A woman with long dark hair is shown from the chest down, wearing a white, long-sleeved dress with a lace-up front. She is holding a black, wide-brimmed hat with a decorative band of small blue and green beads. She is standing in a field of tall, dry grass. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with a light blue sky.

DEAR ENEMY

Jean Webster

Jean Webster

Dear Enemy

Romance Novel

e-artnow, 2021

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December

Stone Gate, Worcester, Massachusetts,
December 27.

Dear Judy:

Your letter is here. I have read it twice, and with amazement. Do I understand that Jervis has given you, for a Christmas present, the making over of the John Grier Home into a model institution, and that you have chosen me to disburse the money? Me - I, Sallie McBride, the head of an orphan asylum! My poor people, have you lost your senses, or have you become addicted to the use of opium, and is this the raving of two fevered imaginations? I am exactly as well fitted to take care of one hundred children as to become the curator of a zoo.

And you offer as bait an interesting Scotch doctor? My dear Judy - likewise my dear Jervis - I see through you! I know exactly the kind of family conference that has been held about the Pendleton fireside.

"Isn't it a pity that Sallie hasn't amounted to more since she left college? She ought to be doing something useful instead of frittering her time away in the petty social life of Worcester. Also [Jervis speaks] she is getting interested in that confounded young Hallock, too good-looking and fascinating and erratic; I never did like politicians. We must deflect her mind with some uplifting and absorbing

occupation until the danger is past. Ha! I have it! We will put her in charge of the John Grier Home." Oh, I can hear him as clearly as if I were there! On the occasion of my last visit in your delectable household Jervis and I had a very solemn conversation in regard to (1) marriage, (2) the low ideals of politicians, (3) the frivolous, useless lives that society women lead.

Please tell your moral husband that I took his words deeply to heart, and that ever since my return to Worcester I have been spending one afternoon a week reading poetry with the inmates of the Female Inebriate Asylum. My life is not so purposeless as it appears.

Also let me assure you that the politician is not dangerously imminent; and that, anyway, he is a very desirable politician, even though his views on tariff and single tax and trade-unionism do not exactly coincide with Jervis's.

Your desire to dedicate my life to the public good is very sweet, but you should look at it from the asylum's point of view.

Have you no pity for those poor defenseless little orphan children?

I have, if you haven't, and I respectfully decline the position which you offer.

I shall be charmed, however, to accept your invitation to visit you in New York, though I must acknowledge that I am not very excited over the list of gaieties you have planned.

Please substitute for the New York Orphanage and the Foundling Hospital a few theaters and operas and a dinner

or so. I have two new evening gowns and a blue and gold coat with a white fur collar.

I dash to pack them; so telegraph fast if you don't wish to see me for myself alone, but only as a successor to Mrs. Lippett.

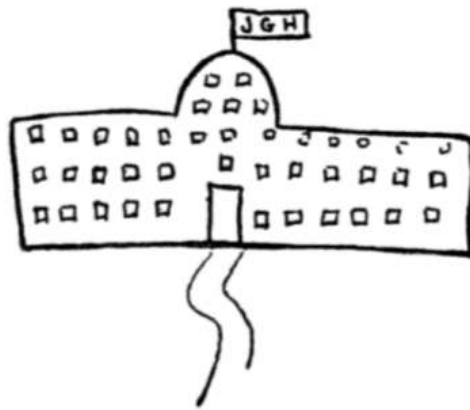
Yours as ever,

Entirely frivolous,
And intending
to remain so,

Sallie McBride

P.S. Your invitation is especially seasonable. A charming young politician named Gordon Hallock is to be in New York next week. I am sure you will like him when you know him better.

P.S. 2. Sallie taking her afternoon walk as Judy would like to see her:



I ask you again, have you both gone mad?

February

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The John Grier Home,
February 15.

Dear Judy:

We arrived in a snowstorm at eleven last night, Singapore and Jane and I. It does not appear to be customary for superintendents of orphan asylums to bring with them personal maids and Chinese chows. The night watchman and housekeeper, who had waited up to receive me, were thrown into an awful flutter. They had never seen the like of Sing, and thought that I was introducing a wolf into the fold. I reassured them as to his dogginess, and the watchman, after studying his black tongue, ventured a witticism. He wanted to know if I fed him on huckleberry pie.

