

# A LETTER TO MY GRANDSON

By Michael Pearcy

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All the named characters except Jessica should age through the play; Amy less so. This will be a challenge for make-up and wardrobe.

Jessica Fairweather (seventy plus years, walks with a stick and has obvious arthritis – knees, hips.)

Jess (the younger Jessica– character ages.)

Conrad Telfer (husband to Jessica/Jess – character ages)

Thomas (their son – character ages)

Laila (their daughter – character ages)

Amy (becomes Thomas's wife – aged late twenties.)

Two dignitaries at the convocation

A group of extras is required for the student audience in the union bar and the audience at the convocation.

The setting may be simple and minimal but props are needed. The only constant setting is for the main room at Brindiwell Farm and the cot which is where Jessica is when the play opens. A versatile area is needed to represent a student bar, a convocation hall and a small London flat. A second cot is required in the London flat. Perhaps some of the furniture could be made to look different when it is rotated or inverted.

The action is continuous.

Jessica is on stage at all times, sometimes separate, sometimes observing and occasionally moving with the family.

The family give human scale to the world events that Jessica outlines in her letter.

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***Jessica is on stage writing at a table in Brindiwell Farm circa 2053. It is a hot, sweaty, tropical night with the buzz of cicadas. Any sound used to make the effect should be faded before Jess enters. There is a cot and a baby cries in its sleep. Jessica goes to the cot and rocks it gently.***

Jessica        Shush. That's the way. Settle down sweetie. I know, you're hot aren't you? Poor little thing.

***The baby settles and Jessica returns to the table. Instead of sitting she picks up her papers and goes back to the cot. She looks down at the baby and is obviously moved. She studies her papers for a moment. She begins reading to the baby from the papers but this shifts into addressing the audience...***

Jessica        While I write this I've been watching you asleep in your cot just a few days after you were born. I want to fill my old memory with as much of your newness as I possibly can – your smell, the little snuffles you make in your sleep and your tiny, urgent cries of hunger. I am desperate for every part of you but being so close makes what I must do today almost unbearable – I must leave you.

You will never have your own real memories of your grandparents but I want you to know what sort of people we were - your granddad and me - and to have something more personal from us, even if it is only this letter and a few photographs.

Your life will not be easy and I would give anything to change that fact. When you are older I'm sure you'll rage against people like me who knew what should have been done but failed. Failed you and all our children. When I was growing up, the tragedy of the world you will inherit was already written, but for us the world was a beautiful place and we wanted to keep it that way.

***During the following speech, Jess, as a student enters on another area of the stage - student union bar. She erects some home made anti-war campaign posters (eg 'Not In My Name' and 'Save The People of Iraq') as the backdrop to a speaking platform at a political meeting. Conrad and others enter to form Jess's audience.***

Jessica        My parents had lived in a world divided into two armed camps and they suffered a real fear that the world could be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust. When the Russian empire collapsed it must have felt like a reprieve, a step back from catastrophe.

But the world was not at peace. The signposts to another, bigger catastrophe were there but we couldn't see them. Governments and business carried on in the old ways – giving us what we thought we wanted – and there were still injustices for ordinary people to struggle against: Apartheid collapsed under the weight of world opinion but in the year Nelson Mandela was released, the Allies went to war against Iraq. This seemed like a war of liberation – freeing tiny Kuwait from oppression - but in time it became known as the start of the oil wars – which seemed to last for ever.

Jess            *(The student audience reacts.)* ...all she wanted to do was read out the names of 97 British Soldiers who died in Iraq. That woman's name was Maya Evans. And what do you think she was arrested for? Standing near Downing Street! Can you believe it? We have a law that says you cannot stand still in the street near our own Parliament. And they say this is not a Police state.

Conrad        ***(To one of the crowd amid applause from Jess's audience.)***  
Who's that girl doing the talking?

Jess            ...They're not really interested in the freedom for ordinary people in Afghanistan or Iraq. They are interested in oil. But not in my name.  
*(Now shouting)* Not In My Name! *(The student audience join in.)*  
Not In My Name! Not In My Name!

***During the following Jess leaves the platform and is greeted and congratulated by her student audience.***

Jessica        We were opposed to the West trying to steal oil from the rest of the world to feed our greed. It was a worthy cause but only a symptom of the bigger sickness.

Some of what I write will seem like I'm making excuses and some will read like an apology - and it is. Because we let you down.

Conrad        **(To Jess.)** Quite a speech.

Jess            Thanks.

Jessica        At university I was a bit outspoken. It attracted a lot of attention - which I enjoyed – especially when it came from the likes of Conrad, your grandfather. Something about him caught my eye and straight away we clicked.

