

# CHAPTER 1

## IMPOSSIBLE

That Saturday, the improbable—and what others would say impossible—undeniably occurred. By nightfall, I even had a witness. Ian, my partner, finally met my doppelganger, and together, we observed this apparition of myself arrive through our bedroom mirror. The veil had thinned.

It was an unusually balmy morning for May first in New England. Ian had already departed for a seven a.m. tee time. Our rented home was deliciously all mine to start my day. The bedroom window over our small altar was cracked open to bring in a cross-breeze. Just as I was about to light the candle and incense, as I did each morning, the new placement of my cream-colored queen chess piece surprised me. It normally sat on the periphery. Now, she occupied the center. Ian and I had an unwritten rule that our sacred objects were off-limits; touching them was taboo. *Why would he do it? The queen of all pieces is symbolic of sovereignty.*

Our altar was a small two-by-two-foot cherry table nested beside the waist-high, overstacked bookshelf. On it were various rocks from our hikes, Ian's crystal pyramid, a Red-tailed hawk feather, a hand-blown blue glass perfume bottle filled with Kauai ocean water, my mother's silver filigree butterfly pin, and a major arcana tarot card, the Tower.

For years, I'd been drawn to the archetypes and guidance of tarot. My preferred deck was Thoth, by Aleister Crowley. The Tower was my growth symbol for the year, when my birthday and current calendar year added up to the number sixteen. The image of a toppling tower symbolized change. The colors of the card were predominantly orange and black—the element of fire destroys the old to make room for the new. It represented a year when I could wake up to who I really was, a year I could have a mystical experience. It indicated I'd dismantle anything artificial within my personality, restoring only what was authentic. The four figures falling out of the crumbling, burning tower represented my outmoded emotional, mental, intuitive, and physical ways of expressing myself. On the top of the card, the Eye of Horus was an Egyptian symbol of perception, seeing the world as it really is. The snake surrounded by a halo implied rebirth, and the dove with an olive branch signified hope—hope that I'd eventually be at peace as I reclaimed my authentic self.

Beside our altar, crumpled in a heap, was an oatmeal-colored organic cotton baby blanket. I'd bought it for myself years ago when I learned I was pregnant. It never swaddled my infant, nor did I

ever hold her in my arms. Instead of returning it, I repurposed it as my prayer blanket. Kneeling upon it reminded me to surrender my will to the greater Will. I pinched the edge of its crochet ribbing, lifted it up to refold it in half, and then laid its rectangular shape out before our shared altar. Its width was enough for me to sit on, and its length held me in an outstretched yogic child's pose.

I stared at the new location of my queen. *What if neither Ian nor I moved it?* It was yet another unexplainable occurrence in my life lately. Except, before today, these odd events hadn't happened within the walls of our home.

My body began to settle after draping my red fox pelt over my lap and giving in to the urge to stroke her silky fur. It took several strikes of the matchstick before it hissed, and its tiny flame lit the wick of my beeswax tealight and incense stick. The scent of jasmine and sandalwood soon replaced the hint of sulfur. Smoke ribbons spiraled up and disappeared into the air, reminding me of my doppelganger's fleeting appearances and disappearances. *Will she make herself known again?*

I didn't know then that she'd show herself to me three times that Saturday. On her final visit, she'd cast an invitation for me to leave with her. I'd never had a chance to speak with her before; she never lingered long enough for a conversation. Ian had nicknamed her Rumored Woman because he was never present when she revealed herself. Like most of us, he required direct experience to believe something was true. I could tell he wasn't convinced she existed; for him, she was more like hearsay, a rumor that doesn't always prove out. I had my doubts as well.

*Could Rumored Woman have moved my queen? How did she know where we lived?* I'd only ever seen her in public before today. As the day unfolded, it became obvious she knew more about me than where I lived.

