

The Letter
A Short Film by
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Draft 6

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FADE IN:

TITLE CARD: Sea Point, South Africa, 1988.

FADE TO:

INT. CRAIG'S BEDROOM - DAY

A boy sits on a single bed in a boy's bedroom. This is CRAIG. He's sixteen. He is turning a letter over and over in his hands, staring straight ahead of him. We see what he sees. Another single bed, this one perfectly made, as if it hasn't been slept in in a long time, on the wall above the bed boy's pictures from the eighties, rock bands, girls and cars, all his brother's. Craig looks down at the letter. We see it for the first time. It has a large SADF stamp on the top corner. Below that every single handwritten line has been censored with a thick, black marking pen. Beneath the black the writing is wild and chaotic, but can't be made out. Craig looks at his brother's side of the room again. He stands, lingers for a moment, then exits.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAIG'S LOUNGE - MOMENTS LATER

The lounge and kitchen are open plan, clearly part of a smallish flat. CRAIG'S MOM is busy cleaning the kitchen. She's dressed for work.

CRAIG

Hi.

CRAIG'S MOM

Hi. How you?

CRAIG

Fine.

CRAIG'S MOM

Did you check the mail?

CRAIG

Ja.

CRAIG'S MOM

And?

CRAIG

No. Nothing.

His Mom sighs.

CRAIG
I'm sure its fine. He's busy,
probably.

CRAIG'S MOM
I'm going to go to the post
office. This isn't normal.

CRAIG
I'm sure its fine.

CRAIG'S MOM
Just, do me a favor and go ask
them today. Find out if there
isn't some problem.

CRAIG
Okay.

She finishes in the kitchen and comes out into the lounge.

CRAIG'S MOM
What you doing today?

CRAIG
Not much. I'll probably see
Marco. No plans.

CRAIG'S MOM
Okay. Just go find out. I'll
see you later.

CRAIG
Kay.

She picks up her bag.

CRAIG'S MOM
Bye.

She kisses him.

CRAIG
Have a nice day.

She walks out the door. Craig stands. Its quiet. He takes
the letter out and looks at it, turning it over in his
hands again.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Craig walks along an empty street, passing quiet rows of flats. It's a hot day. He has the letter in his hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. MARCO'S HOUSE - DAY

Craig stands in front of a closed door. The door opens revealing MARCO. Also sixteen, school friend of Craig's. He's shirtless.

MARCO

Hey.

CRAIG

Hi.

Marco goes inside, leaving the door open for Craig to follow.

INT. MARCO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

MARCO

What's happening?

CRAIG

I got a letter from Grant.

MARCO

Ja?

CRAIG

Have a look.

Marco looks.

MARCO

Shit.

CRAIG

Ja.

MARCO

Wow.

CRAIG

What you think it means?

MARCO

I dunno. You know where he is?

CRAIG

No.

MARCO

Where did he last write from?

CRAIG

This is the first in, like, two months.

MARCO

Shit, man.

TRACEY (O.S.)

Marco?

MARCO

Ja?

TRACEY

Where you?

MARCO

In the passage.

TRACEY appears from in the house. She's fourteen or fifteen, in her pyjamas and carrying a pile of folded washing. She stops abruptly when she sees Craig.

TRACEY

Hi.

CRAIG

Hi. How are you?

TRACEY

Fine, thanks.

She puts the washing in Marco's arms, then turns and walks off quickly. Marco goes towards his room. Craig follows.

MARCO

What you think it says?

CRAIG

I don't know. The writing looks hectic, you know. Like he was pressing really hard.

Marco turns into his room. Craig follows.

CUT TO:

INT. MARCO'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

C/u of the letter. Marco is studying it. We consider the wild writing behind the marker.

CRAIG

You think I should phone them?

MARCO

No point, man. They've done this for a reason. Shit, they've gone to town, hey?

CRAIG

Totally.

MARCO

He must be in a sensitive area. Could be over the border.

We pull out to see Marco's room. Its covered with pictures of the military. A big map of Southern Africa covers one wall. Marco moves over to it.

MARCO

What's his unit?

CRAIG

Three two battalion.

Marco passes his hand over the map. There are little flags and notes everywhere.

MARCO

Ja, well. I don't know about them, but there are definitely okes up over the border.

He touches the area of Angola, vast and empty.

MARCO (CONT'D)

Its maybe not official, but its happening. Maybe he's there.

CRAIG

How do you know?

MARCO

Bru, you read between the lines.

Craig looks down at a newspaper in front of him. There is a picture of troops moving.

MARCO

I mean, going this hectic isn't standard, but it happens.

CRAIG
Why'd they even send it, then?

MARCO
Procedure, bru. They just doing
their jobs.

Craig looks at a picture of a young soldier on the wall,
smiling at the camera.

Tracey enters. She's changed and brushed her hair, a
little make-up.

TRACEY
What you guys doing?

MARCO
Nothing.

CRAIG
I got a letter from my brother.

TRACEY
What's it say?

MARCO
Nothing.

