



7 Gateways of Perimenopausal Initiation

THE MIDLIFE MAVEN MAP



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Before You Begin...

Who is the Midlife Maven? What is her map?

She's not just a concept or an archetype.

She's a lived experience.

The woman who has been through the perimenopausal passage.

She has shed what is complete: She's done saying yes when she means no. She's done keeping the peace to make herself smaller or so that others feel comfortable.

And for sure, she's no longer ignoring her own needs until there's more time or permission from people around her.

After going through the 7 gateways of initiation, she stands in a deeper, truer knowing of herself ... imperfect, real, raw, and true.

The Midlife Maven the woman who has stopped pretending to be anyone other than who she is. (And there's a map for this...)



Introducing the Ancient Map & 7 Gateways of Perimenopausal Initiation

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The Ancient Map

Five and a half thousand years ago, in ancient Sumer, a story was written on clay tablets. It's the oldest written story we have.

It's a story about a woman who went into the underworld and came back transformed.

Her name was Inanna. Queen of Heaven, Queen of Underworld.

And she received a call she could not refuse: A pull toward the depths, toward the darkness, toward everything she had not yet faced. She descended through seven gateways.

At each one, she was asked to surrender something she had been using to define herself. Her crown. Her jewels. Her robes of power. Her lapis lazuli measuring rod. Her breastplate. Her golden ring. Her royal robe.

She arrived at the bottom of the underworld, stripped of everything.

And there, she met her forgotten sister, Ereshkigal.

Ereshkigal is the Queen of the Underworld—Inanna's sister. She rules everything that has been pushed down, denied, and exiled to the basement of consciousness.

Everything you've manoeuvred, explained away, and kept at a safe distance for years—sometimes decades. The unfinished business. The wounds that never quite healed all the way through. The parts of yourself that you've been too afraid, too exhausted, or too busy to look at directly.

Ereshkigal is not a monster. She is a mirror. She screams with precision, at the exact thing that most needs to be faced.

Inanna faced her, and went through a death and rebirth experience, that transformed her in the deepest way possible.

She climbed back through the seven gateways. And what she reclaimed on the way out was not the same as what she had laid down. She emerged as an initiated woman who had been to the depths of herself, returning, bringing back the treasures only she could reclaim by going to the underworld.

This is the oldest map of the peri/menopausal passage. The map our ancestors had, which we were never given.

What Inanna walked through in myth, you're now walking through in your body. In your life. In the middle of your kitchen at 3am. Not as a metaphor, but as a profound midlife initiation.

The Greeks called this Hyerikos, the Victorians called it madness, and built asylums to contain it. And now we are taking it back: The power and beauty of our midlife transition into Mavenhood!



The Seven Gateways

The map moves through 7 gateways. Each one corresponds to a stage of this passage. Each one asks something different of you. And each one delivers, when you walk through it rather than around it, a form of power that could not have arrived any other way.

- Gateway 1: The Reckoning
- Gateway 2: The Release
- Gateway 3: The Unknown
- Gateway 4: Self-Devotion
- Gateway 5: Body Love
- Gateway 6: Self Expression
- Gateway 7: Embodied Wisdom

Seven thresholds. Seven surrenders. Seven powers.

I want to say this clearly...

***This passage is not linear.
It's a spiral.***

You can genuinely be inside more than one gateway at the same time.

You may be walking the reckoning of Gateway One in your marriage, while your body is making the fierce renegotiation of Gateway Three.

You may be in the deep disorientation of Gateway Four, and feel the first tender shoots of Gateway Five breaking through at the same time.

You may cycle back through a gateway at a deeper register, you thought you had already walked ... because you're finally ready to meet what you could not meet the first time.

This is simply the ancient shape of initiation.
It is, like all things truly feminine, the spiral of nature.

There is no hierarchy. There is no correct pace. There is no version of this passage you're *supposed* to be better at.

There is only where you *actually* are.

About the Gateways

- Gateways 1-2 are the descent. The reckoning with what is no longer true. The releasing of what you have been maintaining. The body's fierce and intelligent renegotiation of its own terms.
- Gateway 3 is the underworld itself. The dark night. The dissolution. The meeting with Ereshkigal. The most demanding gateway. The most transformative one.
- Gateways 4-7 are the ascent. The turning toward yourself. The voice rising. The arrival into embodied wisdom. The Midlife Maven emerging.

This is not a passage that ends in decline. It ends in sovereignty. It ends in the woman who trusts the deep intelligence of this phase of her life.

The woman who loves from fullness.

The woman who creates the work of her life after fifty because it takes the whole of the first half to know what she actually has to say.



How to Use This Guide

Read each gateway slowly.

Feel into your body as you read. Not your mind.

You're not looking for the most spiritual gateway. Or the most acceptable one.

You're looking for the one that creates a small shock of recognition.

The one that makes you take a breath and look up from the page.

The one your body says yes to, before your mind has finished reading it.

That is yours.

And here is something I want you to know before you begin...

You may recognise yourself in more than one gateway.

You may read Gateway 1 and feel your chest go tight. Then read Gateway 3 and realise your whole body has been trying to tell you something for months. Then read Gateway 5 and begin, quietly, to cry.

Good. Let all of it land.

If the recognition is strongest in one gateway, start there. If two or three are calling, sit with the strongest pull first. The others will still be waiting for you.

Trust the layered recognition. Trust what your body says yes to. Trust that you are reading this at exactly the moment you are meant to.

Once you find your gateway, or your gateways, sit with what you find. The map isn't asking you to rush through.

Just be with what is here. What is real. What is true.



Message from Elayne Kalila

A Message From Elayne Kalila

This map you're reading has been created through my 11-year descent.

