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A Note to Self

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Dear Self,

I hope that this letter meets you in good health and I hope you're happier than you were the last time we spoke. We have had a rough relationship the past five years, and I want you to consider this letter as a letter of reconciliation.

You needed someone to be by your side and I couldn't be that person. You felt as if the world was against you and I left you in that dark place.

You grew up in Inagua, Bahamas. I watched the way you slowly grew into yourself.

I remember you as a little girl. Your parents stayed at your grandmother's house. The house was as huge as your imagination; you were quite the daydreamer. Your parents often thought that there was something wrong with you as a result. You would think about cartoons, about writing a story, or even creating a project of your own. Sometimes, in the first grade, while everyone was taking notes, you would burst into laughter. Everyone thought that you were crazy or a bit mentally unstable, but you were just happy. You had nothing but elated thoughts. Your joy was overflowing and your spirit was free. I secretly admired how effortlessly joyful you were.

Unfortunately, your heart was soon to be broken by the separation of your parents at the age of five. You couldn't understand why they needed to be apart, but you understood that they could not remain together. I'm pretty sure you couldn't remember a time where they actually got along. At five years old, there was a recognized incompatibility in witnessing the loud

arguing, the tears, and the dysfunction. You just wanted to have a happy nuclear family, the ones you saw on television.

Television was your escape, but all the characters on the screen had parents that did not argue aggressively. They had parents that lived together happily, something that you could only imagine, not experience.

Imagination seemed to become a safe place all of a sudden. When life became harder to bare, the dolls in your room became for sacred. The scenarios in your mind seemed safer than the pain surrounding you. Imagining what was not there was comforting. It was therapeutic.

I'm sorry that your first heartache happened when you were five. It was after your dad left. I remember that you would cry over a photo of you, your mother, and father every night. You were wearing a white church dress with white ribbons tied in your hair. It was the night you were graduating from kindergarten. You had a missing front tooth, but that didn't stop your enormous smile. I think that was the first time that you really discovered that you were beautiful. You had no insecurities, no doubts about yourself. You were so happy. Your mother and father stood on both sides of you. Your mother's hand rested on your right shoulder, while your dad's hand wasn't touching your left shoulder. Even though you were looking at the picture to feel closer to him, he still felt far. He always felt far.

I'm sorry that you did not have a sibling to share this pain with. You cried alone in your room that you were sometimes afraid to sleep in. Maybe you were just afraid of the dark. Maybe you were even more afraid of being alone.

Eventually, you grew accustomed to being alone. Honestly, I do not know whether or not that was a positive thing. You felt alone because you had no one to grieve with. All of your

friends were still living their carefree lives while you were living a lonely and practically fatherless life.

He guaranteed that he still loved you, but he didn't show his face enough. You would go weeks, months without seeing him. He often forgot to call. There was a point where his voice seemed so unfamiliar. It was difficult to even picture what he looked like.

"I'm coming to pick you up."

"You can spend the night with me."

He would never show.

Why did he always do this?

It really affected you as a teenager. You lived with one parent that constantly made you feel like you weren't good enough. Sometimes it felt like she cared more about your grades than your well-being. She loved you, but not exactly in the way you needed. Her way of loving you was pushing you to be the best academically. She loved you by constantly pushing you to be the 'best,' but you needed someone to love you by accepting you the way that you are. All of your worth relied on what you can achieve. If you didn't perform to her satisfaction she would ask:

"What is wrong with you?" She said with her brow scrunched with anger.

Disappointment in her eyes never seemed to leave your memory. You could not shake the feeling of being a disappointment.

Do you remember the day she broke the necklace your father gave you? She thought you were being mouthy so she grabbed you by the neck. She slammed you into the wall. The gold necklace with engraved x's and o's fell to the floor.

“You broke my chain.”

“So what?”

Your heart sank.

The tears fled in your eye sockets blurring your vision. You felt as if you could not be close to your dad no matter how much you tried. You went to your room, you tried to find comfort.

You and your mother were severely hurt. You lived in a home of brokenness. No one taught you how to properly deal with a broken family structure. Maybe it was something no one knew how to do.

You just wanted your father around, and your mom condemned you for it.

Your mom is pretty much known for adding fuel to your every pain. She often cursed at you for being like your dad, the man that cheated on her. She was bitter from her pain, so she ignored yours.

This made you feel alone. This made you feel deeply before being able to place your feelings thoroughly into words.

You cried in her arms one night. You begged her to make him come back. That was the first time you remember her holding you.

On top of everything that you were going through, I hated you.

I'm sorry for telling you that I hated you.

I listened when everyone told me that you were inadequate. Like them, I was wrong. I apologize for adding pressure to your pain. You needed someone to believe in you. You needed affirmation.

Encouragement and support was something you desperately needed, and unfortunately, I couldn't deliver.

I believed everyone when they said you weren't good enough. I believed them when they said something was wrong with you. You had no understanding of what it was like to feel holistically loved. You were just severely criticized by family members that did not know what it was to love themselves. Your father was absent and your mother never seemed to understand how to love you in the time of loss. You thought maybe if you weren't born, the pain would have been easier. You felt as if you were the living reminder of a failed unity; a broken promise made before God.

Looking for validation in the wrong places, you fell victim to a love that did not serve you. Searching for the validation that you thought romantic love would give you. I think he reminded you of your dad.

It was a Tuesday evening when your phone screen lit up.

“You're dirt”

“You aren't worth shit.”

The pang in your stomach was so pungent, but it felt so familiar. Somehow you felt way about this already. Somehow you felt as if it has always been your truth.

But it wasn't true.

I am so proud of the way that you have grown through that situation. The dysfunction in your home led to dysfunction in all of your other friendships, but somehow, you didn't succumb to being bitter. You still loved with all of your heart. You fell in love with art you fell

in love with the friends and family, you fell in love with life. You grew up with the wrong idea of love, but you never stopped loving.

You forgave. You forgave your father for being a cheater, you forgave your mother for being bitter, you forgave me for being excruciatingly unfair to you.

All you have ever known was abusive, neglecting, or nonexistent love. Now that I've watched you grow, I realized that you are love itself. Your past did not hinder you from becoming everything you needed to be.

After witnessing everything you've been through. I know that you can withstand anything.

I do not hate you. I admire you.

With Love,

Self