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## The First Letters



And who are the men in the prison?  
What are their reactions to gaol?  
Do social workers make progress?  
Individual statistics are frail.  
And frail is the whole prison system  
For containment is all it can give,  
Men locked away from their families  
Men who may not have that long to live.

*Alex 1976*

My career as an actress started by accident, not design, when I was eleven-years-old. I was studying to be a ballet dancer at Elmhurst Ballet School in Camberley, Surrey when I was summoned by the headmistress and told that there was a gentleman to meet me. This meeting resulted in a lead role in 'Run Wild, Run Free', a gentle film about an autistic boy and his friendship with a girl, and her kestrel, who lived on the moors. The film was a vehicle for Mark Lester, the star of 'Oliver'.

Two years later, I was filming the epic 'Nicholas and Alexandra' playing the youngest daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, the doomed Anastasia. Before long I was being photographed by Lord Snowdon for the *Sunday Times* to go with an article entitled 'Faces of the Seventies' and by David Bailey for *Vogue*.

This led directly to the lead role in a musical film adaptation of 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. With an all-star cast and music by John Barry, the film had its premiere in December 1972, attended by Her Majesty Queen

Elizabeth II. Most of 1973 was spent touring the world promoting the film and I finally left school that summer.

However, the transition from child to adult actress was proving difficult (I had decided by then that I wanted to act and not to be a ballerina) so I found myself working, temporarily, in an optician's in Wigmore Street just behind Oxford Circus. Lord Hailsham, one of our more prominent customers, would cycle to all his appointments. On arrival he would lean his bike against the railings outside and come into the showroom, huffing and puffing, with his bicycle clips still firmly attached to his ankles. 'Be a dear,' he would say to me, sitting behind the reception desk, 'and make sure nobody takes it upon themselves to divest me of that bike.' (The irony cannot be ignored that he was Lord Chancellor at the time and therefore indirectly responsible for Alex's imprisonment). In 1975, things took a positive turn and I was making the leap into adult roles, filming a BBC television series called 'Angels', about six female student nurses, just starting out on their training. The viewing figures showed that enough people loved it for a second series to be commissioned. By 1976 we were half-way through filming that series.

The rain was almost horizontal, stinging my cheeks as I ran from the underground station to the BBC rehearsal rooms in North Acton. The tall building that loomed in front of me had been my workplace for over a year now and everyone in the reception and security area knew me.

'Blimey, Fiona, you look like a drowned rat.'

'Thanks Bill. Is Erin in yet?'

'Yup. She's just gone up.' I jumped into the lift and pressed six. The building was a purpose-built block of enormous rehearsal rooms, for television programmes that were to be filmed at the Television Centre just down the road in White City. We would rehearse each episode for ten days and then record for two.

The first series of 'Angels' had been shown the previous year on BBC1 at prime time, once a week, and was a huge success. The fan mail flooded in and the six of us who played the students found ourselves at the centre of a million teenage fantasies.

Erin Geraghty was a delightful Irish actress with whom I bonded instantly. She showed me the ropes, as I was the 'new' girl in TV, having only ever

been in films before. (Having five cameras pointing at me when I had only previously been used to one, was proving rather alarming.) ‘Well, would you look at that,’ she said, smiling. ‘Only eight for you today.’ She handed me a bundle of rather damp letters. Over lunch, I had a quick look at them and one of them in particular caught my eye.

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**Prison number 789959**

**HM Prison Parkhurst**

**Isle of Wight.**

**14. 4. 1976**

Dear Fiona,

I recently wrote to the BBC requesting photographs of the cast in your series ‘Angels’. Unfortunately though, I did not have much luck.

I began watching ‘Angels’ from the very beginning and since then I have not missed an episode. It is very rare for me to watch one programme consistently because there are a lot of other things I’m in the habit of doing; such as reading, painting, writing, listening to commercial radio and counting the bricks in my cell wall. Oh, and I have a budgie that talks and he keeps getting his words mixed up.

It’s a picture of you I’d really like though. Your face could launch the US Navy and a couple of submarines, but my pal says just the US Navy.

Sincerely Yours

Anthony Alexandrowicz (Alex)

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It made me smile mainly because of the cheeky twist he gave to the compliment at the end of the letter. But the most interesting thing about this letter was the immaculate, tiny handwriting and the fact that it was written on prison issue notepaper. Something made me send him six photos of all the cast members and not just one of me.

*Dear Fiona*

**BBC Television Centre  
London  
26th May 1976**

Dear Alex

Thank you for your lovely letter. I enclose here pictures of all the cast and hope that they help to brighten up your day. I'm glad you enjoy 'Angels' because we enjoy it too!

Yours Sincerely

Fiona Fullerton

**HM Prison Parkhurst  
Isle of Wight  
27. 5. 76**

Dear Fiona,

Woke up this morning and hit me head on the coffin lid. 'That's it,' I thought, 'gonna be one of those days.' Not much sun outside and too much water in the porridge. My two budgies zooming about like the Battle of Britain and the battery on my radio is down to ghost power.

Got ready for work, being asleep on my feet and all that, rolled up a smoke and went straight down to the censor's office to see if I'd got a letter. Yeah, says the censor, you got a letter. Things are picking up, I thought.

So I got the letter and opened it up and when I saw what was inside it I thought, well just look at that! Fantastic. She's answered my letter. And how! Twenty submarines and the Merchant Navy too! All these pictures, got them here in front of me and talk about 'brighten your day.' Brighten up another century without any trouble at all.

Most of the guys in here are crazy over one or another of you. Many of the screws are too. Say, I still don't know what colour your hair is; guess I'll ask a screw as most of them have colour televisions at home.

I wouldn't mind having a go at medical work when I get out of prison. It seems interesting, but I'd only do temporary work because most of my time would be taken up by writing. There's a couple of books waiting for publication, but this can't be done until I get released – and I don't know when that will be because I'm serving a life term. I should imagine that it will be within the next four years, as I have done five already.

