

Bess was Syd's favourite sibling (of six).

c/o Dept of Applied Mathematics,  
University of Cape Town  
17/5/42.

Dear Bess,

Nothing has been heard of Sydney for three months but I am not giving up hope, but I doubt if we shall hear from him till after the war.

I cannot for the life of me imagine why Singapore surrendered. The bombing did not strike either me or the children as anything to be upset about, but the powers that be in the army thought it something to retreat from.

The Air Ministry do not know anything about Sydney and have not decided whether to give me a wife's allowance or a widows pension, and are continuing the wife's allowance. This makes me hopeful as I do not think they would do so unless they were confident he is all right somewhere. Most of the wives of men in Java have not heard from him and I do not think they can all be casualties.

I have been lucky enough to get a junior lectureship here, and so we are quite comfortably off. This business has taught me even better than I knew already how wicked it is to bring up girls to think they will get husbands to keep them. Even the best of husbands is sure to have periods in which he cannot. In our case Sydney has no idea where we are any more than I have where he is.

I don't think any girl should marry unless she is capable of earning her own and her children's living if anything happens to her husband. The allowance I should get if I did not work would be board and lodging and half-a-crown a day, which is not enough to keep Ivor in shoe-leather in this country.

Incidentally the local children go about barefoot, not because they cannot afford shoes, but because their parents think it gives them good carriage. I cannot ~~buy~~ *buy* Margery and Ivor on that game this winter as they are sensitive to the cold.

I love South Africa, especially Cape Town, which is even more beautiful than Natal. The village we stayed in Natal reminded me of Bude, which is really beautiful enough for anybody, but Cape Town is even more wonderful and like nothing else on earth. Perhaps Gibraltar is the best imitation, but our mountain is

twenty times as long as the rock of Gibraltar.

It is very hard to get accommodation or servants here so we are all three living in one room in a boarding-house. When the children go to bed I hang the bedspreads on a clothes-line across the room and sit down with a reading lamp and a fire at the other end.

The climate is peculiar. In the mornings it is so cold that we can see each others' breath, but in the afternoon it is always warm enough to sit in the garden except on wet days. The sun goes down behind Table Mountain before five o'clock, and then it gets cold very quickly indeed. This is a very cheap boarding-house and the food is not good, but I expect it is better than we could get in England. There is a lovely huge courtyard for the children to play in and we are in a corner of the courtyard well away from people to be disturbed. The children are having to learn not to speak to me when I am working, but I do not see why not. I was never allowed to speak to my father if he was busy so why should they be allowed to speak to me.

I am very lucky to have this photo of Sydney. It is good enough to enlarge. I have had an enlargement done for myself.

I am not making any enquiries about Syd via the Air Ministry or the Red Cross as I know he would consider it cowardly to do so.

My work is for three years so all being well we shall not be seeing you for a long time. The long holidays are at Christmas here, and they are long enough for us to come to England in peace time, but I do not suppose we shall ever possess the fares again. It seems incredible that I ever had leisure for such things as cooking and housework, and I am afraid I shall never be able to afford a home again.

Yours affectionately

Enid

c/o University of Cape Town  
5/8/44

Dear Bess,

We are now established in a better house, with two big bedrooms both getting the sunshine. Our last landlady was inclined to economise in fuel, but this one keeps a big fire all the evenings, and light sit in the morning on wet days. Her husband is a doctor, in the army at present. There are three children younger than Margery.

Ivor had his tonsils out last week, and is already back at school. He has no difficulty with his lessons in spite of six months away. I suppose they go so slowly at his stage.

~~I am sure Winnie can come to South Africa when she is trained and has had some experience. She can exchange with a teacher here for a year, under the Empire Exchange Scheme.~~

Of course she has to risk being sent to some out of the way desert place, but most of the big schools are in nice surroundings. Of course that sort of thing is not being done now on account of the war, but it will be done by when Winnie is old enough to try. They have to have experience and a good testimonial, as the government will only send out competent teachers who are a good advertisement. I do not think they have to pay fares. She would be made at home anywhere near here, as I know so many people.

I do not know if there is anything similar for nurses, but it is not so likely, as the travelling itself is educational. From having Ivor in hospital here, I think our hospitals could learn quite a lot from the South African ones, in the way of making patients happy. It was all wonderfully comfortable and kind, but the fees were fifteen shillings a day for just staying in hospital.

They have visitors every day, and let the parents stay with the child for twenty-four hours after an operation.

~~I expect they do not like nurses who cannot speak African.~~  
It seems to me to be a profession in which language is most important.

The eldest daughter of the house I am staying in is training now.

Love from

Eric

Dear Bess,

You will be glad to hear that we have had the two enclosed cards from Syd yesterday. I have not got Pitchers address, so perhaps you will either let them know or else ~~writexix~~ send me their address if you have it. I have ~~some vague idea~~ about Chaucer Road Broxton, but I do not expect that is standing now since the flying bombs, and I am not sure about the number or if it was really them or someone else. They are very faithful friends. Incidentally I do not know how they are getting on and whether Daphne is married.

I am afraid it would be a very complicated business for us to come over to Sandwich during these holidays, as it is too much for one day, and then you have the complications of the rations, and it means so much extra bedding for you. I think a better idea would be if Winnie took a day trip down to Brighton some Saturday during the winter the girls could get to know each other. If she let me know by Thursday any week, I could meet her at the station, and I should have time to write back to her if it were inconvenient.

I am teaching half-time at the Boy's secondary school from September 13 onward until a master who is in the R.A.F. is released. That should fit in nicely, as the master and Syd ought to arrive back about the same time. ~~It is absolutely essential for me to work as~~ the wife of an Officer Prisoner of war only gets two sevenths of his pay, whereas the wife of a ranker gets enough to live on.

Even that two-sevenths has only just been paid for all the time since I left South Africa. I shall not get any pay for teaching until the first of October, so you see I am really quite hard up and I could not really afford a railway fare to Sandwich.

Ivor came seventh in his class, and has been put up into the Scholarship class, so he should get a Scholarship next year. The only thing is that he will be just under age for the exam.

In any case as things are it looks as if Syd may be able to come to Sandwich with us round about Christmas time. I hope Ivor gets a scholarship before he is settled at a station because having once got one he can have it transferred to any other school in England.

Miss Dolling, who is at Winnie's college was Secretary to the Governors of my college when I was a student. She did not lecture or have anything to do with us, but bossed the gardeners, and saw about repairs to the building, and such things. I believe she is principal of St Gabriels. ~~Do the girls know Miss Burton at Dover County School?~~ She was at college with me.

I did not know that Lorna's brother was alive. I suppose the other one was killed in Malaya. I have lost Lorna's mother's address. It was something to do with "Paddock"

Love from  
Eric.

1945