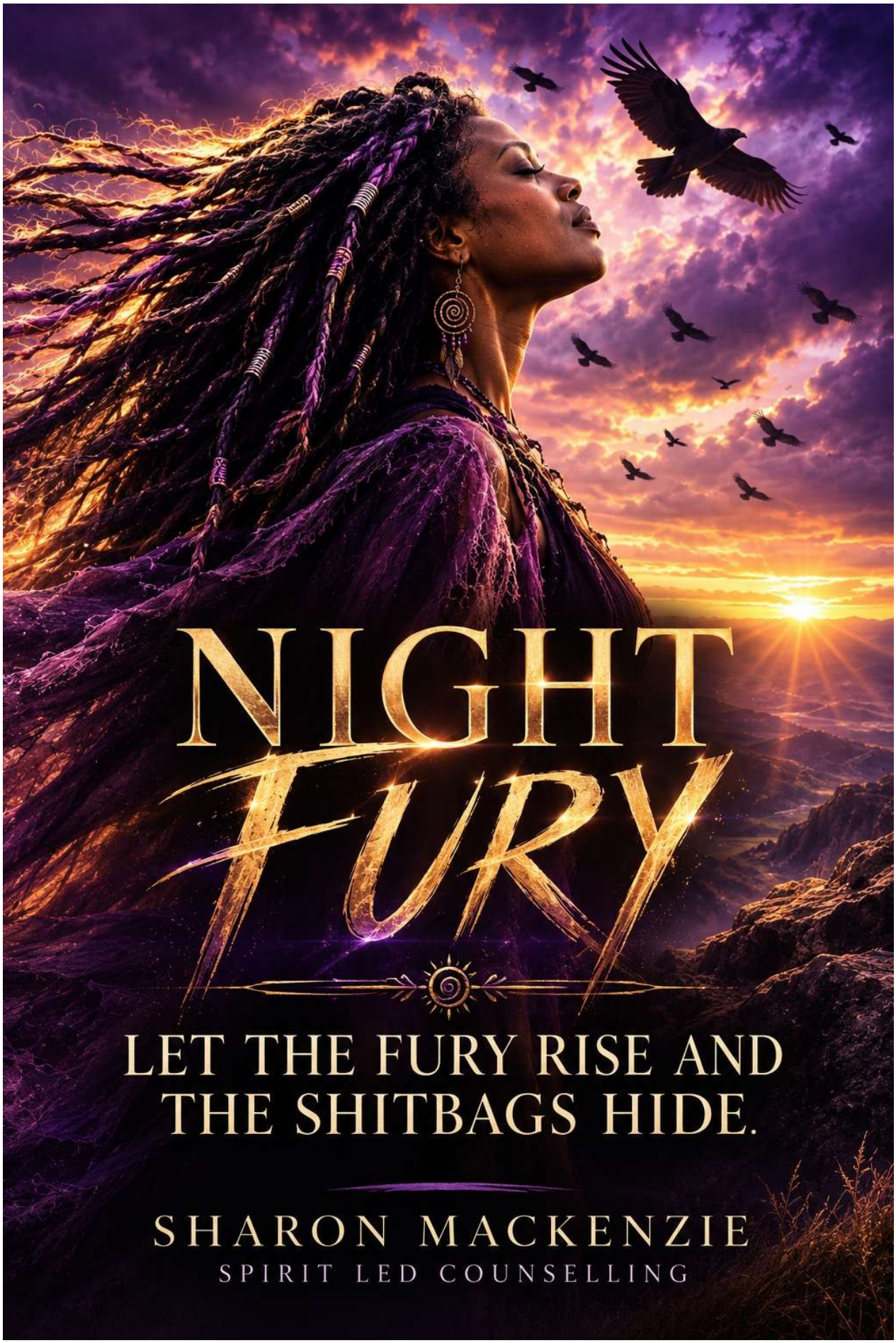

NIGHT
FURY
LET THE FURY RISE AND
THE SHITBAGS HIDE.
SHARON MACKENZIE
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NIGHT FURY

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the Shitbags Hide

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Revised manuscript
23 October 2026

Dedication

To the one

You taught me that I don't like, respect or agree with the way you treat the human beings around you. You taught me something else too: I never want to make another human being feel the way you made me feel.

I'm not grateful for that lesson. I'm not going to wrap it in pretty paper and call it a gift, tell myself everything happens for a reason or decide I needed what happened in order to become who I am. It sucked balls. It hurt. Deeply. I wish it hadn't happened. It didn't need to happen. But it did.

Somewhere in all that hurt, I became very clear about the kind of human being I want to be. I want people to be able to speak around me. I want to listen when someone tells me I've hurt them. I want to be accountable for the space I occupy and the impact I have. Position, authority, knowledge and influence never make another human being smaller than me.

When I walk into a room, I want the human beings in it to be safer, feel safer and become safer because I am there. I want more than safety. I want people to grow, flourish and experience joy. I want them to feel more able to speak, create, question, laugh, contribute, disagree, dream and become.

I don't want my presence to make people shrink or measure their words because they're frightened of my reaction. I don't want anyone lying awake at night furious because I used my position, personality or power to make their world smaller. I want to leave more room for people: more safety, dignity, courage, possibility and joy.

So no, I'm not grateful for what happened. It sucked massively. It hurt. But it clarified something I will carry for the rest of my life: I know what kind of human being I want to be in a room. I don't want to be the one people are afraid of, the one everyone has to manage or the one whose power costs somebody else their dignity.

I want to be the one whose presence makes it safer for other human beings to become fully alive. Perhaps that is the greatest thing you taught me: how much I don't want to become like you. A shitbag.

A Note Before Reading

This book gives anger a voice. It does not give anger permission to harm.