Thank you once again for the photos you sent, Fiona. I hope, when you are not too busy, you will write again.

Meanwhile good luck and best wishes for your future.

Keep smiling and take care.

Alex

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Telling me that he was serving a life sentence so early on in our correspondence was a considerable risk. How did he know that it wouldn't bother me that much? And come to think of it, why didn't it? I suppose I must have read something in those lines that intrigued me but his humour appealed to me too.

Alex's first night in Parkhurst was spent on the hospital wing. It had been horrendous. In his 'Prison Chronicles' he recalls that he couldn't sleep.

'There were too many animals mooing and bleating. On one side of me was a bloke who thought he was an owl and on the other side a monkey. It was my first meeting with mentally-ill prisoners.

The doctor saw me the next day and told me he was putting me on C-Wing. 'You'll like it on C-Wing,' he said.

Of the four separate wings, C-Wing stood out because it was understood to house psychotics and prisoners just back from Rampton and Broadmoor. It was controlled by psychiatrists. It housed a maximum of 20 or so cons, although it had enough empty cells to house a hundred. My first few days were spent adjusting to the regime but I wasn't bothered by any of the other men. They were complex men, each throwing many shadows.'

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*Dear Fiona*

**London**

**15th June 1976**

Dear Alex,

Thank you so much for your last letter. I'm glad the photos gave you so much pleasure but the one of me was so terrible that I'm enclosing a couple more for you.

To answer your question, my hair is chestnut coloured, I have green eyes, I'm five foot four inches tall and have two legs!!

I was interested to hear that you write and would indeed be most honoured to receive a copy of your book. It is so nice to receive letters with a bit of personality too, instead of a curt demand for a photo.

What nationality are you? You have an unusual name. I'm British but in fact was born in Nigeria, West Africa. My father is an officer in the British Army, so consequently we have lived abroad most of the time. I love travelling—I'm a bit of a nomad really, having never lived in one place for more than three years.

Twenty submarines eh? And the Merchant Navy—I'm very flattered.

You have such beautiful handwriting. Did you cultivate that in prison?

Alex, I'm going to play Cinderella at the London Palladium over Christmas, isn't that exciting? I'm only 19-years-old, so I'm very pleased. It's a musical, so I'll be singing and dancing in it as well. I've always wanted to do a stage musical. When I was little, I wanted to be Julie Andrews.

Also, I'm getting married on July 10th in the Crypt Chapel of St Paul's Cathedral to a wonderful young man called Simon MacCorkindale—do think of us on that day.

Please write again, when you feel like it.

Best Wishes

Fiona Fullerton

Simon and I met at a charity cricket match at the Oval late in 1975 where the cast of 'Angels' had been asked to sell raffle tickets to the spectators.

He was a struggling actor, I discovered, who had appeared in small roles on TV and on the stage, but he had a healthy dose of ambition and drive. His dashing good looks and rich, mellifluous voice were reminiscent of the old-style movie stars. Public school educated and with a father retired from the air force, we seemed to have a lot in common. Within three weeks, he had asked me to marry him.

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### **HM Prison Parkhurst**

**22. 6. 76**

Dear Fiona,

Caramba! Thank you for the photographs. Oh boy, what a smile. If I was the Chancellor, Desperate Dennis [Healey], I'd have your face printed on all new currency notes, then fellas would really be able to kiss their money goodbye, wouldn't they?

My nationality? Oddly enough I'm British. My father is from a town in the Western Ukraine called Odessa. He came over here in 1951 on a Party-swap and met my mother, who is from Cornwall, the next year. They moved up North and I was born on the 8th February 1953 in Manchester, although I was brought up in the small industrial town of Nelson, near Burnley, NE Lancs. Terraced houses, mill chimneys and cobbled streets. Near where I come from is Haworth, where the Brontes lived, so the countryside has its own special blend of mystery and charm.

So your father is an officer in the forces? My father also, during the last war. He was a colonel in the Red Army but, unlike others, despised Stalin.

My grandfather was with the Terek Cossacks in 1917 and my grandmother fought in both wars. They still live in Odessa to this day. Occasionally they come to England for brief visits and once, a long time ago, my father took me to Odessa to visit them. I remember my grandfather holding me above his head as everyone danced to the accordion. My grandmother in her best linen, snow white, and my aunts and uncles performing Cossack sabre dances with wine bottles balanced on their heads. When I get out of this place I'd like to visit them again.

## *Dear Fiona*

The Home Office has given me permission to apply for Soviet citizenship and I believe it will be granted, for although I am serving life, it is for no capital offence so I should be freed around 1979. With luck. Then maybe I will marry and settle down somewhere instead of belting around the country on my 850 Triumph Bonnie.

I love travelling too. When I wanted to be on my own, I'd head for Cumberland and the Lake District. Keswick – have you ever been there Fiona? Derwentwater? Well worth a visit. Sometimes it's good to be a nomad.

As I cannot send you a photo, I am 6 feet 1 inch tall, eleven stone ten pounds, brown hair, moustache and beard, blue-grey eyes, a broken nose (would you believe that I walked into a lamp-post when I was nine? True though. Wallop!!) and a North East Lancashire accent.

So you are to be married on the tenth. I am very happy for you – for both of you – but especially for you. Will you be keeping your present name? I hope Simon is really going to look after you. He's the luckiest guy on God's earth and that is a fact. May he always treat you good and proper, may he always love you and be forever faithful and be a good husband. I want you both to be very happy together. Many congratulations and most definitely I will think of you on that day.

Then there's Cinderella at the Palladium. You'll knock 'em for six. This may be your first stage musical but there'll be lots more because you have what it takes. Never lose self-confidence – if you really believe, then you can do anything. You'll have the time of your life. Rave on!

