

A scenic mountain landscape. In the foreground, there are large, grey, moss-covered rocks. A turquoise lake flows through the middle ground, surrounded by green grass and small trees. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains with patches of snow and a prominent snow-capped peak under a cloudy sky.

# still-waters-run-deep

Martina Nyamainashe

# still-waters-run-deep

STILL

WATERS

RUN DEEP

*A Guide for the Woman Who Has It All Together —*

*and is quietly falling apart inside*

How to Restore Yourself, Reclaim Your Inner World,

and Feel Like Yourself Again

**A Letter to You**

*Before We Begin*

*If you picked up this book, something in you already knows. You are tired in a way that sleep does not fix. You are performing fine on the outside and disappearing on the inside. This book was written for you.*

I want to tell you something before we go any further. I am not writing this from the outside looking in. I am writing this from the other side of the experience you are living right now — and I know it from the inside.

I was a full-time nurse, a mother to three young children, a wife, running a side hustle, and financially supporting my family back in Zimbabwe. From the outside, I was capable, committed, and holding everything together. On the inside, I was disappearing.

# still-waters-run-deep

The moment I knew something was truly wrong was not a dramatic breakdown. It was quieter and more painful than that. I started snapping at my children — for harmless things, ordinary child things — and the guilt that followed each time was enormous. I was exhausted all the time, even after a full night of sleep. Not the tired that rest fixes. A deeper kind. A tired that had moved into my bones.

I took three weeks to visit my parents in Zimbabwe, hoping the change of scenery would restore me. Instead, I slept. Constantly. During conversations. During road trips. It was mortifying. My parents kept asking why I was sleeping so much and I made excuses about the heat. The truth was that I did not have words for what was wrong. I just knew that something was.

*I came back to England slightly better — three weeks of sleep will do something, even if it does not fix the root. But the wrongness was still there. So I went to my GP. Blood tests came back normal. Everything was fine on paper. And yet I was not fine, and I knew it.*

So I started my own research. I tried different things — teachers, therapy, prayer. Some helped a little. Most did not touch the specific thing that was broken in me: the short-temperedness, the anger that did not feel like me, the exhaustion that no amount of rest could reach.

Then I found a teacher who was speaking about healing your emotions. He spoke so directly into what I was carrying that I could not ignore it. I invested in his work. And that was the beginning of my real journey back to myself.

# still-waters-run-deep

What I eventually understood was this: I had been running on empty for years. The combination of full-time nursing, three small children, a marriage, a business, and carrying financial and emotional responsibility for family across two countries had depleted me at a level that a holiday, a blood test, or positive thinking simply could not reach. I needed to learn how to heal emotionally. How to restore what had been quietly given away, year after year, to everyone except myself.

I found my way back. And this book is what I wish someone had placed in my hands the day I sat on that plane to Zimbabwe, making excuses about the heat.

You have a life that, by most measures, looks impressive. A career. A household. People who depend on you everywhere you turn. You are the one they call. You are the one who shows up.

And somewhere behind all of that, there is a woman who is running on empty. A woman who snaps and then carries the guilt for days. A woman who looks in the mirror and thinks: I do not recognise who I have become.

*I know her. I was her. And I know the way back.*

## What's Inside

Introduction: The Woman Behind the Capable Woman

Chapter One: The Hidden Architecture of Depletion

Chapter Two: Why You Don't Recognise Yourself Anymore

Chapter Three: The Emotional Anchor Tax — What No One Talks About

Chapter Four: Why Knowing About Self-Care Isn't the Same as Doing It

# still-waters-run-deep

Chapter Five: Coming Home to Yourself — The Restoration Framework

Chapter Six: Regulating Your Nervous System (The Foundation of Everything)

Chapter Seven: Rebuilding Your Inner Life — Identity, Joy, and Presence

Chapter Eight: The Practice — Small, Consistent Rituals That Actually Work

Chapter Nine: Relationships, Boundaries, and Reclaiming Space

Chapter Ten: Sustaining Yourself — A Life That Supports You

Closing: A Promise to the Woman You Are Becoming

## Introduction

### *The Woman Behind the Capable Woman*

Let's describe her. She is probably between her mid-thirties and early fifties. She has built something — a career, a reputation, a family, a life. She is the one her colleagues lean on during uncertainty. She is the first call when someone needs advice. She manages the school calendar and the quarterly reviews and somehow always knows where everyone's passport is.

She earns well. She leads well. She loves fiercely. She performs consistently. By every external measure, she is thriving.

And inside, she is not.

*"I'm still functioning. I'm just not feeling anything anymore. I don't know when that changed."*

# still-waters-run-deep

For many women reading this, there is an additional layer that standard wellness content never addresses: the weight of holding responsibility across two worlds. If you are part of a diaspora community — living and working in one country while carrying financial, emotional, and practical responsibility for family in another — you know the particular exhaustion of that dual belonging. The remittances, the phone calls, the guilt of being far away, the expectation that because you are 'over there' you are somehow resourced enough to carry more.

This is the woman this book was written for. Not the woman who has collapsed — she would get help. This book is for the woman who has not collapsed yet. Who is still showing up. Still delivering. Still being what everyone needs her to be. While quietly wondering: when did I stop being something to myself?

