MARGINALIA

VOLUME 01 | ISSUE 03

SEPTEMBER 2026



IN BETWEEN



CONTENTS

06 Not Quite An Idea Yet

10 Still Becoming

18 What Happens If...?

24 The Pivot

32 Almost, but not Quite.

40 One More Version

48 Is It Done Yet?

56 A Practice In Becoming

MARGINALIA - ISSUE 03

September 2026

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF / CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Jennifer Peterson

Design, art direction, research, photography & publishing

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

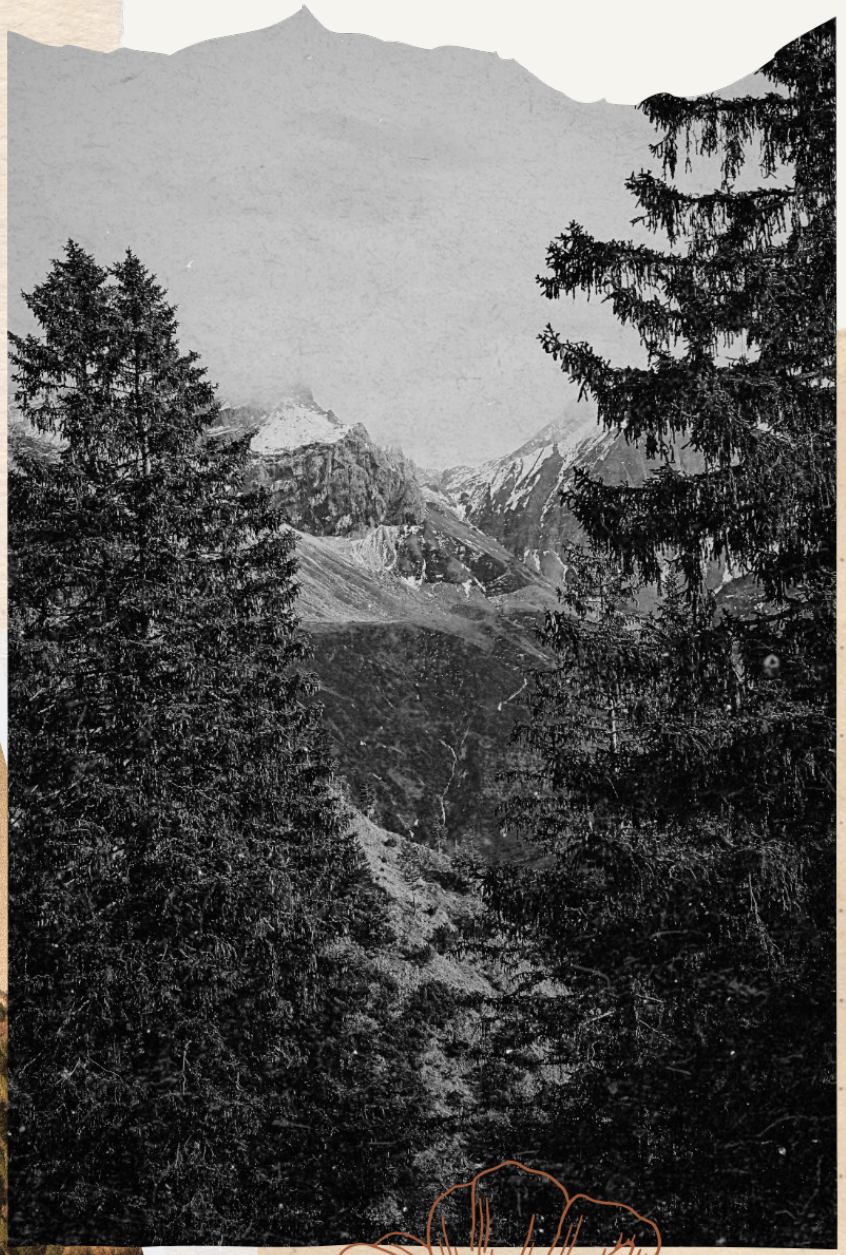
Patsy Carvalho

Editorial writing

PUBLISHED BY

Jennifer Peterson

© 2026 Jennifer Peterson.
All rights reserved.





EDITOR'S NOTE

I used to think creativity was supposed to feel more certain than this.

You have an idea. You make the thing. You finish it. Then you move on to the next.

But the more time I spend creating, the more I realize how little the process actually looks like that.

There are ideas that arrive as nothing more than a sentence. Projects that feel coimpletely wrong until one small change makes everything click. Pieces we revise over and over, only to discover that an earlier version already held what we were looking for. And then there are the things we put away, not because they failed, but because we don't know what they need from us yet.

That space is what this issue became about.

The in-between.

The part where something is no longer what it was, but hasn't quite become what it will be.

As I worked on this issue, I kept thinking about how uncomfortable that space can feel. We like finished things. Finished things can be shared, published, checked off a list. The unfinished asks us to sit with uncertainty a little longer.

But there is so much happening there.

We notice. We question. We try something. We change our minds. We make another version. We walk away. We come back.

And somewhere in all of that, the work changes. Maybe we do, too.

That idea feels especially filling for *Marginalia*. This magazine itself is still becoming. With every issue, I learn a little more about what I want it to be, what I want to explore, and how I want it to feel. There are things I've changed since Issue 01. There will probably be things from this issue that I look at differently six months from now. I'm learning to like that.

I don't want *Marginalia* to be proof that I have everything figured out. I want it to be a record of paying attention while I figure things out. So Issue 03 isn't really about arriving at an answer.

It's about the drafts, detours, abandoned ideas, questions, revisions, pivots, and quiet moments of recognition that happen along the way. It's about being able to look at something, or yourself, and say:

Not quiet yet. Still becoming.

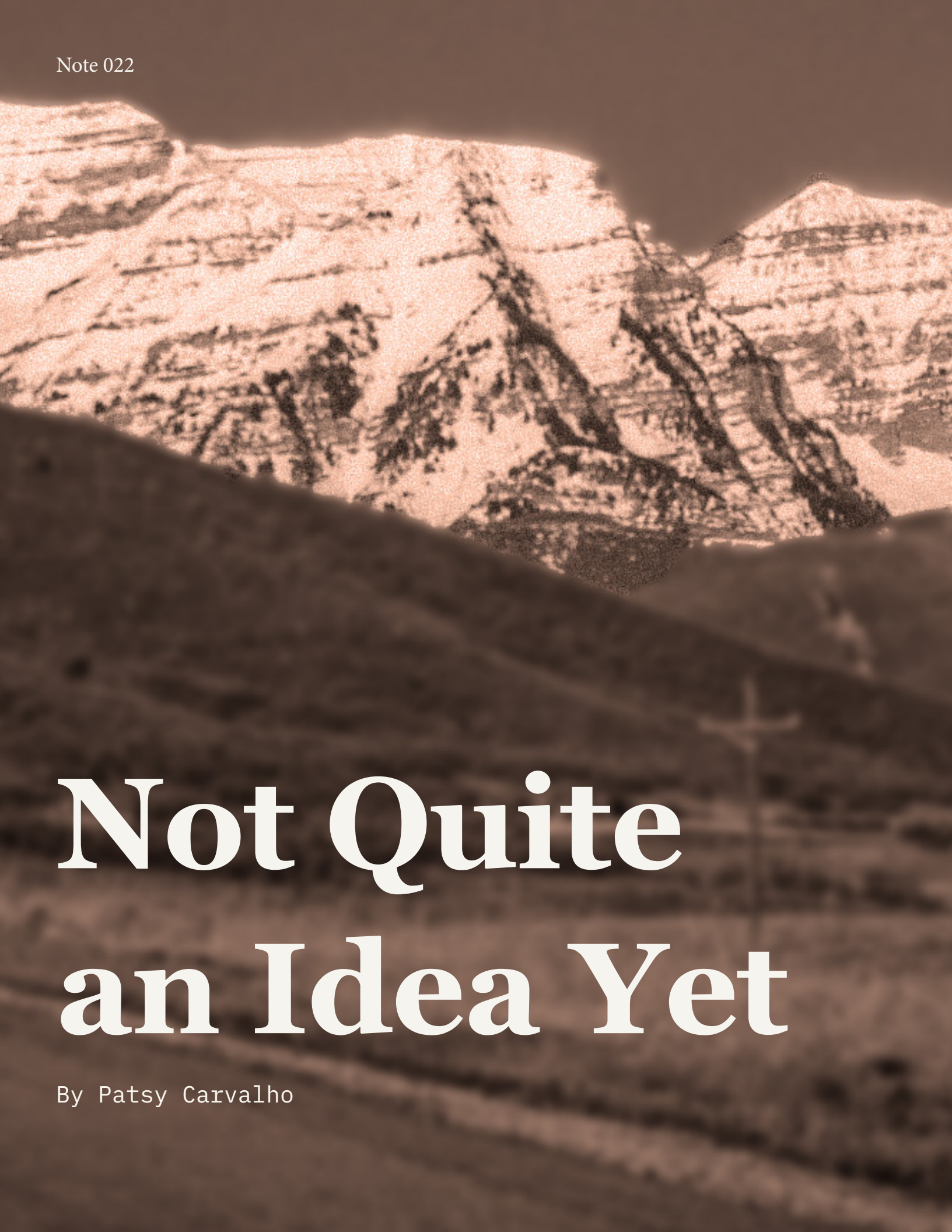
And maybe that's enough.

