



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #33: Elizabeth Gilbert gets Bewildered!

Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan, and this is Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. Today, we have a very special episode, Marty.
- Martha Beck: Yay, oh yay.
- Rowan Mangan: Yee.
- Martha Beck: Okay. So this person, we like her a lot.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: But I doubt you have heard of her. She's one of those low energy people who never achieves much, and is really trying so hard to figure it out, and once entered a state fair in every single event offered and was given a special ribbon called "Most in Show," because this person is the opposite of the one I've just described. This is the incredible, the unconquerable, I'm running out of adjectives, Liz Gilbert.
- Rowan Mangan: Whoo!
- Martha Beck: Yay, Liz. Hi, Lizzie.
- Liz Gilbert: Hi, Marty.
- Rowan Mangan: Welcome Liz.
- Liz Gilbert: Hi, Rowie..
- Martha Beck: It's so good to see you.



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Liz Gilbert: It's so good to see you guys. I love you so much.

Martha Beck: Through the winters of COVID, Liz came over and would sit by the fireplace because she assured us, I grew up in the country. All the air gets sucked up the chimney.

Liz Gilbert: It's true.

Martha Beck: It can't infect you.

Liz Gilbert: It's true.

Martha Beck: I thought it was just one of your clever ruses.

Liz Gilbert: Well, also I had a mask on. And also, you were the only thing I missed during the pandemic about the world being shut, was coming over to your house. So I had to be-mask myself and come and sit by you.

Martha Beck: You were wonderful. You were wonderful. So then we'd all just end up cuddling.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Oh boy. That went...

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: That's what we did. I mean, let's be honest. Yeah. We cuddled a lot. Because that's the natural way. Culture says you don't have your friends come over and cuddle with you, but we say that's our nature. We're cuddly.

Liz Gilbert: Yes, exactly.

Martha Beck: We're cuddly.

Liz Gilbert: Culture's wrong on that one.

Martha Beck: So today we are going to ask Liz Gilbert what she's trying to figure out and we'll talk about what the culture says about that and then we will have a conclusion. I love conclusions. I'm in self-help book writing mode. You have to tell everybody what's going to happen on every page. No. Seriously. What is Liz Gilbert trying to figure out?



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- Liz Gilbert: Well, first of all, thank you very much for inviting me to your house.
- Rowan Mangan: Thank you very much for inviting yourself to our podcast.
- Liz Gilbert: Yes. That's what I did. I said, "You guys, can I come and play on your podcast," because that's the other thing we do. We cuddle and we play and this is playtime. Well, I want to talk about trying to figure out why culture is so incredibly hostile to the idea of single, childless women and especially single, childish women, childless women, also childish.
- I'm not childish. I'm childlike. Okay. Let's just get that right.
- Martha Beck: Yes, absolutely.
- Liz Gilbert: Right? They're two different things. Especially hostile to women who are single and childless by choice. There's pity and compassion and great sorrow available to women who are childless and single alone, because they couldn't help it or wanted something else.
- Martha Beck: Right.
- Liz Gilbert: But to choose that as a path is met by culture with hostility at the worst, way past bewilderment, just rage, blame, disgust, contempt, and I'm trying to figure out why that is the case because I am single and childish. I'm just going to keep saying it, childless by choice and it's so good. It's so deeply good and enjoyable and rich and full. I also have created a life where, my family are my friends, and that's also something that culture does not approve of.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Liz Gilbert: So that's what I'm here to discuss with you beautiful human beings today.
- Martha Beck: So I am curious, you've had these experiences of people coming at you that way. What's a specific time that it happened?
- Liz Gilbert: Okay, well, this one is funny. It was at Rayya's funeral and an older female relative of mine was in the room with me and with a number of my friends who had come to support me. Rayya was my partner, who was your friend also who died several years ago, and right before the funeral, they were all gathered together. This older female relative of mine was with us and she said something about how she had so admired that Barbara Bush - that's already a sentence that you don't hear a lot - she had so admired that



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Barbara Bush had given the commencement speech at Vassar once.

She said, "All of this is wonderful that you're all getting this education, but you'll find in life that there is nothing more important or precious to you than having a family." She got some kickback from that, even 30 years ago or however long was that she did it. I said, "Well, I can see why people might have been - those young, hardworking scholars at Vassar might have been like, "Huh," to that. This relative of mine said, "Well, it's true. A life without children is pointless." I looked around and I was with four of my friends. None of us had children.

Martha Beck: Oh, my god.

Liz Gilbert: I said, "Well, I guess our lives are pointless, you guys." I just started laughing because I was looking at these incredible women in my life and their lives were so extraordinary. They were so wonder... I mean, it's not even like they were all super famous, heavily accomplished, whatever. They were just extraordinary people whose lives were so full and so rich. I thought, man, this just doesn't go away. This really thick, deep idea that there's no other reason to live as a woman. I bought into that. I bought into that as a young person and I went out and got myself married as fast as I could and went on the track to have kids, but then something in my body and my being just refused to allow it. I went into a full mental, physical, and psychological breakdown. Those of you who have read *Eat, Pray, Love* or seen the movie know what happened next because I simply couldn't do it. There was almost like I was wired in a way that I could not do it, even though the culture had told me to do it.

Martha Beck: Oh, thank God.

Liz Gilbert: I couldn't do it and I thought there was something so wrong with me because I kept having nervous breakdowns instead of having children. Then when I gave that up, my life got better and better and better. Anyway, so that's what we're here to discuss.

Rowan Mangan: Liz, what do you think is going on? If the culture's saying your life is pointless...

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: If you don't have children.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Or have a family in that conventional sense.



