

TURNING 10

Written by
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FADE IN:

INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A cheerful kitchen. A bouquet of balloons sits on the island. Wrapped birthday gifts and candles are scattered across the island. A mixing bowl, and a box of cake mix wait nearby.

KATIE (40s, warm, steady) preheats the oven and bends down to pull a cake pan from the cabinet. She straightens and pushes the bouquet of balloons from the middle of the counter into the corner, then yells for her daughter.

KATIE

Anna! Come help me bake this cake!

ANNA (turning 10, bright, barely containing herself) joins her mom in the kitchen around the island.

KATIE

I have something really special for you for your 10th birthday.

ANNA

A birthday present?

Katie begins clearing candles and wrapped gifts from the large countertop. In their place she sets a huge bowl, a whisk, and a box of cake mix.

KATIE

Sort of...

KATIE (CONT'D)

Before I give it to you, let me ask you something.

ANNA

OK. What is it?

KATIE

What do you remember about your dad?

Anna thinks for a second.

ANNA

I remember when we went to the water park together. Dad went on the big slides with me because you were such a wuss!

KATIE
(laughing)
I wasn't afraid! I just didn't want
to get in the way of all the fun
you and your dad were having.

ANNA
(sarcastically)
Oh, I'm sure that was it!

Katie laughs as she is scooping flour into the bowl. She touches Anna's nose and leaves a spot of flour. Anna wipes it off.

KATIE
What else?

ANNA
I also remember sitting next to dad
in church. He would draw pictures
on the program while the pastor
preached. I miss that a lot.
(Pause) And of course I remember
the hospital, him lying there with
all those tubes and grandma and
grandpa staying with us to help
out.

Katie pulls some milk from the fridge and sets it next to the mixing bowl.

KATIE
Well... before he died, he recorded
something for you and asked me to
give it to you when you turned 10.

The smile slowly erodes from Anna's face.

ANNA
Really? Dad left me a message?

KATIE
Yes, it's about 10 minutes long.
Let me get this cake in the oven
and we can watch it together.

Anna sits quietly, staring at the grains in the granite, while Katie cracks eggs and whisks everything together. Katie keeps looking at Anna trying to imagine what she's thinking. Anna's eyes move around the island until her eyes lock with her mom's.

ANNA

Will it make me sad? Maybe we should wait until after my party.

KATIE

It's going to be great! Seriously, great. You will be so glad you watched it. I promise.

ANNA

Have you seen it?

KATIE

Some of it, years ago when he filmed it. I'm actually a little nervous about watching it too, but I promised him I wouldn't watch the finished video until your tenth birthday. I almost caved a few times, but I held out. We can laugh through it together!

Katie pours the batter into the cake pan and slides it into the oven.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Alright, what do you say?

CUT TO:

INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The two make their way in. Katie has a towel and is drying her hands. Anna sits on the couch across from the TV and picks up the remote. Katie opens a small cabinet in the TV stand and pulls out a black case made to hold DVDs. Anna has never noticed it before.

She watches as Katie unzips it and extracts the first disc -- a huge number 10 written on it in black magic marker. As Katie closes the case, Anna glimpses what looks like another disc with a large number 13. She slides it into the player.

Katie sits next to Anna, looks at her and smiles. Both ladies are a little nervous and excited. They hold hands.

KATIE

OK, here we go!

CUT TO:

INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS (VIDEO
PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: ANNA'S DAD -- smiling and looking at the camera.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)
(on screen)
Hi honey! Happy Birthday. I can't
believe you're 10 years old!

BACK TO SCENE:

ANNA
He must have recorded this before
he got sick?

KATIE
Right after the doctors diagnosed
him. He wanted to do it while he
still had the energy.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: Anna's dad stands outside an elementary school,
speaking directly to camera.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)
Alright! I am standing here outside
an elementary school, if you and
mom don't move, this might be where
you'll be attending. I've already
spoken with the teachers to make
sure they'll be good for you and
it's safe to say they are going to
love you!

