread, I can see that a spoon is the most useful of items.

Darlint, I've promised myself not to remonstrate with you and, as I say, not to think about the last few days which have brought us here, but occasionally it becomes difficult to keep my resolve. A sentence rises up in me, like a bird opening its wings in my chest and then beating them, harder and harder. Then I see you again in your coat and hat, running away down

Belgrave Road and I see Percy slipping, slipping and – they have offered me drugs here to keep me from wailing – yes, I admit, I may have been wailing last night, although I can scarce remember – and the sentence is: *Why oh why did he do it?* I believe I know the answer, Freddy, and I believe that when you have the occasion to do so you will explain all to me, reassure me, as you have so often done in the past, so please, forgive me, won't you, for mentioning it just then.

Let us move on to cheerier things. Although I am allowed a pencil, naturally I'm not allowed a knife to sharpen it, which strikes me as funny. After all, I could poke someone's eye out with a pencil, couldn't I, or my own, if self-injury is what they are hoping to prevent. This thought reminded me of the Punch and Judy show we watched, that first summer on the Isle of Wight, do you remember it? *What, Judy, do you mean to cry? Why, yes you hit me in the eye. I'll just lie down and kick, and die!* It must be curious to be a prison governor and to think of people in this way. To think, is this woman likely to do harm to herself or to one of my wardresses, is she a wicked murderess or a careless Baby Farmer or just a poor girl who couldn't pay the rent? So my point is this, that when this pencil is blunt, I must wait until such occasion as I can request permission to have it sharpened. What I am saying, of course, is please forgive me also if this letter has to end abruptly. I don't as yet, understand the routine in here enough to know when I will next speak to someone.

I must end now as I can hear someone coming. Perhaps I will get to sharpen my pencil! Bear Up.

Thinking of you,
Peidi.

It's strange but if I thought in the past of being in prison, which I have to say, I never did, never believing I would experience such a thing, but if I did in some recess of my mind ever imagine it, which I suppose I must have, given that I have dug up the image I'm about to describe; I realise now that I pictured a hospital ward or a dormitory, a long thin room stuffed with many people, sardines in a tin. I did not picture myself alone like this.

I need to calculate, to know the precise moment.

Was it the first instant I clapped eyes on Freddy? Was it when I decided to marry Percy? Was it the conversation I had with Freddy the night of the theatre?

If only I could pin-point it. That's what keeps me awake, struggling to land on the exact square – like a child playing hopscotch. Was it when I knocked on Freddy's door, that evening in the late summer of 1921? Or was it earlier than that – the evening the Irish hawker called at the door and made his sly remarks to me?

For there must be one, one tiny moment, and if I could find it, search for it and land on it, it might be possible – just possible – to pick up the chalk and throw it again, so that it falls somewhere else. So that with a hop and a skip and a jump I'm landing with both feet on another square, doing something else.

Not here in my cell, thinking this.

Monday 9th October, 1922

Dear Freddy,

A short letter, darlint, which perhaps I will be permitted to send to you. Tomorrow is the day of Percy's funeral. Mother

came last night to tell me and to ask what I would like her to write for me as an inscription on the wreath. Can you imagine! What could I say? Mother suggested: *From your Loving Wife, Edith*, but after a lengthy discussion we decided on: *From Edie*. Judging from what mother says of the hubbub at home, the note will be torn up by some irate well-wisher before long.

I am in good spirits again and hope this letter finds you in the same. I did suggest to Mother that she might plant some hyacinth bulbs, for me, on the soil above Percy's grave, which she seemed to think a very odd request. Mother says I cannot seem to get it into my thick head what has happened. Those were her exact words, Freddy! In fact she began shouting. I suppose when I get out of here I will have to plant the bulbs myself.

I know you will find it painful for me to write to you of Percy but today is the first time I have been able to think of him without fainting. Even as I write my hands are perspiring and the pencil slips in my fingers. But I must press on because I have decided it is not a good thing at all to try to survive by not thinking. I am expecting Percy at any minute to walk in here with his navy jacket on and say, Come on, my girl, and then to take over, bustle a little, fill out the forms, do everything necessary to take me home.

I long for cigarettes but I am allowed books and have ordered three novels.

I did so rely on Percy. I can see that now. Perhaps him being those few years older made a difference. He was dreary, and a terrible dance partner, and there's no need to mention to you his temper, after a drink or two! Still, that dreary side of him is something I crave a little, just now, after the excitement of the last week or so. If I ever get the chance to again, I will time his morning egg *so perfectly*, and I will not complain at all if he stands over me, squeezing my waist with his big hands,

while the egg rattles at the edges of the pan, like something mildly angry, like something about to gently explode.