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- Liz Gilbert: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: What's behind that? What's going on because we know that the culture's always got an agenda.
- Liz Gilbert: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: So what's happening behind the scenes when women are being told that?
- Liz Gilbert: So glad you asked. I actually wrote about this a lot in my book ***Committed*** because I was looking into that exact question. So before I answer that, I have to tell you that the culture, there are cases where you can say, "Well, that's opinion and cultures have opinions and people have opinions." Here's the thing. The culture is actually wrong on this and all sociological studies, there's something that's called the marriage benefit imbalance puzzle, which I'm sure you've heard about, Marty.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Liz Gilbert: But it's bewildered... I'm just plugging the podcast when I say bewildered. I'm going to use that word as much as I can. It has bewildered sociologists forever because there is this incredible drop that happens in the quality of woman's life when she gets married and it is across every single aspect of her life. Her financial life will plummet. Her physical health plummets. She will on average gain 10 pounds within a few years. Her life expectancy goes down. Her chances of getting murdered skyrocket.
- Martha Beck: Wow.
- Liz Gilbert: Her chances of committing suicide skyrocket. Depression rises, anxiety rises and the more children you add to that, the worse it gets, right? So literally in every single measurement that you can use to measure the quality of a human being's life, statistically there is not one single place in which it shows that married women do better than single women.
- Rowan Mangan: Married hetero women, yeah?
- Liz Gilbert: Married hetero women and I don't know the studies and I asked that in ***Committed*** too, because I was like, I wonder what happens when two... It probably just becomes really... Whatever.



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I'm not going to get into that. It's not my world. So first of all, I just want to say the culture's telling you a story that is not just an opinion, it's simply not true. You will take 10 years off your life expectancy immediately as a heterosexual woman by getting married, just right off the bat. It's crazy. So there's something happening. What is happening? What's being sold? Yeah, Marty wants to speak.

Martha Beck: I know these studies.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: I don't know if it's the same, but what the bit you left out is that after marriage, a man, a cis, hetero man -

Liz Gilbert: That's the imbalance.

Martha Beck: His quality skyrockets way up.

Liz Gilbert: Skyrockets. Every single thing that happens to a woman is given to a man. So she loses 10 years of her life expectancy. He gains. Her health goes down. His health goes up. Her rates of addiction, alcoholism, suicide, and murder possibility go down. His soars. Her work, her career tanks. His soars. There's no better thing a man can do than hitch himself to a woman. There's no worse thing a woman can do statistically than putting... This is what makes me so crazy about literally every single romantic story we're told, is the opposite of that. It makes me mental when I watch rom-coms and the whole theme of it is a man running away from getting trapped into a marriage and a woman running toward this thing that she wants so much when in fact it should be the opposite. The woman should be running, screaming away and the man should be running toward her begging to make his life a million times better because that's what's actually going to happen.

Martha Beck: Oh my gosh.

Liz Gilbert: Statistically. Obviously there are anomalies within this, but this is shown in study after study and it hasn't changed over the decades.

Martha Beck: No, no.

Liz Gilbert: So first of all, there's this incredible central lie, right? So who benefits from this lie? Well, it could be the patriarchy, right? It could be the men whose lives get so much better when a woman is attached to them. It's also culturally... Okay. This is especially in a culture like an American culture, which is all about individualism



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where the culture and the society does not take care of its citizens and it doesn't want to. It doesn't want to spend money on that. It wants to spend money on the military, so it wants the citizens to take care of themselves because that's what benefits the capitalist market. If everybody takes care of themselves, we don't have to pay for healthcare. We don't have to pay for education. The best way to create building blocks of culture where the building blocks take care of themselves is to have a woman taking care of that block.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: So you bring a woman in, you create a family around her. She will make sure that those children get educated. She will make sure that those children get dentistry. She will make sure that husband goes to his job and if she does all of that, then the culture doesn't have to do it.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: So what happens is that our entire capitalist cultural, huge success, American dream is built upon those women doing that individually one household at a time, which is why they die younger, which is why they commit suicide, which is why they struggle with depression and anxiety. And, can't get through the day because they're holding up something that in a healthy culture would be shared.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I did my PhD dissertation on this. How basically all men are created equal was written by a white property, owning male who never thought to call, include women, people of color, anybody except himself, and those men who matched him, that they were all equal. But all the work of the society had to be, "Oh, I think we better enslave about... hmm, millions of people. And drag them back here to do the actual work."

Then when it was illegal to force a person of color to do everything you wanted for free, women were the only ones left to do the work of households. The care, the feeding, the loving, the healing of every little kid, every old person, women took that all upon themselves. And then at a key point, feminism came out and said, "Yeah, you can do this. And also do a job that was created for a married man who has a full-time free domestic support staff."

And so now women were trying to do it both. This was in the eighties when I was trying to do everything. And somebody went to Gloria Steinem and said, "This is not workable. I have to do everything that a huge household of servants would once have done and do the job my husband is doing. And somehow make



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all this work. Why didn't you tell us it would be this way." And Gloria Steinem looked at her and said, "We didn't know." Because the culture makes it so mind blind.

Okay. This favorite stump, every person going into freshman year at Harvard, drink, was required to read or ask to read *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau and is about this guy who goes to this pond. And he just communes with nature for a whole year to show that nature takes care of you and everything is fine. And it's this classic of the isolated woodsmen out there. He does not mention that every day, his mother and sisters brought clean laundry and food, cleaned the house, took away his dirty laundry, and dirty dishes, and then came back the next day. What? You just assumed that's going to happen. Right? Like that's not a human doing that. It's a woman. That's what they do. It's like the sun rising. They just come wash your clothes. Sorry. If I sound a little bitter. Well spotted.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: So...

Liz Gilbert: Yeah. And I was on that track. Yeah. In my first marriage, I mean, I was supporting us and I was working really hard and I was putting a meal in front of that man every single night and picking up his underwear and I was enraged. And I was like, what am I... And I was about to have a kid. And we bought a house with a nursery in it, like I had, I was on that track.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: But what it took for me to get off that track was to almost commit suicide and have to be hospitalized. I was in so much... I mean, that's the lowest I've ever been in my life. It's the most psychological despair that I was ever in. The despair was, "What's wrong with me."

