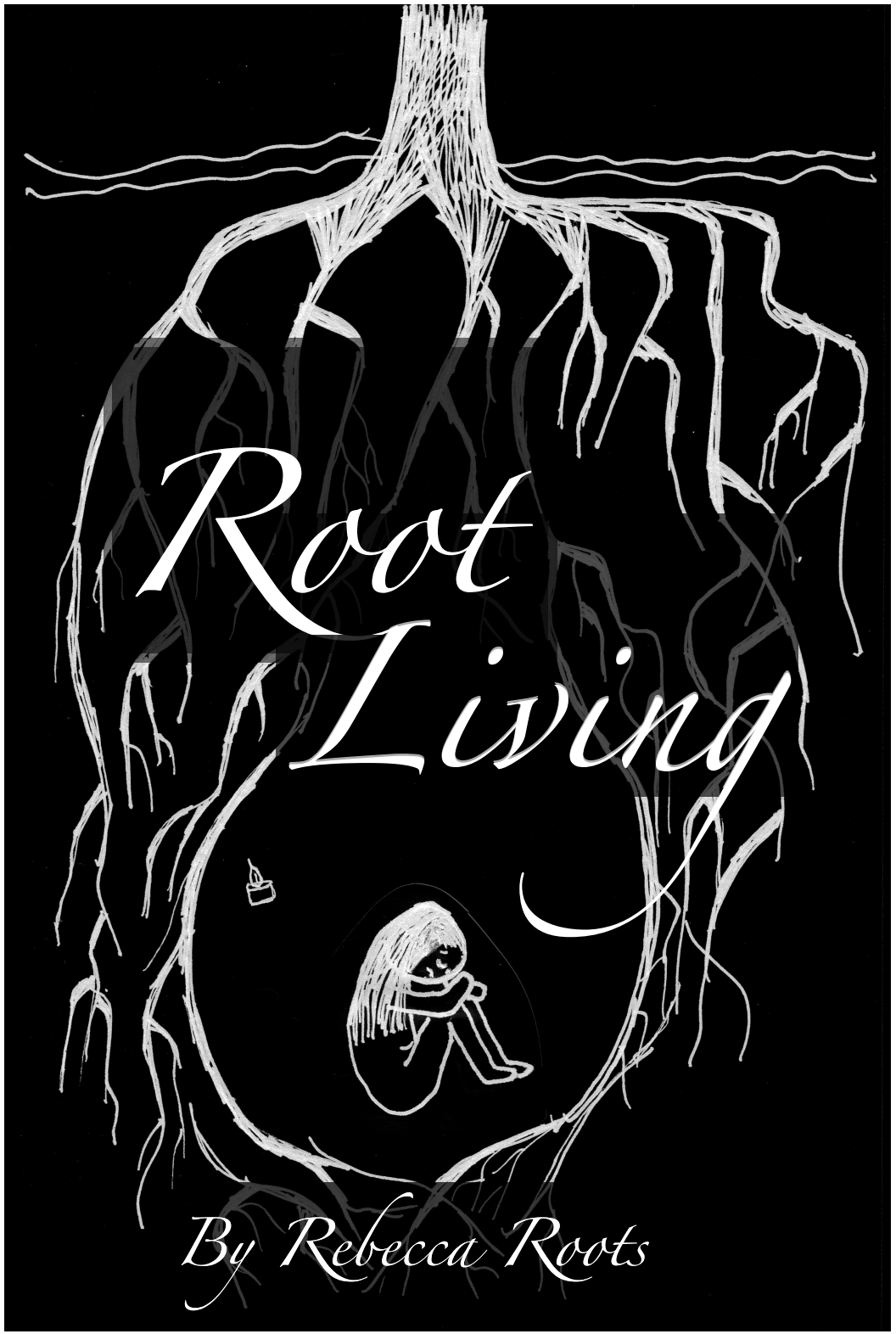

Root Living
By Rebecca Roots

To all the Tealights,
thank you.

May this story be a light for another.

She took an unmarked burrow when she fell to Root Living, and only brought her tears.

Her first foundational pier crumbled when Wise Wells died. Her dear friend of more than a decade, who always encouraged, always listened, was always delighted to hear from Rose Bluehaven.

Rose's everything slid sideways, not knowing how to stand without her. Not knowing what to do with the grief, guilt, and shame she felt.

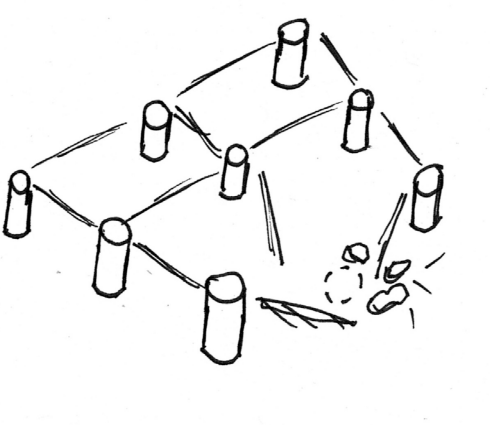
The Above Grounders around her couldn't see. They kept walking on their treadmills, and her Most Isolated Year quietly began.

Her body had trouble breathing Above Ground, but she had never lived anywhere else.

There were new sensations and fragile bubbles and cheese-grater textures and the abundance of pit-bottom tears.

She hadn't realized this could even be possible in human experience.

She called it Grief, the only Above Ground word she knew, and put one foot in front of the other on the path to slowly rebuild one foundational pier through Grieving.



Or so she thought.

That fall, Seasonal Work took her to the Red Rocks, and it was there she marked one year without Wise Wells.

Just stable enough to begin rebuilding, her efforts to make friends were halted when Something Big shook suddenly across all the lands.

Then there was stillness.

This time would later be called The Age of Covered Faces and Harvested Fear.

While it toppled many, Rose remained standing. She relished the quiet: no Widely-World-Webs to entangle her at home, the Red Rocks empty of cars and people.

Spring emerged, and Seasonal Work brought her to the Deep Dome Lake, where a new texture of darkness hollowed her out.

The pines entrapped her.
The housefly gnawed at her.
And the one who measured her work terrified her.

Each morning began with greyer-than-grey dread:
Would she perform well enough?
Would he get angry?

She did not miss Deep Dome Lake when the season ended that fall.

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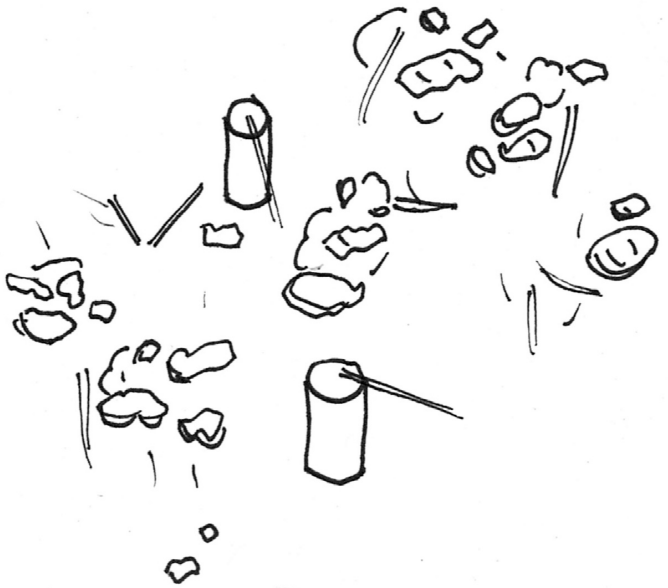
Back in Inbetween, Rose journeyed to Black Mountain, a soft place where Temple Keepers welcomed Help Exchangers.

It was there, that second winter without Wise Wells, where all but two remaining piers were knocked out in one swift blow.



And then she fell.



Down, down,

Deeper she slid,

Darkness all around.

Her body transformed overnight, no longer adept for Above Ground living.

