

Tab 1

Through The Years

The Ghost Of My Past

A story of unspoken love, personal growth, and the painful realization that some moments are lost to time.
Words of a person who changed for someone who unknowingly inspired them, only to discover too late
that what could have been is now out of reach.

JZIN ARAMBULO

2025

Time is the enemy of a heart that hesitates.

A piece assisted by Artificial Intelligence.

Chapter 1

A Name I Never Said

JZIN ARAMBULO

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Before I knew her name, I already knew her. Not through conversation, not even through distant interaction—but through the gravity of her presence. Eighth grade was a year of chaos, identity crises, and half-grown limbs. Yet in the middle of all the noise, she was composed. Quiet, but she was the type who could fill a room just by being in it, at least, that is what I think of her. But there was something graceful, measured, timeless, even in her laughter.

I was not alone during that time. I had a group of friends—loud and awkward, the kind who made lunch breaks memorable with dares and arguments over video games. And among them, my best friend: G. We talked about everything—anime, games, food, life. But not her. Never her. No one noticed. Not G, not my other friends. I kept it hidden. I laughed when they laughed, joined the teasing, and acted like any crush I had was made-up or far-off. Because this one? It was not something I could joke about. It felt too real. Too sacred and fragile. We sat in the middle-right part of the room, like we always do. My desk was worn, scarred with years of carvings and writings from students who are long gone. I rarely spoke unless called on. I did not want to be seen, not out of fear, but out of comfort. There was safety in being invisible. But even shadows have eyes.

The first time I noticed her was during the first quarter of the year. She answered the teacher confidently, her tone laced with sincerity and humor. Everyone laughed—not at her, but because she had that light. I looked at her, stared, and something in me went quiet. I did not know her name. I did not want to know it right away. Naming things made them vulnerable, reachable, and real. I was not ready for that. Not yet. But I knew back then that she was everything I wasn't, and that is why I couldn't look away.

That year passed in slow, torturous increments. I would wait for glimpses—when she walked past my desk, when she laughed at something a friend said, when she raised her hand in class. And I'd pretend not to look, but I was watching, always.

Sometimes, I thought I caught her glancing in my direction. A fleeting moment, maybe. I'd turn away quickly because I wasn't ready to be known. Not yet. Then one day, after a brutal periodical math examination, I sat outside during recess, reflecting on every wrong answer in my head. She walked by with her friends and, for a split second, looked at me, and our eyes met. It was not anything cinematic. She did not smile, slow down, talk, or even wave her hand at me. But in that moment, I felt like my heartbeat echoed across our school grounds.

Later that night, staring at my bedroom ceiling in the quiet night, I whispered her name for the first time, just once, like a secret prayer. And I made a promise to the shadows in my room: *“I will become someone worthy of her.”*

Chapter 2

Becoming

JZIN ARAMBULO

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Transformation is not lightning. It's water over dry stone. Slow, persistent, unseen—until one day you look in the mirror and realize you've carved something new out of the old. Not through magic, but through repetition, through intention, through countless, invisible battles no one was even aware of.

Ninth grade began without fanfare. Same uniform, same halls, same bell that rang like an echo from a life I was trying to leave behind. But something was different: me. Or rather, something inside me had begun to shift—quietly, persistently.

I joined the Science Club. Not out of passion for chemistry or robotics, but because I needed a place to start. A structure. A doorway. Somewhere, I could stretch beyond the walls I built around myself—walls made of fear, silence, and the comfort of staying unseen. I volunteered to present during meetings, even when my voice trembled and my hands betrayed me. I fumbled. I failed. But I showed up again.

I read books on self-development, on confidence, on psychology—not for random knowledge, but for life lessons. I dissected my fears like they were case studies, practiced smiling without flinching, speaking without retreating, stood in front of the mirror, and tried to become someone I could admire, even if only for a moment. And I journaled—pages filled with questions, regrets, redirections. A map of my becoming, my improvement, my growth.

I got a haircut that didn't look like I'd given up. I started jogging every morning before school. Not for fitness, but for discipline. For ritual. I studied hard, not to compete with others, but because it was a way to reclaim control in a world that often made me feel powerless. Slowly, a new version of myself covers the old me, making me new, reborn, and better than my former self.

