

The Letter

Dear Brigitte,

My love, it's me John, your old soldier. I do not have long, and I need to talk to you, if anything to recount our love, but more, much more.

Make love not war, John Lennon said, but I want to talk to you about love and war; our love in time of war. Sure, it's a bit of a dichotomy, but a phenomenon that did exist just the same, certainly for us, and because of war and not just in opposition to it.

Ours was a time, a time when the free world had its back to the wall. I, as you well know, was never a fighter, except once in the playground, but he did call me a Jessie. I abhorred violence, but I had to do my bit; we were up against it after all. I had never dodged responsibility in my life and, if I couldn't fight, I had to do all I could to help. I could free occupied Europe and prevent the Nazis reaching British and, inevitably, Scottish soil. I had your support in this of course.

Do you remember travelling to Arisaig? I do; it was on a steam train from Queen Street, in Glasgow, in November 1940. Travelling through the Highlands, the billowing smoke mixed with the mist that hung around the hills like a mink stole around a grateful neck. For me the Highlands were an alien environment, having been born and raised in an industrialised Lanarkshire. I had worked as an almoner in a large Glasgow hospital, so not quite so ill-informed about life or, more like, death.

Well the war was on, and before long so was mine. I ended up in the medical corp., something about my not doing the killing thing.

My darling, you will remember Arisaig House; how could you forget? Was, maybe still is, the large baronial mansion just off the road to Mallaig on the road to the Isles, Skye that is, some forty miles due west of Fort William. Well, Brigitte, there, as you well know, they made spies.

Me? I had maintained my loyalty to the crown, but I, and those in control of my destiny, were convinced of my inability to kill and the big wigs in authority had the wisdom to appreciate that I would be as much use as blancmange hand grenade on the battlefield and sent me off to the espionage.

How I eventually ended up there in the Highlands baffles me, still does; might have been something to do with managing to stay alive on Dunkirk's beaches and receiving a wee commendation for valour. True, I had saved some lives and got some Tommies off the beaches, into the small boats, but, true again, no way could I shoot no Germans, no way. Well, it seems I was a bit of a hero; some courage, so the brass said. I had kept my head in the face of death; vital characteristics for a spy, or so they thought!

On my return from France, I was interviewed for weeks, brainwashed more like; psychometric tests, aptitude tests, patriotism tests; tests, tests, tests. I had no idea why; it was nothing short of interrogation into my beliefs, values, and fears. Little did I know I was being screened for the S.O.E.

Do you remember our first meeting? It was early evening in the House and we were in a room of English, Scots, Poles, Irish, French, Dutch: men and women all, and trainee agents every one. Some to return to their native lands and die, my love; others, such as me, to join them, and maybe, scupper the Nazi plans to dominate the free world; we had big aspirations my love.

Remember, when we first met. We were in a semi circle in the large oak panelled room in the house; Major McClelland was in full flow explaining how to prime a detonator.

We were a determined lot, not needing much prompting to learn anything more about killing the enemy, but also how to undermine them and defeat them in our way, and not directly hand to hand on the battlefield, because, of course, that was why we were there. Hubert, the one eyed polish navigator, was determined to get closer to the action. He sat one side of Paddy, the Irish cockney who had lost his parents in the Blitz. On the other side of Paddy, there you were my Brigitte, my French resistance fighter, co-opted to the S.O.E. to train in intelligence, ultimately to put you to good use back in your homeland.

You were just within my peripheral vision, but I couldn't see your face properly. I felt your presence permeate through my skin and I felt warmth inside me before I turned to see your face. When I did, I saw your smile and heard the tone of your voice in my head before I heard your words. I was slow to look at your eyes for fear of disappointment, but, when I did, I looked into my future and my fate.

You were tall, dark, and extremely beautiful; long dark brown hair, eyes that drew you in, and a smile that lifted the heart. I was smitten.

Well, if we are extremely lucky, there is a time for some of us when an experience consumes our every thought and when living our life capitulates to a mad, irrational, basic experience. War is a bit like that I came to know. Our everyday awareness assumes a new consciousness and life is lived like never before; as on a battlefield. Our acceptance of old traditions, the kind that keeps us out of trouble, submits to basic instinct, again as in battle. Other less basic needs, such as eating, drinking, living, etc., are put on hold. Alas, in a time of war, one is lost and in love I was totally lost, my darling.

