

It Won't Hurt None

It Won't Hurt None

A story of courage, healing, and a return to wholeness

By Rebecca E Chandler

Rebecca E Chandler
An imprint of The Chandler Group, LLC
Los Angeles, CA
United States of America
www.rebeccaechandler.com

Copyright © 2022 by Rebecca E Chandler



Rebecca E Chandler supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, free speech, and enhances every culture. Thank you reader for buying an authorized edition of this book. Thank you for not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of this story in any form without permission. The sale of this book without its cover is unauthorized. If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that it was reported to the publisher as “unsold and destroyed.” Neither the author nor the publisher receives payment for the sale of any “stripped book.”

LCCN: 2022923599

ISBN 979-8-9874797-0-4 (Paperback)

ISBN 979-8-9874797-2-8 (Hardcover)

ISBN 979-8-9874797-6-6 (Hardcover w/Dust Jacket)

ISBN 979-8-9874797-3-5 (eBook)

ISBN 979-8-9874797-4-2 (Audible)

ISBN 979-8-9874797-1-1 (Kindle)

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. Copyright under Berne Copyright Convention, Universal Copyright Convention, and Pan-American Copyright Convention.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted/distributed in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of Rebecca E Chandler. For all requests, please visit www.rebeccaechandler.com

Ordering Information:

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the author at the address above.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dear Reader:

This book is a memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time and does not represent word-for-word transcripts. Rather, the author has retold them in a way that evokes the feeling and meaning of what was said and, in all instances, the essence of the dialogue is accurate. While all the stories in this book are true, some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved, and some events have been compressed. This is a work of nonfiction. Characters and events are not fabricated. The author recognizes that the memories of real-life family members, friends, and practitioners portrayed in this book may differ from her own.

Please note the following content warning.

This memoir contains detailed references to rape, sexual assault, abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, verbal), child abuse and/or pedophilia, self-harm, depression, suicide ideation, other mental health issues, pornography, death or dying, and pregnancy and/or infertility.

If you feel you would like to speak to someone, please dial 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the United States, providing 24/7 service. It is available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

Dial 911 if you think you are having an emergency and are in danger.

If you are being hurt, know someone who might be hurt, or afraid you might hurt another, dial 911 or call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453 or visit <https://childhelphotline.org/>. Your chat with one of their professional crisis counselors will be a first step in breaking the silence and getting help.

Dear Reader:

I like to refer to the professionals who supported my journey as healers. That's my term. They never used that word or implied that they held any healing ability or powers. They are psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, nurse practitioners, holistic practitioners, guides, empaths, energy workers, neurologists, TCM practitioners, massage therapists, somatic practitioners, astrologists, and mediums.

Please remember I am not a doctor, therapist, counselor, or any other sort of medical professional. I hope that sharing my experiences may be helpful while you work to heal your life and your symptoms. Please know that no information published in this book should ever take the place of professional care, diagnosis, and treatment. Any/all opinions captured in this narrative are my own and do not intend to imply or offer any medical opinions, facts, or diagnosis.

To Seven.

CONTENTS

Preface	
Acknowledgements	
Introduction	
Collapse	
Chapter 1	11
Chapter 2	19
Chapter 3	27
Agency	
Chapter 4	36
Chapter 5	50
Chapter 6	60
Flight	
Chapter 7	72
Chapter 8	80
Chapter 9	94
Transformation	
Chapter 10	112
Chapter 11	172
Chapter 12	142
Reconciliation	
Chapter 13	151
Chapter 14	165
Chapter 15	175
Freefall	
Chapter 16	186
Chapter 17	202
Chapter 18	208
Recovery	
Chapter 19	220
Chapter 20	230
Author's Note	232
Epilogue	234
Special Thanks	235
Resources	236

PREFACE

WHEN I FIRST started to hear voices interrupting my daily thoughts, it was clear they weren't my usual, stressed-out, high school student inner dialogues. Each voice had a tone and vocabulary. Their chatter became an uncomfortable and, at times, dangerous chorus in my mind.

Eventually, I gave each voice a name. After listening intently to their language, tone of voice, and intention, I decided to identify them by their ages. They were Thirteen, Seven, Five, and Six.

Collectively, I called them my fragments, created for my protection when my mind chose to dissociate during years of childhood sexual abuse. Each piece stored horrific details of various assaults at arm's length so that I could survive.

Decades passed before I received the official diagnosis of Dissociative Identity Disorder, or D.I.D., previously referred to as multiple personality disorder. There is significant and unfortunate stigma around those diagnosed with D.I.D. For me, the diagnosis simply meant my mind functioned on a level most will never have to experience. Living with D.I.D. was complicated, but it never stopped me from finding success, being creative, or leading a fulfilling life.

Dissociation is disconnection. Most people experience some level of disconnection in everyday life, such as when they sit at a traffic light and daydream or lose track of time and end up parked in their driveway. However, such moments are short-lived and don't typically involve multiple identities.

