



Mastering
Self

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WOLF

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Publisher's note: This book is memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Some names and characteristics have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

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Mastering Self

Jamieson Wolf



Authors Note

This is the seed that became my memoir Little Yellow Magnet

It was supposed to be a book on positivity, but I realized after writing the twenty-nine pages you'll read here that when you're writing a memoir, you have to write about everything that happened, not just the good things.

You learn to sparkle when you're in the dark because only in the dark can you see the stars.

I hope you enjoy what I wrote below, and I hope it makes you want to read what grew into Little Yellow Magnet.

With thanks and gratitude,

Jamieson

Mastering Self

One

I remember the moment it changed for me.

I had tried cleaning my apartment. I lived in a bachelor at the time, so this shouldn't have been a big deal. It was though; everything was a big deal. I had to fight to do anything and everything was a battle.

I had been trying to clean but I was doing a half assed job at it. My fatigue levels were high and I had close to zero energy, but still I persevered. I was attempting to clean. I had once lived in a home that was spotless all the time. Now, I was lucky if I cleaned the cat litter once a week.

I was cleaning the fridge and I knocked a bunch of magnets off the fridge door. I looked at them, lying on the floor so colourful but somehow so far away. I had to pick them up one at a time, afraid of losing my balance and falling over.

One magnet drew my eyes, however. It was a small yellow faced magnet that my mother had given to me quite a few years ago; I hadn't looked at it in some time but out of all of the magnets, this one drew my gaze.

I bent down slowly to pick it up, making sure that I was propped against the fridge and holding on to the door. I picked it up and held it in the palm of my hand. I looked at it, so sunny and yellow and bright. There were words written in black. They said: *My life is up to me.*

I held that magnet and thought about what my life had become. It had been a month since I had seriously considered committing suicide and my life was no better. I was depressed and still in the depths of the forest. I could hear the trees whispering to me during the day. Even when I couldn't see them, they were there.

I had cut out all of my friends and spent little time with my family. That was my choice as I believed that no one should have to put up with me, let alone myself. I had no social life. Instead, I went to work and then I would come home and hide inside my apartment. My world was the walls of the place that I called home and it was here that I could hear the leaves of the trees the strongest.

In a way, I had died, even though I was still living and breathing. I had let the disease take everything from me, had given it part of myself to try and appease it, though it did no good. I pretended I was okay but the truth was, I was broken.

Looking down at the floor, I saw not magnets but pieces of glass that had been my chalice. It lay in pieces on the floor, glittering at me in the dim light.

I looked down at the magnet again. The words stared back at me: *My life is up to me*. I worked at shaping my mouth to form the words: "My life is up to me." I said quietly. I tried again, a little louder: "*My life is up to me!*"

In that moment, I made a decision that would change the direction of my life. If I didn't like something, I had to change it. The only thing was I had no idea where to begin, where to start looking for help or how to put the chalice back together again.

It didn't matter. I had made the decision. I would change the road I was on and choose to walk along another.

I would choose to live.

Two

I saw the world through a pane of frosted glass.

I could still see, but it was as if I was looking at the world through glass or a film of plastic. Edges and details were blurred out. I often felt as if I was inside a snow globe looking outwards.

I had regained feeling in the left half of my face but I was still deaf in my left ear. I often joked that I was like Two Face from Batman but that I could think of better villains than him. I had no special powers but was merely angry and scarred so I supposed the moniker fit. My speech returned though I had to speak slowly to get all the words out.

I walked with a cane. I called him Hugo. That was the name on the label and it seemed silly to call him something else. I figured if I was going to depend on something to get around, he had to have a name. Walking had always been a chore, but now each step was a small war that I had won. Each step I took was a step towards some kind of freedom.

Everything was a battle: seeing, hearing, walking. But I was used to battles and to fighting my body to do what I wanted it to do. I just didn't expect to have to fight so damn hard. Choosing to live was a constant fight against myself. Nowhere was this battle more evident than returning to work.

After being bedridden for a month and a half, I was desperate to regain some sense of the world around me. The forest was so strong inside the walls of my apartment, the stories I wanted

to tell and the characters I wrote about yelling at me to be written so that my home was really a cacophony of noise. I had to find some way to escape it.