– J

Jennifer Peterson

Founder & Designer

Note 022



Not Quite an Idea Yet

By Patsy Carvalho



Sometimes the most interesting ideas live in the in-between.

A look at what’s there before it becomes something else.

One thing that I keep returning to is a simple sentence from years ago, one that reminds me that no matter how many times the pen is set down, I am not done yet. This line has found its way back into my sight every time I think about walking away. But it is more than that. It is the line that has sparked the opening of several pieces and has been the inspiration for its own story to follow.

• • •

The snow-dusted mountains called after me, beckoning me to get lost, again.

Before an idea, we think it will just appear in our minds fully developed, without question. That is simply not the case. They begin with noticing something. For this line, I had spent months looking at photos of snow-covered mountains and looking to take a trip to snowy places. From all of this, I didn't just see white covering the ground, I saw soft snow that looked to make that satisfying crunch sound under a boot. Sometimes, I would get distracted from the icicles hanging from a tree branch in the background or notice that in some photos, the ice was simply not yet present. Without realizing it a character formed and the idea of surviving an avalanche had come into my mind. I let my mind go with this.

The snow was no longer snow. It was sound, then an environment, then a character, before finally opening up to a story. This concept is associative thinking, and most of us do this automatically. These ideas seem unrelated and they are, to a point, but they led me to my creation. Remember those photos I mentioned? That was me synthesizing multiple observations. This just proves that design is not limited to a drawing or a computer rendering, but it can be found in the creation of a story as well.

While this line has led to a story, not all of them do, and you can't force them either. There are pages of single lines that I have written that have never amounted to anything. But that's alright because they led me to the ones that were.



It starts with noticing

The snow-dusted mountains called after me, beckoning me to get lost, again.

I have not yet written the entire story for this yet, but this line keeps coming back, making sure that I notice it. And I learned not to be hard on myself for the lines I don't return to because they are there, should inspiration strike, but if it doesn't, then they are still there.



Still Becoming

By Patsy Carvalho

Looking back, moving forward,
and everything in between.


Old ideas
don't disappear.
They just help
shape who we
become.

Like any writer, I believed that the piece currently in progress is the most incredible thing to ever grace a page. Even the ones that end abandoned on a shelf or in a folder on the desktop. The first one to come to mind is the one I wrote in high school.

Picture this, a planet of female superheroes where all the control was in the hands of the heroes. And, no matter the injury, they all survived. I know what I wanted from the story then, and what I needed. However, reading it now feels empty, like something is missing. When I made this, I wanted to be stronger in every way.

—

When I made this, I wanted to be stronger in every way.

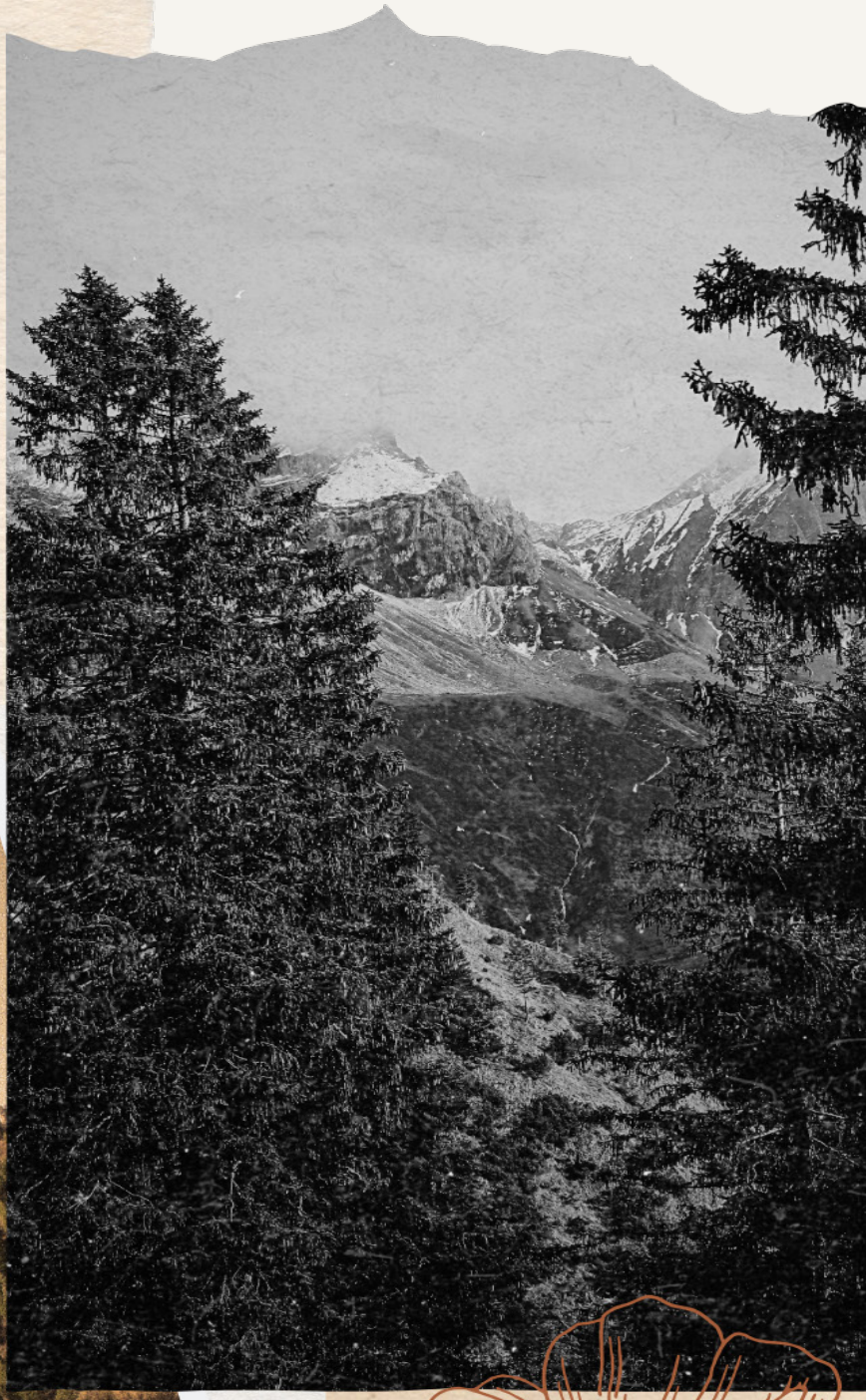
—



What changed is my writing style on purpose. My style became more blunt, and I learned to be more descriptive, among other elements. The big thing, the purpose, evolved into being less for me and more for others. I write to inspire, comfort, and entertain my audience.

Looking back at this piece, one thing that stayed long after the book retired, was the strength of the main character and their desire to share it.

Different ideas.
Same desire to
grow...









When my pen first started to describe the half-dead planet, and the hierarchy, I thought that I would have to embody my character and then develop my writing around them. When I close the book, I realized who I was told to be, and who I was were two different people. What I had written, helped me develop and took me from novice to at least half a step higher. I didn't become an expert overnight. That is what creative processes is: messy, experimental, and constant growth.

Messy.
Experimental.
Constant growth.


It takes effort and practice. Not perfection.



I once thought being a “real writer” meant having natural born talent. I thought it meant producing perfect work at every return. Now, I know, writing takes effort and practice. It means writing, correcting, rewriting, and repeating until the dream is realized.

There are still things I haven’t written, and things I haven’t mastered, but I still have time to learn. I do think my current work around assassins will be in the reject pile of my future self, but that will be because she will have reached a new evolution.

That is the point. Go find an old project and see if you recognize yourself in it. See if you know why. Is it done? Have you outgrown it to the point where completion is futile? That’s okay, because whether you know it or not, it has had an influence on the work you do now and will continue to influence you.

Note 024

What Happens If...?

