

The Return of the Girl Behind the Door
Reflection Guide



THE
WILD SEED
DREAM

Maree Aldridge

Also written by Maree Aldridge

Letters to a Missing Woman

The Return of
the Girl Behind the Door

The Return of the Girl Behind the Door

The Lessons (PDF)

Copyright © 2021 Maree Aldridge

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-0-473-59435-0

THE WILD SEED DREAM

Reflection Guide



“The cold child tethered to you is not your torturer, or a punishment but a wild seed. The seed of true life is not always what you expect it to be. Sometimes it is what you least expect, like the cold and uncared for parts of your soul.”

From the Entr’acte (between the acts): **THE DARK MOTHER’S DIVINING**



Welcome to **The Wild Seed Dream Reflection Guide**, companion to *The Return of the Girl Behind the Door* Visual Novella.

The focus of this guide is to engage with one of the main themes explored in *The Return of the Girl Behind the Door* – the relationship between the Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door. The Returning Woman asks, “How is a cold child a seed, a promise, a hope?” Essentially the question is how we can take discomfort, disruption, and painful change, and transform it into a lifegiving gift. This is referred to as the ‘unwelcome’ visitor in the guiding questions.

Before embarking upon the following questions, reflect upon who or what has/is showing up in your life as unwelcome or unwilling change. These may be unwanted circumstances, or an unknown version of yourself, something unlikeable about yourself you are acutely aware of, or reminders of your younger self trapped in time somewhere in your past who is affecting

your present. The disturbing circumstance or unwelcome visitor (aspect of yourself) may be something you want to reject or run from. This guide is designed to help you move toward what is uncomfortable by degrees, to know it and reframe your perspective.

The following reflection questions/suggestions were used in workshops. Together we used many different approaches to reflect, such as; letter writing, imagination, visualization, story circles, dancing, creating, breaking, burning, burying, writing on rocks, role plays, being out in the elements, finding symbols, sharing pictures, searching through magazines for headlines and mind-mapping. You may like to use the questions/suggestions as prompts to journal, share conversation with a friend or you may need to engage more kinesthetically by creating your way into insightful reflection. There is no right or wrong way, work with the guiding questions and suggestions that you feel comfortable to playfully engage in.

To do this inner work create a holding space that is safe for you to unfold in. Take the position of being a kind witness to yourself, let your gaze upon yourself be non-judgemental, full of acceptance, that honours the truest self within, that loves and shelters, and that has no agenda (not attached to outcomes). Think of watchers or witnesses in nature – like standing stones, massive trees, the ocean, the sky. And as you read the story then see it (and the characters within) also as a kind witness/es. Art and stories often act as mirrors where we begin to see ourselves in the story or the characters. The story and the characters do not judge you or have an agenda for you. You are accepted fully with patient partnership.

From this position of kindness approach the reflection prompts a “Quester”. The **Q.** beside each suggestion or question stands for ‘Quest’. Imagine that you are a self-researcher, a discoverer, an adventurer, a genealogist finding a lost branch of the family, a scientist discovering a new species, an archaeologist discovering an ancient site that has been buried for centuries, an explorer finding an unmapped parts of the world, an astronaut searching space and discovering an unnamed planet. Approach all discoveries with curiosity.

Remember creativity is a wonderful mediator to help you process uncomfortable and difficult things. Take time to undertake any creative suggestions that appeal to you and be as inventive as you desire. See the guiding questions and suggested activities as a way of moving deeper, as a personal quest, into the material of the fictional story and how it might intersect with your life. However, **do not hesitate to work with a counsellor or psychotherapist if any of the following guiding questions raise painful issues/memories/feelings where you feel out of your depth. The guiding questions are not a substitute for therapy if this is a point in your life that you would benefit from a guiding therapeutic relationship.**

Journey well!

Maree Aldridge

The Returning Journey



Exposition - **PRIOR TO RETURNING**

A Dilapidated History: **THE BINDING LULLABY**

PLEASE NOTE that the following reflection questions are about your family history. If this is a painful area, please feel free to skip these and consider working through unprocessed family history with a counsellor or psychotherapist.

Q. What is your "here", your starting point, regarding what you know about your family history? Take time to create a mind map or collage a family tree and the important things that you are aware of what took place in your family's history. You could use family photographs to document people, places, eras, and events.

Q. Who is the keeper of your family's story/history? If you could talk to them, what questions would you ask? Are there gaps or silences in your family story/history? Or is there anything that has been buried? What does that gap, silence, or burial feel like? Find a symbol, word, or image for this feeling and find a (safe) place that feels right to you to 'plant' your chosen token. You could wrap your token and bury it in earth, sand, amongst rocks, in the roots of a tree, a tree hollow or a discarded bird's nest. Or perhaps you might like to try construct a seed husk, (balloon or plastic bowl and paper mache) to hide your token within. You can retrieve this again at the end of the reflection guide process.

Q. Are there any memories that arise for you about how the pain within your family story/history affected you, caused harm or inhibited your sense of aliveness? Were there any family mottos or mantras, narratives, or beliefs that bound you to something weighty, wounded, or silenced? If so and there was a particular age or memory that stands out to you? Write yourself a letter (to you at that age, or to the memory you hold) about how you were impacted. Put this in an envelope to read again later in this reflective process (Scene Six). Title it – "The Vault".



Setting the Scene: **THE TURNING**

Q. Is there any aspect of yourself that shows up and disturbs your tranquility? Describe who this unwelcome visitor is.

Q. Read through Rumi's poem "The Guest House" (see below). How might you begin to see your unwelcome visitor as one sent to help you "from beyond"? You could write your unwelcome visitor two letters, one from the present (how do you honestly feel) and one from the future (imagining what you might have learned from your visitor).

The Guest House

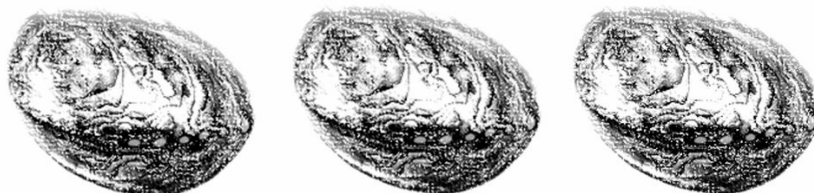
This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.



