

LETTERS FROM THE PAST

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Jared and Malika bought the house for their own separate reasons. Jared was tired of being cooped up in the apartment and wanted a place to keep his tools and be able to spread them out when he needed them. This place had a sizable garage. He also hoped the house could take Malika's mind off the baby.

Malika wanted the house because she wanted a "home." She wanted to walk from the car directly to her front door. She wanted to be able to step out the back door into her very own yard with a garden. She wanted to look out the windows and see her own trees and flowers. She wanted a home where children could play. When she got to that point she would begin to cry.

The house was over a hundred years old and needed work and that was fine with both of them. In fact, that was one of the reasons they both were able to agree on it. They could fix it up to meet their needs. They'd lived in a cramped apartment for so long, the house felt spacious - even while living in just two rooms while they worked on the rest of it.

In the past century the house had been changed here and there. A room had been added to the front, without a basement, though the rest of the house had a basement. This was the now the living room. The original living room had been opened to the tiny kitchen and served as the dining area. In the master bedroom a wall had been bumped out to add a closet. Walking around the house, Malika had expected to see a window on that wall, but once inside she discovered why there was

not. A large deck had been added to the back which she and Jared now wanted to cover and enclose with screens for a more year-round porch.

Upstairs were three rooms and a central hall. The stairway came up to the hall where a window lit the hall from one side. You could stand up fully there because the roof had been raised with the window on the outside wall. There were bedrooms on each end of the hall. The bedrooms did not have full ceilings because the upstairs was like an attic under the sides of the roof. The walls of the bedrooms came up a few feet before the slanting sides of the ceiling. On one side of each room was a tiny low closet behind the short wall. The space in these closets was triangular: the short wall, the floor and the angled roof.

The bathroom was between the two bedrooms and as long as the hall. Opposite the door from the hall was the bathtub. The wall there, under the slanting ceiling, was taller than in the bedrooms. There was no window. Jared and Malika decided to open that wall, but not all the way. They would open the top half and make a shelf under the slanting roof. Then they would put a skylight in the roof to light up the bathroom. The shelf would also be a place to put plants in pots. It would be an indoor garden! They set to work on their first project.

In the demolition work they found a small bundle of letters. The paper was yellow and brittle with spidery handwriting. Malika was curious about them and eager to read what they said. Jared was not interested. In fact, he had tossed them in the trash where Malika had found them. She set them aside until one day when she carefully opened them and began to read.

Dearest Rosabel,

I had the strangest dream last night and I wish you were here so I could tell you. I don't know what to make of it. It wasn't frightening, so it wasn't a night mare, but it was so real, more real than some things I've seen while I was awake. I felt so good during the dream that I felt awful when I

woke up and realized it was just a dream. I really didn't want it to end. Somehow, and I can't explain it, somehow, I feel certain that it won't end.

I know this sounds foolish, I so wish you were here, this is so hard to confine these precious feelings to mere words on paper. If you were here I just know you'd understand. Oh, I'm not getting anywhere at all with this!

On the side of a mountain I saw a building that was square with columns, sort of a palazzo around it, the top was tall with tall windows and on top of that was a dome, a golden dome. I've never seen such a building in my life, I'm sure. It didn't look quite continental, nor eastern. It, it wasn't any style I can name. It wasn't like any other style I've ever seen. It was white, except the lower portion, shaded by the palazzo, that was darker, but not black. It's so hard to describe and the image is already beginning to fade.

What hasn't faded is the feeling of joy when I saw it, as if it signaled the beginning of hope; hope for the human race! Now that's rather silly, I know, but really, that's how I felt in the dream: this building was bringing hope to the human race, to all of the planet. And there were people going up the mountain to this building - all kinds of people dressed in the most outlandish of costumes. And these people were all colors: red, yellow, black and brown. I couldn't see any details, of course, but I knew they were people from all corners of the earth. How they got there, I haven't the foggiest idea, but somehow this seemed like a vision of the future and such outlandish things will be possible then.