Anyway, I digress. Well, later that night there was the official get-together, a kind of introduction, something personal before our lives changed forever. Quite unusually, as it happened, we were to be treated to an outing to Fort William, escorted by the bold Major of course.

We left on time, everything was on time, and we sat on the train adjacent to each other and although we spoke to others there, mostly, we did pass some cursory glances at each other throughout the journey, or so I thought.

You'll remember security was critical then. Do you remember the sentry shooting the gamekeeper's dog? Venison was well off the menu then! We were screened on entering the small waiting-room-less station and on arriving at the platform at Fort William at the other end. The locals had passes, of course, checked as they moved in and out of the area.

Of course they, the locals that is, knew of the presence of this M.O.D. establishment, something to do with the exercises that woke them in the middle of the night as the incendiaries went off, but they had no idea of its importance or the enormity of what was going on there. We were quite popular though, especially after testing underwater explosives, we left around fifty odd trout floating on the loch the morning after. The incident, unreported it seemed, provided some extra nourishment in a time of restriction, although as a coastal village in the highlands fresh fish always seemed to be available.

We arrived in Fort William around eight that evening and went straight to a local bar, the Ben Nevis I think, after the real Ben that hung over the top of the town, like a majestic eagle, wings outstretched.

I was drawn to you in the pub. You talked incessantly about France and of your family who remained there under occupation. You were beside yourself about their safety. You were terrified the Vicè would discover your links with the resistance and their lives would be lost. You talked of your task. "I must kill Nazis and I must help others kill the Nazis, there is nothing else."

I tried to describe my particular conviction to you, my determination to fight the Third Reich in my own non-violent way, but you could not, or would not, accept this. This was about killing Germans and ridding your country of them forever. For you there was nothing else. It was clear though who would make the best spy.

How you probed me that night. "How could you not kill Germans? They are out to destroy everyone. If it were your life in danger, or your family's, would it be them or the Germans?"

In the midst of this contretemps, we had created our own place, a figurative abode, a safe house in times to come, where we would retreat to the exclusion of all others, but in forming this place, we had confirmed our mortality.

Back in the house, we were allowed, again quite unusually, some relaxation of the rules. It was late and none of us wanted the night to end. We were part of the residual group of night dwellers you always find in these occasions. You'll remember Maureen, the English trainee agent, who was determined to maintain a trio, with us two that is, where it was clear we wanted a duo. Remember? She was a small, dogged woman, who may have coveted you, even idolised you, viewing me as a threat. She reluctantly left us alone, around 3.30 am, I think. Training was to begin again at 7.30 am, the night had just about become day.

We fell into bed and into a shape we would grow to know well. We slept together – slept – not risking intimacy by making love, but holding each other as if to protect, fearing a

minute's separation. The bed was smaller than a single and the mattress hard and we awoke numerous times in those short hours, startled by the clanking pipes that ran the length of the room. It sounded like a war zone, which we would soon know well, but for then we felt safe.

Later that morning we awoke stirred and forever shaken. You, because you didn't dare love that which could be killed or lost. I, because I didn't dare kill that which could be loved or saved. We had, though, embarked on something equally dangerous and uncertain: our love and our war.

Sorry darling I am dropping off. I am so tired, but I must continue.

Those were exciting days in Arisaig, blowing up old barns, a few railway lines, not to mention a mountain bothy or two, but after our initial get together you were distant. I knew why or I think I knew why. You didn't want anything to get in your way of your objective; any emotional attachment was not on the agenda; how could it be? I knew in my own head it would be wrong to get involved, but I found it hard not to (my weakness). After that first night, I lay awake thinking of you, then to return to the stark reality of our task. That I was totally in love with you there was no doubt, but you were on one track while I was on two. If I had the same hate, the same pain, the same determination to kill Nazis, maybe I would have had a similar focus. I questioned myself for not having this, and yet I was considered "psychologically suitable".