Next month I'll be up in Strangeways, Manchester, for my annual visits from my family, so you can imagine I'll be looking forward to that very much. I should be back in Parkhurst by the beginning of August.

For now then, Das Vidaniya

Alex

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Alex would often include poems in his letters to me, displaying an unusually creative dexterity, considering his isolation from the world outside. Some of them are heartbreakingly poignant, while others are humorous and tender. I have included an edited selection of poems in the order in which they came.



**Swim**

Tonight I will go for a swim  
In the deep blue sea of the universe.  
I will dive into endless fathoms  
And laze amongst the shoals of constellations.

Passing a plane of astral bodies  
I will give to them a message of tranquillity  
Then, into the Zodiac I will go  
To call upon my Heavenly house of Aquarius.

Astride a comet's fiery back  
I shall laugh; and sing joyous refrains  
of passion and love.  
My heart shall leap and swell  
As I gaze upon the endless beauty of  
Celestial surroundings  
Then I shall be set down upon  
A star; where I may rest and think  
Should I surface from my Moonlit Sonata?

Perhaps I would find it preferable to  
Just lay back and sink...

*Alex 1976*

At this time Alex was transferred to Strangeways Prison in Manchester so that he could receive visits from his family who still lived in that part of the country. The journey to Manchester was a master class in high security travel for a Category-A prisoner. Alex seemed bemused to be at the centre of such an expensive and coordinated operation. He was put into a yellow prison van and handcuffed to a prison warder.

*Dear Fiona*

‘Two other screws sat in the back and there were two more, a driver and a navigator up front. As soon as we left the gatehouse I saw flashing lights; it was a police motor waiting for us, to escort us to the ferry.

Inside, a metal screen separated the back of the van from the driver and navigator, the latter having control of a powerful police radio, which was left on constantly when the van was in use. The van was not allowed to stop. Rumour had it that a shooter was kept in a locked box under the rear seat. Should an A-man attempt an escape he would risk being shot and killed.

As we rolled off the ferry at Portsmouth, there were a further two police escorts waiting. With lights flashing and sirens blaring the whole lot of us set off for Manchester.

As each county boundary approached, a fresh set of police cars would be waiting to take over; the convoy making these changeovers without any reduction in speed.

It was 1976. The summer was long and unbearably hot and the inside of the A-van became like an oven. The police cars forged ahead, their lights and sirens carving a path through the traffic, and I’m sitting there thinking ... Before Parkhurst there’d never been police escorts. So what had happened to change that?

I closed my eyes and focused back to 1971, when I’d been an ordinary kid, albeit a sometime petty thief who stole while on the run. I had read some of Franz Kafka’s stories but they upset me. And then I’d think: “But this is England—not a police state somewhere in Eastern Europe. What’s happening?”

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**BBC Television Centre**  
**London**  
**7th July 1976**

My Dear Alex,

Just a very quick note to thank you for your long, chatty letter and for the beautiful card you made for me. I was really thrilled to receive that and it has pride of place on the mantelpiece.

We are busy now with last minute preparations for the great day on Saturday, and as we will be in France for two weeks, I thought I’d better

write now. This will be the most important day of my life and I'm so excited. Thank you for the little poem.

I will send you a photo. I hope you are well and can share a little of my happiness.

With Fond Regards

Fiona

**Strangeways Prison**

**Manchester**

**16. 7.1976**

Dear Fiona

See, told you the weather would stay fine for you! How about that then? Good job the wedding wasn't in Manchester though because it was teeming down on the tenth. I hope this letter finds you intensely happy in every way.

I got a visit today from my mother, she's been twice since I arrived here last Thursday, and it's been very nice seeing her again although on her first visit I was at a loss what to talk about.

At present I am teaching myself Esperanto, seems to be a popular language, and I feel okay right now because of my visits and the course keeps me busy, which results in each day passing quickly. I don't notice the time as much.

Well, my father is coming tomorrow; I haven't seen him in five years, my mother is coming on Sunday, then back to Parkhurst again. You know, I miss that place, somehow. I suppose it's because all my friends are there. Funny that. They're all cons but some are *decent* – most especially the more 'dangerous' ones.

**Where Will the Path Go?**

Where will the path I tread go through?  
Between the spoken word and silence,  
Where skies are overcast and blue,

*Dear Fiona*

And where warring wills reach balance;

Where dreams of satisfaction breathe,  
Undisturbed by gnawing doubts,  
Where fiery passions toss and seethe,  
Amidst a wilful drinking bout.

Where timid and uncertain eyes  
Discover truthfulness and troth,  
Where clashing lightbeams compromise,  
And thus unite the South and North.

There sleepless lights give blessed light  
To my faithful fountain-pen,  
Like someone dumb I have to write  
To communicate with other men.

Battles, courage and despair,  
Rising hope and gathering storms-  
Like the universe I bear  
Amazing states and startling forms.

Words. Silence. Words come again.  
The two are always with me.  
I'm powerful as a hurricane  
And endless as the sea ....

*Alex 1976*

Just got supper, let's see – mug of tea and currant cake. Now for a scientific experiment ... behold! I take the cake between finger and thumb, I let go! Jesus. As I'm standing here it bounced. Bounced! Hold on, I'll try it again. Fascinating.

Well, I have to finish now. Take care of yourself Fiona. Please write again when you can.

Alex

Alex was having an uneasy time at Strangeways:

‘Strangeways was wary of me. They put me down the block in a punishment cell but I was allowed to use my radio. The visits with my parents (one at a time because they had split up) were spoiled because on either side of the table sat two screws. We weren’t able to say anything confidential, we were so conscious of the screws.

My dad always brought me two ounces of tobacco, which I smuggled in hidden in my boots. At nights the red light was left on and my clothing had to be put in a cardboard box which was left outside the cell.