The level of dissociation, or disconnect, I experienced was multilayered and much more complicated than a simple daydream at an intersection. My dissociation became habitual during years of abuse, and I disconnected whenever any environment made me feel as though I was in danger. I still feel tempted to dissociate in social situations from time to time.

After years of therapy, somatic coaching, and meditation, I reconciled with Thirteen, Seven, Five, and Six. We came to an understanding, and I resolved all their pain. In our resolution, and ultimately their release, I was allowed to finally live wholly complete and in the present.

It Won't Hurt None

My journey reflects a healing approach and experiences particular to me. Each person has to discover the best techniques for them to heal. I often hear “my trauma isn’t nearly as bad as yours so I don’t think I need to get help.” Some believe if their experiences weren’t, say, as violent as mine, their healing journey is somehow less challenging, less of a priority.

The truth is: Trauma isn’t experienced on a sliding scale. Your trauma, or the trauma of someone close to you, is as serious as mine. We are equally affected in our minds and bodies. The details may differ, but your truth carries the same weight.

I hope my story of surviving trauma and healing encourages you to tend to your wounds. *The poet Rumi says, “The wound is the place where the light enters you.”* Let your wound open because when it is visible, it’s vulnerable. Look at it, communicate with it, learn from it, and heal it. We do not have to live broken by shame and in the shadows. I believe we all have the ability to heal.

It won’t be easy. It’s uncomfortable, horrible, perhaps a bit scary, and exhausting. But always remember, you are not alone. You are a survivor among many. You can do the work. You will heal your fragmented soul.

You are courageous because you survived. So stand in your truth, acknowledge all your wounds—even the ones you’ve never talked about—and find the strength to let them open and let all the healing light shine in.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THERE'S NO WAY to properly express the gratitude and love I hold for Shawna, Wanuri, Breanne, Lily, Lynda, Aparna, Monali, Fatuoh, Denise, and Theresa. I aspire every day to mirror their loving, brave, funny, creative, intelligent, and exceptional selves. Their patience, generosity, laughter, and wisdom guide me, and I am better every day when I follow their example.

I owe a debt to my siblings for loving, trusting, and encouraging me to write this story. They have seen me through life's detours with grace, patience, and a wonderfully twisted sense of humor only we can fully appreciate. I cannot imagine a world without them.

To my nieces and nephews, in America and around the world, thank you for sharing your cheeky humor, sense of adventure, and wondrous inquisitive nature.

Thank you Dr. D, Amelie, Natalia, and Hana for hearing me, seeing me, validating my truth, and guiding my healing journey.

To friends far and wide who call every part of the world home, thank you for inviting me into your lives and sharing your humor, creativity, hospitality, and sense of adventure.

Finally, there is one person who inspires me to find joy every day. My late Granny Chandler, Inez, born October 18, 1914, made life bearable, filled it with love, and infused it with hot chocolate and Rice Krispy treats. The magic dust we mixed in our imaginations and sprinkled into the night sky at bedtime fed my curiosity and creativity. She illuminated a dream world full of vibrant color and possibility. When I wasn't sure I could hold on, Granny Chandler showed me how to be strong. Her beauty and wisdom are forever with me.

It Won't Hurt None

INTRODUCTION

HOUSE GUESTS CAN be a blessing or a curse. And sometimes, they can be both.

A great house guest waits for an invitation to visit. They knock on the front door and offer warm embraces, laughter, chocolate, wine, gifts, and treats for the pet. They're considerate and respect the house by contributing groceries and changing the beds before they leave.

A miserable house guest arrives uninvited and barges through the front door announcing they have some dirty laundry and their children are just "getting over" the flu. Every morsel in the cupboards and fridge is devoured. They overstay their welcome and refuse to depart until everyone is sick and exhausted, finally leaving the house in disarray.

Trauma was never invited into my home, my body, or my mind. Instead, it crashed into my body and mind when I experienced the first sexual assault at the age of Five. The sexual violence shook my foundation. My mind buckled and the beams cracked. The bearing walls shielding my body broke. Trauma's force was so powerful I became unhinged. My nerves frayed. The house, my soul, was nearly destroyed.

In an effort to protect me, my mind developed multiple fragments, pieces of me trapped in time and circumstance. Each one claimed a different room for itself. I was no longer the sole owner and occupant of my life. I became a dissociated, early childhood sexual assault survivor.

My identities inhabited and punished me with nagging conversation, "chatter," in my head, obsessing over every decision, thought, and action. Restless, they created space for other uninvited guests, like depression, who I also called Darkness. They all took residence among the rubble that was my existence. I became their host and hostage and nearly succumbed to their ransom demands with my life.

Escape seemed impossible. But a part of me, the bit trying to live my life each day, clawed through the destruction and escaped my captor's grip to find healers. In time, I learned to negotiate with the fragments and reconcile the traumatized pieces of myself, eventually integrating, and then evicting, my uninvited guests.

