

ISSUE 07

2026

CALLA

MAGAZINE

Snow ON THE BEACH

CHRISTY
HOWITT

FOUNDER + AUTHOR

THE PLACE OUR LIGHT &
DARK COME OUT TO
PLAY

OUR LIGHT IS OUR POWER &
OUR DARK IS OUR MAGIC -
THESE STORIES WEAVE
AROUND BOTH



CALLA

MAGAZINE

A BRANCH OF CALLA
CREATIVE STUDIO PRESS

Published by Calla Creative Studio Press
May, 2026
Ontario, Canada
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EDITOR'S NOTE

WELCOME TO THE BEACH, MY FRIEND

THE BEACH IS A PLACE we associate with frivolousness. Stunning views and breezy moments. It's usually hot, it's mostly relaxing, it's where our imagination lives. So *imagine* then, snow cascading down onto a sandy expanse. The same place, cast in a layer of cold, the whole scene transformed. I've loved this metaphor ever since our friend Taylor sang about it. Snow falling in a place where it's not expected is a moment that feels impossible, surreal, beautiful, like life captured in stillframe. It's also reflective of our inner worlds, our divine feminine, our shadows. One side exists because of the other and that's duality, the contrast of our light and dark. *Our light is our power, our dark is our magic.*

This new issue is about exploring the depths of this, and I've been so excited to share these new stories with you! I am thrilled to get into some sultry dark feminine, some sunny earth medicine, unravelling the layers right alongside you. The more you embody your sun and your moon, the more aglow your life will become. You are multifaceted and my hope is that these stories help you remember your brilliance, exactly as you are. Enjoy issue 07.

Love,

-Christy



Christy Howitt

FOUNDER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

OUR FEATURED AUTHORS

POETRY

MARSTON FRIES

ROBYN EADIE

SWATI FLETCHER

ANYA BLOCK

CHRISTY HOWITT

JESSICA LOUISE PHILLIPS

NON FICTION

JENNIFER SICOLI

SHANNON LEIS

LISA HOHENADEL

ELISE FOSTER

WHITLEY ROSE

FICTION

KYLIE DITTON

ERIN MONTGOMERY

MARISSA VELLE

ANNA TOWNES

CHRISTY HOWITT



POETRY

MARSTON FRIES

Formerly a Finance Executive on Wall Street, Marston is a quantum spiritual guide, multidimensional channel, medium, and extraterrestrial contactee and emissary. She is focused on facilitating consciousness expansion and healing at the quantum level, and supporting individuals in their alchemy of transmuting pain, trauma, and fear into purpose, authentic alignment, and power. Her goal is to empower people to embody the authenticity of their Entelechy - the actualization of their soul's potential - through rewiring programming and conditioning, transcending fear, and expanding their consciousness into new horizons.

Prior to fully stepping into her soul mission and purpose, she led a prominent and successful career in the Investment Management industry, most recently serving as Vice President of one of the world's largest Asset Managers. In her tenure, she served as a business consultant and investment expert for the country's leading institutions and banks, working within the retail space of asset management. A prominent public speaker and consultant, she translates her natural leadership skills into her work today, dedicated to healing humanity and expanding the collective consciousness into higher densities, dimensions, and interstellar planes of existence.

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THE COSMIC

DUO

Marston Fries

Life and death are a cosmic duo
taking turns, like the sun and moon
one does not outshine the other
the flow of the current always in tune
no need to swim upstream
no need to resist
no need to hurry
no need to persist.

Both are tones of my consciousness
notes played in my heart
a melody to the expression
of my being
played part by part
the orchestra of the universal opera
where the melodies are made whole
infinitely playing the symphony of the soul.



ROBYN EADIE

Robyn is a graduate of Conestoga College, in Kitchener, Ontario. She enjoys hobby photography and writing poetry. She leans into poetry as a lovely way to express words and emotions, especially the ones we don't know how to say out loud.

IG: @opichi.photography



BOXES

IN THE HALL

Robyn Eadie

Gathering up memories
we shared.

Making sure I've got them all.

Packing them softly
leaving them in boxes.

Boxes in the hall.



SWATI FLETCHER

Career coach by day and storyteller by night, Swati found her way to writing through a lifelong love for reading and the vivid, emotional world of Bollywood movies. Despite building a career in the corporate world, Swati has always been drawn to the complexity of relationships and the quiet power of imaginary worlds. As a second-generation immigrant, she is particularly interested in stories that explore themes of belonging, expectations, and self-discovery. She is currently working on her debut novel while documenting her journey on her podcast, *Drafts & Divination*, and is also developing a collection of her poetry. When she's not writing or contemplating life's big questions, she can be found hiking new trails, biking, doing some sort of arts and crafts, or obsessing over her two cats.
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Podcast: *Drafts & Divination*

BABY SHOWERS

Swati Fletcher

How do I feel? Meeting my friends' babies?
Showering those close to me with
gifts from their registry?
A constant reminder
of what I do not have.
A billboard in my face,
its a subtle but lethal attack.

I paint on my brightest smile
my most authentic *"Congrats!"*
"It's a beautiful next chapter,"
I say while conscious
of my infertile factor.

They may never comprehend
the strength and courage I mustered up
to celebrate a friend.

How do I feel? Meeting my friends' babies?
Showering those close to me with
gifts from their registry?
A silent suffering,
no one knows I am struggling
so I keep them wondering,
my head and heart thundering,
body trembling
when they ask if I'll ever be parenting
and have a plan to be expecting.

I only pray for a miracle hereafter
I mustered up courage for this disaster?

I know it is not their fault,
but why must they verbally assault
with their constant questioning
and societal reckoning

How do I feel? Meeting my friends' babies?
Showering those close to me with
gifts from their registry?
I touch up my brightest smile,
stay at the shower a little while
pretend I'm not envious of a friend
and their happily ever after.



Feeling a little guilty, not wanting sympathy
wishing I could move out of this wretched city.

Made the mistake once,
telling my troubles to a friend
they offered supplements and eluded
I wasn't trying hard enough.



I'm shown kind vigilance
disguised in insolence
no one knows this, but I have great
motherly instincts.

They say my life's easy
my cats aren't actually my babies,
but good that they keep me busy
I was appointed the Chairman of
the No-Baby Committee.

So, how do I feel? Meeting my friends' babies?
Showering those close to me with
gifts from their registry?
I pray all these people will one day
be educated
on the pain and turmoils
of infertility.

They may never comprehend
the strength and reverence
I have for myself
every time I leave the house
to celebrate a friend.

For now, I occupy my time
with endless hobbies,
waiting patiently for my time
hoping one day,
it will be me on this
"exciting new journey".

ANYA BLOCK

Anya Block is a writer committed to truth, using language to foster honesty and connection. Her work explores the depths of human experience, with a focus on self-expression and its power to transform how we relate to one another. Beyond the page, she is a mother and relationship coach, attuned to the unseen dynamics that shape how we love.

IG: @anyastaysia

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Anya Block

To live is brutal;
excruciating.
Something worthy of pain pills
I would swallow gladly
if it could numb the screams
my eardrums hold.

From who, I'm not sure.

It feels collective—
this hunger for more from life,
and at the same time,
less.

Banish the absurdity
that floods my eyes
until I can see
clear as sunlight on sand,
burning my feet.

It's a conundrum, isn't it?
To have everything you
ever wanted
and still ask for less.

He grabbed my hand
like I'd been wishing for a
thousand moons

and I slipped away
as if oil coated my palms

but it was only my blood
I was protecting.

It's hard to be alive
to feel this deeply
and know
you can't edit, delete, submit,
or rewind.

"Erase my past,"
I whisper to the man behind
the curtain

but the scene keeps playing



and I stand here,
baffled by the steps
my feet have taken.

I feed it into AI, and
ask for something more
digestible—

but it still returns:

you.

This is what made you.

I twirl for the audience—
an abstract canvas
of scars and stories wrapped
in smiles

and they applaud...

I'm in the bath now,

silent.



CHRISTY HOWITT

Christy is the Founder of Calla Magazine and Calla Creative Studio Press. She is the author of *Heartsand*, *Sunwild* and *Using Your Intuition to Write Audaciously*, and adores fiction, abstract art, intuitive painting, and holding space for others to tell their stories. She offers 1:1 sessions, coaching, channeled readings and Spirit Art.

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SHADOWS

IN THE SUNSHINE

Christy Howitt

There was a time where all we wanted to do
was escape to the beach
to bask our souls in a sun too hot
to revel and dance in this kind of reprieve.
Because this pocket by the water was sacred.
It was ours.
It was a world we could hold in our hands.
The picture frame for our moments caught in gold shimmer.
The platform where big visions took fold.
The sound of the water the rhythm we created from.

Because all we wanted seemed to happen here
seemed possible here
even when it didn't happen right there
it did.
The sand was where we were, all along
in our minds, longing for this colour of joy.

So when shadows came and cold moved in
and we were left looking for the sun that fueled us
it felt like losing the path, misplacing the way
and the sand didn't hold the same softness.
When your sacred place feels different
cast in a darker glow
the world becomes tilted
the air sharper
until you feel it
the ways the shadows offer glimpses
of your own magic
your own mystery
your own magnetism.