Night Fury is a work of reflective writing for education, personal reflection and encouragement. It is not a substitute for individual medical, mental-health, legal, workplace, safeguarding or other professional advice. If something in these pages connects with a serious situation in your own life, seek support appropriate to your circumstances.

Some experiences and examples are described broadly or through metaphor. Readers should make their own careful assessment of their circumstances rather than treating this book as a determination about any particular person or situation.

And yes, this book contains strong language. This is deliberate. Sometimes 'gosh, that was unfortunate' simply is not the sentence. The language here gives fury somewhere honest to speak while keeping one boundary clear: fury may be felt, named, written, growled and understood; it is not permission to harm another person.

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Before We Begin

We have been sold some truly peculiar ideas about healing. Apparently it looks like forgiveness, reconciliation, closure and serenity. Perhaps sitting on the edge of a cliff in flowing linen while the sun rises behind us and everybody sings Kumbaya. Yeah. Nah.

Sometimes healing does look like forgiveness. Sometimes reconciliation is beautiful and relationships genuinely repair. Sometimes we soften, release and find peace. Wonderful. But sometimes it looks like sitting very still one morning with a strong coffee and realising: Wow. They really behaved like a shitbag. And something inside you relaxes.

Perhaps you have spent months or years trying to discover the complicated psychological, relational, spiritual and organisational explanation for behaviour that did not require a doctoral thesis. Maybe they behaved badly. Maybe you didn't misunderstand, your standards weren't unreasonable and what happened really was shitful. Jeez Louise. Imagine the time we could have saved.

This book contains anger. Quite a lot of it, actually. There will be swearing. There may be yelling, crying or inappropriate laughter at extremely inappropriate moments. You may occasionally need to put it down and walk around the kitchen muttering. You might discover that what you thought was sadness has teeth.

This book makes room for that fury. Nobody is being hunted or threatened. Nobody needs to barricade the windows, although the shitbags may choose to hide. That's entirely up to them.

What I want to offer is permission to stop performing healing or pretending something didn't hurt. Permission to be angry about something wrong, dislike somebody, recognise behaviour you do not respect and stop confusing position with integrity. Permission to decide reconciliation isn't always the prize, and to stop protecting people from every natural consequence of their behaviour.

You don't have to call injustice a learning opportunity because everybody becomes terribly nervous when somebody starts using nouns accurately. You don't have to be frightened of the fact that you feel fury.

Somewhere along the way, many of us learned that anger was dangerous. Especially our own. So we tidied, translated, spiritualised, professionalised and analysed it. We counselled it, prayed over it and forgave around it. We said 'I was disappointed' when we meant 'I WAS BLOODY FURIOUS'. We said 'There were some difficulties' when we meant 'THAT WAS A COMPLETE SHIT FESTIVAL'. We said 'Communication appears to have broken down' when we meant 'JEEZ LOUISE, ARE YOU SERIOUS?'

There is a time for measured language, evidence, reflection, restraint and compassion. Absolutely. But there is also a time for the truth before it has brushed its hair. Sometimes the sentence that comes first is: What the actual feck was that? That is where we begin.

Chapter 1
Hiss and Spit

Whispers came out of a drain. This seems an appropriate place to begin a book about fury. He was the last feral kitten we caught: dark steel grey, tiny, wild and absolutely furious about the entire arrangement.

There was no Disney rescue moment. No trembling little kitten gazing into my eyes and somehow understanding that the giant human reaching towards him had come to save him. Whispers looked at me and communicated something much closer to: Feck. Off.

HISSSSSSSSS. Spit. HISSSSSSSSSSSSSS.

Tiny body. Enormous opinion.

I remember wondering whether we'd left him too long. Maybe he was too feral. Maybe he would never trust people. Maybe something in those early weeks had already become permanent and he was too far gone. But Whispers wasn't too far gone. He was frightened.

He didn't know me. He didn't know what my hands meant or understand that the enormous creature reaching towards him wasn't going to hurt him. All he knew was that something was coming closer, and every little alarm inside that tiny steel-grey body screamed: NO. So he hissed and spat.

And now? I bloody love that hiss. Whispers didn't have much. He was tiny, vulnerable and living feral. He couldn't explain his history. He couldn't say, “Excuse me, Sharon, but my previous experiences have left me somewhat uncertain about the trustworthiness of human contact and I would appreciate a slower relational approach.” He had HISSSSSSS and SPIT. That was his vocabulary.

Underneath it was something enormously important: No. Don't come closer. I'm frightened. I don't know you. I don't trust this. Give me space. Something inside that tiny creature still believed he was worth protecting.

Sometimes we look at the hiss and decide the creature is the problem: too wild, too difficult, too angry, too aggressive, too much. But what if the hiss is information? Before we ask how to stop it, what if we ask why it became necessary?

Eventually his hiss softened. That's why I called him Whispers. Not because he became silent. Good grief, no. Whispers has never shown much commitment to silence. The hiss simply became quieter as he discovered that he was safe. Then another sound appeared: a purr. My goodness, Whispers purrs. Loudly. The volume didn't disappear. The message changed.

And now Whispers dances for me. Actually dances. The little steel-grey feral kitten from the drain follows me, wants connection and refuses to allow me to close doors between us. Apparently doors are now a violation of his fundamental feline rights. The creature who once desperately wanted distance now objects strongly to separation.

It would be easy to turn this into a lovely little healing story: the feral kitten became sweet. The end. Except that isn't what happened. Whispers still growls. And good grief. What a growl.

Chapter 2
The Growl

Before this litter, I didn't know cats could growl like this. They all do it. But Whispers has a deep, throaty growl that sounds as though it belongs to a dog. And not a particularly small dog. If you heard him in the darkness without knowing what was producing the noise, you might reconsider whatever life decision had brought you to our house.

