

Kill the Messenger

by

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## **Abstract**

*Kill the Messenger* is a historical fiction novella comparing the lives of two men, following them from the 1940s to the 1980s. The story follows James Adams, a closeted bisexual man from Boston, Massachusetts, as he avoids active participation in World War Two and builds a life following the path of the “American dream” in the decades following the war. James’s life is detailed in letters he sends to Eoghan O’Rahilly, an Irish immigrant, gay man, and sex worker who is in love with James, but for whom James will not openly admit his own love. Through the years, James realizes the social advantages he has over Eoghan, in that James is a straight-passing white American male who is given the means to avoid combat, whereas Eoghan is a gay immigrant during a xenophobic time and has no legal means of avoiding the draft. In this way, *Kill the Messenger* is a thesis of creative fiction examining the dramatic ways in which individuals’ lives may be impacted by factors beyond their control.

# I

Boston, 1932

James left the building with his head down, recalling his mother's advice to stay out of trouble, to keep the family from even more stress. As always, James did his best to bring no news to his mother. He did his best to stay quiet. As usual, he was doing well.

Until, of course, he turned the last corner towards his family's apartment and came face-to-back with two thin, pale men at least ten years older than him harassing an equally thin, pale boy closer to James's age.

"Ay, ya damn paddy cat-lick," James heard one of the men slurring at the boy, who was standing to his full and admittedly lanky height despite the fear James saw in his shoulders.

The boy did not respond.

"Oy, we're talking to you," the other man said in a horrible faked accent not improved by the sloshing speech of clear intoxication. "Or do you not understand unless we sound like you? Stupid, lazy, like the narrowbacks your kind are. Ay!"

The boy still stood silent.

"Where're you going, boy? This ain't your place." The first man stepped towards the boy eagerly, showcasing his loosened movements more than his subtle swaying before had. As he lifted one arm towards the boy, the near-empty bottle he was holding came into view.

James considered backing away, turning back around the corner and cutting through an alley to get home instead. The men hadn't noticed him yet. He could get away safely.

So for once in his life, he turned away. He gave up on the fight before it had started and retreated to safety, was halfway across the corner building before he heard the boy shout. He hesitated.

The boy called out again, something resembling “help,” but strangled.

James looked around. There was no one else on the street. Why was there no one else on this street? When had he last walked by someone else?

He turned and ran back towards the scene in time to see the men pinning the boy to the ground. One cradled the boy’s head in his lap, gripping a hand around his neck with his elbow towards his mouth, and the other had his knees pinned to the boy’s thighs, a hand forcing both arms to his chest. His other hand pressed against the boy’s crotch.

A now-empty bottle shattered against a helpless head.

18 October 1940

Eogh-

I had that dream again, the one about when we met. Been having it more since we lost Eddie. Have I told you that you die in it? I know I told you that I think I dreamed of when we met. I didn't wanna tell you about the details. I don't know if it's better or worse than dreaming of Eddie.

I was leaving school for the day and everything was empty. There was no one on the streets and I think the shops were shut down. I don't know. I didn't notice it at first. But it was quiet and nothing was happening, but I got to my street and you were there, like the day we met. Except not at all.

You were there, right? And so were those guys. Except you didn't say anything to them, not like that day where you just wouldn't shut up. You didn't run. You didn't do anything. You just stood there. And I didn't do anything either. I just watched and then ran away.

But then you screamed, and I ran back and they were on you. They had you, Eogh, and I know you would never let anyone handle you like that. But all you did was scream until they were choking you. You didn't try to fight or anything. You just took it.

And then one of the guys, he hit you. He raised his bottle up and broke it over your head. I knew you were dead. I knew.

I woke up, then, and now I'm writing this. I didn't know where I was when I woke up. I panicked. You weren't here and no one else was here, so I thought you were dead. Or that you at least got up and left for Ireland without me.

I know you wouldn't do that, but I think it sometimes. I think it would be so easy for you to leave without me. Maybe you already have. I wouldn't know if you did.

I wonder how much different my life would be now if I hadn't gone and shoved myself into your business that day. I wonder all the time if you woulda actually died. That's all I could think when I ran in to help you. But kinda in the way kids think about death. I didn't really realize it was so permanent if you died because you were just some random person to me. To me your death wouldn't be permanent, not at that point. But now when I have that dream all I can think about is how much you dying then woulda changed my life.

I mean, it would have changed your life, too. Obviously.

Maybe if you just never talked I wouldn't have gotten into so much trouble over you that day. They only attacked you because you sound Irish. You know you don't so much anymore, right? I was thinking about it when I woke up since I was just hearing you in the dream. You still say a lot of things that sound really Irish, but now that I actually stop to think about it, your accent was way heavier when we were kids. I think when you first open your mouth it isn't as obvious anymore, but maybe I'm just used to it. But I think you getting a little less shit on the streets from people who hear you is kinda a sign that your accent isn't as bad anymore.

I'm sorry. I don't mean bad. It's never been bad. Just strong. Don't let anyone think you're bad just because you sound a certain way.

I'm sorry, Eogh. I just can't say it right. Maybe it's because if we were in the same place we wouldn't have to be saying anything right now. We never needed to talk when it was just us all sitting around waiting for work the next day. Maybe we were just too tired. Maybe we actually had nothing to say. I'm sorry.

I miss you, Eogh. And Eddie. But I'm sure you do, too.

Yours always,

Jamie

7 May 1962

Eoghan,

I know it's been a long time since I wrote you. I'm sorry. Sometimes it's just hard to bring myself to pick up the pen and put down your name. But hey, it's not like you're writing me either, right?

I miss you.

It's been so long since I heard from you, but it's been even longer since I tried to talk to you and I know that's my fault. I know you would hate me for what happened but I know you would also forgive me. It's not that, though, it's just that I couldn't bring myself to face it. I'm so sorry that I abandoned you like that and I don't deserve your forgiveness, but damn if I don't want it. It hangs over me every day and I guess I finally had to get it out somewhere even though it won't change the past 20 years.

You know... I don't dream about you as much anymore. I think you show up here and there, but I don't really remember what I dream anymore. It's better than it was at the beginning when I thought of you every minute. I couldn't smile without thinking about you, but I'm okay now. I don't get the same nightmares I used to and hardly remember anything at all. I wonder a lot, is it possible that the same things bother you, or are you at peace with it all?

Did you know I'm married now? Do you have a way of knowing that? I wish you could meet Margaret and my daughter Carrie. They're great. Owen and Edward are great, too, and of course I love them, but I know you. Carrie would be your favorite and you'd be shit at hiding it. I miss that about you because it was so easy to know what you're thinking. Your stupid face gave it all away. It's a lot harder for me to figure out what people are thinking now because you were always the person who I understood, but maybe I've always just been bad with

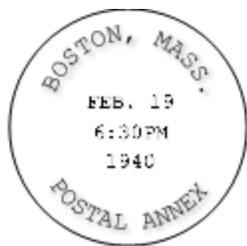
people. No matter what I always thought it would get easier, and I spent the past 20 years thinking I would get better at it, but I guess even that isn't enough time for me to figure myself out.

In some ways, it's gotten better and worse than before. Men can't really touch each other any more at all, not even that casual arms over the shoulder thing you used to do with Eddie all the time. No one wants to be a homosexual because in some places it's illegal, and almost everywhere it's a health problem. But people aren't as afraid to admit to it anymore, and there are a lot of people talking about the positives of homosexuality in ancient Greece, so you wouldn't have to hide anymore if you were here, not like you used to.

I think you'd be happy if you were here, Eogh. I wish I could see you again, and thanks for listening to me. I hope you're happy wherever you are now. You earned it.

Love always,

Jamie



James,

I haven't heard from you since you left, but I assume that you're busy with the fields and doing well. I don't know how the field you're on works, but I assume there's something growing every season. They wouldn't pay you if they didn't have a way to make money.

Your brother isn't doing so well right now. He'll be fine, but for most of two weeks he's been too sick to do much. Mister Harrison had to let him go so he doesn't have a job anymore. Edward kept apologizing to me and saying I should give him to the orphanage, but I can't do that. The apartment is already empty enough without you here. I can't imagine what it would be like to have him gone, too, just because he got sick once for too long. I know you two hated that orphanage. That would be cruel to him. Besides, Mister Harrison had sadness to see him go. He has always liked Eddie. Maybe Eddie can get his job back if luck is with us.

I've been having trouble keeping work, too. Not many people want to hire an Irish man, or else they don't have much trouble letting go of one, either. I do errands for people and can usually keep at least one job at a time, but with Eddie sick and not working, it is not enough to just do work in a factory all day. Food is not always guaranteed, and of course I give it to Eddie first if it's not much for us. He needs it more. Even what I can give him probably isn't enough.

I have thought about enlisting to cover food and everything for myself. I am already set to be called in if they need me. If that war comes here, you know I'm not avoiding it, so I keep thinking I may as well do it now. I would be too worried about leaving Eddie behind. You should have let us go with you, Jamie. I know you thought he'd be better up here, but he misses

you and is sick up here anyway. Might as well be sick with you there. We could take a train and find you. Maybe even get jobs, in a grocer somewhere if not on Walter's land. We will find the money. We will make it work.

We miss you, Jamie. Eddie told me to tell you so, but I was going to tell you anyway. I appreciate you going down there, though. We can get us all out of here. Maybe if Father did not find out, we could have been out by now. I'm so sorry.

Take care of yourself.

Love from Eoghan



Eddie and Eoghan,

Hello! Sorry for not writing sooner. I've been settling in and getting used to the type of work down here. It's the same but so different, you know? I've got to get used to the weather and how open it is here. There aren't so many buildings around here as there are back home and it's weird that I can't just shout to get to a neighbor. But it's still the same sky at night and the same sunrise in the morning.

Eddie—are you doing any better? I know you always come back every winter this happens, but make sure you take it easy and remember that you have to eat, okay? Just 'cause I'm not there doesn't mean I don't care. You ain't getting away with not taking care of yourself on Eoghan's watch.

Eoghan—thanks for writing me and telling me how Eddie is. I would tell you to make sure he doesn't do anything stupid, but you aren't magic. Thanks for taking care of him.

