Winter at Twin Chimneys: A Creative Continuation of the Pat Series

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L.M. Montgomery's *Pat of Silver Bush* and *Mistress Pat* are some of my favorite books. In the future, I hope to write a third volume focusing on Pat's married life in Vancouver, and I have written a piece that could serve as the first chapter of this novel.

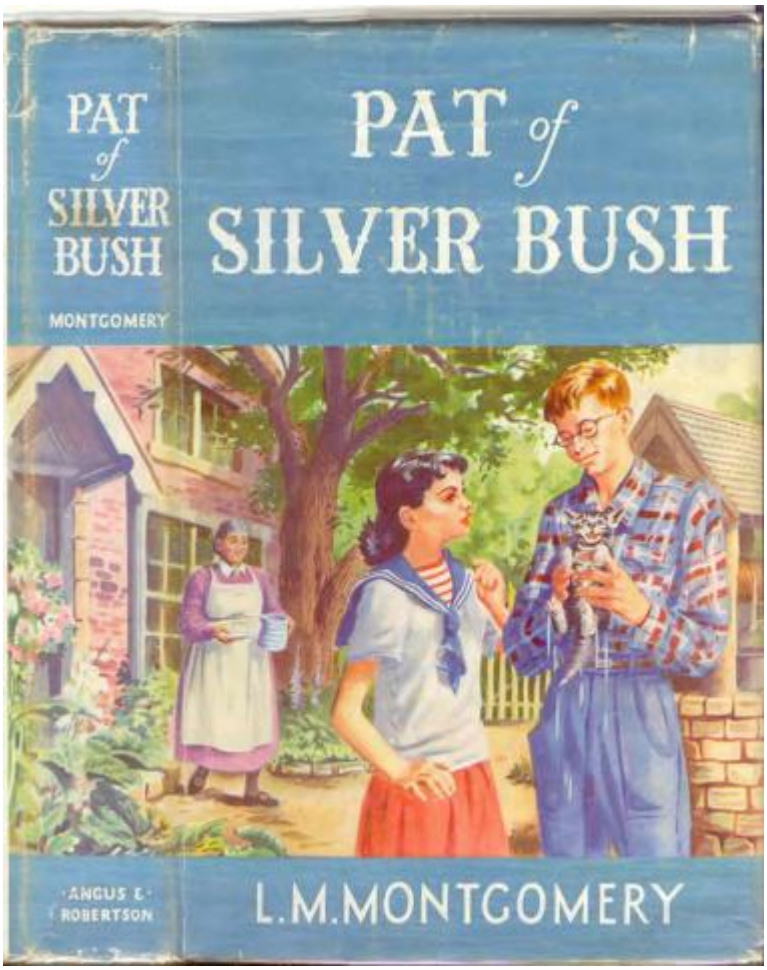
"Why is it that winter seems manageable in December but absolutely intolerable by January?" Pat wondered aloud, a sigh escaping her lips as she tucked Rae's latest letter back into its envelope.

She didn't know why she felt blue when there were so many lovely gifts in the world. That winter boasted the most silent, silvery afternoons Pat and Hilary had ever known … the hills and slopes surrounding their home were sprinkled with the diamond-like dust of fairyland. Even when their daydreams ran dry and the last farewell lights from the neighbouring houses were extinguished for the night, the whispering forests kept the Gordons well supplied with glamour.

They had lived at Twin Chimneys for a little more than a year, and Pat loved every square inch of the place with a fierce affection that almost rivalled her esteem for Silver Bush. None of the other well-landscaped homes in Vancouver could hold the slimmest of candles to the pine woods behind their well … to their view of the Hill of the Mist … to the wisp of a crescent moon peeping mischievously through a sliver in their darkling sky. Pat was certain that the moon and the sky were wholly their own

private property.

She had fought vainly for the privilege of being the only homemaker at Twin Chimneys, but Hilary insisted on engaging a housekeeper after they discovered that the stork would pay them a yuletide visit.



Book cover of *Pat of Silver Bush*. 1956. KindredSpaces.ca. 035 PSB-AR.

“Just someone to come in and do the difficult everyday tasks,” Hilary assured her. “Not polish the house with gleaming touches of home … *you’ll* do that, Pat.”

In every sundry task she performed at Twin Chimneys, big or small, Pat was aware of an insatiable desire to live up to Silver Bush standards. And at Silver Bush, you were always hospitable for the holidays, and Christmas never failed to be observed with scores of guests.

“We must invite guests this Christmas,” declared Pat one evening as they revelled in their favourite December haunt—the cluster of mellow old apple trees hidden among the ghostly stalks of last fall’s spicy ferns. A roguish wind whipped around the trees while a gathering of the merriest stars danced in the sky.

“Won’t it be too much work for you, dear?” Hilary’s voice took on a solicitude that melted Pat’s heart. You could never grow tired of that kind of tender concern, she thought—it was always a joy to find his eyes searching yours for fear or exhaustion or unhappiness.

“It won’t be too much work for me—it’ll be heavenly to play hostess,” Pat told him. “And I’ll have Mrs. Joseph to help me, anyhow.”