What used to be neutral and mundane now cut and pierced and tore.

Air that once supported her life was now completely toxic to her lungs.

The sharpness of everything left her depleted by lunchtime.

A simple ‘Do you have any siblings?’ from a kind Temple Keeper brought tears and a tight throat.

An everyday “Where are you from?” by a new Help Exchanger wrung her towel dry of any juice; she immediately retreated to lie down for the rest of the afternoon.

What was this place?

Energies moved through her body without notice.

It took everything to get through this moment, and the next.

Minutes stretched out like excruciating hours.

Tears of all flavors were abundant, accompanied by Very Uncomfortable Sensations. Both were caused by small everyday happenings.

She felt things she'd never felt before, never even heard of before.

It was dark and damp and duffy.

Is this bottom, this cocoon?

She curled up at Black Mountain.

And though all the maps would place her there, that's not where she was.

She was no longer Above Ground, you see, but she didn't know it.

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In the overwhelm of falling so deep, there was no space to understand what, where, why, how.

This was clearly *not* Grief, but she didn't have a new word.

There was no way to communicate her fall into an unknown realm.
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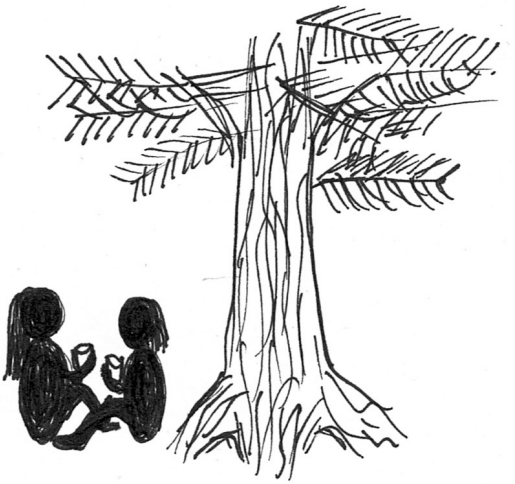
She found a tiny candle to light the way, and shakily held it up to peek around this new world.

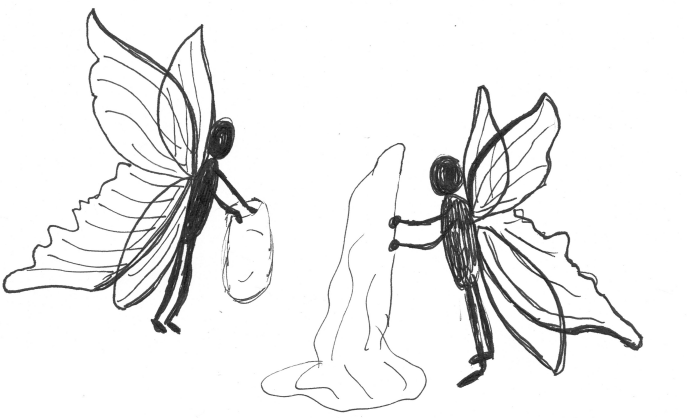
The first Tealight she found was right there at Black Mountain: fellow Help Exchanger, Lady Evergreen.

Lady Evergreen validated the piercing sharpness of Above Ground; she felt it too. The violation of a video ad, the attack of bright lights.

When they could, the two sat with tea or the redwoods, grateful to share laughs or tears, where words were optional.



On the rare days when the two had the same assignment—to clean the House of Travelers—they wore colorful fairy wings and prepared beds for Kings and Queens.

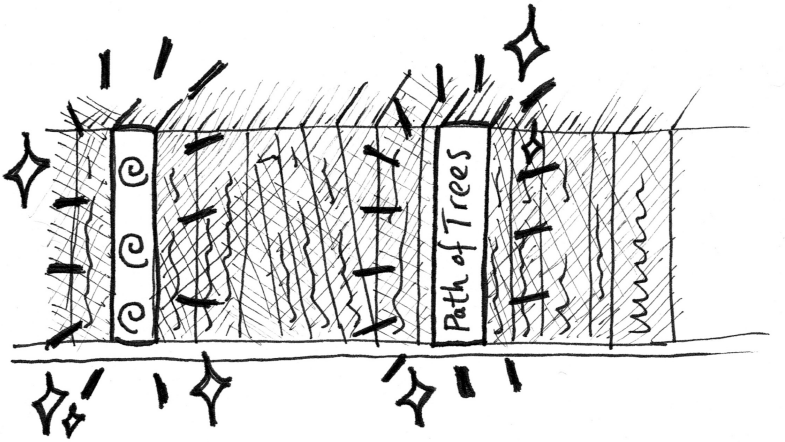


Both felt the immense pressure of Do-It-Right, but each Temple Keeper had a different way to tuck the sheets!

With a single shared glance, Lady Evergreen and Rose could acknowledge one another's unseen distress.

With costumes and play, they could display a lightness otherwise out of reach.

Rose was drawn to books on the Black Mountain bookshelf by a Wise Witch Named Hawk of Star.



She lifted one off the shelf, "The Path of Trees," and began to turn the first few pages.

A handwritten note inside stopped her hand from turning. Her eyes quickly scanned the message—it was written by the author.

It was signed, “your neighbor.”

She lives here? Just down the road?

Another Tealight.

In the spring, Rose began to learn the ways of Story Mammals, guided by a Creatrix from Mountain Land.

Story Mammals listen to the body's wise, fluid sensations, gradually shifting them while thickening stories. They met for six weeks, connected across the Widely-World-Webs.

Rose couldn't see then how divinely timed this teaching was gifted. She learned exactly how to navigate the Very Uncomfortable Sensations that had dropped in without warning.

But she didn't understand why such intensity had suddenly arrived… she hadn't experienced a Terrible Bad Thing, after all.

Rose quietly began practicing during the Overwhelming Activations:

"These are my arms, these are my arms," she'd sob as she squeezed her arms.

"These are my legs, these are my legs."

Rose had been living at Black Mountain for half a year, still raw and tender, when she found a Seasonal Job elsewhere.

Six months of winter is a significant chunk of time, though, isn't it?

She should be able to rebuild her foundation now, shouldn't she?

A butterfly emerges, isn't that how it goes?



Besides, one can't change the timing of this Seasonal Job, and she had no idea she still had false foundations with her.

No idea her story of what's happening was so blurry, tiny, and full of illusion.

And so, with ever-present tears and fragile body full of fear, she moved to the Desert.

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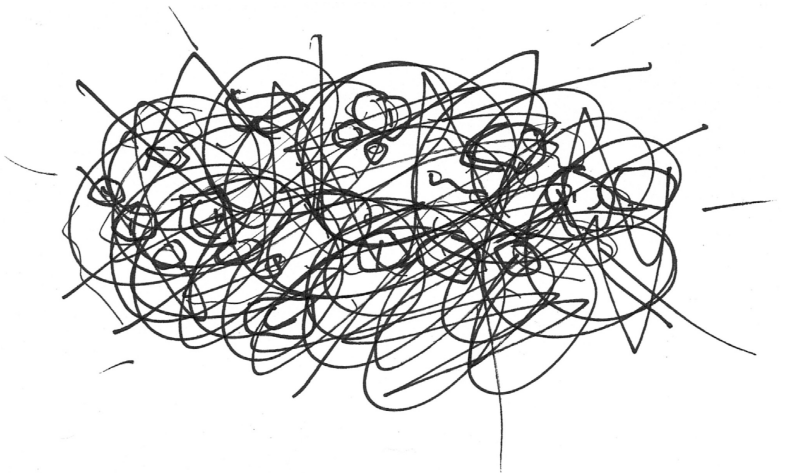
Only one moon after arriving in the Desert, her final two piers were crushed in a single weekend.

No more connection to her Life Before.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A Season turned into 2.5 years at the Job.

Gradually she uncovered more of her Root Living map, while surrounded by Above Grounders.

