



A LOVE LETTER TO SCOTLAND

By Justin Zachary

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In 1995, I was a seventeen-year-old American kid growing up in Southern California. I didn't know much about the world beyond my own backyard, let alone a wee country across the Atlantic called Scotland.

Then Mel Gibson's Braveheart arrived like a battle axe through the television screen. A Hollywood version of history, sure. Messy, mythic, probably guilty of taking more than a few liberties. But it did something important. It opened a door. It made me curious about Scotland. About its people. Its defiance. Its scars. Its ghosts.

Around that same time, drama class became the first place I felt truly at home. My teacher, Debra Vigstrom, once told me, "You have the gift."

I had no idea what that meant.

But I wanted to find out.

A few years later, I enrolled at The Actor's Studio Bakersfield, still chasing whatever that feeling was. One night, a man named Roger Mathey sat in on class. He was casting a local theatre production and looking for actors. He saw me do a scene and asked me to audition.

I was terrible.

Sweat-down-my-back, hands-shaking, forgot-everything-I-ever-learned terrible.

Still, the next day Roger called and offered me a supporting role in William Saroyan's The Time of Your Life. It was the first play I ever booked outside of school. I was eighteen.

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When that production ended, Roger handed me a book: *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh.

"There's a stage adaptation," he said. "I want you to play the lead."

The film had already become a cult hit. The VHS was being passed around my friends like contraband. I opened the script and saw page after page of Renton. Lines everywhere. More lines than any sane actor should want. I panicked.

"Roger, this is too much. The accent. The dialogue. I've never been to Scotland. What do I know about heroin addiction in Edinburgh?"

Roger just said, "We'll figure it out together."

That was Roger. He believed in you before you had the decency to believe in yourself.

So we figured it out.

Our production went on to win Best Play of 1999, Best Director, Best Ensemble, and I took home Best Actor.

And somewhere in the middle of all that profanity, sweat, fear, fake poo, laughter, and late-night rehearsal-room madness, my love affair with Scotland began.

The confidence that role gave me changed everything. I packed my bags and moved to Los Angeles to become a bona fide actor. Of course, as every big fish from a small pond quickly learns in LA, nobody cared who I was, what awards I'd won, or what Scottish junkie I'd played back home.

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I was nobody again.

Back to zero.

Then Roger called.

He wanted to stage Trainspotting in Hollywood and asked if I wanted to reprise Renton. I leaped at the chance.

In 2002, we revived the play that had started it all. We cast actors from Wales, Russia, Scotland, England, and America. A glorious little wrecking crew. Misfit toys with accents, baggage, talent, and just enough bad judgment to make something dangerous.

We became a family.

One cast member got pregnant during the run. I took sixteen stitches to the forehead after a stage accident and was left with a scar I still carry. Celebrities came. Reviews poured in. The LA Drama Critics Circle nominated us for Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Supporting Actor.

Once again, Trainspotting blessed us.

That production got me representation, film roles, and a bit of heat in the LA acting scene. Scotland had opened another door.

Years passed. Roles came and went. Some good. Some forgettable. Some best left buried in the graveyard of old headshots and grainy acting reels.

But nothing ever quite lived up to Renton.

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Nothing had that same filthy music. That humor. That betrayal. That violence. That ache. That dirty Shakespearean poetry Irvine Welsh somehow carved out of the gutter and made sing.

I missed it.

Then, in 2013, Roger called again.

“One last rodeo?”

We brought Trainspotting back. Older now. A little wiser. A little more bruised. Some of the old cast returned. Some had gone back to their countries, their lives, their next chapters. But the spirit was still there.

The audiences came back too.

Sold-out shows. Extended performances. That same electric feeling in the room.

That run led me to a manager I still work with today, and through that relationship, doors opened to shows like American Crime Story, Westworld, and 1923. All of it, in one way or another, traces back to Trainspotting.

To Scotland.

To Roger.

Looking back now, it's remarkable to think how many artists from those productions went on to build extraordinary careers.

Now, thirteen years later, Roger is gone.

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Our artistic director. Our mentor. Our friend. The man who handed me the compass before I even knew I was lost.

Before he passed, I had begun conversations with Davie Carswell about obtaining the rights to PORNO, the stage sequel to Trainspotting. The play finds these same characters decades later, older but not necessarily wiser, still scheming, still wounded, still funny, still dangerous, still trying to outrun themselves.

Roger won't get to see this next chapter.

So now we carry it for him.

Bringing PORNO to Los Angeles for its North American premiere feels like more than a production. It feels like a send-off. A thank-you. A raised glass to a magical, reckless, unforgettable part of our lives, and to the man who brought us all together.

And then, this year, something beautiful happened.

The World Cup came to America, and Scotland came with it.

The Tartan Army arrived with flags, chants, beer, charity, traffic cones, and that impossible Scottish gift for turning strangers into friends before last call. They brought humor. Kindness. Noise. Heart.

They reminded us what culture can do when it arrives without fear.

It can soften a room.

It can change the air.

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It can make people who have never met, throw their arms around each other, and sing like the world is still worth saving.

The Scotland team played their hearts out. They were eliminated, yes. But they left with their heads high and a trail of Americans behind them saying, "Please come back!"

That is the Scotland I fell in love with.

Not a postcard.

Not a costume.

Not a tourist fantasy.

A place of weathered poetry and brutal humor. Of loyalty. Of defiance. Of stories told over pints by people who know that laughter is not the opposite of pain.

Sometimes it's the only way through it.

Scotland gave me a role.

Then it gave me confidence.

Then it gave me friends, scars, stories, a career, and a different way of seeing the world.

Along the way, I learned that Scotland wasn't just a place I'd fallen in love with through theatre. It was part of my own family story. Digging through my father's side of the family, I discovered Scottish roots that somehow made the whole journey feel less like chance and more like coming home.

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Eventually, I finally made the trip.

I walked the streets of Edinburgh.

Sat in the pubs I'd imagined for nearly thirty years.

Heard the accents without having to fake one myself.

And standing in one of the most beautiful countries I've ever seen, I asked the woman I love to marry me.

She said yes.

Scotland has a funny way of giving me the biggest moments of my life.

Now, I want to bring a piece of that here.

For Roger.

For Irvine.

For Davie.

For everyone who ever found themselves in these beautifully flawed characters.

And for Scotland.

The country that grabbed hold of a scared kid from California and never really let go.

No Scotland, no story.

No PORNO, no party.

Sláinte.