

POV: I met my younger self for tea
by Elizabeth Muñoz

She was sitting alone at the coffee shop.

Typical high school look, consisting of blue jeans, a black hooded sweatshirt, and black and white low-top Chucks.

Her brown hair was down, long, all the way to the small of her back.

She had too much makeup on, chola style – brown eyeshadow, thick cat eyeliner, and her lips were lined with brown lip liner. She'd realize later in life that this was way overdone.

The coffee shop was busy, and she had an open seat at her table.

She had her nose in a book, *Rain of Gold*, summer reading for the PUENTE program.

How I loved that book about the two immigrant families from Mexico and their love story.

I walk up, "Is this seat taken?"

She looks up, her eyes a honey brown, mesmerizing to look at from my angle.

"No, you can sit," she says, a bit defensive.

I drop my bag on the table.

"I'm gonna get some tea, would you like one?"

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She looks me up and down, she glances at my book bag, and I can tell she's impressed by my looks.

A Latina in her mid-thirties, wearing an olive green shirt and jeans with my brown guarache style sandals, my brown hair is down and in waves. I have papel picado earrings on, coral lipstick, and mascara on my honey-brown eyes.

"Sure, I'll have whatever you're having."

She always wants to fit in with everyone, so I'm not surprised she didn't ask for what she wanted, but for what "I" liked.

I ordered two London Fogs—Earl Grey tea with steamed milk and a pump of vanilla. She's never tried one, and from this moment on, it will turn into one of her favorites.

I get back to the table and hand her one.

"Thanks," she holds the cup close and smells the aroma. "Smells good."

I start to take my things out of my bag – a journal, a Latinx book, a bag of pens and highlighters, and my laptop.

I'm working on finishing a book for publication.

I can feel her gaze on me. She's wondering what I do for a living.

She's thinking, how can I grow up to be like this woman?

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She looks down at her 10¢ notebook from Walmart and Bic Pen and wishes she had the fancy things I have.

I remember those clear pens with the colored caps.

I take out one of my black gel pens, one of my favorites.

“Want to trade pens?” I say.

Her face says it all. She looks at me like I’d just read her mind.

“For this?” She asks, holding out her blue Bic pen.

“Yeah,” I say as we trade, “I used to love those pens when I was in High School, how smooth they write.”

She accepts the trade.

I flip through my journal, full of prompts, stories, diary entries, quotes, and more.

She watches me and looks at my notebook as I flip through pages.

“Wow,” she says, “you are so organized, and your notebook is so neat.”

She looks down at her notebook.

The spiral-bound notebook is sticker bombed. I see lots of cultural stickers, La Virgen de Guadalupe, a chola Homies sticker, a Mexican flag, and a pink Concha sticker, to name a few. The notebook is bent up, and there are torn edges from the paper that’s been ripped out.

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I try and remember these notebooks.

Notebooks that were shared between me and my best friend between periods to keep us in contact about anything and everything between classes.

She flips through pages. I see there are letter-style entries, 4x6 pictures taped to the pages, quotes, or what look like lyrics in bold on the pages.

She beams and tests out the pen I gave her. She starts writing C-H-A-B-E-L-A in big block letters with the new pen.

I wish I could tell her who I am and guide her, as there are big moments that will shape her life in the next couple of days, weeks, months.

Problems, challenges, heartache.

But instead, I sit there, writing and sipping my tea.

I realize that all those moments, moments WE went through, shaped us into the woman we are today.

She's going to cry, she's going to struggle, she's going to laugh and love, and in time, she will learn it was all worth it.

I pack up my things and thank her for the pen.

I say goodbye because I realize there is nothing I would change about my life, regardless of the situations I've been in.

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“Goodbye, younger me,” I mutter under my breath as I smile and walk away.

She watches me leave through the window of the coffee shop as I get into my new Cadillac and drive off.