

AMY BLOOM

Dear Amy,

There's all sorts of good news from here in the future: You really will get the hang of high heels (you will not go through life feeling like a soft-boiled egg on stilts) and then you will have a big fat epiphany and choose not to do that to your feet (except for very special occasions). You will not be waitressing into middle age. (You could but you won't have to.) Your abysmal performance in all things mathematic won't really matter (computers and calculators and common sense will fill in your ginormous educational gaps).

Please, love your eighteen-year-old body because it's not gonna get better than that. (Better at tennis and the foxtrot, yes — more perfect, no.)

So let's talk about everything your dear body can do, will do, and does.

Most of the sensible adults you know will say — if they say anything at all — bad things about one-night stands. I'm not so sure. They are people — certain types, certain experiences — that

you might not want to miss out on. Be careful, be smart (you know what this means: Do not have sex with anyone if you're not capable of driving yourself home; use condoms, always, always; no sketchy drugs from sketchy guys, and good luck knowing when to bail). Once is sometimes enough and once is sometimes necessary. If you hadn't cuddled up in nothing but your panties to that cute girl from the other high school — after a night of rock and roll and her mother's Tia Maria — you might not have known that you liked girls too. And that would have been a shame. It's true, you don't know anyone just like you, but they're out there. And, furthermore, what strikes you as an unusual but not disturbing penchant is going to make your life bigger and better, as well as bumpier. It will probably help you become the very good couples therapist that you become. (Did I mention this? You become a shrink and then a writer. I know — you really did think you'd be waitressing at O'Malley's into your fifties.) When the men say their wives nag them to death, you sympathize, 'cause you've had girlfriends. When the wives say that they wouldn't nag if the knucklehead just listened the first time, you sympathize, 'cause you've had boyfriends.

I know you worry that you don't have enough sticking power, that when you get fed up, you leave, and not too many people get a whole three strikes. You worry that you can't stay the course of things that matter. I know you worry that your distant father and anxious mother have produced in you . . . mostly a desire to get out of Dodge at the first signs of disappointment. You will get better at this, although you do — sorry to tell you — continue to struggle. You will discover that your mother's warmth and your father's

unshakable and baseless confidence in you, although it takes the form of no intervention and not much interest, combine to make you a loving, weirdly confident person. Could be worse.

You will find yourself with a best friend (thirty years and counting), a beloved sister (yes, you start talking to each other, finally), three amazing children who have many of your best qualities and only some of your faults, and the kind of spouse (as it turns out, a husband) you hoped for and thought you'd never find.

Much love to you, self.

Amy