My structure, my mind and body, is sound once again. The remodel is nearly complete as I am slowly retrofitted with self-love and acceptance one

It Won't Hurt None

brick at a time. Healthy energy, like water, flows through my pipes, and my voice has restored my power. The deep, shameful cracks and fissures in my walls, in my wounds, feel gently repaired but require lifelong maintenance. I check in with my mind and body daily to nurture the ongoing repairs and healing they require.

Today, the foundation, the underpinning, is strong and fortified by my truth. My house is in order, and I am clear.

Trauma hates to lose, and it still lurks around my house hoping to find a window, unlocked door, or vulnerable piece of me to exploit. I no longer fear the interloper because I've done the work.

I am strong.

I am courageous.

I am whole.

It Won't Hurt None

Rebecca E. Chandler



It Won't Hurt None

Rebecca E. Chandler

“This is a time for healing deep emotional trauma. Situations you thought you cleared are coming up again for more awareness. Healing is done in layers. You have to continue to spiral through the same emotional experiences until there is no electric charge left to trigger you.” (Anonymous)



CHAPTER 1

THE WORST KIND of traumatic event is the kind that doesn't sound like it will be particularly traumatizing. Keyhole surgery sounded tidy and simple. Unfortunately, keyholes can be deceptive. A house can look good from the outside. A few nails here and there and a fresh coat of paint and it's good as new.

But once the keyhole is unlocked, the front door groans as it creaks open, revealing the truth. Pipes drip, drip, drip, and the walls are full of holes. Spiderwebs stretch across doorjamb. And the electrical panel, keeping things warm in winter and cold in the summer, is completely offline. My body felt good in January 2017. Sure, I had some pain and the plumbing leaked a little, but I didn't take any of it seriously. I thought I just needed a simple repair.

At the time, I lived in Kenya and experienced sharp, cutting pain throughout every menstrual cycle. A visit with a local doctor revealed a fibroid tumor sitting on my left side, just above my bladder. Additionally, I was also warned I had "prolific and severe" endometriosis contributing to the pain. My doctor in Nairobi recommended I consult with a Dubai surgeon. Just a few weeks later, I met with The Cutter, a tall, glamorous, and determined woman whose offices overlooked one of the city's premiere golf courses.

"The scans show that the fibroid tumor is about the size of an orange," she explained. "It's sitting on your bladder, which explains the urgency issues you mentioned."

“What do you suggest?” I asked.

“When they start to hurt, it’s time to take them out,” she said confidently. I agreed. The fibroid was an uninvited guest, and we made plans for surgery.

A month later, I left my house in Nairobi and traveled back to Dubai and had one last consultation with The Cutter in her luxurious, chic office.

“We’re going to conduct a keyhole, laparoscopic procedure and remove the fibroid,” she explained. “We’ll also check your uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes. It’s a common procedure, and you shouldn’t have any problems.”

“I was diagnosed with severe endometriosis as well. What if you decide during the procedure that it is a more serious issue? What if you find early signs of cancer, for example? I don’t want to have two surgeries,” I said. I was always thinking proactively and negotiating for the best deal. A film and TV producer, it never occurred to me that I shouldn’t treat my body like another project.

“Well, okay, that’s a fair point. I recommend that we leave an option open for a partial hysterectomy where I would potentially remove your uterus but leave your ovaries and cervix. You need to sign a release authorizing me to remove your uterus if I find anything that I think is dangerous.”

I asked her about the post-surgery effects and complications in the same mind frame and tone of voice that I used when I spoke to my blessed mechanic about my 2012 Mercedes C-Class.

“If you yank that old part out, will it still run the same? I don’t have time for more repairs.”

The difference was that I was talking about my body and the removal of a major organ. The conversation with The Cutter was a symptom of classic detachment and I was going through the motions.

“It’s a simple procedure. The uterus doesn’t really serve a purpose once you get beyond childbearing. You may have increased hot flashes and other perimenopause symptoms,” she explained. “We can manage all of it with the HRT (hormone replacement therapy) that you’re currently using.”

“That makes sense. But you’ll only remove it if you feel like it’s really necessary, right?” I asked.

“Of course,” she replied.

It sounded simple. I reassured myself the operation would go well and left The Cutter’s office to enjoy a gorgeous, Dubai spring day. When I got to my friend Sandy’s house to spend the night, I did my best to relax. I ignored

some of the alarm bells going off in my head and dismissed my anxiety as normal pre-surgery nerves.

“So how are you feeling about tomorrow?” Sandy asked as she poured us a special blend of iced tea.

“I feel good. I mean, I’m a little afraid, but that’s normal,” I replied.

“Yeah, I mean from what you’ve told me, the surgeon makes it sound like a pretty straight forward operation. I’m sure it will all go well,” she said to reassure me.

Early the next morning, I sat in bed and had a conversation with the fragments.

“How are we feeling?” I asked, perhaps a bit too enthusiastically at 5 a.m. Almost immediately, there was a lot of “chatter” in my mind.