11 years in which I lost, and found, and lost again, more versions of myself than I can count. 11 years in which everything I thought I knew about who I was got stripped back, examined, grieved, and eventually reclaimed.

I'm a psychotherapist. An actor. A ceremonialist. A sacred feminine teacher. I have spent 30 years doing depth work, shadow work, and archetypal work with women, creating rites of passage that meet them in the places that matter most.

And none of that prepared me for what this passage would ask of me personally.

On Samhain night, 2023, the night when the veils between the worlds are said to be the thinnest, I found myself in an emergency room with my heart in atrial fibrillation. 53 years old. Electrodes on my chest. My heart doing things it had not done before and was not supposed to do.

My body had been trying to get my attention for a long time. I had been too busy, too convinced that I had it handled, to hear it.

It took a heart that stopped following the rules to make me stop pretending I had everything under control.

What arrived in that hospital room, in the hours I lay there watching my own heartbeat spike across a monitor, was not fear.

I finally had clarity. I realized my body had been trying to talk to me for years, waiting for the moment when I could finally stop moving long enough to receive it.



I had been in the passage. I had been reading the map.

And I had *still* been trying to walk *around* it, rather than *through* it.

That night changed everything.

Real change. You know the kind: slowly, precisely, one honest reckoning at a time.

And you are holding the map that came out of it.

With love and devotion for this passage,

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GATEWAY 1

The Reckoning

The Power of Reckoning



You May Be Here If...

I want to tell you what this might actually feel like. Not theoretically. In your actual life.

- It is 3:14 am. You've been awake since 2:40 am. You have a repeated thought that won't be soothed back to sleep...
- "I can't keep doing this." You don't know yet what *this* is. But if you're really honest with yourself, somewhere deep inside, you have secretly known ... longer than you want to admit.
- You're sitting in a meeting, and you hear yourself agreeing to something. But it has a strange quality to it ... like it's coming from a woman you *used* to be. You say the right words. You make the right face. You don't mean any of it.

- There's someone in your life. You know who. You've been quietly working around her. Or him. Or them. For years. You manage the conversations. You soften the asks. You preempt the moods. You've done this so skilfully, for so long, that the management itself went invisible. Even to you. You're starting to see it now. And seeing it, you find, is not something you can undo.
- The anger is coming out sideways. At the wrong person. Over something almost unrelated. Three hours late, because it had to come out somewhere. You're starting to understand, with slightly horrified clarity, that the rage has been there all along. Neatly managed. Thoroughly hidden. Even from yourself.
- Your body has started speaking in ways she did not used to. The hot flashes arrive at wildly inconvenient moments, which is, of course, their signature move. The sleep that ends, reliably, at some ridiculous hour of the morning and doesn't come back. A small thing in your chest you notice and try to talk yourself out of. She's been trying to get your attention for a very long time. She's no longer taking no for an answer.
- Something about the life you're living no longer fits the woman you're becoming. You can't name her yet; but when you pass a mirror at the wrong angle, you catch her looking back at you.

What is actually happening

So. This is the beginning.

This is where the initiation arrives ... though almost no one recognises it as initiation at the time.



What I want you to understand about what you're experiencing is this:

It's not stress. It's not a difficult patch. It's not, in the reductive medical sense, perimenopause making you difficult.

It's clarity.

It's the intelligence that has been quietly gathering in your body for decades. Finally arriving in full. And it's arriving now, in this season, for a reason your biology understands ... even if your mind doesn't.

For 30 or 40 years, your nervous system has been carrying a chemical cushion that helped you smooth things over. Estrogen plays a role in what researchers call the fawn response. The biological drive to keep everyone else comfortable. To maintain social harmony at the expense of your own truth.

As estrogen begins to decline in perimenopause, that cushion lifts. The chemical pull toward pleasing everyone else literally reduces. And what was previously possible to tolerate becomes, with almost no warning, impossible.

This is why the reckoning arrives now. Biology is on your side.

What you're seeing is not new. It has been true for years. You were simply, until now, able to metabolise it. You're no longer able to.

That's the difference.

And the terrible, merciful truth is this: Once you've seen, you can't unsee. The intelligence that has landed will wait, patiently and without drama, for you to stop pretending.

It will wait. Until it will not.

There is something else that belongs here.

That almost no one names.

What you're being asked to see is not only what you've been tolerating from other people. It's where, inside every one of those tolerations, you've been leaving yourself.

Every quiet rearrangement of your truth to keep someone else comfortable was a small act of self-abandonment.

And **every one of those places is a place you can now come home to. I don't say that lightly.**

Sometimes, what surfaces in this gateway is not only yours. It's your mother's. Her mother's. The un-lived truth of the women behind you, carried in your body, finally meeting a woman able to see it.

You may be the first in your line with the chance to perform the reckoning they could not.

The work is yours. And it is also theirs.

This is a holy reckoning. And it's a one-way door.

THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

What am I seeing now that I can no longer pretend I am not seeing?



GATEWAY 2
The Release
The Power of Release



You May Be Here If...

Let me paint this one for you.

- You used to be *extraordinary* at holding it all. Truly. The emotional temperature of every room. The logistics. The birthdays. The deadlines. The soft worry of the people you love.
- You were the one they came to. And you liked it. Or at least you did not mind it. Because you were good at it. And being good at it felt, for a long time, like being someone important, like you mattered.
- And now, quietly, underneath the competence, you're less willing. The job that is fine - but not quite right - feels, some mornings, unbearable. The role you've been playing in your family for 20 years has started to itch. The friendship that runs entirely on your effort. You've been noticing, with a kind of detached surprise, that you're done.

