

ESTD PSI

129 Greenaway Rd.,
 Eggertsville 21, N.Y.

Dear Will:

I was amazed and pleased to hear from you. But Alaska! Of course, you were always the pioneering and adventurous type, and it is too bad that you didn't live when America was opening the Western frontier. You would have settled huge tracts of land and made a fortune out in the West, for you having farming genius and organization, and are the outdoor type, and know all about cattle and horses.

I tried to trace you several times. I traced you through the Coast Guard to somewhere in California, and the letter was returned. Then I got a private detective to look for you, because I wanted to tell you about Peggy and to find out if you were still alive and happy. I got a report that you were in Nebraska, married, and with two children. I wrote to you there and the letter was returned. Again I tried about 8 months ago, and got the same report, and again my letter was returned. Perhaps they got you mixed up with someone else. Then I heard of a Rufus Combs in Kentucky, who had a famous race-horse, and we wrote to find out if you were a relative, and he said not. So I gave up.

Yes, I've had a most frightful struggle. I wrote and wrote after I married Marcus, and got nowhere. Then I was in despair. Marcus looked over the current crop of literature in 1937 very thoroughly, and we both came to the conclusion that I was writing the wrong thing for public acceptance. I had been writing Lives of Christ, Greek novels, etc., because I didn't know anything about modern life and business, etc. So Marcus suggested we collaborate on a modern novel of business and finance. He knows a lot of business and finance, of which I am totally ignorant. I started a story called DYNASTY OF DEATH. We worked on it together, Marcus doing the research in the story, the story of the stock manipulations, banking manipulations, etc. He edited the book and he dictated whole chapters. Our collaboration was a success, and I ~~was~~ sold DYNASTY OF DEATH to a publisher. You can imagine my joy. Of course, I couldn't have written it without his help. I had often wanted to do modern stuff, but couldn't, for I had had little education in the formal way. DYNASTY OF DEATH did pretty well. I wrote other business novels, and Marcus edited, did the research, dictated the business and financial parts, helped with the plot, and they sold. None of them did half as well as DYNASTY, I am sorry to say, but I made expenses. We ~~kept~~ ^{kept} on writing. Sometimes Marcus would bring pages and pages home to me from the office, with a plot outlined, and I would go to work on it. You see, he always did quite a bit of writing on his own account, but neither he nor I got anywhere until we collaborated and pooled our information. I doubt if either of us would have sold a line without the other, though I think Marcus had an article or two published years before we were married.

In the meantime, he began to teach me history and literature and economics, and bought and rented books for me. It was like going back to school. When we began to publish, we incorporated in a partnership.

We made, together, about \$4,000 to \$6,000^A years, and had hopes for the future when the war came. I had just sold a book called THE TURNBULLS, and it began to make money, and then the big income taxes came along, and took almost everything away from us. So we were in despair again, and we thought we wouldn't write until the war was over. We had bought a small house, and we were desperately worried whether we'd be able to keep it, considering that Marcus had had two frightful operations, and I had an operation, and we were in debt.

Then I remembered that old story I had written years ago about "the girl from the towpath." I dug it out of the trunk. Marcus went to work on it, changed it to bring ~~up~~ it up to date, and decided to give it a banking background. We rewrote it together, and renamed it THIS SIDE OF INNOCENCE.

As it was originally, twenty years ago, it was no good, if you remember. I needed a business background, and had to leave it out. But with Marcus' collaboration and knowledge, his editing and correcting, it turned out pretty good. He wrote all the banking stuff, himself, and I changed it here and there to make it sound like my own writing. We were surprised when it was a success, for to me it still didn't sound very good. We were able to keep 15% of what we made, and this makes us sick, after all these years of work. We have half paid off our small house, paid up most of our debts, and are able to help Peggy. I am trying to write another book, but have been sick for nearly two years with arthritis, deep sinus infections, heart trouble and ulcers. After all, I'm 46 now, and getting gray, but I ought not to tell you this after you tell me you look about the same! Marcus, too, is not well, after his own terrible operations, and he is 59 now, God help us, and we have acute anxiety about the future. If we can only write another or so best-selling novels we'll be all right. Marcus is working on the plot of another, and laying in the background, and we'll try to get it done within the next year or so.

We sold THIS SIDE OF INNOCENCE to a new movie company, and they aren't doing a thing about producing it, because they haven't the money. It just makes you sick. They gave us a small down payment, and if and when they produce the picture we'll get a percentage. Right after we sold it to them I had offers from other movie companies up to \$250,000, and we couldn't take them. If you don't think that is hard luck -----

I know you will keep all this confidential about Marcus' collaboration. Maybe I'm vain and conceited, but I don't want people to know about it, generally. Our publishers know, for Marcus handles all business and contract, but my publishers don't want it generally known that Marcus does half the work. I know I can trust you to keep this quiet. I worked alone for so many years until I married Marcus, and now if my enemies knew about our collaboration they would laugh and gloat. You know how people are. I can freely admit to you that without Marcus I wouldn't get anywhere, without my knowledge of business, industry and finance, but I was advised not to tell anyone. Anyway, it's a perfect partnership as it stands now. - So you see, our struggles aren't over yet, and time is marching on. Thanks, anyway, for your kind wishes and congratulations, and please don't mention what I've told you to anyone, will you? Things get around.

