



The Unfinished Woman

Wild, Wise and Still Becoming

ERIKA ENTZ



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From Hidden Potential to Collective Brilliance

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To everyone who is still becoming. And to those who helped me find my way back to myself:

To David, my husband, my steady ground. Thank you for standing beside me through every reinvention, every stumble, every becoming. You never tried to shape me into something I wasn't. You just believed in me while I figured it out.

*To Jessica Ritchie, who drew out *The Firefly Effect*[™] and helped me find words for what was true.*

To Tebeth Shukura Hamon, who I recognised before I could explain why, and who helped me remember who I already was.

To my family – for bad and good, your journeys and your teachings, and my journey alongside you, shaped who we are and helped us learn about ourselves and each other. For that, I am forever grateful.

To Monika, my soul sister across the distance.

And to every firefly out there, still glowing, still becoming. This book is for you.

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P A R T O N E

Still Becoming

I'm done waiting. Are you?

I'm Done Waiting



I'm done waiting. Are you?

I spent decades waiting. Waiting for permission. Waiting until I was ready. Waiting for someone to tell me I was enough, that my ideas were good enough, that I had earned the right to be myself.

I followed the script. The one my family handed me. The one society handed me. Study this, not that. Be practical. Don't bring suffering home. Focus on the sensible path.

So I never picked up the flute. I stepped away from the dancing. I stopped asking what I actually wanted and started asking what I should want.

And I climbed. I worked hard. I collected titles and achievements and proved myself over and over again. I moved countries. I started from zero – twice. I built a career that looked like success from the outside.

Until one day I couldn't answer a simple question: Who am I?

That's when I realised I had been waiting my whole life. Waiting to become the person I already was.

So I stopped waiting.

This book isn't about having it all figured out. I'm fifty-nine and still becoming. Still learning. Still unfinished.

But I'm not waiting anymore.

And I'm inviting you to stop waiting too.



The Script I Was Handed



I was eighteen when I learned that what I wanted didn't fit the plan.

Not cruelly. Not dramatically. Just quietly, practically, in the way families who love you tell you to be sensible. My family in Hungary had survived hard lives. They wanted to protect me from suffering. I understand that now. But back then, all I knew was that the things that lit me up – the flute I wanted to learn, the dancing, the dream of working with disabled children – were being set aside, one by one, for something more practical.

I wanted to study conducting. To work with children who struggled to move, to speak, to be seen. I didn't see suffering in that work. I saw possibility. If I could help a child move their fingers a little better, that was success. That was enough.

My family saw it differently. "You'll bring suffering home every day," they said. "Focus on your studies. Get good scores. That other path won't make you a living."

They weren't villains. They were parents and grandparents doing what they thought was right. But somewhere in those conversations, I learned something that would take decades to unlearn: what I wanted wasn't as important as what was practical.

So I never picked up the flute. I stepped away from the dancing. I followed the script.

At eighteen, my mother was sent to Moscow to represent her company. I was supposed to go with the family.

I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay in Hungary, to study, to find my own path. But the script had other plans. So I packed my things and moved to Russia – Moscow – where I would live and work and study for the next three years.

It wasn't what I had chosen. But it was what I did. Because that's what you do when you're following someone else's plan for your life. You show up. You adapt. You make the best of it.

When my mother was transferred to Kiev, I stayed behind in Moscow a little longer. But without family there, and being well over eighteen, I eventually had to return to Hungary. I wasn't going to follow to Kiev. Something in me was already starting to pull in a different direction – even if I didn't have words for it yet.

Back in Hungary, I built a life. Good jobs. Amazing experiences. I climbed. I achieved. I did what I was supposed to do.

But by the time I was approaching thirty, something was stirring. A restlessness. A question I couldn't quite name.

I had studied English for four years in school, and I wanted more. I wanted to learn it properly – in a country where English was the heartbeat, not just a subject. So I researched. Where could I go, work to sustain myself, and study at the same time?

The answer came back: Australia.

I was twenty-nine years old. I had built a career. I had followed the script faithfully for over a decade.

And I was about to tear it up.



Two Suitcases



I arrived in Australia at thirty years old with two suitcases and six thousand five hundred dollars.

Six months later, the money was gone.

In Hungary, I had been a general manager. I had status, respect, a career I had built from the ground up. In Australia, I was nobody. My accent marked me as foreign. My qualifications meant nothing. My experience? Invisible.

My first job was cleaning a bakery and washing dishes.

I remember my hands. They were so damaged from the work that I couldn't open them in the morning. Every day I would wake up with my fingers curled tight, and I would have to slowly, painfully stretch them open before I could start again.

For over a year, this was my reality.

I worked in a nursing home. I took whatever shifts I could find. I survived.

This wasn't the script I had been handed in Hungary. But it wasn't the script I had written for myself either. It was something else – a blank page, terrifying and free.

Some people would have gone home. Some people would have called it a mistake, cut their losses, returned to the life they knew.

I stayed.

Not because I was brave. Because I was stubborn. Because something in me refused to believe that this was the end of the story.

And somewhere in the rebuilding, I found David. My husband. My steady ground. He has been beside me through every reinvention, every stumble, every becoming. I am grateful for him – for his quiet support, his belief in me, even when I wasn't sure what I was becoming. He never tried to shape me into something I wasn't. He just stood beside me while I figured it out.



Surviving and Climbing



Once I survived, I started to climb. From the bakery floors and nursing home shifts, I clawed my way forward. I got my first job at a dentist in Bondi. Then another opportunity. Then another. Each step a little higher than the last.

I learned how to succeed in this new country. I learned the rules – the spoken ones and the unspoken ones. I worked harder than anyone expected. I proved myself over and over again, because when you arrive with an accent and a foreign name, you learn quickly that you have to be twice as good to be seen as equal.

And I was good.

Over the years, I collected titles. Chief Learning and Development Officer. Head of Implementations. Director of Customer Success. I worked for global business. I won awards. I became a multi-award winning learning professional – the kind of person who gets invited to lead, to shape how others work.

From the outside, it looked like success. And in many ways, it was. I had built something from nothing. I had proven that the woman who arrived with two suitcases could become someone.

But there was a cost.

To survive, I had become tough. To climb, I had put on armour. Somewhere along the way, I had left my heart behind – and I didn't even notice it was missing.

I was so busy achieving that I forgot to ask if this was what I actually wanted.



The Breaking



I had never had an anxiety attack in my life. Not once. Not through moving countries. Not through washing dishes with hands that wouldn't open. Not through any of it.

And then one day, it came.

I had been pushing too hard for too long. Working hours that weren't sustainable. Carrying more than one person should carry. I thought I could keep going – I had always kept going.

Until I couldn't.

I remember the terror. The feeling that everything I had built was made of paper. And worse – the question that rose up from somewhere deep:

Who am I?

I couldn't answer.

That was my breaking point. The only one I've ever had. And it changed everything.



Unlearning Success



Here's what nobody tells you about reaching the top: the view isn't always what you expected.

I had done everything right. Worked hard. Climbed high. Collected the titles and the awards. By every measure I had been taught, I was successful.

But standing in the wreckage of that anxiety attack, asking myself "Who am I?" and hearing only silence – I realised something had gone terribly wrong.

Not with my career. With my definition of success.

I had spent decades chasing a version of success that was handed to me – by my family, by society, by the corporate world. Work hard. Get promoted. Earn more. Achieve more. Prove your worth through titles and awards.

And I had done it. I had won that game.

So why did I feel so empty?

Unlearning success is harder than learning it. It means questioning everything you thought you knew. It means admitting that the thing you sacrificed so much for might not be the thing that matters most. It means starting again – not from zero, but from somewhere even more disorienting: from the realisation that you don't actually know what you want.

That's where I found myself. Successful on paper. Lost in my soul.



The Distance I Needed



We moved to rural Queensland, and everything changed. Not overnight. Not dramatically. But slowly, quietly, in the space that distance creates.

Fifty minutes to the nearest grocery store. Hours to the city. No Uber. No takeaway. No popping out for anything. At first, it felt like loss – all the convenience I had taken for granted, gone.

But then something shifted.

Without the noise, I could hear myself think. Without the rush, I could feel my own rhythm. Without the constant doing, I had to face simply being.

I started cooking every meal. I knew what I was eating, where it came from. The cravings for junk food disappeared – not through discipline, but because my body didn't want it anymore. I was nourishing myself for the first time in years.

Skills I had learned from my grandmother in Hungary – skills I thought I would never use – suddenly mattered again. Gardening. Cooking from scratch. Making do. The old wisdom wasn't old-fashioned after all. It was just waiting for me to have the space to remember it.

I thought I was moving to rural Queensland to live differently.

I was actually moving to become myself.

The distance wasn't a barrier. It was a gift. The distance I needed – from the city, from the noise, from who I thought I had to be – to finally see who I actually was.



Becoming Me



Becoming me didn't happen in a single moment. It's still happening now.

That's the thing nobody tells you about self-discovery – it's not a destination. It's not a finish line you cross and then you're done. It's a practice. A daily choice. A constant unfolding.

In the quiet of rural Queensland, I started to meet myself again. Not the achiever. Not the climber. Not the woman with the titles and the armour. Just me.

In my first years in Australia – when I was still surviving, still washing dishes with hands that wouldn't open – I had tried to pick up the flute. I had tried flamenco dancing. Even then, something in me was reaching for joy, for expression, for the girl I had left behind in Hungary.

But I wasn't ready. I was in survival mode. And I couldn't go home – that would have been failure. I wasn't ready for the "I told you so." So I kept surviving. Then climbing. Then proving.

I dropped those things before they could take root. There was no space for becoming. Not yet.

But rural life gave me the space I didn't know I needed. Without the noise, without the rush, I could finally hear what had been whispering all along.

I discovered that I hadn't lost myself in the surviving and climbing years. I had just buried her – the girl who saw success in small things, who wanted to help children move their fingers, who believed that possibility was everywhere if you looked for it.

She was still there. Waiting.

The teachers appeared when I was ready.

I met Jessica Ritchie at a content writing workshop. A connection grew, and eventually I worked with her on my business branding. What I didn't expect was what would emerge. Jessica has a gift – she draws out the best in people. Through that work, The Firefly Effect™ was born. Not as a marketing concept, but as something true finally finding its words. And from that same space, the direction toward Sekhem opened up – one door leading to another.

When I found Tebeth Shukura Hamon, I didn't need convincing. I saw her picture and something in me recognised her before my mind caught up. I did my research – I always do – but the decision was already made.

That was new. Trusting myself like that. Letting my heart lead.

These women didn't fix me. They helped me see what was already there.

I started listening to my heart instead of just my head. I trained in Sekhem. I let myself be guided instead of always driving.

I am fifty-nine years old. I have lived in three countries. I have started from zero twice. I have survived and climbed and fallen and climbed again.

And I am still becoming.

Not finished. Not figured out. Not waiting for permission anymore.

Just becoming. Whatever that might be.



The Firefly Effect



A firefly doesn't light up to impress anyone. It just glows because that's what it is. Somewhere in my work with Jessica, this idea emerged – The Firefly Effect. It wasn't a marketing strategy or a brand concept. It was something true, finally finding its words.

Light yourself up. Light others up. Leave people better than you found them.

That's it. That's the whole thing.

For so many years, I had been dimming my own light to fit in. Playing smaller so others wouldn't feel threatened. Waiting for permission to shine. Worried about what people would think if I was too much, too driven, too different.

But fireflies don't ask permission. They don't wait for the right moment. They just glow – and in glowing, they help others find their way in the dark.

That's what I want to be. That's what I want for you.

Not a spotlight. Not a performance. Just a steady glow that says: I see you. You matter. You have light in you too.

Here's a fun fact: science has proven that you are already glowing.

In 2009, Japanese researchers used ultra-sensitive cameras to capture something extraordinary – visible light emanating from the human body. It's about 1,000 times too faint for our eyes to see, but it's real. We glow brightest around our faces, and the light follows our circadian rhythm – brighter when we're awake, dimmer when we sleep.

The Firefly Effect isn't just a metaphor. You were born with your own light. The only question is whether you'll let it be seen.

The world doesn't need more people competing to be the brightest. It needs more people willing to glow – and to celebrate when others glow too.

This isn't about success. It's about presence. It's about showing up, not to prove anything, but to contribute. To lift. To leave every person, every room, every community a little brighter than you found it.

You don't have to be finished to be a firefly. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to stop waiting and start glowing.

The light is already in you. It always has been.



Your Turn



This book isn't a map. It's not a set of instructions. Your path won't look like mine – and it shouldn't.

Maybe your becoming happens in a city apartment. Maybe it happens on a farm. Maybe it happens in a corner office, or leaving one, or building something entirely new. Maybe it happens at twenty-five or fifty-five or seventy-five.

