

Letters tell stories

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LETTERS TELL STORIES

„Many Happy Returns . . .“

by O. F. Simpson

I. Jim to Larry

My dear Larry,

Tomorrow's your birthday, and it's the first one for six years that we haven't spent together. I've been cursing the job that has taken you off to Scotland just this week, and in order to stop myself «railling against fate» — which you always tell me is a futile pastime anyway — I'm sitting down to enjoy myself a bit with my memories of the first day we ever met. I'm a bad letter-writer, as you know, without the gift of describing things as fluently and easily as you do — you could always make rings round me where anything like quick thinking or talking or writing is concerned — and like so many healthy young men you live so much in the present that thinking back over the past will probably not be your idea of fun, but there it is. You must bear with me and with this terribly long letter.

I suppose it was Mrs A., the organiser of that week's camping party in the old barn on the Norfolk coast, who was most directly responsible for bringing us together. It was an annual affair and I'd been before several times; but for you it was the first time — something to do with your holiday plans elsewhere breaking down, I believe. Mrs A. always looked on me — still does, bless her — as a really «useful» young man — a mixture of tutor, lifesaver, chauffeur, entertainer, relief cook and general factotum — and because I am fond of her and salute her genius for organization, I did my best to play the part, even though it was sometimes less like a holiday for me than plain hard work, helping with such a large party. You, I think, she didn't know at all, because one of her friends had begged her to take you at the last moment, and she hadn't seen you before that week.

On Monday, the first full day of the week, we all took our first picnic on the beach, as we regularly did every year. I might have spoken a few words to you before then, but only casually, and I think I found you rather shy and stand-offish; someone told me you were twenty and came from a university in the north of England. On the way across the big flat beach to the sea, we all stopped and did various acrobatic tricks on the sand to keep warm, the wind on those long Norfolk beaches being what it is. I remember walking about on my hands for a bit, a parlour trick I've always found easy and always liked to show off with; I think you tried to follow suit but couldn't get into position at all, and at that point I became much more interested in a girl of the party, a ballet student, who really could do almost everything I could do myself in the athletic line, which certainly wasn't common.

Then in the sea itself you came very much into your own and swam straight out all by yourself, almost as far as Norway it seemed to me — at any rate till your dark head was only just visible to the rest of us. Feeling vaguely responsible for the safety of the party, I remember getting worried about you because I'm not such a hot swimmer myself and I doubted if I could have ever followed you so far, if you got into difficulties, but someone in the party reassured me; and we went on fooling about, splashing each other, diving at each other's legs and carrying on as one does on such parties, till we all — you included, as you had returned by that time — began to feel a bit cold and thought it was about time to go in.

When we all left the sea, I don't know what strange impulse it was that started you off, without a word to anyone, running full speed down the beach

at the water's edge; still less do I know what strange impulse made me follow you after a short while. But I like acting on my impulses, and this one changed my whole life. One of the girls in the party shouted after me: «You'll never catch *him*», and indeed it was only afterwards that I learnt you held your university record for the quarter-mile. If I'd known then I'd probably have stayed with the others, and wouldn't be writing this letter now.

You never looked back and I didn't know whether you even knew I was following you, though you must have heard my footfalls on the sand pursuing you after a bit. You were a glorious sight as you flew along — your copper-tanned body still glistening wet after the swim, your dark curly hair dancing in the sun, the muscles rippling across your shoulders, and those lovely high-stepping, dancer's thighs of yours pounding across the sand in regular harmony like the pistons of a perfectly made machine. I thought to myself that even the most fashion-conscious girl couldn't have shown more «dress sense» or skill in showing herself off than this unknown student, lean and brown as an Indian, with just that skin-tight wisp of a faded blue cotton slip round his middle. I certainly had plenty of time to drink in your beauty with my eyes, but with my mind I began to be a bit annoyed that though I was in excellent training, and rather fancied myself as an athlete, and certainly had longer legs than you, I still couldn't catch you.