You'll remember the time we were sent off up Creag Mhor, ahead of a squad of battle-hardened commandos, who had the mission of locating and eliminating us. We were sent off in twos and although not quite the real thing, this was to prepare us for a predictable disclosure in the field and an even more predictable flight from the Gestapo. Although you had said you would have never ran but would fight and take as many as possible with you. Just as well we didn't carry live rounds, because I am sure you would have taken some of our commandos that night. They did though, to replicate the real thing. Although, if they had killed us, the Major would have had something serious to say.

We had our radio and the plan was to make contact from somewhere in deepest Moidart to arrange a pick up from the good old RAF. The commandos were to track and apprehend us, forcibly if necessary. We took off like whippets out of a trap. My plan was to move as fast as possible into the wilderness and get as far as possible away from our hounds. Your plan was less straightforward and scared the shit out of me: we would slow them down, buy time, and limit their enthusiasm for their prey. I wish I had stuck to my plan, but I was not going to resist you or yours. But minding there were six highly trained killers on our trail I must have been mad; how desire can cloud the mind. No such concern from you though.

We split up and, as you thought, so did they as they followed our respective tracks. We rendezvoused at an agreed point on our map. I had no idea of what we were going to do next, but you did. You ordered me out of my uniform, filled it with grass and laid it on the ground next to a raging burn. We made enough of a noise to draw them there; two

cautiously approaching from each side, the latter holding back. Then you were on him, this one.

You were ferocious, a tiger on its prey. You hit him from the side. A well-aimed kick to the kidneys doubled him and you wrapped around him like a python round his neck. I thought if this is how you treat your allies, how would you treat the Germans? You had a vicelike grip on his neck and your knife squeezed intently into his glottis. He didn't expect this, not on a Scottish hillside. I took his gun and held it at his chest. You called out to his comrades. "You will drop your guns or I will keel heem (sorry darling)." They approached holding their stens at the hip, pointing squarely at our bellies. They were commandos, they would not give up their arms, but there was something which played down this incident for them. We were on the same side after all. "Come on maties, give yourselves up and we will be back in our billets for tea by six and have a laugh at your downright cheek." Then you drew blood and I saw their expressions change. It oozed out of his neck, slowly at first and then more, and now there was fear in his eyes. "I said drop your weapons, I will kill him." They looked at each other in disbelief. You were their ally; you would not take this too far. Then the knife bit deep and he lost consciousness, slumping to the ground; you followed him down, not releasing your grip for a second.

"Ok Ok, it's only an exercise, not worth one of ours."

They dropped their guns. I picked them up. Then in total disbelief you pushed him into the water, grabbed me and the guns and pulled me off up the path, leaving them to fish their compatriot out of the burn. We headed off up the path in the knowledge they would not follow. They had no weapons and their fellow was injured, but they were commandos and they would come back at us, but only after linking with the others. We had bought some time right enough. Well, I know I like my woman with a bit of fire, but! I knew though I would never take you on, not in that way!

We spent three days in Moidart, and, although they sent more commandos to find us, find us they did not. You were distant though throughout the time there and, although I knew there was something going on in your mind, we didn't talk much. You seemed to retreat into your own mind. It was not as simple as you putting up defences; you completely blocked me out and I had no idea why. Our night together, was it a one off? Did you have second thoughts about me? Was this a way of protecting you, or me, or us both? On the last night we found a cave. I had heard Bonnie Prince Charlie hid somewhere around those parts in a cave after his retreat from Culloden, and I wondered if this was it. If it was, then he was not the effeminate softy he was portrayed to be. It was cold, damp, and uncomfortable, with no place to stretch out or sleep. We lit a fire and sat at each side of it facing each other through the flames, although we did not look at each other. But there was one glance, once surreptitious glance, which almost flattened me against the hard stone wall. It happened when I reached over to rake the fire and for a few brief moments I looked downwards, mesmerised into the flames. I was transfixed, enjoying the comfort it offered and, as I raised my eyes, I met yours looking intently into mine; as if your eyes had been fixed there throughout my looking into the flames. Your eyes were

soft, gentle, loving, but oh so incredibly sad, and, in those brief seconds, you were pouring out your every thought through my eyes into my mind and my heart. Then, just as I was about to reach for you, your eyes closed and you retreated into a corner of the cave never to return to the fire or to me, that night. But I knew Brigitte, I just knew.