I saw her less often now. Our paths had diverged, different schedules, different circles. But that didn't stop her from haunting the quiet corners of my mind. She remained a lighthouse in the distance, guiding without knowing.

Then the tenth grade arrived, and the world paused. A pandemic spread across the globe like a slow-moving tide, swallowing everything familiar. Schools closed, streets emptied, screens replaced faces, and what was once ordinary became uncertain.

But in that stillness, I found something unexpected: clarity.

I had time now—uncut, uninterrupted time to build myself, brick by careful brick. I learned to code. Enrolled in free online courses about philosophy, psychology, and history. I read books not because I had to, but because I wanted to understand. I taught myself how to meditate, how to befriend my thoughts. I started writing prose, essays, and fragments of reflections. I created routines when the world lost all rhythm.

While others waited for normal to return, I tried to become someone new.

I never spoke to her. We weren't friends. We weren't even acquaintances. She's in front of a different screen, logged into a different classroom, perhaps unaware of my existence, and yet, she remained the quiet flame I orbited around—the impossible standard, the imagined audience, the muse that demanded I be more.

The pandemic taught me many things: How to be alone without being lonely, how to endure long silences without shrinking, how to plant seeds in soil no one else could see, but most of all, it taught me that becoming someone worthy of love isn't about love itself. It's about motion. It's about pursuit.

And so I pursued.

Not just for her. Not entirely.
But because chasing the impossible made it possible.

Chapter 3

Breaking Through

JZIN ARAMBULO

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Eleventh grade arrived without ceremony. No return to the familiar click of classroom doors, no rustle of uniforms in crowded hallways. Just the soft glow of screens and the sterile quiet of online waiting rooms. Still remote. Still fragile. Still stitched together by the internet and willpower.

But I had changed.

Not all at once. Not in some dramatic transformation. But slowly, over time, like a shoreline reshaped by the tide. The old version of me—the one who kept his camera off, who disappeared behind silence—was fading. I didn't need anyone to notice it. It was enough that I did.

So I turned on my camera. Not every time, but more and more. At first, it felt like exposure, like vulnerability, like risk. But then it became something else—presence. A quiet act of showing up. A way to say, I am still here. I am still trying.

I began answering questions aloud, even if I stumbled. I figure it was better to be wrong and learning than right and invisible. I noticed others struggling too—names that ever lit up, voices that never broke through the static. So I messaged them. Checked in. Started a group chat for our class. We shared notes, reminders, and small encouragements.

At first, there were just five of us. Then ten. Then more. The chat turned into late-night discussions, study calls, and a kind of unofficial family—a patchwork of students who refused to let silence win.

I applied for a leadership position in virtual clubs, made short campaign videos, and wrote speeches. Part of me still thought I wouldn't make it, but I did. Not because I was loud or popular, but because I cared and kept showing up.

She wasn't part of that world anymore. We had gone to different senior high schools. The algorithm of life had shuffled us apart. I didn't know where she studied now, what classes she took, what kind of people surrounded her. I didn't even know if she remembered me.

But I remembered her.

She no longer haunted my thoughts the way she used to. Her presence had shifted. She had become something deeper—an anchor, a compass. Less a person, more a force. The reason I started, even if she wasn't the reason I continued.

She was the spark. The fuse. The first breath of movement after stillness.

Twelfth grade came heavy. There was no easing into it. College applications, scholarship forms, competitive exams—all of it pressing down like a weight on the chest. Everyone was scrambling, racing, trying to measure up. I felt it too. The need to prove something. To prove that the version of me I'd built wasn't just temporary.

When it came time to choose a research topic, I didn't play it safe. I picked one that scared me. One that would push me into unfamiliar territory. One I couldn't complete by coasting.

It consumed me.

I worked on it late into the night. I rewrote the methodology a dozen times. I ran simulations. Compared datasets. Checked for inconsistencies. Proofread every sentence like it were sacred. My group began to rely on me for everything—not because they were incapable, but because I had made myself reliable. I didn't complain. I led. Quietly. With intention.

We submitted the final paper with nerves in our throats. And when the results came back, we won. First place. Recognized across campuses. Cited in newsletters and shared on forums. My name was printed under the title. "Best in Research."