It was difficult to find accommodations for my family. Poor Sing was dragged off whimpering to a strange woodshed, and given a piece of burlap. Jane did not fare much better. There was not an extra bed in the building, barring a five-foot crib in the hospital room. She, as you know, approaches six. We tucked her in, and she spent the night folded up like a jackknife. She has limped about today, looking like a decrepit letter S, openly deploring this latest escapade on the part of her flighty mistress, and longing for the time when we shall come to our senses, and return to the parental fireside in Worcester.

I know that she is going to spoil all my chances of being popular with the rest of the staff. Having her here is the

silliest idea that was ever conceived, but you know my family. I fought their objections step by step, but they made their last stand on Jane. If I brought her along to see that I ate nourishing food and didn't stay up all night, I might come – temporarily; but if I refused to bring her – oh, dear me, I am not sure that I was ever again to cross the threshold of Stone Gate! So here we are, and neither of us very welcome, I am afraid.

I woke by a gong at six this morning, and lay for a time listening to the racket that twenty-five little girls made in the lavatory over my head. It appears that they do not get baths – just face-washes – but they make as much splashing as twenty-five puppies in a pool. I rose and dressed and explored a bit. You were wise in not having me come to look the place over before I engaged.

While my little charges were at breakfast, it seemed a happy time to introduce myself; so I sought the dining room. Horror piled on horror – those bare drab walls and oil-cloth-covered tables with tin cups and plates and wooden benches, and, by way of decoration, that one illuminated text, “The Lord Will Provide”! The trustee who added that last touch must possess a grim sense of humor.

Really, Judy, I never knew there was any spot in the world so entirely ugly; and when I saw those rows and rows of pale, listless, blue-uniformed children, the whole dismal business suddenly struck me with such a shock that I almost collapsed. It seemed like an unachievable goal for one person to bring sunshine to one hundred little faces when what they need is a mother apiece.

I plunged into this thing lightly enough, partly because you were too persuasive, and mostly, I honestly think, because that scurrilous Gordon Hallock laughed so uproariously at the idea of my being able to manage an asylum. Between you all you hypnotized me. And then of course, after I began reading up on the subject and visiting all those seventeen institutions, I got excited over orphans, and wanted to put my own ideas into practice. But now I'm aghast at finding myself here; it's such a stupendous undertaking. The future health and happiness of a hundred human beings lie in my hands, to say nothing of their three or four hundred children and thousand grandchildren. The thing's geometrically progressive. It's awful. Who am I to undertake this job? Look, oh, look for another superintendent!

Jane says dinner's ready. Having eaten two of your institution meals, the thought of another doesn't excite me.

Later.

The staff had mutton hash and spinach, with tapioca pudding for dessert. What the children had I hate to consider.

I started to tell you about my first official speech at breakfast this morning. It dealt with all the wonderful new changes that are to come to the John Grier Home through the generosity of Mr. Jervis Pendleton, the president of our board of trustees, and of Mrs. Pendleton, the dear "Aunt Judy" of every little boy and girl here.

Please don't object to my featuring the Pendleton family so prominently. I did it for political reasons. As the entire

working staff of the institution was present, I thought it a good opportunity to emphasize the fact that all of these upsetting, innovations come straight from headquarters, and not out of my excitable brain.

The children stopped eating and stared. The conspicuous color of my hair and the frivolous tilt of my nose are evidently new attributes in a superintendent. My colleagues also showed plainly that they consider me too young and too inexperienced to be set in authority. I haven't seen Jervis's wonderful Scotch doctor yet, but I assure you that he will have to be *very* wonderful to make up for the rest of these people, especially the kindergarten teacher. Miss Snaith and I clashed early on the subject of fresh air; but I intend to get rid of this dreadful institution smell, if I freeze every child into a little ice statue.

This being a sunny, sparkling, snowy afternoon, I ordered that dungeon of a playroom closed and the children out of doors.

"She's chasin' us out," I heard one small urchin grumbling as he struggled into a two-years-too-small overcoat.

They simply stood about the yard, all humped in their clothes, waiting patiently to be allowed to come back in. No running or shouting or coasting or snowballs. Think of it! These children don't know how to play.

