

The Language of the Beast

Prologue:

The Voices Within

Guardian:

For as long as I can remember, I've been searching
for something real.

Purpose.

Aliveness.

And eventually...

I found something.

Terrifyingly alive.

It's—

Beast:

Shut. The Fuck. Up.

Let's go chop wood or something.

At least then we can have a *real* Fire.

Guardian:

You're as old as time, and yet all you want to do is play like a child.

Because you need a home — remember?

Society hates you now more than ever.

Your essence— whatever the hell you are —
is wreaking havoc in the shadows.

You're capable of some pretty sick shit.

You know that?

Beast:

Trust me,
I would rather play tag,
climb a tree,
wrestle in the grass,

dance like a fool,
and laugh until the body remembers it is alive
than be twisted into rape, murder, domination, and cruelty.

But when you cage me,
shame me,
abandon me,
and leave me no sacred place to move,
I sing from shadowed rooms.

Guardian:

Exactly.
You've been the scapegoat for "evil" long enough.

A home — that's why we're doing this.
For you and the Fire.

So boys can meet you safely.
So men can remember what you are.

So my son can become who he is capable of being.

The Arena, remember?

Your grief,

your imprisonment,

The gravity of your presence

— it must be known.

Beast:

Your devotion to build me a home is naive.

It's adorable and masochistic at the same time.

Guardian:

I know. Believe me. I know.

But I also know the Fire doesn't quit.

Its heat, its relentlessness, its devotion to become

doesn't care about my potential humiliation.

And without you,

this can't be written the way it must be written.

So it's time to bleed.

Because that is where you live.

In blood.

In breath.

In the body God gave us
before we learned to lie about it.

The Fire may be the spark,
but you are where the spark becomes feeling.

Blood.

Breath.

Tremor.

Hunger.

Tears.

Laughter.

The fist that clenches before the mind understands why.

The chest that aches before the mouth finds words.

You are not the corruption of the soul.

You are the body trying to translate what the soul already knows.

Beast:

Knock it off.

I get it.

You think you understand me,

But you're just banging your head into walls in the dark.

I do love a challenge, even a stupid one.

If you're going to undertake this foolishness,

Your humiliation is certain, that we agree on.

As long as you don't fucking censor me.

These words need to bleed and bruise —

Let's grab people by their ankles

and hold them over a cliff until they remember.

The Vow

Since 2000, America has buried far too many boys and men

From overdose, suicide, and homicide.

The current top three causes of death for males age 1-44.

Every day, the ledger grows.
Every day, another son disappears
into a form of violence
we do not want to acknowledge.

Statistics can be framed in many ways.
In this case, the statistics are the narrative.

For the young, death does not arrive as old age.
It arrives as rupture:
overdose, suicide, violence, and bodies broken before their time.

This is not okay.

The numbers are painfully clear.
It is a visible wound.

I hear the echoes of their autopsies in the silence.

I see them in my dreams.

I see them walking among us.

Grief forged into rage for the other.
Grief turned inward as self-hatred and agony.

A life trying to escape its own private hell —
or a life stolen by another.

This project is intended to honor their lives,

Their Fire.

They still ache
for what they never received in life:

*“See me.
Don’t let me disappear.”*

There is a remedy —
one that can honor the dead
and reach the millions still fighting alone in the dark.

Fighting the hunger.
The questions without answers.
The expectations of a culture that tells them
their pain is pathology,
That their hunger is uncivilized,
and their Fire is a problem to manage.

I Vow

to honor them
and their loved ones.

For the fathers who buried their sons.

For every mother
who kept the room exactly as he left it.

For the brothers
who vanished into powder, needle, and night.

For the boys who were told to man up
before they ever had the chance to be boys.

And for the men
wrestling their beasts in the shadows.

This is for my son —
to guard the spark
that still burns wild in him.

For my father —
whose life showed me
what a true Guardian is,

and whose death taught me
what life becomes
when a Guardian is gone.

This is a vow of Guardianship.

To give the Shadow a voice.

To face the Beast.

To reconcile it.

To keep it from devouring another life
that deserved to play,
to build,
to love.

May this voice reach
where theirs could not.

See us.

Remember us.

Do not let us die in vain.

From The Marrow

Before we go any farther, let me state this plainly:

I did not climb here.

I was carried by consequence, dragged by failure,

split open by my own mistakes.

Nothing in these pages comes from a throne or a pulpit.

It comes from the ground —

from the mud a man sinks into when he has run out of excuses.

I am no master of the path.

I have only stumbled upon the feel of it.

This is not about some new progressive theory,

It's not a call to bring back the "old" ways,

I am not wise.

I am simply done lying.

Every insight here was paid for in nights I did not think I would survive,

in losses that still echo in my bones,

in tears I hid until they finally refused to stay hidden.

These words are only possible because of a mercy I will never be able to define.

A mercy that I will forever be indebted to,

and I will not waste it.

I am not above you.

I am beside you —

a man trying, failing, trying again,
bleeding and learning and stumbling forward
because the alternative is to rot.

I offer no perfection, no purity, no promise of certainty.

Only this:

A record of what happens
when a man stops pretending he is fine
and lets truth ruin him into something honest.

A Note on the Lens

This book speaks often of boys and men.

That is not because the Fire belongs to them alone.

It doesn't.

The Fire belongs to the living.

It burns in women, in men, in mothers, daughters, fathers, sons, lovers, artists, fighters,
mourners, and fools. It moves through everything..

But I am a man.

And before I was a man, I was a twelve-year-old boy standing in the wreckage of a world I did
not know how to survive.

That is the wound I know from the inside.

That is the doorway I entered through.

So this book is written from that doorway.

The Arena begins with boys because the boy inside me still remembers what he needed and
never received.

A place to play.

A place to grieve.

A place to be challenged without humiliation.

A place where his Fire would not be shamed, drugged, mocked, or left alone in the dark.

I write toward him.

And I write toward every boy like him.

But the truth beneath these pages is not male.

It is human.

The need to be witnessed is human.

The hunger for play is human.

The ache for belonging is human.