These people were walking up steps, through gardens, the most beautiful gardens I've ever seen, to this building. The whole mountain side appeared to be gardens, lawns and pathways. I can't imagine where such a place could be. I've never heard of gardens on a mountain side. It didn't seem to be a very tall mountain, it wasn't high enough for snow to be on top, nothing like the Alps, but steep, really steep. It was certainly taller than anything here in Kansas.

Oh, Rosabel, if the crops hadn't failed you could still be here with me!! It is so lonely here without you. No one has bought your farm, Pappa said the bank would hold it as long as possible, he really wants your family back too. How can we build up this country when people continue to leave? The school is nearly empty, they may not open it next fall. I've even considered teaching the little ones, there's only three now, Porter doesn't count, he's fifteen now (can you believe it) and working with his pa all day now. Curtis has been making eyes at me, but I'm not ready for that yet!

I've got to go now, Pappa's going to town and if this letter doesn't go now, it will be several weeks before he goes again. I just had to tell you about the dream, it was like nothing I've ever experienced before.

I miss you so much,

Sincerely,

Your most affectionate cohort, Irmengard Rumsfiel

Dearest Rosabel,

You'll never guess!!! I may have been silly, I don't know. Do you remember Porter Dunbar? He spilled ink on my second best gingham one day at school. I could tell that he really didn't mean it, he just wanted to tease me, but it went wrong. I'd had a difficult morning before getting to school, I think it was the time McAlliser's bull tried to chase me a ways. Anyway, I burst out bawling and that really upset him - the whole escapade went wrong for him.

That's all beside the point now, what I want to say is that we're married!!!

I'm sure you're shocked, I'm still surprised. It was rather sudden. Six months ago I wouldn't have thought of it, but things change. His pa died, so he's taking over the farm and there's no more school to teach, so what else was there for me to do? Now I can help him on the farm, his mother and younger sister, do you remember Elvira? She was so little when you left. We've become good

friends and we help out Mother Dunbar, it still sounds a little odd to call her that, but I'm getting used to it.

Do you remember that dream I wrote you about last? I've had another one. This time there wasn't a mountain, but a hill with another building on it. This one was somewhat like the other, but different. It had a dome, but a large one, and the building was circular, but with straight sides. It sounds kind of confusing, I know, but I don't know how else to describe it.

Anyway, each of the sides had a door and steps leading up to the door. The doors were open and all kinds of people, all colors, dressed in all kinds of outlandish clothes, were going in. They were very polite and calm, no pushing or shoving. They acted like they all knew each other - but how could such different kinds of people be together - and know each other!?!?

I don't know what they did inside, or even what the building was. Like the building in the other dream,

Sincerely,

You most affectionate cohort, Irmengard Rumsfielt

Rosabel!

My dream, the ones I've written you about, I had another one. This time I, well, in the dream, I went into one of those buildings. Why are the dreams about buildings? I have no idea!! Anyway, the buildings are some kind of church - the people go inside and sit quietly and pray. I guess they're praying, their heads are bowed. I'm sure they were praying, it felt like they were praying and it looked like they were praying.

The building inside was very simple: no statues, no cross - that was odd, no elaborate decorations. But very elegant, I guess you would say. There were different colors on the walls and ceiling, so it did not look dull and boring. No one appeared bored, they all looked content and

happy to be there.

That's an odd thing about these dreams - all the people in them are happy, and all colors together, ALL of them. In every dream, every person has been happy. Maybe that's why it's a dream - such a thing can't happen in real life. I've never, in all my life, seen so many people, so happy, as in these dreams.

I've seen people happy at parties, and little children happy at play, but not so many adults as this. I wonder what could make them happy so...

Well, it's just a dream - and anything can happen in a dream!

Mother Dunbar died, now it's just me and Porter and sister Eliza. The house is really empty without her. She was kind to me as a child and took me in just like a daughter. I still don't think of the house as being mine yet. Porter teases me about all the changes I can make, but I haven't seen any reason to change much of anything. And I wouldn't want Eliza to think I was getting rid of her mother. Things are fine the way they are. When I make a change, I talk it over with Eliza first, to see if she thinks her mother would mind. She likes that and we've grown closer together.

