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Erika Mann
Baur au Lac
Zuerich,
July 20th, 1949.

Mr. Victor Gollancz
14 Henrietta Street
Covent Garden, W.C.2
London

Dear Mr. Gollancz,

your letter came as quite a shock. We had not heard from the now Mrs. Mary Mackay for more than 40 years. Nor had we expected ever to hear from her again. Here are the facts involved:

dying
My late uncle, Mr. Erik Pringsheim, married the lady in the Argentine. He was supposed to be a very rich heir, and even at that time, when my grand parents had no thought of ~~dying~~ had much money to spend. A farm was bought for him where the couple lived - together with a steward whom she had brought along and some sort of an agricultural student, a very young man. When my uncle died on a sudden and without any illness having preceded his death, his widow wrote a number of letters to his parents (- there were three or four such communications) each of which gave a different description of his end. Allegedly, he had fallen from his horse and died consequently; no, - he had drunk a great deal of ~~very~~ cold water when he had returned, hot and exhausted, from an excursion on horse-back, and that had killed him; - no, - he had eaten something that proved fatal; - in short, her stories were most inconsistent and incredible. While she was on her way to Munich - she and the body - a friend of our family, a very well known Munich lawyer, Baron von Pannwitz, who happened to be in the Argentine to look after his wife's estate, wrote to my grand parents, telling them, that in his considered opinion, there had been foul play. The lady's ~~performance~~ ^{behaviour} had been openly scandalous. She had carried on with both the administrator and the student. Mr. Pringsheim had been pitied by all the neighbours and his death was generally considered anything but a natural occurrence. Mr. von Pannwitz strongly suggested that there be a post mortem. Some of her co-passengers on the boat, moreover, reported that her performance aboard had caused them to nickname her "the merry widow".

The post mortem was held; but weeks had passed since Mr. Pringsheim's death, and nothing at all could be determined. In fact, it took his dentist to make the identification, as the body's condition was such as to make it wholly unrecognizable. My uncle might have been slain, poisoned, or shot - and he might also have died of natural causes. Nothing at all could be ~~determined~~ ^{established}. My grand parents were convinced that their son had been murdered, and his widow was forbidden to attend the funeral. Nor did she insist on attending. However, she inherited the estate. Erik was dead.

But although everything seemed to indicate that he had been killed, it might have been difficult to prove it. Hence, - sick and disgusted with the whole gory affair, - my grand parents decided not to prosecute. Mrs. Fringsheim was sent packing and told never to turn up again. Nor did she - until now.

Baron von Pannwitz is dead. So, of course, are my grand parents. My mother, however, remembers it all very clearly, and would be willing to swear to the story as told above. Her - and Erik's - brothers, - in particular her twin brother, Professor Klaus Fringsheim in California, are likely to recall most of the details involved. As for myself, I remember about as much as Klaus tells in THE TURNING POINT. I know, too, that our "aunt" was referred to - if at all - as "the murderess" ("das Moerderweib").

Mrs. Mackay fails to tell the truth when she alleges that Mr. Fringsheim was cremated "after a post mortem establishing death from natural causes". I am no lawyer, and in no position to say whether pages 27 and 29 of my late brother's book may be interpreted as meaning that "the lady was of questionable character, mercenary and licentious, and implicated in the death of Erik Fringsheim". If necessary, however, my mother should be willing to state under oath, that according to several reliable witnesses, and in particular according to Dr. von Pannwitz, these alleged allegations constitute the truth, - or as much of the truth as it was ever possible to establish.

It deserves to be noted that Mrs. Mackay claims heavy damages five years after the publication of the book but only a few weeks after the author's death. Possibly, she is none too eager to have my mother testify, and hopes that she would not now do so when Klaus cannot any longer be held responsible.

Please let me know about any further developments.

Yours very sincerely

Erika Nam

Until the middle of August I may best be reached c/o Querido, Publishers, 262 Singel, Amsterdam.