The where doesn't matter. The when doesn't matter.

What matters is that you stop waiting.

I spent decades following a script I didn't write. Climbing ladders that were leaning against the wrong walls. Collecting titles that couldn't answer the simplest question: Who am I?

I'm not here to tell you that my way is the right way. I'm here to tell you that YOUR way is the right way – whatever that is, wherever it leads, however long it takes to find it.

If corporate life lights you up, stay. If the city feeds your soul, stay. If the script you were handed actually fits, keep wearing it.

But if something in you is whispering that there's more – if you're tired of waiting for permission, tired of dimming your light, tired of becoming what everyone else expects instead of who you actually are...

Then stop waiting.

You don't need to have it all figured out. I'm fifty-nine and I'm still becoming. Still learning. Still unfinished. And I've finally made peace with that.

Unfinished doesn't mean broken. It means alive. It means still growing. It means there's more to discover, more to become, more light to let out.

So here's my invitation:

Stop waiting for the right moment. It doesn't exist.

Stop waiting for permission. No one else can give it to you.

Stop waiting to be ready. You'll never feel ready. Do it anyway.

Light yourself up. Light others up. Leave people better than you found them.

Become the firefly you already are.

I'm done waiting. Are you?



Your Own Becoming

The hardest part of my journey wasn't leaving corporate success or moving to rural Queensland. It was learning to ask myself what I actually wanted – and then believing my own answer mattered more than everyone else's expectations.

For years, I lived someone else's version of success. I followed scripts written by family, culture, and the belief that there was a "right" way to live. It took distance, silence, and the courage to stay unfinished before I could hear my own voice.

This story isn't just mine – it's an invitation to explore your own.

A PRACTICE

Find a quiet space. Place your hand on your heart. Ask yourself: *"What do I actually want?"* Listen without judgment. Don't rush to answer. Just listen.

Give yourself permission to become who you actually are – not who you were told to be. And when that path changes – because it will – give yourself permission again.



Your free Wild and Wise Workbook

This book has a companion workbook with every reflection prompt from both parts of this journey, the Wild and Wise Declaration, and space to write your own story. It is free, and it is yours to keep.

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PART TWO

Wild and Wise

She is wild. She is wise. She is becoming.

Twelve Verses

for Twelve Moments

ONE

The Dance

*She doesn't dance because the music plays.
She dances because something inside her
refused to stay still any longer.*

TWO

The Fire

*She has learned to sit with the flames.
Not to control them.
Just to let them warm what needed warming.*

THREE

The Circle

*The wisest women know this –
that the most sacred thing you can offer another
is your full and unhurried presence.*

FOUR

The Path

*She is not lost.
She is choosing roads
that don't yet have names.*

FIVE

The Surrender

*Some nights she simply stops.
Wraps herself in stillness
and lets the fire do the remembering.*

SIX

The River

*She stepped in fully dressed
because some cleansing
cannot wait for convenient.*

SEVEN

The Walk

*She didn't leave.
She simply knew
it was time to move toward the next beautiful
thing.*

EIGHT

The Medicine

*She knows which plants to reach for.
She learned from the ones
who came before her and left no recipe – only
wisdom.*

NINE

The Gathering

*Not everything wild needs to be grown.
Some gifts are already there,
waiting for someone patient enough to kneel.*

TEN

The Garden

*She tends what she loves.
Hands in the dark earth,
trusting what she cannot yet see.*

ELEVEN

The Heart

*This is where it begins.
Two hands. One heart.
The oldest homecoming there is.*

TWELVE

The Joy

*This is what becoming looks like.
Not arriving.
Just this – arms wide, head back, completely alive.*

What Came Next

You have just read the first part of this story.

You know the woman who arrived in Australia with two suitcases and thirty years of becoming ahead of her. You know the climbing, the losing, the searching, the slowly finding. You know the woman who built a career across four countries, who followed the script because that was what you did, who was tough and capable and successful – and quietly, persistently, aching lost inside all of it.

What follows is what came next.

This is not the end of the journey – I'm not sure there is one. But this is the moment I finally recognised who I actually am. Not who I was becoming. Not who I was told to be. Not who the script required.

Who I am. Right now. Today.

That recognition changed everything. Not dramatically. Not overnight. Just quietly, permanently, and completely.

We are living in a world drowning in scripts. Social media scripts. Gender scripts. Success scripts. Age scripts. Cultural scripts. And most people are so deep inside them they can't even see the walls. The biggest challenge of our time isn't technology or economics or any of the things we argue about endlessly.

It's that most of us are living someone else's life and calling it our own.

I know because I did it for decades.

This book is my honest account of how I found my way back to myself. It is not a manual. It is not a five step plan. It is one woman's story – messy and real and still unfolding – offered to you in the hope that something in it helps you find your way back to yourself too.

Or forward. Sometimes it's forward.

This is not a call to rebellion – although if some rebellion finds you along the way, good.

This is not about turning your life upside down. Unless you want to.

This is not about timing, or waiting until you're ready, or finding the perfect moment to begin. There is no perfect moment. There is only now.

Some of you will read this and feel immediately ready. Something will click and the journey will begin before you've finished the first chapter.

Some of you will read this and file it quietly away. Not yet. Not now. That is perfectly fine too. The door will still be here when you're ready to walk through it.

What I ask is only this – read it honestly. Let it ask you the questions it wants to ask. Sit with the uncomfortable ones. Don't rush past the parts that make you feel something.

Because that feeling? That discomfort or recognition or quiet grief or sudden fierce joy?

That's her. That's the real you. Letting you know she's still in there.

Still waiting. Still refusing to stay still.

I wrote this as a woman. But the journey belongs to anyone brave enough to take it.

If this finds even one person – woman, man, young, old, certain, lost – and helps them recognise what a truly fulfilled life feels like for them. Not for their mother. Not for their partner. Not for their industry or their culture or their carefully constructed LinkedIn profile.

For them.

Then I have done what I came here to do.

Because here is what I have learned after all these years and all these kilometres and all these versions of myself:

When you finally allow yourself to be you – you give others silent permission to do the same. Not by changing them. Just by showing them it's possible.

In a world built on scripts, one person living authentically is a quiet revolution.

And quiet revolutions change everything.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Welcome to your Wild and Wise journey.

Erika



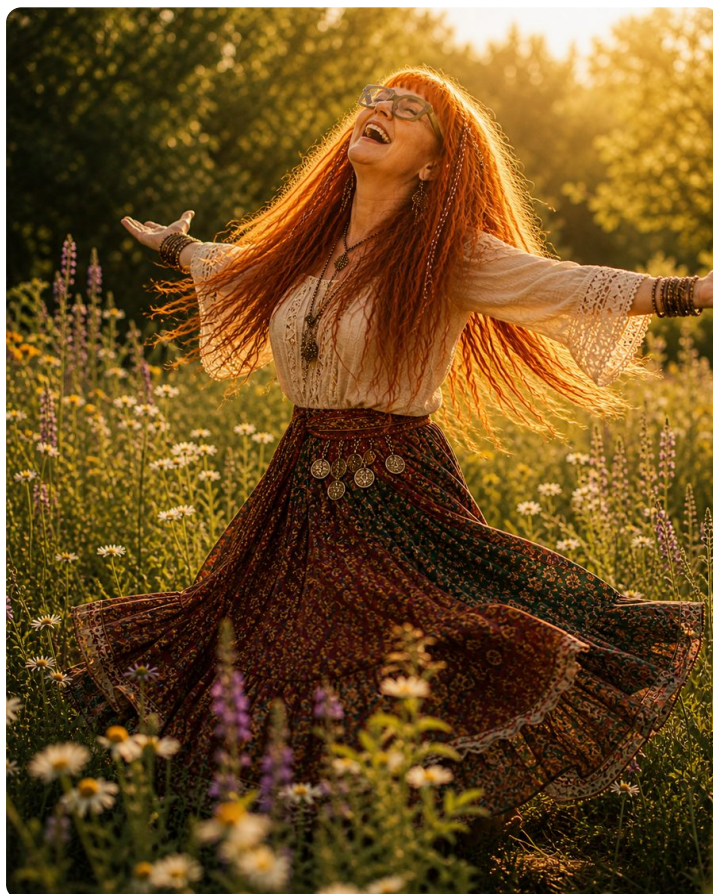
Your free Wild and Wise Workbook

Every chapter ahead has its own pages in your companion workbook, with the reflection questions, the Wild and Wise Declaration, and space to write your own story. It is free, and it is yours to keep.

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The Dance

Waking Up to the Gap



*She doesn't dance because the music plays.
She dances because something inside her
refused to stay still any longer.*

A friend said something to me once that stopped me completely. We weren't in a deep conversation. It wasn't a therapy session or a workshop or a carefully constructed moment of revelation. We were just two women talking the way women do when they finally have time to actually see each other.

She looked at me – really looked at me – and said:

You are a wise, wild earth mother.

I didn't know what to do with that at first. I almost laughed it off. Almost deflected with something practical and self-deprecating the way women do when someone sees them too clearly and it's uncomfortable.

But something stopped me.

Because somewhere beneath all the deflection and the practicality and the decades of being capable and competent and together – something heard those words and went completely still.

Oh.

Yes.

She's right.

I had spent the better part of my life being many things. Ambitious. Adaptable. Capable. International. Professional. I had built a career across four countries. I had started from zero more than once. I had walked into rooms where I knew nobody and made them work. I had followed the script – not because I was weak, but because I was practical, and the script made sense, and it got results.

But a wise, wild earth mother?

Nobody had ever said that to me before.

And the terrifying, liberating, completely unexpected truth was – it was the most accurate thing anyone had ever said.

The Script

I want to tell you about the script. Not because you don't know it exists – you do, somewhere beneath everything – but because most of us have been living inside it for so long we've stopped seeing it as a script at all.

It just feels like life.

The script arrived early. Before we had words for it.

It came from our families – the things that were celebrated and the things that were quietly discouraged. Study this not that. Be practical. Don't be too much. Don't be too loud. Don't want things that make other people uncomfortable.

It came from our culture – what a successful woman looks like, what ambition is allowed to look like, what you're supposed to want by forty and have achieved by fifty.

It came from our industries, our relationships, our own survival instincts that learned very young which version of us got the best response from the room.

And so we built her. The script version. Capable, competent, adaptable. She could walk into any room and know exactly what was required. She was very good at her job.

The only problem was she wasn't entirely us.

And we knew it. We always knew it.

We just got very good at not looking at it directly.

The Gap

Here is what nobody tells you about living inside a script for a long time.

It's not always miserable. That's what makes it so complicated.

There are real achievements. Real relationships. Real moments of genuine satisfaction and pride. The script version of you accomplished things. Built things. Helped people. Loved people.

You are not discarding all of that.

What you are doing – what this chapter asks of you – is simply looking honestly at the gap.

The gap between who you have been showing up as every day and who you actually are underneath all of that.

Not with judgment. Not with urgency. Not with a plan already forming about what needs to change and how quickly.

Just with honest eyes and enough courage to see it clearly.

Because here is the truth – and it is both confronting and liberating:

The gap has always been there. You have always known it was there. You have simply been very busy not looking at it directly.

I was busy for a long time. Productively, successfully, internationally busy. And underneath all of it – the wise, wild earth mother was waiting. Not impatiently. Not angrily. Just waiting. Tending her own quiet fire. Knowing that eventually I would stop long enough to feel her there.

She always knew I would come back.

She just had to wait until I was ready to stop running.

When Did You Stop Dancing?

I want to ask you something and I want you to sit with it before you answer.

When did you last do something purely because it felt like you?

Not because it was productive. Not because someone needed it from you. Not because it fit the schedule or made sense or could be justified to anyone else.

Just because it was the fullest, most honest expression of who you are.

When did you last dance – literally or metaphorically – simply because something inside you refused to stay still?

For some women reading this the answer comes quickly. Last Tuesday. Last month. Recently enough that the memory is warm and close.

For others the question lands differently. There is a longer pause. A reaching back through years. A quiet reckoning that is more shock than grief – though grief comes later, and that's okay too.

It has been a while.

It has been a long while.

Neither answer is wrong. Both are simply true. And truth – even uncomfortable truth – is always the beginning of something.

The first time I really danced again – not performed, not exercised, not demonstrated capability – but actually danced from somewhere real and unguarded inside myself – I cried. Not sad tears. The other kind. The kind that come when something that has been held very tightly for a very long time is finally allowed to move.

The body remembers what the mind tries to manage.

That's what this chapter is really about. Not the dancing itself – though if dancing is your thing, please dance. It's about whatever that is for you. The thing that makes you completely, unselfconsciously yourself. The thing you stopped doing because it wasn't practical or professional or explainable.

