

1857

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PERSONAL LETTER from Louise Declouet in St. Martinville, to her son, Paul Declouet at Brookland School in Greenwood Depot, Virginia.

St. Martinville, November 25, 1857

My dear Paul,

You must be beginning, my dear child, to believe that your mother has completely forgotten you. The fact is that I am too lazy and that I do not write to you often enough. Well, what can you expect, you have to realize that when you receive less letters I have more time to think of all of you. I am sure there is not an hour passing without my thinking of you and Ket (Alexander, your brother). This should not prevent you from writing to me often. I already told you that children owe everything to their mother. Clouet (Alexander, your brother) had announced to us a certain case of chestnuts. We have not received it yet, perhaps it has been delayed somewhere and we will receive it later. It surprised me as we receive your letters regularly and you receive ours.

The grinding season is progressing rather well. About 100 bushels have been gathered. There should have been half of that number added but your father (Alexander Declouet) had a great part of his canes cut off after the first freeze. At the same time the refinery is running, he has never stopped since the day it started. On Friday at 4 in the morning we will have been grinding for 5 days. Tomorrow afternoon we will finish to cut off the canes and the day after tomorrow I believe that Papa will have the two machines activated, then things will work quickly as we have more workers than we usually have. Together with Tonton (Josephine Declouet de l'Homme, your aunt) and Little Uncle (Jean Baptiste Benoit, my brother) he hired 20 Negroes to be able to salvage all the canes. He expects to finish grinding on New Year's day or even before.

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I had news of Ninise (Blanche, your sister) yesterday. Her clean clothes were brought to her. I believe I told you that we are taking care of her laundry since she returned to the convent (Sacred Heart Convent in Grand Coteau, La.). She is well pleased with this arrangement as it gives her more chance to hear from us. Also, each time I send her some sweets good for her and it is a great pleasure even to see a servant from home. It is better than nothing, so she says.

If I could do the same for you, my dear children, how happy I would be to send you your linen, well washed and well ironed, but we must not think of that. It is useless.

Your Papa is more decided than ever to go to see you in the Spring and I think it will be in May. Perhaps I shall go also as I am unable to remain for 18 months without seeing you. However, it is not quite sure but perhaps because Papa firmly wants to take me along but the idea to travel with your two dear little sisters frightens me, as to leave them, I would prefer not to go at all. Finally, I don't know what to do. It also hurts me to leave Ninise but it is impossible for her to lose so much time. Every day Gabi (Gabrielle, your sister) asks me whom I shall take along as her nurse. Titine (Christine, your sister) wants Didi and Edgard. She believes it would be quite possible. In the last few days, I made some little patties. She insisted that I should mail you some in a small cigar box. She speaks of you and thinks of you quite often. She is a chatterbox and amuses us a great deal. In the last few days she started speaking French, you imagine how funny it sounds. Christine sends kisses to both of you and Gabi also. Titine has been growing fatter and taller for some time. Melanie has been here for about ten days. She sends you her greetings. She will enter the convent on the first of April 1858 and Christine insists that she also wants to

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enter the convent but I think she is too young. I remember too well your misery when you entered the College (Louisiana College in Convent, La.)

We are feeling well here, also at Tonton's and Little Uncle's. Your Negro, Francis, sends his regards. He is growing much and still thinks of his little master Paul. Since the grinding started he works near the machine. He clears off the cane refuse which clogs the cylinders. Tell Ket that Papa placed Edouard with the engineer. I think he will be a good engineer. He can start the sawmill and the steam crane.

Your horses are doing well and are very fat. Master Farceur also. He is my watch-dog. He sleeps below our room and when I am afraid I just have to call and he answers snarling. This is enough, it reassures me, I feel he is there. Papa remains very late at night at the refinery. He is not back yet and I forget myself chattering with you. I do fear that you will be unable to read and understand my scribbling. Marceline and the other servants send greetings to you and Clouet. Old Quinne, Mari and Marguerite also.

I already have some little chickens and you must tell Ket that the chicken eaters take some of them every day and Gabi insists that should he be here he would kill all of them. All of my little ducks are fat, my little turkeys also. I must tell you about Mr. Valerie Martin's death, one of Tonton's old neighbours. You must remember him.

Goodbye, my dear Paul, we send kisses to all of you,

Your mother,

Louison Declouet

P. S. Offer my regards to Mr. and Mrs. Dinwiddie and ask them for me to take good care of you, and as to you, be very good. Farewell, good night, it is ten o'clock.

Handwritten in French. Original on file in Dupre Library at the University of
Louisiana in Lafayette, La.