

Chapter One

THE BALI WITHIN

I was down to three pairs of clean underwear and two pairs of socks. For once in my life, I packed light. I had come to Bali almost three weeks ago with a pair of flip-flops, two bathing suits, twenty-one pairs of underwear, ten black Old Navy tank dresses, and no makeup. I was on a mission to figure out *what the fuck just happened to me*. I had no clue what I would find there—all I knew was that I wanted a complete do-over.

People come to Bali for all kinds of reasons. This magical place set in the heart of the Indian Ocean, just off the coast of Indonesia, is known just as much for its rich food, beautiful culture, and lush greenery as it is for its beaches. For years, Australians have flocked to Bali's waters in droves to surf the epic waves, communal bonfires, and endless nights of drinking and partying.

Me? I'd come to Bali to find answers.

I had never been before, but many years ago, I read Elizabeth Gilbert's *New York Times* bestseller, *Eat Pray Love*, a book about one woman's journey to put her life back together after a divorce. The book would lead to Bali becoming the destination of pilgrimages for many women in crisis. I was self-admittedly in crisis, so I thought, why not go to Bali and figure out who I was and why I never felt like I had, or was, enough? So, the day after finishing my cancer treatments, I booked a ticket and began my journey of self-discovery.

I had no idea how I ended up here—thirty-six years old with breast cancer and no family history of the disease. I was in pretty good shape, especially for my age. For the last few years, I had eaten a mostly vegetarian diet. I didn't smoke. I worked out regularly. So, after being a picture of health, how did I get breast cancer? It's a question I still can't answer with certainty, to this very day. But if I had to guess, I'd say it had a lot to do with stress and the pressure I put on myself to be perfect and live my life on other people's terms. Many women are raised with the unrealistic idea of being a superwoman, wanting it all, having their cake, and eating it, too. I've pushed myself all my life to be the best, to be number one, to live up to my mother's legacy, and by some measures, I'd done it. Or so I thought.

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I always say 2015 was the best and worst year of my life. On March 1st of that year, my company, Thank God It's Natural (tgin), launched in 250 Target stores. We had an incredible year, and it took the company to a whole new level. On December 16th of that same year, I was diagnosed with Stage 2 invasive ductile breast cancer.

After nine months of doctors' appointments, endless biopsies and X-rays, eight rounds of chemo, thirty-three rounds of radiation, five to six trips to my therapist, a lumpectomy, and freezing my eggs, my company was somehow still intact.

I, however, was a complete and utter mess. It was like I had fought in a war, only to come home and be thrust back into my old reality with a major case of PTSD. Nothing felt normal. Cancer treatment was grueling, not just physically, but also mentally and emotionally. Even though I had a pretty positive experience while undergoing treatment, with every test, X-ray, and biopsy, I was waiting on pins and needles to know whether everything was all clear, whether the cancer was responding to treatment, or even worse, whether it had spread to other parts of my body. After surviving all of that, I felt like I'd dodged a bullet. The stress was more than I could handle or even imagine.

Yet, all the tests, treatments, physical pain, and exhaustion that came with battling cancer were far more relaxing than juggling being the CEO of tgin while also working a full-time job as senior corporate counsel at Oracle, one of the world's largest software companies.

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It was my last day in paradise before I headed back home to Chicago, and I had some tough decisions to make.

I sat there, looking out from my hotel room at the lush, tropical foliage that went on for miles just outside my window. I had spent days gazing at the mountains of jungle rainforest and listening to the rushing waves from the Ayung River crash against the rocks a few hundred feet below. And, on certain days, if you caught the sun at the right angle, you could see the most brilliant rainbow sparkling in the reflection of crystal-clear waterfalls. Beyond that, there was only peace. And calm. The life-altering kind of calm you never experience in your real, everyday life.

The last three weeks had been nothing short of magical. Aside from a few cultural excursions into the heart of the city of Ubud, I spent my days eating Balinese food, drinking lychee martinis, and journaling poolside as I took in the tapestry of the breathtaking landscape. If I was feeling

really motivated, I would take a walk along the beach and find one of the local women sitting in a small, make-shift hut and get a soothing ninety-minute back massage for just five dollars. I needed this. The beauty of Bali. A chance to pause and reflect. A chance to breathe. This is what my soul had been crying out for these past few months, and maybe even years.

For once, I was able to hear myself think and enjoy a kind of stillness that can only be found when you go off the grid. You can't even begin to imagine what life is like when you're not constantly consuming the false reality that is pumped through social media feeds, the latest political antics, or the story of yet another innocent black man losing his life at the hands of an "I was afraid for my life" police officer. Instead, in Bali, you have nothing, no one but a few sweet-faced Balinese who greet you with a warm smile and speak the few words of broken English they know. You can't put a price tag on that kind of peace; it's invaluable.

Even with all of this harmony surrounding me, I knew it was time to make a choice. The last day of my trip had arrived. Should I stay an extra week? An extra month? Or should I say "peace out" to the craziness that was awaiting me back home and start fresh here on this little island on the other side of the world?

Here I was on the other side of cancer, with a new slate, a

clean bill of health, and a fresh start. Would I go back to who I was and continue to chase money, men, and fame, or would I really use this time to figure out my “why” and my true God-given purpose?