But she didn't have wings.
She hadn't “emerged.”
Hadn't transformed.

She was exhausted, the waves knocking her over nearly daily. She didn't feel human. She hadn't felt like herself for years now.

It's as if she were a tender yolk with no shell, and everything around her were kitchen whisks—danger at every corner.

The amount of energy it took each day to keep her head above water washed out any hopes of returning to life as it had been.

Yet during this time, inch by inch, an entire new understanding and being had s l o w l y unfolded.

What follows is the collection of noticings and patterns Rose gathered across these Root Living years.

But she didn't have the gift of seeing a map laid out clearly before her, as you're about to see.

She had fallen to Root Living, remember?

She hadn't chosen to go. Didn't even know she'd left.

And while this collection in Words is not her Lived-Experience, these relics offer a glimpse into the place itself.

Here is some of what she learned, through experiences with her body:

*** She is not to rebuild any foundational piers.** Instead, she must grow deep, strong roots down in Root Living.

*** In Root Living, it's lush with Genuine**– because that's all that can exist down in these soils. It's all her body can be around.

It's slow.
Attuned.
Flowy.
Loving.
Spacious.
Gentle.
Sacred.
And slower still.

*** Her body has immediate adverse effects to anything not deeply rooted in Love.**

The air up there Above Ground chokes her. Drains her. Until her body crashes into nauseous

Get Horizontal Now.

And so she does, because she must. She can't do anything—no lights, no sounds—only endure until sleep finally takes her. Then comes a Recovery Day. Or two.

But coworkers don't know about Recovery Days or Get Horizontal Now (or Composting Time or I'm Full or Too Loud Too Bright or Following Flow or The Incident or, or, or…).

Above Grounders know Sick Leave and Doctors and Diagnosis and Medicine. Weekends and Families. Choir Concert and Grab Coffee.

Above Ground is boxy and sharp.

*** When she expresses a Full Truth in words to someone who receives a meaning other than that exact Full Truth, her body erupts in a Piercing Pain Explosion!** It doesn't matter how mundane the topic.

She stops sharing.

*** Most Talking drains her life force**—whether she's a part of the conversation or simply within earshot.

And with so little energy to begin with, she protects it fiercely, saving it for the truest interactions.

*** The amount of Content in an average Above Grounder's day is enough input to last her a month**, at her Root Living rate of digestion. Rose calls "Content" anything her body now needs time to digest and integrate.

Content (Requires Digestion)	**Not Content** (Passes Through)
the name of a place	sitting with the trees
a story about a neighbor	petting a dog
how to tie a knot	hanging laundry outside
a poster on the wall with a quote	decorating an envelope
a book sitting out	weaving rag rugs
a single loaded word mentioned in passing: "work," "family," "flat tire"	doing a puzzle

Her calendar looks empty to Above Ground onlookers, but she is very full (and doesn't keep a Calendar).

She doesn't have the Widely-World-Webs at home, so she journeys to the library every couple of weeks, only when her body has space for Content.

Speaking of the content of such Content:

*** Radio ads scrape.** Movies and TV shows slice. So violent. Harsh. Fast. Her once-favorite podcast now drains her. She can't relax with anything Above Ground. Even children's animations sting.

(But she would like to be able to unwind with a TV show, without the cuts they now cause! Oh the simple pleasures she hasn't been able to enjoy in years.)

*** She can only do one thing at a time**, with spacious transition time in between.

If Rose is driving, she is driving.

If she is talking, she is talking.
She is not driving and talking.

* **Allconsuming Fear is always with her**, and it's exhausting. Buzzing around her egg-yolk body, it scans for threats without stop.

* **Her body can no longer bear the energy of the Kind Ones Who Raised Her**. Even distant threads of connection bring constriction. She honors her body's need for space, yet guilt still arises.

* **Capacity cannot be predicted**. It is not linear. She may stay home resting all day–no town trips, no other energies—and wake the next day with Zero Spoons plus fuzzy head horizontal day.

* **A trip to the grocery store is often the only "Doing" for her 3-day weekends.** Before she can finish digesting one work week, the next has already begun.

Questions like "What did you do today?" or "How was your weekend?" drain Rose instantly.

Her weekends and days are not made of Doing —that's how Above Ground measures.

Root Living is made of Being.

*** It's as if a magnifying lens has been placed not just over Rose's eyes, but *all* of her senses.**

Tiny things become enormous, filling her view.
An oil change is the event of the month.
The beeping alert to remove a credit card is a fire alarm.

*** There are others inside of Rose's body, one of whom is Gloria the Good Worker.** Gloria is always helpful, competent, and right. That's how she survives. She cannot ask another for help, as that would be her death, so she does not receive.

*** When Gloria is threatened, it feels like death in Rose's body.** This creates enormous pressure inside Rose.

Often, fragile Rose needs to say no, let someone else handle it, or remove herself to avoid hearing the conversation.

But Gloria forces Rose to say yes, take on the responsibility, or be part of the conversation that will zap her dry.

It doesn't matter if Rose's Mind-Ideas know her life isn't in danger. Gloria is demanding and fierce through Rose's body!

*** Gloria has a very sharp sword: Deathly Shame.** It slices Rose at the very thought of telling another just how depleting the smallest tasks are.

Rose never explains Root Living to Above Grounders—to avoid the Piercing Pain. The isolation is slightly less painful than the explosions.

In her mind, she calls this the **Catch-22**.

Rose uses every ounce of energy to make it through this moment:
Assessing the energetic cost of each potential interaction and situation.
To appease Gloria the Good Worker.
While appearing as an Above Grounder.
Avoiding the Catch-22.
Protecting from the prickly loveless Content that pervades everywhere.
All while hiding her tears, fears, and fragileness from coworkers.

It's such a different world from Above Ground.

Words can't express how different it is from Above Ground.

Words are a tool from Above Ground, you see?

See how strongly Above Ground permeates?

This gap makes even wider canyons between Rose and Above Grounders.

She uncovers a new set of guidelines for her Root Living, things like:

* Put in ear plugs if radio ads play from a coworker's radio. Put on ear pro whenever possible, to drown out coworker voices and sounds.

* 9+ hours of sleep a night comes right after air, water, and food on the list of essentials. Bedtime is 7:30, though usually she's horizontal by 5:15pm.

* Ground with the tree out back at lunch instead of eating with coworkers in the shop.

* Listen to your body, even if Mind-Ideas can't make sense of what she's asking.

* Keep snacks in bedside table to avoid encountering roommate's energy in the kitchen.

* If she feels ⌘, there isn't capacity to drive to the grocery store.

* If she senses ♒, there isn't capacity for interaction with another human.

* If she detects ☙, there isn't capacity to reply to that message.

* Overriding any of these rules will result in pain, energy drain, Get Horizontal Now.

* Sitting outside staring at the trees and birds is a great way to Be.

* Keep practicing Story Mammal ways.

* None of these guidelines are solid. Change is constant. Capacity is not predictable.

There are far too many to list here, but she knows them well after all these years of slow exploration among the roots.

She still knows deeply all the rules from Above Ground, too; she hasn't forgotten those three decades.

This is perhaps what creates the most suffering, remembering what it was like up there, and knowing what Above Grounders expect.

So she befriends the words "capacity" and "deep-sensing" to exchange communications with Above Grounders, if they ever ask why she's not doing what Above Grounders do.

"I don't have capacity," she says, again and again, unable to translate this Root Living world she fell into years ago.

The longer she's in Root Living, Above Ground drifts further and further away from her felt memory.

When it instantly drains her to hear an adult tell a child to be quiet, there is Zero Space for Websites or News or a Meetup.

When she's zapped by the sound of doors closing in her shared housing, there is Zero Space for Cafe or Restaurant or Downtown.

Her world is so, so small.

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Now that you have some Root Living lenses—a little bit of context for what unfolded during those years—we can zoom back in:
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Her first summer in the Desert, Rose Bluehaven befriends a Juniper tree in the backyard, and sits with her back on the scraggly bark, eyes open or closed, soaking in the Sun.