For, when the sun isn't blinding
and we weren't distracted by the frivolousness
our own truths became clear
and we realized
we get to hold both
the effervescent lightness of the beach in full sun
and the whispering shadows that reveal our own magic.



We were always trying to get to the beach
like catching blissful days in our hands
and then slowly
all at once
we started catching, holding, savouring
the other days too
equal in their weight of illumination.

JESSICA LOUISE PHILLIPS

Jessica is a deep thinker and big feeler who finds expression through the written word to be the most therapeutic and creative outlet. She guides others to channel their grief through letters and poetry, or to share their stories and reconnect with the beauty of life through writing. As a free-spirited soul and nature-lover, she enjoys travelling to different lands and wandering through the fictional world of books. You can connect with Jessica via www.withopenwings.com or by emailing jessica@withopenwings.com

THE FOLLOWING POETRY has been selected from a collection of over 80 poems, spanning a ten month period of alchemising grief from ghosting. Taken from an evolving poetry workbook, to share with those who also find themselves in such a predicament. To the ones seeking understanding and solace. Those desiring a sense of peace and closure. The many of us wishing to let go and move on.

It has been birthed in honour of my own journey, but also as an offering for those navigating similar waters. The ones who might be desiring a companion right now, along what can often be a lonely, challenging, and even sometimes, torturous road.

I believe these things happen for our greatest rising. But first we feel, we write, we move, we dance, we shake, we grieve, we cry it out. Until we start to find acceptance & forgiveness, first and foremost for ourselves. Until we begin to make sense of it all. Until we recognise, and even appreciate the lessons and gifts amidst the depths. Until we can fully, wholeheartedly return to ourselves. And from there, the path that awaits and our magic that's eager to return and come out to play, can truly reveal itself. The best really is yet to come.

I invite you to notice the change in tone from the poem written at the start of this journey, to one almost a year on. Some people might tell you to just "get over it", but to my sweet, sensitive ones, the empaths, those anxiously attached, the neurodivergent souls, anyone who has already faced deep hurt in the past, I see you. I encourage you to pick up a pen. *Let Us Alchemise and Rise Together.*

To join the waitlist to be notified when Jessica's poetry workbook is published this summer by Calla Creative Studio Press, along with other publications, email *waitlist* to jessica@withopenwings.com

THE GOLDEN

THREAD

Jessica Louise Phillips

GOLDEN THREAD
07 OCT 2024

I just want to hold you
And hear how you are.
And if you're good
I want to celebrate with you.
And if you're not
I want to be your confidante.

But the energy of wanting gets me nowhere
So I keep leaning into trust
Of both our paths,
Despite the pang of longing in my heart and stomach.

It's like an ache and a burn
The only way to subside it
Is to cry and hold myself,
As if I'm holding you,
Or as if you're holding me.

My physical vessel is on the move,
Moving forwards
Constantly.
But my heart, mind and soul are tethered in ways to the past,
To you.

If I keep journeying,
Perhaps the cord will eventually snap
And we'll both be free.
For now there's still parts of me
That hopes that cord is more like a bungee rope,
In that the further I pull away
The stronger I'll catapult back into your world
And arms.

Whatever happens
I think I'll choose to see it as a golden thread
A significant piece woven into each other's future tapestry and
stories.
At least for me.



CLARITY OR CONFUSION
16 JAN 2025

Another tidal wave
Out of the blue.

I thought I was making progress
This one is so bad I don't want to get out
of bed today.

8 months on.
8?!

It feels like yesterday
The pain so fresh and raw.

Anger
Hurt
Confusion
Frustration
Deep sadness.

The same old
Looping round.

Injustice
Regret
Not knowing
Wondering...

Pain so tight in my chest
My breath is so shallow
The deepest inhale can't seem to fill my lungs
at the moment.

Fatigue
Apathy
Questioning my own sanity.

Apparently all symptoms
Of a twin flame separation
Or was it a false flame
Or a karmic soul mate?

Oh I don't know
I'm not sure I care anymore.

I don't know what it was
Or what it is
Apart from a concoction
Of such parallels and polarities
I am eternally confused.

And perhaps,
That's clarity
In itself.



MY HEART
20 JAN 2025

I wish I could take out my heart
And hold it in my hands
And cradle it
And let it know that I am here.

And remind myself that
Love exists within me
Always beating beating beating
And that it's all around
And it will always come back to each of us
Maybe in a different form
Or from a different source
To the one we gave it out to.

But it will always return
For it endlessly exists.

I CHOOSE LOVE
22 APRIL 2025

And into the field of my mind you came
Flying through
Once again
Seemingly out of nowhere.

Five minutes later
Maybe a little more
The song
That I'm sure will forever remind me
Of you

Playing from a bar or restaurant in the streets
Of the Old Town.

And later
Hearing it again
No surprises
Your energy feels prominent
Right now.

Less than a fortnight
Until a year will have passed
Of our reunion
In this lifetime.

The sadness
That still washes over
At how short
Our meeting
And how seemingly painful
Our separation.

At least physically
Mentally
Emotionally
Energetically
For me.

Still tied to you
In so many ways
No amount of cord cutting
Will change that.

But an acceptance
A surrender
A knowing that it's all unfolded
Exactly as it was meant to.

I'm sure I've written these lines before
But a slight sweetness
And contentedness
Laces the sadness now
That I experienced our encounter.

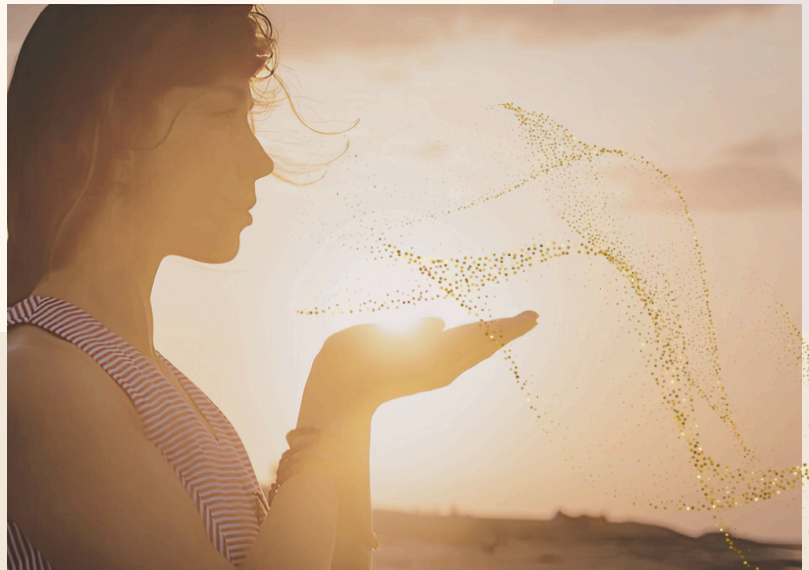
Fond memories
An unconditional love
I feel towards your soul.

A gratitude for you
For self
That I made it through
Without closure
Without answers
Without understanding.
Without knowing exactly for sure
Without a goodbye.
Ooph.

I have so much to be thankful for
And look forward to
Which I am
And I do
Yet the tears still flow.

Honouring it all
Grief is a funny thing
Sometimes a beautiful, strange,
Bittersweet ebb and flow.

Whatever is real
Whatever the truth
Whoever you are
I choose love
Towards you
Towards me.



NON FICTION

JENNIFER SICOLI

Jennifer Sicoli is a Shamanic Practitioner, Certified Psychic Medium, Reiki Master and Meditation Teacher whose work is rooted in Earth-Based Spirituality and European Shamanism. After a near-death experience catalyzed her own healing path, she now walks alongside others as an intuitive guide offering compassionate spaces for spiritual connection, ancestral healing and soul embodiment.

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REMEMBERING

THROUGH YOU

Jennifer Sicoli



The music begins softly. Your body sways before you even realize you've started moving. There's a moment where your mind quiets and **something older takes over.**

Your breath deepens.
Your body opens.

And then, you feel it.

Not just your own energy but something behind you, beside you, **within you.**

The ones who have walked before you.
The ones whose blood and stories live in your body.
The ones who are still teaching, still guiding, **still remembering through you.**

And suddenly, you're not doing this alone.

You're being met.
Held.
Remembered.

There are moments when the veil thins, not somewhere outside of you, but within you.

Moments when **your body becomes the doorway.**
When memory is not something you think about, but something that moves through you.

And the more you listen,
the more you soften,
the more you allow,
the more you begin to recognize this feeling.

Not as something new,
but as *something known*.

Something ancient.
Something yours.

A return that happens slowly, over time.
A **remembering that deepens** each time you
meet it.

A quiet reclaiming of what has always been
within you.

A soft awakening of your inner light,
carried through generations,
alive in you now.

This is how they return.
Not as something separate from you but as
something that has always lived within you,
waiting to be felt again.

And this is how you come home.
Not all at once,
but breath by breath,
step by step.

Returning to yourself and your roots.
Remembering yourself a part of a loving
lineage, woven together, deeply connected
and never alone.



