

# The Time Traveler's Past

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It was a rainy night in a little town located between Illinois and Indiana, USA. In the basement of a little house located in a little neighborhood laid a little boy no older than twelve years of age. He had just spent the last few hours in misery and now was a time to sleep. He wasn't sleeping, instead, he was crying.

You see this little boy had a secret. A secret he had only shared once. He was taught to be a good boy, obey his parents, never fight with his sister – even if he failed to do so quite often. However, the most important thing of all was that he would become a good little Christian boy.

He was taught God was real and he was worthy to be praised. He learned in Sunday school that God was all mighty and loved him no matter what. However, you see our boy questioned the legitimacy of these claims. For he had been praying for a very long time for one specific thing and tonight was one of those nights. Laying on his back, he looked up at the tile checkered ceiling, many of which were falling off, and prayed, “God, why did you make me a boy?”

I'm sure you understand where this boy's story is going. Since he was four, he never felt like he fit the gloves he was given, he could never understand why he didn't like other boys and in fact, much more preferred the play with the girls. He even loved dolls and wished he could wear pretty dresses. He also was jealous of how the way his sister was allowed to do whatever she pleased – her most recent adventure was horses and their parents spent lots of time and money to please her. The same never happened for him. Sure most of what he wanted was kept a secret, such as that American Girl doll or the pretty dress he wanted for his birthday. But the one thing he did share was his love for trains, however, this never went more than them buying the occasional hobbyist train magazine or a broken garage sale train set. Once he asked to go to a model train show and his parents kept brushing it.

You might ask yourself: if he wished he was a girl, then why did he want to play with trains? To which I would ask, are you so bound up by your ideas of gender that you believe girls can't like trains? However, I, the narrator, digest.

“God if you are all powerful and all knowing then why did you do this to me?”

The room was silent and all he could hear was the sound of the rumbling furnace.

“God... I know I’ve prayed this before but would you please turn me into a girl so I don’t have to live like this and I could play with or wear what I want. No one would care... would they?”

But again, the room was still silent.

So what was it that had our protagonist down this evening, you might ask? He had returned from his best friend’s birthday party and things, as you might expect, didn’t go so well. His best friend was the daughter of his mother’s childhood best friend. They had been friends since they were seven years of age but things were different now. In recent years he found it much more difficult to be friends like they always were. She preferred to play with the new boy on the block named Nick. He disliked Nick, in fact, he might say, hate, but he knew that wasn’t a nice thing to say.

He wished Nick would move away, he wished Nick would disappear but he didn’t. Nick would spend so much time with his best friend that he found himself playing with her adopted brothers, which his parents thought was only natural he would prefer – if only they knew the truth.

Earlier that year, his best friend moved away for a few months, that is when things changed for the worst. She never came back the same and he very well knew it. He felt the only way he could have a friendship was to be more than friends, so he decided he would do the very thing that disgusted him – be her boyfriend. Perhaps it was foolish to think and perhaps she never saw him like that – but honest to God, he tried.

Tonight, however, their friendship was over. And if he could see the future, he would know that he would never see her face-to-face again. The most he would ever see of her is through photographs. Photographs posted to her Facebook just after he asked to be her Facebook friend at the age of twenty-something, but nothing more – no messages – no comments.

He had been anticipating her birthday for some time now, he very well knew she was growing distant from him and wanted to do his best to salvage what little friendship they had left, so he came up with a plan. He filled a basket with candy and memorability of their friendship. He wanted to buy her something nice but his parents didn’t have any money to give him and he was forced to split all his paper route money with his sister – it was only fair since she occasionally helped.

Her party was at the roller rink and he didn’t know how to skate, so he sat quietly with the younger boys by the coke machines. Eventually, he got word that cake was to be served and sprung to life – *this is my chance*, he thought. He rushed for the party

room but his best friend already had two other friends seated at her sides – one just happen to be a perfect neighbor boy named Nick. He watched as the presents were opened, some were just cards, others were perfume and cheap jewelry. But when Nick's turn came, what else did he give her but a beautiful necklace that looked like something all their mothers would wear on a nice date. *There was no way Nick bought that on his own, he didn't even work a paper route*, our protagonist thought.

Looking at his wrapped basket, he cringed. He hoped with all his heart this would remind her of her true friend and make her come running back to him. They were about to serve cake when he spoke up and announced that he too had a gift.

He walked over and placed it in front of her. He could see the look in Nick's face as he scarfed at the basket. Nick trying to give a laugh, grabbed a couple pieces of candy from the basket and said, "Oh, free candy!" Our protagonist's best friend rotated it a couple times and finally pushed the basket to the side, without so much as a thank you, as she began to chant with the other kids ready for cake.

He was devastated. The rest of the night, he spent with her brothers, yet again and waited for what felt like hours to go home. He finally followed his parents out the door and sat in one of the huge captain chairs in their 1992 Chevy Astro van. The sliding door was wide open and he waited for his mother to finish talking to his ex-best friend's mother.

When unexpectedly his friend came out and said goodbye. She stood at the door nervously and ground her shoe in the dirt. "Thank you for the basket," she said.

However, he had no words to speak. He wanted so badly to tell her how he felt but instead choose to remain quiet. Given up, he watched as his friend took off and that was the last he ever saw of her.