By Patsy Carvalho

Exploring the possibilities that live on the other side of the question.



same place.
different words.
new possibilities.


What if
I looked
at this
differently?

White crisp snow, crunching under my boots. My breath fogging the air in front of me. My bones shivered from having been in the cold for hours already. But I was determined to find the winter flower.

What if I had written this another way or in another point of view? 'What if' seems to be the question every creative finds themselves asking.

In route, I have written this section a number of times. I have changed the language, and I have changed the point of view. In reality, those changes made the piece sound more like different excerpts with the same meaning and purpose. But what started all of that was asking 'what if'. That husky question pops up long before we find the courage to find out the answer.



Different angle.
Same story.
What else is
possible??

Many of us know this process of wonder, try, discover, adjust, then wonder again. It's natural and that is how a creative finds their place among their work.

So I tried. I found that I like first person in point of view a moderate amount of the scriptures in order to get the scene across. In honesty, when I went heavy on the descriptors and opened like a Shakespeare story, the meaning was lost, the purpose was hidden, and I became stuck as momentum fell short.

This doesn't mean I failed. It means I learned something valuable. I learned the right combination for this piece. However, I did notice that if I went heavy on the description and find momentum, I could possibly write the next great play. But that is not my goal.

What I know now, is that trying gets me closer, but what I don't know, is what if I change it all over again? What else can come of another combination?

What happens if I write this as a journal entry than a story? What will that outcome lead to?

What's your what if?

Trying gets me closer,
but what I don't know is

• • •

What if I change it all over again?

Note 025

The Pivot

By Patsy Carvalho



Now a shift in setting focus.
And perspective turned a stalled story into something worth returning to.

different places.
same story.
A clearer purpose.


same idea. different
place. a stronger story.

When I was working through my Master's in Creative Writing, I wrote a novel. I used something that I had started months before, something that I knew what it was supposed to be long before it was ever finished. I picked something that I never researched and places I have never visited. I wrote about a family of assassins, the ones that are rich but moral. I wrote about New York and France. I looked up pictures of the places, but that was it. However, when I started, I tried to write about Las Vegas, a place that I am all too familiar. It just did not work as well as I would have hoped, and I changed the settings to New York and France.

Sometimes a change in setting isn't about escape, but about giving the story room to breathe.

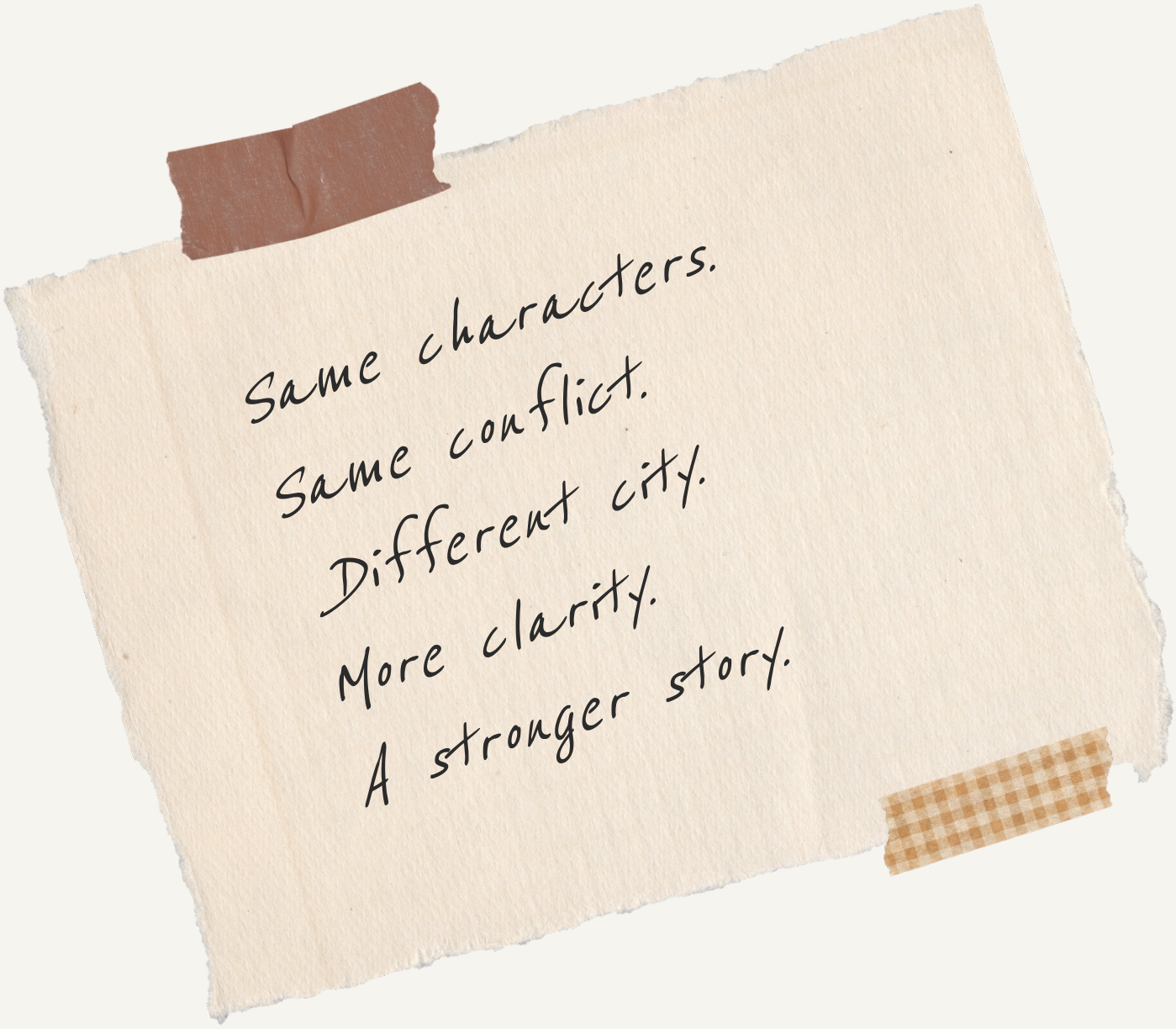


When I found myself struggling, I couldn't figure out what the problem was. I thought it was my character. Then I thought it was the setting. Then I thought I just wasn't meant to write. I felt defeated and had to step away from it for a moment. When I came back to it, I saw that I had already created the bones of the piece. That still didn't solve my struggle. I had actually tried to hold onto everything thinking it all was important when really it was the idea that was getting lost and creating that struggle.

Remember that novel from before? Well, once I located the meaning that I wanted to be at the center of it, I found things falling into place nicely. Now, I didn't actually delete anything. I rearranged scenes, played on the descriptive words a bit more, and I kept a tight hold on the meaning behind it as I finished writing.

I didn't erase the story.
I realigned it.




Same characters.
Same conflict.
Different city.
More clarity.
A stronger story.

The idea of seeing a piece as not right or hard to complete are two different things. Honestly, sometimes you get bored, or you don't want to write the hard stuff, or maybe starting something new is better than problem solving. If one thing walks away with you then let it be that you can quit, but it is never going to be as satisfying as facing the difficult wall and building that tunnel going through it. Because of this thought, my novel evolved from a wild mess into what I needed it to be, and it still is a work in progress.