After a month at Strangeways I was back in the Cat-A van, en route home to Parkhurst. When I got back I learned that there’d been an escape from the Special Security Block (SSB), which is a prison within a prison housing only a dozen or so prisoners who presented the gravest threat to society.

It was beautiful. Two cons, wire-cutters, through the fence, over the wall, in broad daylight under the noses of the screws. Both were recaptured but it was a turbo boost for morale.’

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**BBC Television Centre**

**London.**

**19th August 1976**

Dear Alex,

I loved your last letter. I find you extremely interesting Alex, but unfortunately I won’t be able to answer at such length, as I’m quite busy at the moment.

Well, the honeymoon in France was amazing but so HOT. Paris was everything I wanted it to be but we couldn’t afford very much and, as I was permanently thirsty, Simon had to ration the orange squash ’cos it was soooooo expensive. He took me to the Opera House to see ‘La Traviata’ but we sat in the gods and I had a long dress on and nearly melted.

In Provence we stayed in a little hut on a farm and ate with the family, which was kind of tricky because my French is very basic. Simon’s is quite good though. Did you see the papers?

*Dear Fiona*

I hope all is well with you now that you are back in Parkhurst. Can you enjoy the sunshine?

I'm glad you were able to see your parents. I'm sure it gave you strength.

Well, I'm busy recording my last episode of *Angels* and decorating our new flat! It seems to be covered in horrid woodchip wallpaper but S is a real handyman so he is steaming it off. He decorates other people's houses when he is out of work.

Sorry this is so short. I promise I'll write at length later.

Best Wishes, Fiona

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The honeymoon in Paris was indeed marred by the exceptional heat. Nineteen-seventy-six was a scorching summer and I remember walking down the Champs-Élysées on the Sunday morning, looking for a cold drink, and stopping at one of the little green newspaper kiosks. There, to our astonishment, were all the British newspapers with our faces on the front of every one.

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### **Parkhurst Prison**

#### **Isle of Wight**

**26. 8. 76**

Hello Fiona,

I am always finding that life is something wonderful. I hope you get the same feeling. Please excuse me for writing so often, this is a new experience for me and I find it extremely pleasant, so I hope you don't get too bored.

My friend Taffy delighted me on my return here with all the newspaper cuttings of you and Simon. Wow! Every Sunday paper. And thank you for the wedding photograph – you look extremely beautiful and how happy you look. Now I am decorating! I have to find somewhere in the cell to stand this photograph!

You find me interesting? A lot of people from every walk of life have said they find me interesting and I am baffled. This copper once found me asleep, around two o'clock in the morning (I was about thirteen years old) in a telephone box at Kettering

Bus Station. He marched me up to the local cop-shop and reported to the inspector what he had found. The inspector looked at me and said, 'Interesting'. Oh wow, I thought. Then he took my snake-belt off me. Happens all the time.

Fiona, I know how busy you are so of course you cannot write me long letters! My hope is that one day you will be able to count me as a friend – a very valuable thing friendship, never to be taken lightly, a commodity to be regarded with the utmost trust and respect. May we one day become friends, then.

How's this for coincidence; soon it'll be Christmas and you'll be on stage in London and I might be on stage in Parkhurst. This year we're thinking of doing a concert. On C-Wing we have two guys playing mouth-organ, an accordionist, two drummers and a couple of guitars, but I think the Governor would like us to sing carols, perish the thought.

I remember once in Blackburn, a friend called Catweasle and myself decided to get dressed up and nip over to the local dance hall to listen to one of the touring Rock 'n' Roll bands there. So we get there and find two girls listening outside the doors, decent kids – not the usual back-street freaks – and we asked them if they'd like to go in with us. They'd like to, they said but they couldn't jive ... In the end they took us to this place where it's ten bob to get in if you're wearing a tie. And – we had to waltz!! You can imagine two guys wearing drapes, luminous socks, bootlace ties and beetle-crushers – dancing the waltz. Funny thing though, I took my girlfriend there regularly afterwards – dressed in the approved fashion of course – and that's when I began acquiring a taste for classical music, and I was only around 17.

I'm still messing around with the Esperanto stuff, it isn't very hard if one knows how to roll ones 'r's like a Russian. By the way Fiona, do you know how to pronounce my surname? It is 'vich' with the emphasis on the last six letters that begin with the rolling 'r'. No Englishman has ever pronounced it properly. Have a try. Be the first. Make history!

But now I must finish, I'll have the light turned out in a few minutes.

Be Happy. Take Good Care of Yourself,

Alex.

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Alex's letters from Parkhurst seemed to be so full of humour and indicated that he had settled into a rhythm and routine. I looked forward to

*Dear Fiona*

receiving them but had no idea of the horrors he was enduring. He kept all that from me.

‘The Topping Shed hadn’t been used for a long time, but it still sent a shiver down the spine to stand in it. It was located near the end of the wing and was kept unlocked, so I was using it to store some mop buckets and brushes. Looking up the chute you could see the trap doors, now nailed shut, and at the bottom there were stone brackets to hold the stretcher in place. It was easily the coldest room in the prison and it didn’t do to linger there.

C-Wing was the oldest of the Parkhurst wings. It had clearly been built to house women, as all the cell doorways were less than five feet six inches high. Originally Parkhurst was a holding prison, before its inmates were deported to Australia. The prison ship would anchor in the River Medina and the convicts would be taken there, by way of a tunnel connecting the prison with the riverbank. The tunnel is still said to exist, although both ends have been blocked up.

Some of the C-Wing men had been building their own tunnel; it started under the shower house and ran directly towards the outside wall, some 15 yards away. Unfortunately, quite by chance, a screw fell into it one day, so it had to be abandoned when it was only half finished.’

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**HM Prison Parkhurst**

**Isle-of-Wight**

**C-Wing**

**15. 9. 1976**

Hey Fiona,

I’ve got problems with my beard, it grows all over the place and I can’t straighten it out. I can’t stick Brylcream on it and, promising though it sounds, I think plugging my finger into the A/C socket is a little extreme, though people say go ahead. Don’t fancy lighting-up like Blackpool Illuminations. Do you have any suggestions?

