

# Dear Psyche:

Letters to an Asteroid



BY  
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Dear Psyche,

I've had dreams so often of being lost I wake up and believe it. In them, I can't find anything familiar. My dresser drawers rearrange themselves. My favorite jeans are missing, somehow, despite my certainty at putting them exactly in their always place. My face is not my own. My hands are stranger's hands.

I wake up believing it. My hands are not my hands all day. They are someone else's, pretending to be me. They touch and feel and none of it registers. Once, I tapped my fingertips to a pan sizzling on the stove when my mother wasn't looking. I winced in practice. It never hurt. The dreams bleed through.

I wonder if it's the hurt left behind by my brother that's doing all of this to me. Making a numb thing of me. An empty thing. A shell. When he disappeared, it scooped my insides out and took them to wherever he is.

My mother will not tell me that my brother has disappeared, but I know he has because his bike came home for dinner and the hands on the handlebars were not his. She shooed me away from it all, but I listened, pressed against my bedroom door. Without even my ears, I would have known the word missing by the way it hovered over the officer's brow. The ache of it seeping through. My mother always said you couldn't hold a big sadness in. It leaked out of you like a river. I hadn't understood what she had meant until I saw that bike and those hands and that uniform and his face seeping with it.

That was four weeks ago. My brother is still missing and I am dreaming of being lost too. Four weeks ago, I stopped turning in my homework. Stopped studying for tests. Stopped showing up on days my mother was too sad to notice. With the end of the semester nearing, I was failing everything. The school made me a deal. A special project. Write letters to something. Anything. Something that speaks to me.

So, here we are, Psyche. Today, I am lost. I am strange, even to myself. Part of me thinks you might know something about that. About being lost. About being strange. Different. I have heard about what might have happened to you. All those layers broken off. Now, you are a core. Just a core and I am just an aching heart. For today, anyway. For now.

I'll talk to you soon.

Love,

Lily

Dear Psyche,

I have made friends with silence the way you make friends with the sun. You don't. But it is always there and when you're alone it feels like a friend sometimes. That's what I tell myself. It is so quiet here, I am the only one talking and I am talking alone.

My mother sat me down the other day, weeks after she should have, and told me my brother was missing. I don't know why, but as she did I was certain he wouldn't be coming back. She made it real. Words made it real. Secrets stay secret only when they're pretend. At the end, she said, "Sometimes things are not missing, they're just gone."

"But, he is not a thing. He's part of me. Every single step of me," I said. She looked at me and saw through me. All those steps were shared together. She had been there, too.

I refused to believe he was gone for a long time. I thought of you. How you aren't gone just because we can't see you. I can feel you. I can feel my brother. Until last night, I could feel my brother, I should say.

I had a dream I was finally found after being lost for so long. I remembered my name in the dream. My hands felt like hands. I was smiling in it, a foreign thing. A sunshine thing. I hadn't felt warm in weeks.

My mom came into my room and I was still smiling. I said, "They found him."

She nodded and sat down. *Where is your smile, mamma?* I wanted to ask. *Where has your joy gone?* I realized. Her found and my found were two different things.

I don't think you know what colors are, but I'm certain you know what black feels like, Psyche. Even when it is soft, it hurts. Even when it looks pretty. I will be wearing black for the rest of my life even if it doesn't look like it. I think you understand.

I hope you do.

Trying hard to feel love,

Lily

Dear Psyche,

It has been awhile. A summer passed slinkingly by, something I yelled at so much it whimpered into disappearing. I know it is not the summer's fault. But, it is someone's fault and I don't know who that someone is. My mom seems to think it is herself. She has hidden away all her toothy smiles. All her snorting laughter. Her whole self is tucked into her bed even after she drags herself out of it. That was the beginning of summer. Closed doors and silence again. Different, now, though. Bitter tasting. Everything was.

But, the days passed. Mom's floor creaked more and more on the other side of the house until it wasn't so strange to hear footsteps. To hear her doorknob turn. To hear her click on the stove.

She wouldn't talk to me about Liam, but she let me keep all his pictures in my room. She made mac 'n cheese every day for weeks, extra milk just the way I liked it, she said. I hadn't the heart to tell her it was his favorite, not mine. I didn't mind.

One day at the table, she looked wobbly. Wavering. Her whole body uncertain. I grabbed her hand. "I know what lost feels like," I said.

She squeezed my hand. "I know you do."

We linked ourselves together after that. She must have realized I was still real. The way, I'm sure, you have felt. When they can't see you, it's hard to be sure. She saw me, that day, and remembered to see me every day after that.

A new family moved in next door, a girl my age introduced herself and then never went away. Always there, knocking at the door. Tugging at my hand. She, Bridget, pulled me back into the world.

I started back at school this week and it was only a little harder than I thought it would be. The girl from next door was in my homeroom, sitting next to me. Bringing me back into the world.