Tuesday 10th October

Freddy, just a little note. Last night I had such terrible nightmares and I've woken with such a strong sense of fear, feeling all the events of the last week rise up and tumble over me. I did so long to be held and comforted by you and writing to you like this is the closest I can come to that feeling.

The nightmares were brought about by thinking of the funeral today. I suddenly pictured our lovely house at Ilford with the funeral cortege outside of it, and Percy's dreadful friend Harry lighting his pipe and trying to look solemn and my mother with that shocked expression she wears permanently now and Avis, wearing my borrowed black coat and my beautiful embroidered kid gloves. Then I tried to remember who else might turn up for Percy's funeral besides his mother and brother and realised I could think of no one! How few friends he had. Maybe Ernest – the old boy from the Shipping office – and that's the total. I'm not sure Ernest really cared for Percy much, either. There was an awkward occasion one Christmas when Percy had a tippie too many. That was when Percy was the new boy and great things were expected of him. He'll go far, Mother said when I brought him home, tall and broad in his smart black suit. She could hardly stop herself from rubbing her hands together in expectation! I don't suppose you can imagine that now, can you, knowing him only in the last two years? He was judged a promising catch once, you know.

I mention this not to make you feel guilty, darlint, but only because I have no one else to talk to about such things.

Percy had no son or daughter to mourn him, he only had me. I kept going over it and over it. Mother said the coffin had white lilies on the top and brass handles and I imagine Percy in there – yes, I have got that far, Freddy, I can picture him now lying in his coffin with his arms crossed and feel only the merest pang of pain when I do so, like a knife faintly drawn across my heart.

I'm sorry I mentioned the knife there. I didn't mean anything by it.

In my imagining of Percy, his arms are folded rather smugly, rather stonily and he has a look which says: I told you so. He has just finished one of those short coughs which announced his every comment. This morning when this thought first came to me, I wept and wept, realising the strange futile pleasure Percy took in being right about miserable things. Then I wanted to laugh out loud and get hold of Percy and say, so you see it was all true, your wife is a Judy indeed and that young Bywaters came to no good, all as you predicted. I thought I should hate him but instead I had such sorriness for him that his life was worn down to a tiny penny, dull and soiled, and that it should be his pleasure in reducing the lives of others, too. He knew I wasn't happy, didn't he? We often spoke of it and his stubborn response seemed to be: well I am not happy and never have been so what makes you think your life should be different?

If only I could plant some hyacinths here in a bowl to make the room cheery. I am watched night and day – no I don't mean that a wardress is there constantly. I mean that whenever I glance at the spy-hole, someone seems to be passing, just checking up on me. I've discovered that the young one, the freckled, curtseying one is called Eve. I heard her name called by the stout one, Clara, who bustles in with great speed, in fact does everything speedily; ushers a girl in to take out the

pail, replaces the tray, reports on events 'outside', announces visitors: Governor's on his way to see you. Or: Your sister's waiting in the visitors' room. Despite her brusqueness (and I've heard her shouting at other prisoners, so I would certainly not like to be on the wrong side of her!) it's Clara I like best. I believe she is sympathetic to us. But I wonder if I'm a poor judge of such things? It seems to me that Eve glances at me slyly. Sometimes I catch her eyes on my waist, on my shapeless self inside this prison dress and I know what she is thinking.

Hyacinths, violets, how much difference it would make to be allowed to have flowers in our rooms! Violets always remind me of that night when we stood under the statue of Eros, and I was saying to you that the sky was snagged on his arrow because when I threw my head back to look at the stars, that's exactly how it appeared. And you said, not listening to me at all, but searching amongst the women at the steps of the statue, Damn these flower-sellers, milling around the place, why do they never have violets? until the prettiest of the lot came to you and said: Sir, I have the most beautiful violets, what'll you give me for 'em? and you said, A good spanking if you talk to me that way again. But, of course, you were laughing and you bought some anyway and she took it in good spirit when I appeared beside you to take your arm, seeing that you were taken.

Those violets lasted very well. They were kept in a beaker of water beside my bed for nearly a week, prompting no comment at all from Percy. Sometimes I think he knew exactly who they were from. In my fondest moments I think that at some level Percy regretted his ban on happiness and thought: Let her have that tiny scrap and no more. That much doesn't threaten me.

