

INSIDE HER LEG

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OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

Lexi was on the sofa reading a book when she became aware of an itch on her left leg, just above the ankle. There were things she should be doing, and reading wasn't one of them. It was her secret act of rebellion. She scratched the itch, wondering if it was a bite.

The itch subsided and she began reading again but when she stopped scratching to turn the page, the itch returned with a vengeance. Lexi scratched it again and continued scratching as she read. After a paragraph or two she became aware of a warmth flowing around her fingers. She groaned, thinking that the bite was bleeding and if there was blood on the cushions she'd have to stop reading and clean up the mess and there would be no more time for her book.

When she looked down there was no blood, but her fingers had disappeared into a hole in her leg. This struck Lexi as curious but with her scratching fingers still soothing the itch and no mess to clean up, she decided to carry on reading. When she paused to turn the page again, she noted that her entire hand was now inside her leg and so she fumbled single-handedly with the other and kept on reading. By the time she was on the next chapter, her arm was elbow deep, but it was only when she was in her leg up to her shoulder and it became difficult to balance her book that she stopped to consider the situation.

She thought that a leg containing an entire arm might bulge like a python when it swallows a small goat, but her leg looked perfectly normal, something that couldn't be said for the rest of her. Her body had formed a circuit and it occurred to Lexi that she must look a little like a human doughnut. This made her laugh out loud but the sound startled her and so she stopped.

The sensible thing to do would be to extract her arm, but it felt nice inside her leg so instead of pulling her arm out, she pushed her head in to take a look.

As might be expected, the inside of her leg contained many shades of red from vermilion and crimsons to carmines and rose pinks. More surprising were the glowing violets and cornflower blues, not to mention the streaks of light whooshing by that looked like shooting stars. When Lexi turned her head to follow one she heard a small plop and suddenly her whole self was inside her leg. On checking, she was relieved to see that she still had two legs attached to her body.

There was movement in the distance. She walked towards it and saw that it was another person inside her leg, a young woman with her back towards Lexi. She was dancing. Lexi couldn't hear any music but there was something familiar in the other woman's movements, and Lexi found herself walking in time to the silent beat.

When she was close enough, she called hello. Startled, the young woman turned around. Lexi began apologising for the intrusion but as she looked into the other's face, the words crumbled in her mouth. She was looking at herself, not herself now, but herself thirty years before.

Her younger self stared back and then leaned in for a closer look. As she peered, a new expression came over her face. One Lexi interpreted as dawning horror.

"What happened to you - I mean me?" her younger self asked.

"Life," Lexi replied.

"Oh," the other replied.

"I'm sorry," Lexi said, feeling that she owed herself that much.

A sudden cloudburst in her mind released all the hopes and dreams and ambitions and plans she'd had back then. The contrast between what she'd wanted to do and what she'd actually done hit her hard. She slumped to her knees and sat with her face in her hands.

"Are you okay?" her younger self asked.

Lexi felt a hand on her shoulder. She'd always been a kind soul.

"Maybe there's something we can do to change things," her younger self said, "so that..."

Lexi raised her head. Her younger self looked embarrassed.

"So that you don't turn into me?" Lexi asked.

Her younger self shrugged. "I have an idea."

Lexi got to her feet. "Go on."

“I don’t know where it came from but it’s rooted in my head so it must be true.”

“Are you going to tell me?” Lexi asked.

“No,” her younger self said, “that’s the thing – you’re going to tell me. You’re going to tell me something that will change everything, but it has to be just one thing. That’s the rule. So, what is it?”

Lexi considered her life since she’d been the young woman standing before her and thought about the roads she’d taken and the alternative routes she’d missed.

“Just the one thing?” she asked.

Her younger self nodded. “Be careful - this is our only chance.”

Lexi thought and then she thought some more until finally she said, “I’ve got it!”

Her younger self smiled.

She’s beautiful, Lexi thought. I was beautiful.

“Okay, this is it.”

Her younger self nodded. “I’m ready.”

“Do not go into the Blue Parrot Café, do you understand? When you see that place, just walk on by.”

There was a sound, *sloooooop*, an explosion of shooting stars, and Lexi was out of her leg and back on the sofa, book in hand, and with the aroma of something tasty in the air. Something she hadn’t cooked.

The room was the same, but different. It was brighter. There were flowers and a bookcase against the wall that hadn’t been there before. Lexi looked down and saw that her clothes had changed. Nice clothes, colourful, and she felt different inside. She felt happy.

She looked at the place on her leg where the itch had been and saw a small scar shaped like a shooting star. Lexi smiled, and as she did, she heard footsteps in the hall, and a warm voice calling her to come and eat.

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