The Future Mary-Lou

It had rained the past three nights in a row before the sky opened up like it had. Thunder all but shook the walls and rattled the windows of the old Rollins mill house as rain tapped hard against the glass. She was supposed to go out tonight with Bobby, but her mama and daddy had made her promise to stay home.

And taken the keys to her car just in case.

Mary-Lou had saddled up for a boring Friday night. Her first boring Friday night since the start of Senior Year. Once it became clear that she had transitioned out of “late” and into “bloomer” territory, she’d been beatin’ the boys off with a stick! She got invited to bonfires and lake trips and *always* these boys with their muddin’. Worrying about what she was missing out on had been the worst part of the night before all of this happened—she’d been busy moaning and groaning about being cooped up all night before the power started to flicker, and a *big* boom shook their little mill house all the way down to its foundation. Then came the knock at the door...

“This ain’t *really* what happens to me in the future... is it?”

“It shore is, hunny.” Mary-Lou grunted as she backed away from the fridge and hip-checked the door shut, “Trust me, I ain’t happy ‘bout it neither.”

The woman who claimed to be Mary-Lou too popped the cap off of one’a their daddy’s Natty Lights, pressing its fuzzy wig of heady foam to her lips as she heaved herself over to the dining room table. Like old hat, she grabbed two of the cheap diner chairs and swung them around to plop down on, a satisfied ‘ahh’ leaking out of her before she threw her head back for another drink. Out of breath from simply standing, the ballooned brunette was still quite huffy after the trek from the front porch to inside their humble home. She was drenched from head to toe in the hot Carolina rain, her red tartan overshirt dripping onto the cheap linoleum of their kitchen tile as the woman who was Mary-Lou too kicked off cheap plastic flip-flops and put her porky piglets on the ground.

Mary-Lou didn’t *want* to believe that the hardwood-bending heifer that had walked in out of the rain was her. She still wasn’t sure that it was! But she’d known about her birth marks, that she’d been obsessing over Ethan Haynes since he said hi to her in the second grade, and even the story of how she’d tried to keep a squirrel as a pet when she was a kid. It was the only reason she’d let her in—she knew things that *nobody* knew about her but… well… her! But seeing this woman, this *stranger* in front of her face claiming to be her from twenty years in the future…

It somehow didn’t *feel* right.

“Tha’s better.” the big hick exhaled with approval of the amount of kick in one of their daddy’s Nattys, “Shoot, I ain’t been here in a *minute…* Mama ‘n’ Daddy move into Granny’s ‘bout three years from now an’ sell this place, so enjoy it while ya can.”

“What… what happens to Granny?” Mary-Lou asked naively, feeling so stupid for asking such an obvious question, “Don’t tell me she—“

“Yeahhhh. God rest her soul.” the older woman curled a flat nostril mournfully, “Happened not long after they kicked me out, so I didn’t even hear about it ‘til that October.”

The other Mary-Lou flinched as she watched her future self scratch at her exposed belly idly. Sure, she should have been more concerned with the apparently impending death of her grandmother, but it was a little hard to focus on the immaterial when all she could focus on was that apparently she was shaped just like her dad. The older Mary-Lou’s red tartan overshirt did little to sheath the full half-moon that rode out from underneath her tank top, and her younger self did all but audibly gag every time she looked at that bloated body of hers for too long.

This wasn’t supposed to happen to her. She’d spent enough of her life being a wallflower! It figures that when things *finally* started going her way, when she *finally* started getting attention from boys and going out and having fun, something like this would happen. How could any of that have been a bad thing? What could have been so wrong about her going out and drinking beer with her friends? Why would she be punished for finally getting to have a little fun?

But more importantly, *what* in the world could have happened to her that would take her from the high point of her life in Senior year to… well… *this?*

“Yeah, enjoy *lotsa* stuff while it lasts.” the older woman chuckled knowingly, throwing her head back so hard her ballcap almost fell off, “Pshew! I shore was a skinny li’l thing.”

That gross fucking gut. That fat fucking face with all them fuckin’ chins. This was *worse* than bein’ shaped like her daddy. She looked like her damn Uncle Doug with a pair of fake tits sloped down either side of another forty pounds comin’ out the front. Her future self was so fat that Mary-Lou could count the dimples on her thighs as they threatened to pop right out of her cutoffs! Right down to her fingers and toes, Mary-Lou’s supposed self was bigger’n fatter than anyone she’d ever seen face-to-face before, and it was just so hard to believe that this beer-swilling pile of pudge was really *her!*

“Welp, ‘as what this stuff’ll do to ya.” the fat woman took another big gulp, tossing the bottle into the trash can next to the fridge once it was down to all but the last swig of brew, “They don’t call it a beer gut fer nothin’.”

Oh gawd. Watching it all move when she laughed was somehow even worse than just seeing it up close. She fucking *wobbled*. Her chest moving up and down quick as her slow girthy laugh rumbled throughout her entire upper body. She didn’t even *laugh* the same! Her cute little high school giggling had devolved into a gross throaty chortle—and even *that* seemed to leave her out of breath.