Well, we ran for a long way at the sea's edge, didn't we? You never looked round, so you never saw I was beginning at last to gain on you, when you suddenly turned inland across the beach into a patch of softer sand. Heavier than you, I sank in further with each step at this point and soon lost the lead I was getting. Then I remember your feet seemed to be much softer than mine, so that when a patch of pebbles and seashells appeared in your path, that slowed you up a lot, and I began to draw closer again; but I must still have been twenty yards behind when you reached the sandhills at the back of the beach and threw yourself down spreadeagled on your stomach on the sand, panting fit to burst and just about «all in», as I was myself. You'll laugh at the idea now, but I seriously wondered whether you weren't dead, you lay so still and quiet at first, legs sprawled wide apart and arms above your head; but then the moment I caught up with you, you called out sharply: «Keep off me, you bloody great Tarzan — I'm not giving in, so don't you think it!»

But of course the twinkle in your eyes and the toss of your tousled head and your broad sunny smile all belied your words, and I tickled you and we began to fight together happily there on the sand with the last remnants of our energy. I was astonished then and still often am, at your strength; you hadn't half the muscles or «physique» I had, yet you could twist and turn in my arms like an eel and get yourself out of holds that would have beaten much heavier boys than you.

I don't know just what was the time-table of the next five minutes: how long the moment of perfect stillness lasted when we met each other's eyes and knew for the first time the full extent of our need for each other's companionship. But I do remember that you were all along serenely proud of your body and your good looks, and had none of the shrinking horror of nakedness that most people have. When I first dared to kiss you, you didn't turn your face away, but held me there with your arm reaching up round my neck — the perfect unhurried pledge of affection and seal of love. In all you did there was never a hint of weakness or effeminacy — only the calm dignity of a masculine, virile lad fully the master of his own fate and needing no one else to make up his mind for him.

I remember the complete peace of the moments lying close by you on that sun-baked sand. Nothing in my life so far has ever flattered me so much as your whisper of approval «Gee, what a body and a half!»

So it wasn't much surprise to me to hear from you that first afternoon as we started talking to each other some of those very clearly expressed opinions which have held us together ever since: that you worship good looks and physical fitness as I do; that you love every inch of the soil of England for its own sake, as I do; that we swore a solemn oath together never to let each other down as long as we live. We've had dozens of arguments since, and a few quarrels; but when I get more than usually annoyed with you — because you are cleverer and more sensitive than me, and I can't always follow your more brilliant ideas — then it's that first afternoon I think back to, and the things we agreed about then.

Well, Larry boy, as I say, and as I don't need to tell you, I'm no sort of a writer and have left out half the important things I should have put in; but the above is my birthday tribute to you in absence. And if it bores you, all I can say is don't ever be away from me again on your birthday!

With love always, as you know,

JIM.

2. Larry to Jim

Dear old Jimmy,

I *loved* getting your letter. Picture me reading it last night lying on my bed in this very clean but not at all comfortable Scottish commercial hotel — but you'll never be able to understand all the pleasure it gave me; there were passages that brought a large lump into my throat as I thought again of all your goodness and manliness and kindness through the past years to your not very steady friend, who has led you such a dance at times, I'm afraid.

Of course I too have often thought back to that first afternoon together, and I'm now going to write down for you *my* memories of how it happened. You don't even mention the fact, but it was on the day before, the Sunday, that I first set eyes on you. You were busy unloading food supplies from the camp truck, and listing them and stacking them in perfect order where they could be found. I'd been detailed to help you, but you were so full of your job and so bent on doing it to perfection — as always — you hardly seemed to notice me or my clumsy efforts to help you — not being a very orderly sort of chap, that's the sort of job I always get wrong. You once looked up at me and said «For heavens' sake, boy, can't you *read*? This jam's strawberry, not raspberry,» but I hardly think you even saw me, because you were thinking about the job. But I saw you all right, and have never forgotten the gentle, rallying look on your handsome face, your fair hair lifted by the wind (there's always a wind in Norfolk, isn't there?) and that general air of alertness and determination and abounding physical vitality that marks you.

That, let me tell you, was the moment when I began to fall for you, and I don't mind admitting it was your face I had in my mind's eye when I went to sleep that night, and when I woke the next day. So when we went down onto the beach and you started doing your acrobatics on the sand, I tried to imitate you to get your attention, but wholly without success as you point out. I was just not built for that sort of thing — though you've done your best to teach me since, haven't you, and I'm not such a hopeless pupil.

