

The Return  
of the  
Girl Behind the Door  
(Setting the Scene – **THE TURNING**)

MAREE ALDRIDGE

THE RETURN OF THE GIRL BEHIND THE DOOR

Also by Maree Aldridge

Letters to a Missing Woman

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ISBN: 978-0-473-59434-3

THE RETURN OF THE GIRL BEHIND THE DOOR

"I must be a mermaid. I have  
no fear of depth and a great  
fear of shallow living."

Anaïs Nin



## Setting the Scene

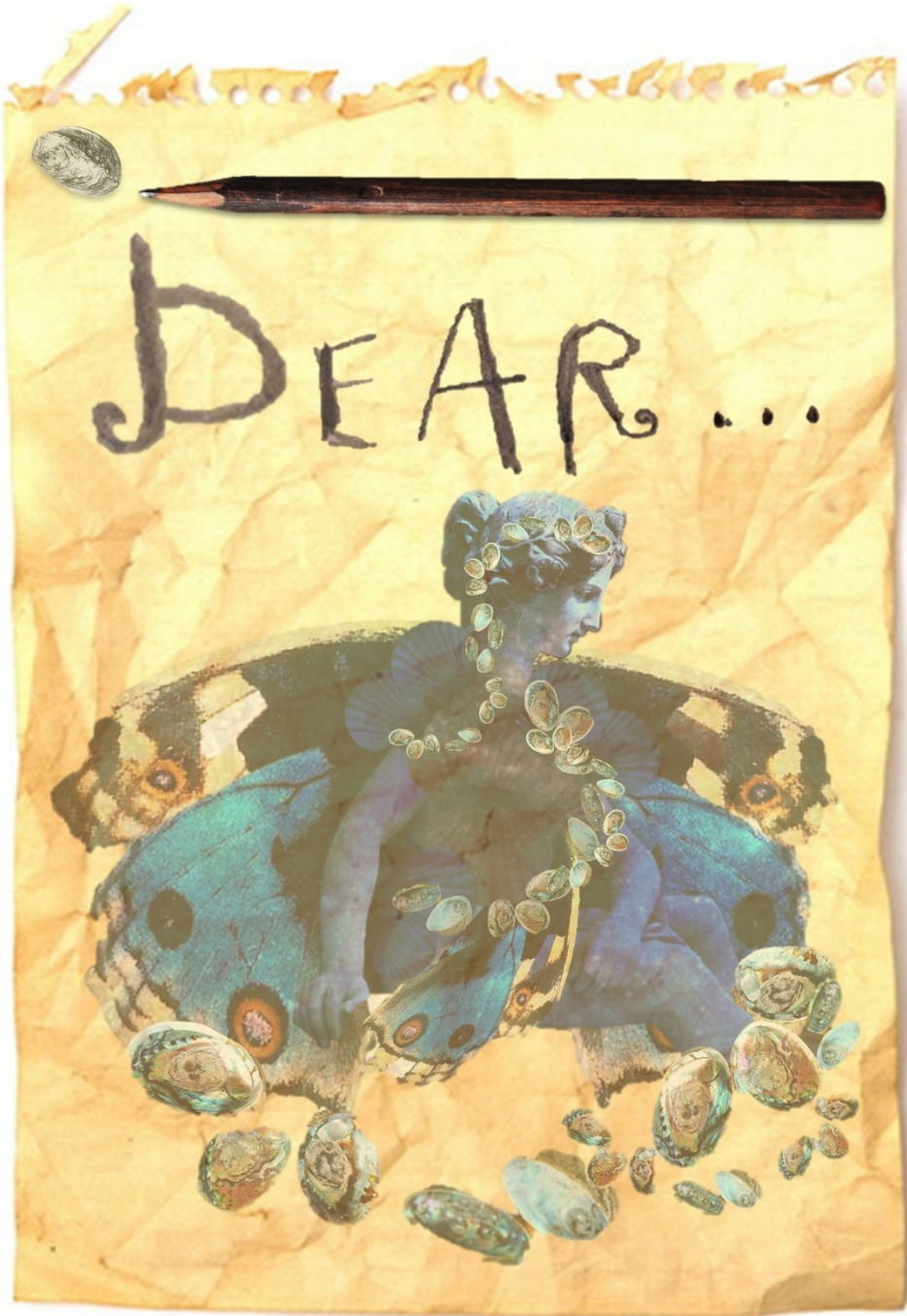
### THE TURNING

*“Thomas Wolfe warned in the title of America’s greatest novel, that ‘you can’t go home again’... I never agreed with the title. I believe that one can never leave home. I believe that one carries the shadows, the dreams, the fears and dragons of home under one’s skin, at the extreme corners of one’s eyes and possibly in the gristle of the ear lobe.*

*I believe we feel safest when we go inside ourselves and find home, a place where we belong and maybe the only place we really do.”*

**Maya Angelou – Letter to My Daughter**

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*“Revolving at her own center, Changing Woman unwinds the incalculable curvatures of time, calling the minutes and months, naming the seasons and years to measure her turnings. Her unity is perceptible in the two moving points of our own spiral dance in time: the journey evolving outward, the search involving inward.”*

**Meinrad Craighead – *The Mother’s Songs***

*“The moment you have spoken the exact words that describe your distance from where you want to be, the moment you have uttered the exact aching dimensionality of your own exile, you have already turned around, faced the other way and taken the first steps on the long awaited journey home.”*

**David Whyte – *The Three Marriages***

# THE TURNING

Dear Reader,

I watched the tattered winged woman fade over time. In her place grew the Woman With Renewed Wings, wings she was no longer ashamed to unfurl. Though they had their imperfections, she loved them all the same. A fairy-tale ending could have read...

She learned to be in her secluded home

She learned to keep letting go

She learned to stay empty enough to allow real life to grow

She learned that first and foremost she found the joy of belonging to herself

in her soul of souls

Happily, ever after

THE END