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: That I am not fulfilled and satisfied by this model. I am a selfish person. I am a broken person. And it never occurred to me to be like, "What's wrong with culture that this is what I was taught is the thing when it's horrible."

Martha Beck: And you know what? That's...

Liz Gilbert: Ro had her hand up too. Sorry.



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Rowan Mangan: Sorry. I have a comment.

Liz Gilbert: Ro's got her hand up.

Martha Beck: Ro in the back row. Back row with the cool kids.

Rowan Mangan: We'll be right back with more Bewildered. I have a favor to ask. You might not know this, but ratings and reviews are like gold in the podcasting universe. They get podcasts in front of more, faces, more eyes, more ears, all the bits that you could have a podcast in front of. That's what they do. So it would help us enormously. If you would consider going over to your favorite podcasting app, especially if it's Apple and giving us a few stars, maybe even five, maybe even six, if you can find a way to hack the system, I wouldn't complain. And a review would also be wonderful. We read them all and love them. So thank you very much in advance. Let's just go out there and bewilder the world.

On the podcast. We try to point towards, or figure out what the culture's doing, because it's often quite subtle. And that it's effect on us is often quite subtle. But when we talk about how do you go from the consensus, which was sending you down that path, right? To coming to your own, coming to your senses, you didn't have a choice. Why do you think your system was like, "Absolutely not" because I'm sure that there's so many women listening to this who are like, "I wish I'd had as big a red flag going into it. Because now it's 30 years later. And I went all the way down that path."

Liz Gilbert: I think that I am very lucky to have a very low tolerance for pain. And I'm not kidding about that. I think the more you can tolerate pain.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: The longer you can stay in a system that is painful.

Yeah. The ancestral women in my family have limitless tolerance for pain.

Rowan Mangan: Hmm.

Liz Gilbert: They can take anything. They can absorb anything. They can come over any disappointment, they can be neglected. They can be so neglected and find a way to still wake up the next morning and do it again. They can be so maltreated and still find a way. My saving... I've never thought of this before, but my saving grace was that I am oversensitive. And so, I'm a little bit of a canary in the coal mine. Right. And now the thing that I've realized, in a



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couple days I'll be 53. But now the wonderful thing I've realized is that the second I feel like, "Oh no, this is awful."

This is a navigational system. Yes. That I now really am grateful that I have, I get out of things really quickly now. I get out of relationships with people really quickly. I back away from things really quickly, that don't feel right to me. So what was happening when I was 30, when I had my 30 year crisis, because I was supposed... I promised my husband that we'd have kids when I was 30. And instead I was starving myself to death, throwing up anything I tried to eat. Every part of my body broke down. I had carpal tunnel syndrome. My knees were, I mean I was having physiological -

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: Just meltdown. Like I was turning into a crazy woman. I called myself Madea, which is ironic. Because what did Madea do? Kill her kids. Anyway...

Rowan Mangan: Yep.

Liz Gilbert: I was literally pacing the halls of this beautiful suburban house all night, freaking out like a caged animal. Right. And I didn't want to be. I took as many antidepressants and anti-anxieties as I could to make that stop. But my natural sensitivity was so huge because I'm super sensitive that I was going to die if I stayed.

And something Glennon Doyle said to me, the first time we ever met was, "I wonder why a woman has to almost die before she'll let herself change her life."

I'm not like that anymore. I make changes very quickly without having to nearly die. But I was this weird combination of this highly sensitive... and I was an artist. So my work was creativity and like my life was destroying me.

So, my sensitivity goes into my creativity and it works, but it went into my household and I'm like, "What's going on? This is a nightmare." But yeah. So I think that I was lucky that I'm overly sensitive because I think if I were tougher and stronger and I could just stuff it and stuff it and mask it and muffle it and do whatever I had to do to get through it. I would've done what so many people do, which is just... I got a letter once. The weirdest hate mail ever after *Eat, Pray, Love* came out and the first line was, "Bitch, you don't think I hate my marriage?"

Martha Beck: Wow! Wow!



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- Liz Gilbert: And it was this letter attacking me for leaving. Like, "I hate every minute of my marriage. I hate being a mother. I hate all this shit, but you don't see me running away to Italy." And I was like, "Well, good for you. Yeah. You found a way to stay. I couldn't."
- Martha Beck: Mm. Yeah. Yeah. I'm the same way I was... Yeah. I went deeper into it than you did, but when I was trying to be a good Mormon wife, you want some oppression... I always say that the only thing the Mormons ask from their women is that they breed well in captivity.
- Liz Gilbert: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So I was going down that path and my whole body fell apart and I had three kids and I could not move my hands. I couldn't...
- Liz Gilbert: I couldn't type.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I couldn't either.
- Liz Gilbert: I was a writer. And I had doctors telling me, "You need wrist surgery, you need knee surgery. You've got an intestinal issue. You've got like all of this stuff." But it was actually just a full body, every atom of my being in rebellion saying...
- Martha Beck: Wow!
- Liz Gilbert: We will kill you before we let you do this thing.
- And I'm a very spiritual person. And I actually think that was... I think that the God of my understanding will do whatever it has to do to me to get me back on the right path that I'm supposed to be on. And it's like, "I don't know how else to get your attention to tell you not this, not this, not this."
- But I was also a really cooperative.... I like to make everybody happy. I'm a cooperative pleasing sweet person. So I felt so... My obedience was, "Look, I got married at 24 and I worked hard and I bought a house and I have a husband. I'm going to have a kid." And the disobedience that I felt.
- Martha Beck: Whoa.
- Liz Gilbert: By breaking that was where my depression came from.
- Martha Beck: Well, I think it's interesting because *Eat, Pray, Love* was such a phenomenon. *The Bible* hasn't sold as many copies as *Eat, Pray, Love*. And then you've talked about how people who swear,



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Eat, Pray, Love, changed my life – they didn't read *Committed*. And I think it's because women have gotten to this level of, or had gotten to this level of suppression. It's like the feminist Elizabeth Katie Stanton said, "Women have been systematically disadvantaged in the polity, the legal system." And what was the other one? "Money, law, politics." That was it. And she said, "My way of my mission in life is to..." And I thought she would say, "Ease the burden." But she didn't. She said, "My mission is to deepen this disappointment in the hearts of women until they will suffer it no longer."