The forest followed me, though. I could hear the leaves of the trees whispering against the windows of the bus or in the wind as I walked. The trees were never far behind, no matter what I did.

I ignored them and focused on rebuilding myself and the world around me. I had to establish some sort of order in a life that had become chaos. I had to find some way to breathe again. Returning to work gave me something to do, gave me something to focus on other than the war going on within my body. I spent enough time fighting that battle in the evenings. I wanted to be free during the day.

I had to relearn to do that which had been second nature to me. I had to train my fingers to type again, had to retrain my eyes to see clearly, to try and see past the film of glass that was over them. I had chosen to fight and my body was the terrain, filled with sharp rocks and deep valleys with wide pools of water and always the constant whisper of leaves.

My boss had called me into her office for what I thought was a performance assessment. When I sat down at her desk, I knew that something was wrong. She looked at me sternly from the other side of her desk and her gaze was almost angry.

“We have a problem,” she said.

“What’s that?”

“Your performance as of late has been terrible. You’ve been making lots of mistakes and that’s unacceptable.”

I remember hearing a rush of wind in my ears, the rush of fire in my gut. “I think I’ve been doing really well.” I replied.

“There have been a lot of errors, mistakes that you wouldn’t have made before.”

“I’m not who I was before. I’ve had to learn how to walk again, see again, talk again, type again. I think you can agree that I’m doing pretty well, all things considered.”

She glared at me for a moment and then said “We’re paying you for a service and you’re not providing it to the standards we want. Either you improve or we’ll have to let you go.”

The wind rushed loudly in my ears, the breeze intensifying to a gale force. The trees of the forest whispered loudly and I could feel a fire beginning to burn in my stomach. I left her office without saying a word.

I let myself be angry for a day. The fire raged on. I had expected sympathy of some sort upon returning to work yet instead, she had threatened to fire me. That fire burned in me the whole day and the lure of the forest was even stronger than it was before. At one point, I could even feel the leaves stroke my face, the pine needles poke into my skin.

Eventually during that day, a cool wind of realization broke through my thoughts. I had expected sympathy and was angry because I didn’t receive it. I realized at that point that there were people who would not be sympathetic or empathetic to my dilemma, that would not be understanding of it and would even look down their nose at it.

I knew then that this was my battle to fight and fight I would. Even if I had to crawl all the way of the dark cave I found myself in on my hands and knees, somehow I would do it. I would not expect or encourage sympathy. Instead, I would cultivate bravery within myself. It

had become lost amongst the shadows, but I would cut away the leaves and vines until it shone brightly once more.

The next day when I went into work. I went into her office and said “I owe you a debt of thanks.”

“Oh, I’m so glad our conversation helped.” She said.

“It didn’t help. You pissed me off. You made me angry enough to want to fight again. For that, I owe you thanks.”

I went back to my desk and got back to work. I would be idle no longer.

Three

I was still shutting myself away.

My mother was my rock and touchstone during that time. She managed to get me to come out of the forest and ignore the lull and pull of the trees as they whispered to me. The depression was always alive in me but instead of a spark, it needed a tear, one sad thought and I would succumb to the waves and let them wash over me.

I wasn't writing. Instead, I would come home from work exhausted and done, finished even before the day ended. I would watch several episodes of television a night and then go to bed. I made it through the entire series of Gilmore Girls. When I went to start it a second time, I knew that something had to change.

I realized that, in order to get better, I would not be able to do it alone. I had cut everyone out of my life and was miserable in my loneliness. So I went about changing that. I wrote an email and sent it to everyone that I had once considered friends. I didn't know any way to do that than to just be honest with what I was going through.

It was a hard letter to write, it felt like I was baring myself and all that was wrong with me. It took me forever to write it and it was the hardest thing I had ever written. I poured myself into that letter in hopes that I would be able to reconnect with someone.

Almost everyone came back with such light and positivity that I was blown over. They had been worried about me and concerned but knew I was going through so much. They had wanted to give me space to deal with my life as it was now.