Sincerely,

You most affectionate cohort, Irmengard Rumsfiel

Rosabel,

We're going to have a baby!! I wasn't sure until last week, but I am now. It's been too long, if you know what I mean. Eliza and I will go through the baby things in the attic to see what I might need. I hope there is enough there, we don't need to spend any more money now than we absolutely need to. This year has been dry again, not as bad yet as the year you left, but the crops are already hurting.

It's exciting to think of having a baby, but I'm worried that it's going to be a bad year.

Sincerely,

You most affectionate cohort, Irmengard Rumsfielt

Dearest Rosabel,

You would not recognize me now! I can't do anything but waddle like a duck!! I'm so glad Eliza is here, she has been such a help.

I've had another of those dreams, at least it seemed like it, but it was different from the others. There were no buildings or gardens, it was people, but these people were like the people in the other dreams, all colors of people together, so I think it belongs to the other dreams.

Anyway, this was a wonderful dream!

The large group of people had gathered together. They prayed and then a young couple stood up and walked to the center of the group; everyone was facing into a circle. The couple had a baby. They held the baby and talked to the group. I can't remember now what they said, but it was something about the child growing and becoming a loving and nurturing person. It was so sweet and wonderful, it made me cry. My pillow was wet!!

I felt such love for that child; everyone in the room loved that child. I knew that if ever in that child's life, he needed help at any time, any of those people would risk their lives for him. I just KNEW it!! I don't know how, I just knew it.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, as a mother, to know that you were not alone in raising your son or daughter; that there were lots of other people ready to help you?

Sincerely,

You most affectionate cohort, Irmengard Rumsfielt

Dear Rosabel,

Little Dysen is so big now. He is beginning to walk and is so proud of himself as he toddles along. He smiles and my heart just melts. I never knew I could feel such happiness!!

I've had another of those dreams, and this time I think it is the last one. The end of it had a finality to it that the others didn't have, oh! that sounds weird, I don't know how to explain the feeling. Only time will tell if it is the end.

If it is the last one.... what will life be like without them? I've come to look forward to them and cherish them. Sometimes the beauty and peace of those dreams is all I have to help me make it from one day to the other. The world I see in those dreams is so different from the world I see around me. I don't know how that dream world has any connection to this real world. On, well...

In this dream there was one man, a specific man, he had an rather old fashioned beard, but it was his clothes that was odd. He wore a sort of robe – almost full length to the ground. It wasn't oriental, but it wasn't like a bathrobe either. It was somewhat like a coat – and very simple, yet elegant.

He was walking and talking to people, they were dimmer in the dream, so I knew he was the important part of the dream. Not only was he brighter and more distinct than the other people, and he was the focus of their attention, but he seemed to radiate a sense of power and calm. He was very serene, as if he was supremely confident that all in the universe was in order and nothing was going wrong. Even when things are unpleasant, or down right awful - it's all part of God's plan and we don't need to fret or despair over it, but do what we can to help other people as much as possible.

He was a wonderful person and I could tell that the people in the dream with him were changed by their connection to him. He was religious, sort of, but in a way that wasn't removed from real life. He was not distant from the world, nor disdainful of it, like lots of preachers I've seen, but actively engaged in the conditions of life. It was inspiring just to see him walk.

I don't know who he was. I've never seen him, or anyone like him, but I know he's a real person - of that I am absolutely convinced. And he lived in the Holy Land, I'm sure of that too. I don't know how I knew that, but I did. You know how in dreams you just "know" things? There was nothing in the dream to indicate what his name might be, but the word "glory" comes to mind. I don't understand, but the dream world is different from this world. Could his name be "Glory?" It seems absurd to me, but who knows?

Here is the weirdest part: the dream seemed to have a connection to an article I read in *Everybody's* a while back. It was a winter issue about 1912. The article was about a man who lived in the Holy Land. He was some kind of holy man, but one who is very practical. I don't remember much about the story now. I don't subscribe, I read it at Lucinda's and she was reading it from someone. He taught a kind of religion that doesn't act like a religion. For instance, they don't have ministers or preaching.

There was a drawing of him and he looked very peaceful and wise. I want to learn more about him, whoever he is.

