

## ***Ann's Letters to Shiro when Shiro was in Boarding School***

The smell of fresh baked bread tickled Anthony's nose.

The ornate little metal table on the veranda was covered with a handmade lace tablecloth. The monogrammed crockery and silver cutlery neatly arranged. The poached egg was cooked to perfection and the home-cured ham juicy and pink.

Picking up the fork, Anthony studied the Ashton crest. He pushed the egg around on the plate. He stabbed the thin white skin of the poached egg and watched the rich red yolk erupt. Damn his stupid vagrant heart. Two months and he was pining for her like some lovesick teenager. She had probably forgotten all about him in the excitement of her final year in school with her new best friend – what was the name? Lalitha. She wouldn't write to him. A letter was useless to him anyway. He wanted her. Here, with him, in his arms and his life. He dipped the toast in the yolk, and then shoved the whole egg in his mouth. Get over her man. Loving her will bring you both trouble and heartache.

Why couldn't he be happy with the occasional night out in Nuwera-Eliya and Diyatalāwa that the other British superintendents enjoyed? He'd tried it – to no avail. He grimaced at the ignominious and embarrassing result. He'd allowed himself to be persuaded by the other guys at the Royal Hotel to join them. The girls were clean, able to speak English. His consort, as they were called by the woman who ran the establishment was a petite curly haired Sri Lankan girl. She had taken him to the bedroom. But he had failed. He hadn't got an erection. She had touched him, massaged, and even gone down on him. That was when he stopped her, paid and left. She had laughed as he walked out of the room.

And he here was sitting thinking of Shiro and he could feel the stirrings of desire in his body.

Damn.

'The mail, sir,' Appu held out a silver tray to Anthony. On it was an envelope and the silver letter opener.

'Thank you Appu.' He glanced at the brown envelope. His heart raced. Neat print, in purple ink – of course. It read: Ann Ashton, c/o the superintendent, Watakälé estate, Watakälé.

Anthony ignored Appu's inquisitive glance. "That will be all, Appu. You may go now."

Appu picked up Anthony's breakfast plate and tea cup, his actions slower than his usual efficient self. He folded the tablecloth and wiped the table, keeping an eye on Anthony as he slit open the letter.

Anthony waved the silver letter opener at Appu. "Appu – go."

Appu gathered the rest of the crockery and cutlery and left the room, stopping at the door to look back.

Anthony held the sheet of paper in his hand. He felt her presence, her impish smile.

*'Dear Ann,*

*Six weeks since we met – Sorry. Bet you thought I had forgotten you. As if I could EVER do that.*

*Things are as better at school and boarding this year. The girls who annoy me have all left. None of them want to continue to university! Anyway I am working on what you said – resilience.*

*I study with my friend Lalitha. She is the ONLY one who knows about my special friendship with you. I had to tell her. After all, who do you think covered for me when I left home to sit by our waterfall with you last vacation?*

*I am still your special friend aren't I? You haven't forgotten me have you (my Juliet).*

*I am following your advice. I do a LOT of reading and writing. Chemistry, physics, botany, zoo. It's fun once I get my teeth into it. I worked hard and I got 99 per cent in the first chemistry test. It was about elements and periodic tables.*

*I wish like Lord Byron, I could write with a quill – so much more romantic than a stupid pen! 'Oh! Nature's noblest gift --- my grey goose-quill! Slave of my thoughts, obedient to my will, Torn from thy parent bird to form a pen, that mighty instrument of little men.'*

*Do you miss me? I miss you very much. Say hello to the stream and the rock for me. And kisses to our eagle.*

*Love XXX*

*Your totally absolutely best friend Shiro*

*PS – Please say hello to Miss Grace and Rev Bobsy.'*

Anthony read her words again. His heart ached with a longing to see her, hear her voice and her laughter.

Paper kisses from his princess. Talk to a rock and kiss an eagle indeed. Yes, he would do that and more for her. He folded the letter and slipped it into the breast pocket of his shirt.

What the hell are you thinking Anthony?

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The Eagle swooped down from the excruciatingly bright blue sky. Anthony looked up at brown and white feathers and soft crested head. "You miss her too, do you?"

Gracious, he was talking to a bird!

Standing with his back to the rock – Shiro's rock, he pulled his writing pad and pen from his pocket.

"*Dearest Shiro*" he started. No, not appropriate –not yet. He ripped the sheet off and shoved it in his pocket. He started again.

*"Dear Shiro,*

*Thank you for your letter darling."*

No, he shouldn't – not now, not ever. He ripped the page and started again.

*"Dear Shiro*

*Thank you for your letter, which I received yesterday. I am here in your place, our place. The sky is the blue you love and your Eagle is in the sky."*

Anthony looked at the stream. The water bubbled over the rocks and shimmered in the afternoon sunshine. Oh hell, now I'm communicating with the stream.

*"I just said hello to our stream. However, I definitely will not kiss the eagle!"*

He could hear her giggle. She would have her hand to her cheek. Or maybe she would be sad and have a tear in her eye?

I do miss you Shiro. Maybe more than you miss me.

What more could he say to encourage her?

*"I met your Dad yesterday. He is so proud of you. He certainly wants you to go to medical school. See – I told you so!"*

Anthony stopped. He longed for her company, her laughter, her teasing voice. Who was he kidding? He wanted her in his arms – in his bed. He put his pen to the paper. He would tell her how much he cared - loved. No – she must concentrate on her study. He had promised to support her not upset her.

*'Study even harder Shiro, not just ninety nine – work for one hundred per cent.*

*Your friend always*

*Love'*

Grimacing, he signed off with a flourish 'Ann'.