

9. Holmview,

Omagh,

27. 1. 41.

My darling Frank,

Yesterday morning I sent off an 8 page letter to you. I can well imagine you receiving all my letters together. The bundle must be waiting for you at Singapore. When you receive them - if you do as I have done - you will immediately look for the post mark on each letter & read them as they were written. Or perhaps you will make a "B-line" for the last letter as some book readers go for the last page! Anyway, I do hope they will bring you as much pleasure as I have got in writing them. With no news of you for 3 whole weeks and no letter for 6 weeks I feel like writing to you more often than ever. I hate having other jobs to do and other letters to write. I only want to write to you darling. It is only you who can understand how I am worrying about ^{you} because I am loving you so much. I have not been in letter writing form for many weeks now - in other letters I am inclined to voice my worries, but you Frank you enjoy my letters with all their faults & failings, you enjoy hearing about my doings, my dreams, my joys & sorrows. That is why I always want to write to you - it is like having a long talk with a very dear friend who knows you & loves you no matter whether you are in good form or bad. I am not in bad form to night - only worried, worried about you, Frank.

This morning I had a nice long letter from Mamma. She told me that there was a box (wooden & about the size of a large biscuit tin) waiting for me at home. It arrived by registered post from Mappin & Wells of Sheffield. It must be your beautiful Christmas present of a pair of candlesticks! How keen I am to see them but I have decided to make the act & wait until Aileen brings them personally to me on Monday next. Before I send off this letter I shall tell you all about them.

Mamma crocheted me a very nice pair of gloves for my birthday. They were greatly admired here & are more than cosy for going to mass in the mornings and spinning up & down to school on the bike. Well, in to-day's letter, she wants to know, would I like her to do a pair for Anne. To-morrow, I am going to shop up town for some nice burgundy-coloured wool for the gloves. You see a very kind big brother of the aforesaid Anne bought her a very nice wine-coloured frock and shoes to tone. The gloves shall make the ensemble complete.

There was also a letter from Terquo enclosed. In it he said

2 "I have a special message which I want you to give to Eileen from me as soon as possible. It is this, tell her that all the fathers here, including Fr. Director and all the boys are praying hard for the safety and the return of Frank. This should be a great consolation to her." This is only one of the many such letters I am receiving and no doubt they do give me a lot of encouragement. I commenced a letter to Fergus this afternoon. I may finish it to-night. Poor little fellow, he does love letters, so it will give him a pleasant surprise. My trouble is how to write him without offending Joe. The only answer is to promise to write the letter in the near future. Woe betide me if I should fail! Joe is not the lad to let his bone go with the dog.

Did I tell you Frank, that Felix & Mona were away in Dublin last week-end? Larry Higgins got his final in December & Felix asked him to do locum. It was Larry's 1st locum & he was all pleased with himself. They wanted him to bring his wife, Pauline along (Pauline is a 1st cousin of Frances') but she did not come so Josephine was called upon to do cook etc. As Josephine was going to the ~~brother~~ Brothers Past Pupils dance in the Club House, Balmoral on the Friday, Mamma went down & I relieved her the following day. Mamma says "Larry talked a lot about Frank. He said he was one of the nicest & best liked fellows at Queens" He recalled the day of some big matches. You were ill, darling so he, Frank Martin & some other student went up to Beechwood to tell you all about the match. Do you remember the incident, Frank? you were beloved by all your school fellows. Even Una spoke of the devoted friends who came daily to your bedside when you were ill. I did not even know you were ill darling. I wasn't this culpable ignorance. What would Mrs Murray have said, not to mention her son, if I have appeared at Beechwood to perform one of the corporal works of mercy! What would you have said if I had popped my head round your door some afternoon & asked "How's the patient?" The night have been of our romance are many, dearest. They hurt me now because I realize that had I not been so blinded with fear, we both might have been spared this awful parting. I ask God, to-night, to hear our joint prayer from different quarters of the globe "Bring us