Act One: THE FIRST LESSON

Return and Back are Not One and the Same

Scene One: THE GIRL BEHIND THE DOOR

Q. The appearance of the unwelcome visitor (the Girl Behind the Door) signals to the woman a change, reminds her of an avoided 'her-story', and calls her towards where she would rather not go. What kind of fears do you think she encountered? What fears does your unwelcome visitor evoke in you at the beginning of this reflection journey?

Q. The woman runs to the Dark Mother's Cave after her first encounter with the Girl Behind the Door. She wants rescue, a solution, or to halt what is happening. She does not want her tranquil life to be disturbed.

Where or to who do you run to when you are uncomfortable? What is your pattern?

"When I am uncomfortable my pattern is to run to _____, or away from _____, because I need _____."

Find a picture of face, or create one (draw, paint, collage), and ask yourself "what am I afraid of facing?" You could turn your 'face' into a mask, by putting another face picture on the inside and writing or drawing what qualities you need to help you face the fears you have named. This is your courageous face, try turning the mask inside out. Acknowledge both faces as states you might find yourself in. Check in with yourself daily which one you are most aware of influencing your decisions, way of relating, thoughts, or feelings.

Q. Think through your story and mind map times in your life when you faced fears that you would normally have run from with courage. Have there been times when you surprised yourself? Write about those times in the third person, like a narrator telling the story about how you (the main character in the story) courageously faced your fears.

Q. "The testament of the Girl Behind the Door" is about an event that has taken place. Underneath the event is the feeling of being trapped and not being able to say 'no' and having one's 'no' dishonoured (not respected). You could create a 'growth chart' starting from your birth to your current age (in five-year increments). Note what you wanted to say 'no' to but didn't or couldn't, or when your 'no' was ignored or disrespected. What was your 'no' about? Notice if there is an emerging theme. Creatively try and name your 'no' as a title (of a movie, a song, a newspaper heading or a book title), or as a personality, or an animal, an entity or geographical place in nature. How has this shaped your identity or view of self?

Q. Rumi describes the hospitable Guest House, but the Returning Woman's experience of the derelict house she left at the beginning of *Letters to a Missing Woman* is vastly different. It was where all the shaping took place where she learned to conform to patterns of

ways/values of life that were not handmade by her but by the spheres of family/education/religion/society-cultural/political. Anything that ties us to an identity that is not who we truly are is a “derelict house”. Working with the ‘derelict house’ metaphor, you could map out a floor plan full of rooms. Give each room a name as above (family, education, religion etc.) or create your own names and consider how each has been shaping/conforming you, not allowing you to be you.

Q. The Phoenix Woman offers wise words about the natural forces within the Returning Woman that can break up what has become set hard and bring her to life through rebirth. Go out into nature and notice ‘the natural forces’. Pick one of your discoveries as a place to pause and contemplate. Imagine yourself having a conversation with the ‘natural force’ (imagine what it might say back to you), whether it be a dandelion growing through a crack in the concrete, or a tree that has weathered storms, the tidal sea or a river that shapes rocks. It could be something in your own garden or a local park, or further afield to some wild space you haven’t explored before. Engage with all your senses and see what draws your attention. Take a camera to document your discoveries and reflect on the images after you return from exploring. What are the natural forces in you?

Q. Image or symbolise “returning” by making a sacred area in your home or garden. You could use candles, lanterns, offerings from nature, pictures or objects of significance, handwritten prayers/poems, and quotes that you find inspiring. This could represent your acceptance that you are not your story, you are not your patterns, you are not your pains, you are not what you have been conformed to, and you are not your loyalties. These are layers, your true identity lies deeper. You could represent the layers you are aware of on pieces of paper and find a way to safely burn these as a representation that they are all temporal. Take the ashes and release them to the winds.



**Scene Two: THE WILD SEED DREAM &
Entr'acte (between the acts): THE DARK MOTHER'S DIVINING**

Q. In this scene the Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door are tethered together. What images come to mind when you hear the word “tethered” or “tethering”? Explore the positive and negative associations that come to mind. Is there a way in which you feel that your unwelcome visitor is tethered to you? What would a symbol for that tether be? Can you find something that represents it? You could try and make tether. Imagine what might be positive and possible because of being tethered to your unwelcome guest.

Q. Try a two-chair exercise. Place two chairs apart from each other (or cushions on the floor if you prefer). One chair is the position/perspective of seeing the visitor as unwelcome. The other chair represents kindly seeing the visitor as a guest for you to look after and seeing the divine in the disguised visitor (the one that Rumi says is sent from ‘beyond’). Explore the following two questions when doing this exercise:

- What message do you have for me?
- What can I learn from you?

Sit in one of the chairs and allow yourself license to talk, feel, imagine from the position of seeing the visitor as unwelcome, and talk to the unwelcome guest. Listen to what you are saying. Swap to the other chair and allow yourself license to talk, feel, imagine from the place of seeing the divine in the disguised visitor. Notice the difference in tone, in perspective, in feeling, in imagination towards your unwelcome guest. Journal, mind map or create some record of what you have noticed. What questions does this exercise evoke that you want to explore further? What would you name this quest? Make a note of the questions and leave them somewhere visible to remind you of the quest you are on.

Q. In the Wild Seed Dream there is a revealing or a breaking open of the potential of the Girl Behind the Door’s handmade-ness, her divine core, wild/true/nature. Think about your unwelcome visitor as having a yet unknown life (like a seed within a husk). What kind of seed is your unwelcome visitor? Could you find a representation/symbol of it? You could create a seed husk by wrapping the yet unknown life of your unwelcome visitor (the symbol) in layers of tissue or newspaper or material of some kind. Create a parcel layer upon layer (like a ‘pass the parcel’ game) and consider what layers have distanced you from the unwelcome visitor, what is it that has gotten between you, or hidden the true life and identity of the unwelcome visitor. Write on each layer words that represent the distance, indifference, pain, or shame.