BACK TO SCENE:

Anna watches, transfixed. His mannerisms, the inflections in
his voice -- she remembers more about him than she thought
she did.

Katie is smiling at her daughter.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: Anna's dad holds a phone up to the camera and
swipes through 3 or 4 photos of himself at a coffee shop.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

I spent about 2 hours this morning,
trying to picture who you would be
when you turned 10. Here, look at
this.

He swipes through the photos. In one, eyes closed, brow
furrowed, lips smashed together. In another, left hand on
his chin, first finger on his nose, right arm stretched to
hold the camera as far back as possible.

In the third photo -- an entire muffin is sticking out of
his face, both hands around his own neck.

BACK TO SCENE:

Both ladies laugh out loud.

ANNA

He had to get someone else to take
that picture! I can just hear him
saying, 'will you take my picture
while I pretend to be choking.'

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: The fourth photo -- a complete stranger hugging
Anna's dad from behind, giving him the Heimlich maneuver.

BACK TO SCENE:

Katie laughs out loud.

KATIE

(sputtering between laughs)
I wonder how he got that guy to do
that.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

Needless to say it's been an
interesting morning, Anna!

BACK TO SCENE:

The sound of her name in her father's voice instantly puts tears in Anna's eyes. She's still laughing, but something deep inside her is being stirred -- healed, maybe. She reaches over and takes her mom's hand.

ANNA
(quietly)
I really miss him.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - SIDEWALK - DAY (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: Anna's dad picks the camera up off the tripod and walks toward the school's front doors, talking as he goes.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)
Well, I survived the attack of the muffin so I decided to come here to figure out what you might be like when you're ten. I enlisted the help of a 5th grade class. I thought if I could figure out what 5th graders are like, I might get an idea of what you are like. Makes sense in my head anyway.

He raises his eyebrows and flattens his smile.

BACK TO SCENE:

ANNA
Where's he going?

KATIE
I don't know. This is the part I wasn't allowed to watch.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: A room full of 5th graders at their desks. At the front of the class stands MRS. WILLIAMS -- Anna's current 5th grade teacher.

BACK TO SCENE:

Anna's hands fly to her mouth.

ANNA
That's Mrs. Williams!

Katie smiles and nods her head.

KATIE
He still surprises me.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY (VIDEO
PLAYBACK)

MRS. WILLIAMS (V.O.)
(on screen, addressing the
class)
Class, we have a special guest
today. He's a friend of mine and
he's doing a survey and needs our
help. Do you think we could help
him out?

STUDENTS (V.O.)
YES!

MRS. WILLIAMS (V.O.)
OK, let's remember the rules, raise
your hand to answer a question and
make sure you answer succinctly and
with respect.

BACK TO SCENE:

ANNA
(eyes still glued to the TV)
She still says that!

CUT TO:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY (VIDEO
PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: Anna's dad walks up the middle aisle and stands
in front of the dry-erase board.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)
I was wondering if you guys could
help me with a huuuuuuuge project,
but I need you to use your
imagination! Can you do that?

STUDENTS (V.O.)

Yeah!!!

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

I need to know what 10 year olds
are really like. Can someone tell
me what your favorite thing to do
is?

A BOY in the front row raises his hand.

BOY STUDENT (V.O.)

I really like to play sports and go
skating.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

Great!

A GIRL in the second row goes next.

GIRL STUDENT #1 (V.O.)

I've started learning how to take
pictures with my dad's camera. Next
I'm going to learn how to edit them
on a computer.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

Wow! That's really amazing! You
know what... I took some
photographs this morning at a
coffee shop. They turned out really
great.

He looks through the camera at the ladies.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Anyone else?

STUDENT VOICES (V.O.)

I read books! / I like drawing
pictures. / I love playing video
games!

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

Those are great answers! Let me ask
all the girls something -- do you
ladies like hanging around with
boys?

ALL GIRLS (V.O.)

No!

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

Oh good! I'm really glad to hear that! Well, I have a daughter and her name is Anna. She is an amazing little lady and she is turning 10 years old. Unfortunately I don't get to go to her birthday party but I bought this amazing cake for her and I was wondering if you guys wouldn't mind helping me celebrate her birthday. Would you guys like some cake?