The most important thing to understand from the beginning is this: what you are experiencing is not a character flaw. It is not weakness. It is not ingratitude for the good life you have built. It is the predictable, documented, physiological and psychological result of years of sustained emotional output with insufficient restoration input.

You did not fail at self-care. The kind of self-care you have been offered was not designed for the specific exhaustion you carry.

This book is.

## ◆ Reflection

*When did you last feel fully like yourself? Not performing, not managing, not holding things together — but genuinely, recognisably you? What was different about that time?*

## Chapter One

# still-waters-run-deep

## *The Hidden Architecture of Depletion*

Before we can restore something, we need to understand how it was damaged. Not to assign blame — you have done nothing wrong — but because understanding the mechanism is the beginning of the cure.

### **The Slow Drain No One Notices**

Burnout in high-achieving women rarely announces itself dramatically. There is no obvious breakdown. No dramatic exit. What researchers call 'silent burnout' is precisely that — silent. It hides behind productivity. It disguises itself as competence. It wears your face while quietly hollowing you out from the inside.

You are still delivering results. You are still meeting deadlines. You are still holding space for your team, your children, your partner, your ageing parents. On the outside, you appear calm, capable, and in control. And so no one — not even you — notices the strain accumulating behind that facade.

*Nearly 60% of women report feeling chronically stressed, compared to 41% of men. Women in leadership roles are 32% more likely to experience burnout than their male counterparts. The burnout gap between women and men has doubled since 2019.*

### **The Three-Layer Problem**

What you are experiencing is not one problem — it is three problems stacked on top of each other, each making the others worse.

#### **Layer One: The Double Shift**

# still-waters-run-deep

You carry what researchers call the 'double shift' — a full professional life stacked on top of what is, in most households, a disproportionate domestic and emotional load. You manage the logistics: the appointments, the schedules, the household running. But you also carry the invisible cognitive and emotional labour that goes along with it.

Researchers describe this invisible work as having three brutal characteristics: it is invisible (no one sees you doing it), boundaryless (it follows you everywhere, including into your sleep), and enduring (it never truly ends). Even if the physical tasks are sometimes shared, the responsibility of remembering, anticipating, and managing them tends to sit with you.

## **Layer Two: Allostatic Load**

Your body has been keeping score. Allostatic load is the physiological cost of chronic stress — the accumulated wear and tear on your nervous system, your hormones, your immune function, your capacity to regulate your own emotions. By the time most women in your position seek help, their allostatic load has been building for years. Possibly decades.

This is why rest doesn't fix it. You can take a holiday and come back still depleted. You can sleep eight hours and wake exhausted. Your nervous system has been overused. It is not simply tired — it is dysregulated. And a dysregulated nervous system cannot rest properly, cannot feel fully, cannot access the joy and presence that you are looking for.

## **Layer Three: Identity Erosion**

Over years of performing, achieving, and giving, many women in your position quietly lose the thread of who they are outside of their roles. You are a professional. A partner. A mother. A daughter. A leader. A colleague. But who are you when none of those roles are required of you? Many women find they genuinely don't know anymore.

# still-waters-run-deep

This is identity erosion, and it is both a symptom of depletion and a cause of it. When you have no self to return to at the end of a long day, you have no place to be restored.

## ◆ Reflection

*Which of the three layers feels most true for you right now: the double shift, the physical cost of chronic stress, or the loss of your own identity? You may find it's all three — that's common. Start with whichever feels most urgent.*

## Chapter Two

### *Why You Don't Recognise Yourself Anymore*

One of the most distressing experiences women describe is looking in the mirror — metaphorically or literally — and not recognising who they see. Not in the way of age or appearance. In the way of self. The reactions that come out of you. The tone of voice you hear. The irritability that surfaces in ways you cannot fully control.

"I'm reacting to everything and becoming someone I don't recognise."

This is perhaps the most common pain point women like you describe. And it comes with a particular kind of shame, because you know better. You are emotionally intelligent. You understand yourself. You care about the people you snap at. The fact that you are behaving this way — despite all of that — is profoundly disorienting.

## What's Actually Happening

This is not a character problem. This is a nervous system problem.

# still-waters-run-deep

When your body has been in a prolonged state of stress, your nervous system lives in what physiologists call a state of chronic activation — the sympathetic 'fight or flight' response is perpetually switched on, or close to it. In this state, the prefrontal cortex — the part of your brain responsible for perspective-taking, emotional regulation, patience, and considered response — becomes less accessible. The threat-detection parts of your brain, which are fast and reactive, take over.

This is why you snap before you have a chance to choose a different response. This is why a small frustration can tip you into something that feels disproportionate. Your brain is not functioning poorly — it is functioning exactly as it would in a state of sustained danger. The problem is that your life does not feel dangerous to your conscious mind, but your body has been sending danger signals for so long that it no longer knows the difference.

*The gap between what you know and what you feel is the signature of nervous system dysregulation. You know you love your children. You know this work matter is manageable. You know you have so much to be grateful for. And yet you cannot access the version of yourself who feels those things fully. That gap is not a moral failure. It is a physiological state.*

## The Loss of Emotional Range

Beyond the reactivity, many women in deep depletion describe something that is in some ways harder to articulate: a narrowing of emotional range. Not depression exactly — you can still feel things. But the highs are harder to access. Joy flickers rather than glows. Excitement feels distant. You go through the motions of things that used to matter and feel a faint echo of what you expected.

