

A stylized illustration of a tree with a brown trunk and branches, and a dense canopy of green and yellow leaves. The tree is positioned on the left side of the cover. In the background, there is a bright yellow sky with a large, textured orange sun in the upper right corner. Below the sun are three small orange dots. At the bottom of the cover, there is a green landscape with a body of water and a sandy beach. The title 'FOLIO' is written in a large, bold, white font with a black outline, centered on the right side of the cover.

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Childhood terrified me. I was born clairvoyant and lived in a wilderness invisible to most, where fear scorched the landscape. Though I tried, there was no hiding from the things I saw. Day after day an opaque, undulating crimson spirit followed me. Thanks to Sunday school, I'd pegged this as the Devil—proof positive that I was born wrong.

No one sees what I see. I'm broken and don't belong. I felt this way for so long that it became a belief. I couldn't be fixed. I camouflaged myself in response. I pretended—about everything—and always felt like a fraud. In school, I pretended the walls weren't rippling like water. In bed, I feigned sleep as globe-eyed beings watched me breathe.

My inauthenticity caused many rock-bottoms. By age forty, it showed. I hated myself. I lived in fear. I drank too much, ate too little, and married a man who only marginally liked me. My role as a wife hinged on panic and subservience. By the end of our marriage, I barely spoke.

Even so, our split flattened me. I couldn't face life alone, especially as a mother. My mind failed. My body followed, and chronic Lyme disease raged out of remission. Even amidst ten months of frenzied prayer—physically, emotionally and mentally—all systems failed.

The night of August 11, 2017, I climbed the stairs on all fours, like every night that year. But tonight was my final ascent. I was headed upstairs to die, and my friends knew it, too. They had warned me for months, but I never-minded them every time.

Tonight my one-note Greek chorus was right and they wouldn't leave my side. Friends rotated in and out. We overlapped on the couch in an unacknowledged vigil. They urged me to call my parents. They stroked my hair as I watched *Castaway* on mute.

I was couch-bound all year, in pain and paralysis. My walker was my chariot. Breathing was a chore. I spoke mostly in whispers. Bags of IV antibiotics drained through the port in my arm. I wore a fanny-pack to carry it all. I functioned like a dairy cow with disposable udders.

Once a day, I crawled from couch to kitchen. I'd lay on the floor and make PB&Js, then line them up along the wall. I'd leave the sandwiches out for my kids, like they were animals.

I was out of life force and I wanted the truth behind death's mystery. But my intuition had other plans. I was nearly to bed when a

thought sounded in my head: *you have to leave your body tonight and find help.*

The idea pierced my resignation. I'd left my body before. I'd astral-traveled for years, though never on command. But it wouldn't have been whispered if it couldn't be done.

As I gripped the stepstool by my bed, another gifted-thought dropped: *lie along the edge and roll your astral body off the ledge.* And just before sleep's tipping point, I did.

After leaving my body, I travelled like a blade and arrived at a place of nothing. A space like wet velvet. No sound or light. It was the zero point of creation, the void.

"God, please take me somewhere safe and good," I said, and He did.

I merged with God. I steeped in His infinite, blazing, golden light and felt what He is made of. Freedom, above all.

I'd thought God a vague but loving force. I was wrong. God knew me. We spoke without speaking. I was wholly loved. I could have been anyone. I could have been a murderer. God received me in love and light because that's how God receives.

And my greatest realization? God and I are one and the same. At once, I knew there is no death—just energy changing form. There are no rules or gatekeepers. All rituals are accepted.

I had built my life around fear, worshipping its counsel with every decision. But no more. My same, jangly life now appeared divinely inspired—because of the rock-bottoms, not in spite of them.

I awoke with the force of lightning strike, sat up and swung my legs out of bed. I kept a floral print walking cane upstairs. My Laura Ashley accessory stood ready, but I patted its handle instead of lunging. I didn't need it anymore. I haven't used it since.

Standing up, I faced a curled print taped to the wall by my bed. My favorite saying doubled me over, though I'd read it countless times: *She remembered who she was and the game changed.* I folded onto my heels and cried. I had betrayed myself at every turn, until this night.

Until I returned home to myself and remembered.

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