

Robert Foster
19 Sturt Street
Adelaide, South Australia
Aug. 23, 1897

Dear Anne,

I must make many apologies for the lateness of this letter. Your letter second previous arrived at the same moment as the previous one. I had quite a shock when it became apparent I had missed a correspondence with you. Admonish the mail carriage and forgive me if their carelessness has cost us correspondence.

I will take this second to write my response to your previous letters that I had not been granted possession of until now. I hope your father is quite well and upon his way to recovery; a patient here came down with a similar infection of the lungs and was removed for recovery. Duties have prevented me from discussing my leave with the Doctor, but I will endeavour to do so in the coming days. You may rest assured that I shall obtain the time off necessary for us to marry the next month.

I am pleased to hear the weather in the North has turned for the better. Perhaps some sun may help with your father's speedy recovery. The weather here has been as equally nasty, save for the recent weeks where we have received much sun, to the patients' joy.

Your concern about my employ is kind but unnecessary. This ward is rather quiet for a criminal ward and no incidents regarding patients or attendants have befallen us as of yet. Due to its recent construction, the ward is barely near half its full occupancy and we attendants have little stress.

On that note, I wish not to trouble you with the worldly worries of this institution in which I take employ; however, you may take interest in a new patient recently arrived from Yatala. He, whom is hereby referred to as Wheaton, proclaims himself to be innocent of those crimes which necessitated his stay in Yatala. Of course, the grizzly details of which are not befitting a letter to a lady.

According to the Doctor, Wheaton became manic and depraved in Yatala and was hastily removed to this ward. He wildly proclaims his innocence some days but appears in sound control of his faculties on others. He appears in frightful delusion of truth, claiming that we attempt to poison and suffocate him in his sleep. Of course, no such actions against his life have been attempted by us nor the good Doctor. I fear for his soul. Some nights, while upon tour, I hear the most hideous and blasphemous sounds from his cell. Whether deliberate or spoken from sleep, I do not know. Perhaps the good Doctor can save his mind and with it his soul.

Please write to me at your next convenience, your letters are such welcomed reprieve. Give my prayers to your family.

With love, yours ever faithful,
Robert.

Writer's Note - Robert the Warder:

Perhaps not often considered in the Z-Ward, are the lives of the staff who worked there. The day-to-day running of the ward is probably the most undervalued part of its history. I was interested to think about how the warders saw the patients. These warders would have seen and heard almost everything the patients did and would have experienced their delusions and insanity as closely as anyone. This, I feel, gives them a unique view into the patients; viewing them from the outside, but with great intimacy.

This character is an engaged warder working in the ward hoping for time off to return to his fiancé. I envision him as a late-twenties/early-thirties city born, well-meaning attendant. He would be positioned to observe and understand a wild character better than any.

**This series of letters was written by Sam Kuhl, a Flinders University student, who was on placement with the National Trust of South Australia. They are works of fiction informed by history and should be read as such. All names and addresses have been made up.*

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