

There was a day, a day I half remembered, only a little stronger than a re-occurring dream. There had been an extra day in the year, and neither of my parents had been able to find a babysitter or a day off or a close enough friend who owed them a big enough favor. I slipped through the cracks, essentially, of the childhood net my parents built around me. I remember that day, it was the day I had to take care of myself.

My mother called about a week before to remind me.

“You remember that day when you needed to take care of yourself, honey? It’s coming up. I figured I’d call to remind you. October 3rd, don’t forget. I’ll drop you off at your house, and pick you up at 10. I might be late, I don’t remember that day too well. It was years ago.”

“Really, that day’s coming up?”

“October 3rd, dear.”

Many fuzzy memories came back. A warmth, a confusion. A long sleep in a familiar car.

“Okay. Don’t worry, Mom. I’ll be ready by then.”

I moved my dentist appointment. After all, my parents had only asked me to take care of myself this one time. I could shift my schedule for this. Some people had to take care of themselves almost once a week.

I went to the store to buy myself some snacks. I remembered when I was young my favorite thing to do was scrape out the insides of oreos and put them on toast. I’ve since stopped liking toast that much, but I stocked up on both oreos and bread. A few juice boxes. I forgot what kids like, but then I remembered that it would just be myself. I started to remember all the strange foods I loved far more than I actually appreciated eating them--I loved the idea of hard boiled eggs, goldfish and carrot sticks and other color-coordinated foods, shelf stable chocolate milk. I ended up buying too much.

At home, I hid all my journals and pictures in a back room and unplugged the TV. I couldn’t reveal too much about the future to myself. Little hints would be fine, just nothing memorable. I got out craft things, colored pencils, glue, paint, and real scissors (when I was young I hated safety scissors with a passion) even though I remembered how bad I was at them. But art things could always calm me down, and all I really clearly remember from then is that it had been a stressful day.

Then my mother’s old car pulled up with that familiar sound I had spent all my elementary school afternoons straining my ears to hear. It was unsettling to hear that sound again. I had arrived.

I went out to the driveway and saw myself. I was so small, smaller than I remember. I don’t remember what I had noticed about myself, but the way that small face looked up at me, thinking so hard and understanding so little, it made me chuckle. It would be awhile before I fully figured out my look, my way of holding my own body, all the little choices and decisions that lead to me. My mother’s eyes had bags under them. She sighed and told my younger self to be good. I stepped forward and hugged my mother. She collapsed into my arms. She seemed frail, in this moment. I had forgotten what exactly had been so stressful on this day, but as I

hugged her and smelled the antiseptic smell in my mother's hair, the old memories flooded back. The time in the hospital--when everything was going crazy--and my uncle was over--and Dad got involved in that accident--and then the school called--old glimpses of the past. They faded like the tide and my mom drove off. Little me watched her car go, all the way to the end of the driveway, and off and off.

"Don't worry, she always comes back."

Little me looked up. Looked into my eyes. I just smiled.

"Come on inside. I've got snacks and things in there." Little me stood there for a while. I grabbed my shoulder and carefully led myself inside. I immediately curled up on my couch like a cat. I let myself stare off into the distance between the couch cushions and did some mindless tidying up. I still think the most calming noise in the world is the quiet movement of someone in the next room over.

Eventually, I was found by myself.

"I'm hungry." Little me said. I got out a few of the things I had bought, grapes too, even though I knew I had hated grapes. We sat there on the couch, and little me munched the heads off of animal crackers, watching me eat grapes.

"How can you eat those things?" Little me asked.

"It's better than other fruit," I added. "Plus, I only eat the green ones."

Little me nodded, and bit the head off of a lion.

I got out the colored pencils, and we both sat on the floor, doodling. We didn't talk much. Little me seemed a bit nervous and I was worried I'd give away some sensitive part of my future if I just started talking. I tried to hide my drawings from little me, but as soon as I turned away I could feel my own small eyes on the drawings. I forgot I had been such a rascal.

Little me seemed dismayed by the drawings. I asked why.

"They're so bad!" I adamantly replied. I was shocked to the core.

"I know. You really don't get better at drawing." I had made myself sad. I forgot how much I really liked drawing when I was young.

I put away the colored pencils and craft things. Little me was off in a side room, playing with the desk toys I had purposely all put on a shelf in the corner. I don't really remember, but I believed I was trying to hide some tears. I can't even admit that I'm crying to myself.

Later, I emerged out of the side room. Little me asked if we could watch TV. I said that we couldn't. They asked why, and I tried to explain. But the words were always too big, about paradoxes and the continuum and the post time incident and recurrent self-like beings and co-existent particles and... I just settled on this explanation: TV from the future has an age limit.

I commented that that particular rule was stupid. I agreed. Little me nodded. I hadn't told a complete lie, I suppose. I asked little me if I wanted to learn to tie a necktie. Little me shrugged reluctantly.

I tried to teach myself how to tie a tie, but little me got bored and stopped trying. I could tell I wasn't really learning anything. I think I made a subtle impact, though, and that's what matters.

We made mac and cheese, or something like mac and cheese. I swear, it had so many added ingredients that the cheese sauce ran thin and macaroni was hard to find. Little me was more creative than I had remembered and also more stupid than I had anticipated. I had to continually resist the notion that chocolate syrup would be a good addition to the mish mash of goldfish, onion, extra cheese, tomatoes, tater tots, ravioli, bacon, and guacamole in mac and cheese. We ate it, and it was okay. I think I enjoyed it more than little me did because I had also added quite a bit of hot sauce. But maybe I just enjoy food more now that I'm older.

We played some board games until I began to get tired. I put blankets and pillows on the couch--many pillows, many blankets. Little me burrowed into them. I always loved to make nests when I was young.

"Would you like a bedtime story?" I asked.

Little me was very surprised. I think I had never really been read a bedtime story at this point. My parents never did them, I don't know why. I saw them on TV, though, so I idolized the idea.

"Ok."

I pulled out an old book, the pages thick with that musty, old book smell. Little me coughed. I read the story--it was a little odd. Something about a young boy traveling through the different time zones, and making friends in every one. How he could stay in touch with his 18th century friend through letter-writing, but had to text his 21st century one. It was a little too educational, and little me was asleep halfway through. I read the whole thing, though.

My mom was late picking me up, but seemed like less of a wreck than she did when she dropped me off. I remember that walk, back into the car and everything familiar. It was back to the warm familiarity every kid craves--but I had felt like I was ripping away part of myself. I had got a sneak peak at the world, through my own eyes, and everything it could be. I feel asleep in my mom's car. As I walked back to my house, my mom's car rumbling off into the night, I felt like a scab was being torn free. But the shadow of it stayed, that my young self had been in the house filled with my old memories. It felt tainted somehow, warmer but in a sticky, humid way. I would never see my young self again. Somewhere in a car, I was driving away towards all my horrible middle school years, then high school years, then beyond. I would go, full force, into all the joys and pains of it. And even though I felt like talking myself out of every horrible embarrassment and painful mistake was just a phone call away, I knew it wasn't. It was all about momentum. Little me was just catching up to me. Big me, I guess. I didn't feel very big that day. Not very big at all.