



Letter to My Younger Self

Alexandra Benedict

HI ALEXANDRA. WELL, this is weird. Isn't it? I'm in my forties and you're what, *sixteen*? You desperately want to be a writer, you have done since you were four when you realised it could be an actual job. And here I am talking to you, like I've got wisdom or something. I know you probably won't want to listen to me, because 1. I'm old; and 2. I'm you, and you've always been hard on me.

But humour me, would you? Please. Sit down with a mug of tea on your beanbag, wearing black and loneliness, surrounded by Morrissey posters (now, I won't break your miserabilist heart by talking about how he turned out right now. This message is supposed to be uplifting. Let's just say prioritise your Robert Smith obsession over Stephen Patrick. Just sayin). Anyway, we both know your writing isn't the best yet that it can be. How could it be? It'll never be. So don't worry about it. Just keep writing and stop comparing yourself to Mary Shelley. Yes, she wrote *Frankenstein* when she wasn't much older than you. But, you know, she's Mary Shelley; she did *her* thing. You could also consider not spending so much time visiting her grave in Bournemouth; again, just a thought, a suggestion. Anyway, you're doing the right thing by reading *everything* you can. All the words you've consumed so far, and will do, have infused into the brain I have now. So thank you! You've flavoured it like gin with the best botanicals (and you'll like gin later as well; just don't try it for a while — and stay off vodka cos it's not good for you). Anyway: fill your head with whatever you can. Keep watching and reading your lifelong love, *Doctor Who*, because, guess what, it'll come back. I know. You won't



believe that either. But it does. Twice. And it'll be better than ever. Learn more languages and instruments. Your older self will thank you when visiting different countries, promoting your books.

Yes! That's right! It happens. You become a professional writer; it is your job. I know. Seems unlikely. Who do you know who's actually a writer? But you do it. I mean, not immediately. It takes quite a while. Yeah, double what you are right now, which is also something you won't comprehend. It takes writing a novel, a whole one, that gets rejected. Then learning how to write fiction through lots of wonderful courses. Getting an agent with your next book. Which goes to auction in the UK and Germany for quite a good amount of money, as well as for the film rights. Best of all, you'll see your book, *The Beauty of Murder*, on the shelves. And that's the dream, isn't it? Our books, on shelves, that people read. That's your dream right now. But try to think beyond that. When those books don't sell well and another deal isn't forthcoming, it's just the start of a long journey of triumphs, embarrassments, and well, sitting in a room by yourself writing. You'll get there, though. You'll start writing scripts, your words spoken on Radio 4 and places that haven't been invented yet. You'll get to write many hours of *Doctor Who* audio drama for actors you've loved since you were small. You'll make friends and travel, and fall in love with a man who loves horror and books and *Doctor Who* and most of all, you. I know. That's probably the hardest of all to believe. But it happens.

So here's my advice. Get good bras, invest in bitcoin and streaming platforms, ignore that now-famous comedian who will look you up and down when you try and join Footlights at Cambridge, who sneers and says 'I don't think so'; just say 'well I do' and join anyway. Go to writing conventions and conferences and find your tribe. Move past the people who hand you red flags when you meet, because those red flags keep coming from up their sleeves, and charm is their biggest illusion. Know that lots of the difficulties you have are because you're neurodivergent, not useless. Most of all, don't give up, because now you are, I am, doing everything we wanted. And we both need to remember that.