
BUILT
IN SILENCE
A TRUE STORY OF BECOMING
FRANK RIZK

BUILT IN SILENCE

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A true story of becoming.

Of questioning what had shaped me.

Of facing the patterns I had mistaken for myself.

Of learning to hear my own voice.

And of discovering what remained

when I finally became quiet enough to listen.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Foreword

This book was not written for applause.

It was not written to impress, convince, or explain.

It began because there were things I could no longer avoid seeing in myself.

At first, I thought I was writing about what was happening to me.

Looking back, I can see that I was writing my way into awareness.

These pages are not a record of a man who had the answers.

They are a record of a man who finally became willing to question them.

Some of what I discovered was uncomfortable.

Some of it challenged what I had been taught about relationships, faith, strength, success, and even myself.

And some of it changed again as I continued to grow.

That is why I do not offer this book as instruction.

My story is not a formula.

What helped me may not belong to you.

What I came to believe does not need to become what you believe.

But a story can still become a mirror.

If you recognize something of yourself in these pages, stay with it.

If a question makes you uncomfortable, notice why.

If something does not fit you, leave it.

The purpose is not to become the man in this book.

The purpose, if there is one, is to become more honest about the person reading it.

Built in silence.

Not because silence contains every answer.

Because sometimes it is the only place quiet enough to hear the question.

Introduction

I didn't plan to write this book.

It revealed itself one chapter at a time.

It began with a relationship reaching a breaking point and with three days of silence I hadn't expected.

At first, my attention was on what had happened between us.

Then the direction changed.

The questions turned toward me.

Who am I when I stop defending the person I have been?

Which parts of me are truly mine, and which were learned long before I knew I had a choice?

From there, the book became something I hadn't intended.

I began looking at childhood, relationships, people-pleasing, discipline, fear, faith, perfectionism, success, possessions, and the thoughts I had allowed to lead me.

I also began questioning some of the ideas I had collected from books and teachers.

Some remained useful.

Some changed as I changed.

The chapters were written close to the moments they describe.

That matters.

You may notice certainty in one chapter becoming a question in another.

You may see language become softer, or an idea become more nuanced.

I have not tried to erase that evolution.

It is the evolution.

Built in Silence is not a guide to masculinity.

It is not a set of rules for relationships.

It is not a promise that awareness removes pain.

It is the story of what happened when I stopped looking only at the world around me and began examining the structures inside me.

Some I kept.

Some I questioned.

Some I released.

And somewhere through that process, silence stopped feeling empty.

It became the place where I could finally hear myself.

So read this as a story, not a prescription.

Take what makes you look more closely at your own life.

Question the rest.

And when the questions become yours,

the book has done its work.

CHAPTER ONE

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The Night Everything Started

It was a Thursday night in May.

I was sitting alone on the sofa after a long day. Work had been intense. Too many demands, decisions, problems and stress.

I turned on the TV.

Not because I wanted to watch something important. I just wanted to switch off.

At that time, I normally watched only two shows when I wanted to disconnect: Seinfeld or Friends. They were easy. Familiar. I didn't have to think.

That night, it was Seinfeld.

My girlfriend was returning from a trip. Earlier, I had messaged her asking which terminal she would arrive at, but we never managed to confirm it before the flight.

Around seven in the evening, my phone buzzed.

She had landed.

I felt relieved and we started chatting. But there was some kind of problem at the airport. The passengers were delayed for more than two hours.

I stayed with her on WhatsApp.

I could feel her frustration, so I was checking on her and trying to support her.

But at the same time, something else was happening inside me.

During the time she had been away, I had made a decision.

A big one.

I was going to tell her everything about me.

There were parts of my past I had never fully shared with her. Things I had been holding back.

And I had reached a point where I didn't want to do that anymore.

I didn't want to be half-honest with her.

More importantly, I didn't want to be half-honest with myself.

I was tired of being present, but not completely present.

Loved, but not completely known.

So while she was stuck at the airport, I was sitting on the sofa thinking about how I would tell her everything.

Then a message appeared:

Where are you?

I knew immediately what she meant.

I replied:

I'm home.

And everything changed.

She was angry that I hadn't come to the airport.

For her, I should have understood that I needed to be there without her asking.

For me, we had never agreed that I would pick her up. I didn't even know which terminal she was arriving at.

I had asked.

She didn't know either.

So from my side, there was no plan that I had ignored.

From her side, there was something I should never have needed a plan to understand.

And I could understand that.

Her messages became emotional. She told me that I hadn't changed. That I still didn't understand what respect looked like to her. That a man from her culture would have been there.

I could feel that this was not only about the airport.

There was more behind it.

Normally, I might have started defending myself. Explaining what happened. Trying to prove that I hadn't done anything intentionally.

But this time, I didn't.

I let her speak.

Later that evening, I learned that the delay had cleared and she had taken a taxi home.

After some time, I sent her another message:

I hope you've reached safely. Let me know when you do.

One tick.

I waited.

Still one tick.

She had blocked me.

From Thursday night until Sunday afternoon, there was nothing.

Complete silence.

And strangely, this is where the story really started.

Because there was nothing I could do.

I couldn't explain myself to her.

I couldn't convince her.

I couldn't fix anything.

So I was left with myself.

And slowly, I started thinking about what she had said.

Not only about the airport.

About me.

I started asking questions.

Who am I?

Why do I behave the way I do?

Why have I been this way for so long?

What am I avoiding?

And maybe the biggest question:

What do I actually want from myself and from my life?

I didn't suddenly have the answers.

And I definitely didn't become a different man in three days.

This is one of the things I would change from the original version.

At the time, it may have felt like I had changed completely. Looking back now, I don't think that's what happened.

I think I simply became willing to look.

And once I started looking, I began seeing things I hadn't wanted to see before.

Patterns.

Choices.

Fear.

Things I had hidden from other people.

And probably things I had hidden from myself.

I couldn't have known then where those questions would take me.

I only knew something had started.

What began as an argument about an airport was becoming a conversation with myself.

And maybe that's why I still remember that Thursday night.

Not because everything changed that night.

It didn't.

But because something became visible.

And once you see something clearly, it becomes much harder to pretend you haven't seen it.

Before You Continue

Maybe you have had a moment like this too.

Something happens on the outside, but somehow it makes you look inside.

You don't need to fix anything yet.

You don't even need an answer.