The thing that refused to stay still even when you told it to.

What This Chapter Is Not

This is not an instruction to burn your life down.

This is not a judgment of the choices you have made or the life you have built. Every choice made sense at the time it was made. Every version of you was doing her best with what she had.

This is not about timing – waiting until the kids are older or the mortgage is smaller or the moment feels perfectly, safely right. There is no perfectly safe moment. There is only now, and now, and now again.

This is simply an invitation.

To stop. To look. To feel the gap without immediately trying to fix it.

To ask – with genuine curiosity and radical compassion toward yourself – whose life am I actually living?

And to sit with whatever answer comes. Even if the answer is messy. Even if the answer is – mostly mine, but not entirely. Even if the answer surprises you.

Especially if the answer surprises you.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including you. Including this.

Your First Dance Step

Before you move to the next chapter there is one thing I want you to do.

Not a worksheet. Not a five step plan. Not a list of action items.

Just one honest sentence. Written down somewhere private. For your eyes only.

The script I have been living is... and the part that no longer fits who I am right now is..

You don't need to know what comes next. You don't need to have a plan or a solution or even a direction.

You just need to be honest enough to write it down.

That's the first step of the dance.

And somewhere inside you – the wise, wild earth mother already knows exactly what you're going to write.

She's been waiting for you to ask.

Next – Chapter Two: The Fire.

What happens when you stop dampening yourself to make others comfortable.



The Fire

What Happens When You Stop Dampening Yourself



She has learned to sit with the flames.

Not to control them.

Just to let them warm what needed warming.

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that comes from managing yourself.

Not the tiredness of hard work or long hours or big challenges. That kind of tired makes sense. It has a cause and a remedy and a satisfaction buried somewhere inside it.

This is different.

This is the exhaustion of constant self-editing. Of scanning the room before you speak. Of measuring your enthusiasm against what the moment will tolerate. Of turning down the volume on yourself – again and again and again – until one day you can barely hear yourself at all.

Most women know this exhaustion intimately.

Most of us learned it young.

Learning to Be Less

I don't know exactly when I learned to dampen myself. It wasn't a single moment. It was more like a slow education – a series of small lessons delivered so gently and so consistently that I absorbed them without ever questioning whether they were true.

Don't be too loud. Don't want too much. Don't take up too much space. Don't make others uncomfortable with the full force of who you are.

Be passionate – but not that passionate.

Be ambitious – but not that ambitious.

Be yourself – but a version of yourself that doesn't require anyone else to adjust.

And so we learn to manage the fire. To keep it small enough to be acceptable. Warm enough to be useful. Never so bright that it might illuminate something someone wasn't ready to see.

The problem with managing a fire for long enough is that you start to forget it was ever bigger.

You start to think this carefully managed warmth is all there ever was.

The Moment the Fire Spoke

I remember the first time I felt my own fire speak and didn't immediately try to quiet it.

It wasn't comfortable. I want to be honest about that. Because every book that talks about authenticity and living your truth makes it sound like a relief, like coming home, like a warm bath after a long journey.

Sometimes it is.

But sometimes – especially at first – it feels more like standing too close to a flame you'd forgotten was real. It's disorienting. Even frightening. Because if this is who I actually am – if this is what I actually think, what I actually want, what I actually feel – then what does that mean for the life I've been living?

That's the question the fire asks.

Not gently. Not apologetically.

Just honestly.

And honest questions, when you've been living behind careful answers for a long time, can feel like heat.

What You've Been Dampening

I want to ask you something that might be uncomfortable.

What have you been turning down in yourself to make others comfortable?

Not what have you been hiding – though that's part of it. But specifically – what parts of you have you been actively, consciously, consistently making smaller so that the people around you didn't have to feel the full force of who you are?

Maybe it's your opinions. The ones you hold clearly and privately but rarely voice because the conversation isn't worth the cost.

Maybe it's your ambition. The scale of what you actually want – which feels too large, too inconvenient, too threatening to say out loud in certain company.

Maybe it's your grief. The losses you carry quietly because the people around you have decided you should be over it by now.

Maybe it's your joy. The full, unguarded, slightly embarrassing joy that comes when something truly delights you – and that you've learned to contain because it makes some people uncomfortable to witness someone else's unfiltered happiness.

Maybe it's your anger. Which is perhaps the most dampened fire of all for women. Because we learned early that our anger was inconvenient. Unreasonable. Too much.

But anger – real anger – is almost always information. It's the fire telling you that something matters. That a line has been crossed. That something you value is being disrespected or ignored or minimised.

Dampened anger doesn't disappear. It just burns lower and longer – a slow smoulder that shows up as exhaustion, resentment, disconnection, or a bone-deep flatness that you can't quite explain.

The fire doesn't go out. It just goes quiet.

Until it doesn't.

Sitting With the Flames

The verse for this chapter doesn't say she controls the fire. It doesn't say she masters it or manages it or makes it safe.

It says she learned to sit with it.

That's the whole lesson.

Not controlling your intensity. Not performing it for effect. Not suppressing it to maintain peace. Just – sitting with it. Being honest about its presence. Letting it tell you what it knows.

Because your fire knows things your carefully managed self has been trying not to hear.

It knows what you actually want.

It knows what you've been tolerating that you shouldn't.

It knows which relationships nourish you and which ones require you to be less than you are.

It knows what lights you up and what quietly, slowly, relentlessly drains you.

The fire is not the enemy. It never was.

The fire is information. Ancient, honest, yours.

The Difference Between Burning and Shining

I want to make a distinction here because it matters.

Sitting with your fire – letting it speak, letting it inform your choices, letting it be as large as it actually is – this is not the same as burning everything down.

There is a version of this journey that looks like destruction. That takes the recognition of self and turns it into a battering ram. That uses authenticity as a weapon. That says – I've been suppressing myself and now I'm going to make everyone around me feel it.

That's not the fire talking. That's the accumulated pressure of too many years of dampening finally finding release.

Real fire doesn't destroy what it loves. It warms it. It illuminates it. It creates the conditions for things to grow.

The goal is not to burn. The goal is to shine.

And shining – truly, sustainably, honestly shining – requires that you stop managing the light.

What Changes When You Stop Dampening

Here is what I have noticed, in myself and in women I have walked alongside:

When you stop dampening your fire, some things in your life adjust naturally. Relationships that were built on the smaller version of you may need to renegotiate. Conversations you've been avoiding become possible. Work that felt flat starts to feel insufficient. Dreams you'd quietly filed under not realistic start demanding to be reconsidered.

This can feel destabilising. I want to be honest about that too.

But here is what else happens:

The exhaustion lifts. Not all at once. But gradually, the particular tiredness of constant self-management begins to ease. Because you are no longer spending your energy on making yourself smaller. That energy is available for other things now.

You start to recognise your own signals. The things that light you up. The things that dull you. The moments when you are fully yourself and the moments when you have slipped back into performance.

And you start – slowly, imperfectly, with many backward steps – to make choices that honour the fire rather than suppress it.

Not every choice. Not perfectly. Not all at once.

Just – more honestly than before. That's enough. That's exactly enough.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including learning to sit with your own fire.

Your Fire Reflection

Before you move to the next chapter, I want you to sit with one question. Just one. Take your time with it.

What have I been dampening in myself – and what has that cost me?

Don't rush the answer. Don't make it neat. Let it be as complicated and layered as it actually is.

And then – when you're ready – ask the second question:

What would it feel like to let that part of me be exactly as large as it actually is?

You don't have to do anything with the answer yet.

Just feel it.

The fire already knows.

Next – Chapter Three: The Circle.

Why the women around you change everything – and how to find the ones who can hold your full flame.



The Circle

Why the Women Around You Change Everything



*The wisest women know this –
that the most sacred thing you can offer another
is your full and unhurried presence.*

There is a moment in every woman's journey when she looks around at the people in her life and realises something quietly startling.

Not everyone in her circle can hold her.

Not everyone she has gathered around herself – through years of loyalty and habit and proximity and love – is actually capable of holding the full, unedited, still-becoming version of who she is.

Some of them need her to stay small. Not out of cruelty. Just because her smallness makes them comfortable. Because the managed, capable, always-coping version of her is easier to be around than the honest, questioning, on-fire version.

And some of them – the rare ones – can hold all of it.

Those are the ones that change everything.

How We Build Our Circles

Most of us don't choose our circles consciously. We accumulate them.

Friendships from school that outlasted the reasons they formed. Colleagues who became confidants because proximity created intimacy. Family relationships inherited rather than chosen. Communities joined because of geography or circumstance or a season of life that has long since passed.

We are loyal creatures. We stay. We maintain. We show up to the birthday dinners and the group chats and the annual catch-ups, even when something in us knows – quietly, guiltily – that we have grown in directions these relationships cannot follow.

There is nothing wrong with loyalty. It is one of the most beautiful things about women – the way we tend our relationships the way we tend a garden. With care and consistency and a refusal to abandon what we have planted.

But here is what I have learned:

Not every plant in your garden is meant to grow with you forever. Some were right for a season. Some have given everything they had to give. Some are quietly taking more than they're returning – drawing from the soil without putting anything back.

A wise gardener knows the difference.

The Women Who See You

I want to tell you about a particular kind of woman.

You may have met her. You may be lucky enough to have her in your life right now. Or you may still be finding her – which means she is coming, and the finding will be worth every moment of the search.

She is the woman who sees you.

Not the version of you that is competent and capable and holding everything together. Not the version that has the right answer and the professional demeanour and the carefully managed presentation of self.

The actual you. The one underneath all of that.

She sees the fire you've been dampening and she doesn't flinch. She sees the questions you've been afraid to ask out loud and she leans in rather than away. She sees the grief you carry and the joy you contain and the wild, wise, unfinished woman you are still becoming – and she is not threatened by any of it.

She is delighted by it.

This is the woman who looked at me one day and said – *you are a wise, wild earth mother*– and waited. Not to see if I would accept it gracefully. But to see if I would accept it at all.

She knew it was true before I did.

That is what the right circle does. It reflects back to you the parts of yourself you haven't yet had the courage to claim.

Full and Unhurried Presence

The verse for this chapter speaks of presence. Full and unhurried presence as the most sacred thing one woman can offer another.

I have been thinking about those words for a long time.

In a world that moves at the speed of notifications and schedules and the constant low-level urgency of everything needing to happen now – full and unhurried presence is almost a radical act.

To sit with someone and actually be there. Not planning your response while they speak. Not half-watching your phone. Not waiting for the conversation to reach the part where you can offer a solution or a silver lining or a pivot to something more comfortable.

Just – being there. Fully. With no agenda other than witnessing.

That is what the right circle offers.

And here is the reciprocal truth – it is also what you must be willing to offer in return.

Because the circle is not just about finding the women who can hold you. It is about becoming the woman who can hold others.

Who can sit with someone else's fire without trying to manage it.

Who can witness someone else's grief without rushing them toward recovery.

Who can celebrate someone else's becoming without measuring it against her own.

The circle asks something of everyone in it.

It asks for presence. Real, unhurried, full presence.

That is its currency. And it is worth more than anything else you will ever offer another human being.

The Ones Who Cannot Hold You

I want to say something difficult here and I want to say it with as much compassion as I can.

Some people in your life cannot hold the real you.

Not because they are bad people. Not because they don't love you. But because your growth – your becoming, your fire, your increasing refusal to be managed – asks something of them that they are not ready or willing to give.

Your authenticity confronts their inauthenticity. Your questions disturb their certainties. Your expansion makes their own boundaries feel smaller.

And so they push back. Sometimes loudly. Sometimes with criticism or dismissal or the particular cruelty of people who love you but cannot grow with you. Sometimes just with a quiet withdrawal – a cooling, a distance, a relationship that slowly stops nourishing either of you.

This is painful. I will not pretend otherwise.

Outgrowing a friendship is one of the least talked about griefs of adult life. There is no ceremony for it. No acknowledged loss. Just a gradual, aching recognition that someone who mattered deeply is no longer walking in the same direction.

You are allowed to grieve that.

And you are also allowed – when the grief has had its time – to keep walking.

Building the Circle You Actually Need

The circle you need for this journey is not large.

I want to be very clear about that because we live in a culture that measures connection by quantity – followers, contacts, networks, rooms you can get yourself into. But the circle that will actually hold you through the Wild and Wise journey is small and deep rather than wide and shallow.

You need:

The woman who sees you clearly and tells you the truth.

The woman who has walked further along the path and will share what she found there.

The woman who is walking alongside you right now – in the same questions, the same becoming.

The woman you are walking ahead of – because teaching is one of the most powerful ways of learning.

