



A Letter to the One Who Pulls Away

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This is a short book. On purpose. You can put it down anytime. This opening holds the promise of a letter, not a lecture. It makes a simple offer: presence without pursuit, understanding without pressure. What follows is arranged as a journey in small rooms—each with a chair and an open door—so you can linger or leave as you wish.

Before We Begin: A Gentle Invitation

I'm not going to chase you through these pages. No homework. No exercises. No demands that you feel something or do something or become someone different. Just some things I've wanted to say. To people I've loved who pulled away. To myself, in the years when I was the one behind the wall. Take what resonates. Leave the rest.

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I. You're Not Cold

I know you've heard it. From partners. From family. Maybe from that voice in your own head that wonders why intimacy that others seem to crave makes you want to disappear. Why can't you just open up? Why do you always pull away? What's wrong with you?

Here's what I want you to know: You're not cold. What looks like coldness is usually protection. A wall, yes. But not a wall built to keep others out. A wall built to keep you safe. Naming this at the outset matters because it reframes your story from defect to defense, from judgment to context.

II. The Wall Made Sense

At some point—probably very early, before you had words for it—you learned that needing people was dangerous. Maybe when you reached for comfort, it wasn't there. Maybe your feelings were dismissed, ignored, used against you. Maybe love was unpredictable—warm one moment, gone the next. So you adapted.

You learned to need less. To self-soothe. To create a world inside yourself that didn't depend on anyone else's participation. This wasn't a flaw. It was brilliant. It was survival. The wall kept out chaos. The wall kept out pain. The wall kept you intact when depending on others felt too risky. The child who built that wall deserves respect, not criticism.

A Pause to Breathe

You can stop here if you want. Come back another time. Or don't. No pressure. The letter will be here whenever you feel ready to step into the next room.



III. But Now

The wall that saved you at seven doesn't always serve you at thirty-seven. The protection that felt like freedom can start to feel like isolation. The self-sufficiency that kept you safe can keep you alone. And the people who try to love you keep bumping into something they can't get past—not because you're unlovable, but because you're protected.

You can stop here if you want. Come back another time. Or don't. No pressure. If you decide to continue, we'll keep naming things in simple, breathable sentences.

IV. What Happens Inside You

I want to try to name what I think might happen when someone gets too close: There's an alarm. Not a small one. A survival-level alarm that says: Too much. Too close. I need to get out. The closeness that others find comforting feels like pressure. Like walls closing in. Like losing yourself.

So you create distance. You go quiet. You find reasons to leave, to criticize, to need space. This isn't cruelty. It's your nervous system trying to regulate. Trying to find a place where you can breathe again. When we can name an alarm, it can begin to quiet—even if just by a few decibels.

V. The Tragedy

Here's what I believe about people who pull away: You want connection too. Beneath the wall, beneath the need for space, beneath the part of you that runs from intimacy—there's a longing for closeness that might be just as strong as anyone else's. The wall isn't proof that you don't want love. The wall is proof that you want it so much it terrifies you.

VI. I've Been You

I spent thirty years in a marriage where I was the one behind the wall. We were best friends. We built an extraordinary life. We never needed space from each other in the obvious way—we were together constantly. What we avoided wasn't each other's presence. It was depth. Vulnerability. The unstructured conversations where real intimacy lives.

We built instead of feeling. We accomplished instead of connecting. My wife told me I was cold. She wasn't wrong. I didn't know how to give her what she was asking for. So I retreated into tasks, into projects, into being useful rather than being present. I cared for her. Devotedly. But I cared for her like a duty, not like a desire. She needed to feel wanted, not just tended. I didn't know how to want. Not openly. Not in the way that requires being seen.



VII. And Then I've Been on the Other Side

After that marriage ended, something shifted. In the relationships that followed, I found myself on the other side of the wall—pursuing people who pulled away, feeling the panic of abandonment when they needed space. I learned what it feels like to reach for someone who keeps retreating. It's devastating.

Not because you don't have reasons. Not because your need for space isn't real. But the experience of loving someone who disappears—without knowing when or if they'll return—is its own kind of suffering. I'm not saying that to guilt you. I'm saying it because having been on both sides, I understand something about this dance that I didn't understand before. Neither position is villainous. Both are painful. And both are trapped. Still with me? No obligation to continue.

VIII. Inner Vows

A pastor I respect talks about something called "inner vows"—promises we make to ourselves in response to pain: No one will ever hurt me like that again. I will never let someone have that kind of power over me. I will never need someone so much that losing them could break me. I will never be that vulnerable again.

These vows weren't made consciously. They were written into your operating system before you had any say. And they've been running ever since. The pastor put it starkly: "Inner vows are made to protect us, but they end up enslaving us. The shield becomes the tomb in which your heart slowly atrophies and dies." I felt that atrophy. For years. I just didn't have a name for it.