Just ask yourself:

What have I been carrying silently?

Where am I not being completely honest with myself?

And what might I see if I stopped looking away?

Then just notice what comes up.

CHAPTER TWO

The Morning I Asked Why

Friday morning.

I woke before the sun, as I usually did.

Water bottle. Headphones. Gym.

Jim Rohn's voice was already in my ears - familiar, steady, and by then almost part of the routine.

I had discovered his work more than two years earlier through a random post online. One post led to a video, then another, and eventually to books and ideas that opened a door I hadn't known was there.

I started reading constantly: human behavior, relationships, business, money, purpose, and anything that seemed capable of helping me understand myself and the life I was living.

That morning, between sets, I looked at my phone.

WhatsApp.

Still one tick.

Still blocked.

But something was different.

In the past, uncertainty like that could have pulled me into calling, questioning, replaying conversations, trying to fix what I couldn't control.

That morning, I wasn't doing any of it.

I felt still.

And that surprised me.

What is happening to me?

Why am I reacting differently?

Why do I feel calm?

A line I had heard many times came back to me:

"If you want things to change for you, you have to change."

I had heard the idea before. That morning, I was finally ready to question what it meant in my own life.

Why was I so disciplined about waking early?

Why was I pushing myself through books week after week?

Why was I training so hard?

Was I building myself?

Or was I trying to survive something?

The answer wasn't as flattering as discipline made it look.

Much of what I had built over those years had grown during the slow breakdown of my marriage.

The gym gave me somewhere to put the pressure. The routine gave structure to days that often felt emotionally uncertain. Reading gave me language for questions I didn't yet know how to ask.

None of those things were wrong. They helped me.

But I started to see that growth and escape can sometimes live beside each other.

I had loved my ex-wife. We had history, and I had wanted the marriage to work. When it began slipping away, I didn't know how to stop it.

I had already experienced divorce once when I was younger. My first marriage had ended, and we had a daughter together. The separation carried

consequences that stayed with me, including time with my daughter that I could never recover.

I had eventually made peace with that decision.

But the possibility of another marriage ending carried a different weight.

I didn't want to repeat the story.

So I searched for answers.

I read about relationships, communication, behavior, masculinity, femininity, psychology, and whatever else seemed capable of explaining what I couldn't understand at home.

At the time, I thought knowledge might help me solve the relationship.

Looking back, I think I was also trying to understand myself.

The gym helped me feel strong when other parts of my life felt uncertain.

The books helped me name things I had never been taught to name.

And slowly, without realizing it, the routines I had built to survive a difficult period were also becoming part of the way I rebuilt myself.

One rep. One page. One question at a time.

Then my attention returned to the night before.

I replayed her messages differently.

Instead of asking whether her reaction was justified, I started asking what her reaction was telling me about her experience.

I couldn't know everything happening inside her. I couldn't reduce ten months of a relationship to one argument at an airport.

But I could acknowledge something uncomfortable:

My intention and her experience were not the same thing.

I hadn't intended to hurt her.

That didn't automatically mean she hadn't been hurt.

And once I allowed both of those things to be true, the question changed.

Instead of asking, "What is wrong with her reaction?" I began asking, "What have I contributed to what is happening between us?"

That question was harder.

But it was also more useful.

I could see patterns in myself that had existed long before this relationship: things left unsaid, difficult truths postponed, discomfort avoided until circumstances forced it into the open.

I didn't need to diagnose her past or explain her wounds to understand my responsibility.

I needed to look at my own.

And that was when another realization arrived:

I was the common denominator in my own life.

That didn't mean everything was my fault.

It meant that if there was one person whose choices, patterns and responses I could actually examine, it was me.

That difference mattered to me.

Responsibility was not the same as blame.

It was simply the decision to stop using other people's behavior as a reason not to examine my own.

Later that afternoon, at the office, I kept going back through the previous months.

Conversations. Reactions. Things I had said. Things I hadn't said.

I wasn't trying to build a case against either of us.

I was trying to understand.

I checked WhatsApp again.

Still blocked.

For a moment, I thought: Maybe this is the end.

And, unexpectedly, part of me felt relieved.

A few days earlier, I had decided that when she returned, I would finally tell her the parts of my past I had never fully shared - my previous marriages, my daughter, the things I had been afraid might change the way she saw me.

If the relationship was over, I wouldn't have to have that conversation.

The relief exposed something.

I was still looking for a way not to face the truth.

That was the part I couldn't ignore.

So I made a quieter decision.

I would stop trying to predict what would happen between us.

I wouldn't chase. I wouldn't make decisions from fear. And I wouldn't use the silence as an excuse to disappear from what I already knew I needed to face.

For the rest of that day, I let things be.

No desperate move.

No final conclusion.

No attempt to force an answer.

Tomorrow would come.

And when it did, I would deal with what was actually there.

Before You Continue

Sometimes discipline is growth.

Sometimes it is protection.

And sometimes it begins as one and quietly becomes the other.

What have I built because it genuinely serves me?

What have I built because I was trying to survive something?

Where might responsibility help me see more clearly without turning into blame?

You don't need to judge the answer.

Just be willing to see it.

CHAPTER THREE

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Tomorrow Is Here

Saturday. The third day after the airport storm.

At 6:00 a.m., Jim Rohn was in my headphones again as I walked to the gym.

But something had shifted.

I wasn't wondering anymore what the next step in the relationship would be. My message was still undelivered. I was still blocked. And I had started treating the silence as an answer.

I assumed it was over.

Oddly enough, part of me felt relieved.

If the relationship had ended, I wouldn't have to face the conversation I had been preparing for - the truth about my two divorces, my daughter, and the parts of my past I had still not fully shared.

For a moment, silence felt like an escape.

The gym was peaceful that morning. My movements were steady. My breathing was deep.

But underneath the calm, my mind had already started moving somewhere else.

After the gym, on my way to the barbershop, I started thinking about my second marriage.

The distance.

The quiet.

The way two people can live under the same roof and slowly stop reaching each other.

There had been a time when I believed the change between us had happened suddenly.

Looking back, I don't anymore saw it that way.

Most endings are visible long before they are final.

Not always through dramatic events.

Sometimes through smaller things.

Conversations avoided.

Needs left unspoken.

Resentment that becomes routine.

Affection that becomes less frequent.

Two people adjusting to distance until the distance itself starts feeling normal.

