

KEEP SMILING!

by Wm. Brett Hill

Milo pushed the toe of his worn, leather boot through the charred rubble. It was a risk, returning to his home, and he knew it. Even though the city had been completely destroyed in the first wave of attacks he knew drone patrols still swept through the area at random intervals. As he scanned the burnt timber and brick, kicking aside discs of melted plastic and shards of glass, he remained conscious of any movement in his periphery.

“Just something. Anything,” he whispered as he ran he kicked aside ash and metal. “A reminder of what we had.”

His eye caught something different in the landscape of ruin—the corner of a box sticking out from a pile of bricks—and he began to dig, finally uncovering, of all things, his mother’s recipe box, inexplicably sound amidst the rubble. Eagerly, hungrily, he popped the latch and lifted the lid, his memory flooding with the taste of her pot roast and mashed potatoes. If he could just see some remnant of his family, even his mother’s hand-written pumpkin pie recipe, he could find the strength to carry on.

All that sat inside was a letter. He recognized it immediately. His mother had made him write it on New Year’s Day, just months before everything went to hell, as he ate his cornbread and collard greens.

“Write a letter from you to you in six months telling yourself what you want from the year. Then in June we’ll open it.”

June had come and gone several times since then.

So much had come.

So much more had gone.

Tears ran down his face as he tore open the letter and stared at the words he had begrudgingly written.

Dear Milo,

Mom is making me write this stupid letter, but she said she wouldn't read it so I can put whatever I want here. I guess she's right. Things do seem promising right now, and it would be good to remind myself of this feeling. I mean, it's cheesy as hell, but it makes sense.

So, to make her happy, here we go:

- 1. Mom said if you ace your finals they will buy you a car. I know you did it! I wonder what you're driving...*
- 2. If you haven't mustered up the courage to ask Paige Dooley out already, do it tomorrow. If you don't ask, the answer will always be no.*
- 3. The future looks bright. It only gets better from here!*

That should be enough to make her happy. Enjoy whatever wonderful thing you are doing (probably cruising around in your awesome ride with your arm around Paige Dooley, you stud!).

And remember, whatever happens, KEEP SMILING!

Sincerely,

Milo

Milo stared at the letter and laughed. "What an idiot I was," he said, then he looked up. "Am."

The hateful red light on the front of the drone blinked rapidly as the guns slid out of the front of its casing.

He hadn't even heard it descend.

Milo raised his gun and smiled.