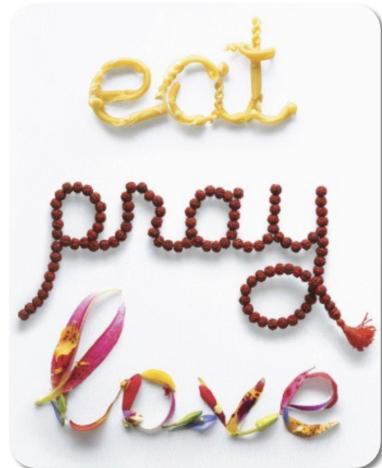


# Eat Pray Love

---

(a summary by Pat Evert)

**W**ho gets to do such a thing? Who has twelve free months to spare, just to kick around the globe? Who has the freedom or the money for that? I'd forgotten the punishing shame of what it feels like to have failed at marriage, or what it feels like to have failed at life. **"What if your life belongs to you?"** And that was the moment when I knew. I would never have a child of my own. I could love children; I could delight in children; I could help other women take care of their children . . . but I would never have one myself. I was literally and emotionally heading in a different direction. I was going off to become something else in this world—I did not yet know what—but not a mother. It was a glorious moment. **I don't think marriage is supposed to be an endurance contest.** Indeed marriage is a contract, but in most of the modern world, it is a voluntary contract. We often forget this fact. We marry these days for love and for companionship—otherwise, we don't need it. These are not easy questions, by the way. They are merely the biggest and oldest questions of any human life: **Who am I? Who does my life belong to? What is my relationship to divinity? What have I come here to do?** Do I have the right to change my own path? With whom do I want to share my path—if anyone? Do I have the right to experience pleasure and peace? If so, what would bring me pleasure and peace?



## • Italy - Say it like you eat it, or the Pursuit of Pleasure

I had just come through a failed marriage and a devastating, interminable divorce, followed immediately by a passionate love affair that ended in sickening heartbreak. This is why, in fact, I have decided to spend this entire year in celibacy. I found a nice Italian young man to be my language tutor in Rome. But Giovanni and I, we only talk. Well, we eat and we talk.

Three years earlier I decided that *I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to live in this big house. I don't want to have a baby.* How could I be such a criminal jerk as to proceed this deep into a marriage, only to leave it? We'd only just bought this house a year ago. Hadn't I wanted this nice house? Hadn't I loved it? I don't want to be married anymore. My husband was sleeping in the other room, in our bed. I was acting like a

madwoman. I equal parts loved him and could not stand him. **There are always two figures in a marriage—two votes, two opinions, two conflicting sets of decisions, desires and limitations.** I started to pray... to God.

Now, this was a first for me. And this is the first time I have introduced that loaded word —GOD—into my book. I feel all names for God are equal because they are all equally adequate and inadequate descriptions of the indescribable. I respond with gratitude to anyone who has ever voyaged to the center of that heart, and who has then returned to the world with a report for the rest of us that **God is an experience of supreme love.**

Then I heard a voice. It was merely my own voice, speaking from within my own self. But this was my voice as I had never heard it before. The voice said: Go back to bed, Liz. **Go back to bed, because the only thing you need to do for now is get some rest and take good care of yourself until you do know the answer.**

Seven very difficult months later, I did leave my husband. I moved right in with David after I left my husband. He was—is—a gorgeous young man. But, oh, we had such a great time together during those early months when he was still my romantic hero and I was still his living dream. On September 9, 2001, I met with my husband face-to-face for the last time, not realizing that every future meeting would necessitate lawyers between us, to mediate. Two mornings later I woke up after a troubled night's sleep to find that hijacked airplanes were crashing into the two tallest buildings of my city, as everything invincible that had once stood together now became a smoldering avalanche of ruin. This is when he started to retreat, sudden emotional back-stepping. This was my very worst of circumstances. I was despondent and dependent, needing more care than an armful of premature infant triplets. **His withdrawal only made me more needy, and my neediness only advanced his withdrawals.** The fact is, I had become addicted to David. When the drug is withheld, you promptly turn sick, crazy and depleted, not to mention resentful. Meanwhile, the object of your adoration has now become repulsed by you. **You have now reached infatuation's final destination—the complete and merciless devaluation of self.** I came to fear nighttime like it was a torturer's cellar. I would lie there beside David's beautiful, inaccessible sleeping body and I would spin into **a panic of loneliness.**

David and I had broken up for good. But some wonderful things did happen to me in the shadow of all that sorrow. For one thing, I finally started learning Italian. Also, I found an Indian Guru. Lastly, I was invited by an elderly medicine man to come and live with him in Indonesia.