Well the commandos didn't find us, but I thought we were in for a kicking! We arrived back to be arrested and were well and truly carpeted by the Major. It was not condoned to harm our fellow soldiers. The commando was OK after a few stitches and some Glenfiddich. We had evaded capture when all others had been picked up on the first night out, but we spent two days in the glasshouse; detention in one of the many house's rooms. Secretly, I felt we had gained some credos, both in the eyes of the major and in our fellow spies. It was your doing though. I was only your accomplice; brave spy me!

Brigitte, my time is short, but this letter needs to be written, if anything to confirm to you the reality of our love which lived in a completely unnatural place and time, and which would ultimately destroy us both.

We spent the following days in the theory of reconnaissance, code making and breaking, languages, the culture and practises of the Nazis, the Gestapo, and the Vicè. I absorbed this information as if it would save my life, which of course it would. You seemed disinterested, gazing out of the window much of the time. It was clear you preferred the practical application to the theory.

Being there in the house, in one of the most beautiful parts of Europe, helped balance the sense of isolation from the rest of the world, and, in particular, our families. Oh how I remember Arisaig, the small seaside village of two hundred odd souls. I will never forget those sunsets over the islands of Rum, Eigg and Muck, and the Cuillins of Skye, well in sight from the beautiful sandy beaches. The people were proud and respectful. They may have suspected S.O.E. activities and maybe even our activities! But would they tell?

Nights were spent quietly, reading, drinking, and we had the occasional ceiliadh in the local village hall, the Astley hall, after Sir Astley, the owner of the house, requisitioned by the War Office for our purposes.

I remember the ceiliadhs well, do you? The highlanders really know how to enjoy themselves. The mix of the music and the whiskey was a potent combination, as strong as our detonators and TNT, and just as explosive. They, and we, whirled and whooped into the night. Many of the local men were off at war, but the older and younger men, and the women, were determined to ensure life continued.

I also remember well a few times attending the local bar and having a few drams with the locals. One time in particular, coming back to the house with a few lobsters with their claws tied by string, some crab, and a massive bag of mussels. The locals were warm and friendly, and spoke the native tongue, the Gaelic. Ciamar a tha thu, my darling. We went to great lengths to conceal our relationship and obtain some time together on those sojourns to the village. We walked along the Camusdarach beach, and pondered life in this

small isolated village, so far away from the action in France, and, although I knew there was work to be done, I enjoyed those long nights talking. I could have stayed there forever, but, just as I thought you were relaxing, warming to me, you were off.

The day you hit me was a day which marked my realisation that ours was not going to be a conventional relationship, but how could it have been, we were at war and the likelihood was that we were going off to our deaths? I know why you did it; I always thought I knew what was going on in your head, but not so sure what was going on in your heart.

My mind is going now love, but do you remember the day we got our orders? The day felt differently to any others; we mustered in the boardroom, zero eight hours prompt. Two hours later than usual and no programme pinned to the notice board, we knew there was something on.

The chairs were set out in rows. We shuffled in and nearly every seat was filled. I sat near the back of the room. You were next to the large oak windows, as you were always in this room, often found to be looking longingly off into the distant hills.

The major strode into the house and didn't beat about. Huxley, O'Hare, Briggs, Beck, Jones, Casserly: operation Foxtrot, Norway. Romanidi, Crow, Jennings, McTavish, Wisneski: operation Tango, Belguim. Myres, De Paul, Stepek, operation Waltz, Italy.

"Italia non, la France, la France." You were on your feet, shouting at the top of your voice.

"Sit down Madam, you will not disrupt this briefing, you understand? "

"France, France, I need France."

"Sit down woman or you will find yourself in the glasshouse, sit down I say, that is an order. I will go on. Gilberts, Murphy, Hamilton, De Clerk: operation bossa nova, France."

"France, France, I need France," you persevered.

"Take that woman out. All to your respective operations, now."

And that was that, he was off. I was going to France; you were heading to three days solitude, and eventually to Italy.

My love, this is difficult for me. My strength is waning, but I must go on.