You know, if man would stop to look, to see his actions, how very different this world of ours would be! Can you imagine what a wonderful place this would be if we had people that truly cared, to make our laws, and to rule with feeling, instead



of greed and the lust for power! There would be no need for dreams, for life would be real for each and every one of us.

Well, Autumn is here, and trees are beginning to cast their coloured leaves, the days are now a paler shade of grey, colder now that the sun grows weak and nights seem to come sooner. There is of course consolation in a good book (I've nearly finished Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, a marvellous book, have you read it Fiona?) the writing of a letter, and also the fact that one seems to have more time for thought. I seem to have so many plans for future times!

It has been pouring down on the I.O.W. these past couple of days and everyone is happy and all the farmers have been bombing around and vegetation is thriving. I love rain, Fiona; it really clears up the air. And I love thunder and lightning. It may sound strange but I used to walk on the moors around home when storms broke out and, when thunder and lightning came, I'd just stand still and yell at the sky, 'Come on, then. Here I am! – see if you can hit me!?', and I never got hit once. Tempting the Gods? Sure, why not? They must like me, hey? Yeah. Never had pneumonia, either.

It is carols we're doing at Christmas and a few pop songs thrown in. I'm on drums, not guitar, as we have two guitarists, but if things drag I'll hot up that beat. Begin with Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, and finish with a rave from the grave or a blast from the past. Here's a poem I wrote the other night. See what you think ...

**Evening in Lancashire** *For Fiona*

Soulful cries ... of grubby young children.  
Angry shouts ... of unemployed men.  
Long rows ... of grey terraced houses.  
Soot-blackened brickwork ... A solitary wren.

Raindrops bouncing ... from cobblestones.  
Curtains drawn in ... many homes.  
Streetlights ... orange against darkening blue.  
Lonely, up in the sky ... an aircraft drones.

Twin beams of Light ... a passing car.  
An ambulance siren ... is heard from afar,  
Echoing over ... tired backyards.

*Dear Fiona*

A tramp lies gazing ... at the North Star.

The wary cat will ... spit and hiss.

Watching mice play ... hit and miss.

Darkness unites ... lights go out.

Beneath the heavens, stars, beneath the gold moon

A tender goodnight kiss.

*Alex 1976*

The trouble with writing poems is that they take up so much space. Anyroad, lass, here I am always thinking of you and, though I don't believe in God, I offer a prayer each night to the planets asking them to guide and protect you and Simon always. Take good care of yourself, Fiona, keep on smiling and keep up the good work.

Will write again when I can.

Alex

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Earlier in the year, knowing that I was about to be married, I had asked the BBC to release me from my contract on 'Angels'. I could have continued in the show for years but it is rather telling that I chose domestic bliss over my career. It was ultimately to cost me dearly.

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**London**

**24th September 1976**

Dear Alex,

Forgive me for not writing for so long—I'm so lazy—but things have been rather hectic here recently. Thank you very much for your beautiful letters (what a shame I cannot match them in beauty) and especially for the

poem. I'm extremely flattered and think it's absolutely lovely. How clever you are.

Guess what? I was asked to be a representative of the British Film Delegation at the Moscow Film and Arts Festival next week. Isn't that amazing? I was so excited. I've always wanted to visit Russia and this trip would be a four-day stay in Moscow with a visit to Leningrad too. How marvellous I thought—I was raring to go. Then it was all called off. Not the festival, just the British delegation, because the producer who was taking us out there, Stuart Lyons, is in the San Sebastian Film Festival and consequently unable to make the trip to Moscow. Very sad. I'm so disappointed. However, I'm told I might be able to go next year.

Our flat is looking much more homely now. We're nearly finished with all the painting and papering, so it's just finishing touches.

You must have missed Angels on the 13th as you don't mention it at all. It was a big episode for me, (including a ride on the back of a Harley down the motorway!!) and a lead into my final episode on the 27th. Hope you can see it.

Yes I have read *Gone With the Wind*. A truly wonderful book. In fact I lived in Atlanta for three years when my Dad was serving out there in the American Army, on an exchange appointment. Have you seen the film? Must go now. Many thanks again.

Love and Best Wishes

Fiona

**HM Prison Parkhurst**

**28. 9. 1976**

Hello, Princess, just received your letter. A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-lop-BAM-BOOM!

I am glad you've got the work coming to an end at the flat – you must be exhausted with all that painting and decorating! On second thoughts, it must have been plenty of fun while it lasted.

## *Dear Fiona*

Ah, Moscow. What a pity you were unable to go, Fiona! And you must have been so proud to have been chosen! What a let-down. But do look on the brighter side, there will always be next year. What you must see in Moscow is the Monument to the Space Conquerors.

Still no word from the Embassy, so, as soon as I get the go-ahead from the Home Office, I'm writing direct to Leonid Brezhnev. Funny isn't it – one hears such a lot about people wishing to come to the West from the Eastern Block but never the reverse ... I'm going to see, though, if I can get swapped for one or both of the two Britons who were recently sentenced to seven and eight years respectively in Soviet labour camps. The way I see it I'm no earthly use to the U.K. – unless they want a revolution, similarly, the two Britons are no use to the Soviet Union. So a swap may be quite on the cards. But first I must get permission to write to Brezhnev before I put the question to the relative authorities.

Yes, groan, you guessed it, Fiona. Out of the present series of Angels I have seen only the first episode. I am down the chokey block doing a total of 68 days Solitary at present, and privileges such as TV and radio, etc. are not permitted. I have done 20 days, however, so there are only 48 to go. Last night there was thunder and lightning on a magnificent scale. Each peal was as though the whole sky was being ripped apart piece by piece. It must have been like that when Tchaikovsky composed his Overture to the '1812', when Holst created 'Mars'. It's the only type of weather one might call 'inspiring'. Do you like thunderstorms, Princess? I think one day I might record a good thunderstorm on a tape recorder, over-dub it with some organ music and you never know – may have a billion-seller on my hands.