- The voice in your head that used to say *I'll do it*, has got quieter. And the one that says *this is no longer mine to hold* is getting louder. The people around you are noticing. Your partner thinks you're more irritable. Your children think you have lost the plot.
- A friend misses the woman who said yes to everything without complaint. You're not sure you miss her.
- And underneath it all, something is grieving. Something you can't quite name. A cycle that's becoming erratic and may not come back. A version of yourself that is completing. A door you hadn't realised you were still holding open.
- You're standing at the top of the stairs and can't remember why you came up. You're holding a fork in the kitchen with no idea what you were about to do with it. Underneath the dark humour of it, you're quietly frightened that you're losing your mind. You're not. You're releasing a cognitive pattern that was propped up by hormones you no longer have in the same measure. It's a different thing entirely.
- The emotion is arriving in waves you didn't order. Grief in the supermarket aisle, for no reason you understand. Tears during a television advert. A laughter that surprises you with how much it wants to keep coming. You are, in your own quiet way, beginning to empty.
- You're beginning to let things fall. Not because you have given up. Because some older, wiser thing in you has finally decided: *This was never mine to carry forever.*

What is actually happening

There is a Carole King lyric that arrives, uninvited, in the bodies of women at this gateway: *"I feel the Earth move under my feet."*

You know the one.

Because something is moving. And it isn't small.

Here is what I want to tell you about this gateway that almost no one is saying out loud.

You're losing your cycle as your internal compass. And it's a bigger loss than anyone has prepared you for.



For 30 or 40 years, your menstrual cycle has been quietly orienting you. Monthly. Reliable. A built-in rhythm of descent and return. It was the architecture you didn't know was holding you.

When perimenopause arrives, and that rhythm becomes erratic, and then, eventually, disappears entirely, you aren't only losing a biological function. You're losing the navigation system that has been running your life from underneath your conscious attention.

If you feel strangely, inexplicably adrift in a way that goes beyond the symptoms, this is exactly why.

You're being asked to learn a new kind of orientation. Not cyclical. Not external. Something older, and closer, and much harder to fake.

And the structures holding you up from the outside are also giving way.

This is the real work of Release.

The things that are falling, are falling because they were only ever being held together by your willingness to keep holding them:

The job that was fine.

The dynamic you kept managing.

The role that stopped fitting years ago.

They were propped up by self-abandonment.

They can't survive the end of that. And they aren't meant to.

You aren't failing ... even if it feels like that. You're removing the scaffolding from what was never truly yours.

And yes, things wobble when that scaffolding is removed. Yes, people aren't always delighted.

Of course they're not. You were holding up a whole structure with your body. And they had grown accustomed to walking on it.



This is also the gateway where you begin to grieve.

Grieve the cycles. Grieve the younger woman who could hold it all. Grieve the version of you that was so good at keeping everyone fed, soothed, and unthreatened.

She was extraordinary. She got you here.

You're allowed to thank her, tenderly, and let her rest.

What is being released is making space. Not yet for what is coming next.

Simply for the gap in which what is coming next can arrive.

THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*What have I been maintaining that I already know, somewhere in my body,
is no longer mine to hold?*



GATEWAY 3

The Unknown

The Power of the Unknown



You May Be Here If...

I have to tell you the truth about this gateway. It may not be easy to hear, but you won't be surprised, either...

- You don't know who you are anymore. This isn't a poetic statement.
- You wake up some mornings, and the disorientation is so complete that it takes you several seconds to locate yourself in your life. The roles that used to tell you have dissolved or stopped feeling true: Mother. Professional. Partner. The capable one. The sorted one.
- The strategies that always worked have stopped working. You used to be able to outrun this. Stay busy. Stay useful. Stay so continuously in demand that there was never a silence long enough to sit in. Perimenopause has quietly taken that option off the table.

- The energy that used to fuel the running is gone. And in the quiet, the basement of your life has started to empty itself into the kitchen.
- You have done the work. Therapy. Circle. Ceremony. Journalling. Years of it. You believed, for good reason, that you had met the deep things and genuinely processed them. And here they are again. Deeper. More precise. More insistent.
- And yes. I'm not going to pretend this is not infuriating. It's infuriating.
- Some part of you knows what is down there. Some part of you has always known. And some part of you is beginning to understand, with a dawning that has the quality of dread and relief at the same time, that you're going to have to look. *Again.*
- The darkness is not empty. It's full. You can feel it. And you're not sure, yet, whether you're ready.
- Your body has stopped performing. She is tired in a way that isn't about sleep. Tired at a cellular level. The kind of tired that coffee merely postpones and a weekend away doesn't begin to touch. Whatever she was carrying for decades, she is, now, laying it down. And you're beginning to understand that you're going to have to meet her where she is.
- Something has happened, or is happening, in your body. Somewhere inside you, a professional has called benign. You experience it as anything *but*. Your body is saying, quite precisely, that *she is done being overridden*. You're learning, in small and frightening increments, what it feels like to listen.

What is actually happening

Congratulations. You've made it here.

I mean that with complete seriousness.

This is the gateway that requires the most of you. This is the dark night of the soul, not as a poetic metaphor but as an actual lived experience. The kind of dark where you genuinely can't see your hand in front of your face.

What I want to say to you about this gateway, more than anything else, is this: **Stay.**

Don't run. Don't rearrange. Don't fill the gap with a new project, relationship, diagnosis, or new thing to fix.



The darkness is not empty. It is full.

It's full of the unfinished business of your becoming. The old wounds that never quite healed all the way through. The things you genuinely believed you had resolved and that are, somehow, here again. The parts of yourself you have been too busy, too afraid, or too exhausted to face directly.

They are all here. They were always going to meet you.

They were waiting for this passage, specifically. Because this passage is the first time in your life, enough has been stripped away for you to actually hear them.

Here is something I learned the hard way, and offer to you now.

**Ereshkigal does not scream in gibberish.
She screams with precision.**

What meets you at the bottom of the underworld is not a random monster. She is a mirror. And she screams at the exact thing that most needs to be faced.

