

UNLEASHING
LOVE



JOANNE DODGSON

UnLeashing
LOVE

Medicine Stories to Feed Your Spirit
and Awaken Your Heart

JoAnne Dodgson

UnLeashing Love:
Medicine Stories to Feed Your Spirit and Awaken Your Heart
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for Jasmine



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Table of Contents

[UNLEASHING LOVE](#)

[WEAVING THE WEB OF LIFE](#)

[TUMBLEWEED WHO FORGOT TO TUMBLE](#)

[GRANDMOTHER CORN](#)

[FEATHERS AND FIRE](#)

[DRAGONFLY WINGS](#)

[SHAKING DOWN THE SEEDS](#)

[EMBODYING BEAUTY](#)

[SAGE QUEST](#)

[THANKS • GIVING](#)

[SACRED DANCE WITH DEATH: A DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY](#)

[BUTTERFLY MEDICINE](#)

[LOVING EVERYTHING](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

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[UNLEASHING LOVE](#)

It was clear from the start there was a wildness in her that wasn't to be tamed. Despite what they say in dog-training manuals, Jasmine had no interest in following along at my heels or obeying commands just so I'd call her a 'good girl.' She wasn't here to live by the book. She wasn't born to be leashed or caged.

She'd come to run wild in the woods on impassioned, instinctual hunts. And reach her face to the sky, catching scents blowing by on the winds. And roll around with joyful abandon on the earth, adorning her body with rich pungent smells. And teach me about opening up my senses - listening, feeling, communicating without words as we walk among the trees intrinsically connected as a pack.

We first met at the animal shelter, Jasmine and me. There were many quirky circumstances that easily could have kept us from crossing paths. And I'm not quite sure who chose who or exactly all the reasons why. Apparently Jasmine wasn't deterred by my doubts about being a dog mama. She's made it clear over the years she's come into my life to stay. Evidently she wasn't troubled by the fact that I vowed I'd never let my dog sit on the furniture or eat my food or sleep on my bed. She's done it all anyway.

Jasmine instinctively knows that passionate aliveness has nothing to do with settling for a ho-hum existence. She seeks out abundance and lush creature comforts - warm and cozy places to sleep, dishes full of nourishing foods, a pack of companions, lots of room to roam.

She runs through the land with unbound exuberance. No fences holding her back. No leash reining her in.

With Jasmine, I've discovered something magical about love. I can smell it. A beautiful fragrance emanates from Jasmine's body when she's happy and content, getting a belly rub or rounding me up to go out for a walk. I call her enchanting fragrance Puppy Love.

The exquisite beauty of Jasmine's Puppy Love stops me in my tracks. I want to soak it all up and bask in the feeling, breath it all in and share some back.

Imagine a world filled with Puppy Love. Imagine unleashing Love. That's the dream I like to hold. Creating a world filled with love so tangible we can even smell it. We can taste it. We can feel it in our bones.

* * *

WEAVING THE WEB OF LIFE

As the sunset painted the clouds purple and red, a spider crawled out from the shadows and began to weave a web. I stepped toward her to get a closer look, cautiously keeping my distance. The spider's close proximity evoked old habitual fears, those lingering effects of the rampant propaganda about the dangerous nature of all things creepy-crawly.

The spider looked otherworldly with her sleek round brown body held up by eight highly arched striped legs. She was a skilled acrobat, moving about with great agility. Intrigued, I spent much of the evening watching her.

The spider initiated her weaving by free-falling from the porch rafters suspended upside down and swinging side-to-side, gliding along a shimmering thread. She came to land on the very tip of a blade of grass far below the wooden beams. There she attached a grounding cord, anchoring her web to the earth.

She crawled back up the thread, expanding the intricate framework as she stretched fibers out in all directions like the rays of the sun. Returning to the center, she circled around, steadily moving further outward, making a spiral.

This artful weaver wove her web with fibers generated inside her. She knitted threads together with the very fabric of her being, forming patterns, building structures, joining diverse angles, shapes and lines into an integrated whole. Guided by ancient blueprints she carried within, the spider's focus was unwavering as she weaved.

When her elaborate design was complete, hours had passed and darkness enveloped the sky. The spider settled in the center of her grand tapestry. The glistening threads were sticky, the web's geometry magnetic, all designed to attract and to hold what was nourishing for her. Very still, she sat watching over, keenly aware of anything that touched the sacred space of her web.

Later that night, I couldn't get to sleep. After tossing and turning awhile, I finally got out of bed and made my way through the dark house, irresistibly drawn back outside by some mysterious calling. Wrapped up in a blanket, I laid down in the hammock, gently swaying as I watched the spider ride the waves of the breezes fluttering through her web.

Silhouetted against the background of the dark starry sky, the spider felt mystical, so alive even in her stillness, so purposeful with every movement she made. I both feared and admired her instinctual wildness, all of which compelled me to stay with her through the night.

Early the next morning, as the sun began to rise, I was abruptly awakened out of my sleep. There at eye-level, right in front of my face, was the long-legged spider looking back at me as she floated in the air on an invisible thread.

My startled surprise soon faded into delight. How had this small silent creature so boldly called me out from my sleep?

What was it she wanted me to see?

The spider dangled in front of me just long enough to be sure I'd left behind the dreamtime and was truly attentive to what was just about to happen right before my eyes. The spider crawled fluidly back up the thread and suddenly somersaulted, cartwheeling into her web.

Glistening fibers broke apart. Delicate threads came undone. The elaborate spiral design imploded as the bottom half of the web collapsed in on itself.

I watched with wide-eyed amazement as the spider dismantled the rest of her web, unraveling her weaving with her spindly striped legs, deliberately taking apart the intricate tapestry she'd created just hours before. Then she crawled away into the rafters, retreating into the shadowy crevices between the wooden beams and peeling bark.