Graduation day came hot and electric. The sun was merciless, but no one cared. Families filled the auditorium. Students in robes buzzed like bees. The air held joy. Cameras clicked. Names were shouted. Teachers wore real smiles, not the exhausted ones from screens.

Then they said mine.

I stood and walked to the stage. The crowd erupted louder than I expected. It wasn't forced. It wasn't the kind of applause that came from obligation. It felt genuine. I

scanned their faces as I moved forward—my classmates, my teachers, people who had seen me quiet, hesitant, now watching me rise.

A teacher placed the medal around my neck. It was cold. Weighted. Not just with metal, but with meaning.

I stood there for a second too long, looking out into the sea of faces. I knew she wasn't among them. But I imagined her anyway. I pictured her sitting in the back, arms folded, eyes fixed. Not clapping. Just watching. A witness, not a fan.

In that moment, I wasn't a boy chasing an impossible crush. I was someone who had made something out of longing. Who had taken a silent infatuation and built a life from it.

"I did this because of you.", I said silently. "You were the first reason I wanted to be seen. The first reason I believed I could be more."

I walked off the stage. The medal thudded softly against my chest, each step echoing with something I couldn't quite name.

It wasn't just an award.

It was a turning point.

It was the end of the old story.

And the beginning of the new one.

Chapter 4

From The Ashes

JZIN ARAMBULO

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College started with a strange, weightless feeling. I entered First Year ready, not with confidence, but with determination. I joined the student council as part of the media committee. I wanted to be behind the scenes, to contribute without standing in the spotlight. I poured my energy into graphic design, posters, and publication materials. I designed layouts, edited graphics, and created content for school events.

And then, something unexpected happened. Professors began recognizing my work. Students approached me, complimented the layout, and asked for help with their projects. I, the once-invisible boy, was suddenly someone known.

It was overwhelming. But it was also empowering.

My work became my voice. Through my designs, I communicated stories, themes, and values. I made new friends, built new routines, and became part of something. I was no longer the quiet kid hiding in the back row. I had found a role that felt right, where I could make a difference.

Then Second Year came, and with it, something bigger: I was elected Public Information Officer. It meant more responsibility—writing statements, handling communications, managing publicity for events. I had to lead a team, coordinate with departments, and speak in front of audiences.

It was terrifying. But it also felt like a turning point. I was trusted. I was visible. I was respected.

And still, I thought of her. Not constantly, but often. Even though I hadn't seen her in years—not during senior high, not during college—we attended different schools. She remained a silent force behind every accomplishment.

I didn't talk about her to anyone. Not because I was hiding something, but because it felt sacred. Like if I said her name out loud, the spell would break, and she'd vanish from my memory entirely.

In an effort to forget her—to push the weight of that old, persistent ache into the background—I let myself be open to someone new. She was kind, witty, and always knew the right thing to say. She noticed the details, asked how I was doing without expecting surface-level answers. We talked, laughed, and shared silences that didn't feel

empty. And for a while, I thought maybe... just maybe, I could stop looking for someone who no longer even knew I existed.

But even at my happiest with her, there was always a shadow in the room. A memory, a ghost, a name I still couldn't say aloud. I tried. I did. But when the heart's blueprint is carved by one person, it's hard to redraw it without the lines showing.

She noticed. And she deserved better than to be someone's escape. So I let her go.

I didn't cry. I didn't beg. I just... let her go, quietly. Because some goodbyes aren't about endings—they're acknowledgments that we're still haunted by things we thought we'd buried.

Still, I moved forward. The boy I was in 8th grade? He would've never believed any of this. And that thought kept me going. I kept learning. I kept designing. I kept building the life I imagined someone like her might notice. Even if she never did.

Then the Third Year arrived. My name began circulating more often—on emails, in meetings, whispered among students who wanted to collaborate. I was no longer someone who simply contributed; I was someone they relied on.

But no matter how far I went, or how wide the circle around me grew, my world always had a center. And that center was still her.

She was the silent reel behind the highlights of my growth. The imagined audience of my proudest moments. I didn't need her to applaud—I just needed her to exist somewhere in the story. Even if we never spoke again.

Then came Fourth Year. Internship season.

I wasn't expecting anything special. Just another requirement, another bullet point on the résumé. I walked into orientation with a clipboard in hand and the exhaustion of someone who'd carried too much for too long.

