

A Letter to My Past Self

written by

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SCENE

*PRESENT* appears in the doorway of a dreamscape that resembles her childhood bedroom. She beholds the space in front of her with wonder. It's exactly how she remembered it. Well, of course it is because this takes place all in her memory. She enters, pensively. It's as if she's afraid the wrong move will cause the scene around her to pop like a bubble and disappear forever, taking the memory with it. She takes a hesitant step into the room. Another. Another.

*She's fully in the bedroom, looking about.*

PRESENT

This is a dream.

*She approaches the child-sized desk in the room. It's cluttered with childhood belongings. Beneath some papers she finds a handwritten letter. She smiles and starts to read it.*

PRESENT (CONT'D)

"Dear Future Me..."

*Lights up on PAST, Present'S younger self. She's bright-eyed and eager. She recites the letter on the page from memory. Or she's reading her own copy.*

PAST

"Dear Future Me. It's me. You. You're in my future. I'm your past. Right now, I am ten years old, and we are living in the mountains. I don't know if you remember, but there's a llama farm just up the road. We drive by them every day on the way to school. We can smell them as we go by. They stink real bad."

*Present smiles at the recollection. Past continues.*

PAST (CONT'D)

"How old are you now? Are you old? Like thirty? Or are you super old, like forty?"

*Present stops reading for a beat and looks at the audience, then resumes.*

PAST (CONT'D)

"Where do you live now? Are there llamas there, too? I am in fifth grade. Miss Darla's class. My favorite subjects in school is reading. When I grow up, I want to be a dancer, a Navy pilot, and a Marine Biologist. Miss Darla says I can't be all three, so I have to choose one, but I'm not sure which one to pick yet. But I'm gonna be one of them! I've decided it."

My favorite food is cantaloupe, my favorite color is aqua, and my favorite dinosaur is the Ankylosaurus. In the future, I want to have a job and a house with a dog and a cat. I want to drive an electric car and travel to Florida so I can visit Disney World. I hear their castle is bigger. When I grow up, I want to be happy, and to make the world a better place. I hope you did, and I hope you are. Signed, Me."

*Present stares at the page and takes it all in. The lights change on Past. She steps into the bedroom and addresses Present directly.*

So, are you?	PAST (CONT'D)
Hmm?	PRESENT
Are you...?	PAST
Am I what?	PRESENT
Are you happy?	PAST
Define "happy."	PRESENT (beat)
Huh?	PAST
Nevermind.	PRESENT
It's an easy question.	PAST
It's not, actually.	PRESENT
Why not?	PAST
<i>Because.</i>	PRESENT
<i>Because why?</i>	PAST

PRESENT

Because there's a lot more important stuff to life than just being happy.

PAST

Like what?

*Present is caught off guard - how the hell does she answer this? She takes a deep breath and a big swing:*

PRESENT

Like being responsible. Like paying your bills on time and keeping your credit rating up so you can try to buy a home, even though you've never been able to save enough for a down payment.

(beat)

It's learning how to stay online long enough be informed and disconnecting before social media wrecks your mental health and rots your brain.

PAST

(beat)

What's social media?

*Present looks at Past incredulously, realizing how she's showing her age.*

PRESENT

(slightly overwhelmed)

Oh Jesus. Okay. Uh...

(beat, then to Past)

Don't worry about it. You'll know soon enough.

PAST

Alright.

PRESENT

Life is... trying to find time to work out, read, and play video games while balancing a full-time career and a family, and somehow being creative. It's getting a full night's sleep but always waking up tired. It's... being excited to clean out the refrigerator.

PAST

Huh?

PRESENT

Well, not being excited to *do* it, but being excited by *having* a clean refrigerator once its done.

(beat)

It's realizing that nobody else cares what your favorite dinosaur is anymore - which is still Ankylosaurus, by the way - but understanding it's not personal; your friends are concerned with their own adult things.

(beat)

It's coming to terms with not having the grades to be a Marine Biologist. It's following your conscience and not joining the military so no more Navy Pilot dreams. So you go to school and get a dance degree, which worries you a little, but everyone tells you that you can find an entry-level career position as long as you have a degree in *something*. Anything will do.