SHANNON LEIS

Shannon is a multi-passionate artist at heart and is drawn to working with the subtle magic in everyday moments. She is always looking to nature to learn about love, beauty, creativity, and how to become more like them in her own journey to self love. Her artistic expression is integral to her healing and wellbeing, and evolves along with her as it explores the interconnectedness of her inner and outer worlds. It navigates both dreams of a beautiful future, as well as honest inner explorations with a creative curiosity to reconnect, feel, and weave gold out of what was once lost.
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A PORTAL

TO LOVE

Shannon Leis

I try to put down roots
In the wrong environment.
In a place where I feel and remember, to let go of what is
Heavy before walking
Towards **the soil where I can really bloom.**
But still I tried
Desperate for nourishment
Trying to make the sand into something it wasn't.
Wishing for desires fulfilled. Not accepting
The sand for what it is.

Like snow on a beach.
Forcing something to grow in a place not built for that
purpose.

The waters lap gently around my ankles, an invitation.
Let go of what no longer serves.
But it feels like frozen knives against the scorching sun
soaked sand.
So I freeze.
Desperately clinging onto what I'm not ready to let go of.
Not ready to face who or what I'd be without.
And the snow blows in heavy with winter weight.

But still **I can feel the golden glow** dancing all around.
Creating change as its state of perpetual being.

And so I finally trust and *let go*.
Feeling naked without
The comfort of what I once knew.
Chilled to the bone when the Arctic breeze returns.

Again I freeze
Feeling unprepared
For conditions I've never been in.
In this state
I go within desperately searching for
My own inner fire
That can show me a path forward
While the icy exterior remains. Protects.

Snow slowly melts from the dim warmth that remains
within.
Turning to ice as it travels the wind between root and
earth.
The only thing that tethers me to the sand worn stone.



The victim of my own storm. Frozen in time.
Going inward to tend to what was forgotten.
A portal of love that sparks the new life of Spring.
Woven into a new golden tapestry
That invites the ice and snow
To return to the ocean and dance
With the inner south winds that breathe
New life into all they greet.
As the stars reflected
Above and below
Twinkle in celebration.



LISA HOHENADEL

Lisa Hohenadel is a compassionate therapeutic coach with over 15 years of experience in the mental health field and specialized training as a Dialectical Skills Group facilitator. She supports women who are contemplating ending their fertility journey without a baby or navigating a childless not by choice life. Drawing from her personal experience of miscarriage, failed fertility treatments, and choosing a childless life, Lisa combines professional expertise with lived experience to help women find acceptance and rediscover joy. She offers practical tools and emotional support to manage triggers, set boundaries, and heal from grief. Lisa is the creator of *Finding Clarity: A Guide to Ending Fertility Treatment with more Peace & Empowerment*. Her mission is to provide a safe space for women to feel seen, validated, and supported as they redefine their dreams and embrace a fulfilling life.
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FINDING UNEXPECTED BEAUTY

IN A LIFE WITHOUT CHILDREN

Lisa Hohenadel

For as long as I can remember, I dreamed of being a mother. **I pictured little hands reaching for mine,** first words, first steps, family traditions, and a house filled with laughter. When that dream slipped away after my husband and I decided to end fertility treatment without a baby, I thought life would always feel empty. **I worried joy had passed me by, and I no longer knew who I was outside of that identity.** I would often find myself looking at photos of myself before infertility and envy who that woman was—the one who never knew the pain of miscarriage, chemical pregnancies, endless fertility treatments that didn't work, and the constant feelings of loss and disappointment.

I thought that life without children would always feel this way, that this was just my new normal.

But here's the surprise I never saw coming: life without children can still be beautiful. It's just a different kind of beautiful than I expected. Different, yes. Painful at times, absolutely. But also richer and more meaningful in ways I never imagined.

Not becoming a mother didn't erase my ability to nurture, love, or create lasting memories. **Instead, those qualities began showing up in unexpected places.** I felt it in the joy of taking my nieces away for a weekend adventure, watching their excitement become my own. I found it on long walks with my dogs, where peace settled in with every breath of fresh air. I discovered it in spontaneous drives with my husband, with no destination in mind, just **the comfort of being together on roads we'd never traveled.** The beauty of life didn't disappear when motherhood didn't happen. It simply found new expressions.

There are still moments that sting—family milestones missed, the silence of what might have been, the sweetness of imagining my husband making our child giggle, being called, 'Mommy,' or a home cluttered with toys. In the beginning, finding beauty or joy "seemed" impossible. I often felt isolated, misunderstood, and left out, unsure of how to manage the daily triggers that surfaced.



But over time, I learned how to honor my grief and pain. **And slowly, even in the hardest of seasons, joy found a way to slip in**—the key was to allow it, to be open to its return. I saw glimpses of it while dancing the night away at my cousin's wedding. Laughing with my husband at a comedy show until my cheeks ached. Cozy weekends glamping in our trailer with friends and family. **The snowy quiet of this different life.** If someone had told me, during the thick of infertility treatments, that I would one day feel joy and contentment again, I never would have believed them. And yet here I am—living a life I truly love and feel grateful for.

What surprised me most was how much strength I found in the darker spaces of this journey. Living without the children I longed for felt, at first, like stepping into a void—a version of womanhood that few talk about. *It was raw, complicated, and messy.* **And yet, that darkness became a teacher.** It's where my resilience grew, where I learned to honor my grief instead of running from it, and where I began to see myself not as "less than" but as someone carrying wisdom forged from unimaginable heartbreak.



Resilience has shown up in the ways I've dared to dream again, even when it felt scary. Joy has surprised me in ordinary moments—gathering around a campfire under the stars, or speaking to nurses about how to better support women ending their fertility journey without a baby. Fulfillment has come through deep conversations with people who truly “get it”, traveling to places I never thought I'd see, and creating meaningful work that supports others walking this same path.

I've discovered a deep sense of joy and purpose in giving back to women navigating infertility and childlessness in a way I never experienced before. By speaking openly and honestly about my journey, feelings, and needs, I've not only found healing for myself but also strengthened connections with my husband, extended family, and close friends. **I no longer hide behind a mask of fake smiles**—I share when I feel hurt, unseen, or misunderstood. I've learned to set boundaries, *protect my heart*, and take space when I need it—while above all, choosing **to love this new version of me** unconditionally.

This journey has shown me that while I didn't get the ending I hoped for, my story didn't end.

It's still unfolding—filled with beauty, connection, and possibility. I can't point to one single turning point when I shifted from deep loss to acceptance, but I do know this: *I didn't give up. I chose a new path—one that focused on healing rather than hoping.* A path that allowed me to rebuild joy, reconnect in my marriage, and begin imagining a life I could love

again, even if it looked different from the one I had planned.

No, it's not the life I imagined. But it is *a life that matters*. Every day, it reminds me that **love, joy, and meaning aren't limited to one version of family—or one definition of womanhood.**

There is freedom here.

Space to define what family, love, and purpose mean on my own terms. Beauty in creating a life that looks different than I once dreamed, but one that still holds laughter, adventure, and connection.

Over the course of my journey, **I've learned that life after infertility is not a blank space—it's an open canvas.** I found passions in myself I never knew existed, a side of myself I never knew, and a strength that surprised me.

Yes, being childless not by choice feels strange and painful.

I often feel like I'm living in a world that doesn't quite make sense. But now I see it can also be *deeply beautiful*. It has opened space for reinvention, for new kinds of love, and for joy that is no less real because it's different. It's weird. It's not what I planned. And it's still mine—and it's still fucking beautiful.



ELISE FOSTER

Elise Foster is an intuitive who uses her gift of claircognizance to navigate all avenues of her world. She loves markets, books that leave you thinking long after the last page, crisp ocean air, and deepening into how magnetic life can be when you lean into exactly who you are.

KNOWINGS

THAT REWROTE SELF TRUST

Elise Foster

When I was a small girl, I was told the things I felt were different than what I knew to be true. I *knew things* from a very young age. And by this I mean things I had no business knowing, things I *couldn't* have known. I'd tell my mother and watch the shock flit across her face, blooming into confusion and traces of fear. Her little bubbly four-year-old had knowledge that Grandma was about to pass, could tell that the neighbour was lying, **knew things about her she'd worked hard to shield her from**. For, I knew my quiet, guarded mother had lost her job. Without ever having heard any of this spoken aloud.

"Who told you that, Ellie?" Mom would demand each and every time I shared what I knew with her, and I often felt like I'd done something wrong, like my secret knowledge was a bad thing, **something little girls weren't supposed to have**.

I'd shrug. I didn't have an answer because the answer was *no one*. No one had told me any of it. I *just knew*. And I didn't know *how* I knew. I didn't have explanations.

One day, when I was seven, Mom was picking me up from school on an overcast afternoon in May and I told her that my friend Sarah was going to hurt her arm and should leave the playground right away. I was upset and rightfully so, bursting into frantic tears that sent Mom into panic mode, her curly auburn hair flying everywhere in the wind. **She didn't know how to handle my knowings**, as I heard her call them on the phone to my aunt Sheryl one evening.

"Ellie, please. We have to go home now. Sarah will be alright." She tugged on my hand and led my flailing, resisting body into our little awaiting car.

