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Dear April and David, David and April,

As I promised over the phone, here are my first immediate reactions to the Soft Vengeance script.

The idea is ingenious and I think it will work and it has a certain historical and thematic appropriateness. I am also happy that the two of you are working together, although I had not been informed. So the project is yours, to do the best you can with it in the light of your own judgement. You each did a lovely job separately with my books: now let's see if you can do an equally or doubly good one together! For myself and the way I am portrayed, I take my chances.

I will offer my opinions, and you will accept or reject them as you see fit. I repeat, it is your project, not mine. I might just be insistent when it comes to the way others are portrayed: I sent the manuscript of the book to each one of the main persons to get their general okay, and I don't think this will be possible with your script, so I might have to insist a little that names be changed or dialogue altered a little if I feel they are being done an injustice or might feel offended. To adapt Graham Greene, if I have to choose between my friend and my script, I hope I would choose my friend.

My main concern [and here I am just giving you my opinion for you to weigh in the scale] is with the way the character Albie comes through overall. I just didn't find him sympathetic enough. Too smart-alec, too nervous. The dreamer isn't there at all. The romantic. And he's a bit rude. Albie would never throw a Bible down - even if he is a non-believer in the formal religious sense, he respects the book for its holy meaning for others. He certainly wouldn't shout: get me a shrink. He is polite and well-behaved to a degree; new thinking, new body language, old-fashioned grace. [It's not just a personal thing: Tambo had it, Mandela has it, Zuma should have more of it in the script, he has it in ordinary life].

We are the last of the freedom fighters. (Discovering humanism wasn't a problem. Discovering pluralism and the limits of the will, was.) Where is the soft vengeance? The eventually triumphant naivety?

I also felt that the politics of disability and of rediscovering my place in the world are not well explored.



I might in real life have an even better ending: Right now, I am in limbo, waiting to see if I will be appointed to the Constitutional Court, which will be the highest court in the land with special responsibility for guarding over human rights. If I am appointed, the human rights theme, experienced in a lived way both through my mind and my body and through my dreams and thought, will receive a "happy ending". If I am not appointed, I am brought down to earth, becoming part and parcel of ordinary political life, where heroism becomes embarrassing if not converted into the currency of political combat and integrated into the norms of office-seeking. This would certainly make a lovely ending for you: the idealist, fighting with soul and body for righteousness, enters the exalted kingdom at last, only to be marginalised by the banal but effective intrigue of everyday politics! A very English hubris!!

In any event I send you a little piece I wrote a couple of days after Election Day in which I sought to recapture the experience of voting. About 30 South Africans were asked to keep a diary on the day, to be used for a book called "April 27" which should be published later this year.

To get on with my reactions - I am not mentioning all the things I liked, of which there are many, nor my admiration for the skillful counterposing of the two experiences, which I think you have done quite remarkably. I also make allowances for the fact that interior monologue has to be converted into fairly snappy dialogue and that in the nature of things I will be inclined to be resentful of any change to my actual words and my actual experience. So I throw into the pot certain counterweight observations that I feel should be mixed in with what is already there.

The whole theme of dreaming, touching, flowers, running is almost excluded. The softness which becomes a strength gives way to a perky and I found at times rather irritating combativity. This confessional type of self-revelation is tricky at the best of times. The tone has to be just right. I feel there might be better ways of achieving contrast and interest.

One more general point. I never worked out quite why I liked the stage play Jail Diary so much, and the TV version so much less. It was partly that I saw the latter under bad conditions: suffering from jet lag, with another soundtrack interfering on the BBC machine where I saw it. But I think it was that it was too focussed on words, on continuous snappy exchanges, without the rhythms and sense of

isolation-suggesting space that came from the volume of the stage. I fear that something similar happens with the present script. The lyricism and gentle humour is lost. The joy of rediscovery of self, of body, of sensation, of confidence.

