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Don't Be Like Me: A Letter to My Daughters

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Don't Be Like Me: A Letter to My Daughters

The best piece of advice I have for my daughters? Don't be like me. Most people look up to their parents; even want to be like them. I know you love me. You admire me. In a lot of ways, you are already so, so, much like me—like I used to be. Even though you're uniquely you, I see glimpses of little me, old me, in there too. And that doesn't reassure me. Quite frankly, that scares me.

My vibrant, precious girls. I know this isn't making sense to you. I know you aren't going to understand me. But please, please feel me—what I'm trying to tell you. No matter how much you think I've got it together, How much you think I've overcome, How much you think I've accomplished . . . Because I love you and want the best for you, right now I am begging you. Please, please don't be like me.

Don't turn out like me. Don't be anything that remotely resembles me. Don't be like me. Being me means you will get hurt. Being me means you will get used. Being me means you will be discarded. Being me means you will be disrespected. Being me means you will be disregarded. Being me is to never be certain of yourself.

To never be at ease in known or unfamiliar surroundings. To always struggle to understand things. To trust when you shouldn't, and not to fear when you should. It is complicated, it is draining, it is being too much of some things, yet not nearly enough of others.

To be me means that even when someone harms you
Even when someone lies to you
Even when someone hurts you, betrays you . . .
You don't value yourself enough to leave.

It means that no amount of the trappings of pseudo-success
In your new, seemingly enriched life
Can sufficiently satiate the cavernous labyrinth of despair within you.

It means that no matter how many prayers you whisper
No matter how many affirming words you utter
No matter how many bullet journals and vision boards you create
No matter how many degrees you earn or accolades you collect
No matter how many times you try to “wipe the slate clean”
It’s never going to be clean enough.

You’re still that helpless, lost child who got ruined so many years ago
Who can’t do anything right
Whose body is only good for bringing others pleasure (but you pain).
It means that when you look in the mirror
you hate what you see, who you see.
Yet it’s the only person you recognize—the only one you know how to be.
It means fighting with your own mind incessantly.

Wondering . . . Is what you’re producing good enough?
Are you working hard enough?
Are you giving enough?
Are you doing enough?
Are you being enough?
Are you even enough? Will you ever be enough?

My beloved daughters.
Don’t be distracted by my tears; feel my words.
I don’t want your beautiful, unique spirits crushed.
I don’t want your joy depleted and your self-worth deleted.
I don’t want doubt, anxiety, sadness, regret to take residence in your heart.


I want you to be happy.
I want you to be you.
I want you to be fulfilled.
I want you to fly.
I want you to be free.
And that is why you must never
Never, never, never
Never end up like me.

—Morénike Giwa Onaiwu

Morénike Giwa Onaiwu is an educator and global self-advocate in a neurodiverse, serodifferent family. She was diagnosed as autistic in adulthood following the diagnoses of two of her children. A prolific writer, public speaker, and social scientist, Morénike focuses on meaningful community involvement, human rights, justice, and inclusion. She is also a Humanities Scholar in the Center for Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Rice University, and Advocacy & Research Director for Foundations for Divergent Minds.



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