

## PART ONE

Perhaps home is not a place  
but simply an irrevocable condition.

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

## Baby

Imagine yourself as a baby. You would look at that baby and think they lacked nothing. That baby came complete. Their value was innate from their first breath. Their value did not depend on external things like wealth or appearance or politics or popularity. It was the infinite value of a human life. And that value stays with us, even as it becomes easier to forget it. We stay precisely as alive and precisely as human as we were the day we were born. The only thing we need is to exist. And to hope.

## You Are the Goal

You don't have to continually improve yourself to love yourself. Love is not something you only deserve if you reach a goal. The world is a world of pressure but don't let it squeeze your self-compassion. You were born worthy of love and you remain worthy of love. Be kind to yourself.

Nothing is stronger than a small hope that doesn't give up.

A thing my dad said once  
when we were lost in a forest

Once upon a time, my father and I got lost in a forest in France. I must have been about twelve or thirteen. Anyway, it was before the era when most people owned a mobile phone. We were on holiday, the rural, landlocked, basic kind of middle-class holiday I didn't really understand. It was in the Loire Valley, and we had gone for a run. About half an hour in, my dad realised the truth. 'Oh, it seems that we're lost.' We walked round and round in circles, trying to find the path, but with no luck. My dad asked two men – poachers – for directions and they sent us the wrong way. I could tell my dad was starting to panic, even as he was trying to hide it from me. We had been in the forest for hours now and both knew my mum would be in a state of absolute terror. At school, I had just been told the Bible story of the Israelites who had died in the wilderness and I found it easy to imagine

that would be our fate too. 'If we keep going in a straight line we'll get out of here,' my dad said.

And he was right. Eventually we heard the sound of cars and reached a main road. We were eleven miles from the village where we had started off, but at least we had signposts now. We were clear of the trees. And I often think of that strategy, when I am totally lost – literally or metaphorically. I thought of it when I was in the middle of a breakdown. When I was living in a panic attack punctuated only by depression, when my heart pounded rapidly with fear, when I hardly knew who I was and didn't know how I could carry on living. *If we keep going in a straight line we'll get out of here.* Walking one foot in front of the other, in the same direction, will always get you further than running around in circles. It's about the determination to keep walking forward.

## It's okay

It's okay to be broken.

It's okay to wear the scars of experience.

It's okay to be a mess.

It's okay to be the teacup with a chip in it. That's the one with a story.

It's okay to be sentimental and whimsical and cry bittersweet tears at songs and movies you aren't supposed to love.

It's okay to like what you like.



It's okay to like things for literally no other reason than because you like them and not because they are cool or clever or popular.

It's okay to let people find you. You don't have to spread yourself so thin you become invisible. You don't have to always be the person reaching out. You can sometimes allow yourself to be reached. As the great writer Anne Lamott puts it: 'Lighthouses don't go running all over an island for boats to save; they just stand there shining.'

It's okay not to make the most of every chunk of time.

It's okay to be who you are.

It's okay.