Throughout the day, the spider kept creeping into my mind. I marveled at the mystery and magic of her ways. The long-legged spider didn't only weave webs. She also took them apart. She lived with unshakable clarity that she had what she needed to manifest what she wanted when the guidance from within and the rhythms of the earth indicated it was time.

That evening I returned to the place I'd last seen the spider, waiting and watching for my friend. As the land quieted into sunset, the spider reappeared. She sailed gracefully toward the earth on a shimmering thread, beginning once again to weave her extraordinary web.

* * *

TUMBLEWEED WHO FORGOT TO TUMBLE

I've been clearing a patch of land near my house where there's a burly overgrowth of brown tumbleweeds. My harvesting wardrobe includes thick leather gloves and toeless socks pulled over my forearms to prevent painful encounters with the sharp prickly spines. I've gotten to wondering about this unlikely gathering of still-rooted tumbleweeds. Why haven't they tumbled the way tumbleweeds do? What's held them in place despite their natural inclination to uproot and blow in the winds and dance across the land?

Do they really like it here or have they just gotten stuck?

My clearing-away of the aged tumbleweeds has revealed unexpected treasures. Hidden beneath the crunchy brown tangle I've discovered a lush growing world of green. A vibrant Yucca once buried beneath the overgrowth now stands visible and undisguised. White blossoms on a delicate curvy vine now reach joyfully toward the sky. Purple wildflowers are flourishing. The soil is sunning herself, nourishing the renewal of her patch of land.

From what I've seen, tumbleweeds are ingenious. They begin by growing low to the ground with tiny green leaves and dark purple stems spreading out weblike in all directions. Their roots dive into the earth with a strong central core surrounded by a weaving of tendrils running just below the surface of the soil. In this early season of their lives, tumbleweeds tenaciously hold their ground. Growing upward and outward in a spidery open-armed embrace, their plant bodies become round and full, light and airy, perfectly shaped for the journeys to come.

Carried somewhere inside tumbleweed is the knowing of all the how's and why's and whens to guide their transformation. Instinctually, tumbleweeds stop gathering up nutrients from the

soil and sun and rains. Their bodies turn brown, dry out and harden to hold onto the roundness essential for rolling with the winds. As their shallow roots detach from the earth, tumbleweeds free themselves up from the way of life they've so loved for awhile.

Riding on the winds, they head off on their passionate quests. No maps to follow. Destination unknown. They scatter thousands of seeds as they tumble along, planting countless potentials for the generations to come, seeding the land with the very blueprints for new life.

So here in the high desert just beyond my living room window, what's up with the tumbleweeds who've forgotten to tumble? I sense they've stayed put just long enough to roll into my awareness, tugging at my curiosity with the mystery of their presence, inviting me to gather up the wisdoms of their ways.

Touching the world of the tumbleweeds has allowed me to feel what it's like to naturally embody change. These wild nomads of the desert readily transform and playfully tumble around in their dance with life and death, all according to their unique, ingenious design. Tumbleweeds know about rooting themselves only when and where it's nourishing. And they intentionally move on from what-has-been when the cycle is complete, when that purpose has been served, honoring it all with their ease, lightness and quirky grace. Tumbleweeds have shown me how to call in the winds to let old attachments go.

I've come to see this aged gathering of browned tumbleweeds as a council of elders who hold and seed sacred ground for the generations to come. The tumbleweeds know it's never too late to remember what it is that's been forgotten. If we've come here to tumble, to love or heal or dream, to build or sing or create, we can start any time, any day.

In the harvesting of the tumbleweeds and their teachings, I've grown aware of the understanding we share. That I'm home and it's time for me to dig in my roots and tenaciously hold my center, to reach out and give and receive in the sharings with a spidery open-armed embrace.

And it's time for the tumbleweeds to move on, to uproot and get untangled so they can follow their spirits' callings and flow with the freedom of their quests.

The prickly brown tumbleweeds easily pull away from the sandy soil and I carry them toward the open mesas, huge billowy armfuls of sundried plants held over my head. I place them on the ground on the other side of the fence so they're lying now on wilderness lands - free to dance with the elements and join up with the winds and continue on their way.

* * *

GRANDMOTHER CORN

She came on the waters, traveling many miles and many moons on a wooden raft bound with sinew and vines. Attentive to every sound and sight and smell, she searched along the shore for signs of the villages she'd seen in her dreams. Grandmother knew the people were hungry. She'd seen the rippling effects of their fears. Guided by her visions, she followed the currents of the wild waters, carrying bundles of ancient medicines for those calling to her.

Drawn to the laughter beneath the canopy of trees, she came upon a group of children playing where the river meets the land. Grandmother drifted into the cove, chanting her Greeting Song. With wide-eyed curiosity, the children waded into the waters, giggling and holding each other's hands. They pulled the raft into shore, staring at the old woman who'd come from Upriver. With her long silvery hair, wrinkled dark skin and green eyes shining like stars, she was unlike anyone they'd ever seen.

The old woman and the young ones were soon playing together like long-lost friends, splashing in the waters, painting their faces with mud. The children drank in the grandmother's love as if they were famished. They breathed in her joy, filling themselves up. They devoured her stories and songs.

When the sun began to soften the late afternoon sky, Grandmother waded into the river, listening to the currents pulling at her feet. She gathered up a bundle from the raft, her every move followed by a circle of curious young eyes. Sitting on a boulder, the old woman cradled an emerald green turtle shell in her lap. The children gathered around, trying to get a closer look. Humming softly, the grandmother lifted up layers of furs to reveal a mound of woven pouches tied with ribbons of vine, all tucked inside the bowl of the turtle shell.

Calling them each by name, Grandmother handed every child a pouch. She told them stories about the sacred bundles of corn they held in their hands. The children listened intently to the instructions for planting. Grandmother taught them the old ways of blessing the soil, of calling in the sun and the rains, of making offerings to the Spirit of the Corn.

