

Why I Wrote *Producing Beck*

One evening not long ago, I found myself sitting outside with a small glass of tequila, watching the sky change color as the sun dropped behind the mountains.

The light was doing what evening light does in Colorado—turning everything warmer for a few brief minutes. The logs of our home caught the last gold. The dogs wandered the deck. The air had that quiet warmth of late summer when the day finally exhales.

And for a moment I had a strange realization.

I felt more alive than I had in years.

That surprised me.

Somewhere along the way, many of us absorb the idea that vitality belongs to youth—that creativity, sensuality, curiosity and desire are things that gradually taper off as life goes on.

Women, especially, have been given that message.

Reach a certain age and become less.

Less visible.

Less sensual.

Less adventurous.

Less interested in sex.

Less interested in ourselves.

Frankly, I don't know who came up with that idea.

I think about *The Golden Girls*. When I was younger, those women seemed ancient.

Then I got older and realized they were in their fifties.

Fifties.

The women I know in their fifties, sixties and beyond aren't necessarily winding down.

Many are finally inhabiting their lives with a depth and honesty that was harder to reach when careers, children, caregiving, expectations and sheer responsibility occupied nearly every available inch of space.

They know more about who they are.

They know what they love.

They know what they have tolerated too long.

They are painting, writing, traveling, starting businesses, falling in love with new ideas and discovering parts of themselves they never had time to meet earlier.

And many are no longer particularly interested in asking permission.

That interests me enormously.

So does something else.

What makes us feel alive?

I have become fascinated by attention.

By what happens when someone truly notices another person.

Not merely sees them.

Not admires them.

Not compliments them.

Notices them.

There is a word for some of this: attunement.

The ability to pay attention closely enough to recognize what is happening in another person and respond to it.

I began noticing that creativity, laughter and intimacy seem to arise from much the same place.

All three require a certain surrender.

You stop managing yourself for a moment.

You become present.

Something opens.

A laugh escapes before you can control it.

A painting goes somewhere you hadn't planned.

A conversation becomes more honest than you expected.

Another person sees something in you that you had almost stopped seeing yourself.

And suddenly you are awake.

Producing Beck grew from those questions.

It is a novel about a woman in her sixties who is not disappearing.

Quite the opposite.

She is becoming.

Art moves through the story because art has always been one of the ways we make the invisible visible. Music runs through it because sometimes a song reaches a feeling before language does.

And intimacy matters because being truly seen by another person can illuminate places in ourselves we have neglected.

But ultimately, *Producing Beck* is not a story about finding another person who can make us feel alive.

It asks a more difficult question:

What if the aliveness we recognize in the presence of another person was ours all along?

What if someone else can awaken it, challenge it, reflect it back to us—but cannot own it?

And what happens when we finally recognize it as our own?

At sixty-two, I am increasingly convinced that becoming is not reserved for the young.

Neither is creativity.

Neither is sensuality.

Neither is adventure.

Neither is joy.

Aliveness does not expire at fifty.

Or sixty.

Or seventy.

It waits patiently for us to notice it again.

And sometimes the most vivid chapters of a life arrive long after everyone assumes the story is winding down.