# still-waters-run-deep

This is not who you are. This is what chronic stress does to the brain's reward and motivation circuitry. It is reversible. But it requires more than a spa day or a motivational podcast to reverse it.

## The Woman You Remember

Most women can describe her clearly. The version of themselves they want back. Energised, present, joyful, in control of their inner world. Funny, perhaps. Spontaneous. Someone who didn't have to manage themselves quite so carefully. Someone who laughed without effort and rested without guilt.

That woman is still inside you. She has not left. She has been buried under years of output, expectation, and role performance without adequate restoration. This book is, in its deepest sense, a recovery plan for her.

### ◆ Reflection

*Describe the version of yourself you want to return to. Be specific. What did she feel like in her body? How did she move through the world? What did joy feel like in her? What do you most miss about her?*

## Chapter Three

### *The Emotional Anchor Tax — What No One Talks About*

There is a cost to being the person everyone leans on. A tax, if you will. And unlike most taxes, it is invisible, unacknowledged, and largely uncompensated.

# still-waters-run-deep

You are the emotional anchor of your household. When the atmosphere shifts, people look to you to stabilise it. When there is tension, you are the one who navigates it. When someone is struggling, you are the container for their struggle. You hold the emotional temperature of the room. You regulate the people around you, often without being asked or even aware that you are doing it.

At work, it is no different. You are the one people bring the difficult conversations to. You are the leader who holds the team together in uncertainty. You are the colleague who notices when someone is not okay.

This is a beautiful quality. It is also exhausting in a very specific way that most wellness content does not address.

## Co-Regulation and Its Cost

Human nervous systems are designed to co-regulate — to soothe and settle each other. When a regulated, calm person is in proximity to someone who is dysregulated, there is a neurological pull towards the more regulated state. This is why a baby calms in a calm parent's arms. Why a panicking colleague feels better after talking to someone grounded.

You, by nature and by long practice, are very good at providing this regulation for others. But here is what no one tells you: every time you regulate someone else, you are drawing on your own nervous system's reserves. If you are not being adequately co-regulated yourself — if there is no one who holds you the way you hold others — you are running a deficit that compounds over time.

*Women frequently carry enormous emotional responsibility. They stabilise families, relationships, workplaces, and social circles. They absorb stress and continue functioning. The nervous system keeps track of all of it. Years of holding tension can create a body that never truly relaxes.*

# still-waters-run-deep

## The Invisibility Problem

What makes this particularly difficult is that the work is invisible. No one counts it. No one thanks you for it in the way they might thank you for a deliverable or a gesture. The house feels calmer because of you — but no one marks that. The team holds together because of you — but it appears in no performance review. The relationships in your life function because of your emotional labour — and yet it is often the first thing overlooked.

This invisibility is not merely frustrating — it has a psychological cost. When our labour is unseen, we begin to feel unseen. And there is something deeply depleting about being profoundly necessary and persistently unnoticed.

## Giving What You Don't Have

There is a point — and many women reading this will recognise it — where you are still giving, still anchoring, still holding, but the genuine warmth that used to come naturally now requires effort. You are doing the right things from muscle memory, not from fullness. You are pouring from a jug that has been empty for some time. The tea still comes out for a while, but the quality is different. And you know it, even if no one else does.

I know this point intimately. I was a nurse — giving care professionally, all day — and then coming home to three children who needed me, a household to run, a marriage to tend, a business on the side, and a family in Zimbabwe to support emotionally and financially. Every single one of those demands was real. Every one of them mattered to me. And every one of them drew from the same finite reserve.

# still-waters-run-deep

The snapping at my children was not cruelty. It was depletion. I had been giving from empty for so long that the smallest additional demand — a harmless question, a bit of noise, an ordinary child moment — was enough to tip me over. That knowledge, when I eventually understood it, was one of the most compassionate reframes of my own behaviour I had ever encountered. I was not a bad mother. I was an exhausted one who had never been taught how to fill herself back up.

This is not failure. This is what depletion looks like in caring, capable, responsible women.

## ◆ Reflection

*Who regulates you? Who do you go to when you are struggling? Is there a person in your life who holds you the way you hold others? If the answer is 'no one really' — sit with that gently. Not with judgement, but with recognition. This matters.*

## Chapter Four

*Why Knowing About Self-Care Isn't the Same as Doing It*

You know the language. Boundaries. Rest. Mindfulness. Regulation. You follow the accounts. You've read the books — perhaps this is not even the first one. You have bought courses that you have not finished, not because you didn't believe in them, but because you couldn't sustain the effort of adding one more thing to an already overwhelmed life.

And somewhere in that experience, a quiet narrative has formed: that you cannot help yourself. That you know what to do and you don't do it. That this is, in some way, your fault.

It is not. And this chapter exists to explain why.

# still-waters-run-deep

## The Problem with Conventional Self-Care

Most self-care content is designed for someone with available resources: time, energy, emotional bandwidth, and a nervous system that is not chronically activated. It presupposes that you have the capacity to begin, to choose, to commit, to follow through.

When your nervous system is dysregulated and your resources are depleted, those capacities are diminished. The very depletion that makes self-care most necessary also makes it hardest to access. This is not a willpower failure. It is a physiological reality.