***Jess and Conrad have moved close to each other. Suddenly they are in a passionate snog as Jessica says ‘clicked’.***

Jessica        ***(Walking around Jess and Conrad as they embrace like a ghost from the future.)*** Conrad Telfer met Jessica Fairweather in a sweaty student bar. I was just twenty-one and Conrad was twenty-two. Within a few months we were totally committed to each other and that has lasted all these years. Until this year.

***Jess and Conrad end the embrace and settle at a table in the union bar.***

Jess            They’re trying to make us believe we’re not in a real war but we’ve got soldiers in two foreign countries fighting and dying so what is it if it isn’t a war? And civilians are dying – in The Twin Towers, The Madrid bombing, the London underground bombings.

***Jess and Conrad don gowns for their degree ceremony. The platform in the student bar is now the presentation platform for the degree ceremony. There are two dignitaries from the university. The union bar crowd become the convocation audience.***

Jessica        We tried to speak up for the millions who were suffering because of our greed. But we were only just beginning to realise that our love affair with oil and gas was more than just a dangerous addiction.

***Jess goes forward to receive her degree:***

Jess            ***(She receives her degree and raises her right arm.)*** Peace for the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan.

***Consternation amongst the dignitaries and cheers from the audience.***

***Exit Jess and Conrad, dignitaries and audience cheering Jess.***

Jessica        Then came the Allied invasion of Syria and then the Channel tunnel bombing, the Gulf Oil attack, the Milan bombing – the list was endless.

Governments across the globe talked about global warming but they all lacked the courage to solve it. While airports expanded and the sky filled up with airliners all we were asked to do was give up using carrier bags for our shopping and do our washing at 30 degrees. And the people squabbled about so called unfair greenhouse taxes and accused other nations of causing the problem.

***Enter Jess carrying a new-born baby wrapped in a shawl.***

***Enter Conrad with a suitcase. We are in their home, a flat in London:***

Conrad      Welcome to our humble home young thing-a-me-jig.

Jess          Don't call him that. What's he doing calling you silly names?

Conrad      Okay, Rooney, that's not a silly name.

Jess          I need to think about that.

Conrad      In the hospital you agreed. Rooney, he's a legend, a God of football. And he's the best manager England ever had.

Jess          I was in agony. I was giving birth in case you didn't notice.

Conrad      It's got a ring to it: Rooney Telfer.

Jess          ***(Playfully but firmly.)*** No.

Jessica      Thomas, your father was born while we were living in London struggling like everyone else to make a decent foundation for our children's future.

***Jess puts the baby in a cot.***

***Exit Jess and Conrad.***

The politicians began openly admitting that the wars were about oil. They gave us a stark choice: if you want to keep the goods and life style that comes on the back of oil – support the war. ***(Pause)*** The human race does not deserve this beautiful planet, maybe it will only be able to heal itself when we are all gone.

***We are back in the London Flat.***

**Enter Jess with another new born baby but this time in a pink shawl.  
Conrad still has the suitcase.**

Conrad Nigella, Sue, Briony. Why not Briony.

Jess There's plenty of time, don't rush me.

Conrad It's my turn to name the baby, why not Briony? I wasn't allowed Rooney.

Jess I'm so glad there are no women playing for United.

Nell That's where you're wrong – United has a women's team. Roonia. Roonella. Roonalee.

Jessica Laila, your aunt, was born two years later. I especially need to tell you about my beautiful Laila because she died before her time – she was so brave, so determined. Laila was a born academic – hard working and quick. Thomas was good with his hands and practical and far from stupid but not academic. In the future we would rely so much on Thomas for survival. I was proud of Laila but I wish with all my heart that she had not followed the path she set herself.

**Time has passed. Jess is reading in the London Flat. Twenty year old Thomas is listening to music on headphones from an iPod.**

**Laila, now late teens enters with a bunch of four bananas.**

Laila Bananas! Look at them, real bananas.

Jess What a girl! Thomas! Thomas, look at what Laila has.

Laila The guy would only let me have four but they're real – look at them. Smell them!

Thomas **(Surfacing from the iPod pool.)** What you got sis? **(Laila waves the bananas under his nose.)** They're a bit manky.

Laila Well don't bloody have one then.

Thomas Don't say that. Come on, share them out.

Jess They must have cost a fortune.

**Enter Conrad.**

Conrad        What did?

Jess and Laila together:    Bananas.

Conrad        Bloody hell. I haven't seen a banana since... for years. Where did you get them?

Laila         I cannot reveal my source of supply.

Thomas        (*Teasing.*) Black market was it? Thought you didn't agree with the black economy.

Laila         I can find a needy child to eat yours if you prefer.