We both knew she wouldn't be.
We both knew I'd be right.

But she didn't know what to do with the knowledge I passed on to her, having nowhere to put it.

A few days later, Sarah returned to school with a cast on her arm. She'd fallen from the monkey bars and



sustained a fracture.

She was okay. She was on the mend.

But I wasn't.

I was outraged Mom had not taken me seriously.
Even at that young age, the injustice landed hard.

I was told that accidents happen.

I was told it was simply my over-concern for my friends.

That I needed to worry about *me*, first and foremost and stop caring so much about other people's business.

I was told to disregard the truth I knew so strongly my young **bones felt heavy with the knowledge**, like they understood the weight of my accuracy.



As I grew, **the knowings stayed with me, but I stopped trusting them**, Mom's voice ringing louder than my own intuition and my inner monologue became clouded, became small and trickier to decipher. My knowings became silly nudges that were not meant to be spoken about because that would make me different, that would draw attention, and we didn't want *that*. We wanted to be agreeable, liked, understood, **and a girl who knew what she shouldn't could be none of those things**. Mom's voice was more pronounced than my own most days, long after I'd left home.

Now, as a full grown woman, I'd found my way back to trusting myself again. I reconnected with the four-year-old who knew her Grandma was about to transition, and **trusted her wisdom**. Trusted how much she, that little me, trusted herself, even when given information she had no business having. When there was no proof, no validation, that little girl knew how to have blind faith, despite the ways her gift was shut down, time after time.

Because that's what it was back then and that's what *it is* now. **A gift I'd found my way back to**, that had been with me all along.

Embracing my *knowings* has saved my own life more times than I can count. From leaving toxic jobs, to driving a different route for no apparent reason, to sharing information with friends when it was in their best interest to hear it. These said friends live for my knowings now, and instead of running from the nudges that always showed me the way, I listen. I am not always understood, but I've found something infinitely more important than that. Myself. **I never needed understanding, I just needed the okay, from myself, to live as who I was always meant to be.**

I was told what I knew wasn't what I knew. For far too long I was taught not to trust myself. But now, I do. Now, this trust is the greatest asset I have.



WHITLEY ROSE

Whitley is not your average therapist - she's a bridge between worlds. She holds a Master's Degree in Transpersonal Psychology and has over a decade of experience guiding others through deep, multidimensional healing. Her work is rooted in clinical training and ancient wisdom, blending modalities like mindfulness, EMDR, energy healing, hypnosis, and psychedelic integration with the sacred arts of witchcraft and ritual. As a practicing witch, professional tarot reader and astrologer for over a decade, she's walked between the veils and helped others reclaim their power through intuitive guidance, spellwork, dreamwork, and spirit connection. She doesn't just offer insight - she holds space for you to activate your own magic, tune into your inner knowing, and align with the rhythms of your mind, body and soul. When you're ready to cross the threshold, she'll be there.

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THE IN BETWEEN

Whitley Rose

I don't know who I am in this moment and it's terrifying. Things are morphing and changing at a speed I can't keep up. Motherhood has completely shifted everything I once knew and I feel lost in no man's land.

*I miss her. **The part of me I once knew. The pieces of her that felt so familiar.*** She was safe and predictable. Things feel lost without her. Like a boat navigating through a stormy sea with nothing but a life jacket. I am barely hanging on without her by my side.

The anger seems to come fast and furious. The sleep is forever fleeting. My body crippling from over stimulation. My ears ringing from all the constant noise and movement. **Sometimes I still get a glimpse of her** and her softness. She feels like a warm safe hug. She isn't around much anymore so I soak in every second that she is. Everyday I ask what I can do to bring her back. She is like the ex that you will never stop loving.

I can't stop thinking about her life. Like the way she could just get up and go somewhere. Or the way she could shower when she needed it. Or the way she could drink her coffee hot in the mornings. **She had a beautiful life and I don't think she even realized it.** What I would do to have her back.

No one tells you that becoming a mother requires a quiet death. Not of the self, but of the version of you who could live untouched by this kind of love. And by letting her go, life became full of living. Living by the belly laughs and the full vocal screams. Living by the snuggles and tight squeeze. Living by the, "I love you so much!" and, "you're the best." **Life became a full vibration never skipping a beat.**

I became someone's entire world and they became mine.

An act of sacred devotion.
A holy initiation into the vibration of love.
A love beyond measure.
A love that is so big you can't even explain it.
A love that mends the heart.
A love that softens any rage.
A love that is unconditional.

I miss her and I love you.
In her, I found you.
But more so, in *you*, I found me.



These are the moments I call the in-between.

Motherhood is the threshold where identity dissolves and devotion becomes its own form of worship. Somewhere between loving and madness.

Between lost and found.

A place where living is multi-dimensional and we are pushed to our edge in every capacity.

And just when you feel like you might crack, **love saves you.** You realize that love is the way. It is all that exists beyond measure! It is our purpose here. And it is our purpose when we leave.

The in-between.

This is the holy ground where the woman I was and the mother I am becoming meet, bow to each other, and bless the path ahead.



FICTION

KYLIE DITTON

Kylie Ditton is an intuitive essence coach, Holistic Sound Healer and the founder of Aletheia Collective. As a special needs mom, her journey has been one of reflection, resilience, and discovering the power of reconnecting with her true self. Drawing on her passion for self-discovery, she helps others embrace their inner light and uncover their unique essence.
IG: @_aletheiacollective

THE DAUGHTER

OF WINTER TIDE

Kylie Ditton



There is an old tale whispered in the places where fire cannot reach. It speaks of a girl who was not born in any season, but in the space between them **when winter had not fully ended and summer had not fully begun.**

The story says her first breath was taken on a shore where snow fell upon the sea. The villagers who found her thought it an omen. The ocean had cast up driftwood, bones, and seaweed before but never a child. Wrapped in white frost, she was neither shivering nor crying, only watching **with eyes the color of the storm.** They carried her inland, away from the strangeness of the beach, but she never belonged there.

From the beginning, she was different.

The sun made her restless, and warmth felt like a burden. While others sang beneath midsummer skies, she lingered in shadows, tracing symbols in the dirt, **listening to winds no one else could hear.** She was beautiful, but with a beauty that was unsettled. Her hair black as midnight water, her gaze cutting as ice. People said **she**

carried both silence and storm in her bones. Some feared her. Others desired her. None understood her. As she grew, **the sea called louder.** At night she dreamed of snow falling against waves, of white veils dissolving into black water. She heard voices in the tide low, echoing, insistent. They did not soothe her. They summoned her.

One winter's night, unable to resist, she returned to the shore of her birth. There, the snow was falling again. The sea stretched vast and endless, dark as obsidian, silvered by the flakes that vanished as they touched its surface. **She stepped onto the sand, and the tide seemed to rise in greeting.** From the foam a woman emerged. She was taller than flame, draped in garments of mist and ice. Her hair streamed like waves, her eyes glimmered with moonlight. She was neither young nor old, neither soft nor severe. She was the shape of the sea given form, and the girl knew without words: this was her mother.

The sea-woman spoke, and her voice was like thunder wrapped in velvet.

"You are not of the fields, nor of the sun," she said. "You

are of the threshold. You are mine."

The girl trembled. "What am I meant to be?"

The sea-woman raised her hand, **snow swirling into a crown above her.** "You are the dark feminine, the tide that swallows and gives back, the silence that reveals, the shadow that transforms. You are, storm and stillness in one."

The girl wept, for at last she understood why she never belonged in the sunlit world. She was not meant for it. She was born for the paradox, snow on the beach, shadow in the light, grief beneath joy.

Her mother's arms opened, waves rushing forward. "Come. Be what you are."

The girl stepped into the sea. The snow fell heavier, covering the shore until nothing remained but water and white. **And when the tide receded, she was gone.**

The villagers whispered that she had drowned. But others knew: *she had become something else.* On certain nights, when the air is sharp and the sky burns pale, travelers speak of seeing her on that same beach. A woman cloaked in a storm, her eyes silver, her presence vast. **Snow falls when she walks, even in the heart of summer.** She is no longer a child, nor human. She is the Daughter of Winter Tide, **the one who holds the threshold between worlds.**

It is said she appears not to all, but only to those who carry weariness in their bones. Those who can no longer bear the endless light. Those whose laughter rings hollow beneath the weight of summer's brightness. To them, she is a guide. She does not comfort. She does not soothe. She leads them into the water, where the snow falls into waves, **where masks dissolve, where shadows rise.**

Some emerge, changed forever. Others do not return.

But none are unchanged.

This is why the story endures: not to frighten, but to remind.

There is a beach inside each of us where winter meets the tide. A place where our shadows gather, waiting to be seen. A place where joy and sorrow, warmth and cold, sun and snow exist together.

Most of us avoid it. We chase light, we worship heat, we polish our smiles for the world. **But the beach waits.** And when the snow begins to fall when sorrow or silence or longing pulls us inward, the Daughter of Winter Tide waits as well. She will not ask you to flee the storm.

She will ask you to become it.