“What if something goes wrong? Who is this doctor? How long will it take to recover? Are you sure you want to do this? Do you really want a hysterectomy?” they asked in a chorus.

“Well, if there’s something wrong with my uterus, and it’s dangerous, then it needs to come out,” I explained.

“It’s scary,” Five whispered.

“What’s the rush? Why now?” Seven pressed.

“It’s not a rush. I’ve been in pain for years. It’s time to get rid of the tumor. It’s fine. I trust the surgeon. She might not even need to remove my uterus,” I replied hoping to calm their nerves.

The fragments pumped more fear and adrenaline into my body once I left Sandy's house at 6 a.m. and headed to one of Dubai's private women's hospitals. After checking in, I lay in the hospital bed while they started the IV. I kept reassuring myself the surgery was necessary. In hindsight, I wasn't present and paying attention.

My mind and body frantically waved a flag back and forth, but I ignored their warning. Normally I would read everything Dr. Internet had to say about a particular procedure, medication, or diagnosis before making any health decisions. And yet, for reasons unclear at the time, I skipped over my usual “protocols.” *It’s too late to turn back,* I told myself as the anesthesiologist delivered the first round of sedatives and I was wheeled into surgery.

I woke up a few hours later in a lovely, peach-toned, private hospital room on the maternity floor. The view out the window captured a beautiful grove of bright-green trees, healthy from the latest rainstorm. I slowly regained my senses and recognized the sound of the newborn babies crying

down the hallway. Once more lucid, I started pressing my nurses for information.

“Do you know if she removed my uterus?” I asked the nurse who was checking my IV. She gave me a confused look. “She didn’t know if it needed to be removed before the surgery. I want to know if she removed it,” I said in a slightly panicked tone.

“I don’t know,” the nurse replied. “You need to wait for your surgeon to call.”

“Okay,” I said, “please tell her to call me now. I need to know what happened to me.”

“I’ll call her office and leave a message,” the nurse said on her way out of my room. I stared at the clock, walls, and out the window for what seemed like hours before The Cutter finally called me.

“Hello, Rebecca,” she said. “I hear that you’re asking questions about your surgery.”

“Yes, well, I thought that you would stop by today. The nurses don’t seem able to tell me what happened.”

I felt her rolling her eyes at me over the phone. After a pause, I detected a bit of agitation in her voice. “Okay, well, I don’t normally speak to my patients the day of their surgery. But you seem to be recovering very quickly.”

My eyes started rolling. Did she think she was doing me a favor?

“Well, thanks. So how did it go?” I asked in my “Don’t you dare screw with me right now” voice.

“The fibroid was removed without any issues. I didn’t see any abnormalities.”

I took some deep breaths. I didn’t care about the fibroid. It was harmless. I knew that. I wanted to hear about my womb. Sighing heavily into the phone, I felt as though I had to drag the most critical information out of her.

“That’s great. And what about my uterus?”

“Well, when I examined the uterus, it was severely damaged from endometriosis,” she said. “In fact, you had a lot of endometriosis outside of your uterus as well. It didn’t look healthy, and I made the decision to remove it.”

My throat tightened. I started to feel tears form. I didn’t understand what was happening. *Why am I sad?* I asked myself. It was just a simple operation.

“Are you happy with the result?” I asked The Cutter.

“Yes. I don’t expect you to have any issues. It was a straightforward procedure.”

Fibroid gone. Uterus was out. No signs of cancer. I kept telling myself it was a good outcome. I wasn't in too much pain. The call ended but the ache in my throat and chatter in my mind wouldn't stop.

"What have you done?" my body asked. "We can't ever have a child now. You've ruined us."

"What? How in the world did I ruin us?" I asked.

"I wasn't finished. I wasn't ready to stop trying for a baby. I wasn't ready to close that door forever. I never gave up hope. It was my dream. I just wanted to be a mother. I was going to keep our child safe and love it forever."

"I get that, but our chances of having a child ended long before this operation, and you know that," I replied impatiently.

"You've ruined us," my body responded through tears. "You took away the one thing that guaranteed we would not be lonely. Our womb. Who is going to love us now?"

There was a familiar anguish in the voice. Two years of failed attempts to get pregnant dragged me through two years of grieving until I was finally able to grow comfortable in the knowledge I would not have any children. Did the voice, now back with fresh torments, lay dormant the whole time? Why did my body still want to be a mother? How would I get it, me, to accept the fact that I allowed our womb to be removed?

The voice, like the surgeon's blade, cut deep when it asked, "Who is going to love us now?" I sat alone in the darkened hospital room in the middle of the night, listening to the newborns crying. An overwhelming sense of loss filled the space where my womb once resided.

The next morning, I was discharged, and I settled back at Sandy's house where I went for walks along the beautiful track, passing by kids on the playground, birds enjoying water fountains, and gorgeous spring flowers. Walking a little further a few times each day, I congratulated myself for my resilience. *"I'm feeling good. I'll get through this."* I told myself proudly.