“Speakin’ of, mind handin’ me another ‘un?” the would-be Mary-Lou stretched out a flabby arm, her bicep hardly raising from her fleshy side as she signaled her want, “It ain’t Busch, but it’ll do.”

“Y… Yeah, sure…”

What the fuck else was she supposed to do? Tell her no? The woman had come from the fucking future, the least that she could do was try’n be a good host. Even if ethically, she didn’t think that she should. It was clear that this woman, *whoever* she was, had had one too many already. Not that she was drunk or nothin’, but just…

Mary-Lou just didn’t want to make this any worse than it already was.

“Yeahhhh I guess I shoulda listened when mama’n them tried to tell me ‘bout hangin’ out with Bobby’n the boys.” The fat woman drawled while Mary-Lou reached inside the aging fridge, “Woulda saved me a *lotta* heartache.”

The older woman snorted, palming her uppermost shelf of gut flesh and gave it a little quake.

“Hell, prolly woulda saved me some heart*burn* come t’think of it.” She chortled slightly, struggling to lean forward as she reached for the bottle that her ostensive younger self presented to her, “Thanks a ton, hun—are Mama’n Daddy around?”

“Nah they’re out for the night.” Mary-Lou answered with a little venom, still angry that they’d been allowed to get caught up in the storm outside while she’d been forced to suffer in silence, “I don’t know when they’ll get home though on account’a the weather.”

“Just the same, they’d prolly flip their wigs.” The other Mary-Lou’s entire bicep rippled with the force it took to take the cap off her bottle, “Some fat ol’ lady come bargin’ in sayin’ I’m you from the future.”

“Yeah, it’s… kind of hard to believe.” Mary-Lou cleared her throat as she sat down from across the woman in question, “I don’t think they’d be cool with it.”

“They ain’t cool with nothin’.” Was her elder’s response, with much the same of a little venom that steeled her twangy tone, “Guess I’m preachin’ to the choir, huh?”

“I mean…” it was only the sight of seeing what a lifetime without their guiding presence might have looked like that shocked poor Mary-Lou into giving a more nuanced response than normal, “…they’re not *so* bad.”

“Until they kick you out straight outta high school.” The fat woman snorted, “Trust me, I may look well fed, but it ain’t ‘cause I’m spoiled’er nothin’—I earn my checks same way as e’ery one else.”

“So like… what’s my job in the future?” Mary-Lou asked with a twinge of hope flickering into her voice

“I didn’t say I had a *job*.” The elder Lou sniffed derisively before she killed her next bottle, “Grab be another bottle an’ I’ll tell you a couple stories—sound good?”

It really, *really* didn’t.

Mary-Lou couldn’t even imagine the kinds of things that this woman had gotten up to in the time that it had taken her to become… *her*. Pie-eating contests? So many keg stands that she couldn’t get helped up onto the nozzle? Fishin’ and muddin’ with the boys while they popped the caps off their beer with the gap in her teeth? It all sounded so horrible that she didn’t even want to *think* about seeing any of her li’l boy friends ever agai—

Wait a minute.

Her parents not being home was awful convenient. And come to think of it, those things she rattled off on the porch could have come from *them* one way or another. They might have had something to do with this. Like that old episode of South Park. Her mama an’ daddy had to have been playin’ a prank on her—maybe they’d set up like… hidden cameras or somethin’ and hired an actor to try and scare her straight!

“*Goddammit*—I missed.” The ostensive Mary-Lou frowned, the sound of glass shattering pulling the original article out of her epiphany, “Sorry ‘bout that.”

“Oh hell, I can’t let Daddy see that…”

She had been fully prepared to move the bottle or two that she’d already snuck to the bottom of the trash bag like always. But if they were broken, it was harder to convince her daddy that he’d just drank ‘em and forgot. Surely her “future self” would know that, so she didn’t question it when Mary-Lou leapt into action to start cleaning up the wreckage.

She could use this! A deep enough cut along her foot would definitely leave a scar, right? That fat wad rocking forward just to see past that gut of hers wasn’t gonna be able to do shit to her feet without Mary-Lou lookin’. It’d hurt like shit, but it’d be a nice and easy way to settle all this real quick once and for all.

“Ow!” Mary Lou cursed, deftly slicing the top of her foot deep enough to leave a mark, “Shit, that *hurt!*”

“Wha’s wrong?” the fat woman burbled, “Y’cut yourself?”

“Yeah, on the glass…”

Mary-Lou looked the woman spread across two chairs up and down as far as she could see. From her kneeled position, starting with the hanging belly that eclipsed any hope of eye contact between them. Then down below, to those monstrous cottage-cheese thighs of hers, threatening to pour over the sides of her seats with as much force as they were trying to escape those denim cutoffs. Further still to her pillowy legs and meaty calves, which lapped over her ankle by a stray roll to create one hell of a cankle…

And then there, just over the bridge of her toe, she had a scar to match the incision she’d made with the shard of beer bottle.

“Oh my god.”

“Yeah, you might wanna siddown.” The older woman laughed, smoothing the afflicted area over with another chubby foot as if in fond remembrance of a faint itch, “We got a *lot* to catch up on, honey.”