My heart stood up and announced: "I want a spiritual teacher." Then I started meditating every morning on the ancient Sanskrit mantra the Guru gives to all her students (the regal Om Namah Shivaya, meaning, "**I honor the divinity that resides within me**"). And when I heard she had an Ashram in India, I knew I must take myself there as quickly as possible.

I went on a trip to Indonesia. There I visited a medicine man, Ketut Liyer, who advised me, “you must stop looking at the world through your head. **You must look through your heart**, instead. That way, you will know God.”

I wanted to travel to Italy, India and Indonesia. Four months in each place. A year in total. I wanted to explore the art of pleasure in Italy, the art of devotion in India and, in Indonesia, the art of balancing the two. After months of my husband holding out for a better deal of divorce he finally signed it. I was free to go.

I have quit my job, paid off my divorce settlement and legal bills, given up my house, given up my apartment, put what belongings I had left into storage in my sister’s place and packed up two suitcases. My year of traveling has commenced. And I can actually afford to do this because of a staggering personal miracle: in advance, my publisher has purchased the book I shall write about my travels. So now I am a resident of Rome.

I visited libraries, bookstores and so many of Rome’s fountains and tasted some of its best gelatos. Despite all the disagreeable encounters of traveling, it is the great true love of my life. So I began my schooling of the Italian language.

For the longest time, Italy wasn’t even a country. Parts of Italy belonged to France, parts to Spain, parts to the Church, parts to whoever could grab the local fortress or palace. The Italian people were alternatively humiliated and cavalier about all this domination. In the sixteenth century, some Italian intellectuals got together and decided that this was absurd. This Italian peninsula needed an Italian language, at least in the written form, which everyone could agree upon. They handpicked the most beautiful of all the local dialects and crowned it Italian. It principally came from the fourteenth-century vernacular of the great Florentine poet Dante Alighieri.

**Depression and Loneliness** track me down after about ten days in Italy. I say to them, “How did you find me here? Who told you I had come to Rome?” Depression, always the wise guy, says, “What—you’re not happy to see us?” **They empty my pockets of any joy I had been carrying there. Depression even confiscates my identity**; but he always does that. **Then Loneliness starts interrogating me**, which I dread because it always goes on for hours. He’s polite but relentless, and he always trips me up eventually. why I ruined my marriage, why I messed things up with David, why I messed things up with every man I’ve ever been with. Loneliness watches and sighs, then climbs into my bed and pulls the covers over himself, fully dressed, shoes and all. **He’s going to make me sleep with him again tonight**, I just know it.

I’d stopped taking my medication. It had just seemed crazy to be taking antidepressants in Italy. What a large number of factors constitute a single human being! How very many layers we operate on, and how very many influences we receive from our minds, our bodies, our histories, our families, our cities, our souls etc! I came to feel that my depression was probably some ever-shifting assortment of all those factors. Those pills might have saved my life, but they did so only in conjunction with about twenty other

by Elizabeth Gilbert

efforts I was making simultaneously during that same period to rescue myself, and I hope to never have to take such drugs again.

In struggling again against insanity a message comes to me. **I'm here. I love you. I am stronger than Depression and I am braver than Loneliness and nothing will ever exhaust me.**

Sometimes I wonder what I'm doing here, I admit it. While I have come to Italy in order to experience pleasure. Generally speaking, though, Americans have an inability to relax into sheer pleasure. Ours is an entertainment-seeking nation, but not necessarily a pleasure-seeking one. Alarming statistics back this observation up, showing that many Americans feel more happy and fulfilled in their offices than they do in their own homes. Americans don't really know how to do nothing. This is the cause of that great sad American stereotype—the overstressed executive who goes on vacation, but who cannot relax. **Italians are the masters of bel far niente, “the beauty of doing nothing.”** I found that all I really wanted was to eat beautiful food and to speak as much beautiful Italian as possible.