She sits out there often on the weekends, just staring.

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Across her first moon at the Job, she gets to know a few coworkers, mostly through thin crew chatter and shared projects.

It's on her first 1:1 ride with the Grounded One where conversation finally deepens.

"Are you co-dependent?" he asks her, after sharing something personal.

Am I dependent on another? she understands it to mean.

"No," she quickly replies, thinking of her grand voyages in years past—across continents, across landscapes—all on her own.
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“Good,” he says.

Something in Rose's body tingles at the approval and settles a hair.

Only much later would she learn the word means something else entirely.

The Job begins to feel slightly more familiar, though it still drains Rose dry.

Her weekends are devoted entirely to replenishing enough energy to begin another week.

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When autumn comes, Rose returns to learn from the Story Mammal Creatrix across another two moons.

She strengthens her skills at being with Body's Sensations and thickening stories.

She practices speaking in front of these sweet Story Mammals, being seen with tears, Overwhelming Activations, and her Root-Living body.
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With this growing awareness, Rose senses Gloria the Good Worker more clearly each work day, unmistakably present.

She longs to have Story Mammal friends nearby.

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In the winter, she puts her name on a waiting list to see a Talking Doctor, because that's what she's heard to do when things aren't right. It could be a full season before there's an opening, they say.

As she waits for that door, another opens.

The Creatrix creates the Loam: a yearlong intimate gathering of Story Mammals across the Widely-World-Webs, to practice sensation and story together, with the Earth.

Rose has little idea how much of a home the Loam will become.
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One weekend that winter, she discovers the deep meaning of the word "Empath."

Suddenly, parts of her life she'd always seen as individual stars were now woven together into an unmistakable constellation:

✧ The deep dreaming

✧ The digestive disorder from her 20s

✧ The preference for being alone

✧ The almost-dying experience at 16

✧ Being drawn to unseen/healing realms

✧ Her deep love of nature

✧ The curiosity, her search for truth

✧ Being unable to lie / pretend / do things half-heartedly

“Empath” leads Rose to the term "Highly Sensitive Person," and onto her map they both go.

Rose is wary of labeling any human with words, however, so she doesn't fuse these new clues with her fluid Identity.

She doesn't yet know that many of these lenses will soften and dissolve entirely in the years to come, allowing space for something quieter and truer.

For now, they help her orient—temporary lanterns along the way. The terms make her feel slightly less alone; part of her experience is reflected.

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But she still doesn't see her exact experience in the books and audios.

These sharp sudden sensations, the instant draining.
Avoiding the Piercing Pain by avoiding spoken interactions with others.
But foregoing the verbal pleasantries threatens
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Gloria's life. She begs Rose to please help her. To save her. To do what a kind person would do.
To be a good friend.
To be a good worker.
To be a good housemate.
To be a good sibling.
To be a good daughter.

In these Catch-22s, it's as if the gas and the brakes were slammed at the same time, body being given two completely opposite commands, urgently.

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In spring, there is an opening with a Talking Doctor. Rose experiences many tears and painful discomfort at being misunderstood. The Talking Doctor asks about the Kind Ones Who Raised Her, and Rose's whole body constricts.

The Talking Doctor doesn't know what Rose is experiencing in her body. Rose shares that she benefits from Noticing Body's Sensations, the Story Mammal practices she's been using since Black Mountain.
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Rose is teaching the Talking Doctor how to be of help, and that's much too big a burden for someone as tender as her.

She goes for nine weeks, and then her body says to stop. It is not helping to Talk About Things.

And it is not helping to be observed through such a narrow lens.

A lens which excludes the Juniper tree,
the subtle energy communicating everywhere,
the Very Uncomfortable Sensations unfolding in the here and now,
the Great Mother who blesses and guides,
the Divine Source of all life.

It misses so much that's true to living, that narrow lens.

When Rose arrives on her final visit, there is no doubt in her bones that leaving the Talking Doctor is the right thing to do.

But, you see, to *do* this, she has to *tell* the Talking Doctor that this is her final visit.

And Gloria will not have this.

Gloria anticipates the harm that could befall the Talking Doctor if she hears Rose's truth:

You are not helpful to me.
You are not what I need.

Gloria thrashes her sword and holds her shield high. You will not tell this Talking Doctor such a mean thing!

When the time is right, Rose begins to speak the words—and instantly Gloria takes over. It happens all at once:

Gloria's shrieks and protests bring tears, heat, and sweat, flooding Rose with Shame-Sensations-of-Death. Rose's eyes have broken from the Talking Doctor's, down to the left and closed, per usual. Her shoulders have caved inward, making her as small as she feels.

Her body is overwhelmed with Gloria's battle.

This can't be happening.

Rose has been here before, though. And while it's still terrifying and beyond uncomfortable each and every time, it's getting familiar.

Rose uses all the capacity she can gather to tolerate Gloria's lash-out.

And when she's able to make words again, once she's allowed back in her body, Rose continues.

They aren't polished words from Mind-Ideas, but rather the words that her vessel makes in the moment.

Rose Bluehaven was able to speak what she needed to that day, and that was cause for celebration.

Not because she triumphed over Gloria, though.

Rose would have celebrated even if Gloria hadn't let her end visits with the Talking Doctor.

You see, in both cases, Rose is aware of Body's Sensations. She celebrates the Noticing.

And across years of Noticing-Celebrations, bit by bit, Rose learns the subtle language found in no books. The meaning of each constriction: each type of tightness in her throat, each flavor of tears, each pain pierce in her top left shoulder blade, each pre-migraine throb, each flash of heat across her upper back.

Feeling. Sensing. Connecting patterns.

She now has one of her most trusted tools: Body-as-Compass.

Invisible to others, Body-as-Compass becomes the air her lungs now breathe.

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Rose reads that Highly-Sensing Souls are valuable and helpful to all groups of humans.

They are the Yellow Birds who warn the others of danger, the Makers and Healers, often endowed with spiritual gifts to lead others with their hearts.

But Rose isn't receiving visions or able to communicate with spirits or other realms. She can't even sense her own energy centers. There are no new "powers" being bestowed here.

Instead, a 15-minute drive to town for groceries is still a taxing Capital-E-Event.

A honk from a car rocks her, tears immediately present.

Those all too familiar crashing waves tossing her about, as she struggles and flails, grasping for a buoy that isn't there.

What is wrong with me? she often thinks.

I'm not made for this kind of life. Everything changed, and now I cannot. I'm not a person.

At least once a week, Rose envisions the only other future she could possibly imagine, given her capacity:

Leaving her job and car camping.

It doesn't quite *enliven* her body, but at least she could simply be with the plants and animals.

She would have freedom to feel energies-in-motion and let tears fall, without managing others' perceptions.

This is what she'd done after Wise Wells had died, after all, while in Inbetween.

Although the Grief had been difficult, being with the vast Red Rocks and Sage Brush had nourished her. Staring out at those wider than wide skies, days deliciously spacious and unfolding at the perfect pace. A nibble of loving Content when there was space. No other voices or energies present. No

Content to digest. No measuring of hours or days. Simply Being.

But Obtaining Food and Water Without a Home, and Not Having a Mailing Address were things she didn't have capacity to navigate.

And so she continued, one moment at a time, with Body-as-Compass amid the crashing waves.

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As spring continues to turn, she gets connected with another Tealight: a Roots-Aware Talking Doctor who also practices Energy Healing.

They begin to meet every other week on the phone. After two moons, the Energy Healings begin.

The healings all start in the same way:
"Can you sign in for me, saying your full name three times?" she asks over the phone.