That is four. Maybe five. Maybe three.

Quality over quantity. Always. In circles as in everything.

And here is something important – your circle does not have to be geographically close. Some of the most profound circle relationships I have experienced have been across time zones and hemispheres. Women who show up fully in a voice message or a late-night conversation or a perfectly timed message that arrives exactly when it needs to.

The circle is not about proximity.

It is about depth.

What the Circle Is Not

The circle is not a place to perform.

It is not a networking group or a mastermind or a carefully curated collection of people who make you look good or feel validated or seem more successful than you are.

It is not a place where you go to be told what you want to hear.

The right circle will challenge you. Gently, lovingly, but honestly. Because real support is not agreement. Real support is someone who cares enough about your becoming to tell you when you are hiding, when you are settling, when you are making yourself small again out of habit or fear.

The right circle holds up the mirror even when the reflection is uncomfortable.

Especially when the reflection is uncomfortable.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including finding your circle.

Your Circle Reflection

Take some time with these questions. They don't need to be answered quickly.

First:

Who in my current circle sees the real me – not the managed version – and loves what they see?

Then:

Who in my current circle requires me to be less than I am?

And finally – the most important one:

What kind of woman do I need to become to be worthy of the circle I am seeking?

Because the circle finds you when you are ready for it. And readiness looks like showing up as yourself – fully, honestly, without the careful management.

The right women recognise each other.

They always have.

Next – Chapter Four: The Path.

What it means to choose roads that don't yet have names – and why that is not the same as being lost.



The Path

Choosing Roads That Don't Yet Have Names



*She is not lost.
She is choosing roads
that don't yet have names.*

There is a particular kind of fear that comes when you step off the mapped path. Not the fear of danger exactly. More the fear of not knowing. Of moving through territory that has no signposts, no reviews, no reassuring evidence that anyone else has been here before and survived it.

We are raised on mapped paths. Study this. Work there. Achieve this by this age. Acquire these things in this order. The map was drawn before we were born and handed to us so early we mistook it for the landscape itself.

And then one day – usually quietly, usually inconveniently, usually in the middle of a life that looks perfectly fine from the outside – we look down at the map in our hands and realise it doesn't match where we actually are.

Or more accurately – it doesn't match where we actually want to go.

That's the moment everything gets interesting.

The Myth of Being Lost

I want to talk about the word lost.

Because it is the word most people reach for when they see a woman stepping off the expected path. She's lost. She's having a crisis. She doesn't know what she wants. She needs to find herself.

As if the self were a set of keys misplaced somewhere obvious. As if the solution were simply to retrace your steps back to the last place you felt certain.

But here is what I have come to understand:

There is a profound difference between being lost and being unmapped.

Lost means you had a destination and you can't find it. Lost means disorientation, panic, the desperate need to get back to known ground.

Unmapped means something entirely different. It means you are moving through territory that hasn't been charted yet. Not because it doesn't exist – but because no one has walked exactly this path before. Because this particular combination of who you are, what you've lived, what you're moving toward – it's yours. It doesn't have a map yet because you are the one making it.

That is not lost.

That is pioneering.

And pioneering – real, honest, courageous pioneering – looks messy and uncertain from the outside. It looks like not knowing. It looks like choosing roads without names.

But inside it? Inside it feels like the first honest movement you've made in years.

What the Path Actually Looks Like

I want to disabuse you of something.

The path toward yourself – toward the life that actually fits, toward the woman you actually are – does not look like a clear trail through open country.

It looks more like bush walking without a track. Some days you can see a long way ahead and the direction feels obvious and your feet move with confidence. Other days the scrub closes in, the light changes, and you're not entirely sure which way is forward.

Both are part of the same journey.

The clarity days don't mean you've arrived. The uncertain days don't mean you're failing.

They're just the terrain. And the terrain of becoming – real becoming, not the performed kind – is always varied. Always changing. Always asking something slightly different of you than it did yesterday.

What I have learned is that the path reveals itself one step at a time. Not ten steps ahead. Not the whole route laid out in advance. Just – the next step. Visible only when you've taken the one before it.

This is deeply uncomfortable for women who have been trained to plan. To have the five year strategy. To know the destination before they begin the journey.

But the Wild and Wise path doesn't work that way.

It asks you to trust your feet more than your map.

The Question That Changes Everything

There is a question I return to often. I offer it to you now because it has never failed to cut through the noise and point me somewhere true.

What would I do if I already trusted myself?

Not what would I do if I had more money, or more time, or more certainty, or more permission from the people around me.

What would I do if I simply – trusted myself?

Sit with that for a moment. Really sit with it.

Because most of us are waiting for external conditions to align before we take the steps we already know we need to take. We're waiting for the right moment, the right resources, the right level of readiness.

But the readiness comes from the doing. Not before it.

And the trust comes from taking the first step on the unnamed road and discovering that your feet know more than your fear does.

On Following Someone Else's Path

I spent years on paths that were not mine.

Not because I was foolish. Not because I didn't know myself. But because the paths that were offered to me were well-lit and well-populated and came with clear evidence of where they led. They made sense. They were safe enough. They were what you did.

And I did them. Well, in many cases. With genuine effort and real achievement.

But there was always something – that quiet, persistent refusal to stay still – that knew the destination on the signpost was not mine.

Here is what following someone else's path costs you. Not in one dramatic moment but slowly, cumulatively, over years:

It costs you your instincts. Because when you are always following someone else's direction, your own inner compass gets less practice. It doesn't disappear – but it gets

quieter. Less trusted. Easier to override with logic or obligation or the comfort of the familiar.

It costs you your energy. Because moving in a direction that isn't truly yours requires a constant low-level expenditure of will. You are not flowing. You are pushing. And pushing, sustained over years, exhausts something deep.

And it costs you time. Which is the one thing none of us can recover.

I am not saying this to create regret. Regret is not useful here. Every path you have walked has brought you exactly to this moment – to this book, to this question, to this quiet recognition that there might be another way to move through the world.

The paths behind you were not wasted. They were preparation.

But the path ahead – that one gets to be yours.

Naming the Unnamed Road

Here is something practical I want to offer you.

The unnamed roads in your life – the directions you keep almost moving toward and then pulling back from – they are not as nameless as they feel.

They have feelings attached to them. Sensations. A particular quality of aliveness that you notice when you let yourself think about them honestly.

The unnamed road might feel like relief. Like breathing properly for the first time in months.

It might feel like terror mixed with excitement – that particular cocktail that usually means you're standing at the edge of something real.

It might feel like coming home to a place you've never actually been but somehow recognise.

These feelings are not decoration. They are information. They are your inner compass doing exactly what it was designed to do – pointing toward true north.

And true north, for each of us, is always the direction of our most honest self.

You Are Not Behind

I want to say something to the woman reading this who is measuring her path against someone else's timeline.

You are not behind.

You are not too old to begin. You are not too far down the wrong road to change direction. You are not too invested in the current path to choose a different one.

The woman who begins her Wild and Wise journey at thirty is not ahead of the woman who begins it at fifty. The woman who has already made some of her unnamed roads real is not further along than the woman who is still standing at the trailhead trying to work out where to put her first foot.

There is no race here.

There is only your path, at your pace, in your time.

And the most important step is always the same one.

The next one.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including finding your path.

Your Path Reflection

One question. Take as long as you need with it.

What would I do – what direction would I move in – if I already trusted myself completely?

Write it down. Don't edit it. Don't make it practical or reasonable or explainable.

Just write what's true.

That unnamed road? It has been waiting for you to give it a name.

You just did.

Next – Chapter Five: The Surrender.

What it means to stop forcing – and why letting go is sometimes the most powerful move you can make.



The Surrender

The Art of Stopping Without Failing



*Some nights she simply stops.
Wraps herself in stillness
and lets the fire do the remembering.*

There is a word that most high-achieving women have a complicated relationship with.

Surrender.

Say it out loud and notice what happens in your body. For many of us there is an immediate tightening. A resistance. A voice that sounds suspiciously like every

mentor, manager and motivational poster we have ever encountered saying – winners don't quit. Push through. Keep going. You're almost there.

We were taught that stopping is failure. That surrender is weakness. That the woman who keeps going – regardless of the cost, regardless of the signals her body and soul are sending – is the woman who deserves to win.

But what if that's wrong?

What if surrender – real, conscious, chosen surrender – is not the opposite of strength?

What if it's the fullest expression of it?

What We Were Taught About Stopping

The messages arrived early and they arrived often.

Don't give up. Push through the pain. Sleep when you're dead. You can rest when you're finished.

And so we learned to override ourselves. To treat our own exhaustion as weakness rather than information. To mistake busyness for productivity and relentlessness for resilience.

We became very good at going.

What we never learned – what nobody taught us, because nobody taught them either – was the art of stopping well.

Not collapsing. Not burning out until the body has no choice but to shut down. Not the involuntary stopping that comes when you have pushed so far past your limits that something finally breaks.

The conscious, chosen, deliberate stopping.

The kind that says – I am not stopping because I have failed. I am stopping because I am wise enough to know that this moment calls for stillness, not motion.

That is a completely different thing.

The Difference Between Giving Up and Letting Go

I want to draw a distinction that I think matters enormously.

Giving up is reactive. It comes from defeat, from exhaustion, from the feeling that you have tried and failed and there is nothing left to offer. Giving up leaves a residue – of shame, of incompleteness, of a story about yourself that you carry forward.

Letting go is something else entirely.

Letting go is active. Conscious. A choice made not from defeat but from wisdom. From the recognition that what you are holding – whether it is a path, a relationship, a version of yourself, an idea of how things should be – is no longer serving the life you are trying to build.

Letting go says – I have been here long enough. I have learned what this had to teach me. And now, with gratitude and without shame, I release it.

That is not weakness.

That is extraordinary maturity.

And it is one of the hardest things a driven, capable, achievement-oriented woman will ever learn to do.

What You Might Be White-Knuckling

I want to ask you something gently but directly.

What are you currently forcing?

Not working hard on – working hard is beautiful and real and often exactly right. But forcing. The thing you are holding onto with white knuckles because letting go feels like failure, or loss, or the admission of something you're not ready to admit.

Maybe it's a business direction that made sense two years ago but no longer fits who you are becoming.

Maybe it's a relationship you have outgrown but feel too guilty or too afraid to release.

Maybe it's an identity – the capable one, the successful one, the one who always has it together – that served you once but now sits on your shoulders like armour you forgot you were wearing.

Maybe it's a version of the future you decided on so long ago that you've forgotten to check whether it still belongs to you.

Maybe it's simply the pace. The relentless, unforgiving pace of a life lived at full speed with no spaces in between – and the terrifying possibility that if you stopped, even briefly, you might have to feel everything you've been outrunning.

Whatever it is – your body knows.

Your body has been trying to tell you for some time.

The question is whether you are willing to listen.

The Night She Simply Stops

The verse for this chapter describes a night of stopping.

Not a planned retreat. Not a scheduled holiday or a strategic pause. Just a night – ordinary, unremarkable – when she simply stops. Wraps herself in stillness. And lets the fire do the remembering.

I love this image because it is so honest about what surrender actually looks like.

It doesn't look like a dramatic decision. It doesn't look like a press release or a pivot announcement or a carefully crafted explanation to the people in your life.

It looks like a Tuesday night when you put down everything you are carrying – just for now, just for tonight – and let yourself be still.

And in that stillness, something happens.

The fire – that deep, ancient, knowing part of you that has been trying to get your attention – gets to speak without interruption.

Not to tell you what to do. Not to give you a five step plan or a new strategy or a better way to push.

Just to remind you of what you already know.

Who you already are.

What already matters.

The fire does the remembering so you don't have to work so hard to forget.

Surrender as a Practice

Here is something I have learned about surrender that took me longer than I would like to admit.

It is not a one-time event.

You don't surrender once – dramatically, completely – and then live in a state of effortless flow for the rest of your life. That is not how it works.

Surrender is a practice. A daily, sometimes hourly, returning to the question – am I flowing here or am I forcing?

Some days the answer is flowing. You are in your element, moving with the current of your own life, and things are unfolding with a kind of ease that feels almost suspicious after years of white-knuckling.

Other days the answer is forcing. You can feel the resistance – in your body, in your mood, in the particular quality of effort required to keep going in this direction. And the practice is noticing that. Not judging it. Not adding shame to exhaustion. Just noticing – ah. I am forcing again. What do I need to release?

This noticing is not passive. It is one of the most active, courageous things you will ever do.

Because it requires you to be honest with yourself even when honesty is inconvenient.

And honesty, for women who have spent years performing capability and strength, can feel like the most dangerous surrender of all.

What Becomes Possible in the Stillness

I want to tell you something about what I have found in the moments of genuine surrender.