Back in his room, he was crying just thinking about earlier. He loved his best friend like a sister. He genuinely believed that if he was born a girl, as he wished, they might still be friends.

He was about to close his eyes when suddenly a bright blue light filled the room. He didn't notice where it came from or where it went but he sprung from his bed and looked about. As his eyes adjusted, he saw a figure standing in his room.

It was a lady and she was taller than most girls he knew – not so much taller than his father but regardless, she was very pretty. She wore strange clothes he had never seen before. There was no mistaking it, she must have been a time traveler.

“Who are you?” he asked as he looked into her eyes. He realized her beauty continued as he saw pretty kind eyes that reminded him of his own.

“I think you already know that,” she answered.

“No, I don’t but I’m going to guess your from the future.”

“You could say that.”

“So what are you doing here? Don’t tell me you’re lost and it’s just by accident that you landed in my room – or my parent’s basement.”

“No... I know exactly where I am,” she said soft. “I know you are almost twelve and that you just had a terrible evening at your best friend’s party.”

“Wait, how do you know that?”

“I know everything about you. I know your name is Joel.”

“So if you know my name and who I am, and you are from the future? Then you must know my future, do I end up okay? I mean do you know...?”

Her face went from a smile to that of grieving. “I think we need to talk.”

She sat down on the bedside and began slowly, “Yes, I know you wished you were born a girl. From the age of four, I believe. You also only ever told your cousins and haven’t spoke up since about it after they rejected your feelings. Where I come from, it’s not as much a taboo subject as it used to be. You’re unfortunate that you were born in a time period such as this.”

“So what ends up happening to me?”

“Let me start out by saying you are okay. You are happy and you love who you are. However...”

“However?”

“It was a long road to get there and this is far from over. The hurt will only keep on coming and you will be helpless to do anything about it.”

“Don’t say that it’s true. Can’t you fix it?”

“No...” she answered shaking her head. “No, I can’t change the past, in fact, you won’t remember my visit after I leave. I’m not really a time traveler. You’re actually a virtual recreation from your future self’s memory.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. I feel real, I think I’m real.”

“You’re not. I’m sorry to say this but you are only a memory. You exist as a set point in time that can’t be changed but it also can’t be ignored.”

“So I’m never free of this curse?”

"I never said that. You do find freedom. I did just say your future self loves who you've become, didn't I? But..."

"But what?"

"It costs you something... it costs you everything!"

"Everything?"

"Yes, you lose your friends and family, most especially. You decide to do something that finally frees you of your grief and bondage and what do you get in exchange? You are now considered dead to everyone."

"That doesn't sound like a future I want."

"Do you really have a choice?"

"I can choose to be a certain way and..."

"And what... suppress it and let it fester? Besides I just told you, you are not real, you are only a computer-generated hologram. I can't change it!"

Suddenly Joel froze in place and the room faded away. Our time traveler stood up just as the bed faded to dust. A set of doors was revealed at the far end, they opened, and in walked a man in a jumpsuit.

"Amelia, you need to stop crashing these programs. You keep coming in here and overloading your childhood self with ideas that the system can't compute. How do you think the real child you would respond?"

"I don't know... I guess I keep hoping one day he might. Maybe I wish he knew the truth and he knew what would happen. At least, maybe I could better prepare him for everything he will lose."

"I've told you before, this is not a time machine, it's a program being developed to help treat others like you. Do I need to call your physiologist for another session?"

"No, xir."

"Good. Now I think it's best you go back to your room."

"Before I do, can you reset the program right before it crashed and let me do one thing?"

"I really shouldn't but okay... you are our top subject. Computer, reset right before the crash."

"Affirmative!" responded the computer. The room came back into view and Amelia sat back down on her childhood bedside.

Just as Joel became conscious, he jumped at the sight of the technician who never left the room. "Who's that?! Is that me?!"

Amelia looks at the tech and asked, "You didn't make yourself hidden?"

"Oops, my mistake. Let me fix it. Computer..."

"No, I'll work with it. Give me a second."

Amelia turned to her childhood self and answered, "No... that's not you."

"Good because I didn't like his beard. I don't like beards."

"Ouch," said the technician jokingly.

"So can I see myself?"

"Actually, you already have?"

Joel's eyes went big and he looked right at her eyes and realized the truth.

"Do you mean to say?"

"I do. But what I said is still true, the road is costly and you will face hardship. I would say, remember it but... anyway. It's time you get some sleep."

Joel slipped under his covers and laid to one side. Amelia snapped her fingers and the room dimmed.

"Actually, can you leave the lights on?" asked Joel.

"Oh sorry, I forgot I used to sleep with the lights on all the time. I don't know how I even did it, to be honest."

Amelia placed her hand on Joel's head and pat his hair. He smiled and made noises like a happy puppy. She knew he loved head pats and this soothed him to sleep.

After a moment she stood up ready to end the program, when suddenly Joel spoke up, "Hey, future me?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Do we still love Jesus?"

Amelia smiled and tears ran down her cheek.

"We never forget him. He is the one and only friend that walks you through this struggle. In the end, we love him more than anything. And just so you know, you do some amazing things in his name."

"That's nice to hear."

Amelia gave it a moment, maybe two and finally said, "Computer, end program."