

Once Upon A Time: Letters Never Sent

Our favorite questions begin with 'why'. 'How' mystifies us sometimes – it does for me a little, in this case --- but the why is always the sought after prize. Why is so subjective, varied; the answer lies only in another mind. Knowing why is like finally catching triumph and seeing her true form.

There are so many things I wish I could know about you, but I don't have the courage to ask. My questions make me blush, and if you were here in front of me now, with your confident smile and penetrating gaze, I'd find myself silent, even though I know I'm a girl of words, of action. Around you, that girl dies and I don't know whether her shy replacement bears any resemblance to the deceased or is more like that of a hollow and vapid impersonation, who can smile and laugh and nod, sometimes imparting opinions. But perhaps I'll have the courage to write my words on paper, as I do now.

Let me first say that I don't love you. There was never love between us; really, I don't know what there was – perhaps an ersatz form of it. I don't pretend to know what love is. Whenever I think I do, when I feel that insuppressible feeling and strength that gives me clarity, that could sustain me for days, something seems to prove me wrong. Maybe I should've said it then, anyway, but I kept quiet, as I usually did.

But for us, how could I have known? How did it feel, Peter, after talking of all our hopes and sins, to finally put my hand in yours, intertwine our fingers that night? To share in one moment what seemed like the world? Why did you never show up? You were the one who sought me out, but you were also the one who abandoned me. And why? Why go through all that trouble, and drag me along?

Some people, the very few I have confessed this to, ask me why I have never thought of it as me taking advantage of you. *You used him*, someone has accused of me. You know why I've never thought of it that way? Because I laid my soul bare for you, and you only threw me away. Was I only just a paper heart, to be endlessly crumpled? Was I too sincere? (Maybe. After all, being earnest is not a good quality when all those around you are merely players, actors with masks. I should've seen yours. What's ironic is that I don't resent you at all... I care about you much more than I should.)

So should I send this letter to you, Peter? You were once an open wound that bled freely, but I have come to entertain the notion that you are a comfortable scar on my form. We have frozen in silence and I don't mind keeping it this way. Yet I dream of you too much. I see you again and again, unexpectedly, too vividly. And even though I'd rather run away than stand to face this mess again, I've missed an opportunity before, and the 'why's' haunt me. I don't want to miss the chance to ask you the questions that have plagued me for far too long. It might be too late, otherwise.

Someone once said to me that relationships should have obituaries, even if they were merely once upon a time. To know that I could've taken the chance to ask you, to quell these clawing questions... and done nothing about them? That contradicts who I am. It consumes me even now. Simply, Peter, give me that closure.

- Julia

"Tell me, should I send it?"

I looked across the coffee table at my mentor's eyes, glad to discover they weren't directly focused on mine. I knew he had finished, but his eyes were still on the piece of paper in front of him. I stared back into the depths of my tea, anxious. There was some kind of pseudoscience in which tea leaves predicted the future. I wondered what the tea leaves had to say about me, but rather, I needed to know what John thought, and he was taking his time.

"You know, when you came in here, cold, and wanting my advice, I didn't think it'd be this." John finally looked up from the letter and directly into my eyes. His gaze struck me, seemingly piercing my own. I paused. He smiled then, reassuringly, his whole face softening and calming me. "I'm happy to tell you though, that I'm glad it is."

I waited for him to continue.

"Is it only closure you want?"

Is it? "I suppose," I answered.

"Do you expect he'll write you back?"

"I don't even know if I'm going to send it."

"And what if you did, and he replied back? What do you want him to say?"

I stopped. I knew I wanted more than closure, more than just an explanation.

Luckily John didn't expect an answer; he was walking to his desk, pulling out an envelope. "I went to a funeral last week; an old friend of mine had passed away. Good man, worked together for a while. I happened to meet his grandson. I knew him when he was a child. We talked for a little, and afterwards, he came to see me and gave me this, wanting to know what I thought. I think you should read it."

He handed me the envelope, and I took out the letter, puzzled.

Dear Julia,

This letter will probably bring to your mind a number of questions. Why am I writing you this letter, after years of unbroken silence? Why now, when it is probably far too late? What could I possibly have to say, when my actions have spoken for themselves?

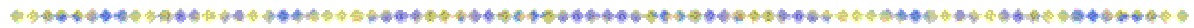
You may be tempted to tear this letter apart, erase all memory of me, and I would not fault you if you did. But I implore you to bear with me and read this confession of mine that I myself have too often torn, thrown away, and given up on. But here it is; I've resolved to finish it, and send it to you.

I was there that day we were supposed to meet. I saw you waiting for me, the anxiety in your eyes, and the tears that fell from them. I saw the disappointment in your face, even worse than a denied child, and how slow your steps were when you finally left. If you had stayed longer, maybe I would've overcome my fears; but you didn't, and I stayed a coward. Now I live with the ignominy of knowing that I had someone so important to me walk away. I made a mistake, a horrible one.

I'm sorry. But that's not enough, is it?

These past few months have been shrouded in death. Last week, I put my grandfather in the ground. His death unleashed a flood of regrets that clouded my mind, blocked all clarity, and brought slowness to my actions. We hadn't talked in two years after a simple falling out. He raised me as a child and later in life, close to death, I repaid him by letting my obstinacy get in the way.

In the passing shiver of my grandfather's death, I felt as if he had left me a message I could not yet decipher. I finally was able to put it to words when I chanced upon an old book of fairy tales. I remembered how delighted I once was with the fantastical, always transporting myself to the realms of faeries and gypsies. I allowed myself a happy memory, yet when I opened the book there were only the remnants of cast off dreams.



Later on that night I lay thinking of my wretched mind, my body, my life, and hoped for a different one. The words to my grandfathers' message came to me then, in surprising clarity. They had been right on the pages I had wearily skimmed through.

Life is a once upon a time. There is no other life that I can live but this one. If we are to be reincarnated in another lifetime, as Buddhists believe, I would never consciously know of it. If there is a heaven, as Christians believe, then heaven would only be known after death, after the loss of all contact.

I don't believe in Buddhist reincarnation. I don't believe I will meet you in a Christian heaven. I believe in the here and now, Julia, I believe in the present, in our once upon a time. Once upon a time, in our fairytale of failures, mistakes, lies and truths; our chance encounters and what we make of them. Once upon a time, Julia, no matter how disillusioned, frail and pathetically human we are. I hope you realize that it is not only my grandfather's death I mourn, but you Julia, what I did to you.

You and I are like sentences half-finished, ideas half-born. I caught hold of something precious – you—but felt my own fingers let go at that crucial moment. In this one chance we have at life, will you let me catch you again?

- Peter

Before I had known it, I felt wetness on my cheeks. Tears were streaming down my eyes, and I immediately got up from the couch and sought my mentor's warm, warm embrace. John was saying something, but I didn't quite hear what. All I knew was that I was crying and laughing because I had never sent my letter, and nor had Peter.

Kanyakrit Vongkiatkajorn