3 Together again safely and soon.

Yesterday was a frightful day so the 2 Convent teachers from Holmview were none too early for morning class. So I was putting the finishing touches to my soufflé who did I spy walking along the back drive to the Convent but my good friend, Dr Heron. You must remember him, Frank! He is the bane of every teacher's existence! I have experienced him both as a pupil & as a teacher. Well, there was a mad rush to make class before he appeared. I was his first victim. He came to Form V Geography class (1st year Seniors) We were doing the "Basin of the St. Lawrence", a part of America I have actually seen. The children were brilliant, drew magnificent maps for me & altogether the class went with a great swing. I asked him to question them, but he refused. He then went to Mother Vincent, then Mother Grand & finally to Aileen. In the afternoon great was my surprise to find him again in my class. This time the Form IV A (distinction Junior grade). We were doing Malaya & the East Indies. He appeared very interested as all the islands mentioned in the daily war bulletins were pointed out. He refused to question them again. I was the only teacher to whom he gave the doubtful honour of a double-visit. It could have been a compliment but the compliment I prefer not to receive. He returned to the Convent this afternoon & went to hear the choir, which is very good under the able guidance of Miss Boland. At 4 p.m. he entertained nuns, teachers & senior pupils to a talk (1½ hours) on Poetry. To-morrow he is lecturing us on "Prose". The poetry talk was very interesting & most instructive but unfortunately I had heard it & the examples as a member of Form VI in Mt Carmel Kilkeel in the year 1932 or was it 1930?

Aileen has the supper reading & is calling me. Good night darling God bless you & protect you always. I shall never cease loving you as I love you now. — and that is with all my heart & soul.

Thursday, January 29th

Today my dearest one is one of the happiest and saddest days I have spent for many weeks — today the postman brought me two of your long look-forward-to letters, dated December 3rd and December 11th. I was just getting into my coat when I heard the postman's step at the door below. Then I heard Mary's voice "Miss O'Kane, there is a large post for you. With that I took those

stairs & at a time but not too quickly to notice that the letters were those beloved blue letters which I am ever longing to receive. Poor Mary, I think I swung round her neck a few times with sheer delight. Mrs Ray appeared & told me how pleased she was. Aileen had not come down so I simply shouted my good news to her. Little did I care if the Good Major was listening in to some favourite Radio programme. I just could not contain myself. Six whole weeks without a single letter & then two. Now, you admit Frank I had a good excuse for upsetting the whole Ray family! Alas I could not read them because it was then well past the appointed hour to mount my bicycle. However I did open a strange letter which proved to be one from the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Company, London. In it was a cheque for £100. This came as such a surprise that I was left breathless. I know, in a recent letter (last term) you did mention that you were going to send me money to put in the Munster & Leinster Bank, High Street, Belfast in both our names. Well, my darling, I know this money must have come from you although there was nothing amongst all the papers the letter contained, to tell me so. Thank you so much. I love this money because it is your earnings. God bless you for thinking too about our home. You can rest assured that this money will not be spent foolishly. I would not think of using it for any purpose other than for our home but I am wondering if it will be possible for me to draw it - since it will be in both our names. I understood, in that case, your signature was needed for every withdrawal along with mine. This may not be the case. To-morrow I shall call with Mr Vaughan in the Munster & Leinster Bank here & explain my problem. I had not intended going home until our ring arrived. Then, I had planned (not mentioned to anyone yet) of having a little celebration. I had hopes of mixing & having your father & Anne & Joe, Mona Felix & Frances to Spring Villa for the Sunday of that famous week-end. Father Joe could bless the ring & in the presence of your dear ones & mine he could take your place & put it upon my finger. In order to manage this I should have to ask Monday morning off (the train does not reach Omagh until 10.45 A.M.) I shall do this when they wire me from home (as they have promised) that the ring has arrived. Every detail of that famous week-end will be written to you darling. You shall also have a cable.

