Dear Darling,

I feel like like a lot of my friends hate me, which is something I've always struggled with, but in some cases I've been right. Lately its been really bad. I tried to tell a friend I was having a bad week and she just stared at me. Other people in the group have been ignoring my messages and attempts to make plans and I just feel this creeping dread. I don't feel it to be an unfounded fear either. Ive failed over the years I've known them, been a disappointment to say the least. As a result I always feel like I'm on thin ice, and I keep them at a distance as a result. Well, I keep everyone pretty distant, but the people in question are still some of my closest friends. Im torn between a rock and a hard place; confronting them and risking pushing them away fir good or ignoring it and hoping it's all in my head.

Hello my dear Onyx,

My heart goes out to you, it really sounds like you're in a predicament of volcanic proportions. What's more, I can deeply relate to the things you're feeling. Frequently, I find myself feeling like my friends are actually enemies, feeling like I'm all alone, and leaning into the relative safety of isolation. I try to keep a cool demeanor on the surface, but underneath the crust and mantle is a seething, roiling mess of emotions. But we're not here to talk about me, we're here to hopefully help you move back from the cliff's edge and safely explore some of those relational chasms you're facing. It also sounds like you're feeling some immense pressure to perform for your friends, to be seen as worthy of their friendship. Oh, dear Onyx, no wonder you feel like you're traveling on a rocky road

right now, those are some big expectations to carry, it makes sense that they would weigh you down. Hopefully, together, we can take some of the stones out of our pockets and lighten your load.

I'm going to start with that second point, the one about feeling like a disappointment to those around you. I'm not sure there's an easy way to say this, so I'll opt for directness instead: You are worthy of care, love, and wellness, full stop. You may feel as though you have let your friends down (and in fact, you may have actually let them down, I don't know, I wasn't there), but that does not change the baseline: You are worthy of care, love, and wellness. Of course, hearing this and internalizing it, believing it, are two different things, and it may take some time to bridge the gap between them. I don't think that you necessarily even need to believe it, but it's okay to just start by saying it whenever you need the reminder, whether or not the conviction is there. You can even write little reminder notes to yourself and leave them in places you'll find them, like on your mirror or in the pocket of your jacket. Hell, get a label-maker and really go to town! I honestly believe that, under the right circumstances, it is both acceptable and beneficial to gaslight oneself into believing good things, and I've found in my own journey that if you tell yourself something enough, you just might begin to actually believe it.

Of course, telling yourself you're worthy is just one facet of this predicament; we've also got to figure out how to reach across this faultline you're sensing between yourself and your friends. I recommend being honest and direct with your friends, but not so much that you come across as stony and uncaring (it's a fine line, have some grace for yourself if you don't quite get it exactly right). I won't lie, this can be extremely scary or challenging, especially if you don't feel very grounded. That's where your trusty label-maker comes in handy, just slap one of those "You are worthy of care, love, and wellness" labels on the palm of your hand so you can

remind yourself while you're talking. I would wager that your friends don't actually know how hard things are feeling for you, especially if you're already keeping them at a distance. You might find that if you reach out and ask for the space to be vulnerable about what's going on for you and how you're feeling, your friends will receive you warmly and remind you that you are loved for who you are, regardless of your successes or failures. To be fair, you might also find that your friends are unreceptive, and while this may be painful, it is also valuable information. If your friends are unable to offer you the care, love, and wellness that you need at this moment, it might be worthwhile to try and invest your energy elsewhere. Remember that if this happens, it's not necessarily a reflection of your friends as people that they are unable to support you right now, don't erupt at them for it. Thank them for their friendship and their honesty, and then decide if or how you'd like to keep engaging with them. It may seem so scary but I promise you that carving new canyons of friendship will serve you better than continuing to rely on dams that are unable to adequately hold you.

Anyways, I really hope this was helpful, and I hope that you're able to find your way to a place where you don't feel so much like schist. One last reminder, change won't happen overnight, it takes eons for metamorphosis to happen, practice patience and grace, dear Onyx, and don't take your friends for granite!

Rock on,
Darling Tonia