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Tenth and/or Eleventh Grade English Class

“Dear Dante...”

Recently a collection of letters has been found written by the renowned Dante Alighieri’s wife to none other than the wonderful poet himself. Or perhaps this is just a poorly written fictitious story and the letters were written by a procrastinating high school student. It is anyone’s guess really.

30-12-1308

Dear Dante Alighieri, my wonderful husband,

What exactly is this thing you keep writing me about anyways? Honestly, Dante, do you think I want to hear about another one of your ridiculous stories. They are nothing but nonsense or about Beatrice and you already know how I feel about her. And is that really how you want to spend your time in exile? Not writing to your children or anything, just writing about a silly childhood crush you once had? It is not like it will bring her back or anything.

Sorry, that was a bit harsh, but you have left me here all by myself with the children for years. Some of them are getting old enough to take care of themselves, but not little Pietro. He doesn’t even know his father. What do you expect us to do when you get back, if you do get back that is? Are you at least making money over there? I hope you are doing something productive other than all this story writing I keep hearing about.

Also, I really would love it if you stopped mentioning your stories in every single letter you send. And perhaps you should start sending letters to your children, too. I think they are beginning to think you don’t care about them. You’ve been gone six years and you don’t even try and keep in contact that much. You could try a little harder.

With an endless amount of love, Gemma di Manetto Donati

11-07-1312

Dear Dante, my loving husband,

You moved to Verona? Why am I only just hearing about this? I mean it seems like kind of an important thing, right? Did you get all of the other letters I sent to the place you were previously staying at then? Because those letters had very important things in them. I can always write them out again if you'd like. It would be quite a bit of trouble remembering all I said in them, but they were about important topics and I really wouldn't want you to miss out on what I had to tell you.

Anyways, I just wanted to let you know that everything is going fine here. It has changed a lot over the years. I am not sure you would like it here anymore. Most of the children have gone off on their own or will be ready to soon. I can't say I talk to as many people as I used to. So many avoided me after you were exiled. I think they feared that if they kept associating themselves with me than something unfortunate would happen to them as well. Everyone still remembers it, they remember you. You, the one always trying to defend Florence and make his works famous. They all still think of great things when they think of your name. You should be glad. Isn't that what you always wanted?

With so much faith in you,

Gemma

27-11-1314

Dear Dante, my ever-so-kind husband,

I thought you were joking when you said you were writing a poem and what kind of poem is that long anyways? You asked if I had read it yet, but it only came out not very long ago. I mean I will get around to it eventually, really I will. I have just been so busy lately, doing things like, oh I don't know, taking care of a misfit teenager.

Pietro is beginning to turn into a man and I don't know what to do. You were here when Jacopo was going through all of this, what do I do? He is changing and growing and you are missing all of it. It makes me quite sad actually that he has to do this all by himself because there isn't another male figure here to help him. I've tried talking to him and it is like he wants nothing to do with me, I don't understand it. Maybe if you wrote to him it would help.

Back to your poem, I just hope it isn't another one about Beatrice. It isn't, right? Other people around here have read it. I haven't talked to a lot of them, but I have heard many rumors about how controversial it is. I've even heard talk of it being banned, but people here are so over dramatic. Why did you name it *Inferno* anyways? That seems awfully depressing. I don't see what the appeal is. If I saw a book or poem titled that I definitely wouldn't pick it up.

With overflowing hope,

Gemma

05-08-1315

Dear Dante, my honest husband,

Seriously? You were given the choice to return to Florence if you just pleaded guilty and repented? But you refused? Yeah you would have gone to jail for a few years, but at least you would have been back home. Don't you think of anyone but yourself or Beatrice? You have an actual family, a wife and four children, and you still choose to dwell on distorted memories of a girl you once knew. She probably wasn't even that great anyways.

And, by the way, why haven't you been answering my letters? You had an excuse before because you moved, but what is your excuse now? Are you too busy writing these silly poems to answer your wife? Isn't there anything else important to you than writing? Do you no longer care about your family? Please get back to me soon, Dante.

Passionately,

Gemma

13-01-1318

Dear Dante, my renowned husband,

Well after sixteen years we finally get to live and be together again. You, me, and Antonia. She is wonderful, she helps out so much. She has really grown into such a beautiful young woman. Do you think it will be strange to see one another again after all this time? Will it be different? Will you still look at me and picture what your life could have been like if our parents hadn't arranged our marriage or if Beatrice had loved you back?

Also, I know you said you've nearly finished this poem of yours, right? I hope the rest of it is a lot happier and less disgusting than your first one. Why did you want to write about Hell anyways? Isn't that going to get you into more trouble? You literally condemned Pope Boniface VIII. I don't think the church is very happy with you. Well, I suppose I will see you soon in Ravenna and we can talk more about this in person.

Ardently,

Gemma

01-09-1321

Dear Dante, my beyond incredible husband,

They keep saying you might die and I am not really sure how to feel about that. It isn't much of a secret that we have never really gotten along, but that doesn't mean I do not still care. I am not really sure how sick you are, to be honest. You don't seem well at all, but I think that you can get through this, especially with all of my loving support. You don't seem to have much of a will to live though. You don't care to live for your family, but I'm sure if you were still working on that story you would try a little harder.

Speaking of your stories! You are so obsessed with them! You literally read that poem of yours to Antonia as a bedtime story. She isn't even a little girl anymore, Dante, and she still found the first part terrifying and the rest of it boring. I guess the second two parts did do well at putting her to sleep though.

I suppose if you do die though, it won't be too difficult to get over. I lived without you for 16 years and raised some of our children by myself. I'm sure I would get along just fine without you here. I guess I won't have anyone to write letters to though, but I think I could do it. I don't think I'll have to worry about that though, I am sure you will be just fine.

Sentimentally,

Gemma

14-09-1322

Dear Dante, my good for nothing husband,

It has been a year since your death, so I do not really know why I am writing this letter. It is not going to change anything, but I suppose that it is just a way for me to let all my emotions out, in a way. Once a man is dead, everyone seems to praise him for all the great things he did in life, but I suppose with you I do not really see the point in all that pretending. I mean, we both know our marriage was failing from the very beginning. It was arranged by our parents of course, but that does not mean you should not have tried. You were always mumbling under your breath about the wondrously beautiful Beatrice, yet you could not even give me the smallest of compliments. Do you know how that made me feel? Even in your poem all you ever did was talk about her. What about me? I suppose I am not dead and that might be part of the reason, but still. What was so special about this Beatrice anyways, you always wrote about how unapologetically beautiful she was and in your *Commedia* you talked of how she had such a high amount of good in her, but did you even know her that well? You fell in love with her when you were just a boy, perhaps you only made up all these things about her so the girl you were in love with was remembered fondly after her unfortunately young death.

I cannot say you were all bad though. You did help me with the children, until you were exiled of course. You were only standing up for what you believed in, even if you were an idiot for doing so. And I finally finished the *Commedia*. I don't even want to think about where I would end up if that was real. It was actually really great if I replaced Beatrice's name with mine every time it came up. Let's just say I did a lot of replacing. That isn't really the point though. I guess what I want to say now is I am sorry. Is it too late, do you think? I hope you forgive me.

I keep wondering where this letter is going to go, what I am going to do with it. I have no idea, perhaps I will just burn it or maybe bring it to your grave. Neither will do any good though,

but then again I suppose writing this letter in the first place won't either. I should probably go now, I have clothes to clean. I don't think I'll write again.

Your lonely wife,

Gemma