Liz Gilbert:

Wow.

Martha Beck:

Yeah. And so that's where you got, and I really think, I mean, tell me where I'm wrong here, but the fact that book hit so hard and had so much influence is precisely because you were expressing what it's like to experience that. Your soul rebelling against the whole archetype of what you were supposed to be as a woman. I think that's... *Eat, Pray, Love* may just be... the way you figured it out. And it helped a ton of other women do it as well. And that's because that's what you did on the bathroom floor. If you haven't read, *Eat, Pray, Love*, two of you...

Rowan Mangan:

There's a copy in your house.

Martha Beck:

There's a copy in your house. Yes. All your friends have it just borrow it for the night, whatever. But when *Eat, Pray, Love* came out, there was so much of the problem that has no name. And it was you coming to your nature on that bathroom floor. The culture was pressing in on you from everywhere. And you found your true nature at the center and it would not. It would not. You deepened your disappointment until you will suffer it no longer.

And I think 13 million people got that book and we're trying to read their way out of the cultural trap that is marriage. And I think probably men as well as women. Probably more women, but men as well. It's not a pretty picture for anybody. The man's going to some hideous office with a noose around his neck with nothing to do, but try to make money. That's not really a life. So how do you... As of now, you said you back away quicker, you stay in touch with your nature, much more closely. Like for the people out there who are going, "Oh my God, the culture is pressing in on me. And I don't like it either. And I don't want to get to the point where I kill myself. I want to start taking steps here." Sorry, the self-help author. So, is there a method? Did you *Eat, Pray, Love* was this huge cataclysmic thing. And then you had to go around the world to find yourself. And now, when, during the pandemic, for example, you had to do it alone in a room.



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Liz Gilbert: That's easier.

Martha Beck: There's still pressure though. There's still pressure. Online pressure and stuff.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah. Yeah.

Martha Beck: So how do we help people go from that kind of consensus to their senses? What is your methodology for staying in touch with the part that said, "I will not"?

Liz Gilbert: I have to feel it physically. There's no other way for me, because my mind has been so distorted by trauma and culture that my mind is really not to be trusted a lot of times. It's in the groundwater. I've drunk so many messages. It was in the mother's milk. It was in the uterine fluid.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: It's all of it. And so I have to feel what I physically feel like. And you've taught me a lot about this, Marty, and you talk a lot about this and I've been given this navigational system, which is this actual physical body.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: And I find it so interesting that when I was going through that depression and anxiety, because I was like, "I don't want to be this person who blows up." I didn't want to be the person who blew up culture. I wanted to be approved of and happy and loved. So I go to a doctor and the doctor would give me medication that would make me not be able to feel my body. Right.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: Not be able to feel... Anti-anxiety medication will tamp that down so you can't feel it.

Right. And that would make me be able to stay in the block...

That was so oppressive. And so I...

Rowan Mangan: No one go off your meds because of what she just said.

Liz Gilbert: No, don't. No. I have great respect for it. And there were times when I needed it, but I will also say this. I used to be on a lot of



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medication and I'm not on any anymore. So I just want to lay that out there.

And again, don't do anything hasty, but I don't even take an Advil PM to go to sleep anymore.

It's really because I'm navigating my life based on what it physically feels like. So when I meet people who make me feel physically uncomfortable, I do not have...

Martha Beck: How does it have come into your body? What is the sense of not comfortable that some people give you?

Liz Gilbert: It's for me right below my sternum and it's like right behind my sternum, there's almost a line from... There's actually different feelings that I can feel. And I also feel my hands start to shake.

Martha Beck: Huh.

Liz Gilbert: But when I grew up, my hands shook all the time. Because I had a lot of anxiety in the family household. There was a lot of tension. So I was used to walking around with shaky hands as a child.

Martha Beck: Just for one moment. Let's just...

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: You had so much anxiety as a child that you were more used to your hands shaking than not shaking.

Liz Gilbert: Totally. My hands shook my entire childhood. My stomach hurt my entire childhood.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: That was the baseline. That was normal. It was a high pressure, high intensity household. And a high pressure, high intensity culture.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: So it just feels... I'll discontinue. And I've gotten so much more honest.

Martha Beck: Yeah.



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Liz Gilbert: I've aborted things with people where I've just said, "I have no intellectual defense for this." I had a conversation with somebody recently who wanted to work with me. And then I felt like, "No, this is not..." My body didn't feel right around this person. And I said, "I have no intellectual defense for this. What I'm about to tell you. But my intuition is telling me that this is not going to work. And I have a long history of showing that when I override my intuition, it's going to be a disaster."

"It's going to be a disaster for me, for you. So I'm just going to discontinue this now. And I can't even tell you why beyond that."

Martha Beck: I love that.

Liz Gilbert: And yeah. So I trust the body response now and I went to a doctor, I was going through pre-menopause and I went to a doctor who put me on a whole bunch of medication and after a month I was like, "This isn't it." So part of it is trying stuff.

I put my body into a situation and I see is this the situation? And after a little while, or a long while my body's like, "Nope." And then I take it back out of the situation. And I did the same thing to him. I said, "Look, I'm not a scientist. I'm not a medical doctor. I have nothing to base this on. Other than that, I have intuition, but I guide my life by intuition and this doesn't feel right. So I'm not going to continue this path. I'll find something else." Right?

