

## Letter from Mary to Arthur Prior, undated<sup>1</sup>

CANTERBURY UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

CHRISTCHURCH N.Z.

My darling,

Many happy returns of the day. I think I might even be home with you tomorrow – a belated birthday present. The gift itself must wait until its given. Can look around for something nice. But she sends a lot of kisses to make do.

Do you know there is a joker almost as profuse as you with inverted commas – or underlining used “as an equivalent to it; and that is Henry James. Sentences {2} like this one abound:

It seemed indeed incredible so Hyacinth mused that the splendid creature who, at that very moment should swim so exquisitely into the room, should, so immediately bring them, as it were to “down to tin tacs” as she did when she magnificently rang out: “Oh we must, we simply must, all go on this binge” this very moment.”

You see its[sic] an awful example, however illustrious. I must, by the way, tell you some of the lovelier things in Edith Sitwell – later I’ll read you them, {3} but for the moment I’ll resist temptation, and tell you what little news there is. I’m been up in chair and I can walk without support – in fact, I can walk an amazing ease, though I do feel I’ve Stilts, and not leap! Here is some lovely Edith Sitwell. She is very preoccupied with the fact of lover’s deaths and the hardness of that separation and cease in the rejuvenation of the earth with spring, and the growth of life from decay – a symbol of the Phoenix-like eternity of love. I am trying to choose {4} quotations, but it is very hard. They are so build up architecturally it is not easy. It is not a style with detail, but one of sweep and weight.

But this bit is beautiful, describing the death of his love: “Then Sun of my life, she went to warn the Dead and must now go sunless in their stead.” This poem “One day in Spring” reminds me at times of Henry King’s Exequy on the day of his wife’s death. Then sound of the opening to a poem is super

“Though the world is slip and gone, sounds my loud discordant cry

- note the avoidance in “song” and use of “cry” – not underlined sounds my {5} loud discordant song, which wd have been almost a rhyme - So near one wd instinctively use it. The word my is more or less heard counter to this other word “cry” wh. Our own mind puts forward. So the discord is increased.

Now I’ve been shifted to a new room, as suddenly as anything, and I can’t see where in my locker I’ve put my pen. Everyone here – there as six – is snoozing, and it seems to be the rule to do so, so perhaps I’d better dose too.

Extra birthday kisses, da

From Polly.

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<sup>1</sup> Editors’ note: This letter has been edited by Martin Prior, Peter Øhrstrøm and David Jakobsen. It is part of the Martin Prior Collection, presently kept at Aalborg University folder C, item 5. The letter is written on standard unheaded writing paper. It was kept in an envelope stamped 9. August 1954.

