

Letters and Lufstories

Matt Blackwood August 2011 (VIC)

Two women stood side by side in a lavender bedroom with a lemon trim.

They shared a family resemblance in their eyes and hips.

Out in the street, neighbouring Conformadoors out-revved each other.

The calico curtains did their best to buffer the roar.

'It is three months. Why has Laszlo not called?'

'I've told you already Mum; there's no reception in the middle of the Pilbara.'

The fact that Telstra's invisible arms couldn't connect Frankston to the red interior didn't seem to satisfy the woman with the thinning hair.

After all, Romania was only a Skype away.

'Read it again, please.'

Younger hands relented and took the deeply creased paper, peeling back the three folds, until the words of her brother reappeared.

Along with the words were a voice.

Along with the voice came images.

Images of warm hands that showed how to skate on frozen lakes. Arms that helped her up from the first five attempts at riding a bike. A face that seemed just as happy to receive a single green banana for Christmas, And unlike her, a face that could somehow wait for it to eventually ripen and then sell to the highest bidder.

'Hi Mum, I've suddenly been offered some work in the Pilbara with an indigenous community. It's a chance to do some volunteering before starting the Austin residency?'

The blue penmanship was stiff

Each letter painfully considered and raised at every opportunity.

Juliska's own writing was scrawl in comparison; her words tended to bleed into one another, and the more she wrote, the smaller the words became, until it made it difficult even for herself to decipher.

'Where I'm going there'll be no phones or mail, so I won't be able to speak to you until I get back.'

Her brother's full stops were more dashes than dots; a trait picked up from their father. Their father had learnt how to read from the TV guide. For years this meant asking his children 'What are you doing today tonight?'

Juliska peered from the letter to her mother who was sorting *lufstories* into shades of pink. Across the bed lay knitted proof that Ali MacGraw could shine on through to the beanie makers of Ceausescu's regime.

'Keep reading', the mother asked as much as stated.

'Send my love to everyone and see you soon'

Juliska's voice trailed off.

There was no emotion attached to the words 'never again', or 'hate'. In fact 'hate' was written with as much calm clarity as 'I' or 'you'.



'You are not reading it right. You forgot where he talks about us,' declared the lips of her mother as she plumped a nearby pillow.

It was hard enough reading words that weren't there, but when they were words that were never said

Juliska gazed at her mother. The same person she rang up last week to say thanks and they both knew what it meant.

Not once in her twenty-seven years had Juliska ever heard Laszlo utter thanks. Not for his three cooked meals a day or for the neat piles ironed y-fronts. No mention of Juliska being repaid the 1000 dollars she put aside from scouring dishes at the corner restaurant, just so he could repair his motorbike.

But according to the plan it was all ok because he was the one with the better marks, the PhD and the one without the accent. The one who would own his own home and buy another for his parents. The shining proof of why Australia was better than having to starve, and fleeing to the other side of the world was worth it. And yet between Juliska's fingers was blue-penned proof that her brother wanted drastic amendments to the plan.

'I love you all and will miss you very much. See you in three months.'

Juliska could feel her throat drying up.

When she first 'read' the letter to her mother, three months seemed like an appropriate amount of time for Laszlo to understand that the expectations were just their parent's way of looking at things.

Some five recitals later, Juliska now wished more than anything that her mother could read the truth for herself. A woman who had left behind her sister, her friends, her home and a career as a physio, and had escaped in the middle of the night, only to work in a laundry for the next twenty-three years. Juliska wanted to tell her mother that her golden son didn't want to be so golden any more.

'Your loving son, Laszlo.'

Juliska handed the letter back to the willing fingers of her mother, and quickly passed by lavender walls towards the lounge room and her reclining father absorbed by the dull throb of the TV.

The mother witnessed the march down the corridor, and as she folded the letter, she gently brought the paper to her lips.

'Forgive me,' the mother knowingly whispered, before carefully returning the letter to its envelope and placing in the top left drawer where it belonged.

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