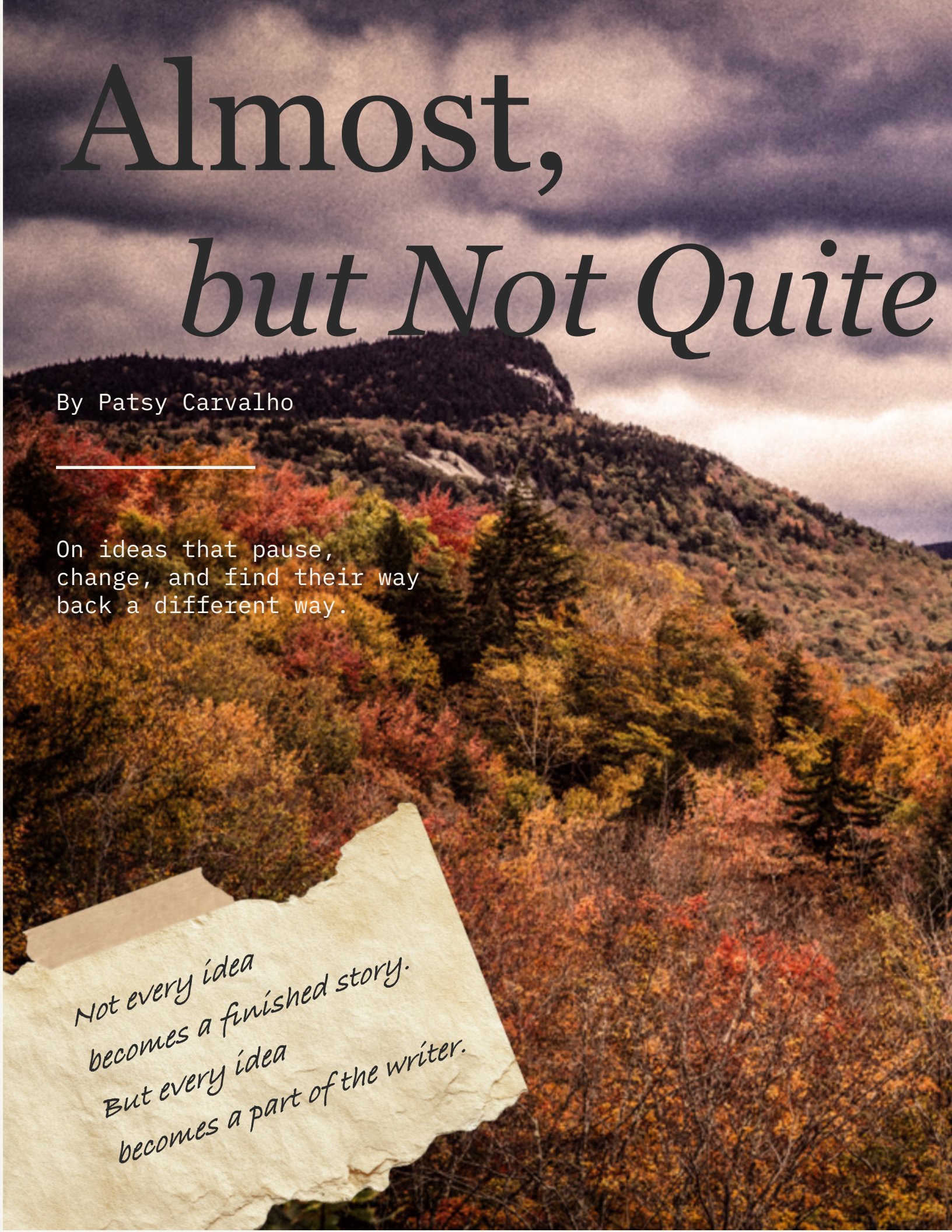
It's never going to be as satisfying as facing the difficult wall and building that tunnel going through it.



Almost, *but Not Quite*

By Patsy Carvalho

On ideas that pause, change, and find their way back a different way.



Same idea.
Different path.
Still a story.





This is a plan for a recent piece of writing. I stopped here because I hit a fork in the road. I was not out of ideas, instead I had too many ideas. Does Jericho fight the werewolf? Are they mates? Or does something else happen?

This is usually where an idea becomes *almost*.

—

Sometimes a story stops not because it's over, but because there are too many ways it could go...



Ideas.
Detours.
Maybe.
Later.



Potential title: Werewolf in the Wild

Characters: Human hunter - Jericho;
Werewolf Alpha's daughter - Lori

Opening scene: 8-year-old Jericho
training with his father.

"Son! You have to get your head out of
the clouds. Werewolves will kill you the
moment they find your weakness."

"Dad, I'm trying."

"Try harder!"

Eight years later:

Jericho is in the forest
collecting healing herbs for
his father when he comes
across a werewolf.



What you just read was the planning process I use with nearly every new idea. Now, this outline is not necessarily clean, but it doesn't have to be. I just start planning my characters, their voice, the problem and the ideas that I don't automatically commit to.

Essentially, I start writing before I know what I'm writing. I work this way for a couple of reasons first, I want to see how things get put together. This allows me to change things before it ends up in a story format. Once it ends up in that format, to me, it feels almost permanent and very difficult to change. Like this, I'm able to go through and add what I am wanting to or needing to for the character or that development without trying to think on the spot while I write. Also, this allows for things to be moved around easily while making more sense than bullet points.

I start writing before I know what I'm writing.

Characters
Setting
Conflict
What if...?
Different ending?
Same idea, new angle?
Keep or cut?
Does it still fit?



For me, if things don't click into place at this stage, then moving forward becomes a near impossible task. This click just means that everything is connecting like a puzzle and I can see it come to life. When things don't connect it feels like there is a wall. If I try to force it then it's like jackhammering through cement without control of the machine.

Looking back at the outline at the beginning, any option regarding Jericho and the wolf would work, but the problem becomes finding which one belongs to the story.

It's not a failed story, it's something in between.

My desktop is full of folders, one of which is just labeled writing. I have a flash drive that is for writing as well and that one is 4 TB of storage. I have had it for years. I make it a point to look at it once a month on a day where I intentionally don't plan anything and make it just my writing day. Sometimes I'm sad looking at pieces of writing that never amounted to anything and sometimes I get a spark of new ideas where I can take these abandoned ideas and repurpose them.

Some of those ideas are there permanently because I know they'll have a fit with my new style of writing. But that's okay because I know they led me to where I am today.

One story that I repeatedly opened is called Battle Moon. The outline is complete and all the ideas fit completely creating a whole image. One question led to another, and one image became several that followed. This is the opposite of Werewolf in the Wild.

Nothing is ever truly abandoned. Often characters, setting, conflict, or even the feeling of the original story remains.

This just shows that my planning process includes moving on. I've never thought of leaving my writing in a folder as abandoning them. Rather, I thought of that as saving them for when they would be more useful. Some outlines and plans are done being ideas and they're just waiting for the story they belong to.

Jericho, at sixteen, is still in that forest. But that is where the story ends. For now, it's not a failed story, it's something in between.

Note 027



One More Version

By Patsy Carvalho

On what changes, what develops, and what stays.


Different drafts.
Same story.
A clearer view.
DRAFT 01
DRAFT 02
DRAFT 03
DRAFT 04
DRAFT 05
DRAFT...
Not about
the number.
About what
happens
in between...

In writing, I do not believe that there is an unreasonable number of versions that can come out of the process. This doesn't mean that every piece will continuously face revisions, but the number is irrelevant. The important thing is what happens between those drafts.

—

The number is irrelevant. What matters is what happens between the drafts.



Idea
Draft
Revise
Rearrange
Let it sit
Return
See clearly

The first draft is a space to get the idea onto the page. This is where I am still discovering what I'm writing. Some things are clearer in my head than they are on paper. Again, this is a tangible collection of thoughts and dialogue that needed a place to exist. Eventually, the writing will have to evolve into something that exists for more that the author.

This is where version two comes in. Authors edit, or have someone edit, their work in order to facilitate a change in the relationship with the work. This doesn't mean the work was bad, but the goal is to create a cohesive, coherent, and enjoyable piece for more than just myself. This means that while I know what was happening in the scene, the reader is oblivious. During this process, and for me personally, it may be discovered that a scene needs more development, or maybe a character is running too rampant across the page, something may be unclear, or changing one thing may affect another part of the story. This is evolution.

This is evolution.
Not a step back,
but a deeper look.



When I revise scenes and characters, the story becomes deeper, and it feels like clouds are dispersing. It is like version one was the surface level of the writing. Version two allows more of the imagery and character development to become exposed. A character is able to become more complicated which amplifies a scene or two. The next thing I realize is that another revision is on the horizon because my new understanding has consequences somewhere else in the story. This does not mean that I am dissatisfied with what I wrote, quite the opposite. I will write a new version because my understanding of the story has changed.