Until I saw a name on the list. Hers.

At first, I thought it was a coincidence. A duplicate. A glitch.

But my fingers froze. My breath stalled.

It wasn't just the name—it was the handwriting on the attendance sheet. Familiar, looping, slightly rushed. It was the way my heart reacted—not confused, not anxious, but alert. Like some forgotten part of me had just been woken up.

And then I looked up—

And she was there.

Standing by the door, sunlight casting soft edges around her frame. She was older. Brighter. Still unmistakably her.

Her hair was longer. Her posture is more grounded. There was something in her face that hadn't been there before—maybe clarity, maybe calm. Maybe just time.

And yet, the second our eyes met, all the years folded like paper.

I froze. Not in fear, but in awe.

It was like watching a dream return to reality. A chapter I thought I'd closed, opening itself up again, word by word.

She looked at me.

Not through me.

Not past me.

At me.

And then she smiled.

That smile—God, I remembered it. The one that made me believe in goodness. The one that used to live in my memory like a locked box I'd stopped trying to open.

And just like that, the weight I'd been carrying didn't disappear... but it shifted.

Because now, she was real again.

And for the first time in years, I didn't feel like I was chasing a ghost.

I was standing face-to-face with her.

My multo.

Alive.

And here.

Final Chapter

In Another Universe—Maybe...

JZIN ARAMBULO

2025

Eight years.

That's how long it had been since I last saw her. She had disappeared into a different school and a different life while I stayed and tried to become someone worth remembering. And even though we hadn't crossed paths in all that time, she had never truly left.

Because she was my multo.

Not a ghost in the tragic sense—but a presence that trailed behind every version of me I tried to grow into. She was in the silences between victories, in the spaces where my motivation burned brightest. She was the unspoken reason behind my late-night grind, behind the way I sat straighter when I presented, behind the quiet determination to never fade into the background again.

When the government internship program was announced, I didn't expect anything except another bullet point on my resume. I had been serving as Public Information Officer for the student council, had a portfolio of graphic design and published works, and my name was starting to carry a little weight in campus circles. Professors knew me. Students sought me out. I had long shed the invisibility of my 8th-grade self.

And yet... the moment I saw her name on the participant list, everything paused.

She was back. Not by fate, not by accident—but by some cruel, quiet twist of the universe that knew I wasn't ready, and sent her anyway.

When we met again, she looked older, more sure of herself. Her laugh still cut through the air like music I hadn't heard in years. For a moment, I thought maybe I had imagined all of it—my feelings, the journey, the quiet devotion. But then she looked at me and said, "You've changed."

I laughed softly. "You're the reason why."

She blinked, the surprise in her eyes barely concealed. And before the moment could slip past us, I added, "I liked you. Back in 8th grade. You didn't notice, and I never said anything... but I carried it. For years. And I changed because of it. Because of you."

Her lips parted slightly. “I... I had no idea.”

“Of course not,” I said with a half-smile. “I never gave you the chance to.”

We worked on the same team. Not close, not always side-by-side—but close enough for me to notice how different we both were. I caught her looking at me during briefings. And just for a moment, I allowed myself to hope. Maybe this was the time the story finally caught up to us.

But one evening, when the day had bled into dusk and the sky had turned the color of regret, we sat together outside the office. We were both tired. I don’t even remember who spoke first.

What I remember is her voice when she said it: “I’m not alone anymore.”

A simple sentence. No flourish. No drama. Just the truth.

She had someone. Had for a while.

The hope I didn’t even know I’d been nursing flickered once, then vanished. There was no heartbreak, not the kind that rips and breaks. Just a quiet unraveling. Like a balloon I’d been holding for too long, finally drifting out of reach.

“You don’t have to be sorry,” I said after a while. “I think some part of me always knew.”

She turned to me then, with that same warmth she’d carried years ago. “Still... if you had told me back then—if I had known—I think I could’ve reciprocated your feelings.”

And that hurt more than any rejection. Because it wasn’t a no—it was too late.

Before the moment ended, I smiled and nodded. “It’s okay. Really. Knowing that is enough.”

I didn’t expect anything more after that. But a few days later, I found a letter tucked inside my folder—her handwriting unmistakable.