Anyway, I was off the next day, but I so wanted to say goodbye to you, and also to say that we would meet again, some sunny day and all that, but we were ordered out. But I needed to get a message to you, but how? And how could we keep in touch? Our good friend Alasdair Ruadh, the gillie, was the only man who knew about us and who we trusted. We had spent some time in his cottage, off the Rhu road, drinking tea and drams. He was a gillie for the rich English officers desperate for the large game on the hill.

He was the best stalker in Lochaber and ensured they got their kill. He detested them, but enjoyed the perks they provided. They befriended him and would do anything to ensure his services, as they competed with each other for the largest stags and had their heads mounted and presented in extravagant parties at the house.

Through them, he could get letters to you. He could be our intermediary. He was my only chance. That night, I snuck along the corridor to the glasshouse. It was guarded by Corporal Sean McBride. There was no way he would let me see you, but I begged, "One minute, Sean, just one minute." I could hear you breathing behind the door, but you didn't answer my silent words. "I love you Brigitte, we will see each other again, stay safe my love until we meet again. Alasdair Ruadh will be our link. I will write my darling until the day I die and beyond, forever." Then a strong hand bore down upon me and I was away.

"How will I reach you?" Ruadh said.

"You won't, I will reach you," I said, and I was away, never knowing how much this man, who I knew little about, and would mean to us both. His words, in broad West Highland, followed me: "John, your letters... I will see to it."

I arrived at RAF Brize something, tired, stunned, and very scared. But I was sure you would have envied me, it should have been you going to France. I wondered if they sent you to Italy because you were so emotionally locked on France. You would have been excited, repressing any fear. It was an inconvenience to you, a hindrance, but it also invigorated you, stimulated you, drove you on. I was the wimp, and here I was heading off to who knows what. I was to proceed to Honfleur, a small coastal village in Normandy, near to Le Havre. I was to be an Irish Journalist, but really to act as the link between the resistance and the Allies, to transfer information of German troop movements, and to encourage and provide moral support to the fighters there. Little did I know at the time Normandy would become the stage for the biggest invasion known to man. My mission though, I thought, was simple and relative safe. As I said, so I thought.

I had no idea where you were in Italy? I sent my first letter to Alasdair Ruadh, never thinking it would reach you, but this man was more than a gillie, he was an immense facilitator. He had a way of cutting through red tape, bribing officials, exploiting the black market. He called up many favours from the brass that used Arisaig as a place to recover, hide, and love. He said he had contacts in high places and his links with the spy network through Arisaig house ensured the letters reached their destination.

My first letters were sent into the ether. I remember the first letter I wrote:

"I am well, my love. I live without fear in a seventeen-century townhouse. It is truly beautiful here, if not for the numerous German officers who use the local bay to relax. They have no concerns. This is an easy posting for them. No eastern front. No Atlantic U Boats. No Tripoli or El Alamein. It is easy to get information, too easy. The Germans are fortifying the Atlantic sea-board, but Calais is their fear. They thought we wouldn't try

again down here after Dieppe. They think we need a deep water port to land our heavy armaments. Stay lively my love. Your John"

I wrote that letter in the dark. Knowing if it was intercepted I was a dead man, but I was a dead man without contact with you.

Most days were the same. I met with different groups each day. French fighters itching for a fight. They harassed me for news. When, where, how will the Allies strike? I developed excellent French and not a little German. I was viewed as an eccentric Irishman, a neutral correspondent for the Irish Press, with a liking for the pastis.

I didn't know if you knew what was happening with Alasdair Ruadh? I did not know then, but I know now he had risked all for us, but his liking for a wee dram and his links with Arisaig house did not go unnoticed with the German high command. After some months of surveillance he was approached in a Fort William bar.

An Oberleutnant, Muller, he later told me, approached him at the bar, brandishing an impeccable Oxbridge accent, obtained after an extended classical training at Oxford, he said. They spent most of the night talking about jazz music, a common interest and an international language. They left late and chatted as they wandered down by the loch.