There were a few people that didn't want anything to do with me. One person even said that I was faking the disease for attention and she pitied me for having to seek attention in such a way. I was heartbroken. This was someone I had considered a friend.

I came to realize that not everyone would understand or even try to. Some people just couldn't. In the end, those that stayed friends were true ones. Those that wanted out because the going had gotten tough for me, well they weren't really friends after all.

As further outpourings of concern and love came forth, the forest outside of me and the ocean inside of me retreated that much further. I was not alone, I didn't have to do this alone. Now that I had reached out to other people, I was faced with the next obstacle.

I had to accept help from others.

This wasn't an easy thing for me to do. I had always been stubborn and had always done everything myself. I couldn't do that now, at least not yet. I had to let other people help me when they offered assistance. Out of everything I had been through, this was the most difficult thing to accept.

It made me feel weak, like I wasn't able to do anything for myself. Asking for help made me feel as if I was an invalid. I had to realize that accepting help didn't mean that I was weak, that it didn't make me less of a person.

I had to accept help and, even more importantly, I had to learn to ask for help. I had people who would offer to do anything for me and, while I wouldn't take them up on everything, I would take them up on some things. My mother would often change the litter for my cat Tula. Other friends would help with groceries.

I struggled with the idea of people doing things out of kindness, but that's where every action came from. I had to learn to be kinder to myself and to stop feeling like a failure when I had to ask for help.

Learning to love myself would take a little longer.

Five

I had to get out into the sunlight.

The forest had ruled my life for too long. With its sway of leaves and comforting shadows, it was no wonder I had chosen to hide for so long. But I couldn't hide forever. I had to re-engage with life and with what it had to offer me, no matter how afraid I was.

It was terrifying to put myself into situations, places where I had to be myself again, where I couldn't hide behind the leaves or in the shadows. I had to find something that called to me, an opportunity to grow beyond what I was and what I had become. That opportunity came unbeknownst on Halloween of 2013.

One of the people I knew had started reading Tarot cards. Her teacher was holding a Tarot Expo where all the students would be reading Tarot cards. I decided that there was nothing better to do on Halloween than have my cards read.

It had been a long time since I had engaged with the cards. I knew how to read with them, but had forgotten a lot of what I knew. I was a little apprehensive though. Tarot card reflected the seeker, laying him or her out on the table for all to see. I wondered what the cards would have to say about me, what they would reveal and the messages that they had for me.

Seeing Diane again after so long was a blessing and it was wonderful to have a friend doing my reading. It put me in a comfortable frame of mind and I knew that whatever she had to tell me would be exactly what I needed to hear.

In the end, it was a thrilling experience. I saw my life as it was now laid out in the cards and the personal growth that was still to come. It was somehow comforting to know that Spirit or whomever was talking to me through the cards could see that I was hurting.

I wanted to engage with my spirit again. It had been so long since I had prayed to anyone or anything. So long since I had had faith in anyone. It had been months since I had believed in a higher power.

I'm not a religious person. I have always been more spiritual. But when I became lost within myself, I had forgotten how much comfort that my spirituality had brought me. I had forgotten to be my own light, to let my light shine forth.

My light had dimmed considerably to the point that it was non-existent. So, I decided to change that. The leaves of the trees cast too many shadows and, with a little light, they would look like ordinary leaves again instead of the shadows of something strange and frightening.

I took a Tarot course, learning about the cards from the ground up from Diane's teacher. I took a workshop and manifestation, learning how to change your surroundings and to welcome in the positive; that if I didn't like something about what was happening to me, I could change my outlook and attract something better. I learned about Reiki and attained my level two degree, learning how the body was made of energy and how we could use that to heal others and heal ourselves. I took a second level Tarot course, learning about the cards in even more depth and saw how the cards really told a story, how they were really signposts and windows into the soul.

Over time with all these workshops, I began to feel a little better about myself. I had been uncomfortable with people seeing me as I was, walking with my cane and dependant on it. I had stopped viewing myself as Quasimodo in the bell tower.

I had come to realize that I wasn't ugly or flawed. This disease was part of me, a piece of what made me complete, much like the Magician is one of seventy-eight cards in a Tarot deck. When I began to embrace my spirit, I began to embrace myself.