I've been sewing mailbags and I'll tell you something, Fiona, sewing mailbags is a very good way of getting the hands blistered-up. Every time I do a bag the needle ends up in my thumb at least twice, it's a good job you can't hear the language I use on such occasions! Most colourful. They ought to give us an anti-tetanus injection with every bag. Ye gods. No, it's a painful experience having a needle slide into one's thumb, honest.

Enclosed is my latest poem for you.

### **The Soldier**

The brave young soldier hears no more  
The rifle's clash nor the cannon's roar,

He feels no more the burning heat  
And listens not, for enemy feet.

He answers not, the bugle's call  
Or runs to join the charge.  
No more a soldier of the war.  
He's ... Human fodder for the crow.

His blood has stained a distant land,  
He lies in an Unknown Grave  
Somewhere beneath a distant star,  
For sure, we know not where  
For there's a Sea of Crosses  
Stretching out afar.  
Every one a Soldier  
Who gave himself to war

*Alex 1976*

Maybe not exactly the right sort of verse to write to a girl, but criticism is a valuable commodity to me and I think somehow you would make a nicer critic than most.

So long for now, Princess. All My Love,

Alex

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By his own admission he was 'down the block' doing 68 days in solitary confinement. In his *Chronicles* he explains what happened:

I was walking around the exercise yard with my friend Chilly when another con, Pete, came up to us and started talking about one of my mates who was having a bit of trouble. He was due out in a couple of months and saving up his wages to supplement his pension on release. Another con, M, had been threatening to do him in if he didn't buy him things from the canteen. Pete suggested that we

*Dear Fiona*

should “have a word with M”. I didn’t like it. Pete had a lot to do with Ron and Reg (Kray) and I was thinking, if Pete’s so tough, why doesn’t he do his own dirty work.

He gave us an excuse about the screws watching him and in the event Chilly and I went round and laid into M.

We did the 68 days and both went back to C-Wing. It turned out that the whole thing had been a scam. Pete just wanted someone to beat up M, told us porkies, and Ron and Reg weren’t involved at all.’

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**London.**

**November 11th, 1976** (In a Christmas card)

Dear Alex,

Haven’t forgotten you! Thank you for your letters but since rehearsals have started my feet haven’t touched the ground. Richard O’Sullivan is really funny (he’s playing Buttons) and I’ve just been told that I’m going to have four little white ponies to pull my coach onto the stage. I’m singing some really good songs too. Hope you have as good a Christmas as you expect. Be good!

Yours,

F F

**H M Prison Parkhurst**

**D-Wing**

**24. 11. 1976**

Hello Princess

I don’t know where you’ll be as you read this but I’m gonna make you smile at least once in this letter, Fiona, so watch out.

I have your photo – the large one that I like best – pinned on the wall where I can see it from most angles and I gotta say the angles don't matter much on account of you being so much dynamite you're gonna blow a hole through them bricks one of these days.

Anyway, as observed from above, I am no longer on C-Wing and over the past week I've been busy moving in. Been doing a bit of decorating (six pin-ups) and making a couple of new friends and generally getting the feel of the wing. When I'm banged-up (locked behind my door) I still do a spot of writing. Doing a university course on British Constitution. Writing a few letters. Composing a new jingle for Tetley's Tea Bags. Which will be okay if I can get Fats Domino to sing it.

Anyway, that's the way it goes. Speaking for myself, I'm going straight when I get out of this dump. In fact there'll be a clause in my Licence stating that I must do, 'cos I've been disallowed from breaking various laws. It's nice of them to show so much concern. Of course, though, my first priority when I get evicted is to jump on the first available Aeroflot from Gatwick, skim over to Moscow, thump out a few books, sink a few vodkas and get myself citizenized or whatever it's called. Then I can book a seat for the 1980 Olympics or get shot at or something.

And you're going to be busy this Christmas, hey? I'll be keeping my fingers crossed for you on your first night, Fiona, it always works. But I guess you don't need luck from anybody 'cos you have what it takes and you're bound to win all the coconuts and a lotta flowers and such. Anyroad, lass, take good care of yourself, Fiona. Keep on smiling.

Will write again when I can.

Alex

### **Princess**

Around you every Night — the Elves;  
When you are fast Asleep,  
Cast their mystic Spells of Light;  
Myriad Starbursts at your feet.

As approaches the magic Eleven-Hour

*Dear Fiona*

Clothed in silken Leaf-Lace;  
The Elf-Prince once more Appears  
To gaze into your Face.

On Bended Knee he steals  
A Kiss upon your Lips.  
Onto your hair a tiny Teardrop Spills  
And trickles to your Fingertips.

Next Morn' when you Awaken  
From depths of Blessed rest  
Glance into your Looking-Glass  
For sure, you're bathed with Beauty  
No Mortal has Ever Possessed!

*Alex 1976*

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Cinderella had opened on December 4th and I did indeed have four adorable little Shetland ponies pulling my gold carriage. It was like a dream come true. The cliché being, of course, that I had only just found my very own Prince Charming.

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**HM Prison Parkhurst**

**D-Wing**

**24. 12. 1976**

**Christmas Eve**

Hello Fiona,

Heard you're giving a really smashing performance and I think that is fantastic, so much so that I thought I'd slam my congratulations in while you're not bogged-down in floral vegetation, or signing autograph books or saying nice things to un-nice humans 'cos convention demands.



### **Christmas Day**

Heard no bells jingling. Only Keys. Not a bad breakfast: bowl of Alpen, bit of bacon, a cold plastic fried egg and a tinned tomato. This morning I was outside on the compound, freezing me fingers off, watching the 'Over 40's' football match, which ended 4-3 and was a complete shambles – but a good laugh. Also I smoked a cigar.

