

A Letter, a Lighthouse and the Wind

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I can never seem to write a decent letter. I may be a good story writer - but letters? I've never been good at those. The words never want to cooperate and I always end up in a pickle. Now's one of those times. My notebook is situated on my lap, or should I say half my notebook. Many of its pages lie screwed up and torn out, scattered around me on the grass. I hadn't exactly realised what a mess I'd made. That's the problem with letters, you have to get it right the first time. All formal and perfect, sentences fitting together like phrases of music. My page is covered in violet ink blotches from the amount of times I've crossed things out. Just this once, just this one time - I'd like to write a perfect letter. Frustration starts to build up, and everyone knows that's exactly how to give yourself a writer's block. Flicking through the notebook to a clean page, I address and name it at the top.

The wind starts to pick up and it keeps turning the pages of my notebook. It's whooshing all around me and doesn't seem to care that I'm trying to write a very important letter. I should've thought more carefully about sitting on the edge of the hill. All the pages I've torn out start to move around like little butterflies, and I scramble to catch them before they fly away - I'm not a litterbug. Just when I think I've got them all in my backpack, my notebook starts shuffling away from me. I gasp, wide eyed. It starts to move quicker, hooked on a gust of wind, and suddenly I'm up on my feet frantically trying to catch it.

"No!" I scream. "Not my notebook!"

I'm running harder and harder, my feet thumping on the ground and my heart trying to escape my chest. It's moving faster and faster, getting smaller and further away from me. Right now I'm cursing myself for not being a good runner, maybe if I'd tried harder in P.E. this wouldn't be as bad. It starts to head over Petone way, straight down on the other side of the hill.

"Noooo!" I screech, huffing and puffing so loud I'd make my father's motorcycle seem quiet. I run down the stairs, hoping I'll be able to catch it before it makes its way down. While I'm so caught up in my thoughts, staring up at the sky - I don't notice a boy at the bottom of the stairs. I run straight into him, trip over his feet, and land face first into a pile of dirt.

"Who are you?"

I blink, slowly coming back to earth again. A boy is towering over me with a concerned look about his face, as if he can't grasp what's just happened. He looks around my age, 13 or 14 maybe - dark haired, green eyed. I open my mouth to speak but I end up choking on the dust and dirt, leaving a gritty feeling in my throat. He puts out his hand and I grab it thankfully.

"You've scraped your nose," he says, handing me a tissue.

"Oh... thanks," I sigh, struggling to find words. If I could just have one walk where I don't walk into the stickiest and most awkward of situations in such an oblivious manner - it'd be a miracle.

"I'm Charlie," he tells me. "Are you alright?"

"I guess," I shrug, brushing the dust off my hoodie. "I'm Avery."

I lean against the balcony next to Charlie, and stare off into Wellington harbour. You can see almost everything from up here - a plane takes off, disappearing into the mysterious mistiness, each and every car is like an ant on a mission. I wonder how each individual car helps our world go round, every person working together on the never-ending journey. If one of those cars just stopped, what would happen to all the other cars behind it? Would they all just stop too until every single car was a stationary object in a stationary town? I'm losing myself in my thoughts again, as I so often do. It's the puzzles of our world that keep me awake at night, trying to solve the inexplicable question of existence.

I can feel Charlie's eyes on me, probably wondering why I've got my head stuck in the clouds. It must seem strange to him, but I zone out a lot. Moving my arms off the balcony, I turn to face him. As I glance up I get a better look at him and notice a Wellington Phoenix Hoodie.

"You a football fan?" I ask.

He thinks for a bit before he answers, the sun glimmering off his now water-filled eyes. I'm confused as to what I've done to upset him - I look up and he looks back at me, seeming to remember I'm still here.

He shakes his head, "It's my brother's." He wipes his eyes with the cuff of his hoodie. "Sorry, I've got... allergies."

The allergies part comes out all rushed, like he doesn't know what he's talking about. I know he's lying, but I nod and pretend it all makes sense in this crazy, messed-up world. After all - I've got my own secrets.

There are a few minutes of silence before we speak again. I don't know why I haven't just left and made my way home, but there's something about this kid that draws me to him.

