

TIME TRAVEL

INT. MODEST BRIGHTLY LIT APARTMENT - DAY

STELLA, 30's, gently bounces a swaddled baby in her arms while her best friend catches a much needed nap.

STELLA

How could something so tiny take so much work? Your mom's a total boss for doing this alone. I could never. But she's amazing. You'll see, once you let her catch up on some sleep. Baby Valentina. Good name. Means strong. Brave! And you're gonna be both! Just like her.

I was never considered brave. I was the 'sensitive' kid. Quiet, shy, always escaping reality. Like, I would often imagine my cooler, hotter adult self would visit me from the future to tell me about how much of a Chingona I was then and what a badass life I had. And how there were no more bullies to face anymore. "Don't worry," I'd say. "It gets better. Just hang in there." Hey, judge all you want, kid, but those thoughts kept me alive!

Future me never did show up, though. But, as I got older, when things were going really well or I hit a milestone that made me really proud, I would imagine going back in time. To reassure that little girl in so much quiet pain that it actually did get better. Just like she had hoped.

I think everything I've ever achieved was for that little girl. And from an overwhelming sense of duty as a first-generation American-born child of immigrants. And even though I feel like I'm always falling short, I keep pushing with all I've got cuz there is no future me coming to tell me that it all works out. Cuz it's me, now, ya know? I'm it. And that's really scary. Because I feel like I'm still not that

future me that I willed into the universe all those years ago. Like that version of me requires more courage than I'm capable of?

Like the courage your mom has choosing to raise you solo. Or my parents and my grandma escaping war to come to the U.S. with nothing in order to build a life from scratch without any certainty that it would work out. That's next-level brave, ya know? That's the type of courage future me has. What I keep striving for.

Maybe that's the point, huh? And I've been too focused on the noise of my own self-doubt to hear the only voice that has ever mattered. That brave little girl who kept going, despite the world, because she believed in me. Still does. Cuz she'll always wait for me, THIS me, to go back and show her what an absolute Chingona we are.

Maybe that's how we time travel, huh, little one? When we reconnect with the tiny people we once were: full of hope for our future selves. Wild. Thanks for the pep talk, kid. Don't tell your mom I cursed.