



Letter to my Readers

Simon Rae

HELLO AND THANK YOU.

Although I only know a tiny fraction of you, you are the most important people in my life.

What a disparate bunch you are. Cricket lovers, with their well-thumbed copies of my biography of the greatest cricketer ever, W. G. Grace; a broader spectrum who have followed the clues and red-herrings through my three detective novels featuring Chief Inspector Dalliance (and no, I don't know where I got the name; but it works, doesn't it?) And then a younger cohort, who have raced through my three adventure stories, *Unplayable*, *Keras* and *Medusa's Butterfly*. Not forgetting the much smaller group who like my poetry. This, I have noticed over the years, has a tendency to tell stories, or at least to hint at narrative threads.

And I think that's what I am at heart: a storyteller. And I have been from an early age. I was brought up above my parents' bookshop in Canterbury, so I was introduced to books and the stories they contained from an early age. Writing books was the first and really the only thing I've ever wanted to do.

And to be able to reach real readers like you is fantastic. Both a pleasure, and an honour. Because, as I remind those I teach on creative-writing courses, you start with the huge privilege of the reader's attention. But it is so easy to squander that; and once you've blown it, it's gone.



Fortunately, I have a very low boredom threshold, so if I bore myself, I know I'll bore you and you'll rightly put me aside and pick up someone more interesting. Even when wading through the endless stream of W. G. Grace's cricket statistics, I always wanted to breathe life and drama into the individual matches where he amassed his huge tallies of runs and wickets.

Grace was such a powerful figure, and so controversial that there really was hardly a dull moment. His behaviour was always dangerously close to the edge, especially on his two tours to Australia, where he offended more or less everybody. Throughout his career he got into fights, he disagreed with umpires, cheated where he could. He once kidnapped a player from the Oval where he was about to play for the Australians, frog-marched him into a cab and took him across London to Lord's to play for Grace's own team. Grace was a pirate — the Presidential Trump of cricket, if you like. And as such he made a wonderful subject.

But then so was Tom Marlin, the hero of *Unplayable*, who, after an operation for a shoulder injury, found he could bowl ripping leg-breaks and ended up winning the Ashes for England.

My fondest memory of you younger readers is a book-signing I did at my local cricket club. The under-twelves queued up and then started reading, many leaving with their noses still in my book. It was a great moment for me.

I hope there will be many more. I'll certainly keep writing for you.