Muller picked his time well. It was a dark moonless night. He would kill Ruadh should he reject his offer, disappear into the night, and be back to his safe house by early morning. More money than he could ever hope to earn as a gillie with the rich English officers he could have used, which would have funded his alcohol habit. He was anti royal, but would not traitor himself for that. The final determinant was when Muller informed him that they had his only son, Angus. He was in a prisoner of war camp in Eastern Europe and they had tortured him, obtaining more than his name, rank, and serial number. Ruadh had no choice, co-operate, or lose his only son. We had a traitor informant for an intermediary, my love.

My life is now all but gone.

Then my existence was two fold: do my job and keep my contact with you, but of the former I had overstretched the mark. I had a particular tactic and was good I thought, at exploiting my 'Irish charm'. I would arrive in a café bar, early, a different one each night, to be only repeated ever few weeks. I would identify my hit; get close enough to drop a comment: weather, French ladies, the Dutch art in the galleries that surrounded the square, the stinking French snails. That generally got them talking about sauerkraut back home, leading to information they thought to be innocuous: shift patterns, time on leave, moral of the troops. One night, this particular uniform was pretty drunk already. I moved over. He was hanging over his drink, war does that.

He pulled out a book, Descartes I think. Most German officers were well read and could not resist some intellectual discussion. He quoted, in German, just above a whisper.

"What are you saying?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to disturb you."

"Well you did."

There was a pause.

"That is a lousy Irish accent."

I was flabbergasted.

"Come to think about it, the last time I spoke to you, you said the same thing."

Shit, I thought. This was the same German I hit three weeks ago in a different bar.

My love, I had to think quickly. I laughed, "I remember, I remember, I told you then, I had travelled extensively since leaving Ireland, the land of my birth, and had picked up a variety of accents. Anyway how are you?"

"Me? Why are you asking about me? You do not know me. I seem to remember you asking me questions before. Are you a bloody spy?"

As he asked this, he pulled out a Luger. "I could shoot you now and save the firing squad. Well, what are you?"

You will remember the role plays in this type of situation. I drew deeply on those acquired skills.

I laughed loudly, loud enough to draw attention. "Me a spy? An Irishman a spy! I fought the British black and tans and then fought the black and white whiskey. Me a spy? I my friend I am a drunk, but not a spy." I downed a large pastis and broke into a rendition of the Irish Rover.

He smiled, bless him, and lowered his Luger. "You are a lucky man my friend, another time, I would have shot you."

I was convinced of that.

The next day I realised how close I had come to my demise. He was Waffen SS - Hitler's bodyguard. Why didn't I pick this up the last time? I was losing my touch, but more importantly, what was he doing here in those parts. I should have found out, and got the hell out of there. It wouldn't take much for him and the others to talk to each other about this strange, overly friendly, overly inquisitive, Irishman.

Two days later, I found your letter in our concealed post-box; under a rock in the bay. Ruadh had done well. You had received my last letter, I had received yours. We were in contact my love.

I read your letter over and over again.

"My Dear John, I hope my letter finds you well and safe. I cannot say where I am at the time of writing. Enough to say that we move a lot. I worry about you. You say you worry about me; we worry about each other; what way is this? Worry, worry, worry, Brigitte."

I laughed at the letter. In Arisaig, you said if we worried about each other, we would be less likely to worry about ourselves individually. So I worried about you, you worried about me, which meant we had less time to worry about anything else.

I kept my head down for a while in Honfleur, until activity was stepped up.

Oh, how my heart aches for your voice, your face, your eyes, but soon love we will meet again.

It was mid 1944 and it was close. It did know how close it was or where it would be, but I had orders to cover the area from Honfleur to Deauville and Trouville, watch the river crossings, fords, bridges for heavy armed vehicle movements, and as always plot the only Panzer Division in the area, the 21st. And watch the German Seventh Army, where, although concentration of troops had increased, they appeared relaxed, enjoying leave in the bars of Trouville. It was clear the Germans did not believe an invasion on this coast was possible.

And where were you my love? From your last letter you indicated you were somewhere down south, maybe in Sicily involved in your own landings, and ultimately in the fall of the Ducè, Mussolini. After that, I had no idea where you were. Did you recognise the Italians had no heart for a fight, and did you head back to France, where the action was? Was your family in danger? Later, through Ruadh, I found you had been captured my love, in Paris, where you were with the resistance. Were you treated as francs-tireurs, immediately shot, or tortured my love?

