

The Letters From Sarah Rennins  
By: Anna Turner

No one mourned the death of Sarah Rennins.

That is until the letters arrived.

My letter was snuggled cozily between an electric bill and a postcard from my sister, who was honeymooning in Antigua. “Be happy you’re a spinster!,” it read. “You’ll never have to leave cold, wet Seattle for a sunny paradise! I’m absolutely miserable here!”

Sarcasm. I scowled at her dig—another jab at my status as a single thirty-something. Her postcard found its home amongst apple cores and coffee grinds, fitting in nicely with the rest of the garbage. I was tempted to throw the electric bill in there, too, but paused when I saw the other piece of mail: the letter from Sarah Rennins.

I had spent the past two years trying to forget my time under Sarah Rennins, editor of Seattle Women. She was a bitter, sour, diabolical woman that belittled, degraded and demoralized her underlings—primarily myself. I had spent three months in therapy thanks to her berating and had been forced to take another job, one that didn’t include my editor telling me I had the writing skills of an illiterate six-year-old immigrant.

I couldn’t imagine why Sarah was sending me a letter. She had spared me no criticism, and any harsh commentary she entertained on my behalf was always publicized. What did she possibly have left to say?

I opened the letter to find a handwritten note. I expected the familiar harsh handwriting to blare from the page, screaming in red ink and uppercase letters. Instead I found a simple cursive in gentle blue, and it was not screaming.

“I am terribly sorry that I was not a better editor. You showed talent. Please do continue writing. You have it in you to be a great author—didn’t you say you wanted to write a novel? I look forward to it.”

I stared at the letter in shock. At first, I laughed. Then, I cried. Then I laughed again. Never had a compliment on my writing meant so much—if only because the compliment came from the very mouth that had made me doubt my literary future. A week passed—a week of reading the letter over and over again, reciting it in my head, keeping it in my pocket, slipping it behind the sun visor in my car, sticking it to the fridge with a magnet from Nantucket...

After seven days of confusion, I decided to pay a visit to Sarah. If anyone could explain the letter, it would be the one who penned it.

I showed up at the office of Seattle Women and requested a meeting with the editor. The secretary asked my reason for visiting. “I received a letter from Ms. Rennins.” I said simply.

“You too, then?” The secretary sighed, a note of pity piercing her professionalism. She reached into her desk and produced a letter that looked identical to mine, but much longer. “She sent out hundreds of them, all written within the last few months of her life,” the secretary said. “I guess when she was diagnosed, she felt the need to apologize to everyone she had wronged. She asked me to send all of them upon her death.”

I fought back an uncontrollable urge to mourn the woman who had once made my life miserable. But an urge even more uncontrollable was an itch to write that novel, for I had finally found something to write a novel about: the letters of Sarah Rennins.



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