The children danced in their joy, celebrating the abundance. With the gifts of the corn, they would always be fed. All the people, all the land, would forever be fed. With Grandmother's corn, even their dreams would have space to grow. No more empty bellies and hungry hearts.

Gently holding the pouches, the children ran back to the village and exuberantly shared all they had learned. Doubts and suspicion instantly erupted. Fear infiltrated the village, rolling like shockwaves, creating turbulence in its wake. The children were scolded for being gullible, for speaking nonsense, for telling lies. They were reprimanded for breaking the rules and talking to an Outsider. They were punished for carrying something so dangerous in their hands.

The village leader demanded that all the pouches be collected and immediately brought to him. Everyone in the village was required to watch as the corn bundles, one by one, were thrown into the fire and the children, one by one, were threatened into silence.

The corn was never to be spoken of again. There was not to be another word, not even a whisper, about the old woman who came from Upriver. None of that was real. It never even happened. It was simply to be forgotten. That's what the children were told.

Grandmother heard it all in the winds and knew the time had come to continue on her way, though she'd continue to watch over the village for many generations to come. She drifted downriver, moving farther out from land, until she heard someone humming beneath the canopy of trees. Drawn back by the song, Grandmother floated into the secluded cove. There was Wakena, a child from the village, barefoot in the rippling waters, digging a hole in the mud.

Sensing somebody's presence, Wakena glanced over her shoulder, fearful she'd been discovered in this now forbidden place. Seeing the old woman on the raft, Wakena took a deep breath as her body flooded with relief and delight. A greeting passed silently between the old woman and the girl, the warmth of their welcoming held quiet inside the instinctual protection of the unexpected crossing of their paths.

Wakena reached into her basket and waded in the river toward the raft, her arms outstretched, carrying something for Grandmother to see. Nestled in the girl's small muddy

hands was a bundle of corn, still wrapped in the colorful weaving and tied with the ribbon of vine. The eyes of the elder and the eyes of the young one met in a steadfast embrace. Their deeply-felt trust, the alliance of their ageless wisdoms, held the sacred promise of the remembering to come.

With Grandmother watching over, Wakena walked back to shore to finish digging in the place where the river meets the land. She set the corn pouch deep in the muddy hole, burying the bundle beneath handfuls of pebbles and leaves. She filled in the hole and patted down the mud, securing the corn's safekeeping.

Wakena pressed both hands palm-down into the clay, leaving her print, sealing her agreement. She leaned in close, her nose touching the wet earth, whispering her promise to never forget, to someday return, to always remember the grandmother's corn.

Wakena walked up the path toward the village, turning back just once to wave a muddy-handed farewell to the old woman. Grandmother continued her journey along the wild currents of the river, carrying bundles of ancient medicines, seeking those calling to her.

* * *

FEATHERS AND FIRE

The beginnings of summer have been filled with songs of new life coming from a nest outside my window. It all began with the ingenious nest-building by the elder birds who chose to roost on top of a ceiling fan on the porch. Inside the nest made with clay and dried grasses, tiny eggs were discretely laid and attentively protected by the warm presence of the parents' bodies.

The period of quiet, steady holding eventually erupted into a flurry of motion. As the baby birds found their way out of the eggs, the parents began a ceaseless dance flying back and forth from nest to open lands, from sunrise to sunset day after day, gathering up food for the little ones. Such a bold and unwavering commitment, this tenacious feeding of growth and new life.

At first I could only hear the little ones and their high-pitched peeps. As the days passed, I began to see wide-open yellow beaks reaching above the rim of the nest, calling to the mama and the papa when they brought home buggy feasts. The chirping became louder and more insistent as the little ones grew.

Soon the baby birds stretched their bodies above the top of the nest, reaching out for nourishment with every ounce of their being. An exuberant chorus of songs welcomed each essential bite. Such wide-open receiving of the gift-giving. An unyielding passion to flourish and thrive.

The baby birds' first flight was a momentous occasion which organically unfolded over a series of days. The little birds began looking much too big for their nest. Their fluffy feathery bodies overflowed the bounds of clay and dried grasses which once upon a time hid them away inside. The little ones fluttered their wings wildly and scrambled over each other, hopping around on the edges of the nest. The once tightly woven nest started falling apart.

As the baby birds explored the expanding world at their feet, they ventured out along the wooden blades of the ceiling fan. When a gentle breeze blew, the birds were taken along on an unexpected merry-go-round ride. Standing on the end of the fan blades, the little ones bravely orbited around their nest.

And just as the nest grew too small, the world defined by the boundaries of the ceiling fan grew too small. The little birds were unstoppable in their momentum to reach further, to boldly go beyond what was known, to explore new possibilities about themselves and their abilities, about their relationships with each other and the world.

There came a magical day filled with life-changing leap-of-faith moments when, one by one, the little birds spread their wings and took flight.

This beautiful emergence of life has been joined by blazing wildfires nearby. Our skies are darkened with heavy smoke and falling ash. There is much fear in the air – the disruptions and uncertainties in the lives of displaced people; the risks to homes and sacred lands, animals and plants; the unknowns about how long the flames will burn and what it will take to put them out.

“What have you come to teach us?” I asked the Fire Spirits in ceremony.

“Your fears,” said the Spirit of Fire, “are far more destructive than the wildfires. The fears people carry stifle their aliveness - silencing joy, creativity and love - all the while fueling anger and stress and justifying judgments and war.

“Extinguish the fears,” said the Fire. “You’ll discover worlds of possibilities you haven’t even dared dream of before.”

“What is it like,” I wondered, “living in a world without fear?”

“Pure Freedom!” roared the Fire. “Just ask the little birds.”