Six

I had never really loved myself.

I liked parts of myself and others I could do without. But to love myself completely? Never. Now that I had Multiple Sclerosis along with the Cerebral Palsy I was born with, it seemed an impossibility.

However, I was open to the idea of love. I think every person dreams that there is someone to love them out there, someone to see them differently than they see themselves, able to see past the flaws.

I worried about dating with MS. The CP is hidden under my skin, but the MS shows itself. It wants to make itself known. I often feel as if there are two people inside of me, warring to get control. How could I date while battling myself?

I was brave enough to try. My need to be with someone else and to quiet the whispering of the leaves and the wind inside my head was too great. I was desperate for love or for the chance at it.

I don't like to go to bars and at that point, it was not a good idea. I wasn't able to drink beer. For some reason, when I had one, I lost control of my legs and could not walk, So bars were out and I never liked meeting men there anyway. Men that meet at bars are usually only care about one thing and I wanted more than a quick roll in the hay. I wanted a companion. A tall order to be sure.

I started looking online. That felt safe as there was a screen and the whole world of the internet between me and prospective men. I was safe inside of my bubble, comforted by the anonymity of the internet.

I put a profile up on line at a few dating sites. I found the nicest photo I could and was as honest about myself as I could be. I didn't mention anything about the cerebral palsy or the multiple sclerosis in the profile. I wasn't too hopeful that I would get to that point of knowing anyone. I wanted to protect that part of myself from public knowledge a little bit longer.

I didn't think I'd get to know anyone well enough to reveal that part of me. Aside from that, I was still coming to terms with what that part of me would become. I hadn't gotten to know it well yet; I wasn't sure that I wanted to.

I started chatting with men online and I was hesitant at first. I thought that, from the moment I put my profile up online that they would come to me and I would receive tons of notations about men that wanted to meet me. I was wrong. My profile sat there for a while, unresponsive and empty.

I did the only thing I could do and started looking for men that piqued my interest. I tried being myself as much as possible, and then the unthinkable happened: one of the men wanted to meet me.

The forest of trees whispered loudly, trying to keep me within their shadows, but my thirst for love was greater than even the darkness could brush away. I started corresponding with him via email and I told him about my multiple sclerosis, that I walked with a cane. He didn't seem to be bothered, so we agreed to meet.

We went on a few dates, but it became clear that he was still in love with another man. I didn't want any part in that. I had just come out of an abusive relationship and had finally found myself. I didn't want to have that lost within a competition for attention from another man I didn't even know.

I dated a few others. Only once did I not mention having multiple sclerosis. That did not go well. When I showed up with my cane, he asked me what that was for and flapped his hand at the cane. He couldn't even say the word. Another man was severely depressed after his partner had left him for another man. I met one with a heart defect that he let rule his life, afraid and hopeful at the same time, always fighting with himself.

I came to realize, after a string of unsatisfactory dates, that the men I was attracting were all broken in some way, they were all lost within themselves, much as I was. It was the energy that I was putting out into the world that was coming back to me. I remember when that clicked for me, when the bell rang. I had gone on a date with a man and then arranged for a date on Valentine's Day. He cancelled the date via a text message.

So, I took myself out instead. I got myself a fancy present, bought a bottle of wine and some romantic movies. If no one else could love me, I would love myself, every part of myself. I knew that it would be hard but I thought back to that magnet and what it said: *my life is up to me*.

That night, I took the first step towards loving myself. I had to love myself first before I could love anyone else. I had to accept all of me, even the part of myself that I didn't like. I had to love everything about me, even the difficult parts.

When I made that decision, the leaves from the trees shook but a breeze ran through them. It sounded almost like a sigh of relief.

Seven

I remember when I started to do the things I had for taken for granted again.

Things like taking out the garbage, taking a shower, riding the bus. Things like ironing my shirts using and ironing board, changing the cat litter, being able to do up buttons on a dress shirt. Doing the dishes, going grocery shopping. All of these things and more that I had taken for granted, things I did every day that I didn't even give a second thought to.

