

Brianna Gielow

“The Doctor Takes a Break from Battling Aliens to Get Me Some Closure”

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The only way I can imagine that Annie and I could get any closure is if we were in an episode of Doctor Who. The opening credits would roll, “Doo-wee-ooo” and all that, and then the show would start out with just me for a moment. I would be home alone, probably eating macaroni in my cow-print pajama pants and a holey gray tee shirt, and there would be a knock on my front door. I would go open it, and there would be the Doctor (the Matt Smith incarnation, I think), smiling his goofy Doctor smile and offering some inadequate Doctor explanation. The Tardis would be parked by the side of the road where my dad’s car usually sits. Maybe Amy Pond would be there, too. But the important thing is that they have brought two small girls with them: six-year-old me and six-year-old Annie.

When I’m imagining my fantasy episode, I never worry too much about why the Doctor would be giving two little girls free rides through time and space. The important thing is that our past selves travel forward in time, from those early golden years when we thought we’d be Best Friends Forever, before it was shortened to BFF, before I moved away, before I moved back, before things between us flared up and died out. Two little kindergarteners with their hair parted in the middles of their foreheads, dressed in florals like little hippies and smiling with no self-consciousness of their buck teeth, standing close together with their arms bumping into each other, like sisters.

I would have a moment of terror standing face-to-face with my younger self. What would she think of me? Would she expect me to be all grown up? I’d remember back when we got my dog, how I’d counted the years of an average canine lifespan and figured out that I would be at

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least seventeen when he died. I'd been relieved- by that age, I wouldn't feel things anymore, I thought happily. I'd be able to handle anything by then.

My first impulse would be to say “Holy shit,” but then I would remember my manners. No swearing in front of children. Turn on the filter between my brain and my mouth for once. “Oh,” I would whisper instead.

“We have a question,” Little Me would ask shyly. “Are we still best friends when we're your age?”

Oh, God. It would squeeze my heart to the point of bursting, looking into our little faces. Even worse than looking at pictures of us at playdates and birthday parties, because these faces would be moving, blinking, smiling up at me with expectation. And I wouldn't be able to let them down.

I'd get down on my knees and pull them both into a hug, tearing up, stifling a sob in the skinny shoulder of myself from 12 years ago. “Of course we are,” I'd lie. “Of course.”

“Can we go see me?” Little Annie would ask excitedly.

“Of course.”

I'd go inside quickly, grab my keys, slip into some flip flops and a jacket.

“We live in the same neighborhood?” They'd shriek with delight when I led the way on foot. The Doctor and Amy would just smile at us, follow behind at a short distance. Little Me and Little Annie would skip over the cracked sidewalk to keep up, asking me questions about what's happened to us, if we've had boyfriends, what grade school is like, what puberty is like.

“You have boobs!” they'd exclaim.

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“Just wait till you see Annie’s boobs,” I’d say with a wink, falling into a role, sugarcoating and glossing over things, lying, grinning through the steady trickle of tears I wouldn’t be able to stop. “Puberty sucks, but don’t worry about it. Grade school is fun. Boys are still icky.”

“Just wait here for a minute,” I’d say to them as we got to Annie’s street. I’d try to give the Doctor a pleading look without the little ones seeing it. *Please keep them here.* “I need to make sure she’s ready, that your parents don’t see you. That could be bad, right?” I’d look to the Doctor again.

“Right, right, you go on ahead and scout it out.” Amy would look a little worried, but the Doctor would understand enough, guess from my tear-filled eyes and flaking plastic smile, to give Amy a small look so that she’d draw the kids’ attention away from me. They’d wait behind Annie’s mom’s Jeep, kicking at pebbles on the concrete, out of sight of the front stoop.

I’d go and knock on her door, the blue door with the brass knocker in the shape of an anchor that I used to bang on with such eagerness, that now I can’t help but glance at whenever I drive by.