For Hilary had engaged Mrs. Joseph Roberts to help Pat with the housework. Mrs. Joseph was a solid woman; a good helper but determinedly bossy. She had odd little habits: smoothing down wrinkled wallpaper whenever she passed the parlour, turning around and whistling twice before supper—evidently to ward off something of which Pat was unaware. Mrs. Joseph was twice Pat’s age but considered herself still “a young thing.”

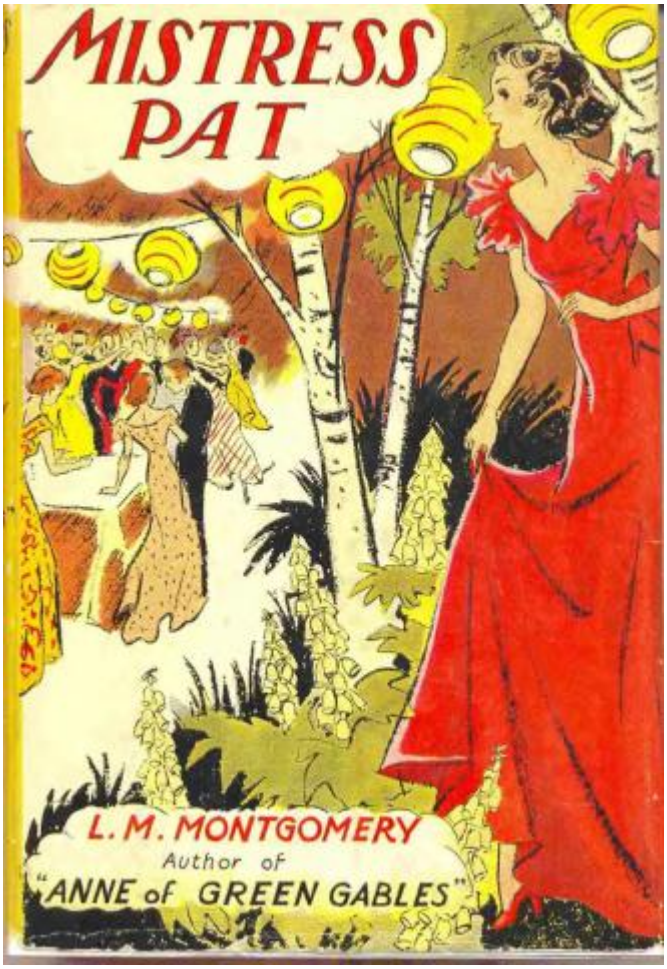
“The way to stay young is to act young,” Mrs. Joseph once remarked with one of her characteristic nods that served as a visual underscore to her words. “I make a regular habit of trying out new creams that most folks my age put away when they’re thirty. You can’t give in to old age, Mrs. Gordon,” she added gravely. “You have to stave it off.” It still gave Pat quite a start to be called “Mrs. Gordon,” but Mrs. Joseph couldn’t be convinced to call her employer anything else.

Mrs. Joseph disapproved of Hilary, however.

“I’m not sure that it’s steady work he has,” Mrs. Joseph said somewhat anxiously one day. “How many folks need new houses these days?”

“Oh, there’s always work for an architect,” said Pat airily.

Mrs. Joseph’s voice was foreboding. “Until you get smug about it.”



Book cover of *Mistress Pat*. 1939. KindredSpaces.ca. 186 MP-GD.

But even with Mrs. Joseph and her whistling, the following days at Twin Chimneys constituted a sort of domestic bliss she had never dreamed possible outside of Silver Bush. Little Judy Gordon arrived shortly after Christmas. She was named after the legendary Judy of Silver Bush days, who had been almost solely responsible for Pat and Hilary's marriage. Pat was overjoyed by Little Judy's appearance in their world … there was such life in her little face, such unaccountable bliss in her eyes, and she was *all theirs* …

Shortly after the birth, Pat and Hilary attempted to ascertain the origin of every feature on Little Judy's elfin face … she had been blessed with the Gardiner ears, the Selby mouth.

"I think I see a little of Aunt Hazel in her eyes," said Pat dreamily, standing over Little Judy's cradle as she examined the wee angel.

“No, those brook-brown eyes are yours and no one else’s,” said Hilary, a tender look flashing across his face.

“But she has the Gordon nose,” Pat declared. “There’s no doubt about that. And …” she hesitated, wary of mentioning the supercilious Doreen Garrison … “I think she has your mother’s hair.”

“It might darken,” Hilary pointed out, but as he gazed at his tiny smiling daughter, he didn’t look especially concerned about whether it darkened or not. “It *is* her colour, though … my mother’s. Aunt Maria used to say Mother had Scandinavian blood … that might explain it.”

Mrs. Joseph refused to leave Pat’s side now that the baby was here. How, Mrs. Joseph asked stubbornly, could she leave poor Mrs. Gordon to tend an infant alone? Her sterling conscience would never allow her to abandon anyone in their time of need, despite many reassurances from the new mother that she was capable.

