

Pen Pals

By C. Jade Wyton

Lefu, a teenage girl with a bad home life, reaches out to a stranger through the mail. They become pen pals and, after several years of back and forth letters, Lefu seeks her friend's help so she can run away from home.

Contains mentions of child abuse and neglect.

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## Year 1

“Hi. My name is Lefu, and I’m sorry to write to you out of nowhere. But I’m really lonely, and life is kinda really hard right now, and was wondering if maybe you would like to write back and talk? I can’t receive things to my home address without my mother looking through them (is that normal? I’m 14 if that means anything) so I’ve been renting a P.O box with my allowance for online shopping. You can write to it if you’re interested in talking. [P.O ADDRESS]. I kinda need to make a friend right now I think. But I understand if you’re not interested.”

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“Hello Lefu,

Your letter was unexpected, but not unwelcome. I’m sorry to hear you have been having a hard time, especially with your mother. No, it is not normal for her to go through your mail; even if you are young you are entitled to your privacy.

If you want to talk about your worries I’m happy to be an ear. Though I’m curious about how you found me? Please try to be safe when approaching strangers. The P.O box is a good idea, but there are a lot of ill-intentioned people in this world and you don’t want to get hurt. Do not give out your address or full name.

-Brendan.”

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“Hi Brendan. Thanks for writing back. I was thinking it wasn’t normal but it’s always sort of been that way so I wasn’t sure. I found your address on the maps app on my phone. It looks like a nice place to live. I live in a city, and its SUPER loud and dirty all the time. I wouldn’t mind seeing a lake irl but I don’t think my mother would ever be able to take me. Is it nice to live by one? And I know there are a lot bad people. They don’t even need bad intentions to hurt people, you know? My mother’s a bit like that sometimes. She can be bad but not deliberately.”

-

“Lefu,

The lake is beautiful. Especially this time of the year. My brother and I often go fishing together during Spring.

I do know what you mean. And I’m sorry about your mother. Even if her intentions are good it is terrible to hear she is hurting you. What sort of things is she doing? Do you have anyone nearby to reach out to?

-Brendan.”

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“Hi Brendan. I’m not supposed to talk about the things my mother does because of her work. She’s a doctor, and most of the stuff that happens is because of that. Have you ever had anything bad happen to you that you felt like you couldn’t talk about? Did it turn out okay in the end?”

-

“Lefu,

I have had a lot of bad things happen to me over the years, and I would be happy to talk about them with you, but right now I am very concerned about how your mother is treating you.

Is she hitting you, insulting you, or making you feel unsafe in any way? I know that I’m a stranger, but please be honest with me so that I can help.

-Brendan.”

-

“No, she doesn’t hit me or anything. She’s just really busy and forgets about me a lot. Sometimes she forgets to make food and stuff and I have to try and find things to eat around the house. She doesn’t insult me either and actually tells me I’m very special and important. Can you tell me about some of the stuff you’ve been through?”

-

“Lefu,

I’m relieved to hear that your mother isn’t hurting you. But it is concerning that you are not being fed properly. You said you get an allowance? Are you able to use that to get anything to eat?

As for the things I’ve been through; I am a recovering addict. I used to abuse drugs and alcohol, and gambled much of my money away. I found myself in debt multiple times. Every time it happened it seemed harder and harder to tell my family the truth. It felt like I was letting them down. The guilt from that created a spiral; I would feel guilty, so I would abuse substances and gamble to relieve the pain. But as soon as I stopped the guilt would come back worse, and I would be

driven to the substances again.

This continued on for years until I was arrested and sent to rehab. I'm a baker, now. And I've been clean for a few years. Even though it's not always easy. My friends and family help me through it.

Do you have anyone at home you can rely on? Friends or teachers in school?  
-Brendan."

-

"Wow Brendan you have been through a lot! Did you get arrested because of the drugs or something else? And no I don't have friends because I'm homeschooled. So I don't get to see a lot of people except for the people who work with my mother and they're all kinda weird and she doesn't like me being alone with them. Could we be friends?"

-

"Lefu,  
I would love to be your friend. Though you need to know that I'm an adult, and not your own age. So certain topics might not be appropriate to discuss. And I was arrested while attempting to rob a gas station.  
-Brendan."

-

"Yay!! I'm so excited! I've never had an actual proper friend before! What do you want to talk about next? You said you were a baker? Can you tell me about that?"

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Year 2

"My dear friend Lefu,
I hope you are doing well. Did you get my gift? I hope your birthday this year was a good one. Did you do anything fun? Fifteen is a big age to turn.
-Brendan."

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"Hi Brendan!
Yes, I got your gift! They tasted SO good. Did you make those with Griff? They were WAY better than the gas station cookies my mother's always bringing home. And no, we didn't do anything really. She forgot about it again because she got busy with work. She tried to make up for it but it just wasn't the same. Vickie gave me a new jacket, though. It's a little bit big but it's very warm and has a LOT of pockets! Lol!