Beware dear reader, a fairy-tale, this is not. It was true that she no longer lived in a derelict house, dwelling under the roof of its capricious patterns. No longer did she look out longingly through the imprisoning panes. Nor did she try to hold up the structure dangerously poised to tumble and crush. Still, it was not the end. There can be no ending when there is one who is dearly missed. The Woman With Renewed Wings pined for the guide who had led

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her from the derelict house, one letter at a time, towards her current sojourn. We had beheld each other face to face on the Night of Fire and at the dawn of the new day I witnessed how she let go of her tattered-winged identity. That was the day that I left her sight, yet she was never beyond mine. I watched and I waited until her yearning to see me was ripe and ready for revolution.



I had observed how she spent unhurried time resting in the roots and the boughs of pōhutukawa trees. Learning all about the life of blooming, the cycle of seasons from summer to spring, and all a tree goes through between bloom and bud, had filled her hours. They were pleasant days, idyllic days, and hidden days.

The Woman With Renewed Wings grew stronger and freer, though she did not notice at the time because she had been gone so long. She was not paying attention because there was nothing to overcome anymore. When hiding in tranquility begins to go to seed, contentment can cause stagnation. Seclusion can sour into self-centredness. There are many things no longer noticed,

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awareness dulls. Especially if one entertains the hope, by means of forgetting, that all that has been left behind cannot find you. It had not yet occurred to her that she might be called upon to Return. She did not yet know the importance of remembrance, yes, even remembrance of her shadowy collective history, fears, and nightmares she had tried to blot out from memory. She was becoming a recluse. Yet she, her voice and her action were needed.

There was a blight at the heart the tattered-winged community she had departed from. She did not know this when she lived in the communal shadow. They were moulded together, into a forged distortion, that had a long mysterious history. This was veiled, a forgotten yesteryear. Though every child grew up fed on the grim ghost stories vaguely connected to their ancestry. Unbeknown to her, I had listened at the window as her mother languidly sung her little girl to sleep with an old frightening lullaby. This is what all mothers did, sing the same old morbid song that had been sung to them. No wonder the children of that tattered-wing community did not sleep well in their beds.