Annie would open it, and she would be in sweatpants and a green printed tee shirt with a bulldozer chasing a couple of frightened-looking pine trees, the words “Run, forest, run!” arcing across her chest. Because even though we haven’t spoken in months, we’re still the same dorks we’ve always been.

Before she could say anything, I would blurt out, “Please just answer one question for me: If you could go back and do it all over, would you still want to have been friends with me for all those years? Because I would. I wouldn’t change a thing about how we used to be.”

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I don't know how she would answer in real life. I think she might say no, maybe add something spiteful, or maybe mumble something non-committal. Maybe she'd shut the door in my face without a word. I don't know. That's the worst thing: I don't know at all.

In my imaginary episode, though, she'd say, “Yes. I would keep those years the same.”

“Then I need you to play along with me for a few minutes,” I'd say, sighing with relief, hope bubbling up in my throat. “Something weird has happened, you need to see it. Just please play along with me. It hurts like hell, but please, just for this once.” I'd grab her wrist and pull her out of her doorway, down the street to where our pasts are waiting.

And I would lay it on thick, smiling at both of the Annies and standing close next to mine, laughing with her, muttering happy incredulity at her while our little selves were looking. And Annie would cover her mouth with her hands and get down onto her knees to pull them both into a hug. And the Doctor and Amy would smile and make jokes about how much we've grown, and then they would back off, give the four of us a few feet of space.

Maybe we'd all go down to the flats and run around together (neither Amy nor the Doctor would be squeamish about getting their toes in the mud), and then sit on the seawall with our six-year-old selves nestled in our laps, reminiscing about the years that the little ones have to look forward to.

“Remember when I showed up to your birthday party at your uncle's house that time?”

“Remember when I visited your middle school for a day?”

“Remember when I used to visit from Delaware, when you were still in your old house?”

“Remember when we made that fort in the woods on the island?”

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“We move away for a while,” I’d say to Little Me, “but we meet other cool people and go to pretty places and learn lots of things. And later, we move back here, just a few blocks away from Annie. It’s hard sometimes, but Mom and Dad are always there for us, and it will all turn out alright. And we can always call Annie, or write to her, and she’ll be there for us too.”

“Okay,” Little Me would giggle, happy as can be. I hope that she’d like me enough to take my advice and not hate me for what was to come.

“Remember our Friendship Boxes?” Annie would say.

“We should show them!”

We’d go back to our houses and I’d pull mine out from my closet. It’s just a shoebox, decorated years ago with beads and marker and pictures cut out of calendars. Annie had one too. We’d made them together and filled them with memories. In real life, Annie may have burned hers, crushed it and thrown it away, but I still have mine, tucked away in my closet. And in my imaginary episode, she’d have hers, too, pull it out from some shelf or cupboard and bring it over and put it on the coffee table in my living room. The Doctor would make cute comments about the smallness of my house while our little selves would hold the boxes in their hands, turning them over to see all the pictures and quotes and decorations we scrawled and taped and glued on the sides, then opening them up to find the pictures we took in the photobooth at the mall, arms around each other, gleeful smiles on our faces.

When the Doctor decided it was time to go, we’d all troop back outside and hug one last time, the Doctor and Amy looking on with worried smiles on their faces, talking quietly together.

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Then our past selves would get back in the Tardis with them and disappear, leaving me and Annie alone on the sidewalk.

I don't know what to imagine for this part. Do our smiles fade once there is no one to put on a show for? I think I would start crying. What would Annie do if she saw me like that—if I cried for what we've lost in front of her? Would she cry too? Would we talk it over? Would we agree to keep in touch? Would we go back inside and hug it out, reminisce some more, play video games like we used to? I don't know what we would do, because right now, in real life, all we have between us is unsaid hurt and anger and confusion, and the memories. Once our pasts slip away through time and space again, what will we have to say? The Doctor and Amy would probably come back, after dropping off the little ones, to find me alone on the sidewalk. Without a word, the Doctor would pull me into a hug, and I would cry into his shirt, forehead pressed against his bow-tie.