* * *

[DRAGONFLY WINGS](#)

Maia woke up with a start, her heart racing. She got out of bed and fumbled through the darkness, trailing her hand along the wall, searching for the kitchen light. Blinking against the brightness that suddenly filled the room, she brewed herself a warm cup of tea with hopes to soothe herself back to sleep. She wanted to get some distance from the troubling dream that kept waking her up in the middle of the night.

The dream was always the same. There she was, standing on a moss-covered cliff watching the ocean waves crash against the rocks far below. A golden dragonfly with glistening wings suddenly appeared. The dragonfly hovered high above the ocean, just beyond her reach, mysteriously calling to her. She felt an irresistible urgency to catch it, to claim it, to keep it for her very own.

Keeping her eyes on the dragonfly, Maia took several steps back and then ran forward as fast as she could. She leaped off the cliff, desperately reaching out for the dragonfly. She caught it, cupping it between both of her hands, feeling delicate dragonfly wings fluttering against her palms.

Her delight instantly turned to terror when she realized there was no longer any ground beneath her feet. Flailing her arms in distress, Maia plummeted, empty-handed, toward the ocean. And that's when she woke up, night after night, in the midst of a free-fall toward the rocky shore far below.

Maia finished sipping her tea and went back to bed, tossing and turning for a few more restless hours. She was relieved when morning finally arrived. She quickly got dressed and hurried to the beach, hoping her daily ritual would bring some relief.

Running along the sandy shore, she splashed through the tide pools filled with starfish and seashells which she usually enjoyed taking time to explore. But she was too preoccupied trying to outrun the dragonfly dream which still lingered in her mind even in the daylight hours. Maia couldn't shake the haunting feeling, that unsettled yearning to fill up the empty places in her life.

Maia waded into the ocean and jumped over the frothy waves, finally diving in for a swim. Exhilarated by her immersion in the vibrant salty waters, Maia aimed toward the distant horizon and swam as far and as fast as she could. The simple act of taking action, of moving under her own power and holding her own against the ocean tides, filled Maia with a great sense of accomplishment. Her mind raced with seductive imaginings of what it'd be like to just keep on swimming and leave everything behind.

When her arms and legs began to ache, Maia stopped to catch her breath, floating on her back in the rolling waves. She glanced toward the shore, seeking reassurance that she really hadn't gone too far.

From the corner of her eye, she saw something glowing in the water and swam quickly to catch up with the trail of shimmery lights. A shocking, searing pain suddenly erased Maia's awareness of anything else. She hadn't noticed the stinging tentacles dangling below the surface near the jellyfish's alluring glow. Numb and disoriented, Maia laid on her back and floated further out to sea. Like a leaf on the water, she floated between worlds, in a time beyond time, where the ways of the world as she knew it had been washed away.

Embraced in the warm salty waters, Maia sensed shifting shadows of darkness and light beyond her closed eyelids. She felt the ocean tides moving inside the rhythms of her breathing. Maia floated out into the waters beyond the coral reef, farther from shore than she'd ever been before. Flocks of pelicans guided her safe passage from above while sea turtles watched over from below.

It was boisterous laughter that finally woke Maia up. Disoriented, she tread water and quickly spun around, trying to figure out where she was and who she heard laugh. Fear gripped her belly when she found absolutely nothing around her except water stretching from horizon to horizon in all directions. Panic surged through her veins when she felt something move underwater, brushing against her legs.

Suddenly, the rippling surface of the sea burst open with wild commotion. Countless dolphins soared toward the sky, spinning, flipping and splashing back to sea. They called out to one another with staccato clicks and melodic whistles, creating a symphony of sounds, filling the air with harmony and joy.

Maia couldn't help but smile watching the dolphins, feeling their boundless freedom, thrilled by their exuberance and play. She became aware of an invitation being sent her way.

Come join us. Maia clearly sensed the dolphins' message though not a word was spoken.

Come play. The dolphins whistled, soaring above the waters.

Instantly flooded by an old familiar tug-of-war, Maia so wanted to join in. But could she? Should she?

You're drowning in fears. The dolphin pod swam around her, singing songs, making waves. What you really want is right here.

With an exuberant shout, Maia dove into the waves. Instantly immersed in an undersea world of bubbles and flow, Maia joined up with the dolphins' dance. She soared to the depths of the sea, gliding gracefully, enchanted by the diverse life all around. Maia swam back up toward the surface and sailed into the sky, spinning, flipping and splashing back to the sea. And on she danced between worlds of water and air, of spirit and physical form.

As the rhythms of the dance slowed, Maia floated contentedly on her back encircled by dolphins, resting in the soothing waves of her joy. An elder dolphin swam to the center of the circle. Maia reached out to touch the dolphin's silvery sleek body, enthralled with her power and grace.

Speaking in lyrical clicks and harmonic whistles, the dolphin looped a ribbon of seaweed around Maia's neck and placed a starfish on her heart. Maia immediately sensed the starfish had something she wanted, something she'd been searching for and feared she'd never find.

Starfish reminded Maia of the agreement they'd made, heart to heart, in a time beyond time. The starfish was to be a guardian, watching over Maia as she navigated the often turbulent waters of human life. The starfish had promised to provide safekeeping for the parts of Maia that got lost or left behind along the way. And as they once agreed, Maia would meet up with the starfish when she was ready to retrieve the lost parts of her spirit, to remember and reclaim them, to once again feel whole.

Maia's tears flowed into the salty sea. Placing both hands on her heart, she held the starfish tenderly and breathed deeply, intent on calling back all that was naturally her.

Subtly at first, Maia felt a sweet vibration light up inside her. The sensation expanded, filling her up like a thousand golden dragonflies fluttering their wings. The rhythms of her spirit, the song of her heart, resonated inside each and every cell. Maia floated in the spaciousness, welcoming the rememberings of her beauty, of her passionate enchantment with life, of her own undeniable power and grace.