"What's that lighthouse over there?" He asks, thinking hard about something.

"Pencarrow, I think... it looks so mysterious on the edge of the hills like that."

"I'd love to go visit it."

I nod again, smiling. He thinks like I do, an adventurer, always wanting to find something else to know about.

He grins at me. "Why don't we?"

I frown back in confusion. "You want me... to come with you... now?"

Charlie lets out a deep breath. "Well... I only moved here a couple of months ago, and I haven't exactly made many friends yet." He sighs. "I'm not very good at it."

I think for a moment - it's not like I'm doing anything, or have any friends to hang out with.

"I'm not either," I say. "So, which way are we going?"

We start to make our way down the hill, running down the stairs, jumping from step to step. Ironic really, seeing as last time I ran down stairs I ended up crashing into Charlie and

tripping over myself. But I suppose it hasn't turned out the worst. The path down the hill is much quicker than going up, and my tired legs thank me.

"Hey Avery?" A voice asks from behind me.

"Yeah?" I reply, knowing it's Charlie.

"You know when you crashed into me? Why were you looking up at the sky, yelling like a lost maniac?"

Oh great, we're talking about this now.

"I was writing in my notebook. A stupid gust of wind blew it out of my hands... and now I've lost it."

I don't tell him the full reason I've lost it. He doesn't need to know that I'd left my notebook on the grass, and been silly enough to let the wind take it. He also doesn't need to know the reason it was on the grass, that I'd spent ages trying to write the perfect letter.

"Oh," he says, like it's not a big deal. "What were you writing about?"

"Well, I wasn't exactly writing a story, I was starting to write a letter."

"Who for?"

I sigh. I really don't want to talk about this.

"My sister. Well, my twin sister actually."

"Are you a writer?"

"Yeah, we write each other little notes and stories - it was our secret." Or should I say we did. My eyes start to brim with tears, and I start to feel like a lost little kid again. I dry my eyes with the cuffs of my hoodie to eradicate any visible signs of sadness - I don't want Charlie to see.

Once we get to the bottom of the hill I immediately throw myself on the grass. I'm exhausted and my feet are aching, but somehow I'm happy. As I'm lying down I notice how blue the sky is - the kind of blue I'm always trying to mix when painting. I watch three seagulls argue about something - probably food - until eventually two of them fly away looking defeated. A light breeze blows by, and it feels nice and cool underneath the sun's rays.

Charlie clearly wants to ask me something, as he gets up and sits next to me.

"Hey Avery, how are we gonna get to the lighthouse?"

"I just assumed we'd walk, it's mostly flat."

"If we walk we'll take forever! C'mon, why don't we bike?"

"Well..." I hesitate.

"Do you have a bike?"

"No." I lie. It's not that I want to cause a problem, I just... haven't biked in a while.

Charlie has his thinking face on, and I'm slightly worried he'll find some solution to the biking problem. It turns out he does.

"You could borrow my brother's bike - he wouldn't mind. My house isn't far from here."

Oh boy. I'm not sure, but he looks so hopeful it's hard to say no. I brace myself, giving my best fake smile - showing the complete opposite of how I'm actually feeling.

"Ok, cool - that'd be great!"

He was right, his house isn't far. We get to the bottom of a long driveway, with a house all the way up the top.

"Wait here," he tells me.

As I'm waiting I notice the brown letterbox to the left of the driveway. Number 76. I trace the numbers with my finger, and soon Charlie appears from the top of the driveway. He's holding two bikes, one red and one blue. I get given the blue bike while he jumps on the red. When I first get on the bike starts to wobble, and I gasp in fear. Charlie looks at me.

"Sorry," I tell him. 'I'm a bit rusty.'

"That's okay," he replies. "Just follow me and remember to pedal, the roads are pretty flat."

The roads around here are pretty flat, and not too busy either. Makes it good for someone like me, who can start daydreaming and ride straight through an intersection without even noticing. Once I've ridden for a bit, I gradually start remembering how to ride again. I remember how nice it feels, wind against my face, sun on my back. I used to go biking a lot - it brings me back to the times when I didn't feel like the entire world was against me. As a child the world seemed like a giant playground, but now all it seems like is a place of unanswered questions and sacrifices. I'm often looped up in my thoughts, thinking about what makes our earth go round, what makes us all exist - but I've never found an answer.