Have you been keeping work now? Please don't enlist, not yet. If it's the only thing you can do anymore then do, but please don't just yet. Give me some time to make some money before you do, so that if this war blows up in our faces you aren't ready to go yet. Please just wait.

Also, don't blame yourself for anything. What were you gonna do if he hadn't found out yet? He was never a good part of your life. That wasn't the first time he beat you half to death. Things wouldn't've been easy either way.

I miss you two. Take care and write when you can afford. I'll send you updates every now and then.

Missing you,

James



James,

*Dia dhuit, mo buachaill!* I'm so glad to hear back from you. I wasn't worried about you, really, but I was worried that when you got to Scottsboro they didn't need your work and you had to go somewhere else, that you wouldn't be getting my letters if I sent them to you there.

Eddie is doing a bit better now. He is running paper routes and helping with neighbors for money right now. He is good at it really. Everyone likes him. He has a smile like rising sun, almost like yours, so he can talk almost anyone into giving him some work when he's able to get out of bed and outside. It's a helpful trait on him.

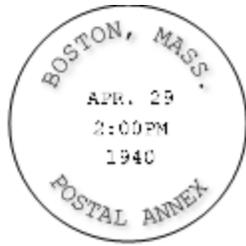
I'm still working at a factory, but I've also got something going on at night, too. It pays well. I don't like it much, but I like the money. What else can I do? I can pay for Eddie and pay for me now and sometimes still have a little left over to put away. It's better than I ever expected, so I'll take some unpleasant work for all of our sake.

Wish we could go down there to be with you soon, but it will take us a while, right? It's not been two months. No way we already have enough between all us, and I know Walter will not want Eddie who can't work and me there with no money. I would work so hard for him if it meant we could go to Ireland soon, but I understand and will earn money here doing what I can. We can wait a bit longer. It will be worth it when we finally get out. Any money I spend to see both you and my home again is money I am happy to spend.

Thanks for writing, Jamie. It's been good really on Eddie to hear we got a letter from you. He misses you a lot. Write us whenever something exciting happens. We miss you. Hope you are taking care of yourself.

Much love,

Eddie and Eoghan



Jamie—

Eddie is in a bad way. He isn't sick or anything, but it's bad. Yesterday after mass, I found him. He normally waits for me by the bakery down the street—you know it, that sells the old bread for really cheap—so we can get the first pick of the afternoon, but he was not there. So I started walking the route back home thinking he wasn't paying attention to the time and was still at home or just leaving, but I found him before I got to the apartment. He was on a corner, barely out from between the building and the road. It wasn't a turn I'd normally take to get home so there was luck I found him. He had been beaten to hell clearly. I don't know who did it because he can't talk. He isn't awake yet. But it looked like more than one person, from the amount of broken bones and bruises and how much of a mess his face was.

Jamie, they wouldn't let me stay with him in the hospital. I can't get in the hospital room with him. I've been in for a little while, but they won't let me stay with him and he has to come home. We can't get the doctor to stay at the house, though. I can't see him right now. They'd let you in for sure. I can't do anything for him.

I'm so sorry, Jamie, I shouldn't have left him on his own. One of the nurses told me she sees people like this every day and they normally make it out okay even if they are pretty hurt up over it. But I shouldn't have let it happen, Jamie, I'm so sorry, I should never leave him alone. I don't know what to do.

I promise I'll find out who did this to him, I really will, and I'll tell you as soon as I know. I'll ask that nurse and see if anyone has said anything about who attacked them. I'll ask around the place I found him.

I had some money saved up and after the hospital hopefully I'll still have some more, but I don't know how much. I'm still working and Eddie was content doing his odds and ends. They were enough to feed him almost most of the days, even without my pay in the days before pay day, so what else did he need? But now that won't happen. I don't know how long he'll be here, but he's not doing okay just yet.

I wish you were here, Jamie, and I know Eddie would want you here. He wouldn't want you to see him all hung up, but you know how he is better than I do. Act all tough, but really he needs you. I wish you were here.

I'm so sorry, Jamie. Eddie and I love you and miss you and will be there soon with you and then we can go wherever we want and be as safe as we can. Your brother loves you so much. Don't worry too much about him just yet, but know that if he could talk right now, he'd be poking at me until I wrote that he misses you.

Take care and write soon,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

Is Eddie okay now? I can go into the town and call you on their phones. Walter doesn't have a phone on his land, but I can always go into town if you can get Eddie somewhere he can talk to me. We can set up certain dates and times and you can always call the town and send for me if you need to talk. Don't be afraid to call if you need me.

But listen to me, Eoghan. You don't have to find out who did anything. We can't do anything about what they did. We have enough to worry about with Eddie, and Eddie has enough to worry about without having to worry about you dying over defending his honor or whatever you're going to try to tell me you're doing. He isn't some defenseless dame who needs to be watched after and he'd never forgive me if I let you treat him that way.

I do want to know what happened, though. How was he? What was broken? How long until you can see him again? Even if you don't do anything else, tell him I love him no matter what and tell him that he can tell you if he knows why it happened. He isn't the type to have any money on him, we aren't rich enough for that, so you tell him that if he got beat up because he was trying to save a stray from some bullies in a back alley again, I'll take a train up there and string his ass out and deliver him to the Lord myself. There isn't a single life on God's earth worth risking his for.

Don't worry about the money. We'll get out of here soon enough. I will send you anything I can to help Eddie, okay? Don't you dare even think about worrying over money because I am

here just to take care of you. Do you think I would be down here if I didn't think I could help you from here? Don't worry.

When Eddie wakes up, tell him I miss him.

Jamie



James,

It was nice to hear your voice. Mister Korzcak was so kind to let me and Eddie use his phones. Eddie misses you and I think that did him good.

I was wondering, do you want us to move down there with you now? Eddie is in a bad way and can't walk fast now. I don't think they made his leg sit properly but they said he could walk anyway. I make sure he sits as much as he can. But he doesn't want to just sit anymore, he wants to get up and do things, and we can't have that or else he'll get hurt again. So can we go down there with you soon? I've still got my jobs and I can make enough to get us down there pretty soon if you want, I can just take more work for my second shift. It would do Eddie good to see you, and I think it would be a good place for him anyway. The air will be clearer there than it is here. ~~And really it would do me good, too~~

Please write back saying if you think we can go or not. If it's an emergency, you can always call. Mister Korzcak was happy to have company in his shop. If you call he would be glad to let me know and use the phone sometime in exchange for some help around the place. He does everything himself, you know. If Eddie gets well enough, maybe he can work there, even if it is just to pass the time and not for pay.

With love from Eddie,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

I don't know if you will have gotten this letter by Saturday, but I will call you that morning. I will be going into town then anyway. I think you'll be working, but I'll try anyway.

I know you want what's best for Eddie, but please don't come down here right now. The air is clearer, and I would love to see you both, but I don't know how much better it will be for either of you. Besides, the air may be clearer, but it's also always so hot down here, and you know how much trouble Eddie has breathing when it's too hot.

Please let me know if anything changes up there. I need you to trust me for now when I say that here isn't any better than there for Eddie. I know how both of these places are so I know if it'll help him or not. But I promise I'm listening to you, and if things get bad enough up there, I'll tell you to come here as soon as I know that.

I hope I get to talk to you this weekend. When I call, I'll ask Mr. Korzcak to give you a few times that you can call when I'll be able to come into town. We'll definitely find something.

Tell Eddie I love him, but don't be too nice to him or he'll think I'm pitying him.

Take care,

James



Jamie,

Eddie told me what happened, some. I think he doesn't know all of it, but he was able to tell me what he remembers, and I wanted not to push him more. He says he doesn't want you to know, so I am not writing this letter where he can see me. He says he does not feel shame, but he does not want to worry you. I think you would worry more if I did not tell you.

Eddie tells me that he left earlier to meet me than he normally does. He thought the day was nice and that he would take the air before meeting me. He walked around until he was stopped by some young men he said he recognized but did not remember. They harassed him and told him they had heard he was making time with deviant men and that they had always kind of thought he was an invert because he always looked like it. He says he doesn't remember much of what they said after that because he wasn't thinking about anything but surviving. He didn't say much else, but I don't know if he will tell me anything about the boys. I don't know if he actually doesn't know them or if he just doesn't want to tell me who they are so I won't hurt them. But I would not even if he did.

James, I have to tell you something else, and I know you will be upset. Please do not hate me. This is my fault. I never meant for Eddie to get hurt, but you have to know that this is my fault. You already know how I feel and who I am, but I think it is my night job that got Eddie hurt.

I have told you that I do not enjoy what I do. It feels even more unclean than the factory, but it pays more than enough to survive, so I do not need to enjoy it. But there is a large man

who waits near the factory every night. He has a small face with too many teeth, and he has a lot of money. I saw that he took boys under his shoulders and talked to them and they went away with him. I noticed this for many nights before he approached me, and as I listened to him and walked, he told me that he is a photographer who has trouble finding models for his art. He thought I would make a good subject and when he told me what he would pay me for a few hours of work, I could not say no. But I do not like it, Jamie.

I am not always the only person there. The first night I was, and even though I did not like it, I was more comfortable with his art that night. He said he wanted to capture the beauty of the human body, and I felt so exposed but also so calm because it was easy to forget he was there when he was behind his camera. But other nights it is impossible to feel alone because he brings others back, too. He pays more on those nights, but what we do is worse.

They are always men, James. The man says he only ever puts men in his art. I think we all feel it is something else, but none of us say anything. The money is too much.

I think this is why Eddie was hurt. I don't know who may have seen what, but I think they knew about this. Why else would they hurt him?

I am so sorry, Jamie. I will send Eddie to you with money when he is better for travel. I never wanted to hurt either of you.

If you hate me, I understand. Once Eddie is safely with you, you do not have to write me again. But please, will you write me when Eddie gets to you so I know he is safe? You two always took such good care of each other.

Eoghan



Eoghan,

No, I do not hate you. You've been doing what you thought was best for you and Eddie, which is exactly what I've been doing but with more glamor behind it. My job seems noble when yours seems dirty. If I hate anything it's that you think you've gotta be a part of something so filthy to earn money to help us. You do not have to do anything, Eoghan, besides what you've been doing. Taking factory work is more than enough.