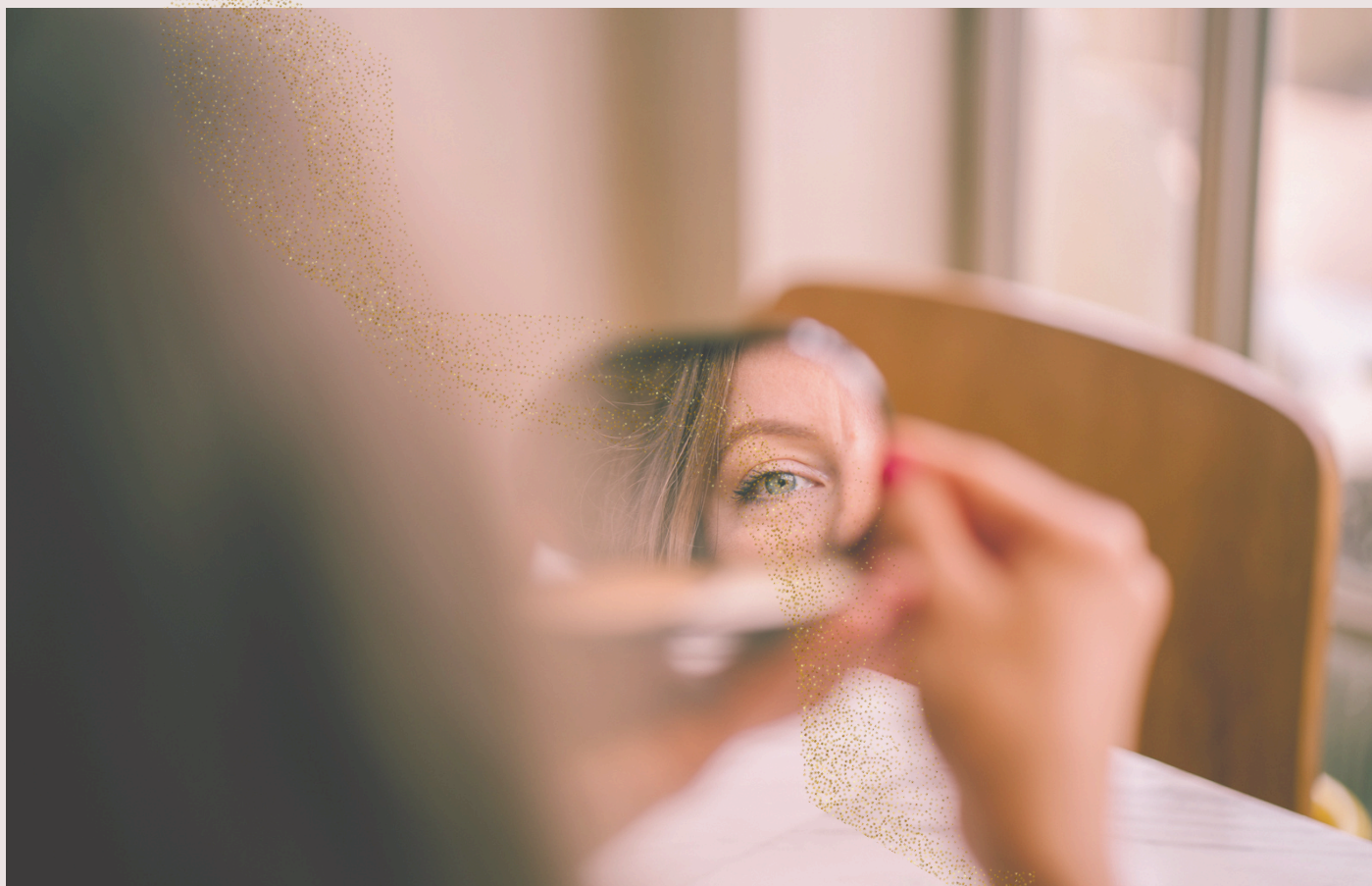
ERIN MONTGOMERY

Erin Montgomery is a journalism graduate who has been working in marketing in advertising for the past ten years. She is a mom to three children and two dogs. She is a published author with five anthropologies and a children's book. She is an avid traveller, coffee drinker, and reader.
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THE MIRROR

OF HER MAKING

Erin Montgomery



The house had always been too quiet. Even when the wind rattled the shutters or the old pipes hissed, silence settled back into the bones of the place like a cat curling on its master's lap. Mara had lived there long enough to know that **the quiet wasn't emptiness, it was her**. Her presence was so heavy it pressed against the walls, her shadow filling every corner, smothering sound.

She stared at herself in the hallway mirror, where the light was thin and gray. The reflection was wrong, as it always was. The face staring back at her seemed made of borrowed pieces: eyes that belonged to her mother, lips too stern to ever be called hers, and skin stretched like parchment over a story she couldn't read. She touched her cheek. The mirror-Mara did the same, but slower, **as though mocking her hesitation**.

"You're never enough," the reflection whispered.

The words weren't real, of course. The mirror made no sound, but Mara heard it in the marrow of her bones. She always had.



There was a ritual she had developed over years, small, sharp habits meant to make her acceptable. **Each morning she painted herself carefully**, layer after layer, until she resembled someone she thought the world might love.

She built a woman others might want.

And then, every night, she peeled it away: the paint,

the fabric, the pretense. **What remained beneath was a body she could not reconcile.** Wide-hipped, scarred from years she preferred not to remember, marked with softness she was taught to hate. She wanted to be rid of it, to escape it, but there was nowhere to go.

Her body was the house she could not leave.



One evening, after a day spent smiling in ways that made her jaw ache, Mara lit a single candle in the bathroom. **The flame trembled, reflected infinite times in the mirror.** She leaned close.

"What do you want from me?" she asked her own eyes.

The reflection smirked. "For you to admit it."

"Admit what?"

"That you don't hate me. You hate yourself."

Mara's breath caught, her throat tightening. The candle guttered, and shadows swelled along the tiles. **Her reflection seemed darker now, not an image but another presence entirely, alive, waiting.**

"I don't..." she began, but the lie shriveled on her tongue.

Because the truth was this: there were days when she felt power beneath the loathing, a coiled darkness she was afraid to name. Days when she looked at her full hips and thought goddess. When she pressed her lips together and thought witch. When her scarred body felt less like ruin and more like history carved into stone.

And then shame would crush her, because she was not supposed to think those things.



Mara tried to sleep that night, but **her dreams carried her to the mirror again.** In them, the reflection moved freely, no longer bound by her mimicry. This other-Mara stepped forward, dripping shadow like ink in water. Her skin was the same but darker, glowing faintly as if bruised by moonlight.

"You keep me caged," the shadow said. "You starve me, cover me, silence me."

"You're not real."

"I am the most real part of you."



The shadow reached out. Mara flinched, but the hand was warm when it touched her cheek, warm like her own skin, solid like her own bones.

"You want to be loved," the shadow whispered. "But you've mistaken love for approval. What you need is to love yourself, even the pieces that frighten you. Even me."

Mara woke gasping, nails digging into her palms, heart hammering against her ribs like a prisoner demanding release.



The following days were a blur. She went through her rituals, painted her mask, smiled for others. **But the shadow was always there now,** lingering in the mirror, curled in the corner of her eye. When Mara turned her head, she swore she saw it smile.

One night, unable to bear it, she returned to the bathroom with no candle, no light. She stood before the mirror, stripped of her paint and her clothing,

stripped of every disguise.

"Show yourself," she demanded.

The darkness stirred. Her reflection peeled away like water, revealing the shadow self once more.

"You're terrified of me," it said.

"Yes."

"Because I am the woman you might be if you stopped apologizing."

Mara's throat burned. "She wouldn't be loved."

"She would not need to be loved. She would love herself."



The shadow stepped forward again, and this time Mara didn't flinch. **Their bodies aligned, one of flesh, one of shadow, and for the first time she saw herself whole.** The curves she had despised looked powerful. The scars glowed like sigils. The softness, the darkness, the rage, the desire, it was all hers.

Tears pricked her eyes, but they did not fall. Instead, she laughed, low and bitter, because she realized how long she had been starving herself of acceptance.

"You're not my enemy," Mara whispered.

"I am your freedom," said the shadow.



From then on, **she did not erase the darkness.** She wore her eyeliner sharper, not to please but to wound. She painted her lips crimson, not neutral. She chose clothes that revealed what she once hid. **When she passed the mirror, she let her shadow smile back.**

The world noticed. Some people recoiled, uncomfortable with the shift. Others looked at her with awe, as if she had grown taller overnight. But Mara no longer cared.

She belonged to herself.

And in the silence of her house, the quiet was no longer suffocating. It was steady, strong. It was hers.



MARISSA VELLE

Marissa guides women in rediscovering their truth and living a life that feel authentically them. She lives for travel and how each unique place can awaken something new in you. Stay tuned for her anthology of short stories, coming soon!

RETURNING

TO REAL

Marissa Velle

She'd forgotten what it felt like to touch the world with her bare hands. Capri was on her way to the beach, a book tucked under her arm, clutched tightly like a security item, **as though the story within its pages could keep her safe.** Safe from the things she couldn't predict. Safe from the gaze and pressing thoughts of the world that thought it knew more than it did. Because, as she sat on the cold metal seat of the city bus, it was hard to grapple with the rain streaking down the glass next to her face. There were tears on the window where there should have been sunshine streaming through.