When I get lonely these days, I think: **So be lonely, Liz. Learn your way around Loneliness.** Make a map of it. Sit with it, for once in your life. **Welcome to the human experience. But never again use another person's body or emotions as a scratching post for your own unfulfilled yearnings.** I could use a little break from this cycle, to give myself some space to discover what I look like and talk like when I'm not trying to merge with someone. By the time I left for Italy, my body and my spirit were depleted. I felt like the soil on some desperate sharecropper's farm, sorely overworked and needing a fallow season. So that's why I've quit.

There's a power struggle going on across Europe these days. to see who shall emerge as the great twenty-first-century European metropolis. **But Rome, it should be said, has not bothered to join the race for status.** Rome doesn't compete. I would like to be like Rome when I am an old lady. **The Augusteum warns me not to get attached to any obsolete ideas about who I am,** what I represent, whom I belong to, or what function I may once have intended to serve. Even in the Eternal City, says the silent Augusteum, one must always be prepared for riotous and endless waves of transformation.

What if we admitted that we make each other nuts, we fight constantly and hardly ever have sex, but we can't live without each other. And then we could spend our lives together—in misery, but happy to not be apart. The problem is, I'm not like my mother. There's a constant level of closeness that I really need from the person I love. But it **just destroys me to not be able to count on that affection when I need it. I'm choosing happiness over suffering, I know I am. I'm making space for the unknown future to fill up my life with yet-to-come surprises.**

Over the next six weeks, I travel to Bologna, to Florence, to Venice, to Sicily, to Sardinia, once more down to Naples, then over to Calabria. I drop out of my Italian language school, since it was keeping me stuck in the classroom instead of wandering around Italy, where I could practice with people in person. *I can go wherever I want.*

Every city has a single word that defines it, that identifies most people who live there. **“What’s Rome’s word?” I asked. “SEX.”** The Vatican isn’t part of Rome. Their word is POWER. **“What’s the word in New York City?”** I think it’s ACHIEVE. The word in Los Angeles? SUCCEED. The word on the streets of Stockholm is CONFORM. My word might be SEEK. But it might just as easily be HIDE.

None of my pants, after almost four months in Italy, fit me anymore. I have gained twenty-three pounds in my four months of Italy. About fifteen pounds of that I actually needed to gain because I had become so skeletal during these last hard years of divorce and depression. The balance I gained for fun.

I decide to spend this last week traveling through Sicily—the most third-world section of Italy, and therefore not a bad place to go if you need to prepare yourself to experience extreme poverty. With a sad Italian history of corruption by local leaders and exploitation by foreign dominators, all of which has generally led Italians to draw the seemingly accurate conclusion that nobody and nothing in this world can be trusted. Barzini says, Italians will tolerate hideously incompetent generals, presidents, tyrants, professors, bureaucrats, journalists and captains of industry, but will never tolerate incompetent “opera singers, conductors, ballerinas, courtesans, actors, film directors, cooks, tailors...” In a world of disorder and disaster and fraud, sometimes only beauty can be trusted. Only artistic excellence is incorruptible. **The idea that the appreciation of pleasure can be an anchor of one’s humanity. You were given life; it is your duty (and also your entitlement as a human being) to find something beautiful within life**, no matter how slight. I came to Italy pinched and thin. I did not know yet what I deserved. I still maybe don’t fully know what I deserve. But I do know that I have collected myself of late—through the enjoyment of harmless pleasures—into somebody much more intact. And I will leave with the hope that **the expansion of one person—the magnification of one life—is indeed an act of worth in this world.**

### • India - Congratulations to meet you, or the pursuit of devotion

We pull up to the front gate of the Ashram at 3:30 AM, right in front of the temple. I can hear the first familiar bars of my favorite Sanskrit hymn coming from inside. It’s the morning *arati*, the first morning prayer, sung every day at 3:30 AM as the Ashram wakes. I have not meditated in four months. I say the mantra to myself once very slowly and deliberately, syllable by syllable. **Om Namah Shivaya. I honor the divinity that resides within me.** when the sun finally comes up that morning in India and everyone opens their eyes and looks around, and it is as if I have been here in this flock forever.