Eddie has always been a strange one, you know. He's been called a queer for as long as I can remember. He was always a little slower than the other kids his age at the orphanage, just real quiet and not quick to talk even to answer a question. He was never as quick at reading out loud when the nuns asked him to, not like the other kids. You've seen that yourself. And then when he shot up in height he didn't know what to do with his body. You see how he is, he can break anything without doing much. Taller than every kid his age, but he doesn't know how to use that height. It hurts him more. Put all that with how he's always too worried about being frail to worry about kissing girls, he's been called a queer for years. Maybe he is, I don't know. But if people found out about what you do and know that he lives with you, that's just an excuse for them to beat him half to death, not a reason. They always hit him before, back when it was just me and him. Don't think you're the only reason why. Eddie was always a target.

Tell him I love him, okay? But don't send him down unless you're ready to come down yourself. He's just a kid. I don't want him thinking he's a burden to either of us, so you gotta come down together so it doesn't seem like you want to get rid of him.

I'm sending a separate letter just for Eddie, okay? Maybe you can read it to him.

Do me a favor and stop taking those photos. It's not worth it.

Take care,

James



James,

I called and you were not there. I will keep calling later tonight when you will have heard that I called, but I am almost afraid to hear your voice now. I am writing and sending this because I am afraid I will become so much of a coward that I will not call you like I say.

James, I am so sorry. I do not know how it happened, but your brother has died. He had been ill following his injuries, but nothing worse than before. A few nights ago he was even well enough to stand with my help and step outside for air. He had trouble breathing that night and wanted to go outside, and he did, and he was doing okay. Before he was ill, he was even walking better. I do not know what happened. I came home today and he was there, completely still. It is the first time since I met him that he had been still, because you know he is always trying to do something and always hurting himself more that way, so I knew something was wrong.

I do not know if there will be a real funeral. I think I would be the only one there, if you are not. I do not know what to do now, James. I need you. Eddie needed you because I was not enough. I am so sorry.

I am certain you hate me now. I understand because I hate myself too. I hate what I have allowed to happen.

The world is falling down around me. I am sorry I have brought it to you.

Eoghan



Jamie,

Will you read this letter? You do not have to. I know that you are hurt. I know that I have put a sadness on you that you will never get off you, and I am sad that I have done this to you. I am sorry.

I feel like things should change now that Eddie is gone, but I am not sure how. Nothing seems to have changed. I still have work, and I still pay a rent. Are there things different for you? You are in a different place, but do you notice a change, *mo bhuachail?* He does not follow me like I thought he would, but I think that I have failed him. I want to fall into a coat of water and be made into seafoam, and I want. I want and I want. And it will be this, forever maybe, the want the want the want. But, unlike even with you, it is a want I cannot have. I do not pretend to love you perfectly, but I can say I love you humanly. But I can never pretend to have done right by him, and I deserve what *he* wants. If that is to be left wanting and unfulfilled by the emptiness where he was, then that is what I will take.

James, how are you? I hope you are eating and working and dreaming like you always were before. I miss you, more than I have ever missed *mo mhamai* and *m'athair*. And even now there is no you, and there is no him, and there is only work. I will work more, and you can continue dreaming, and we will be out soon.

I have told you about my work, *mo bhuachail*. I have told you about the factory work by day and in the night work with him, whatever he needs me to do and he can photograph me for his art. He must make money and be such an artist with the way he pays me for what he does. I

must be a good model. I work every day except Sundays at the factory, and I don't work every night with him. Only when he needs something he seeks me out, and since you told me to, I have not looked for him. Sometimes he seeks out one of the other boys, but I think he chooses me the most lately. It was very helpful for a while so that Eddie did not have to worry about his work so much. We were not rich, but we made rent and he had enough to eat. (~~I just regret that it costs us this.~~)

How is Walter? You never told me if he was close to Eddie. Did he know him? Did he remember him? Eddie didn't seem to remember much about him when you were going to work for him, but Eddie was so young to remember those things. Is Walter okay? Is he working you too hard, and what does he have you doing at this time of year? I don't know much about the American harvest seasons. Actually, I didn't know much about the Irish ones. That wasn't the work I did. I was too young. What are you eating? Is the food good when you know you had a hand in it? I would think it would be, but I have never made anything valuable with my own hands. I imagine anything you grew for me would taste perfect even if anything I grew for us would certainly die. Are you good at the planting? Do you like the farm? Walter is older now. Can he consider passing it to you?

I have missed you, *mo bhuachaill*. Eddie missed you too. I wish I had the words to take the sorrow away, and I wish I had not given it to you at all. There is nothing here I can do but let you keep dreaming.

Yours,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

I'm sorry about not having written you. It's been rough lately. I know that means you think I hate you, but I don't. You didn't do anything wrong.

No, Eddie doesn't follow me around either. I think it's because I've been here for a while without having seen either of you, so it doesn't feel so strange that he's not around. That doesn't mean I don't think about him all the time, because I do. I just don't feel haunted by the fact that he's dead. That's still just a phrase to me. I don't feel anything empty where he used to be, not yet. I guess since he hasn't been around in so long I can pretend it isn't real.

I think it's strange, but if anything, you follow me around more. I dreamed of the day we first met a couple times. I think that's why I'm writing this now. I don't want you to think I'm not worried about you. I still care and I don't hate you.

Walter is doing okay. I think he and Carrie are more worried about me than they are sad about Eddie. Carrie keeps talking about how he was so young and it's such a shame and all that, but I think she would say the same about anyone who dies young. She's not mourning him as his aunt, she's mourning him as an older woman who's lived her life knowing that a young boy will never live his. Carrie is remarkable, really. She's been my favorite part of being down here. It's sad that her and Walter don't have kids because it makes me wonder who will remember them when they die. They both deserve it.

Please take care of yourself. You are my home. Do you understand what I mean when I say that? You're the last person who I can call home. Everyone else is gone.

Also, I told you to stop taking those photos. Please. It sounds real bad, Eogh. Real dangerous.

Not worth it. Please don't get into trouble over it.

Again, sorry for not writing you. I don't hate you. I just haven't been myself lately.

Love,

James

19 August 1940

Jamie,

You and I will remember Walter and Carrie. I have never met them, but from Walter's kindness alone, he is a man worth remembering.

I think you do not understand. I cannot just stop going with the man. He has power in a way I can't describe. He has money, but it's more than that. He knows things about us and has proof. He knows that I have been with men. All of the other men there know, but they are like me. They don't think they are free and what they know means they have done what I do. He has not said anything directly, but I know that if I try to leave, he can easily bring me back since he knows what he knows. He photographs us doing things the world would find disgusting. Things that I find sinful. I cannot just leave. I have never seen the ones who have tried again. I wish sometimes that I could be honest about myself. You know. I don't know why I told you, but I did. And all those years ago, when I was no longer of use and my family found out. They know, but they never wanted to see me again after that. After that you were the only person I was honest to. I don't know why you other than how I love you.

I know you are not damned like me and I am glad you are not, but I love you, and I wish to express that freely to you. I never will in the way I would like. But that does not change that I am damned. Perhaps it is God's punishment that Eddie died. It was a warning to me to change. I do not think I can.

I am so sorry, Jamie. You should never have met me.

With my regrets,

Eoghan



Jamie,

You and I will remember Walter and Carrie. I have not met them, but Walter's kindness makes him a man worthy of memory.

The man will find new people to photograph soon. He always does. After a time, I notice that boys stop going with him but new ones leave with him then. Soon I will be able to leave because I will have the money to get to you without putting a burden on you. I don't have enough money to leave safely yet, but when I have no choice, I will go.

I am so sorry, Jamie. I cannot go a day without feeling this sadness. No matter what you tell me, I know this is because of me, and I am sorry of it. I wish I could change things.

With my regrets,

Eoghan

1 September 1940

Jamie,

I have not heard from you. I am sad for what I have done. Do you understand? Not only do I tell you I am sorry, but I am sad by it. I wish I could change it.

I do not know what I can do to fix things. Every time I think about going home to Ireland, I realize that I will never afford it. The man, I think he knows. I think he knows that I want to leave, and he is making it harder and harder. I have less money than before and I think it is because he knows that if he gives me enough, I will never come back. So I have no choice but to stay and sin. To damn myself again and again and again until there is no way that God will ever forgive me. I am the worst of men, Jamie.

Please, Jamie, I need you. I have not heard your voice or read your hand in so long. Please. I will not be here much longer. We need to leave. Jamie, I want to go home. Will you still come to my home with me? Will you still walk by the old churches and beautiful fields with me or will you wonder too much how such a sinner can come from such beauty?

I know why you hate me, Jamie, and I understand. What I am is worthy of nothing but hatred, and I know I have caused you so much pain because of Eddie that you may not care about me at all anymore. I know the pain I feel is nothing compared to what you must feel, but I am hurting. I don't want to ask for forgiveness. But will you please just let me hear from you?

I am sorry for loving you more than I am sorry for anything else. I am glad you are not damned by loving me, too. I do not want to bring you Hell with me.

Love,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

I hope you're doing well. I know I am. The fields are getting boring now, but the money is better than I expected for the work I'm doing. Especially this time of year. I'm getting paid for nothing, feels like. Maybe we can get out sooner than I thought.

Look, I had that dream about you again. The one about when we met, except it didn't go anything like when we met. Have I actually told you what it is? You get hurt in the end, and then I wake up. I dream that every now and then for the past few months. Still scares me every time.

I hope you're doing fine. I think you are. You're not great at secrets so I'd know if you weren't. I promise we're getting out of here, Eogh. I'm not letting anything happen to you.

Yours always,

James



Eoghan,

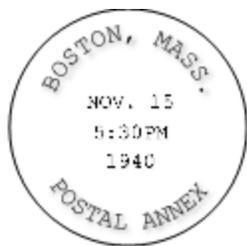
I hope you don't get this letter too late. Happy birthday, kid. I wish I could be around for it. I would buy you a milkshake or something. I hope you do something small for yourself. You know you're allowed to buy a chocolate bar or something sometimes.

I haven't heard from you in a few months. Are you okay? I promise I don't hate you. You can write me if you don't hate me. I just want to know that you're okay. Are you keeping work? Are you eating enough? Are you able to pay the rent? I can always send you money if you need it. You know Walter doesn't make me pay for much of anything as long as I'm helping him.