And here is something that matters deeply: even the medical system, which we trust to tell us when something is wrong, often cannot see this kind of depletion. When I finally went to my GP after returning from Zimbabwe, blood tests came back completely normal. On paper I was healthy. In reality I was running on vapour. The kind of exhaustion I was carrying did not show up in a blood panel — because it was not a physical illness. It was the accumulated cost of years of emotional depletion that no standard test is designed to measure.

If you have been to the doctor and been told everything is fine, and you know it is not — I believe you. The absence of a clinical diagnosis does not mean the absence of a real problem. It means the problem lives at a level that requires a different kind of attention.

*Most self-care content is designed for someone with available resources. When your nervous system is dysregulated and your resources are depleted, those capacities are diminished. The very depletion that makes self-care most necessary also makes it hardest to access. This is not a willpower failure. It is a physiological reality.*

## Why Intelligent Women Get Stuck in the Knowing-Doing Gap

# still-waters-run-deep

There is a gap between intellectual understanding and embodied change. You can understand every mechanism of burnout, read every framework for restoration, and still not change — because change at this level is not cognitive. It is physiological. It requires working with the body, not just the mind.

This is why information alone does not heal depletion. I know this because I tried it. I searched. I researched the symptoms — the anger, the short-temperedness, the exhaustion that would not shift. I tried teachers, therapy, prayer. Good things, all of them. But until I found an approach that worked directly with emotional healing at its root — until I found someone who spoke into the actual wound rather than around it — nothing fully landed.

That experience taught me something I now consider essential: the right kind of support, at the right depth, changes everything. Not more information. Not another framework to understand. Something that actually reaches you where you are.

If you have tried things and they have not worked, please hear this: that is not evidence that you cannot be helped. It is evidence that you have not yet found the approach matched to the specific depth of your need. That approach exists. This book is a beginning. The pathway that follows it goes further.

## **The Self-Compassion Paradox**

High-achieving women often treat themselves with less compassion than they would treat anyone else in their position. They would never look at a colleague running on empty and tell her she is weak, or selfish, or failing. Yet they say these things to themselves with regularity.

# still-waters-run-deep

Research shows that self-compassion — treating yourself as you would treat a close friend — reduces guilt and shame, builds resilience, and is one of the most powerful foundations for sustainable change. Yet it is often the hardest practice for the women who most need it.

Before we move into the practical work of restoration, we need to establish something foundational: you deserve the same care you give everyone else. Not because you've earned it. Not because you can justify it. Simply because you are a person, and persons require care.

## ◆ Reflection

*What have you told yourself about your inability to maintain self-care consistently? Write down the inner critic's version of events. Then write what you would say to a dear friend who told you the same story about herself. Notice the difference.*

## Chapter Five

### *Coming Home to Yourself — The Restoration Framework*

Restoration is not the same as relaxation. Relaxation is a pleasant state that exists within a generally functional life. Restoration is something deeper — it is the rebuilding of the inner architecture that makes a full life possible.

The Restoration Framework in this book works across five dimensions, each supporting the others. You do not need to work on all of them at once. In fact, trying to do so would be counterproductive. But understanding the whole picture allows you to see why each piece matters and how they connect.

## The Five Dimensions of Restoration

# still-waters-run-deep

## 1. Physiological Safety

Your body must first learn that it is safe. Not conceptually safe — your logical mind knows you are not in danger. Physiologically safe. Your nervous system must be brought out of its chronic state of activation and taught to rest. This is the foundation. Nothing else works properly without it.

## 2. Emotional Processing

Depletion is not only about too much output — it is also about unprocessed emotional content that has accumulated over time. Grief. Resentment. Loneliness. Fear. Disappointment. These emotions do not disappear when they are not processed; they are stored in the body and the nervous system, adding to the load. Restoration requires creating space for these emotions to move through you.

## 3. Identity Reconnection

Rebuilding a sense of self that exists outside of your roles and responsibilities. Reconnecting with what you actually enjoy, value, feel drawn toward. Remembering — or discovering for the first time — who you are when you are not being useful to anyone.

## 4. Relational Recalibration

Examining the patterns of giving and receiving in your relationships. Building boundaries that protect your energy without damaging your connections. Finding safe relationships where you can be held, rather than always being the one who holds.

## 5. Sustainable Rhythm

# still-waters-run-deep

Creating a life structure — daily, weekly, seasonal — that actually supports the kind of person you want to be, rather than constantly extracting from her. Not an ideal schedule, but a real one, built for your actual life.

*You do not need to transform your life. You need to restore the person living it. When she is restored — even partially — everything shifts. Her relationships. Her work. Her experience of every ordinary moment.*

## Chapter Six

### *Regulating Your Nervous System — The Foundation of Everything*

This is the chapter that changes everything. If you read nothing else in this book carefully, read this.

Your nervous system is the operating system of your experience. When it is dysregulated, nothing works as it should: your emotions are harder to manage, your thinking is less clear, your sleep is poor, your relationships are strained, your capacity for joy is diminished. When it is regulated, everything becomes more possible.

The good news is that your nervous system is neurologically wired to heal and restore equilibrium. But it requires something specific: consistent signals of safety, sent to the body through the body.

### Understanding Your Stress State

The body operates across a spectrum of nervous system states. At one end is the highly activated state — heart rate elevated, breath shallow, muscles tense, mind scanning for threat. At the other end is the deeply restored state — heart rate settled, breath full and easy, muscles soft, mind clear and present.