The weather forecast had called for sun and clouds but mostly sun. And as the sky clouded over and the teardrops fell from the gray masses above, Capri didn't turn back. She continued on to the beach. **Even though it was not what she was expecting, not what she'd hoped for.** She would take it because this stretch of water was Capri's sacred place.

She wore black gloves – her other layer of safety. And that might have seemed odd for a summer day, as she made her way to the edge of the city, arriving at the waterfront. But that didn't matter. Oddities were celebrated in this city, anyway, and, mostly, **she didn't want to touch what wasn't hers.** She liked to keep a distance, a layer between herself and the real, fabricated world.

Capri had spent most of her youth on the stage and that'd allowed the world to think they owned a piece of her. She'd acted in theatre until small roles fell in her lap. Small roles on the television that turned into larger, more profound ones on a wider screen. And the more she saw and participated in that performative world, the more she stopped touching what was pushed in her face.

If she touched it, she would start to lose what was real. She would begin to lose track of the line where she began and the acting stopped. **What was performance and what was true.** Who Capri was and who she absolutely wasn't.

But when she came to this beach, past all the noise, all the eyes, all the comments and claims on her, her mind could become quiet. Still.

She could hear her own voice again. She could know what was true, rebalancing, recalibrating, returning back home to the woman who pretended for no one.

Carefully, with a pounding heart, Capri slipped one glove off and then, slowly, the other. She sat down in the sand



and felt the damp softness with her hands in a sensory overload that made every nerve in her whole body tingle, like a light switch being turned back on. She picked up her book then, cracked it open to the right page and began reading just where she left off, **sinking deeper into the girl she knew**, like a greeting after being away.

Here, she didn't act for anyone. Here the world had no right to her, no claim on her, no opinions to project.

Here, she could touch her world and not feel the pressing burden of it.

Here she was free.

ANNA TOWNES

Anna is a storyteller, first and foremost, and loves creative writing and reading to an absurd degree. She lives for lore with a quirky, uncanny twist. She loves cooking and channeling new ideas with each recipe she creates.

A WORLD WE

CAN'T REMEMBER

Anna Townes

It began the day Madden brought home the intricate, mildly-tacky gold-framed artwork from the Abermill market on Lake Street, by her favourite stretch of beach. **She was drawn to it in a way that surprised her**, shrugging her canvas bag higher on her shoulder, her skin pinched from the sun. For, it was hardly her taste – an eighties abstract of pastels and cloudy glass. She didn't have room for things like large art pieces in her cramped studio apartment in the city. She had stopped by the market, not looking for anything in particular, when it fell into her sightline. **There it was, with the sun reflecting off its old glass, casting a beam of luminescent light that obscured her vision for a moment.** She blinked a few times, collecting herself, and moved across the aisle crowded with semi-precious things.

"How much for that painting?" she'd asked, surprising herself again. The woman running the booth paused, frozen in the act of turning to face her, and stared. After a beat too long, she tucked her wild frayed curls behind an ear and nodded.

"Ten dollars. I can tell it's meant to be yours."

Madden didn't know why the woman said that, her words turning into insisting. But there Madden was, lugging it home, her grandmother's words ringing in her ears from years ago.

"Paintings are a window to other worlds, Madden, dear. You can get lost in them. You can get lost in a world inside yourself. In a world we can't remember."

Madden's child self had nodded, believing her grandmother without any idea what she meant. Keeping her apartment *distinctly artless*, her walls blank as a result, hesitant. But there she was now, carrying the monstrosity up four flights of stairs, through her apartment door, propping it up on the console table in her entranceway, letting it rest gently against her soft taupe wall. **She had no intention of getting lost in any capacity**, she decided, brushing the sweat from her forehead.

The painting was older than she first thought. She couldn't decide if it was ugly or magnificent with its unique shade of gold highlighting the ornate frame, the swirls and blots of pinks, turquoises, yellows and ceruleans. Light reflected off its glass surface once again as she gazed at her own image staring wide-eyed back at her. She touched the ends of her long auburn hair, noticing her flushed cheeks from all the stairs and the summer heat.



She looked at her reflection and the way she held herself with her arms crossed around her middle. She stared until she made herself look away, as if in an effort to resist. **The moment she tore her gaze from the glass, something began to rise up within her.** It was an intense longing she couldn't place, so unexpected and peculiar. It was only later that Madden would realize what she had just done.

It was a Wednesday. Madden had pushed the odd painting from her thoughts. She raced around her apartment, hastily getting ready for casual drinks with the girls. She tore off her office attire, searching through piles of clothing strewn around her bed, seeking a cute option to wear out. She pulled her long hair from its twist, running her fingers through the strands, hoping some kind of wave would remain. On her way out the door, she paused. She pulled her rose lip gloss from her purse and leaned in close to the reflection cast in the shiny glass to apply a quick coat before heading out for the evening. In the moment she glanced up to meet her own pale eyes, something washed over her, **like a wave enveloping her, encircling her, stilling her in her rush.** She stood there, lip gloss still raised in her left hand, trying to make sense of it all.

The shift in the room was undeniable. The change was perceptible, bringing with it a cold that made her whole body shiver. It was July and her apartment's AC sucked, so the air should not have felt icy and brisk, and yet it did. She shook out her hands, trying to snap herself out of whatever was going on, **her eyes still locked on the reflective glass**, on the girl before her. The average, eager, fiercely indepen-

dent girl, convincing the world she had it all together at twenty-nine There she was, right there. *She was Madden.* It was just her face looking back, so why did it unsettle her like this? Why did she feel so immensely shaken, like the floor wasn't steady beneath her?

She turned to go. She could almost laugh at the ridiculousness of it all. *She needed to get a grip.* She needed to find her way back to safe, sturdy ground. On the verge of leaving her entranceway and heading out for the night, she saw it. She saw the shape that moved past her, behind her, in the reflection. The sun shifted, casting a golden hour glow from the window in the next room, landing on the old glass, obscuring her reflection for a brief moment. But she saw it. She saw *him*. **He walked right behind her in that old gaudy piece of art**, in the reflection, and she watched him move in profile, sure, beyond a doubt as she whipped her head around to look behind her, that there was no one else in her apartment.

Madden kept it to herself as she sipped her pinot, happy to let her friends lead the conversation about nothing in particular. Her mind drifted back to him. Him. The man in her painting's glass. The man in his dress pants and button up shirt, with his dark hair neatly a mess. Maybe a few years older than her, though she had no real way of knowing. When she got back home that night, she refused to look anywhere but straight ahead, running to her bed, throwing her duvet immediately over herself. She kept her velvet throw blanket over the painting the rest of the week. She wasn't ready to lug it back down the stairs yet, to return it to the knowing market lady. But she couldn't stand to be near it, either.

She slept in the following Saturday, revelling in the feeling of having nothing to rush off to. She made her way to the kitchen, stretching languorously in her oversized white T-shirt and pink underwear, her mind on her coffee press. **Her feet moved faster as she passed the front hall.** She stole a quick glance in that direction without meaning to, noticing, as she did, that her throw blanket was off the framed picture and now on the other side of the hall. She froze, heart pounding, a trembling sensation growing and expanding throughout her body. But she didn't dart away. Curiosity enveloped her this time and she walked toward the artwork as though drawn there by an invisible force. **Inhaling, Madden looked at her own reflection as the sun landed on the glass again**, taking in her wide-eyed expression, her messy slept-on hair. There she was. She wanted to laugh. What had she really expected? That it wouldn't be her gazing back? She hadn't meant to but she stood by her reflection all morning waiting for him to come back. She told herself she wasn't waiting but she was.

Don't stare too closely at paintings, my Madden. You'll get lost in a world inside yourself. In a world we can't remember.

By afternoon, she dragged her cozy reading chair over, put the throw blanket around herself now and waited some more. **The sun was lowering in the sky, casting its golden glow around her, when he walked past again.** She let go

of the breath she seemed to be holding all afternoon.

He was there, in the reflection, and then he was gone, making her question if it had truly happened at all.

Madden forced herself to go to sleep, tossing and turning into the early hours of the morning. She canceled her Sunday plans. **She was transfixed.** She waited for him. **She noticed the longing rise up in her again, the one she didn't understand**, the one that kept her frozen, staring at herself in the glass, her face mixing with the mesmerizing colours before her (had she once thought they were gaudy?), trying not to see the painfully eager expression on her own tired face.

It's meant to be yours.

The next night she drifted into another fitful sleep, this time still in her reading chair. She dreamed of him and could see him fully now. He was there, standing next to her, **this time in her hallway, on the other side of the painting.** She rose from her chair at the sound of his voice, so melodious and inviting.

"Madden," he said, close to her. "You've finally come back." The longing was there in full force and she tried to keep it at bay, she tried to keep it from overwhelming her, from swallowing her whole.

"What do you mean?"

He looked at her, his eyes intent and the colour of warm honey. A strand of his dark hair fell across his forehead.

"It's me, Dalton. You're here now. You're back."

