



UNTIL THE LETTER CAME

An adaptation of *The Secret of Pheasant Cottage* by Patricia St. John

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Chapter 1

NOTE TO THE TEACHER

Until the Letter Came is an adaptation of Patricia St. John's *The Secret of Pheasant Cottage* which was originally written circa 1930. In all of her stories, Ms. St. John had a way of making them relevant for each generation. This story is no exception.

Until the Letter Came takes place in Great Britain. For this reason, there are several parts to the story that could be unfamiliar to those living outside the British Isles. The following background information will help you to tell the story. Feel free to incorporate the explanations into the story. We have kept the British setting, allowing children to learn about customs other than their own.

The main character in the story, Lucy, lived with her grandparents in a cottage located on an estate. Her grandfather had been groundskeeper at the castle on the estate for over 30 years.

You will notice a reference to *Girl Guides*. This British organization is similar to the *Girl Scouts* in the United States.

In this story, the word *holiday* is used for the word *vacation*. Instead of saying *summer vacation* or *Christmas vacation*, those speaking British English would say *summer holidays* or *Christmas holidays*. Instead of going on a vacation, they take a holiday.

There is a reference to the Cotswold Hills. This range of hills is located to the west of London, near Wales. This range runs about 50 mi/80 km long and is full of ridges with fantastic views of the countryside. These hills consist of meadows, valleys, woodlands, quaint villages, old churches, and manor houses. This area is known mostly for the honey-colored buildings built from the limestone found among the hills.



Show Illustration #1

It was eleven o'clock on the first day of May. Lucy and her kindergarten friends were having a morning break. They sat under the tree in the school playground, drinking their milk. Everything was perfect

until Harvey spoke in a loud voice.

"Lucy, why do you live with your gran? Why don't you have a real mum and daddy like everybody else?" Everyone looked at Lucy.

"Because I don't," she answered. "Wipe your mouth, Harvey. You've got a milk moustache."

Harvey was not giving up. "But everyone has a mum and daddy. I mean, where are yours?"

"Maybe they're dead," someone said.

"Or perhaps they're . . . divorced," was another's idea.

Suddenly it was quiet. Lucy trembled inside, feeling tears just about to spill over. Then she breathed a sigh of relief. Teacher was coming, and the children stopped looking at Lucy to look at the teacher. But Harvey wasn't finished. "Teacher," he called, "why does Lucy live with her grandparents? Why hasn't she got a daddy and. . ."

The teacher's voice interrupted. "If I had grandparents like Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson, I imagine I wouldn't care if I had parents or not. They're as good as both a father and a mother. You're a lucky girl, Lucy. My grandparents died when I was a baby. Wipe your mouth, Harvey; you've got a milk moustache. Now, everybody listen. Because it's the first of May, we are going for a nature walk in the woods. Let's see how many different wildflowers we can find."

The children whooped with joy, and Lucy was forgotten.

Five-year-old Lucy loved the nature walk, but she did not forget the question her classmates had asked.

It was something she had thought about before, but Gran and Grandad never talked about it; so she kept the question inside her. She said to herself, *I'll ask Gran today.*



Show Illustration #2

Gran and Shadow, the big black Labrador dog, were at the bus stop when Lucy arrived. Shadow barked and wagged his tail, but Lucy ignored him. She took Gran's hand then asked her question. "Gran, why do I live with you and Grandad? Didn't I ever have a mummy and daddy? All the other children have parents."