# still-waters-run-deep

Most depleted women are not at either extreme. They exist in a kind of chronic low-level activation — not acute panic, but never truly settled. The body learned, over years of high demand, to stay prepared. This is an intelligent adaptation to an overwhelming environment. But it is not sustainable as a permanent state.

The goal of nervous system regulation is not to eliminate the stress response — it is to restore the body's capacity to return to baseline after stress. To be activated when needed and to rest when the demand has passed.

## Three Core Regulation Practices

The following practices are evidence-based, grounded in polyvagal theory and neuroscience, and importantly — they are brief. They do not require 30 minutes. They do not require a special setting. They require only your body, and a few minutes of genuine attention.

### Practice 1: The Physiological Sigh

1. Inhale slowly through your nose until your lungs are full.
2. Take a small second inhale on top — a tiny 'top-up' breath — to fully inflate the air sacs.
3. Exhale long and slow through your mouth, releasing fully.
4. This double inhale followed by extended exhale is the fastest known way to shift the nervous system towards calm. Practice it in the car, before a meeting, in the bathroom. It takes 15 seconds.

### Practice 2: The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

1. Name 5 things you can see around you right now.

# still-waters-run-deep

2. Name 4 things you can physically feel (feet on floor, air on skin).
3. Name 3 things you can hear.
4. Name 2 things you can smell.
5. Name 1 thing you can taste.
6. This interrupts the loop of anxious thought and returns attention to the present body, activating the parasympathetic nervous system.

## Practice 3: The 5-Second Pause

1. When you feel reactivity rising — a snap, an impatience, an overwhelm — stop.
2. Do not respond yet. Breathe slowly for five seconds.
3. Feel your feet on the floor. Let the urge to react pass its first wave.
4. Then choose your response.
5. This tiny pause creates the neural space between stimulus and response that is the basis of all emotional self-regulation.

## The Body as Ally

Somatic practices — those that work with the body directly — are among the most effective tools for nervous system restoration in women experiencing chronic depletion. These include yoga, gentle movement, breathwork, time in nature, and body-based therapies such as somatic experiencing or EMDR.

# still-waters-run-deep

The reason body-based approaches are so powerful is that the nervous system is a body-level system. You cannot think your way to regulation. You can only feel your way there.

## ◆ Reflection

*Where do you feel tension in your body right now? Not emotionally — physically. Your shoulders, your jaw, your chest, your stomach. Place your hand there. Breathe into that place. This is where the stress lives. This is where the restoration begins.*

## Chapter Seven

*Rebuilding Your Inner Life — Identity, Joy, and Presence*

Once the nervous system begins to settle, something else becomes possible: you start to hear yourself again. The quiet voice underneath the noise of obligation and performance begins to speak. And what it often says, first, is: I don't know who I am anymore.

This chapter is about listening to that voice, and what to do with what it tells you.

### Rediscovering Who You Are Outside of What You Do

Your identity has, likely without your conscious awareness, become deeply fused with your roles and your achievements. Your worth feels tied to your output. To how much you accomplish. To how well you manage everything. To being needed.

When you strip those things away — even theoretically — who are you? Not your job title, not your relationship status, not your list of accomplishments. Just you. What do you love, not because it is useful or productive, but because it calls to something essential in you?

# still-waters-run-deep

Many women at this stage discover they genuinely don't know. They haven't made space for that question in years. Some feel a flicker of panic at the emptiness it reveals. This is not a problem. It is actually a beginning.

*After decades of adaptation, women begin asking 'What feels true?' instead of 'What will be rewarded?' This inner pull is not a crisis. It is your authentic self, asking to be included again.*

## The Pleasure Audit

Begin here: make a list of every small thing that has given you genuine, uncomplicated pleasure in the past year. Not satisfaction — that is the feeling of completing something. Pleasure. The kind that comes from inside, not from having done something well.

Your list may be shorter than you expect. That is information. If you struggle to name things, do not be alarmed. The capacity for pleasure is suppressed by chronic stress — but it is not gone. Think of small things: a particular kind of light. A smell. A song. The specific feeling of being in a particular place. Warmth. Stillness. The sensation of having nothing to manage.

These small things are breadcrumbs. Follow them.

## On Joy

Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is responsive — it comes from good things happening. Joy is a baseline state, an inner orientation that makes the good things visible and lets the ordinary things be enough. It is the difference between appreciating a sunset because it is beautiful and experiencing a sunset as a gift.

# still-waters-run-deep

Joy does not require circumstances to be perfect. It requires the nervous system to be settled enough to register the good that is already there. Many depleted women discover that when their nervous system begins to regulate, joy begins to seep back in without fanfare. Not a dramatic awakening. A quiet return, like light coming back as the clouds clear.

## Presence as Practice

The inability to be fully present — to be physically in a place while your mind is elsewhere, cycling through tasks and worries and responsibilities — is one of the most painful aspects of depletion. It robs you of your own life.

Presence is not achieved by effort. It is achieved by regulation. As your nervous system settles, presence becomes more natural. But you can also practice it actively: choosing, for short windows, to be entirely where you are. Not checking anything. Not planning anything. Just being in the moment you are actually in.

Start with five minutes. At dinner. In the bath. During a walk. Just five minutes of genuine presence in an otherwise distracted day is a profound act of self-return.