The summer, I yelled at. The fall, I am letting be. Not inviting it in. Not loving it but leaving it. Letting it happen to me. Letting the world happen without wanting to tear it to pieces. That's enough for me, now. More than enough.

I don't remember my dreams anymore. I think that's a good sign.

Psyche, I hope you have a hand to hold someday. I've found it really helps.

Lily

Dear Psyche,

I thought I knew all the definitions of loss, but there are so many I'm not sure I will ever know. Or, I don't want to know them all. I've known enough, haven't I? I have lost enough.

It's been years since I thought of you. That's not true. I think of you often. I haven't needed to write, though. After that assignment all those years ago, I thought I was done needing an outlet. A place to put all the confusion. Pretend to send it into space and it doesn't feel so heavy anymore.

I'm feeling heavy again, and so I come back. I think we live our lives in orbit. Circle through our lives. Dark to light. Isolation to engagement.

I was engaged in this world. Now, I am not. Isolation. An orbit I've been in for years. I can never seem to find someone that sticks.

He was kind, this one. So very kind. Soft. Smiling. But, it just didn't work. We didn't work together. Sometimes, I am harsh on accident. Sometimes I am dark. He doesn't understand it. Pokes at me until I lash out and then is shocked by it. It's not his fault. Not mine either. Okay, maybe a little. But, still. We just don't fit. Grind against each other.

Sometimes I am certain there is no one that will ever love me, period. Love me without an asterisk. A condition. I don't mean love me without finding flaws in me. I just want a promise that even at my worst, someone will still want to sit beside me. Hold my hand. Is that so much to ask for? To be seen.

Growing up, I wanted to be invisible. Wanted to slide through life without anyone seeing me. Hearing me. Knowing me. I think that was just something to hide behind. Pretend I wanted people to look right through me. It still hurt no matter how I pretended it didn't.

I thought this guy saw me. Capital S, Saw. But, now I'm not so sure.

Am I asking for too much?

I don't think so. But, the world seems to think otherwise.

It'll just be you and me forever, Psyche. Hope you don't mind.

Lily

Dear Psyche,

I thought I was going to be alone forever, and I was getting to be friends with that fact. I adopted a puppy and let him drag me around the world. Let him show me love and joy and all the things I was missing. Let him teach me to be clumsy and messy and good.

Then, out of nowhere, my neighbor from all those years ago found me online. Asked to catch up. She had been there when my brother died. Had been there to hold my hand. Wasn't that all I asked for last time I wrote? Just a hand to hold. Doesn't matter much who it belongs to.

She was just as bright as I remember her. Laughter-full. She knows exactly how to brighten the world. I don't know. I loved her the minute I met her, decades ago.

I thought I knew what friendship meant, but now it is becoming something new. A tugging at me. Back into the world.

She tries a new coffee shop every week and declares it better than the last. She cooks old family recipes and piles both of our plates high. When we watch movies, she has always seen it at least once, mouths the words along with the actors on screen and grins when I catch her. I don't understand it. Joy on the outside. It scares me, almost. Shocks me, certainly.

With her came others. A giggling group of women I am starting to learn the lives of. Each of their laughter different, but kind. I find myself wishing to hear them, all of them, laugh long after we have left whatever it is we were doing.

I don't ever ask them over. Don't ever make the plans myself. But, if they ask, I'll go. That's a rule I can make for myself. These women are dragging me into the light and the least I can do is let them do it.

I am hesitant and comfortable in myself. I am reluctant to lose again. Terrified. But, I think I'm going to try. A long time ago, I told you I clawed at summer, and let fall be. It is spring now and I am diving head first into it.

Always thinking of you,

Lily

Dear Psyche,

Yesterday, my kitchen was overfull, chairs crammed around my little table and dishes crowded so tight I stuck my elbow in sweet potato casserole while I was eating. It should have been hectic. Should have been stressful, all those people coming to my home. All those wonderful, goofy women.

But, it wasn't. Not at all. They bustled in early and elbowed their way into my kitchen. They cracked open my fridge without hesitation. They found pots and pans crammed into cabinets and long untouched. Casserole dishes and bread tins. They pretended store-bought potato salad was their own by dressing it up and adding a little salt, offering each other a bite to test it out. "See," they said, "it's incredible, right?"

It was my birthday. And, my brother's birthday. And the ladies knew that and they loved me enough to force their way into my kitchen. To make me eat and laugh, even on our birthday. I asked them not to sing. Didn't want to hear my name without Liam's attached. They listened to that, at least. Still brought out a cake. Sang something else. A silly pop song. They made it almost okay. That's a miracle in itself.

It is strange. Odd. They tell stories and tease each other. They are sharp sometimes, and soft, and special. All of them.

I realized, looking at them around my tiny table, Kat with frosting on her nose and my elbow still sticky from the sweet potatoes, they were exactly what I'd been looking for.

