

Personal letter 10 – 12

Thursday, 3rd of November 2011

TO:

Plot 451

Springvale Botanical Cemetery

600 Princes Hwy

Springvale VIC 3411

Dear Grandmother,

This is the apology that you deserved, which I was never able to give to you when you were alive. You used to say ‘Bac hanh lay hieu di dau’ (The first vice is a lack of filial piety), so I guess if there is a hell then I’m going to burn in it for all eternity. If there isn’t a hell, then the regret and shame that bears upon me everyday is sufficient a punishment I think.

I’m sorry for being ashamed of you, for abandoning my culture and foolishly chasing something that was never me. In my defence, I was so lonely. I wanted to belong, needed to belong because somehow I attributed my self-worth as being dependent upon other people’s perceptions of me. When you look so different and live such a culturally different life you become self-conscious and exposed. You were able to stay strong and continue to be who you always were but I could never find that strength. I thought if I could connect with someone on even a superficial level then I was finding a place, finding my worth, somehow.

Do you remember when I told you I hated wearing ao dai (Vietnamese traditional dress) because it was ugly? That wasn’t true. I love wearing ao dai, especially the beautiful silken blue one which you sewed for me. I still remember the dainty chrysanthemums you embroidered and the vivid butterflies which you knew I loved. But I also remember how I ripped it in front of you to prove my hate for ao dai and the look of hurt that cast over your face that never left and etched itself into your features – yes, I remember all that. I hurt you, who loved me unconditionally and whom I was so close to, in favour of a tenuous connection with people who couldn’t even accept me as I truly was.

Structural features of letter writing such as date and address are present

Personal greeting

Outlines the reason for writing and establishes a regretful tone

Goes into more detail about the past, providing an explanation of what went wrong and why

Vivid description of scenes from the past provide the reader with insights which promote empathy and understanding

Use of imagery to convey the emotion

Contrasting description ‘patient wisdom’ and ‘blatant rudeness’ highlights the repentant nature of the letter

You used to try and teach me Vietnamese, every Saturday you'd explain to me the significance of a proverb or the moral of a folklore story. I scoffed at you and complained incessantly but you, in all your patient wisdom, still tolerated my blatant rudeness. I never made an effort to try and communicate with you anymore after I started school, where I could count with one hand the number of students of Asian background. My difference was made painfully aware and to immerse myself in Vietnamese culture was to widen that gap between the others and me. So I took the coward way out and denied my culture which really meant that I was denying you too.

I made your voice nonsensical to me because in my mind, the stronger your presence in my life, the weaker my connection with my peers became.

I didn't realise that my connection with them was as fragile as a thread of silk whilst my bond with you was like the magnetic pull of gravity, always pulling me to my feet and allowing me to stand upright.

I don't forget how even when I distanced myself from you, you still bathed me in love. I remember my sixteenth birthday when you managed to fold a thousand paper cranes in the space of three months so that I could have a wish.

I didn't know how big a part of my life you had become until you went to sleep one day and didn't wake up again. I realise now, dear grandmother, that only by truly connecting to a person who can accept me as I am, can I find out who I am. I have lost a part of myself now that you are gone. I will spend the rest of my life trying to find something reclaimable: a place with you.

I take Vietnamese classes now, did you know? But even then I write this apology in English which you can't read. I wonder if the gap I intentionally created could ever be rectified. But one day, I will try my best to write this apology in Vietnamese. I will try to rediscover me again.

Your regretful grand-daughter,

Figurative language used to further highlight the conflict and contrast between the writer's two worlds

Use of punctuation to add emphasis

Refers to hope for the future as the final thought

Personal sign off reiterates the regretful tone

From:

VCAA English GA3 Exam,

Examiners report 2011

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