Please write back soon just to tell me you're okay. I don't actually hate you and I worry about you a lot. I don't have much else to do but think down here, so I can come up with a lot of horrible ideas of what's happening to you. Please just let me know if you're okay.

Yours,

James



Jamie,

I did not get the letter too late. Thank you for sending it! I am happy you remembered.

I am paying rent easily. I only have to pay for rent and food for myself now. It is not so bad.

It is affordable with just me. I do not have much trouble keeping work, which surprises me. I guess I have been there long enough that they do not let me go first.

I am okay. Are you? I do not do much so there is not much to write about. But if you worry I can write you more often. Please write me, too.

I am afraid for next year. I will have to register for your military then. I want to find a way home before that.

Take care,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

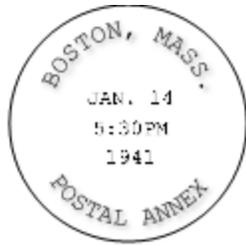
Write me whenever you want to, even if you don't have much to say. I don't mind getting letters. I don't really talk to people much unless I go into town, so it's nice to read what you send me even if you think it isn't much.

Try not to worry about next year right now. You have now to worry about. Isn't that a lot to think of without worrying about the future?

It gets cool down here, not cold. I would have expected to be cold by now, but it isn't too bad. When it gets colder at night, the air is real refreshing to breathe in when you're outside. I do that to clear my head some nights. It's nice. I hope you have a way to find moments of peace like that. You deserve them.

Yours,

James



Jamie,

Happy birthday! I want to tease you for being old, but then you would tease me for being young, and really I am not that much younger than you so I don't want that. But know that I am not teasing you not because I am kind, but because I am selfish.

Do Walter and Carrie celebrate your birthday? I wish I could be there to celebrate with you, but I will instead send you my thoughts and wishes. I hope I can see you on your next birthday. Maybe you will have seen my home then, if we are lucky enough to get to Ireland soon.

I hope you are taking care of yourself, Jamie. I am trying to keep myself okay because I know that is what you would want, but it can be hard sometimes. Being only me here, it is hard to fight when I don't see what I am fighting for. But for you I am trying. I wish I felt as comfortable breathing cold night air as you do. That sounds good.

Happy birthday and much love,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

Thank you! Walter didn't do much, but Carrie baked a small cake. It was delicious. I wish you could have tried it. Carrie is a great cook and a kind woman. I think you would really love her.

I want to see where you're from, but you know it's going to be hard for me to get there. Now may not be the time, but I promise in the future I will visit you there. I want to feel why you love that place so much.

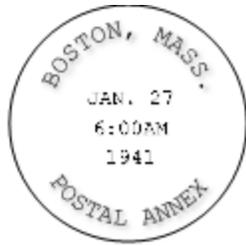
If I have to take care of myself, so do you. It isn't fair for you to think that there's nothing to take care of yourself for. Just because we're apart doesn't mean I don't care about you. I care about you more than you know. I care more for you than I do anything else. So if I have to make sure I am eating okay and remembering to breathe, so do you. What is that word?

*Análaigh*? If there is one word I remember you teaching me, it's that. Also, why is it so hard to spell?

Thank you for writing me. I have missed you.

Love,

James



Jamie,

If you are ever going to come to Ireland or visit Ireland with me, you will have to know more than that. My little island speaks Gaedhilge more than English. And it is not my fault that you only know one language. That is just how we write. But do not worry. I will teach you. I am doing my best to take care of myself. That is not easy when you are telling me about cakes I do not get to have. You have become a mean old man.

I have not much to say, but I am glad you had a good birthday. Write again soon.

Yours,

Eoghan



Jamie,

I don't know what is happening anymore. I don't know how to describe what is happening, I do not know what is happening, I do not know who I am. I do not know who he is. I do not know. I am sorry. Do you understand that? That he has put sorrow upon me that was not here before, despite everything. I can't understand it. It is like finding a clear patch of water that is not polluted rainfall and instead a real, clear pond, and I look at it and see no reflection even though I can see the trees around me through it. I know I am there, but I do not understand why I cannot see myself. I don't know what is happening.

I do not know who he is, really. He does things to me that do not make me forget him, but make me less likely to remember him. I still know who he is when I see him, and I still know what I think when I see him, but I do not have the same thoughts. Time slows down with him, and the things he does do not hurt, but they are not enjoyable neither. It is better than just a factory job or port job because even though time slows down and the hours are longer, it does not hurt. It is not work I like, but it is not the sort of exhausting that factories is. It is not the same sort of exhausting as being an Irish child among Americans, only left alive because I provide them with service they can't get.

Actually, I think it is that kind of tiring. I think the feeling is the same, even if the event isn't. I am still an Irish with the Americans, alive only because of a particular service.

I think you would hate me if you saw me now. I don't know why but I think I am someone to hate now and I think you would be one to hate. I think you would be able to tell, for the first time ever I remember, that I am tired.

I'm sorry. I am sorry for what happened to him. I may not have been his blood, but he was my brother, too. He was in this household and he was my family. I don't know if that's something you can understand because you are not in my position, but he was my brother. He was your brother first, but I protected him nearly as strongly as you, even if I failed.

I'm sorry, Jamie. And I know you are, too. I know that you have a sadness, too. But please wait for me, and I will wait for you, and if nothing else, you and I can get out without getting more of this blood on my hands. I won't ever be able to not see it, but we can get out alive, in the end.

Always yours,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

I know you feel trapped, but I need you to listen to me. We'll get out of this, okay? There is no blood on your hands, and one day we'll get to see your home together. Focus on home instead. What was your island called? I can't remember. Tell me about it. What do you remember? Do you want to go back there specifically, or will you just be happy to be in Ireland again?

If there is one thing you need to do for me, Eoghan, it's to stop going with that photographer. The things you tell me about him make me afraid of what he's doing to you. You cannot keep letting him control you the way he does. Please, Eoghan. As soon as you can, as soon as you think you have enough money to survive until we make enough to leave, stop going with him. I don't know what I would do if he hurt you.

I don't hate you, and nothing you say will convince me that I will. I don't know what you mean when you say you are someone I would hate now. I could never hate you, Eoghan. Is there anything I could do that could make you hate me? Whatever that is is what you would have to do for me to hate you. I will never abandon you for things out of your control. Even if you were the reason Eddie died, did you kill him? Did you take your own two hands and hurt him? You never would do that, Eoghan. Step back for a moment and remember who you are, and who you are is not that. You are the one person I have left, and you are the one person who has known me, actually me, for this long. Do not forget that.

Please write or call whenever you need to. You know I am in the town most weekend mornings, so you can call then, or you can always write me. Do not think any letter is too short. If you need to see your words to me on the paper, and if you need to see the writing I send back, I will do it for you.

Nothing can bring him back, not even acting like I'll hate you, so stop trying. You know we have to move on.

Take care of yourself,

Jamie



Jamie,

My island is *Árainn Mhór of na hÁrainneacha*. It is the largest of three small islands, and it is beautiful. I have told you about the days I remember standing in the warm air and watching the sheep graze. Those moments are my calmest perhaps. I want to go back to those moments. I was so small and knew so little of the world. I want to feel that peace again.

I have mentioned how I do not remember speaking English there. I know they do. My family had English the whole time we were here, so they must have learned it somehow, but I do not remember speaking much English. You will have to learn Gaedhilge, but I will teach you. Or we can go somewhere else in Ireland. They speak English on the main island, not as much on the smaller ones, so I will take you to my home, but we will find somewhere else to stay where you can speak the language.

Nothing you do would ever make me hate you, but you have not killed my brother, so it is not fair to ask that question. But I will continue to write you until I can see you again. It will not be easy to leave, but I promise you I will when I can.

You are too fair, *mo bhuachaill*. Thank you for it. I will care for myself if you do.

Love,

Eoghan



James,

Things are not getting better here, but I keep trying. I want to get out soon, and I will keep trying as long as you are there to try for. The man is paying less than ever for the same things now, but I have things saved. I will keep saving until I can leave.

I saw Mister Harrison recently. He told me that if he ever needs more help, he will tell me first. I know he does not like me the way he liked Eddie, but I also know that he cared about you and Eddie very much. He would ask about you when I would see him more often, so I know he thinks of you. I think he hopes to help me more because it would help you even if he has never liked me as much. I appreciate his kindness.

How are you? I hope everything is well. How are Walter and Carrie? I wish I knew them. They seem so kind, and I sometimes need to remember that there is goodness in the world. I am glad people like them exist. Mister Harrison is kind, but less since Eddie died. I sometimes think he blames me too, but maybe he just does not know what to say to me without Eddie here.

Write again when you can. I like to hear from you.

Take care,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

I'm glad Mr. Harrison is offering you something if he needs it. Maybe you'll be able to get out even if the photographer stops paying you well.

Walter and Carrie are well. Walter is just as quiet and hardworking as ever, and really, I wish you could meet Carrie. It makes me so sad to think that the rest of the world will go without knowing her. She is so genuinely good and I wish the rest of the world could see how kind they could be with her as their example.

How is the factory work? It's good that you've been able to keep work there. Are you keeping your health up? I know how exhausted you must be all the time from the factory.

Can you promise me something, Eogh? If it gets bad enough and you can't be there anymore because of that photographer, I need you to pick up everything you can carry and leave. I don't like what you've told me at all. Get up and leave the second something goes wrong.

Take care of yourself, Eoghan. I mean it.

James



James,

Factory work is still not special or interesting. It is the same thing every day, but it is work that pays, so I will not complain.

I promise you that if I need to leave, I will try my best. I am not sure where I will go, but I will find somewhere and write you from there. I just wish that somewhere will be home, but I will not leave without you. Even if I could afford it, I would never want to leave you here. I cannot leave you behind knowing there is a war I could help you avoid. I will not stand by when they take you.

I am okay, so stop worrying. I know you do it because of the way you write me. It seems less controlled than it used to, but I am okay.

I miss you very much, *mo bhuachail*. I hope to see you soon.

Yours always,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

Happy birthday! It has been too long since I wrote you, and I'm sorry for that, but I wanted to wish you a happy birthday anyway. I will try to call you on the day of if I can. I'm sorry I can't be there for it, but hopefully we will see each other again soon.

