



MISS FORGET
MENOT

By: Eleni Sakka

Dear Mr Grantham,

I am writing to you while my heart trembles with trepidation, and the tingle I feel on the tips of my fingers makes the writing of this letter even more anxious, that I chose consciously to write in half-darkness; only to hide my own words from my eyes, to avoid the pen to be stopped by my embarrassment, because you have to believe me. This is the first and only time I am writing such a letter to a man, and even more so to someone I may not know in person; and yet, I do know you... on that stage.

Yes, Mr. Grantham... Despite an introduction that in itself was dressed with ambition and even dare I say, hope to sound intriguing, to hold your attention enough, I do have to come clean and say, I am a humble fan of you, your acting, your character... the way you carry yourself on and off stage. Oh!! Mr. Grantham, I do confess my secret pleasure and sin, all wrapped in one, I do scan the gossip columns for your very scarce news.

So there, I stand in front of you naked... and I won't ask to forgive the pun... It was intended. I am relieved I cannot see my face under the faint light of the candle, for it is warmer than the neighbouring flame. But I do not wish to bring you in an awkward position, imagining this girl in nude, writing to you... It was my heart I decided to strip in those lines, with poor words and with nervous determination to make myself known as someone who is simply besotted with you, from the moment I laid eyes on you, on King Lear in Chicago. Since then, I do follow your career with a passion that grows like the darling buds of May under the ripening breath of a summer sun...

I won't hold you anymore. I may over expose my poor heart in front of those piercing eyes of yours and my modesty over my nakedness makes my hand to freeze on the page. I just came

back from your Hamlet performance, and I must be drunk still by the passion your Hamlet fed my soul. I may not sleep tonight.

Till next time...

Forever Yours

Miss Forget-me-not

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It had started with this letter. A page long, no more.

Words...

Laid down on an elegant correspondence paper. Like a woman who lays down on bed waiting for her lover.

Anticipating...

For him to breathe life into those words when he would read them. Wake them up, turn them real. As real as they were when she felt when she wrote them. He would caress them with his velvet tongue, make them vibrate by the warm timbre of his voice.

All the admiration, the adoration, for him. The actor, the man. She was besotted by him; she would not hide it. On the contrary. Those letters she wrote to him, always under a barely there light, because as she had said, they were a celebration of her passion for him; so much so, she was too embarrassed to see under the bright light her words spread with such audacity on the page...

Terence Grantham was, to say the least, intrigued. She had started writing to him, after the premiere of Hamlet in New York, with him on the main role. Since then, after every performance of his, a new letter was waiting for him in the dressing room.

The same crisp envelope, the paper smelling of narcissus and Amalfi lemons, "My Sin" by Lanvin. He loved her smell. She always enclosed a dry forget-me-not flower inside the folded letter.

Miss Forget me not...

Soon Terry could not escape the question that run rounds in his mind.

Who was that woman...? Who was Miss Forget me not?

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April 1921 - Boston, Massachusetts

He opened the door of his dressing room. After three gruelling hours on the stage, he is keen for some quiet time. Behind him, he can hear the humdrum of the theatre slowly emptying. He has promised Langhorn to get dressed and join him for a small get-together at the hotel. There will be some theatre patrons, perhaps a couple of journalists, upstanding citizens of Boston, fans... the usual suspects for a night that can only spell boredom on his part.

He should not complain. He had become better at facing those things. He would never like them though. It was the one part of the acting package, he tried hard to get used to. In the end, he had come in an agreement with Robert Hawthorn, his boss, director and manager of their theatre troupe. Robert gave him an hour at most to get ready. Compose himself, bring himself

back to reality. He needed time to decompose. Like the deep-sea divers, reaching the surface of the ocean from the depths they had dived, fishing for seawater pearls. Going up too fast and they risked their sanity and life.

It had been the same for Terry. Every time he entered a role, he got lost deep inside the character. For three or so hours, Terence Grantham was only a name, while Hamlet had acquired flesh and bones, residing under his skin. He had to take time and let the character slowly leave his mind and soul. Let the tempest die down inside. His life as such may not have been in real threat, but his mind could.

The clothes on him had been soaked with his sweat. His hair was sticking wet on the nape of his neck. Before he even flicked the light switch of the room, the smell of roses hit his nostrils. Light flooded the room. Big bouquets of red roses were left on every surface. His dressing table, the armchair, the side table. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Pushed the door behind him, shut. Let his back rest on it for a moment.

He walked towards the flower bouquet that was closer to him. Picked up the card.

"Congratulations on a stellar performance"

He kept picking up the cards from the bouquets that were lined next to each other.

"Magnificent Hamlet!"

"Tremendous performance"

The Mayor of Boston, surnames of rich families he had no idea who they were, newspaper titles, Boston Herald. He took another deep breath. The adoration and the accolades still felt surreal to him, even after being years in the theatre company. Not that he didn't feel he was

good enough an actor. He had strived and worked his arse off to actually reach to that point of feeling confident to step inside the shoes of a character such as Hamlet. To have the emotional depth and the humility to perform such an iconic role. He felt content with what he had achieved and yet he was still hungry for more.