I never associated my fascination with the veil between the seen and unseen worlds with my Celtic heritage. I never imagined my ancestral past had any influence on my life. Like many immigrant families, my parents didn't identify being Irish. Before my great-grandparents came ashore in Boston Harbor, our Celtic culture was discarded in the Atlantic. It didn't visibly influence how I was raised, despite the full-blooded lines they passed on to me. However, we did proudly wear green on St. Patty's Day. My parents, like the general public, celebrated with an abundance of libations. Even though I didn't grow up being told stories of faerie folk and elfin rings, my mother did tell me I had a vivid imagination. *Is Rumored Woman real or just my imagination playing tricks on me?*

My mind edited the old adage: *be careful what you ask for, you may surely get it.* I sensed it needed a postscript, something like *it might not be the way you imagined it, or be prepared to leave the familiar behind, or maybe even be prepared to make sacrifices.* I didn't want to make sacrifices. The Tower tarot card

intimidated me. I didn't want to burn my life to the ground. I'd felt for weeks that I was approaching a fork in the road. What had I set in motion by wanting to partner with the invisible field? In all aspects, I had a good life, but outward appearances can be misleading.

Ian kept hinting he planned to propose, I countered with reluctance. I'd been married before, and I no longer trusted my judgment in men, nor my ability to commit again. The whole construct of marriage—that two people are capable of living authentically together for their whole adult lives—felt like a fantasy to me. I certainly didn't witness it in my upbringing. At times, I thought it was just me, that other couples had it figured out. That was until another one of those allegedly happy marriages in my community filed for divorce.

I longed to bow before our altar, to empty my mind of doubts and clear the field to speak my blessing. I knelt on my prayer blanket and pressed my palms together at my chest for a few deep breaths, then reached my hands in front, touching both index fingers to the ground beyond my bent knees. I said, "Amidst it all, I carve out sacred time and sacred space to bow to the Great Mystery," as I traced an outward arc on either side of me, forming an invisible oval around me that ended at the soles of my feet.

I bowed my forehead to the floor, arms outstretched in front, in surrender. With the weight of my head on the ground, my sinuses started to drain. On my exhalations, I released the tension created by my need to figure everything out. I let my worries about the future seep into the earth, and my tendency to take on too much responsibility slip from my shoulders. I rested there until I felt at peace and grounded in my skin. My contact with the earth under my palms, knees, shins, and the tops of my feet reminded me that I am held. *I'm never alone.*

Lastly, I said my blessing. I wrote it for myself and knew it by heart. Somedays, I spoke my blessing with my head to the ground; someday, I sat back up, cross-legged, and spoke it upright. That day, I kept my forehead to the ground, my mind below my heart, in submission.

"May the tempo of my life  
allow my heart, mind, body, and spirit to move at the same pace,  
the pace of embodied presence.

May my breathing and pausing be a reminder to surrender and  
receive guidance throughout my day, to soften and melt with breath.

May each day unfold with a priority on creative expression,  
sensing the deeper currents and stalking the sacred.

May I become patient with uncertainty,  
welcoming mystery into my life as my beloved dance partner,  
letting go of expectations, even with disappointment,  
to honor what is authentic in the moment.

May my connection with the elements re-source my days,  
cultivating courage, faith, and my sense of belonging, be-longing.

May a sense of humor be a source of laughter in my days  
for enjoying life more fully.

May I be willing to be lost, to venture into the *terra incognita*,  
letting go of my need to know, my need to figure it out to be safe,  
trusting life and experiencing the wonder of renewal.

May I live in the inquiry of what if, maybe.

May I tend to myself, others, and our environment from a connection with myself,  
offering kindness, compassion, and spacious witnessing.

May my listening be an invitation, an integration.

May I dwell in the place of infinite capacity, my heart, offering *love*.

May my experience be one of reciprocity with all my relations.

May my presence be enough.”

Anticipating time with my three closest friends today had carried me through the week. We planned to meet in Newburyport, twenty miles north of where I lived in Manchester by the Sea, Massachusetts. Veena, Jocelyn, and Maggie knew me better than my blood family ever did, sometimes better than I knew myself, and thankfully, they didn't hesitate to challenge me, especially when my passionate opinions turned preachy. They were my chosen family. As an only child, I was the last one standing now that both my parents were ancestors. Oddly, their deaths improved my rapport with them. Who would have thought?

As friends, we ran the gamut on relationships. Veena was divorced but I wasn't sure we could count that as a strike against the institution of marriage since hers was arranged. Jocelyn was about to celebrate her twentieth wedding anniversary with two teenage kids, a thriving consulting career, a fifteen-year-old Labrador, and as many years left on her mortgage. Maggie was still flying solo, married to her childcare business; she flipped through men like magazines, unwilling to subscribe to any one. She appreciated her pick of the stand, for one or maybe two nights.