Someone walks past: Grrrrrrrrrrr. Someone approaches: GRRRRRRRRRRR. Something unfamiliar comes near his home, his people, his family, and Whispers growls.

He doesn't spend his entire life doing it. He's not wandering around the house in a permanent state of feline outrage. He purrs, plays, sleeps, dances and loves. When something activates the protective part of him, the growl appears. Whispers didn't lose his growl when he learned he was loved. He had something worth growling for.

Perhaps healing isn't the removal of the growl. Perhaps healing is learning when the growl belongs. Whispers developed a larger vocabulary: hiss, growl, purr, dance. Same cat. Whole cat. Maybe that's what we need too.

Chapter 3
I Growled. Ask What Came Through the Gate.

Something strange happens when a person finally gets angry. People remember the anger. They don't necessarily remember the seventy-three things that happened before it: the patience, understanding, politeness and reasonableness; one more attempt, one more conversation, one more carefully written message asking, “Could we please clarify...”

And then: ENOUGH.

Suddenly everybody notices. Oh dear. They're angry. Difficult. Aggressive. Bitter. Unforgiving. Confrontational. Emotional. They can't move on. An angry moment becomes a character assessment.

Nobody looks at Whispers curled up purring with his family and says, “Don't be fooled. That's a growling cat.” Of course he growls. Sometimes. The growl is something Whispers does. It isn't everything Whispers is. The same is true of us. I am angry about something. That doesn't make anger my entire identity.

Before you diagnose my entire personality, perhaps ask what came through the gate. What happened immediately before the growl, and what happened before that? How many conversations and attempts at resolution? How many boundaries crossed? How many times did somebody swallow the sentence they actually wanted to say? How many polite emails preceded the sentence everybody is now clutching their pearls about?

Context matters. One of the easiest ways to avoid examining what happened is to examine the reaction instead: tone, language, persistence, emotion. Suddenly the growl is on trial. Meanwhile nobody has bothered checking what came through the bloody gate.

Chapter 4
Night Fury

Why Night Fury? Because fury has a habit of waiting. During the day we have things to do: work, phones, emails, shopping, appointments, meals, animals, deadlines, laundry, conversations, responsibilities. Coffee. More coffee. Life keeps arriving.

Human beings are remarkably capable of functioning while carrying unfinished things. We compartmentalise, distract ourselves, suppress, problem-solve and perform the role in front of us. Sometimes that is necessary. You cannot always collapse into existential rage in aisle seven of Woolworths. Apparently there are expectations.

Then the house quietens. The messages stop and nobody is asking anything of us. The external noise drops, and suddenly the internal noise has room. There it is: the conversation you never got to finish, the meeting that never happened, the injustice nobody acknowledged. The humiliation, betrayal, unanswered email, distorted story, relationship that never repaired or consequence that somehow landed on you.

At two in the afternoon: I'm fine. At two in the morning: WHAT THE ACTUAL FECK?

That is Night Fury. Our fury, finding room when the demands of the day have stopped. Night can make unfinished things feel louder. With fewer distractions, less external structure and fewer roles to perform, the mind has room to replay, rehearse and review what didn't make sense when it happened.

Sometimes our nighttime interpretation will need checking in the morning. Anger isn't infallible. Neither is memory. The recurrence can still be information: something remains unresolved inside us. Perhaps responsibility, grief, shame or a boundary. Perhaps simply the words, “That should never have happened.”

Night Fury is the name I'm giving that experience of being far too bloody reasonable through the day and meeting the unfinished fury after dark. We're bringing the bloody thing up.

Chapter 5
When the Fury Goes Inward

Something dreadful can happen when we hide our fury. The consequences go to the wrong address. Someone behaves appallingly: power is misused, trust is broken, a boundary is crossed. Somebody lies, humiliates, harasses or manipulates. Somebody spectacularly stuffs something up and then behaves like an overgrown toddler in a sandpit when anyone has the audacity to mention it.

There should be a consequence somewhere in that story. A difficult conversation, an uncomfortable truth, a boundary, a complaint, a loss of access, a changed relationship. Accountability. Perhaps simply having to sit for five bloody minutes with the knowledge: I hurt someone.

Sometimes none of that happens. The person who was hurt is encouraged to be gracious and professional. Don't make trouble. Think about the organisation, the family, the community, their reputation. Think about how your words might affect them. Forgive. Move forward. Let it go. And so we do something extraordinary: we swallow the consequence.

Well, where the feck does it go? The meeting nobody had stays in your memory. You rehearse the words nobody said. Your mind returns to the injustice nobody acknowledged. Your body may still carry the tension and activation that came with anger you couldn't safely express. Your jaw knows. Your shoulders know. Your stomach and sleep may bloody well know.

Bodies and health are complicated, and anger isn't a simple explanation for illness. But the experience of carrying unresolved stress is real. Something happened out there. Because there was nowhere safe for the response to go, so much of the aftermath ended up happening in here.

What absolute witchery is this? Someone else behaves badly and somehow my internal world receives the invoice? No. Return to sender.

Consequences Are Not Cruel

I think some of us have confused consequences with punishment. They aren't the same thing. If I repeatedly treat someone badly and they stop giving me access to them, that's a consequence. If I behave poorly in a position of responsibility and somebody raises a concern, that's a consequence. If I damage trust and the relationship changes, that's a consequence.

I don't have an automatic right to be protected from another person's changed opinion of me. Sometimes enormous effort goes into protecting people from the ordinary relational consequences of their own behaviour, and somebody else ends up carrying the aftermath instead. That's backwards.

