

4. Some Letters Are Exchanged.

My dearest Herself

- wrote the boy Finnegan to his mother Herself - I hope all is well with yourself. I am doing a message for Major Gweene here, but I will be home soon as I am to be managing director emeritus of the new plant. We can't let the old ways stand in the path of progress, Major Gweene was telling me. That was just what was wrong with the old ways. They weren't new at all. The Major says there was a style of grim malevolence about us, amounting at times to a spirit that was quite positively malignant. Yes, and he was right! We need to be improved, the lot of us, and it is the likes of the Major that has been trying to improve us for ages. But the malevolence got in the way. Well, not any more, he says! They have put pounds and pounds into the place over the years and taken nothing out but a bit of harmless fun for themselves and the odd haunch. And what do they get for it? Accusations of colonialism! You wait till we bring in the diggers and flatten the lot of them! That'll improve them all right, and it is just for their own best interests! Meantime I am, Your humble son, Finnegan.

Oh Finnegan boy

- You know fine who this is from but I won't sign it for security reasons. I have bad news about Barnacle: he has gone missing. I am very worried about your mother too, she is behaving more strangely than usual. It's all to do with the high-lift cams, she says, though I was always more of a Humanities man myself. But this isn't enough for her now. She has got herself a painting kit - and it is herself that she is painting! Her face is the bit, if you don't mind!

They call it makeup, and makeup is the word for it at their age! I would tell herself but I don't have the nerve. Maybe you could tell her in a letter? That poor woman with the ribbons, she isn't a bad singer right enough, whatever your mother says, is making a nuisance of herself. I am going to keep in touch with her, in case she starts talking about me in the olden days when I was wild before I settled down like I am now. It is a terrible thing to give them any encouragement at all! Talking of bad news. The old cabin is a good bit down on her marks since you were last here. Maybe it was all the dancing that night. It will be in at the window any day now! But who's caring? You know fine who this is from. But I will tell you anyway; it's me with the Ôpoon. Cheerio the now!

Dear Ms. Adeline -

This is just to warn you that I will be in the Capital and your arms shortly. See if you can find out if there is anything good on though maybe it's not so important, I hear the bars are open half the night down there anyway. We'll be having a few good times the two of us the weekend I am back, if I am not in your arms like I mentioned earlier! There's no need for you to be gnashing your teeth about me and you outside the dance, by the way. It was just a bit of high jinks, the same as you would do with anybody. I would blame it on the effect of the pipes myself. I hope there are good pipers when we two meet again! Finnegan.

Oh Finnegan

- It is me your mother here and I have disturbing news. It concerns that useless creature with whom it is our misfortune to share this miserable cabin! The way he is behaving, you would think he was

in love with someone, and he needn't think it is going to be me! Anyway, it's not. He posted a letter the other day, not the one to you, but another one. To whom was that other letter directed? I do not yet know but enquiries proceed. I am watching him carefully, in case it turns out to be in his own best interests. When he isn't whistling around the house he is in the laboratory and having a go at the stuff in the black pot in there. It makes him see things and I don't suppose that is very good for him, but at least it keeps him off the drink a bit and quiet, apart from the whistling. Talking of quiet, that is the way it is here. Barnacle has gone, and we fear he may not return. I don't suppose it will be that quiet, mind you, when they start building the new plant. There was men in white coats here the other day, taking measurements of the place, not counting the one that got drowned in the bog. Jacob didn't like the look of them, he was never keen on strangers, as I suppose you have maybe noticed, so he kept insides all day long, just whistling. Myself, I have a new rocker-assembly for the bike and that keeps me going. Bikes is a good healthy interest in life compared to some things I can think of! Thank you for your letter, it is good news that you are not being led away by temptation of any sort. Nor am I, not yet anyway, even though I have every right to it, seeing what I have had to put up with in this hut for far too long! We will be seeing you whenever, Herself.

