

THE COFFEE LETTERS

A short film

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FADE IN:

INT. JURGEN'S FLAT - DAY

JURGEN, a burly bloke in a woolly bathrobe, sits typing and stirring packet after packet of sugar into a dainty coffee cup. His wall is covered in rejection letters, tacked with increasingly bigger nails and a huge stake.

A letter is slipped under the door.

MARTI (V.O.)

Dear Jürgen, Ever since you won the blue ribbon in Mrs. Aarnio's essay competition, your future as one of Europe's brightest literary lights was foretold. The nuance with which you captured your family's off-season, low-budget holiday in the Archipelago had us enthralled.

Jürgen gets up to retrieve the letter, knocking his coffee all over his messy desk.

INT. MARTI'S OFFICE - DAY

MARTI, long-suffering agent with a soft spot for her serially underperforming client, reads her termination letter to him.

MARTI

As the years rolled on and blue ribbons turned into rejection letters and praise turned into pitiful reviews, in my eyes you remained a champion.

INT. JURGEN'S FLAT - DAY

Jürgen sits down with a thud, reading the letter out loud.

JURGEN

Have I ever misled you? Lied? Inflated projections? Increased my cut, even as your sales faltered? Perhaps, but you have always been my favourite author, Jürgen.

He's struck dumb, can't believe what he's reading.

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MARTI (V.O.)

That is why this is so hard.

The letter falls. Jürgen starts typing, maniacally. The typing fades. The sound of a moving train gets louder.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

ELAINE and CHERYL, tipsy, middle-aged Kent housewives, sit side by side, read the letter, howling with laughter.

ELAINE

Dear Seat 38, Coach J, Two months ago, like clockwork, I boarded the 17:30 to Bristol Temple Meads from London Paddington for my daily commute home and my life was forever changed.

CHERYL

I've travelled this route 370 times in the past 10 years and have never encountered you. By my calculations, on a scale of "I will find you again" to "You're lost to me forever," there is...

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

GRETA, a business woman chews gum annoyingly as she works.

GRETA

a) a 1 in 370 chance, roughly a point twenty seven percent likelihood, of us crossing paths on any given journey

She blows a bubble and pops it loudly.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

ROBERT, a hipster works on his laptop. He looks at Greta annoyed. He scans the letter without interest.

ROBERT

b) a 12% probability that you are a regular on this train but usually sit elsewhere.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Cheryl has passed out. Elaine hides the letter in her purse.

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ELAINE

c) a 38% chance that you travel similar routes but at different times.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

A POSH GENTLEMAN draws penises on the letter in red marker.

POSH GENTLEMAN

...and d) a 19% chance that there was no pattern at all and our fleeting encounter was fated to be.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

ALLY (18, looks younger), reads the letter, mesmerized.

ALLY

(sighing romantically)  
Though the odds are not in my favor, that single moment was all I needed to know ....

LEO (19), reaches over the seat and grabs the letter.

LEO

that I had found my one true love.

ALLY

(swooning)  
You only glanced my way a few times but I felt an electrifying current.

LEO

(gagging)  
.....each time our eyes locked.

Leo balls the letter up and chucks it.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Korean tourist, DO-YOON, picks up the crumpled letter. He tries to make sense of it. He looks very confused.

DO-YOON

Are you a Kylie fan? Her song Love at First Sight played like an anthem in my head when I first saw you.

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He gives up and holds up his phone, SIRI translates.

SIRI-LIKE VOICE (SUBTITLE)  
(in Korean. English  
subtitles)

My heart thumped along to the beat.  
After you disembarked at Chippenham  
I dove into your seat... drank the  
dregs of your discarded coffee (you  
really shouldn't litter, darling)

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

ANNETTA dressed to the nines, fidgets in her seat. She douses herself in perfume and applies bright lipstick. She's read the letter so many times it has faded and has been folded over and over.

ANNETTA  
...and inhaled your scent, an  
intoxicating combination of lemon  
rind, patchouli and perspiration,  
that ignited my passion.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

DARIUS, in his Sunday best, waits on the platform. He checks his watch obsessively. He holds a beat-up paper coffee cup with lipstick stains and a chewed-up straw.

DARIUS  
For weeks I searched, guarding your  
cup as my talisman. I rode my usual  
route, plus the 7:43 and the 18:01.  
I quit my job. I'll have you know  
that scouring train carriages for  
one's true love is time consuming.  
I tried 'Rush Hour Crush'. Now I am  
resorting to more inspired (or  
desperate) measures, depending on  
your point of view.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

JASMINE, 70s, sits on a bench munching on cheese & onion crisps. She steps on something. It's the letter. She bends over to read it.

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JASMINE

If you are reading this and you are not of average height, with fair hair that is in desperate need of a touch up at the roots, and are not partial to cheese & onion crisps, please put this letter back where you found it. Photocopies are expensive and not environmentally friendly.

She stops chewing and looks up, creeped out. Is the letter addressed to her?

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

Annetta nervously steps off the train and looks around.

DARIUS (V.O.)

If it is you my darling, do not tarry. I set up an email address, LoveTrain3738@hotmail.com, because there are a lot of weirdos out there and you can never be too careful about sharing your personal information.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

People leave the train and Darius bends to pick up the defaced letters that are littering the platform. He is on one knee. Annetta bumps into him. Ta Da true love!

