

AUTUMN 1945.

I first became acquainted with Green in the Reading Room. I was not aware of anything untoward regarding Green at that moment in time. We were just two freshmen starting out, preparing our first papers, and well, just behaving like freshmen! Or at least I was!

Green had come up to Oxford via a spurious route of Lankgsters in Holland and Sherborne. Athleticism was not his thing, though he was prepared to be Nightwatchman for his college cricket team – his college being Hertford. I, on the other hand at Christchurch, trialled for the university's rowing team, made the final fifteen in rugby, and managed to install myself as a spin-bowler in my college cricket team. At Harrow, I had seemingly excelled at all sport, though as my old English tutor Crompton would say, "...boy you excel at nothing in particular for what life has in mind for you."

Green appeared to me a studious type. Wearing his college gown, not frowned upon in those days but certainly considered pretentious, was offset by his immaculately polished black hair, semi-rimmed glasses that he would perch on a strange bulbous nose but would remove to establish pompousness when speaking, and always wearing an attire that resembled a country squire. These were the final days of tweed and plus-fours. The war had put an end to the 1930s Brideshead attire and here, us first intake since the allies victory and the Labour landslide, the autumn breeze was bringing with it changes in decorum and fashion.

"John Barnsforth," I said holding out my hand to this unlikeliest fellow that was to be my friend for the rest of my life.

"Peregrine Aldous Green," came the timid reply.

I looked at Green completely startled. Really? His name? Really?

"Or, Pag could be easier?" he said. All his face seemed to smile, not just his mouth.

"Reading Byzantine history"

"Aha. Byzantium eh? Well in that case, we shall be on opposite sides of the debate yes? I'm reading Roman mythology. "I'm heading to the Lamb and Flag for lunch. Care to join me for a half of Morrells?"

As we walked toward St Giles and the Lamb and Flag, Harold Hall called out. Harold and I had been chums since our days at Heathfield. We had boarded together; went up to Harrow together; had our first fight together after Harold won the 100 dash; and holidayed together in Cornwall where his family ran an art school that included the likes of Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, and Peter Lanyon.

"Who the hell is this old boy?" asked the clumsy Harold.

"Pag, meet my old sparing partner, Mr Harold Hall."

"Pag! Sounds like Fag to me!"

"Ignore Harold. It's just his way," I said to Pag, whilst thumping Harold in the arm.

"Sure you can trust this fellow, JB?" enquired Harold in a voice not too dissimilar to Churchill. "He looks like a Russian spy to me. Undercover student."

“Any more than I can trust you, Harold. Pag and I are heading to the Lamb and Flag for lunch. Care to join us?”

“Heaven’s no. Wouldn’t want to interrupt your interrogation by old Pag here!”