

NOT THIS

by Elizabeth Gilbert

Most of us, at some point in our lives (unless we have done everything perfectly...which is: nobody) will have to face a terrible moment in which we realize that we have somehow ended up in the wrong place — or at least, in a very bad place.

Maybe we will have to admit that we are in the wrong job. Or the wrong relationship. With the wrong people around us. Living in the wrong neighborhood. Acting out on the wrong behaviors. Using the wrong substances. Pretending to believe things that we no longer believe. Pretending to be something we were never meant to be.

This moment of realization is seldom fun. In fact, it's usually terrifying. I call this moment of realization: "NOT THIS."

Because sometimes that's all you know, at such a moment. All you know is: "NOT THIS". Sometimes that's all you CAN know. All you know is that some deep life force within you is saying, "NOT THIS", and it won't be silenced.

Your body is saying: "NOT THIS."

Your heart is saying: "NOT THIS."

Your soul is saying: "NOT THIS."

But your brain can't bring itself to say "NOT THIS", because that would cause a serious problem. The problem is: You don't have a Plan B in place. This is the only life you have. This is the only job you have. This is the only spouse you have. This is the only house you have.

Your brain says, "It may not be great, but we have to put up with it, because there are no other options." You're not sure how you got here — to this place of THIS — but you sure as hell don't know how to get out..."

So your brain says: "WE NEED TO KEEP PUTTING UP WITH THIS, BECAUSE THIS IS ALL WE HAVE."

But still, beating like a quiet drum, your body and your heart and your soul keep saying: "NOT THIS...NOT THIS...NOT THIS."

I think some of the bravest people I have ever met were people who had the courage to say the words, "NOT THIS" out loud — even before they had an alternative plan.

People who walked out of bad situations without knowing if there was a better situation on the horizon. People who looked at the life they were in, and they said, I don't know what my life is supposed to be...but it's NOT THIS. And then they just...left.

I think my friend who walked out of a marriage after less than a year, and had to move back in with her mother (back into her childhood bedroom), and face the condemnation of the entire community while she slowly created a new life for herself. Everyone said, "If he's not good enough for you, who will be?"

She didn't know. She didn't know anything about what her life would look like now. But it started with her saying: "NOT THIS."

I think of my friend who took her three young children away from a toxic marriage, despite that fact that her husband supported her and the kids financially...and the four of them (this woman and her three children) all slept in one bed together in a tiny studio apartment for a few years, while she struggled to build a new life. She was poor, she was scared, she was alone. But she had to listen to the voices within her that said, "NOT THIS."

I think of friends who walked out of jobs — with no job waiting for them. Because they said "NOT THIS."

I think of friends who quit school, rather than keep pretending that they cared about this field of study anymore. And yes, they lost the scholarship. And yes, they ended up working at a fast food restaurant, while everyone else was getting degrees. And yes, it took them a while to figure out where to go next. But there was a relief at last in just surrendering to the holy, non-negotiable truth of NOT THIS.

I think of friends who bravely walked into AA meetings and just fell apart in front of a room full of total strangers, and said, "NOT THIS."

I think of a friend who pulled her children out of Sunday School in the middle of church one Sunday because she'd had it with the judgment and self-righteousness of this particular church. Yes, it was her community. Yes, it was her tribe. But she physically couldn't be in that building anymore without feeling that she would explode. She didn't know where she was going, spiritually or within her community, but she said, "NOT THIS". And walked out.

Rationally, it's crazy to abandon a perfectly good life (or at least a familiar life) in order to jump into a mystery. No sane person would advise you to make such a leap, with no Plan B in place. We are supposed to be careful. We are supposed to be prudent.

And yet...

And yet.

If you keep ignoring the voices within you that say "NOT THIS", just because you don't know what to do, instead...you may end up stuck in NOT THIS forever.

You don't need to know where you are going to admit that where you are standing right now is wrong. The bravest thing to say can be these two words.

What comes next?

I don't know. You don't know. Nobody knows. It might be worse. It might be better.

But whatever it is... it is **NOT THIS**.