That doesn't mean every relationship can or should be saved.

It simply means collapse is often the final stage of something that has been changing for a long time.

And I had been part of that change.

That stayed with me.

It was easy to remember what I had received from the relationship.

It was harder to ask what I had contributed to the atmosphere between us.

Not because everything had been my responsibility.

But because my part was the only part I could honestly examine.

Responsibility gave me something I could actually work on.

I started reviewing small moments from the marriage.

One of them was almost embarrassingly ordinary.

She would ask, "What would you like for dinner?"

And I would often answer, "Anything. Whatever you like."

At the time, I believed I was being considerate.

I thought I was making things easier by asking for less.

But I began to wonder whether that habit said something else about me.

Not about masculinity or femininity as universal rules.

About me.

How often had I confused consideration with disappearing?

How often had I avoided expressing a preference because I didn't want to create friction?

How often had "whatever you want" really meant, "I don't want to risk disappointing you"?

The dinner question became interesting because it was small enough to expose something larger.

Indecision wasn't only showing up around food.

It appeared in my tone, my timing, my willingness to say what I wanted, and my tendency to keep the peace before asking whether the peace was honest.

I had learned how to be accommodating. I hadn't always learned how to be clear.

That distinction changed the way I thought about presence.

I had been reading a lot at the time about masculine and feminine dynamics.

Some of those ideas helped me question myself. Some, I would later understand, were too absolute to explain real people.

What stayed useful was simpler:

Clarity matters.

Being able to express a preference matters.

Making a decision when a decision is yours to make matters.

Listening matters too.

So does flexibility.

The point was not to become dominant.

It was to stop mistaking uncertainty for kindness.

There is a difference between making space for another person and abandoning your own position inside the relationship.

I was starting to see how often I had done the second while believing I was doing the first.

Presence does not require control. It requires honesty.

That morning, I wasn't trying to create a new rule for how men or women should behave.

I was trying to understand one man: myself.

What happened when I was afraid to disappoint?

What happened when I avoided conflict?

What happened when I wanted harmony so badly that I became unclear?

Those questions felt more useful than any theory.

Because they gave me something real to work with.

I couldn't rewrite my second marriage.

I couldn't know exactly what my ex-wife had felt in every moment.

And I couldn't turn a few books into a complete explanation of relationships.

But I could become more aware of how I showed up.

I could speak more clearly.

I could make decisions without needing to control the person beside me.

I could listen without disappearing.

And I could stop waiting for a future version of myself to do it.

Tomorrow was no longer a place where change would happen.

Tomorrow was here.

Before You Continue

Sometimes we think we are being easygoing when we are actually avoiding being known.

Sometimes we call it kindness.

Sometimes it is fear of friction.

Where do I say "whatever you want" when I actually have a preference?

Where have I confused keeping the peace with being honest?

What would clarity look like without control?

You don't need to become louder.

Just more present in what is true for you.

CHAPTER FOUR

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Sunday - The Face-to-Face

Sunday morning.

Before heading to the gym, I checked WhatsApp one more time.

My message from Thursday was still sitting there with one tick.

Still blocked.

I decided I would stop checking.

No more trying to predict what the silence meant. No more chasing an answer I didn't have.

I had spent the previous two days questioning my own patterns. This morning, I wanted to respond from what I had been seeing in myself, not from anxiety.

I put on my headphones and went to the gym.

Jim Rohn and Les Brown followed me through the workout and back home.

In the kitchen, while preparing breakfast, I heard a line from Rohn:

"I'll take care of me for you if you'll take care of you for me."

The idea stayed with me.

I couldn't control another person's reactions, choices, or healing.

But I could take responsibility for the way I showed up.

Later that morning, I started looking back over the ten months we had spent together.

I thought about our first date and how different I had felt compared with the man I remembered from my marriages.

When I first asked her out, I hadn't overthought it.

I simply said:

"I'd like to have a coffee with you. Let me know when you're available."

Our first date lasted hours.

I listened.

Not because I was following a rule about how much a man or woman should speak. I was interested in her, so I gave the conversation my attention.

She spoke about herself, her life, and the things that mattered to her. I asked questions because I wanted to understand.

Looking back, that was one of the simplest lessons I had been trying to learn through all those books:

For me, presence started with attention.

Listening doesn't mean decoding someone or assuming we know what they feel.

It means paying enough attention to notice what they are actually saying - and being curious about what we don't understand.

During that first date, we also talked about birthdays, relationships, and our histories.

I noticed similarities between her and people from my past, and at the time I wondered whether I was repeating some hidden pattern.

I didn't have enough understanding to know.

But the question stayed with me.

Our relationship had begun shortly after my second divorce was finalized. I hadn't planned it. I wasn't searching for someone.

It just happened.

And for a while, I believed I was entering it differently.

In some ways, I was.

In others, I was still carrying things I hadn't faced.

The first serious challenge came when she heard from someone that I was married.

We spoke on the phone.

She told me she felt fooled and that she would not be involved with a married man.

I explained that I had been married, but the divorce had been finalized. The trip I had recently taken had been connected to completing that process.

That part was true.

But it wasn't the whole truth.

I still hadn't told her about my first marriage or my daughter.

We had agreed not to focus on our pasts, only the present and future.

That agreement made the silence easier.

But it didn't make it honest.

There is a difference between privacy and hiding.

I was starting to understand that difference.

I hadn't hidden those parts of my life because I wanted to manipulate her.

I had hidden them because I was afraid of what they might change.

How she saw me.

What she thought of me.

Whether she would stay.

And perhaps most of all, how I would have to see myself once I said everything aloud.

That Sunday, after breakfast, my phone rang.

It was her.

We spoke for hours.

There was blame. Defensiveness. Hurt. Silence. Then tears.

Eventually, she asked me:

"What do you want from this relationship?"

I told her that from where I stood, the relationship had ended on Thursday night.

I said there had been good between us, but there was also too much underneath the surface to pretend everything was fine.

She cried.

Listening to her through the phone, I knew the conversation couldn't remain there.

"Give me thirty minutes. I'll come to you. We need to talk face-to-face."

I put on my shoes, took my keys, and drove.

We talked until around two in the morning.

This time there was nowhere to hide behind a screen.

She told me how she had been experiencing me and how some of my changes had affected her.