The bottle of the single malt whiskey he had asked to have in the dressing room was on the table. He opened it and poured himself a shot. He drunk it straight away. Poured himself a second one. The sweet heat of the alcohol in his throat made his blue green eyes sparkle. He sat down. Lit himself a cigarette, took a couple of drags and let it standing on the ashtray while he lay a thick layer of cold cream on his face. Massaged it for a minute or two to break the make-up, all the while staring at himself at the big mirror in front of him. Picked up a squared soft face towel and started wiping his face clean. The mask was coming off, revealing Terry underneath, coming back to the surface.

That was his routine. Every time.

He kept the same routine religiously, after every performance. An hour when he would speak to no one while he was getting out of character and stepping back into feeling like himself again. There had been nights when he would have preferred to have stayed into character and not return to feeling like himself. But those nights were very few and far in between by now, whereas they were more common in the past.

He took another couple of drags from the half-spent cigarette which was still burning at the ashtray and crashed it before he got up. Behind the fold out screen, a blue suit was kept on hangers, ready for him to change into. He had begun to get undressed when he heard a knock at the door. He asked for whomever he was to come in.

The door opened.

"Mr Grantham."

It was the box office clerk of the theatre. He came in, holding a letter.

"Someone left a letter with a small token for you at the box office, sir."

Terry showed up from behind the screen, buttoning up the clean, white shirt he had just put on. The man handed him a folded piece of paper, tied with a piece of blue silk ribbon and a small bunch of little blue flowers held between the paper and the ribbon. He recognised them, immediately.

Terry thanked the theatre concierge, before he left him alone once again.

"I'll be damned." Terry uttered quietly. Took the tiny bouquet of forget me nots out and unfolded the paper.

Miss Forget me not...

Soon after he started reading.

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*Dear Mr Grantham,*

*I find you once more, with my beloved Stratford Theatre, "your" troupe, in Boston. May I say how utterly delighted I am to the decision of taking Hamlet on the road?! Of course, I realise by now, you are an established actor of the Legitimate Theatre in Broadway; not necessarily the type of theatre that tours the United States, but just to the thought of giving us mere mortals, the opportunity to come and watch your unforgettable performance as Hamlet...*

*Truly, this is a present which fills me with deep joy. I have to count my blessings for my family duties allow me to travel frequently.*

*Aside my obvious excitement of watching you on the stage once more... by the time you sir, will be reading this - how can the prospect of you reading my letters fill me with such electrifying nervousness and dread at the same time? - I will have returned to my hotel, once more in a state of complete enchantment.*

*But I want to confess... I debated long and hard with myself whether I should write to you once more. Writing to you just once, as I already have done, could easily be considered a simple folly labelled as cute... funny even! An indulgence perhaps, of a young woman who loves daydreaming; she is indeed a hopeless romantic. I could even risk the possible frowning from your part. I can easily imagine your reaction if you did indeed read my first letter.*

*Having followed you, as much as I am permitted to do so, I have come to the conclusion that you must be a man of a serious composure. Someone for whom everything in life has a weight and a meaning, and you may look down upon frivolities and female capriciousness. Certainly not approving intimate letters from fans of a certain kind, with their heads in the clouds perhaps who take liberties such as the ones I took writing bold and inappropriate words...*

*I do admit, my impulsive nature sometimes is too much even for my loved ones to handle. But I digress. After much deliberation, I let myself succumb to the temptation to write a second time to you. Please let me explain, Mr Grantham, before you raise your brows in contempt. Knowing you may read my thoughts and feelings about you, possesses a power that has almost supernatural strength, impossible to resist, impossible to ignore, impossible to stop...*

*Becoming the fool, I fear I am becoming in front of you. How to keep my dignity...*



*Refuse the fact that I am drawn to you so very much, I feel I am turning into two people, constantly quarrelling. When my mind demands of me to stop and my heart rebels. My very own personal story of Nurse Jekyll and Miss Hyde.*

*Please laugh sir! I beg of you!*

*I need to think of you laughing at that point of my letter. Only thus I can bear thinking of what I do right now, at least has an entertaining value for you.*

*I will stop here. The remaining thoughts about you, I will whisper to the wind. Allow him to caress my scarlet cheeks when I confide to him words about you, I don't dare write. Let him decide whether or not he carries them to you, perhaps let you know of them, inside a dream of yours...*

*Before I put a full stop and leave for the theatre, I want to say something, get it out of my chest. Writing those letters to you... I do not write them expecting anything back. I need to be clear. Even if the choice of correspondence paper may seem as an invitation. Yes, I do stay at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel but forgive me for having not taken with me my personal stationery for my correspondence. Best of luck for tonight although I know you do not need it.*

*Forever Yours*

*Miss Forget-me-not*

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The moment, Terry finished reading the letter, he sprung up from his chair. Opened the door of the room and rushed out, in search of the theatre concierge who had brought him the letter. It didn't take him long to find him.