The first time I tried to take a shower, I lost my balance and fell out of the shower, taking the shower curtain with me. I lay on the bathroom floor, crying, wondering if this would be my life from now on, where even the act of standing was difficult.

The second time I took a shower, I made sure to balance myself properly and to lean against the shower wall if I had to. I was determined that I would shower from now on, that I was strong enough to do this. I was frightened the entire time I showered, but when I finally turned off the water and was still standing, I let out a shout of joy. I had did it! I had conquered a flat surface that had felt like a mountain.

When I tried taking out the garbage the first time, up the stairs to the back door of the building looked like it was from here to the edges of the world. My neighbours had been taking my garbage out as I couldn't handle the stairs. I couldn't get up them. It was a mountain made out of wood.

It had taken everything just to get the garbage can up the small flight of stairs to the back door. I had fallen down the stairs twice, the garbage can and the garbage landing on top of me.

I lay on the stone floor and felt the tears come. One of the neighbours came and helped me and he took my garbage to the dumpster for me. I kept telling him I didn't need his help, but he helped anyways.

Why did I try again? Because I was determined to. The whisper of the forest would not win. It told me often that I was nothing, whispering to me to just give in and give up, to realise that I was half a man now.

So I kept trying. I took my time on the stairs, trying to find a way to get the garbage can all the way up the way up those stairs. I did it one stair at a time and rested after each step. I took my time and eventually made it all the way up. I let out a small woohoo sound, celebrating the fact that I made it up the stairs. It was the first time I had been able to go up a flight of stairs on my own without holding onto someone's hand.

I went into the back lot of the building and looked at the pathway to the dumpster. It looked like it was from here to forever. Out here, it wasn't the whisper of the trees I heard but the whisper of the wind.

I took it a little bit of time, even sitting on top of the garbage can a few times to catch my breath. I knew that my real battle was coming. When I was in front of the dumpster, I knew I would have to lift the can above my head and into the gaping mouth that waited to be fed. I braced my back against the dumpster and lifted, maintaining my balance. I turned, still propped against the cold metal and tipped the can, letting the garbage fall.

I let the can fall to the ground when it was empty and the sound of its hollowness echoed in the alleyway. It had taken me forty minutes to do what had normally taken me five. I let out a

loud shout then, and more tears came, but these were not tears of sadness or self pity. They were tears of joy. I would not let this disease beat me or control me.

The first time I tried to iron my shirt, I was in the kitchen. I ended up losing my balance and falling on top of the ironing board with all my weight, hitting my head on the oven that was close by. I lay on the floor, the ironing board shot. The tears came again, they always came again. The trees rustled in the background, almost as if laughing at me.

I tried again. I got a new ironing board. Whenever I felt myself losing my balance again, I would grab on to the oven or prop myself against the wall. I even got a chair to sit on to see if I could iron that way. When the shirt was done, it didn't look too pretty but that didn't matter. The main thing was that I had done it.

So why did I keep trying? Why did I keep torturing myself to do these tasks when others would have gratefully done them for me? Because I wanted to prove that I could do them, that I was still human in some way. I wanted to prove that I wasn't a broken man. I wanted to be whole again, even if it was only a little bit at a time.

As I accomplished each task, finally able to scale that part of the flat mountain, something started to happen to me. I became grateful for even the smallest task I was able to accomplish.

It reminded me that it wasn't the big things I had to be thankful for. I had to cherish the small things because, though they were sometimes the toughest, they were what I had to be thankful for.

Eight

I had made the decision to move on New Years Day.

I was at a friend's house for New Years Eve and had woken in her guest room. I had looked around myself and wished that I had a home I could call m own, not just a place to stay. Not just somewhere to sleep.

I was living in a small basement apartment. There were only two small windows and no sunshine. The trees of the forest liked shade. There was the bedroom where I slept and wrote and the living room and kitchen that was so small, if I was standing in the middle of the living room, I could touch both walls with my hands.

The bathroom wasn't even in the apartment, but across the hall. At first, it felt very European to me, very youth hostel-ish. The truth was, it was the only apartment that I could afford after the breakup of my marriage.