Just a few days later, though, my confidence quickly evaporated as extreme hot flashes engulfed my entire body. I felt like I was immersed in a boiling pot. I reassured myself it was all part of the side effects The Cutter mentioned until the hot flashes escalated and sleep became impossible.

A little more than a week after the surgery, my symptoms grew even more severe, and I finally consulted with Dr. Internet about "What to expect after a hysterectomy."

The news wasn't hopeful. I read the removal of my womb could potentially deliver me into metabolic syndrome. Other risks, like premature

menopause and other post-menopause complications were also common. The Cutter never mentioned any of it to me. I became increasingly worried about the hot flashes and sleeplessness that continued to escalate as I made plans to return to Nairobi.

Within a few days of getting home, my mental health began to decline sharply. Darkness, like a fog silently creeping into a forest, pushed into my mind. I sat on my porch one morning and stared at the trees surrounding my small, stone cottage in Kenya as my thoughts unraveled.

The Cutter took my womb, and I'm going crazy, I said to myself. *No. Stop.* I had to admit that it wasn't true. I willingly surrendered my womb. I gave it away voluntarily. I didn't protect my body. I had to take responsibility and accept whatever came my way.

My mind was breaking while massive hormone shifts pulsed through my flesh. Absent sleep, I became obsessed with the pursuit of information. I conferred with Dr. Internet as my symptoms worsened and research revealed The Cutter lied when she told me the uterus didn't play a significant role in the body beyond childbearing. The Cutter wanted to cut. The truth was somehow extraneous. The uterus, I learned, plays a significant role within the entire endocrine system. It's where every hormone and biological process is regulated.

My symptoms escalated and bore no resemblance to the days of relatively gentle perimenopause. Where I used to experience an occasional hot flash before the surgery, they now set me ablaze and drenched me in sweat in seconds, multiple times an hour. At night, my sheets became soaked as I lay naked under the constant blast of a large fan. Sleep came in short bursts that only served to intensify the Darkness growing in my mind.

I became completely untethered as my mind and body replayed every painful step of my infertility. The failed attempts to get pregnant, the discovery of no ovarian reserve, and the sting of a formal rejection of my adoption application as a single parent jabbed at me. Every emotion I ever felt about not having a child circled back, bigger, darker, and more hurtful than ever before. Unlike other bouts of depression, this species of Darkness draped over me like a wet, weighted blanket.

The "routine keyhole procedure" devastated my entire endocrine system. My body quickly surrendered to Metabolic Syndrome. I felt destroyed and refused to leave the house.

Darkness tightened its grip and escalated its forced march across my mind by unearthing my childhood sexual trauma. I stopped obsessing about

my infertility as vivid flashbacks of the assaults flooded into my mind. The creak of a doorway, or the sound of my gardener smacking his lips as he ate lunch, were part of a long list of cues, triggers, that dragged me away from the present and into my past.

In the midst of all of my troubles, I had to find a way to get back to work. I had recently shifted to consulting for one of the world's biggest brands after twenty-five years of producing films, TV, and marketing campaigns. My work couldn't be put off any longer.

But nearly a month after the surgery, I was clearly not ready when my manager and friend Monali called me about our television project, and I dissolved during the conversation. I was in bad shape. I didn't know how to describe what was happening to me. I could have asked Monali for help, or just to listen, but instead I lost control.

"Hey," she said, "How are you? I talked to procurement today and they said they're still waiting for you to send in the report. When do you think it will be ready? We need to get the project moving."

"You know what, Monali," I shouted into the phone, "I do not care about the damn budget. I am losing my mind. My body is completely falling apart! I can't sleep! I can't function! I don't care about any of it!" I shouted.

"Wow, okay, I'm going to let you go. You don't sound good. I'll talk to you tomorrow," she said, ending our call.

I felt so embarrassed. Monali was, and remains, a good friend. She was also one of my main client contacts, and I had just lost my shit on the phone and sounded hysterical. I was known for having a short fuse at times, but the exchange that day crossed over so many boundaries I was afraid for my job.

I should have known better. A few hours later, a messenger arrived at my house to deliver an enormous bouquet of flowers. The note read, "You need these. Mo."

When my friend Sam called me at home, she kindly asked if I needed any help. I was ragged and immediately rattled off all my health issues.

"If I do not figure this out, I will not survive," I told her.

"What does it feel like?" she asked.

I know she wanted to help me. I could hear it in her voice, so I tried to explain. I found it so difficult to articulate.

"I feel like I'm going crazy in real-time. I am sliding into some sort of void where I can't think. The last time I felt like this was when I first revealed my abuse to a therapist. My mind literally broke when that happened."

"Jesus. Does it help to work? To keep your mind busy?"

“Work is impossible. I can’t concentrate. I sat through a normal meeting earlier today where we talked about production schedules for the next TV series, and I forgot the details. I’m a producer. I live for details. If I can’t remember things, execute plans, and focus, I’m no use to my clients.”

“Maybe you need some extra sleep,” she encouraged.