Yoga, in Sanskrit, can be translated as “union,” to yoke. Yoga is to find union—between mind and body, between the individual and her God. The Yogic path is about disentangling the built-in glitches of the human condition, and **to sustain contentment**. **The Yogis, however, say that human discontentment is a simple case of mistaken identity.** We’re miserable because we think that we are mere individuals, alone with our fears and flaws and resentments and mortality. We wrongly believe that our limited little egos constitute our whole entire nature. We have failed to recognize our deeper divine character. We don’t realize that, somewhere within us all, there does exist a supreme Self who is eternally at peace. **That supreme Self is our true identity, universal and divine.** The manifestation of God’s creative energy—men, women, children, turnips, bedbugs, coral: **it’s all God in disguise.** But the Yogis believe a human life is a very special opportunity, because only in a human form and only with a human mind can God-realization ever occur. OK—so we are all one, and divinity abides within us all equally. No problem. Understood. But now try living from that place. Try putting that understanding into practice twenty-four hours a day. It’s not so easy.

You must show that you can work because you’ll be expected to contribute to the overall operation of the place with about five hours a day of “selfless service.” They also ask, if you have gone through a major emotional trauma in the last six months (divorce; death in the family) that you please postpone your visit to another time because chances are you won’t be able to concentrate on your studies. You’re going to be spending hours and hours a day in silent meditation and contemplation, with little distraction or relief from the apparatus of your own mind.

This is the first New Year’s Eve I can ever remember in my life where I haven’t known any of the people I was celebrating with. In all this dancing and singing, there is nobody for me to embrace at midnight. But I wouldn’t say that anything about this night has been lonely.

It’s tiring physical labor, but my daily hours of work are considerably easier than my daily hours of meditation. How quickly I swing again into obsessive worry, blowing the mood; and then it’s the remembrance of an angry moment and I start to get hot and pissed off all over again; and then my mind decides it might be a good time to start feeling sorry for itself, and loneliness follows promptly. You are, after all, what you think. **Your emotions are the slaves to your thoughts, and you are the slave to your emotions.**

When students come to her complaining that they’re having trouble meditating, the Guru always asks how their digestion has been lately. The food at the Ashram is vegetarian, light and healthy. But still delicious.

Your ego is trying to stay in charge. This is what your ego does. It keeps you feeling separate, keeps you with a sense of duality, **tries to convince you that you’re flawed and broken and alone instead of whole.** Pretty soon your ego will be out of work, and your heart’ll be making all the decisions. So your ego’s fighting for its life.

I have been having nightmares. My mind has been betraying me into a state of panic like I haven't felt since the worst of the divorce years. My thoughts keep flying back to my failed marriage, and to all the attendant shame and anger of that event. Worse, I'm again dwelling on David. I'm arguing with him in my mind, I'm mad and lonely and remembering every hurtful thing he ever said or did to me. Intense meditation brings everything up, you're just clearing out all your residual demons... **"You have the capacity to someday love the whole world. It's your destiny. Don't laugh." A true soul mate is a mirror, the person who shows you everything that's holding you back, the person who brings you to your own attention so you can change your life.** A true soul mate is probably the most important person you'll ever meet, because they tear down your walls and smack you awake.

I have been driven to find inner peace with methods that might seem a bit drastic for the general populace. I don't know that I have much of a choice, though. I have searched frantically for contentment for so many years in so many ways, and all these acquisitions and accomplishments—they run you down in the end. Life, if you keep chasing it so hard, will drive you to death. **You gotta let go and sit still and allow contentment to come to you.**

What I'm alarmed to find in meditation is that my mind is actually not that interesting a place, after all. I really only think about a few things, and I think about them constantly. I believe the official term is "brooding." When I sit in my silence and look at my mind, **it is only questions of longing and control that emerge to agitate me, and this agitation is what keeps me from evolving forward.** I told myself, "I will not judge you for these thoughts." My mind tried to protest, "Yeah, but you're such a failure, you're such a loser, you'll never amount to anything." In meditation I experience every intensity of sensation: fire, cold, hatred, lust, fear...