Martha Beck: So, it's interesting because I've, when working with clients, I found that everybody has their own compass needle, the way it shows up. And yours shows up in your solar plexus, is probably coming from the gut. How do you feel it Ro? Because I think we all have this. There's a warning that comes into the body when we're not in a safe space or with a safe person.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Mine's always anxiety similar to Liz. It's always anxiety and I'm also very hypersensitive and somehow I didn't... One of the things we come up against when we talk about this stuff is, I didn't get as much culture in my mother's milk as a lot of people had. And that was such a blessing for me because I've been saying no to things because that made me feel weird for a long time.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: And there are advantages and disadvantages to that.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: For sure. But yeah, I go into a very physical state of anxiety that is not anything to do with my brain. It doesn't feel as though it's



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anything to do with my brain. It's very high discomfort and I've had to do a lot of forensic sort of analysis after the event of going, "Oh, because I wasn't meant to do that."

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: And something that was trying to stop you. From doing something and they're throwing everything at you to try to stop you from doing something that's not good.

Rowan Mangan: Right.

Liz Gilbert: For you.

Rowan Mangan: The thing that's... Right. Exactly. For me. But Liz, the thing that I always come back around to is then there's that moment. And you say that you are now really good at doing it quickly, but when you are not gaunt and suicidal and your body's not falling apart because you're listening. There's something that you don't get. And that's the, "my body's falling apart, I can't." And so there's this courage. I feel like that we all have to kind of find when we want to go back out of that empty room.

Liz Gilbert: Yep.

Rowan Mangan: And say, "Okay, culture, I'm not going to do that. And I'm going to say it's because my intuition." Which the culture will laugh at because intuition and capitalism don't know how to talk to each other. And so, where do you find the courage and how do you do that in a practical way? The saying and the getting the courage to say no.

Liz Gilbert: Ooh, What a good question, Rowie. So I also just want to share what my somatic opposite of the 'no' feels like. What 'yes' feels like to me is a belly full of warm, vanilla pudding. And I actually have come to call it the "vanilla pudding, warmth of serenity, calm and peace." When I'm where I'm supposed to be, with the people that I'm supposed to be with, doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And by supposed to, I mean, my own original software program that the universe gave to me. When it's doing what it's supposed to be doing, it feels like I have a belly full of warm vanilla pudding.

Martha Beck: It feels like melted chocolate.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah. That's what oxytocin feels like, I guess.

Martha Beck: Yeah.



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Liz Gilbert:

It's just yummy. Mm. This feels yummy. And the more I get of the warm vanilla pudding in my belly, the less I'm willing to give it up. So, when I say 'no' to things now, what I'm saying 'no' to, I think of it as saying 'yes' to warm vanilla pudding. If I'm going to have more warm vanilla pudding I have to say 'no' to this thing. And I'll give you some examples. So, when the pandemic hit and we went into lockdown, I was living in warm vanilla pudding. I recognized that I don't want to be insensitive to the incredible pain and harm and death that people went through with the pandemic. But in my case, being shut into a house, having everything in your life canceled. I mean, I had 18 months of business stuff canceled in one day, just wiped off the calendar.

And, and the world was like, "You have to stay home now by yourself." My whole world became warm vanilla pudding. To an extent that I had never before imagined because I had never stopped that much. And I had never realized how yummy stopping felt and how delicious my routines became when it was just me alone in a house, living with this great roommate, myself, who we have the same hobbies, we're into the same stuff. I love getting up early. So does she. I like taking a bath and eating popcorn in the bathtub and watching Great British Baking Show. So does she. Just finding these little hobbies and I didn't want to lose any of it.

Martha Beck:

The miracle of finding the perfect person to be with that everybody's trying to solve.

Liz Gilbert:

Yeah, that's right. It's like by Byron Katie always says, "You're the one you've always been waiting for, the love of your life is yourself." So what happened was when the world opened, again, all these things started being reintroduced, right? Like suddenly social life came back. Professional life came back and I weighed each one and thought, "Do I want to reintroduce it?" Because I had a really yummy vanilla pudding vibe going there for a while. Now, do I want to return to what I was doing before? Which was a lot of stuff that I didn't consciously even wonder, "Do I want to do this? Do I like doing this? Do I like these people? Do I like these friends."

I had a couple friends who were very... several who are, who I discovered when I came out of my warm vanilla, pudding solitude, I experienced their energy to be very pushy. That they were like missiles. They were sending texts all the time. They were sending invites all the time. And I tried a couple sort of subtle like, "Hey, you know, I'm working on a book and I need some space." And I recently read that you can do with people, something called the "no test". Which is that when you make a new acquaintance or you have a new relationship to try out a 'no' on them and see how it goes.



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Martha Beck: Oh, cool.

Liz Gilbert: And if they react violently or self pityingly or pushing against that no, that's a relationship you're going to want to discontinue because it's not going to get any better. Right.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: So I did some "no testing" on some people where I was like, "Hey, I'm really kind of in my zone right now and I'm not doing anything." And when the text came the next week, "Well, how about next week? Can we do this? Can we do that?" I finally realized, "Wow. I have to ask some people to leave my life."

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: And I did. I mean, if you'd shown me this video or audio as a 30 year old and said, you will someday become a person who contacts somebody who they have been a friend with for a long time and says, "Hey, listen, I want to let you know that I'm shutting my life down a lot because I've discovered that I really, mostly just love being alone. And I want more of that. And so, I've really reduced my social circle to about six people. I see that you keep coming in and asking for more contact and I don't want to ghost you. And I don't want to be constantly saying no to you. I just want to let you know that I think I really just am going to ask that you step back and let me just live my quiet life now."

And I did that a bunch of times after the pandemic and I did it as with as much kindness as I could, but they weren't stopping coming at me.

And I had to stop it or else I was going to lose my vanilla pudding.

