

“LETTERS NEVER SENT: HUMPHREY BOGART TO ELVIS PRESLEY”

By George Curtis

Kid,

I've been watching the circus you call a career, and I'll give it to you straight, because nobody else around you seems to have the backbone.

You've got something most men would sell their souls for. Presence. Electricity. The kind of raw pull that makes people lean forward without knowing why. But instead of sharpening it into something dangerous, something lasting, you've let it get wrapped up in glitter, cheap scripts, and handlers who treat you like a slot machine that never stops paying out.

You don't build a legacy by smiling for the camera and shaking your hips on cue. You build it by saying no when it counts. By walking away from the easy money and the worse ideas. By making people uncomfortable once in a while, because that's where truth lives. Right now, you're playing it safe, and safe is just another word for forgettable.

I didn't get where I am by letting other people decide what I should be. I took roles that had teeth. I made choices that could've sunk me. That's the price of being more than a passing headline.

You've got the voice. You've got the look. But you're in danger of becoming your own impersonator before you've even had the decency to peak.

So here's the deal: stop coasting. Fire the people who tell you you're perfect. They're killing you slower than any bad habit ever could. Find something real to say, and say it like it matters. Or don't, and fade out under a pile of sequins and applause that won't mean a damn thing in ten years.

Your move.

—Bogart