

## 18. More Letters are Exchanged.

Oh Jacob!

I don't think it will take you long to guess who this is from, you'll maybe have guessed already from the Valparaiso postmark! I suppose that you will have guessed too by now that I have left you for another. This is quite true, but I thought a word of explanation might be proper as there wasn't really a chance to tell you before I left, it was done quite suddenly, but I wouldn't call it an impulse, though we all have those! No, the truth is I had been planning it for a good while, it was just a matter of the right man coming along. We got on fine, the two of us, it is true. But that just isn't enough, getting on fine is no basis for a relationship worthy of the name. And so I just waited for my chance - that was Stilson - and made my move. At first, everything went fine too, that is the way relationships worthy of the name are at first. Of course they always go wrong afterwards, they wouldn't be proper relationships otherwise! So we bribed a docker down at the deep-water harbour, that is how we got away. There were a few terrible hours in the hold, we weren't sure if we had been spotted or not, but after a while we were clear, and quite soon we could feel the roll and the heave of the open ocean. At first it was stormy - a taste of things to come, perhaps! - but by the time we were down in warmer seas it was quiet again, and the boys let us up onto the deck to see the old yolk in the diesel now and again. It was a great moment when we spotted the coast for the first time, that was about seventeen days out from home! We went into the mouth of a huge river, I never saw the banks of it yet, and the water was as brown as the insides of a pot. Then it was jungle with awful serpents, you never saw the like, except maybe you did when you

were at the whaling, it quite put me in mind of the bush all those years ago. (I don't know if you will ever get this letter, but I want to put the record straight about that, just for old times' sake between us. That running away to the bush was a bad idea, I was beginning to regret it not long after getting there. I wish now that I hadn't but I have always had a weakness for song. I hope you will find it someday in your heart to forgive me my impetuosity in this regard.) Anyway, it took a long time to get through the jungle, in was mainly on foot that we went, and I can tell you that we had to stay in some very dubious places, even night-clubs in the shanties, and my heart nearly tumbled to a man playing the tuba in one of them! But luckily for Stilson it didn't, and so on we went, the place was just teeming with parrots, it quite made my heart sore for the old days. Then we came to the foothills and that was easier going, sometimes even we would get a lift on a mule, and after a few of them we got to the mountains. That was a hard time, and soon we were down to the bare feet and not much more than a couple of blankets between the two of us, not counting the mule, for the dark hours. But oh, the glories of fair Valparaiso, that first morning as we gazed down on it from the high, cold, uncaring summits of the mountains, over whose rosy tips the sun was even then most majestically rising! So down we went, by crag and glacier, and we got a flat after a while, and after another while I became aware that things were not working out the way I had hoped. Stilson (did you know he was the father of Finnegan?) was spending less and less time in the flat, I think he was drinking a bit too, and he was never mad keen on the Valparaiso trip anyway, it was just me that talked him into running away, I have always had a talent in that direction. I had always wanted to visit Valparaiso, as I suppose you must have guessed by

now, but I only ever got to the bush and that isn't the same at all. I know myself a lot better now as a result of these experiences. I like romance and I like travel, that is the main reason I run away with men, I am not so keen on the men themselves. Apart from you, of course, and you don't like travel, perhaps because you did so much of it in your young days. Anyway, I have repented my hasty action, and am calling upon you to rescue me. Could you send me my fare home? Stilson has now left me for another, and for a living I am reduced to - I dare not say! You can send the fare in any currency or any format, just be quick. Your ever-loving Helena.

Oh my dearest Finnegan,  
Can you believe that it is your own, true Adeline that writes to you; though I do not know for how long I will be able to continue! When I last enjoyed your company, did not the world look young and full of hope! But then in little more than an instant was that hope crushed and in its place was to be found the most awful despair! This should be a warning to all of us. My last attempt to make contact with you in person was, I am sure you will agree, extremely sad. You were, as you may recall, to lodge with my governess and I on return from your overseas business trip, but when you failed to make contact I, fearing for your wellbeing, determined to discover your location. In consequence of this, I was reduced to investigating some of the lower drinking dens in the great centre of our great city: but though each was lower than the last, I did not find you, though in each, when I gave a simple description of you, and spoke clearly and slowly to the servants there, it was said that you had recently been. Then, wandering sadly in the night streets and the vicinity of that mighty castle whose outlines stride at dawn across our city skies, I

came across an elderly and rather well-spoken beggar, who appeared to reside on that portion of pavement on which I had so fortuitously found him. When I was pleased to give to him such monies as I had, he offered to tell my fortune, but was at least able to inform me that you were even then at an unknown location in the company of two of the senior bankers of our great Capital. Dawn therefore found me on the brows of our splendid crags in the cause of an assignation (for my governess is very strict) with an acquaintance whose attentions I had chosen, on account of you, to henceforth spurn. With extraordinary insolence, this ruffian endeavoured to dispute the matter with me, and even attempted to be - forward! Naturally, I hurled him aside at once and by accident he fell with dreadful screams to his death below. To ascertain this sad fatality, it was necessary for me, your love, to lean out over the dread precipice: when a sudden gust of morning air, to my intense surprise, hurled me over the edge too! It may be supposed that I was for some considerable time thereafter in a condition of profound unconsciousness, although I distinctly recall a dream in which you seemed to be very near to me, and which seemed also to involve intimacies which I dare not attempt to describe. On at length awakening, it was to find myself in a metal cabinet lined with cheap skin-tone plastic. At once, however, I thought of you and was emboldened. I peeped out, and to my amazement found myself in a chamber furnished with numerous cabinets of a type similar to that in which I was lying. There were a number of policemen there, and in the middle of the chamber a doctor of medicine, wearing rubberised shooting boots and a tunic in a repellent shade of lime-green, was conducting an operation on a patient who was quite clearly in a condition of profound unconsciousness. Despite the