But he was wrong, wasn't he? I think that happiness – once planted – grows roots. Before I was ever happy, I had no

idea of what it might feel like. So many people seem to have no idea at all that they might choose to be happy: one only has to look around to see that. Perhaps it only takes the tiniest shoot of true happiness for that to germinate, to exist somewhere and contain the seed of itself, something that might be passed on. For surely it is impossible to feel something if you don't know – if you have never been told – that such a thing exists?

We had our happiness didn't we, the light might shine through it sometimes but it was green and fresh and unbending as a blade of grass, wasn't it, Freddy, while it lasted?



The first time I clapped eyes on Freddy. It must have been then.

Percy carries the cases, of course. We take a number 25 from Cranbrook Road to Victoria station, and sit at the front on the top deck, this being a *treat* to get us into the holiday mood (since we could have just as easily taken a tram) and Percy remarks, more than once, on the heaviness of my case.

What have you in there? he teases, amiably enough. Half of Carlton & Prior?

I return his teasing moments later when I read an advertisement on the side of the bus passing us. FORCE, *a wholewheat breakfast cereal*, and under the picture it reads: *For breakfast try FORCE.*

I nudge Percy. For breakfast, try force! You've been taking that too literally, darling . . .

His head swivels towards me as if on a stick, and at first he looks like someone who has just sat on a bee. Then right after that, he bursts out laughing. (This, I know, might be considered provocative. But when Percy is in a good mood, I like to take liberties.)

So we arrive in good time at Victoria station, where we are to meet Avis and Freddy. We buy our tickets and have a cup of tea and a Sally Lunn in the tea-shop at the station. That's where we are sitting when they turn up. Fred and Avis. I have my back to them; I'm smoking a cigarette.

Percy sees them first. I watch his face register their arrival and then he noisily scrapes back his chair and stands up and it is all a flurry of greetings and introductions. I stub out the cigarette hastily and stand up too.

My first impressions of Freddy are . . . not particularly tall, perhaps, and wearing a long midnight-blue sort of coat, a spotless grey hat? His shoes gleaming and freshly polished.

He is smiling, a charming smile, a smile that tells me he is conscious of his handsomeness and his good teeth. He holds out his hand. If I close my eyes now I can feel his palm – smooth, warm, flat, the texture of a pebble washed smooth by the sea. When I try, *try* as I'm doing now, to bring that moment to mind, I can hear him jingling coins in his pocket, or hear that odd whistling he did. The snap and click of footsteps on a pavement, the hiss and sulphur of a match being lit . . . but that's not right; that's not my first impression of Freddy surely, that's from somewhere else?

Well, we have scarce a moment to acknowledge each other's existence in the run to the platform and with Avis twittering that we had all misjudged the time and that Percy's watch must be wrong. We bundle ourselves onto the train, laughing, and Percy takes our coats for us and hangs them up and the train begins moving almost as soon as we sit down.

I'm trying to remember Freddy from school; Avis has told me he was there and how much younger than me he was. Naturally enough, girls of fourteen are not much interested in boys of seven! I'm not having much success.

Avis has brought sandwiches of cured ham and boiled

eggs and a flask with more tea, organised as she is, and we are all ravenously hungry and excited, I think, yes, even Percy is talkative and ventures a few jokes, as London fog gives way to green fields and hedges and a blank sheet of cloudless sky.

Freddy doesn't say much to me beyond could I pass him please the salt for his egg, and I'm unsure what impression I've created, or whether I've impressed him at all. I notice the way he eats – the way he always eats – quickly, a little like a wild scavenging animal might eat something, a fox say, with one eye on the look-out for hounds.

It's watching him eating which reminds me. I don't know why but the dip of Freddy's head, the intensity of his concentration, his jaw moving determinedly: all of that brings a picture of Freddy to mind, a memory of the *very* first time I saw him, as a small boy, in school.

Valentine's Lake.

We are swimming, all the children are swimming in Valentine's Lake and Freddy is a small child, one of the youngest. Of course we loathe swimming in the lake – icy and slippery with reeds, sometimes even a water-rat or a duck swimming right into your path to scare the wits out of you, but we all put up with it because it is Mrs Wall who teaches us swimming and terrorises us into compliance. But not Freddy! Now I can see him on the bank of the lake, with a stubborn thrust to his lower lip (a 'pet lip' my mother called such a thing and it was strictly forbidden) there he is, with his skinny legs and his long shorts, refusing, refusing point blank, to go into the water.