“Maybe she’s right, Pat,” said Hilary, a tinge of worry creeping into his voice. “You do need rest now, after all, and she will continue to be a help to you.”

“And a hindrance,” Pat added, but only in her thoughts. The women of Silver Bush never criticized their housekeepers, and she would not break tradition. As usual when her mind flitted back to her old home, Pat felt a tug of sadness, and she struggled to realign her thoughts to superior patterns. “Next year Rae and Brook will move here to Vancouver,” she consoled herself. But a year seemed an interminable distance of time. The arrival of her sister and brother-in-law had been delayed already.

In the evenings after Little Judy was sound asleep in her cradle upstairs … they would never refer to *their* baby’s cradle as anything so newfangled as a bassinette … Pat and Hilary whiled away their hours in the cozy kitchen, Hilary poring over architectural blueprints spread out on the table while Pat sat knitting by the fire. Sometimes they’d read poetry to each other … "The Lady of Shalott" was perfect for those blustery nights tucked away in the warmth of the kitchen. Other times they’d reminisce for hours about endless summers long past.



Book cover of *Mistress Pat*. 1982. KindredSpaces.ca. 017 MP-AR.

Sometimes Pat would look around the gentle rooms of their house and sigh. There was the china dog on the mantelpiece … that little dog that had come to mean so much to them both … letters from Rae parading on the knick-knack shelves … the brass knocker from Silver Bush adorning the door …

“It’s so nice just being us,” Pat reflected, poking at the fire. “Just us and Little Judy. I’d simply hate it if anyone else intruded upon us—destroyed the sweet charm of our solitude.”

“Who would ever dream of destroying it?” Hilary asked. “Anyhow, nothing could really destroy what we’ve built for each other here.” He reached under the table to stroke the happy, panting dog that lay faithfully at his feet … for they had finally decided that the time had come for McGinty to have a successor. They had christened him McGinty the Second, but he had simply become Second or Sec,

depending on how quickly you wanted him to come. “You know, Pat, there’s nothing material in our happiness,” Hilary added. “It all stems from being together.”

Yet after he had spoken these words, Pat couldn’t help but feel another fledgling piece of concern. Why did she feel so unsettled these days, despite all the small joys of married life? She could not answer the question … but there it was, an unmistakable loneliness, always inching into her consciousness, marring what should have been perfection. The source could not simply be her abject longing for Silver Bush, although she suspected this played a supporting role.

“Loneliness,” thought Pat, staring into the smudged hall mirror. “Why should I be lonely?” She gave the glass an extra scrub—nobody was going to accuse the Twin Chimneys mirrors of reflecting badly on its visitors. Upon hearing a pitiful cry, she flew to Little Judy’s cradle, glad to be desperately needed. It was nice to know that you meant something to a small sweet soul as perfect and delicate as Little Judy.

As Pat gently adjusted the baby’s cream-coloured afghan, a stab of regret pierced her heart. A painful knowledge pervaded her … the knowledge that her daughter would never know Silver Bush and its sanctuary of girlhood dreams. In vivid detail she remembered standing before the ashen wreckage of the house, flooded with the snap realization that she was useless and her life was over. Then Hilary had come.

But Little Judy would never experience all the wonders of Silver Bush … never step into the awe and splendour of the Poet’s room, never to sit in the cozy kitchen while her namesake ladled up soup and served amber tea, never to walk down the Whispering Lane or frolic through Happiness with a flush feeling of ownership … it was unthinkable. Pat wanted all of these things for her little daughter, and she could have none of them. She fiercely instructed herself to make Twin Chimneys as perfect as possible to atone for the loss, and—if Pat could prevent it—Little Judy should never feel lonely without knowing why.

With these restless thoughts, Pat pushed aside a wisp of the muslin curtains in Little Judy’s nursery. Her eyes alighted on a young boy in an inadequate coat meandering his way up the path, walking among the crooked magic of the aged apple trees, ducking under angled boughs, kicking a stray pebble. As soon as he bent down to pat McGinty the Second, he won Pat’s heart.

She ran down the stairs, heels thundering on the steps just as a drumroll heralds excitement. But she could not do anything so alarming without alerting Mrs. Joseph's sharp ears. "Where are you off to, Mrs. Gordon?" she inquired, twisting a dishcloth between nervous hands.

"There's a boy outside, walking all by himself. I hope he's not lost, he'll catch his death in this weather." Pat flung a scarf over her head, tying it round her chin.

"No doubt you'll be bringing him in by the fire to warm him up," Mrs. Joseph predicted with her customary pessimism.

Pat laughed her old laugh that Hilary loved, the one he had not heard lately. "It's my house," she said cheerfully, relishing the sound of the words. "It's my fire, too." And she hurried out to investigate, where the snow glittered like jewels in a wash of sudden sunshine.

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About the Author: Anna Rose Johnson has a passion for telling timeless stories through journalism and novels—whether it's the tale of an Olympic athlete or a heroine who lived a hundred years ago. Johnson, who lives in northern Wisconsin, has been a fan of L.M. Montgomery's works since the age of ten. She continues to study Montgomery's writing to hone her own craft as a writer.

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