intense cold, I remained in hiding for some days, refreshing my romantic imagination from the shelf of nineteenth-century fiction with which the chamber was furnished: in the cause, no doubt, of providing the doctors with some improving reading in their few leisure moments. And then, thinking of my dear Finnegan at every moment, I made my escape, dressed in the clothes of a lady policeman whose size, though she clearly had a deficient sense of fit, was luckily mine. I am now on the outskirts of the Capital, where there is great tumult. Fleets of bombers have been flying overhead all day long and very low, so that conversation in the streets is badly interrupted. As I am dressed as a lady policeman, my natural authority is recognised at once, and I have asked an elderly lady to take me in, having given her to understand that I am on undercover business. In our Capital, the better class of person is always most accommodating to proper authority such as the police. The elderly lady tells me that our governing authorities have been summoned to the airport, which is nearby, for a consultation with our neighbouring great power. That is why the air is full of such dreadful noises. Rough soldiers from that neighbouring great power are also abroad in our streets, and it is better to stay indoors, as I have been close to unfortunate experiences with their like before, and might again, I fear, despite my uniform. Tomorrow, when it is hoped that all will be quiet again, I set off on my journey towards you. Your dearest Adeline.

Dear Ms. Adeline

Thank you for your recent letters which, on account of trying circumstances, I have been unable to answer until now. We are all fine here and the weather continues settled, though the nights will

start drawing in soon, as they usually do about this time of the year. It is good to know that you are thinking of taking up an interest in folk-dancing whenever you have the chance. It is well-known to be a sustaining recreation which strengthens the morals and loosens the muscles in about the same proportion. Now I will turn, if I may, to the matter of the identity of your father. I am not surprised your mother could not remember much about it, there was a lot of drink flying in those days, there's a lot less of it nowadays they tell me, and we must suppose that to be a good thing. But you are quite right, she was an experimentalist in the field of literary fiction, that is what she told me anyway, though I was never very sure about it myself. When we were courting, she used to take me away to the literary salons in the Capital, and we would sit up day and night discussing poetics, that is why I don't like the name Alexandrine very much, though it is fine for a hotel of course. We shared a great interest in classical history too, though there were other interests as well, the French poets for one, they were awful wild boys in their young days, just the way you would expect. It was after this we got the train day and night till we arrived in the land of bog and rock and casual indigents (that would be me she is talking about there). It was round about this time too that she fell in the family way, though maybe of course she didn't know about that sort of thing, not many did in those days. I suppose it was the advanced fumbling to blame, it usually is. So away she went back and that was the last I ever heard or saw of her. But I knew fine who you were the minute I set eyes on you, that will explain to you why I was a bit shy at first, your mother was beautiful, but you are even better yourself. So there you are, you know fine who your own father is now! Hoping all continues well with you, and that the weather continues fair. I will not sign this

letter as I am getting bad writer's cramp, the way your mother used to. But you know fine who I am now! Cheerio!

Oh Finnegan

Can you believe that I am sentenced to hang tomorrow morning on a Constitutionalist gallows? Be brave, dear boy, be brave! It happened like this. As I strode out for the far hills of the hinterlands, I was given a lift by a passing truck of neighbouring great power soldiers, who were on their way north to assist the Constitutional Forces in an advisory capacity. I regret to say that they had been drinking alcohol, which is always an ominous sign for a young lady of good character, even a chaste one like me: and particularly so, I now believe, when dressed as a lady policeman. When they made camp that evening I was invited to join them in their bivouac. It would have been impossibly churlish to refuse! After some further hours of drinking, they attempted to - to violate my person. Thinking only of you, I resisted strongly, but finally found it necessary to shoot three of them quite dead. That is what led to my capital sentence, and I am now being held by the rebel forces in a cage on the remaining eminence overlooking the site of your picturesque old cabin. I notice that the nearby mountains have been partially removed since I was last in the district, and that a mighty enterprise appears to have been constructed on the great bog which was hitherto in that place. But the important thing is this: what do you think about getting married? I have to say that I think it would be in your best interests. I will try to escape tomorrow. Dear, dear Rupert has intimated that he has the very highest regard for my virtue, and as a result is unable to help. He suggests, however, that I volunteer for his SBRU (which means, I believe, suicide biological research

unit), and as a consequence of which I might yet elude that pendulous fate which otherwise awaits me. And I will so do, first thing tomorrow morning! If this fails, you will not hear from me again. Not counting this last letter of course. Be strong, Finnegan, be strong; and I will be strong too! Adeline, xxx.

Dear Jake and Finnegan

It is me, Herself. I am in a forest hut on the border of Hussaria. It is getting dark, and there is not much time. You will know by now that I have run away with Adolpho. I always loved him, and never stopped loving him all the years we were apart. I took the bike down to Oban, but he had been arrested by then. They lifted me too, but we met shortly after in a forced-labour camp. Then we escaped. I agreed to follow Adolpho to Hussaria, where we are going to make our home. We will be there in the morning. Adolpho's family is a big one, his brothers all play the mandolin and his sisters all wear the national costume which is best sindon embroidered in the colours of their country. We are getting married at once in the village church. There will be hot brandy and a big feather-bed for us after the ceremony. But winter is coming and there is not much time left. The snows started this morning. We go through the neighbouring great power lines tonight. Adolpho says it won't take long. God bless you all. Herself.