Martha Beck: And it's really interesting that the technologies that we now enjoy, were helping people come at you.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: I just read this book by Katherine May who self-diagnosed at, I think 38, on the autism spectrum. And she's a brilliant writer. And she talks about how she learned to mask her extreme sensitivity in her. And she would have these things called white outs where she just couldn't cope with all the data coming into her brain. She didn't know she was on the spectrum. She didn't know that till much later, but one of the things she said that struck me as, so why didn't I think of that, was that she said, "If I had been born 150 years ago, it wouldn't have been a great time to be a woman, but



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there would not be flashing lights everywhere. There would not be friendships with 200 people. There would not be jet lag."

She said, "All the things that trigger me would not have existed 150 years ago. There wouldn't have been that many people. There wouldn't have been the ability for them to get in touch with you." And it's kind of like the pandemic pulled back the culture, which is pulling back the patriarchy, which I think we have agreed is the root of the problem. Not you guys. We love you, but the patriarchy, which is going to kill you too. It wants you to be cannon fodder. So yeah. I mean can you just decide not to come back fully into that flashing lights culture?

Liz Gilbert:

That's what I've done. And I got off social media too. Which I felt scared and disobedient when I did that too. I was like, "Who do you think you are? This is the most important communication of the age." Right. But it didn't make me feel good. I really was like, "Wow, there's nothing for me here. This makes me feel sick. I think it makes everybody feel sick actually. But it makes me feel sick. And I have to go now. I have to get a divorce from social media." Even though it was the same feelings I had when I got divorced from my first husband, which was like, "Are you allowed to? Don't you have to... Didn't you commit, you've got all these followers don't you have to." And I really question now, any voice that I have internalized that tells me, "You have to." Anything. I really pause. And I'm like, "Do I?, Do I really? Because my God doesn't tell me that. My God has never told me anything that begins with you have to." I'm more aligned these days with you get to.

Martha Beck:

Yeah.

Liz Gilbert:

You get to get off social media if you want to. You get to ask boundary pushers to step back. You get to spend time alone. If that's what feels yummy to you.

Martha Beck:

I once knew a horse whisperer who said he wanted to take out of his life, the phrase, "You must or I will hurt you." And I just read this brilliant book called the Dawn of Everything by two David's. I don't remember their last names. Two David people wrote it together and they looked at anthropology and archeology to see why the world is so effed up right now. And it's a 700 page book. It's a vast trove of research. And what they found out was that everything started to go wrong. The culture started taking over other people, a certain specific culture. They go back to Rome. And what they say is this was the first time somebody could say, "I love you as your father. And I will hurt you." The other tribes and things they looked at, they might hurt people. And they had kids, but they never hurt their kids ever.



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People from Native American communities would talk to anthropologists and say, "We never hit or yelled at a child before you people came. And now it's like a toxin that spreads through the whole thing." So that 'you must, or I will hurt you'... Do a deep dive if you feel weird around anything or anybody. And see if there's a trace of, 'I must, or it will hurt me.' And it loves me. Like all your followers on Facebook who would get enraged when you disappeared, that's saying, "No, you must, or we will attack you." And if it has that energy to it... They weren't talking about feminism. They were talking about why we're about to crash and burn, like the fall of Rome.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Rome fell because of that. And now we've got it going again.

Martha Beck: Like we had a president who said, "A lot of you must, or I will hurt you." While he was in office.

Liz Gilbert: He just the loudest vocalization of...

Martha Beck: Sure.

Liz Gilbert: What this culture has always been.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah. He's just its ultimate metastatic- I can't say that.

Martha Beck: We were thinking of doing an entire podcast with our tongues glued to our mouth.

Liz Gilbert: We thought that would be fun for everybody.

Martha Beck: We just... That was the best baby talk.

I will answer your question in two ways. First is sociology...

Any section [inaudible 00:42:41].

Liz Gilbert: The question that I have for everybody listening is have you inherited a belief that you're not allowed to feel well? I really did inherit that belief that you're not allowed to feel well. Who do you think you are? And you're allowed to feel good. And there are lots of things that this culture provides. That'll make you feel good. Like lots of intoxicants, lots of sedatives, lots of distractions, lots of things to consume that'll make you feel good. You'll get that good, good hit. But that's not the same as feeling well, and



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there are days now where I don't necessarily feel good, but I feel well. I heard it explained that you could be... There are times in my past where I felt really good, but I wasn't doing well. Cause I was consuming a lot of things that made me feel good, but I was not at my essence doing well and now I'm doing really well. And sometimes I don't feel good because I'm feeling my feelings and I feel sad or I feel lonely or I feel angry and doesn't feel good. But, but I'm doing really well. That's largely because I can feel...

Martha Beck: Yeah. Feelings. It works better than wine. Think of that. And I think Ro and I have been talking about this. I'm writing about self-regulation and how all of those are attempts to self-regulate. When you find somebody who's... You weren't an alcoholic or anything. People don't get the idea that Liz is a drug addict or whatever...

Liz Gilbert: But I'm an addict.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Of situations. Of relations.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah. I'm an addict. Yeah, for sure. And I've used more substances than I would like to admit to regulate myself.

Martha Beck: Yeah. But, but here's the thing. If you're out there doing this and you don't see the way out, don't kick out the person who is trying to regulate your entire inner system. If you talk to them as a separate part of yourself, you'll find out they're doing their absolute best. And they're trying to give you signals. Like, "We're sick, we're sick. We don't like this, but we will regulate in this unhealthy way if we have to. It's better than you dying."

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: So, we've been talking about self-regulating and looking at all the things we use to regulate. I think you called it bottom line behaviors once. And then there are behaviors that are much better at coping. So, Ro said something the other day about just feeling that something that really helped stabilize things. No, couldn't do it anymore.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Like carbohydrates or something. Because she's got insulin resistance.

