



Literature & Books | Spotlight | International | USA

Letter to My Daughter After the Murder of a Poet in the Streets of Minneapolis

“Poetry is a testament to the failure of wolves.” —
Anonymous Midwest poet, in a letter published in the Literary Hub after Renée Good's assassination by ICE agents.

If you listen closely, you'll hear the other poets in the distance, the bright concordance of their voices, their evidence and witness and their warning.

The author is a poet from the Midwest. At this time, he prefers to remain anonymous*

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My dearest daughter,

When the poet Lorca died, he died on a road of dust. Sad men killed him and his body disappeared. You haven't read him yet. You are still too young, and so his name, for you, means very little. In time, maybe this will change. I hope that time will change for you. I hope the times will change.

Today is full of cruelty and I am sorry. Even in the relative seclusion of our home, the world has found us. They killed a poet on the streets of Minneapolis and now the world grows dark.

It wasn't always like this. I used to be so young, so present in the ebb and flow around me. I never feared the prospect of tomorrow. Not even when my father died or when I started losing friends. But now, because of you, I can't forget the future.

In times like this, I think of you and of your sister. Your lives point to my life. I am a poet and a father. Your lives remind me I am here.

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It is winter in America and there is much that we must do. This letter is now my work. There are things I need to tell you.

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Maybe someday you'll go searching through my bookshelves as I once did when I was your age. The books my father kept became a world for me, and I believed them. His books are now a part of my books. I save these books for you.

It was there I learned to be a poet. My hope is you will someday see as I did what that means. Someday soon you'll take a book down off the shelf and open it. Maybe you'll read: kisses tie our mouths in a tangle of new vines. Maybe: there is no oblivion, no dream.

If I am still alive when you are going through my books, you'll ask me questions. What does Lorca mean when he insists that those who are hurt will hurt without rest? That those who are scared of death will carry death upon their shoulders?

I won't know what to tell you. Keep reading, I will say. Keep listening.

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I know that you've been listening. I know you've heard the news. They killed a poet and now your life feels different. This isn't the life I hoped to give you when we came here, but here we are. This is the world for us, and it is happening.

When I first met you, I was bewildered. You were so beautiful, and the world, too, since it contained you, seemed full and spilling over.

I write this letter hoping that you might know your father in the moment of his bewilderment, for better and for worse, before your birth and after.

It is difficult today to tell you now that I am terrified of after.

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They killed a poet, a mother, on the streets. Like me, she loved her children and there was, I have to think, a world she hoped to raise them in.

When your mother and I decided to move to the United States,

we, too, dreamed of a life for you and we were there. All of us together. Our small lives intersecting and sustaining one another. America is a country made of dreams like ours.

This is my secret foolhardy faith, even now: that America will be a home for us. I keep this faith for you, though it is difficult, though it's sometimes painful to believe. The most terrible of all feelings is the feeling of having lost your hope, says Lorca, and so I turn to him.

I know you have seen the videos and photographs. You saw what happened, what they did. Already you've started asking questions. Why would someone do this? What kind of person would shoot a poet on the street and walk away?

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My dear, you must be careful. The men in masks are lonely. Don't go near them. Their hearts are the hearts of wolves. They hide their faces and decorate their loneliness. They dress their isolation in the wolfish symbols of the state. Their flag is a flag of darkness. Their God is not a god. Their language is not a language. It is the deathbell of truer speech. An angry animal of sound.

Theirs is a desperate utterance, an alphabet of grief. It is an old and unimagined speech. Nothing good or beautiful or full of joy becomes a language such as this. Scared of death, many men have used it, carrying death upon their shoulders. This death turned them into wolves and they are wrong.

Imprisoned in their loneliness, struck blind by loneliness, they bark their orders in the shadow of an empire. This is the empty grammar of the predator, the always hungry language of the dead. When the mouths of wolves fall open, a script of corpses march. Don't listen. Don't be fooled by the dull façade of their authority. They want their loneliness to become your loneliness.

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It is not your loneliness. I am your father and I am here. Your family and your friends surround you. The poets are taking to the streets. They are a part of the world you move through, the world that moves through you. This is the miracle of our contingency, the human music of our overlap.

To be a poet is to know this. Every word exists in service to the words around it. Language is our covenant. The songs we make

belong to one another. This is our prerogative and bond. We keep the language safe. In the dark, a poet sings to hold the wolves at bay.

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I know you fear that they are coming. I know you wonder if they'll come for you, or for your mother, or your sister. I fear this also and I am sorry. I cannot keep you from the world. The wolves are real and they are all around us. Their barking shakes the windows. This is why I write you.

Everything I am demands that I protect you. I want my life to be your shelter. I want the words and work I'll someday leave behind to find you. I want to keep you safe at the incalculable level of your soul.

My fear is that the murder of a poet on the streets of Minneapolis will encourage you to darken. They murdered Lorca too, but here's the thing. They failed. I am writing now to tell you about their failure.

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Poetry is a testament to the failure of wolves.

It is what the language does when a person loves the world enough to sing of it.

Keep singing. You are a poet also.

If you listen closely, you'll hear the other poets in the distance, the bright concordance of their voices, their evidence and witness and their warning.

Like me, they sing to tell you they are there.

In a world like this, there is no such thing as isolation, no death that is an ending.

When a poem is over, its language lingers in the aftermath and changes who we are.

Our sense of what is there expands.

When a poem is over, we understand how limitless we are, how porous. Time and time again our lives surpass themselves.

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Lorca understood this and he is here.

He is with me as I write you. Even now as the sad men gather, he is asking me to tell you. Everything will be ok. Don't be scared.

There are things locked within the walls that if they were to suddenly burst out into the street and scream would fill the world, he says. And so the world is full.

He is asking you to know this.

Tell everyone I haven't died, he says. My heart is full of fire.

You, too, are full of fire. Your name is music. The world is made of light.

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When a poet dies, it isn't death that welcomes them. A poet turns into their poem. They drift and change and linger. This lingering becomes the sound of a book in a new room, opening, its music carried in a wind that crosses borders. If you listen close enough, if you turn your life into your listening, you'll see. These are the sounds the living learn to sing by, the songs that shape our seeing.

Look again. New forms appear on the real horizon. My love, there is no oblivion, no dream. In this, the days take on a glistening. The shadows thin and open. Nothing remains apart. A poet knows that in the hearts and minds of others, the eye and ear believe and are each other. Together, they build a world through which the body starts to move.

The sad men will be shaken by this movement and they will change. The wolves will startle and retreat. Their masks will fall away. Their weaponry will rust. Even here, today as they approach us.

Lorca is still alive. Turned to music, his body emerges from the ditch and now the dust is beautiful, a labyrinth of intersecting crossroads. He is standing there, and you and I are with him. The road goes on. The music is real music.

This letter is my heart and body learning now to sing. I sing for you. I move in your direction. If the wolves arrive tomorrow, if you look outside and see them, I need you to remember. I am a poet and your father. My life belongs to you, my small song expanding in the dark. Keep listening. May we entwine ourselves, says Lorca, our soul bitten by love.

Here, then, is the sound of the world in which I love you, and here is the music that rises from it, spilling over everything, filling up our home. In time, when time discovers me, my love for you will turn my body into a poem. Don't be frightened. The poem will block the door.

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