

## An Untitled Letter

To my grandpa, the funny and the care-free. You are always electric at telling tall tales. You injected excitement and humor to my life: the solemn and the serious. You were always fond of the ocean blue and so did your father and his father before that. While the world was growing upwards, you ventured outwards to the waters of life hoping to score fish for sale. And in that fateful day, when you performed your daily ritual at sea, she delivered justice in the form of a storm, sentencing you to life in a thalassophobia prison. "Me and the sea are not really in talking terms these days, but I do wish I could take her out on a date someday", accompanied by hysterical laughs and gasps of air. Satire became an outlet for the muted screams of your fear.

To my grandma, the wise and the shrewd. No one is aware of how brilliant you are, the genius running through your cerebral cortex. You simply were born at the wrong time. "I remembered beating all the boys in my class at academics, but my father told me to stay home after I turned 16". You knew your time was running short when you could barely count your age within a minute, which prompted my forced integration to your household as a way to 'help' my working parents. I loathed it. You shoved down Simone de Beauvoir to an 11-year-old, while reading outrageous literature for bedtime stories the likes of Kerouac and Nabokov. As I spent time with you, the dam of knowledge within you came bursting forth flooding my Philistine village. Now that your memory is slowly fading to dust, so too the shackles of your past.

To my brother, the angry and the bold. My advice in life is to take yourself less seriously. That angst feeling you're having right now is not permanent. You never really saw that youthful rage in me because while you were out there blazing, I was keeping the fire within. I remembered that you were there for me when that shyster handphone vendor tried to gouge the price of a DiGi mobile plan. You set him straight alright. "If I ever see you lying again, I will smash your face!" I had to change a few words of course, because mom will be horrified if I quote you directly. You were blunt and borderline barbaric; I'm sure no one will mess with us again. When you finally caved and cried buckets at the parking lot just outside, I hugged you. It's okay to be angry when injustice occurs. That guy would've cheated me out of a few ringgits if you didn't step in.

To my father, the responsible and the hardworking. You took upward mobility and you cranked it a thousand times like a broken slot machine. You were dealt with the worst hand, but you knew there was more to life than rubber plantations and tin mines. Enter computers. Who the hell thought you could make 6 to 7 figures on an appliance that fails to perform tasks successfully? I do wish you spent more time with me though, teaching the ways of a man in a world increasingly unkind to the inexperienced. But I know working is not easy. Those panda eyes and tiger voice that you projected after the daily nine to five clearly painted the labors of a workplace. I do cherish all the memories I had with you though, especially when we played Nintendo together. Perhaps in your twilight years you could share stories of your life. I just hope to god you are as good as Grandpa at telling it.

To my mother, the neat and the orderly. I'll be honest, you were never easy. You were the Confucian ideal of a mother: disciplined, stern, and above all, competitive. I never understood why everything had to go

your way or the wrath of the hand (sometimes a coat hanger; if she's very angry it's the belt). I was so used to following your orders: the only outlook I had of correctness was you. "The heavens are underneath your feet". Those words were held holy, never to be challenged by any offspring. To me, you were infallible and flawless. However, the passage of time is often relentless to youthful naïveté. As my innocence came untangled, my long-held orthodox view of you followed suit. I held you to an impossible standard and felt betrayed when I saw how imperfect you are as a person. And when I have made my peace with it, I'm still unsure whether you have accepted me unconditionally. Maybe you too viewed me the same way. Maybe you were afraid that I am, after all these years, a human.

Finally, to my family, the alone and the populous. We are six lost souls. We are not bounded by ideals, values, or background. The potent mix of fate and blood have forced these six nomads to intersect at the crossroads of life. It wasn't easy to give ourselves to each other though, as loneliness was a state of mind in which we are spared of hurt and loss, but we knew we only have each other. The curse of man is to reject vulnerability, yet at the same time long for it. Our lives have always been a clash between independence and dependence. At the end, the yearning to belong triumphs over the comforts of solitude, and the result is the most sacrosanct union that humans can ever attain. The gift of family.

To Grandpa, you understood the waters more than anyone.

To Grandma, you are now free.

To Brother, be angry. Be bold.

To Father, how am I going to survive this brutal world?

To Mother, I will always keep you in my heart.

To Family, I know it's difficult to reconcile our differences, but I learned that no matter how much I push you away, I can't.