Chapter 6
The Great Consequence Redistribution Scheme

Imagine a giant sorting office. Every action arrives carrying a parcel marked CONSEQUENCE. The sensible thing would be to deliver it to the appropriate address. Instead, some human systems appear to operate according to a different postal arrangement.

Powerful person behaves badly. Parcel arrives. Oh goodness. We can't give it to them. Why not? They'll be upset. Right. It could damage their reputation. I see. It could create conflict. Naturally. So where shall we send it?

Everyone slowly turns towards the person who has already been hurt. Ah. Of course. Give it to them. They can carry it. And while you're there, pop in another parcel marked PLEASE MANAGE EVERYONE'S FEELINGS ABOUT THIS. Excellent. System restored.

What a load of shit.

This is why I am becoming increasingly fond of the hiss. Sometimes the hiss is the moment the parcel gets refused. No. Wrong address. I will carry my grief and attend to my healing. I will examine my behaviour, take responsibility for my choices and work through what happened. But I will not accept responsibility for your behaviour simply because everybody is frightened of asking you to answer for it.

That's yours. Here. Have it back.

Chapter 7
Maybe That's Why It Keeps Coming at Night

Maybe some fury keeps returning because it still has unfinished business: recognition. Something inside us keeps saying, “That wasn't right. That wasn't mine. I should never have had to carry all of that.” Every time we shove it back down with “I need to forgive”, “I should be over this” or “I don't want to be bitter”, we may be answering the wrong question.

Perhaps the question isn't only why I'm still angry. Perhaps it's what my anger is still trying to put back in the right place. Responsibility? Shame? Blame? A boundary? Someone else's emotional reaction, reputation or consequences?

This is what bringing Night Fury into daylight can do. We open the parcels and read the labels: mine, not mine, definitely not bloody mine. Mine to grieve; yours to answer for. Mine to heal; yours to learn from. Mine to decide; yours to feel uncomfortable about.

Perhaps eventually there is less to carry because we are no longer demanding that our internal world act as a storage facility for everything nobody else wanted to deal with. We speak, write and establish boundaries. We tell the truth where it is safe and appropriate. We stop chasing people who refuse to communicate or requiring ourselves to feel affection we don't feel. We stop protecting people from every natural consequence of their behaviour.

Sometimes we simply say no. That can be the parcel arriving at the correct address. And if somebody experiences discomfort because their behaviour finally has a consequence, that isn't necessarily cruelty. Sometimes that's just delivery confirmation.

Chapter 8
Healing Is Not a Personality Transplant

Healing does not require you to emerge from pain admiring everybody involved. You do not have to become a serene little woodland creature, look lovingly into the middle distance and announce, “I'm grateful for everyone who wounded me because they were my greatest teachers.” You can if that's genuinely true for you. But please don't say it because you think there's an exam. There isn't.

Sometimes after reflection, counselling, prayer, grief, boundaries, attempts at resolution and careful examination of your own behaviour, the conclusion may simply be: Wow. That person really behaved like a shitbag. There can be relief in no longer tying yourself into philosophical knots trying to make unacceptable behaviour acceptable.

You don't need hatred, revenge or anybody's destruction. You don't even need them to agree with your conclusion. You can know that you didn't like the behaviour, don't respect it and don't want more of it. Walking away can be clarity.

So if your healing involves sitting peacefully on a cliff singing Kumbaya, beautiful. Enjoy the cliff. Watch your footing. But if it currently looks like standing in the kitchen, coffee in hand, staring into the middle distance and saying, “Jeez Louise. What an absolute shitbag”, welcome. Pull up a chair.

Chapter 9
I'm Glad We Didn't Reconcile

There. I said it. I'm glad we didn't reconcile.

For a long time I thought reconciliation would be the good ending: two adults, a conversation, understanding, acknowledgement, perhaps an apology. Peace. How lovely. Now I realise I don't actually want every relationship restored.

I don't have to pretend to like someone. Position isn't character, authority isn't integrity, and a title doesn't require my admiration. There are behaviours I don't respect and ways of treating people that make something inside me say no. There are people with whom I eventually realise we are not cut from the same cloth.

At two in the morning, the fury occasionally goes further: WE ARE NOT EVEN THE SAME FECKING SPECIES. Biologically inaccurate. But emotionally? I understand the sentiment. What I'm really saying is that I do not recognise myself in that way of treating another human being. And I don't want to.

Maybe closure isn't a handshake or everybody understanding each other. Maybe, for me, it is the moment I realise I don't want this relationship anymore. No revenge, pursuit or plotting anybody's downfall. Just no. And holy shit, there can be freedom in that.

Chapter 10
Welcome to the Sandpit

Now we need to discuss something truly mind-blowingly ridiculous: grown adults in positions of authority who become spectacularly upset when somebody holds them accountable. I've particularly witnessed this dynamic among men in authority. But the issue here is power. Men can be on the receiving end of terrible leadership too; women can misuse power. So can families, churches, workplaces, boards, committees and communities.

Anyone can be badly led or silenced by hierarchy. Anyone can be expected to carry the emotional consequences of somebody else's inability to tolerate accountability. A person has the title, office, salary, influence and authority. They make decisions affecting other people's lives. Everything is going splendidly until somebody says, “Actually, I don't think you're handling this very well.”

Suddenly, welcome to the sandpit. Someone has taken Gerald's little yellow shovel. Gerald is NOT happy. There is sand everywhere, and somehow everybody standing around the edge is expected to manage it.

He's feeling attacked. Okay. We need to consider how this has affected him. Do we? Because I thought we were discussing his behaviour. How the bloody hell did we end up managing his feelings about being asked to discuss his behaviour?

Five minutes ago Gerald was accountable for something. Now eight adults are discussing whether the person who raised it used a sufficiently affirming tone. What the actual feck?