But, if this is all I get, if these ladies are all I ever get, it'll be enough. They see me. Don't look through me. Refuse to let me disappear. It's more than enough.

Just like loss and friendship, love looks like so many different things. I hope I find more and more of it day after day.

And, Psyche? When we come, when we *see* you, you're going to love it.

Lily

Dear Psyche,

I feel so stuck to the ground I don't know how I'm not pressed against it at every moment of my day. When I stand from my desk, I feel as if something should be forcing me back down. Stopping me from getting up at all. This desk will be my grave where I sit and work and don't notice I'm dead.

It is almost a surprise when I do stand and nothing happens. When I make my way outside to sit in the sun on my lunch break. All of our windows in my office are turned down. It is approaching winter. The sun hides from me and I do not like this game of seeking it. Shivering

I go back inside after my forty-five minutes of sunlight and want to leave so desperately. There is the parking garage. Here are my keys. But, I can't. I don't. What else would I do?

I have never known what I wanted to do. I took what was offered. I said yes anytime I could. I ended up here and just never left. I don't think you know about getting stuck, but I want to tell you anyway. I think we're friends now, aren't we? I'd like to think so.

I want to do something different. Something more. But, I don't know what. I keep coming back here, making transcripts out of videos and I am bored by it. Numbed by it.

This is not the life I wanted. More than that, this is not even a life I'd settle for.

My lunch break is over, Psyche. Back to my desk I crawl.

Lily

Dear Psyche,

I've decided to go back to school. Just at night, after the work-day is done. I listen to peppy music as I make the commute and am certain this is the right choice even well into the night when homework has pulled sleep away from me yet again.

Psyche, I have decided I want to work on missions like yours. I'll be too late to put my fingerprint on anything of you, but you've inspired me. That's close enough, right?

I was feeling so stuck to the ground, but this has made me lighter. My heels don't touch quite so heavy. Sometimes, when no one is looking, I start to skip as I walk into class. Dance a little. Let myself be happy and light. It feels right. The bounce of me, now. It feels right.

It's silly, but I feel like this is something that doesn't even feel like settling. Of course, I've got a ways to go. A long while. I might change my mind. There's always that possibility. I have changed my mind so many times on so many different things. Dinner and college and career. Love, even.

But, I feel good, Psyche.

Your launch is coming up soon. A few more weeks. Are you excited? I am. I'm going to go. To watch us take off on our journey to see you. I wonder what you'll look like. We have guessed. Blind portraits. Drawing with our eyes half-closed, speculating based on the data we do have. But, it'll be so different to know for sure. To *see* you the way I pretend you've seen me for the last twenty years.

I hope you know just how many of us are rooting for you. Loving you from afar.

See you soon,

Lily

Dear Psyche,

The launch was today.

You probably have no idea, but we're on our way.

It was hot. Crowded. I brought all of my friends with me. I had long ago told them about you. About my letters. They wept as they read them, especially the first set.

You have known me at my heaviest, Psyche. I have known you when you were unknown. I think that's a fair trade-off, isn't it?

My friend, I cried when we launched.

I felt so light, seeing it take off. Seeing how weightless it all looked. The ease of it. Like I too would go hurtling into space to come see you. I wish I could, Psyche. Wanted to reach out and cling to the thing. Attach myself to it. Tell them, when they found me, "It's okay. We're friends, Psyche and I."

I told you once I'd be wearing black the rest of my life, but now it feels like it has faded. Been washed a few too many times. Hugged by soft hands. Touched oh so very gently time and time again until it softened. It's not so harsh.

You have lightened me in so many ways and, I hope, we lighten you too.

I've seen you, always,

Lily

### **Author's Note**

I think we function in orbits. We circle things all our lives. That's what these letters are about. The way we circle, cycle, to and from the same things all our lives. Lily, for example, goes through three phases of an orbit with each set of three letters. The first is isolation. The second hesitation. The third association. Engagement. Burrowing into the world instead of, in the first sections, away from it. If you'll look back, each set of three letters have a repeated line. In the first, it appears early on. The second about halfway through. The third of the set features it in the end. You'll notice these lines change as Lily does. She is dreaming of being lost, then found, and then not dreaming anything at all. A sign of healing, perhaps.

It can be easier to talk to things like Psyche instead of other people. Times of struggling. But, as Lily demonstrates, it can't last forever. Find comfort in things like Psyche, sure. How they parallel your hurt. Your life. Your isolation. But, also, let people in, too. Psyche might have been through a lot, but it can't talk back. Isolation to hesitation to engagement. You need all three to complete the circle.

Want to write your own letter to Psyche? There's a template below! Be sure to tag us on social media @NASAPsyche and add the #dearpsyche if you do write one and want to share. We'd love to read them!

Dear Psyche,

Love,