Q. Have you had any dreams that might have a connection with your unwelcome visitor? You could try a visualisation of your unwelcome visitor coming to you and showing you something about themselves. A simple visualisation process you could try is:

1. Get comfortable and still, allow your body to relax, let go of tension and breathe in and out slowly a few times.

2. In your imagination choose a safe place where you would be willing to meet the unwelcome visitor. Ask your kind inner witness to be there with you, supporting you. If you feel uncertain at all in the process you can ask the inner witness to intervene and help you.
3. Invite the unwelcome visitor to meet you and wait until you feel or see them arrive.
4. Notice how you see or sense them, tell them what you see or sense. Invite them to show you some potential about themselves that you cannot see, sense, or understand.
5. Wait for what the unwelcome visitor wants to show you. It might be that they are wearing a disguise or that they hold something in their hand that they want to give you, or perhaps they want to tell you something important.
6. Thank the unwelcome visitor for what they have shared and say your goodbyes and leave the visualisation with your inner witness.
7. Use your 5 senses to reground you back into your own time and space. Look around and noted the 5 things you can see, the 4 things you can hear, the 3 things you can touch, the 2 things you can smell and the 1 thing you can taste.

If this process is helpful, you can use it as many times as you like.

Alternatively, using the same process you could try a writing exercise. Use all the steps above and try writing a short movie script, the characters that have speaking parts are you, your kind inner witness, and the unwelcome visitor. Make these characters fictional, cast yourself and the others as anyone you want. Choose your scene to set the movie in, describe it and then create a written dialogue between your characters. Try not to overthink it but write down the first things that come to mind. Review when finished and note what stands out.

Q. In the Wild Seed Dream the Returning Woman gave the Wild Seed Child something that helped her to germinate and grow. Try watching some seed germinating and growing on videos available on You Tube. Consider what you might give your unwelcome visitor/your Wild Seed to nurture its germination and growth? You could create a collage of your unwelcome visitor as a seed and what you would surround it with to help its transformation.

Q. The Dark Mother steps into the Wild Seed Dream to speak wisdom words to the bewildered Returning Woman. Write yourself a letter from the Dark Mother in the story or your own version who you would imagine her to be in your life. This practice of writing from another person, gives you permission to access intuition or repressed aspects of yourself. Imagine you are the Dark Mother writing to the woman (yourself) that she sees and cares about. What does the Dark Mother see and know about you and your unwelcome visitor that you can't see right now?



Scene Three: **THE CROSSING**

Q. The Phoenix Woman gives the Returning Woman “fire feathers”. She says, *“Here, put these by your heart. They are fire feathers, and no, they will not burn you. They will only warm and thaw what is cold and frozen within you. Like the most attentive winged mother, may they brood over what needs to be incubated and nurtured to life in your nest made of flesh. May they help your earthy heart become a warm womb, heat the seed out of its tomb-like fossilised state so it searches for its source and sprouts towards the light.”*

What are your ‘fire feathers’? What specific actions of warmth does your Wild Seed and heart need to “thaw what is cold and frozen within you”? Find some feathers as reminders.

Q. Read the poem “To the Mothers and the Fathers” that the Returning Woman speaks at The Crossing. Who would you write a letter to in your family line to ask for the blessings of your family lineage? What blessings, support, lessons would you ask of those ancients of yours? Write a letter or a poem, it could be someone still alive or a past ancestor.

Q. Where does life seem to be falling – or have fallen? You could explore this a number of ways; emotional yoga – move and experience the feeling of falling in your body by using postures, noises, and movement; OR find images of something that has fallen (a building, a wall, a tree, a person or animal, a sand castle, leaves or flowers etc.); OR find a metaphor of ‘fallen’/‘falling’ and use it to inspire a poem, story or song.

Q. You could try a visualisation; imagine you are the fallen pōhutukawa tree in the story. Consider how the fallen parts or passages of your life might regrow again and become “twisted beautifully strange”. Allow yourself to envision all sorts of possibilities. From the vantage point of imagination what could you be grateful for regarding this “falling”?

Q. As you read through this scene, who is the Guardian Pōhutukawa tree to you? What stands out to you about her nature/character? Can you find/access some of those qualities within yourself?

Look at the Daoist understanding of woman as tree and note what insights this offers:

Loving the Root: A Daoist perspective on trees and wise woman

<http://www.elephantjournal.com/2015/12/loving-the-root-a-daoist-perspective-on-trees-and-wise-women/> - cited 23rd September 2021

“In many Daoist and pre-Daoist traditions, trees were venerated as masters of how to ‘live the way’ (i.e. be in the here and now, wholly present). In this worldview, all life is viewed as the expression and interplay between the descending Yang forces from above and the ascending Yin forces from below.

Ancient wisdom traditions observed and emulated the natural world. They observed animals, fish, birds, mountains and trees. By noticing, they enhanced their quest to navigate the world in a way that brought them the greatest ease and joy.

Trees were great teachers. Especially old, large trees who had learned to survive by simultaneously rooting themselves deeply to receive the Yin nourishment that naturally rises from the earth and whose trunks and branches and leaves and flowers reached gracefully towards the sky, receiving the Yang bounty that descends so generously to their grateful reach.

The work of the roots is mostly below the surface. They, literally, do the dirty work. Out of view and out of the mind of many who cross the path of the tree.

Roots do their work mostly in the dark, beneath the surface. Often the root system is more extensive than the tree it supports, reaching deeper and wider than the tree's visible height and width. It is the ceaseless persistence and striving for nourishment that provides the nexus and source of sustenance for the tree's trunk, branches, leaves, fruits and flowers.

The roots are trees' connection to the limitless love that is the bounty of Mother Earth. They are conduits of the ascending Yin influences of Earth.

Roots are the nexus to the source of limitless potential that is the universal gift of the Mother.

The work of networking, nourishing, sustaining and giving begin with the roots. They are the foundation and sustenance for the entire tree, and their influence, while largely unnoticed, goes even further than just nurturing the tree. This below-the-surface network supports and generates life on so many other levels as well.

In Chinese medicine, roots are highly prized. Roots contain the healing essence and potential of the entire plant. They are cherished for their wisdom and alchemical potentials."

Q. The Guardian Pohutukawa sings to the Girl Behind the Door at the end of the scene which reveals she knows something about her. Accessing the nature/character of the Guardian Pōhutukawa tree write, speak, or sing to your unwelcome visitor and acknowledge them through ancient, wise, alchemical tree eyes.