Chapter 11
Grown. Ass. Adults.

Adults are allowed emotions. Obviously. People can be hurt, embarrassed, angry, ashamed, overwhelmed or defensive. Nobody needs to become an emotionless robot. But adulthood involves emotional responsibility. My feelings are real and matter. They are ultimately mine to manage.

If I hold authority, that responsibility becomes even more important. I cannot reasonably say, “I will exercise authority over you, but if you challenge how I exercise it, you must also manage my emotional response to being challenged.” No. Put your own bloody shoes on. We're leaving the sandpit.

Authority and accountability belong together. If you want the title, accept the responsibility. If you want influence, accept scrutiny. If you make decisions, accept questions. If you lead adults, learn how to hear no from an adult.

Being challenged isn't automatically being disrespected. Being disagreed with isn't persecution. Sometimes somebody will tell you, “That wasn't good enough.” That's not oppression. That's Tuesday. Welcome to leadership.

Chapter 12
The Cushion Department

Good grief, the cushioning. Before raising a legitimate concern, people prepare. Could we phrase it more gently? Maybe soften the first paragraph, take that sentence out and add something affirming. Don't say failure; say opportunity for improvement. Don't say accountability too early. Perhaps bring biscuits.

By the time we're finished, the original concern is sitting beneath seventeen decorative pillows and a crocheted throw. We deliver it gently, carefully, respectfully, possibly accompanied by baked goods. And sometimes the shovel still gets thrown.

At some point we need to ask how many cushions one grown adult's accountability requires. Compassion, kindness, fairness and process matter. But other people's emotional regulation is not automatically our job. Sometimes the healthiest thing we can say is: That is not my sandpit. That is not my tantrum. And that is not my bloody shovel.

Chapter 13
When Everyone Else Bought the Bloody Story

Sometimes the original shit festival isn't the end of the shit festival. Oh no. Apparently there is an afterparty.

You challenge something significant. Something that makes you think, “Surely everyone can see how mind-blowingly stuffed this is.” You raise it carefully, perhaps repeatedly, perhaps with documentation. Perhaps after spending three weeks composing an email so measured it could be used to calibrate laboratory equipment.

You explain, ask questions and use the proper channels. You give people the benefit of the doubt and assume that once everyone has the relevant information, something sensible will happen. Adorable. Then you discover that other people have bought into a different version of events.

Sometimes they have incomplete information. Somebody may have got to them first, or they heard a cleaner version. They may be protecting a relationship. Accepting your account might require them to reconsider someone they respect, or the organisation itself. Sometimes, let's be truthful, believing you are the problem is simply more convenient.

That creates a different fury. Now it isn't only “Look what happened.” It's “JEEZ LOUISE. YOU BELIEVE THAT?”

Chapter 14
Wait. You Too?

Sometimes the deepest hurt isn't caused by the obvious person. You already knew something wasn't right there. The shock comes when you look around and realise: Wait. You too?

Someone you thought knew your character. Someone who laughed with you, worked beside you, prayed with you, shared meals and sat in meetings with you. Someone who has known you for years. Suddenly there's distance. Perhaps nobody says anything directly. Conversations become shorter, invitations change, people become careful and the room feels different.

Sometimes you discover a circulating story through absence: the message that isn't returned, the invitation that doesn't come, the warmth that disappears. Individually, these things can be hard to interpret. Together, the loss of connection hurts. Somewhere inside: Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr.

Now you aren't only dealing with what happened. You're watching connection disappear. The original event is one wound. The loss of belonging can be another.

Chapter 15
The Bloody Distortion Machine

Distortion rarely arrives wearing a badge saying HELLO. I AM DISTORTION. That would be enormously helpful. Instead, it often sounds reasonable. “It's complicated.” Of course it is. “There are two sides.” Usually. “They've been under enormous pressure.” Possibly. “I think there have been mistakes on both sides.” Maybe.

“Perhaps the way you raised it made things worse.” Ah. There it is. Now we're cooking. Slowly the conversation moves away from what happened towards how you responded. “Was the behaviour appropriate?” becomes “Why are you still talking about it?” Eventually the original issue is sitting in the corner wondering how the feck it became invisible.

Meanwhile the person who raised it stands beneath a giant spotlight. Tone, reaction, persistence, anger, emails, boundaries, refusal to reconcile: everything gets examined except the bloody elephant sitting in the middle of the room eating the organisational pot plant.

Good People Can Get It Wrong

This is where things become complicated. Sometimes the people who buy into a distortion are good people. Bugger. It would be much easier if humanity divided neatly into heroes and shitbags. Unfortunately humans refuse to cooperate with this arrangement.

Good people can believe incomplete stories. Kind people can protect systems. Intelligent people can participate in groupthink. Caring people can avoid uncomfortable truths. People who love us can misunderstand us. Night Fury isn't asking us to replace one distortion with another.

We don't need to decide everyone who didn't believe us is evil. Sometimes the truer sentence is: People I cared about believed something about me that wasn't true, and it bloody hurt. That sentence contains enough fury already.

Chapter 16
When Belonging Gets Expensive

Humans need connection. Family, friendship, community and workplace relationships matter. Churches matter to the people who call them home. Teams and neighbourhoods matter. Which means the cost of challenging something may include belonging. That's a very expensive bill.

Sometimes we face an extraordinary choice: tell the truth and risk connection, or preserve connection and betray what we know. Jeez Louise. No wonder we lie awake at night. There is a particular loneliness in looking at something and thinking, “This isn't right”, while everybody around us appears to carry on normally.

We begin checking ourselves. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I've misunderstood or overreacted. Maybe everyone else knows something I don't. Those can be sensible questions. We should examine ourselves. We can be wrong. Our perceptions aren't infallible. Anger isn't evidence.