Had you any idea at all how *marvellous* you looked stripped down in the sun, putting that magnificent athlete's body of yours through its paces? (And talking about «dress sense», what about those satin swim trunks of yours, without a single crease or fold, so that from a distance you seemed to be wearing nothing at all?) I'd seen muscular men before of course, but never one who knew how to *use* his muscles like you did. I felt even more in love with you, and even ashamed at being so unlike you.

However, when we got to these sea — well, the water is my element, and swimming is a thing I *can* do, and of course it was all on your account — to show *you* what I was capable of — that I swam out all that way. Sorry if it made you anxious, but I just *had* to get you to notice me somehow. I had the idea that some kind of physical or gymnastic feat was the best way to get your attention; and I was right, wasn't I?

I'm fairly energetic, and swimming has never tired me at all; so when we all left the sea, I started off to run down the beach as I always liked to do, to dry off. I saw you looking at me in the surf and knew I'd made some sort of impression on you by the swimming, but I never expected you'd follow me in the run; but when, as you say, I began to hear your footfalls in the sand behind me, I got a huge thrill and put all I knew into my running to keep ahead of you. I've no idea to this day what made me *know* it was you following me, as I never looked back and you never called out or anything.

But all good things come to an end, and I made a silly mistake in turning inland so that you caught up with me. When we fell on the ground together under the dunes, I really was utterly exhausted. I think I laughed when you spanked me as one always does, and wriggled about when you wrestled with me as one always does; but my heart began to fill with the most glorious feeling of thanksgiving that you and I were all alone together, at last I knew that if I could give you even a short moment's pleasure, I would do so, both then and whenever in the future you asked me.

We lay still under the scorching sun a long time, I think, before I summoned up courage to touch you again. Of course I was shy about it — I myself hate having my bare flesh touched by strangers, and I thought you'd certainly consider it all an impertinence from someone younger than you. But I loved to touch your huge shoulders and chest knotted with muscle, your neat, flat waist, your powerful arms and legs; and in the sublime joy of touching them I gave up worrying how a fine man like you could ever be remotely interested in a skinny student like me. This worry, let me say, has often recurred to me since, and on the moral as well as the physical front; I've never known why a strong, good character like yours should trouble itself with anyone as unstable and untrustworthy as me. I've never known the answer to this puzzle, Jimmy, but you can bet I bless my luck it has all turned out as it has.

(And now it's you who'll think me silly! I've just been running my hand up and down the arm of the leather armchair in which I sit writing this, trying to kid myself it's your leg, and that I'll soon feel the contraction as you suddenly tense those wonderful long muscles on the outside of your thigh — just how I felt it that afternoon the first time, and made you go on and on doing it for the pleasure it gave me, remember?)

We bathed again, didn't we, after discussing most solemnly whether we were far enough down the beach for the others not to see us bathing completely naked. You reminded me there were some keen bird-watchers in the party who'd be certain to have brought binoculars, but we decided if they used them on us, they'd just not have to mind what they saw. Anyway in we went for another swim, and then rolled about together madly in the surf like seals for quite a time. Then what I remember so vividly is how, after we had put our slippers on again, we walked back along the beach together, lingering and spinning out the pleasure in each other's company as long as we could, in complete contrast to the hell-for-leather run in which we'd covered the same ground in the other direction. You held your arm tight round my waist, almost pulling me off the ground as we walked, and I had my arm up on your shoulder, and so we sauntered along, me in a daze of happiness talking eighteen to the dozen about nothing, you rather reserved and silent. Then we got back to the others and the outside world broke in on us again. It was tea time for the party, and we were both

hungry, and you had to help with the tea and see that sand didn't get into the cake! —

Jimmy, that «daze of happiness» has lasted six years for me. I've often behaved very wildly and been a trouble to you in many ways, but I know well that my love for you — which began that afternoon — has been the best thing in my life so far. You're so big and kind and straight — always the same, always there when you're wanted, for support or advice. Just believe me then, won't you, when in spite of all my rebelliousness and lack of consideration for you, I sign this.