Act Two: THE SECOND LESSON

To Return is to Speak the First Words of Creation

Scene Four: **THE FORCED MARCH &**

Entr'acte (between the acts): **THE DARK MOTHER'S DIVINING**

Q. The Forced March begins with the 'Lore of Pathfinding'. Take yourself out on a walk preferably to an unknown physical path (or place). How does this path speak to you about your journey right now in terms of 'Pathfinding'? What does 'Lore of Pathfinding' mean for you? You could take photos or collect things from the path you walk and explore these as symbols of the lesson/s for you at this time. What is the path suggesting or recommending that you learn?

Q. On the Forced March the Returning Woman has an "if only..." list. Try writing out your "if only" list. Let it all out on the page, especially if you have resentment or anger bubbling away towards the appearance of your unwelcome guest.

Q. During this scene the Returning Woman gains a fuller awareness of the shadow and the disconnection she has lived with. And she also discovers the remedy of reclamation. What is being separated from during this stage in the story is what Edith Eger in her book *The Choice* calls "a victim's mind". Eger describes this as "rigid, blaming, pessimistic, stuck in the past, unforgiving, punitive, and without healthy limits or boundaries." This confinement happens and is allowed to continue when we become and act as "our own jailors".

The Returning Woman faces her own cruelty. Consider how you have been cruel or acted as a jailer towards yourself. You could do this by finding images of faces that have an unkind, cruel, or harsh expression on them. Glue them onto a piece of blank paper and create speech and thought bubbles. What are the unkind, cruel, or imprisoning things you have said or thought about yourself? What are the unkind, cruel or imprisoning things you have done to yourself? Or to someone else who reminded you of what you do not like about yourself.

Q. The Returning Woman claims the Girl Behind the Door by saying, "*she belongs with me, twine-tethered to me, she is mine and I am hers.*" Consider what words would you need to say to your unwelcome visitor, to yourself, to claim you as your own. You could repeat the above exercise but this time by finding kind and loving faces. Again, create speech and thought bubbles of claiming words/thoughts. And consider what kind and loving things you could do that reinforce you are claiming yourself as belonging to you.

Q. The Entr'acte title page has a Parker J. Palmer quote on it (see below). Consider what 'monsters' have you fled that might actually be your guide "to the deeper reaches of [your life]"?

"...conventional wisdom warns us to flee monsters lest we lose our lives... those monsters are the only reliable guides to the deeper reaches of our lives. Only by riding them down, despite the risks, will we be able to find the primal source of ourselves and our world... we must cultivate the hope that they can become the companions to be embraced, guides to be

followed, albeit with caution and respect. For only our monsters know the way down to that inner place of unity and wholeness; only these creatures of the night know how to travel where there is no light."

Parker J. Palmer - *The Active Life*

Q. On a piece of paper titled "Dear Fear" write a letter guided by all or some the following prompts:

- Tell fear how you are trapped in a Forced March
- ...how you have built high walls to keep fear out
- ...how you have attacked fear to try and kill it
- ...where you buried its monstrous body
- ...how your neglect of fear is hurting yourself
- ...what grave you had to re-dig and how it was your grave as well as fear's
- ...what care and nourishment you can offer fear
- ...what friendship you can give fear
- ...what friendship you might receive from fear
- ...what ledge you are on with your companion fear
- ...what 'soul' purpose you're exploring with fear
- ...how does your sanity depend upon taking the leap off the ledge
- ...what so called 'safety' are you leaving behind
- ...how might wholeness grow

Q. The Creation Story in the Entr'acte told by the Wized One describes witnesses called "The Creators". Who might these characters represent for you? You could visualise the source/s of creative life as witnesses or guides. What would they say to you, what would they want you to learn, embrace, be challenged in your life "*to grow more like [your] handmade self*"? You could use the visualisation practice on page 9 and 10, replace the unwelcome guest with 'the Creators'.

Q. If you have an opportunity to do so, walk a Labyrinth or you could try creating your own in your garden or inside your house. There are online resources about creating one you could google. Labyrinth walking is an ancient spiritual practice, it's purpose is to help the walker centre themselves, contemplate, and pray through walking. The idea is to walk it slowly, quiet your mind and focus on a question, or quest, or a desire to be shown something you're holding as a quest/question. You could walk a Labyrinth pondering how to allow and invite the unwelcome visitor (the one you are seeking to reclaim as your own, belonging to you) to become your guide.



Scene Five: **BONE VALLEY**

Q. At the beginning of this scene the Returning Woman asks, *“Can you trust someone so small to be your guide?”* When we have been rejecting of some aspect of ourselves (like your unwelcome visitor) we have some letting go to do. Letting go of mistrust, of our judgements and of our disappointments is important. Do you trust your once unwelcome visitor whom you are seeking to reclaim? You could explore this as a two-chair exercise, one chair to express your mistrust or doubts, and the other chair to express trust and a willingness to listen and be vulnerable with the aspect you are seeking to reclaim. You could also explore this through making two collages or writing two letters from the different perspectives of mistrust and trust.

Q. The Girl Behind the Door is trusted to collect the bones. She has someone to give them to in Bone Valley, a purpose that the Returning Woman doesn't understand. The aspect of yourself you are seeking to reclaim has some bones to give to the oldest, wisest, most foundational part inside of you. You could visualise what the reclaimed part of you is carrying and going to place into the hands of that oldest part of yourself. You could explore this as a poem beginning with the line, *“I could not see what you had in your hands to give to the oldest and wisest in me...”* Write in a free flowing way without overthinking it.

Q. The Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door walk into Bone Valley. Is there any part of your life, or your family (history) that feels *“Godforsaken”* or *“cursed”*, a valley full of bones? Visualise walking into this wilderness with your inner witness, and the part of yourself (your former unwelcome visitor) that you are reclaiming. What do you see, what has been laid to waste? Ask yourself as you visualise this place, *“Can these bones live?”* Ask your inner witness and reclaimed self the same question and listen to their answers.

Q. As a meditation or contemplation process use the 'Creation Hymn: LET THERE BE' in this scene to *“sing the song of consciousness till [you] feel the burn of truth... [throwing] a burst of fire into the darkness of psyche...”* (see the Clarissa Pinkola Estes quote below). This could be spoken like a mantra or sung like a hymn or pictured in your mind and felt deeply with your body. Alternatively, you could write your own hymn to use. Ask yourself; what would the four winds bring into your Bone Valley to recover and bring what seems dead to life? And what would the bones cry out in response?