But endless self-questioning can become self-abandonment. You have looked, checked, asked, reflected, listened and considered other explanations, and something inside still says no. That's when the growl matters. It tells you something requires your attention. Don't worship it. Don't suppress it. Investigate it.

Chapter 17
Don't Chase the Jury

When connection starts disappearing, we want it back. Of course we do. Maybe if I explain it better, show them the emails, clarify the sequence or correct that part of the story. Maybe if I apologise for how I raised it, everything will go back to normal.

Sometimes conversations are worth having. Sometimes we discover we contributed to the mess and an apology is needed. Relationships can genuinely repair. But sometimes getting the old connection back requires agreeing to a version of reality we don't believe. That's too expensive. We haven't restored belonging; we've purchased admission by leaving part of ourselves outside.

Eventually we can find ourselves standing before an imaginary jury presenting Exhibit 247B while everybody else has gone home. Stop. You do not need unanimous public approval before you're allowed to trust your experience. You don't need to chase people around with a PowerPoint presentation entitled WHY I AM NOT ACTUALLY A SHIT PERSON: An Evidence-Based Review.

Court adjourned. Go home, everyone. I've got a life to live.

Chapter 18
Why the Feck Did I Get the Consequences?

Someone behaves badly. Another person gets hurt. The hurt person speaks. The social system starts moving, but sometimes it moves towards the disruption rather than the behaviour. The person who named the problem becomes associated with the disruption.

They're angry. Difficult. Unforgiving. They keep bringing it up. They need to move forward. Wait. What? A moment ago we were discussing what happened. Now we're conducting a character assessment of the person it happened to. That's one hell of a magic trick.

Sometimes what gets described as dysfunction is someone's refusal to cooperate with bullshit. Their anger, questions and memory are inconvenient. Their refusal to return smiling to the same arrangement is particularly inconvenient. So they begin questioning themselves: maybe I am difficult; maybe I should forgive; maybe I'm dwelling on it; maybe I'm too sensitive.

Eventually they've swallowed so many maybes there is barely room inside for themselves. Then night comes, and the belly says, “Actually, I'm bloody furious.” Perhaps the question isn't only why I'm still angry. Perhaps it's what my anger is still trying to put back in the right place.

Chapter 19
Let It Rise

Let it rise. Up, through you. Not at someone, into violence or into cruelty. Maybe it becomes tears, shaking or swearing. Maybe you need to scream somewhere safe. Maybe your first coherent contribution to the healing process is AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH.

Anger doesn't always arrive as an articulate essay. Sometimes the body speaks first. Underneath everything may be a sentence you were never allowed to say: YOU HAD NO BLOODY RIGHT TO DO THAT TO ME.

You had no right to humiliate, harass or manipulate me. No right to use your position against me, make me chase basic communication or gossip about me. No right to make your discomfort my responsibility, demand silence in exchange for belonging or make my reaction the story while ignoring what I was reacting to.

You had no right.

That's the recognition this chapter makes room for. The feeling can be named without turning it into permission to harm another person.

Chapter 20
The Uprising of Disrespected Souls

I want an uprising. Not the pitchfork kind. They look cumbersome, and frankly I already have enough shit in my handbag. I want an uprising of disrespected souls.

People who swallowed sentences for twenty years. People called difficult because they finally established a boundary, or unforgiving because reconciliation wasn't right for them. People whose anger was examined more closely than somebody else's behaviour.

People who remained polite because they needed the job, quiet because they needed the community, careful because they needed the relationship, silent because belonging mattered. People who discovered an unspoken admission price: Don't make us uncomfortable with your truth. The price is too bloody high.

You are allowed to be angry, dislike what happened and decide some relationships are better left finished. You are allowed to refuse reconciliation and say, “That should not have happened to me.” And then, this matters, you are allowed to have a magnificent life anyway.

Fury isn't the destination. Fury is fuel. Fuel is supposed to take you somewhere. Eventually we need to bloody go.

Chapter 21
Turn the Frig Around

Right. We've had enough. We've hissed, growled and opened the parcels. We've identified which were ours and which were delivered to the wrong bloody address. We've wandered through the shit festival and visited the sandpit. We've watched grown-ass adults fight over the little yellow shovel and wondered how the actual feck people could believe some of the nonsense they believed.

We've cried, raged and grieved. We've probably muttered Jeez Louise at least seventeen times. And now, darling? Turn the frig around. Look in the other direction. There is an entire bloody world behind you.

Walk That Ass Away

You don't need a closing speech or everyone to finally understand. You don't need to send the seventeen-page email you've been composing in your head since February. You don't need to stand at the edge of the sandpit shouting AND ANOTHER THING. Let them have the shovel, the bucket and the little plastic rake as well. We're leaving.

There comes a point when even our fury is too valuable to keep spending on people who don't deserve it. Anger can wake you up. It can tell you something was wrong, something mattered, something wasn't yours. You deserved better. Beautiful. Thank you, fury. Message received.

When it has completed that work, we can begin looking elsewhere. If we keep feeding it, the shitbags are still getting our energy. They've had enough.

Chapter 22
They Don't Even Deserve Your Fury

They don't even deserve your fury. Because fury is energy: your magnificent, creative, ridiculous, powerful life force. Do you know what else you could do with that?

Write, paint, plant or learn something. Travel, build, love somebody or find new people. Sit in the sunshine. Laugh so loudly somebody at the next table turns around. Wear something completely inappropriate for your age. Start again, dance in the kitchen, drink spectacular coffee or rescue another bloody animal from a drain. Live.

Imagine spending all that energy on you. Jeez Louise. We could cause some serious joy.