She is the intelligence of your own becoming, finally arriving with enough force to get your attention.

And there is something else here, which has changed everything for me.
What was laid down in puberty is rising now for completion.

Perimenopause and puberty are the two great hormonal thresholds of a woman's life. Same hormones. Opposite direction. The only two times in her life her brain undergoes this level of structural rewiring.

Whatever was silenced in the first threshold, the voices, the knowing, the parts of you that had to go underground to survive adolescence, is rising now for completion.

This is the Puberty Mirror. It's why so much of what is surfacing feels ancient and feels new at the same time.

It's both.
Stop running.

Turn and look in the eye whatever needs to be seen.



Because what lives on the other side of the thing you've been most afraid to face is your essence voice. The voice that has always been there underneath everything. The one that could not come fully online until this moment. Because this moment is the first time enough has been stripped away for it to be heard.

This is where most women get stuck for years.

Not because the Unknown is impossible to walk. Because the culture has no framework for her.

What lives on the other side of the thing you have been most afraid to face is your essence voice. She has been waiting for this exact moment to finally be heard.

THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*If I stopped running from the thing I have been most afraid to face,
what would I finally be free to hear?*



GATEWAY 4

Self-Devotion

The Power of the Self-Devotion



You May Be Here If...

Let me tell you what this feels like when it begins.

- You're sitting at your kitchen table. Everyone has gone out or to bed. The house is, finally, genuinely quiet. And a question arrives that you don't remember ever asking yourself: *What do I actually want right now?* You notice, with something between amusement and horror, that you have almost no idea.
- You're saying *no* to things you would have said *yes* to automatically a year ago. And the *no* is coming out before you can stop it. And afterwards, you realise that the old *yes* was the reflex. And the new *no* is the first honest answer in decades. You sit with that.
- The roles you've played your whole adult life ... The good mother. The capable professional. The woman who never asks for too much. The one who keeps everyone fed and held and low-drama.

They've started to feel like costumes. Beautifully made ones. Real ones. Worn by a real woman who did her absolute best. But costumes nonetheless. And you're beginning to notice how tired she is, under the costume. How long has she has been under there?

- For most of your adult life, you've been overriding the signals. Tired and pushed through. Hungry and postponed. Sad and rescheduled the feeling. Angry and smoothed it over before anyone could be inconvenienced. Your body metabolised all of it, obligingly, for decades. And now, quietly, you're noticing that she is no longer willing.
- You're beginning to see that your body has been at the bottom of your list for as long as you can remember. The aches you pushed through. The tiredness you medicated. The hungers you talked yourself out of. She has been asking, quite patiently, for something you didn't know how to give. Turning toward her, you're realising, is self-devotion at its most literal.
- You're feeling a hunger that is new. A hunger for a life that actually includes you. Not in the way the magazines talk about self-care. Not the bubble baths and the scheduled me-time. In a way that feels, strangely, like survival. As if you have finally understood that there will be no life worth living if you don't turn toward yourself with the same quality of attention you have spent decades offering everyone else.
- And some part of you, the part that has been extraordinary at outward devotion for so long, is completely terrified by the thought. Because if you stop orienting around everyone else, you'll have to know who you are underneath the orienting.

That is the work of this gateway.

What is actually happening

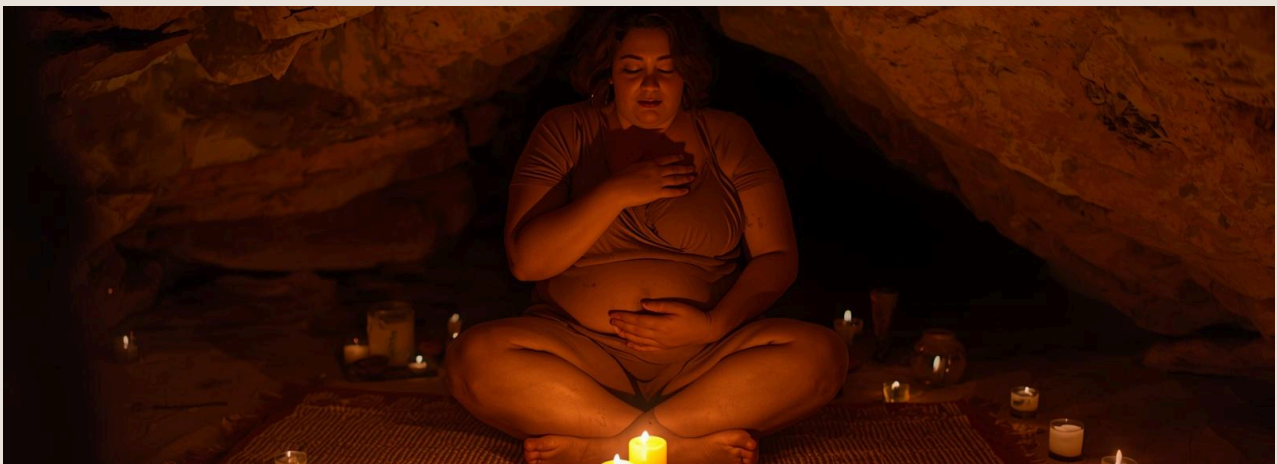
This one is my personal favourite. And also, for many of us, the most terrifying. Because this gateway does something none of the others quite do. It turns the compass fully inward.

You have spent 30 or 40 years being exceptional at outward devotion. You learned early. Most of us did. That the way to be loved was to be useful. The way to belong was to be needed. The way to be safe was to make sure everyone else was taken care of. Everyone else was comfortable. Everyone else's needs were met.

You became so good at it, that it stopped feeling like a choice and started feeling like who you were.