5 To return to my letter. I rushed up to School, but instead of putting the children to study (as I wanted) I made an act & caught leaving the letter unread in my bag. Later in the morning my opportunity came & I became oblivious to all that was going on around me - I was away with you in Malaya. The tiny snap of my poor Frank was excellent. At first my heart missed a beat! (you know what I mean) because I thought you were ill. When I read that it was taken in Rawalpindi I was able to enjoy looking at it. I thought that instead of looking miserable (as you said) you looked very pleased with yourself. You had an expression on your face which I know so well. Strangely enough this is the first snap in which I get a glimpse of you as I remember you. Not that you were invalided when last we met.

I did enjoy your description of our circular tour of Ireland, but my dear fellow you have left out many parts (how annoyed our friends would be) There is Baginbown (where Auntie says we must spend part of our honeymoon) then there is Carrickmacross (Sr Fidelis would never forgive me if I did not bring you to meet her - she knew you, through me since Ranapost days) not to mention dear Donegal. How happy we shall be visiting all your friends and mine.

You were worried darling about your dread of hurting me and you want me to promise always to say if I should be hurt. Of course I promise you. If I am hurt I shall come & tell you right away. You could never hurt me dear Frank, it is probably I, who will, unthinkingly hurt you. Please tell me, if I do. Your happiness is my main consideration. I have made you unhappy in the past but with God's help I shall never give you an unhappy moment in the future. Our home will be the happiest the world has ever seen because we shall strive to imitate Mary & Joseph in Nazareth. Our happiness shall then be so complete that we are both asked to suffer a little beforehand. When I feel very lonely, these thoughts come to console me.

It was very encouraging to hear your news about the Red Cross. Yes, I think the fact that you are wearing our Lady's medal gave me more consolation than the automatic you now carry.

Though I have still lots to say - mostly concerning your own letters - yet bed is calling. Yes, dear one I am a sleepy head. Instead of the recognised 8 hours I claim 9 and sometimes $9\frac{1}{2}$ these nights. I am really thinking of you when I go to bed early. I want to be so fit & well when you return to claim me.

Our friend Dr Heron cries off his prose lecture. He was not

6 feeling up to the mark. I am ungrateful enough to say thank you because it was such a glorious afternoon I longed for the open spaces. Violet, silent & I had a 4 mile walk along the banks of the Shule (headwaters of the Foyle, which really only takes this name below Strabane)

Good night, my own dear Frank. God bless and protect you. Thank you for all the happiness you have given to me this day. The sadness came with the knowledge, that this last night be your farewell letter. That cannot be - I shall go on hoping, no matter how long, that another will arrive soon. Please never say good-bye again in any of your letters. It really does hurt so very much. Good-bye sounds so final - I hate the word as I loathe all good-byes. I cannot end to days diary on such a note so I'll tell you a joke. You remember Jack Finnegan? Well he is qualified now & is in the R.A.M.C in Palestine, somewhere. He writes home to his mother "I am in the place where Christ was born & I wished to Christ I was in the place where I was born (Fall's Road)" Fred Breen is in Libya somewhere. He has never seen his son (Fred)

Wednesday, February 4th

Are you wondering, dear Frank, where I have been all this time! I am ashamed of myself for leaving this letter so long unfinished but come what may, off it shall go to-day. No, my own darling, say you were not forgotten - how could I forget you when last week brought me such a lot of happiness & all from you too. Your two wonderful letters have been read so very often that now I can quote at length from them. I have not them beside me as I write because every word is written on my memory. Surely, darling, these letters will not be your last! I could not bear to think of weeks, perhaps months of silence. Your letters must get through to me & mine have just got to get through to you - even if it means my turning Heaven upside down in an attempt to get my friends up there to listen. Now my trouble is where to begin - I must tell you first about your oh so welcome - cable which reached me yesterday. It actually arrived in Belfast on February 2nd. Thank you, thank you dear Frank for your good wishes for my birthday. I knew you would not forget it. How relieved I was to hear that you were safe and in Singapore. You have survived two whole months of the Malayan war and I know that you will come through the siege of Singapore too. No earnest prayer was ever left unanswered. Our prayers shall be heard and be shall soon be

together safely again, never to be parted. I am not saying this because I hope it will happen but because I believe it. How do you know, when a cable has been sent? The Belfast cable-balks are not very definite. I have decided that you sent the cable & the cheque about the same time (January 21st), when possibly you arrived in Singapore. You have no ^{con}ception dearest, Frank of the relief those cables can bring me. All the nuns & teachers at the Convent were almost as excited as myself. When each item of news comes to me I set out to tell those, who are praying for you & I know it makes them so happy. This morning, coming out of mass, Nollie Hughes whispered to me "I offered my mass & Holy Communion this morning for Frank & you, Eileen. I give you both a day each week."