Meanwhile, Back at the Sandpit

What about them? What if they still don't understand or think you're difficult? What if somebody still tells the distorted story? What if Gerald remains deeply offended that somebody questioned his shovel-management strategy?

Darling. Look over there. Sandpit. Gerald. Shovel. Not our department.

Let them form a committee. They love committees. Perhaps a Sandpit Governance Working Group, with minutes, terms of reference and a twelve-month review into who threw the shovel. There'll be consultation, a working party and perhaps a confidential survey. Someone can produce a forty-seven-page report concluding that communication could have been better on all sides.

Marvellous. We wish them every success. From over here. Because we have somewhere else to be.

Chapter 23
Stop Looking Back

This part is harder than it sounds. Sometimes we physically leave while emotionally remaining at the gate. We keep checking: did they finally understand? Did somebody realise? Did anything happen? Did they experience consequences? Do they regret it? Did anyone defend me? Did my absence matter?

Maybe. Maybe not. Every time we turn around to check, we're still orienting our life towards the sandpit. Turn back. Again and again, as many times as necessary.

My life is this way. My people, creativity, laughter, home, future and morning. We don't have to keep facing them, what happened or whether justice arrived wearing the outfit we expected. This way. Your life.

Chapter 24
Some Fury Needs a Funeral

Not every fury needs confrontation. Some fury needs a funeral. Underneath anger there can be grief for a friendship, community, role, reputation, dream or relationship you thought would survive. A person you thought would understand. A place you thought was home.

Something ended. Anger cannot resurrect it. Neither can being right, proving what happened or winning. Sometimes there is simply an empty chair where connection used to be. That hurts. We should say that.

Standing up for yourself is often marketed as exhilarating. Find your voice! Stand in your power! Set the boundary! Wonderful. But occasionally standing in your power is bloody lonely. Sometimes you find your voice and discover someone you love doesn't particularly want to hear it. You establish the boundary and the other person walks away. You stop chasing and nobody comes after you. You tell the truth and lose the room.

That's grief, and grief deserves tenderness. You can know leaving was right and still miss what you left. You can know a relationship wasn't healthy and still grieve it. You can know a community failed you and still miss belonging there. You can know you don't want reconciliation and still mourn what reconciliation once represented.

Human beings are complicated. Thank goodness. We're not bloody flowcharts.

Chapter 25
The Connection That Remains

When some connections disappear, others become clearer. The people who ask what happened. The people who don't require you to make the story comfortable. Those capable of saying, “I don't know enough to judge this.” Those who can disagree without withdrawing their humanity or requiring you to become smaller before they'll sit beside you. The people who know you can growl and still know that you purr.

Those relationships become precious. Real connection doesn't require permanent agreement. It requires enough safety for truth. Sometimes after losing one place of belonging, we discover a difference: losing that place does not mean every possibility of belonging has gone.

The world is much bigger than that room. There are tables you haven't sat at, people you haven't met, conversations you haven't had. Places where nobody knows the distorted story and you don't have to enter carrying Exhibit 247B. Places where you can simply be.

Imagine that. Nobody has heard about Gerald. Nobody gives a shit about the shovel. Glorious.

Chapter 26
Take the Growl With You

We're walking away. But don't leave the growl behind. We're taking what it taught us: the boundaries, discernment, knowledge and great internal “Oh, absolutely bloody not.” We aren't returning to innocence. We're moving towards wisdom.

Whispers didn't stop knowing how to growl when he learned to dance. Neither do we. Maybe this is what integration looks like. We can't promise nothing bad will ever happen again. Deciding never to trust anybody again can become a prison. There is another possibility: I trust myself to hear the growl, notice, ask questions, step back and say no.

I trust myself not to spend twelve months convincing somebody to have a conversation they clearly don't want to have. I trust myself to recognise when the parcel has the wrong address and to leave the sandpit.

That is different from living permanently on guard. Eventually we go inside and live. But we know where the gate is now, and we know what the growl sounds like.

Chapter 27
Same Throat

Whispers' growl and his purr come from the same throat. I keep returning to that. The throat that warns “Stay back” rumbles with contentment when he is safe with his family. The cat that protects is the cat that dances. The cat that once hissed now refuses to let me shut the door. Same cat. Whole cat.

Maybe we're allowed to be whole too. I can be furious about injustice and laugh until my stomach hurts. I can call out terrible behaviour and still be tender. I can establish boundaries and have enormous compassion. I can growl at the gate and purr with the people I love. None of those things cancels the others.

My anger is something I experience. It isn't my identity. My growl is part of my vocabulary, not my entire language. Don't take a photograph of me in the moment I finally lost my shit and tell me that's who I am.

Look at the whole person: what happened before the growl, what they love, protect and create. Look at how they dance. Perhaps healing isn't becoming less feral. Perhaps it's becoming safe enough to use the whole vocabulary: hiss, growl, purr, dance.

Chapter 28
And Now We Dance

Maybe this is what Whispers has been trying to teach us. First he hissed. Then he trusted and purred. He still growls. And now the little bugger dances.

Maybe that's the destination: life becoming bigger than what happened. Imagine the thing that once occupied your thoughts at three in the morning becoming something you occasionally remember while making toast. Good grief. What a shitbag. Butter toast. Continue with day.

There can be freedom in the people who once occupied far too much internal space becoming less important. The truth and what we learned can remain, while the experience becomes one chapter in a much bigger life. Fury doesn't have to remain the loudest sound.

There are other sounds waiting: laughter, conversation, music, birds, coffee machines, cats purring, people we love walking through the door. Our own voice saying, “I have an idea.” That's life returning.