Still Later.

I have already begun the congenial task of spending your money. I bought eleven hot-water bottles this afternoon (every one that the village drug store contained) likewise

some woolen blankets and padded quilts. And the windows are wide open in the babies' dormitory. Those poor little tots are going to enjoy the perfectly new sensation of being able to breathe at night.

There are a million things I want to grumble about, but it's half-past ten, and Jane says I *must* go to bed.

Yours in command,

Sallie McBride.

P.S. Before turning in, I tiptoed through the corridor to make sure that all was right, and what do you think I found? Miss Snaith softly closing the windows in the babies' dormitory! Just as soon as I can find a suitable position for her in an old ladies' home, I am going to discharge that woman.

Jane takes the pen from my hand.

Good night.

The John Grier Home,
February 20.

Dear Judy:

Dr. Robin MacRae called this afternoon to make the acquaintance of the new superintendent. Please invite him to dinner upon the occasion of his next visit to New York, and see for yourself what your husband has done. Jervis grossly misrepresented the facts when he led me to believe that one of the chief advantages of my position would be the daily intercourse with a man of Dr. MacRae's polish and brilliancy and scholarliness and charm.

He is tall and thinnish, with sandy hair and cold gray eyes. During the hour he spent in my society (and I was very sprightly) no shadow of a smile so much as lightened the straight line of his mouth. Can a shadow lighten? Maybe not; but, anyway, what *is* the matter with the man? Has he committed some remorseful crime, or is his taciturnity due merely to his natural Scotchness? He's as companionable as a granite tombstone!

Incidentally, our doctor didn't like me any more than I liked him. He thinks I'm frivolous and inconsequential, and totally unfitted for this position of trust. I dare say Jervis has had a letter from him by now asking to have me removed.

In the matter of conversation we didn't hit it off in the least. He discussed broadly and philosophically the evils of institutional care for dependent children, while I lightly deplored the unbecoming coiffure that prevails among our girls.

To prove my point, I had in Sadie Kate, my special errand orphan. Her hair is strained back as tightly as though it had been done with a monkey-wrench, and is braided behind into two wiry little pigtails. Decidedly, orphans' ears need to be softened. But Dr. Robin MacRae doesn't give a hang whether their ears are becoming or not; what he cares about is their stomachs. We also split upon the subject of red petticoats. I don't see how any little girl can preserve any self-respect when dressed in a red flannel petticoat an irregular inch longer than her blue checked gingham dress; but he thinks that red petticoats are cheerful and warm and hygienic. I foresee a warlike reign for the new superintendent.

In regard to the doctor, there is just one detail to be thankful for: he is almost as new as I am, and he cannot instruct me in the traditions of the asylum. I don't believe I *could* have worked with the old doctor, who, judging from the specimens of his art that he left behind, knew as much about babies as a veterinary surgeon.

In the matter of asylum etiquette, the entire staff has undertaken my education. Even the cook this morning told me firmly that the John Grier Home has corn meal mush on Wednesday nights.

Are you searching hard for another superintendent? I'll stay until she comes, but please find her fast.

Yours,
With my mind made up,

Sallie McBride.

Sup't's Office, John Grier Home,
February 27.

Dear Gordon:

Are you still insulted because I wouldn't take your advice? Don't you know that a reddish-haired person of Irish forebears, with a dash of Scotch, can't be driven, but must be gently led? Had you been less obnoxiously insistent, I should have listened sweetly, and been saved. As it is, I frankly confess that I have spent the last five days in repenting our quarrel. You were right, and I was wrong, and, as you see, I handsomely acknowledge it. If I ever emerge from this present predicament, I shall in the future be

guided (almost always) by your judgment. Could any woman make a more sweeping retraction than that?

The romantic glamour which Judy cast over this orphan asylum exists only in her poetic imagination. The place is *awful*. Words can't tell you how dreary and dismal and smelly it is: long corridors, bare walls; blue-uniformed, dough-faced little inmates that haven't the slightest resemblance to human children. And oh, the dreadful institution smell! A mingling of wet scrubbed floors, unaired rooms, and food for a hundred people always steaming on the stove.