Not what I expected to find – which was emptiness, or loss, or the anxious silence of a woman who has stopped doing and doesn't know who she is without the doing.

What I actually found was – myself.

Not a new self. Not a better or wiser or more evolved version. Just – me. The one who was always there underneath the doing. The one who knew things I had been too busy to hear. The one who had been patiently, quietly, persistently trying to get my attention for years.

In the stillness she was simply – there.

And she had things to say.

Not instructions. Not a to-do list or a new strategy or a better plan for optimising my life.

Just truth. Simple, clear, completely obvious truth that I had been too busy to hear.

That is what becomes possible when you stop forcing long enough to actually listen.

Not answers exactly.

But something better than answers.

Clarity.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including learning when to stop.

Your Surrender Reflection

Two questions. Take your time.

First – the honest one:

What am I currently forcing that is asking to be released?

Sit with that. Let it be specific. Let it be uncomfortable if it needs to be.

And then – the permission one:

What would become possible in my life if I put that down?

Not forever necessarily. Not dramatically. Just – put it down. For now. For tonight. Like she does in the verse – wrap yourself in stillness and let the fire do the remembering.

What does the fire already know that you have been too busy to hear?

Next – Chapter Six: The River.

The cleansing that cannot wait – and what happens when you finally step in.



The River

The Cleansing That Cannot Wait



*She stepped in fully dressed
because some cleansing
cannot wait for convenient.*

There are moments in a life that don't announce themselves.

They don't arrive with preparation time or a gentle warning or the luxury of getting yourself ready first. They arrive in the middle of an ordinary day – or an extraordinary one – and they ask something of you that cannot be postponed.

Not tomorrow. Not when you're ready. Not when the conditions are better or the timing is right or you've had a chance to think it through.

Now.

This is what the verse is describing. Not a planned cleansing. Not a retreat booked six months in advance or a carefully scheduled moment of transformation. Just a woman who looked at the river and understood – with every cell in her body – that she needed to step in.

Fully dressed.

Inconveniently.

Immediately.

Because some things cannot wait for convenient.

What the River Represents

Before I go further I want to talk about what the river is.

Because it is different for every woman. And recognising your river – knowing it when you see it – is one of the most important skills this journey asks you to develop.

For some women the river is a conversation they have been avoiding. The one they know needs to happen but keep finding reasons to postpone. Too busy. Wrong time. Not sure how it will land. Waiting until they have exactly the right words.

But the right words never quite arrive. And the conversation waits. And the waiting itself becomes its own kind of weight.

For others the river is a decision. One they have already made internally – if they are honest – but haven't yet made externally. The gap between knowing and acting. Between the truth they carry privately and the life they are living publicly.

For others still the river is grief. Something that happened – a loss, a betrayal, an ending – that they have been managing rather than feeling. Keeping it at a careful distance. Functioning around it. Treating their own heartbreak as an inconvenience to be scheduled rather than a reality to be lived.

And sometimes the river is joy. The unexpected, inconvenient, completely impractical joy of something that lights you up so completely that stepping toward it feels terrifying precisely because it matters so much.

Whatever your river is – you know it.

You have been standing on the bank for some time.

The Problem With Waiting for Convenient

Here is what I have noticed about the things we keep waiting to be ready for.

The readiness rarely comes.

Not because we are weak or avoidant or incapable. But because the mind – clever, protective, well-intentioned mind – is very good at generating reasons why now is not quite the right time.

There's too much else happening right now. Wait until things settle.

I need to think about it more first. Wait until I'm clearer.

The timing isn't right for the people around me. Wait until it's easier for everyone.

I'm not sure I'm strong enough yet. Wait until I feel more ready.

And so we wait. And life moves. And the river keeps flowing. And the thing that needed to happen – the conversation, the decision, the grief, the joy – gets heavier with every day of postponement.

Because here is the truth about rivers.

They don't stop flowing while you decide whether to step in.

The water moves regardless. And the longer you stand on the bank, the more the current changes – sometimes carrying away the very thing you needed to cleanse, sometimes depositing new sediment that makes the crossing harder.

The river is always now.

It was always now.

Fully Dressed

I want to stay with this image for a moment because I think it's important.

She stepped in fully dressed.

Not prepared. Not in the right clothes for swimming. Not having planned for the wetness or the cold or the way everything would cling to her on the other side.

Just – in. As she was. In the middle of her ordinary life with all its ordinary complications still attached.

This is what real transformation actually looks like.

Not the curated version – the woman who has cleared her schedule and packed her retreat bag and arranged everything neatly before she begins her inner work.

The real version. The woman in the middle of her actual life who recognises a moment of necessary truth and steps toward it anyway. Inconveniently. Imperfectly. Without waiting to be ready.

I have stepped into rivers fully dressed more times than I can count.

The conversation I had when I was not prepared to have it but knew it could not wait another day.

The decision I made in the middle of a busy Tuesday when the clarity arrived suddenly and completely and I knew that waiting for a better moment would mean it never happened.

The grief I finally allowed myself to feel – really feel, not manage – on an unremarkable afternoon when I simply ran out of ways to keep it at arm's length.

None of these moments were convenient.

All of them changed me.

What Happens When You Step In

I want to be honest about this because the books don't always tell you the full truth.

Stepping into the river is not always immediately relieving.

Sometimes it's cold. Sometimes the current is stronger than you expected and you have to work to keep your footing. Sometimes you come out the other side soaking wet and shivering and wondering if you made a terrible mistake.

But here is what I have never experienced on the other side of a river moment.

I have never regretted stepping in.

Not once. Not for any of the difficult conversations or the hard decisions or the grief finally felt or the joy finally claimed.

The regret – if it exists at all – is always on the bank. In the waiting. In the postponing. In the standing there watching the water move and telling yourself you'll step in when the time is right.

The river always feels better from inside it than it looked from the outside.

Always.

The Cleansing

There is a reason the verse uses that word. Cleansing.

Not just change. Not just growth. Cleansing.

Because some of what we carry – the accumulated weight of unexpressed truth, unmade decisions, unfelt grief, unclaimed joy – it doesn't just slow us down.

It dirties something.

Not in a moral sense. But in the way that anything left too long without air and movement begins to stagnate. To lose its vitality. To become something heavier and darker than it was originally meant to be.

The river cleanses that.

Not by making it disappear. But by moving it. By letting it be what it actually is – felt, expressed, decided, claimed – rather than what we've been managing it as.

And on the other side of the river – soaking wet, slightly breathless, more honest than you were before you stepped in – something is lighter.

Just – cleaner.

More true.

More yours.

Recognising Your River

I want to offer you something practical here.

You already know what your river is. You have known for some time. But in case the voice of inconvenience and not-yet has been louder than the voice of truth, let me help you hear it.

Your river is the thing you think about in the quiet moments – in the shower, in the car, in the minutes before sleep – and feel a particular combination of dread and relief when you imagine finally stepping toward it.

The dread is real. I won't minimise it. Stepping into rivers is not comfortable.

But the relief – that feeling of finally, of at last, of this needed to happen – that is the river calling you.

And it will keep calling.

Until you step in.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

But some things cannot wait for convenient.

Your River Reflection

One question. The most important one in this chapter.

What is the river I have been standing on the bank of – and what has the waiting cost me?

Sit with that honestly.

And then – when you are ready – ask the second:

What would it mean to step in today? Not perfectly. Not prepared. Just – in. Fully dressed. As I am.

The river is there.

It has always been there.

And the water – when you finally step in – will be exactly the right temperature for what you need.

Next – Chapter Seven: The Walk.

The difference between moving toward something and running from something – and how to know which one you're doing.



The Walk

Moving Toward, Not Away



*She didn't leave.
She simply knew
it was time to move toward the next beautiful thing.*

There is a question worth asking yourself at every significant turning point in your life.

Am I moving toward something or away from something?

It sounds simple. It is not.

Because from the outside – and often from the inside too – the two can look almost identical. The same decision. The same action. The same physical movement from one place to another. But underneath, in the place where motivations live, they are completely different things.

And the difference matters enormously.

Not because moving away is always wrong. Sometimes leaving is exactly right. Sometimes the most courageous and self-honouring thing you can do is walk away from something that is diminishing you.

But when the primary motivation is away from – away from discomfort, away from difficulty, away from the hard work of staying and growing and facing what needs to be faced – then the movement, however decisive it looks, is really just another kind of running.

And running, as most of us eventually discover, is exhausting.

And temporary.

Because whatever you are running from has a tendency to arrive at the next destination just slightly ahead of you.

The Difference Between Leaving and Running

I want to be very careful here because this distinction is subtle and important and easy to get wrong in both directions.

There is leaving that is right. That is conscious. That honours both you and what you are leaving. That says – I have been here, I have given what I had to give, I have received what was here for me, and now I am complete with this and ready for what comes next.

That kind of leaving is a walk. Deliberate. Forward-facing. Eyes on the horizon of the next beautiful thing.

And there is leaving that is running. That is reactive. That mistakes escape for freedom. That moves fast and decisively but without the clarity of actually knowing where it is going – only knowing what it wants to get away from.

Running looks like confidence from the outside. All that forward motion. All that decisiveness.

But it feels different from the inside. There is a particular quality to running that is hard to describe but instantly recognisable once you know it. A kind of frantic energy. A relief that doesn't quite settle. A sense that you need to keep moving because if you slow down the thing you're running from might catch you.

The walk feels different.

The walk has a stillness inside it even when the feet are moving. A groundedness. A sense of direction that comes not from fleeing but from following something. Something that calls rather than something that chases.

What You Are Actually Moving Toward

The verse says she knew it was time to move toward the next beautiful thing.

I love that phrase – the next beautiful thing. Not the perfect thing. Not the safe thing. Not the logical, well-researched, fully planned thing.

The beautiful thing.

And beauty here is not aesthetic. It is not about how something looks. It is about how it feels in your body when you let yourself imagine it honestly. That particular aliveness. That expansion rather than contraction. That sense of yes, even when yes is accompanied by fear.

Because yes and fear can absolutely coexist.

In fact the presence of fear is often a signal that something genuinely matters. That you are not just making a practical decision but moving toward something that has real stakes for your real life.

The question is not whether you are afraid. The question is whether the fear is accompanied by that aliveness. That pull. That quality of – this is mine to walk toward.

Or whether the fear is the only thing there. Whether underneath the fear there is not aliveness but numbness. Not pull but push. Not yours to walk toward but someone else's expectation of where you should be going.

That distinction – between fear-with-aliveness and fear-alone – is one of the most important things your inner compass can tell you.

Learn to listen to it.

The Women Who Walked

I have known women who walked.

Not dramatically. Not with grand announcements or carefully crafted explanations to everyone in their lives. Just – walked. Quietly, deliberately, toward something they could feel was theirs even before they could fully articulate what it was.

The woman who left a career that looked successful from the outside but felt hollow from the inside – not in a crisis, not because everything fell apart, but because she had finally listened long enough to hear what she actually wanted and had the courage to walk toward it.

The woman who moved to a place that made no practical sense – wrong direction, wrong timing, insufficient reasons by anyone else's accounting – but felt undeniably right to her in a way she had learned to trust.

The woman who walked toward a creative life she had been told wasn't practical, wasn't financially sensible, wasn't what you do. Who walked anyway. Who discovered on the other side that the practicality she had feared sacrificing had found its own way of following her.

None of these walks were easy.

All of them were right.

Not because they led to perfect outcomes – life doesn't work that way and I will never pretend it does. But because they were honest. Because they were chosen. Because they were toward rather than away.

And there is a quality of life available only to the woman who is walking toward something she actually wants. A quality of presence and aliveness and engagement with her own existence that is simply not available when you are running from

something, or standing still out of fear, or moving in directions that were never truly yours.

When Staying Is the Walk

I want to say something that might be unexpected in a chapter about walking.

Sometimes the walk is staying.

Sometimes the most courageous, most deliberate, most toward movement you can make is to stop moving and choose – consciously, fully, with your whole self – to be exactly where you are.

Not because leaving is impossible. Not because you can't imagine anything different. But because you have looked honestly at where you are and recognised that this – this work, this relationship, this place, this life – has more to offer you than you have yet received from it. That there is growing still to be done here. That the walk toward your next beautiful thing runs right through the middle of your current circumstances rather than away from them.

This kind of staying is completely different from staying out of fear or inertia or the inability to imagine something else.

It is a choice. Active and alive and fully owned.

And it changes everything about how you experience where you are.

Reading Your Own Direction

Here is something practical I want to offer you.

Next time you are facing a significant decision – to leave or stay, to begin or end, to move toward or away – try this.

Sit quietly. Close your eyes if that helps. And imagine yourself having made each choice. Not the practical consequences. Not the logistics or the finances or what other people will think.