I had wanted a cave than, I had wanted a place to hide, where sunlight couldn't reach me. Where I could pick up the pieces of my chalice that had been shattered. I had glued the pieces back together, but the chalice was fragile. It had broken into even more pieces now after with the MS and the recent bad relationship. When he had called me a broken man, I felt the chalice disintegrate into dust.

I still held the dust of my chalice within me. I felt it sitting atop my skin, a layer of dust that wouldn't leave me as it was part of me. I had to live somewhere that had sunlight, that had

windows. Some place where I could sweep the dust off of my skin and plant it within me so that the chalice could start to grow again.

I still hadn't found an apartment. I knew that one would come along at the right time but that was something I was running out of I had given my notice on January 1st and it was now the middle of February. I had to leave on March 1st.

I had looked at several different apartments but all of them were too expensive, too small, too dark. I wanted, needed sunlight. I wanted to grow. I wanted to thrive.

I finally emailed the company I was renting from to see if they had any bachelor apartments. They had one and it was available. I went to see it immediately. The winter was harsh and there was ice everywhere. I fell several times and still got up, kept walking. I had a feeling about this apartment. I always trusted my gut, my instinct. It had never led me wrong, even though I sometimes ignored what it was trying to tell me.

I remember walking in the darkness, my way marked by light in the shadows. My breath came out like cold clouds of mist and I was sweating. I hadn't walked so far in a very long time and it was almost too much for me. But time was running out. I was driven by my need to live in a better home.

When I found the apartment building, I let out a sigh of relief. Calmness washed over me and I smiled as I took it in. I pressed the buzzer for the super and he let me in. When he opened the door to the apartment, I took it all in. There were hardwood floors and plenty of windows, a space for the bed. There was even a hallway to the bathroom that offered additional storage. It was spacious for a bachelor apartment and not just a box to put a bed in.

More important than any of that, there were windows. A glorious half wall of windows. I imagined this apartment during the day, with the sunlight streaming into it and felt some lightness within me, as if a switch had turned itself on.

“Do you like it?” The super asked.

“It’s perfect.” I whispered.

The next morning, I called my parents and they fronted me the money for first and last months rent and I worked out a payment plan with them. Then I went to the rental office and signed a new lease for the bachelor apartment that was now my home.

It felt like a new beginning. A place where I could heal, where I could leave my old self behind and embrace a new part of me. But more than that, it felt like it could be a home, rather than a place to just lay my head.

It was a place where I could move forward instead of wallow in the shadows. I hoped that the trees would not show themselves in this place, that by finding a new home, I had moved on from the forest.

I hoped that I could leave them behind.

Nine

I had been waling with a cane for over a year.

It was a necessity to get from point A to point B. It was the only way I could manage to get through the day. At first, it felt odd to depend on a third leg made of metal in order to balance myself, but then it was as if it became part of me.

Even though it aided me in walking, it still wasn't a big help to taking the bus. I had no balance, so when the bus moved, I was thrown. The first time this happened, I landed in the lap of an older gentleman. I was quite apologetic. I was mortified, actually. He told me not to worry about it, that that kind of thing happens and to take care of myself. Not everyone was so forgiving.

I remember waiting to get off the bus at one point and ended up losing my balance again. I ended up ramming the cane into a woman's foot. She spent several minutes yelling at me, even though I apologized.

I resolved never to let this happen again by being patient. I sat in the front of the bus where they had priority seating. I waited until the bus driver stopped the bus until I tried to get up and get off the bus.

I met some lovely people on the bus and at first, I was touched by how caring and concerned people were. It was the first time that I had been treated like a human being on public transport. Drivers waited for me and helped me off the bus, people gave me their seat and the older folk that sat at the front often gave me sage advice.

However, throughout it all, I just wanted to be treated normal again. I wanted to feel like myself once more. I wanted to believe I was normal. I didn't want to feel like I was riding around in the crazy kitchen, my balance being thrown at any moment. I dreamed of being normal once again.

With each ride on the bus, I regained a bit more of myself that I had left behind. I often wondered if people could see the sparkling trail of the chalice dust as it trailed behind the bus. I wondered what it looked like to them, whether it looked like the milky way or its own constellation of stars.

