



Do A Nice Thing For Your Future Self, by Elizabeth Gilbert

I grew up on a small family farm, with plants and animals needing care in every direction, so vacations were rare. But one summer my parents convinced a neighboring farmer to tend to our goats and chickens while we got to go to the beach for a whole entire week. On the morning we departed, my mother stripped her bed, washed and dried the linens, and remade the bed perfectly, as if she were preparing it for a guest. I was baffled. Nobody was going to be visiting while we were away; why go to so much time and trouble?Â

“Oh,” my mother explained, when I asked why she had bothered, “this is just a little present I’m giving my future self. This way, when she comes home all tired and worn-out at the end of her vacation, she’ll have the gift of fresh, clean sheets waiting to welcome her back to her own bed.”Â

“She,” my mother had said “not I.” I found it striking that she felt such friendly kindness toward the person she would be. My mother’s current self clearly believed that the stranger she’d become over the next week was deserving of love. This gift of a freshly made bed was not an insignificant act: It was a conscious handshake of affection across time, a way of connecting the woman of this moment to the woman of the future.Â

I have never forgotten this lesson.

We are told to be kind and generous to ourselves, but it’s not always easy. Often we don’t feel deserving. Often we fail to act in our best interests in the chaos of the present moment, denying ourselves loving tenderness. We look in the mirror and think about every dumb thing we’ve done or said today, and we decide, “Well, there stands a lousy piece of human garbage.” Then comes the punishment, which can be anything from binge eating to taking other people’s abuse to blowing off our taxes. When you hate yourself this much, why would you ever make your bed? You’re basically a worthless dog who deserves nothing better than to sleep on a pile of damp rags.Â

But what about the person you will become in a week? Or a month? Or a year? What about that innocent stranger? What did she ever do that was so wrong? What if you were able to regard your future self as a deserving visitor worthy of affection and sympathy? What if every single day you tried to think of one nice gift you could offer her—something that might make her feel welcome and safe and loved when she finally shows up?Â

It can be as small a gesture as flossing your teeth (a boring task I

can never bring myself to execute unless I begin by saying, "This one's for you, future Liz!"), or as big a gesture as quitting smoking or walking out of a toxic relationship because you don't want your future self to suffer as much as your present self is.

If you can't do a nice thing for you, could you possibly do a nice thing for her? That mysterious and blameless stranger will someday have to live in the world you're creating for her today. In other words, you're the one making the bed, but she's the one who'll be lying in it. So be nice to her today. Be nice to her every day.

Remember: You are the best friend she has.

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