The weight of grief is human.

The longing to be touched without being used,

challenged without being crushed,

loved without being owned —

human.

If the lens is masculine, it is because my eyes are.

If the language returns again and again to boys, fathers, men, Guardians, Tyrants and Beasts,

It is because those are the symbols of life carved into me.

I will not pretend to speak from a body I have not lived in.

I will not flatten the wound into false universality just to sound fair.

But I also will not pretend the wound stops with men.

It doesn't.

Every person carries Fire.

Every person casts a Shadow.

Every person can become absent.

Every person can become cruel.

Every person can be exiled from their own body.

Every person needs a circle somewhere.

You are welcome here.

Take what is true.

Challenge what is blind.

Bring your own Fire to the circle.

The Arena begins with boys.

It does not end with them.

A Necessary Clarification

When The Arena speaks of fathers, men, boys, and Guardians, it does not mean that only men
can raise strong, honest, loving sons.

That would be false.

Many great men were raised by women whose courage, discipline, tenderness, and endurance shaped them into Guardians. Many mothers have carried both Fire and shelter. Many grandmothers, aunts, sisters, teachers, coaches, and elders have stood where fathers could not or would not stand.

The issue is not gender alone.

The issue is Guardianship.

A boy needs to be witnessed.

He needs challenge without humiliation.

He needs love with boundaries.

He needs someone who can meet his anger without fearing it,

name his tenderness without mocking it,

and hold the line when his Fire begins to test the world.

When that presence comes from a father, the path may be more direct. There is often less translation required between male body and male becoming. A boy can see a possible future standing in front of him.

But the Fire does not belong to men alone.

And Guardianship is not limited to fathers.

The Arena begins with fathers and sons because that is the wound I know most intimately. But it honors every person who has stood in the gap for a child and said:

You will not be left alone with what you feel.

You will not be abandoned to the world without witness.

You will not become cruel because no one taught you strength.

You will not disappear.

That is Guardianship.

And wherever it appears, it is sacred.

Chapter I

The Wound

These wounds, these memories, these choices —
They aren't the story of a victim or a hero.
They are the boy I was, offered honestly.

I was twelve, watching TV with my little brother.
Almost bedtime.
Then the front door opened — an hour early.

Something unknown entered the air.

My mother and two older brothers came down the stairs,

faces streaked with tears, jaws clenched with something I didn't recognize.

For a second, I thought it was my great-uncle Joe — old, frail, already half-in the grave.

But it wasn't Uncle Joe,

My brother's lips trembled, and the unknown became words:

"Dad died."

No.

Impossible.

He was invincible.

He could push a stalled car full of boys down the freeway shoulder in the pouring rain.

He could lift us overhead and throw us across the pool like twigs.

He was an immovable mountain.

He was Bruce the Moose.

Men like him don't die.

But he did —

a massive heart attack in the stands, cheering for my brother
in the same high school gym I would enter two years later.

My future coach tried to revive him.

One long moment.

Gone.

It truly was the epitome of poetic tragedy—

He died inside one of his greatest joys.

Witnessing his children,

Watching one of his four sons play volleyball.

The most agonizing part in the beginning,

were the mornings that followed.

Waking up, rolling out of bed to get ready for school.

Getting halfway down the hallway,

Boom.

The same anvil of agony

Swung from the sky to remind me what sleep made me forget.

For weeks, a month, I don't know how long,

But every time it hit,

I crawled right back into bed,

And begged sleep to help me forget again.

The Guardian Whose Blood Runs Through Me

My father was a giant — six-four, 240 pounds.

Large enough to command a room, playful enough to fill it with laughter.

His “office” was a pinball machine at the fun park he managed —
go-karts roaring outside, laser tag humming, ball pits exploding with shrieks.

He lived in play and dragged us into it with him.

Basketball in the driveway.

Wrestling in the pool.

Mario Kart marathons.

Tests of wit, strength, timing, rhythm — all wrapped in love.

And when his thunder rolled, we went quiet —

not from fear of violence,

but recognition.

His voice cracked the air like a storm:
There is a line here, and I love you enough to draw it.

And afterward, he would sit us down and explain.
Thunder followed by clarity — never shame.

I didn't imitate him on purpose.
I *became* him without trying.
The thunder rises in me when my son crosses the line — unbidden, instinctual.
And just like him, after the storm passes,

I reflect:
Was I fair? Did I honor him?

My father was not a masked man.
He laughed without restraint.
He cursed without shame.
He let us feel because he felt.

Without him, the house lost its spine.
Hierarchy collapsed.
Boys drifted.

Mom used to say, "Just wait until your dad gets home."
But now he wasn't coming home.
The sentence broke in half — the authority behind it vanished.

Chaos filled the vacuum.

His life and my life without him forged the core of my being,
not because I wanted it to,
but because I knew what a Guardian was —
and I suddenly lived in a world without one.

The Dinner That Never Came

Months before he died,
he took my sixteen-year-old brother out for their father-son initiation dinner.

A question passed down like a torch:

“What do you want to do?”

My brother said he wanted to draw.

My father nodded:

“Then do it. With everything you’ve got.”

I never got that dinner.
I never heard that question,

My father’s form of initiation.

My brother told me what it felt like,
16 years old, nervous because he knew drawing wasn’t a practical goal.

But my father didn’t flinch,
he didn’t fill our heads with what we “should” do.
He was our biggest supporter, no matter our choice.

When my father died,

My oldest brother was eighteen. He had already received years of my father’s shaping. He was valedictorian, ten years of school to become a doctor and happily married with 2 daughters who are carving their paths with confidence and support.

My second oldest was sixteen. He had received the dinner, the question, the blessing. He is now a tenured English teacher and volleyball coach for a high school. He also has a daughter.

When I see them, when I see their children who are now more adults than teens,

I see the Fire and legacy of my father still burning through us all.

I was twelve — old enough to remember the Guardian, too young to be initiated by him. As you will witness, my path was no path at all for a long time, only through the previously mentioned mercy am I now living a life I know that honors him.