When I looked in the refrigerator to size up my options for breakfast, my inner voice said, *This is my life. I wake, I eat breakfast, I work, I eat lunch, I work, I eat dinner, I sleep, rinse and repeat till the weekend rolls around and I socialize between or during meals. Is this all there is?*

I didn't know what I wanted for breakfast—nor my life, for that matter. Upon closing the refrigerator door, I plunked down on the barstool. A scrawled note on the back of an envelope caught my attention.

*Sarah, we're out of eggs*

– Ian.

*Well, I won't have eggs then.* My elbows rested on the island counter; my hands cupped my chin and cheeks. I couldn't shake the nagging fear I was missing my life, the one only I could lead. *Am I settling for what I'm supposed to want, for the script? Do I want what Jocelyn has: a marriage, a career, children, and a white picket fence around a hefty mortgage? Oh, and let's not forget the dog. That way, the act of visibly cleaning up shtit can be daily.* If that was the scorecard, I could only tick off one of the five boxes. Even my choice of career as an English teacher was questionable. I probably would have been happier teaching philosophy but that wasn't offered in high school, so I taught it anyway. I admired Socrates. On the first day of school, my students were greeted by his quote written in fluorescent green chalk on the blackboard: *The unexamined life is not worth living.*

Sometimes I cross-examined myself. There was a time when I doubted I'd be a good mother. I'd been pregnant twice but never blessed, for different reasons, to hold the miracle of life in my arms. Now, I wasn't so sure I still wanted to bring children into this world. Witnessing the interrelated crises of climate change and systemic racism gave me pause. The temptation to be an ostrich and stick my head in the sand was undeniably present.

*Am I doing enough?* This question plagued me. I realized it wasn't always about doing; it was about being. *Life is a journey, not a destination. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I sound like a fucking bumper sticker.* I'd read enough self-help books in my attempts to avoid therapy to know all the catchphrases, although since Veena was a therapist, I occasionally got unsolicited advice.

I took out the ingredients for a smoothie: kale, banana, and frozen blueberries, knowing later I'd indulge in a jelly donut when we all met at the Changing Tides Cafe & Donut Shop in Newburyport. Jocelyn's daughter, Sam, was part of a demonstration that Saturday with Extinction Rebellion (XR), a global organization that believed we were in the midst of a climate emergency and that we had the moral duty to take action, whatever our politics. Sam had been increasingly active in the XR's Massachusetts chapter.<sup>1</sup> After hearing her enthusiasm for their work, I'd checked out their rebel training video and was impressed with their nonviolent approach: Tell the Truth, Act Now, and Go Beyond Politics.<sup>2</sup>

Likely, going beyond politics appealed to Sam, given she had the entire political spectrum in her parents. Jocelyn was a liberal Democrat, and her father, Jim, was a staunch Republican.

Apparently, much of my beloved Newburyport and the surrounding coastline were at risk of being submerged due to climate change. XR Mass had organized a "tidal tour" around downtown with postcards and letters of how the historical sites would be underwater. Jocelyn had sewn Sam's polar bear costume. Demonstrators dressed up as ocean people in blue and green, while others were part of the Polar Bear Brigade. I arrived early to see it all for myself. It turned out to be a clever way to use art and imagination to raise awareness through a protest. They won over new members that day. I was ready to join.

Sam, short for Samantha, had surpassed her mum and most highschool boys in height. She made a towering polar bear. Maggie offered Sam a role model that everything has its season, even though being statuesque can be hard to carry off at sixteen. Maggie rarely hid her height with flats.

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<sup>1</sup> Extinction Rebellion, <https://rebellion.global/>.

<sup>2</sup> Extinction Rebellion, "Heading for Extinctions and What to do About It." July 24, 2022, Training Video, 23:53, <https://rebellion.global/>.

The only thing that was short on her was her tousled pixie haircut. She insisted it was the only way to tame her curls. Someday, I'd like to see her grow it out so she could embrace her even wilder side.

The café's front glass window offered a full view of fresh donuts in the making, an excellent marketing strategy. Simply plant the thought of a warm donut and trust what follows.

Meeting in public meant we altered our starting ritual of lighting a candle and sitting in silence until one of us offered a gesture. After a few moments of silence, we each reached for our respective sweet or caffeine. Jocelyn asked, "So, did you all watch the movie? I felt like my own family dynamics were on display. The teenage boy in the film could have easily been Jeremy. He's attached at the hip to his phone. I'm horrified by the number of hours he spends on it. What's it doing to his brain? I swear he is more distracted than ever." She noticed Veena had powdered sugar on her upper lip and pointed to her own lip.