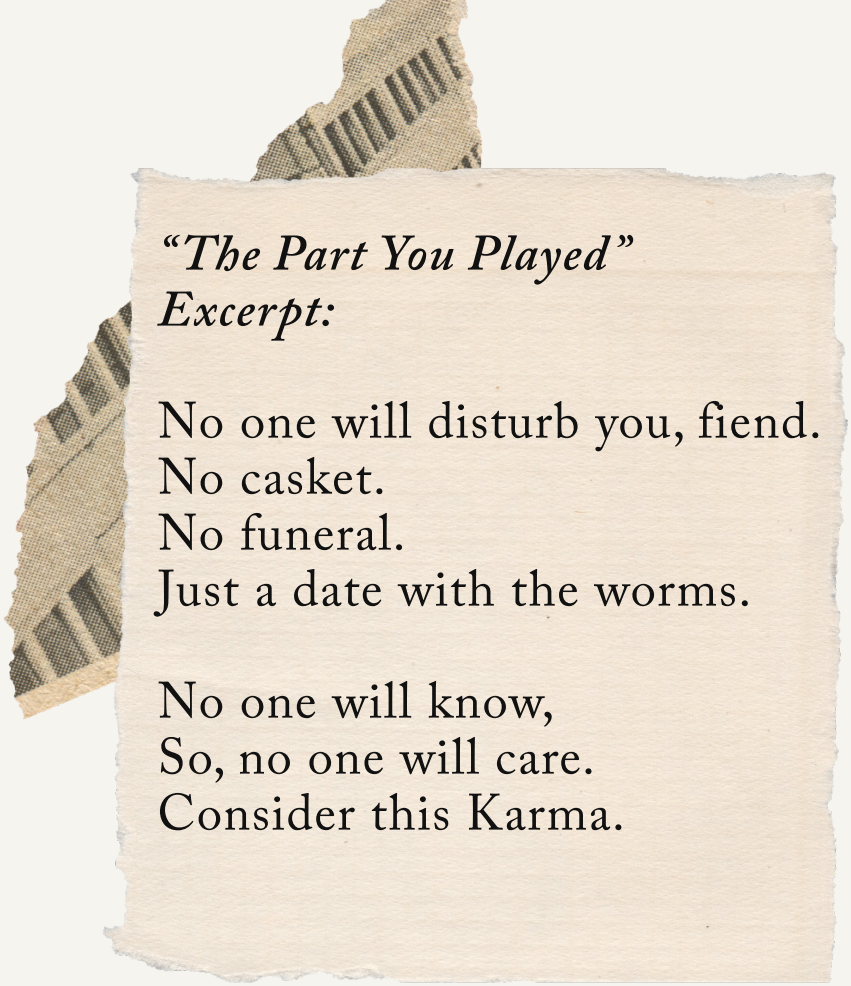
A new version
doesn't mean it was wrong.
It means I understand
it more now.

This does not mean that the newest version is better. Better in prose means clarity and coherence. However, poetry acts up differently from prose. Sometimes grammar, structure, or punctuation can be "corrected," but that would change the effect of the poem. I often return to older poetry I have written and get the urge to correct these issues, but then I pause to read the poem again. Sometimes the grammatical issue adds something.

I had written a chapbook during my undergrad at UNLV. There is a section called "The End" where I talk about friends who allow a man to come between them. The friend ultimately betrays the narrator. The poem "The Part You Played" explores the beginning of the end of their friendship. When I revised this poem I rearranged it multiple times, and I even layed out sections on note cards so that I could physically see the progression. I knew the point I wanted to get across. Eventually, I realized that I had already reached the version that worked.

I learned that when something fits, it stays. I didn't give up on the revision because the revision had done its job.

I still don't think that there is an unreasonable number of versions in writing. A novel could need seven drafts whereas another might need more, or less. A poem might need dozens of revisions before it just clicks into place. The number is useless, what we learn is the important part. We need to stop looking at which draft we are on and start asking the questions that will push the piece forward. Is the revision clarifying the writing for your reader? Is it developing the character or the plot? Is it dispersing another cloud? Don't force a revision; otherwise, you will spend more time picking up the puzzle pieces just to end up at the beginning again.



"The Part You Played"
Excerpt:

No one will disturb you, fiend.
No casket.
No funeral.
Just a date with the worms.

No one will know,
So, no one will care.
Consider this Karma.

The next version does not have to be "better" just because it is the most recent. Sometimes it is just the next tool to help disperse those clouds. A character you don't fully understand yet. A scene that lacks a purpose. A story that isn't completely clear.

The challenge isn't knowing how many versions you are allowed to, or have to, make. It is recognizing when the clouds have gone and your story is completely revealed.

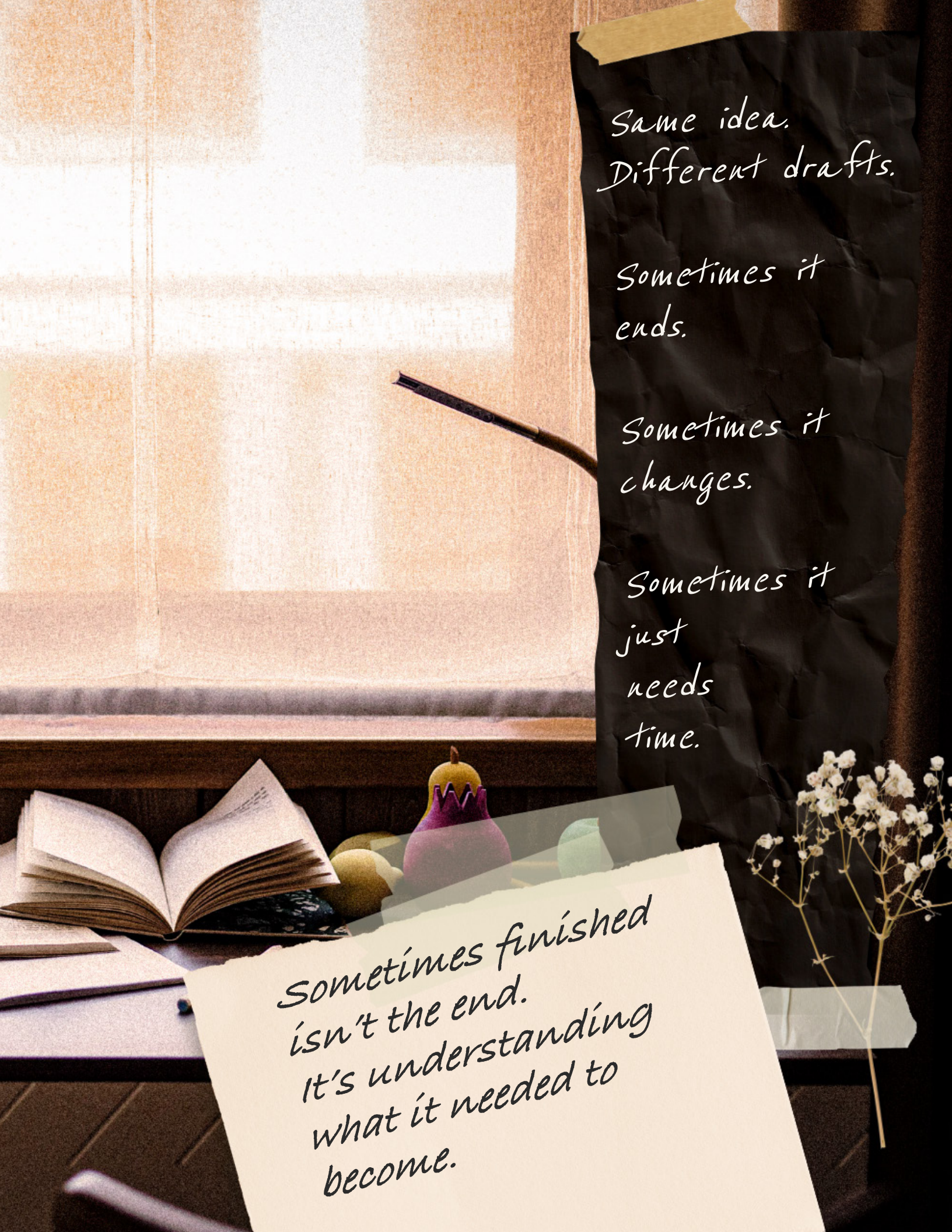
Note 028

Is it Done *Yet?*

By Patsy Carvalho

On endings, evolution,
and knowing when to let go.




Same idea.
Different drafts.
Sometimes it
ends.
Sometimes it
changes.
Sometimes it
just
needs
time.
Sometimes finished
isn't the end.
It's understanding
what it needed to
become.

At the end of the piece, with the final sentence written, and the final revision written; there's something humorous that comes out of "the end". Look at the name of all your final drafts.