"Rose Bluehaven,
~~~

Rose Bluehaven,
Rose Bluehaven," Rose chants, lying on her back on her bedroom floor, right where the window light pours in, the soft shawl stretched over her front like a blanket.

"Thank you, Rose. Would you like an Energy Healing today?"

"Yes."

Then Rose enters her Meditation Sanctuary, as the Roots-Aware Energy Healer guides.

Rose gets used to not seeing visuals, but trusting the wisps.

She hears a distant beep of work equipment and wonders what her coworkers are doing outside.

Will it stay quiet enough?

Once she has landed in her Meditation Sanctuary, the Energy Healer invites Rose to send roots deep,

deep into the Earth, from the base of her spine. "Even deeper, even wider," she says, "Wider than the entire Desert."

Once she's anchored down, Rose welcomes in Earth Energy.

"Now, open the bottoms of your feet like flower petals," the Energy Healer says.

"And on your inhales, begin to bring Earth Energy into your body. Feel it rise from your roots, up into your feet, up your legs, to about your belly button."

One inhale at a time, sturdy Earth Energy breezes into her body.

As the breaths continue, her vigilance softens a bit.

Now comes the releasing.

"With each exhale, allow anything that's ready to release leave out the bottom of your feet–into the Earth, where she'll compost it into new Life. Send

out other people's energy, any stagnant or stuck energy, anything that's not yours."

Often Rose envisions she is a coffee press, and as she exhales, the press comes down, from her head to her neck, her neck to her heart, her heart to her belly, to her root, to her legs, to her knees, and down to her feet. Gathering all the debris and sending it out the soles of her feet with a blessing.

With each inhale, a heaviness gradually fills her body.

With each exhale, her shoulders relax a bit.

Over and over she breathes deeply with intention, grounding her energy.

Rose senses inward, and is surprised she can actually feel a difference! It's subtle, but it's there. She feels weighted, less buzzy. Sturdier. She can feel the contours of her body touching the carpet, being held.

Once grounded they continue the sequence that becomes familiar: bringing down Life Force from above, refreshing each chakra, clearing/refreshing her aura, and connecting with her Wisest Self.

It is through this practice, that for 30 minutes every other week, Rose has reprieve from the Allconsuming Fear.

The effect dissolves quickly once she opens her eyes, returning to the walls around her. But some wise part within tells Rose to continue practicing anyway.

She begins to weave in a short Grounding during her 15-min morning break at work, lying on her back outside, knees up so her feet can make contact with the Earth. On the weekends, she guides herself through a fuller Grounding, often out with the Juniper.

Through this consistent practice, Rose deepens sacred relationships with the Great Mother and her kin. She clears and strengthens her body's electric Bio-Field. She knows one other human who validates the subtle energy she feels each day.

~~~

Across her own explorations, it is in this season that Rose learns deeper meanings of the word "co-dependent."

She's surprised to learn its origin is far different than what she'd thought when The Grounded One asked her all those seasons ago. It comes from unhealthy relationships often involving addiction and care-taking.

But in a class for Highly-Sensing Souls, she encounters some of the term's branching meanings:

- shaping oneself around another's needs,
- abandoning one's own desires,
- carefully tending another's perception to stay safe

A passage in the course text stops Rose cold:

> "Some people learn to stay safe by becoming exactly what others need them to be. They monitor tones, moods, facial expressions, and expectations so closely that they lose contact with their own body's signals.
>
> They put another person's needs over their own to maintain relational safety.
~~~

> The compulsion is not simply to help. It is to prevent discomfort, disapproval, anger, or rupture."

Rose reads the words again, and her thoughts immediately go to Gloria.

- The quick agreement.
- The over-helpfulness.
- Tracking every second for what others might feel, think, prefer, expect.
- The terror of disappointing another.
- Acting as an Above Ground Good Worker instead of voicing what's true.

Rose feels something rearrange inside her as this lens thickens her story. The temporary lantern lights new paths.

This is precisely what causes so much of the constriction, the migraines, the exhaustion!

Yet thanks to her Story Mammal experiences, Rose understands these ways haven't been conscious choices.

Her body couldn't tolerate the discomfort of another person's disappointment or disapproval.

Her system had morphed itself automatically to what others preferred… to survive! (No Terrible Bad Thing required—the body doesn't rank.)

Compassion for Gloria expands.

Gloria had been carrying that heavy shield and sword each day to protect Rose, in the only way she knew how.

So Rose begins sitting beside Gloria. Listening. Thanking her for carrying so much for so long. Letting her tired head rest in Rose's lap.

Gently affirming that Very Uncomfortable Sensations will not end her life—Rose has got her.

To begin loosening these co-dependent tendencies, Rose embraces a new Mind-Idea to accompany her Sensation-Noticing:

Ask clearly for what you want,
while letting go of the outcome.

This means slowly growing her body's ability to be with another person's discomfort, disapproval, or anger.

Drop by drop.

She begins where her system can:
On a phone call, a teacher asks if Rose would like the templates mailed to her.

Rose doesn't have a printer. It would take an enormous amount of energy to make the journey to the library on a weekend to print. Receiving them at her mailbox would be so simple.

The sensations of constriction arrive instantly, Gloria anticipating danger.

Before Rose can even sense them, she hears herself saying, “No, that's okay.”

Gloria does not want to inconvenience the teacher.

Then, Rose's new practice flickers into awareness.

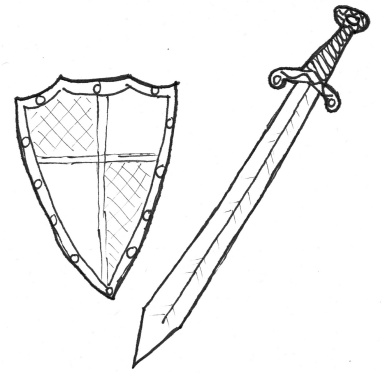
“Actually,” she corrects clumsily, “yes, if it's not too much trouble, please mail them.”

The teacher says great, she will. Nothing terrible happens.

Rose celebrates a triumph!

She writes about the phone call and shares the win with the Loam.

A new possibility begins to emerge:
Perhaps Gloria does not need to grip her shield and sword quite so tightly after all.



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Around the same time, a relationship buds with an Above Ground Man with Heart Roots, who joined her Job that winter. They begin to share love with one another. Since Rose no longer builds false foundations, they intentionally grow roots together.

She soaks in the warmth of hugging another human being. The strength of not being alone in this. The solidness of an Above Ground Heart-Roots human who wants to know how she is and who she is and what she feels and love her and call the auto parts store for her when she has No Spoons to investigate the Light of Terror that appeared on her dashboard.

Does everyone with an intimate in-person friend feel this much sturdier? she wonders.

Their work rhythms and work housing locations only allow for seeing each other one evening per week.

Life is full, full, full, FULL

for Rose, losing one solo-recovery day each weekend to make a Full-Hour-Long journey Fridays after work to see him, and the return Full-Hour-Long journey on Saturday morning.

But after so many years isolated, his loving company is worth this huge energetic cost, even for one dinner and early bed.

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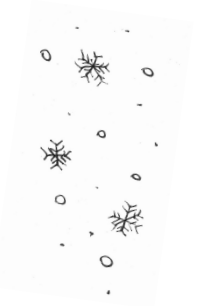
At this new weekly rhythm, the summer days get long and hot, until they begin to cool and shorten.



Soon snow covers the ground holding the Juniper again, and across this white winter, an array of experiences unfold:

* Journeying alone to see the Kind Ones Who Raised Her.
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* Experiencing a Terrible Bad Thing at the Job with coworkers, Heart-Roots Man among them.

* Receiving a puzzle that provides breathing space.

* Arranging travel to meet the Creatrix in person, nine moons from now.

* The arrival of a new housemate, the departure of another.

And after many snows, signs of spring emerge anew.

Across this year, the hour drive begins to take slightly less energy than it once did for Rose. She gains more practice navigating with Body-as-Compass and Grounding, while continuing to nurture Gloria.

Rose has a deeper felt-knowing of what she needs.

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The Man with Heart Roots isn't enjoying his Job in the Desert, though. And since his body is much more fit for Above Ground living, he takes a new job in Mountain Land.

He can do those things, you see, things like Pack Up Home, Travel to New Land, Find Housing, and Start a New Job with New Coworkers.

While those sorts of Above Ground things are still far beyond the reach of Rose, she also feels in her body it's not right to follow.

For many moons, she had sensed that their roots were reaching towards different soils, but she hadn't been able to look there directly.

It had been hard living Above Ground at that Job in the Desert, but the Man with Heart Roots had made it more bearable.

One night a week to look forward to.

Someone wonderful to talk with, to be with, to connect with as Heart Roots.

You can imagine what it might have been like when he left, can't you?

While her bright weekly light is splashed out, and new Grief-to-feel abounds, it's soon accompanied by two additional hours a week of Tealights, new anchors amid the storm: Body Work and Qigong.

This is the first time she's even able to drive to Downtown on a weekend for a Something, her third summer in the Desert.

She uses that new capacity for Friday Body Work and Saturday morning Qigong. Then back to Rest & Recovery at home, in order to get through another demanding four-day-week at the Job.

The Body Work is a type that changes how her body arranges and moves. It builds gradually, across the summer moons.

Week by week, Rose gains height, walks differently, slowly feels a little more spaciousness, slightly less contraction in her body.

The woman facilitating such transformation is Body Magic Mel. She once had a Job at the very same

place Rose works now. Body Magic Mel had left it all ten years prior to pursue this work when she experienced how miraculous it is.

Qigong is taught by Purple Heart Woman, who weaves in gentle reminders as the handful of students follow her graceful movements.

“Remember, don't do something simply because I tell you to. Listen to your wise body.”

This is the only time a week Rose is with people beyond coworkers.

She returns, week after week, using all her weekend capacity to get there.

Moons pass, Grief and greyness abound. And these Tealights of Body Work, Qigong, and Energy Healing keep her moving forward.

She is not well, though. Still very not well.

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At summer's end, she makes the gigantic effort of Traveling East to be with the Story Mammal Creatrix.

There, she is in the company of Loamy Heart-Roots humans for four days. Away from the Job for a week.

In that environment, she receives a potent Groundswell Root Infusion. Her body shifts, being in a gentler place with some shared language (and shared no-language). Where it's okay for tears to fall, to eat alone, to be as you are. No story is needed. No energy drained in explanations or translations. No protecting or pretending. Simply tracking Body's Sensations, without judgement. Being.

It is green and lush and there are streams.

It's like she is a Fern, and this is where Ferns can be.

She feels the difference in her body!

The return to her Job in the Desert is jarring.

Ferns do not live here, because it's not the environment they need. Her leaves quickly begin to brown and wilt.

It takes a few weeks, but she knows what she must do. Her body has been communicating clearly for years. She will leave the Job Above Ground, which was never a place for someone like her to begin with.

This means also losing her Mailing Address and living space, which is why it took the potent Groundswell Root Infusion plus every ounce of capacity she'd slowly built up over 2.5 years in toxic air, in order to do so.

She packs up her things and makes a four-day journey back to Black Mountain for a Help Exchange, because it's the only place she knows, and all she has energy to do.

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She feels a bit between worlds there at Black Mountain. There's some space for Root Living, yet heavy Above Ground elements are there too.