"Can you tell me, please." He said to the man who already was startled, sensing Terry's urgency. "That letter you brought to me..."

The man nodded.

"Did the person who brought it, give it to you personally?" He asked him.

"Yes, Mr Grantham."

"It was a-"

"A lady, indeed, she was, Mr Grantham." The man admitted before Terry had time to finish his sentence.

"What did she look like?" Terry asked him.

The man's look changed, as he scratched his head, looking uncertain of what to answer. "I cannot really say..."

"Why not?!" Terry replied.

"Because I didn't see much of her..." The man replied. And he continued, before Terry taking the role of the interrogator. "She wore dark glasses and a silk scarf on her head, Mr. Grantham."

Terry pressed his lips. The plot indeed was thickening with this woman. Having written him a first letter, he certainly had drawn his attention. The second letter came and somewhat she caught him completely unprepared for a continuation.

"She was of short stature if that helps, rather a petite woman, elegantly dressed I may add and she had a quite polite, soft voice. That is all I can tell you, Mr Grantham."

"Freckles...??" Terry asked out of the blue.

"Hm?!" The man's eyes widened in response to the unexpected question.

"Did the woman had freckles?!" Terry rephrased his question, all the while starting to feel impatient.

"I don't think she did, sir..." The concierge replied. "Although it was night time... by the time she came... because she watched the play too. Can I go now... if you don't have any other questions?" The man completed his confession. He wanted to complete his job and finish for the night.

Terry realised he kept this man, unnecessarily too. What did he care, what that strange woman looked like?

"OK, well! Thank you for the information." He said and turned his back on the man who had been left there completely dumbfounded, watching Terry walking away, half dressed for the after-play event while still wearing Hamlet's pants and tights.

Of course, the famous actor could have cared less, walking around still wearing Hamlet's costume, even if partially. What overtook his mind was the question about the identity of the woman behind the nickname.

Miss Forget me not.

He could swear the tone in her letters sounded familiar to him and then it was not...

She was quite frank and forward... and sexy, and alluring, all the while sounding so innocent at the same time. Was she playing with him? Why did Norah have come to his mind? She could have anyone... He had to get a grip.

Perhaps it was his imagination that was playing tricks on him... Like the man who walks in the desert in desperate need of water and imagines lakes of crystal blue, clear water where there is nothing but sand dunes.

She had written this letter on the hotel correspondence paper...

Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel

He walked back to his dressing room to finish up getting dressed. Then it suddenly dawned on him and that sudden realisation felt like a lightning having struck him, making the hairs stand at the back of his neck. The after-play event... was at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel!

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As an actor, Terence Grantham was someone who was not sort of fans and admirers. From both sexes. And it wasn't only his onstage presence which drew people to the theatre to come and see him. His obvious talent was mesmerising for everyone who would witness it; for the spectator, to be lost into the roles Terence portrayed, was something everyone sought from him, and Terence achieved such a formidable task with an unparalleled ease.

With that same ease he wore the skin of the most glorious of Kings and the lowest of paupers. He let insanity light up his stare. Make his voice sound as sweet and dangerous as was the serpent that seduced Eve out of the Garden of Eden and yet, he fought with the noblest of hearts, the bravest of bodies and died a thousand deaths, each time leaving his last breath on the wooden planks of the stage. Without fail, there was not a dry eye in the auditorium.

Terence Grantham knew how to keep his audience suspended between reality and fantasy, the same space he inhabited willingly since...

It was already five years since the moment his life had broken into two.

He alone was privy to that distinction. No one else from his background knew. Perhaps his mother... but whatever she knew about the matters of the heart, and especially when that particular heart was her son's, with whom her relationship was best described as sensitive, bordering on fragile, whatever she knew she kept for herself. There had been no talk between them. He had not allowed it.

Five years ago, it was as if an axe had fallen on his life - better said it had fallen on his love life and had created two distinct eras.

*The life he knew with her... and... The life he got to know without her...*

Five years ago, he would have thought it impossible.

Impossible to live away from her.

To be happy away from her.

Hard to accept the fact that even if their love for each other had not died, they could not make it work equally so.

A third person had come between them. A young woman for whom, being next to Terence, sharing a life with him, meant the difference between life and death for her. And if the pursuit of happiness is what counts in life, the time had come when he and the woman he truly loved, both had understood they had a much better chance for making each other happy by being apart than being together.

