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Kilchberg am Zürichsee, 1965-04-22

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Erika Mann

Kilchberg am Zürichsee

Alte Landstrasse 39

April 22nd 1965

Dear David O.

for a goddish half eternity - to put it mildly - have I been intending to write. Alas, it was always the familiar mixture of illness and an overabundance of work that prevented me and chased my entire correspondence into bankruptcy. Today I can simply stand it no longer and here we go:

Let's begin with good old "Magic Mountain". Frederic Ewen may or may not have announced his plan to turn the book into a play and produce it Off Broadway. Ewen has been here last summer, made a good and honest impression upon both my mother and myself so that we decided to give him a chance. The whole thing is to be on such an extremely modest scale that no flop could possibly hurt us, whereas a success might do us some little good. To try and get Jennifer involved in the venture seemed absolutely senseless which is why I failed to encourage Ewen in that direction. Meanwhile our troubles with Abich and Brauner are growing from worse to worst. To put it in a nutshell: You were right and I was wrong. Having gone through four films with Abich I wrongly presumed that the fifth ~~one~~ could also be produced without any major breaches of contract or loss of confidence on our part in little Abich. Most unfortunately, Abich kept lying to us continuously and while the contract still protects us against the foul machinations of Brauner, we have not thus far succeeded in getting out of the whole thing. By now I believe that a good lawyer might be able to save us or, rather, the project. Actually, I am only waiting for a final long distance call from Eberhard Krause who continues to be a comparative rocher de bronze of good faith. Should his news be bad, I shall contact our specialised lawyer immediately. For in one decisive point I have been right: According to the contract Brauner is in no way entitled or permitted even to offer the property to anyone, let alone to conduct negotiations, let more alone to close any deal. The mere fact that he keeps offering "The Magic Mountain" to all and sundry is not only illegal but most damaging on which grounds a law-suit is called for. Should the rights refer to The Estate, I should, of course, inform you rightaway. For the rest we have made important progress: Jan Lustig whom you may know (he has been with MGM for 18 useful years) and myself have written what we all consider to be a rather first-rate treatment. That piece of work, though only 79 pages, approaches the final screenplay so that I am now confident the latter will be the bases of a good film while containing enough of the milieu, characters and essence of the book to be considered a true transposition of the novel into the medium of the film. If only honest Joe Eberhard hadn't kept paying whatever was due to The Estate! Had he not done so, things were far simpler. Even so I am hopeful.

Incidentally, Lustig and I have seen to it that "Clawdia" plays a very important part in the proposed film.

As for hopes, I am also hopeful regarding my forthcoming operation. We have - needless to say - been considering your "Hospital for Special Surgery" most seriously but finally had to decide against New York in this context. More than likely, there will have to be too major operations within a number of months; my mother wants to be with me for both, and two trips to New York for the two of us seemed hardly feasible. In addition the specialist who is now going to do the job is a world renowned block by the name and title of Prof. J. Trueta of Oxford, of Spanish origin but with an astonishing career in England. We have been very careful in our investigations and heard nothing but the utmost best about him. He has studied no less than 128 X-rays of my bones, written cautiously but with confidence, the dies are cast, I am flying to Britain on May 18th and all that remains for me is to thank you most warmly for your readiness to help me in connection with Howard Rusk. Little do I know whether or not you are given to prayers. Should you so be given, it would be very nice if you'd put in a hearty word or two on my behalf.

Please give my very best love to Jennifer not before having deducted a nice share for yourself.

Yours as ever affectionately,