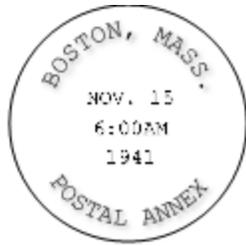
I know you're worried about registering, but please don't be so stressed. There is a way to register but refuse to fight. It's what I want to do. You can object to war for religious or moral reasons, and they'll put you in some nursing roles or something. I'm not sure exactly what they are, but you won't actually have to fight.

Please try to have a nice day, okay? I know you're going to be worried about everything, but please, try to find a day for yourself. I would make sure you did at least something for fun if I was there. We'd get some chocolates or go to a diner or something. You can do that stuff alone, you know, so I hope you do, just once.

I won't ever go so long without writing you again, okay? If I ever have to, I'll make sure to call you when I'm in town like I did a couple times these past few months. I'm sorry about it.

Take care,

James



Jamie,

Thank you for your kind words. I have missed your letters, and no matter what you say you would do if you were here, the best gift I have gotten from you is your letter. I am always happy to hear from you.

I will register like normal because my fear for this war is that it will come to me and I will have to fight. It is because I am scared that I do not want to fight, not because I have any objection to war. I do, of course. I do not understand the need to be violent in response to violence, even if it is for good reasons. But America is not being violent. It is being silent. I hate that there is a war going on, but I cannot reasonably distance myself from the cause for any reasons that are not selfish.

Write again as soon as you like, Jamie, and I will write to you soon, too.

Love always,

Eoghan



Eoghan,

I'm sure you've heard by the time you get this letter. Everyone has. For a couple weeks I really thought we could make it. But we're not getting out of this one.

I haven't registered yet. I have to, now more than ever. Do you think they'll find me if I don't? Do you think they know where I am? What do they do if you don't register?

I don't know about you, Eoghan, but I'm scared. I got no stake in this war. I got nothing to do with it. But now they hit home. Now we can't keep closing our eyes and pretending this isn't happening. It's here.

Do you think they'll hit us again? Stateside this time? If we're lucky they won't, or maybe if we're really lucky they will and we'll be fighting here and we can find each other easier. We can hide out for however long this takes to get over. We don't have to stay anywhere. We can just keep running until the fight ends or we do.

I'm sorry I couldn't get us out sooner, Eogh. I owed you at least that much.

I wish you were here.

Yours always,

Jamie

March 1942

Eoghan,

Seeing you turn up at the door that day with your fucking notice. Jesus, Eogh, I've missed you. That feeling I got when you hugged me and you were crying. You slept on the step. You took a train down and just walked and walked until you found this place and then you slept on the damn step. I can't believe you, but you'll never know how happy I was to see you. Even under your stupid face with the stairs still pressed into it and even under your tears, you were smiling. I haven't even thought of you smiling since Eddie died. I forgot how beautiful it was.

I wish you were a coward like I am. I wish you would just run away now instead of going. Who cares about the money, Eogh. Just get on a boat and get out, you'll find a job when you get home. You have to do it now. They don't have you yet. You won't get deployed immediately. And, Eogh. This country has never once treated you like an American so why do you have to fight like one? This isn't your place. I wish you would just go home.

You know, I registered eventually. Sort of. There's a way to sign up to avoid the fight itself. Because I'm a coward. I don't want to go, but if I have to, I don't want to fight.

There are things I'm never telling you, Eoghan. Things that you've told me, but that I can never tell you because for some reason, for some damn reason, I'm scared. I wish I could be like you.

Love,

James



Dear Mr. Adams:

This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your brother, Private Eoghan O'Rahilly, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], has been reported missing in action since 7 May 1943 in [REDACTED]

I know that added distress is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore, I wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you with delay, and, if in the meantime no additional information is received, I will again communicate with you at the expiration of three months. Also, it is the policy of the Commanding General of the Army Forces upon receipt of the "Missing Crew Report" to convey to you any details that might be contained in that report.

The term "missing in action" is used only to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed. I wish to emphasize that every effort is exerted continuously to clear up the status of our personnel. Under war conditions this is a difficult task as you must readily realize. Experience has shown that many persons report missing in action are subsequently reported as prisoners of war, but as this information is furnished by countries with which we are at war, the War Department is helpless to expedite such reports. However, in order to relieve financial worry,

Congress has enacted legislation which continues in force the pay, allowances and allotments to dependents of personnel being carried in a missing status.

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULIO  
Major General  
The Adjunct General

## II

Scottsboro, 1942

James opened the door to head to the shed out back. He was used to waking up earlier than Walter in the mornings now, both to keep Walter from having to do too much in his old age and to get some time alone during his days. James hadn't slept well since Eddie died, and the only time he really felt alone and at peace was when he started his morning with the same quiet monotony of finding what he'd need for the day. The rest of the day was filled with physical work too exhausting to feel quiet, or talking to Walter about what needed to be done, or going into town to buy or sell whatever they needed, or making conversation with Carrie when he finally got to sit down at night.

Nothing ever changed, and he had accepted that. He preferred it that way, actually, because it meant he didn't have to think too much about what was happening in the world, could focus on pretending to live a normal life instead. He'd let things stay the same for so long that he expected them to. He had never thought about the ways his own act could fall apart.

That James felt fear—honest and immediate fear—for the first time that he could remember in months when he opened the door caused him more stress than the lump curled into the corner of the wooden steps did. He stopped immediately, afraid to move closer, afraid of accepting the change in his routine. He stared.

James stood in the doorway, between the strange lump and Walter and Carrie's kitchen, until he realized the lump was a person who had folded themselves under a ratty coat. He approached it slowly, until he could reach the coat to move it. He hesitated, then decided to

invite the person inside for a meal and a real place to lie down. James breathed in then moved the fabric gently, and the person stirred.

“Eoghan?” James whispered into the air, destroying the silence he had so meticulously crafted over the past months.

Eoghan sat up, shucking the coat off himself and staring hollowly at James for a moment. He tilted his head to the side, and James noticed how much thinner and paler Eoghan was, how he looked far smaller than he remembered, and then Eoghan was jumping up to wrap himself around James. He was crying against James’s shoulder, breath shallow and words muddy, and James hadn’t felt so at home in years.

James relaxed, no longer scared because it was Eoghan, just Eoghan, and he was sobbing on James’s shoulder like he used to, and James had missed him so much and hadn’t held him like this in so long. The quiet thought of how much he loved when Eoghan cried because it gave James the excuse to hold him like this was drowned out by the overwhelming sensation of peace James felt. He had forgotten what it meant to feel calm and happy and loved, and he fell into the moment so entirely that he forgot the pressure of living his false normal and admitted to himself what he still hadn’t told Eoghan, if only for a second.

“Jamie,” Eoghan said into James’s neck. “Jamie,” he repeated until James finally began to believe he was real. “James, *mo bhuachaill*, I got my notice.”

7 May 1969

Eoghan,

I hope you've been happy. I hope you haven't been panicking too much watching me live.

I've had a lot of time to think without you and Eddie talking at me all the time. I think the main conclusion I've come to is I miss you and Eddie talking at me all the time. I especially miss when Eddie got excited about the little things. I'm kind of glad he's going to stay that kid forever, you know?

I don't write to Eddie, only you. I don't think I left anything unsaid with Eddie, and maybe I always knew he wasn't going to live so long. But I really did think you were unstoppable. You were a force, Eogh. You were so calmly stubborn that it was like you weren't planning anything at all, but really you were gonna have your way or be damned.

You know, I never believed in that sort of thing, not much, but if anyone is going to be damned, it better not be you. I don't care who says what, you aren't an abomination.

I think it was only kind of recently that I finally stopped hoping you were actually just missing. I go back and forth on whether that would have been better. I wondered if you had found a way to just leave without saying anything to anyone, and I really hoped that you were out there doing everything you wanted to do. I thought maybe you found a way to get home like you always said you would, but I also didn't want to think that you had finally done it and never told me about it. So my other thought was that you really were captured or something, that the Germans or Italians got you and that when the war was over you'd come back. I think that's what I really hoped, because I didn't wanna believe that you had left without telling me. It's real bad of me, Eogh, but I hoped you were back there and suffering and missing me and

wishing you could tell me that you hadn't left me behind, that you would never do that in a million years.

When it came to you, I always was pretty selfish. I'm sorry.

You probably know everything I'm gonna say before I say it, if you're really gone. I never much believed in that heaven thing, either, even though I told you I did, but for you, there's gotta be a place like that, and if there is, you're up there knowing exactly what I'm gonna do and seeing everything I say before I say it. Even when you were alive you knew me better than I knew myself, so I know there's gotta be some way you know what I'm up to now.

I still wanna write it, though. Have you ever needed to say something out loud just to believe it yourself? I don't know if you have, but probably not. You're always so determined about yourself. You probably never have to convince yourself of things. But I do, and you're not here, so I'm gonna talk.

I miss you, Eogh.

Love always,

Jamie

5 July 1969

Hey, Eogh,

You know how I said you probably knew what I was gonna say before I said it? Then you probably know what's going on now. Have you been paying attention to New York? To the Stonewall Inn?

Honestly, I don't know why you would be. I'd never heard of the place until the other day, so I don't think you're actually out there staring down at every corner of queers, but maybe you've heard of it by now. The police raided it, and the kids weren't happy. They're fighting back.

I don't know how I feel about it. I've worked really hard to keep up the life I have, and I have to hide who I am every day. I even hid who I was with you, but you knew, I know you did. But at this point... I've kind of figured out that nothing is really worth fighting for. It doesn't matter what we win, we always lose. We won the war, but I lost you. There's no point in fighting to me. But I guess to these kids, they've still got life in front of them. They don't know that they're never gonna win, not the way I do now. And I guess that's how you and Eddie always were, but look where it got you. Eddie went and got himself killed at home, and you went and lost yourself fighting someone else's war. Fighting isn't worth it.

I'm just trying to convince myself that you'd see this the same way, but I know you wouldn't. You never had anything to lose, so why not fight? You were never ashamed of yourself. I know I would have found you at one of those fag holes, and you would have been so happy. Honestly, I can't say I wouldn't have been happy for you. I just want to believe that you would agree with me, but you were never the coward. I'd never be caught dead in one of those places, but you would own one if you could, so I don't know what I'm saying.

