THE WOMEN BEFORE ME

A Seat at the Tea Room

A Sampler of Letters, Recipes, and Small Practices

From Letters From The Tea Room,
the publication of The Women Before Me

WELCOME

A Welcome, and What Is Inside

This sampler gathers a few of the pieces our readers return to most: the story of a muse, a recipe from our Sunday table, and two small practices for living on purpose. They were first published in *Letters From The Tea Room*, our weekly publication, where every Tuesday brings the story of a remarkable woman from history and every Sunday brings a recipe and a question for the community.

If you are new here, begin anywhere. Each piece stands on its own, and together they will show you the shape of this house: memory, nourishment, intention, and generosity, most weeks in that order. Take what serves your season, and leave the rest for another day. The kettle stays on.

With warmth, Shanice

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FROM THE MUSE ARCHIVE

Mary Seacole: The Mother of the Crimean

Mary Seacole arrived in the world in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1805, in a household where care was both a calling and a craft. Her mother ran a boarding house for officers and their families, and alongside that hospitality she practiced healing, drawing on Jamaican and Creole traditions of nursing and herbal knowledge. Mary learned at her side. She watched how a clean room, a warm meal, a steady hand, and close attention could change the course of an illness, and she learned early that healing was not only about medicine. It was about presence.

That education became her livelihood. As a young woman she helped run her mother's hotel and healing practice, building a reputation of her own for skill and composure. She was also restless and curious, and she traveled widely. Her journeys took her to Panama, where she nursed people through outbreaks of cholera and other illness, often in difficult and frightening conditions. Those years tested her. They also confirmed something she already believed: that when institutions moved slowly or not at all, one prepared woman could still go where she was needed and begin.

When war broke out in the Crimea, Mary understood at once where she belonged. Soldiers were dying not only from their wounds but from disease, cold, and neglect, and she offered her services through official channels in London. She was turned away. Again and again, the doors she knocked on stayed closed. Many women in her position might have accepted that answer and stayed home, sad but obedient. Mary did not.

Instead, she traveled at her own expense to the Crimea and set up the British Hotel near Balaclava. The name can mislead modern readers. It was not a hotel in the leisure sense. It was a store, a kitchen, a canteen, a place of rest, and a base for her nursing work. There she provided food, supplies, and comfort to officers and ordinary soldiers alike, and from there she went out to the battlefield itself. She carried provisions and medical supplies into dangerous places, tended the wounded where they fell, and comforted men who knew they would not survive. The soldiers gave her a name that said everything about how they experienced her care. They called her Mother Seacole.

Her rhythm of grace was practical, unshowy, and relentless. She rose to meet the day as it was, not as she wished it would be. She cooked. She cleaned. She bandaged. She listened. She kept accounts, ordered supplies, and managed a business in the middle of a war, because care without organization does not last long. There was tenderness in her work, but there was also discipline. She believed comfort should be reliable, that a sick or frightened person should be able to count on soup being

hot, bedding being clean, and a familiar voice returning when promised. Grace, for Mary, was not a mood. It was a rhythm she kept, even when she was tired, even when resources were thin, even when no authority had thanked her or authorized her to be there.

That rhythm is why she opens our Healing month. Mary invites us to look at the smaller, faithful acts that make recovery possible: a nourishing meal, a safe place to rest, a hand that does not flinch. Readers who gather with us in the Tea Room community will recognize that spirit.

What she teaches us is, first, that rejection is not the same as disqualification. The officials who turned Mary away did not have the final word on her usefulness. She assessed her own gifts honestly, prepared herself thoroughly, and went anyway, at personal cost. Second, she teaches us that care and enterprise are not opposites. Her business sense funded and sustained her mercy. Selling provisions was not separate from her healing mission. It was how the mission survived. Third, she teaches us that mothering, in its widest sense, is a form of leadership. To feed, to shelter, to sit with suffering without turning away: these are not soft extras to serious work. In Mary's life, they were the serious work.

Mary Seacole died in London in 1881. We remember her now not as a footnote to someone else's war, but as a woman who built a place of care where there had been none, and who kept showing up until the work was done. May we learn to do the same, one faithful act of care at a time.

Sources Seacole, M. (1857), Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands. The Mary Seacole Trust.

FROM AFTERNOON TEA, EDITION 7

The Comfort of Curry

Some dishes feed a household. Others seem to gather it. Curry belongs to the second kind. Long before it reaches the table, the kitchen has already changed. Garlic and onion soften in warm oil, curry powder blooms in the heat, and the whole house knows that someone has taken time, real time, to make a meal that cannot be rushed.