But now that I am here in India, here in the Ashram that was home to Swamiji, I'm finding that all I want is Swamiji. All I feel is Swamiji. The only person I talk to in my prayers and meditations is Swamiji. He's the master I need when I'm really struggling, because I can curse him and show him all my failures and flaws and all he does is laugh. Laugh, and love me. And I never feel him closer to me than when I'm struggling through the Gurugita, with its unfathomable Sanskrit verses.

It was then I decided I needed to stay here at the Ashram. This was so totally not my original plan of touring India. The search for God is a reversal of the normal, mundane worldly order. In the search for God, you revert from what attracts you and swim toward that which is difficult. You abandon your comforting and familiar habits with the hope (the mere hope!) that something greater will be offered you in return for what you've given up. I couldn't care less about evidence and proof and assurances. **I just want God.** I want God inside me. I want God to play in my bloodstream the way sunlight amuses itself on water.

Prayer is a relationship; half the job is mine. So now I take the time every morning to search myself for specificity about what I am truly asking for. I kneel there in the temple with my face on that cold marble for as long as it takes me to **formulate an authentic prayer**. If I don't feel sincere, then I will stay there on the floor until I do. Destiny is also a relationship. Half of it you have no control over; half of it is absolutely in your hands. Man is neither entirely a puppet of the gods, nor is he entirely the captain of his own destiny; he's a little of both. I'm going to regard unfortunate circumstances in my life—as opportunities, I can choose my thoughts. **Work on the mind. That's the only thing you should be trying to control. Control your thoughts?** Instead of the other way around? Admit to the existence of negative thoughts, understanding where they came from and why they arrived, and then—with great forgiveness and fortitude—dismissing them. I repeat this vow about 700 times a day: "**I will not harbor unhealthy thoughts anymore.**" Unhealthy thoughts, for obvious reasons, will no longer be received.

Months of counseling and mediation had only made me and my ex more divided and locked our positions solid, turning us into two people who were absolutely incapable of giving each other any release. **The rules of transcendence insist that you will not advance even one inch closer to divinity as long as you cling to even one last seductive thread of blame.** Much later I opened my eyes, and I knew it was over. Not just my marriage and not just my divorce, but all the unfinished bleak hollow sadness of it...it was over. **I could feel that I was free.** This is what rituals are for. We do spiritual ceremonies as human beings in order to create a safe resting place for our most complicated feelings of joy or trauma, so that **we don't have to haul those feelings around with us forever, weighing us down.**

I decide that I've been talking too much. I don't want to waste the greatest spiritual opportunity of my life by being all social and chatty the whole time. It's been amazing for me to discover that even here, even in a sacred environment of spiritual retreat on the other side of the world, I have managed to create a cocktail-party-like vibe around me. Swamiji, my Guru's master, was a stickler about silence in the Ashram, heavily enforcing it as a devotional practice. He called silence the only true religion. It's ridiculous how much I've been talking at this Ashram, the one place in the world where silence should—and can—reign. But, due to a special request from management, I was no longer to be part of the floor-scrubbing team. They had a new position in mind for me at the Ashram. And the title of my new job was—if you will kindly dig this—"Key Hostess."

You make some big grandiose decision about what you need to do, or who you need to be, and then circumstances arise that immediately reveal to you how little you understood about yourself. "**God dwells within you, as you.**" **AS you. If there is one holy truth of this Yoga, that line encapsulates it.** God dwells within you as you yourself, **exactly the way you are.** We all seem to get this idea that, in order to be sacred, we have to make some massive, dramatic change of character, that we have to renounce our individuality. **To know God, you need only to renounce one thing—your sense of division from God.**

What I will be hosting, to be exact. I will be the one person in the Ashram they are allowed to talk to if something is going wrong. I will listen to the problems of the retreat participants and then try to find solutions for them. They are all just afraid. **“Yet, you have never seen so many brave people gathered in one place at the same time.”**

The topic of the retreat, and its goal, is the *turiya* state—the elusive fourth level of human consciousness. There are three different levels of consciousness—waking, dreaming or deep dreamless sleep. This fourth level is **the witness of all the other states**. And who is the one who is always standing outside the mind’s activity, observing its thoughts? It’s simply God, say the Yogis. *Turiya* is not affected by the swinging moods of the mind, nor fearful of time or harmed by loss. **To claim it, you must leave the busy commotion of the mind and abandon the desires of the ego and enter into the silence of the heart.** One Thursday afternoon in the back of the temple, right in the midst of my Key Hostess duties, wearing my name-tag and everything—I am suddenly transported through the portal of the universe and taken to the center of God’s palm.