You know what, Eogh? I'm glad you lived as exactly who you are. You don't know how sick I am of being someone else. Even if you didn't get to be happy because of who you were, I'm glad you were never afraid of it. You didn't deserve that. I wish I could share the person you were with the world, but sometimes I think you were never even there at all. No one else remembers you.

I'll write again if anything happens. I wish you would do the same.

Love always,

Jamie

7 May 1970

Eoghan,

I'm real tired, but I'm sure you can tell that much. When am I not tired? The whole time I knew you I was always exhausted, so I guess it's not a surprise now. I just don't think I've felt safe and at home in a long time, so even when I sleep it's not good enough. I'm still exhausted.

I've gotten old, Eogh. I'm more than twice as old as I was when we met. I'm more than three times the age Eddie was when he died. Do you ever think about that? How young he really was and how it isn't fair that he got so many years less than you did? That kid shoulda lived forever, but he was so unhappy. The world didn't deserve him. He was too good for any of the people he ever met, except maybe you. You and him? Best people I've ever known, and I love you both for it.

I'm trying to raise my kids to be just like him, you know? I tell them about Uncle Eddie all the time, how he was too damn kind to let anything go. I named Edward after him, obviously. I think he hates that, Edward. I don't expect him to be Eddie, but I want him to be as good as he can be. I want him to be good and happy, just like Eddie shoulda been.

Edward's gonna older than Eddie was when he died this year. Owen's still got another year before he's Eddie's age, though.

I don't wanna try to make Owen be just like you, either. I don't talk about you as much as I do Eddie, but that's because I want to keep you to myself. I built you up in my head to be mine, Eogh. I don't care anymore how selfish it is, but you're mine on your own.

I'll write you again next time. I'm sorry I don't have much to say. I don't wanna talk about what I can say to anyone else. I only wanna say what I can say to you, but it's hard when you

aren't around getting into trouble for me to yell at you about. Go kick up some trouble and tell me about it. I miss yelling at you.

Miss you,

Jamie

7 May 1971

Eoghan,

Me and Margaret will have been married for twenty years this year. We've been married almost as long as you were alive. The way time moves has really been getting to my head as I've gotten older. I still feel like I'm twenty, but I turned 53 this year. Isn't that crazy? Me, 53, and you, you're always gonna be 22, at least to me. Hell, always felt like an adult kid to me, you know? Even when you were 15 I swear you were an old man, but an innocent one. You really thought the world was gonna be good to you one day, but you took care of everything so seriously.

Edward's gonna be 17 in a few months, and Owen just turned 15. Carrie will be 13 in December. She's older than you were when we met. I wonder if she has any secret friends who watched her almost die. I don't think so, but who the hell knows. She definitely isn't getting into the same sort of trouble you were as a kid, not running illegal contraband for her family, but who knows what she does with her time. That's why they're secrets, right? I wouldn't know them. My mom never knew about you before she died.

Even in twenty years of marriage, I've never told Margaret who you were to me, not really. I told her about you early on, and I used to bring you up more in the early days. She knows you were important enough that she was okay with naming Owen after you as long as he got her older brother's middle name. Obviously I said yes. I didn't even press her about what to name Owen, but she mentioned it one day, and I was glad she was willing to do that for me.

I don't deserve Margaret. I haven't been completely honest with her, but she's always been nothing but a gift to me. She would understand when I had nightmares early on, and she always does her best to support me through what she doesn't understand. And it's not like I don't do

the same for her, but she's never been as unwilling to talk about someone in her past as I am. She's always so honest. I love her, I really do. It just isn't the same. I don't know if I could be myself around her or if she'd make me leave.

After this long, I doubt she'd make me leave, but I just can't tell her. I haven't told anyone. I've never found someone who I trusted like you, and I didn't even treat you right when I had you. I'm sorry.

I can't ever seem to do right by anyone I love. I wish I could. I'm still figuring out.

I hope you don't hate me for Margaret. I know you'd actually love her, but I can't help but feel you'd feel like I hurt you with her. You'd never say it, but I'd see it. Or maybe I would just worry over nothing, I don't know. But she's probably the best person who's ever been in my life besides you, so I like to think you'd be happy for me.

Missing you,

Jamie

7 May 1974

Eoghan,

You know how being a queer isn't illegal a lot of places anymore? It isn't a disease or anything anymore either. I think people are starting to see the harm it did. A lot of famous or important people have died either fighting against it. Some of them killed themselves, you know. I hope you didn't do that.

I wonder if Margaret or the kids ever notice how much attention I pay to this sort of thing. About ten years ago I read a book about it. There was this documentary that came out in California but that wasn't available on the east coast, but when I heard about it, I ordered a book that was about it. I keep it in the same box I keep all our old letters in, and the kids know better than to go in there. Otherwise, I don't seek it out much. I go to work every day and come home for dinner and time with the kids every night, or at least the nights when the kids are around. I don't let the past control me as much as it used to.

Really, I only let myself focus on this part of myself around this time of year. It's getting easier to pretend throughout the year that I'm okay. You asked me once after Eddie died if I still felt him around all the time, and I didn't. For a long, long time I still felt you, but I don't anymore, not until this time of year. And even though it's easier to live every day, it's harder to pull myself out of it after every time. But I think I'm finally living. I don't think I've been alive since the war.

You know there's been other wars, right? They've been terrible. Edward's in college to avoid the current war, and Owen will be going soon, too. I'm happy for them, Owen especially. He's really aware of how awful it all is, and he's going to college to avoid it because he refuses to take part in it, not like Edward, who just doesn't want to go. Owen legitimately has a reason.

I guess Edward is like me in that way, but Owen is like you. I'm glad.

I wish you were here, Eogh. You'd never believe how much better things have gotten for me. I'm not rich, but we have money. I can afford to take Margaret out for nice dinners or to concerts if I want to. She doesn't have to work, but there's a shop down the street that one of her friend's husbands owns, so she helps out in there, and it suits her. It makes her happy, and she gets to paint and spend time with the kids on the side. It's nothing like what we were doing before. It's especially not like you were doing before. If I get sick, I can take a few days off work at the bank and still not have to worry about money when I'm better. And let me tell you, I hate what I do. At least when I worked with Walter, the company was good, even if it was physically exhausting. Things were worse then, but at least I felt like me.

Miss you,

Jamie

7 May 1979

Eoghan,

Do you ever get tired of the violence in the world? If it isn't wars, it's serial killers, and if it isn't serial killers, it's political assassins. I'm sick of it all.

I wish I could say our world was a better place, but it really wasn't. You died fighting in a war that wasn't yours, for a country that never wanted you. My brother was beaten to death for being homosexual, and we don't even know if he was. They killed him because they thought he was, and I'll never know who they were, but they got to walk around free after that. They killed my baby brother and then continued on with their lives.

I hate that. It didn't bother me so much at first because that's what I knew. People would beat on Eddie. But why? What was the point of hurting him? Was it fun? I know he wasn't hurting anybody. And I know, I knew from the moment I met you, that people were trying to hurt you just because you were different. They could get away with it. Who would care if a little Irish kid was left for trash on the sidewalk? Not them.

Every time I think the world is getting better, I see all the ways it's gotten worse. And I should be happy for what I have, but I'm not.

Some things have gotten better, but people pay the price for those things. I remember hearing about how Martin Luther King got shot. That man never hurt anyone, and what did he get for it? It's just sick. I don't care who or what you agree with, no one should get killed for standing up to say they think people aren't being treated fair.

And people really never have been treated fair, have they? I got lucky. You had the accent to tell people from the moment they met you that you were different. Eddie just wasn't quite right. He was tall but slow, and too good to hurt anyone, and that made him an easy target. And God,

Eoghan, I wonder all the time about that photographer. He picked you out because you couldn't get away. You needed the money, and when you were there with other men, he had you, didn't he? I told you to leave, Eoghan. But I guess that's me. I'm American, no accent to claim I'm anything else. On Walter's farm, I was lucky enough to have everything I needed, and running away sounded so easy to me. What did I ever fight for to get me here? Nothing. Not like you and Eddie.

God, Eoghan, things have never been good, have they? But they felt better when I had you.

Jamie

7 May 1983

Eoghan,

I think I'm gonna go to Ireland soon. Margaret and I have talked about it, and she's always wanted to go to Europe, too. So we're going to, but I asked her if I could go to see your home. I told her about how you used to tell me I'd need to see it one day, and she thought it was a great idea. So we're going to try to get everything figured out and go sometime soon. In the next few years.

We talked about whether it should just be me and her, or if we should bring the kids. Carrie may want to come, and maybe Owen, but Edward... I don't know. I haven't felt like I knew him for the past few years. We just don't talk as much.

I wish you were here to tell me where to go. I just finally decided that it wouldn't hurt me as much to see it without you as it would to never see it at all. I always promised you I would.

*Mo bhuachaill.* Can I call you that? Or does it only work one way or the other? I don't know, I never learned Irish. I wish I had now.

I miss you more than ever, kid. I hope to see you soon.

Love always,

Jamie

7 May 1984

Eoghan,

Me and Margaret and Carrie are going to Ireland this summer. It's last on our list. We're gonna start in Greece, since Margaret has always love it and ended up getting Carrie really into the classics and stuff, then we're gonna move west. Edward and Owen aren't coming, but Carrie can. Have I told you she wants to teach? She's so certain she's gonna become a professor one day, and she's been working really hard at it lately. And honestly? I believe her. I don't think she's ever not done something she's wanted to. She's always been real stubborn like that. I guess she got it from you somehow, because me and Margaret never fought for something the way Carrie does. So she's coming with us. It'll be good for her, probably, to have this sort of experience.

I still have all your old letters. I kept them when you sent them to me, and then when you went to war. And then, when I heard you were missing, I put them in that old leather bag you gave me and never let them go. I think I'm gonna bring some of them with me. You never got to go home, did you? I'll take you there.

There's a lot of things I regret never saying to you, Eogh. I've never found another person I trusted as much as I trusted you, so there are things I've never told anyone. I used to think I would never tell anyone because I would never find anyone who was as really good as you are. I thought no one could ever be as selfless as you. But I'm figuring out that I was wrong. There are good people in the world. There are some really, really good people in the world, even though for a long time all I saw was everything wrong, with the wars and everything. So the reason I haven't told anyone isn't because they weren't good people.

