

**Dear Body, I'm sorry and I love you.**

**Hillary McBride, 2018**

Dear Body,

I'm sorry for telling so many lies about you. I called you ugly, a waste of space, just *this* and just *that*. I reduced you down, and used words with you I would never use with others. I told myself and other stories about you that were not true, and did not honor how sacred you are.

I'm sorry for all the times I've hurt you, both on the outside and inside. I have starved you, scraped you, plucked pulled cut and burned you. I scrubbed you too hard in the shower. I filled you with food then made you empty yourself. I have celebrated when there was less of you, and screamed at you when I thought there was even just a ¼ inch more of you where there used to be less. You never asked for this. You never deserved this.

I'm sorry for the ways I have neglected and ignored you. You told me so many times, "this isn't safe", or "this feels good", or screamed at me "LISTEN TO ME". But I silenced you. I covered up your voice with distractions, and the promise that maybe I would love you, that maybe I would love me, if you just stopped telling me things.

I'm sorry for how I've kept you stuck and small, when you wanted to expand and be free and wild. I sat there, trying to be 'good', but it cost you. I told you we couldn't climb the tree, instead we would sit still with our legs crossed. I made you think you were better if you behaved, and didn't challenge anyone's ideas of what it means to be a woman.

I'm sorry for how I believed what other people said about you. They said you were so many things, they called the beautiful life giving parts of you bad and horrible names. I let them. I said nothing, sometimes I laughed.

I'm sorry for blaming you for holding all the feelings I didn't know how to feel. You have been so good at telling me when I'm in danger, when I am alive or full of joy. But the hard things were too scary. Just to get away from feelings, I tried to make you go away, to be invisible, to shut up.

I'm sorry for putting you down just to fit in with others. It seems that other people felt safer being around me if I told them I hated you. But I let you down. I want to find a way we can belong, without hating our bodies to feel close.

I'm sorry for making you an object to use, and be used. I am sorry I felt better for a while when I let people use you. I really thought I would be more lovable. And when you told me you didn't like it, I didn't listen.

I'm sorry I didn't know how to protect you from a world which told us both that you were for someone else's pleasure, not quite enough of *that*, too *this*, bad, ugly, broken, a thing, a puppet, not wearing enough, the best thing about me, dangerous.

I'm sorry for hating you when you did nothing wrong.

I love you for staying with me, for never really leaving me even though I have tried to leave you. You are there, always. As long as I am there, you will be there. Here, we are together and we can and will never be apart.

I love you for the ways you let me experience life. Through adventure, through taste and smell and sound. Without you I would not know any joy. Without you, I would not even be alive. I used to think my mind was safe and you were what was unsafe. Now I know my thoughts told me lies, but you never have.

I love you for allowing me to love others. To hold close my dear ones, to make love, to grasp a hand, to wipe the tear away from another's cheek. It is through you that I can show and feel love, and know what being connected really means.

I love you for helping me move. Taking me from here to there, fast and slow, with intention and sometimes without even knowing it. Together we have travelled the world, and see it all. You will help me appreciate others, and the uniqueness and beauty that each of us are.

I love you for introducing me to time. No one else will take the journey of life with me, all the way from beginning to end. As you change, I will remember what we have been through together. When you show lines and marks, it will be the storybook of what I have lived, reminding me daily of all the times I have laughed, chopped apples carelessly, fallen from the swing set, and squinted to see the beautiful day under a bright sky. Skin, you tell me about what it means to become wise, and joints, you remind me that we are not permanent. But, I refuse to shame you because you cannot do what you used to.

I love you for teaching me how to rest. You remind me to care for myself, and have deepened my understanding of what it means to be present and still. In teaching me how to rest, you have taught me how to need, and in needing I have allowed others to love me, and give me parts of themselves. Through rest, I understand the rhythms of life. I understand that humility is a spiritual discipline, and I do not have to do it all to be loved.

I love you for helping me touch. Myself, others, the softest petal on the flower outside the front door, sand against the heels of my feet, and the neck of my lover. Touch is a poem that says it all.

I love you for carrying life inside. You have always had life within you, even before you were born. Each month, I am reminded of this. I plan my week, what I will wear, what activities I do or not, because of this life-reminder that you bring to my awareness. Oh, how this reminds me

that we are connected to those who come before us and after us. And you remind me, always that I am not alone, even when I am alone, we are together. All of the versions of us both I hold in my memory.

I love you for being a miracle on the inside. There is so much to you I will never understand; Why you and I wrestle sometimes in the morning about when to begin the day, or at night. Why you make a clicking noise sometimes and not others. Why you seem to like it when I feed you some things and not others. You are a mystery to me. And instead of frustration, now I feel full of wonder, and appreciation.

I love you, just as you are.

Now, I am sometimes surprised to find myself in this no-man's land of not hating anymore, not quite where I used to be, but not certain that love is the right word for how I feel about you. While these words are true, some days they feel absolute, while other days more tentative, hopeful, but aspirational. But, because you have done nothing wrong, I want to keep reminding us both that I am sorry, and that I do love you.