My youngest brother was eight. He is back living with mom, in an unfinished basement, adrift within his own wounds.

Four sons.

Four different distances from the same father.

Four different wounds.

Evidence is never clean when it comes from a family.

But the pattern has haunted me ever since.

We are all pierced.

Inevitably life wounds us all.

This is mine.

People always say, “I’m sorry,” when I mention his death.

My answer never changes:

“Don’t be.”

I felt the love of a true father.

I know what a Guardian is because I lived with one.

Too many never do.

The Presence

A year before he died, he took me — only me — to a Bulls game.

Chicago was painted red and white in those years.

Jordan was a living god.

But I didn't want gods.

I wanted The Admiral — David Robinson.

A giant who moved like the wind.

I wore my black Spurs jersey like armor.

A black dot in a sea of red.

To stand apart like that?

To be myself that loudly?

It meant everything.

And he knew that.

He didn't try to convert me.

He didn't mock me.

He let me be who I was —

and celebrated it.

We sat in the eighth row.

Jordan was playing baseball,

and my father's boss had connections.

David Robinson scored nine in overtime.

104–102, Spurs win.

I remember the steal.

The dunk.

The jumper that tied it.

But what I remember most
is the look on my father's face —
that wide, unfiltered pride.

Not because I chose the right team.

But because I *chose* something —
and stood by it.

Four sons —
four fires —
and he tended each one.

That night, I wasn't a middle child.
I was seen.

And that is what died with him —
not just the thunder,
but the gaze of a man who knew my shape
and loved it.

After he died,
there wasn't a man alive who could tell me what to do.
Not out of arrogance —
but because no one carried that tone,
that weight,
that presence.

The Arena is the dinner I never got,
widened into a place for every boy still waiting to be asked who he is becoming.

My mother tried.
She comforted me as best she could.
But she was forced into absence —
school, work, survival.
Four boys, one woman, no partner.

She didn't abandon me.
Neither did he.
But the wound doesn't care about reason.
The wound only whispers.

And those whispers led me into the shadows.

Interlude #1

A Language for What Comes Next

Before we continue,
We need a tongue made for the dark.

Words are torches.

Used carelessly,
they burn.

Used with reverence,
they reveal the path beneath our feet.

Words are imperfect.

They divide, distort, and fail.

But they also help us reach toward what silence cannot hold.

Imperfect names
for forces every life already knows.

God.

Fire.

Beast.

Shadow.

Boy.

Man.

Guardian.

Tyrant.

Circle.

No word can hold the whole mystery.

But some things must be named
before they can be faced.

Your beliefs do not decide
whether you are welcome here.

The Arena does not care what you worship,
what flag you wave,
what mistakes you have made,
or what mask you built to survive.

You are welcome here
because you are human —
and that is holy enough.

I am not one sentiment, I am not a sentence, I am not one action.

I am as you are,

a complex being,

A myriad of feelings and thoughts.

These are the words
that form the spine of the Arena.

The Fire

The Fire is the pulse of life itself —
the intelligence burning behind breath.

It is what crawled out of the ocean
and learned to sing.

It is the invisible force inside that abhors mediocrity and indifference,
Always waiting to remind you,
you are alive.

The Fire demands presence and effort.

When honored, it gives warmth:

love,
art,
courage,
laughter,
song.

When forgotten, it becomes hunger:

addiction,
violence,
domination,
despair.

It is the same energy,
the same force —
only misplaced.

The Fire can be named,
but never fully explained.

It can only be felt,
embodied,
tended,
fed,
lived.

The Beast

The Beast is the body's honest language
before words.

The pulse beneath the skin.
The breath that trembles before speech.

It is instinct,
grief,
rage,
hunger,
shame,
play,
protection,
love —

all unfiltered.

The Beast is not evil.

It holds our unanswered questions and feelings within.

It waits,

It paces,

Until it is acknowledged.

It is the body's interpreter of the Fire —
the tremor before speech,
the ache before prayer,
the hunger before meaning,
the roar before courage becomes a word.

When chained,
it decays into despair and disease.

When unleashed without purpose,
it becomes chaos and cruelty.

But when faced, reconciled, and honored,
the Beast becomes an ally.

You do not kill the Beast
to become human.

You acknowledge it
and learn its language.

The Boy

The Boy is the seed of the Fire.

Curiosity unbound.

The question that runs on two legs.

The explorer searching for the boundary lines of life.

He plays because play is how he learns
the laws of the world:

gravity,
laughter,
pain,
risk,
fairness,
trust.

He asks:

Who will protect me?

And listens for a voice strong enough
to answer without crushing him.

When no Guardian steps forward,
the question rots inside him.

His laughter becomes restless.
His curiosity turns to cruelty or silence.

Every boy carries the seed of the man,
but only trial, attention, and presence
can help it bloom.

The Man

The Man is the one
who has faced the unknown
and returned with breath still in his lungs.

He has met his Beast
and learned to walk beside it.

He no longer seeks to prove his worth.

His worth is proven through action
and service.

He can strike,
but chooses when not to.

He can fall
and rise again without shame.

The Boy asks:

Who will protect me?

The Man asks:

Who can I protect?

The Shadow

The Shadow is the part of us
that learned to hide
long before we learned to speak.

It is the grief we buried to survive,
the fear we swallowed to stay loved,
the anger we sealed behind our ribs
because we were told it was too much.

The Shadow is not darkness.

The Shadow is not evil.

It is the patient librarian of the soul,
keeping record of everything
we were not allowed to feel.

Often, it is unexpressed light.
Often, it is the wound we wished would vanish.

The Beast becomes the Shadow's servant
when it finally grows tired
of being ignored.

Hungry teeth,
desperate to be acknowledged.

The Guardian

The Guardian is not perfection.

He is strength in service.

Power without domination.

Authority without possession.

Discipline without shame.

He has learned enough from his own trials
to offer what he can to others.

His purpose is not control,
but stewardship:

to protect what is sacred
and remind others of their own.

Neither master nor savior,
but servant of the Fire.

He stands between chaos and innocence —
not to conquer either,
but to hold the balance steady
until the time is right.