Maia flowed with the tides of the great waters, continuing her journey home. Pelicans guided her safe passage from above. Sea turtles watched over from below. She crossed over the coral reef, passing through the veil between worlds, coming closer to the land. When she opened her eyes, she discovered she'd washed ashore, nestled in the sand among a collection of shells.

Maia untied the ribbon of seaweed from around her neck and set the plants free in the ebbing tides. Placing the starfish in a tide pool, Maia shared her gratitude for the sacred safekeeping. She dipped her hands in the ocean waters, wiggling her fingers and splashing around, sending rippling waves of playful greetings to the dolphins out at sea. She walked home along the shore, leaving a trail of her footsteps gently imprinted in the sundrenched sand.

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[SHAKING DOWN THE SEEDS](#)

Wintertime has settled into the red rock mesas of northern New Mexico. The blue skies have quieted since the geese and sandhill cranes have flown by boisterously celebrating their migration to the warm waters farther south. I rarely cross paths these days with coyotes and jackrabbits. There's a hush among the lavender since the hum of bumblebees has grown silent. The yucca and prickly pear cactus simply hold their ground, no new fruits or pods or blossoms, no visible signs of growth since the frosts.

The quieting on the land and shortened hours of daylight have brought my winter homing instincts into full bloom. Be home by dark. Settle in and embrace the quiet. Focus inwardly, like the trees, toward the core of my being and my roots.

Jasmine, my beloved canine friend, blends her wild romps on the mesas with long hours sleeping on the land. Luxuriously stretched out in the warmth of the sun, her nose touches the ground as she breathes in the very essence of the earth. The winter ways of the canines reveal the extraordinary that exists in the ordinary moments of life. Like taking a nap.

Deep inside the stillness we discover the rhythms of our hearts. Breathing in the earth and soaking up the sun intimately connect us with our planet and our star, their healing medicines, the knowledge they've gathered up through the vast passages of space and time. It's all there in the soil and the sunbeams.

Jasmine breaths it in and soaks it all up. A wide-open welcoming of the gifts being shared. A grateful giving back with her ease and contentment. A natural weaving of connection with the great aliveness flourishing within her and all around.

The lushness of the sharing between the canine, earth and sun has gotten me to wondering what it'd be like to so generously give and so warmly receive the diverse and extraordinary gifts of life - in all the ordinary everyday moments, with each and every breath that I take.

The songbirds enchant the winter season with an ingenious feasting dance. Bouncing around on golden tufts of dried flowers, the petite winged ones jostle the delicate stalks and blossoms until the ground is peppered with tiny morsels. Hopping down to the sandy soil, the birds chirp with delight while gathering up the delectable seeds one by one.

Nourishment showers the earth when songbirds shake down the seeds. A universe of potentials and vast volumes of information are held inside the body of each tiny seed. Inside the seed is a living matrix of what is and what has been and an innate, empowered knowing of when and how and what and who may be. The seeds eaten by the birds and those left resting on the earth nourish life with the sacred promise of generations to come.

Winter offers initiations into new cycles, a passage into stillness that feeds the birthings of spring, a readying for the awakenings to come. In this time on the earth so potent with change, I feel the whispers as I walk about the land. Nestle in the stillness. Breath in the earth. Soak up the sun. Shake down the seeds.

There's an irresistible calling to join up in this sharing with our sun and the earth, with the four-leggeds, plant nations and winged ones. Nestle in the stillness. Breath in the earth. Soak up the sun. Shake down the seeds.

If we seek it, we will find it for it too is seeking us - the exuberant dance of life we're innately a part of. The vibration of ancient rhythms will be carried up along our roots. We'll feel the hum and soon find ourselves humming along, sharing our voice, finding our rhythm, dancing on rich fertile ground.

Nestling in the Stillness.
Breathing in the Earth.

Soaking up the Sun.
Shaking down the Seeds.

Nestling in the Stillness.
Breathing in the Earth.
Soaking up the Sun.
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Nestling in the Stillness.
Breathing in the Earth.
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Shaking down the Seeds.

* * *

EMBODYING BEAUTY

How is it we've come to believe there are some people who are beautiful and others who are not? Does it really make sense that bathrooms scales, clothing sizes and calorie counts hold the power to determine whether or not we're worthy of love? What drives us to spend countless hours and dollars to recolor, reshape and resize our bodies over and over again?

Why has the beauty of who we are become so difficult to see?

The mother earth has something to say about beauty that's free of judgment and unburdened by fears. Bears don't worry about the shape of their bodies. Dragonflies aren't distressed by the size of their wings. Oak trees don't attempt to look more like the pines. Vultures aren't hiding behind pretenses, pretending to do something other than what it is that they do. The mother earth reveals beauty that's filled with integrity, that celebrates rich diversity in the web of life.

Beauty sings out from the sunsets and echoes in the wind and rains down from the moon and dances in the sea and whispers on wings and howls with coyotes and weaves webs with the spiders and lingers in the scent of the sage.

Beauty calls out from the mountains and rumbles with thunder and sits quietly with the lizards and soars with the hawks and radiates from the rocks and buzzes with the bees and glistens in the shimmering dawn.

Beauty comes alive in the free, unencumbered expression of being just who we are. Beauty is the honoring of what is, a celebration of life in all it's magnificent, mysterious, remarkable shapes and sensations and colors and purposes and forms.

Mother Earth's exuberance is a compelling invitation to open up to our own natural beauty. Beauty is found in the feeling of who we are, in the essence of our aliveness, in our uniqueness. The truth about beauty isn't all tangled up in comparisons and competition. No winners and losers. No suffering and sacrifice. Beauty just isn't that complicated.

Beauty simply is. And comes vibrantly alive when there's acceptance in the air. And openly exists in all cycles of life, in our connections with each other, in sharings of appreciation, inspiration and awe.

Remember the last time you experienced Mother Earth's beauty? Maybe seeing the full moon. Smelling spring rains. Tasting wild berries. Breathing fresh air. Hearing the tree frogs call in the night.