It took him a lot of time and pain to persuade himself, they had done the right thing by breaking up. Terence Grantham, as the tabloids had said:

*"Became engaged with Stella Montague "*

*Stella Montague.*

The third person. The woman who had wedged herself between Terence Grantham and Norah Fitzgerald and had subsequently drove them to break their relationship, as she happened to save Terence's life from grave injury or even death when while both of them had left the theatre and were to cross a busy street on their way to a dinner organised by the manager of their acting company, they had not taken notice of a car that was coming towards their way.

She pushed Terry out of the way in a flash of a moment, the exact right moment. But it was too late for her, having wasted time, she had let herself the only one who was hit by the car. She had escaped death, but became an invalid as a consequence. Paralytic from the waist down. Lost her independence as a person, lost her future as a wife and a mother, lost her career as a promising actress. Not only that.

Life to her had no meaning if "Terry could not be in it." She had said. That deep and absolute was her obsession with the young actor, only a hopeful talent by then.

Both Terence and Norah obliged. It didn't take them long to realise that they could not have made each other happy by staying together in the expense of this young woman who was laying in the hospital bed.

Little by little, step by step, he managed to make it work. Live without her. He may had thought it impossible at the beginning; in the end, after surpassing deep emotional turmoil, he had achieved some level of happiness, with Stella as his fiancé.

He found it true of what they said; happiness may come in all shapes and forms.

Even though his happiness did not come from having not stopped loving the woman who had left from his life, he had found completeness nevertheless, from serving the theatre, being as fine an actor as one could be. At the same time, while he helped Stella, the woman whom he had accepted her to be by his side, to achieve as many of her dreams possible, despite her misfortune, gave him some kind of a worthy purpose.

She would have been proud of him... The thought of making himself worthy in front of the eyes of Norah, kept him going. He hadn't always been like that... The young delinquent boy he used to be, hurting people before being hurt himself.

Thus, five years had passed and the promise both and Norah had given to Stella, not only they had kept intact... but from Terence's side, not contacting Norah, never seeking for her news, had been transformed from this deep shearing pain into a soft longing, hidden dormant in his heart, lulled by the ever-present ticking of the time going by...

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The taxi left him in front of the hotel. The blue suit on him looked pretty sharp and perfectly tailored for his tall, lean body. He looked every inch the beautiful jeune-premier of Broadway the newspapers could not tire writing about. Turning the heads of people, wherever he went. No one could deny how magnetic the presence of Terence Grantham was.

The curiosity and the anticipation he felt inside made the shine more intense inside his green blue eyes. Could the mysterious woman be there?

However, whether or not those couple of letters by her had managed to win his attention, it wasn't as if he attended the event with a purpose any other than just a hope to meet her, get to know who she was

-if she was to be there, that was...

He entered the hotel. His eyes scanned the lobby with a more than usual examining stare.

"Mr Grantham." A man approached him who was belong to the hotel staff. "They are all expecting you." He said and asked him to follow him.

They walked inside the modern Art Deco dance hall, with the long marble columns that reached the ceiling and the black and white geometric shapes on the polished floor, the crystal chandeliers hanging with their light reflecting on the mirrored covered walls, the whole event proved to be a glitzy affair. Everyone who was noteworthy in Boston's society was there. The moment they all turned and fixed their eyes on Terry making his entrance, they broke into an enthusiastic clapping and cheering.

Robert walked towards his principal actor who took a few more steps under the extended roar of the congratulation. He bowed his head with his characteristic modesty, he thanked them several times even if it was only his lips moving, his voice was hardly heard.

"Terence!!" Robert exclaimed and opened his arms to welcome the star of his company. Behind him, the group of the people who were most enthusiastic and also most influential for the good fortunes of the Theatre Company waited for the usual meet-and-greet with the famous Broadway actor.

Whether Terry agreed or not with all that smooching, the adoration, the pretentiousness, the air kisses, the lustful stares... he could do nothing about it. As much as he loved acting, it was part and parcel of show business. That was where he belonged.

Show business.

He did the show... they did the business.

The crowd grew around him. Swallowed him whole. And for two hours he could hardly break away. He became a little more restless than usual. While he kept going on, working on the empty chatting with people he cared not much about, he continued scanning the hall.

In search of a petite woman who may have kept her eyes on him... Surely with letters such as the ones she wrote, she wouldn't be hiding... Despite saying she expected nothing of him, why did she write what it was, a clear and defined love confession? He had no doubt that she knew he was already engaged...

After what seemed to him an eternity, he asked from the group he was participating in conversation, to be excused for a moment. He returned back to the lobby. It was rather quiet. He walked towards the man at the reception desk.

"May I help you sir?" The man asked him, as Terry reached him.

"Hmm..." Terry replied, pressing his lips, trying to think what to say to the man. He wished he knew something of that woman. "Well, I am actually looking for a woman." Terry said.

He looked at the man, who seemed puzzled. Looking for a woman, not only was as vague as asking him to describe how water tasted, but also could have sounded a little inappropriate. He placed his hands on his hips, starting to feel awkward. "She stays here... She is a rather petite woman...?"