Then she said something I didn't expect:

"You've changed so much, and so fast, I don't recognize you anymore. That scares me. It feels like the change is on the outside, but inside you're still the same."

I couldn't dismiss that.

I had spent years reading, training, changing routines, and trying to improve myself.

But her words forced a different question:

Was I changing, or was I learning how to look changed?

I didn't know the full answer.

But I knew I couldn't continue the conversation while still protecting the parts of myself I was most afraid to reveal.

So I told her.

About both marriages.

About my daughter.

About why I had stayed silent.

I didn't ask her to excuse it.

I tried to explain what I was only beginning to understand myself: that fear and unresolved experiences had influenced the way I handled my past.

She was shocked.

We talked.

We embraced.

And we decided to continue.

But something in me already knew that deciding to continue and actually being able to continue were not the same thing.

The underlying tension hadn't disappeared because we had finally spoken.

A week later, we fought again.

She left, then returned later upset and apologizing.

I loved her.

But by then I could see something I had struggled to accept before:

Love was not enough to make the relationship healthy.

I told her that I couldn't continue being part of something that was causing both of us so much pain.

Ending it wasn't proof that either of us had failed.

It was an acknowledgment that what we had become together was no longer something I knew how to repair from inside the relationship.

And for the first time, I wasn't interested in immediately replacing the ending with another answer.

I needed to understand myself.

Not fight millions of demons.

Not become a completely different man overnight.

Just go deeper.

To understand the fear.

The hiding.

The need for approval.

The patterns I kept carrying from one chapter of my life into another.

The relationship ended.

But the questions remained.

And this time, I wasn't going to run from them.

The face-to-face conversation with her became the beginning of a face-to-face conversation with myself.

Before You Continue

Sometimes another person's experience of us shows us something we cannot see from inside ourselves.

That doesn't make their interpretation automatically right.

But it may still be worth hearing.

When was the last time I listened to difficult feedback without immediately defending myself?

Where might change on the outside be moving faster than change on the inside?

What truth am I protecting because I am afraid of what might happen once it is spoken?

You don't have to accept every judgment made about you.

But you can still ask whether there is something there worth seeing.

CHAPTER FIVE

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Ignition - The Monday After

Monday morning.

I followed the routine that had become familiar.

Gym. Headphones. Jim Rohn and Les Brown in my ears.

But that morning, I added something.

Not another book.

Not another workout.

A few minutes of stillness.

A reflection.

A prayer.

After training, I walked home and stood in the living room facing the floor-to-ceiling glass wall.

The sun was beginning to rise.

I waited until the light reached me.

Then I closed my eyes, took a breath, and spoke.

"Thank you for everything. For the good and the difficult. For what I understand and what I don't."

There was no prepared prayer.

No script.

I wasn't trying to say the right words.

I simply wanted the words to be mine.

"I want to love You in a way that is honest for me, not simply because I was told how. I trust You. Help me see beyond what is obvious. Help me listen beyond what is being said."

"And if my mother and the people I have loved and lost are somehow with You, let them know that I love them. And that I miss them."

Something about that prayer felt different.

Not because I believed I had discovered the correct way to pray.

Quite the opposite.

For the first time, I wasn't interested in whether I was doing it correctly.

I was interested in whether I meant it.

My prayer had moved from repetition to relationship.

Faith had always been part of my life.

But much of the way I understood it had come through what I had inherited - family, culture, religion, rituals, expectations, and fear.

That didn't make any of it wrong.

It simply made me wonder which parts I had consciously chosen and which parts I had repeated because they were familiar.

For years, I often turned toward God most strongly when I needed something.

That morning, I didn't want anything.

I just wanted to speak.

And perhaps more importantly, to listen.

I began thinking about how much of a life is inherited before we are old enough to question it.

The way we pray.

The way we love.

The way we define success.

The way we understand being a man or a woman.

The way we decide what is acceptable, shameful, respectable, or worthy.

We learn through what surrounds us.

We watch. We imitate. We adapt.

Belonging matters to human beings, and sometimes fitting in becomes so natural that we stop noticing how much of ourselves has been shaped by it.

I wasn't interested in blaming my family, religion, culture, or anyone else for that.

They had inherited things too.

The question was different now:

What do I still believe because it is true for me, and what do I believe simply because I have never questioned it?

That question reached far beyond faith.

It touched everything.

Relationships.

Identity.

Work.

Success.

Fear.

The person I thought I was supposed to be.

For a moment, my instinct was dramatic:

Destroy everything. Start again.

But even then, I wasn't talking about destroying my life.

I was talking about questioning the foundations beneath it.

What had been built consciously?

What had been built through fear?

What had been built to belong?

What had been built simply because nobody had ever told me I was allowed to examine it?

A passage attributed to Jesus came to mind - the image of a temple being destroyed and raised again.

At that stage of my life, I received those words personally.

Not as a claim about what the passage was intended to mean theologically, but as a metaphor for what I felt I needed to do:

Examine the structure. Keep what is true. Rebuild what is not.

That felt more honest than trying to become a "better" version of myself.

Better according to whom?

I wasn't interested in becoming superior to anyone.

I wanted to become more conscious of the life I was actually choosing.

For months, questions had already been following me:

What does God ask of me?

What is mine to do with this life?

How much of the person I am living as was chosen by me?

I didn't have answers.

And I don't anymore needed to pretend that I did.

That Monday morning wasn't a revelation that solved my life.

It was an ignition.

A decision to question more honestly.

To pray more honestly.

To live more honestly.

And to let whatever I rebuilt begin from there.

Not from fear. Not from performance. From truth.

Before You Continue

Some of the strongest beliefs we carry were given to us before we were old enough to choose them.

Questioning them doesn't automatically mean rejecting them.

Sometimes questioning is how we discover what we genuinely believe.

What in my life have I consciously chosen?

What have I continued simply because it is familiar?

If I removed fear, approval, and expectation for a moment, what would still feel true?

You don't have to destroy everything.

Maybe you only need to look at what it was built on.

CHAPTER SIX

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The First Demon I Faced

It was already eleven at night.

I was lying in bed with no plan to write.

I didn't know what Chapter Six would be about.

I only had the feeling that I needed to begin.

And once I did, the previous days started replaying in my mind.

The airport.

The silence.

The questions.

The decision to stop looking only at what was happening around me and begin looking at what had been built inside me.

I wanted to go back.

Not to relive the past.

To understand what might still be travelling with me from it.