We all look on in awe and terror as Mrs Wall seems to rise from the neck of her coat like a swan and then begins to push at him with her stick, screaming: Come on boy, don't waste my time! And still he refuses to go near the water. Some boys call out names, treading water and calling softly,

Scaredy Fred, Baby Boy, and other nastier ones, but there he is, undeterred.

Now the funny part is, I can't remember the outcome. I can't picture whether Freddy is forced by the teacher to swim with the rest of us, or whether he runs away, or is caned or whether he escapes punishment. I remember that his hair is curly and dark and not much different at seven than it is at twenty and his eyes like two bright pearly buttons, much too pretty for a boy. Infuriating – the way that memories offer themselves only as fragments or incomplete stories. The end of this incident refuses to relinquish its secrets and so here he is, childish and uncompromising, not minding how much ire he produces in the teacher. Stuck.

Little Freddy Bywaters, seven years old, refusing to dip a toe in the water.

Wednesday 11th October, 1922

I am writing this back in my room in Holloway in the afternoon at around 2 p.m. I've noticed that if I begin my letter 'Just a little note' it invariably transforms into a great epistle, so I will restrain myself from such inaccurate beginnings in future! I am going to try again to approach the Governor about writing to you and see if he won't allow this letter – and all my others – to be passed on.

This morning was the most bewildering experience, so strange to be out in the world but yet chaperoned and still not free to go the toilet or wave my arms about or run and skip or do anything without being held tightly by the two wardresses bustling me through the mob at Stratford . . . and then to see you standing in court so stiffly, only in fact two feet away from me. I tried not to stare, Freddy, afraid that it might

damage our case. (My solicitor has been talking to me a great deal about this, he even approved of the black dress with the beaded apron and neckline this morning because it is 'sober', but that shows how much *he* knows, as it is in fact the most fashionable Parisien dress I own and any woman would realise that straight away. Fortunately there were few women in the court-room. Still, I think he is wrong and there was no harm in my looking my best. That dress is based on a design by Paul Poiret. It floats across the bust and is very flattering.)

You looked pale, as I suppose, did I. I know so well your composed face, your composed posture, the one which tries to disguise the fact that internally you are like the flame from a gas-jet, pure energy and fire shooting upwards, but all the while casting an illusion of something still enough, calm enough to touch. I only had to glance down at your hands to guess the truth and, as I expected, all your agitation could be seen there, in the way your fingers wrapped themselves around your thumbs in tight fists. I wanted to gently unfold your fingers, the way Mother once unpeeled mine from the school gate when I was small girl and protesting violently at being taken inside. I wanted to kiss each finger and say to you, it's all right, Freddy, bear up.

I really did believe I would be freed by the end of the session. I tried to follow what was said in court this time. Last week was an utter fog and this morning I thought it important to understand. I was feeling fine, quite bolstered up until the prosecutor read my statement from the police station and explained how you and I 'accidentally' met up at Ilford in the police station as I was escorted to another room. There was no accident about it! He and the other policeman *deliberately* engineered it, opening the door at that exact same moment so that you and I were facing each

other, only a yard between us. We were like puppets on the hands of the Punch and Judy Professor. I'm sure you know that as well as I, and in the state I was in about all that had happened my mind would not operate fully. I could only drop my mouth open in the most dramatic way like a drawer falling off its runners and stare at you and then moments later utter those words to them, those words that they seized on and wrote down and then read out in court and made us both sound so guilty: Oh God, oh God, what can I do? Why did he do it, I did not want him to do it. I must tell the truth.

But hearing it read out like that, it sounded different entirely, I was incensed! If you saw me whispering to Stern it was because I was asking him if it was possible to interrupt, to tell the court that in fact I had been *told* in the police station by the officer in charge, by that ugly one, with his horrible protruding eyes and a tongue that doesn't seem to fit right in the bottom of his mouth, I was *told* by him, that you had already confessed to the crime and that I would now be helping you if I told the truth. You must believe that, Freddy. I wasn't trying to save myself from any involvement. I didn't know I *would* be involved, I didn't know I would end up here, I -- Freddy, I ask myself over and over -- *why* did you do it, why oh why . . .