Veena wiped her mouth. "Is it gone?" We all nodded. "A number of my patients are addicted to their screens. They're sleep-deprived. It's not just affecting their attention span—it's inhibiting their ability to form healthy relationships and socialize with friends. Texting has become their default communication pattern."

Maggie's phone had dinged. She typed a response as she spoke. "Texting's been a godsend. It's better than being caught in a long conversation with my mum when I only have a question."

We all exchanged glances while Maggie's head was down. Jocelyn bit her lip. She had a hair trigger for phones being on while we were together. I said, "Hey, Mag, away with that thing, it's circle time."

Maggie looked up. "Yeah, okay, busted. I'm turning it off." She silenced it and dropped it in her leather bag.

Veena broke the awkward silence. "Sure, it's convenient, but it's no substitute for having an eye-to-eye conversation or a call. How else do we learn not to interrupt, to read body language, or empathize?"

"Empathy is in short supply." I looked at Maggie, checking to see if she was still with us. "How are your parents?" Typically, we'd assume Maggie was tending to work issues, but since it was the weekend and her closest friends were with her, it had to be a family issue.

"Becoming more and more dependent on my sister. I'm not sure how much longer they will be able to live independently.. Luckily, she still lives nearby." Maggie pulled apart a twist of her cinnamon cruller. "I didn't anticipate how living on separate continents would feel during this phase

of their life. It's rough." She rolled her eyes as she took her bite. We knew that signal meant a new topic of conversation, please.

Jocelyn obliged. "Did you track your phone usage last week?"

I had. "I was shocked to see I'm averaging four and a half hours a day on my phone. I'm not on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Although, I'm still a Google hound for information."

Maggie said, "Don't forget podcasts and listening to music."

"Yeah, my phone's become my camera and entertainment source, which admittedly is convenient."

"Without Facetime, Indra would barely know her grandparents. They've been more a part of her life than I thought possible, watching her grow up." Veena looked wistful. "It's been too long since we've returned to India. Her life is so full now it's harder to extract her for a few weeks."

Jocelyn added, "I get that it's not all bad. I appreciate having information at my fingertips. It's hard to believe I grew up with encyclopedias. My kids only know Wikipedia and Uncle Google."

"I find myself wondering what we did with those five hours before there were cell phones?" No one replied. "How many hours is Jeremy on his phone? Is he in the double digits?"

Jocelyn had finished her donut and pressed her index finger on the remaining crumbs, delivering them to her mouth. "I'm afraid to tell you he is." She pushed her clean plate away. "Did you watch the credits on the film where the business executives leading the tech companies admitted they're fanatical about keeping their kids off screens? I mean seriously, how hypocritical is that?"

At our last gathering, Jocelyn encouraged us to watch *The Social Dilemma*, the documentary by the Center for Humane Technology on Netflix.<sup>3</sup> It sounded the alarm on the power of social media in our lives; while it could be a force for good, it isn't always. It sheds light on how technology invisibly outsmarts us, addicting and polarizing our society with its amoral algorithms. I watched it with Ian and found their systemic analysis spot-on and disturbing. The attention economy was a powerful concept, especially coupled with the recognition of our downgraded attention spans.

Maggie held the last bite of her cruller in her fingers. "Jeremy probably has his phone out during class." She ate it and licked the cinnamon off her index finger and thumb. "God, that was good, I'm tempted to get another."

"Talk about distractions!" My voice went up an octave. "Phones in classrooms are a pet peeve of mine."

"So what do you do about it?" asked Veena.

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I got on my soapbox. “On the first day I let my students know my expectation is they keep their devices either off or on mute and put away during my class. If I catch anyone using it, there is no warning. I take it and drop it in the basket by the door. I write their name on a corner of the blackboard, and they have to leave it in the basket for the next week while they are in my class. If I catch more than three students in a week on their devices, then the whole class has to put their devices in the basket when they enter class for the remainder of that week and the next week. I want them to know their actions have consequences, not just for them but for their classmates.”

Maggie smiled. “Nice try, but how many of your students are just throwing old phones in the basket or using their Apple Watch to play Solitaire?”