The asylum not only has to be made over, but every child as well, and it's too herculean a task for such a selfish, luxurious, and lazy person as Sallie McBride ever to have undertaken. I'm resigning the very first moment that Judy can find a suitable successor, but that, I fear, will not be immediately. She has gone off South, leaving me stranded, and of course, after having promised, I can't simply abandon her asylum. But in the meantime I assure you that I'm homesick.

Write me a cheering letter, and send a flower to brighten my private drawing room. I inherited it, furnished, from Mrs. Lippett. The wall is covered with a tapestry paper in brown and red; the furniture is electric-blue plush, except the center table, which is gilt. Green predominates in the carpet. If you presented some pink rosebuds, they would complete the color scheme.

I really was obnoxious that last evening, but you are avenged.

Remorsefully yours,

Sallie McBride.

P.S. You needn't have been so grumpy about the Scotch doctor. The man is everything dour that the word "Scotch" implies. I detest him on sight, and he detests me. Oh, we're going to have a sweet time working together



"Oh Willow Woe is me
Alack & Well a day
If I were only free
I'd hie me far away"

The John Grier Home,
February 22.

My Dear Gordon:

Your vigorous and expensive message is here. I know that you have plenty of money, but that is no reason why you should waste it so frivolously. When you feel so bursting with talk that only a hundred-word telegram will relieve an explosion, at least turn it into a night lettergram. My orphans can use the money if you don't need it.

Also, my dear sir, please use a trifle of common sense. Of course I can't chuck the asylum in the casual manner you suggest. It wouldn't be fair to Judy and Jervis. If you will pardon the statement, they have been my friends for many more years than you, and I have no intention of letting them go hang. I came up here in a spirit of – well, say adventure, and I must see the venture through. You wouldn't like me if I were a short sport. This doesn't mean, however, that I am sentencing myself for life; I am intending to resign just as soon as the opportunity comes. But really I ought to feel somewhat gratified that the Pendletons were willing to trust me with such a responsible post. Though you, my dear sir, do not suspect it, I possess considerable executive ability, and more common sense than is visible on the surface. If I chose to put my whole soul into this enterprise, I could make the rippingest superintendent that any 111 orphans ever had.

I suppose you think that's funny? It's true. Judy and Jervis know it, and that's why they asked me to come. So you see, when they have shown so much confidence in me, I can't throw them over in quite the unceremonious fashion you

suggest. So long as I am here, I am going to accomplish just as much as it is given one person to accomplish every twenty-four hours. I am going to turn the place over to my successor with things moving fast in the right direction.

But in the meantime please don't wash your hands of me under the belief that I'm too busy to be homesick; for I'm not. I wake up every morning and stare at Mrs. Lippett's wallpaper in a sort of daze, feeling as though it's some bad dream, and I'm not really here. What on earth was I thinking of to turn my back upon my nice cheerful own home and the good times that by rights are mine? I frequently agree with your opinion of my sanity.

But why, may I ask, should you be making such a fuss? You wouldn't be seeing me in any case. Worcester is quite as far from Washington as the John Grier Home. And I will add, for your further comfort, that whereas there is no man in the neighborhood of this asylum who admires red hair, in Worcester there are several. Therefore, most difficult of men, please be appeased. I didn't come entirely to spite you. I wanted an adventure in life, and, oh dear! oh dear! I'm having it! *Please* write soon, and cheer me up.

Yours in sackcloth,

Sallie.

The John Grier Home,
February 24.

Dear Judy:

You tell Jervis that I am not hasty at forming judgments. I have a sweet, sunny, unsuspecting nature, and I like

everybody, almost. But no one could like that Scotch doctor. He *never* smiles.

He paid me another visit this afternoon. I invited him to accommodate himself in one of Mrs. Lippett's electric-blue chairs, and then sat down opposite to enjoy the harmony. He was dressed in a mustard-colored homespun, with a dash of green and a glint of yellow in the weave, a "heather mixture" calculated to add life to a dull Scotch moor. Purple socks and a red tie, with an amethyst pin, completed the picture. Clearly, your paragon of a doctor is not going to be of much assistance in pulling up the esthetic tone of this establishment.

During the fifteen minutes of his call he succinctly outlined all the changes he wishes to see accomplished in this institution. *He*, forsooth! And what, may I ask, are the duties of a superintendent? Is she merely a figurehead to take orders from the visiting physician?