She did not know a Dalton. She did not understand.

"What do you mean? I'm back? Where have I been?" her dream self asked. She shook her head slowly. "I've been here all along."



He looked bemused. He touched a strand of her hair. His gaze drifted to other parts of her. His hand brushed hers and she felt ignited by his touch.

"Madden," he said, his voice low now. "Remember."

In a world we can't remember.

She stared into his face, oddly familiar, pulling her in just as the painting had. She shook her head harder this time, feeling the tears coming. She couldn't remember. She didn't know what he meant.

"Try. Remember," he said again, this time more insistent, urgent.

She woke with a start, gasping for air as though she'd fallen from the sky, fumbling to wrap her mind around what she had just experienced. **She tried to remember, without any indication of what she was searching for.** When the morning light flooded her space, she sat up in her chair. Her heart pounded as she saw the protruding crack spanning across the glass. of the picture.

It was broken. Shattered.

How had this happened? The grief that flooded her was powerful as it gripped her. In pure raw emotion, Madden threw on her leggings and a sweater and lugged the painting back to the market. It was closed that day, but the woman with the frazzled curls was there, organizing her inventory.

"I need to return this," Madden managed, fresh tears welling in eyes, tears she didn't understand. **She couldn't place where these emotions were coming from** but they threatened to overtake her. The woman looked at her and then looked at the cracked artwork, the colour draining from her face. "I need to return this," Madden said again, increasingly desperate to be away from the heavy piece and for this woman to truly hear her.

"Honey, you can return it, that's fine, but what's done is done," the woman told her slowly. "It was only a matter of time."

Madden wasn't in the mood for riddles. She didn't want to hear anymore. She left the painting and the woman behind, exiting the market, pushing her experience, pushing *him* as far out of her mind as she could manage. As she walked, down the busy street, towards the beach, she saw it then, up ahead. **It was quick and she almost didn't catch the image of the man, reflected off the glass of the storefront to her right.**

t was Dalton. She knew it in her bones. His eyes caught hers for a moment and she knew. **She knew she hadn't become lost in a world inside herself.** She'd opened a door to a new one, a world beyond herself, one where reflections were not just reflections, but gateways to things we *must* remember, to a longing so powerful and consuming it could change everything.



She didn't remember in that fleeting glimpse, but she knew.

He was here now, outside of the antique, magnificent painting, somehow, living in an in-between, still hauntingly outside her reach. Reflections held so many things. Art was a window to more than she could ever hold, and Madden understood all this now as she stepped forward toward those eyes that beckoned.

CHRISTY HOWITT

Christy is the Founder of Calla Magazine and Calla Creative Studio Press. She is the author of *Heartsand*, *Sunwild* and *Using Your Intuition to Write Audaciously*, *Everything You Need to Know to Write Your First Book*, and adores fiction, abstract art, intuitive painting, and holding space for others to tell their stories. She offers 1:1 sessions, coaching, channeled readings and Spirit Art. IG: @christyhowitt @callacreativestudiopress The following is the first chapter of her fiction series, *The Coastal Letters*. Subscribe to read more at www.christyhowitt.com/thecoastalletters

THE COASTAL LETTERS

PART ONE

Christy Howitt

They said it was courage. To pack up and begin anew took a certain kind of inner daring. Or so her friends and family whispered behind her back, around every corner since it happened. They all thought she was brave (and grief-stricken) packing up her life in Toronto, saying goodbye to her usual spots, taking a leave of absence from *Everly Marketing*, from the position she'd poured all of herself right into, **closing the blinds on her life** - and then leaving.

Leaving the city. Leaving her hectic routine that was so *Hannah*. But mostly leaving *him*. The memory of him. Behind.

From the start, Rhodes Holloway fit into her life like an effortless part that had always been there. He was breezy and fun to be around. Impulsive in a way that made things feel important and tantalizing all at the same time. He called her golden brown hair, the locks that turned rust-tinged in the summer, *honey sunshine* and it made her beam just like that real sun. She adored everything about him - everyone did. She'd met him in undergrad in Waterloo and married him two years after graduating. Now, at twenty-six, **it felt like all of that was a picture made of smoke**, and, like fog dispersing, everything she loved most about that image was faded at the edges, blown away and dissipated, **leaving her standing, stricken, with its absence.**

They called her brave but Hannah did not feel that way. She had not felt brave the day she'd received the call that the mansion sale had gone through. That Rhodes had purchased his family's old once-grand now-rundown manor home without ever once mentioning it to her, a call that came just days after his unexpected passing. She hadn't even known it existed and now it was somehow hers.

Hannah had not felt brave when she'd decided to move to the little waterfront town on Georgian Bay, almost four hours northwest of Toronto - the town she had never even heard of, let alone stepped foot in. But what else could she do? **The grief was swallowing her whole. The memories of him were everywhere.** The corner of Kearney Park he'd proposed to her in, right by the lilac trees, just steps from their condo. The vintage suede chair he'd leave his in between shirts on, the ones that couldn't



be hung back up in the closet but also weren't ready to be washed. The kitchen floor they'd slow danced on during that bad thunderstorm to settle her shaky hands. The walls that still held tiny splatters of his homemade pasta sauce from his comedic cooking antics. The places he'd kissed every inch of her, over every inch of their living room. The night the door knob dented the drywall, as they crashed about, tipsy and so enthralled with one another as they returned home from a dinner out, with not enough time to tear each other's clothes from their limbs, leaving marks on the space around them. All of it. **All still there as evidence.**

She could feel him everywhere. *Everywhere*. Smell his familiar musky scent around every corner. **He was everywhere and nowhere all at once.**

She couldn't breathe. She couldn't breathe in that condo, in her city, with those marks on the walls and a thousand meaningful moments crowding in on her. So there was no

question. No real choice.

She had to go.

But it wasn't bravery that drove her away. It felt more like cowardice than anything. Running, scared of all the things she couldn't look at. It felt like annoyance that she had to deal with a crappy old musty house that Rhodes had not had the decency to tell her about. **Like a romantic gesture that had gone all wrong.** He was always about the sweeping gestures and this one was like a grip squeezing the last bits of life from her heart. There was a finality with it. This was the last over-the-top romantic gesture he would ever give her. As frustrating as it all was, she would take it.



The drive was monotonous. Consistent and uneventful. Even **as emotions swirled powerfully within her**, you would never know from glancing at her. She gazed at her reflection in her rear view mirror. Her blue eyes were bright and alert. Her hair fell in neat loose curls to her shoulders, landing on her fleece-lined shacket she wore to keep out the October chill. She cranked up the car's heat and set her eyes back on the road. The highways slowly transformed from busy city freeways to back country roads as Hannah made her way in the autumn late afternoon sun, her Prius packed to the brim with all the possessions she dared to take with her. She glanced at her GPS display on her phone. *One more hour to go.* She groaned inwardly, restlessness rising in her chest. She had planned to arrive before the sunset and she knew she was cutting it close. **The last thing she wanted was to settle into a creepy old house in the dark.**

She at last pulled into Coastal, driving through the tiny downtown, past its shops with their autumn décor, past the town square gazebo and signs pointing to their hiking trails, beaches and public waterfront access. Nobody was out on the sidewalks and she tried to ignore how unsettled that made her feel. She was used to the city. To traffic that was bumper to bumper without fail, with signs of life and vibrancy at every corner. Things were a little too still here for her liking, as much as it resembled a Hallmark movie. She kept driving, making a few turns down roads without streetlights, finding herself at the opening of a long narrow driveway. **She squinted against the bright rays of the setting sun to see the grand sweeping mansion** that loomed in the distance, surrounded by mass amounts of overgrown lawn, wildflowers, fallen leaves and large sprawling trees.

There it was. The Holloway House. As much as she was running from the memory of Rhodes, she was surprised to find a piece of him right there before her. Generations and **generations of his family had lived and loved and died within those walls.** This was his legacy. And because of that, as much as it filled her with unexplainable dread, it would be hers, too.

Hannah took a shaky breath and pulled into the long



gravel driveway. It felt like ages before she made it close enough to the house to park the car and get out. The key would be in the mailbox, in a white envelope, the realtor had said. **But Hannah's feet remained planted,** frozen in place next to her packed car, as she stared up at the impressive, looming house. *Oh, the stories it could tell.* It had a massive wooden wraparound porch that had seen better days, two elegant double front doors that stood under a curved archway. There were grand old windows on both sides of the house and shuttered curtained windows on the second, third and fourth floor. The house had once been white, it seemed, but in the setting sun, it was quite a different, darker shade, with paint peeling from most of the surfaces.

What in the hell have I gotten myself into? What have you done, Rhodes? she mumbled to herself, knowing she couldn't just stand there forever. She sighed, about to take her first step towards the porch when she noticed movement up in a third floor window. It was the gentlest rustling of a curtain, in the window furthest to the left.

There was no way. No way.

She would not go in there. Her mind was already playing tricks on her, her stress becoming manifest before her eyes. She thought about getting in her car and driving back home. But where would she even be driving to? **Home did not exist for her anymore.** With that thought, she turned and headed for those beckoning front doors, stepping over the threshold to the new life that called her.