And now my darling I must bring you up to date.

Ruadh lied my love. He lied. He passed our information to us right enough, but he passed on information from our letters to others, which led to your capture and mine. I should have known it was too good to last, but my heart had led my head. My letters contained more information than was necessary, yours were more circumspect, but I thought I was talking directly to you. I was taken to Gestapo headquarters in Le Havre. Little did I, or the Germans, know this was the eve of the greatest invasion known to man. When the balloon went up all German concentration was on mounting an attack on the allied beachhead. I was tortured after the invasion and I told them everything my love, everything I knew. I told you I was no hero.

But now, all these years later, I have to tell you the full story. I need your absolution in my life my love, before I meet you in death, for I cannot bear the thought of your rejection for all time and I must describe our love in a way which no one, not even you, can deny. And I am so very tired now, but I must continue.

I did not betray you my love, Ruadh did. Please believe me. You will wonder, after I was free, why did I not expose him? I could not my love, because in exposing him I would have exposed us. And by exposing us, our love would have been seen to be the cause of information being passed to the Germans. By revealing our love, our love would have destroyed everything we believed in, and, in turn, everything we believed in would have destroyed our love. So I was content in Ruadh being left alone and, in return, he, through his "friends", arranged my release. I told you he had friends in high places my love.

But that was then my love and now is now.

After the war, I met again with Ruadh. I had travelled to Arisaig for a reunion of the SOE, those who had made it that is. His son had died and he begged for forgiveness. I could not kill him my love, it was not in me, although my anger almost destroyed me, and I needed an outlet for the despair I felt after losing you. I know you will never forgive me for not killing him, because that is exactly what you have done. I could not kill him but I could kill myself.

I am asking your forgiveness my love, not for not killing him, and not even for being instrumental in your own death, but for something else, which I am now going to go on to describe.

There was a final letter my love, one you didn't receive, because he didn't forward it to you. I have it here with me now. I have to read it to you.

"My Brigitte, I am sorry for not writing to you for such a long time, months maybe. I am moving through France ahead of the allies. I am supported by Free French and am instrumental in getting them the arms they need to pick away at the Germans from behind their lines, as they prepare to meet the allies. My darling, there is something which I have to tell you about, which breaks my heart and maybe will yours. I met her in Honfleur...."

I don't think I need to say anything more my love, this says it all, but you were never to know this. Ruadh made sure of that; maybe that is why I couldn't kill him, apart from my conchie views. So now you know. Later when I found out you had been killed in Paris I thought these were the last words you had received from me, it broke my heart, but would have it been better not to have told you. Now you know, maybe where you are you know everything, but I had to explain, to ask your forgiveness. Our love, after all, existed in a time of war, and my betrayal also. Both were made because of war, of mortality, but ours will survive into immortality ... if you forgive me.

She was a comfort in a time of fear. I was a coward and I sought solace in her arms and she died also at the wrong end of a firing squad, so I am responsible for the death of two who loved me. But there was no reality; my reality existed in my love for you and my letters to you, and my pain I could not bear without comfort.

So you now know what I am, and I am soon to be with my maker, and I dearly hope with you. In killing myself I hope to convince you of my love for you, because this is all I

have to give you, me. The pills I have taken are now affecting my breathing and I am becoming very drowsy. I hope I do not suffer too much because as you know - you must be fed up of me saying this - I am a coward, and maybe this is the coward's way out.

Could you live with a coward in life? Could you be with a coward in death? Could you be with someone who has betrayed you in life? Could you be with someone who has betrayed you in death? No, I suspect not, to all.

I am, therefore, risking all in the hope you see something in this, in me, which is strong and selfless, in the way you were, but perhaps not in the way you gave yourself. To be with you for all time is my only hope left in this life and for the next.

I risk eternity without you, but life without you is no life.

But ours was a love, my love; love in a time of death, and in death may it live.

Forever yours - until we meet again.

John

p.s. I have arranged for this letter to be given to Ruadh. He will "see to it". As I have said he has friends in high places.