What Do I Know and What Am I Assuming?

When something is unclear, your body may already be responding as if you know what is happening. You read a message and your stomach tightens. Someone does not answer and you feel a pressure to do something. A change in someone's voice makes you alert before you have consciously decided what you heard. Stay with that moment before explaining it. Notice where you feel the uncertainty in your body and what happens there when you imagine that you do not know what the situation means. Then give the situation two different descriptions. In one, write only what you actually know. What was said or done? What did you see or hear? What information were you actually given? In the other, write what your mind has already made of it. Let the sentences be as they normally appear in your head: "She is angry with me." "I have done something wrong." "He is going to leave." "I have to sort this out." "Something bad is about to happen." Read both versions slowly and notice what happens in your body as you move from one to the other. Where does your body change? What happens to your breathing, your muscles, your stomach, your chest, your sense of urgency? Where does knowing become assuming?

That point is worth staying with because an assumption can become part of your experience so quickly that you no longer notice the difference. Once you have decided what the silence means, you may start behaving as if you have received an answer. You explain yourself, prepare for rejection, take responsibility, try to repair something, or become more careful. The assumption has already given you a position in the situation and your body may already be responding from that position. Look at one assumption that carries a strong physical response and notice what it makes you do. If you assume that someone is angry, what changes in your behaviour? If you assume that you have done something wrong, what becomes your responsibility? If you assume that something will go badly, what do you start preparing for? The assumption may be connected to something you already believe about yourself, other people, relationships, safety, rejection, responsibility, or control. The present situation gives that belief something to attach itself to, and the gap in what you know gets filled with something that is already familiar.

There may be a reason this happens so quickly. Perhaps you once needed to recognise changes in other people before they were spoken. Perhaps uncertainty was difficult to remain in because you had to act before you knew what would happen. Perhaps knowing what something meant gave you a way to stay connected or keep yourself safe. When you notice the bodily response that accompanies the assumption, you may recognise something familiar in the way you are positioning yourself. You do not have to remove the response or decide that the assumption is wrong. You can notice what your body has learned to do and what it is preparing you to do now, and then return to the situation with the distinction still present: What do I actually know? What am I assuming? What remains unknown?

Let the unknown remain there for a moment and notice what happens when you do not complete the situation with an explanation. You can stay with what was actually said, done, seen, or heard and allow everything beyond that to remain open. From there, notice what you choose to do while you do not yet know the outcome, the other person's intention, or what the situation will become. You can know what you know, recognise what you have added, and notice what your body is doing with the uncertainty without having to turn the assumption into a fact.