I started thinking about childhood.

About the experiences I still remembered clearly and the patterns that seemed to have followed me into adulthood.

I couldn't remember everything.

And memory itself is never a perfect recording.

But I didn't need a complete history to notice something that had repeated throughout my life.

I had spent a great deal of my life trying to be accepted.

I wanted people to be happy with me.

I said yes when I wanted to say no.

I avoided conflict.

I gave more than I sometimes wanted to give.

I tried to become easy to love, easy to work with, easy to approve of.

For years, I called that kindness.

And some of it was kindness.

But I was beginning to wonder whether all of it was.

A childhood memory came forward.

I was born with a physical difference.

And I remember receiving messages from my father that left me feeling as though this difference made me somehow incomplete - something to be conscious of, perhaps even something to hide.

I cannot reduce an entire childhood, or my father's intentions, to one memory.

But I can speak honestly about what remained with me.

Somewhere along the way, I learned to question whether being myself was enough to be accepted.

I can't prove that every later act of people-pleasing came from that experience.

Human behavior is rarely that simple.

But the connection was meaningful enough for me to examine.

What if some of my giving had been generosity - and some had been a strategy for belonging?

What if some of my patience had been maturity - and some had been fear of rejection?

What if some of the qualities I proudly called my character had also been shaped by ways I learned to protect myself?

That possibility changed something.

Because I could see the same pattern in different parts of my life.

In relationships, I sometimes kept quiet rather than risk disappointing someone.

In business, I struggled to say no and often carried more than I needed to carry.

I wanted everyone satisfied.

I wanted everyone comfortable.

And when someone told me, "You have a big heart," I felt rewarded.

Those words meant more to me than I had realized.

They seemed to confirm that I was good.

And perhaps, somewhere underneath that, that I was worthy of being accepted.

The problem was never having a big heart.

The question was whether I still needed other people to prove it to me.

That week, someone said it again.

"You have a big heart."

I noticed that the words landed differently.

I could appreciate them without needing them to define me.

I could still give.

I could still care.

I could still help.

But I was starting to understand that generosity without boundaries can eventually become resentment, exhaustion, or self-abandonment.

Giving didn't need to disappear.

It needed choice.

A no did not cancel my kindness.

A boundary did not make me selfish.

And someone else's disappointment did not automatically mean I had done something wrong.

Kindness feels different when it is chosen rather than required for belonging.

I had originally thought of this pattern as a demon.

Something inside me that needed to be fought and defeated.

But the more I looked at it, the less that language fit.

If people-pleasing had once helped me protect connection, avoid rejection, or feel accepted, then perhaps it had not been an enemy.

Maybe it had been an old strategy that had simply outlived its purpose.

That didn't mean I had to keep obeying it.

It meant I could understand it without hating the younger version of myself who learned it.

So, lying there that night, I imagined speaking to that part of me.

I see you.

I understand why you learned this.

You helped me survive situations I didn't yet know how to understand.

But I don't need you to make every decision anymore.

I can care without disappearing.

I can give without earning love.

I can say no and still be a good person.

I can be accepted - and I can survive not being accepted.

For me, faith was part of that shift too.

My trust in God did not remove uncertainty.

But it gave me somewhere deeper to place my worth than in other people's approval.

And slowly, another possibility opened:

Maybe rebuilding myself did not mean destroying who I had been.

Maybe it meant finally understanding what had built him.

Before You Continue

Some patterns can look so much like personality that we never think to question them.

Understanding where a pattern may have come from doesn't require blaming the past.

It simply gives us more choice in the present.

Where do I give freely, and where do I give because I am afraid of disappointing someone?

What part of my personality might also have been a way of protecting connection or belonging?

What would remain if I don't anymore needed approval to confirm my worth?

You don't need to fight the part of you that learned to survive.

Maybe you only need to understand it well enough to choose differently now.

CHAPTER SEVEN

—

The Gentlemen at My Table

That morning, I returned to the words that had been travelling with me for years.

I woke up and, before getting out of bed, reached for the pages I had finished the night before.

Something was still moving inside me.

After my morning ritual, I sat with an espresso, a piece of dark chocolate, and the small leather notebook I had carried for years.

It wasn't a journal in the usual sense.

It was a collection.

Whenever something I read or heard stopped me - a sentence, an idea, a question - I wrote it down.

At the beginning of my journey, I didn't always know why certain words affected me.

I only knew that they did.

So I kept them.

Jim Rohn. Les Brown. Tony Robbins. Napoleon Hill. Marcus Aurelius. Bob Proctor. Zig Ziglar.

Different men. Different eras. Different philosophies.

But in my notebook, they had somehow ended up sitting at the same table.

And that morning, I joined them.

I had built myself a council without realizing it.

Not a council I followed blindly.

Not men whose every belief I had to adopt.

A collection of voices that had challenged the way I was thinking when I needed challenge most.

As I turned the pages, I noticed something.

Some ideas still felt powerful.

Some I understood differently now.

And some no longer fit me at all.

That mattered.

Because growth was not supposed to turn these men into authorities over my life.

Their words had opened questions.

I still had to decide what remained true once those questions became mine.

A teacher can open a window. He cannot decide what you must see through it.

I used to imagine awareness as a room filled with closed windows.

An idea would arrive and suddenly one of them would open.

Light would enter a place I hadn't known was dark.

Once I had seen something, I couldn't completely return to not seeing it.

But I also understood something I hadn't understood when I first filled those pages:

Not every powerful sentence is a truth.

Some are invitations.

Some are provocations.

Some are useful only for a particular season of life.

The work is not collecting more quotes.

The work is deciding what still makes sense after I question it for myself.

What remained after the quotes

Looking through the notebook, I could see several ideas repeating beneath different words.

Do not confuse being busy with moving forward.

Do not spend your life asking for certainty when life itself cannot promise it.

Pay attention to the places where fear keeps making your decisions.

Do not make yourself small simply because being seen makes you uncomfortable.

Let your behavior carry more weight than your opinions.

Take responsibility for your attention, your choices, and the way you use your time.

Learn to encourage yourself when nobody is watching.

Do not waste the important parts of life on things that only feel urgent.

And perhaps most importantly:

Think for yourself.

That was the irony.

I had spent years collecting other people's wisdom, and eventually their greatest value was helping me develop my own judgment.

I don't anymore wanted a code handed to me.