“Ugh, you’re killing me, Maggie. Sadly, you’re probably right. I’m being duped.” I only half-jokingly mouthed a scream. “I don’t want to compete with a screen for my students’ attention. Even on my best day I’m not that enthralling.”

Veena laughed. “I wouldn’t want to be you. I get that surveillance of device use isn’t your job. There’s a bigger question here: What’s going on inside for your students? How is our educational system not meeting them? I hear them complain that at eighteen, they can legally vote and go to war, but they can’t drink. They are waking up to how the world doesn’t make sense, and many don’t want to participate in it. A little or a lot of distraction is the escape they want, and no one is going to stop them.”

Jocelyn said, “Sam has found groups online she identifies with, which she wouldn’t necessarily have met at school, like XR. She doesn’t spend time gaming like Jeremy, but she does listen incessantly to true crime podcasts like *My Favorite Murder*.<sup>4</sup>

“Indra listens to MFM, too. I’ve heard a few episodes,” Veena said, “but I wouldn’t call myself a Murderino.”

“A what?” Maggie and I asked simultaneously.

Veena explained, “It’s how they identify themselves. Indra wears her T-shirt and inevitably gets comments from her tribe. MFM covers crimes and often unsolved murders. Many of them are about women or people of color who’ve disappeared or been killed, and the police barely bothered to investigate. I know it sounds like an odd fascination, but you’re going to love this, Maggie. One of the central messages is ‘fuck politeness.’”

Maggie broke into a smile and nodded. “You’re right, I’d wear a T-shirt that said that.”

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<sup>4</sup> My Favorite Murder, <https://myfavoritemurder.com/episodes>.

Veena continued, “It’s not a get-out-of-jail-free card for being rude when there is a difference of opinion. It’s more about not overriding your instincts when your body tells you something is unsafe. Women are conditioned to not make waves, to be polite, and take care of others’ feelings. Perpetrators consistently take advantage of this tendency to dismiss our inner warning alarms.”

“My inner alarm bells went off when I was watching that film. The line, ‘If you’re not paying for the product, then you *are* the product,’ still haunts me.” Jocelyn added, “Nothing is ever truly free. They are monetizing our eyes and attention with advertising dollars.”

Veena shuddered. “I couldn’t stomach the quote that flashed on the screen, something like the only businesses that refer to their customers as ‘users’ are illegal drugs and software. The business model is blatantly designed to create addiction—time on screen.”

“Speaking of haunting lines,” Maggie said, “I read this article in Fast Company that quoted Reed Hastings, the CEO of Netflix, who said sleep is their competition.”<sup>5</sup>

“Oh, mercy.” Veena folded up her napkin and put it on her empty plate. “Binge-watching, another source of sleep deprivation.”

“I don’t want to find another series I like.” Jocelyn bunched up her napkin and stuffed it in her empty coffee cup. She started gathering up our empty plates. “It’s hard to tell my kids to stay off their screen when they see me on it at night. I tell myself I’m folding laundry or making meals so it’s okay. But it’s not.”

I’d just finished my jelly donut. My fingers were still sticky even though I’d done my best to lick them clean. I’d been waiting to use the bathroom, but there was still a line. The crowds from the demonstration had filtered into the cafe for coffee and sweets. “I think multitasking is a curse. I hate how it prevents me from devoting my attention to the present moment.”

Veena quipped, “It’s a survival skill for working mothers, especially single working moms.”

Maggie and I were sitting facing the glass windows. She directed our attention with her finger pointing outside. Jocelyn and Veena pivoted around. “There’s a perfect example.”

We all saw a mother pushing a stroller while she walked her dog and spoke on her phone with a coffee cup balanced in the cup holder.

“The sad thing is”—Jocelyn turned back towards Maggie and me—“she probably doesn’t even recognize it as multitasking. It’s simply a way of life.”

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<sup>5</sup> Rina Raphael, Fast Company, "Netflix CEO Reed Hasting: Sleep is our Competition", November 6, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40491939/netflix-ceo-reed-hastings-sleep-is-our-competition>

While their attention was on the multitasking mom, I noticed my doppelganger walk past her. She turned to look straight at me as if she knew I was there. She smiled. I smiled back but furrowed my eyebrows. *How is this possible?*

I sat straighter in my chair and uttered, “Holy shit, there she is again. Did you see her?” Without waiting for a response, I seized the moment and announced. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

An oversized man in a navy jogging suit carrying a full cardboard tray of specialty coffees blocked my dash for the exit. When he reached for the door, the corner of the tray threatened to collapse. He needed another hand. Multitasking wasn’t his strength. I shuffled in place as I held the door for him and tried to recall the color of my doppelganger’s clothes. *Why didn’t I pay better attention?* A sea of blue and green demonstrators milled around.