“Yeah, if only I could sleep. I don’t even get the sensation of being sleepy anymore. I’ve tried melatonin, hypnotherapy, and medication. I think that my body is too angry to let me sleep. It’s like a part of me will only let me focus on my abuse.” I began to feel exasperated. I wasn’t in the mood to explain all the miserable details about my childhood.

“After all this time? I thought you said you went to therapy and sorted that out,” she asked.

“I did go to therapy,” answering a bit abruptly, “several times. But I don’t think that the trauma was entirely healed. I mean, I’m remembering details about the abuse that I haven’t thought about for decades. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Let’s hope your surgeon can sort you out when you get to Dubai,” she replied.

“Inshallah,” I replied. God willing.

I clung to the hope that a checkup with The Cutter would give me answers and put my body and mind back on track.



CHAPTER 2

AFTER FLYING THE all-too-familiar route from Nairobi to Dubai, I spent the night at my favorite Sofitel Hotel on the beach. I needed some peace and quiet. There was something really wondrous about Dubai in late spring, when the sea was 85 degrees and well before the monstrous summer heat took over the city. After an evening swim, I went to bed early, hoping The Cutter would offer solutions and life would return to normal.

“So, Rebecca, how are you doing? Your incisions have healed really well,” The Cutter observed.

“Well, sure, that’s the easy part, isn’t it? The other side effects of the surgery have been disastrous.”

“Tell me. What’s happening?” she said, settling back into her overpriced chair. It was white leather, like the rest of the furniture in her office. The environment I once thought was European chic flipped to overpriced and tacky in my mind. My throat tightened as I started to speak.

“I feel like I’m losing my mind,” I said, noticing my tone sounded rather desperate. “I am incredibly depressed. Irritable. I cannot sleep. I don’t even feel tired. I have brain fog and it’s affecting my work.”

“Well, Rebecca,” she said condescendingly, “there’s absolutely no correlation between a partial hysterectomy and insomnia or depression.”

A surge of anger filled my veins. My anger was always fueled by a fragment I called Thirteen. Whenever I became annoyed or pissed off, Thirteen took over. We had a complicated, and completely unhealthy, relationship. *“Thirteen, would you like to have a go at her?” I asked, prepared to unleash hell.*

“Yes, I would. Get the fuck out of my way,” she snarled as her energy took over.

“Right, well, I wasn’t depressed or an insomniac before the surgery. Now, I am. And you think you’re going to sit there and tell me that none of these issues are related to my surgery? It’s all a coincidence?”

She flashed her best “I’m a doctor and you’re not” look at me and said, “Removing your uterus had no effect whatsoever on your sleep or mental health. It says in your chart that you have a history of depression.”

“Yes, that’s true,” Thirteen replied with a thick layer of disdain. “But this depression is different. I haven’t felt this depressed in decades, if ever. Something is wrong.”

“Honestly, Rebecca, you sound a bit hysterical.” Her derision made me want to punch her in the face. “I’m going to write two prescriptions for you. One is a mood stabilizer, and the other is a sleeping pill.”

“Wait a minute. You want to medicate problems that you claim don’t exist? Is that right? Keep your prescriptions. I won’t take them. You’re throwing a Band-Aid at me while I’m bleeding out.”

Her overfilled lips remained pursed. Perhaps her malpractice insurance provider was lurking around the corner, making her incapable of speech. I’ll never know. After what felt like a full minute of silent staring, Thirteen and I had enough.

“We aren’t getting anywhere. You’re not listening,” I said to The Cutter, completely exasperated.

“It’s only been a month. Your body is going to settle down in a few weeks. This is all normal,” she said in a slightly less offensive tone.

“Normal? Right. I can’t sleep and I’m dangerously depressed. My memory is fading. And you think that it’s all normal? Or I’m hysterical. Which is it?”

I stood up and left her sitting in her diploma-laden office and walked to the front desk.

“Hi. I’d like copies of my entire file, please,” I said to the office manager. “I won’t be back.”

There were plenty of moments when Thirteen’s anger served a solid purpose, and my final meeting with The Cutter was just such a moment. The ability to summon Thirteen from within and channel her into my immediate thought process was a great tool; but Thirteen’s sharp barbs extracted a price. She didn’t easily back off after I set her free. It took me several hours of

swimming in the ocean and relaxing in my hotel room the rest of the day to calm down and focus.

I spent the evening consulting Dr. Internet to find a new OB/GYN and specifically looked for a woman who was at least my age. Early the next morning, I found “Dr. Sensible’s” listing in an expat chat room and called to make a same-day appointment. A mid-fifties woman who studied in Beirut, Dr. Sensible had a calm, sophisticated energy about her that all women from Lebanon seem to share. Her office wasn’t chic, and that comforted me. I’d had enough of chic. I needed pragmatism, experience, and intelligence.

“Of course you have insomnia. Your entire system is in shock. You’re going to have a lot of side effects for a long time,” she explained after listening to my story.