CRAIG
We can't tell. It's been
censored.

TRACEY
Hey?

Craig passes her the letter. She looks at it carefully.
She holds it up to the light.

TRACEY
You can kind of see what it says.

Craig goes over. He looks with her.

TRACEY
(Tracing with her finger)
'Hi...guys'. 'S-o-r-r-y,
sorry'...

CRAIG
Ja, I think you right.

TRACEY
'Sorry...I'... um. It's hard.

MARCO
I wouldn't do that. You'd just
be guessing. It's too mixed up.

CRAIG

But, wait.

He tries to pick out certain words.

CRAIG

'waiting', 'we're waiting'

Marco takes the letter away.

MARCO

I'm serious. You being stupid.
You just going to make stuff up.

CRAIG

I can see.

Craig takes the letter back. He turns a desk light on and shines it through the back.

MARCO

You being stupid, man. Be better
to find a way to get the cokey
off.

CRAIG

You can't get the cokey off!

MARCO

You can. I've heard you can.
Maybe nail polish remover or
something.

CRAIG

What?

MARCO

I think so.

TRACEY

You can. I think you can use
nail polish remover. Or
peroxide.

CRAIG

Have you got any?

TRACEY

What?

CRAIG

Either, I guess.

TRACEY

Ja! No. Mom locked her room.

MARCO

Fuck.

Pause.

MARCO

Let's go. We'll find something.

Marco takes a t-shirt from the pile, puts it on. He walks out.

TRACEY

Will you come here for lunch?

CRAIG

I dunno.

TRACEY

You should come. I want to see if you get it off.

Craig looks at her. He's pretty worried. He exits.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Craig and Marco walk along.

MARCO

What unit you wanna be, when you go?

CRAIG

Same as Grant, I suppose.

MARCO

I wanna be a Recce.

They walk.

MARCO

Did you know only seventeen percent of Recce applicants get accepted? Know why?

CRAIG

No.

MARCO

The Recce's are the most highly trained elite unit in the world.

CRAIG

Sounds hectic.

MARCO

Ja.

CRAIG

Think you can get in?

MARCO

Ja. I'm training fuckin hard.

CRAIG

Think you can go all the way?

MARCO

What you mean?

CRAIG

Do what they tell you, no matter what?

MARCO

What? Like kill?

CRAIG

Whatever.

MARCO

Bru, I was born for this shit.
I'm gonna fuck everybody up.

He pretends to shoot at random people. A passing ADULT sees him. He stops and smiles apologetically.

CUT TO:

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Marco is looking at rows of nail varnish and other feminine products. Craig walks up from another aisle, holding a bottle of peroxide. Marco looks at it. He picks up a bottle of nail polish remover.

MARCO

What you think?

CRAIG

We don't know what we doing.

MARCO

Ja.

Marco looks round. They see a guy around their age working behind the counter. JARED. They walk over.

MARCO

Hey.

JARED

Hi.

CRAIG

Hi.

JARED

What you guys looking for?

MARCO

We not too sure, really. Check this out.

Craig puts the letter on the counter. Jared picks it up.

JARED

Whoa. Who's it from?

CRAIG

My brother.

Jared turns it over and over.

JARED

Oh, man. That sucks. Talk about paranoid.

CRAIG

You think it's bad?

JARED

Don't know. You never know.

Jared looks at the letter some more.

JARED

You want to get it off?

MARCO

Ja.

Jared looks at the products they've chosen. He shakes his head.

JARED

No.

He walks out from behind the counter to a sun-cream display. He selects a spray-on version.

JARED

This' the best. Come.

MARCO

What about the shop?

JARED

My boss is here.

He points to MR PETRIE, a middle-aged man standing in another part of the shop.

CUT TO:

INT. STORE ROOM - DAY

JARED

Pass here.

Craig passes the letter. Jared puts it down on a table, puts a light on it.

MARCO

You sure that's going to work?

JARED

Spray-on sun cream is best for permanent marker.

CRAIG

How do you know?

JARED

My dad showed me. It gets it off your clothes really well, but I don't know about paper.

MARCO

Just be careful.

They all look at the letter.

JARED

It sucks that he wrote on both sides.

MARCO

Just do a corner, just to start.

CRAIG

Just do the date.

Jared carefully sprays then wipes at the corner of the letter. The marker dissolves, but so does the paper. He stops.

JARED

Shit.

He steps back.

JARED

The paper's too thin.

MARCO

Let me try.

Marco takes the cotton wool. He sprays at the first line very carefully, then wipes even more carefully. Same effect. Mr Petrie walks in.

MR PETRIE

What you boys doing?

JARED

Ah...

Mr Petrie sees the letter. He picks it up and reads.

MR PETRIE

Where's he based?

CRAIG

I don't know. We can't tell.

MR PETRIE

How long's he got left?

CRAIG

A year.

Mr Petrie looks at them all.

MR PETRIE

You boys going when you finish school?

MARCO

Yes, sir.

MR PETRIE

(To Craig) You?