Rowan Mangan: No, I decided I wasn't going to have a glass of wine in the evening anymore for a while because I could feel myself waiting for like knock off and have a glass of wine. And it was more like it was in my mind too much. I was sick of like being like, "We have



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our wine time and I have a nice glass of wine." And then I was like, "But if I don't, what's that going to be like?"

Martha Beck: And what was it... because I'm interested in hearing from both of you, when you take away the familiar patterns that help you cope with living in the patriarchy. What I think will happen is you'll suffer enough that you will tolerate the culture no more. So, I love what you said, Liz, about how anti-anxiety medications, wine, whatever is helping people regulate and feel okay in a situation culture.

Liz Gilbert: That's not okay.

Martha Beck: That is toxic.

Rowan Mangan: Wait, could you give some examples of what they might be if they're not actually substances? What are other ways that we regulate? Cause substances is easy. People will be able to go, oh yeah, for sure.

Martha Beck: Watching TV, flipping through your phone. Oh my gosh. The dopamine hit from flipping through your phone. We had...

Rowan Mangan: Such a drug.

Martha Beck: I had a game that had amazing haptics. It made my hand feel like the world was happening in it. And they knew they had something because when you go to renew your lives, it's not \$5. It's like a hundred dollars. And I was like, "I must. It's shiny. It makes my hand feel the world." And yeah, that was my regulator for a while. And then Karen came and said, oh, about these charges. I was like...I'll delete it. But it was hard.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah. You probably went through withdrawal.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I did.

Liz Gilbert: I went through withdrawal when I got off Instagram, like real withdrawal.

Martha Beck: Really? Was that? Like?

Liz Gilbert: I felt incredibly uncomfortable, lonely, sad, scared, jacked up, agitated. Mostly fear for me. Anything that I've ever put down, which is the sort of recovery term for like not using it anymore, has come with a period of withdrawal that has, for me always felt like fear.

Martha Beck: Wow.



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Liz Gilbert: Like "What will I do now? How will I be okay if I don't have this thing?"

Martha Beck: What did you do with that? When you got off Instagram?

Liz Gilbert: I felt it.

Martha Beck: Oh, that.

Liz Gilbert: I felt it. And that's when I knew that for me, this had become a drug because I was going through the withdrawal of, I don't have my drug. I don't have my comfort. So I sat through it and I felt it. I sat there and I felt that the shakiness, the jerkiness of wanting to reach for this thing, I felt the sense of I'm not connected anymore. I'm not relevant anymore. I don't know what's going on in the more in the world. Nobody cares about me. I'll be forgotten - all of these deep, psychological withdrawals. And then after a couple weeks, I mean, it was really typical for the first few days. And then it settled, then it settled. And then what filled it was just well, vanilla pudding.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: Back came my initial factory settings. Of, "Oh my God. The world is so beautiful. I'm going to go for a really long walk." And I had been wanting, I'd been asking my higher power and my guides and my muses to send me an idea for a novel. I'd been asking for two years, for two years.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: I'd written in my journal almost every day, "Hey, anytime you guys have an idea for me for a novel, I would love one." And they would write back, "When we've got an idea for you you'll be notified." That was the conversation that I had for two years. And I have enough trust of my creative process to believe I'll be notified. They'll let me know and then I'll do it. I'll do what they tell me. Two weeks after I got off on Instagram.... Got off Instagram. Got off on Instagram, was what I used to be doing. Got off Instagram. The idea came.

Martha Beck: Wow.

Liz Gilbert: For the book that I'm now almost finished with.

Martha Beck: Isn't that...



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- Liz Gilbert: It's like, there was no room for it. Right? So I had to get rid of this thing so that I could create this spaciousness for this thing that I didn't even know what it was that was going to come in.
- Martha Beck: Wow. I love it when that happens. This actually happened. Ro stopped drinking a glass of wine ever. It was not usually a big deal for her anyway, but immediately got the plot of another novel. And it's really, really good.
- Rowan Mangan: It's something about like being available, right? Yeah. It's like, you're not available for whatever guidance or opportunity or whatever.
- Liz Gilbert: And you guys being present is incredibly uncomfortable. That's the thing, like, I love that Pema Chödrön talks about this, because she says, "People always think that meditation is going to make them calm. And ultimately it will," because she said, "Essentially what happens is you've got this mind that's like the surface of a lake with a big wind whipping across it. So it's without white caps and spray flowing and all this stuff and it's chaotic. And then you go into meditation and breath work, and that water settles. And then the surface of the lake is clear and people think that's going to make them calm. But it doesn't because now you can see what's at the bottom of the lake. You can see the shipwreck and the industrial waste and the garbage and like the corpses and everything that you've been not seeing."
- Rowan Mangan: Right.
- Liz Gilbert: Right. So to actually be present. I wrote about this in ***Eat, Pray, Love*** how I was crawling out of my skin at the Ashram, sitting in meditation on and on. It's uncomfortable if you're not used to feeling.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Liz Gilbert: It's uncomfortable to sit and feel, but what happens if you can sit and feel and become an antenna that receives signals, is that you start to receive signals.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Liz Gilbert: Suddenly you've got inspiration. Suddenly you've got ideas. Like everything... You're available, but it's not necessarily, this is why I say there are days that I don't feel good, but I always feel well.



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And when I don't feel good, when I feel sad or alone or hurt or angry, and sometimes I'm afraid I'll get carried away by it these days. I just think. "How incredible that I used to not be able to let myself feel this.

I would've reached for. I mean, I had a subscription for Xanax for... Prescription... subscription. It came every month. I mean, I had Xanax and I always had an emergency Xanax in every pocket book that I ever owned. Long back when I was standing on stage, giving people life coaching advice, I had Xanax in my pocket. Because the minute those feelings of discomfort would come up, I'd be like, "That's got to stop."