"I am sorry Mr Grantham, but I can't help you very much with your request... Do you know her name?"

"Hmm.." Terry responded with a laugh. Scratched the back of his head, looking sheepish. "I don't expect you to have heard of Miss Forget me not...?"

The moment those words left his lips, he felt so stupid. What the hell was wrong with him? Asking the clerk at reception desk about a woman going by with such a name...

"You know..." Terry said almost immediately, before the young man behind the desk replied to this ridiculous claim from Terry. "Forget it... Can I please borrow a writing pad, if you have any?"

The man smiled. Those showbiz people were truly strange...

"Of course!" He replied and handed Terry a writing pad who asked to direct him to the hotel bar and the man promptly did that. In his turn, Terry thanked him and felt grateful as he left without making himself sound any more foolish than he did.

The hotel bar was rather quiet. Not many people were there. Again, no woman who fitted the description of the theatre concierge. Such was Terry's luck...

He sat at the bar and ordered a whiskey. The bartender poured him one and left him in peace. He took his pen out of his breast pocket. Left it on the writing pad. Took a gulp from his whiskey. Lit a cigarette and took a couple of puffs. He breathed deeply. He removed the cap from his fountain pen. Took another gulp from his whiskey. If Miss Forget-me-not wants to play...

Dear Miss Forget me not

....

....

He spent a good fifteen, twenty minutes, completely focused in writing this letter. Till he heard someone calling his name. It was Robert. He was missed from the dance hall. Where had he disappeared? Terry lifted his head. Replied he was coming. He gave his letter a once read through. Bit his bottom lip and smiled.

He walked back to the reception and asked for an envelope. The man without asking any questions, gave him the envelope. Terry wrote with big enough letters on it.

FOR MISS FORGET ME NOT

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

"Can you please, put this letter here on the reception, so everyone who passes by here to be able to look at it?" Terry asked the reception desk manager, who once again widened his eyes in surprise. "Please..." Terry added. "It is important to me."

"But of course, Mr Grantham!!" The man replied and placed the envelope upright, against a brochure stand, so everyone who would approach the reception desk to be able to see it.

"Thank you so much!" Terry said and left back to the dance hall.

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*Dear Miss Forget Me Not*

*You win... You got my attention. I am sufficiently intrigued. So much so, I am writing to you, while sitting at the bar of the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel with the after-play reception happening right next door, without me. My manager won't be happy to realise I am missing.*

*But you surprise me my dear Miss Forget Me Not. Despite managing to keep my mind occupied with your... revealing letters - was this not your aim? - you decide to keep yourself hidden when I had hoped you would make your presence known in the after-play reception. We could have had this conversation face to face. It is unjust that you know many things about me, following me, when I know nothing about you.*

*I find even unfair the little time I have in my hands to write those few lines to you, and I feel under pressure to deliver the grand words, the poetic phrases you have got used hearing me recite on stage. All that I am good in the end is acting. Or so they say...*

*I am afraid, if you get to know me from up close, you will be severely disappointed.*

*You talk about causing you conflict; here I am, complaining about not knowing about you and at the same time pushing you away. You talk about making yourself a fool; try imagine someone as serious as I, you have analysed me correctly... trying to ask strangers whether they know a young woman going by the name Miss Forget-me-not.*

*Miss Forget-me-not...*

*Do I dare borrow a leaf from your book and expose myself by saying you remind me of someone dear I knew... Using a name so endearing and yet I can safely assume, it is not your proper name.*

*Who hides behind a wish, not be forgotten?*

*Till our next exchange*

*T.G.*

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It had been a long time since a spontaneous smile had graced the lips of Terence Grantham. While he sat on his seat inside the train carriage, the world outside was passing him by with flying speed, but he hadn't paid any attention.

With his eyes closed and his body feeling tired and limp, he hovered between falling to sleep and being awake. The reception the night before lasted for longer than what he had desired. But he was already used to it. He knew by now of what he had signed for. He had toured before. The schedules were punishing. Three months on the road, or on stage. One or the other, with the breaks being few and far in between.

"... but just to the thought of giving us mere mortals, the opportunity to come and watch your unforgettable performance as Hamlet..."

Miss Forget me not. He wondered whether his letter had found its way inside her hands. He thought of the surprise on her face when she'd walk to the hotel reception in the morning, only to find that envelope staring at her. The corners of his lips twisted upwards. He let a faint chuckle.

He really had no idea who she was. He had to thank her however for making him feel something he had not felt for a long time. Lightheartedness. He sought nothing out of this. Yes, he was curious. And yes, initially he thought perhaps that woman was Norah.

Was she the woman behind Miss Forget Me Not? He remembered how she disliked being called the nicknames he used for her. His heart wanted this woman to be her when his mind was telling him to stop "reading" Norah into everything he encountered in his life. Books, songs, plays, films... It could be a phrase, a lyric, a screenplay... He had done the same thing before. "Reading" Norah, remembering Norah, things reminding him of her had become like a hobby to him.