“If we sing the song of consciousness till we feel the burn of truth, we throw a burst of fire into the darkness of psyche so we can see what we're doing...what we're truly doing, not what we wish to think we're doing. This is the untangling of one's feelings and the beginning of understanding why love and life are to be lived by the bones.”

Clarissa Pinkola Estes – *Women Who Run With the Wolves*

Q. Where are you finding room to thrive? Terry Tempest Williams writes, *“I am writing the creation story of my own voice...”* You could collage, or mind map, write a story/poetry, or a make up a creation myth about the emergence of your voice (or the voice of the aspect of

yourself you are reclaiming).

Q. Find a way to get out of your head. Dance, twirl and sing with the self you are reclaiming. If it helps, you could dance with an object/symbol representing your reclaimed self, it could be a mirror of your reflection, or a picture/photo. You could even dress up to represent the self you are reclaiming. Find an appropriate song and dance your heart out.

Q. The reclamation taking place in this scene has to do with what has been “unsanctioned” by the origin family/society. An “unsanctioned child” (Estes) is the outcast or the exile. We are often faced with the challenge to choose between loving the unsanctioned child or being accepted by the community by discarding such children. What has exiled the aspect of yourself that you are seeking to reclaim? What challenges do you face in reclaiming them?

Q. Part of unmaking the man-made psychologically or ideologically is the thawing of “frozen values” of the family/society that influenced you. Explore the values that are important to you and any lists that you must adhere to that mark you out as ‘good enough’. What values feel too rigid, frozen in time or a context that no longer serves you. As a creative exercise you could try freezing something(s) symbolising values in a container of water. Once it is frozen you could place it out in the sun and watch the warmth thaw the ice, liberating the symbol(s). What do you need to liberate? What will thaw what it is trapped in?

Q. In this scene there are vows and promises made in Bone Valley. Consider what promises you might make to your reclaimed self. You could write these in a letter that you mail to yourself. You could create a ceremony where you pledge your troth to your reclaimed self, this could be done somewhere special, it could involve witnesses (not only human but perhaps a special tree, the full moon, a scared site), or it could be in a private sanctuary of your choice.



Scene Six: **BETWIXT AND BETWEEN THE SHADOW PEOPLE**

Q. The Wized One tells the Returning Woman that in the cold-hearted realm of the Shadow People, *“Let your heart be moved towards what is warm.”* What warmth in yourself can your heart be moved towards? Spend some time in a warm place, wrap yourself in blankets, a fire, a heater, the sun. With the sensation of physical warmth move inward and find the place of warmth within yourself – go exploring. Call on your inner witness, ask *“will you show me the way towards the warm place within me?”*

Q. The book that the Wized One gives to the Returning Woman burns with truths yet unknown. In the ‘Testament of the Wized One’ she reveals the history and her-story that has been long forgotten. What griefs/laments, shadows, forced marches, or survival strategies are you aware within your family story or lineage? Retrieve the letter you wrote and put into an envelope titled *“The Vault”* in the ‘A Dilapidated History: THE BINDING LULLABY’ section of this reflection guide. Re-read it and add to it your own ‘testament’ – place these back into the envelope to look at again later in this reflective process (Scene Seven).

Q. The swamp in this scene represents the decline and decay, a continual cycle hung onto as ‘the source’. The swamp strangles whatever potential life presents itself. Reading the history/her-story reveals how values became frozen/fixed/concreted – because of a choice to make ‘grief’ the spiritual source. What have been the spiritual sources that you have turned to in your life? Have there been seasons when you lost connection with your source? Take some time to write or find a prayer (online or use one from the story). A prayer does not need to be words, it could a drawing/images, silence, dance, lighting a candle, being mindfully in nature or expressed with music. Spend the next week mindfully giving space for ‘prayer’ to connect to your source. If you find ‘spiritual source’ a concept that doesn’t resonate, then consider what do you draw from to connect with love and warmth. It might be a person who totally accepts you, it might be somewhere in nature, or it might be a favourite book that you return to often. Spend the next week mindfully connecting with those sources of love and warmth.

Q. Has there been a time, a choice you have made to “abandon your soul” – saying yes to abandoning yourself when you wanted to say no. Write in your journal on one page *“I am making/I made this choice to abandon my soul because...”* free write what comes to mind. On another page write *“It’s your choice, how will you choose life?”* Free write.

Q. There are two symbolic trees in this scene: the memorial tree which absorbs all the trauma of loss and sickens; and the hidden sea tree/the Sacred Root/a tree of life. Which one do you connect with or feel resonates with your experience, family history, or your own story? Create in some form the symbolic tree you want to work with. You could do this in any creative medium. You could also choose a tree (if you have one in your garden) to hang tokens in. Exploring the ‘memorial tree’ – depict what keeps you grafted to and rootbound in the trauma narrative. Exploring the ‘tree of life’ – depict the flourishing and sheltering

characteristics of the tree, imagine yourself welcomed home to the flowing life within.

Q. Spend some time at a beach watching the waves. Or alternatively watch some videos of rolling waves on You Tube. Reading the poem “I am the Sea and the Sea is me”, consider how might you be containing your own ‘sea-ness’, controlling and keeping your oceanic-ness at bay? Explore your family/cultural shadows that have felt like a containment.

Q. Every day for the next week you could meditate on the rolling ocean as a natural force that is within you. When showering, swimming or having a bath speak to yourself about being like the sea; flowing, fluid, powerful, surging, untameable. Listen to audio files of rolling waves on You Tube, ask the sound of the sea to speak to you about your own ‘sea-ness’. This oceanic part of us retains the *“innocence in being the lover of life”*.

Q. The Returning Woman preaches to the captives (the collective shadow, and her own inner shadow), *“You can be free from this malnourishment. Let the wild seed child become a thriving tree.”* Find a way to talk, write, sing to your shadow – “you can be free from this malnourishment”.

Q. Who/ what is the “Sacred Root” in this scene to you? What does she represent? Ask her to show herself to you. You could collage, paint, or draw her. What siren song do you hear?

Q. Adding to your envelope you could write a letter to the “Sacred Root” on behalf of your family lineage inviting the reconnection of spiritual source and life-giving flourishing. Add this to your envelope titled “The Vault”.



