

A Letter to You

When You Feel Lost

Dear you,

Feeling lost can be difficult to explain because nothing has to be visibly falling apart for you to feel as though you no longer know where you are going. You might still be getting up, going to work, caring for people, answering messages and doing all the ordinary things expected of you, while somewhere underneath there is a quiet question: what am I actually doing with my life? Perhaps the direction you once had has disappeared. Perhaps something ended. Perhaps you changed and the life around you did not change with you.

Sometimes we become lost after a major event: grief, separation, redundancy, illness, diagnosis, children leaving home, retirement, a friendship ending, burnout or a plan that did not happen. At other times there is no single event. You simply look around one day and realise that you have spent so long meeting responsibilities, adapting to other people and getting through each day that you are no longer sure what belongs to you.

If that is where you are, I do not want to hand you a map and tell you where to go. I do not know what your next direction should be, and perhaps you do not need to know yet either. Being lost is uncomfortable because we are taught to value certainty. We are expected to have plans, goals and answers. Yet some periods of life are not about knowing. They are about noticing.

Notice what drains you now. Notice what you have outgrown. Notice what you miss. Notice what makes you curious, even briefly. Notice the conversations in which you become more animated. Notice where you feel able to breathe properly. Notice what you keep imagining when nobody else is telling you what you should want. These are not instructions. They are small pieces of information about the person you are becoming.

You may be trying to find the old version of yourself. The person you were before something happened, before you became exhausted, before grief, before parenthood, before a diagnosis, before the relationship changed, before your body changed, before life became complicated. It is understandable to miss that person. But perhaps the task is not to find your way backwards. Perhaps it is to become acquainted with who you are now.

That can bring grief of its own. Growth is not always exciting. Sometimes it means recognising that something you worked very hard for no longer fits. Sometimes it means admitting that a dream has changed. Sometimes it means disappointing somebody who

preferred the older version of you. Sometimes it means standing in a space between what was and what comes next, with neither feeling completely like home.

Please do not rush to fill that space simply because uncertainty makes you uncomfortable. You are allowed to pause before choosing another direction. You are allowed to explore without committing. You can try something and discover it is not for you. You can change your mind. You can learn something at fifty that alters what you thought you knew about yourself at thirty. There is no age at which you are supposed to stop becoming.

When everything feels unclear, make the questions smaller. Instead of asking, "What should I do with my life?" ask, "What do I need more of?" Instead of "Where am I going?" ask, "What is one direction I am curious about?" Instead of "Who am I now?" ask, "When do I feel most like myself?" A smaller question can give you somewhere to begin without demanding an entire future from you.

You might also need to separate being lost from being behind. They can feel similar, but they are not the same. There is no single route through adulthood. Lives change shape. People begin careers late, return to education, leave relationships, find relationships, become parents, do not become parents, receive diagnoses, change professions, lose money, rebuild finances, move home, care for relatives, become ill, recover, relapse, start businesses, close businesses and begin again. A life can contain many beginnings.

Comparison makes uncertainty harder because other people's lives can look like maps when yours feels like blank paper. But you are seeing their visible milestones, not every private detour. Their route cannot tell you what is right for you. You are allowed to build a life around your actual needs rather than around what looks successful from the outside.

And if you feel as though you have wasted time, I want you to be careful with that thought. Years spent surviving were not empty years. Years spent caring for someone mattered. Years spent trying something that eventually ended still contained learning, relationships and experiences. Years before you understood yourself were not proof that you were doing life incorrectly. We make decisions using the understanding and resources available to us at the time.

You do not have to turn every painful experience into a lesson, but you can carry forward what you now know. Perhaps you know that constant pressure is not sustainable. Perhaps you know you need more quiet, more creativity, more security, more independence, more connection or fewer expectations. Perhaps you know what you never want to feel again. Knowing what does not fit is also a form of direction.

There may be a temptation to wait for a dramatic moment of clarity. Sometimes it comes. Often it does not. Direction can emerge through very ordinary experiments: one

conversation, one course, one application, one boundary, one afternoon doing something different, one honest admission, one new routine. You gather information by living, not only by thinking.

So if you feel lost today, you do not need to panic and choose a destination. Stand where you are for a moment. Look around. You have already travelled further than you realise, and you are carrying knowledge that an earlier version of you did not have.

Perhaps you are not lost in the way you think you are. Perhaps the old map simply no longer describes the landscape.

You can draw another one slowly.

With warmth,

Maggie

Space to Breathe Therapy