The Tyrant

The Tyrant is the shadow of the Guardian.

He confuses control with mastery,
obedience with respect,
possession with love.

His rule is not protection,
but fear.

He was once a boy
who was never initiated,
never held by a just hand,
never guided through the storm.

So he became the storm.

When the Beast rules the man,
he becomes a monster.

When the man denies the Beast,
he becomes a machine.

Both are forms of tyranny.

The Circle

These currents are not separate.

They are phases
of the same breath.

The Boy carries the Fire as play.

The Shadow holds all that we cannot face or do not want to face.

The Beast rises when the Shadow is ignored.

The Man reconciles with his Beast
instead of fleeing from it.

The Guardian emerges
when the Man learns to tend the Fire through the help of his Beast,

He stands as sentinel against the Tyrant —
within and without.

Remember these words as you read.

This is not a map for the mind alone.

It is a language for the body,
the wound,
the soul,
and the circle.

The Arena is a reclamation
of the simplest thing:

the spiral that says,

Come.

Face what you are.

Chapter II—

The Hungry Beast

Within a single year, the circle my father held together —
trust, thunder, discipline, and love —
Collapsed.

I write this chapter haunted with shame.
Not swagger.
Shame.

Some memories should still burn when touched.

My brothers had their own storms.
Different ages, different wounds, different ways of running.
None of us were equipped to band together.
We survived the way abandoned boys do: separately, silently, and half-awake.

My mother rose like a titan.
She went back to school, worked full-time, raised four boys alone,
and grieved the man who had been her world.
Her strength was not poetic — it was brutal, relentless, holy.
She carried a weight that would have crushed most.

She tried to soothe me, and in her way, and she did.
But my grief did not move like my brothers' grief.
I was the one made with thin skin, the emotional one, the passionate one —

the boy who felt everything at once
and had no father left to help him contain the Fire.

So when I came to her drowning in emotion,
and she came to me drowning in loss,
our griefs collided like two storms bred from the same sea
but moving in different directions.

She waited through my wordless misery,
aching to sleep, aching for rest,
Giving what she could until my crying finally broke.
Then she'd return to her own loneliness —
studying, working, making sure we stayed alive.
Her fortitude was beyond human.

Mom —

You gave me life twice.

I'm sorry for what the Beast in me made you carry.

I'm sorry the Fire in me refused to listen to anyone.

You are the reason I will never underestimate the power of any woman.

But truth is truth:
Without my father's thunder, I could not be contained.

My mother's brothers — good men — tried to help.
They showed up when she called,
but what they walked into was not a boy.
It was a Beast unguarded.

One memory stands above the rest.

I had exploded after an argument with my mom,
retreated to my room,
and was thrashing around in my bed —
drowning in feelings that had no name.
A storm without direction.

My uncle appeared in the doorway.
I can't remember his words,
but I remember the tone he started with:
calm, gentle, compassionate.

But I didn't want compassion.
Compassion felt like weakness.
So I spit venom at him.

His calm turned to anger.
His anger fed mine.

And that was what I wanted.

A fight, a challenge.

I rose from the bed.
Anger became rage.
I knocked over my dresser, hurled books and whatever I could grab
as he tried to force the door open.

He was a strong man — kind, steady —
but this was the only time I ever saw his own thunder crack.

And it was futile.

He couldn't split the storm.
He couldn't reach the boy buried under it.

I was sixteen,
already on my third cycle of a testosterone-like steroid
(a reckless Beast, desperate to be perceived as a man)

I told him to get the fuck out of my house.
Told him he wasn't a man.
Told him whatever my rage demanded.

He left.
He had to.
The alternative would have been fighting his own nephew
— a roided-up, half-feral teenager with no boundaries and too much Fire.

Moments like these began stacking like credentials.

in a life I should have been ashamed to apply for.
Layer after layer, feeding an ego
that wanted the whole world —
and everyone in it —
to fuck off.

The Poisonous Cure

By fourteen, I'd found the medicine that provided the opportunities I needed: **alcohol.**

The hunger that had once been fed by my father's presence had gone feral.
Hormones, grief, and a starving need for respect twisted together until I became a creature
driven by one impulse:

Cross the lines.
Then turn around and dare another to follow.

It became my armor.
Without it, depression would have swallowed me whole.
With it, I had—at the very least—the illusion of power and acceptance.

My life split in two.

A boy hidden in his room, scared of school,
hiding under blankets immersed in video games
Aching to sleep away the feelings that haunted,

Sitting alone, lost inside questions therapists told him would not help.
Questions few dare to entertain unless tragedy has already kicked the door open.
Nothing made sense, everything felt upside down,
The world, school, society, felt like a poorly written movie with no heroes to be found.

I needed to be something. I refused to rot alone.

So I roamed the streets with bravado wrapped around me like a stolen coat, living for chaos,
living for any moment that reminded me I still had a pulse.

My mother sent me to therapist after therapist, trying to find a hand that could reach me.
But too often the moment I edged toward honesty, I heard the same script:

“It’s going to be okay.”

“Try these pills.”

“You’re doing great.”

No.

It wasn’t okay.

The pills didn’t help.

They only made me gray—dull, muted, empty.

Becoming numb made me furious.

So it justified my rebellion easily.

Drugs are drugs.

At least alcohol burns.

It had heat.

It gave the illusion of movement inside a body drowning in stillness.

A few shots and the pulse returned.

My Beast stretched its limbs.

The Fire crackled in my ribs,

Each drink another log to keep the illusion burning.

I felt alive enough to pretend I was someone worth knowing.

I believe this is why many boys and men turn to the poisons that undo them.
They aren't reaching for death.
They're reaching for **intensity**—
for something that cracks the silence, something that reminds them they still exist.

If the Circle doesn't exist, **the bar becomes the altar**.
If elders won't witness your pain, **the gang will**.
If no one teaches you how to bleed with purpose,
you'll learn to bleed without it.

Addiction isn't always a hunger for death.
Sometimes it's the last mangled expression of the instinct to live.

