

The Letter

Without opening the envelope, Gerard hurriedly put the letter into his pocket. He had a busy day ahead and thought, unwisely as it turned out, that the letter could wait till he returned that evening.

The day, indeed, was busy. Gerard return to his flat tired and hungry. He had his supper and relaxed in front of the television. He had forgotten all about the letter and, indeed, did not remember it again until two days later when he received an email asking him why he had not replied.

He did not recognize the email address of the sender and did not reply at once. He tried to remember when he had received the letter and what he had done with it. He remembered he had been in hurry when the post came that day. He had put the letter in his pocket, had he not?

He looked and could not find it. He looked through all his pockets in all the trousers and jackets he might have worn that day. He still could not find it. Maybe he had misremembered and simply put it down somewhere. He searched his flat high and low but could not find it. He wondered if he had, perhaps, absent mindedly put it down at the office that day. He decided not to reply to the email but to wait till the next day and have look at the office.

The next day he made a thorough search of his office desk, through all the papers and files on it and through every drawer in it. He asked around among his colleagues if they had seen an envelop addressed to him. But none of them had. It began to dawn on him that the letter may have been lost between home and the office. He must be more careful, he thought.

When he looked on his computer that evening, there was another email from the same sender:

Did you receive my email yesterday? I still have not had a reply to the urgent letter I sent you. It will be to your advantage if you do reply.

As Gerard did not know who the letter had come from and what the letter had said, it would be difficult to reply. Also, he was a bit suspicious about the email as the sender's email address was not one he recognized. He could just ignore it. In the end he did reply and wrote:

When I read the letter I did not realize it was urgent. If it was so urgent, why was it sent to me via snail mail and not as an email attachment? I left the letter behind at the office and I will read it again tomorrow.

It was not long before he received a reply which read:

The letter contained confidential information which I could not risk getting intercepted if I sent it through cyberspace. I did mark it as confidential and urgent. A bequest has been left to you; you need to act quickly. Please click this address www.bequesthandler.com

Gerard grew more suspicious. Letters can be intercepted if they come through the post in the old fashion way. Surely if the letter had been so confidential and urgent, it would have been sent at least by recorded delivery or more probably by special delivery. It had come just by ordinary post; he had not had to sign anything when it arrived.

Also could not the message have been *encrypted* and sent via email? He was sure it could have been. He would ask Angela at work tomorrow; she knew all about these things.

He did, however, click the bequesthandler address. The website certainly looked authentic

enough. He started to fill in boxes: his name, postcode, first line of address and so on. But he was worried when it asked for bank details so that the bequest could be paid directly into his account. He decided to quit the site. He would ask Angela about this as well tomorrow.

On the following day, Gerard did tell Angela about the emails and website.

“It sounds like a scam,” said Angela. “I guess someone must have found your lost letter and decided to use it to their advantage.”

“But how would they have known my email address?” asked Gerard. “Unless, of course, it was given in the letter itself.”

“I wonder,” said Angela. “If it was someone from here, they could find your email address without its being in the letter. But you say you opened the link to the bequesthandler site.”

“Yes, I did,” said Gerard, “but I quit when it asked bank details. I wasn't going to give those.”

“Very wise,” replied Angela. “But it would have been better not to have opened that site at all. It is almost certainly a spoof website.”

“But it looked genuine,” said Gerard.

“It's not difficult to mimic a genuine website,” said Angela. “You may have downloaded malware or a virus by opening it. It's a laptop you have, isn't it?”

“Yes, it is,” answered Gerard.

“OK,” said Angela. “Why don't you bring it in tomorrow and I'll have a look at it. I should be able to trace where the emails came from as well.”

“Thanks,” said Gerard. “I will.”

That evening Gerard had an unexpected phone call from his aunt Muriel.

“Is that you, Gerard?” she asked, “Are speaking from home?”

“Yes,” answered a surprised Gerard, “yes, it's me and I'm in my flat in London. Where else would be?”

“Not Copenhagen, then?” said his aunt.

“Copenhagen!” exclaimed Gerard with some surprise. “What would I be doing in Copenhagen?”

“Getting injured in a car accident,” said his aunt.

“What?” asked Gerard in disbelief.

“I had a letter this morning saying you were involved in a car accident and asking if I would send you five hundred pounds to help expenses. Looked a bit fishy to me – I mean, it's not like you to be asking for money like that.”

“No, indeed,” agreed Gerard. “Besides we can still use the EU Health Insurance card in Denmark; we haven't left the EU yet. Yes, it's definitely fishy. I would take that letter to the police as soon as you can.”

“I'll do that, Gerard,” said his aunt. “By the way, I'm still waiting for a reply to the letter I sent you last week.”

“Oh, sorry, auntie,” said Gerard. “I've been a bit snowed under with work this week, but I'll send you a reply tomorrow.”

“Good,” said his aunt. “I'll look forward to it. Look after yourself and,” she added with a

laugh, “don't go having car accidents in Copenhagen!”

“I won't, auntie,” he said. “Goodbye!”

“Goodbye,” she said and rang off.

The next day Gerard took his laptop in for Angela to look at and told her about his phone call from his aunt.

“That confirms it, doesn't it?” she said. “Someone's found your letter with your aunt's address and is trying to get money out of you both. Well, I'd better not look at your laptop in company time. Come over at lunch time and we'll have a look then.”

“Thanks,” said Gerard. “I will.”

At lunch time Gerard went over to see Angela.

“It's alright,” she said, “no harm has been done. It doesn't look as though it's a practised scammer but rather an opportunist trying their luck. Let's have a look at the full header of one of those emails.”

With a couple clicks a lot of what looked to Gerard like gobbledygook appeared above the email.

“Ah, right,” Angela said. “Now we can trace where it comes from.”

“Good grief,” she said after a moment or so. “It was sent from a computer here.”

“But,” said Gerard, “the email address isn't from here.”

“It's easy enough to use a different account for email,” said Angela. “Now, let's see. Yes, it seems to be from that young Danish technician we've got. That would explain the Copenhagen connexion.”

To cut a long story short: the young technician was confronted and eventually admitted it all, handing back the letter to Gerard. He asked them not to involve the police, but it was too late as Gerard's aunt had taken the false letter to her local police. However, as the young man had not actually been successful and had an otherwise unblemished record, the police give him a formal caution. The company moved him to another department, making it quite clear that if he did anything like that again he would be dismissed.

Gerard got his letter back in time to reply that day as he had promised his aunt he would. Gerard and Angela got to see more of one another and eventually decided that having two separate flats was a bit silly; they married and moved into one. We hope that, as in all good stories, “they lived happily ever after.” One thing we know with certainty: Gerard *never again* stuffed a letter into his pocket without reading it first!