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If anyone seemed to be experiencing a similar suffering, the only medicine offered was the lullaby's refrain. "Stay silent cold child, stay behind death's door. Remain cold child under the concrete floor." This was a reminder to not complain, be still, be silent and survive. The knowledge of healing mind and heart, and the renewal of wings, was an inconceivable and unlooked for remedy.

It took departing from her kin and kith to see more clearly the frigid cruelty that bound them together. It silenced, it shamed, threatened, it did not right any wrongs, rather it hid the truth and advocated denial. Growing up she had learned to deny herself, her pains, the need for truth-telling, and her own voice. Any challengers to this dis-ease were quickly shunned into submission. The enmeshed culture that facilitated the nature of neglect was formidable, a fortress unassailable.

Even now, the Woman With Renewed Wings thought of those she had left behind as the offspring of the 'Shadow People' in dishonour of the chilling lullaby. When history is not explicit, mystery evokes imagination to describe the unseen. Her women kin existed in a half-life under a diaphanous shadow, resigned to their lot, hammered down to the marrow. She too had felt its blows and the shadow's sway over her. It is a fate she would have shared if she had not responded to my call and departed the root bound community, she once called home.

However, leaving does not necessarily mean you are truly free.



She had yet to experience the full circle of freedom and its responsibilities. Quiet days of repose was a comfortable life she appeared confident of continuing as an endless shore to explore.

Until... Until the Woman With Renewed Wings found herself in expired time on the revolving wheel of life, and the first stirrings of that wheel's turnings began to present themselves.

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One day she came across tracks in the sand. She noticed they were the feet of a child, but there were no children here. Her heart fluttered at the sight. Questions formed. Where and who was the child? Confusion clouded her mind; it could not be, could it? Why here, why now?



The 'something' that had gone to sleep in her, woke. She started noticing things she would rather not. Like the day she discovered a little trail of sea shells amongst the footprints, all carefully arranged.



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The trail disappeared off away from the shore in a direction the woman had no inclination to head. She did follow it to the dune line and then no more. Though she scanned the hills of sand, she could not bring herself to venture into them. Instead she wistfully looked back at the sea. It had become like her mother, her source of life, her breath. It quenched her thirst for companionship.

No, she could not leave. After all, she had only just arrived, discovered and recovered a way to be a renewed-winged woman. In truth, time had stretched beyond her sight, much like the shore where she had been sojourning.

The curious awareness of being stalked by someone small and invisible was unnerving, like a game she had no idea how to play. She was discomforted by the turbulent feeling of unwilled seasonal change. It was like the hands on the clock face were turning backwards and would soon stop and then start moving forwards again. Something was about to begin.

But before it did there was another pause and the woman lapsed into being sleepy and dreamy again.



Then one day she thought she caught the imp out of the corner of her eye, following her but staying just out of sight. And though it was only a glimpse, the shock of how familiar the child felt jolted her perceptions. The recognition was like a lightning strike that had come too close and shook her for many days afterwards.

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The disorienting shock gave way to hazy disjointed memories. Some felt familiar and others felt older than her years. They came like clouds that obscured her sun. A shadow would pass over her face, and though the weather was clement, the woman felt cold. She shuddered as she ruminated. Wrapping her arms around herself, she felt distracted from normal delights and was on guard against further unpleasant surprises.

The Woman With Renewed Wings did not know what to do with this new disorientation. Sitting in the wise pōhutukawa trees she consulted with them.

