

ENG-1050-009
Kempis Songster, AS-2308
Assignment due: 1-27-2014

January 27, 2014

Dear Kempis,

settle your thoughts and let me get your undivided attention for a few minutes. I know you're surprised to get mail from someone. I mean, how many 15-year-old kids in Brooklyn, New York, or in any inner city, get mail? But this is special. You are special. Of course, you're wondering who is this letter from. Well, it's from You. This letter is being sent to you from yourself 27 years later. If you thought the date at the head of this letter was a mistake, take a look at the postmark on the outside of the envelope. You should be receiving this some day in the first week of June 1987. I know, i know, it's "impossible." But i didn't use the U.S. Postal Service. I used God's Portal Service, because i/you prayed for relief from the consequences of a decision you're about to make, and my/your prayers were answered in the form of this service.

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So, i'm sending this letter across time to tell you plainly and urgently, don't do it. I know what you're thinking, what you're about to do. But please, Man, don't do it. Running away from home is not the way to true independence. And you're only 15; what's the hurry? No need to rush or take shortcuts in the journey of life. You'll miss things, healthy experiences and valuable life lessons, along the way. You will even fall into traps you might never get out of. I'm telling you what i know. I have been trapped for the past 27 years from something unimaginable that you will do four months after you make the decision you're about to make.

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Truth is, some mistakes you can't afford to make even once.
And you're about to make that kind of mistake.

I remember your being bullied. I remember the one evening Ma sent you to buy some groceries at A & P and you were robbed of the little change you had left by two bigger dudes in the parking lot. One of them pushed something pointy against the inside of his shirt and said it was a gun. What was taken from you that evening was more than the dollars and coins balance. What was taken from you left you mentally and morally ^{un}balanced. Your dignity. I remember that long walk home, feeling utterly emasculated. I remember how hard it was to tell Ma, who was unemployed at the time, that you were robbed of her change. I remember her doubting your story, and suspecting that you may have taken the money because it was the second time you lost some money she entrusted you with. I remember how horrible you felt, lying on your bed in the dark, violated and accused. You didn't have a father, an uncle, a big brother, a big cousin, or some homies, to talk to about what happened and maybe go out with you to find those two predators and help you reclaim from them the dignity they took from you. You had no male mentors to help coach you through your feelings. No one knew, but I know, the inner demons that were born in you that night. You made up your mind to NEVER allow anybody to make you feel the way you did that night EVER again, even if it meant that you would have to learn how to play the role of the taker yourself. Thus began our slide over to the darkside. Hurt people hurt people. I remember, Man. But i've carried that pain with me for too long. I've been overcompensating for it for too long. It was burning me out, fatiguing my mind. I had to let it go. And i'm writing to tell you to let it go right this instant.

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I know you feel as if you have a mountain of inadequacies to climb. But you are a valley full of potential and promise. You only have to make choices that are consistent with your potentials, i.e., the things you're good at. You are quite talented with a pencil. I remember you being able to draw any character in your Marvel Comic books exactly as they were. Who knows, you could even be an artist for Marvel Comics one day. Marvel is really doing good these days, IN THE MOVIES! That's right, some of your favorite comic characters have become some of the biggest blockbuster movies. Spiderman, Hulk, Iron Man, Thor, X-Men, Fantastic Four, the Avengers. And they look real. Characters are being drawn and animated with computers now. You could have a part in that. And the rhinoceros you sculpted in your 8th grade art class was beautiful. And just think, it was my very first sculpture. Don't forget how good you were in drama, and in rapping. You remember Dante? Yes, Dante Smith? He was in the grade under you at IS 383, Phillippa Schuyler Junior High. He would come around your rap circles and listen to you rap. You inspired him to start rapping. And he took the same drama class you did. Well, guess what? Dante is now a famous rapper who goes by the name Mos Def, with several successful albums under his belt. And he's also an actor, who starred in some big Hollywood movies. Again, he got inspired to start rapping by listening to YOU, and he was in the same drama class YOU were in. If he can do it, then how much better and sooner should you? If you explore your talents you can find a bright future in them.

However, there's no future in the streets. I know you want to be grown and independent. But i want you to learn early a life

Wow - This is so evocative

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lesson you had learned a bit too late: the child who loves freedom is the first victim of it. The freedom you crave will be forever taken from you in the form of a sentence to life in prison without the possibility of parole. In other words, you will be sentenced to die in prison. The system will throw you away, much like how you are preparing to throw away your mother's and family's love for you. Society will turn its back on you the way you want to turn your back on your loved ones.

Don't get it twisted, Young Man: to run away from home is to turn your back on your family. How could you do that when they've been loving you and taking care of you since before you could even remember? By the way, you've been getting a lot of mail now, for the past 27 years, and most of it comes from your family, not from so-called homies, friends, or girlfriends. And your mother has sacrificed so much for you. And you love her and your family so much. You're a good child. Don't be so down on yourself. You have so much about you to love, and absolutely nothing to run away from.