## ◆ Reflection

*What have you given up in the service of being responsible, capable, and needed? What small pleasures, interests, or relationships have quietly fallen away? You don't need to reclaim all of it at once. Begin by naming it.*

## Chapter Eight

*The Practice — Small, Consistent Rituals That Actually Work*

# still-waters-run-deep

This chapter is about practical reality. Not the ideal version of your restoration journey — the version where you have space and time and a beautiful wellness ritual every morning. The actual version, where you are still working full days, still being needed by everyone, and still trying to find something real within the constraints of your life.

The principle here is simple: consistency matters infinitely more than intensity.

A 3-minute practice done every day will do more for you than a 3-hour retreat done once a month. The nervous system learns through repetition. You are teaching it something new — that safety is possible, that restoration is available, that you matter enough to tend to — and that teaching requires showing up repeatedly, even briefly, even imperfectly.

## **The Morning Window**

The first 20 minutes of your day set the tone of your nervous system for much of what follows. Currently, for most depleted women, those 20 minutes are spent checking phones, absorbing information, and beginning to problem-solve before the body has fully arrived in the day.

What would it mean to spend even 10 of those minutes differently? Not on a complex ritual — just on something that signals to your body that this day begins with you attending to yourself.

## **A Minimum Morning Practice (10 minutes)**

1. Before touching your phone: sit up, place both feet on the floor, and take three deep, slow breaths.
2. Drink a glass of water slowly and without multitasking.

# still-waters-run-deep

3. Write one sentence in a journal: 'Today I notice...' (Complete it without editing or judgment.)
4. Spend 5 minutes in silence, looking out of a window or sitting outside. Nothing required of you. Just being.
5. Then begin your day.

## The Mid-Day Reset

Identify a moment in the middle of your day — often lunch, or a transition between commitments — where you can take 5 minutes to genuinely stop. Not to check messages. Not to respond to something. To stop.

### A Mid-Day Reset (5 minutes)

1. Find somewhere you won't be interrupted, even briefly.
2. Do the physiological sigh twice.
3. Ask yourself: How am I actually feeling right now? Name it without judgement.
4. If you can, step outside or near a window for a moment of natural light.
5. Return to your afternoon with slightly more of yourself available.

## The Evening Landing

Many depleted women cannot switch off in the evenings. They carry the day's tension into dinner, into bedtime, into sleep. The result is poor quality rest even when sleep duration is adequate.

# still-waters-run-deep

An evening landing practice is not about winding down into sleep — though it helps with that too. It is about marking the end of the day's roles. Creating a signal that the performing is over and the person can now emerge.

## **An Evening Landing Practice (15 minutes)**

1. At a consistent time, do something that marks the role shift: change your clothes, make a specific drink, light a candle.
2. Write down three things you noticed today — not achievements, but observations.
3. Do a brief body scan: lie down or sit comfortably and slowly bring attention through each part of your body, releasing tension as you go.
4. Name one thing you are grateful for — not from a sense of obligation, but something genuine and specific.
5. Avoid screens for at least 30 minutes before sleep.

## **Weekly Anchors**

Beyond daily practices, you need weekly moments that belong entirely to you. Not because they are productive. Not because they make you better at anything. Simply because you are a person and persons need unstructured time that is entirely their own.

Schedule one hour per week that is genuinely yours. No errands, no responsibilities, no self-improvement agenda. You choose how to use it, and that choice can change week to week. The only rule is that it is for your pleasure and restoration alone.

# still-waters-run-deep

Guard it. When something tries to take it, notice the pull to give it away, and make a different choice.

## ◆ Reflection

*Looking at your typical week, where could one of these practices genuinely fit? Not ideally — actually. Be honest about your constraints, and then be honest about what you could protect if you decided it mattered enough.*

## Chapter Nine

### *Relationships, Boundaries, and Reclaiming Space*

You cannot restore yourself in isolation from the relationships that shaped the depletion. The people in your life — your partner, your children, your parents, your colleagues, your team — are both part of the problem and part of the solution. This chapter is about navigating that reality without blowing up your relationships in the process.

### **The Difference Between a Boundary and a Wall**

Boundaries are not punishments. They are not declarations of war. They are not about coldness or withdrawal. A boundary is simply a clear communication of what you need in order to stay well and remain in relationship. It is, paradoxically, an act of care — for yourself and for the relationship.

Without boundaries, depletion builds. Resentment forms. The warmth you used to offer freely becomes something you dole out carefully, because there isn't enough. The people you love most receive the most depleted version of you, because by the time you reach them you have nothing left.

A boundary protects the warmth. It protects the version of you that people actually want to be in relationship with.

# still-waters-run-deep

*You are not being difficult when you say no to something that empties you. You are protecting your capacity to say yes to what matters. Boundaries are not the end of generosity. They are the infrastructure that makes generosity sustainable.*

## Communicating Your Needs Without Guilt

High-achieving women are often extraordinarily skilled at meeting other people's needs and profoundly uncomfortable with naming their own. The request 'I need...' can feel like a vulnerability too far. Like weakness. Like asking for too much.

This discomfort is worth examining. Whose voice is it that tells you your needs are too much? In what environment did you learn that needing things was not acceptable? And is that voice actually yours?

Naming your needs — clearly, without extensive apology — is one of the most healing things you can practice. Start small. Name one need today. To someone safe. Not perfectly. Just honestly.