I've just had my Christmas lunch: turkey, etc. Yeah, we had a turkey. All three hundred of us – a slice each. I held mine up to the light and I could see right through it. Anyhow, to supplement this, there was a slice of cold ham, slice of pork, and a square inch block of stuffin'. Plus greens. An' a pudding the size of a Chinese teacup with ersatz rum sauce to cover it up. Two inches deep. So don't be fooled by the press reports that we're all getting slap-up cuisine 'cos we're not – and that's straight from the horse's mouth.

Stayed the afternoon in my cell listening to the radio and reading a book or two, but watched the TV this evening. Bruce Forsyth on the Generation Game closely followed by the Morecombe an' Wise show whereupon Angela Rippon released exclusive proof that she's got legs. That's all for today, Princess. Off to bed an' another day crossed from the calendar. Sweet dreams.

### **Boxing Day**

Woke up with a bloody great headache, stabbed at the 'on' button on the HMV, got an earful of the 'Post Horn Gallup' stabbed at the 'off' button in deep disgust an' grabbed me greys 'cos they were shoutin' 'anymore f'breakfast!' Bowl of cornflakes an' a boiled egg. Pow! Got the cornflakes down alright, threw the egg at the wall, caught it on the rebound and it was just right for shelling.

Lunch was okay, the Yorkshire pud was palatable and looking pleased with itself so I risked it. I'll give it four for presentation.

This morning saw me again in my cell, but this afternoon I'm gonna watch (yet again) the 'Wizard of Oz'. I got plenty of time for this film. Now that I'm on D-Wing I have a few more pals. One of them comes from Atlanta, Georgia. He was in the State Penitentiary there – he says it's a large establishment, which visitors can't fail to miss upon driving into Atlanta.

Said something about the city standing on the boundary of two States. He's done Bird in San Quentin, too, and tells some very interesting stories about the place, some of them terrible but believable. Over here they're more subtle.

*Dear Fiona*

Oh, what festivities and merriment! Yo-ho-ho! You know something Fiona, I bet Father Christmas is crazy. Look at it this way, there's thousands of houses in Britain, and they all have a front door an' a back door – yet this guy comes in down the chimney. Highly illogical and irrational behaviour, to state the obvious.

Fiona, I hope you have had a really smashing Christmas with lots of fun and parties to go to. I wish I could have watched you playing 'Cinderella' – I heard you even had some royalty at your Charity Show. Even as I write this you must be on stage. I do hope everything is successful and that you're happy and always will be. Please write when you find time. Meanwhile, my love and best wishes to yourself and Simon.

Your Friend

Alex

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As December 26th fell on a Sunday that year, I was resting at home with Simon and my parents. Christmas came and went in a blur as on the following day it was back to two shows a day. I was having a ball, but soon the mood backstage was about to change.

# The Journey to Parkhurst



Three days before Christmas 1971, Alex arrived at Risley Remand Centre. He was just 18-years-old. So began his Kafkaesque nightmare and a lifelong struggle to clear his name.

‘There it was, the high wall with the razor wire looped around the top ... the great wooden doors sliding open and my heart racing in time with the car engine — and the gloom of the gatehouse as the doors closed behind, shutting out the daylight.

The realisation washed over me — *two life sentences* — like a dread tide until I was submerged by it. I was taken out of the taxi and escorted into the reception block, given prison clothing and a number — 789959.

Normally, a prison doctor would see a new inmate in reception, but I was told I was to be located in the hospital wing anyway, so there was no need.

I was taken into the ward, not into a single cell, they wanted to keep an eye on me, I realised that. All lifers are treated this way because the authorities expect a suicide bid. I was given a tot of medicine which made me sleepy. I fell asleep.

When the teas were being served, I was woken up. I had a few hours of consciousness where I had the opportunity to replay the day’s events through my mind. Sentenced to two life sentences ... What had happened? This was my life, not theirs. As far as I could figure it out, I’d been set up. What a fool! *I hadn’t committed those crimes. I was innocent.* There was a curious sensation of abstraction as if it was somebody else — that this wasn’t happening to me. How could it be happening to me? The drugs bit into me and I was gone again.’

Since Alex began his sentence he had been moved to six different establishments before arriving at the notorious Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight. After leaving Risley, he was transferred first to Walton Gaol, Liverpool.

## Dear Fiona

‘The cell was not overly clean. It was relatively spacious; its walls rough brick with patches of paint peeling away. The last occupant had left his pin-ups on one of the walls, a frieze of naked women in different postures. There was a bucket in a corner that stank, the toilet, which needed emptying—another gift from the last occupant. I put down the bedroll I’d been carrying and sat down on the cot. I realised that there was no water jug or wash-basin and immediately felt thirsty and dirty.

I was hungry; my last meal had been a small bowl of porridge, before leaving Risley that same morning ... God, that seemed like *days* ago.

I hand-rolled a cigarette from a few dog-ends. I hadn’t any more tobacco. I went for a piss. The bucket had a couple of inches of urine in it and a turd, which was melting into liquid, stuck to the bottom. I directed a stream of urine onto the turd and then threw up. To stop the vomit from falling onto the cot I had to put my face over the bucket.’

It was here at Walton that Alex discovered he was a Category-A prisoner, the highest security level, usually given to murderers and rapists who pose a ‘threat to society’. But Alex was neither of those. He insisted in all his interviews that he had been set up, that he was innocent of the crime. So why was he Category-A?

Shortly after arriving at Walton Prison, he had been transferred to the hospital section.

‘I was having tremendous difficulty accepting my lot, because I knew that it was not deserved. By that time I’d been pretty well briefed about the life sentence and I knew that—unless something happened to put a halt to it—I was likely going to serve ten or maybe eleven years. The prospect of that was disturbing. Gone was my hope that the police would honour their side of the bargain and make sure I served a short sentence. Yet my father hadn’t been deported. That was something.

