



# If You Exist: In Search of a Reader Deep in the Future

BY LILIAN MOATS

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**I**f *You Exist* is a personal message written, not to currently living, but rather future descendants, who may find it many generations in the future. The aging narrator faces her own mortality, while at the same time, she faces the possibility of thousands more species, including her own, becoming extinct. She speaks, in very humanist terms, of her concerns about the future of *Homo sapiens* and the survival of life on our planet.

As a private heartfelt message to someone who may never exist, the writer likens her missive to “a note in a bottle set to sea in hopes of reaching you, if you exist in the future on some unfathomable shore.” The narrator shares her personal take on where humanity is now and where we might be heading depending on what choices we will make. Wishing that her imagined reader could answer questions about whether the writer’s anxieties have ever been resolved, she writes about climate change and such topics as human migration, racism, and the pandemic, as well as her projected concerns about the possibilities of unbridled technical advancement and human redesign.

After offering her perspective on where hope could lie, the writer ends her note with “the stuff of fairy tales,”—her positive fantasy in the final chapter called, “If We Could Meet.”

Author Lillian Moats was born in Detroit in 1946. She attended Barnard

College and graduated with a B.F.A in art and creative writing from the University of Michigan and an M.S. in education from the University of Wisconsin. She has been an artist throughout her life, creating in mediums including painting, film, and illustration, as well as literature. With her creative partner, JP Somersaulter, she’s created over twenty animated short films for children and adults. These original stories and retellings of classic fairy tales have been shown and awarded in festivals around the world and are in the permanent collection of the Chicago Film Archive. Her drive to write rose to the forefront in 1993 and has continued to be her most satisfying creative outlet to the present. She has written a collection of original fairy tales, a fictionalized memoir, a work of creative non-fiction, another of political fiction, and now, this short philosophical essay with a twist.

A short excerpt from the book:

For me, the question of what it means to be human is more pressing than ever, though my own answers reside in recollected incidents, not in academic definitions.

Here’s such an incident...my young friend Olivia was only two years old, and I was holding the handle of her stroller while we waited for her mother to pick up food from a restaurant. We were

looking into the window at the array of succulent plants. Something caught Olivia’s eye. She pointed her index finger so insistently that it nearly bent back at the tip. Right in front of us was a large shriveled lobe on one of the plants. She whirled her head around to look plaintively into my eyes. “OUCH!” she said.

Her empathy for the apparent suffering of the plant struck my heart, and I leaned down to kiss the top of her head. Not a definition of what it means to be human, for some humans seem not to possess such empathy, this is only a glimpse at a quality I hold dear in humanity. For that matter, many animals besides ourselves feel empathy, something we’ve taken far too long to admit.

Do your children, your little ones, still imagine they know how other species feel? Do you still have little ones at all? Do you grow in number by sexual reproduction? Does it still take a long time for human progeny to mature? May I, in fact call you our “progeny”? Are we anything like each other?

The publication date for *If You Exist* is August 23, 2021. Pre-orders are now available at Amazon.com or through the distributor, Itasca Books. 