## The Relationships That Restore You

Not all relationships are equal in their impact on your nervous system. Some people leave you feeling more full. Some leave you more depleted. Most depleted women, when they examine this honestly, discover they have been prioritising the connections that require the most giving while protecting the ones that genuinely restore them.

Inventory your relationships with honesty. Who among the people in your life makes you feel more yourself? More settled? More held? Prioritise those connections. They are not luxuries. They are medicine.

### ◆ Reflection

# still-waters-run-deep

*What is one request you have not made because you were afraid of how it would land? What would it mean to make it? What would change if the people in your life knew, clearly, what you actually need?*

## Chapter Ten

### *Sustaining Yourself — A Life That Supports You*

The deepest work of this book is not the practices — though they matter. It is the shift in belief that must underlie them. The belief that you are worth sustaining. Not because of what you produce. Not because of what everyone needs from you. Simply because you are here, and because a life fully lived is something you deserve.

This chapter is about building a life that does not extract from you faster than it restores you.

### **Redefining Success**

Most depleted women have been operating with a definition of success that is externally generated: title, salary, recognition, the appearance of managing everything. These things are not meaningless, but they are incomplete. A more sustainable definition of success includes how you feel at the end of a day. Whether you moved through the world with some degree of ease. Whether you experienced moments of genuine presence and pleasure. Whether you were able to offer something to the people you love from fullness rather than depletion.

This is not a lesser ambition. It is a fuller one.

### **The Structural Shift**

# still-waters-run-deep

Beyond practices and mindset, sustained restoration often requires some structural change to the conditions of your life. This does not have to be dramatic. It might be as simple as:

- Identifying two recurring commitments that drain you disproportionately and considering whether they are truly necessary.
- Delegating one category of task that you have been carrying unnecessarily.
- Having one honest conversation about the distribution of domestic and emotional labour in your household.
- Asking for one accommodation at work that would reduce the friction of your role.
- Saying no to one thing per week that you would previously have said yes to reflexively.

None of these changes are enormous in isolation. Together, over time, they alter the structure of your life in ways that create space for restoration to actually take hold.

## **When to Seek Professional Support**

This book is a beginning, not a completion. For many women, the depletion described here is deep enough that working with a therapist, coach, somatic practitioner, or other professional will be an important part of their restoration.

There is no shame in this. There is extraordinary wisdom in it. You would not attempt to resolve a significant physical health issue purely through a self-help book. The same principle applies here.

If you are experiencing symptoms of clinical depression, severe anxiety, or other significant mental health challenges, please seek professional support. The practices in this book can complement professional care, but they are not a substitute for it.

# still-waters-run-deep

*Asking for help is one of the bravest things you can do. It is not a sign that you have failed. It is a sign that you understand what you need — and you are finally willing to ask for it.*

## ◆ Reflection

*What would a life that truly sustains you look like? Not a fantasy — a realistic, grounded vision. What would be different about your mornings, your evenings, your relationships, your work? Start there. Not with a plan to achieve it, just with the honest articulation of what you long for.*

## A Promise to the Woman You Are Becoming

*"You are not starting over. You are returning. And there is a profound difference between the two."*

I think about that woman on the plane to Zimbabwe. Exhausted in a way she could not name. Making excuses about the heat because she did not yet have language for what was happening inside her. Sleeping for three weeks in her parents' house and still coming home not quite right. Sitting in a GP's office and being told the tests were normal while something in her knew, with absolute certainty, that normal was not what she was.

I think about how long she searched. How she tried therapy and teachers and prayer. How close she came, more than once, to concluding that this was simply who she was now. That the woman she remembered — the energised, present, joyful one — had been lost somewhere in the years of nursing shifts and school runs and international phone calls and side hustles and holding everything together for everyone everywhere.

She was not lost. She was buried. And the day she found the right approach — the one that spoke directly into the wound — was the day the returning began.

# still-waters-run-deep

That woman was me. And this book, and the pathway that follows it, is what I built so that your search might be shorter than mine.

We have covered a great deal of territory together: the architecture of how depletion builds, the neuroscience of why you do not recognise yourself, the cost of being everyone's emotional anchor, the gap between knowing and doing, the framework for restoration, and the practices that make it real.

But here is what I want to leave you with, above all else.

The woman you remember is not someone you were before life got complicated. She is someone you can be again, when the resources are restored. This restoration does not require you to change your life entirely. It requires something quieter and more profound: the sustained, compassionate decision to include yourself. To treat your own needs as real. To show up for the woman inside you the way you show up for everyone else.

You are not too far gone. You are not broken. You are depleted. And depletion, unlike brokenness, has a remedy.

Begin today. Not with everything. With one breath. One moment of genuine presence. One honest naming of what you need. One small act that says to the woman you have been neglecting: I see you. I am coming back to you. You matter.