The hospital was a large and relatively modern part of the prison, and the cells were large and well-aired. My cell had a big sash window that let in lots of sunshine. I listened a lot to Radio 2.

One day I went for a shower and one of the other men was in there. He had breasts like a woman and was apparently awaiting a sex change. It was made more incongruous because he was a big, burly geezer built like a heavyweight boxer. If he had the sex change he would still look the same and there was no way he could

ever be mistaken for a woman. I watched him deteriorate into a zombie-like state, perhaps because of the drugs he was on. He would shuffle along in slow motion. I guess he was sent to a mental hospital eventually.

While in the hospital I was seen by Dr. Gray, from Grendon Prison in Buckinghamshire. He wanted me to go to Grendon because he was concerned that I may try to kill myself. I *had* thought about killing myself, that was true. The feelings I had were awful. I was upset for most of the time because I couldn't accept my sentence.

I agreed to Grendon because it represented a soft option. Its relaxed regime was well known.'

Soon after his twentieth birthday, thinking he was going to Grendon, Alex was transferred to Wakefield Prison in Yorkshire. An adult, high security prison, built in the Victorian era, it was a dark and shadowy place, holding around 400 inmates, two thirds of whom were serving life sentences for murder. He thought there had been some mistake.

'In the outside world it is very rare to meet a murderer. If there were a high-rise block of flats, containing 300 killers and social misfits, it would be a place to avoid at all costs. No ordinary person in his or her right mind would want anything to do with them. I observed that most murderers regarded themselves as superior to everyone else and took great pains to project an image of violence. A weak person didn't stand a chance and was the first to be singled out and persecuted.'

Shortly afterwards, Alex suffered a brutal attack by four men and retaliated by hitting one of the perpetrators over the head with a metal bar. He was never to be bothered by another prisoner again.

'When the attack came it was when I least expected it. I had gone to fetch a bowl of hot water for a wash. As I was putting the bowl on the table in my cell, I sensed someone behind me. I started to turn around but I was too late. I felt an arm go around my throat and the press of sharp metal at the side of my neck.

I felt someone else undoing my jeans and pulling them down. I knew then what was going to happen, but I couldn't believe it. There were four of them. All the while I was held around my neck with the knife at my throat. The pain I felt

## *Dear Fiona*

as each one raped me was excruciating. I couldn't see anything because I was held face down across the cot.

My mind was a million miles away and everything that was relevant just died.

The cell door slammed shut. I couldn't sleep that night. I knew that I wasn't going to survive. No way.

Out came the razor blade and I put it to my veins ... the temptation to end everything there and then was so strong.

A couple of days later, I was told who was behind the attack and where to find him. I was given a metal tube. Outside his cell I heard voices. Very quietly I opened the cover on the spy-hole in his door and saw that he was having sex with one of the other cons. I waited down on a lower landing, then I went back and saw that he was alone. I pulled the metal tube from my jeans and pushed the cell door wide open.

I gave him a few whacks with the tube and the screams could be heard in every part of the prison. I felt disgusted with myself.

I left his cell and leaned on the landing rail as the screws piled up the stairs. They marched me down the block and I was sentenced to 56 days in solitary confinement.'

In 1974 Grendon Prison accepted Alex, despite the fact that he was a Category-A prisoner, but he didn't last long there. One of the fundamental requirements of a prisoner at Grendon is to accept and come to terms with their offence. Alex couldn't do that. He refused to admit to a crime he did not commit, even though he knew it would affect his chances of parole. At Grendon, he found the regime, of group therapy and remedial programmes, extremely difficult and after only two months asked to be transferred back to 'normal location' in an ordinary prison. To his surprise, he was told he'd have to wait for another three months.

'That was too long. I began to look for ways to get myself moved. I had to break the rules somehow. I removed all the metal handles from the mop buckets and bent them into a hook. Then I tore a bed-sheet into strips and wound them around my waist with the hook attached. When I was sure that a screw was looking my way, I legged it a couple of hundred yards towards a corner of the perimeter wall, stopped and waited for the screws to catch up. That was it.'

Alex explained to the prison governors why he'd done it and his request to be transferred was accepted. He was taken to Winchester Prison the next day to serve his punishment, initially "down the block", in solitary confinement. When that was completed, he was quickly transferred to Albany Prison on the Isle of Wight, after a particularly harrowing journey in the vehicle hold of the car ferry, handcuffed to the van's windows.

'Albany was a maximum security (or "dispersal") gaol, just across the road from the more notorious Parkhurst. I was greeted in the reception area by a con I'd known at Wakefield.

"Stone the crows, Alex. Welcome to Disneyland! You're going on A-Wing mate; I'll see you up there as soon as I can. Don't go into the tv room on the wing tonight Alex, 'cos the telly's goin' up."

I was escorted up to A-Wing and the principal officer called me into his office to read out the rules. This was the pep talk that all new arrivals were given.

"You'll find that this is a relaxed community. Very little trouble..."

A deafening explosion rocked the telephone on his table. There was the sound of glass shattering and people yelling. A blue-shirted officer, breathing heavily, appeared at the office door.

"They've blown up the television sir."

I wasn't at Albany for very long. Somebody put my name up as being involved in some scam and I was ghosted out within only a few months of my arrival. I thought I was going back up North, so I was surprised when the journey lasted only five minutes. I'd been taken across the road—to Parkhurst. I didn't know it then but this was to be my home for the next six years. My introduction to Parkhurst was F2, its notorious hospital landing. There were maybe 20 or so cons on that landing and all were either on heavy drugs or waiting to be sent to Rampton or Broadmoor Special Hospitals. When I asked a screw why I had been put onto a medical landing, he replied, "So the doctor can have a look at you."

I didn't like the sound of that.'