The jokes: yes, I told the Himie Cohen one to all my visitors. It made them laugh. It made me the centre of attraction, which, by the way, was a very strong need I had = I couldn't bear visitors discussing world affairs, they had to talk about me! But I would never have harassed Melba with jokes. The tension between us was far more interesting. I fell in love with every physiotherapist and o.t., and with her as well. It was a love of involvement and proximity, the sparkle of health, the kindness of femininity, the eagerness to feel the female presence. On top of all this, Melba had the South American vitality and expressiveness that Lucia had had, we were alone together for several hours at a time, and she bathed me. I was physically feeble, mentally strong, emotionally fragile, and re-discovering sensuality. She would be dressed, quite smartly, not like a nurse or a cleaning person; I would be naked. I would love it when she sprayed hot water on my back. And then she would soap my shoulders, and round to the front and down .. and stop ... my feet, my ankles, my legs, my thigh ..... I'm told there was a similar scene in the Singing Detective. And it became too much for her, she was falling in love with me, and she was not the person to believe in casual love relationships, and in any case, what would I see in her?

I felt uncomfortable too about the scene with my friend\lover. "in a warm country." The fun, the jousousness, the over-the-top feeling is gone. More important, the point is lost that it was happiness that released my anger, not bitterness or ire. You work that one out! Can't you make something of my politeness and correctness in inappropriate situations? I had really smart discussions with her, and she would have been amused by my political correctness even when swearing [bastard, bugger ...]. We had real discussions on feminism and rights for women: her position was that she did not want to be part of a women's movement, because that would reinforce the artificially imposed idea of woman; all she wanted was to be a full human being and do all the things that men could do, e.g. have different love relationships going at the same time, each meaningful but each casual. Our dialogues were witty and friendly and very affectionate: we would go for each other, but never accuse one another of being manipulative. I have proposed above that she be combined with the friend who gave me my first massage in Vienna and who told me I was lucky to have lost my

you take yourself. If you think you are ugly, you will be ugly. If you feel beauty and pride in yourself, people respond accordingly. It's no less true for sounding like a Reader's Digest homily. Where disablement consists largely of disfigurement, rather than functional incapacity, as in my case, this discovery is fundamental. You wear a prosthesis to hide difference. You do so because you want to spare others the sight of you. When I took off my top, I was throwing away my prosthesis. I would love it if the scene could be shot so that the body with the amputated arm could look beautiful surrounded by roses in the sun. The camera could even track backwards and pick up a Greek statue with a broken off arm [I adore them!].

One theme that came through strongly to me at the time was the way in which pep-talks and proud statements about courage from my male comrades gave me no strength at all and in fact rather alarmed me, while flowers, hugs, beauty and

concern for intimacy, usually from women, gave me real strength and courage and a sense of worth. This wasn't ideology, it was experience. I propose to you a scene of one of my male comrades sitting at my bedside making a little speech in old style political language intended to cheer me up and make me feel proud, but in fact undermining and distressing me. ["We knew you had the courage and steadfastness of a true revolutionary, that the enemy would never be able to defeat you...."] I couldn't stand the abstractness of the words, their reference to vast, physical confrontation between major global forces. The point however is that it came from someone whom I liked, whom I admired, who had been decades in the struggle and who was trying to convey to me the support of a movement, so it's not something to be caricatured. On the other hand there was my craving for beauty and serenity, for Matisse, for a lovely new watch, for visual sensuous beauty as a restorer of health and rightness in the world, the discovery of bodily sensuality through massage [and the humour that went with it: massage for a revolutionary, and with oil!]. By the way, would a screen work, with silhouetted bodies behind it, showing my truncated arm, for a discrete love scene? [one could have such post-modernist fun with all the identities of Albie, real, remembered, enacted, enacted\remembered, two-armed, one-armed .....rushing behind the screen two-armed, silhouetted one-armed .... But you guys are too serious for that!!!]

Then the child-like joy [literally] as I tie my shoelace, write, walk - not just the ironic deja vu of jail but the elementary happiness of someone growing up and achieving new skills - I'm sure we can find a way of letting the viewer share these experiences.

Isn't there anything in the progression  
 I have consciousness therefore I am  
 I laugh, therefore I am.  
 I shit therefore I am  
 I walk therefore I am  
 I run therefore I am?

Lots of wry little jokes, touches of fantasy and surprise, the bouyant side rather than the victim-fighting-back side.

The relationship with Zuma misses out on the very warm interaction between what I call the Jewish humour of the Cohen joke and the African delicacy and laughter of Zuma, the storyteller and the story-listener, a good contrast with correct but cheerless words of the comradely-greetings comrade I propose above. Zuma would not discuss my balls