Schedules and tasks that create pressure and discomfort.

The absence of deep Loamy intention.

Above Grounders on Temple Keeper treadmills who talk about Above Ground.

Above Grounders on Help Exchange treadmills, coming and going with that hard-to-breathe air, that dizzying speed.

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Rose learns that the Wise Witch Named Hawk of Star will be teaching a Magical Plant Class right there at Black Mountain come winter. The same woman whose books had enlivened her two years prior, in the thick of the dark.
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With courage, Rose uncomfortably asks the Temple Keepers if she can attend. Could she make up the three weeks of Help Exchange she would miss, later on?

They say of course, we'll work it out in the winter.

Rose withers in worry all fall. She can hardly keep her head above water with the required 25 hours a week of Helping. How will she ever "make up" that many hours on top?

Gloria will not let her ask, of course. The Temple Keepers think that Rose is helpful and dependable, from her first stay. Gloria intends to keep it this way, even though Rose's capacity has changed.

The interactions with fellow Help Exchangers cause such sharp Pain Explosions, that Rose's heart beats faster when one comes into view, and her feet run away.

She rarely joins for group meals. Instead, she watches from a hidden lookout until the Big Kitchen

is empty. Then she darts inside, heart pounding as she rushes to gather what she needs. Someone could enter at any moment.

Yes, the environment at Black Mountain is gentler than in the Desert: the Temple Keepers are housing Rose and feeding her. Redwoods and ocean views abound. But the weekly Helping hours and the human interactions they require are unbearable.

The Allconsuming Fear remains with Rose each day, though it seems louder than before.

Gloria is still swinging her sword, but trapping Rose in Catch-22s that somehow feel fiercer than in the Desert.

The Temple Keepers don't know the language of Story Mammals, so Rose doesn't share. They don't know how much Rose is struggling.

They don't see Rose as much as they did her first stay.

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What if even Black Mountain is too much for me?, she wonders one day, exhausted from an Overwhelming Activation, many moons after arriving.

Perhaps she could stay at the Man with Heart Roots's new home in Mountain Land—the only person safe enough to ask for such a favor—if Black Mountain isn't where she can rest.

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In the middle of winter, the Creatrix announces she will host another Root Infusion at summer's start. In Mountain Land.

Rose signs up immediately. This could be her off-ramp from Black Mountain. Her exit from Inbetween. Ready or not, she will get herself to Mountain Land in six moons.

Maybe she could even visit the Man with Heart Roots, since she'd be so nearby.
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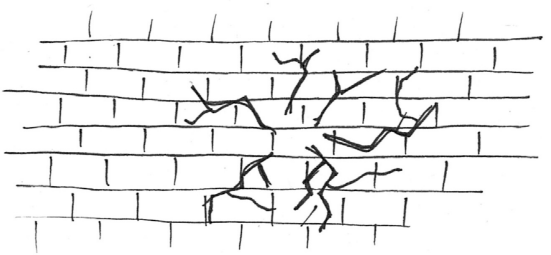
Days later, she smacks into a brick ceiling during the Magical Plant Class.



For three weeks she is surrounded by Witchy Above Grounders who can laugh and delight and drive to town with the effort of a breath and call a friend and be vertical after 4pm and be around other people all day.

They bring with them Activism and Making and Sharing Meals With Friends and Gathering in Communities—all things far outside of Rose's capacity.

The Magical Plant Class students bond and have a life-changing experience with Hawk of Star, while Rose experiences Get Horizontal Now and Fuller Than Full and Too Much Too Fast Too Soon.

The brick ceiling is hard.

"Don't try to climb!" it shouts fiercely, "You're in Root Living, not Above Ground, silly."

"Just be where you are," it softens.

“But Hawk of Star is here now!” Rose is so frustrated and sad that she cannot participate and learn all these exciting things she wants to learn and know.

She cannot interact with and speak to these beautiful people she wants to befriend. Her body still has no space for such Above Ground concepts and ideas.

Instead, she experiences Shame-Sensations-of-Death at how much is beyond capacity.

Like a dish-washing task one morning with others.

She's very familiar with the Big Kitchen, as cooking and dishes are a regular part of the Black Mountain Helping.

But the Magical Plant students are not using the special dishwasher the way that the Temple Keepers taught Rose! (The Magical Plant students didn't even receive proper training for the dish-washing task!)

Rose can hear the Temple Keepers in her mind, feeling their disapproval:

"They put soap in the dish buckets?! You know dish soap can ruin the machine!"

"They ran it with trays only partially full?!" Why didn't you say anything, Rose? You were there!"

"You know we hand wash the wooden cutting boards. You let them go through the dishwasher?!"

Rose's left shoulder blade is flaring, the heaviness of responsibility already crushing her.

Dishes clang as they're put away, voices from the dining hall overwhelm her ears, the cooking crew is shouting directions to each other, the water from the pull-down sprayer pangs against the shiny sink.

It's Too Loud. Too Much. Too Fast.

Rose sees a team member about to slide a tray only half-full into the dishwasher.

No, no, no! What a waste of hot water!
Rose uncomfortably stops her:

"Wait! Oh, we need to fill that tray before we run it."

"I worked at a restaurant," the woman says calmly, "we have to keep the trays moving." And before Rose can get out another word, the team member's hand slides the partial tray into the dishwasher, pulls the cover down, and the wash cycle begins.

Alarm bells go off inside of Rose.

Gloria shrieks, spirals, sinks, as she cannot satisfy the Temple Keeper's dishwasher preferences. The sounds build and build. Tears are here. Head feels fuzzy.

Rose escapes to the bathroom.

On top of the Overwhelming Activation, she's aware she is coming across as cold and serious.

There's no time or space to explain Gloria and Root Living to the Magical Plant Class.

Rose is exhausted and the first session of the day has not yet begun.

Gloria forbids her from asking to skip these team chores that squeeze her dry, and so it piles on:

The Catch-22 of being misunderstood, keeping an eye on the dish washing at every meal—even when it's not her team's shift, ensuring the Black Mountain buildings and grounds are used properly, missing sessions she desperately wants to attend, body short-circuiting and choking on all this new Content she genuinely longs to learn, not sleeping well because her body doesn't have space to digest each day, the horror and panic of a Car Ride with Other People, the wood stove leaking smoke until the fire alarm screams, dodging to find safe places for tears, dangerous depletion of Composting Time, and now there's a Group Project to complete during "free time," then present to all two days from now.

When will she get to rest?

To cry?

To process?

Rose is trapped in Root Living while navigating an intensely Above Ground experience.

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The Magical Plant Class ends, and Fuller-Than-Full Rose returns to bed with cough and snot and little hope left.

The wood stove still leaks, and she cannot bring herself to ask the Temple Keepers for help. Without a fire, the cold settles in and stays.

Debris covers everything in a thick heavy fog.

She honestly doesn't know if she's climbing or falling.
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How close to the surface is she?

Or was there further to fall?

She'd left the Above Ground Job that wasn't aligned, and has been doing little beyond staring at moss for a quarter of a year, aside from the Helping hours… and *now* she's dropped to a new low?!

When will she return from Root Living to all the people up Above Ground?

When will she have a home and actual in-person friends?

When will she feel like herself again?

When will she have space for the learning and books that used to light up her soul… Before.

It's been five unthinkably long years, for goodness sake!

She never imagined so much of her fourth decade on Earth would be spent alone with the roots, in this world that was completely hidden growing up. A world unseen to many.

She holds oceans of Grief for all these years unable to live Above Ground.

She needs a sanctuary with others in Root Living.

She needs to curl up and cocoon a while longer.



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A week after the Magical Plant Class—still encompassed in fog, wobbling, but able to be vertical—she receives word from the Man with Heart Roots that he's ready to connect romantically with another Above Grounder in Mountain Land.

Perhaps he could meet Rose somewhere that summer for a brief visit, but she can no longer stay at his house.

Rose's stomach drops as her eyes dart away from the words.

Boom.

Pang.

Pierce.
~~~
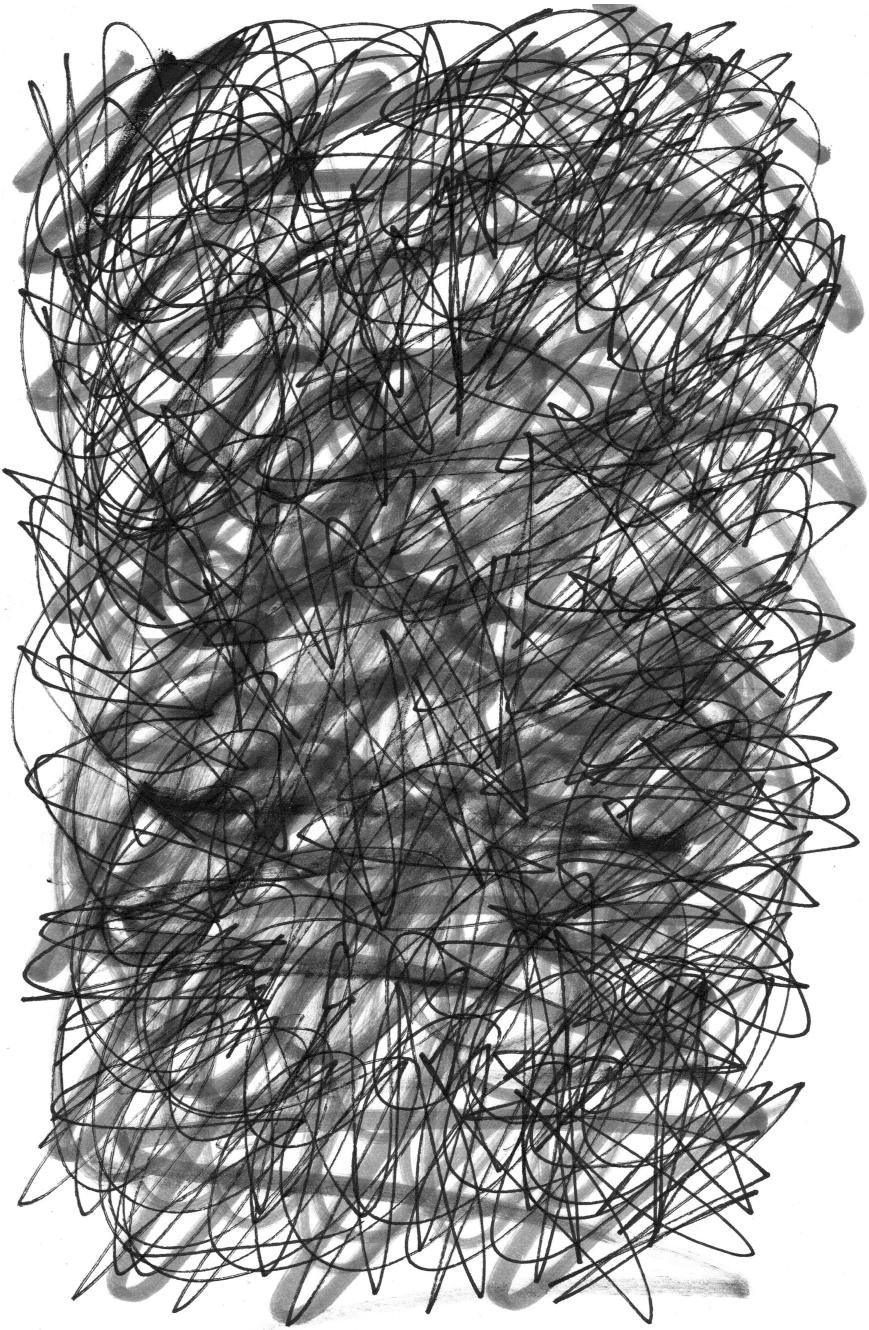



