

25th October 1973

My dearest Evelyn,

You always told me I should talk less and think more. Indeed, it was the very first thing you said to me, on that spring day by Christ Church; and, for a few heart-wrenching months, I thought it would be the last thing you ever said to me.

However, there is nothing like solitude to discourage talking and encourage thinking - and White Gate has been an awfully solitary place these past few months. Andrew is still here of course (for now, at least - more on that in a moment), but his skulking presence was never much in the way of company. The Colonel visited the other day, but mainly to update me on his long, slow slide into melancholy and nostalgia. For the most part I am by myself. And so I have been talking less and thinking more. I finally took your advice, Evie.

I thought about you. I thought about little Lisa. Mostly, however, I thought about myself; specifically, what an oaf I have been to you lately. Once I cursed you for leaving. Now I curse myself for making you leave. What kind of man willingly allows an ocean to come between him and his family? I shan't take all the blame - you know that - for we were always a double act, in sickness and in health, but I shall apologise and make amends for my share of mistakes.

First, then, the apologies. I am sorry for neglecting you, for putting my travels and writing and other diversion before you. I am also sorry for not listening to you when you warned me, back in January, what lay in store for us if I did not change.

Now the amendments. I am, of course, going to change my will. Or should I say: I am going to correct my will. After all, I only wrote you out in one of my beastly moods (as you would call it), and I look back on that decision with the same regret with which I look back on all my mistakes. Everything will again fall to you and Lisa, just as it was in April; Andrew will again receive nothing. I have an appointment with Macaulay on Monday to finalise all this.

Allow me to correct another of my mistakes: Andrew is to leave White Gate. I told him this afternoon that he has two weeks to pack up and ship out. From now on he is to make his own way in the world rather than ride on my coattails. Andrew, I'm sorry to say, did not take this well at all. In fact I think the old boy rather ashamed himself. Came out with his standard complaints about working too hard for too little credit, how I was being unfair, how I couldn't navigate my way out of



Oxfordshire without his help, etc. etc. ad nauseam. This, apparently, is the thanks I get for taking him under my wing and letting him travel with me. For letting him see the world. He used to be such a dependable companion, always willing and able. And grateful, by God, for the life I let him be part of. Alas, something has soured in him. It just goes to show that I coddled the boy. I let him stay here for far too long even though I knew you disliked having him around.

Apologies for the philippic. I know you have no desire to hear me complain about my brother, especially as you were the one who warned me about him in the first instance. Yet another instance, Evie, when I should have listened to you sooner.

Come back to White Gate. You and Lisa would love it here right now. Autumn has set the beech leaves aflame and the air has that crisp, cold snap to it you always adored. One wakes up to delicate, mist-shrouded mornings and falls asleep beneath glittering starry skies. It was a fantastically clear night last night. Orion is once again charging over the horizon to claim his winter home. Leo has long since slinked away to warmer climes. I was outside for a long time gazing up at those constellations.

Do you remember that Monday in Oxford when you first told me to think more and speak less? Thomson, Bennie and I had been cavorting down Blue Boar Street when we all but collided with you and the rest of the March sisters. I can still see that powder blue cardigan you were wearing as if it were with me the in the panelled room right now. I cannot recall what it was I said to you, Meg, Beth and Amy that made you first deign to talk to me; perhaps some corner of my subconscious has buried it to save me the embarrassment of remembering. What I do remember is your response. You drew yourself up and, despite the fact we three boys were taller, you still managed to look down on us. You had already mastered that haughty look of yours. "Mr Paris," you said, "permit me to give you a piece of advice. It is the only thing I ever intend to say to you, so I hope you will listen." It only took me twenty-seven years to do so.

Come back soon. I cannot wait to see you.

Yours always,

John