I have been waiting for many weeks now before writing to you, Margaret & Gerry. I knew they would be anxious for news of you & I also wanted to send them your Snap (in car). Well, this is what I have been up to lately. I wrote your father & Anne first, gave them all the news of your letter, enclosed a Snap & quoted the part about your privileges under the International Red Cross. I wrote the same type of letter to the other three (enclosing a Snap for each - which I sent with both our love labelling it "Kuantan, Sept. 18th 1941"). Una was very prompt with her reply. How happy I was that I had written her. She says I have no idea how welcome my letter was - she had heard nothing about you since Christmas (nothing of your January cables). She was charmed with your little Snap & did wonder how you had been persuaded to "pose" for the camera. Next letter shall tell you of my replies from Anne, Gerry & Margaret. Altogether, Frank Una's letter was really a very friendly one. She was so worried about you. She says "Since December I have been alternating between desperate hope & hopeless despair" She explained that she had both a letter & card from you - both sent before the Far Eastern war. I do hope darling to keep in touch with all your dear ones. Your letters & cables to be made known to the others. I do not mean that I shall send them - but tell of their arrival & of the news they bring. I think you would want me to do this, Frank.

Now to tell you about the candlesticks! Eileen brought them safely to me on Monday. Josephine - bless her - had got up early & brought the precious box to the Station. At 10.30 I flew up to the Staff room to unpack my box but alas, they were so magnificently packed in a wooden case & bound (twice over) with copper wire that I could

8, make no impression. Violet & I took it to the kitchen but even the
implements there proved useless. So a disappointed young lady
had to return to class and leave her precious box. At lunch I
hurried home with it & between Mrs Ray, Mary & yours truly
we unpacked my gift. Darling they were beautiful! I have
never seen candlesticks I love so much. To think that they are
ours, to repose in our home, to burn our candles each
Christmas Eve. They shall always be my most cherished poss-
-ession. I intended bringing them home & to Ballymahinch but now
I find I cannot part with them even for a while. They
stand on my mantelpiece (a bit of a crush) with your photo,
my clock & my religion (a little water fountain which Mammie brought
me from Lourdes; a statue of the Infant of Prague and
Margaret's hand made pictures of the Little Flower). However
the nuns & teachers insisted on seeing my gift so up to the
convent they had to go again, packed neatly into my
basket (which Mrs Murraghan bought for me in Carrickmore
— thereby hangs a tale which I shall tell you later). I
placed them on a slate on our staff room mantelpiece &
escorted each one to admire them — you should have heard
their praise. Tell me darling — have you seen our candlesticks?
If not, let me know because I should attempt to draw them
for you. I did this for the Spring Villa folks but of course I
couldn't do the candlestick justice — what "artist" could I?

I am expecting word from the Red Cross tomorrow
concerning a letter which I intend writing to Fr. Ashness. I have
remembered him & all your Malay friends in my prayers.
I am still at Mass & Holy Communion each morning (have
not missed even one morning since December 3rd 1941) I commenced
a 9-day novena to Our Lady of Lourdes yesterday. February 2nd &
Feast of the Purification was the date. Matthe entirely. St Francis Xavier's
Feast is also drawing near. All these prayers are for you darling
darling Frank. So take good care of yourself and please come
back to me. I should die if anything were to happen to you.
How I wish I could put myself into this envelope & post myself to
you. If I were with you, I would not mind being besieged in
Singapore. God Speed this letter to you and bring you all the love
that is in my heart. May He protect you now & always. May
Our Lady of Lourdes watch over you. Yours ever lovingly