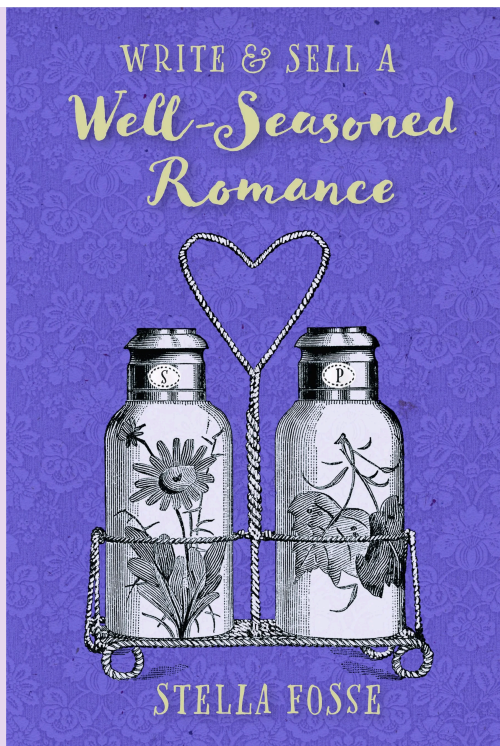


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Epiphany Edition

Our Bodies are Stories Waiting to be Known

The first thing I notice when we land in San Francisco is my *frisson* at being here. San Francisco is one of those places, like Paris or New York, that if you tell people you've just been, they look at you with envy. And I used to live here. Not exactly here, but across the Bay. Close enough.

The next thing I notice is while walking the streets of Berkeley: A vague memory of feeling annoyed or lost or irritated while at places that seem magical today. Is it weird that a grocery store can feel like sacred ground? I walk around Berkeley Bowl, that mecca of vegetables. I look at people doing their everyday shopping and think, *Do you realize where you are?* Back home in North Carolina I often carry my Berkeley Bowl shopping bag to the organic market and think, *I am so cool that no one here knows how cool I am.* Because I used to shop at the Bowl. I lived around the corner and it was

just my store. This famous place that nobody in North Carolina ever heard of. What was I doing feeling annoyed so much of the time, those thirty years I lived in the East Bay? Why wasn't I floored by enchantment every single minute?

I leave the Bowl with a peach blueberry galette for my son who lives two blocks South. As I walk I remember the title of Mary Smich's book, [*Even the Terrible Things Seem Beautiful to Me Now*](#). Mary's mother said that to her while in hospice. To my knowledge I'm not imminently dying, but I am old enough to look back with wonder at the places I've been and the not-so-ordinary days I've lived.

I spend the afternoon with my Elderotica writing group in the Arts and Crafts bungalow of a friend who points out that we have been meeting for ten years. Ten years! Another friend, Charli Allan,* has just moved into assisted living. She says, "When we started, all we talked about was sex. Now we talk about our health." It's all bodies, my friends, in their unfoldingness. One member of our group is not here. She's home, convalescing from a stroke. Another woman is away on a spiritual retreat in Thailand after recovering from a shoulder replacement. That leaves five of us in the room; several including me are cancer alumnae. I sit next to the effervescent Billie Berlin* and mention the success of my recent cardiac ablation. I show her my normal EKG in real time on my Apple Watch. Billie says she has asymptomatic atrial fibrillation. She tries on my watch and discovers she is in the midst of an AFIB episode. Our bodies are stories, just below the surface, waiting to be known.

Over lunch we ponder the state of the world, the coming change in administration, the agony of women in the Middle East. What does it mean to have the privilege to write in a world more perilous than when we began? Later that day I see this quote from Ursula LeGuin on Facebook:

The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary.

We are renegade women. And so we write.

Charli has brought two writing prompts. Here is the first (and, Reader, feel free to write about it for five minutes before you read the rest of this

Newsletter):

This is what she wants most in the world.

Of course I write about impatience with recovering my strength after the medical adventures of the autumn.

She wants to regain her health, all the way, like going-to-the-gym-and-lifting-weights kind of healthy. But is that realistic? Or is this the new abnormal? Time will tell, but she want time to tell her now, right now.

She can still write, though. Click those keys, push that pen, ring the bells that still can ring. Ring them good and loud.