Remember how you felt? How full of beauty you felt? How beauty-full you felt?

Remember. How beautiful. You felt.

Beauty resonates within you and ripples out into the world when you honor other beings for being just who they are.

Beauty radiates out from the inside when you simply are who you are, filled with clear awareness and unconditional love. No hiding. No searching somewhere-out-there for an official stamp of approval.

So next time you're about to look in the mirror to figure out how much beauty you've got, just redirect your attention to how you're feeling inside. In any moment, any place, you can fill yourself up with the remembering of beauty. And you're beauty-full instantly.

You're beautiful. It's a matter of choice, of where you're putting your attention, of what you're allowing yourself to feel.

Beauty thrives in acceptance and unhindered self-expression. Beauty comes alive when you naturally are who you are and love who you are exactly as you are, here and now. Feeling the Beauty. Being the Love.

* * *

SAGE QUEST

My bundle of sage was dwindling. This particular sage plant offers beautiful medicines for smudging ceremonies. What I love about the smudging sage is the way the dried silvery green leaves can be crumpled into a ball. Once lit, they gently burn like an ember. On this burning ember, other plant medicines can be added – cedar, sweetgrass, osha, juniper, oak. This allows for a natural smudging ceremony, similar to the old ways.

To wild-harvest the sage and replenish my herb bundle - this became a passionate quest. My search ended up taking me across state lines into the mountains of southern Colorado. Intuitively I headed toward an ancient rock formation which holds stories of indigenous peoples who lived there in centuries past. I sensed I'd find sage in the wilderness lands surrounding the sacred site..

Walking among the towering pines, I shared a gift offering with the land, plant nations and spirits to request their help in finding the smudging herb. I'm-looking-for-Sage became a silent chant, a drumbeat setting the rhythm for my explorations around the land.

I found feathers. I listened to the ravens and watched turkey vultures coast and shared quiet companionship with rabbits and deer. I welcomed the sight of the ancient crumbling rocks, feeling embraced by the presence of my old friends. But the sage was nowhere to be found.

Late in the afternoon, beginning the hike back to my car, my mind got consumed by distracting chatter. Had I come all this way only to return home empty-handed? Why hadn't I talked with an expert who really knows something about plants? Am I just wandering around following my heart and aimlessly getting off-track?

Slowed by depleting tugs of doubt and disappointment, I stopped and stood still in the middle of the path. I breathed in the pines. I felt the earth beneath my feet. I remembered what I had come there to do.

"I'm searching for Sage," I said out loud to the trees. "And Sage is searching for me," I said with a smile, playing around.

I really loved the feeling of the possibility I'd just found. I'm looking for Sage and Sage is looking for me. Instinctively we now were joined in the hunt, both seeking and searching, reaching out to meet up.

I walked on through the meadow with renewed curiosity and intent. Something lying on the ground near a tree caught my attention. I leaned in to take a closer look at the collection of bones bleached white by the sun and nestled in the earth.

And there beside the bones, right next to my foot, was a sage plant! Graceful stems of tiny mint-green leaves reaching out in all directions, soaking up the sun. I glanced around and discovered yet another plant. Then a whole cluster. And then even more. Sage plants were flourishing in the meadow.

How had I not seen them before?

We crossed paths in the closing steps of my journey, coming full circle, not far from where I'd started my search.

Sage taught me something essential about manifesting. It's a mutual thing. It's embodied in connection. It's an intimate weaving of the choice and intent of everyone and everything involved.

What we seek we will find when we know (without a doubt) that it too is seeking us – be it a plant or a friend or abundance or love.

About a year after my wild-harvesting adventure, I noticed my bundle of smudging herbs needed replenishing. It didn't seem I'd have a chance before the first frost to travel north to gather more of my beloved sage.

Hiking around the mesas near my house, I looked for other medicinal plants for a fall harvest. I walked along the pathway of the dry riverbed I call Mama Arroyo. She's a wild curving passage through rocks and desert soils shaped by rushing waters from thunderstorms and snowmelt. All other tributaries branch off from and connect back with her.

I stopped to rest along the banks of the Mama Arroyo at a confluence of pathways I'd wandered through countless times. Lying down on warm soils beneath turquoise blue skies, a particular shade of silvery green caught my eye.

There among the wildflowers and gnarled tree roots was a sage plant! Graceful stems of tiny mint-green leaves reaching out in all directions, soaking up the sun. I looked around and found another sage plant. Then a whole cluster. And then even more. An entire community of sage plants.

How had I not seen them before?

Sage magically appeared to help me awaken a knowing I hadn't quite fully grasped. Manifesting is an easeful and natural thing. It's an organic unfolding, rooted in the remembering of what we really love. What we really want. What it is we've come here to do.

Claiming our dreams and following our hearts, trusting ourselves and the universe - these are vital nourishments for any manifestation quest. Self-imposed pressure, stress, force and fears will distract and misguide us, blind us and keep us stuck.

Our natural ability to manifest thrives inside the knowing that anything and everything is essentially within our reach.

Sage showed me that what we are searching for is often much closer to home than we think.

* * *

THANKS • GIVING

“She hiked along the deer trail, looking forward to seeing her old friend. High on the mountain ridge, Jessie sat down among the gnarled tree roots winding serpent-like through the red clay and rocks. She leaned back against the peeling bark of the juniper’s trunk, nestling into the welcoming embrace of the ancient tree. Jessie closed her eyes, soaking up the warmth of the sun as her mind wandered off into the events of the past week.”

“It’s been awhile since I’ve seen you.” The juniper tree’s voice awakened Jessie from her hazy rehashing of days gone by.

“I’ve been so busy,” Jessie explained, “running around getting ready for the holidays. I’m exhausted. And it’s not even Thanksgiving yet.”

“Set aside your worries,” said the old tree. “Thanks giving is already here. You’ll see. Just take a look around.”