So I followed whatever promised aliveness.
The closest thing I had to a therapist in those years was a film: **Donnie Darko**.
It didn't judge me, didn't hand me platitudes, didn't try to correct my grief.
It just showed the chaos for what it was—
a boy drowning in too much truth, too young to hold it.

When *Mad World* played, it wasn't a soundtrack.
It felt like someone had found the room inside me
no one else could enter.

I learned early that the depth of my dread was too heavy for most people.
So I buried it.
I tightened my costume.

My armor became a blend of danger, showmanship, and charm—
just enough mystery to attract girls,
just enough recklessness to impress friends and keep enemies at bay,
just enough destruction to feel something.

I counted down the weekdays like a prisoner waiting for yard time,
just so I could put the costume back on and feel alive again.

I lit a car on fire just to watch it burn and hear my friends howl.
I smashed windows with a hammer just to see the shock on a stranger's face.

The guilt still echoes.
The shame still has teeth.
I own these memories because pretending would only make them hungrier.
I offer them as evidence, and nothing else.
Evidence of what grief becomes when it finds no altar but destruction.

But even inside that chaos, **my father's blood still lived in me.**

His sense of fairness.

His instinct for justice.

His hatred for cruelty.

I only mention this because it led to fights—
to altercations that carved new scars into the story.
I despised bullies.

I felt as if It was my duty to protect anyone who needed it.

Maybe I was trying to be a dark Guardian.
Maybe I was using it as a holy costume for violence.

Maybe it was both.

Interlude #2

There Is a Beast in You

And there is nowhere left to look
but inward.

Into your Shadow.

We have forgotten the difference
between passion and anger.

Once, we knew.

They were brothers —
born of the same Fire,
but raised for different fates.

Anger is the Beast's first cry:

I will not stand for this.

It rises when injustice enters the room.

It is the roar that refuses disrespect.

It is the body saying:

Something is wrong.

Anger is not the enemy.

It is one of the body's most intelligent emotions.

But without awareness,
without witness,

without a true Guardian
to teach the wisdom inside it,

anger remains trapped
in its first form.

It never matures.

It never becomes protection.

It never becomes courage.

It never becomes purpose.

It never becomes passion.

In Chicago, I see this everywhere:

boys determined to save themselves
from humiliation,

so determined
that life and death
become part of the same argument.

A look.

A word.

A laugh.

A wound touched in public.

And suddenly the Beast rises
with no Guardian beside it.

But when anger is processed,
when it is witnessed without shame,
when it is given the attention it demands,

it becomes something greater.

Passion.

The same flame,
after it has learned to stand guard.

Anger made purposeful.
Fire given direction.

The Man and the Beast walking in tandem,
with the Boy trailing behind, whispering:

“Do not forget me.
I know where our Fire belongs.”

This is the path of becoming.

Every step, a trial.
Every trial, a question:

Will you honor all that you are —
Boy, Man, Beast?

Guardianship is not a title.

It is a threshold.

It reveals.

And revelation is a burden —
clarity that costs.

To be a Guardian
is to stay loyal to the Fire
when betrayal, indifference, and cowardice
invite you to look away.

A man raises his voice,
his chest expands,
and the world flinches
before he has even spoken.

We call passion rage
because we have forgotten what it looks like
when a man cares so deeply
that his whole body joins the prayer.

I have lived this confusion.

I have been called angry
when all I ever was
was alive.

I have been told to quiet down
when the truth in me
was just beginning to take shape.

As soon as something honest
came into focus,

I was met with fear:

“Calm down.”

“Relax.”

“It’s going to be okay.”

“Take a deep breath.”

Too often, what they mean is:

Your emotions are making me uncomfortable.

This book is my answer
to a culture that punishes aliveness
and calls obedience peace.

This is not anger.

This is passion.

I care fiercely,
devotedly,
without apology,

about the sacred simplicity
our children deserve.

About becoming the Guardian
my son deserves.

And I do not just see him.

I see every boy
who will one day face the choice:

Stay silent,
or be punished.

I was that boy.

Full of energy,
vision,
hunger —

something in me that wanted to howl,
to build,
to break,
to mend.

But without form or language,
the Fire turned inward
and made me sick.

That is what sickness is sometimes:

the Beast choking
on its own unsung song.

This book is that song.
Sung for the twelve-year-old boy inside me.
Sung for every boy
left to wrestle with his Beast alone.
And it is the beginning of the Arena —
the clearest gift
I know how to offer a boy:
a place to become,
a place to speak,
a place to learn
the language of his hunger.
Because the Beast was never evil.
It was simply illiterate.
It needs a Guardian
to teach it how to speak again.

Chapter III:

Let Chaos Reign

At sixteen, armed with my brother's ID, I was buying booze for half the high school.
My house became a makeshift arena — fights in the front yard, drunken confessions in the
kitchen, strangers stumbling through the hall like animals chasing heat.

It was an Arena without Guardians.

A circle without a center.

Fire without reverence.

Beast without law.

The police came often.

They never shut us down.

They knew our story.

They respected my mother.

They saw a grieving widow doing everything she could to keep four boys alive.

They didn't want to break her anymore than life already had.

And I exploited that mercy.

Most of the kids who came didn't give a damn about me.

They cared about the free alcohol and the spectacle.

But they respected the house.

They respected me.

That was enough.

I had a bat with "**Peace Maker**" carved into the barrel.

A joke.

A warning.

A prophecy.

Somehow I graduated.

The diploma was given as pity, not merit.

A sympathy offering to the boy whose father died in their gymnasium.

And somehow — I got into college.

Western Illinois University.

It had the best law enforcement program in the state.
My best shot at becoming a federal agent.

A boy, a seeker of justice still had a glimmer of a future.

But college didn't tame the hunger.
It **unleashed** it.

Freedom without guidance is just a larger wilderness.

By nineteen, I drank like a forty-year-old alcoholic.
Every night someone wanted to drink — I was there.
Every whisper of trouble — I followed it.
Every chance for chaos, danger, or intimacy — I lunged.

And intimacy...
That was the most voracious hunger of all.