Act Three: THE THIRD LESSON

To Return is to Heal the Home of Your Sacred Root

Scene Seven: **THE MATRIARCH'S HOUSE &**

Entr'acte (between the acts): **THE MATRIARCH'S VALEDICTION**

Q. “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.” Read the full quote of Terry Tempest Williams below. Explore with your inner witness, and the self that you are reclaiming, are there any memories of times you have kept silent or been silenced and other women have gotten hurt. Or have you been hurt by the silence of others? Write a lament/poem about when silence has hurt or harmed. Consider how being voiced may have split open the world and changed things. And what truth about your life would you have told?

“My body is my compass, and it does not lie. As women, we are quiet about our personal lives... The woman stands alone. Our stories live underground. Muriel Rukeyser asked the question ‘What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.’ The world is splitting open. When one woman doesn’t speak, other women get hurt.”

Terry Tempest Williams – *When Women Were Birds*

Q. In the poem “A Mountain Grew” the Returning Woman considers the loss of her external mountain (standing place, connection), the attempt to create one from rubble (survival) and the surprise that she was growing an internal mountain within herself. Explore what mountain is growing inside of you? You could draw it, make a model of a mountain (clay or paper mache), or connect with a mountain that is special to you and photograph it. What feels solid and sure that is growing within?

Q. The Matriarch leaves her community a testament expressing regrets. Consider if you have any regrets that you want to put right. You could write a letter to yourself, or to someone that your actions or words have affected and express your regrets. If it helps you, and you have someone safe to share the letter with who will listen non-judgementally with compassion, do so. You do not need to send this letter to anyone (if it is written specifically with someone in mind). Ask for advice first regarding the content of the letter and potential consequences if you feel a need to send it.

Q. Read the poem “The Nature of Neglect”. Consider if you have ever been seduced by charm (or someone charming) and found yourself neglected or perhaps you’ve experienced the neglect of indifference. Reflect if you have been an ambivalent mother to yourself and handed yourself over to harm? Choose an old dress (one you have or one from a second-hand shop). This dress represents anything you’ve had to bear, anything that has been put on you that wasn’t yours to wear, anything or time where even though clothed, you have felt naked and uncared for. Write or paint on it, naming the things above and how you have been

neglected or practiced neglect of yourself. Write or paint on it what neglect you are fed-up about. When you have finished take it all in. Consider what you want to do about what you have expressed on the dress. Consider what might be a powerful symbolic action in regard to what you do with the dress (you could keep it as reminder, make it into art, you burn it or bury it, or throw it in the rubbish).

Q. The Returning Woman arrives as provocateur, a truth-teller, who invites her community into the renewal process, stating “there is another way to be”. She expresses this by speaking, using metaphors, poetry, and song to open up a public conversation. If you could open up a public conversation in your family or community that you feel concerned or passionate about, what would it be? What renewal would you be inviting others into? Using post-it notes brainstorm what your truth-telling would be about and how many different ways could you express it? Keep asking yourself the question, “why do you care?” Answer it and add it to your pile of post-it notes.

Q. The Returning Woman opens her discourse by saying, *“It has been a long time since I lived by the ways of the Matriarch. I have learned many things on my journey. There are ways to be strong beyond survival, without being destructive.”* She continues by adding, *“I have learned something about our history that has been forgotten. There was always another way to be a woman in this life.”* Retrieve your envelope titled “The Vault” and re-read what you have written. Imagine that you were attending a significant gathering of your family, past, present, and future, a whole lineage together. What speech would you make regarding your learnings and other ways to be. Try writing out a speech or you could ad-lib and video or voice record yourself. Add this to your envelope.

Q. In the story there is pressure to save the Matriarch’s house. What is the metaphorical “house” that you are aware of feeling some pressure to save, that inhibits growth or change? You could try a two-chair exercise where you explore two positions; one with a complicit response to “you must help save this house”, and the second a refusal to help save the house. You could make a house out of flimsy materials and leave it standing, paying it no attention until it falls of its own accord - *“Why not just let it fall?”*

Q. Read through the poem “Whose Voice is in Your Head?” Ask yourself some questions about ‘who said?’ and ‘who told you?’ that you should think and feel a certain way. During one of your days mindfully pay attention to your thoughts, self-talk, and what you say to others. Ask yourself the questions, and ponder is that what you really think, feel, and want to say? Is that how you really talk to myself? Is that your voice or someone else’s that you learned to repeat? Who’s voice is in your head? *“And what does your own brave voice say?”* Take time to explore what does your own brave voice say. Write out some statements and place these somewhere you’ll see them daily.

Q. In the Entr’acte the Matriarch says about the letters from the Returning Woman, *“They were shaking my house, and nothing had done that before. Have you not felt an earthquake and found yourself unable to move towards safety? Clinging to my derelict life was all I could*

do while held spellbound by the effect the letters were having on me.”

Consider if there is anything (in this story, or something you have heard or read, a conversation with a friend) that you both feared and were drawn to at the same time. Reflect on what you fear and what draws you. List the fears and what is stirring in you. Consider what you might be tightly holding onto and what would help you to open your hands and let go of what is old and tired, what is running out of energy, and no longer serves you. Create a ritual of letting go.



Scene Eight: THE EXILES' ENCAMPMENT

Q. Try building yourself a “dreaming tree house” (inside or outside). You could furnish it with objects that remind you of the wild rampant life within you. You could make a tribal hat or mask as a declaration of your allegiance to being fully alive.

Q. If your “dreaming tree hut” was a sign to leave for others to find, who would you want to find it? What message would you want to leave for them? If this was a space someone else had left for you, what would be the message you would most want to hear?

Q. Have you had an experience of being exiled or feeling like an outcast? Read the quote below and consider, if being exiled was a past experience, how did you get on your feet and search for what you belonged to? Spend time remembering this part of your story. If being exiled is a present reality, consider what next step you could take in the quest of discovering what you belong to. Imagine five different steps like researching a topic that draws you, trying something new you’ve always wanted to, joining a group that has a focus for being together.

“She may feel like a tormented outsider who belongs nowhere – which is relatively normal for the exile – but what is not normal is to sit down and cry about it and do nothing. One is supposed to get to one’s feet and go off in search of what one belongs to. For the exile that is always the next step... it is the quintessential step.”