I was scheduled to go back to work at Oracle a week after my return from Bali. After being diagnosed with breast cancer, I had taken a leave of absence from practicing corporate law to focus solely on my health and keeping my company afloat. Now that I was “cured” and the doctors had declared me cancer-free, it was time to get back on the grind. I thought it would be easy. I had dealt with other crises before, like losing my mom to cancer right after graduating from high school and the unnerving struggles that come with building a business, but somehow, I always managed to pull it together quickly and get back to my “normal.” So naturally, I thought I would be able to seamlessly transition from cancer patient to cancer survivor. Unfortunately, that was not the case. My battle with cancer at such a young age not only taught me that life was short and precious, but it dealt a major blow to my sense of security. I was no longer a superwoman.

The day I left for Bali, I checked my Oracle work email as I was heading to the airport. I hadn’t been into the office in almost nine months, and sitting in my inbox were thousands upon thousands of unread emails. As I quickly skimmed through them to see if I missed any-

thing important, one email immediately caught my eye. It was from the general counsel informing our department that a woman in the office had died after battling breast cancer. I can't describe the sudden "oh shit" moment that erupted inside me. I knew I had to make some changes. Just weeks before, I had been struggling with when to quit my day job and focus on tgin full time. Right then and there, a voice inside me was telling me I couldn't go back to operating at that level—to who and what I'd been before.

As much as I wanted to stay in this newfound wonderland, the reality was that I had a mortgage to pay, a job to start, and a company to run on the other side of the world. My employees, many of whom had built careers with the company, were counting on me. I was faced with an odd contrast as I peered at the jungle beyond my windowsill. I knew back home in Chicago lay the real jungle, filled with endless concrete, towering skyscrapers, rumbling traffic, roaring horns, and earth-shaking subways. I was always running from one event to the next, preparing for the next speech, going over my endless to-do list, solving factory issues, or meeting up with a girlfriend for brunch and drinks. Daily, I battled the constant stress and warfare of growing my business. Decisions had to be made in milliseconds, calls had to be answered, emails needed responding to. And I always had to be "on." Hair done, nails done, everything done. It was too much.

But not here in Bali. There was no schedule to keep, no event I was scheduled to speak at, no inbox of emails to respond to, no one to look good for. Nothing mattered.

I didn't know what I'd find in this mecca for the broken and lost—or whether the myth and lore surrounding it would help me find myself. The only thing I did know for sure was that I never wanted to leave.

As I continued to deliberate on whether to stay or go, I couldn't stop thinking about an encounter I'd had earlier that morning. I went to visit a spiritual reader who was recommended to me by one of my girlfriends who had visited Bali the month before.

To meet with this reader, I traveled to Kuta, a town known for its surf-friendly beaches and wild parties. She owned a cute little restaurant right off the beaten path. When we sat down for my reading, she pulled out her deck of cards. I was a bit skeptical. Her card reading abilities seemed less than average compared with other readings I'd had before. Forty-five minutes into the session, after hearing a stream of one wrong thing after another, I was ready to walk out and say, "Thanks lady. Keep the \$40." But as they say, "In for a dime, in for a dollar." She suddenly said something that struck a chord.

"Chris-Tia, you're an empath," she said. "You're also

extremely intuitive. You have a gift; you just need to use it.” I had always known that I was intuitive, but I never fully trusted or gave much credence to my intuition.

In the past, that voice would always be like a soft whisper in my ear. It would tell me over and over again, “That girl is not your friend,” “That guy is running games,” “You need to release this product.” When it came to business, I always listened. When it came to personal matters, I rarely did. After years of being a lawyer and hanging out with Harvard folks, I always felt compelled to make a case for why I felt what I felt with data, witnesses, exhibits, footnotes, etc. It could be about the simplest of things, but I was always forced to offer up support or a complete analysis for what I was thinking or feeling. That dulled my intuition over time. But like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, this woman was my own personal Glinda the Good Witch, telling me that my ruby slippers were my intuition and that I had the power to go home—or be who I wanted to be—all along.

As she continued flipping the cards, she asked me about the details of my trip. I revealed to her my desire to move to Bali and leave my old life behind. She responded with words that have stuck with me to this day.

“Look, girl. It’s not about Bali the place. It’s about finding the Bali within you.”

That's where my journey took a turn.

The rest of the day, I kept thinking about what she said. What did it mean to find the Bali within? What was it about this place that I loved so much? I started to realize that it wasn't about selling all my stuff back home and leaving my old life behind to move to Bali. It was about truly looking at my life and finding peace with who I was, what I had, and where I stood, no matter where I lived.

So many times, I traveled to places around the world, looking for an escape from the stress that came in my everyday life. I was committed to the idea of taking regular vacations, but she helped me realize that vacation is truly a state of mind rather than a particular place. How many times have I traveled to Mexico, Jamaica, Vietnam, Greece, Italy, South Africa, you name it, only to come home and feel like I needed another vacation two weeks later? I realized that if I were truly going to make it through this thing called life, I would have to be able to create peace in my daily life. I had to make it a life I wanted to come home to, a life that I felt relaxed in, a life that had more meaning than just being a CEO.

As I continued to process her words, I realized that finding the Bali within meant being grateful and staying present. I needed to create boundaries for myself, spend time with

the ones I love, and ultimately, find peace within me, my home, my heart, and my spirit.

She may not have been able to predict my future or tell me if I was going to get married, but she gave me a piece of advice that will stick with me forever. That short visit with her ended up being the best forty dollars I ever spent.