

C. ALLYSON LEE

Letter to my Mother

I lost my mother six years ago and still feel the tremendous loss very deeply. I wrote this letter for my mother while sitting on the beach on a grey, cold and lonely day in winter. I wanted to write down all the things I'd wanted to tell her but couldn't while she was alive.

Dear Mum:

There isn't a day that goes by without my thinking of you. Every day there is something, some place that reminds me of you, of your loving warmth and tenderness.

So many times I have wanted to share something with you, a funny story, a profound thought, the way we used to so many years ago. There is always a pain in my heart when I realize I can't turn around and call you to tell you what I saw today, who I talked to, or what I did. So many times I've wanted to bounce ideas off you, knowing you would understand.

There is no way I could ever understand how you've felt all these years living under repression, oppression, and unfulfillment. Knowing you had the wherewithal to have enjoyed a brilliant career, but was prevented from doing so because of family, obligation, and tradition. All I know is that it angered me so much when I'd try to interest you in taking a course here and there, and you'd feign disinterest and apathy. I knew you stayed home because you thought you should and because Dad demanded it. Even right up until the end, your mind was sharper and brighter than mine will ever be.

You were witness to the part of my life that was full of misery, self-deprecation, and insecurity. During those years I know I must have hurt you terribly being as irascible, stubborn, and hot-tempered as I could manage to be. I know you intimated to some of my friends that you wished I wasn't "so headstrong". But you know what? I'm glad I was and glad that I still am. I drew a lot of strength and courage from you, first and foremost as a person in your own

right, and secondly as my mother. Of course we had our moments when we clashed and couldn't see eye to eye, but I always knew you loved me. You didn't know I never wanted to hurt you.

You never saw me help myself out of the darkness, and force myself to barrel through the mud and grime I allowed to build up around me. You never knew I had built a fortress of bitterness and hatred inside myself. It took me a lot of determination to take a cannonball to it all. You never knew that a lot of my resentment came from watching you being held down, kept down, and torn down by Dad, watching you not even try to defend yourself or stand up for yourself. But what I did know was that you were tired of it all, weary of arguing, and just resigned to what you thought was your fate in life.

You had vowed never to let yourself be treated like Po Po was by Grandpa, getting yelled at and ordered around constantly. But you did let that happen to yourself, and you knew it. I too vow never to be treated like that, especially by any man. But I have an advantage over you - I've been fighting ever since I was four years old and I've had lots of practice. You taught me something very valuable, not to let myself end up with anyone who needed me more than I would ever need them.

You will never get to see me overcome a lot of years of pain and wounds, and above all, you will never see me happy as I am now. It hurts me that I cannot introduce you to Mary and watch proudly as you meet and get to know each other, blending two very soft spots in my heart. I am saddened you will never see her smile or laugh, or know that she brings so much joy to my life; I am saddened she cannot meet the strong, clever woman who gave me life.

It hurts that I cannot tell you that the tenderest places in my heart are occupied by women. They will always be the most cherished and intimate parts of my life. How can I tell you that I feel so deeply and strongly for them, both as friends and as lovers, in a way that I could never feel for a man? I think that deep down, after all the intellectualizing and analyzing, you would begin to understand in your quiet way. I know you would finally see that this is what makes me strong, makes me happy, makes me feel like myself. And I know you'd want me to be happy above all else. Because of you I learned women can have a quiet strength.

Memories... Distances... Exile...

Up until now, I've not done anything I've been especially proud of, and that's probably because of my lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. I know I felt intimidated and inadequate because of your anxiousness for me to do well. I always wanted to make you proud of me. I've been stuck in neutral all this time. I'm only beginning to go into drive and conduct my life down the road to recovery. Along each step of the way, each of my little successes I attribute to you and no one else.

I wish you could be here to revel in new joy with me, to celebrate and share in my moment.

Good night, Mum. I love you and miss you so much that sometimes I hear the wind whisper your name.

Sister to Sister