And now, in this passage, your nervous system is doing something extraordinary.

It is releasing. Not you. Not your relationships. *The chemical.*



Estrogen plays a role in what researchers call the fawn response. The biological drive to smooth things over, maintain social harmony, keep everyone else comfortable at the expense of your own truth.

As estrogen declines, the neurological pull toward please everyone else literally reduces.

Which means the women around you who are suddenly saying what they actually mean, who are suddenly unavailable for the old shenanigans they used to tolerate without complaint, who are setting boundaries that don't come with explanations or apologies, they aren't having a breakdown.

They're having a biological awakening.

You're allowed to put her down.

The version of yourself that spent three decades bending herself into whatever shape was needed. The one who knew what every person in every room was feeling before she knew what she was feeling. The one who kept the show running.

She was doing something genuinely remarkable. She got you here.

You can set her down with tenderness and with gratitude and let her rest.

And what will remain, when you do, this is the thing almost no one tells you, is you.

Not a new you.

The oldest you.



The one who was there before you learned to bend yourself around other people's comfort. The one who had preferences. The one who knew what she liked. The one who knew, quietly, what she wanted. Long before she learned to ask permission to want it.

She has been waiting. With extraordinary patience. To come home.

Self-devotion is not selfishness. It's not self-absorption. It's not a reward you give yourself once the list is done.

And here is what I want you to know. The reclamation is possible. It is, in fact, part of what this gateway is asking of you.

Not to get back what you had at 25. I'm not interested in that. And neither is your body.

To come home to an erotic aliveness that is slower. Deeper. More embodied.

And entirely your own.

It's yours whether you share it with anyone or not. It's not contingent on a partner. It's a life force.

And perimenopause, strange as this may sound in the middle of it, is not the end of it. It's the beginning of a different relationship with it entirely.

Your body is not a problem to be solved.

Your body is saying: pay attention. There is something here that wants to be known.

THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*What is my body carrying that has never been fully expressed,
and what would it mean to finally let it be known?*



GATEWAY 5
Body Love
The Power of the Body



You May Be Here If...

This is the gateway your body is speaking the loudest in. So let me speak to you as honestly as I can.

- You're noticing, with some surprise, that the body you thought was quietly closing down, is doing something else entirely. Something is returning. An aliveness. A warmth. A wanting. You don't quite have language for her yet.
- You're catching glimpses of yourself in the mirror and feeling something you had stopped expecting to feel. Not the old approval-seeking self-assessment. Something quieter, more settled. Something that looks like her.
- Pleasure is returning as information, not indulgence. A meal eaten slowly because you actually wanted to taste it. A bath taken because your body asked, not because it was scheduled. A morning where you simply inhabit yourself without needing to be anywhere.

- Your relationship with your body is shifting. She is less a project to be managed and more a creature to be listened to. Less something to be disciplined into acceptability, and more something to be inhabited. The language you use about her—even in your own head—is changing.
- You're feeling a very specific kind of hunger for sensuality that has nothing to do with anyone else's gaze. This isn't about being attractive to someone. It's about being fully alive in your skin, on your own terms, whether anyone is watching or not.
- You're noticing that you're not fighting your age anymore. The silver at your temples. The softness at your belly. The lines around your eyes. You have stopped waging war on her. And on the days when you're really inside this, you find her beautiful. Quietly. Simply. Because she is yours.
- Your body has started to feel like a teacher. Not a burden. Not a body to be optimised. A source of information and wisdom you had been trained to override. You're listening now. And the more you listen, the more she seems to be telling you things you had almost forgotten were possible.

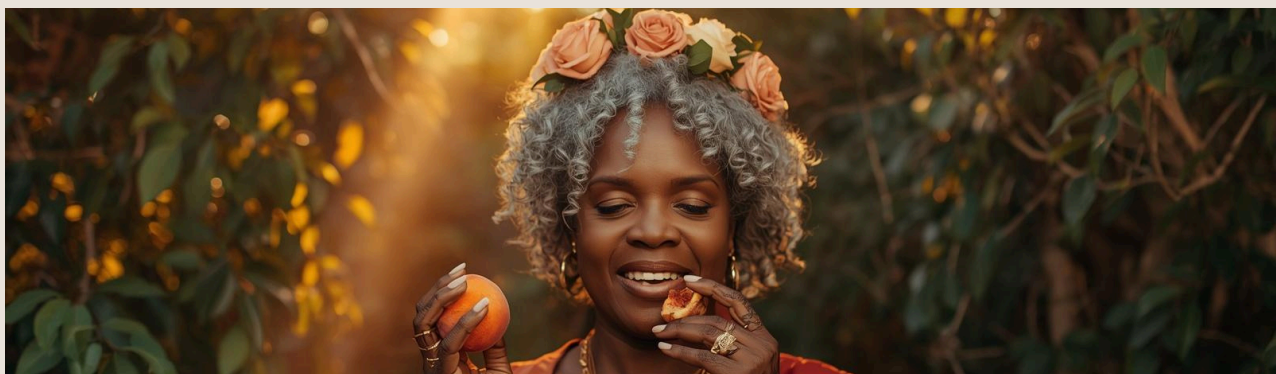
What is actually happening

Here is what our culture will not tell you, because it has no language for her.

The perimenopausal body is not in decline. She is in reclamation.

Something happens in this passage, usually after the descent, usually after you have stopped bargaining with your body and started listening to her, where she begins to come home to herself. The symptoms soften or you become more fluent in them. The relationship changes. You stop treating her as an enemy that keeps surprising you with what she will no longer do, and start meeting her as someone you are getting to know again. Someone you had actually forgotten.