Jessie looked out toward the western horizon, spotting deer in a distant meadow, not exactly sure what she was supposed to be looking for. “You celebrate Thanksgiving out here?” she finally asked.

“Always have. Always will,” replied the juniper tree. “Every day, as a matter of fact. Gift giving and receiving. Thanks giving and receiving. It’s all here in the circle of life.”

“Well, where I come from,” said the woman to the tree, “the giving of gifts and the giving of thanks are scheduled holiday events. It’s supposed to be meaningful and merry. But the funny thing is,” she leaned in closer to the tree, lowering her voice to reveal a long-held secret, “everybody seems pretty stressed.”

“Take a deep breath,” invited the tree. “And take another look around. Listen with every cell of your being. Feel through the eyes of your heart.”

Jessie sighed and leaned back into the juniper’s trunk. She gently touched the ground, feeling the warmth of the sun held in the soil and emanating from the rocks. She watched a flock of speckled birds fly from tree to tree feasting on plump juniper berries.

She heard the tree’s whispers floating by on the winds:

Giving and receiving are vibrant rivers of energy, open and flowing and circling around from one to another and back.

It’s a natural thing - all this love, all the sharing.

That’s what builds our connections.

That’s what nourishes Life.

Jessie sat quietly, pondering awhile. “That sounds really easy if you’re a bird or a tree,” she grumbled sarcastically.

She turned once again to face Juniper. “Do you really think people can do this?”

There was a sudden underground tremor. The wild quaking moved through the juniper’s roots and up through the branches which shivered and shook, showering the woman with needles and berries. Ravens cackled and cawed, sharing the contagious vibration of the juniper’s delight rippling along the mountain ridge.

“People can do this,” said the tree. “You’re part of the web of life.”

“Oh, yeah,” Jessie laughed, “I almost forgot.”

Warmed by the sun and rooted deep in the earth, the woman and the tree sat quietly side by side relishing the sweet sharing of their joy.

The glowing sunset reminded Jessie the time had come to hike back along the deer trail and over the mountain ridge. She stood up and brushed spiky green needles from her hair and blue juniper berries from her lap, passing on to the earth the gifts shared by the elder tree.

Searching around in her pockets, Jessie found the colorful stones she’d collected by the river earlier that day. She gently placed the stones on the gnarled roots of the tree before continuing on her way.

* * *

SACRED DANCE WITH DEATH: A DAUGHTER’S JOURNEY

The diagnosis of cancer unexpectedly blew blustery winds of change into our lives. The prognosis for the illness was being measured in a handful of weeks, maybe months, if you were lucky they said. I wasn’t quite sure what ‘lucky’ was even supposed to mean in this particular circumstance. But all those casual assumptions I had about time - about there always being plenty of more time - were suddenly called into question.

Death was close by. And death has a way of clarifying things. I felt an urgent invitation to get very clear about how I wanted to live, how I really wanted to be, and what I wanted to share with you in the precious time left.

You were a great inspiration, Dad, a compelling teacher in fact. You went about living your remaining days on the planet with unwavering acceptance in the inevitable coming of death. Though we never directly talked about this, you and me, father and daughter, I’m quite sure you understood why I was there. I’d come to be with you in your dying. I’m so grateful for the ways you welcomed me in and received what I’d come to share.

In all those years I’d spent sorting out who I was and who you were and who we were as father and daughter, I’d finally stumbled upon the notion of non-judgment as a vital key. This opened up space for me to be me, for you to be you, and for us to be father and daughter just as we were.

Seeking your approval, hoping you’d change or trying to fit myself into your world only served to get in the way. In the space of acceptance, I’d come to know our relationship to be

filled up with comfort, with ease and delight. Something about our differences evoked an open-minded, open-hearted love.

And so it was with your dying that Acceptance and Love become trusted guides as I witnessed your rapid decline. There were daily, even hourly, changes in your body and mind. The veil between worlds became more transparent as a vast oceanic feeling filled the house. The time marked by calendars and clocks became elusive. You looked older and younger all at once as you increasingly disengaged from things of this world, turning your attention toward your journey through the doorway of death.

I cherish the many hours I spent simply being with you, resting alongside you, listening to your breathing, responding to the rhythms of your wakefulness and sleep. I felt like a midwife called to intentionally tend to the transformational process unfolding right before my eyes – respecting the natural cycles, embracing the mysteries of what was being birthed, honoring what was dying away.

In the midst of the sadness, the unanswered questions and all that went unspoken, I understood that this was your dance, Dad, filled with your sacred purpose, guided by your choices made in the here-and-now and beyond this time and space.

Very soon there came a day when you no longer spoke, when you stayed in bed drifting in and out of deep trance-like sleep. I sat beside you that afternoon sharing aloud my gratitude and love, though that wasn't our usual way, you and me, father and daughter. Even so you listened, looked directly into my eyes and gently nodded your head.

And that was the day I watched your spirit flowing from your body. A clear stream of energy flowed out from your mouth. A flame-like crown of energy moved out through the top of your head. This energy was so alive, unencumbered by the illness, unhindered by pain, unbound by the confines of human physical form. Your spirit was a bright flowing river, passionately moving on it's way.

And that was the day, later on after midnight, when Mom called out for me to join her at your bedside. Something had shifted. Death was palpable in the room. You'd clearly decided it was time to go.

In the dark peace of the night, we sat silently with you as your body became still and your spirit set itself free. You danced your way out on your breath, Dad. These timeless moments I will always hold sacred, the witnessing of your passage.

It was a beautiful dance, Dad. It was really a beautiful dance.

In the years that have passed between then and now, I've been gathering up the lifetime of gifts you shared with me in your walk with death. I've learned that death has a way of amplifying passions, accentuating beauty, sharpening focus, and opening doorways for love. Death moves about in mysterious ways, catalyzing change and giving birth to renewal.