-Lefu.”

-

“Dearest Lefu,

I’m happy to hear you enjoyed the biscuits. You’re right; Griff and I made them together. They were his suggestion. We made four batches before they came out just right for you.

Besides being forgetful, has your mother been treating you well? Has she been feeding you properly?

-Brendan.”

-

“Hi Brendan!

I called it! I knew that you and Griff made them together! You should totally ask him out. And no, my mother’s been forgetting to make dinner again a lot. Like last night she seemed really busy, so I didn’t bother her. But she fell asleep in the lab and it just sort of sucked to be me like, all night. But then today she gave me some donuts she got from a meeting she went to! They were the expensive kind with fancy fillings. I don’t think I like custard. Am I weird?

-Lefu.”

-

“Lefu,

It is important that you eat properly. If it is safe to, tell your mother that she has been forgetting again. Perhaps suggest she stock the kitchen with food that you would be able to prepare on your own? There are many pre-made meals that only need to be microwaved. See if you can’t convince her or Vickie to get you some.

And don’t worry. You’re not alone; I don’t like custard, either.

-Brendan.”

-

“Hi Brendan!

I asked mum and Vickie about frozen meals and they got me some. They thought it was a good idea and complimented me on being so smart. I still haven’t told them we’re talking. I’m scared they’ll make me stop writing to you and you’re the only person I can tell things to. I don’t want to lose you! You’re so smart and you help make life easier.

-Lefu.”

-

“Lefu,

I understand why you haven't told your mother about me, though I also understand why she mightn't want her daughter talking to a strange older man through the mail.

There are a lot of dangerous people in this world and I hope you never run into any of them. Be wary, Lefu. You are a kind-hearted soul, but also vulnerable, and it would break my heart to see you get hurt.

And thank you for the compliment. If my bad experiences can help guide your own life into something easier, they will have been worth it.

Let me know if you need anything, Lefu.

-Brendan."

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### **Year 3**

"Hi Brendan. It's Lefu. Sorry I haven't replied to you in a few weeks. I've been sick again. Mother made me go into quarantine."

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"Lefu,

That's alright, I understand. I've been ill many times, myself, and know how it can make contacting others hard.

How are you feeling now? You've been very unwell lately and Griff and I are both worried.

What was it you were sick with, that had you needing to quarantine?

-Brendan."

-

"Hi Brendan,

My mother says I'm not meant to tell anyone, but I think it's okay for you to know. It was measles."

-

"Lefu,

You had measles? How did you get measles? Your mother is a doctor. Aren't you vaccinated? And why wouldn't you be allowed to tell people you were sick?

Lefu, are you alright?

-Brendan."

-

"I'm not sure if I'm alright, Brendan. Can I tell you a secret?"

"Of course you can tell me a secret, Lefu. You can tell me anything you need

to. I'm here to support you.  
-Brendan."

-

"Brendan, Tamra isn't my real mother.

Well. She kind of is. But she also kind of isn't. I think of her like my mother and she raised me kinda like you'd raise a daughter but it's really weird and hard to explain.

I'm part of a genetic research project for a disease that's being passed down in my biological family. I'm the first girl in generations not to be sick with it, and they hired Tamra to find out why and if I can be used to make a cure.

I hate it. It's awful. It's to save my family but I can't stand it. I hate not being in control of my own body and I hate all the tests they run on me.

And then I feel bad, because they don't really WANT to hurt me. They want to save my family. But sometimes I want to kill myself just to get away from it all. It's too much and I don't know what to do.

I need help, Brendan. Please help me. I know you probably don't believe me about what's happening because it sounds crazy but I need help. It's getting worse and worse every day and I'm starting to get scared that I'll never get away from this life."

-

"Lefu,

I believe you. And I am so sorry. That is not fair. It is not your responsibility to give yourself up for your family. It should be your choice. You should have control of your own body.

I have spoken to members of the community and we are all wanting to help you. Many of us have been through situations where we were abused and mistreated, just like you are being now, and we understand.

Are police a safe option for you to contact?

I know you don't have many people to talk with, but would any of your mother's coworkers be a safe person to reach out to?

Are there any shelters in your area with resources you could utilise?

If you think your situation is dire enough, we can help you to come here.

-Brendan."

-

"Please. I'm not sure how much longer I'll survive here. Please let me come and live with you."

-

"Lefu,

One of my friends used to live in the same city you do now. She said if you get

on the 8pm train heading towards the Eastern Suburbs, and stay on it until the last stop, she can pick you up at the junction. As of sending this letter she has already left to wait for you. She will remain at the junction either until you meet her or until you write me back with a change of mind. Her name is Abigail and her phone number is xxxx-xxx-xxx.

I have enclosed 20 gold to get you there.

Do not leave our letters or my address behind where your mother might find them. Be safe.

-Brendan.”

—END—

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