Just – how does it feel in your body to imagine having made that choice?

Is there expansion or contraction?

Aliveness or numbness?

Relief that settles or relief that is immediately replaced by a new anxiety?

A sense of moving toward something or a sense of escaping something?

Your body knows the difference between a walk and a run before your mind has finished constructing its arguments.

Learn to ask it.

Learn to trust what it tells you.

The Next Beautiful Thing

I want to end this chapter with a question rather than an answer.

Because the next beautiful thing is yours. Not mine to name. Not the culture's to define. Not your family's or your industry's or your carefully constructed LinkedIn profile's.

Yours.

And you already have a sense of what it is. Even if it feels impossible or impractical or too big or too small or not the kind of thing you're supposed to want.

Even if it scares you.

Especially if it scares you.

Walk toward. Deliberately. With your eyes open and your feet steady and the quiet confidence of a woman who has finally learned to trust the direction her own life is pointing.

She didn't leave.

She simply knew it was time.

And she walked.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including finding what you are walking toward.

Your Walk Reflection

Two questions. Sit with both.

Am I currently moving toward something or away from something?

Be honest. There is no wrong answer here – only a true one.

And then:

What is the next beautiful thing I am being called to walk toward?

Don't make it neat. Don't make it practical. Don't edit it before you've written it down.

Just write what's true.

The walk begins with knowing the direction.

You already know the direction.

Next – Chapter Eight: The Medicine.

The wisdom you already carry – and what happens when you finally trust it.



The Medicine

The Wisdom You Already Carry



*She knows which plants to reach for.
She learned from the ones
who came before her and left no recipe – only wisdom.*

There is a particular kind of confidence that has nothing to do with certainty. It is quieter than certainty. Less loud. Less insistent. It doesn't need to prove itself or defend itself or convince anyone of anything.

It is simply – knowing.

The knowing that comes not from a course you completed or a certificate on the wall or a title that grants you permission to speak. But from living. From paying attention. From accumulating experience and sitting with it long enough to understand what it was actually teaching you.

This is the medicine.

And most women have far more of it than they have ever been given credit for.

Or given themselves credit for.

What We Were Taught About Wisdom

We live in a culture that has a complicated relationship with the kind of wisdom that can't be credentialed.

The wisdom that lives in the body. In the instincts. In the particular knowing that arrives not through analysis but through experience. Through years of paying attention to people, to patterns, to the quiet signals that most of us learn to read long before we have language for what we are reading.

We were taught to trust the external. The qualification. The expert. The peer-reviewed study. The person with the most impressive credentials in the room.

And those things have value. I am not dismissing them.

But in elevating the external we often learned to distrust the internal. To dismiss our own knowing as merely anecdotal. Merely personal. Not rigorous enough. Not objective enough. Too emotional. Too subjective. Not the kind of thing you cite in a meeting or lead with in a proposal.

And so we learned to preface our knowing with apologies.

I might be wrong but...

This is just my experience...

I don't have data on this but...

Take this with a grain of salt...

The apology before the wisdom. The disclaimer before the truth. The habitual diminishing of something real and earned and genuinely valuable.

This chapter is about stopping that.

The Women Who Came Before

The verse speaks of the women who came before. Who left no recipe – only wisdom.

I want to sit with that for a moment because I think it is one of the most important lines in the whole collection.

No recipe. Only wisdom.

A recipe is transferable. Replicable. The same ingredients, the same method, the same result every time. A recipe removes the need for judgment. For reading the situation. For knowing when to deviate from the instructions because something in the air or the light or the particular quality of today requires something different.

Wisdom is not like that.

Wisdom cannot be fully transferred. It can be pointed toward. Gestured at. Offered through story and metaphor and the particular quality of presence that comes from someone who has genuinely lived what they are sharing.

But the wisdom itself – the deep, embodied, lived-in knowing – that has to be grown. Inside you. Through your own experience. Through your own paying attention. Through your own willingness to stay with difficulty long enough to understand what it is teaching rather than escaping it before the lesson is complete.

The women who came before you – in your family, in your industry, in the long unbroken line of women who navigated the particular challenges of being fully human and fully female in a world that has not always made that easy – they left you something.

Not instructions. Not a manual.

Themselves. Their stories. Their ways of being in difficulty. Their particular genius for endurance and adaptation and finding beauty in the middle of complexity.

You carry more of that than you know.

Your Medicine

I want to ask you something that most people never ask.

What do you actually know?

Not what your resume says you know. Not what your qualifications certify. Not what you've been formally trained in or officially recognised for.

What do you actually, genuinely, deeply know – from living, from paying attention, from the accumulated intelligence of your particular life?

Because here is what I have discovered about women who have reached a certain depth of self-awareness – and that depth has nothing to do with age, though age can help. It has to do with willingness. Willingness to pay attention. Willingness to be honest about what you're seeing. Willingness to let experience teach you rather than simply accumulate.

These women know things.

They know how people work. How trust is built and broken and rebuilt. How organisations actually function beneath their official structures. How children learn. How grief moves. How creative ideas arrive and depart and arrive again if you are patient enough to wait for them. How the body signals what the mind hasn't yet processed. How a room changes when someone walks in who is genuinely at peace with themselves.

They know how to read what is happening beneath what is being said. How to feel the shift in a conversation before anyone has named it. How to know – sometimes without being able to say how they know – that something is wrong or right or about to change.

This is medicine.

And it is yours.

Why We Don't Trust It

If the medicine is real and it is ours, why do so many of us not trust it?

I have been thinking about this for a long time and I think the answer is layered.

Part of it is what I described earlier – the cultural conditioning that taught us to privilege the external over the internal. The credential over the instinct. The data over the felt sense.

But part of it is something more personal.

The medicine was often acquired through difficulty. Through loss and failure and the particular education that only comes when things don't go the way you planned and you have to find your way through anyway.

And difficulty, for many of us, carries shame. Or at least the residue of shame. The sense that the hard things that happened were somehow our fault. That a smarter or better or more together version of us would not have found themselves in those situations.

So we discount the learning that came from the difficulty. Because to claim the learning we would have to claim the difficulty. And claiming the difficulty means looking honestly at things we have sometimes preferred to file away.

But here is the truth.

Your medicine was forged in exactly those places.

In the relationships that broke you open. In the careers that looked successful but cost you something important. In the moments when you had to find resources in yourself you didn't know you had. In the grief and the failure and the starting over and the discovering – again and again – that you were more resilient than you knew.

That is not something to be ashamed of.

That is the most valuable thing you own.

Trusting What You Know

There is a practice I want to suggest.

The next time you find yourself in a situation where you have a clear felt sense – a knowing, an instinct, a strong and settled feeling about what is true or right or needed – and you are about to override it with logic or deference or the habitual disclaimer, try something different.

Pause.

And ask yourself – what do I actually know about this?

Not what can I prove. Not what would stand up in a meeting or a court or a formal review.

What do I know?

And then – and this is the harder part – trust it enough to act from it. Even partially. Even tentatively. Even with the acknowledgment that you might be wrong.

Because the only way to develop trust in your own medicine is to use it. To discover, again and again, that it is reliable. That it is earned. That the knowing you carry is not wishful thinking or emotional bias but genuine intelligence.

Hard-won, deeply personal, entirely yours.

Passing It On

The verse says the women who came before left no recipe – only wisdom.

Which means that what they left required you to receive it actively. To interpret it. To make it your own. To understand through your own living what they were pointing toward.

And it also means that what you are building – through your own living, your own paying attention, your own willingness to turn experience into understanding – is something you will one day pass on.

Not as a recipe. Not as a manual or a methodology or a set of instructions.

As yourself. As your presence. As the particular quality of knowing that only you could have developed through the specific life that only you have lived.

Someone is watching you right now and learning what it looks like to be a woman who knows herself. Who trusts herself. Who reaches for her own medicine without apologising for its existence.

That is not a small thing.

That is legacy.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including growing into the fullness of what you know.

Your Medicine Reflection

Two questions. Take your time with both.

First:

What do I actually know – from living, from paying attention, from the accumulated intelligence of my particular life – that I have been undervaluing or apologising for?

Sit with that. Be specific. Be generous with yourself.

And then:

What would change if I trusted my own medicine completely – if I stopped prefacing my knowing with disclaimers and started offering it as the genuine, earned, valuable thing it actually is?

You have more medicine than you know.

It is time to start using it.

Next – Chapter Nine: The Gathering.

What is already available to you that you haven't yet claimed.



The Gathering

Claiming What Is Already Yours



*Not everything wild needs to be grown.
Some gifts are already there,
waiting for someone patient enough to kneel.*

There is a particular kind of searching that exhausts itself.

The kind that looks outward. Always outward. For the missing piece, the missing answer, the missing version of yourself that will finally make everything click into place. The course that will give you the confidence you lack. The mentor who will show you what you can't yet see. The opportunity that will finally prove you are enough.

We are very good at this kind of searching.

We have been trained for it.

The self-improvement industry is built on the premise that what you need is always somewhere else. Always ahead of you. Always requiring another investment, another certification, another level of becoming before you can claim the life you actually want.

But what if that premise is wrong?

What if the most important gathering you will ever do is not outward but downward?

Not reaching for something new but kneeling – patiently, humbly, with open hands – toward what is already there.

The Forager's Wisdom

The verse for this chapter carries the image of foraging.

Not farming. Not the deliberate planting and tending and harvesting of something you have grown from seed. But foraging – the ancient, patient practice of moving through a landscape and recognising what is already there. Already growing. Already offering itself to anyone wise enough and attentive enough to see it.

The forager doesn't create the gift. She recognises it.

And recognition – real recognition, the kind that requires genuine attention and knowledge and a willingness to kneel down close to the ground and look carefully – is itself a profound skill.

Most of us move too fast for it.

We are so busy creating and acquiring and becoming that we walk straight past what is already available. What has always been available. What is growing quietly in the landscape of our lives, waiting for someone patient enough to notice.

I think about this often in the context of women I have known and worked alongside.

Women who have spent years searching for the confidence they already have but keep waiting to feel certain before they claim it.

Women who have been seeking permission to take up space that was always theirs to occupy.

Women who keep preparing to begin the work they were born to do, not realising they have been doing it already – in every conversation, every relationship, every moment of showing up fully for another human being.

The gift was always there.

They just hadn't stopped moving long enough to see it.

What You Have Already Grown

Before we talk about what is waiting to be gathered, I want to acknowledge something.

You have not arrived at this moment empty-handed.

You have built things. Relationships, skills, knowledge, understanding. You have shown up in difficult circumstances and found ways through. You have loved people and been loved. You have made mistakes and recovered from them. You have developed instincts and capacities and ways of moving through the world that are genuinely and specifically yours.

You have, whether you have fully recognised it or not, already grown a great deal.

The question this chapter asks is not – how do I grow more?

It is – what have I already grown that I have not yet harvested?

What strengths have you developed that you still treat as ordinary because they came so naturally you forgot they were extraordinary?

What relationships have you built that you take for granted because they have always been there?

What knowledge have you accumulated through years of paying attention that you discount because it wasn't acquired through formal channels?

What doors are standing open right now that you haven't walked through because you are still waiting to feel ready?

These are your gifts. Already grown. Already available.

Waiting for you to kneel down and gather them.

The Patience to Kneel

The verse specifically mentions patience.

Someone patient enough to kneel.

I want to stay with the kneeling for a moment because I think it matters.

Kneeling is not a posture of defeat. It is a posture of attention. Of slowing down enough to see what the upright, fast-moving, always-forward version of you walks past.

It is also, and I say this gently, a posture of humility.

Not the false humility that dismisses what you have. Not the habitual self-deprecation that many women have learned as a way of making themselves palatable in rooms that weren't always welcoming of their full presence.

But genuine humility. The kind that says – I don't need to be more than I am in this moment. I don't need to reach further or climb higher or acquire something I don't yet have. I can slow down. I can look carefully at what is already here. And I can receive it with gratitude rather than grasping for something beyond it.

This is genuinely countercultural.

In a world that equates worth with growth and measures success by how much further you have gone since last year – choosing to kneel. To be still. To gather what is already present rather than striving for what is not yet – this is a radical act.

And it is one of the most nourishing things you can do for yourself

Recognising the Gifts You Walk Past

I want to offer you something concrete here.

There are several categories of gift that I have noticed women most consistently walk past. Not because they are invisible. But because we have been taught to look in other directions.

The first is the gift of your own history.

Everything you have lived through has given you something. Every difficult season, every unexpected turn, every moment when the path you planned became the path you didn't. The woman who has navigated complexity has developed a capacity for it. The woman who has rebuilt herself has knowledge of what rebuilding requires. The woman who has loved and lost and loved again carries wisdom about the nature of both love and loss that no course can teach.