Final

Final Two

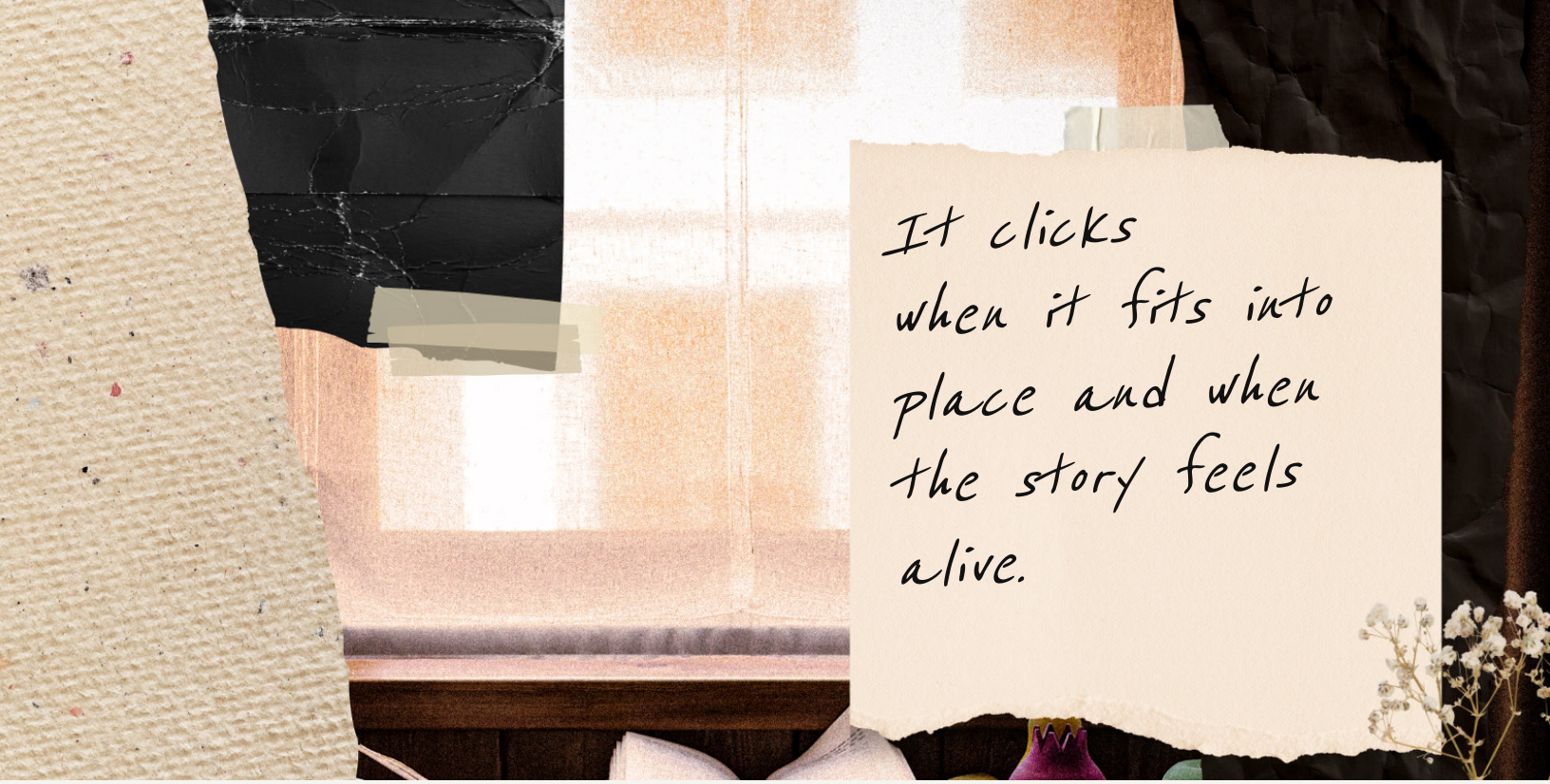
Final-Final

Actual Final

Final-use this one

—

All jokes aside, what makes the final version the last version? For me, it's when a story clicks in the place.



A story clicks when it fits into place, and when the story feels alive. Before I reach this, I can feel that something isn't sitting right, even if I can't immediately put a name to it.

Sometimes there isn't a sentence I can point to to name it as the culprit. I just know the story hasn't reached peak evolution yet. Finished isn't always a measurable qualifier, sometimes it's something you recognize instinctually.

Well, now what happens when it doesn't click? This is where I walk away. I'm not abandoning my work, I'm giving it space because sometimes making changes won't necessarily solve the problem.

Sometimes I come back and rewrite what I have already written. Sometimes the spark is just gone. This doesn't mean the story is dead. I hope the spark returns.

I wrote something I called "The Warrior and His Princess". I had the story, but it just wasn't working. Eventually, I walked away from it.

It didn't just die, where it sat. The spark returned. But it was more than that- it transformed.

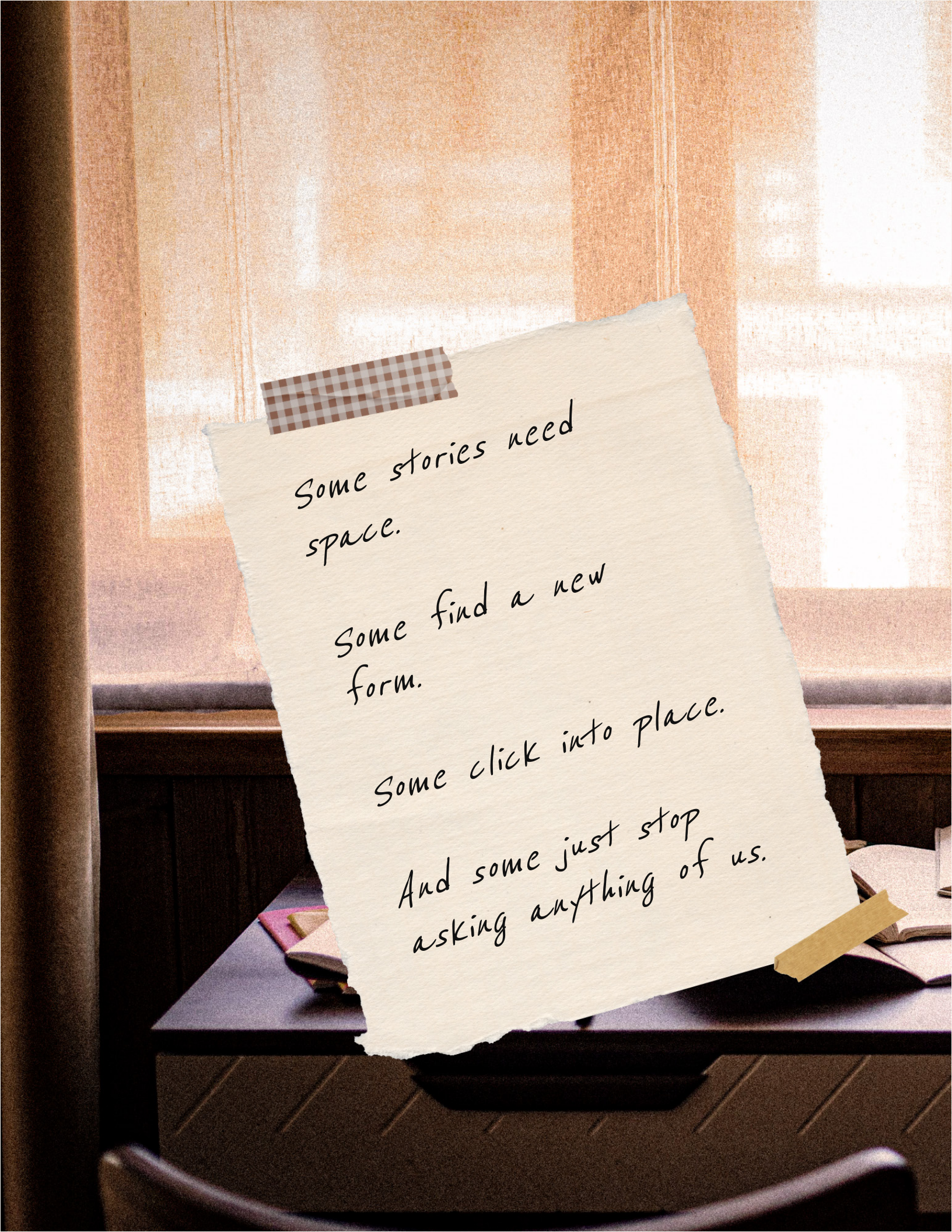
The warrior became a modern assassin.

The princess became an ordinary, civilian woman.

Eventually, "The Warrior and His Princess" became "The Unsuspected Hero", the novel I completed for my Master's in Creative Writing.

The original story wasn't waiting to be finished. It was waiting to be understood about what it needed to become.

This is when the story felt alive and the ideas came together.


Some stories need space.
Some find a new form.
Some click into place.
And some just stop asking anything of us.

Revisions are to help you find the story when you rewrite major sections, change characters, or walk away.

When the story clicks, revisions become about refinement. You are no longer trying to find the story, you were trying to find what it is to be.

So when does this end?

For me, this is when I can't find anything else that needs changing.

When I was in high school, I wrote about superhero women; one notebook every year. At the time I saw them as complete when the school year ended. After developing as a writer, I went back to them and easily picked out things I would revise. I even tried. But whenever I did, nothing happened.