Oh my dearest Finnegan

- wrote the girl Adeline to the boy - thank you so much for your kind letters which arrive here by express service every morning. I have forgiven you everything. But first my news, and then to important matters, such as our future together. I enjoyed an uneventful

journey by train back to the Capital. There was a long delay in the vicinity of Oban as the riots have been spreading and we could all hear what sounded like gunfire in the near distance. It was all rather exciting for a young lady of a nervous and well-bred disposition, which is, of course, mine; as I am sure you have already noticed. Then some soldiers came into my carriage, and quite quickly became extremely drunk. I suppose the fighting disturbs their nerves. But we city girls, though our hearts may live in the country with those who are nearest and dearest to us, are used to loud noises and in consequence are less afraid of gunfire. The remainder of my trip was without disturbance. The evening prior to my departure I took tea with your dear mother, Herself, although I am sorry to say that I saw no sign of Mr. Jacob. He had gone, your mother said, to the post office. Your mother and I discussed the deteriorating situation in Oban and district. She should have the new rocker-assembly and cams fitted by now on her motor-cycle, and was looking forward very much to enjoying some high-speed driving before the weather takes a turn for the worse, as it usually does at this time of the year. She was particularly keen to motor down to Oban and try out the new stretch of road which is presently under construction on that route, before the situation in the town gets entirely out of hand. If I may now turn to personal matters: you and I had a wonderful weekend together and I know that we will always treasure it. Despite your disgraceful behaviour outside the dance, I have decided to overlook the matter. I can recognise now that it was, as you say, simply a matter of high spirits engendered by undue exposure to the charms of music. A superfluity of music is always a danger to a sensitive temperament such as yours, and we will need to guard against this in future. I

therefore accept your assurance that you were only pretending and did no harm to me at all, or even anything else. These things should be done properly. Until we meet again, all my love.
Adeline. xxx

Oh Jacob

- wrote Helena to Mr. Jacob himself - can it be that it is you again after all these years? I thought it would be nice to meet just once more and let bygones be in the past which is the place for them. I can honestly say that I have forgiven you completely for letting me run away with the sailor all those years ago. You should have gone after me, mind, and persuaded me not to leave, you know I have always had a weakness for romance! It is true that I did run away with him, I cannot deny it. But these things don't count, and I know you are old enough now to understand that. It was just a one-off situation and I wasn't used to them at the time. Thank you for your letter, by the way, I could tell fine it was you, and appreciate fine the need for security. She must be a difficult woman to live with, right enough! I know too what it is like to live with someone, and yet have another dwell in one's heart! It was a good idea not to go to the dance, we had a far better time down beside the sea, listening to your stories. They get better and better the more I hear them. I have always liked that one about the shipwreck that was sailed to safety by a children's choir with a cargo of rum. It must have been the angel that did it, right enough. It just goes to show, you can never trust the sea. Maybe we can meet again? I don't approve of treachery in relationships, but it is very common nowadays, and sometimes it is justified, especially when it is the likes of us that are involved. What about meeting in a hotel, just

the two of us, for a night? A temperance one would be a good disguise for you, and handy enough if there was a bar round the corner. It wouldn't do to be recognised, even though the nights will be drawing in any day now, mind. I must close at this point as there is no more paper in the house. I got this bit out of the back of a romantic book. In hope, Helena.

Mr Dear Mr. Jacob

- wrote Adeline to Mr. Jacob with regard primarily to a pressing and personal matter - I write to ask you whether you might be in a position to assist me with an enquiry relating to the identity of my natural father, who, I have some reason to believe, originated in a northern and desolate part of the country: such as yours is. This is what my dear governess once told me, although my mother, who was an experimentalist in the field of literary fiction, refused always to discuss the matter with me in any detail. Perhaps, of course, she could not remember. But there has recently come to my hand a letter from her, to me, and intended for perusal subsequent to her death. I enclose a copy of this letter which, I can only regret, appears to be incomplete: and meantime take this opportunity of thanking you once again for your recent kind welcome in a household that I might yet call home. Your daughter in spirit, Adeline (Ms).