I remember the moment that life changed again. My balance was improving, a little at a time. It wasn't an over night thing; it took time. It helped that I was stubborn and I refused to listen to the whisper of the leaves that followed me even during the day, telling me that it was impossible, that I would never walk unassisted again, that I was nothing.

I ignored them and started trying to walk without my cane. I carried it with me, hooked on my arm, but I tried to go as far as I could without using it. I went a little farther each time, ten steps then twenty. Twenty steps, then thirty.

One afternoon, I thought I would take myself out to the mall, without my cane. I purposely left it at home. It felt odd walking without it, without the third leg that had been part of me for over a year. It felt as if I was swimming through out the mall, the other people moving around me as if we were all part of some underwater ballet.

I heard the whisper of the leaves joining with a new song. There was a lightness growing within me that hadn't been there before. I felt weightless without the cane. My spirit was able to soar without it.

The next day, when I went home, I kept the cane retracted on the bus. It was hooked on my arm. I got on the bus and not a single person gave me their seat. Not a single person moved out of my way. It was its own kind of gloriousness. The art of feeling normal once again. I rode the bus the entire way home standing up, holding on to a pole.

It was another kind of flying.

Ten

The move had finally come.

I looked at the mound of boxes that were the sum total of my life. Leaves and covered some of the boxes, as if the forest of trees didn't want me to forget them. I scraped off the moss and flicked away the leaves, brushed off the pine needles.

I wasn't foolish enough to think that the darkness wouldn't follow me, but there would be a few less shadows where I was going to. It was too bright, there were too many windows, for it to be completely dark.

My parents and a few friends had come to help me move. At times, I thought my mother was happier to see me move out of my cave-like apartment than I was. She had a right to be happy for me, they all did.

I think they could all sense that my moving into the sunlight was a cause for celebration, a joyous occasion. They were right. I was finally choosing to live rather than hole up and hide. I was finally choosing myself first instead of letting my depression or disease call the shots.

For far too long, I had let them do just this. I was too afraid to actually engage with the world, as I was too busy hiding from it instead.

Karine and Jay packed the boxes into a trailer and they drove to my new address with everyone following behind us. As I rode, I wondered if there was a trail of light behind me, lighting the path that we were on.

When we got to the apartment building, I could swear that it was glowing softly in the winter light. It would be where I would live again, where I would leave one life behind and start a new one. Where I would live again.

As everyone began to move stuff into the apartment, I was worried what people would think of it. I had been embarrassed by my last apartment and wanted people to like my new home. I needn't have worried and nor should I have. This was my home, my place, and no one else's opinion mattered. It did help thought.

I was nervous. I was starting a new life for myself. A new home, a new me. I had a right to be nervous. But as my friends and family moved my belongings into my new home, that nervousness faded. It was replaced with an absolute joy that this was my home, that I was doing the right thing. No more flights of stairs to worry about, no more too hot or too cold temperatures, no more basement with its lack of light and no view.

However, what I was most grateful for was the fact that it had a bathroom inside the apartment. It's odd what you can do without when the need arises. But I finally had my home all in one place and the simple fact of having a bathroom made all the difference.

I remember my first night there. My bedframe had broken during the move, so my mattress and box spring were right on the floor. I was surrounded by piles of stuff and mounds of boxes and tubs. I could hear my cat, Tula, climbing atop the boxes, scaling her own mountain. I called to her and she came to me, nestling in for a cuddle. Her purr comforted me.

I had no blinds up yet, so the windows had art that I intended to hang acting as a privacy wall. It let a lot of light into the apartment, but that was okay. For the first night in my new home, I wanted to see everything.

I wanted to know every nook and cranny, every corner and space. If I was going to grow here, I needed to. I wanted to make sure that the forest didn't grow again inside these walls, that the trees didn't show themselves. If they tried, I wanted to be able to see them.

As I lay there in the semi-darkness, I felt a seed of something wonderful plant itself in me. Now I would grow a different kind of tree inside of myself, a tree that yearned for light and love to help it grow.

I was ready.