

Dear Maggie,

As I'm sending this snail-mail anyway, I thought I'd include this note. Sitting down at my old typewriter, I had an eerie feeling of Deja-vu, because we were once pen-pals. I'm trying to block that thought out with the hard thwack of the ink on paper, because I can't stand to remember anything from high school.

Let's just address the largest elephant in the room: that I'm absolutely furious with you. Not because you involved me in this nonsense, or even because you kept all this from me in the first place, but simply because you gave Sophie an opportunity to do something that I would have killed for.

I could have used all that money to visit the religious shrines of Burma, live in Tokyo as an exotic prostitute, spend time in an opium den in Marrakesh, or maybe just stay right here and not work for a few years. The fact that Sophie pissed it all up the wall, and you are now the one graced with the chance to engage in risky behavior in the Orient, appalls me greatly. That you may even lose a finger or two is just salt in my wounds.

Half of me wanted to let you rot over there, but I have far bigger betrayals to deal with right now. I can't even give you the cold shoulder while helping you, because the sad truth is that for the sake of my sanity, I need unburden myself on someone and I can't risk boring the people around me. They'd probably think I was having some sort of delusional episode if I ranted to them like this.

I bumped into Sophie a while back. She said she was in town for only a few days. We agreed to meet for lunch, but she never showed up. She ignored my messages, and I supposed she had left again. A few weeks later I get a postcard from you with a hysterical letter stapled to it about a situation you both concealed from me all this time.

So you needed to know where she was, and in order to find out, you turned to me, an impoverished loon. Your instincts must be pretty good, because I found her, but even with my connection to her family and friends it took enormous effort. She said she would be returning to Indonesia, but her brother said she was off hitchhiking. Nobody else had any idea where she was. I tried everything I could think of. I even tried being really uncool by visiting Grandma's house to use the internet, but still got nothing.

All hope was not lost, however. Through my network of traveler kids, itinerant hippies, drifters and indigent druggies, I have chased Sophie for months. I never lost the trail, but even when I got close, she was always still ten steps ahead. First, she had just left a commune with friends in Hippiland, then she was going from town to town playing her fiddle with a traveling bluegrass band called Billy Jeans and the Trouser Boys, then she was apple-picking, and then I wasn't so sure.

Maybe she was on the run from you, or maybe she was just a nomadic person. Maybe it was both. It seemed she would always be out of my reach, until finally came the break I needed. Her mother called and said there was someone holding a meeting to track down acquaintances of Bram's, and Clara asked that I not attend.

I explained that I had to go because there was a possibility someone who knew Sophie would be at this meeting, and I was hoping they could put me in touch with her. Wankers call that sort of thing "networking".