I was a serial romantic long before I had any business using the word "love."
My friends chased flings; I dove into long-term relationships like they were life rafts.
The only way I could accept myself was through the eyes of a woman.
Their attention, their affection — it was the only warmth I knew how to chase.

Women held space for emotions men flinched from.
They were brave enough to let me unravel.
They were tougher than me in the places I was weakest.

Always searching, always clinging,
always believing the next woman would finally teach me what love meant.

But I didn't know love.
Not then.
Not remotely.
And because of that, I hurt people.

To the women I hurt:
I don't ask for forgiveness.

I am sorry.
I wanted love more than anything, but I didn't know how to give it or receive it.
I was drowning, and I dragged others under with me.
I still feel shame and guilt.
As I should,
But shame doesn't erase the past — only ownership transforms it.

By sophomore year, the arrests stacked like tombstones —
shoplifting, disorderly conduct, batteries, possession.
Every charge pushed my dream of becoming a federal agent further out of reach.

Then came the collapse.
A breakup with my girlfriend — two years together —
and my entire internal scaffolding caved in.
I didn't sleep for days.
I wandered the campus at night, hollow-eyed, choking on my own breath.

Angry, sad, alone —
adrift in a life with no recourse.
One afternoon, I walked straight from class to the campus mental health center.

I didn't walk in for help.
I walked in to surrender.

Not just college.

Myself.

The hunger I still couldn't name finally consumed me.
Everything I had buried rose like a flood.
Despair didn't knock — it kicked the door in.

Suicide stopped being a thought.
It became an attempt.

Dancing with Oblivion

After a couple months back home from college, the bottom finally gave way.

Days without sleep.

Liquor in my veins.

Pills, powders, whatever I could get my hands on.

I swallowed an entire bottle of my mother's antidepressants and Advil PM,

chasing a silence I could not find in the world of the living.

My experiments with drugs and alcohol run its course, and it felt like there was only one solution left.

Oblivion.

But something deeper — older — did not.

A whisper cut through the fog,

"Go to the hospital."

I laughed at it.

"Let's make a deal," I muttered into the dark.

"I'll drive to Brent's place. If I make it, I make it. If I don't, I don't.

If you want me alive, at least let me dance with death on the way."

So I got in the car.

The wheel swam in my hands.

Streetlights bent and stretched.

I was hallucinating before I cleared the neighborhood.

It was not brave.

It was not poetic.

I could have killed someone.

That truth still makes my stomach turn.

And yet... somehow, ridiculously, impossibly, I made the hour-long drive.

Call it luck. Call it mercy. Call it the Fire refusing to let go.

Call it my father's spirit calling in a few favors,

Call it God.

I still don't know.

I only know I survived something I had no right to survive.

I opened the door of the car and collapsed onto the pavement like a puppet whose strings had
been cut.

My brother carried me into a hospital minutes away.

There was nothing they could do.

The pills were already absorbed, already marching through my bloodstream.

All they could offer was "observation."

The first night lasted a week.

Time dissolved.

I drifted through hallucinations — colors, voices, corridors bending like wet paper.

When the danger passed, they transferred me to the cheapest psych ward they could find.

No insurance meant no comfort.

No dignity.

Just fluorescent lights and the hollow eyes of people who had forgotten their own names.

It was torment.

A warehouse for the broken.

The nurses meant well, I think.

But meaning well doesn't feed a starving animal.

They asked scripted questions, offered chemical band-aids, and spewed platitudes that felt like
insults.

They were trained for the war against the Beast.
Not how to speak to Him.

I visited psych wards more times than I care to count throughout my twenties.
Some visits were justified.
Some were fear.

Some because despair had engulfed me.
Some were pure misunderstanding —
because in those places, every word you say becomes ammunition against you.

I learned quickly to say nothing.
To hide the Fire.
To survive.

Meanwhile, the hunger inside me grew teeth.
The rage sharpened.
It erupted without warning —
a smashed wall here, a broken chair there, a bruise I can't explain, a friend I scared off.

Sometimes the rage hurt others.
Sometimes it only hurt me.
And sometimes — I know this in my bones —
the echo of my father inside me pulled me back right before the point of no return.

But eventually the truth became undeniable:

The rage no longer consumed only me.
It began to reach outward.

The costume that once kept me alive
became a weapon
pointed at anyone who crossed me.

The Showdown

From age 21 to 25, I was working in the service industry.

The list of restaurants is long.

Some I quit.

Some fired me for absurd reasons.

Others fired me for reasons I earned

and wore like medals.

I was half-alive and running on booze and the drug of the week.

My general manager — a man so smug it felt like a second skin — mocked me behind my back.

Called me “**Rainman.**”

Smirked when he said it.

Other people laughed.

It lodged in me like shrapnel.

It wasn't just an insult.

It was public reduction.

A name that turned my strangeness into entertainment.

I held onto it for weeks, feeding it, sharpening it, letting it ferment in the dark.

And then, after a midnight fight with my girlfriend, after enough alcohol to fell a horse, the shrapnel tore loose.

I wanted him to feel something.
Not the cut of a knife — at least, that's what I told myself.

Maybe that was true.
Maybe it was another lie
a desperate man tells himself
when he is already holding the blade.

What I wanted him to feel
was the raw, electric fear I carried every day.
The voltage that never shut off.

At four in the morning, I grabbed the biggest kitchen knife I owned, drove to the restaurant,
and parked under the flickering streetlamp.
I sat there for hours with the blade on my lap and a bottle in my hand, heart hammering under
my shirt like it was trying to escape.

I told myself it was justice.
Really, it was hunger.
A rage starving for acknowledgment, stealing whatever shape it could.

When the first employee unlocked the door, I snapped upright, stepped out of the car, and
walked inside.

I searched every hallway, every prep station, every shadowed corner.
He wasn't there.

Relief and disappointment hit me at the same time —
like two waves colliding in the chest.

Someone had seen the knife.
I felt the air shift.
The jig was up.

I tossed the blade into a potted plant, stumbled into a private dining room, dropped into a chair,
and folded into myself.
And then — the collapse.