(Later)

I have taken some deep breaths and am trying to compose myself. I know this is no place for recriminations. What you need now from your Peidi is for her to remain cheery, for her to give you her undivided support, her help, her love. And I do, darlint, I offer you all of that. Naturally I am disappointed to be back in here again -- I really thought today would be the last day of my custody and have set a lot of store on it all being over by now. It is what has

helped me to get through the last week, knowing that when we got to court it would all be cleared up. I have tried not to dwell on Percy, on the events of last fortnight, instead willing myself to concentrate on the future, on how we will both survive this experience. Your behaviour . . . well, I'm not sure what to say here, as I worry now at who might read these letters . . . still, your behaviour is at the least *explicable* when they understand our *circumstances* and how much you tried to protect me.

Now I want to end this letter on a different note so will write to you of other things. Did it strike you as astonishing, the crowds, what, how many people would you say, I can never estimate such things . . . were milling outside the Stratford court? Eve, the younger wardress, has a sister in Manor Park, you might remember the sister, Olive Draper, I think she is the same age as Florrie. Olive was there, Eve, told me. They are all trying to get a glimpse of you Mrs Thompson, she said, in her slightly nasty, sly way, as she was escorting me to the bathing rooms.

Eve is hard to fathom, she does not say what she thinks, unlike Clara, but sometimes her look says it all. She has four children, I discovered, so she is not as young as I imagined. She lost her husband in France, and the children are looked after by her sister. (It occurred to me then, Freddy, that I am now a 'widow'. You might think this discovery a belated one, but the word has never presented itself to me before, and even now that it has, even whilst I might concede intellectually that it is true, the word won't seem to stick, but floats away unattached, like a piece of paper on a stream. Others might think of me as a widow. I wonder if you do? If the word has occurred to you, or the idea?)

The bathing rooms, I wonder if you have to suffer

the same indignity? But then, men of course, mind these things far less, and – what am I thinking of – you have spent years on your ship, you can scarcely be embarrassed about performing your ablutions in public! Some of the other prisoners, I can tell, have also now received ‘news’ of who I am. I have scarcely had a conversation with any of the other women and I am, naturally enough, afraid of them. On walking into their company I have that feeling I often had, whilst working at the shop or at the theatre, or even, now I think of it, from school. It is when parts of myself seem to flake and break apart and reshift, and I wonder with a feeling of pure terror, who I am and where I fit in. I am sure that the women here think I have a ‘posh’ accent, a ‘posh’ haircut, that I lived in Ilford with my garden and my job in the city and my big house and thought I was better than them. Of course they don’t say that, but I *know* it anyway.

And then in other situations, walking into the Governor’s office for instance, or when Lady Rothermere used to come into the shop for her hats, or even Diana Sheperton, you remember her, don’t you? Well then, I used to feel so lowly, so ignorant, so ill-bred and petty with silly desires for a ‘maid’ at Kensington Gardens, when there was only Percy and me to look after and I would see myself for what I was, a girl from Stamford Hill, a child as Percy always said, ‘too big for her boots’, with ideas above her station. I would think of Mother, and her mania for buying gloves, all kinds of gloves, and never letting anyone but us girls see her hands so that no one else could realise how calloused and rough they were, from *her* childhood, her years of hard work.

You know, Freddy, before all of this, I really expected Mother to be proud of me. I mean, I had a good job and yet when I used to go on a Friday for tea at Shakespeare

Crescent, what I felt most strongly even then, was her *disapproval*, the constant questions from Father about the patter of tiny feet, the constant comments from her on the hat I was wearing, or the stockings, or the cigarettes I was smoking. I kept thinking that I had done all she wanted, that is, found myself a solid husband with prospects and a lovely big house and then, to cap it all, started to earn more money than Percy, in fact, earned more in a week than Father used to earn in a month and instead of being pleased for me she seemed, well . . . what was it? Always trying to crush me. I don't want to make Mother sound cruel, which she wasn't. I keep going over that occasion I told you about, the planting of the hyacinths, the way she looked at me. I tremble when I think of it, although I don't understand why.

I feel sometimes as if I am constantly shrinking and then inflating – I am serious here, I know I can talk to you of such things and that you won't laugh at me – I can't seem to remain the same size in any given situation and I still have that sensation, I have it in fact more powerfully lately. In court, I'm sorry to go back to this, but I must – in court, I thought, if only I was educated, like Stern, my solicitor, if only I could make sense of their strange words and see myself the way they see me, maybe then I could understand how I should be, how I should behave, what is *required* of me to make them *understand*.

Well, I must finish this now (my wrist is aching and the pencil is worn down to the stub). I will see you in court in Stratford, darlint, on Tuesday the 17th and now I will begin again my petition to the Governor, begging him to allow me to send you these letters.

All love,
Your Peidi.