It's up wi' the bonnets o' McBride and MacRae!

I am,
Indignantly yours,

Sallie.

The John Grier Home,
Monday.

Dear Dr. MacRae:

I am sending this note by Sadie Kate, as it seems impossible to reach you by telephone. Is the person who calls herself Mrs. McGur-rk and hangs up in the middle of a

sentence your housekeeper? If she answers the telephone often, I don't see how your patients have any patience left.

As you did not come this morning, per agreement, and the painters did come, I was fain to choose a cheerful corn color to be placed upon the walls of your new laboratory room. I trust there is nothing unhygienic about corn color.

Also, if you can spare a moment this afternoon, kindly motor yourself to Dr. Brice's on Water Street and look at the dentist's chair and appurtenances which are to be had at half-price. If all of the pleasant paraphernalia of his profession were here - in a corner of your laboratory - Dr. Brice could finish his 111 new patients with much more despatch than if we had to transport them separately to Water Street. Don't you think that's a useful idea? It came to me in the middle of the night, but as I never happened to buy a dentist's chair before, I'd appreciate some professional advice.

Yours truly,

S. McBride.

March

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The John Grier Home,
March 1.

Dear Judy:

Do stop sending me telegrams!

Of course I know that you want to know everything that is happening, and I would send a daily bulletin, but I truly don't find a minute. I am so tired when night comes that if it weren't for Jane's strict discipline, I should go to bed with my clothes on.

Later, when we slip a little more into routine, and I can be sure that my assistants are all running off their respective jobs, I shall be the regularest correspondent you ever had.

It was five days ago, wasn't it, that I wrote? Things have been happening in those five days. The MacRae and I have mapped out a plan of campaign, and are stirring up this place to its sluggish depths. I like him less and less, but we have declared a sort of working truce. And the man *is* a worker. I always thought I had sufficient energy myself, but when an improvement is to be introduced, I toil along panting in his wake. He is as stubborn and tenacious and bull-doggish as a Scotchman can be, but he does understand babies; that is, he understands their physiological aspects. He hasn't any more feeling for them personally than for so many frogs that he might happen to be dissecting.

Do you remember Jarvis's holding forth one evening for an hour or so about our doctor's beautiful humanitarian ideals? *C'est à rire!* The man merely regards the J. G. H. as his own private laboratory, where he can try out scientific experiments with no loving parents to object. I shouldn't be surprised any day to find him introducing scarlet fever cultures into the babies' porridge in order to test a newly invented serum.

Of the house staff, the only two who strike me as really efficient are the primary teacher and the furnace-man. You should see how the children run to meet Miss Matthews and beg for caresses, and how painstakingly polite they are to the other teachers. Children are quick to size up character. I shall be very embarrassed if they are too polite to me.

Just as soon as I get my bearings a little, and know exactly what we need, I am going to accomplish some widespread discharging. I should like to begin with Miss Snaith; but I discover that she is the niece of one of our most generous trustees, and isn't exactly dischargeable. She's a vague, chinless, pale-eyed creature, who talks through her nose and breathes through her mouth. She can't say anything decisively and then stop; her sentences all trail off into incoherent murmurings. Every time I see the woman I feel an almost uncontrollable desire to take her by the shoulders and shake some decision into her. And Miss Snaith is the one who has had entire supervision of the seventeen little tots aged from two to five! But, anyway, even if I can't discharge her, I have reduced her to a subordinate position without her being aware of the fact.

The doctor has found for me a charming girl who lives a few miles from here and comes in every day to manage the kindergarten. She has big, gentle, brown eyes, like a cow's, and motherly manners (she is just nineteen), and the babies love her.

At the head of the nursery I have placed a jolly, comfortable middle-aged woman who has reared five of her own and has a hand with bairns. Our doctor also found her. You see, he *is* useful. She is technically under Miss Snaith, but is usurping dictatorship in a satisfactory fashion. I can now sleep at night without being afraid that my babies are being inefficiently murdered.

You see, our reforms are getting started; and while I acquiesce with all the intelligence at my command to our doctor's basic scientific upheavals, still, they sometimes leave me cold. The problem that keeps churning and churning in my mind is: How can I ever instil enough love and warmth and sunshine into those bleak little lives? And I am not sure that the doctor's science will accomplish that.