I read it alone, under the dim flicker of my desk lamp.

—,

Your words made me stop. Not just pause, but stop—like the kind of pause where you suddenly become aware of your breathing. I had to take a moment to absorb it all.

I didn't expect you to say any of that. And the fact that you said it to my face? Grabe. I never imagined someone would hold on to a version of me for that long. Let alone let it shape their future.

I didn't know you liked me in 8th grade. I didn't know I meant that much to you. And honestly? If you had told me then... I think I could've felt the same way.

Maybe we could've been something.

But I guess we're both too late now.

Still, thank you. For changing. For growing. For remembering me in silence. I'm proud of who you became—even if I wasn't there to see it all.

You're not invisible anymore. You never were. I just wasn't looking in the right direction.

—Yours, maybe in another life, another universe

Your Multo.

I folded the letter and pressed it to my chest, eyes closed.

She was my multo. The silent reason I kept becoming. And though she belonged to someone else now, I no longer needed her to complete the story.

Because I had already lived the story.

And that was enough.

But still... I love her with all my heart, and that love will never fade.

I love you... I loved you...

Epilogue

**Through The Years: The Ghost Of
My Past**

JZIN ARAMBULO

2025

Time had passed, but it still felt like I had never truly left that place. I wondered if it was possible to stand still and move forward at the same time. As I walked through the campus, the familiar faces, the old halls, everything felt like a strange echo of my past. The boy I had been, the one who couldn't even say her name without feeling the weight of every unsent word, seemed so far away now. But every step I took felt like I was stepping back into that old version of myself, even as the world around me kept shifting, growing.

I had learned to smile at the things that once caused me pain. I had learned that some wounds don't heal—they just change. They become part of who you are, woven into your history, etched into your heart. And while I had moved forward, there was always a part of me that stayed rooted in the past.

The thought of her still haunts me, like a ghost.

It wasn't something that consumed me, not anymore. But there were nights, sometimes, when I could still feel her presence—a whisper in the quiet, a shadow in the corner of my mind. It was like she was always just out of reach, not a person, but an idea, a possibility that had been erased before it had even begun.

As the years went on, I found myself wondering if things could've been different, if we could've been something else, in another life, in another universe. I thought about the "what-ifs" that would never have answers. Maybe she could've felt the same way, maybe she could've been the one who had been there for me when I needed her most. Maybe we could've built a future together, something that didn't feel like a dream.

But that was the painful truth of it all—we were never meant to be. And it wasn't for a lack of trying, not for me at least. I tried to move on, tried to let go, and in many ways, I did. I found new people, built new relationships, and created new memories. But there were still days when her name lingered in my chest, heavy and unspoken.

I didn't know if I would ever fully let go, but I had learned to live with it.

And then, one day, as if the universe had heard my silent plea, I saw her again. It wasn't dramatic, no grand reunion, no signs flashing in the sky. It was just a moment, a fleeting instant. We bumped into each other on the sidewalk, and for a brief second, I saw

her as she was before—full of life, the same laugh that still felt like music to my ears. Her eyes met mine, and in that split second, everything came flooding back.

But we didn't say anything.

She smiled softly, a smile that felt both familiar and distant, like something I had been waiting to see for years but could never quite touch. And then, as quickly as it happened, she was gone. Like a dream that fades as soon as you wake up.

In that moment, I realized something that I had always known, deep down—that we weren't meant to share a future. Our paths had crossed for a reason, but it wasn't to stay intertwined. We were two separate lives that had briefly brushed against each other and then drifted apart. There was no tragedy in that. No heartbreak, no sense of unfinished business.

It was simply the way of things.

The space between us was wide now, filled with time, with growth, with the memories of who we were, and who we had become. There was no anger, no longing, no regret. Just the quiet understanding that I have moved on.

As I stood there, watching her disappear into the crowd, I felt a kind of peace. I had always carried her with me, but I didn't need her to define me anymore. I had lived my story, with or without her. And that was enough.

I had finally learned that sometimes, the stories that hurt the most are the ones we let go of. And the ones we never get to finish.

But maybe, in another universe—maybe, there was a version of us where we had more time. More chances. A future that never slipped through our fingers.

And for the first time, I let myself believe it.

It was enough.