CRAIG

Well, I don't have much choice, do I?

Mr Petrie puts the letter on the table.

MR PETRIE

Jared, hurry up.

He takes a box and exits. Silence.

MARCO

What's up with him?

JARED

His son, ah, died. Up there. He wasn't supposed to see this.

Silence.

JARED

My Dad's sending me overseas. I don't have to go.

MARCO

Cool.

JARED

Look, you guys can keep messing around, but I don't think you gonna get it off. It's too mashed up.

CRAIG

Isn't there something else?

JARED

I don't think so. Ask me you should just chuck it away. You can't sit and worry about it. I mean, look at this fucking thing, they meant business.

He holds it up. We see again how covered in black marker it is, how furious his brother's writing was, the top portion of it now damaged by chemicals.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Marco and Craig walk along. Marco's carrying grocery bags. The two stop. They've reached Marco's house.

MARCO

You coming in?

CRAIG

No. Thanks.

MARCO

Come in, man. Tracey's made you something.

CRAIG

No she hasn't.

MARCO

Come on.

CRAIG

I'm going.

MARCO
There's no point in worrying.

CRAIG
Ya, well, you don't have anyone
to worry about.

MARCO
I'm just saying. There's no
point in worrying.

CRAIG
Thanks.

MARCO
Alright, man.

CRAIG
Later.

FADE TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Craig walks along.

FADE TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Craig sits on the beach, smoking a cigarette, watching the sea. A YOUNG SOLDIER walks onto the beach a little way away. He's dusty and travel-worn, just returned from his two year duty. He dumps his kit-bag on the sand, rips off his shirt and runs down to the water, diving in. Craig watches.

The young soldier returns, sprawling on the sand. Craig walks over.

CRAIG
Hi.

YOUNG SOLDIER
Yo, bro! Howsit?

CRAIG
Okay.

Craig offers him a cigarette. He accepts.

GRANT
So, what the hell's going on?
Where the ladies?
(MORE)

GRANT (cont'd)
I'm supposed to be seeing bikinis
everywhere, where the fuckin
bikinis?

CRAIG
Its still early.

Craig stands there, watching him.

YOUNG SOLDIER
So, what's up? You in school?
You on holiday? You lucky fuck.

CRAIG
Did you just get back?

YOUNG SOLDIER
Absolutely. Freedom! Feels
good.

Craig sits next to him.

CRAIG
Um, do you know Grant, Grant
Howell?

YOUNG SOLDIER
Hey?

CRAIG
He's in three two battalion, he's
been there a year now. From 13
December.

YOUNG SOLDIER
No, sorry man, I was in one oh
one. The fuckin 1-0-1! He up at
the border?

CRAIG
I think so.

YOUNG SOLDIER
You haven't heard from him, or
what?

CRAIG
No. Well, no. We're worried.
How are things up there?

YOUNG SOLDIER
It's the army, bru. Things are
lekker kuk up there.

CRAIG
Do you know how I can get in
touch with him?

YOUNG SOLDIER
Write him a fucking letter.

CRAIG
He doesn't reply.

YOUNG SOLDIER
Listen, boet...

Craig shows him the letter. He reads.

YOUNG SOLDIER
Jesus. Look, this could mean anything. Could be some rock, didn't understand the English so he just crossed it all out, maybe they're somewhere that no one wants to know they're there, but no one fuckin told them, you know? Anything, bru. It's the fuckin army.

CRAIG
But the writing.

YOUNG SOLDIER
Check here. Your boet wrote this, so he's alive. In my book that mean's he's okay. So just leave it there.

The Young Soldier crumples the letter up and throws it at Craig. He stands, collects his kitbag and starts to walk away.

YOUNG SOLDIER
Shot for the smoke.

Craig watches him go.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAIG'S KITCHEN - DAY

Craig cleans the kitchen meticulously.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAIG'S BEDROOM - DAY

Craig sits on his bed, the same position as earlier. He's got the letter in his hand, smoothed out. Again, he looks from it to his brother's side of the room, all his posters, his bed. We hear a key rattling in the lock of the front door. Craig looks up, listening.

CRAIG'S MOM (O.S.)

Craig?

Craig doesn't answer, thinking.

CRAIG'S MOM (O.S.)

You here?

He covers the letter in his hand.

CRAIG

(Calling)

Hi.

His mom enters the doorway.

CRAIG'S MOM

Hi. Why you so quiet?

CRAIG

I was sleeping.

She walks over, looks at him. Ruffles his hair.

CRAIG'S MOM

Fish and chips?

CRAIG

Ja. Nice.

She nods and walks out. Craig opens his hands, revealing the letter.

CRAIG'S MOM (O.S.)

Did you go to the post office?

CRAIG

Ja. They said there's no problem.

There just hasn't been anything.

Everything's fine.

He looks at the letter, then slowly crumples it up. He puts it in his pocket. He stands for a moment, then walks out. We hear the two of them talking indistinctly. We look at the empty room, his shadow disappearing in the passage.

FADE OUT.

End.