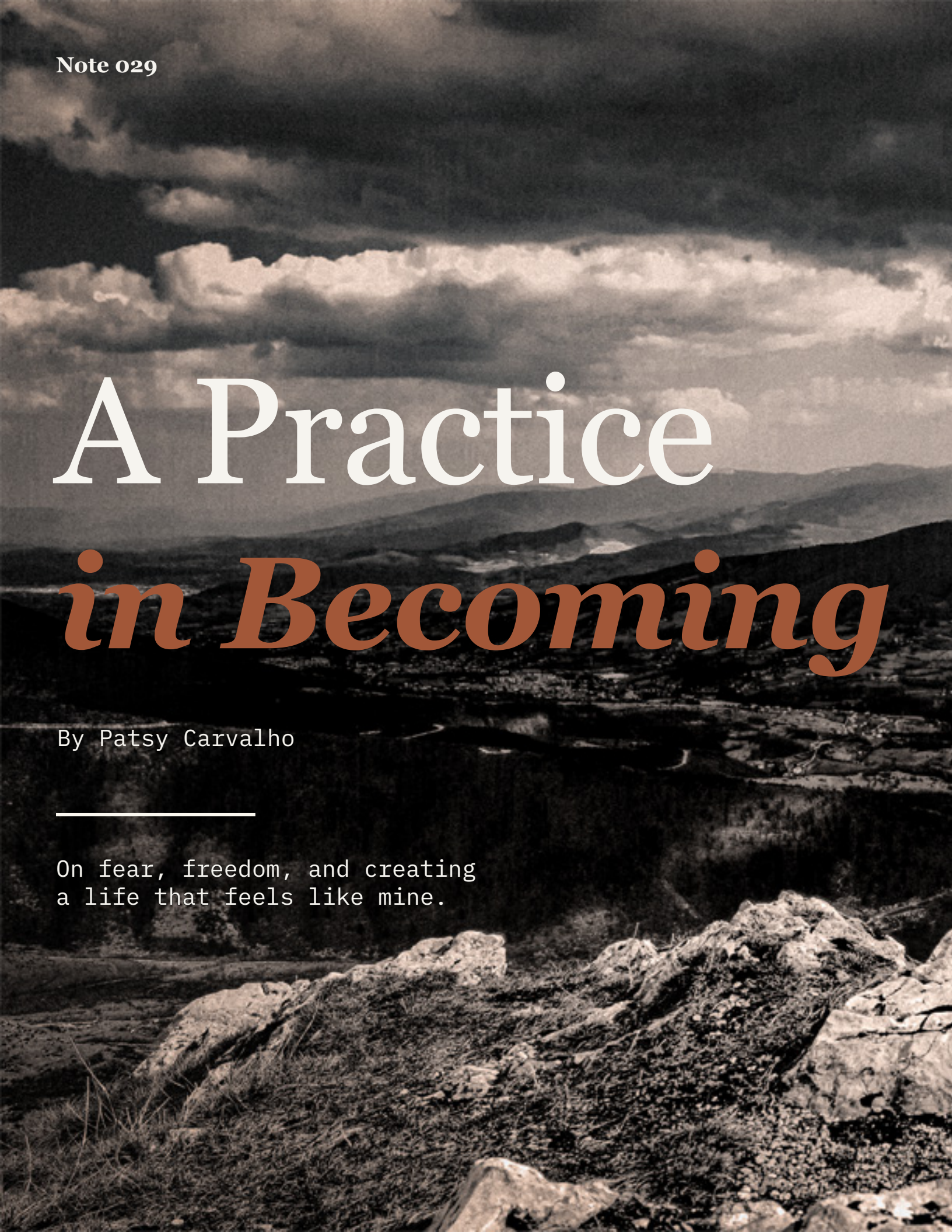
There is no new version trying to come out. There is no spark. This is when I realize:

The story has already done what it was supposed to do.

I'll let you in on a secret: not everything is written to be read by anyone other than you.

This is what makes defining " finished" so difficult.

Maybe finished isn't when there's nothing left to change. Maybe it's when the story has nothing left to ask of you.