I wanted principles I had examined, tested, and consciously chosen.

The notebook showed me the distance I had travelled.

Earlier, I had often reached for these voices because I wanted answers.

Now I could sit with them without surrendering my authority.

I could agree.

I could disagree.

I could take one idea and leave another.

I could even outgrow something that had once helped me.

Respecting a teacher does not require becoming his echo.

That realization felt important because I had just begun questioning how much of my life had been inherited.

Religion.

Culture.

Relationships.

Definitions of masculinity.

Definitions of success.

If I was going to question what had been handed to me by family and society, I also had to be willing to question what had been handed to me by the people I admired.

Otherwise, I would only be replacing one form of borrowed thinking with another.

I closed the notebook.

For years, I had thought I was filling it with answers.

That morning, I understood what I had really collected:

Starting points.

The gentlemen had done their part.

They had challenged me, encouraged me, and sometimes disturbed the comfort of the person I had been.

But they could not build the rest for me.

That part was mine.

The council could speak. I still had to choose.

I finished my espresso.

Closed the leather cover.

Picked up my keys.

And walked out the door.

Not with a new quote to follow.

With a quieter question:

What do I believe now?

Before You Continue

We all have a council.

Authors. Parents. Teachers. Friends. Culture. People we admire.

The question is not whether we are influenced.

The question is whether we remain conscious of what we allow to influence us.

Whose voices are sitting at my table?

Which ideas have I examined for myself, and which have I simply adopted?

What belief once helped me but may no longer belong to the person I am becoming?

Choose your teachers carefully.

Then make sure your own voice eventually has a seat at the table.

CHAPTER EIGHT

—

The Real Enemy

I sat down with a weight in my chest and thoughts circling faster than I could settle them.

I wrote anyway.

Not to escape what I was feeling.

To look at it.

By then, writing had started becoming another form of observation.

When something inside me became loud, I could put it on the page and create enough distance to ask:

Is this reality, or is this fear speaking?

I was starting to understand that not every thought deserved my obedience.

A thought could arrive with urgency and still be wrong.

A fear could feel completely real without describing what was actually happening.

An old protective response could enter the present as though the past were happening again.

That difference mattered to me.

Earlier in my life, I often experienced thoughts as instructions.

If my mind warned me, I listened.

If it predicted rejection, I prepared for rejection.

If it told me something was unsafe, I reacted as though danger had already arrived.

Now I was trying something different.

I was listening without immediately following.

A thought can have a voice without having authority.

That was when I thought again about the "demons" I had been writing about.

I had used that word for the parts of me I wanted to defeat.

But Chapter Six had already shown me something important.

Those parts were not necessarily enemies.

Some of them may have developed as ways of protecting me.

They warned.

They anticipated.

They defended.

They tried to prevent old pain from happening again.

The problem was not that they existed.

The problem was that I had sometimes allowed them to make decisions for a life they no longer understood.

They were protecting an old version of me in a life that had already changed.

That changed the way I looked at the whole battle.

I didn't need to declare war on myself.

I needed to learn how to recognize when fear, memory, or an old belief was trying to take control.

For years, I had thought discipline meant waking up early.

Training.

Eating properly.

Working when I didn't feel like working.

Keeping promises to myself.

All of that mattered.

But another form of discipline was becoming more important:

Learning not to believe every thought that enters my mind.

That was harder than the gym.

There was no mirror showing progress.

No weight to add to the bar.

No number to measure.

Sometimes the entire practice happened in a few seconds.

A thought would arrive:

"You're not enough."

"Something is going to go wrong."

"You need to fix this now."

And instead of automatically reacting, I could stop.

Notice it.

Ask what evidence I actually had.

Ask whether the thought belonged to this moment or to something older.

Then choose.

That was the new authority I was trying to build.

Not control over every thought.

I don't believe we get to choose everything that enters the mind.

But we can become more conscious of what we feed, what we repeat, and what we turn into action.

Awareness did not silence the noise. It changed my relationship with it.

I had originally written about castles, warriors, weapons, and war.

That language matched how the experience felt at the time.

I wanted to reclaim my territory.

To stand my ground.

To say: This is my life. I decide what leads it.

I still believe in that authority.

But I don't anymore think freedom requires violence against myself.

Peace can have boundaries without becoming war.

Strength can be quiet.

A boundary can simply be:

I hear you. But you don't decide.

My faith also gave me something to stand beside while learning this.

Not certainty that nothing difficult would happen.

Not protection from every fear.

But a deeper sense that fear did not need to become my compass.

I could feel afraid and still choose.

I could doubt myself and still move.

I could hear an old voice and refuse to become it.

Maybe that was the real enemy I had been trying to name.

Not trauma.

Not fear.

Not my past.

The real enemy was unconscious obedience.

The moment I treated every fear as fact.

Every thought as truth.

Every old defense as necessary.

That was when the past could quietly take authority over the present.

So I stopped trying to kill the demons.

I turned toward them instead.

I see you.

I know why you may be here.

You can speak.

But I will check what you say against reality.

And I will decide what happens next.

That felt different from fighting.

It felt like leadership.

Not leadership over another person.

Leadership over my own choices.

And perhaps the thing I had feared was not trying to destroy me at all.

Maybe some part of me had simply learned, long ago, that fear was how it kept me safe.

I could appreciate that intention without continuing to live by its instructions.

Protection may explain the voice. It does not have to give the voice control.

Before You Continue

Your mind will produce thoughts you did not consciously ask for.

Some may be useful. Some may be old alarms.

Awareness creates a small space between hearing a thought and obeying it.

What thought do I repeatedly treat as fact without examining it?

When fear speaks, what evidence do I actually have?

What would change if I listened to my protective patterns without automatically letting them decide?

You don't have to silence every voice inside you.

You only need to become more conscious of which ones you allow to lead.

CHAPTER NINE

—

The Garden of My Life

Two weeks after moving into my new home, the garden began teaching me something I had spent years trying to understand.

For days after the move, I questioned myself.

Was it the right time?

Was it the right decision?

I had left something familiar and stepped into something new.

But that morning, sitting quietly in the garden with a glass in my hand and watching birds land on the grass, the question disappeared.

I knew.

Moving here had been one of the best decisions I had made.

Not because the house was better.

Because something in me was different inside it.

My rhythm had changed.

My mornings had changed.

Even the way I trained had changed.