Thomas        I didn't say I wouldn't eat one – just to help you out.

***With great ceremony Laila hands out the four bananas. They all carefully peel them and then in unison take a bite and chew. Silence. Ecstasy. Mmmm.***

Conrad        Oh God that's good. Better than sex.

Jess         Conrad, do you mind.

Thomas        **(Throwing his banana skin in the waste bin.)** Thanks Laila, nice one. **(He returns to his headphones.)**

***The others finish their fruit and drop the skins in the bin. Laila is the last.***

Laila         **(She holds the bin up to her nose and breathes deeply.)** What a wonderful smell. **(She notices one of the bananas has not been finished. She holds it up.)** Whose is this. Own up.

Jess         Not mine.

Conrad        Are you joking?

Laila         **(She pulls Thomas's headphones off.)** Was this you? Did you throw away half your banana?

Thomas        Sorry, but you know... Me and fruit.

Laila         You fucking bastard. **(She grinds the banana into his face.)**

Thomas        All right I'll pay for it.

Laila ***(She hurls his headphones away and stands angrily in front of him.)*** That banana came half way round the world and you throw it in the fucking bin.

Jess Laila, love. Come on, he didn't think.

Laila How could he do that? Doesn't he realise what's going on in the world?

Thomas I said I'd give you the fucking money.

Laila It's not the money. Don't you get it - we shouldn't be having stuff shipped here like this. It does too much damage. I wish I'd not gone in the bloody shop now. I feel like a traitor.

Jessica The world had a love affair with oil and gas. They planned to use tidal energy and massive wind farms were proposed but industry did not have the capacity to make the turbines at the same time as the tanks and guns needed for war – and of course the tanks won. In the end it was not a lack of oil that brought the world to its knees but simply the fear of oil's end, and greed.

***In the flat, another day with Conrad, Jess, Laila and Thomas.***

Thomas You moan on about petrol rationing but when it wasn't rationed you couldn't afford it anyway.

Laila He's right dad, every time it went up you complained.

Conrad But it's a stupid way to do it – they should let you carry the ration over from week to week, so you could buy as much as possible when you can afford it.

Laila That defeats the object – they don't want you to have it at all.

Jess I remember the old days when London was full of cars. Now it's just busses and delivery lorries.

Conrad I've got a lot of money tied up in that car but I can't afford to run it and nobody wants to buy it.

Thomas Could I have it to live in? Then I could afford to leave home.

Jess Don't think you're going park your new home outside the front door and still pop in for your meals and your washing. ***(Laughter)***



Laila On the subject of leaving home...

Thomas It was my idea first.

Jess You two will have to toss for it.

Laila This is serious. Well not ever so serious but... I've decided that I do want to go to university.

Jess Oh Laila, that's great.

Conrad Well done. And...

***Thomas is noticeably quiet.***

Laila And... medicine.

Thomas Brilliant.

Jess That's excellent, you'll be the best doctor ever.

Laila No pressure on me then. ***(She produces a prospectus which they fuss over.)*** Have a look at this.

***Thomas leaves the group, Conrad notices and follows.***

Conrad Good news about Laila.

Thomas Yeah brilliant for her.

Conrad You don't mind?

Thomas No, why should I?

Conrad If you'd really wanted to go we would have managed.

Thomas I know that. I don't mind. You know me, if I'd gone to uni I'd have just pissed my time away. That's the way I am. It's okay.

***Thomas joins Laila and Jess.***

Thomas Let's have a look, see if my brainy little sister can manage without my help.

Laila ***(Laila hugs Thomas.)*** Oh thanks bruv.

Jessica        There were price rises for everything that was made from oil or used it as fuel. The rise in transport costs pushed up the price of food. Life in the cities was getting harder and harder.

***We are with the family in the flat again.***

Conrad        ***(Addressing the other three.)*** So, all those in favour... ***(He holds his hand up but the others do not join in.)***

Laila         Don't be daft dad.

Thomas        What would I do? It's all right for Laila, she's at university and then she'll be off doctoring somewhere. What will I do living in a field surrounded by cows? All my friends are in London, and my job's here.

Conrad        You know what's happening – anybody who can has left the city already.

Jess         But if you decide to stop in London we will make it work for you.

***Exit all during Jessica's next lines.***

Jessica        By the time we'd sold everything we had we were able to buy a run-down small-holding in Devon – Brindiwell Farm. The plan was to get away from the city and be self-sufficient and perhaps sell some produce. It was hard, much harder than any of us expected. But at the time we never fully realised how important those few acres would be to our family's future.

***You have read 10 pages of a twenty page script. If you want to read the whole play please contact the writer.***