Your ever loving and true friend till the skies fall,

LARRY.

No Answer

by Richard Arlen.

My dear

As we shall see each other only after your holidays (meaning that I shall have to miss you for six whole weeks), I should like to tell you several things today — it is sometimes easier to do it by letter. For there are a number of matters I feel that I should talk over with you.

When I returned home the day before yesterday after my mother's funeral, amongst the many letters of condolence there was one from my young former colleague and friend, Stanley and his wife. Stanley, despite his relative youth, is an intelligent fellow. As you know, I have been very fond of him, both as a colleague and as a friend — and I am using the word friend in its basic sense. He mentioned in his letter things about which I had been thinking in exactly the same way during the days following mother's funeral when I was clearing out our old home. The most important realization was the fact — appreciated by Stanley in his letter, too — that, by my mother's death, my own life would have, of necessity, to be put on a different basis. The great and willingly fulfilled task of caring for her, being with her whenever possible, looking after her and lighting by my presence the slowly darkening horizon of her life — this great task no longer exists. I can and, indeed, must, think about how to shape my own life to suit my temperament.

All this had been in my mind while I stayed for the last time at home. In consequence, I visited on my return the three people who are nearest and dearest to me but from whom I have been virtually separated—and not only by distance.

I went first to see my oldest friend, H., at C. As you know, we have been friends for twenty years and more. The passionate beginnings of our relationship have, in the course of time, changed into a lasting friendship which has withstood the test of time. As ever, we are fond of each other — but he is married and that fact in itself marks the border. The second one of my friends, G. in T. is married, also, as you know. With him this fact hurts far more. I may say that H., my first friend, was, and still is, my own creation. I moulded him into what he is today. Whereas G. to this very day is and has been one of the rare people in my life whose influence has made my own thinking processes more concise and clearer. I owe him a lot. His mental influence is to this day—twelve years after we met — so great that I would not hesitate for a moment to share my life completely with him. Alas, if only he too was not married.

Finally, I met for a weekend young C. who is so very dear to me. He drove me proudly in his new small car to the sea which is his great love and which we saw together for the first time. It was a lovely weekend with the boy. I keep calling him a boy though, at the age of thirty, he is hardly that. However, I met him, an orphan, homeless and destitute, in the chaotic last years of the war.

The worries which we shared at that time and during the immediate post-war years are probably the reason why I shall always look upon him as my boy, for shared sorrow makes for a closer friendship than shared joy. We spent a whole sunny afternoon at the shore, saw the high tide come slowly in and had one of our long talks. About his job, about the difficulties he is having with his thesis and naturally most of all about his beloved «Zuleima» to whom he will be formally engaged as soon as he has finished work on his thesis. I realised once more on that afternoon that the love this boy gives me freely and of his own accord may from now on be easily the one and only genuine and lasting love in my life. Just because he is utterly normal and the physical side never once entered our relationship he gives me the warmth of a genuine and spontaneous affection. That I shall lose him to a very great extent by his forthcoming marriage we both realise.

These were the three meetings which preceded my return home. All three of these friends are close to me but I know as well that in regard to them all I am finally alone. I do not mind greatly. As you know I am well able to keep myself good company. But — and this was the outcome of my meeting these three close friends of mine — from now on I no longer want any half-hearted things in my life. I do not want either any vague and unsettled affairs in my life which will only cost me strength. And the only thing here which is vague, unsettled and unfulfilled which has been costing me a good deal of strength, has been my relation to you.

It is now nearly a year since we first met at the Autumn gathering of *The Circle* at Zürich. In that dense crowd I asked you to dance with me and, when I realised how well you let yourself be led (one of the very few points where you could be led), we danced a good deal together. Dancing together, we found out that without knowing each other, we had taken the same train from Basel to Zürich to enjoy the night's fun at the Club. Well, next morning we took the same train back — but together. That's how it started and I'll gladly tell you once more in this letter what I have told you verbally quite often that in the months that followed I began to be very, very fond of you. I am evading the big word 'love', which is much misused by people of our kind.