This week we have been sitting with Mary Seacole, the Jamaican born nurse who carried care across oceans and onto a battlefield. It feels right to honor her at our table with a Jamaican curry, a dish rooted in home cooking, patience, and resourcefulness. Mary understood that nourishment was part of healing. A hot, well seasoned meal told a tired soldier that he had not been forgotten. In our own homes, it can say the same thing to a weary mother, a neighbor in grief, or a friend who has had a long and quiet week of carrying too much alone.

Curry also teaches us something gentle about care. The seasoning goes on early. The pot is watched. The heat is adjusted, lowered, lifted again. Nothing about it is instant, and that is the point. Care, in a family lineage, is rarely a grand gesture. More often it is a recipe learned by standing beside someone, a hand remembering how much salt is enough, a pot brought to a door without a speech attached.

If you make this dish this week, consider making a little extra. Set some aside for someone outside your own table. That small, deliberate abundance is one of the oldest languages women speak, and you can share more of those kitchen stories with us at The Women Before Me, where our Journal themes return again and again to the tables that raised us.

Recipe: Jamaican Curry Chicken Serves 4 to 6. You may use the same method with goat, allowing extra simmering time until tender.

Ingredients: 3 pounds bone in chicken pieces, skin removed; juice of half a lime; 1 teaspoon salt; 1 teaspoon black pepper; 3 tablespoons Jamaican curry powder, divided; 1 teaspoon ground allspice; 3 cloves garlic, minced; 1 medium onion, sliced; 4 scallions, chopped; 1 sprig fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon dried; 1 Scotch bonnet pepper, whole, optional; 2 tablespoons vegetable oil; 2 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks; 1 large carrot, sliced; 2 cups hot water or light chicken stock.

Method: Wash the chicken with lime juice and water, drain well, and season with salt, pepper, 2 tablespoons curry powder, allspice, garlic, onion, scallions, and thyme. Cover and marinate for at least 1 hour, or overnight. Heat the oil in a heavy pot over medium heat and stir in the remaining

curry powder for about 1 minute, until fragrant. Add the chicken pieces, reserving the marinade vegetables, and brown lightly. Add the reserved vegetables, potatoes, carrot, and hot water or stock. Place the whole Scotch bonnet on top if using, taking care not to break it. Cover, lower the heat, and simmer for 35 to 45 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through and the sauce has thickened. Remove the pepper and thyme sprig, taste for salt, and serve warm with white rice or rice and peas.

What dish represents 'Care' in your family lineage?

Journaling Through Life Transitions

Some seasons announce themselves. A new home, a new role, a goodbye you did not choose, a beginning you prayed for and still feel unready to hold. Others change quietly, until one morning you realize the life you were living no longer fits the woman you are becoming.

Journaling will not hurry a transition or tidy it into something neat. What it can do is give the change a place to sit down. A notebook becomes a small, honest room where you can tell the truth before you know what the truth means. You need a page, a few minutes, and permission to write badly.

Here is one simple framework to begin. It has three movements, and you can complete it in about ten minutes.

First, name the season. At the top of the page, write one plain sentence about where you are. Not the polished version, the true one. For example: I am leaving a job I outgrew. I am caring for everyone and feel tired. I am starting again and I am hopeful and afraid. Naming is not solving. It is simply refusing to carry the season unnamed, where it grows heavier than it needs to be.

Second, sort what is yours. Draw two short lists. In the first, write what is ending or changing, exactly as it is. In the second, write what remains steady: a value, a relationship, a strength, a practice, a belief you are not releasing. Transitions often make everything feel unstable at once. This second list reminds you, in your own handwriting, that change in one part of a life is not the loss of the whole life.

Third, choose one small next step. Not a five year plan. One step small enough to take this week, written as a sentence you can finish. Send the email. Rest on Sunday afternoon. Open the box. Book the appointment. Call the friend.

Then close the page. This matters more than beginners expect. A journaling practice has a beginning and an end, so the feelings you visit on the page do not have to follow you through every hour of the day. You can return tomorrow. The page will keep what you left there.

If you miss days, and you will, do not start over and do not apologize to the notebook. Simply write the date and begin again with the first movement. The practice is not a streak to protect. It is a path to return to, and returning is itself a skill worth building in a season when so much else is unfamiliar.

One small practice to begin today: set a timer for five minutes this evening and write only your first sentence, the plain naming of your season, followed by one item for each list. That is enough. Five

true minutes are worth more than an imagined perfect routine you never start.

Over time, these pages become a record you can trust. You will be able to look back and see that you were not stuck, you were in passage, and passage, however slow, is movement. The women before us crossed their seasons without maps for much of it. Your journal can be the beginning of a map, drawn honestly, one page at a time.

