Grief, Loss, and What Cannot Be Repaired · About 4 minutes

Missing Someone Without Renewing Contact

Making room for a relationship that remains unfinished

There can be a real pang of longing for someone you have good reason to stay away from.

The combination can be surprisingly difficult to accept. Longing arrives, and a boundary you felt clear about begins to seem suspect. Perhaps you were too harsh. Perhaps missing them means another conversation is required.

Nadine, in this fictional example, ended a friendship after her friend shared information she had promised to keep private. No apology followed. Nadine misses their ordinary companionship and wants the breach acknowledged. She also wants to keep this person at a distance. Both experiences belong to the relationship as it was and to the decision she has made.

A friendship need not become worthless to justify ending it. The good parts may be precisely what make the loss painful. Nor does affection excuse the broken confidence. An account that demands one verdict about the entire relationship leaves little room for its actual complexity.

Some unfinished conversations concern someone who has died. Others concern a living person who may be unwilling or unable to respond as hoped. Those losses differ. In either case, the wish to be acknowledged may remain reasonable even when it cannot be met by that person.

Candyce Ossefort-Russell's clinical writing on bereavement emphasizes the particular person, relationship and available support rather than imposing one map of grieving.[1] Other kinds of loss need attention to their own circumstances. A theory cannot tell Nadine whether contact would help or reveal what her former friend privately feels.

Imagining an apology may clarify what Nadine wanted. It cannot supply the apology itself. Even a real apology would leave questions about trust, conduct and the access she wishes to allow. There is no obligation to turn an imagined conversation into a message.

These words could belong to Nadine at the same time: “I miss our friendship and wish you would acknowledge what happened.” And, “I am not choosing renewed contact under these circumstances.”

She need not make either sentence disappear to justify the other. Their coexistence may be sad. It may also offer relief from the demand to choose between honoring the relationship and protecting herself.

Someone else may be able to keep her company in that sadness without replacing the friend. A supportive person can hear the longing without campaigning for reconciliation or condemning everything that came before. Where an ending affects housing, shared work or care, practical help may be needed as well.

There will be days when approaching the loss feels useful and days when ordinary activity is enough. Grieving does not require constant attention to what hurts. Threatening or unwanted contact can end immediately, without one final explanation as the price of leaving.

Nadine can give her longing a place in her life while keeping the boundary around contact.

Tonight the wish for their company can be heard somewhere safe. There is no need to send it to them.

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Companion reading · The Conversation That May Never Come

Full pathway companion · included with paid learning
Pathway introduction: Grief, Loss, and What Cannot Be Repaired (public introduction; full modules require access).

Sources and further reading

[1] Ossefort-Russell, C. (n.d.). Individuals grieve: AEDP as an effective approach for grief as a personal process. Transformance: The AEDP Journal. Source.

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