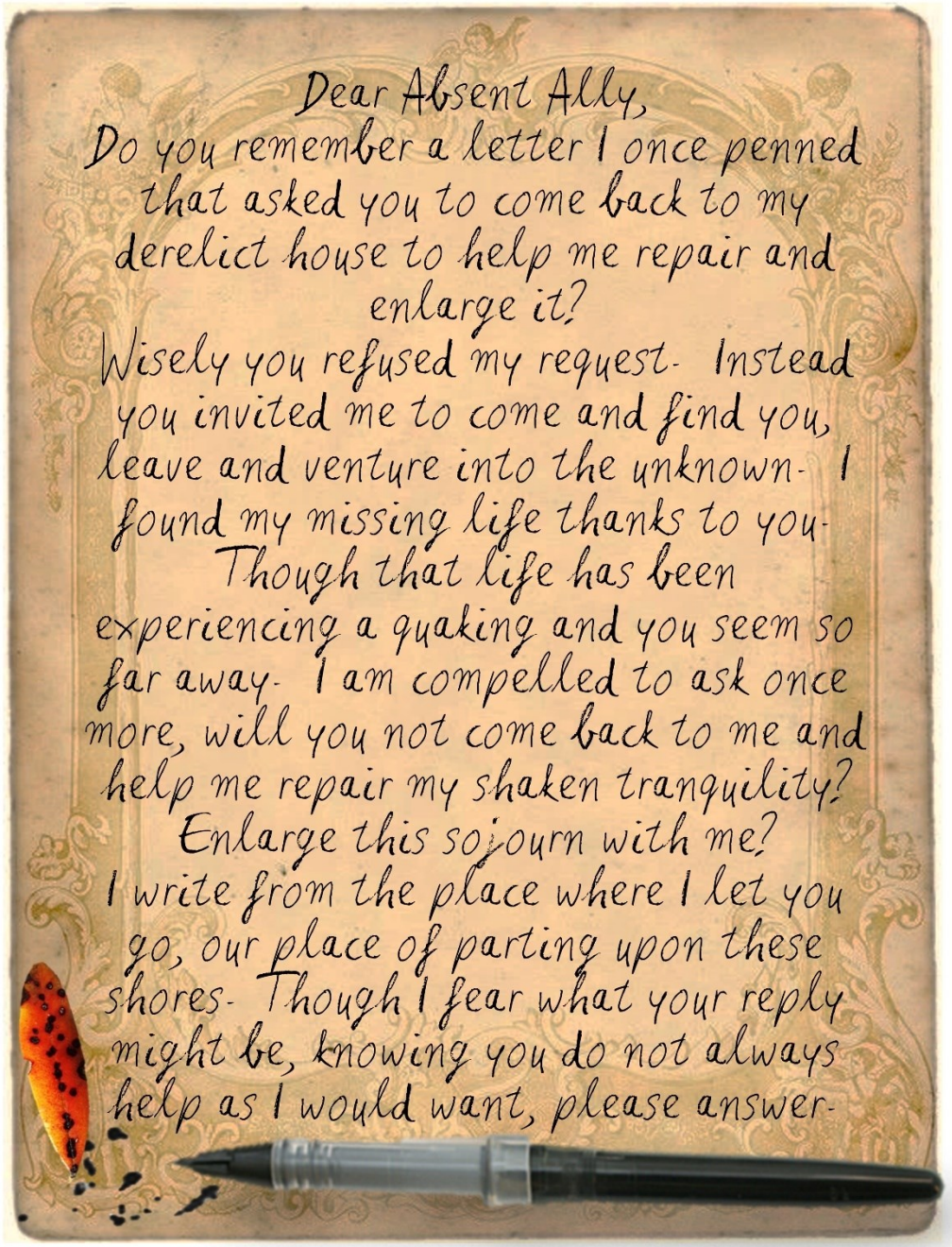


She considered doing what she had done once before. Help was a hard thing to ask for, help had not often been given. When she was a tattered-winged woman she had simply learned to stop seeking it. Yet she had discovered an ally whom she could ask, who had heard and answered. Trust in her new guide had grown and with trust came a difficult departure from the familiar, adventure and adversity, tests and triumphs. The Mermaid Woman would know what to do, the woman thought to herself. Although, asking for the sea maiden's intervention meant it might not come in the form that she requested. Her trust might be tested.

It was a risk to engage the wise, to ask for a remedy or guidance or a sign. If what was given was undesirable or difficult to receive, refusal of such gifts had

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consequences. The Woman With Renewed Wings resolved that her disquiet was acute enough to write to the Mermaid Woman.



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Though she waited pensively for a reply, no letter came. The disjointed memories faded, the impish game seemed to have ended and nothing happened, not for weeks. Some form of calm settled on the woman again.