The Wealth of Time

Most of us would never hand a stranger our wallet and tell her to spend as she pleases. Yet many of us hand over our weeks in almost exactly that way. Meetings multiply, requests arrive, screens absorb the leftover minutes, and by Friday we say the sentence every busy woman knows by heart: I do not know where the time went.

A new year is the right moment to treat time like the wealth it is. Not to squeeze it, punish it, or fill every corner of it. To budget it, the way a careful household budgets money: honestly, in advance, and according to what actually matters.

The Framework: A Simple Time Budget

A household budget begins with income. Your time income is fixed and famously fair. You receive 168 hours each week, and so does everyone else. Sleep, work, family, and care will claim much of it, and that is not failure. That is life. The budget begins when you stop pretending the hours are unlimited and start assigning the ones that remain.

Work in four steps.

First, list your accounts. Name the few categories that deserve funding this season: rest, family, deep work, friendship, health, home, and learning is a good starting list. Keep it short. A budget with thirty categories is a wish list, not a plan.

Second, audit last week. Not from memory, because memory flatters us. Look at your calendar and, honestly, at your screen habits. Where did the unassigned hours actually go? An audit is not an accusation. It is information, the same way a bank statement is information. You cannot redirect what you refuse to look at.

Third, assign before the week begins. Give each account a specific home on the calendar, even a small one. Two hours of deep work, one evening fully off, one call with a friend, thirty minutes with a book. Money left unassigned tends to disappear, and so does time. Assigned hours have a chance of surviving contact with Monday.

Fourth, review weekly and adjust without drama. A good budget is not a contract you fail. It is a tool you tune. If rest was underfunded three weeks in a row, that is not a character flaw. It is a line item asking to be corrected.

One Small Practice

Try this week: choose one hour, and only one, and protect it the way you would protect a bill you must pay. Put it on the calendar, tell anyone who needs to know, and spend it on the account that has been most underfunded lately. Reading, resting, walking, or working deeply all count. One protected hour will teach you more about your real priorities than a month of good intentions.

Time is the one currency every woman in this community holds in common, rich and poor alike. Spend yours like it belongs to you, because it does. The year ahead will be built from weeks, and weeks are built from hours you chose on purpose.

THE HOUSE COMMITMENT

Our Covenant

At The Women Before Me, we dedicate 15% of our profits to a pooled fund supporting charities that create a better life for women and girls worldwide. Our partners are CAMFED, Love Missions Global, and WE LEAP. It is our covenant: kindness is the ultimate chic, because it requires the most discipline.

This covenant stands behind everything we make: the letters, the gatherings, and every piece in the collection.

FROM THE TUESDAY ESSAYS

The Legacy Library: A Starter Shelf

Every Tuesday essay in the Tea Room closes with a book from the Legacy Library, a reading list a woman can begin the same evening. These five are the shelf to start with.

Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands (1857), by Mary Seacole

Begin with Mary's own voice. It is warm, observant, and quietly brave, and there is no better way to know her than to let her tell you, in her own words, where she went and why she stayed.

For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria (1997), by Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba

This biography places her organizing in its full context and restores the women around her to the story, which is precisely where she would have wanted them.

My Experience as a Legislator (1964), by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy

A rare and valuable thing: a reformer explaining, in her own words, how change is actually made, and how long it can honestly take.

On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker (2001), by A'Lelia Bundles

Written by Walker's great-great-granddaughter, it remains the essential biography, careful with the record and alive to the woman behind the legend.

Motherwit: An Alabama Midwife's Story (1989), by Onnie Lee Logan

Onnie Lee Logan's own account of learning midwifery from her mother and serving her Alabama community. Read it slowly. It is skilled work, faithfully remembered, in a woman's own words.

THE INVITATION

Your Seat Inside

The Tea Room does not end at the page. Inside the app, the conversation continues out loud, in the company of women across generations.

There you will find **voice journals** for telling your story in your own voice; **MentorMatch**, which pairs women so a question can meet the woman who has already lived its answer; the **SelfCareTracker** for tending to yourself on purpose; discussion rooms for healing, career, relationships, purpose, and home; and more than ten gatherings every week, from book conversations to quiet reflection.

Your seat is already saved. Come as you are.

iPhone: https://apps.apple.com/us/app/the-women-before-me/id6759931775

Android: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.base6994869c0173bc45e9583f79.app

On the web: https://app.thewomenbeforeme.org

A Seat at the Tea Room is a sampler of Letters From The Tea Room, the publication of The Women Before Me (thewomenbeforeme.org). The essays, recipe, and practices are drawn from the publication's pages; the covenant is quoted in the words of our About page.