

## The Meeting

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### Abstract

*This piece, despite being steeped in fantasy, still has enough of a foot in reality in order to drive the premise by basing it off real anxieties that I and other people have: fears about identity and personal growth. It is a creative piece about an internal meeting between four different versions of myself: my eleven year old, fifteen year old, nineteen year old, and present-day self. They only have one goal: figure out what happened in my life to cause everything to veer off-course. And the only thing standing in their way is, of course, each other.*

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I took a deep breath. “Thank you all for coming. I know that normally it’s very hard to get us all in one place, so I appreciate you for making the trip.”

Someone raised a short, skinny arm. “Don’t you mean ‘appreciate *me* for making the trip?’” my eleven-year old self asked.

“Yeah dude, he’s got a point,” my fifteen year old self said. “Also—what trip? We’re not going anywhere; we’re literally inside your head.”

They were right about that. See, I had a problem: when I left high school in 2019, I thought I knew exactly who I was. But now it was 2023, I was about to graduate college, and I had *no* idea who I was. I needed to figure this out. And since therapy was a little expensive at the moment, who better to help me figure it out than...me? Or more accurately, three past versions of myself?

“Guys, focus!” my nineteen year old self said. “I know it’s easy to get hung up on details, but we need to do this. We need to *help*.”

He gave me the sweetest, most sincere look anyone could ask for. I missed those days—the days where I could just blindly offer anyone kindness without worrying they’d take advantage of me. Because no one would ever *dream* of taking advantage of me, right? I forced myself to ignore the lump in my throat and say, “Thank you.”

My brain’s default setting was “over-active” (or imaginative, if you wanted to be polite about it). But for today, I forced it to create the most boring setting imaginable: a doorless, windowless boardroom. Everything was gray, from the walls to the desk to the chairs—everything

except the water, because gray water freaks me out.

“Okay, let’s start from the beginning,” I said. “First, we didn’t have a very pleasant childhood. I wouldn’t call it ‘bad’, but it wasn’t without its struggles. Eleven, stop fidgeting.”

My eleven year old self sat still. “But this is so boring! Couldn’t you have gotten a PowerPoint or something?”

“This is a conversation, not a classroom. And if it’s too boring for you, you have my full permission to mess around.”

“*Finally.*” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a red Nintendo DS. It was our brother’s, but he wasn’t in our subconscious right now. “Remember to keep the sound off,” I reminded him.

“I know what I’m doing,” he replied. But he double-checked just in case.

“If he gets to have the DS, why can’t we have our phones?” Fifteen asked.

“Because he’s not even in middle school yet, and you two are old enough to pay attention. So pay attention.” Fifteen sulked, but I ignored him. “Anyway, our childhood wasn’t great—this much is true. But things took a turn for the worst somewhere between seventh and ninth grade.”

Nineteen turned his chair towards Fifteen (despite me wanting to stay focused, I couldn’t stock the room with anything *but* swivel chairs. I’m not a monster). Fifteen defensively asked, “What?”

“You were in charge during that time,” Nineteen said. “Don’t you have an explanation for your actions?”

“If you really want to know what happened,” Fifteen replied, “why don’t you ask Thirteen? Or Fourteen?”

“Because ninth grade was when things started to get *really* bad. And that’s the year you’re responsible for.”

Fifteen grumbled something about how it “wasn’t his fault”. “How is it not your fault?” I replied.

“Because *they* started it, not me! I was just defending myself!”

“Defending yourself from what?” Eleven asked.

Fifteen scowled. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Well, do you want us to understand?” Nineteen asked.

No response. Nineteen knelt next to Fifteen’s chair. “Hey,” he said in a soft voice. “Whatever happens, it’s not going to change the way we feel about you. You may have made some mistakes, but...who doesn’t? At the end of the day, you’re still one of us. And I think that’s something to be proud of.”

Fifteen looked directly into Nineteen’s eyes. The saddest, most joyless grin came onto his face. “And I think,” he said, “that you should stop trying to be Superman and go back to being the sad, lonely nerd that you always were.”

For a moment, Nineteen didn’t react. None of us did. Finally, with his face getting redder by the second he shouted, “Why you stuck-up son of a—!”

“O-*kay*, we’re taking a time out,” I said. “Preferably before you two kill each other.”

Eleven raised his hand. “Don’t you mean, ‘before *we* two kill each other?’”

“Shut up, Eleven!”

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