I've been exploring what all this means in our connection, you and me, father and daughter. Because here I am, still in a human body, doing earthly things, enjoying life on the planet. There you are, in spirit, moving about in vast unseen realms, in boundless worlds of knowledge and experience.

So it seems there's a rich opportunity here - to get to know one another beyond all the labels we long carried since family roles, job titles, gender and age are most likely irrelevant where you are.

How would it be to unravel the bindings of the old aches and pains of the lineages we shared?

What if we set aside the well-ingrained habits that kept us safely hidden from one another's view?

Imagine what it'd be like for our relationship to be centered simply in being who we really are. In the mutual sharing of acceptance, love and respect. In the joyful vibration of all those hearty belly laughs.

My sense is you're already there, Dad, flourishing in freedom. That's where I'd like to be too.

I want to know your vast spirit-being, honoring you as my dad and getting to know who you are beyond who you were as my dad. And I want you to know the vast spirit-being that's me.

So here's to embracing the gifts that are ever-unfolding in the sacred dance with life and death. Thanks for sharing this beautiful dance, Dad. It's really an extraordinary dance.

* * *

BUTTERFLY MEDICINE

Inside the stillness of the morning sun, the woman heard the soft pattering of wings. A delicate shadow fluttered by, dancing across the ground, brushing over her shoulders. The woman tracked the path of the dancing shadow, curious who it belonged to. She spotted a brilliant blue butterfly touching down on a yellow wildflower.

Taking flight again, the swallowtail beckoned the woman to follow. Landing in cluster of red blossoms, the butterfly crept inside a flower to drink in the nectar. He walked along a broad green leaf, reaching around with his antennae, sensing with every step.

"There's magic happening here," Swallowtail whispered. "Come see."

The woman leaned in toward the blossoming plant and noticed a small pod dangling beneath the leaf. The glistening shell of the pod split open. Delicate legs reached out from the inside. Slowly and steadily, a purple-winged butterfly began emerging from the chrysalis.

"There's something unstoppable calling her out," said Swallowtail. "The seasons of the earth. The purpose of her being. The passions of her life. Can you feel it?"

The woman's amazement soon turned into worry as her mind clouded up with fears. The poor little butterfly seemed to be struggling. It was too much, all the changes. It was too hard, coming into the world on her own.

The woman reached toward the chrysalis, compelled by the impulse to help make things better. Swallowtail fluttered wildly around the woman's face, intentionally distracting her. The woman stepped back and sat on the ground, deciding to just watch and let things be.

The purple-winged butterfly moved in her own rhythm and pace, shifting and stretching, reaching beyond, seeking the truths of her life. She finally freed herself, emerging from the chrysalis. She took a look around with newly awakened eyes.

Resting and readying in the warmth of the sun, she opened and closed her wings until they fully took shape. Then magically, as if she'd flown millions of miles before, the purple butterfly gracefully took flight.

Now it's your turn - the woman heard the butterfly say.

* * *

LOVING EVERYTHING

When I moved away from my beloved mesas in Abiquiu, life felt turned inside out and upside down. Such a whirlwind of packing and unpacking, reorienting to a new place and time in my life. And nothing in the house seemed to quite work as it should. Much cleaning and repair were needed to create a healthy and comfortable living space. Exhausted and not feeling at home, I kept wondering if I could stay.

And then there was Jasmine, my four-legged friend, who simply loved everything about everything from the minute she jumped out of the car.

She joyfully followed trails of invisible scents, gathering up stories along the way. She barked with coyotes and befriended neighbors' dogs. She walked out on the ice along the riverbank to find open water to drink. She curled up to rest in sun-warmed piles of dried cottonwood leaves.

There wasn't a momentary pause in Jasmine's passionate presence in her self, in her life, in her newfound place on the land.

I was spending my days washing walls and floors and fixtures. Cleaning up years of accumulated grime and dust. Clearing trash from the land. Clearing disharmonious energies from the house. Waiting for the repairman to finally show up. Sometimes I could laugh about the wild circumstances. Other times I got tripped up by discouragement and doubts.

Side by side with Jasmine's boundless love of everything about everything, my complaints and distress became harder to justify. Jasmine's enchantment with life so naturally flowed from inside her, shaping her relationship with the world all around her.

Such big love is not blind. Jasmine doesn't allow just anyone or anything to step too far into her space. She intently investigates things close up – looking and smelling, listening and tasting, sensing the energies inside everything going on. Then she chooses what to engage with, what to move away from, what to tenaciously pursue, what to simply allow to pass by.

Not a hint of judgment. No fears or self-doubt. Just keen awareness and purposeful choices. Freedom and contentment. Boundless curiosity. A wide-open, all-encompassing embrace.

In the presence of such expansive love, it became clear that frustration and stress were so imprisoning, only serving to shut things down. Things like Joy. Creativity. Gratitude. And the freedom to see what actually exists in the here and now.

Like the river, just steps from my door. The eagles and elder cottonwood trees. The welcoming from the Land Spirits. The generous giving from friends. The beautiful mesa towering over the nearby tribal lands. All the spaciousness, the peacefulness, the quiet.

Loving everything about everything, Jasmine guided me back home. To my heart. To my happiness. To passionate enchantment with life. To my newfound place on the land.

Honoring everything about everything. Respecting everything about everything. Accepting everything about everything. Loving everything about everything.

It's a dance. It's the Song. Our co-creation. A natural rhythm.

A beautiful way of life.

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[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

JoAnne Dodgson is a healer, author and teacher of Ka Ta See, a unique Peruvian tradition from the Eastern Andes. JoAnne has a doctorate in counseling psychology and has pursued an extensive twelve-year shamanic apprenticeship to live and learn the Ka Ta See tradition and share the ancient teachings and ceremonial ways. She has over twenty years experience offering counseling, holistic healing, workshops, and ceremonial gatherings.

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