You're damnably handsome, exceptionally full of charm and lovely to touch. That you're thick-headed never bothered me much — I prefer my partner to have his own personality and stick to it, too. That I had to share you with some others (or shall I say: many others?) was equally well known to me right from the beginning — it did not bother me too much and would not have bothered me at all if all else between us could have been clear and in the open. But that was never the case.

Every human relationship has its two sides. Ours, too. With one side — the one of our easy camaraderie — I have been extremely happy. Going around with you made me realise once again that I am still capable of being fond of a person — and for this renewed knowledge I have always felt grateful. Every time we have been together in the past months has been a pleasure. How often have we sat in the shadow of the big cathedral overlooking the huge river filled with barges. How often did we explore the town in the darkness of night, happily strolling along arm in arm. The many times we went to the pictures together, the fewer times when, finances permitting, we went for a Wednesday dance to the Club at Zürich until that time when the Isola Club at Basel was opened and from its first night we became «habitués». Looking back on those peaceful hours spent together, I think mainly of the Untere Rheinweg which runs past my own flat. I have watched the big river from that Rheinweg in your company through nearly all the four seasons — from Winter, when we met each other, to Spring and Summer. How often have I stood late at night after seeing you off at the river-bank and felt grateful for your very existence. You changed the course of my inner life to such an extent that, even at a time when I am

getting on in years, I started to write love-poems again, and not bad ones either as critical friends of mine have assured me. All this has been, and still is, to me a lovely proof that our relationship, loosely as we kept it right from the beginning had much of beauty in it.

However, every human relationship has two sides. It is the second side which has never been cleared up between us. We have known each other now for nearly a year. During all that time we have only been three times relatively near to each other. When it happened the first time there was something of a shock in store for me. We had known each other for quite a while, as you remember. You had been several times to my flat in that old house in the Untere Rheinweg. Its baroque facade covers surprisingly modern apartments one of which I proudly own. The night when for the first time I held you in my arms, I was myself surprised at the huge upsurge of feeling that I felt in having you so close to me and it made me realise how extremely fond of you I had become. All at once I knew that you had gone far deeper into my system than I would willingly have admitted even to myself. A couple of months later you had a bath in my flat — and I'll readily admit that what happened afterwards belongs to my most cherished memories of you. The third time that we came together was rather an incomplete affair — you wanted to look at nude studies (the collecting of which I always think to be the common denominator and weakness of lonely people.) Well, that evening had a conclusion but rather an unfinished one, as I said, for I am not the sort of person to snatch an occasional gain. And half-hearted things have never pleased me.

I realise many things myself without being told about them. I am (I'll have to be in your younger eyes) a man getting on in years. I am not too attractive and you have far more handsome and younger lovers to choose from. All this — and a lot besides — I can see without being told. But — even a friendship like ours needs, if it is to survive, nearness. This physical proximity need not become a constant rule, neither should it be the exception.

(I felt that «something is wrong in the state of Denmark» last Wednesday when I went to meet you at the Isola Club. One of your colleagues told me you were on duty that night and unable to come. All at once I felt vastly relieved — which is in itself a contradiction. Yet it is a fact that I am often more happy about you when you are not around because your presence frequently shows me the inadequacy of it all.)

Like every human being I need a good deal of physical warmth and nearness. Even today when I am quite able to keep a strict hold on myself. From the touch and the warmth of another person dear to me, I gain strength. Like everyone else. As we two, you and I, have only been near each other three times in nearly twelve months, I have now and then looked for that touch and warmth somewhere else. My conscience wasn't quite happy about it until the day when I heard someone I respect very much remark at the Club that to make a small present of cash did not necessarily mean that the receiver was trade. It did not happen too often, anyway — that young worker from the Rhine docks whose photograph you liked so much recently has been the only one seeing me with any regularity. I knew he liked to come and see me — perhaps because I knew how to make him comfortable without his losing an iota of self-respect. These «small pleasures» did not cost me too much. Even with an income like my own, I could easily «indulge» myself. Although I could permit myself these small extravagances I often asked myself: Why spend money if there lives in the same town someone of whom I am genuinely fond?