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: I had this last night. Last night I went through this wave of just, I don't know why, like things come in waves. I went through this wave of sorrow. I was thinking about Rayya and I was laying there in bed and my heart ached. I could feel it, my physical heart was aching in grief. And I thought, "Wow. There was a time a couple years ago where I would've just reached right over into this right into this very bed stand and there would've been sleeping pills and there would've been Xanax and I would've created some sort of combo." And then I would've gone downstairs and made some buttered noodles and I would've muffled and suffocated this feeling any way that I could because it hurts.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: But instead last night I just laid there and I felt "this hurts." And I thought what a rare bliss it is to be able to finally feel all the feelings that my culture has told me are not allowed. This is the hurt of pain. I knew I was going to see you guys today. I always feel nostalgic for Rayya when I see you because she loved you so much. I always feel so sad that she's not in the car with me coming to see you. And I was feeling that last night and I just felt it. I had one hand on my heart and because when I get a lot of grief, I get like a cramp in my shoulder because it's almost like a tiny little heart attack.

Right. Whenever people have heart attacks, they feel it down their arm. So, I get a cramp in my shoulder and down my arm. So I had one hand on my heart and the other one just holding my shoulder. And I just laid there and I just kept saying to that pain. I see you. I see you. And I love you. I see you. And I'm not going anywhere. I see you. I see you. I know. I see you. That hurts. Doesn't it. I see you. I see you. I see you. And within 45 minutes or an hour, which might seem like a really long time to be in pain, but it settled. Because it just needed to be seen and loved.



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Martha Beck: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: And it didn't have to be muffled. It didn't have to be peeled away. And then I fell asleep and I got to come over here without a hangover from taking sleeping pills last night.

Rowan Mangan: Right.

Liz Gilbert: And feeling like, wow, it's amazing that I loved somebody that much, that all these years later, just knowing that I'm going to drive to see her favorite people without her makes my heart hurt. It should make my heart hurt. That is an accurate feeling. So that's what I'm learning about my hypersensitivity is that all of these feelings that I medicated and when you were saying, what did you use if not drugs? I used people. That's why I was always in such intense relationships. I used people as sedatives. I used people as stimulants. I used people as sedatives and I used Rayya as a sedative and a stimulant. She was a speedball right. She was heroin and cocaine. I used people to regulate my nervous system.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Liz Gilbert: And now what I consider sobriety for me is any day where I don't use anybody to change my internal life is a day where I'm emotionally sober.

Rowan Mangan: Wow.

Martha Beck: Wow. And that is like balancing on the head of a pin. Right.

Liz Gilbert: It's wild. It's a wild experience to be alive. It's supposed to be.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I don't know if you would agree with this, but one of the things that I find with that, letting yourself feel it, stuff that Marty introduced me to this idea of shards. Where I remember when I don't know... We hadn't been together long. I was having a day of feeling it. And, what Marty said to me, which felt so true and continues to feel true for me is she said, "You've been feeling this this whole time anyway. That is something that you have been carrying around every day. And now it's coming out, which really gets your attention and you really feel it, but it's a shard. And then when it comes out, it's one less shard that you're carrying around and that you'll be that much lighter. And this is just the time to let it work its way out." And part of it is that, wow. It makes the feeling it, so much easier on me. And it has been my experience that after not distracting, not doping, not picking up the phone, not



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picking up the pills, that I do feel lighter after letting myself... and I think about the Pema Chödrön metaphor of the ocean is that I think the water gets a little bit clearer each time. Right. Because you've pulled one of the corpses out.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah. You're pulling out the 55 gallon drum filled with toxic waste. Right. And you're cleaning it up. But yeah, the first glimpse, when you look down and for the first time you see it without distraction, it can be shocking. It's jolting.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: And it's all part of you.

Liz Gilbert: Yeah.

Martha Beck: So each shard is a part of you. It's like something very traumatic happens. Part splits off and becomes the carrier for that pain. And then it may start drinking or something. And you feel like you are not in control because it's not what you identify as self. It's a shard. And what you just said so brilliantly Liz and I left out of what I told you is, as the shard comes out, no matter how it hurts, it is something innocent that wants your love. It doesn't matter if... Rayya had years of addiction on heroin and cocaine. There wasn't a single time she took a hit of drugs that it wasn't an innocent person trying to take care of the whole world.

Liz Gilbert: Absolutely.

Martha Beck: So to look at each shard, as it comes out and not even say, "Oh, I'm so glad you're gone, but I see you. I love you. You can come back if you like." And what happens when you do that practice is that all the little shards come back. The corpses come out and the toxic waste comes out. But then there are like beautiful urns that are carried by mermaids around them. You go into the mystical, magical part of your brain. And because all those shards are available to do whatever you want. And what they want to do is create. And we all create partly because we're super sensitive, we couldn't tolerate life. It was making us super sick. And then we started loving our shards. And those shards said, "How about we write a book?" Some of them just said, "I didn't want to go and kiss the baby." And that's good too.

Liz Gilbert: I just want to snuggle.

Martha Beck: Should we go cuddles a bit?

Rowan Mangan: I think we should.



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. So at the end, traditionally, do you feel complete?
- Rowan Mangan: I feel complete. Do you feel complete Lizzy?
- Liz Gilbert: I feel complete whenever I'm with you two.
- Rowan Mangan: Aww.
- Martha Beck: Aww.
- Liz Gilbert: For real.
- Martha Beck: We didn't even get to...
- Liz Gilbert: You're my vanilla pudding friends.
- Martha Beck: Choosing friend as family, which is another thing you've done. And it's a whole another topic we could get into on, in a different hour.
- Liz Gilbert: Let's get her back. Now that we've got the microphone.
- Martha Beck: All right. So we have to say stay wild in unison at the end. So 1, 2, 3, stay wild.
- Rowan Mangan: We hope you're enjoying Bewildered. If you're in the USA and want to be notified when a new episode comes out, text the word, WILD, to 570-873-0144. We're also on Instagram. Our handle is @bewilderedpodcast. You can follow us to get updates, hear funny snippets and outtakes, and chat with other fans of the show.

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