The train was leaving Boston behind. Next destination Washington. They would travel the length of the East Coast till they reached Miami, before they would turn back and head towards Midwest, and into Chicago. The gentle rocking of the train carriage lulled Terry further into sleep. He pulled his Fedora hat down to shade his dreamlike stare. Crossed his arms over his chest, his eyelids heavy closed over his eyes, while the ghost of the smile haunted his lips still.

Whether or not Miss Forget Me Not was Norah, he was certain for one thing. He would look forward of receiving her reply.

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May 1921 - Miami, Florida

*Dear Mr Grantham,*

*I am usually not lost for words. Not of the verbal kind and certainly not of the written kind. But today, I keep staring at the empty page and it scares me. I keep looking at it and the words don't come.*

*So, I decide to go with the flow of my heart. You see, writing to you...*

*Writing to someone who... I try so hard to find the words. Otherwise, I will run out of paper. Already there is a considerable amount of scrunched paper balls scattered like lonely planets on the floor. Writing to someone who is your object...? Or better said, the subject? Please, bear with me. I am not trying to trigger an episode of migraine for you.*

*When you admire someone, and have placed that person on a pedestal, and you feel so much that your heart cannot contain it all, and the contents of that overflowing heart spill on the paper, it is like a force that cannot be stopped. To hell with the consequences! I mean...*

*I mean I never expected to see this morning a letter from you! There! Let's address the elephant in the room. Your letter. Addressed to me. Miss Forget-me-not. Did I chuckle? Yes, I did! And I thank you for that. And I also thank you for the that brief moment of rendering my heart silent, you robbed it from its ability to beat. I will never forget it.*

*You complained of having not graced you with my presence at the after-play reception which took place in the same hotel I happened to reside while on family business.*

*I reply that I wish... I wish, I could have been there! Talk face to face. But alas, even the best thought plans can go awry! My personal circumstances did not allow me to attend such a glitzy affair which believe me when I say I would have done so in a heartbeat, even if it was for a mere minute to shake your hand and say thank you.*

*You find it unjust of knowing nothing about me... This statement surprised me, if I have to be honest and serious. It disappointed me slightly, perhaps. For I believe that I have revealed a lot about myself to you. In fact, I have laid myself bare in front of your eyes, even if I never wrote a physical description of me, or things that would fit better inside a work resume than a "love" letter. But in the name of all things being equal, if so you wish, I will tell you about myself.*

*I am twenty-three years old. I reside in Chicago. I come from a big family. Father is in commerce. I partake in the family business but mostly my travels involve fund-raising for various charities.*

*As for my appearance... You mentioned that I remind you someone who was dear to you. It would have been selfish of me to break a spell as powerful as the one born out from memories by describing my otherwise trivial self. Permit me therefore, to keep my appearance hidden and let you imagine me, however you may wish.*

*But please know this. You could never disappoint me. Someone like yourself, whose heart must have endured a lot and have felt even more as a response, to be able to pour everything into your roles, down to the last drop of passion, love, hatred and anguish with such conviction, I am afraid words fail me once more to make you understand of how much I know I would not be left disappointed by you.*

*Who hides behind a name such as Miss-Forget-me-not?*

*Have you ever read the poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt? On his poem to Venus, the poet's words touched me greatly and gave thus the birth of my alias, Miss Forget-me-not.*

*“Yet on my faith, full little does remain  
Of any hope, whereby I may myself uphold,  
For since that only words do me retain,  
I may well think the affection is but cold;  
But since my desire does not match what in reality I may attain,  
But in my hands it resteth whole and clear,  
Forget me not, en voguant la galère. \*” (\*come what it may)*