“What do you mean?” I asked, confused. She was so matter of fact that it caught me by surprise.

“The uterus is a major organ. It helps regulate your endocrine system. It’s all connected. You can’t just remove an organ without disruption. Your body is going to have to recalibrate. The depression and brain fog you’re experiencing are common for women who have a partial or total hysterectomy. Why did she remove the uterus?” she asked, glancing through my file.

“The report at the back says that the endometriosis was severe and that it greatly affected the uterus,” I replied.

“Yes, I see it. I mean, that’s probably true, but that’s not life-threatening. It might be painful, at times, but I don’t see anything in the report that suggests your uterus needed to be removed,” she commented.

Her words hit me like a full body blow. I was embarrassed and I felt stupid. I couldn’t tell her it was all my fault.

“My surgeon called me hysterical,” I told her.

“You’re not hysterical. It sounds like you’re experiencing a possible system collapse, and you’ve every right to be upset,” she explained. “I don’t think the insomnia and other symptoms will last for more than a year.”

“Did you just say that I was going to be miserable for a year?” I asked in shock.

“Yes. This is a massive disruption. The body doesn’t recover from this very quickly, even when everything goes perfectly. And your body isn’t handling it well.”

“Should I take HRT (hormone replacement therapy)? Will that help?” I asked.

“Probably not,” she replied. “It will complicate your body’s natural ability to balance. Get out and walk. Eat healthy food. Give yourself time.”

I left her office and felt a bit reassured. It was helpful to speak to a woman who had herself gone through menopause. She understood my symptoms and feelings, which made a difference.

I also felt anger growing inside of me. I was in a thermonuclear meltdown and it was entirely my fault. I signed the paperwork. I didn’t research the removal of my uterus. As a result, I was going to have to live with the consequences of my actions for a very long time. The thought of not sleeping properly, feeling depressed, and fighting through brain fog for years overwhelmed me, and I started to think of resources in Kenya that might be able to help.

After a final night at the Sofitel, including a stop at my favorite gelato shop, I boarded the flight to Kenya and prayed my body would find balance. I’ve never been naturally inclined to feel hopeful. That’s one of the many side effects of being abused. My mind jumped from the beginning to the end of the story in one big leap, and the finale is always an apocalypse. The worst-case scenario was the only option.

It’s called “catastrophizing,” and it made me a great Executive Producer, granting me the “sight” to see all the way down the pipeline to the end of the project and identify roadblocks long before they occurred. It was going to be difficult to see a rainbow at the end of the journey I was on, but I tried. *I’m going to heal. I will meditate on my healing,* I said to myself in the car on my way home from the airport. *I will focus on the positive.*

Unfortunately, Darkness didn’t care about my hopes, positive affirmations, meditations, or prayers, as it marched relentlessly deeper into my mind. The sexual violence of my past became wholly intertwined with my everyday life. I began to hear whispers in my mind—my grandfather’s whispers. Words I’d not heard for years echoed in my head like some sort of macabre performance from the past.

“Do you like that? You love me, right? You feel good. Touch me. You’re a good girl.”

My mood became increasingly darker and I knew I was in trouble. I didn’t want any more traditional talk therapy. I wanted to explore a different approach to unwrap, yet again, my childhood trauma. In April 2017, I booked a session with an incredibly gifted, empathic healer, Amelie, who I had met in Nairobi just a few years prior in 2015. I knew instinctively she was the person to help me.

Vulnerable and on the verge of tears, I wasn't sure I would be able to talk to her as we sat down in her office. She took a long look at me and immediately sensed things were off.

"What's going on with you? You're shaking," she said to me while holding my hand.

"I need your help. There's a lot of chatter in my head," I replied.

"What do you mean by chatter? Remember, I'm French—you Americans say some strange things," she said with a smile, lifting my spirits.

"Do you remember a few years ago when I told you about the fragments in my mind? The alters? I need them to settle down. They're all in an uproar because I had a partial hysterectomy about six weeks ago," I told her, before breaking down into tears.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry. What do you mean by a partial hysterectomy?"

"They removed my uterus but I kept my cervix and ovaries," I answered.

"Your womb? They removed your womb!" she repeated in shock. "That's why your energy is so confused. What happened? Did something go wrong?"

I exhaled and explained through intermittent sobs all the horrible details. I cried from the center of my soul with Amelie. After every deep inhalation, I wailed some more. A lifetime of tears poured out of me. She listened intently and helped me calm down.

"Rebecca, you're in mourning," she said. "You've lost a huge part of your identity. Your womb. You need to forgive yourself for signing the release. It was a mistake. It's over. Accept what has happened so that you don't get more depressed or angry. Make space to give yourself time to grieve."

"I will try to accept it," I said through fresh tears. "It's so complicated, Amelie. I never had a great relationship with my womb. You know that I was sexually assaulted as a child. I had terrible period pains my entire life. I wasn't able to get pregnant. Why am I grieving for a body part that betrayed me?"