*Because you do. You always did.*

*With deep care,*

**Still Waters Run Deep**

**Quick Reference**

# still-waters-run-deep

## *Your Restoration Toolkit at a Glance*

### Daily Practices

- Morning: 3 deep breaths before phone, 1 journal sentence, 5 minutes of silence
- Mid-day: Physiological sigh, honest emotional check-in, 2 minutes outside
- Evening: Role-shift ritual, brief body scan, 1 genuine gratitude

### In-the-Moment Regulation

- Physiological sigh: double inhale, long exhale — 15 seconds to calm
- 5-4-3-2-1 grounding: use senses to return to the present body
- 5-second pause: breathe before responding when reactive

### Weekly Practices

- One hour that belongs entirely to you — non-negotiable
- One relational connection that restores you
- One gentle movement or body-based practice

### Questions to Return to

- Who regulates me? Who holds me the way I hold others?
- What gave me genuine pleasure this week?
- Am I giving from fullness or from depletion right now?
- What do I need that I haven't yet asked for?

### Signs You Are Restoring

# still-waters-run-deep

- You catch yourself before reacting rather than after
- Small things begin to feel pleasurable again
- You notice you are more present in conversations
- You feel brief, genuine moments of ease rather than constant effort
- You can hear your own voice — your preferences, your wants, your opinions — more clearly

*Remember: consistency over intensity. A 3-minute practice done daily creates more lasting change than a 3-hour session done once. Show up for yourself, imperfectly, repeatedly. That is enough. You are enough.*

## BONUS

### My Trigger Tracker

#### *Understanding What's Driving Your Reactions*

A trigger is any situation, person, tone, word, or moment that activates a disproportionate response in you. It feels bigger than the situation warrants. You react before you can choose. And afterwards, you feel the familiar wash of guilt, confusion, or exhaustion.

Tracking your triggers is one of the most powerful things you can do. Not to judge yourself — but to understand yourself. Patterns reveal where your nervous system carries the most load. And where you carry the most load is exactly where the restoration work matters most.

Use this tracker for one week. Complete it as soon after the moment as you can, while it is still fresh. Be honest. Be kind.

### How to Use This Tracker

# still-waters-run-deep

For each triggering moment, note the five things below. There are no right answers — only honest ones. Over time you will begin to see patterns: times of day, types of situations, particular people or tones that consistently deplete or destabilise you. That awareness is the beginning of change.

**When & Where**

**What Happened (The Trigger)**

**How I Reacted (Be honest)**

**What I Was Feeling Underneath**

**What I Needed in That Moment**

**End-of-Week Reflection**

*After 7 days, look back over your tracker and ask:*

What time of day am I most reactive?

What type of situation triggers me most consistently?

What emotion is most often underneath my reactions?

What do I seem to need most that I'm not currently getting?

**My single most important pattern this week:**

**BONUS**

**What Comes Next**

*For the Woman Who Is Ready to Go Deeper*

# still-waters-run-deep

You have done something important in reading this book. You have named what is happening. You have stopped pretending it is fine. You have sat with the truth of where you are — and you have given yourself the compassion of understanding why.

That is not a small thing. For a woman who has been outrunning herself for years, that kind of honest stillness takes courage.

And now you may be feeling something that many women feel at this point: a readiness. A quiet but real knowing that what you've been doing is not working, and that something different is possible. That the woman you remember is not lost — she is waiting. And that you are, perhaps for the first time in a long time, genuinely willing to go find her.

Introducing

## **The 90-Day Restoration**

### **Pathway to Wholeness**

*A Private 1-to-1 Journey Back to Yourself*

This book gave you the map. The 90-Day Restoration Pathway to Wholeness is the journey — held, supported, and completely tailored to you.

This is not a group programme. This is not a course with modules you'll fall behind on. This is a private, 1-to-1 pathway designed specifically for the woman described in this book: intelligent, capable, high-functioning — and quietly depleted in a way that generic wellness solutions haven't reached.

### **What the 90-Day Pathway Includes**

# still-waters-run-deep

## Month One

### *The Foundation*

Deep-dive assessment of your specific depletion patterns, triggers, and nervous system state. Building your personalised regulation toolkit. Establishing the daily practices that will carry the 90 days.

## Month Two

### *The Reclamation*

Emotional processing, identity excavation, and relationship recalibration. Working through the specific patterns that have kept you depleted. Reconnecting with who you are beneath the roles.

## Month Three

### *The Sustaining*

Building the life structures, rhythms, and relational boundaries that ensure this restoration holds. You leave with a personalised sustainability plan — not a set of rules, but a way of living.

## Throughout All 90 Days

### *Private & Held*

Bi-weekly private sessions. Voice message support between sessions. A safe space that belongs entirely to you — where you are the one being held, not the one doing the holding.

## This Pathway Is for You If...

# still-waters-run-deep

- ◆ You have read this book and recognised yourself on every page
- ◆ You are functioning on the outside and disappearing on the inside
- ◆ You are tired of knowing what to do and not being able to sustain it alone
- ◆ You want to feel like yourself again — genuinely, not just occasionally
- ◆ You are ready to invest in your restoration with the same commitment you give everything and everyone else
- ◆ You want to be held, guided, and genuinely seen by someone who understands exactly what you are carrying

## Your Next Step

Book your 60 Minute Calm Audit & Strategy Session to explore whether the 90-Day Restoration Pathway is the right fit for you.

*This is not a sales call. It is a real conversation — this is a focused, high-level strategy session designed specifically for stressed out mothers and high-achieving individuals who are ready to trade chronic stress and reactive "snaps" for steady, unshakable calm. In this 60-minute briefing, we will move past the "why" and get straight to the "how."*

## 60 Minute Calm Audit & Strategy Session

*You have held everything together for a very long time. You are allowed to let someone hold you now.*