DARIUS

Our future awaits. Yours, the besotted bloke in Seat 37.

The frame shrinks to a circular spotlight as Darius and Annetta embrace.

Sound of furious typing on a keyboard.

INT. JURGEN'S FLAT - DAY

Jürgen pulls finished pages from his typewriter.

MARTI (V.O.)

For decades, I flogged your work to publishers far and wide. I have nourished you through vomit drafts and writer's block.

(MORE)

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MARTI (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I convinced sub-editors not to throttle you on account of your deplorable grammar. I tried to save you, time and time again, from career annihilation. To clear this up once and for all, saccharine romantic comedies rehashing boy meets girl tropes had their moment, Jürgen, and it's long gone.

Jürgen tears up the letter theatrically and puts his head in his hands.

MARTI (V.O.)

And before you even broach it. No Jürgen, no one is interested in your memoirs. You're a hermit. You live in a desolate apartment, bathe weekly, and eschew human interaction for an infrequent cuddle with a feral feline. This is NOT bestseller material.

A CAT meows softly. Jürgen looks up.

INT. SANDRA FLAT SITTING ROOM - DAY

SANDRA sits on a sofa stroking her CAT and voice-notes a letter into her phone.

SANDRA

Dear Pete, It is with a heavy heart that ...blah, blah, blah. No one wants a Dear John Letter but ... I choose Constance. You're a good man Pete, but Constance makes for a better companion in many ways.

She puts men's things into a box: cap, mug, t-shirt.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

It's not because you clip your toenails in the living room or because you never met a kitchen cupboard door that you could close. Nor is it because you put the juice back in the fridge when there is only one sip left. I could get past so many of your irritating habits but the truth is, Constance fulfills more of my needs.

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EXT. STREET - DAY

PETE sits on the sidewalk going through the box, sniveling, sneezing and being miserable.

SANDRA (V.O.)

Constance is low-maintenance, inexpensive to feed, she's independent and she does not need constant reminding to tend to her personal hygiene. She also purrs in her sleep which I much prefer to your nocturnal flatulence.

INT. SANDRA FLAT SITTING ROOM - DAY

Sandra continues packing the box with allergy medicine, tissues, and antihistamines.

SANDRA

You pride yourself on being an expert handyman. I'll allow that you're competent with a wrench BUT you make a huge mess and I get stuck spending a fortune on tools that you'll only use once.

She comes across a pair of socks. She sniffs them and gags, then giggles and chastises the CAT.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

Whereas only last week, Constance had a cathartic conversation with Granny Millie's ghost and like magic, the annoying rattle in the pipes disappeared...and it didn't cost a penny!

EXT. STREET - DAY

Pete cries and snots pulling out more stuff from the box.

SANDRA (V.O.)

In evolutionary terms, Constance has you beat by miles, Pete. You can't even intuit when the loo needs a flush.

Pete finds a cereal box with scratches on it. He tips it into his hand. Cat litter falls out.

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SANDRA (V.O.)

Constance, on the other hand, can see in the dark, can sense when my IBS flares up and is so finely attuned to me she knows when I need to be left alone. A skill you've struggled to master despite my direct verbal clues.

INT. SANDRA FLAT SITTING ROOM - DAY

Close up of the cat looking satisfied as Sandra strokes it.

SANDRA

If this were a proper feud, Darwin style... only the fit survive... it would not end in your favour, Pete.

Sandra dumps the box outside and slams the door shut with a sigh of satisfaction.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Pete sits on the sidewalk crying.

SANDRA (V.O.)

And you would have been vanquished by a mildly lethargic, 6.4kg blue-cream lynx, long-haired Ragdoll mix.

A ball of yarn unravels and hits Pete's foot. He sneezes.

INT. JURGEN'S FLAT - DAY

A cat pads over Jürgen's keyboard.

MARTI (V.O.)

The long and short of it is that there's new blood out there. They're hungry and they're good!

Defeated, Jürgen takes down the rejection letters.

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INT. MARTI'S OFFICE - DAY

MARTI

You had your moment. Put down your quill. Pull the ribbon from your typewriter. Snap the lead from your pencil. Your latest draft is a dud. Come to think of it, so were the earlier five.

INT. JURGEN'S FLAT - DAY

Jürgen puts his pages into a bin and scrounges for matches.

MARTI (V.O.)

Sit this one out, mate. And the next one. And maybe all the rest after that.

He finds a lighter. It doesn't work.

JURGEN

(seething)

Might I propose that now may be an opportune time to take to the internet? Lick your wounds. Bemoan your fate. Shake your pen at those who have succeeded where you have failed. Be bold. Be bitter...and post about it daily on the internet. The algorithm likes that, I'm told.

He finds matches and struggles to get them to light.

MARTI (V.O.)

On a lighter note, it is my sworn duty as your agent to keep your back catalogue selling briskly.

Finally, a match lights but has Marti just thrown him a lifeline? Jürgen goes to blow out the match but the rest of the letter dashes all his hopes.

MARTI (V.O.)

On the off chance you become the next internet sensation and your followers increase beyond the four members of your immediate family, I have prepared the attached anthology of your abridged works.

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He drops the match into the bin and watches as his life's work goes up in smoke.

MARTI (V.O.)

It's a slim volume and I've yet to find someone willing to write the introduction but I remain optimistic...and will of course be taking my usual 20%.

FADE OUT:

**THE END.**