Rose feels the similar isolation as when her final foundations had crumbled upon first arriving in the Desert, three years prior.

His home in Mountain Land has been the Only Idea of where to possibly go, if she can't be Above Ground when she leaves for the Root Infusion in four months time.

What if it gets worse, as it had during the Magical Plant Class? What if she needs to fully cocoon?

Now there's no safe place to go.

She's trapped in a Too Much Too Fast Too Soon existence.

She slides back down deeper in the roots,
painfully alone,

Deep in the despair of this collapse.

After a week of composting, and beginning to write this very tale (thanks to a prompt in the Loam), a realization surfaces:

Now Is Not Then.

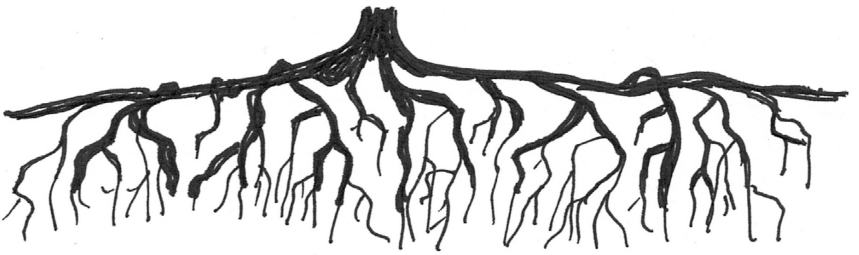
She'd grown roots with The Man with Heart Roots.

Roots!

Not a foundation.

And here's the thing about roots:
Roots remain.
Roots do not collapse after a single blow.
And roots gently return to the Earth when it's
Nature's Right Timing.

There. Are. Still. Roots. Here.



She looks around in her dark, and senses what else has been hidden by the recent fog.

More roots:
- Roots with Lady Evergreen.
- Roots with Loamy friends across the Widely-World-Webs.
- Roots with her Spirit, and the Great Mother.
- Roots with Younger Rose.
- Roots with her Wisest and Most Loving Self.
- Roots with her Younger Sibling.
- Roots with Energetic Systems.
- Roots with the Energy of her Teachers from Books and Podcasts.
- Roots with the Snails and the Redwoods and the Creek and the Moss.

Yes, her soil lacks hearty laughs and deep delights and cozy friend time. But it's not a barren sand. There are some nutrients here.

She has cabin time and resting and books and grounding and staring at the mossy branches out the window. She has been replenishing this soil for years in Root Living.

In the weeks that follow, she gathers on paper some of the superpowers she's gained through her explorations of Root Living.

Root Living Superpowers

* **Sword of Truth** - Slices through illusion
* **Learning Legend** - I can learn anything!
* **Snail Mail Magic** - Sends love and new energy in envelopes
* **Fiercely Feeling** - Sits with emotions and lets them flow
* **Deep-Sensing** - Senses subtle shifts in energy; intuits the unspoken, the unseen
* **Superb Self Knowing** - When body needs to lie down, I know upon first hint
* **Body-as-Compass** - Mind-Ideas take the back seat, fully fluent in Body's Sensations
* **Micro/Macro** - Seamlessly zooms in and out, to detail and the soul's long journey
* **Warm Space** - Can transform any space to brighten energy flow

She feels a new rootedness, a sliver of fear/shame has been shed, a new layer is emerging. It's subtle. This still isn't a caterpillar-to-butterfly transformation, even five years in.

And yet it's something. More like a ladybug.

So while she doesn't yet know places Above Ground that house and feed Root Living folks, that wrap them in safe gentle love, these bodies that can't do Jobs and Rent and Towns,

and while she doesn't know what it will look like to leave for Mountain Land in the summer, how far underground she'll still be, or where she'll live then,

she does know this:

Rose Bluehaven holds in her bones these Root Living powers—which perhaps could not have emerged Above Ground.

And she holds in her heart a beautiful story.

Of meeting those magical connections who welcome her truly with open arms and deep love, who let her sleep and who cook her soup and don't expect company or tasks in return.

Being able to flow in relaxed rhythms, as the hearts around her have no expectations, no timeline, no pressure, require no words or reports of what she's Doing. Simply deep wells of love.

Singing together and crying together and feeling together and no one is trying to change anyone and these are relationships which can actually hold her, and she doesn't need to "get better" to return to the surface.

Through this love, she would connect deeply with Above Ground humans again.

She would rise back anew, offer gifts in love and truth, nurture relationship with an area of Earth she calls home–knowing it's all connected, magnetize a Chosen Family of Heart-Root humans, live with the Earth's rhythms, her body's rhythms, feel safe to be

seen and woven into community, and use her deep roots to love, be with, witness, and inspire other humans in Root Living.

Creating the maps and stories and books she wished she'd had.

Singing songs and birthing heart creations, guided by her joys and delights.

Guided by the Great Mother.

Trusting that this loving ripples out—like roots reaching farther than can be seen—blessing all beings, all Life, in divine Right Timing.

To be continued...

Root Living Resources

* **Irene Lyon** - Nervous System Education & Somatic Experiencing
  www.irenelyon.com

* **Molly Caro May** - Story + Soma + Social Loam & Story Mammal (*Now: Modern Mammal*)
  www.mollycaromay.com

Early Tealights

* Starhawk's "The Earth Path" / Reclaiming
* Sonia Choquette
* Mirabai Staar
* Feldenkrais (feldenkraisproject.com)

The Desert Years

* Lynn Andrews - "Medicine Woman" series
* Sandra Ingerman
* Judith Orloff
* Judith Blackstone
* Laura Lynne Jackson
* Bliss and Grit - Vanessa Scotto & Brooke Thomas
  www.youtube.com/@BlissandGrit)
* Intuition Medicine (as taught by Caroline Lewis of Root Awareness, www.rootawareness.com)
* Lyla June

* Catherine Liggett - Insight Timer talks
* Threshold Choir - https://thresholdchoir.org
* Rolfing
* Qigong

Back at Black Mountain

* Sophie Strand
* Perdita Finn
* Dr. Kelly Brogan
* Amber Magnolia Hill (Medicine Stories Podcast)
* Home to Her (Podcast)

After

* "The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness" by Sarah Ramey
* "If Women Rose Rooted" by Sharon Blackie
* Kristin Noelle - Energy Healing www.kristinnoelle.com
* Dra. Rocío Rosales Meza - www.drrosalesmeza.com
* Lorie Ladd - Teachings with Jesus www.lorieladd.com

Journals of non-fiction stories from this Root Living time can be found at

www.rebeccaroots.love/root-living

as well as songs and heart creations.

a note about how this story came to be...

In January of 2024, I was deep in despair, exhausted and hopeless from five years of struggle, isolation, and darkness— my body responding with survival physiology to most everyday things, adrenals over-worked for years unable to interact with most people. There were no words in our realm to describe what my 'living' had become.

Definitely without 'writing energy' in me, I was sitting on the floor in a small cabin, no service or wifi to distract, and I mustered the strength to do a writing prompt from the Loam. It was a fill-in-the-blank prompt.

Something like: She took a [type of transportation] when she fell to [place] and only brought [item].

I set a 5-min. timer and began to move the pen.

"She took an unmarked burrow when she fell to Root Living," and only brought her tears."

Out came three sloppy hand written pages.

Suddenly there was a place.
Suddenly there were words.

A few weeks later, in that quiet cabin, I moved the pen and created a list of the powers I'd been gaining across these challenging years; the fog slowly lightened.

I typed up the short story, and there it sat. (I was still navigating Root Living each day.) A year passed. Then another.

In April of 2026, the story asked me to finish it and share it widely. And so...

I invite you to Print/Copy this Zine and share it! (if it feels right)

PDFs (One formatted for Booklet printing, one for e-readers):
www.rebeccaroots.com/root-living

Energetic Exchange
I am sharing this freely from joyful overflow; soul assignment. And, if you receive from this story and want to engage in a feels-good energetic exchange, I am open to receiving $ via Venmo @RebeccaRoots (-1437). Money received will allow me to print more pass-along copies that people can hold in their hands.

Other ways to exchange energetically:

- Keep tending the roots—unseen & quiet, yet potent—in your everyday: noticing sensations, thickening stories, celebrating the noticings, listening to your body's preference
- Have a conversation with your people about a question, curiosity, or noticing this story stirred in you
- Share 'Root Living' with someone who might resonate with this story (physical booklet or link to PDF)
- Print & gift a copy to your local healing arts office, yoga studio, or free little library.

Thank you!
-Rebecca

Dummerston, VT • 2026