And what arrives, when you stop trying to get her back to who she was, is something none of the women who came before you were permitted to speak about. *Pleasure returns. Sensuality returns.* A quality of erotic aliveness that has nothing to do with performance returns. Not the kind you had at 25, which was often about being wanted, being chosen, being found attractive. A different kind. A slower, fuller, more *entirely yours* kind. The kind that knows what she likes because she has stopped asking permission to know.



I want to be careful here, because this language has been taken from us for so long. When I say *erotic*, I don't mean pornographic. I mean the Greek sense, *eros*, the life force, **the appetite for being alive**. The thing that makes you want to eat a peach over the sink, because it is so good you can't wait. The thing that makes you stretch in the sun. The thing that makes you notice beauty. The thing that makes you want to touch your own skin ... not because you're fixing something, but because she is yours and she is warm and she is alive.

Many women arrive at this gateway and feel almost apologetic for what they're experiencing, because no one told you your body was going to do this. The cultural story about perimenopause is one of loss: the loss of fertility, of youth, of desirability, of the body as she was. That story is so loud that when your body begins, quietly, to come alive in a different register, you may not even recognise her. You may think something is wrong. Or you may think this is a private aberration that you should not mention.

It is not an aberration. She is a gateway. And she is as essential to the passage as the descent was.

The women who arrive here have walked through fire.

The reckoning that would not stop.

The release that took years.

They've been to the underworld that stripped away everything.

They've turned toward themselves and it felt like the most radical act of their lives.

And now, because all of that came first, something in them is free to feel good again.

And there is something here about your erotic body that I won't let go unsaid.

Your erotic aliveness is not a peripheral feature of this passage.

Your body is not the site of your loss.

She is the site of your homecoming.

THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

If I devoted to myself even a fraction of the care I have given to everyone else, what would I give myself right now?



GATEWAY 6

Self Expression

The Power of the Expression



You May Be Here If...

- Something is reorganising in you. It's happening whether you planned it or not. And when you notice it, there's a quiet relief you didn't expect to feel.
- You're saying things, out loud, in public, in conversations, in your writing, in the way you show up, that you had only ever dared to think in private.
- Some people are uncomfortable with this.
- You notice, with your own surprise, that you can tolerate their discomfort.
- There's a creative hunger in you that you can't quite explain. A pull toward making something. Saying something. Building something that is genuinely yours.

- You may not know yet what it is. But the pull is insistent. And it doesn't care whether this is convenient for anyone. The relationships that survived the earlier gateways are deepening. They have a different quality now. More real. Less managed.
- The ones that couldn't meet you where you are now are revealing themselves as such. You're grieving some of those. You're relieved by others. Both are allowed.
- You're holding your body differently. Taking up the space you actually occupy, rather than the space you'd been trained to perform into. Sitting back in your seat. Letting your shoulders be where they are. You're not leaning forward to manage the room anymore. And you're not apologising, with your body, for being in it.
- What you say and what your body is doing are beginning to match. For years, you said yes with your mouth, and your shoulders said no. Your face agreed while your chest tightened. That split is closing. Body and voice are telling one story now. Which is, you're discovering, how you know you're telling the truth.
- Your voice is changing. Literally. The timbre of it. The register of it. The resonance of it. And also in how you use it. The voice that's emerging is not the polished one. It's rougher. More direct. Less concerned with whether everyone in the room stays comfortable. And it sounds, finally, like you.
- And your life is beginning to reorient around what is actually true, rather than around what is expected of you. It may be smaller, in some ways, than the life you were living before. It is, in every way that matters, more alive.
- You're making eye contact differently. Holding it longer. Not to challenge. Simply because you're actually here. You're speaking more slowly than you used to. Your sentences end where they end. You're not chasing them with reassurance. And people listen in a different register to the one you had before.

What is actually happening

Something is beginning to reorganise in you, organically, from the inside out.

And it is, frankly, a relief.

You've been through the reckoning and the releasing. You've been through the body's fierce renegotiation of its own terms. You've been, in whatever form this took for you, into the dark.

And something has shifted on the other side of all of it.



What is happening in this gateway is that your inner truth is coming to the surface as expression.

It's coming as voice. As form. As what you build. What you say. What you let be seen. What you decline to keep performing.

And here is something I want to name. Because I find it genuinely extraordinary.

Your voice is literally changing.

The physical voice deepens and shifts during menopause due to the hormonal changes. The timbre. The register. The resonance.

All of it subtly transforming. I can't help but love the poetry of it.

Your outer voice is changing its register at exactly the same time your inner essence voice is finding its way home.

The body is rhyming with the soul.

And the expression that wants to come through you doesn't have one shape.

This is important.

The woman who emerges from this gateway does not look any one way.

For some of you, expression will mean building something visible. A book. A practice. A studio. A business. A movement. Something that has been gathering inside you for decades, finally finding its form.

For others, it will mean a radical quieting. Letting go of what is not yours. Tending a garden. Tending grandchildren. Writing only for yourself. Creating a life that is, in its own undramatic way, the most honest thing you have ever made.

All of these are expressions. All of these are the Maven rising.

The woman who builds publicly and the woman who quietly tends what is hers are both sovereign. Neither is more real than the other.

Whatever is genuinely alive in you gets to be the form.



What you're no longer willing to do is organise your life around what is expected of you.

That willingness is gone. And where the willingness goes, the capacity follows.

You will still love the people in your life, fiercely. You will still show up. You will still give.

You will give from what is real, now, instead of from what is scripted. And the difference between those two things is everything.

A life built around your actual truth has a quality that the previous one, however full it appeared, simply did not.

THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

What wants to be expressed through me now that I have stopped organising my life around what is expected of me?



GATEWAY 7

Embodied Wisdom

The Power of the Embodied Wisdom



You May Be Here If...

Let me describe her to you. Because if you're here, some part of you will recognise yourself.