I'll write you when I'm in Ireland, okay, Eogh? I hope to see you there.

Love always,

Jamie

Howth, 1984

James took one step back and then another, away from Margaret and Carrie, until he felt the small stone ledge that marked the bottom of the hill behind him. He sat on it before his knees gave him no choice, then breathed in weakly. He felt his eyes watering.

“Dad?” Carrie asked when she turned around. She still had the peaceful smile she had worn their whole hike, but she looked confused and edged on concerned when she saw James sitting in frozen awe, staring out at the water below with tears in his eyes.

James focused on the head of one of the seals that had popped out of the water the moment he decided it was too much. He watched it curiously, and it seemed to stare back at him, not following the other seal that had shown up at the same time. It calmed him to watch it as he reached for the old paper in his chest pocket, fragile and thin after so long folded up and untouched. Watching the seal felt right, felt as if he hadn’t made a mistake in coming here.

“What was that, Dad?” Carrie asked, coming to sit next to him on the stone ledge. It was a tight fit, but she sat with her arms around him, and it was comfortable.

James unfolded the paper as delicately as he could. It was the first time he had done so in over forty years.

“I loved him,” he whispered as he reread the words. He looked up to see the seal still watching him, then said again, more confidently, “I loved him.”



My lovely J,

I am sorry for not writing you while I have been gone. It is not that I have not wanted to. But there is very little that is beautiful here, very little that I would want to tell you. I am sad that I have nothing beautiful to say, but I want to write to you anyway.

I hope you have been well, my love. I hope you are keeping busy and not worrying too much about me. There is nothing to worry about. How have you been?

Did you know that there is a man who fights next to me who has Italian family in America? He is not able to write to them in Italian, and his family cannot send him letters in Italian. I understand why, but it makes me sad. I know there are times when I cannot find the words in English to mean the same way as they do in my language. I hope that he is not the same, and that he can tell his family he loves them and misses them freely and not have to worry about what he means in Italian.

I will not write to you in my Gaedhilge, because I want you to understand what I am saying.

I love you very much. I wish I could say that to you, not this paper, but this is the best I am able to say it. I love you. And I know you know that already, but I want you to know it in case I never get to say it to you again. I am very afraid that I may never see you again.

My love, I know that I will never be what you need, but that is because you are a better person than me. You are not in the same ways deeply sinful as me. It is for that I am glad you do not have to feel what I do or fight as I fight.

I am here because I am being punished for all I have done. I have told you who I am, and God has seen who I am and is punishing me. I am sorry if that causes you pain. I wish I had not made you damned like me.

Though I hope to see you soon, I have this fear that I will not see you again. Please do not have that fear, though. I have enough fear for both of us. Please have hope.

I love you. Please do not wait for me. I do not want to make you suffer more.

Yours always and love always,

Eoghan

22 August 1984

Eoghan,

You remember the stories you used to tell me about those lazy American drunks who would demand that ten-year-old you get them better booze, then complain about how you were a lazy Irish drunk? Remember how scared you used to say you were of what they would do if they found out you were lying and couldn't get them anything better? Do you remember how you said you would rather deal with them than your father because they weren't nearly as violent to you?

Remember how you used to have to be scared of your family? I wish I could say I was never scared of mine.

I'm writing this from Howth, Ireland. I know it's not where you were from. They speak far too much English for that. But I couldn't remember where you were from, and I couldn't bring myself to read your letters again after all these years just for that. That's not why I want to hear from you again. But it's beautiful here, and it feels like home in a way I haven't felt in years. It just feels like a place where I could be happy for the rest of my life. Maybe because I can pretend I see 18-year-old you bouncing around excitedly at the fact that you're home. Maybe it's because I feel like I finally gave you the funeral you deserved.

I told them, Carrie and Margaret. I told them things I should have told you. Carrie was, as always, supportive and diplomatic. Margaret wasn't upset, or even surprised, but she was uncomfortable. I still think she is. She says she wishes she would have known sooner, but that it doesn't change anything about our lives together. I wish I had known that sooner, too.

It's not fair, Eoghan. I've lived this whole life without you. I got lucky and was good at lying my way out of things. I lied and said I had a moral objection to the war, and I was lucky enough

to be the one young, hearty man on Walter's farm. So here I am, still alive and untouched by the war that took you from me. I'm not the one who deserves to be here.

Eoghan. There's so much I wish I could have told you. But I think it's okay that I didn't. I think it would have made things worse for you, to know how much I actually cared. I think I wanted you to think I was treating you like a charity case, but part of me was always sad that you never took that charity for what it actually was.

There's so much to say, Eoghan, but I've long since been out of time to tell you.

I love you,

James

## On *Kill the Messenger*: The Process of Creating Fiction on Opportunity and Privilege

### **Introduction**

*Kill the Messenger: Fiction on Opportunity and Privilege* was originally conceived in July 2014 on a cross-country roadtrip from Los Angeles, California, to Charlotte, North Carolina. Though I have never been able to pinpoint what event or location gave me the idea, at some point during that trip I realized I wanted to write a story exploring a situation in which individuals who have been actively trying to avoid a war fail to do so and are drafted into said war. While thinking through how I would approach writing this historical fiction novel, I considered writing a comparative story in which one character sees combat and another never does, and I concluded that a substantial amount of money, which almost always translates to some form of power, is often enough to protect almost anyone from almost anything, as has often been the case in both times of war and times of peace. However, I began to realize as I started writing that it's not just wealth that leads to opportunity, but other expressions of privilege, such as gender, sexuality, and nationality. Given that I wanted to write a piece that takes place during World War Two, all of those factors would affect my characters even more greatly than they would in a contemporarily-set novel. With all of this in mind, I started scribbling down frantic notes at rest stops and in run-down motel rooms to create what would become the outline of *Kill the Messenger: Fiction on Opportunity and Privilege*.

### **Purpose**

Although *Kill the Messenger* was originally a fun project for me to practice writing in a different genre, when I made progress on it, I began to see how important this novel could be. I had initially planned to write a full-length historical fiction novel that featured love

letters between two male characters, but as I began to see this work not just as a fun exercise but potentially as a work of significant social value, I decided that the letters should be the main text because of their power to convey an individual's internal response to their experience and how they manipulate their external response when communicating with others. Because I wanted to focus on how individuals are affected by society, I thought this epistolary form would allow more focus on each individual's experience of events. Though I still wrote many sections in the standard style of a prose narrative, it was the realization of letters' potential to express insight that I may have not otherwise expressed that led to the format of this thesis.

A major advantage of this letter form is the unreliable narrators it creates. Though no person exists in a vacuum, it is oftentimes easy for individuals to internalize both successes and failures without considering the effect that society plays on them. Every person is a social entity, thus they must interact with society whether they are aware of it or not. Perhaps more important, though, is that society interacts with individuals on levels they cannot necessarily see. Though I specifically designed characters who would be at a disadvantage within their society in one way or another, and though with the advantage of distance from the time period my readers would more likely than not be able to identify the factors that would impact the characters, my characters would not be aware of the extent to which each of these factors would affect them. With this novella and particularly with this epistolary form, I wanted to depict individuals' perceptions of themselves without the advantage of sociological perspective on how they are social entities and not truly *individuals* when they interact with society. In this form, characters express their disappointment at their circumstances while also holding onto the belief that if they just work hard enough, they will

be able to climb up the social ladder. While to an extent that is true, working “hard enough” for an able-bodied, heterosexual white male who was born in the United States is different from working “hard enough” for someone who is disabled, queer, non-white, non-male, or an immigrant. With this novella, I can compare the progress a person makes when they have a majority of the above advantages with the struggles of a person who does not have those advantages. In doing this novella in an epistolary form, I am able to make it clear just how dramatic the difference between those characters is: while one reports success because of the work they’ve done, the other expresses disappointment at their perceived lack of progress. While readers may know why that is, characters express frustration or confusion each time they face a setback, unaware of just how much who they are plays into how society affects them.

Another key point I wanted to make with this thesis is how rarely disadvantaged individuals, who have certainly always been present throughout history, make it into historical narratives and textbooks. When I started this story, I was concerned that, although the characters are representations of real people history has left nameless, the communications between them would be unrealistic. I have been unsure of how common such a correspondence would be, even though I knew it had to have occurred, even if history did not keep record it. Luckily, I found exactly the sort of correspondence I was hoping existed two and a half years after I first had this idea. During World War Two, Gordon Bowsher and Gilbert Bradley exchanged letters that expressed how much they loved each other and how much they hoped for a future time in which they could publically be a couple (Bell). Though at this point I had already written many letters back and forth between my characters, upon reading about these letters, my enthusiasm to finish this story and to, more

importantly, do it justice was heightened. Even if such a correspondence was rare because of the danger it could pose to those involved, finding that it existed at all motivated me. To me, it is essential to write stories that represent the parts of history that have too often been erased.

### **Background and Writing Process**

*Setting the novella.* Writing a work of historical fiction required more detailed research than anything fictional I had written before. Unfortunately, I would often get sidetracked when writing because I would find a detail of which I was unsure, then spend hours researching it. Though at first this prevented me from writing as much each day as I would have liked, it does add to a sense of authenticity to readers.

The first historically-guided choice I had to make was that of setting, and because an essential facet of the identity of one of my characters is his Irish background, I had to choose a place where an Irish immigrant would not seem out of place. However, I also did not want to choose any city where the Irish settled, but one that could play into the plot. For these reasons I chose Boston, Massachusetts, for its history of Irish settlement and Irish crime, but also because Irish crime during prohibition could not outcompete other organized crime groups, thus leaving my character at a disadvantage even among those unfortunate enough to have to fall into a cycle of crime (Preston 267-8). In Boston, my Irish character not only had a reason for being Irish, but a number of disadvantages linked not just to his status as an immigrant, but specifically an Irish immigrant.