*Forever Yours*

*Miss Forget-me-not*

~~~~~


Terence Grantham never met with Miss Forget-me-not. They never had *that* conversation.

Face-to-face.

They continued exchanging letters through the theatre's concierge, whomever that man was, at any given theatre, that Terry may have been performing. Both he and Miss Forget-me-not had appointed him like the Messenger, the man straight out of Shakespeare's plays, who carried letters between lovers, existing only in secret. Existing only on paper.

She would entrust her letter with him, instructing him to leave it on Terry's dressing table. Waiting for him to read it when the performance was over. Terry would write back and entrust his letter to the Messenger to give when a mysterious woman would appear to leave a letter for him.

Within the time that followed, she became Terry's confidant. Their talk became personal, turned into a love affair of the minds. They talked about the burning fire of Eros, the passion that runs through Love, the pain which comes with the End, about Life and about Honour, he confided his melt down, his enduring love for another...

For him she remained the mysterious *Miss Forget-me-not*; For her, he remained her *Mr Grantham*. Never Mr Terence, Terence or Terry even. He always closed his letters “ *Till our next exchange, T.G.*”. She always closed hers with “ *Forever Yours, Miss Forget-me-not*”.

Then one day, two years after Miss Forget-me-not had come into his life, and just before Terence was about to travel to London, having been invited with the troupe to perform Hamlet in the Royal Theatre in Haymarket, a rare accomplishment of an American Theatrical company; such was the expanding fame of Terence Grantham, as he was becoming one of the greatest Shakespearean actors of his generation, he received one last letter from her.

14th February 1923, Chicago

Dear Mr Grantham,

Today, it marks two years since my first letter to you. I cannot help but think of how strange life is, when a spontaneous act of whim from my part, gave me such an unexpected gift. To get to know you, the man of my dreams, intimately, deeply through our mutual correspondence which lasted till this day. I cherish each and every one of your letters. I keep them all with religious care; tied with a ribbon, the colour of the flower that gave its name to my identity.

I kept myself hidden from you. But I kept myself hidden from me too. The part of me, who writes to you, in the semi-darkness, with trembling fingers... remember?

It was the day of Saint Valentine. Somehow, anniversaries of certain moments in life, which one considers as important, such as today's date, which marks the beginning of the dream for me, stops life for a moment and allow me to think. I am trying to bring myself into saying goodbye.

I want to be honest and say I never expected of myself to continue writing and certainly have I ever expected of you to respond. I know you have been invited to play your Hamlet in London. I cannot tell you what joy the news brought into my heart when I read the papers. I will not hide my feelings from you. The joy arrived hand in hand with sadness. Like a coin with two sides.

The time has come to travel back to your country. Return triumphant and proud of being a man who succeeded into making his dream a reality. What better achievement of making our dreams come true in the short life we live! But you will be further away from me. We won't be

able to correspond. Time asks the permission of no one when it flies away from you. And I realise perhaps, for me also, the time has come to move forward. Find my destiny.

But for one last night, before I depart from your life, I could hide myself behind the girl you said I reminded to you once. Pretend that I am her and for this one night, I ask you to think of me as her and read this letter of mine as if it comes from her... Only as such I can carry to write the words that come in my lips and seek for release.

Every time, I imagined you reading my words, with my senses aroused to the point of torment. I felt alive. I became someone else next to the dancing shadows on the walls of my room. In my mind, I became your Aphrodite and you, my Adonis. The sound of your voice imagined, awakening the words from the paper, turned into a daring caress.

On the last trembling throes of the dying light, we became lovers. Sharing something that existed only between us. Your fingers, I imagined them, tracing the curves of my body. Fleeting touches, your lips grazing the grooves over my collarbones, kissing my soft shoulders... the swells of my breasts, the valleys of my waist, the hills of my hips. My skin tingles and I sigh when the warmth of your breath caresses my belly, coming closer to the mount of Venus, reaching between my legs, at the most secret part of my body, the most sensual which knows only the touch of my fingers but it is you who I imagine to be...

My sighs carry no sound, but my breath is hot, and it is not blood that runs inside my veins but desire, thick and warm, I wish to feel your weight over me, to see you face, your eyes looking back at me, with love. Lose myself inside your stare and never come back... Never come back.

We shared the same bed, you and I, for those two years, my beloved Mr Grantham. Even if we never met face to face. I can close my eyes and feel you near me, next to me, hear your

*voice whisper sweet words of love to me. Your words in your letters were your caresses.
Sometimes I want more of you but I know this will never become a reality.*

*My dear sir and master of my soul, I am trying to bring the letter to a close but you keep
dragging me back into your embrace. I will never cease to be your humble admirer. Please
keep me inside your heart. Take me with you to London while you take good care of yourself.*

*Forget me not, en voguant la galère. * (come what may.)*

Forever Yours

Miss Forget-me-not

A short while after Terry received her letter, he travelled back to Great Britain. It had been a long time since he had left his home country and had arrived in the States to become an actor, back to the day of being a young lad with passion in his blood and fire in his belly. The play in London was an absolute triumph even it was cut short. Only a month, they kept Hamlet on stage. News had got back to Terry; Stella had fallen ill. He never disclosed her illness. An illness that, despite his efforts to battle it, he returned and remained by her side, having brought the best physicians in the country, claimed her life, five months later.

