

Dear ~~Mr McGreggor~~ Sirs,

I think they call this a speculative letter.¹ I guess because I have to speculate that you find it interesting. I don't know. I heard you're looking for other people's letters and I got a good one for you, only it's not a letter. I got it in the mail a few years ago, and, I don't know. Maybe it's not the kind of thing you want.

In this tape some girl, a cute girl, maybe fourteen years old walks into the scene and she's wearing some ridiculous Sherlock Holmes hat and her t-shirt is stretched all tight across her belly because she's maybe six months pregnant. You can't always tell with real young girls. *[Redacted section]*² But that's not the point of this letter.

So Prego examines this dead body, some old lady, lying spread-~~fucking~~-eagle on some dinky linoleum floor and then she calls for her sergeant and this little boy comes running into the scene. He's scribbling madly into his notebook, like there's no way he's actually writing anything, and then Prego says, she ~~fucking~~ proclaims, 'cause of death: Murder!'

The story is that it's Christmas Eve and the dead old lady is a social worker in this orphanage. I mean, real stretch, right? She's probably a real social worker in this real foster home and this whole video is probably some art therapy ~~shit~~ or vocational training ~~crap~~ that's she's doing with these kids. I don't know. I'd heard about that kind of stuff going on when I was in juvie, but I never did get to do any of it myself. But my sister did, and that's what I'm trying to tell you. Essy got all kinds of opportunities like that. Things she wouldn't of got to do if I hadn't of *[Redacted section]*³ made it possible to live in that place. I think she knows that.

In this tape Essy is still a kid and she's playing some kind of local nobody. The town drunk maybe. Prego calls her a hobo at one point but I don't think that's right. She's not on the move. Not going a hundred miles across Nebraska, just you and your trucker. But I'm not trying to say that one is better than the other. Being a hobo isn't some kind of ~~fucking~~ vocation,

and most the ones I knew were drinking their meals, same as anybody.

So it's no surprise when the cops arrest Essy for murder, but right then when Prego slams the cuffs on her everything freezes, I mean the fuzz, the orphans, everybody, and Essy stands there with her face looking up to the sky and the whole thing is like the ~~fucking~~ last supper. They call it a Tableau. It's a ~~fucking~~ TABLEAU.

So there's a murder trial and it's full of these kids in ridiculous hats and tiaras talking, giving witness against Essy. No one has any real evidence but a couple of them say she probably did something to someone and getting her for this crime is making up for the last one they didn't get her for. 'The greater good,' one of them says.

Finally there's this scene where Essy ~~finally~~ tells her lawyer her alibi. Turns out right when the old lady was kicking it Essy was at the other orphanage across town bringing secret presents to all those little unwanted kids. And her lawyer is ~~fucking~~ over the MOON. 'The jury is going to love the orphan angle! People go ~~fucking~~ crazy for orphans', she says. And it's true. People ~~fucking~~ love stories with little orphan white kids who can sing and dance their tragedy like it's comedy. Whatever. But Essy says she can't tell her alibi, because then those little kids will know there's no Santa. 'They already lost their families, I can't take Santy from them too', she says.

So we're back in the courtroom and the judge says, 'guilty!' and the camera is looking over Essy's shoulder at all the other kids from all the other scenes, only now they're dressed in rags and have dirt smeared all over their faces. A dozen Tiny ~~fucking~~ Tims. And the camera sits there, and it's like two minutes of these golden reactions. Yeah, there are a couple of kids mugging it up, but for the most part it's some god ~~damned~~ subtle shit. I look at those kids and I know I have no regrets. I guess that's not what I'm supposed to say. But we all got to find our own way out of the past, and I still got 7 to 10 years to work on mine. I don't know.

Then the video goes black. No credits. No music, nothing. The tape came a few years ago in a plain brown envelope, and I guess I'm still unwrapping it. Maybe you could use it for your project. I don't know. It's the best letter I ever got.

Sincerely,

Linda Lopez.
L.L.

¹ This letter is a work of fiction. The original typescript carried strikethroughs, redacted sections, and handwritten corrections. We have followed the corrections, indicated the strikethroughs, and noted the redacted sections below.

² 'Like I know this one girl and one day she looks like she finished a good sized hoagie and the next day she goes into labor right there in the dining hall. At first some of us thought she'd been stabbed, which we'd all been waiting for anyway'.

³ 'hadn't of ~~created the~~ killed our mom'

⁴ Cassie Gonzales's work has been published by *The Kenyon Review* and *Tin House*, and has won or been shortlisted for writing competitions held by *Granta*, *The Paris Review*, and the BBC, among others. Originally from Tucson, Arizona, Cassie now lives in Stockholm, Sweden and blogs at www.cassiegonzales.com.

so it's no surprise when the cops arrest Lissy for murder, but right then when Grego slams the cuffs on her everything freezes, I mean the furn, the orphans, everybody, and Lissy et al's there with her face looking up to the sky and the whole thing is like the ~~whole~~ last supper. They call it a Tableau. It's a ~~Tableau~~ Tableau.

so there's a murder trial and it's full of these kids incredible hats and tiaras talking, giving witness against Lissy. No one has any real evidence but a couple of them say she probably did something to someone, and getting her for this crime is asking up for the last one they didn't get her for. "The greater good," one of them says.

Finally there's this scene where Lissy ~~finally~~ tells her lawyer her alibi. Turns out right when the old lady was licking it Lissy was at the other orphanage across town bringing secret presents to all those little unwanted kids. And her lawyer is ~~seeing~~ over the hood. "The jury is going to love the orphan angle! People go ~~fucking~~ crazy for orphan-s." she says. And it's true. People ~~fucking~~ love stories with little orphan white kids who can sing and dance their tragedy like it's comedy. Whatever. But Lissy says she can't tell her alibi, because then those little kids will know there's no Santa. "I've already lost their families, I can't take Santa from them too," she says.

So we're back in the courtroom and the judge says, "guilty!" and the camera is looking over Lissy's shoulder at all the other kids from all the other scenes, only now they're dressed in rags and have dirt smeared all over their faces. A dozen tiny ~~fucking~~ times. And the camera sits there, and it's like two minutes of these golden reactions. Yeah, there are a couple of kids mugging it up, but for the most part it's some ~~god~~ subtle shit. I look at those kids and ~~I know~~ I have no regrets. I guess that's not what I'm supposed to say. But we all got to find our own way out of the past, and I still got 7 to 10 years to work on mine. I don't know.

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