Here is the point from which this long letter really arises. I must decide what to do. I am open-minded to both possible ways. A further life with you (after all, I am very fond of you), but only after clearing up the «other» things for which I would not think of asking you. If they are not given to me freely, that must be the end of it. You must know by now that I am not an over-sexed dog

and you must also know that between us something is wrong. That is one of the two ways. The other is the one of which I made mention just now — from time to time there will be pleasant companions for me willing to give warmth even if it is in exchange for a small «cadeau».

On *no* account do I want to go *both* ways any more. If there is one thing I loathe and hate it is make-believe in a human relationship. This letter deals nearly exclusively with my own point of view — it goes without saying that you have as much right to your own opinion as I have. You have also the right of choice as well. As I have told you, I am no longer young and cannot compete with your younger friends. All the same, I have a feeling that there has been a genuine fondness for me on your side, too. I think you share the happy memories of our times together. Tell me what you think — you know me well enough to know that I shall not take a frank answer amiss.

We can remain friends (perhaps I should say: become friends) when this missing link in our friendship is resolved. On the other hand, we can also be «good pals» meeting each other at the Isola Club, shaking hands and asking after the other's welfare.

It's up to you. I am ready for both decisions.

As I know your nice thick-headedness well enough and also your intense dislike of writing letters or taking part in any discussion, I'll make things as easy as possible for you. You are going away now for your holidays. You'll send me the usual picture-postcard.

If you are ready to go the first way with me, the one leading us into a closer and a real relationship — all you have to do is to write on that postcard: «Yes».

If you are not ready or willing to go this way (and I shall be the last one to condemn you for it), simply write on that postcard: «No».

In both cases I shall honour your decision and shall not think any the less of you if the answer is a negative.

Je t'embrasse.

Yours

From: Manchester Guardian

If all the resolutions and suggestions discussed over the week-end by members of the National League of Young Liberals at their annual conference at St Hugh's College, Oxford, were to become effective, there would certainly be that new vitality in politics which Mr Jo Grimond, Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal party, told them was so badly needed.

A resolution demanded the repeal of the «antiquated licensing laws, which tend to increase, rather than lessen, drunkenness». It also called for the revision of the laws regarding prostitution «which are totally ineffective», and those regarding homosexuality, «which are a barbarous remnant of an antediluvian moral code based on retribution rather than reform.»

«We offer our apologies to the author of «The Boy on the Spanish Steps» in our October-issue for omitting to put in, as requested by him: «World-Copyright by Philip Dell-Creed» — and also for several cuts and alterations made necessary at the very last minute to fit the story into the all too few pages of our English section.

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Deutschland: Gesellschaft für Reform des Sexualrechts e. V., Grunewaldstrasse 78/1, Berlin-Schöneberg.
Int. Freundschaftsloge (IFLO) Postfach 1399, Bremen.
Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für 1957/58: IFLO
Gemeinsames Organ: ICSE-Kurier/IFLO-Bundesbrief.
Verein für humanitäre Lebensgestaltung (VhL), Kettenhofweg 46, Frankfurt a. M.

Dänemark: Forbundet af 1948, Postbox 1023, Kopenhagen K. Organ: PAN.

Holland: Cultuur- en Ontspanningscentrum (COC), Postbus 542.
Amsterdam C. Central-Büro: Damrak 57, Tel. 34596. Organ: Vriendschap.
Clublokal: «De Schakel», Korte Leidsewarstraat 49, Tel. 64511.

Norwegen: Det Norske Forbundet av 1948, Postboks 1305, Oslo.

Schweden: Riksförbundet för sexuellt likaberättigande, Postbox 850, Stockholm I.

USA: One Inc., 232, South Hill Street, Los Angeles 12, Calif.
Mattachine Society, 693 Mission Street, San Francisco 5, Calif.

Belgien: Centre de Culture et de Loisirs, boîte postale 1, Forest 3, Bruxelles.
Tous les réunions: 29, rue Jules Van Praet, 1er étage. (Près de la Bourse).

Frankreich: Le Verseau, Paris (Anschrift über ICSE).

Sonstige Zeitschriften und Vereinigungen, dem ICSE noch nicht angeschlossen:

Deutschland: Der Weg, Verlag Rolf Putziger, Uhlandstrasse 149, Berlin W 15.

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Mattachine Review (from U.S.A. in English)

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