When I finally got outside, a polar bear handed me a postcard. I said “Thanks” and quickly took it so as not to be completely rude, but didn’t stay to hear the spiel. I jogged along the sidewalk, dodging between people, heading in the same direction she had been walking when I first glimpsed her from inside the cafe. Up ahead was the four-way intersection.

As I arrived at the crosswalk, the pedestrian signal flashed 7, 6, 5... I ran across. Only a few folks populated the sidewalk. She wasn’t amongst them. She could have ducked in any number of shops or restaurants.

I’d lost her again. *Damn it.*

At my feet was another postcard. I picked it up before yielding to the pull of my friends waiting for me in the cafe.

When I returned, Veena asked, “What happened? Why did you disappear so fast?”

I hadn’t mentioned Rumored Woman to them yet. “I saw someone I’ve been trying to reconnect with, but I don’t have her contact information.”

“Did you catch her?”

“No, I lost track of her.” What I didn’t say was “again.” Had I known she was planning to track me down later that day, I wouldn’t have chased after her.

Sam occupied my seat. “Come on, Mom, it’s time to go, I still have homework.”

It was nearly four o’clock. We’d monopolized a table long enough. Everyone exchanged hugs. I’d never hugged a polar bear before. “Sam, you’ve got a great costume for Halloween.”

When Veena and I chatted in the parking lot, I asked her for a recommendation for a couples therapist. Living with Ian had turned me into a nag. He resisted picking up after himself, and I hated seeing his clutter or fighting about it, so I begrudgingly cleaned up. However, it wasn’t a long-term

solution; it made me fume with a predictably short fuse. When I flared, he made it about my reaction, not his behavior.

Upon my return home, there was no sign of Ian, and a part of me was relieved to have the house to myself. After fixing a cup of tea, I sat with my back up against our overstuffed, purple twill couch. We'd found it in the secondhand store. My journal rested open on my lap, the mug of Good Earth tea warmed my hands, hints of cinnamon and clove wafted in the air. Although our furniture was comfortable enough, the sun patch on the floor beckoned. Our orange, wooly mohair afghan covered my bare legs and kept the chill at bay. I'd optimistically worn shorts on a day meant for jeans. My attempt to rush the season had failed.

A wall of windows faced me, and to the right was our screen porch door. Sunlight streamed in and illuminated everything it touched with a golden hue. I referred to it as the hour of dust because there was no denying my house had a layer of it.

I felt like a cat catching the last of the day's warmth. My lids took longer to open after each blink. Sleep's undertow won as I forfeited my mug to the floor and closed my eyes.

Random images came to mind, layering themselves before me like a collage: an old stone bridge arched across a verdant valley with a river rushing below, an owl perched on a leafless tree at dusk, a red fox curled up with her nose tucked into her back haunches, a toppled queen chess piece.

When I was a child, just before sleep, these unfamiliar collages entertained me. I never spoke of it to anyone. I thought it was normal.

While I enjoyed the picture show, I heard footsteps on the porch and partially opened my eyes, expecting to see Ian as he attempted to sneak through the screen door. He loved to catch me in a rare nap. I often faded at this hour but rarely gave in to feeling drowsy. Typically, I pushed through. He wasn't there, but I was convinced I wasn't alone. The sounds were too substantive to be a creature.

I called, "Hey Ian, I know you're there, come out."

Movements to the right revealed a woman's dark billowing hair as she stepped off the porch. My legs felt leaden.

"Who's there?" When I scrambled to stand, my journal collided with the mug, spraying tea over the carpet. "Shit!"

By the time I crossed the room and pushed open the screen door, she was gone. "Hey, come back. Let's talk. Don't keep running away from me."

Even though the only response was silence, I lingered barefoot on the threshold for a few more minutes. *Am I hearing and seeing things now? Was her appearance another figment of my imagination, one more image in my afternoon collage? How does Rumored Woman know where I live? Did she follow me home today?* Goosebumps prickled my forearms.