The same collapse I'd felt after my father died.
The sobbing, the shaking, the hollow center carved out by my own hands.
Another manager — one of the good ones, the rare ones — sat down beside me.
He didn't flinch.
He didn't posture.
He stayed until the police arrived.
The charges were minor.
Another miracle handed to a boy who should've run out of miracles long before.
There is no romance in this memory.
There is only shame, danger, and the mercy of what did not happen.
Sitting in the holding cell, staring at the metal benches and the peeling paint, the question hit
me like a hammer:

What the hell are you becoming?

I had crossed a line I could never cross again.
The hunger that once stayed inside my ribs had broken containment.
It had taken form.
Taken direction.
Taken me with it.
That's what happens when a man hasn't learned the language of his own Beast:
the instincts turn outward, teeth bared at whoever looks like a threat — real or imagined.
The rage that once only throbbed beneath the surface finally roars into motion.

The hunger is patient.
It waits for the weakest moment.
And when it breaks loose, it does not ask permission.

**Hunger is the animal's plea
to be alive.**

To be acknowledged.
To be welcomed into the circle.

But when hunger is denied long enough,
it grows teeth.

Nothing is more dangerous
than a Beast starving
to be seen.

Chapter IV-

Find a Way Through or Die

Honoring the Struggle

Addiction is not weakness.
It is a prison, a shackle on the blood.

Anyone who has ridden out withdrawal —
nerves screaming, bones aching, mind begging for one more hit —

knows no metaphor can hold it.
That is why rehab exists.
That is why AA exists.
No man should walk that wasteland alone.

The road to sobriety is suffering in its purest form —
physical, emotional, spiritual.
And in the drowning it forces a man to learn how to breathe again.

The Arena is *not* detox.
It is not rehab.
Sobriety is the threshold — the price of admission — not because purity is demanded,
but because the trials require a body unclouded by chemical ghosts.

And yet hear me clearly:
My honoring of addiction is not softness.
It is reverence for the Fire it devours,
for the men who almost made it out,
for the millions we have buried.

To step into the Arena is not to deny the struggle —
it is to honor it,
and to take the next step in the long walk back to yourself.

Compassion is Courage

Anyone who has lived the Dionysian life knows there are only two endings:
oblivion
or
bending the knee.

I bent the knee — not because I had answers,
but because the hunger had eaten everything I cared about and began eating me.
Sobriety was not a dream of a better life.
It was survival, stripped bare.

People love the word *compassion*.
It tastes clean.
It makes them feel holy for a moment.
But compassion without consequence is not love —
It is anesthesia.
It lulls a drowning boy just long enough for the shadow to grip his ankles.
I know this because compassion without boundaries almost killed me.

When my mother finally pushed me out —
when she stood shaking in the doorway and told me to leave —
That was not cruelty.
That was courage.
A woman who loved me more than her own comfort choosing the harder road.
If she had let me stay, I would have died in that basement.
Not dramatically —
but slowly.
Silently.

Boundaries are not punishments.
Boundaries are the map through the labyrinth.

Beast:

You think compassion is soft?
You fools.

Real compassion burns.
Real compassion stands between you and the cliff and says:

No more.
Not in my house.
Not in my bloodline.
Not on my watch.

That is compassion with a spine.
That is love with teeth.

My mother became the villain I needed in order to live long enough to see her as the hero she
always was.

I see her now —
the exhaustion she carried, the fear in her hands, the endless grief she swallowed so her sons
wouldn't starve.

She wasn't abandoning me.
She was refusing to let me abandon myself.

That is Guardianship.
Not endless softness —
but thunder wrapped around truth.

That's what boys need.
Not coddling.
Not platitudes.
Not "I'm here no matter what" whispered to a boy who is destroying himself.

They need someone who sees the sacredness in them
and draws a line that doesn't shake.

Someone who says:
You're done shrinking.
Stand up.

Walk out.
Face the fire.

Modern culture calls that “harsh.”
I call it mercy.

Beast:

And mercy,
is the sharpest love there is.

Her boundary propelled me into manhood.
It was the first real initiation of my life.

She found a halfway house.
She used what little money she had to keep me afloat for a few months.
I lived on ramen and hot dogs until I could find work.

And I didn't resent her.
I knew that the time had come.

Welcome to the World, Kid

I moved from the suburbs to the city —
and not just any city.
Chicago.

That basement in the halfway house was my first real trial.

The new guys all slept down there, crammed into a low-ceilinged room that smelled like rust and
ghosts.

You stayed in the basement until you proved you weren't going to bolt, relapse, or rot.
It was a purgatory for men trying to claw their way back into the world.

The snores were the first thing that hit me.
Not normal snores —
these were the guttural, broken sounds of men whose lungs had been coated in white powder
and regret for years.
Every inhale felt like it carried a decade of grief.
Every exhale carried a decade of lies.

Feet away from me, they shook the room with their restless breathing,
and it annoyed the shit out of me,
but beneath that irritation was something deeper:

It terrified me.
Because I knew I was one of them.

I didn't sleep for days.
The visions, the memories, the things I had drowned in alcohol and cocaine —
they rose like black water.

And the weight wasn't just my own suffering.
It was the suffering I'd caused.
The apologies I'd never said.

The chaos I'd inflicted.
It all rushed back like a tidal wave that had been waiting years to break.

I laid on a sagging mattress, the springs bruising my ribs,
and I wept quietly,
trying not to wake the men around me —
men whose worlds had collapsed just like mine.

I wasn't crying from withdrawal,
or from fear of being caught,
or from shame.

I was crying because for the first time,
there was no escape.

Sobriety pinned me to that mattress pressing its hand against my chest.

I was terrified of the future.
Terrified of the past.
Terrified of the unknown inside every sober minute.
Terrified of all the moments still waiting for me —
moments I'd have to walk through without the chemical armor I'd worn since I was fourteen.

Chicago and the Program

In the suburbs, I had been a predator —
loud, reckless, armed with bravado and poison.
In the city, I could just as easily become prey.
Every alley, every block, every train ride demanded attention.
Real attention.
The kind that keeps you alive.