Never forget that education and hard work is the formula for making your dreams become lasting realities. I know the streets seem to be the quicker and easier way to travel your life journey, but that's only an illusion. Malcolm X could tell you that. Yes, on Ma's very first visit with you at Philadelphia's Youth Study Center, a prison for juveniles, she brought three books for you to read. The Autobiography of Malcolm X, by Alex Haley, was one of them. The other two were "The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela", and "Kaffir Boy". But you would read the Autobiography of Malcolm X first, and your way of thinking started changing with each turn of the page. You see Malcolm did what you're planning to do; he took to the streets in search of

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adventure. And in it he became what you will become too. He became a part of society's problems. Several times he could have been killed in the streets, as you could be also. But he suffered another consequence of the street life; he was arrested, charged, and convicted for a crime and ended up spending years in prison. Through education he was able to undergo a cognitive transformation, i.e., he started thinking in a new way, while in prison. And after he emerged from prison, he went on to live his life as no longer a part of the problem with society, but a part of the solution. But it was education that allowed him to do that, and to have such an impact on the world around him. However, you don't have to go through what Malcolm went through to learn the lessons he learned, and to experience the growth and changes he experienced. A wise man learns from another man's mistakes. Read Malcolm's autobiography. And after that you can read about Nelson Mandela and Kaffir Boy, too. And get the thought of dropping out of school out of your mind.

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In the journey of life, be patient, and know that you have all the help you need. Just talk to someone older and wiser about what's on your mind, what's troubling your spirit, and what you want out of life. And please, apologize to Michelle your girlfriend from the 8th grade. She really loved you, and she didn't deserve to be hurt and humiliated that way by anyone, especially not by you. You never know, you could have had a bright future with her or because of her. One of the best things you can do for yourself is to pick up the phone and call her, or get on the bus and go see her, and tell her from the bottom of your heart how sorry you are. Then come up with a way to make it up to her.

So, in your 27th year---imagine that, TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS and

counting---behind razor-wire fences, or 40-feet-high concrete walls, you've been confined in one cell or another. You're about to go from a warm and love-filled home, to living in what basically are small bathrooms with a steel bunk bed in it in the place of a bath-tub. You'll be beaten by guards. You'll spend years in solitary confinement 23 hours a day on weekdays, and 24 hours on Saturdays and Sundays, where you can't hear birds or rain. You've had no control over your life. You've been told when, where, and what to eat, and when and where to sleep.

And look at Trey. He's two years old at the time you're reading this. A beautiful angel of a baby, and he looks up to his big Brother already. You have no idea, in fact, you're not even considering, how your actions will affect him. Well let me tell you, your disappearance from home, not only made Ma physically sick,---and i'm talkin' tumors, Man,---but it also confused Trey in a devastating way. Your incarceration was a bad example for him. Trey went on to be incarcerated at an even younger age than you. 13 years old. And that was just his first bid. He's in prison right now with years & years to do. And he has left a son, your nephew, out there in the world, fatherless. And a child with an incarcerated parent is seven times, or 85 percent, more likely to end up incarcerated themselves, if no positive intervention is made in their lives. So, you see the ripple-effect of what's about to happen to you. You will be the start of intergenerational incarceration in our family. And your nephew loves you to death.

Yet through all that you will suffer, you've kept hope alive, you've strengthened the bond with Ma and the family, You've learned that no one can take your dignity from you. Only you can surrender that. And you have forgiven the two ignorant guys who

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robbed you, because you realize that hurt people hurt people, and you don't know how the inner demons controlling their thinking, behaviors, habits, and lives were born. Plus, you understand now that they had no way of knowing that you would become a politically conscious and socially responsible man who wants to help make Planet Earth a friendlier and healthier place to live. More importantly, you have forgiven yourself, because you know that it wasn't your fault. At the time, you didn't know if it was really a gun under the one dude's shirt. And you remembered Ma always telling^{you} after that one kid got killed over his watch a block a way from where we lived, that your life is worth more than any material thing a robber may demand from you. So for a few dollars and coins you are still alive. Your mother's wisdom kept you alive. And you are grateful for that. You don't have to go through the decades-long nightmare to make the right change. You can do it now, by not doing what you're thinking about doing. Remember, "Experience is not what happens to you; it is what you do with what happens to you." (Aldous Huxley) Take even your hurtful experiences and let them temper your spirit and character like steel. Let that steel be an attitude of gratitude for what you do have in your life. And know that the the Universe has a storehouse of abundance for you, if you would but utilize your God-given talents to open the door and claim it, in good faith and honor.

In the meantime, Little Kempis, stay healthy, hardy, and high-spirited. Straight ahead!

Shari - This letter is so powerful, so beautifully presented.
Thank you for sharing this with me. So much wisdom here, Love,
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