

LETTERS
By
Charles R. Merwarth

The following letters changed my life.

Craig Jamison

* * * *

April 21, 2007

Manager, Morrison House
116 South Alfred Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Sir:

As you know, over the past several years, whenever my business schedule allows, I stay with you at The Morrison House. You have been extremely helpful to me in matters large and small, and, so, I call upon you again for advice and assistance.

I stayed with you last on the nights of April 17 and 18. As I packed to leave, I dropped my room key. In retrieving it I saw, caught between the bed skirt and bed frame, a sheet of paper that obviously had escaped notice by your cleaning staff. Both sides were written on in a precise hand which I assumed was feminine. Since I was pressed to reach the airport for an early flight, I, thoughtlessly, placed the piece of paper in my coat pocket and did not read it until I was well on my way home.

The contents of that page disturbed me greatly. Frankly, I do not know what to do about my concern. With the date and her presumed occupancy of 408, you should be able to identify the author. The sheet is enclosed.

These are trouble times. Who knows what might have happened.

Please let me know what you think and what action you deem suitable.

Sincerely,

Craig Jamison

(Enclosure)

April 16

I will not allow the memories to fade, ever. That is why I write this.

The trees were in early blossom when we first met. I was enchanted with the town, its cobblestone, tree-lined streets, its houses, some no more than three windows wide, standing shoulder to shoulder close upon the brick sidewalks, the shops along King Street, and the river, swollen and muddy from the spring rains, flowing by it all. There were so many sights, all new, all so enchanting, and all so different from the drab surroundings of the small town one hundred miles to the west from which I had escaped on a brief holiday. The afternoon of our meeting, paying no attention to where I was strolling, I walked straight into you knocking the ice cream cone from your hand. I was flustered and embarrassed. You were kind and forgiving. You accepted my offer of another treat provided I join you. I am, by nature, reserved. Yet, without hesitation, I accepted your invitation to stroll along the riverfront. We walked and talked long after the ice cream was gone. That night we dined together in a building made of old stone and dark wood. Afterwards, walking back to my hotel, we held hands. Instead of viewing the buildings and monuments of the nearby Capitol as I had planned, I spent my days with you wandering aimlessly through the city that was, each day, growing more beautiful. Our only goal, it seemed, was to be together. You were so handsome and, in your quiet way, made me feel as if I were the most beautiful and desirable girl in the world. In the courtyard of the old, brick church, you took my hand between yours and said, "I have sad news." I was stricken when you told me you must leave and be gone for, perhaps, a year. "Why?" I asked. "A commitment," you answered. I began to cry. You put your arms around me. "I have made one commitment I cannot break. I will make another. I vow to come back to you."

I dreaded the months of your absence. You had so completely changed my life.

In the weeks following our parting, I received your letters regularly. There were no postmarks and no return addresses. I had no idea where you were and who you might be with. I wrote almost every day to the address you had given me. You wrote that my letters had finally reached you. Now, six months have passed with no communication of any kind. I continue writing receiving nothing in return. Each day my anxiety increases. Each week I become more frantic. I am at my wits end. So, I return to the place we met searching for anything. I know nothing else to do.

I feel overwhelming despair. My only emotion is melancholy. I do not sleep for thinking of you. Without you, I wonder what I have to live for.

April 26, 2007

Mr. Craig Jamison
3000 Galloway Ridge
Pittsboro, North Carolina 27312

Dear Mr. Jamison:

Thank you for the kind words. I appreciate your confidence in me.

I, too, was disturbed by the tone of the writings you sent to me. They do seem the expression of a troubled soul. I took the liberty of faxing a copy to a psychiatrist friend for professional advice. His opinion is that the writer is most likely young, emotionally fragile, unsophisticated, and deeply depressed by the assumed loss of "the love of her life." He fears she may be suicidal.

The options for intervention, he said, are limited. He suggested I write stating how the letter came into my hands, and that, because of my concern for her welfare, I consulted a physician who felt there were indications of significant emotional distress needing prompt medical consultation.

I wrote to her this morning. She stayed in room 408 for three nights preceding your arrival. I found her address easily.

Sincerely,

Manager, Morrison House

May 2, 2007

Manager, Morrison House
116 South Alfred Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Sir:

I am embarrassed beyond words by the concern my errant sheet of manuscript caused. I am an author who recently visited Alexandria to research material for a novel-in-progress. My laptop malfunctioned, and, before the thoughts I had collected escaped me, I jotted down a few paragraphs by hand. I did not realize it was missing until I arrived home and had no idea where I might have misplaced it.

Your actions on my behalf indicate a degree of caring and concern that is all too infrequent in today's hectic world. Many thanks.

Please, if you can, send me the name and address of the guest who first brought this to your attention. He also deserves my thanks.

Sincerely,

Sally Lewis

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May 9, 2007

Mr. Craig Jamison
3000 Galloway Ridge
Pittsboro, North Carolina 27312

Dear Mr. Jamison:

Enclosed is a copy of a letter sent to me by the author of the disturbing piece you sent to me. A most happy outcome, I must say.

She wishes to thank you for your concern. My I send her your address?

Sincerely,

Manager, Morrison House

December 15, 2007

Manager, Morrison House
116 South Alfred Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Sir:

I write again requesting your kind attention on our behalf. Indeed, a most happy and joyous follow-up to what began with so much worry.

Sally Lewis wrote to me shortly after I gave permission for you to send her my address. Strange are the coincidences that affect our lives. Miss Lewis is a writer who lives in the historic village of Hillsborough which is less than an hour's drive from my home. Soon after I received her note, we met for dinner. We have much in common.

Please reserve your best suite for us for the nights of April 17, and 18, memorable dates. For the 17th please arrange for flowers, champagne, and dinner in the room. I leave the particulars in your hands.

Many thanks.

Sincerely,

Craig Jamison