Instead of the gym, I found myself outside around 6:30 in the morning, barefoot on the grass, exercising under the early sun.

There was something simple in it.

Ground beneath my feet.

Heat on my skin.

Birds moving around me.

No machines. No walls. No noise.

And somewhere inside that simplicity, my prayer changed too.

I don't anymore felt that I needed a particular position or a prepared sentence.

I stood.

Head lifted. Shoulders open. Feet on the ground.

And I spoke to my Creator in my own words.

"I am not here to complain. I am not here to blame. I am here to say thank You."

"Help me stay aligned. Help me see with more than my eyes and hear with more than my ears. Help me become what I am capable of becoming."

Then I listened.

Afterward, I prepared the glass of water that had become part of the ritual — lemon, vinegar, and fresh mint — and sat in the garden.

That morning, two bees were moving close to my feet.

My first instinct was familiar: move away.

But I stayed.

I watched them.

They weren't interested in me.

They were simply doing what bees do.

Nearby, the birds continued eating even though I was sitting there.

For a few minutes, nothing needed to be controlled.

Everything was simply sharing the same space.

Then I looked down.

There were brown patches in the grass.

Immediately, my mind started working.

Maybe I should add seeds.

Maybe I should treat it.

Maybe I should cover it.

Maybe I could make the whole lawn green again.

And then I caught myself.

There he was again: the perfectionist.

I almost laughed.

I was standing in the middle of nature asking nature to look artificial.

I wanted real grass to behave like synthetic grass.

Always green.

Always even.

Always presentable.

But synthetic grass can remain perfect because it isn't alive.

Life leaves marks precisely because it is alive.

The heat changes the grass.

Leaves fall.

Branches dry.

Flowers come and go.

Some things recover quickly. Others take time.

Nothing in the garden seemed ashamed of its season.

Only I was trying to correct it.

And then the grass stopped being about grass.

I realized how familiar the impulse was.

Fix it.

Hide it.

Make it presentable.

Make sure nobody sees the patch.

But nobody was there.

There were no guests.

No audience.

No one judging the lawn.

I was preparing an image for people who existed only in my mind.

That was the part that stayed with me.

How often had I done the same thing with myself?

How much energy had I spent covering the brown patches rather than understanding what created them?

The garden did not need to look perfect to be healthy. Neither did I.

I had read about wabi-sabi — the appreciation of imperfection, impermanence, and the marks left by time.

But sitting there, I wasn't interested in turning it into a philosophy.

I could see it.

The garden was beautiful because it was changing.

Because it reacted.

Because it carried evidence of heat, growth, stress, recovery, and time.

Because it was real.

Looking around, I noticed something else.

Without consciously planning it, I had chosen the same feeling throughout the house.

Natural textures.

Earth tones.

Organic surfaces.

Materials that didn't need to pretend they had never been touched.

Maybe I had been moving toward this before I had words for it.

Not perfection.

Honesty.

My role was not to control the garden. My role was to tend to it.

Water it.

Nourish it.

Remove what had died.

Pay attention.

Give it what I could.

And then allow life to do what life does beyond my control.

The same was true of me.

I could read.

Reflect.

Train.

Eat well.

Choose better company.

Set boundaries.

Question old beliefs.

Show up honestly.

But I couldn't command the speed of my own growth.

I couldn't pull at the roots to check whether they were working.

I could only tend to the conditions and trust that something was happening beneath the surface.

Roots do not need to be visible to be growing.

I took another sip of water and looked across the garden.

Two weeks earlier, I thought I had simply moved into a new home.

That morning, it felt like something more.

I had created a place where I could hear myself.

A place where prayer felt like conversation.

Where imperfection didn't need to be hidden.

Where life could be alive without being arranged for an audience.

I looked upward and spoke quietly:

"I never expected You to speak to me through something this simple."

"Maybe You were always speaking. Maybe I was finally becoming quiet enough to notice."

I don't know where God ends and my own awareness begins.

I don't need to know.

What mattered in that moment was the sense of connection.

To the garden.

To myself.

To something greater than myself.

And for once, I didn't need to make any of it perfect.

I only needed to be there.

Before You Continue

We often imagine growth as improvement: becoming stronger, cleaner, more successful, more complete.

But living things do not grow in straight lines.

They change with seasons.

They carry marks.

They recover.

Where in my life am I trying to make something look perfect instead of allowing it to be real?

Whose approval am I still preparing for, even when nobody is watching?

What am I tending patiently — without yet being able to see the roots growing?

Not everything imperfect needs to be fixed.

Some things need attention. Some need time. And some may simply be showing you that they are alive.

CHAPTER TEN

—

What Was Never Mine

That evening, I came home tired, hungry, and carrying the weight of a long day.

I parked the car, went upstairs, changed my clothes, dropped my things, and came back down.

And there it was.

The garden.

Every morning when I woke and every evening when I returned, it had become the first place I wanted to see.

That day had been full. I hadn't eaten properly since breakfast, but I remembered the chicken I had marinated the night before.

Despite the summer heat, I decided it would be a barbecue night.

So I waited for the temperature to soften and sat outside.

Birds moved across the grass in front of me.

Then I noticed something.

They were chasing one another away from a particular spot.

Fighting over territory.

I watched them and wondered why.

There was enough room.

Enough grass.

Enough food.

My garden could have held dozens of them.

And yet each bird behaved as though the small piece beneath its feet had to be defended.

I smiled at the irony.

How different are we?

We spend so much of life defending what we temporarily occupy.

Land. Homes. Titles. Positions. Possessions.

We call them ours.

We build identities around them.

Sometimes we fight over them.

But eventually, every one of us leaves.

That did not mean ownership was meaningless. Homes, property, boundaries, and responsibility matter in the world we live in.

But the birds reminded me that possession and permanence are not the same thing.

I could say, "This is my garden."

Legally, practically, it was.

But I hadn't created the soil.

I hadn't invented the trees.

I hadn't designed the bird.

I was here for a period of time, tending a small piece of something much larger than me.

That thought changed the feeling of ownership.

Maybe I wasn't here only to possess.

Maybe I was here to care for what passed through my hands.

That felt different from simply saying something was mine.

The sun went down.

The birds disappeared.

I lit the grill and waited for the flames to settle.

And while I waited, an old memory returned.

It was during my first divorce.