I got pulled through the wormhole of the Absolute, and in that rush I suddenly understood the workings of the universe completely. I left my body, I left the room, I left the planet, I stepped through time and I entered the void. It wasn’t hallucinogenic, what I was feeling. It was the most basic of events. It was heaven, yes. It was the deepest love I’d ever experienced. Not only did I feel unhesitating compassion and **unity with everything and everybody, it was vaguely and amusingly strange for me to wonder how anybody could ever feel anything but that.** I hovered in this magnificent ether of union before I had a sudden urgent thought: “I want to hold on to this experience forever!” And that’s when I started to tumble out of it. Just those two little words—I want!—and I began to slide back to earth. Then the unspoken message: *You may return here once you have fully come to understand that you are always here.*

I’m getting a lot of time alone here now. I’m spending about four or five hours every day in the meditation caves. I can sit in my own company for hours at a time now, at ease in my own presence.

I found my word. **ANTEVASIN.** It means “one who lives at the border.” The antevasin was an in-betweener. He was a border-dweller. He lived in sight of both worlds, but he looked toward the unknown. I find myself **between my old thinking and my new understanding**, always in a state of learning.

I believe that all the world’s religions share, at their core, a desire to find a transporting metaphor. **When you want to attain communion with God, it has to be the biggest boat imaginable.** The other objective of religion, of course, is to try to make sense of our chaotic world and explain the inexplicabilities we see playing out here on earth every day. The best we can do, then, in response to our incomprehensible and dangerous world, is to practice holding equilibrium internally—no matter what insanity is transpiring out there. You are free to search for any metaphor whatsoever which will

take you across the worldly divide whenever you need to be transported or comforted. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. But doesn't that make sense? **That the infinite would be, indeed...infinite? and includes everyone?**

My flight leaves India at four in the morning, which is typical of how India works. I decide not to go to sleep at all that night, but to spend the whole evening in one of the meditation caves, in prayer.

• **Indonesia, “Even in My Underpants, I Feel Different,” Pursuit of Balance**

I've never had less of a plan in my life than I do upon arrival in Bali. I don't know where I'm going to live, I don't know what I'm going to do. Nobody is expecting my arrival. I have no friends in Indonesia, or even friends-of-friends. Turns out I'm allowed only a one-month tourist visa. What did that medicine man tell me? All I have for sure is his name—Ketut Liyer—and the memory that he lives in a village just outside the town of Ubud. But I don't remember the name of the village. Maybe I should have thought all this through better.

So I take a taxi to the town of Ubud, which seems like a good place to start my journey. I check into a small and pretty hotel there on the fabulously named Monkey Forest Road. At the front desk Mario knows Ketut Liyer, who is a famous healer. Mario drives her there to see Ketut, who after awhile remembers her from before.

Bali is a tiny Hindu island located in the middle of the two-thousand-mile-long Indonesian archipelago that constitutes the most populous Muslim nation on earth. Bali is therefore a strange and wondrous thing; it should not even exist, yet does. It is not a wild exaggeration when people say that everyone in Bali is the descendent of either a king, a priest or an artist, and that this is why the Balinese have such pride and brilliance. There are religious ceremonies here which must be performed five times a day and others that must be performed once a day, once a week, once a month, once a year, once every ten years, once every hundred years, once every thousand years. All these dates and rituals are kept **organized** by the priests and holy men, who consult a byzantine system of three separate calendars. I'm not so sure how much of the Balinese worldview I'm going to be able to incorporate into my own worldview. The Balinese don't wait and see “how things go.” That would be terrifying. **They organize how things go, in order to keep things from falling apart.**

In the morning, Mario helps me buy a bicycle. I spend my first day with Ketut. Ketut gets about ten visitors a day like this, Balinese who need his help or advice on some holy or medical matter. On highly auspicious days, when everyone wants a special blessing, he might have over one hundred visitors. We do a simple meditation with a smile.

