

No. 7

Janos Pongracz

6 Vermezo St., District II

Budapest, Hungary

10 February 1940

Dear son,

After exactly one month of your travels, we received your postcard that you sent on the 7th of January. It was really really kind of you that you sent a postcard to Choles. I'm very curious if they will say anything to mum. We haven't heard from them for months now. Aunt Ilonka [de Balogh] was also so happy that you mentioned her. We obviously wanted to hear from you regarding your landing as soon as we could but we understand that you had other duties to fulfil. We are still looking forward to receiving your letter by air mail that you sent from New Zealand and by our calculation it should be here after tomorrow if everything goes as it should. We are hoping that a week later we can get a letter from you from Sydney. We can't wait.

While all of this has happened, three days ago our maid reported that while we were away from home, Baroti was here and he left a message saying 'please don't call me back because you won't find me' and that he would call us the next day, but he didn't call us the next morning so I tried to find him at noon but at that time he wasn't in the office. Another day went by and he didn't show up. Then yesterday morning he appeared and Baroti said that he is returning to work on your case. His point of view was that he had to wait for something to happen in favour of your case so your wish could be fulfilled and this has just happened now. I don't know what it was, he didn't tell me but [? unknown]. But he joyfully reported that the leadership voted for 2000 pengo for you and I can receive this amount next week. So your friend B[aroti] was very happy that this case was resolved and in a good way and he was really curious how your life is going. He asked me to tell him how you're going when I hear from you. Of course I gratefully expressed my gratitude to him for what he has done. I have no idea who you need to say thank you to for this but you probably know. I'm afraid that you will need to write three letters, one for B[aroti], one for Kalmar and one for Istok. But please wait with these letters until I write to you next time. Maybe they will give me a letter with the money and you might need to reply to that letter.

From my side I'm quite happy that the Metallo went well because I think you were thinking of getting 1500 but I think in your thoughts you decreased that to 1000 if I am not mistaken, and all these things just show that people are nicer than we think. We don't know what the future brings. Istok's opinion about your skills and your personality, maybe even in Australia, will mean something good for you. I feel sorry that the whole case doesn't come with more financial profit. I am sure this money would have been good for you, especially these days, if we could transfer it to you, but because we can't we will use the money. It is coming in at a very good time because on the 15th we need to pay a portion of the tax and we have other urgent matters that we need to use it for, but don't take it that we are taking your money, we know it's yours.

I will send you some printed material. It contains the French Yellow Book [a published collection of diplomatic documents]. I'm pretty sure you would have heard about this in England. You don't need to read the whole big book word by word, but it contains reports from the ambassador of Berlin and it is about meetings with the Germans and it seems to be

very, very interesting. The French radio reported that this Yellow Book the biggest bestseller in the French book industry. It was a surprise because the first prints were done only in a run of 50,000, but a lot of people wanted to read it so new prints followed and it was translated to another dozen languages. After its release the book was launched in French and other languages and two and a half million copies came out. Only *Cyrano* [*Cyrano de Bergerac*, Edmond Rostand, 1897] and *Bete Humaine* [*La Bete humaine*, Emile Zola, 1890] had that many copies. I don't know how much of this is true but the fact is that in Budapest within days it was gone and then they just ordered more from Paris. It cost one pango.

Otherwise no other news. The weather is awful. For days, the snow has been melting and the street is basically turned to a lake. The snow is still falling, it's beautiful and white and it's still on the street. Some parts of the street have become a mud slide. And then sometimes the snow comes down from the from the roof and so it is actually quite dangerous to walk under these things.

Lots of kisses my darling son.

Dad.

Dear son,

I just thought of something. If the letters we are writing which are coming your way are censored, which I doubt, then the censor has a double job if we write in Hungarian and in English. So it will be double work for them to understand and put the picture together. So therefore I will write to you in Hungarian. These censors are extremely kind. For example, in the last couple of days, Lorant wrote to someone to London. He writes by hand, and it looks very much like an old style, it's hard to read and he wrote it in Hungarian, and in the letter he found a printed note saying that the censor asked him to please write in a more readable way because they can't read it. We have another friend who writes every day to England because her mum migrated there and the censor again wrote a note saying to please make your letters shorter because they're too long to read. And it also happened with Gyuri [Nandor] that he wrote a letter and because he wanted to save some money he said in the letter that he was sending a letter to someone else - he put two letters in one envelope to save money - and the censor wrote on the letter saying that no letter was enclosed so he can't be responsible for not putting in the letter that he was saying that he would. So I think we should help them because they are very nice people, so we need to make their job easier. But if you think it doesn't matter then I'm happy to write in English.

I don't really have other important things to tell you other than what your father already wrote above. Of course we can't wait to receive your first letter. I'm trying to be patient and optimistic and trying to explain to myself that it's going to be here next week, and we don't need to wait too much longer. I'm also curious what you have seen in Cape Town and how it was. What was your opinion about it? But I can imagine that you only spent a very short time there and you couldn't really look around and you probably couldn't experience a lot there.

There is no news from our side. Aunt Ilonka [de Balogh] didn't give us any interesting material yesterday. Our lifestyle hasn't changed. Like in every quarter we always have a think about whether we should be giving up this apartment but usually we decide to stay and this is what happened this time as well. First of all I'm still unsure what is going to happen with Istvan [Pongracz] and what will happen in the world. It's hard to make decisions for the long term, even for a few years. But also it is so hard to find a smaller, cheaper apartment but still sunny and in a good area, which would be worth the move and the trouble. So we think it is a clever decision to stay, especially when there are not enough houses on the

market and the winter is so hard. It's so hard to find a place where you can have good heating and we heard from a lot of places that they don't have good heating. They don't even have warm water nowadays because of the huge snows and the cold. And also we need to use our finances in other areas. There have been problems with transportation but we were lucky because everything worked really well here. So we are staying, we are not moving, so our things in the house are staying as they are.

I can say that I'm still living a very comfortable life even though I'm getting less and less work, but there is still some. I'm still doing a translation for a different "lame duck", [Hungarian writer and director] Artur Bardos. So that is okay. Hopefully in the business we can sell things sometimes. And sometimes I'm amazed that it's still worth it to write about the nightlife in Budapest and the film production, because *Variety* [magazine] brings down a whole page of this. And sometimes I can be very firm, especially about what you brought up in Karoly Papp's case. He is not easy to get rid of.

I'm sending hugs a thousand times, my dear.

Mum