After we read to one another comes Charli's second prompt (and again, Reader, feel free to write along at home before you read more):

She is lying. This is what she really wants.

This invitation to deeper sharing pushes me to time travel.

She wants a do-over. She wants to marry a different first spouse, a kinder funnier partner, but have the same children. How to do that? Can you have sex with a man, collect and freeze the effects, and inseminate yourself later, once you find a suitable mate?

By the time I finish writing I realize that my sixties were my do-over: the era when I loved happily, enjoyed my children mightily, and got to write whatever the hell I wanted.

Fortunately she got a re-do on a lot of this. Not all. The gap between reality and wishes is where gratitude lives.

Everyone's shares are delightful. "She wants to wantonly want," intones Billie Berlin, "before she was the ocean and all life was born from her waves."

For our third and final prompt, Billie passes around a bottle of a nutritional supplement called Libido. "I got the last one in the store," she grins.

The prompt (and do write along at home) is this:

What happens when you take Libido in a capsule?

Biotech alum that I am, my response is an imaginary clinical trial, complete with contradictory data: nothing at all on some days, howling at the moon on

others.

Rene* writes about sexual confidence. Her narrator is "in control of her out-of-control," and has heard it all from men. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. They think they're doing you a favor because you're seventy." Charli writes about reclaiming her life force. "Was it those pills? Or was it the choice to take them? Where does the power lie?"

That night, we trade texts about the afternoon.

So good to be among us Great Dames...

Awed by your magnificence...

Still savoring, hanging onto the laughter, stories...

Later I discover another gift from the fountain of Facebook, this one an anonymous meme:

Twenty years from now you would do anything to have the health, energy and time you have now. Go do some main character shit before it's too late.

I will be 91 in twenty years. If I'm still here, I will look back on today and know I squeezed out every ounce of joy and drank it greedily, joy trickling down my chin and onto my radiation-sore breast.

The gap between reality and wishes is where gratitude lives.

*These are pen names from our collaborative effort, [Aphrodite's Pen: The Power of Writing Erotica after Midlife](#) (North Atlantic Books, 2019).



All the best,

Stella,

stella@stellafosse.com

Please Share this Newsletter!

From the blog and podcasts this month



The Magical Power of Life Review

Stella Fosse

December is a busy yet contemplative time. We are down to the essentials. Outside our windows the branches are bare, while inside the house, the packages are shipped and the cupboards empty as we ready for holiday travel. The New Year is upon us with chances for new resolutions, new activism, new growth. Soon will come the perfect time to reflect on our lives.



Getting Through the Tough Times with a Trip to Evergreen

Stella Fosse

I don't know if it's possible to break the dashboard of a Mini Cooper, but I gave it a good try. The day after the 2024 Presidential election I was disappointed and stressed about the future. I was sitting in the driver's seat of the car, parked at the grocery store and pounding on the touch screen of the radio. All the stations were set to the news,

Our sixties and beyond are an ideal life stage to revisit our experience and find meaning in the mosaic of our histories. Conducting a structured life review can increase our sense of purpose and our satisfaction with life. We can revisit our accomplishments, find closure with issues that feel unresolved, and arrive at new contentment. By revisiting our relationships we can deepen our understanding of their meaning. Reflecting on our life story and the values we developed over the years can provide deep fulfillment.

A formal Life Review can happen in conversation or through writing. Therapists trained in life review may ask questions like, “When were you first attracted to another person?” or “What wisdom would you like to share with the next generation?” When memories are difficult, a facilitator can suggest a reframe to help deepen the meaning of the experience.

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except something called Road Trip Radio that appeared out of nowhere. When I wanted to believe we would soon be living in a stronger, happier world, I was hooked on the chatter that helped me believe.

Polls were promising. Talking heads inside my dashboard were upbeat, even joyful. The consequences for our country, and especially for women of any age, were debated and driven home. Most Americans seeking sanity knew just what to do. We would welcome Madam President, and the healing in a deeply divided nation would begin. The voices who fed my hope couldn't all be wrong.

They were wrong. There's no excuse for my susceptibility to the positive news flooding the airways in the days preceding November 5. I worked in government for 35 years. It's a good bet I should have known that pollsters, pundits and predictors would miss the mark. Spinning out certainty in an uncertain world has always been risky.

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Stella Fosse



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