(beat)

And when you graduate, you tear some ligaments in your knee on your first professional gig and suddenly you need surgery and you're on the shelf for months. You lose that job. You're six figures in debt and you learn that no one is hiring dance majors that can't dance and your much-hyped degree is useless. So you get the first job you can find, working nights at a hotel. But that job is boring and nights are dangerous, so you get a job in a call center selling storage units. And you promise yourself that this is temporary. That you're going to make a new plan and change course. You're going to get back into shape and start taking dance classes again so you can go audition for that professional company downtown. But the pay at the call center is shit so money's always tight and classes are expensive so you put them off until you can get a raise or a better job.

(beat)

And before you know it ten years have gone by, and by professional standards, you're well past your prime. Your career is over before it even started. So one day you finally throw out your dance shoes because you can't bear to look at them anymore.

(beat)

But hey, by then, you're now a call center manager for a company that sells plumbing supplies online, which pays enough for you to finally get to Disney World. And yeah, the castle there is MUCH bigger... but once you see it in person, you realize it's not all it's cracked up to be and that you like the simple charm of Disney Land's smaller castle better.

(beat)

It's visiting where you grew up and seeing that your old mountain town has grown into a small city. The llama farm is now a Target, but you swear you can still smell the manure on the breeze.

(beat)

It's learning you're ADHD at thirty-nine, and your focus problems and executive dysfunction aren't how normal people's minds work; they just didn't know what ADHD was when you were young. It's realizing how different your life could have been had you gotten the help you didn't know you needed, and it's being able to let go of the resentment and bitterness from that realization and moving forward.

(beat)

It's discovering that you *do* have the strength to get a new cat and love them with every fiber of your being, even though you swore you couldn't put yourself through the pain of losing one again after the first two.

(beat)

It's deciding that you don't have to justify doing what you love by turning it into a career or hustle. So one day you wrap your knee up and sign up for group hip-hop classes at 24 Hour Fitness, just so you can move again. And you remember why you love it.

(beat)

It's planning and disruption and adapting and compromise and frustration and realizing that when you look back, you're not at all where you thought you would be by now, and you feel your heart fucking *break*.

(beat)

It's accepting that you're never going to change the world. And it's deciding to make your own happiness in spite of that, and learning to love yourself anyway, and celebrating the stuff you *have* managed to do.

PAST

Like what?

PRESENT

Well, I got an electric car.

PAST

(excited)

You did?

PRESENT

Oh yeah. This year. Bought it at the store. Paid a little more. But it's brand new and beautiful and all tricked out. Gets over 300 miles per charge, and the battery goes from zero to eighty percent full in thirty minutes.

PAST

Wow.

PRESENT

Yeah.

PAST

That's cool.

PRESENT

Yeah.

PAST

So... how old are you now?

PRESENT  
 (beat)  
 Fifty.

PAST  
 (wide-eyed and whispering in awe)  
*Fifty?!*

PRESENT  
 Yep.

PAST  
 Wow.

PRESENT  
 Yep.

PAST  
 ...Are we happy?

PRESENT  
 (a thoughtful pause, then)  
 Yeah. We are.

PAST  
 Good.

PRESENT  
 And we're a lot of other things, too.  
*They look at each other. Suddenly, Past hugs Present.*

PAST  
 I love you.

PRESENT  
 I love you, too.  
 (beat)  
 And I am so excited, and happy, and sad, and scared, and thrilled for everything you get to go through.  
*The release the embrace.*

PAST  
 So... are you done?

PRESENT  
 Done?

PAST  
 Living.

PRESENT

...no?

PAST

(beat)

Really?

PRESENT

Yeah, really.

PAST

(beat, then sincerely:)

But you're *so old!*

PRESENT

Hey, don't make me take back what I just said. I still got a few decades left in me.

PAST

Oh.

PRESENT

As a matter of fact...

(she grabs a pen and a piece of paper)

Dear Future Me. It's me. You. Your past self.

(she glances at PAST)

Your past selves.

*They smile at one another. Past cuddles in with Present as they start to write a letter to their Future self.*

PRESENT (CONT'D)

"Right now, I am fifty years old."

PAST

"And I am ten."

PRESENT

"...and our favorite dinosaur is still the Ankylosaurus..."

BLACKOUT