Ketut Liyer is a ninth generation of medicine men. He didn't believe in medicine men, but wanted to be an artist, a painter. One night an oil lamp exploded and burned his arm. In the hospital for a month it got infected and the doctor said he needed amputation.

Ketut went home and was visited by his ancestors in a dream and was told to put saffron and sandalwood juice and powder on it. In the days his arm was healed. They again visited him in another dream and told him to be a medicine man. He still wants to be an artist but doesn't have the time being the community medicine man. His surname 'Liyer' means bright light.

After the decadent business of zooming all over Italy and eating everything in sight, this is such a new and radically peaceful episode of my life. I have so much free time, you could measure it in metric tons. I found an Artist's House for Rent, with Kitchen and moved in. I'm here to do is work on my own equilibrium, and this still feels, at least for now, like a nourishing climate in which to do that. Bali seems a perfect Eden with no history of violence or bloodshed ever. But it preceded European participation in the international slave traffic by several centuries, and also outlived Europe's trafficking of human lives for a good long while. Internally, the island was constantly at war as rival kings staged attacks.

Ketut's wife, Nyomo, daily watched me with suspicion. Ketut Liyer had all these piles of old, lined notebooks and ledgers, filled with tiny little handwriting, of ancient Balinese-Sanskrit mysteries about healing. Yellow and crumbling and musty, they look like disintegrating piles of autumn leaves. Every time he turns a page, he rips the page. With his permission I took a pile into town and photocopied them and put them in binders. They were surprised and I continued to copy the rest of his documents. From that time on Nyomo was my friend.

I got hit by a bus, a smallish bus, but nevertheless it did knock me off my bicycle as I was cruising down the shoulderless road. My bicycle was fine, although the basket was bent and my helmet was cracked. The worst of the damage was a deep cut on my knee, full of bits of pebbles and dirt, that proceeded—over the next few days in the moist tropical air—to become nastily infected. "Infect," Ketut diagnosed. "Painful." "Yes," I said. "You should go see doctor."

I limped into the shop with my sore knee and introduced myself to Wayan the healer—a strikingly attractive Balinese woman. I stayed there in Wayan's shop for the next five hours, talking with my new best friend about her troubles. She divorced her husband after he beat her so severely "that I lose my baby, my second child, the one in my belly."

Now my days are divided into natural thirds. I spend my mornings with Wayan at her shop, laughing and eating. I spend my afternoons with Ketut the medicine man, talking and drinking coffee. Most of my prayers are expressions of sheer gratitude for the fullness of my contentment. I have never felt less burdened by myself or by the world.

I went to a party. Then I start thinking about Felipe, for some reason—that handsome older Brazilian man. He's nice. Felipe. He says I am young and beautiful and that I will have a wonderful time here in Bali. He's right, right? I should relax and have some fun, right? But this morning it doesn't feel fun.

by Elizabeth Gilbert

Wayan is a single mother facing eviction who found it in her heart to take in two extra homeless children, a pair of orphans Wayan has adopted. I wanted to help this single mother with her daughter and her extra orphans.

I went to Ubud's local Internet café, where I sat and wrote—in one effortless draft—a fund-raising e-mail to all my friends and family across the world. If my friends and family would care to make a donation to help a woman named Wayan Nuriyash buy a house in Indonesia for herself and her children. I began to receive donations from perfect strangers. It was a global smothering of generosity. A mere seven days after the original plea went out—my friends and my family and a bunch of strangers all over the world helped me come up with almost \$18,000 to buy Wayan Nuriyash a home of her own. When I told Wayan she replied, “If any of these people comes to Bali, they must never stay in a hotel, OK? You tell them they come and stay at my house, OK? Promise to tell them that? We call it Group House...the House for Everybody...”

I spend some time with Felipe, an older Brazilian man who is also divorced. **“It’s still two human beings trying to get along, so it’s going to become complicated. And love is always complicated. But still humans must try to love each other, darling. We must get our hearts broken sometimes. This is a good sign, having a broken heart. It means we have tried for something.”** We compare notes about the bottomless depths of post-divorce depression. We drink wine and eat well together and we tell each other the nicest stories we can remember about former spouses, just to take the sting out of all that conversation about loss.