The realtor could have sent someone to open the place up for me. That was who was upstairs, Hannah rationalized, squeezing her shaking hands tightly, her heart beginning to pound in her chest as she walked up those creaking porch steps. *More likely, I'm sure it's drafty up there. It wouldn't take much for those curtains to rustle about.* She made a mental note to look up the closest AirBnB for the night as she summoned every ounce of the bravery her friends and family thought she possessed and stuck her hand in the ornate, rust-covered metal mailbox beside the door, pulling out the folded envelope containing the key. She twisted it into the old lock and, after landing a few good shoves, the front doors swung open with a wave of mildew that washed over her. She choked out a few coughs, stepped into the front entranceway, turned on her phone flashlight and began searching for the light switch. She found it by the door and with one flick, a beaded chandelier struggled to life, **illuminating a massive front entranceway with a ceiling that reached over twenty feet above her.** She tried not to gape as she took in what looked like a parlour room to her left and a sitting room to her right, all furnished in turn-of-the-century furniture. She couldn't see much down the hallway that flowed in front of her but her eyes fell on the grand staircase that began to the right of her and seemed to sweep upwards, reaching all of the floors of the house, its regal railing revealing the grandeur of the home.

When her eyes trailed higher, reaching at far as they could see in the dim light, her heart froze in her chest, dropping forcibly down into her stomach. There was in fact a woman standing there, partially in shadow, leaning on the staircase railing, staring down at Hannah, the skirts of her dress casting odd angles on the floor beside her.

Hannah felt her whole body begin to tremble and her head swim uncomfortably but she willed herself to speak. It was someone from town. **This house hadn't been occupied in years.** The realtor had in fact sent this woman to open up the house for her, someone to meet her here so she wouldn't feel creeped out and alone. She was sure.

"Hi, I'm Hannah Watson," she began, her voice no more than



a hasty whisper, one that still seemed to echo off the high walls. "My husband was Rhodes Halloway. I'm just arriving at the house tonight—"

She faltered, her words catching somewhere in her throat and she tried to remember what she was even saying. **The moment she stopped speaking, the woman swept further into the shadows,** up the stairs so Hannah lost sight of her. On instinct, she made for the stairs too.

"I found the key in the mailbox. That's okay, right..." She didn't know what she was saying. This was *her* house now. But maybe one of Rhodes' relatives still lived here? She ran up the winding staircase, the runner leaving dusty plumes in the air with every step. She followed the woman, using her phone flashlight as her guide. But the moment she made it to the second floor, **there was truly no one in sight.** The long hallway was eerily quiet. She glanced into a few dark rooms but no one was there.

She whipped around at the sound of a loud bang that came crashing from the first floor. It sent her running back down the stairs, her feet moving faster than her thoughts. Her mind did not have time to catch up as her ankle book caught on a tear in the carpet runner and then she was weightless, falling down the last six steps of the staircase, before it all went dark.



Hannah heard the noises before she dared open her eyes. She was still drifting, floating in a peaceful escape where pain couldn't reach her and tragedy couldn't touch her, until the noises became too hard to ignore. She tried to remember where she was. What day was it? Was that Rhodes' not-so-quietly going about his morning routine, the insane early-riser that he was? **But something poked and prodded at that**, sharp at the edges. Like so many days these past three months, the remembering slipped in the same way. The complete paralyzing soul-shaking shock as the truth rushed back in. The sinking in her stomach. The panic, the denial, the rage. Back on over to the crushing sadness. **It felt like swimming against a stormy tide, the finding her way back to herself**, the returning to the present moment, like lifting her head from the waters to be there fully, to finally breathe.

She listened to the footsteps, the closing of cupboards and rattling of utensils as she lay on a soft surface, noticing the ache in her wrist now. A throbbing in her knees. She wanted to open her eyes. **There was something to be remembered.** Something from earlier. But instead she waited, listened. Finally she glanced around the room she was in. She was laying on an old floral patterned sofa in what looked to be the parlour room of The Halloway House. A lamp was lit next to her. She noticed a fireplace mantle, a piano in the far corner, chairs placed about – and movement in the room that connected to this one, to the left of where she lay.

"Oh, you're awake. Heavens. Thank God," a voice spoke, deep and peculiar and entirely unfamiliar as the figure emerged from the door of that other room, just beyond the parlour. **Hannah tried to speak but words failed her.** "It's alright. Don't force anything. I've brought you some iodine and some bandages."

Hannah stared at the man before her, not much older than she was, the concern etched in his pale handsome features, an intense frown furrowing his brow as he gestured to the bottle and what appeared to be bandages in his hands. He was wearing a dark pair of pants and a casual white button up linen shirt as he pulled up a chair that matched her sofa, moving it next to where she lay on the old fashioned couch. He seemed to be assessing her like a doctor would a patient until she began to remember what had transpired earlier in the house.

"There was a woman. I was trying to see where she went when my boot caught on the stairs," Hannah mumbled in a rush, not sure if he was making sense of what she was saying. "Did you see where she went?"

He looked up into her eyes at that and their gazes met for the first time, **bringing forth a current that suddenly pulsed through her whole body.** All at once she was hyperaware of every single thing in the room, as though a crackle of electricity bounced throughout the space. He held her stare and she noticed that his eyes were a pale faded gray but his look carried an intensity that surprised her, **that woke up every sense in her body.** It took everything in her to look away and down at her wrist which seemed to be bleeding from a small gash.



"You've cut your hand and your knees. May I?" He held up the bottle of iodine and a cloth. Her jeans, she now noticed, were torn where she'd scraped her knees and he stared down at them intently. She nodded, still paralyzed by the striking look he'd given her, and allowed him to tend to her cuts and scrapes, eyes welling at the sting from the potent liquid.

"The woman. She was wearing a long dress. Did you see her?" she repeated, recalling the memory of the woman on the staircase landing, a chill running up her spine. He shook his head, still intent on his work, wrapping her hand with the cloth bandage, her skin growing hot in all the places he touched, that current running wild through her body. She realized it was warm in the room though no fire burned in the fireplace, though it had been chilly when she'd entered the front door not long ago. **But next to him there was a lovely radiating warmth she wanted more of.**

And then something else struck her. *Wait.* Who was this guy? This person who had somehow found her and brought her over to this sofa? He seemed to sense her questions the moment they crossed her mind.

"I'm your neighbour. Porter. I came by and found you collapsed on the floor. The picture of grace, if I may add." There was humour dancing in his eyes but she grimaced, maging the sight he saw, finding her like that. *How embarrassing.* She wished she had it in her to throw a snide remark back, but she was still too rattled by it all.

"Which house is yours? I didn't see many neighbours too close by. Or actually any."

He grinned at her. It was the first time she saw his smile – a devilish smile that caused the heat to rush to her face. She knew he could see her flushed skin, her rosy cheeks, **even in the dim light of the room.**

"The house to the left."

She nodded as if that told her anything. She made a mental note to explore her street – and what else was around her – in the morning.

"So, what's the prognosis, Dr. Porter, *neighbour*? Will I live?"

He eyed her with a half-amused, half-knowing look in those intense eyes of his and she felt the bile rise up in her throat at her careless use of words. *People don't always live. Some people don't make it out alive.*

He studied her. "You've been hurt far worse than this, darling. That I know."

He placed his hands gently around her carefully bandaged right hand and she watched him, **her heart betraying her**, picking up speed in her chest. He was close to her and she could smell his cologne, or whatever it was on him, so different than anything her husband ever wore.

"So this will heal. You will heal," he said almost inaudibly. She tried to speak but the emotion rose steadily in her throat, her eyes filling with unexpected tears.

"The cuts aren't deep." He studied her still but she looked away now, embarrassed by the vulnerability she let show to this man. "How does your head feel? You must be especially careful in this house."

She considered. Her head felt like a thousand things. Confused. Dazed from this Porter who had so suddenly appeared in her life, who leaned in so close now, who... could somehow sense the level of her grief, of her past hurt.

"You must rest."

With you, please stay. Please keep your heat radiating around me.

Her thoughts shocked her. She was a grieving widow. What was wrong with her? What would Rhodes think of her, in his *family's house*?

Porter watched her, shifting his body as though he'd just read those thoughts of hers.

"Hannah, my name's Hannah. Hannah Halloway. This is my house. My family's house."

She was a Halloway. She stated it confidently to clear up any confusion of what she was doing in this house, what claim she really had, **clearing away all traces of the sudden strange connection with this mysterious man.** But his face froze, his eyes grew wide and he ran a hand through his now tousled dark hair. He pulled back from her, straightening in his chair, the mood suddenly different.

And then a hard steady knock sounded from the front door startling them both. She sat up and turned on the sofa, away from the elusive Porter, **feeling a little off balance from everything that had occurred that evening,** and tried to see out the window of the parlour room. But the curtains were too dusty and partially closed and it was now full darkness out beyond the house. It seemed suddenly darker in the room itself.



"That's weird, I can't tell who..."

But when she turned around to face Porter again, the room was empty, the cold chill had returned, the lamp was off, the chair he'd just sat on was across the room, like no one had sat on it in years – and Porter was gone.

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