

Reap as you Sow

Godolphin Prep School

October 1970

Dear Father,

We write letters home every Sunday after chapel, so here I am in the common room again, pen in hand. I'm sorry you've been unable to reply to my previous letters but I know how busy you are.

It's rather difficult being the new boy. The others are in groups already and don't want to make the effort. Sometimes they talk about their parents in rather disparaging terms, which grieves me, as I would give anything to be able to speak to mother again. I'm sure you must miss her too, so I try to respect your stoic refusal to admit that.

Unfortunately the food here is not what I was hoping for. It might be more tolerable if I had someone companionable to sit and eat with, but for now I must endure the gristle and lumpy custard alone. The teachers are not unkind but I miss my friends from St Mary's. Freddie must be wondering why I disappeared from school so suddenly, and I don't know what I shall tell him if I ever see him again.

I shall close now as they are turning off the lights and locking up. Father, I know your feelings on this topic but I will ask once more if you would reconsider your decision to send me away. I promise I will do very well at the town school with Freddie and make you proud of me, if you would only let me come home.

Your affectionate son,

James

The Birches Care Home

April 2025

Dear James,

They tell me I ought to contact you before it becomes too difficult, and perhaps I do owe you a letter. I can only hope you will read it, though I know how busy you are with Christine and the boys, and your job, although I don't pretend to understand what you do.

I am rather on my own here, as the residents are a motley crew of fools and lunatics. I am yet to find a single soul with whom I can sustain a conversation about the most basic topic, and although the staff here are well-meaning they lack that fundamental curiosity about the world which is so necessary to intelligent conversation. For now I have to content myself with Bargain Hunt and Pointless, the latter being entirely self-explanatory.

The food here is disappointing. I never entertained after your mother died and instead relied on Marks and Sparks. Perhaps you would have visited more often if I had learned to cook.

I shall close now, as I sense I do not have long before the lights go out. James, I know I was not the best father, but I will ask you once more to reconsider your decision to send me away. I promise I will do better as a grandfather, if you would only let me come home.

Your

Father