Yudhi and I decided to take off for a week, rent a car and drive all over this tiny island, pretending that we are in America and that both of us are free. We don’t even penetrate the interior of Bali; we just drive along the coast, and it’s beaches, beaches, beaches for a whole week.

When I return to Ubud, I go straight back to Felipe’s house and don’t leave his bedroom for approximately another month. This is only the faintest of exaggerations. **I have never been loved and adored like this before** by anyone, never with such pleasure and single-minded concentration. Never have I been so unpeeled, revealed, unfurled and hurled through the event of lovemaking. **Perfectly matched**, genetically engineered belly-to-belly success story. There are no parts of our bodies which are in any way allergic to any parts of the other’s body. Nothing is dangerous, nothing is difficult, nothing is refused.

I got attacked by a nasty infection in my bladder. A typical affliction of the overly sexed. My experience with these infections is that they can take days to clear, even with strong antibiotics. Wayan made a concoction with eye of what I believe might have been newt...all floating in its own brown juice. There was about a gallon of it in the bowl, whatever it was. It stank like a corpse. I suffered it down. In less than two hours I was fine, totally healed.

Also, if a couple is not having any luck conceiving a child, she will examine both the man and the woman. But you cannot inform a Balinese man that he is sterile. What she does in the case of male infertility is to inform the man that his wife is infertile and needs to be seen privately every afternoon for “healing sessions.” When the wife comes to the shop alone, Wayan calls some young stud from the village to come over and have sex with her, hopefully creating a baby. But Wayan is unapologetic. This treatment is only necessary because it’s not possible to tell a Balinese man that he is infertile without risking that he will go home and do something terrible to his wife.

Still, Wayan needs to buy a house, and I’m getting worried that it’s not happening. Felipe and I have stepped in now. The Balinese value their land with a passion that extends beyond the reaches of economic sense. It’s almost impossible to find out when land is actually for sale around here. becomes available for sale only by...rumor. And all these land deals are executed under strange veils of secrecy and deception. Superstition also plays into it.

After three months of looking for a home for Wayan and her family, I ask her how the search is coming. She tells me a story that she needs about \$22,000 more to buy a property she needs. AMD later she can possibly build a hotel on it. SHE’S FUCKING WITH ME. Felipe advises me, **“Don’t get angry about it, whatever happens. If you get angry, you’ll lose her, and that would be a pity because she’s a marvelous person and she loves you. This is her survival tactic, just accept that. Play the game with her and you can both win.”** So I see her the next day and lie to her that all my friends are mad at us and if she doesn’t get a house in the next week, they want their money back. Four hours later—four measly hours!—the phone rings in Felipe’s house. It’s Wayan. She’s breathless. She wants me to know the job is finished. She has just purchased the two aro from the farmer. There was no need, as it turns out, for any magic dreams or priestly interventions or taksu radiation-level tests. Wayan even has the certificate of ownership already, in her very hands! And it’s notarized! Also, she assures me, she has already ordered construction materials for her house and workers will start building early next week—before I leave.

Felipe and I end up going on vacation is a tiny island called Gili Meno. I came to this tiny island two years prior all by myself at the very worst of that entire dark journey of divorce. I then told myself, **“This is not your time for companionship, Liz. You have a different task here.”** I felt each piece of sorrow completely, as if it were happening for the first time, and then I would say, “Come into my heart now.” I did the same for anger. Then the same for shame. I saw that my heart was not even nearly full, not **even after having taken in and tended to all those calamitous urchins of sorrow and anger and shame; my heart could easily have received and forgiven even more.** Its love was infinite.

And now I’m coming back to Gili Meno under notably different circumstances. Since I was last here, I’ve circled the world, settled my divorce, survived my final separation from David, erased all mood-altering medications from my system, learned to speak a

by Elizabeth Gilbert

new language, sat upon God's palm for a few unforgettable moments in India, studied at the feet of an Indonesian medicine man and purchased a home for a family who sorely needed a place to live. I am happy and healthy and balanced. So Felipe was thinking... "maybe we could try to build a life together that's somehow divided between America, Australia, Brazil and Bali." All I can do is laugh, because, hey—why not? It just might be crazy enough to work. A life like this might strike some people as absolutely loony, as sheer foolishness, but it resembles me so closely. Of course this is how we should proceed.