Until... Until a night came that the Hunter's Moon took charge of the sky and everything changed.



The Woman With Renewed Wings had been stargazing, after which she fell into a deep sleep. Yet her dreams were far from serene, the moon pursued her as its quarry and no matter how far or fast she ran she could not elude the hunter on her heels. Suddenly she awoke, saturated with the feeling she was not alone. Her eyes flew open and there, standing by her reclining body, was a child who seemed to tower above her. A waif and a stray, a girl in a tattered dress with pale tissue thin disintegrating wings. Her hair was matted and unkempt like a wild thing, belonging to no one and nowhere. She was emptied out, like someone had tried to tame her, driving her spirit away in the process, their method of taming far too severe. Her face was stained, streaked with trails. These were old remnants of having cried, though tears had not fallen for some time and the trails, like old river beds, had run dry, leaving deep channels.

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For a while the child stared at the woman, studying her, and the woman dared not move or breathe.

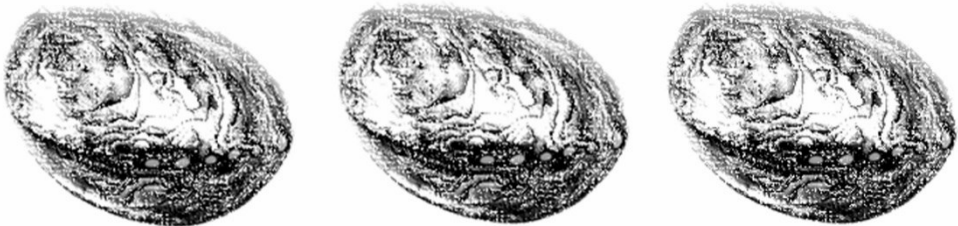
The girl lifted her gaze and looked off to some distant point. Her eyes suddenly grew cold, the temperature of the air around her seemed to suddenly drop. The woman thought her heart would stop with how frozen the girl's stare was.

Then the girl's eyes hardened. The mouth became set in grim determination to show no emotion and to not make a sound. The woman was not unfamiliar with that expression and was sure there would be a violent anguished noise happening inside the small mind and body before her. Then, with no warning, the girl startled, leapt suddenly from her statue state, and bolted off into the darkness.

The woman found herself gasping for breath. She knew who the girl was. What the woman desperately wanted to know was what the girl was doing here, and how had she been discovered? How had the girl found her way across time's tundra to this point, and why now? Why this disturbance of the woman's peaceful, hidden renewed-winged routine and existence?

Peace was shattered as the woman gasped, heart racing, mind reeling. Questions, panicked questions crowded her consciousness demanding answers. She had none.

But now at least she knew who had been dogging her, playing an impish game of hide and seek. It was not a fun game. This felt like someone had broken into her emotional safe house and ransacked it, looking for the one thing she did not want to give up or have stolen.



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It was too late. She had been robbed of her amnesia, masquerading as serenity, and the girl had bolted off with it into the night. Now she was wide awake to a memory she had been trying to screw up tight into a tiny ball, compressed with immense force so it could not unravel. That memory was unravelling and at great speed.

The night seemed to last an age before the tinge of dawn graced the horizon line. The woman rose and began the long walk to the cave of the Dark Mother. The Mermaid Woman had not answered. It was then the woman realised she had not wanted to talk to the Dark Mother about her recent disturbances. Now she had no other choice. Her tread was troubled, far from confident. She stopped often to look over her shoulder anxious that she might be followed. Little did she know then that what she feared was following, had already gone on ahead of her.

I not only witnessed the genesis of the strange passage the woman was bound for, I set its turning in motion. She had asked for my help and I had replied. Though before I answered, I had to retrieve something from the depths where it had last been stowed. I had not held the Banishment Stone for many a year, but I would carry it in my raiment for as long as the needed deeds of the woman remained undone.

The tale that follows unfolds in the world between worlds, where nothing is as it first seems. Here the odyssey begins, one the Woman With Renewed Wings had no intention of making. A new herstory, a journey called 'Return'.

### **Mermaid Woman**