Clarissa Pinkola Estes – *Women Who Run With the Wolves*

Q. The Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door are led to a forest, where they discover a gathering of women, fellow exiles. If you were to find a group of like-minded others what and who would you hope to find? What experiences in your story feel unaccompanied that you would like to share with others and hear about their story too? What within you needs to be heard, received, and held safely?

Q. In this scene there is a renaming ceremony, the Returning Woman is asked to choose her ‘Claiming Name’. In the story a *“true name was not a one worded affair, but an idea revealing the nature of the named.”* If you could choose a ‘Claiming Name’ (a description of your core nature) for yourself, what would it be? You could collage, draw, paint, photograph the woman who bears this name. Or you could find a symbol that represents your ‘Claiming Name’.

Q. “The Third Lesson of ‘Return’” poem ends with the lines:

I am re-named and re-membered to my originality

I will Return, I will Return, I will Return and heal the Sacred Root’s home in me

Take a whole page to write out as many variations that come to mind, starting with the line, “I will Return (re-named, re-membered to my originality) because...”

Q. The Girl Behind the Door gives up her tattered wing and name. What tattered, worn-out identity are you feeling it is time to let go of? You could create your own burning ceremony. What name(s), labels, stories that others (or that you yourself) frame you with that it is time

to let go of?

Q. The wing that was broken was kept and the Girl Behind the Door was told that her new wings (identity) would grow again *“like a tree stump that sprouts a new life from its own wooden bones.”* What are you letting go of regarding how you have seen your unwelcome visitor in the past and what you are learning about that part of yourself in your reclaiming? What would you rename your reclaimed aspect now? What could you imagine that renewed identity of the reclaimed aspect being? You could explore different visual images and begin a collection of pictures that help you to keep seeing your reclaimed aspect in fresh ways.

Q. In this scene a letter arrives from ‘beyond the grave’, it is the Matriarch’s reply. Throughout this reflection guide there have been questions and suggestions about exploring ancestry. Is there one ancestor that you want to hear from at this time of renaming and reclaiming in your life? You could visualise meeting your ancestor and having a conversation. Or you could try a freewriting letter exercise, write what you feel your ancestor would say to you at this time. Add this to your envelope titled “The Vault”.

Q. The Returning Woman’s kinswomen enter the camp she realises that her *“healing twine had been received, just not in the way [she] first thought it would.”* Consider what is your healing twine, (your liberating message, the healing lessons you could pass on)? If you have known for some time what it is, do you feel it has been received or have there been times that you have been surprised that things did not turn out as you expect. If you are unsure what your healing twine is brainstorm what you sense, what you feel in your gut (there are no right or wrong answers). Allow yourself to explore wildly, especially follow any threads of thoughts/ideas that have life or energy to them. When we give our gifts to another, our family, community, or the wider world those gifts will take on a life of their own. Make a commitment to set your gifts free, to reach whomever, whenever. Make a cut-out of a bird or find an image of a flying bird. You could write your healing twine (liberating message, healing lessons) on the cut-out or image, and add “I will set you free”.

Q. If you could have taken this reflective journey with someone in your family (present or past) or someone who feels like family, who would it have been? What would you most want to share with them about anything significant, insightful, or touching you have encountered as you’ve reflected and created? Write that person a story, or you could draw a map that depicts your own travelling within and without. Add it to your envelope titled “The Vault”.

Q. Towards the end of this scene the Returning Woman reverses the hide and seek that she had encountered from the Girl Behind the Door at the beginning of the story. You could also try reversing the relationship role of your reclaimed aspect (once the unwelcome visitor). Play hide and seek. You can do this simply by asking your reclaimed aspect, “where are you?” throughout the day. You could do this by writing to your reclaimed aspect, making a ‘lost and found’ poster about your reclaimed aspect, or leaving post-it notes throughout your room/house inviting your reclaimed aspect to ‘play dates’. Try taking your reclaimed aspect out on a friendship date, a walk, a movie, or a road trip.

Q. Reading the prayer “Dear God of those created to quest” take some time to consider what is your quest, what is wanting to sweep you away into venture? You could create your own venturing ‘prayer’ (keeping in mind all forms of prayer; written, verbal, symbolic, creative, nature-based, or musical).



Scene Nine: RE-TURNINGS & Epilogue: HER RESOLUTION

Q. While at the Exiles' Encampment both the Returning Woman and the former Girl Behind the Door have been in a readying process for each of their respective new phases of life and quests. The girl can finally reveal her truer nature. Revealed as the Mermaid Woman she lays down the stone called 'Banishment'. Consider if there any 'banishments' in your life that you are yet to lay down. To explore this, you could work with a large stone, decorate, or deface it with all the ways you have felt 'banished' and *"driven away from your own self as one lovingly handmade."* Where would you want to lay this stone down, choose somewhere of significance to you.

Q. The Returning Woman is challenged to choose whom she would apprentice herself to. If you could choose someone to mentor you, to train or grow/challenge your gifts further who would it be? It might be an author you love, or someone who has a career you want to advance in, it may be an artist or musician, or perhaps someone who has attributes and strengths you admire. Regardless of who it is write them a letter (not to send unless that feels right for you to do so) stating why you particularly want them to mentor you. What/who is it that you desire to grow into? Read your letter and notice what intentions you state, then ask yourself what you will need to choose to follow through on those intentions. *"What are you prepared to do to seek and find the world, become mistress of the worlds you carry within yourself?"*

Q. Read the poem "Moonflower". Consider the Guardian Pōhutukawa's story told in this poem. Are you hiding your glory? Do you play it safe, hiding who you are? If you could imagine having a 'big reveal', what would you imagine being different about what you do or say or look?

Q. How will you root/ground/anchor yourself? The Dark Mother says to the Returning Woman that her roots need *"time to find their depth"* so that *"the first storm that [comes] along would not knock you down and drag you away as it can do to a wounded healer such as yourself."* How will you give yourself time to keep finding your depth? Make some plans to keep coming aside to deepen your life. What does 'wounded healer' mean to you? Explore.

Q. Create for yourself a book of wisdom. What are the lessons of Returning that feel important to you? You could work with the following nine themes, or another way of your own choosing.

1. Returning is not going back.
2. We are tethered to discomfort for our good – it is a Wild Seed to grow wild life.
3. We fall to become twisted beautifully strange – we learn to regrow.
4. Fleeing our fears (monsters) sends us on a Forced March – when we turn and face and embrace the monstrous parts of our life's experiences, we will find our guide.