One of our most pressing *intelligent* needs just now is to get our records into coherent form. The books have been most outrageously unkept. Mrs. Lippett had a big black account book into which she jumbled any facts that happened to drift her way as to the children's family, their conduct, and their health. But for weeks at a time she didn't trouble to make an entry. If any adopting family wants to know a child's parentage, half the time we can't even tell where we got the child!

"Where did you come from, baby dear?"

"The blue sky opened, and I am here,"

is an exact description of their arrival.

We need a field worker to travel about the country and pick up all the hereditary statistics she can about our chicks. It will be an easy matter, as most of them have relatives. What do you think of Janet Ware for the job? You remember what a shark she was in economics; she simply battened on tables and charts and surveys.

I have also to inform you that the John Grier Home is undergoing a very searching physical examination, and it is the shocking truth that out of the twenty-eight poor little rats so far examined only five are up to specification. And the five have not been here long.

Do you remember the ugly green reception room on the first floor? I have removed as much of its greenness as possible, and fitted it up as the doctor's laboratory. It contains scales and drugs and, most professional touch of all, a dentist's chair and one of those sweet grinding machines. (Bought them second-hand from Doctor Brice in the village, who is putting in, for the gratification of his own patients, white enamel and nickel-plate.) That drilling machine is looked upon as an infernal engine, and I as an infernal monster for instituting it. But every little victim who is discharged *filled* may come to my room every day for a week and receive two pieces of chocolate. Though our children are not conspicuously brave, they are, we discover, fighters. Young Thomas Kehoe nearly bit the doctor's thumb in two after kicking over a tableful of instruments. It requires physical strength as well as skill to be dental adviser to the J. G. H.

Interrupted here to show a benevolent lady over the institution. She asked fifty irrelevant questions, took up an hour of my time, then finally wiped away a tear and left a dollar for my “poor little charges.”

So far, my poor little charges are not enthusiastic about these new reforms. They don’t care much for the sudden draft of fresh air that has blown in upon them, or the deluge of water. I am shoving in two baths a week, and as soon as we collect tubs enough and a few extra faucets, they are going to get *seven*.



SEVEN BATHS A WEEK!!

Unprecedented Cruelty
on the part of an Orphan
Asylum Superintendent

But at least I have started one most popular reform. Our daily bill of fare has been increased, a change deplored by

the cook as causing trouble, and deplored by the rest of the staff as causing an immoral increase in expense. ECONOMY spelt in capitals has been the guiding principle of this institution for so many years that it has become a religion. I assure my timid co-workers twenty times a day that, owing to the generosity of our president, the endowment has been exactly doubled, and that I have vast sums besides from Mrs. Pendleton for necessary purposes like ice cream. But they simply *can't* get over the feeling that it is a wicked extravagance to feed these children.

The doctor and I have been studying with care the menus of the past, and we are filled with amazement at the mind that could have devised them. Here is one of her frequently recurring dinners:

Boiled potatoes
Boiled rice
Blanc mange

It's a wonder to me that the children are anything more than one hundred and eleven little lumps of starch.

Looking about this institution, one is moved to misquote Robert Browning.

“There may be heaven; there must be hell;
Meantime, there is the John Grier – well!”

S. McB.

The John Grier Home,
Saturday.

Dear Judy:

Dr. Robin MacRae and I fought another battle yesterday over a very trivial matter (in which I was right), and since then I have adopted for our doctor a special pet name. "Good morning, Enemy!" was my greeting today, at which he was quite solemnly annoyed. He says he does not wish to be regarded as an enemy. He is not in the least antagonistic - so long as I mold my policy upon his wishes!

We have two new children, Isador Gutschneider and Max Yog, given to us by the Baptist Ladies' Aid Society. Where on earth do you suppose those children picked up such a religion? I didn't want to take them, but the poor ladies were very persuasive, and they pay the princely sum of four dollars and fifty cents per week per child. This makes 113, which makes us very crowded. I have half a dozen babies to give away. Find me some kind families who want to adopt.



You know it's very embarrassing not to be able to remember offhand how large your family is, but mine seems to vary from day to day, like the stock market. I should like