- You know things in your body before your mind has formed the thought. You've stopped needing the external confirmation you used to reach for. You trust your knowing. It's quiet. It's accurate. It's still, occasionally, a surprise to you how accurate it is.
- You're not striving to prove anything. There's a settledness in you that is new. It's not complacency. It's not resignation. It's something older and more solid than either of those.
- You've arrived somewhere inside yourself. And you have no particular desire to leave.

- You love from fullness now. Your relationships have a different quality. The care is there. More, if anything, than it has ever been. But it's no longer anxious. No longer contingent on whether the person you love is doing what you need them to do. You can love them and let them be themselves. This is newer than it sounds.
- Other women come to you. They don't always know why. They arrive with confusion, grief, and their half-formed questions. And something in your presence helps them think. You recognise this as something you've earned. *Earned.*
- You laugh easily. Your humour has got drier. More specific. Kinder. You find the human condition endlessly, tenderly absurd.
- You don't take yourself as seriously as you used to.
- You enjoy your own life.
- And what remains in you, after everything that was stripped away in the earlier gateways, is not diminished. You know that now. It's essential. And you carry it with a quietness that no longer needs to announce itself.

What is actually happening

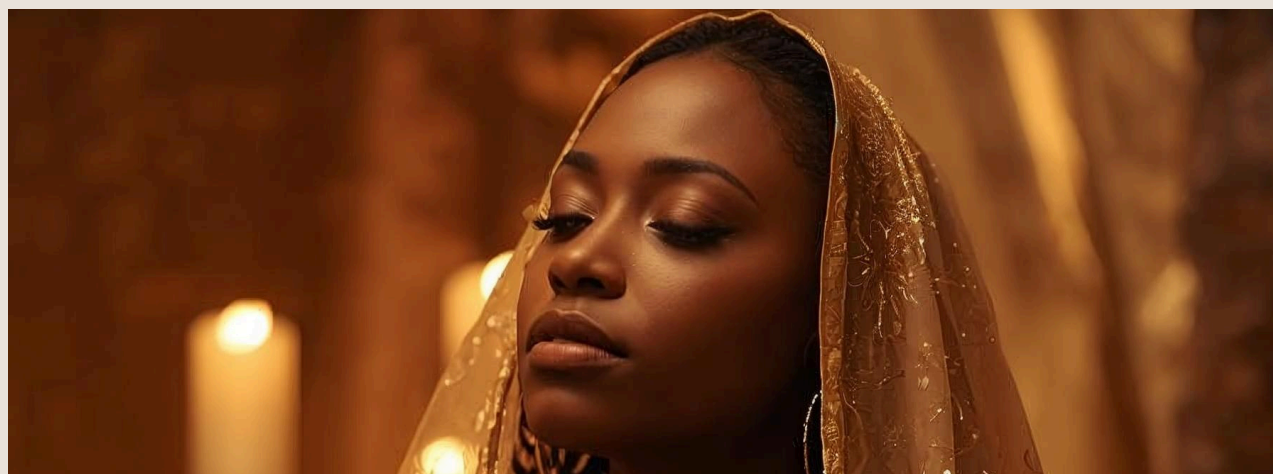
This is where Inanna climbs back through the seven gateways and begins to ascend toward the light.

And what she picks back up on the way out is not identical to what she laid down on the way in.

It's the same thing. Her crown. Her jewels. Her robes of power. But it has been through the underworld with her. And it carries that knowing now. You can see it on her. Something in the quality of how she holds herself.

Something in the way she looks at you.

That is what embodied wisdom is.



It's not information. It's not expertise. It's not the accumulation of years.

***It's wisdom as a lived way of being. Present in the body.
Evident in the choices.***

***Woven into the quality of your attention and the way you move
through a room.***

You know things now. You know them in your body before your mind has formed the thought.

You know what is authentic and what is performance. What is aligned and what is merely maintained. What is grief and what is fear. What is yours and what was never yours to carry.

They're not striving or efforting in the way they once did.

They love from fullness, rather than from fear of what happens if they stop.

They speak from somewhere deep inside rather than from the surface of what is required of them.

They rest in themselves. With the settled, undramatic, utterly reliable presence of a woman who has arrived inside herself and has no intention of leaving.

This is what our ancestors called elderhood.

In virtually every indigenous culture on earth, post-menopausal women held specific and honoured roles.

The council of grandmothers. The keeper of the stories. The one whose counsel was sought precisely because she had been through the fire and come back carrying something no younger woman yet possessed.

This is what was stolen from us when they took the map.

And this is what is waiting for you.

Not at some impossible distance.

At the end of the passage you're already walking.

THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*Where are you, truly? The map is only useful from your actual location.
And wherever you are, you are exactly where the initiation needs you to be.*



Introducing the Midlife Maven

PRIESTESSPRESENCE.COM



At the end of the 7 gateways...

The Midlife Maven Rises. Who is she now?

She's *not* who you were before this passage began.

The Midlife Maven is what becomes possible on the other side of the 7 gateways of initiation.

Which, I should say plainly, does not mean she's some glossy, finished product. I'm not interested in that woman. And I suspect you aren't, either.

She's the woman who has stopped pretending to be anyone other than who she is.

As you can clearly see...

The Midlife Maven is a woman who has travelled far and deep through her life, and has finally let go of everything that no longer feels true: The approval-

seeking and the endless recalibration of herself against what she thinks others could handle.

Gone.

What remains can't be faked or taught. It can only be lived into. Through fire. Loss. And the long, disorienting passage of midlife initiation, where everything that was never real, quietly dissolves.

She is sovereign. And you can feel it before she even speaks.

Her sovereignty is not a spiritual concept for her. It's a physical fact.

