

The Unopened Letter

The letter came on Monday, over a week ago. Maggie had been absently wading through the morning's harvest of mail, as she usually did during her lunch hour. Predictably, it reaped the usual bills, flyers, and grocery store ads, when she suddenly spotted the familiar masculine scrawl. Maggie was stunned.

After all the years of checking the mail, there it was, a pearl among the cow pies. She marveled at how the letter felt as she turned it over and over in her hands and then wiped at a tear that was threatening a slow getaway down her cheek.

After nearly an hour, Maggie still didn't know whether to open the letter or not, so she dropped it on the cherry table in the foyer. It sat there for nearly a week, mutely resting between the potted ivy and car keys, marking time, patiently waiting for her decision.

It remained unopened, of course, but Maggie was pretty sure what it said. She just couldn't make herself open it and read the words -- she knew they were angry -- that was a given. She also knew the words were probably written to demand in yet one more way, her whole future and one more chance -- and

quite frankly, she loved her autonomy and was flat out of any more chances.

Maggie tried so many times to tell Jonathan he needed help. Abuse was abuse. It didn't matter whether it was emotional, physical, psychological, sexual or verbal -- God knows, he had been proficient in all of them -- it had hurt and it had been unnecessary.

She loved him, true, but she loved herself and valued her safety even more -- and now this letter. Well, it's too late, she argued. By moving away, she was finally free and that's the way it's going to stay, she thought - - and now this damned letter! Then again, what if he wrote to tell me he got help and therapy?

Maggie walked through the foyer a thousand times and each time, she stared at the letter. She even picked it up and held it close to her heart once -- as if her heart could tell by sheer divination that the words didn't say what she knew they did. She thought, maybe if don't read it, the words will somehow change and say what I need to hear, but then, Jonathan was never into apologies or admissions of wrongdoing -- forgiveness either, for that matter. "Damn it to hell and back! What a sorrowful waste of a stamp!" Maggie shouted into the empty foyer, creating an eerie echo.

For a solid week, even Maggie's nights were plagued by the letter -- open it, don't open it, open it, don't open it. By the following Wednesday, Maggie had had enough. She marched angrily into the foyer and grabbed the offensive letter. First she folded it in half, then quartered it, and finally, she stuffed it roughly into the back pocket of her blue jeans.

Ha! There! Now it would be safe from misbehaving hands and, with it out of sight, her mind wouldn't be tempted to breach its unspoken ceremonial rule to grant her permission to either touch it or want to open it.

Within a few hours, Maggie found herself in a quandary. She was unable to ignore the letter or throw it away. She wasn't sure how long she walked around with it in her back pocket. She only knew it began to burn her heart, then blister her mind, until finally, it even scorched her self-control.

It wasn't until she saw her jeans, letter and all, in the washer, twisting and turning in the soapy water, that she was even aware of what she'd done. When she saw them in the washer, she suddenly realized she had been cleansing and purging the past. It was just as well ... maybe now, she would find some peace at last