

BETWEEN CURTAINS

The Dance Worth Staying For

...The Jump

I didn't jump because I wanted to die.
I jumped because I had run out of ways to stay.

1. Silence

Silence isn't the absence of sound.
It's the absence of expectation.

Or maybe... the absence of being expected.

There's a kind of quiet you choose — like turning your phone face down and deciding, just for a bit, that it doesn't get to own you.

A small act. An ordinary rebellion.

And then there's the quiet that arrives when your body stops negotiating altogether.

They call it a coma.
As if it were a place I'd checked into. Somewhere I might complain about the pillows.

But this silence isn't hospitality.

It's surrender.

At first, I waited for someone to come and explain the rules. A nurse with forgiving eyes. A doctor with a clipboard. A parent. A god. Anyone.

No one came.

So I did what I've always done when life stops making sense.

My mind went somewhere else.

Shoes.

Not the sensible kind. Not the flat, worn ones that carried me through supermarkets and office floors while I smiled more than I meant to. Not the shoes I wore while pretending I wasn't drowning.

These were different.

Dancing shoes.

Black leather. A strap around the ankle.
Not controlling — just sure.

A heel made for turning, not for running.

It's strange what the mind chooses when it no longer has to justify itself.

Tango had always been safer on a screen.

I watched *Scent of a Woman* so many times it became a private ritual. The room. The music. The pause before the invitation.

The girl saying what I'd said in a thousand ways before:

"I'm afraid of making a mistake."

And then he smiles.

"There are no mistakes in the tango, darling. Not like life. If you get tangled up, just tango on."

The line stayed with me — not because I believed it, but because I wanted to.

Not the man.
Not the dress.

The permission.

Three minutes of being held without having to prove I deserved it.

In the life before this silence, I kept ledgers.

Not official ones. Invisible ones.

How much I owed.
How much I'd failed.
How often I spent to feel better — and hated myself for needing it.

Some debts live on paper.
Some settle into the body.

I could tell you the number that grew inside my credit card like mould behind wallpaper.

But that was never the real number.

The real number was how many times I told myself: *just today*.

And then did it again.

And again.

Somewhere in all of that, something stopped making sense.

Nothing dramatic.

Just a slow, creeping sense that I was doing everything I was supposed to do...
and somehow missing something I couldn't name.

At some point, drinking stopped being an event.

It just... stayed.

Spending stopped being about things.

It became a way of quieting something inside me.

Love — a performance.

And then the performance ended.
Not with applause, but with a long, quiet fade.

My last clear memory is air.

Cold. Metallic.

I just want this to stop, I thought.

Then nothing.

Then this.

Not silence exactly — a sound, repeating somewhere just out of reach. Muffled.

Like the world pressing its ear against a wall and listening.

The first time I hear it, I don't recognise it.

But something in me leans towards it.

Then something else.

Footsteps.

Measured. Controlled.

And a presence.

A man-shaped presence waiting at the edge of my quiet.

Curious despite himself.

He doesn't speak.

I can't.

When the sound swells, my heel shifts lightly against the floor of this nowhere.

He stills.

As if he hears it.

As if it reaches him.

As if, somehow... he is listening.

2. December

Christmas arrives faster every year.

Not joyfully — more like a deadline.

A bill.

An unexpected knock you're meant to answer with enthusiasm.

Time behaves badly in December.

The present gets traded — for memory, for anticipation — and the moment you're in ends up carrying both.

For years, Christmas tightened something in my chest.

Nothing to do with the cold.

Lists multiplied.

School events stacked up.

Plays. Parties. Donations.

Money got louder in December.

Not just the amount — the meaning.

Presents became proof.

Proof of care.

Proof of adequacy.

Proof I wasn't failing at something unnamed but somehow judged by everyone.

When my daughter was with me, the days softened.

I loved watching joy arrive whole.

Uncomplicated.

The certainty that something good would happen simply because she expected it to.

She anchored me.

When she went to her father's, the gap returned.

Not quiet — hollow.

The house felt the wrong size.

Too big for one adult pretending not to count the hours.

Too small for the weight of unoccupied time.

Evenings blurred.

Episodes rolling into each other — other people's lives resolving neatly while mine stayed suspended.

Sometimes, late at night, I bought small things.

Candles. Books. Clothes.

As if one of them might shift something.

Nudge something back into place.

Nothing did.

Each year, the thought arrived earlier.

Each year, it lingered longer.

And that Christmas, standing still in the cold air, something became impossible to ignore.

It wasn't the future that frightened me.

It was the effort of pretending I could imagine it.

Early Reader Praise

“Raw, honest, and deeply immersive, this book gives readers permission to face their fears with clarity and compassion.”

— **Julie H, financial services**

“Beautifully written and deeply thought-provoking... a powerful reminder that beneath everything, we are all vulnerable — and that life, in the end, is a dance.”

— **Chris M, financial adviser**

“Full of wisdom, insight, and deep compassion... These are important truths that deserve to be shared.”

— **Kate S, author**

“This book feels like a kind friend — one who listens without judgment and gently puts into words the thoughts and emotions we struggle to express.”

— **Marianne D, engineer**

“WOW — what beautiful writing. I could relate to so much of it.”

— **Emma H, director**

“Clear, poetic, and beautifully multilayered.”

— **Grainne D, performance coach**

Alina P Burlacu writes about the quiet ways women lose themselves — and how they can find their way back.

*You can still
begin. Again.*