My dearest child

By the time you read this I will be no more. But that is no concern of yours. I write with regard to your father, or rather your apparent lack of a father. I have no doubt at all that this is a consideration with which you will never have troubled yourself. Certainly, I never

did. But as you get older your mind, in moments unoccupied by creativity, may idly turn to the matter. I can tell you very little about it. I do, however, know that in the course of preparing one of my lesser works, I found myself - to my considerable surprise - in a northern region characterised by bog and water: which inclines me to the view that this place was, perhaps, at the seaside. I have little precise recollection of the events that followed, concerned as I naturally was with the work in progress. I do, however, remember some occasions of congress with a muscular indigent. This man had once been, as I recall, something of a classicist. But he had abandoned the trade for that of harpoonist (which is, I understand, a species of seaman), and it was during a study-break from this latter vocation that he had the good fortune to fall under my influence. I can tell you very little more, other than that he lived in a cabin

My dearest Herself

- wrote Adolpho to Herself - but the time hangs like a stopped clock without you! I am writing this by the hungry light of a candle-stump, and there isn't much time to go before it is starved and gone. I've got a mirror at the back of it for a bit of reflection, but what do I see but my own gaunt and haggard features? We've been on candles now here in Oban for a few nights, and what with them starting to draw in, we will be needing more soon. The electricity is not expected to return until the rioting is finished - and that could be a long time. The situation, though we are well used to them in far Hussaria, is increasingly difficult. Were I to risk a charge of exaggeration, which is not in my nature, I would say that it began to be desperate. Fighting surges the length of the esplanade daily,

although it doesn't normally come down as far as the hotel. So those of us who work here are safe for the moment. Luckily, the heroic combatants pause for a refreshment towards noon, and retire from the day's battles just before the first dinner service. So the nights, though long and lonely, are without disturbance - though how long that may last is not known. There are worrying reports that the trouble is spreading to the outlying districts too, which must occasion some alarm in the hearts, should they have any, of the governing authorities. I enclose as a souvenir, as the French poets used to say, of our recent meeting, a small but tasteful cosmetics case which is intended to please your fancy. When we ran away all those years ago you wanted one and I was going to get one for you, but your brothers came and took you away. That was a cruel act indeed; but, as if widely known, adversity adds spice to amour! But I have important news. I must return to my native land again. They say there are guides who can get a brave person through the lines at the front. There is to be another rising in Hussaria, inspired by my translations of Byron, which as you know were inspired by you. It all inclines me to a spirit of the greatest humility. We can none of us escape that which is ordained by the stars. So how do you fancy running away with me to Hussaria? Come down on the bike any time. If I am not in the hotel, I will be in the bar across the road from the back door. Just ask the barman, he too is a poet and a partisan of the future. Your humble soldier, Adolpho.

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Boy

- you had better come home at once if you are not here already. Strange things are going on in the district. The riots in Oban have spread all over the place, people say it is more like a rising now.

Your mother got another letter yesterday, I hope she isn't involved in it. She is never done polishing the bike, you would think she was planning to run away somewhere. And she won't hardly speak to me any more either. Normally, that would be a blessing, of course. She is singing to herself all the time too. Love songs, whatever that might mean. So you better come home. You know fine who this is from. Cheerio and hurry up. PS There is no news about Barnacle. I am listening out for his bugling every day, but I haven't heard it yet. Cheerio again the now.

Dear Jake -

It is me Finnegan here. I will be back in a day or two. I have got all the samples with me. I hope I get through all right. I have to keep the stuff so that the Boards can test it. So send me down some of our own gear if there is any left in the pot. Send it care of Peter at the bank. Finnegan.

Peter

Gweene here. We've got the bog. It will cost nothing if the half-wit boy gets the usual package and a figurehead post. I have sent him to RV with supplier reps and collect the samples. The Boards will have the stuff in a few days. There will be no problem with Customs, and the cops are fixed. We ship the powder direct once production is up to speed. We'll make liquids on-site, until demand gets out of control. We can't go wrong! Copy this to George, will you? Gweene.

TOP SECRET. cc/Chief Constable

Target has been subject to team surveillance for last three-days. My senior officer is now endeavouring to establish a sexual relationship with said target, but to date has failed to do so. So she says, anyway. Perhaps she should be replaced. There is clear evidence of on-site psychotropics manufacture. They have a full-service lab but production appears for personal use only. There are also grounds for suspicion that they may be planning to import bulk quantities of same or similar, for a purpose as yet unknown. We should bust at once and take the lot of them! Det. Sgt. B.