STUDENTS (V.O.)

YEAH!

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

OK, I'm going to grab my camera in the back of the room and if you guys will sing happy birthday to Anna, I will send her the video. And everyone can blow out the candles. Deal?

BACK TO SCENE:

Katie notices Mrs. Williams sitting in the corner of the screen, wiping her eyes. It's obvious she knew the situation.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: All the kids hover around a birthday cake. In pink icing it reads: "Happy Birthday Anna." Ten candles are lit. The kids begin to sing.

About halfway through the song, Anna's dad holds the camera out at arm's length -- him in the foreground, all the kids behind him -- and sings directly to his daughter.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)

(singing, shouting)

Happy birthday dear ANNA...

He turns the camera back onto the class. They finish the song. Everyone blows out the candles.

A series of short edited clips: the cake being cut. Kids laughing and eating. Mrs. Williams looking into the camera.

MRS. WILLIAMS (V.O.)
Happy Birthday Anna!

A few kids saying thanks for the cake. Anna's dad on one knee talking to a couple of students. A final shot of him hugging Mrs. Williams.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)
Thank you.

The screen fades to black.

BACK TO SCENE:

The two ladies sit without words. Katie uses her hold on Anna's hand to pull her into an embrace.

KATIE
Pretty great dad, huh?

Anna wipes her eyes with her sleeves.

ANNA
Wow... Did he leave you any videos?

KATIE
Nope. Not a one. But he left me hundreds of emails. One shows up in my inbox every month or so. I have no idea how your dad set that up before he died, but it always brightens my day.

The alarm on the stove goes off. Katie stands to head to the kitchen -- then the screen comes back to life.

CUT TO:

INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS (VIDEO PLAYBACK)

ON SCREEN: Anna's dad is so close to the camera only his eyes and nose are visible.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.)
You guys aren't crying are you?
Seriously... it's a birthday celebration. Don't be such wusses.

He shakes his head and rolls his eyes. Then backs up so they can see his whole face.

ANNA'S DAD (V.O.) (CONT'D)
One last thing. I love you Anna! It took some imagination today, but I see you! I can picture exactly who you are. A beautiful mini version of your momma. I'm so very proud of who you are.

He smiles as big as possible -- mostly to hold back his own tears -- and waves goodbye. The screen goes dark.

BACK TO SCENE:

Anna stares at the screen for a long time.

ANNA
Mom, can I watch it again?

Katie comes back in from the kitchen, strokes her daughter's hair and responds.

KATIE
For sure, but after the party.
Right now, you can help me clean up
all the cake making mess.
(smiles, pushing back tears)

ANNA
Definitely. Thanks mom. That was
amazing.
(stands and wraps arms around
her mom)

CUT TO:

INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The party is over. The last guest is gone. Anna walks to the TV, opens the cabinet, and pulls out the CD case.

She opens it. It's full of DVDs: 13, 16, 18, 21, marriage, kids #1, kid #2 -- a timeline of the life waiting for her. At each milestone, her father will be there.

She closes the case and slides it back into its home. She pulls the disc labeled 10 from the player and takes it with her upstairs.

CUT TO:

INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Anna walks up the stairs and down the hallway, passing her mom's room.

KATIE
(from inside the room)
Anna! Come see this.

Anna enters. Katie holds out a tablet.

ANNA
What is it?

KATIE
Another email from your father.

ANNA
Can I read it?

KATIE
Nope.

ANNA
Then why are you showing it to me?

KATIE
Look what's at the bottom.

Anna leans in. There, underlined in blue -- a video link.

ANNA
It's another video! You got to let me watch!

KATIE
Maybe, but me first. I'll tell you about it in the morning!

The two hug. Anna heads out of the room.

KATIE (CONT'D)
(calling down the hallway)
What about breakfast in the morning? Coffee shop?

Anna turns and sticks her head back into the master bedroom.

ANNA
Sure! But no muffins.

Door closes.

FADE OUT.

THE END