

8 December 91

Dear Vanetta and Joel,

We have been living like hermits, holed up in our house trying to complete the exiles book by the end of this year. I over-reached myself. I ended up with more than a million words, which is more than five times the amount of wordage I needed. Cutting and editing became a massive task, and organising the interviews into the structure of the book, and getting some of the factual information (dates, names, places, organisations) that I needed. We did nothing else but the book, went nowhere, saw nobody, seven days of the week. Our social life nil, our cultural life a documentay or two on TV and the magazine in the Observer. Rusty has been working as hard as I - he is a very good editor. I could not have finished without him, both for the editorial work and also because my word processor is not what I would call user-friendly - I don't understand it and it doesn't like me, and without him it would all have been impossible.

Now the end is in sight - half manuscript going in tomorrow, other half I hope by the end of the year. Publishers hope to have it out in Autumn 92, and my editor is prepared to read a manuscript still twice as long as it should be.

Funny, I said to Rusty, maybe we could call in on Vanetta and Joel, perhaps they'd even like to see us - then your card came. I was going to write and say - Are you still there? So I hope we can meet again soon.

I've got really old in this year. In July I had a thrombosis and they put me in the geriatric ward at Hereford hospital. I had known until that time that I was a geriatric, and it was a horrible shock. I was among senile women - those not senile were too old and ill to be half alive. I now feel my bones are crumbling to pieces - painfully - and unfortunately even this hasn't cured my mind of its optimistic belief that I'm really only middleaged. I'm not, I'm not, and old age is disgusting.

Shortly we hope to be able to clear our limited space of word processors, huge piles of transcripts, print-outs, reference books and all the rest. And I shall spend the time that's left painting pretty pictures and reading the books I keep buying and don't have time to read.

Much love

18th March 91

My dear Vibeka,

I think of you often as the weeks and months rush by particularly since I received your two cards - on one side the lovely pictures by the Skagen painters, on the other, the news of the end of your lovely new dream. It distressed me so much, but I had nothing to say! I don't know him, I can think of him as someone who is afraid of life. To live so many years with someone with whom you are not happy; then afraid to leave the home that held him all that time to embark on an entirely new adventure. We women are more open to change - some of us, anyway.

I am working continuously on the book; I have a massive amount of work to do in the next few months, lots and lots of fine material, but much editing and writing, researching on dates and places and times and so on. I have done much of the interviewing, but still have gaps to fill in. I am grateful for this work that occupies me all the time, because if I lift my head and look over the wall, what I see is unbearable, a world so corrupt, fouled, mutilated that one no longer can bring coherence to it. I had a good trip in Canada, with a lovely young woman who organised everything for me, acted as secretary, chauffeur, guide. We were staying with her parents-in-law, old friends from Johannesburg. Toronto is a nice, orderly city where you feel safe and wellorganised - also it strikes me as being very boring; except for the fact that due to the immigration policy of the Canadian government there is now a very big ethnic mix - mostly from Asian and Middle Eastern countries, not from Africa, but making a wonderfully colourful and mixed population, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Phillipinos, Greeks, Indians, Pakistanis, Turks, Portugese - all over. And with very progressive educational and social services. I met a couple of really splendid South African women, of Indian extraction, who had broken away from their limited backgrounds and made themselves into new people.

Here, the worst of winter is over. Oh, how I long for Spring, and at last it ~~is~~ coming! Daffodils are out in our lane, buds on the trees, bulbs coming up in the garden, and every evening it stays light later and later. The darkest, coldest days are over, but meanwhile it rains, and rains, and rains.

Our South African news is not too good, too many problems, and too many people creating new ones. What do we learn from the Winnie Mandela case? Only what we should have learned all these years - that we are all a mixture of positive and negative, and no one should be elevated to a position where they are above everyone else, untouchable and unopen to criticism, no one, not the best and most honourable among us. We are still playing with the idea of going home and seeing what prospects there are, although neither Rusty nor myself can quite see ourselves living permanently in Johannesburg ~~again~~ again.

So this is just a letter to let you know I'm still here, that Vibeka is over there but here as well with me.

Much love

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