The track is on the edge of the sea, with hills on my other side. It's nice to be near the water, breathing in the salty sea air. The bike rides well too, it's a rather nice one. I'm surprised I was allowed to borrow it.

"Hey Charlie, are you sure your brother's fine with me using his bike?"

He sighs. "It's not like he's using it anyway."

"What do you mean?" I ask, confused. He looks out at the harbour, seeming so dull and lifeless all of a sudden.

"My brother's not here anymore... he moved away."

"Oh." I'm not quite sure how I should respond. "Why'd he move away?"

"University... up in Auckland." He pauses. "I miss him."

"I get that."

"We always used to go for bike rides, go on an adventure together - sometimes even camp somewhere overnight. I call him all the time, but it's not the same."

I look over at him and I see the same watery eyes he had last time his brother was mentioned.

"I understand, I really do... I used to have a twin sister."

He narrows his eyes. "Used to?"

"She's dead."

I stop. My feet lie on the ground, my bike stationary. I get off and lean it against the side of the hill, then I go and sit down by the water's edge. My brain feels like it's completely shut down and I've gone emotionally numb. I can feel my eyes well with watery sadness, and the saltiness drips down my cheek. Everything that I've held in all comes spilling out. Someone sits down next to me - Charlie - his face full of complete shock and sorrow. He hands me a tissue to wipe my eyes, and sits there patiently, waiting for me to speak.

"The world just doesn't seem the same without her around." I say.

Charlie puts his arm around me, and I lean on his shoulder. He doesn't say anything, but I know he understands. For once I don't feel so alone, and the world doesn't feel upside down. I pick up a couple of rocks, feeling their smooth, solid texture.

"Can you skip rocks?" Charlie asks.

He takes a rock and throws it out into the sea, and it jumps across the surface like a little frog.

"You still want to go see the lighthouse, right?" Charlie asks.

"Of course, we're so close!"

We're back on our bikes again, and almost at the track that goes up to the lighthouse. I've always wanted to visit this place, and now I can. Looking out at it from my window it looks so mystical, sun gleaming off the roof, clouds hanging around the harbour. It looks even more mysterious in real life. I'm beginning to see why so many people love the outdoors, it makes me feel so... emotional - but in a good way. In fact I'm so engrossed in my environment I ride straight past the turn off.

"Avery, Avery!!"

I jump and look behind me to see Charlie standing behind me. Whoops... I rode straight past him - I've yet again zoned out of reality. Looking up at the track, it seems way much steeper than I thought, but I suppose it's direct - probably won't take us long. I'm already exhausted, and the thought of riding up that hill only causes me to sweat and pant more. Maybe if I ride up as fast as possible it won't be as bad, I'll be up there before I know it. Using a run up, I pedal as fast as possible - only to find my legs are burning in pain within a few seconds. Charlie looks at me, his face so serious it makes me crack up in laughter.

"We're walking," he says, hiding a smile. "We're definitely walking."

We're at the lighthouse. Finally, oh finally, after the strangest adventure and a walk up an incredibly steep hill, we're here. It's even more magnificent close up, looking like something out of a fairy tale. There's a little balcony wrapped around the top of the white body, light glinting off the windows above. A little patio surrounds the lighthouse, and I run over to it. I'm met by a large gust of wind blowing my hair in my face, but I'm too happy and excited to be annoyed about anything. I lean into the wind, letting it hold me, as I feel so free from myself. The wind might be some people's worst enemy, and others best friend. For me - it's both. It took my notebook from me, but gave me a new friend. As I lie on the edge of the hill next to Charlie and the lighthouse, I stare off into Wellington harbour, thinking to myself. The question of existence doesn't seem quite so bothersome anymore, because what's the thrill of life if you know all the answers?

"Hey Charlie?" I ask.

"Yeah?" he replies.

"If the wind had never blown away my notebook, we'd never have met."

"You're not worried you've lost it?"

"No... I don't need the letter anymore."