"Betrayed you?" She looked at me in surprise. "Your womb didn't betray you. Your womb likely suffered during the abuse—perhaps beyond repair. Your womb was part of you. You didn't betray yourself."

I took a breath and held it for a beat. I was trying to connect all the dots. "What am I grieving about?"

"You're not grieving for the actual body part. You're grieving the loss of motherhood," she explained, breaking my heart into a million tiny pieces. Amelie's words pierced my soul, and the truth nearly pulled all the air from my lungs.

"Motherhood? I processed all of that when I found out I couldn't have children in 2012. I grieved my infertility profoundly for two years," I told her as flashes of doctor's reports, ovarian reserves, the news I would never get pregnant, and the adoption rejection filled my mind.

"How? *How* did you grieve for it?" she asked.

"I cried a lot, and then I got angry."

"Ah, well, I know you, Rebecca. Be honest. You probably got angry and stayed angry," she pushed back. She knew me too well.

"Maybe. But it's in the past. What more do my mind and body need from me? I cannot have children. Full stop. That was true in 2012, and it's still true in 2017."

"You only mourned infertility. That's only one part of your mother journey. Adoption was the second part," she clarified.

"Okay. And I was sad about that—and angry," I explained.

"Yes. More anger. The removal of your womb is the final end to the entire cycle because it's the gathering point for all of your experiences and expectations. It feeds your own life and is attached to your mother self—the part of you that still wants a family," she explained. "And now it's gone. It cannot be fixed. The source at the center of your soul is trying to understand the unexpected and devastating loss," she explained.

"What can I do?" I asked her.

Amelie knew me well enough to know I healed through ceremonies. "You're a writer. So write a letter to your womb. Write whatever you want. Say everything you've ever felt. Read it out loud, and then burn the letter."

The conversation with Amelie gave me some relief. I knew if I continued to meet with her, I could unravel the truth of what was happening in my mind. Later that afternoon, I sat at my desk overlooking the garden and watched the beautiful Kenyan sunset and wrote a farewell letter to my womb.

"You were my source—my power—and now you're gone. How do I mourn the loss of the part of myself that made me a woman? Does a womb make me a woman? I didn't know that I needed you until you were gone. It seems like such a natural thing—that my womb would be my friend. But we weren't ever friends. Endless cramps. Tormented by pain. Why is that? I assumed pregnancy would be easy. But it wasn't. I tried to get pregnant, but you left me childless. Barren. Why wasn't I good enough for children? I still feel jealous of my friends who have swollen bellies or already have children. I so wanted to have a family, but you made it impossible.

Somewhere in my head, I've decided that half of my sex is gone. Now I'm afraid to even touch myself. Am I still female? What am I? Half a woman? How can I find anyone to grow old with if I'm incomplete? Is that fair? What is a woman? Do I decide if I'm still female even though I don't have a uterus? Without a womb? I don't think I know anymore.

Will men notice that I have no womb? Will they sense that I am somehow 'incomplete' and avoid me? Embarrass me? The thought terrifies me. I am afraid of growing old alone, and yet I feel sentenced to a life of isolation because I am incomplete.

When I say that I had a hysterectomy, I cry. I'm so sad. Shattered. But there's no turning back now. It's final. I have to find a way to say goodbye to you and be okay with that. I have to say goodbye to my womb—my mother self—and accept the loss.

So this is goodbye. Goodbye motherhood. Goodbye to the center of my source. We were never really friends, and I'm sorry. I didn't trust you, and I'm sorry. I didn't consult with you, and I'm sorry. I didn't protect you, and I'm sorry. I didn't listen, and I'm sorry. But it's over now, and I need you to release me.

Please, I beg you, please release me, motherhood, because I can't mourn you forever. I can't be punished for my decisions forever. It's done. It's my fault, and I'm so sorry. I made a terrible decision. I broke my body. Please release me from this anguish so I can heal."

I printed the note and made a small fire in the outdoor chimney just a few steps from my front patio. Listening to the Kenyan night full of owls, frogs, crickets, and some errant monkeys, I sat down and stared into the hot fire for quite some time until the wood burned down into orange and red embers glowing against the dark night sky. My cheeks turned red and tears rolled down my face as I contemplated my womb.

My mother self.

No longer residing within me.

I cried for my body, my health, and my happiness, all destroyed in an hour at the hand of a surgeon.

Night grew late, my favorite big dogs lay beside me, and I read the note out loud several times until the pain within the words had finally extinguished. And then, I tossed the note into the flames and watched it burn. The ceremony was cathartic. It established the beginning of my healing journey. After sitting in the dark for several hours, I decided to wait for the sunrise.

It Won't Hurt None

Just as the equatorial sun rose over the treetops, my mind whispered, *Start writing. It's time to tell your truth.*

I walked back into my cottage, grateful it was Sunday and the house would be quiet. Sitting down at my desk, I powered on my laptop, took a deep breath to clear a bit of the anguished cobwebs out of my mind, and typed: “My Womb.

Rebecca E. Chandler