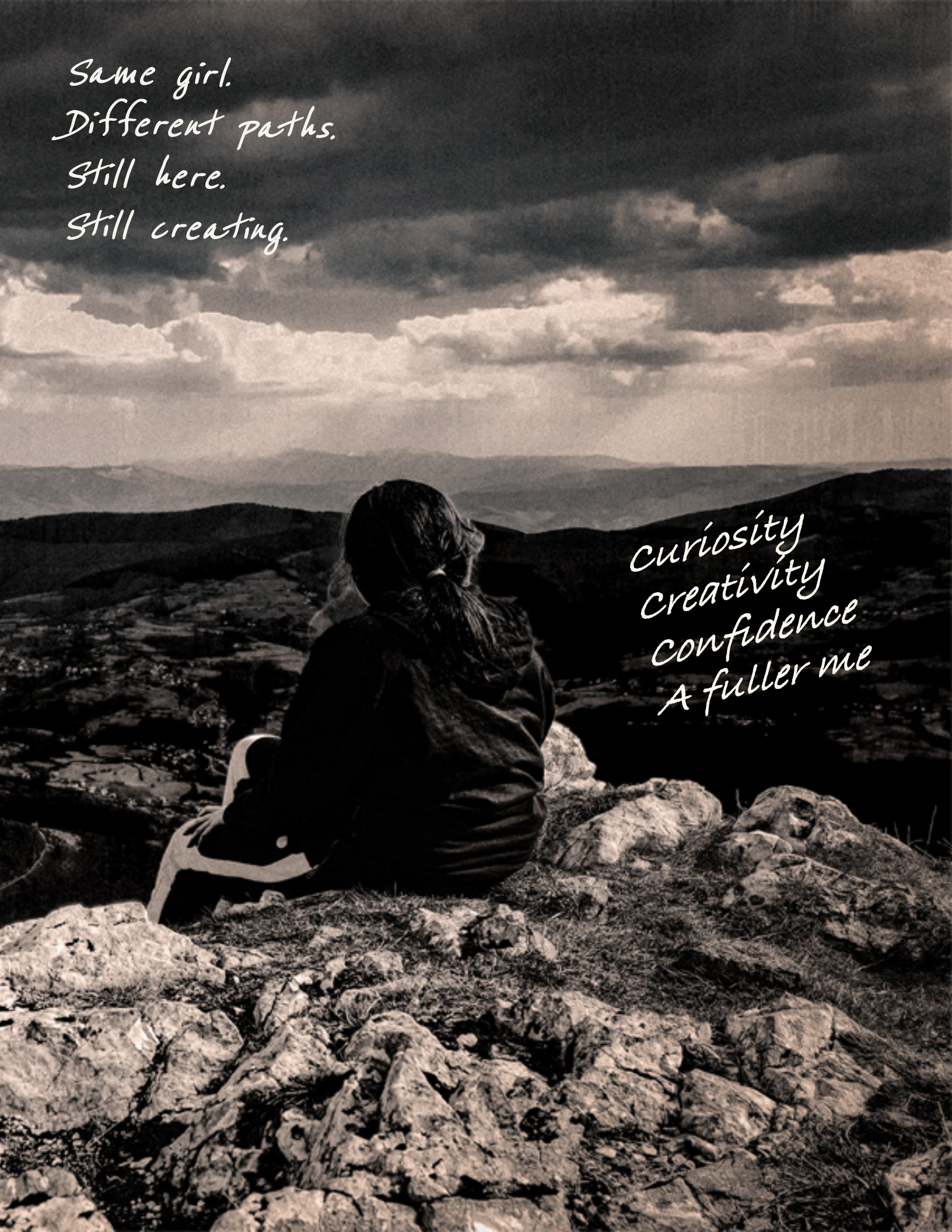


Note 029

A Practice *in Becoming*

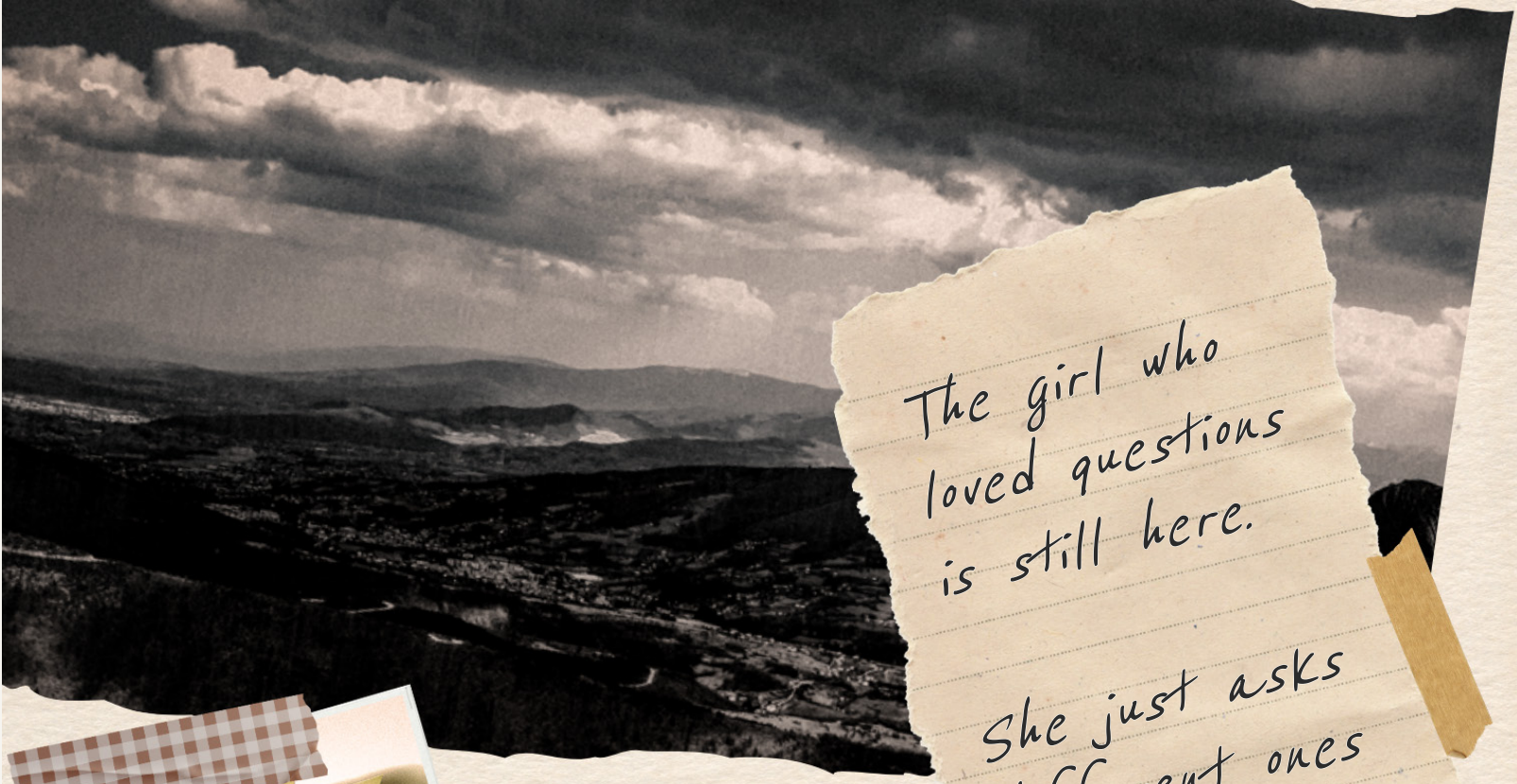
By Patsy Carvalho

On fear, freedom, and creating
a life that feels like mine.


Same girl.
Different paths.
Still here.
Still creating.
curiosity
creativity
confidence
A fuller me

When I was younger, I thought I'd be a scientist. I wanted to explore what things were made of which is why I was set on chemistry. Creativity wasn't part of the future I imagined. In fact, I was afraid to be creative. I was told that I wasn't good enough and never would be. I believed it. I wrote about superhero women, but no one read it.

I was afraid to be creative. I believed it.



The girl who loved questions is still here.

She just asks different ones now.



Things changed when I met my husband at UNLV. He told me I could do anything. That didn't instantly transform me into a creative person. However, it gave me enough confidence to branch out of what I was " supposed to do". For the first time, I felt in charge of my own path.

I started joining creative writing groups, where I learned that nothing shared should be perfect. I shared my first work nervous and shaking. I was doing the one thing I was afraid to do: let others read my work. But I kept going and found my interest. Finally, I changed my major to English with a concentration in creative writing.

I wasn't thinking about being a writer. I just wanted to be happy.

Through every struggle and doubt I got what I wanted: a bachelors and a masters in creative writing. And I have written a novel. An actual novel.

I wasn't thinking about being a writer. I just wanted to be happy.


Join the group
Share the work
Keep going
Change the path
Find my interest

Apparently, I had become a writer before I ever thought to call myself one.

Finishing a novel didn't close any process, but it opened up my creative ability.

I became willing to experiment.
I found freedom in escaping from reality.

Somewhere along the line, I started making worlds to understand our world that we live in.

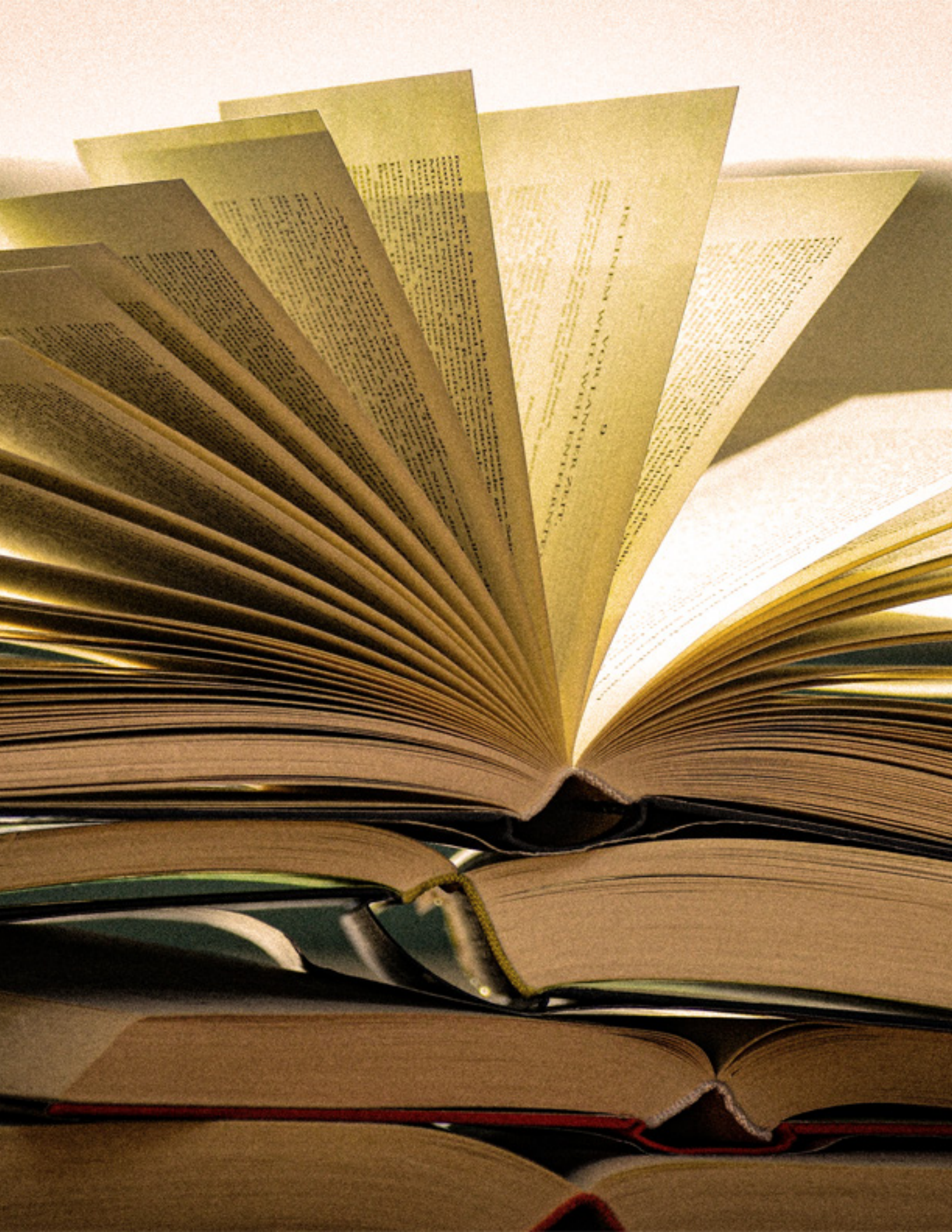
Sometimes I still find fear lingering at the back of my mind about whether I'm good enough.

But I no longer let it stop me from being creative.

Once, I believe that creativity required confirmation.

Someone had to read it.
Someone had to like it.
Someone had to decide it was good.

But, sometimes I'm writing for myself. And I no longer need permission.



Archive

to

Remember.



MARGINALIA ARCHIVE

JENNIFERPETERSONN.COM/MARGINALIA