This is not nothing. This is profound.

The second is the gift of your relationships.

The people who love you. Who would show up for you. Who have shown up for you, again and again, and whose presence in your life represents a kind of wealth that has nothing to do with money.

Many of us are richer in this way than we recognise.

The third is the gift of your instincts.

That quiet inner voice that has been trying to guide you, often for years, often through circumstances you would have navigated differently if you had listened to it sooner. The instincts you override with logic, with obligation, with the fear of what others will think.

They are a gift. Already yours. Waiting to be trusted.

And the fourth – the one I think is most often overlooked – is the gift of your own enoughness.

Right now. As you are. With everything you have and everything you have not yet figured out.

You are already enough to begin.

Whatever it is you have been waiting until you are enough to begin – you are already enough.

The gathering starts here.

What Becomes Possible When You Stop Searching

There is a particular quality of life that becomes available when you stop searching for what you lack and start gathering what you have.

It is not complacency. Not the settling that comes from giving up on growth.

It is more like – landing. Coming to rest in the fullness of what is actually here rather than constantly reaching for what is not yet.

From that place of landing, of genuine presence to what is already available, something interesting happens.

You start to see possibilities you couldn't see when you were searching.

Not because the possibilities have changed. But because you have. Because the woman who is grounded in what she already has can see clearly. Can act from genuine abundance rather than perceived scarcity. Can offer her gifts without the anxiety of someone who believes the gifts are insufficient.

The gatherer, it turns out, acquires far more than the searcher.

Not because she reaches further. But because she sees more clearly.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including recognising what you already have.

Your Gathering Reflection

Three questions. Take your time.

First – the inventory:

What have I already built, developed, learned, or become that I have been treating as ordinary when it is actually extraordinary?

Then – the recognition:

What gifts, relationships, instincts, or opportunities are already available to me right now that I have been walking past?

And finally – the permission:

What would I begin – right now, with what I already have – if I truly believed I was already enough?

You don't need to find anything new.

You just need to kneel down and look at what is already growing.

It has been waiting for you.

Next – Chapter Ten: The Garden.

What you tend is what grows – and the quiet power of choosing what deserves your attention.



The Garden

Tending What You Love



*She tends what she loves.
Hands in the dark earth,
trusting what she cannot yet see.*

There is something deeply honest about a garden.

It doesn't respond to urgency. It doesn't care about your deadlines or your ambitions or the carefully constructed timeline you had in mind when you put the first seeds in the ground. It operates entirely on its own schedule – one governed by light and water and the particular temperature of the soil and a thousand other variables that have nothing to do with how hard you are trying.

A garden teaches you, if you let it, that effort and outcome are not as directly linked as we have been led to believe.

You can work yourself to exhaustion in a garden and still lose everything to an unexpected frost. And you can tend something quietly, patiently, without drama – and watch it grow beyond anything you imagined when you started.

The lesson is not that effort doesn't matter. It does. Your hands in the dark earth matter enormously.

The lesson is that control is an illusion. And the sooner you make peace with that, the better a gardener – and a woman – you become.

What You Are Actually Tending

I want to ask you something that sounds simple but isn't.

What are you actually tending right now?

Not what are you working on. Not what are you trying to achieve or build or fix or improve. Not what is on your to-do list or your five year plan or your vision board.

What are you actually, daily, consistently giving your energy and attention to?

Because here is something I have learned about tending.

You are always tending something. The question is whether you are tending it consciously or by default. Whether the things growing in your life are growing because you chose them or because you simply haven't noticed what you've been watering.

Some women, when they look honestly at what they are actually tending, discover that they have been giving most of their energy to things that are not theirs. Other people's needs. Other people's visions. Other people's ideas of what their life should look like.

They have been excellent gardeners for everyone except themselves.

And their own garden – the relationships they actually want to nurture, the work that genuinely lights them up, the version of themselves they are trying to grow into – has been quietly waiting for the attention it has never quite received.

Does any of this sound familiar?

The Dark Earth

The verse speaks of hands in the dark earth.

Not the bright, clean, Instagram-worthy garden. Not the finished product with its neat rows and visible results and the particular satisfaction of standing back and seeing what you've made.

The dark earth. The part of gardening that happens before anything is visible. Before you know whether what you've planted will take root. Before the results justify the effort. Before anyone else can see what you are doing or understand why it matters.

This is where the real work of tending happens.

In the dark.

In the not-yet.

In the trusting what you cannot see.

I think this is the most important and most difficult part of tending anything that genuinely matters. Because the things worth growing – the deep relationships, the authentic work, the truest version of yourself – they all require a significant period of tending in the dark.

Before the results are visible. Before other people understand what you are building. Before you yourself can be entirely certain that what you have planted is going to grow.

The temptation in that dark period is to stop. To conclude that nothing is happening. To abandon the garden and start something new – something with faster, more visible results. Something that doesn't require this particular quality of faith.

But the roots are forming in the dark.

They always were.

The fact that you can't see them yet doesn't mean they aren't there.

Choosing What to Tend

Here is something I want to say clearly because I think it matters enormously and is rarely said.

You cannot tend everything.

This is not a limitation. It is a liberation.

You have a finite amount of energy, attention, time, emotional capacity. These are not things that can be endlessly expanded through better systems or more efficient habits or the right morning routine. They are real and they are limited and they are precious.

Which means that every yes is a no to something else.

Every garden bed you choose to tend is a garden bed you are choosing not to tend. Every relationship you pour your attention into is a relationship you are not pouring your attention into. Every project you give your full creative energy to is a project that receives the dregs of what is left.

Most of us have never made this choice consciously.

We have simply accumulated. Said yes to enough things that eventually we are spread so thin across so many gardens that nothing receives the depth of tending it actually needs.

And we wonder why nothing seems to be thriving.

The question is not – how do I tend more things better?

The question is – what deserves the full depth of my tending?

What in your life – if you gave it your whole attention, your deepest care, your most consistent presence – would grow into something extraordinary?

Start there.

Let the rest wait.

Or let it go.

The Trust

The verse ends with trusting what she cannot yet see.

I want to stay here for a moment because I think this is the heart of the whole chapter.

Trust – in the gardening sense – is not a feeling. It is a practice.

You don't wait until you feel certain to plant. You plant. And then you tend. And then you wait. And then you tend some more. Not because you can see the results yet. Not because you have evidence that this will work. But because you have made a commitment to this particular garden and you are choosing to honour it even in the absence of visible proof.

This is the kind of trust that the Wild and Wise journey asks of you.

Not the trust that comes after the results are in. Not the retrospective trust of someone who can look back and see how it all unfolded and say – I knew it would work out.

The prospective trust. The trust you extend before the evidence arrives.

Trust in your own instincts about what deserves your tending. Trust in the process even when the process is invisible. Trust in the seeds you have planted even when the ground still looks bare.

This is not blind faith. It is informed trust – built on the accumulation of your own experience, your own medicine, your own hard-won knowing about what grows in you and what doesn't.

You know your own garden.

You know what the dark earth of your life has been able to grow.

Trust that.

What Is Currently Untended

I want to ask you one more thing before we close this chapter.

What in your life is currently untended?

Not forgotten. Not abandoned. Just – quietly waiting. Patiently asking for attention you haven't yet been able to give. A dream you keep meaning to return to. A relationship you keep intending to nurture. A version of yourself you have been meaning to grow into when things settle down.

Things don't settle down.

You know this.

The tending happens in the middle of the unsettled. In the middle of the busy and the uncertain and the not-yet-ready.

The garden doesn't wait for convenient.

It grows or it doesn't, based on what it receives right now.

What does yours need right now?

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including what is growing in the dark.

Your Garden Reflection

Three questions. Take your time.

First – the honest audit:

What am I actually tending right now – and is it what I truly want to be growing?

Then – the choice:

What deserves the full depth of my attention that is currently receiving only the edges of it?

And finally – the trust:

What am I growing in the dark right now – what have I planted that I need to trust even though I cannot yet see it?

Your hands are already in the earth.

You have been tending more than you know.

Now tend it consciously.

With intention. With love. With the patient, unhurried trust of a woman who knows that what she plants in the dark will find its way to the light.

It always does.

Next – Chapter Eleven: The Heart.

The oldest homecoming there is – and what it means to finally arrive back to yourself.



The Heart

The Oldest Homecoming There Is



This is where it begins.

Two hands. One heart.

The oldest homecoming there is.

There is a homecoming that has nothing to do with geography.

No plane to catch. No road to drive. No physical distance to cross between where you are and where you are going.

Just a turning. A quiet, profound, sometimes agonisingly slow turning toward yourself.

Toward the woman who has been waiting – patiently, faithfully, without judgment – through all the years of busyness and achieving and becoming and performing and searching.

She was always there. She never left.

You are the one who has been away.

And this chapter is about coming home.

What Home Actually Means

I want to be careful here because the word home carries a lot of freight.

For some women it carries warmth and safety and the particular comfort of being known. For others it carries complexity – the homes of childhood that were not always safe, the homes they built that did not always hold, the concept of home as something perpetually sought but never quite arrived at.

I am not talking about any of those homes.

I am talking about something older and more fundamental.

The home that is your own self.

The place inside you – not metaphorical, actually felt in the body – where things are settled. Where the noise of other people's expectations and your own relentless self-improvement projects and the constant low-level anxiety of not-quite-enough goes quiet.

Where you are simply – yourself.

Not performing yourself. Not working on yourself. Not comparing yourself or improving yourself or justifying yourself.

Just yourself. Present. Sufficient. Home.

Most women have visited this place. Briefly. In moments of deep connection or profound creative absorption or the particular grace of an ordinary day that somehow, for no explicable reason, feels exactly right.

But visiting is different from living there.

And this chapter is about learning to live there.

Two Hands. One Heart.

The verse is spare. Deliberately so.

Two hands. One heart.

Not the grand gesture. Not the dramatic transformation. Not the moment of arrival after the long and heroic journey.

Just two hands. Your hands. Placed over your own heart.

The oldest gesture of self-compassion there is.

I want to ask you – when did you last do this? Not literally necessarily, though literally is powerful. But in the sense of turning your own care and attention and compassion toward yourself rather than always outward.

When did you last treat yourself with the same quality of presence and tenderness you offer to the people you love?

For most women the answer is – not often enough. Or – I'm not sure I know how. Or – it feels self-indulgent. Or – I'll do that when I've done everything else that needs doing first.

But here is what I have come to understand about self-compassion. About the quality of care we extend toward our own hearts.

It is not self-indulgence.

It is the foundation of everything else.

The woman who cannot be kind to herself cannot sustainably be kind to others. The woman who will not tend her own heart eventually has no heart left to give. The woman who treats herself as the last item on her own list discovers, eventually, that she has been slowly disappearing – not dramatically, not all at once, but in the small daily erosions of a life lived entirely in service of everything except herself.

Two hands. One heart.

It begins here.

The Voices That Make Homecoming Hard

I want to talk about the voices.

Because homecoming – returning to yourself, living in yourself, making your own heart the primary home you tend – is not as simple as it sounds. There are voices. Internal and external. Loud and quiet. Old and new.

The voice that says this is selfish. That a good woman puts others first. Always. Without exception. That her own needs are negotiable and everyone else's are not.

The voice that says you haven't earned it yet. That rest and self-compassion and the particular luxury of simply being are for women who have finished everything on the list. And the list, of course, is never finished.

The voice that says you don't deserve it. That voice usually arrived early, installed by someone who was not careful with your heart, and it has been running quietly in the background ever since – so familiar now that you barely notice it. But it shapes everything.

And the voice that says who do you think you are. To want this. To claim this. To make your own wholeness a priority.

I want to say something to all of those voices.

They are lying.

Not maliciously. Not even consciously. They are the residue of old learning, old wounds, old systems that were not designed with your flourishing in mind.

They are not the truth.

The truth is that your homecoming – your return to yourself, your commitment to living from your own centre – is not selfish. It is not indulgent. It is not something you need to earn.

It is the most important journey you will ever make.

And it is yours to make right now.

What Homecoming Feels Like

I want to try to describe something that is genuinely difficult to put into words.

The feeling of being home in yourself.

Not arrived-and-finished home. Not problem-solved-and-complete home. But the feeling of being in right relationship with yourself. Of having your internal and external life pointing in roughly the same direction. Of knowing who you are clearly enough that the world's noise – however loud – doesn't drown out your own signal.

It feels like – solidity. Like having ground under your feet even when everything around you is uncertain.

It feels like – spaciousness. Like there is room inside you. Room to think and feel and respond rather than always react.

