



Letter to My Younger Self

Sarah Jasmon

DEAR SARAH,

I'm aiming this when we are ten, when we are reading with uncritical joy and writing stories without any awareness of how it should be done. It's a funny thing, but you're going to go on a long writing journey where you'll lose that fluid capacity to start at the beginning and build a world of delight which surprises you as much as anyone with where it ends up. You'll go through periods when your imagination gets blocked in by a high brick wall of doubt, when you can't think what can possibly happen next. You'll read lots of books (and I'm sorry, but you'll never quite stop getting in trouble for reading when you should be doing other, more boring, things. Oh, and by the way, probably best not give into that need to read *More Trouble at Trebizon* under the desk during the music lesson. Mr Skinner will confiscate it and lose it and Roberta Bartholomew won't lend you any more of her books. A little bit of delayed gratification is a good thing here). Where was I? Oh yes.

Read the books — they have everything in them that you need. But also try to stay more confident in what you think. There are lots of people out there who have heard of things you've never come across and will make you feel ignorant, will make you feel that what you have to say is somehow less important than what they've heard from others. This will start to happen most when you go to university. I can't guarantee this, but maybe stick with your desire to go to Stirling University — it's okay to disagree with your mum. It's not too far away and you can get there by



train, and maybe there you'll be able to expand into the person you were beginning to be when you had all those great teachers for your A levels.

If you do make that change, it's possible that you won't send your first article to the cycling magazine, but you'll definitely send it somewhere. The advice that the editor gave, that the readers want to know more about the kestrel flying above the rainbow that you see from the mountain pass in Wales and less about what it's like to change a tyre in the rain? They're not wrong, though maybe they should have added that it's how you write about the flat tyre that matters. But know that editors don't usually send detailed notes after an unsolicited submission. Don't feel crushed: grab the opportunity, rewrite the article, make a start on your career earlier. Or don't. You'll have a rich and fascinating life anyway and you'll become a published writer in the end. I don't regret anything, and neither should you. So stop worrying about what you're missing and enjoy the journey. You are a writer already. Build on that.

Oh, and when Julia Humphries asks if you like Matthew Webb, say *Yes*. It's not a trick question.

Lots of love,

Sarah x