5. We respond with “yes” and the world begins – even if something feels dead saying “yes” re-creation helps us find the hidden source of life within the loss and we can re-join bones.
6. Though our shadowed histories and parts of our selves threaten us with amnesia and separation of self – we hold out our vows and refuse to abandon the missing or unsanctioned parts of ourselves.
7. We give up fealty to whatever has become a lifeless way of life – a derelict house, and we do not engage in the activity of rebuilding/or propping up what needs to fall.
8. There is blessing in being an exile – is time to prepare for our true home and belonging and contribution.
9. We must choose to become our truth, make our choice to do what we must to be apprenticed to the gifts we feel compelled to offer.

Q. Retrieve your token that you found/made based on the following question asked in “A Dilapidated History: THE BINDING LULLABY” at the beginning of this guide:

“Are there gaps or silences in your family story/history? Or is there anything that has been buried? What does that gap, silence, or burial feel like? Find a symbol, word, or image for this feeling and find a (safe) place that feels right to you to ‘plant’ your chosen token. You could wrap your token and bury it in earth, sand, amongst rocks, in the roots of a tree, a tree hollow or a discarded bird’s nest. Or perhaps you might like to try construct a seed husk, (balloon or plastic bowl and paper mache) to hide your token within.”

Take time to look at the token that you chose and ‘planted’ in a safe place. Consider how has this planted token changed in your view? Has the feeling changed? Does there feel like there has been a shift or some kind of growth? Are there any things that you would want to add to the token, or perhaps change it for a new symbol. Do you feel a need to ‘replant’ it again somewhere different? What is the learning or wisdom that you feel you have gained through reflecting?

Q. Reframe history – considering the **Q.** above, you could use three old frames to represent past, present and future. ‘The Past’ for the initial view of family history you had at the beginning of this process. ‘The Present’ representing your view now. ‘The Future’ for your hopes regarding how family history is held and see in future generations. You could fill the frames with images and headlines from magazines. Journal regarding what shift you have noticed in your own vision.

Q. Reading the below quotes of Jan Richardson and John O’Donohue, take some time to consider what threshold you find yourself on at the end of this reflection guide.

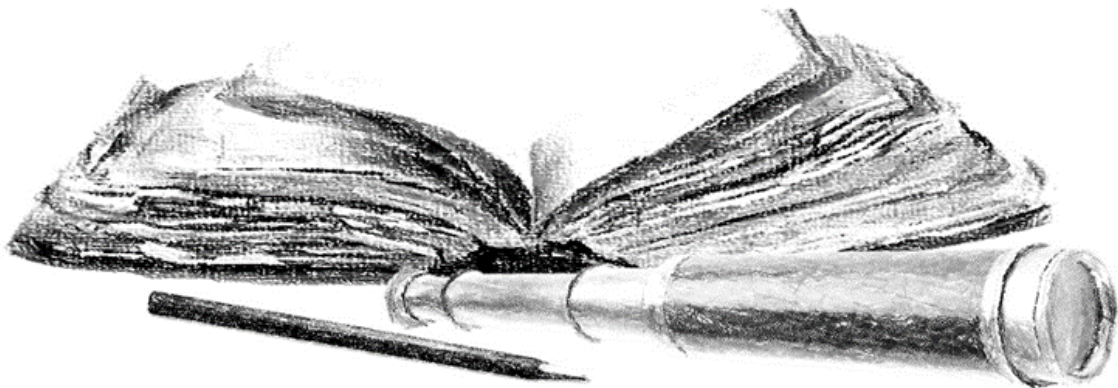
“Whether we arrive at these between-places by design, by accident, or by the choices that others have made for us, the threshold can be a place of wonders. It can also be chaotic,

discombobulating, and even terrifying. Yet a threshold, chosen or otherwise, is a place of wild possibility. A threshold invites and calls us to stop. To take a look around. To imagine. To dream. To question. To pray.”

Jan L. Richardson – *Illuminating the Threshold*

“A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience or a stage of life that it intensifies towards the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up. At this threshold a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. This is one reason why such vital crossings were always clothed in ritual. It is wise in your own life to be able to recognize and acknowledge the key thresholds: to take your time, to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there, to listen inwards with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward. The time has come to cross.”

John O’Donohue – *Benedictus*

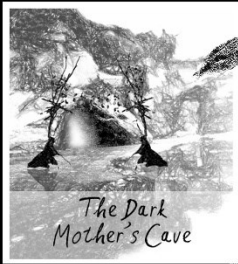


If you would like to share your reflections or photos of creations with others, there is a private group called ‘Wild Seeds of Shared Reflection’ on the “Letters to a Missing Woman” Facebook page:

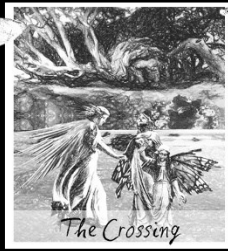
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/799999394231917>

Please feel free to message me to gain access to the private group.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/799999394231917>



The Dark Mother's Cave



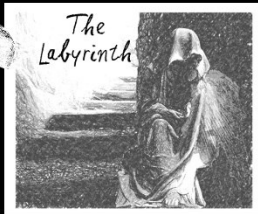
The Crossing



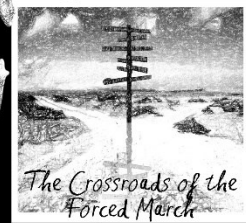
The Guardian Pohutukawa



Bone Valley & the Four Winds

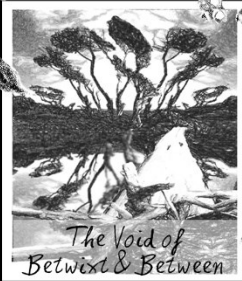


The Labyrinth

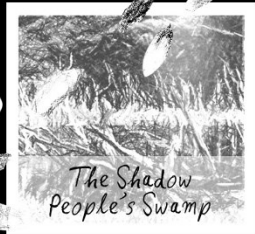


The Crossroads of the Forced March

The Pathfinder's Many Soul Turnings



The Void of Betwixt & Between



The Shadow People's Swamp



The Sacred Root



Re-turnings



The Exiles' Encampment



The Matriarch's House



The Mermaid Woman's Return



The Dark Mother's Apprentice