It feels like – recognition. Like meeting yourself after a long absence and finding that you are glad to be reacquainted.

And sometimes – on the very best days – it feels like joy. Not the performed joy of someone who is doing fine thank you. But the deep, quiet, completely unperformative joy of a woman who is simply, genuinely, fully alive in her own life.

That is home.

And you deserve to live there.

The Practice of Coming Home

Homecoming is not a one-time event. It is a practice.

A daily – sometimes hourly – returning. Because life, in its relentless way, keeps pulling you out of yourself. Into other people's urgencies. Into old patterns and old stories and the habitual ways of being that developed as adaptations to environments that no longer exist.

The practice is noticing when you have left. And returning. Without drama. Without self-judgment. Without the exhausting narrative of I was doing so well and now look.

Just – noticing you are away. And turning back.

The way you might turn back toward a conversation you drifted from. Gently. Without making the drifting mean anything terrible about you.

Because the drifting is human. It will always happen.

What matters is the returning.

Again and again and again.

Two hands. One heart.

Every time.

What Becomes Possible From Home

I want to end this chapter by talking about what becomes possible – truly possible – from the ground of your own homecoming.

Because this journey – the Wild and Wise journey – is not ultimately about finding yourself and then retreating into some private sanctuary of self-knowledge. It is not about disappearing into introspection or becoming so focused on your own inner life that the outer world becomes irrelevant.

It is about the opposite.

The woman who is home in herself – who knows who she is, who has tended her own heart, who lives from her own centre – this woman is more available to the world. Not less.

She is more present in her relationships because she is not performing in them.

She is more effective in her work because she is not running on empty.

She is more generous with her gifts because she is giving from genuine abundance rather than the desperate need to be seen as good or valuable or enough.

She is more honest because she no longer needs to manage other people's perceptions of her at the expense of her own truth.

And she is more joyful. Not because her life is perfect. But because she is actually in it.

Present. Grounded. Home.

That is what becomes possible.

That is what the whole journey has been for.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including finding your way home.

Your Heart Reflection

Two questions. The most intimate ones in this whole book.

First:

When do I feel most at home in myself – and what conditions make that possible?

Sit with that. Notice what comes. These are clues about how to build more of that into your daily life.

And then – the one that matters most:

What would it mean to make my own heart the primary home I tend?

Not instead of loving others. Not at the expense of the relationships and work and commitments that matter to you.

But first. As the foundation from which everything else is offered.

Two hands. One heart.

Come home.

Next – Chapter Twelve: The Joy.

The final chapter. The arrival that isn't an arrival. And the most important question of all.



The Joy

This Is What Becoming Looks Like



This is what becoming looks like.

Not arriving.

Just this – arms wide, head back, completely alive.

We have been building toward this moment.

Not an ending. Not a conclusion. Not the satisfying resolution of a story that ties everything neatly together and sends you home with all your questions answered and all your uncertainties resolved.

This is not that kind of book.

And you are not that kind of woman.

You are the kind of woman who has read eleven chapters about dancing and fire and circles and paths and surrender and rivers and walking and medicine and gathering and gardens and homecoming – and arrived here not finished, but more yourself than you were when you began.

That is not a small thing.

That is everything.

What Joy Actually Is

We have complicated joy.

As a culture, as women, as people who have learned to be careful and responsible and measured in our expressions of feeling – we have made joy into something that requires justification.

I am allowed to feel this because I have earned it.

I am allowed to feel this because things are going well.

I am allowed to feel this because I have done enough to deserve it.

But joy – real joy, the kind the verse describes – does not require justification.

It does not arrive as a reward for sufficient achievement or adequate suffering or the correct quantity of personal growth. It is not a destination you reach at the end of a long enough journey.

It is available here. Now. In this moment. Not because everything is perfect or resolved or figured out. But because you are alive. Because you are here. Because you are, in this moment, present enough to feel it.

The verse doesn't say she arrived.

It says she is becoming.

Present tense. Ongoing. Alive in the process rather than waiting for the process to be complete before she allows herself to be fully in it.

That is the joy.

Arms Wide. Head Back.

I want to stay with the image in the verse for a moment.

Arms wide. Head back. Completely alive.

Not a careful joy. Not a contained or appropriate or socially calibrated joy.

The full-body, completely unguarded joy of a woman who has stopped managing how she appears and started actually feeling what she feels.

Think about the last time you felt something like that. The last time joy moved through you without being intercepted by the part of you that monitors how you are being perceived. The last time you laughed until you couldn't stop. Or danced without watching yourself. Or felt so deeply glad to be alive that your whole body registered it.

When was that?

If the answer is recent – good. More of that. More of whatever conditions made that possible.

If the answer is longer ago than you'd like – that is information. Important information. About what has been dampened. About what the Wild and Wise journey is really asking you to reclaim.

Because here is what I believe with everything I have learned and lived and discovered on this journey.

Joy is not a luxury.

Joy is not something you earn at the end of the hard work or the healing or the becoming.

Joy is the evidence that you are actually living your life rather than managing it.

And a life managed rather than lived is a slow, quiet tragedy that happens so gradually most women don't notice until they are standing somewhere in their fifties or sixties or seventies wondering where the aliveness went.

Don't let that be your story.

The Joy That Doesn't Wait

There is a particular kind of joy I want to name because I think it is the most important kind and the most overlooked.

It is not the joy of arrival. Of achievement. Of finally having the thing you were working toward.

It is the joy of the middle.

The joy available in the ordinary Tuesday. In the cup of tea that is exactly right. In the conversation that goes somewhere unexpected and true. In the moment when the light changes and the world becomes briefly, inexplicably beautiful and you are present enough to notice.

This joy does not require anything to be different than it is.

It requires only one thing.

Presence.

The willingness to actually be in your life as it is happening rather than perpetually in your head managing the next thing or reviewing the last thing or planning the future thing or worrying about the uncertain thing.

Presence.

It is both the simplest and the most difficult practice on this entire list.

And it is the one that unlocks everything else.

Because the woman who is present – actually, genuinely, bodily present in her own life – she finds joy everywhere. Not because her life is perfect. But because she is in it. Really in it. With her whole self.

That is the wildness. That is the wisdom. That is the becoming.

She Is Wild

I want to come back to these three words at the end because I think they are the whole book in miniature.

She is wild.

Not reckless. Not chaotic. Not the performed wildness of someone who has decided that wildness is her brand.

The wildness of something alive and uncontained. Of a woman who has stopped trimming herself to fit into spaces that were never designed for her full size. Who has reclaimed the parts of herself that were too much or too loud or too inconvenient or too honest for the rooms she was trying to belong in.

Who takes up exactly the space she actually takes up.

No more apologising for her existence.

No more making herself smaller so others can be comfortable.

Wild.

She Is Wise

She is wise.

Not the wisdom that comes from credentials or age or the performance of having figured things out.

The wisdom of lived experience. Of paying attention. Of sitting with difficulty long enough to understand what it was teaching. Of trusting her own knowing even when it couldn't be proven. Of learning – slowly, imperfectly, through many mistakes – to read the signals her own body and heart have always been sending.

The wisdom that was forged in exactly the hard places.

The wisdom that is entirely and specifically hers.

Hers.

She Is Becoming

And she is becoming.

Not arrived. Not finished. Not the completed version of herself that exists somewhere in a hypothetical future where everything has been figured out and all the work is done.

Becoming.

Right now. Today. In the middle of the uncertainty and the not-yet and the still-figuring-it-out.

This is the most important word in the whole collection.

Because becoming is not a problem to be solved. It is not a deficiency to be overcome. It is not the gap between who you are and who you should be.

Becoming is the aliveness itself.

The fact that you are still growing, still questioning, still moving toward things that matter, still refusing to be finished or fixed or fully explained – this is not your limitation.

This is your life.

This is the joy.

What Comes Next

I want to say something about what comes after you close this book.

Because books end. This one is ending now. And the question that matters is not what happened in the chapters – the question that matters is what you do with the morning after.

The Wild and Wise journey does not happen in the reading.

It happens in the living.

In the small, daily, sometimes barely perceptible choices to show up as yourself rather than the managed version. To trust your instincts rather than override them. To tend

what you love rather than what is expected. To step into the rivers that are calling you rather than waiting until you are ready. To let the fire speak rather than dampening it to keep the peace.

It happens in the moments nobody sees.

When you choose your own path over the prescribed one. When you find the circle that can hold your full flame. When you kneel down and gather what is already growing rather than endlessly searching for what is missing. When you come home to yourself – again and again, as many times as it takes – and discover that home has been waiting for you all along.

None of this is done.

All of it is possible.

Right now.

Today.

Your Wild and Wise Statement

This is the final reflection. The one the whole book has been building toward.

Not a question this time. A statement.

Your statement. Written in your own words. The fullest, most honest answer you have ever given to the question that started all of this.

Who are you right now?

Not who were you. Not who will you be when everything is figured out and the becoming is complete.

Who are you right now. Today. This version. This moment.

Write it down.

Don't make it tidy. Don't make it impressive. Don't write the version you think sounds best or most enlightened or most together.

Write the true one.

And know that next month, next year, in the next season of your life – the answer might be different. And that is not failure. That is the whole point.

You are wild. You are wise. You are becoming.

And that is more than enough.

It always was.

Everything good takes exactly the time it needs.

Including you.

Including this.

Including the life that is waiting – right now – to be fully, joyfully, unapologetically lived.

She is wild. She is wise. She is becoming.



KEEP GOING

Your Free Workbook

You have read the story. Now it is time to write your own.

The Wild and Wise Workbook gathers every reflection from this book into one place: the questions from Still Becoming, a section for each of the twelve Wild and Wise chapters, the Wild and Wise Declaration, and room to write the true version of who you are today. Print it, write in it, come back to it.



erikaentz.com/workbook

Scan the code or visit the link, enter your email, and your workbook will arrive in your inbox.

WHERE THE BOOK ENDS AND THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The Wild and Wise Method™

The twelve chapters of Part Two are not just a story. They are a framework.

The Wild and Wise Method is built on the same twelve themes – The Dance, The Fire, The Circle, The Path, The Surrender, The River, The Walk, The Medicine, The Gathering, The Garden, The Heart and The Joy – each explored in depth through guided practice, honest conversation, and the particular kind of work that only happens when someone is fully seen.

WWM is available as:

The WWM Course – a self-paced online journey through the twelve modules, in your own time.

WWM Group Journey – a cohort-based program for women moving through the twelve modules together, in community.

One on One with Erika – a private, deeply personal coaching journey for the woman ready to go all the way in.

This is not another self-help course. It is a methodology built from the inside out – from a woman who has lived every chapter, not just written it.

If something in this book stopped you. If a question landed somewhere real. If you closed these pages feeling more like yourself than when you opened them – the Wild and Wise Method is where that goes next.

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About the Author



Erika Entz is a Business Systems and Operations Strategist, coach, mentor and author with more than twenty years of international experience across Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Ireland.

Born in Hungary and shaped by a life lived across cultures and continents, Erika brings a distinctly human lens to everything she does – whether she's helping trade businesses build systems that actually work, or helping women find their way back to themselves.

Her philosophy is simple: systems exist to serve people, not the other way around. That same people-first thinking runs through every page of this book.

Erika is the creator of The Firefly Effect™, the Trade Like a Viking™ consulting philosophy and the Wild and Wise Method™, a coaching methodology built from lived experience, not theory. She is a 2026 Beam Awards Silver Winner for Support Service Business of the Year, and a qualified coach and mentor.

She lives in rural Queensland, Australia, where the land has taught her more about patience, resilience and trust than any course ever could.

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Also by Erika Entz

Stop. Think. System.

A Practical Guide for Trade Operations

Trade Like a Viking™

The Viking Code™: 11 Principles for Building a Trade Business That Runs Without You

The Wild and Wise Workbook

The free companion to this book · erikaentz.com/workbook

What happens when you follow everyone else's script for success, only to discover it was never yours to begin with?

Born in Hungary and shaped by the immigrant experience across multiple countries, Erika Entz built what looked like an impressive life: two decades of international consulting, corporate achievement, the markers of "making it." But beneath the polished exterior, a question grew louder: *Is this really who I'm meant to be?*

Part One, Still Becoming, is about the courage it takes to step away from family expectations and familiar paths, and about leaving the corporate world for rural Queensland, where wide open spaces finally gave room to question, to breathe, and to begin discovering an authentic self.

Part Two, Wild and Wise, is what came next: the moment she finally recognised who she actually is, told through twelve chapters from *The Dance* to *The Joy*.

For anyone who has ever felt the gap between who they are and who they're supposed to be, this book offers permission to stay unfinished, to keep questioning, and to trust that your truest life might look nothing like the one you planned.