IX. The Question

I'm not going to tell you that you need to change. I'm not going to tell you what to do. But I want to ask you something: Is the wall still serving you? Not whether it served you once—it did. Not whether you still need some protection—you probably do. But is the current wall, at its current height, with its current lack of doors—is it giving you the life you actually want? Only you can answer that.



X. What You're Not

You're not broken. You're not incapable of love. You're not doomed to isolation. You're not a diagnosis or a problem to be solved. You're a person who built protection because protection was necessary. That protection now has a cost. And you get to decide what to do about that. Dignity belongs to you, not to the wall.

XI. What Might Be Possible

The wall can have a door. Not an open archway—that might feel like too much. But a door. Something you can open when you choose, at a pace you can tolerate. Some people with avoidant patterns do develop what's called "earned security"—a genuine capacity for intimacy that doesn't feel like drowning. It doesn't happen fast. It often requires help—therapy, patient partners, a lot of practice. But it's possible. The wall doesn't have to be permanent.

XII. Small Things

If something in you is curious about change, here are small things. No pressure. Just options. Before you withdraw, say something. Even just: "I need some space. I'll be back." Those few words change everything for the person on the other side. When someone offers love, pause before deflecting. You don't have to receive it fully. Just pause. Notice what it feels like. Let it land for one second before you brush it off.

When the alarm goes off, name it. "This is my system reacting to closeness. The alarm is not the truth. I'm not actually in danger." Stay five minutes longer than you want to. Not forever. Just five minutes. Build tolerance slowly. Small things. That's all. You can stop here. This is a natural ending. Or you can keep going.

A Breath Between Chapters

If you're pausing, consider noticing your shoulders, your jaw, your breath. Whatever you choose next is already the right pace for you.



XIII. What I Wish I Could Tell the People I've Loved

The ones who pulled away. The ones I chased and couldn't reach. If I could say anything to them—without pursuit, without agenda—it would be this: I know the wall isn't about me. I know you didn't build it because I was too much or not enough. I know you want connection, even if you can't always tolerate it. I know your withdrawal isn't cruelty. I know you're doing the best you can with patterns you didn't choose.

I wish we could have found a way. Maybe we still can. Maybe we can't. But I want you to know: you were never cold to me. You were protected. And I saw, underneath, someone worth reaching for. I'm not reaching anymore. I've learned that lesson. But I wanted you to know what I saw.

XIV. What I Wish Someone Had Told Me

Back when I was the one behind the wall. Before I knew what I was doing or why. The efficiency you're so proud of is costing you something. The self-sufficiency is loneliness wearing a mask. The people who keep asking for more from you aren't being needy—they're seeing something in you that you're afraid to show. You're not cold. You're scared. And the things you're scared of—being seen, being needed, being vulnerable—those are also the doorways to everything you actually want. You don't have to walk through them today. But you should know they're there.

XV. No Chase

I said at the beginning that I wouldn't chase you through these pages. I meant it. I don't need you to change. I don't need you to do anything with what you've read. I don't need you to become a different person. If this book sits on a shelf for years before you pick it up again, that's fine. If you read it once and never think about it again, that's fine too.

But if something resonated—if even one sentence made you feel seen instead of diagnosed—then it was worth writing. And if someday you decide the wall could use a door, there are resources that can help. Books, therapy, patient people willing to walk slowly alongside you. The door is yours to build. No one can build it for you. And no one should rush you.



XVI. Closing

You're not cold. You're not broken. You're not incapable of love. You're protected. And that protection made sense once. What you do with it now is up to you. I'm not chasing. But I'm glad you read this far.

With care and no pursuit,

~ethan

The Only Things Worth Remembering

The wall made sense.

Honor the child who built it.

The wall has a cost.

Only you can decide if that cost is still worth it.

You're not cold. You're protected

Doors are possible. When you're ready.

At your pace. No one can rush you. Including me.

If you need an image to carry with you, let it be a hand on a doorknob you control, a hinge that moves because you chose to oil it, a door that opens as slowly as you wish.



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“The door is yours to build. No one can build it for you. And no one should rush you.”

~ ethan

If You Want to Go Deeper

This letter is complete in itself. You don't need to read anything else. But if you're curious: Book 3: What I Wish I Could Tell You — A longer exploration of avoidant patterns, where they come from, and what might help. Same tone as this. No homework. No pressure. The Supplementary Materials — Exercises and practices for those who want them. Completely optional. Therapy — If you're considering it, look for someone who understands attachment, who won't push you faster than you can go, and who feels safe enough that you might eventually take a risk. But those are just options. This letter is enough.

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