Sincerely,

You most affectionate cohort, Irmengard Rumsfiel

Darling Rosa,

I don't know how to say this - my heart is breaking. I've spent the last weeks crying. I don't think I'll ever be happy again. How can I be?

My precious baby, sweet and wonderful Dysen, brave as he was, has passed on. He expired in my arms not understanding any of it. He tried to wipe the tears from my eyes, then sighed so peacefully and was gone!!! It breaks my heart. I just can't go on.

Sincerely,

You most affectionate cohort, Irmengard Rumsfiel

Malika gasped. She'd never imagined this. She had become so caught up in the letters that she felt Irmengard had been writing to her. Her heart went out to this mother who had also had a child die. Dysen must have been older than her baby. Kierra was only six weeks old. He had so many physical complications, the doctors were amazed he had lived that long. That didn't help her heart any. Little Kierra was her pride and joy – and now she was gone.

The memory of holding her lifeless little body swept over Malika and she began to sob.

She cried for a few minutes grieving over her baby girl then her eyes glanced at the first words of the next letter. They surprised her and she resumed reading to see what had happened.

Dearest Rosa,

God is Most Merciful! I don't know how it could have happened, but the Glory Man, I don't know what else to call him, came to me in a dream again last night. He said he is taking care of my precious baby. He said my little Dysen would not have been able to grow in this world, so God was merciful and let him come home early. Then he seemed to draw open a curtain in the air, though there was no curtain, and I saw my sweet boy playing, running and laughing with other little boys. He was so happy. He never had a playmate here and I could never spend as much time to play with him as he wanted.

It was so wonderful to see him again, alive and so happy. His laughter, I can still hear it. I'll cherish that vision always. God is Merciful! I can sleep nights now. I still cry, but through my tears I can see him play.

And the Glory Man, around his head, on his head, he was wearing a sort of hat-turban, I don't know what to call it, anyway – there were letters of light, very bright: B - A - H - A. I don't know

what that means. Is it a word? His name? I don't know, I don't know how to find out. Oh, well. I must close.

Sincerely,

Affectionately, Irmí

Malika thoughtfully opened the next paper wondering about those four letters: B – A – H - A. What did they mean? That was certainly mysterious. Maybe she could find out on the internet. Then her eyes went to the words on the page.

Dear Rosa,

I have good news and bad news. I'm going to have another baby. I wasn't sure I wanted to, but I remember little Dysen playing in the dream and I feel it's all right to have another baby. I've begun to show a little, so I don't go out any more, but who has time?

We have to move. The crops have failed again and the bank is taking over the farm. We can't pay the mortgage or the notes on the equipment. Porter tried to delay them, and he was successful more than once, but the new owner of the bank would not give us any more time. We're not sure where we'll end up. I'll write as soon as I can.

I couldn't bear to leave my baby here in that lonely cemetery, but thanks to the Glory Man, I know my little boy is not really in that grave. He is somewhere else, in a far better place. My precious darling is playing with his new friends in some other world and he is happy. That is all that matters to me now. I'll write as soon as I can.

Sincerely,

Irmí

That was the last of the letters.

Malika sat stunned. In just the few minutes she had been reading them, she had grown close to Irmengard, and was even a little jealous of Rosa being her friend.

She leaned back and pondered over them. What happened to Irmengard Rumsfielt, the bereaved young mother who wrote them? Why were there no more letters? And where was little Dysen buried? Which cemetery? Where did they live? There was no return address. And no dates. They were written a long time ago, but for Malika it had all happened just yesterday.

She put the letters aside and went outside to walk in the yard, her yard, her flowers, her trees. She was comforted by the dream. She was sure her little Kierra was also in that other world and playing with other children. She would never have been able to do that here, Malika was sure. The doctors had said, even if she lived, she would always have been severely handicapped physically. Being in that other place was much, much better. Malika closed her eyes and envisioned her there.

She knew things would be okay now. She was sure Kierra was in a better place. And, the next baby would be fine. She hadn't told Jared yet, she had wanted to be sure. Now, she was. But, what did those four letters mean: B – A – H - A?