He never heard from Miss Forget-me-not, ever again.

January 1933, Stratford-upon-Avon

Time passed and so did life continue like the water that runs through a river; never ending, sometimes quiet like a whisper, while others wild like the blood rushing in the veins of the body.

It is early in the morning. There is frost in the ground, and it feels that it's early dawn when in fact it is nearing eight o'clock. Winter mornings are dark in Great Britain, but Norah doesn't mind much. She is an early riser. She has already got up for about an hour. According to her husband, she gets up in ungodly hours. He of course tries to keep her in bed, trying to appeal to her charitable nature of keeping him warm if she stays a little bit more with him. And most times she obliges... Not that she needs a lot to be persuaded by Terence Grantham. Only a smile from him and her heart melts.

They both live in a cottage by the river Avon. Terry works as the lead actor on the Royal Shakespeare Company which resides in the Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford. They have been living there for almost seven years now. A happy life. A difficult life. A life with its ups and down like everyone else. But it is their life and they are together. That is all that matters.

Norah had lit up the stove and has put up the kettle with the water to prepare the tea. She feels a pair of hands coming around her waist. They pull her back. She feels Terry's body on her back and his lips on her neck before she hears his voice soft and hoarse still from sleep.

"You left me there in the cold..."

She turns and raises her head to face him. Her smile is like the sun to him. "And good morning to you too, husband."

Terry mumbles something about Norah not being a caring wife while he steals her lips for a morning kiss before she sends him away to wash and come back for breakfast. It is nice and

warm in their kitchen with the fire burning inside the wood stove. The kettle whistles. She pours tea inside a big teapot and lets the tea brew before putting a plate out with scones, clotted cream and jam.

Terry shows up and sits at the table. They are having breakfast tea while facing each other. She's preparing some letters to send to the States. Having written them the night before, she is keen to send them on the day, to reach her family and friends by Saint Valentine's Day. While they keep small talk about their task of the day, Terry's eyes follow Norah's continuing with her task. She folds each of the letters carefully and before she puts them inside the envelopes, she slips a dried rosebud in each.

"Never, have I seen you before putting dry flowers in your letters." He remarked.

"Oh! It's something I do for some time, Terry." She replies absentminded, while she continues stuffing letters inside the envelopes. One for her parents Andrew and Rose, for her sister Evelyn, her cousin Archie, her friends Ellen, George, Tom, a few more.

She tries hard to keep in contact with everyone back home. She misses her friends and family dearly. But she would have taken the same decision she took seven years ago, in heartbeat still. She will never leave Terry. He will never leave her. They are together now.

*

*

*

14th February 1933, Stratford-upon Avon

He's finished with the rehearsals for the day. It's the day of Saint Valentine. Norah will be waiting for him at home. She has planned for them this romantic dinner under the lights of candles. She is cooking something really elaborate apparently. He chuckles. He hopes they can eat something that is edible.

He stops at a flower shop. He is looking at the flowers, perhaps buy her a bouquet of roses, though he doesn't like roses much... The florist is glancing at him.

"Would you like help, choosing some flowers sir?" He asks.

"Yes, please. It is for my wife. Celebrating Valentine's Day."

"I gathered as much." The florists say with a smile. "Roses are perfect of course."

Terry's eyes fall on a vase, full of little blue flowers. Vivid blue with a yellow centre. Beautiful flowers, elegant, fragile.

The florist stops picking up the roses for Terry and turns his eyes towards where Terry is looking. "Forget-me-nots. Beautiful little flowers."

"Indeed, they are..." Terry says, as if he's daydreaming.

A moment later, he stops the florist. "I changed my mind... Could you please make a small bouquet of Forget-me-nots, instead?"

"Are you sure, sir?" The florist asks. "Roses are the perfect flower for Saint Valentine's Day."

"Yes, I'm sure..." Terry says.

He's on his way home. The bouquet of Forget-me-nots at hand. He could be doing a really stupid thing with this bouquet or something that both will remember for ever. Having seen Norah stuffing the letters with the dry flowers...

He reaches the door of the house and comes in. Norah is in the bedroom.

"Terry, I am getting ready. Don't come in the bedroom. I want to surprise you." She raises her voice, sounding excited.

They haven't had a romantic dinner for quite some time, and she's pulling all the stops. He smiles. Goes in the dining room and lets the flowers on the table. He leaves to the bathroom to freshen up.

Norah leaves the bedroom. Dressed up with a red evening dress he had bought for her birthday, she looks so beautiful. Her green eyes sparkle like emeralds on her freckled face. The table is set. She goes to the kitchen and picks up their dinner, all covered on a silver plate. Beef Wellington. She hopes that she has cooked it well. The moment she comes with the plate to the dining table, she freezes. Stands there with the plate in hand. She almost dropped it while the surprise of the bouquet is still sinking in.

Forget-me-nots...

She places the silver plate on the table and picks up the bouquet. So many memories...

With quiet steps he comes in the dining room. He stands behind her. His presence electrifies her. His voice, soft and deep, caresses her ears.

"Yet on my faith, full little does remain"

*Of any hope, whereby I may myself uphold,
For since that only words do me retain,
I may well think the affection is but cold;
But since my desire does not match what in reality I may attain,
But in my hands it resteth whole and clear,
Forget me not, en voguant la galère. * (*come what it may)"*

She is shivering, but says nothing. Tears have gathered inside her eyes.

"*Miss Forget-me-not...* "

She takes a breath. She's reminded of a life that now feels like it happened a lifetime ago.

Love so intense, washes over her. Fingers that tremble in the dying candlelight.

"*Welcome home Mr Grantham...* "
