A Letter for You Now

For Ella Mensah

Dear Ella,

I wanted to write this while the little details of our life together are still fresh. You are sixteen now, and I can see you becoming more independent. I sometimes rush through the day and forget to say what matters. Today I want to slow down and tell you.

I still remember our walk along the seafront when you were seven. You stopped to help a smaller child retrieve a dropped bucket, then spent the rest of the afternoon building a sandcastle with her. We missed our bus, but I came home thinking how naturally you make room for other people.

I admire your curiosity and the way you notice when someone is left out. I also love your ridiculous jokes, your determination to finish a drawing, and the questions you ask when an explanation does not quite make sense. You do not need to become louder to be heard; your thoughtful voice matters.

Being your dad has made me more patient, although I am still practising. You have taught me that listening is often more useful than offering an answer. Some of my happiest moments have been ordinary ones: making pancakes, collecting you from school, and talking in the car.

I do not say often enough how much I enjoy your company. I am proud of you, and I am sorry for the times I have let work distract me when you wanted my attention. You deserve to feel heard without having to compete with a screen.

One lesson I want to pass on is that being wrong does not make you less worthy of respect. Ask questions, change your mind when you learn something new, and apologise when you need to. Those are signs that you are growing.

I hope you find work that interests you, people who treat you kindly, and space for the things you enjoy. You are allowed to discover your own path. My hopes for you should never become a weight you have to carry.

If you remember one thing, let it be this: you never have to earn my love through grades, achievements, or being easy to parent. I love you as you are, and I am glad I get to be your dad.

With all my love,
Dad