Chapter 29
Glorious

Glorious. That's the word. I don't want us merely to survive the shitbags. What a miserable ambition. I want glorious: ridiculous, creative, colourful, curious, connected, safe, wild, tender, strong and full. Whatever glorious looks like for you.

Maybe it's quiet or loud. A tiny house and six cats, a business or a garden. Falling in love, or being spectacularly single and taking up the entire bloody bed. Writing books, painting or studying something simply because it fascinates you. Sitting outside in the morning with ridiculously strong coffee and nobody demanding anything from you.

Maybe it's finding a community where nobody requires you to amputate parts of yourself before you're allowed through the door. Maybe it's realising you don't need everybody to understand you.

I don't know what your glorious is. But I don't expect you to find it standing at the sandpit. Take the growl, purr, lessons and dignity. Take your magnificent ass. And go. There is life on the other side of this. Glorious bloody life.

Chapter 30
Morning

Eventually morning comes. Perhaps this is where Night Fury was always leading us: towards integration. The fury doesn't have to wait for darkness anymore. We have heard it, named it and brought it into language and daylight.

We've opened the parcels, read the labels and begun returning things to their correct addresses. We've mourned some relationships, stopped chasing some juries and left some sandpits. We've recognised that some people may never understand. Somehow, we're still here.

The fury can come into daylight as discernment, boundaries, courage and voice. As that deep internal growl saying something isn't right here. Instead of automatically swallowing it until three in the morning, we listen.

Not blindly. We investigate, think, ask and discern. When something genuinely isn't right, we no longer automatically silence ourselves to protect everybody else from discomfort. Maybe that was what Night Fury wanted: to be heard.

Chapter 31
Let the Fury Rise

Whispers didn't become quiet. He developed a larger vocabulary: hiss, growl, purr, dance. That's what I want for us. Whole people. People who know when to purr and when to growl, and aren't ashamed of either. People who understand that anger isn't their entire personality.

People who can recognise when something has crossed the gate, refuse the parcel addressed to the wrong person and survive somebody else's disappointment. People who can tolerate being misunderstood and know reconciliation is beautiful when it is real, but too costly when it requires self-betrayal. People who stop protecting others from every consequence and can leave the sandpit without stealing the shovel.

People who can grieve, laugh and swear occasionally. People who can sit with the complicated truth that someone hurt them without needing to turn that person into a monster. People who can say, “That was wrong”, and “I'm going to live anyway.”

Let the fury tell you what mattered. Listen for what you will no longer tolerate, where a boundary may belong and which parcel isn't yours. Investigate the growl. Then take that magnificent energy and build something with it.

Write, create, love, laugh, work and rest. Make something ridiculous. Drink strong coffee. Rescue something from a drain. Live. As we begin putting down what was never ours to carry, there can be room for curiosity, creativity, ridiculousness, connection and love. Room for life.

Somewhere nearby, a little steel-grey cat begins to dance. He still has his growl. Of course he does. From that same deep throat comes an enormous purr. Same throat. Same cat. Whole cat.

You don't need to cut your anger out of yourself to become whole, forgive on command or restore every relationship. You don't need to chase every distorted story, attend every sandpit you're invited to, manage every grown-ass adult's feelings or carry every parcel. And you certainly don't need to spend another night arguing with somebody who isn't even in the bloody room.

Your fury has been hidden long enough: in your stomach and jaw, in the words you deleted before pressing send, in the conversations you rehearsed at two in the morning. Beneath forgiveness you weren't ready to offer, politeness, professionalism and “I'm fine”. Bring it into the light. Let it remind you what you value, what you will protect and what you will no longer agree to carry.

Then let it become voice, boundary, discernment, creativity and life. Darling, turn the frig around. There's an entire world behind you.

May your life become that safe. May your boundaries become that clear. May your discernment become that strong. May your joy become absolutely ridiculous. May you always trust yourself enough to investigate the growl when something comes through the gate. And may your purr become every bit as loud as your hiss.

Because, my darlings, it's not your fury that should be hiding. It's the shitbags. Let the fury rise. And let the shitbags hide. We've got a glorious bloody life to live.

A Final Word from Sharon

Well, my darlings. We made it. We hissed, growled and opened the parcels. We returned quite a few to sender and left Gerald in the sandpit with his little yellow shovel. Hopefully, somewhere along the way, you heard something important: your fury does not make you a bad human being.

Listen to it. Get curious about what it is protecting, grieving or trying desperately to put back in the right place. When it has told you what you need to know, take that magnificent energy and go and live. Grow, create, flourish, laugh, find your people and drink excellent coffee. Become more fully yourself. Cause some serious bloody joy.

If something in this book has stirred something for you and you'd like to explore my counselling, reflective safeguarding work, resources or ways to connect, you'll find me at Spirit Led Counselling: spiritledcounselling.com.

For my other books, essays and the slightly strange collection of things that emerge from my desk, come and find me at sharonmackenzie.org.

Thank you for reading Night Fury. Take the growl with you. Keep the purr. And for goodness' sake, go and live your glorious bloody life.

Sharon Mackenzie
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Spirit Led Counselling

About the Author

Sharon Mackenzie is an Australian author, counsellor and social science freak whose work explores what happens between human beings: community, culture, belonging, power, dignity, relationships, safeguarding and the strange, beautiful business of being human.

Her writing brings together social observation, lived experience, reflective practice, humour and a deep interest in the conditions that help people feel safe enough to grow, flourish, create and experience joy.

Sharon writes for people who have ever found themselves trying to make sense of messy human systems, complicated relationships, belonging, exclusion, healing, faith, identity and the occasional absolute shit festival.

More of Sharon's books and writing can be found at sharonmackenzie.org. Her counselling and reflective safeguarding work can be found at spiritledcounselling.com.