My motivation for telling this story in letters was that I would have a character working in the south, and my motivation for having that character working in the south was the potential to make money that would help him avoid the war by working on a southern

farm, which means that choosing a location where there would be year-round fieldwork to be done was essential. In my search, I found documents and summaries that described the time range for the planting and harvesting of each crop in every state and crop yields in 1941, and with this research found that Scottsboro, Alabama, falls exactly in the region that would have crops most of the year (“Annual Crop Summary,” “Usual Planting,” “Alabama Agricultural Statistics”). Though the specific information I found regarding exact planting and harvest dates ended up being irrelevant to the final product of this thesis, having that background still comforted me in that it gave me a reason for my setting, which in turn gave me a reason to keep the epistolary form I wanted to write.

*Learning Irish.* When I began writing from the perspective of my Irish character, I realized that adding the occasional word or phrase in Irish would not only help give my two main characters distinct voices, but also add a bit of authenticity to the work. Initially I wondered how much my Irish character, Eoghan O’Rahilly, would use Irish in his daily life given that he had moved to the United States at a young age, but when I used my own experience as a guideline, I realized how many times a day I use simple Spanish phrases to express irritation, surprise, or excitement, among other expressions to refer to others. Having moved from Puerto Rico back to the United States before I even began elementary school, I decided that since I use basic Spanish to express myself regularly, then Eoghan would use Irish. The first line of Irish I found myself needing was an imperative form of a verb, and when I could not find an easy-to-use English-Irish dictionary that gave full conjugations of verbs, I decided to turn to web resources such as Duolingo and gaeige101 to learn enough Irish to incorporate it into Eoghan’s portions of the novella. I quickly learned that trying to learn Irish on my own would not be easy.

I tried to reflect how I use Spanish in the way Eoghan uses Irish, so I began with simple details to incorporate, particularly nicknames for those important to him, some of which would have double meanings. When I found that the word *buachaill* means not only “boy” but “boyfriend,” I thought it would be a nice touch to have Eoghan call James, whom he loves, *buachaill* with some frequency. However, saying “my boy” in Irish is not as simple as it is in English, or even as simple as Spanish’s need to match the determiner and noun in gender and number. Instead, Irish has systems of initial mutations called eclipsis and lenition, which, in short, change spelling and pronunciation of words when other words of certain types are put before them, including the determiner “my” (*mo* or *m’*). These changes help determine meaning in a sentence when the determiner would be identical for a variety of meanings, such as *a* meaning “her,” “his,” or “their.” Luckily, with the case of the word *buachaill* I was using, the lenition is simple: following the determiners equivalent in English to “my,” “his,” or “your,” *\*mo buachaill* becomes *mo bhuachaill* (“Learn Irish: Lenition). Still, though I understand the rules of lenition for these determiners, I am far from understanding all other rules for lenition, so I did not often use Irish that would require lenition for fear of using it inaccurately.

While my main intention was to create a character who uses Irish the same way that I use Spanish, I also wanted to have my character communicate in ways that make the influence that the Irish language has on him affects the way he expresses himself to others. One of the most interesting things I found in Irish was the way emotions, physiological experiences, and knowledge are expressed. In my thesis, the largest example of the differences in how emotions are expressed comes through apologies. In Irish, to say “I’m sorry,” one would say *tá brón orm*. The Irish verb *bí*, which conjugates to *tá*, is the

descriptive form of the English “to be” (“Learn Irish: Basics”). *Brón* translates to “sadness,” and *orm* translates to “on” or “upon me.” Thus, keeping in mind Irish’s verb-subject-object word order, *tá brón orm* translates to “sadness is on me.” This connection to apologies and sadness in Irish made me consider how an English apology can easily be insincere in comparison to an Irish one, which led to my writing Eoghan as expressing sadness every time he apologizes. Often he says that he is sorry and asks James, the recipient of all his letters, if he understands that when Eoghan says he is sorry, he means that he is genuinely upset. In this way, learning Irish became more than a few throwaway lines here and there as a reader may expect to see from a bilingual character, and instead became an opportunity to express the differences in how two characters see and value apologies.

*Communication: Postal Service and Phone Lines.* Another significant concern of mine was that the correspondence between my characters was historically accurate. To ensure that accuracy, I did both some very simple research on the postal service and the prevalence of telephones in the 1940s, and some more detailed work and research both on creating period-accurate postmarks and the implications of how telephone communication changed how individuals communicate across long distances. While postmark research meant finding photographs of 1940s envelopes and recreating a postmark for each date for which I included a letter, the latter, though less essential of a detail, gave me something incredibly important for this work: the title. While watching the short film “Long Distance!” I heard the line “it is the age-old tradition of the message bearer,” which immediately called to mind the expression “don’t shoot the messenger” (“Long Distance!”). Since I knew from the conception of this story that at least one character would die, and that this character often shares bad news with the other when he writes or calls him, I immediately decided to twist

the phrase into a title that would describe a key point in this story. As was often the case when writing this novella, the research I did served as so much more than historical or contextual information, but sparked ideas in me that have now become essential to this story. *Historical Queerness*. From the moment I had the idea to write about men trying to avoid World War Two, I knew I wanted my main characters to be queer. To write this story any other way would not be true to my original idea, but I knew that I would have to consider the differences between the contemporary “queer experience” and the historical ones. *Kill the Messenger* takes place over a few decades, so I knew that I would be looking into the legal and social response to queerness not only in the 1940s, but in the decades that followed. The largest challenge was not finding that information, but taking facts about the so-called “experience” and its change over time and applying them to the individual. To do otherwise would suggest that all members of the queer community interact with the world in the same way, which would be inaccurate at best and a harmful perpetuation of a stereotype at the worst.

The most significant record of experience I found for the 1940s was the set of letters between Gordon Bowsher and Gilbert Bradley (Bell). While facts about the legal response to being queer, including the fact that men could be shot to death for engaging in consensual sex, are essential to understanding the risk being openly queer presented, it was Bowsher and Bradley’s lines displaying optimism for a better future and fear of being found out before they were safe that most helped me write with historical accuracy. What I read of these letters captures the human side of history better than any list of laws could.

As *Kill the Messenger* moves out of the 1940s and into the late 1960s and early 1970s, the queer community’s visibility begins to play more of a part. Hearing of the now-

famous Stonewall Riots in 1969, James begins to express his discomfort with himself, contrasting how confident and proud the protesters are of their sexualities with how hard he has worked to keep up a standard of normalcy (Truscott). Throughout the 1970s, James records in private letters how things have changed: pride parades, the depathologization of homosexuality, and the acknowledgement of gay historical and political figures (“LGBT Rights”). To ensure that James grows as a character and begins to respect himself more, I needed to understand a timeline of gay rights in the United States. As society takes steps towards equality, James takes steps towards respecting himself.

### **Future Directions**

Though I always wanted to include letters as a part of this project, I never intended for these letters to be the entirety of this story. I am mostly happy with what these letters have done on their own, but there is so much more story to tell that these letters cannot do on their own, and I hope to expand *Kill the Messenger* from an epistolary novella into a full-length novel with this set of letters as a complement. I am glad the letters can stand on their own, but I do not want them to be the end.

When I expand this novella, one of the first things I want to add is James discovering the language to describe his sexuality. Though throughout my letters I try to make it clear that he loves both Eoghan and Margaret, the woman he marries, at no point do I have James find the word that describes himself. Though not everyone feels defined by language, it can be used as a tool of self-identification that helps individuals find similar people and build a community. Thus I think it is important that James both finds the word *bisexual* and takes the time to consider it relating to himself, to “try it on,” so to speak. The word *bisexual* is not only important because it would help James to align himself with a community, but because

it is often such a taboo even within the queer community. While members of the community who are strictly gay are often the object of social ridicule by some pockets of heterosexual society, bisexual people are targeted not only by heterosexual society but by non-bisexual members of the queer community for the assumption that they are promiscuous, resulting in their refusal to choose “a side.” I hope that having James embrace his bisexuality as what it is while also being in a closed and committed relationship expresses the reality of James’s sexuality to readers. It is important that James does not live negative bisexual stereotypes that could further harm the bisexual community.

In conjunction with James’s sexuality, in the future I want to explore James’s coming-out process to his family. By the end of *Kill the Messenger* as it is written now, James tells his wife and daughter that he was in love with Eoghan, but other than a brief mention of it in a letter to Eoghan about how Carrie, James’s daughter, was accepting and encouraging, the process of coming out is barely touched. However, I find it important that James, who is in his sixties by the time he comes out to his family, has a more expanded coming-out moment. The process of coming out is not a one-time event, but instead a lifelong experience of society assuming and imposing heterosexuality upon its members until something else is proven. However, the popular coming-out narrative revolves around young people coming out to their friends, family, and peers. This narrative is often considered by anti-LGBT activists to be a trend or a fad to youth as if queerness is a recent invention for getting attention. Having James chronicle his same-gender attraction his whole life but not come out to his family until he is in his sixties both contrasts the belief that youth come out for attention and touches on the effect homophobia, both societally and internally, can have on an individual’s choice to come out.

Though I want to make many small changes to *Kill the Messenger*, the last larger change I know I want to make when I expand it is the inclusion of more women. As this novella is almost exclusively letters between two characters, it is mainly those two characters readers see. In the background there are mentions of others, but no two are as important as the ones writing the letters. When I expand this novella, I want to take the diverse cast of characters who have been hovering at the background of each of these letters and bring them forward. In a section of draft that was cut for this final thesis, I had lines describing the brilliance of some now-minor characters, and James's sadness that many wonderful people in his life will be lost to history because of their gender. Similarly, James writes about the Civil Rights Movement and feminism, particularly how his daughter wants to change the world, in passing because they are not as significant to his sexuality as the Gay Rights Movement, but because of the epistolary form, at no point does James interact with these other movements. In a more traditional novel format, I would be able to show the ways that James interacts with the world around him and how it changes him into someone more aware of how he can affect the world.

## **Conclusion**

*Kill the Messenger* is without a doubt the most complex project I have attempted. The interactions of nationality, language, gender, sexuality, and financial opportunity are only a portion of creating complex and varied characters who are both unique and realistic. Though I am proud of what I have done and the ways that I have portrayed certain aspects of sexuality and bilingualism in this novella, this is still very much an early draft. I have barely touched what I want to of family response to coming out as an adult, I have done little to break the taboo of bisexuality, and there are many characters and details not explicit in this

draft that I find essential to the completeness of the story. With time constraints for a graded thesis, I was not able to include everything I would have liked, but I know that I will expand this novella until it tells the story how I want it told.

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