I know you must be bored to death by all this and so I'll get down to more personal things. In 1940 Peggy married a very nice Buffalo boy, a Gerald F. Fried, a six-foot, red-haired, blue-eyed boy a couple of years older than herself. That was when I first tried to reach you, and had my letter returned from California. The boy had an electrical equipment outlet with a partner, and they did all right until he was hauled into the Army and lost his business. His brother-in-law, a German fellow, undertook to run the business for Jerry while he was in the Army, but he was just a dumb German and let the whole thing collapse. In the meantime, Peggy was having babies, and, as Jerry was in the Army, Marcus and I had help Peggy out. She now has three children, Michael, 6, Brina, 3, and Jeffrey, 3 months. Yours and my grandchildren! Think of it, Grandpaw! Mickey is a nice little boy, dark like Peggy, but Brina has very blonde hair and Peggy's eyes, and the little baby has blue eyes like Jerry, and is going to be a red-head.

Peggy wasn't well after the last baby's birth in November, so Marcus borrowed some money on his insurance until our first royalties on THIS SIDE OF INNOCENCE would come in, and we sent her to Florida to recover. She and Jerry had had a terrible time in an Army camp in Harriensburg, Pa., because, though we sent them money, they couldn't get a decent place to live. So Peggy went down to Florida, and is coming back soon, and then Jerry will leave his family with the children and they'll get a house. Marcus is negotiating for a two-family flat for them, and we are going to give them \$2,000 to pay the first payment. At the present, we are having their flat redecorated. It isn't much of a house, but with the frightful housing shortage they are lucky to get this. Jerry is back in business with a partner, Jack Something-or-other, and they are going to manufacture large glass and wood show-cases. Jerry is kind of happy go lucky, and doesn't worry about anything much, but he has quite a lot of business ability. He and Peggy seem very fond of each other, and the children are very healthy.

Marcus and I had to help get him started in business.

Our own daughter is a big girl now, almost fifteen.

Now, you tell me if it is true that you are married again and have two children. I do hope so. I remember our desperate struggles, and I know that part of it was because of the tragedy of us not being good for each other. We were just not suited, and it is too bad we didn't find it out in time, isn't it? Married to different people, we would have been happier. Our backgrounds were so different, and our ways of life, and our ambitions totally different. Well, that is all over, and all I can wish is that you are now very happy and content. Alaska sounds awfully cold, but I have an idea you are doing very well indeed. I want to know all about this, and your new family, and their names. You say you are in charge of that place, and I am sure that you are doing an excellent job.

Please don't reproach yourself for anything in the past. That is all done with, and you have the whole future to look forward to. You have a tremendous lot of executive ability, and in the right setting you will do excellently. You don't mind hardship, if the goal is in sight. But if you remember, hardship of any kind almost killed me. I didn't know it then, but it was because I had a rheumatic heart, which was neglected in childhood, and I was always exhausted, even when I was young, and what I had to go through in my childhood left my nerves completely unstrung. You needed a strong, healthy and normal young wife, and I wasn't that. But now that is all in the past, and I know we are both more content. In a couple of years Marcus will be able to retire from the Government service, and Judy will be growing up and getting married, and I can rest. Marcus will have 30 years in the military service, including his Army service, and he will have a pension of \$1500, and by that time we hope taxes will be down and we'll be able to save enough money, with the pension, to live on. Writing is a very precarious business. You might have a success one year, and the Government haul away most of it in taxes, and then you might publish another book and have it flop. It just makes you disgusted. We wrote a book together, spending two years on it, and it sold about 3,000 copies and brought us in \$1,110. I am joining a Writer's Union, and they want to make it so that you can spread the gains over three years, and have something left.

Aunt Pollie and Uncle Willie are leaving almost immediately for England. He has retired, and has a Social Security Pension, and I suppose they'll spend the money they made in America in England. Do you think that is right? Marcus says they ought not to get the American money when they are in England, but our laws are so stupid that I suppose they'll get it anyway. It isn't fair.

It may surprise you to know that I have to support my mother. My father left her \$27,000, but the interest, at 1%, isn't enough for her to live on, and so my brother and I have to help. My brother is married and has a child of his own. He married a German girl, and she is very thrifty, though my father would spin in his grave if he knew his son had married a German. My grandmother is dead, and so is my Uncle Louis, in Newark, and his sons have just gotten rid of everything he left them. My Aunt Nellie, his wife, committed suicide, under very odd circumstances.

In rereading your letter, you call yourself "worthless." That is absurd. You aren't worthless, and you are going to make a lot out of your life, and I know it. I am keeping your letter, and will show it to Peggy, and she will write you when she returns. I have a couple of letters you wrote me after I married Marcus, in which you wish me all kinds of happiness, and I am adding this last one to them. I will like to reread them at intervals, for they please me so much. And I hope you will write me soon and tell me everything about yourself, and the family the investigator said you had. All good luck. Tell me more about that station in Alaska.

As ever,

Janet

P.S. I know you won't mention it, but again, PLEASE don't let anyone know that Marcus does half of the writing, will you? Sometimes things slip out, even if we don't intend them to. But I remember you could always keep your own counsel.