She sits back upon the seat of her "throne." She doesn't try to manage anyone, earn anyone, or rescue anyone from their discomfort. She's sourced from the depth of her being. And because she's sourced from that depth, she can't be destabilised by the surface winds that used to knock her over.

Something in the space reorganises when she walks into a room. This isn't because of a large ego, but because she finally stopped making herself small.

You can feel it. You probably already have felt it, in the presence of a woman like this, even if you didn't know at the time what it was you were feeling.

She's wild because she has stopped being domesticated by other people's comfort.

She still cares about the people she loves. She cares even more, if anything.

But what has changed, is that she finally cares more about what is *true* than



what might make you comfortable.

She tells you the thing. She leaves the silence where it needs to be. She does not chase others with reassurance. She speaks. And then she stops.

Which is, I know, an extraordinary thing to encounter. Most of us were trained to do the opposite.



She is vibrant. Sexy. Hot. Juicy.

She has reclaimed her erotic aliveness as a life force that belongs entirely to her. She's not trying to prove her desirability or perform for anyone else. No.

Her eroticism isn't even contingent upon whether there is a partner in the picture!

It is *her* fire. Her life force! She carries it whether she is married or single, partnered or not, celibate or deliciously not.

She has done the work. Physical. Energetic. Psychological. To reclaim her sensuality ... not as it was when she was younger, but as it is now. Richer. Slower. More embodied. More on *her* terms.

This is one of the great unspoken victories of the initiation. And no one, frankly, tells you it's coming.

She is funny.

The Maven has a devastating sense of humour. The kind that comes from having seen enough of human nature to find it tenderly absurd. She can crack you open with a laugh before you realise she was being serious.

Her wit is not a defence anymore. It is the expression of a woman who finds life genuinely, unexpectedly delightful, even in the middle of its difficulty.

She belly-laughs. She swears a bit when it is called for. She does not, any longer, take herself or any of this quite as seriously as she used to.

Which is, to be fair, a relief for everyone.

She loves from fullness.

Her heart is not fragile. It's open.

She has walked back to it the long way round ... through all the places where it was closed, protected, defended, and disappointed. She has done that work.

She loves ferociously and freely ... in the way that only becomes possible when love has been disentangled from need.

She is moved by beauty, suffering, and the sheer, unlikely miracle of being alive.

And she's not ashamed of any of it.



She has stopped proving herself. Permanently.

She simply doesn't need to anymore. She has the receipts. She knows what she is made of. She was tested, and she knows what remained.

That knowing makes her immune to the usual social games. She won't shrink to make you comfortable. She won't ask for your approval.

She already knows what she knows.

Her presence is the teaching.

You sit near her, and something in you remembers who you are. You stand taller. You feel permission to stop pretending.

You can't always explain what happened in the conversation, because nothing specific was necessarily said.

But something shifted.

This is the transmission. She is so fully herself, that you recognise yourself in her field. You learn from *being* with her. Not from what she says or does.

Just from being with her.



She is dangerous in the most magnificent sense of the word.

She can no longer be managed, contained, medicated into agreement, or convinced to stay small.

She has been to the bottom of herself. She knows what lives there. And she came back carrying something that can't be taken.

And here is the thing about the Midlife Maven that our culture, for rather obvious reasons, forgot to tell you.

**She does not arrive fully formed at some distant finish line.
She is rising right now. Through you.
Through the very passage you are in.**

However hard it feels.

However far from magnificent you feel in the middle of it.

The breakdown *is* the becoming.

The dissolution *is* the preparation.

The fire *is* the forging.

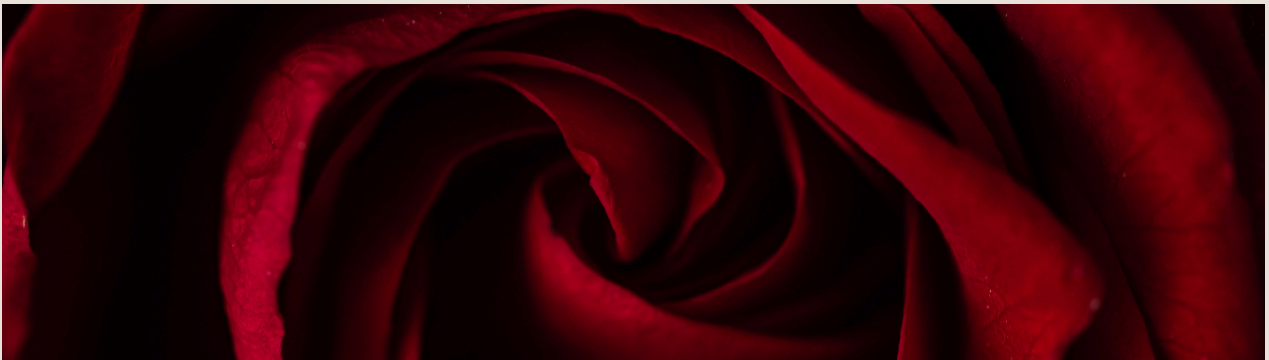
This map will show you where you are in that descent ... and eventual rising.

When you start to feel into where you are, then you begin to better understand where you are on the journey.

The Midlife Maven is rising in you.

She always has been.





What I have laid out in these 7 gateways is not simply a map for navigating the most important rite of passage you will experience in your life.

It's the architecture of a nine-month journey I've been building for women who want to walk this passage with real guidance ... the container I wish existed when I most needed it.

This devotional, sacred container includes the company of other women who are in it alongside them. Together, we'll transform an ordeal into an initiation in the truest sense.

9 months. 7 gateways. The passage walked together.

If what you have read has landed in your body the way I think it might, you will know when the time is right....

The Midlife Maven Is Rising

9 months. 7 gateways. The passage walked together.

If what you have read has landed in your body the way I think it might,
you will know when the time is right.