One rainy morning, I was driving to work when I saw a priest standing alone beside the road.

I stopped and offered him a ride.

He seemed surprised.

"You're the only one who stopped," he told me.

Then, before getting out, he said he was going to church and asked:

"What would you like me to pray for?"

I was living through confusion, pain, and uncertainty.

I could have asked for many things.

But only one word came out.

Peace.

Years later, sitting beside that grill, I realized how long I had been searching for that word.

I had looked for peace in achievement.

In money.

In cars.

In relationships.

In the next goal.

In the feeling that once I reached something, acquired something, or solved something, I would finally arrive.

But peace kept moving because I kept attaching it to the next condition.

That evening, there was no next condition.

There was grilled chicken.

A chair.

A garden.

Summer heat.

Silence.

And me.

Nothing extraordinary happened.

That was precisely why it mattered.

For once, I wasn't trying to get somewhere else.

I ate slowly.

I looked around.

And the meal felt richer than meals I had eaten in far more impressive places.

Not because of the food.

Because I was there for it.

The same simplicity had started entering my mornings.

I would walk into the garden, pick fresh mint or rosemary, toast a slice of sourdough, add olive oil, and sit.

Small things.

But they were mine in a different sense.

Not mine because I possessed them.

Mine because I was present enough to experience them.

I had spent years accumulating. I was starting to understand receiving.

My relationship with God was changing in the same way.

I don't anymore felt that I had to search for Him only in prescribed places or borrowed words.

I experienced that relationship in the grass, the birds, the leaves, the quiet, and in the awareness that came when I stopped filling every space with noise.

Maybe He had always been speaking.

Maybe I had simply been too occupied to hear.

A passage attributed to Jesus came back to me: look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap, and yet they are fed.

I had heard those words before.

But now there were birds directly in front of me.

And I understood them differently.

Not as permission to become passive.

Not as a promise that life would require no effort.

But as a reminder that fear does not have to dominate every moment.

I still had responsibilities.

I still had work.

I still had to make decisions, earn, plan, protect, and build.

But I didn't need to turn all of that into my identity.

I could participate in life without pretending I owned life.

That was the peace I had been asking for all those years.

Not the absence of difficulty.

Not a life where nothing could be lost.

Something quieter.

An inner place that did not have to move every time the outside world moved.

I thought again about the priest.

One word.

Peace.

Maybe the answer had taken years because I had been looking for it in places that could never keep it.

That evening, I didn't feel that I had finally conquered life.

I felt almost the opposite.

I don't anymore needed to.

Peace was not something I had won. It was something I had stopped interrupting.

I looked toward the garden and quietly thanked God.

For what had gone well.

For what had hurt.

For what I understood.

And even for what I still didn't.

I asked for the same thing I had begun asking every morning:

Help me stay aware.

Help me stay aligned.

Help me recognize fear without allowing it to lead.

Help me listen.

And if anything I learn can be useful to another person, let me share it without needing them to believe exactly what I believe.

I don't know whether that is a calling.

I don't need to name it yet.

I only know that this book began in silence.

And somehow, silence had brought me here.

Back to the word I had asked for years earlier.

Peace.

Before You Close This Book

Before you move on, sit with your own version of the garden.

It doesn't have to be a physical place.

It may simply be the place inside you where nothing needs to be performed.

What am I still chasing because I believe it will finally give me peace?

What have I mistaken for permanence simply because I currently possess it?

When everything becomes quiet, do I recognize my own voice?

What would remain if I stopped trying to prove that I had arrived?

You do not have to abandon ambition to know peace.

You may simply need to stop asking achievement to give you what only presence can.

Peace is not a destination.

It is a return.

Author's Note

—

This book began as a journal.

It became a mirror.

I didn't write these chapters after I had figured everything out.

I wrote them while I was still inside the questions.

The confusion, the relationships, the memories, the faith, the patterns, the garden — all of it was unfolding while I was writing.

What you have read is not a record of conclusions.

It is a record of awareness arriving.

That distinction matters to me.

Some of the things I believed at the beginning of this journey, I understand differently now.

Some ideas became stronger.

Others became softer.

Some I simply outgrew.

I have left that movement in the book because it is part of the truth of what happened.

Growth did not arrive as one great revelation.

It arrived through questions.

Through uncomfortable conversations.

Through recognizing patterns I had once mistaken for personality.

Through learning that a thought can speak without deserving authority.

Through understanding that rebuilding myself did not require rejecting the man I had been.

It required understanding what had built him.

This is not a book about becoming perfect.

And it is not a formula for becoming a man.

It is one man's account of becoming more conscious of himself.

My experiences are mine.

My relationship with God is mine.

My interpretations are mine.

You may recognize yourself in some of them. You may disagree with others.

That is not a problem.

I don't anymore believe another person's truth has to become mine in order to teach me something.

Maybe the same can be true for you.

If this book gives you anything, I hope it gives you permission to look.

Look at what you inherited.

Look at what you learned to do for love, belonging, safety, or approval.

Look at the voices you have allowed to lead you.

Look at what you are still chasing.

And then decide, consciously, what still belongs to you.

For me, silence became the place where that became possible.

Not because silence gave me all the answers.

Because it finally allowed me to hear the questions.

Somewhere in that silence, my relationship with God became more personal.

And somewhere in that same silence, I began recognizing myself.

I had spent years trying to build a life.
I didn't realize that I was also being built by it.
Until I became quiet enough to see.

So if you close this book with one question, let it be your own.

Not mine.

Not your family's.

Not society's.

Not the voice of someone you admire.

Yours.

And then give yourself enough silence to hear the answer.

FRANK RIZK

Built in Silence

BUILT IN SILENCE

A TRUE STORY OF BECOMING

This is not a story of success.
It's a story of stripping everything down
to discover what was never truly me.

For years, I lived on autopilot—building,
achieving, adapting—believing that
who I was was enough.

But inside, something didn't align.
The relationships. The patterns.
The reactions. The questions
I kept avoiding.

So I returned to the root.
I questioned everything.
I faced the parts I buried.
I let go of what I had outgrown.

This book is the raw, unfiltered
record of that journey.

Of discovering the truth.
Of rebuilding from nothing.
Of becoming who I was always
meant to be.

"We are not meant to be perfect.
We are meant to be real.
When you stop running from yourself,
you begin the real work.
The kind that changes everything."

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CLARITY MENTOR

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