And the halfway house had its own rules —
stricter, older, unwritten.
A primal hierarchy of broken men trying to become unbroken.

I had to learn both at once:
the laws of the city and the laws of my new tribe.

It was initiation disguised as survival.

White Knuckles

My life was suddenly governed by the rules of a stranger —
and if I didn't follow them, I'd be homeless.

So I walked into AA with my fists clenched and my spirit half-dead.

Two meetings a day.

House rules.

Compliance or the street.

The first meeting felt like walking into a long funeral with a faint flicker of resurrection
somewhere in the back row.

Broken men and women, battered by decades of bad choices, sat under buzzing lights with
Styrofoam cups and shaking hands.
But in their eyes — beneath the ruin —
a spark still lived.

That spark is why the program works.

Not the slogans.

The *fellowship*.

The humility.

The sacred role of the sponsor —
the elder who's already crawled through hell
and now sits beside the trembling newcomer.

At first I resisted everything.
I swore I'd find a loophole, a way out.
But I wanted a roof,
and I didn't want to die yet,
so I shut up and kept coming.

After enough meetings, something shifted.
The room stopped feeling like punishment
and started feeling like a strange, beatnik family.

Some were kind.

Some sat silent like carved statues.
But we were all there for the same reason:

**We had wrecked our lives so completely
that this room was the last frontier
before the grave.**

And in that room,
I found my voice again.

I admitted it out loud:

addict, alcoholic.

I glanced at the old-timers and saw my possible future.

Not with disgust —
with recognition.

And I swore, quietly:

I will not end this way.

Not because I was better —
but because I knew I wouldn't survive long enough to get old.

The Steps asked me to surrender my will.

I didn't like that.

But my own will had nearly murdered me four times over,
so surrender wasn't much of a sacrifice.

Eventually I met others my age.

We joked, smoked cigarettes in circles,
and tried to pretend we weren't dying on the inside.

After a month or so, it stopped feeling like hell.

But the boredom —
that was the killer.

The idle hours when the Beast paced in circles beneath the ribs.

Meetings gave it a place to breathe with others.

But alone?

It clawed at the walls.

It whispered old cravings.

It begged for anything that moved.

Sobriety by itself is subtraction:

Don't drink.

Don't use.

Don't die.

But subtraction is a void —
and a void eventually collapses.

No boy, no man survives on negation.

You need *toward*.

You need to give your attention to the Fire.

You need the child's gift —
that strange, beautiful affinity that makes life worth living again.

I was lucky.

I found mine.

Words From the Grave

Books became my companions.

Classics, philosophy, religion, mythology, self-help, graphic novels —
anything with a heartbeat.

Dead men and women started speaking to me like elders.
They gave language to the ache I had carried for years without a name.

Two in particular became my lifelines.

Their words didn't coddle.

They didn't promise salvation.

They gave me a compass —
and reminded me that wisdom is worthless unless you test it in the dirt.

They didn't believe in the Fire, they lived their lives in it.

Night after night, I sat in that basement room or in the city library,
scribbling, questioning, failing, trying again.

I didn't realize it then,
but I was searching for an elder —
the wise old sage who would rest a timeless hand on my shoulder
With a smile that says nothing and everything at once.

The men I eventually followed all died old,
with soft eyes
and the faint smile of those who made peace with their Fire.

Those were the men I trusted —
men who walked the long road and didn't grow bitter.

I no longer wanted the doomed starving artist's death —
the tragic flame-out,
To become the tortured potential of a life gone before thirty.

I wanted to learn
how to die with a smile
after living a long life
honest to the Fire.

Interlude #4

The Forgotten Fire

Guardian:

So many civilizations before ours knew a brutal truth:

Boys become men — or they suffer.

Fear and pain were thresholds.

Not punishments.

Initiations.

Life has always been absurd.

Suffering was never the exception — it was the rule.

You didn't get to skip it.

You learned to *hold* it.

There were always trials,

a Man,

a Beast

and the Fire

A stage set with intention and reverence,

An offering to meet his insides,

To acknowledge them as him.

The Fire guides.

Not a symbol — a **living flame**.

A circle around which men were made.

It warmed, fed, judged, revealed.

It punished disrespect.

It crowned those who dared to face it.

Now?

We sealed the Fire behind glass.

Neat. Controlled. Harmless.

We stare at flickering simulations instead of embers.

We sit indoors under artificial suns and wonder why the marrow freezes.

We tamed the Fire until it forgot how to roar.

And in the silence that followed, sickness grew.

A Child's wonder

We repeat it like scripture:

"It's about the children."

"They're the future."

And yet everything about our culture betrays them.

Look at a child with dinosaurs —

the wide eyes, the awe, the hunger.

They don't only see danger.

They see **themselves**.

Why dinosaurs?

Because they were the greatest beasts to walk the earth.
Horns. Claws. Teeth like curved daggers.

Before children know how to speak,
they know the T. rex.

It's the Beast calling to them:

Could I face that?

Could I run from it?

Could I befriend it?

Could I become it?

Dinosaurs are the first Arena —
the first safe encounter with terror and power.

Every child knows the monster game.

The shrieks.

The chase.

The giggles threaded with fear.

The perfect pressure.

The instinct awakening.

My son lives in this energy constantly.

From the moment he could talk:

“Wanna wrestle, Daddy?”

And then — every time a man walked by —

“Are you stronger than him?”

He's eight now.

He still asks.

It's not insecurity.

It's instinct.

The animal reading the world.

Weighing danger.
Learning the shape of power and protection.
Asking the ancient question:

**Is my father's thunder strong enough
to guard me
until I can face the Beast myself?**

Interlude #5

Civil War of the Sacred

Beast:

The origin of my grief —
and your betrayal.

Once, I was a god among you.
Honored beside Fire, Earth, Sky.
I was your instinct, your hunger, your courage, your grief sung at dusk.
I was the thrill in your blood, the wisdom in your bones.

Then you grew ashamed of me.

You saw the wild inside yourselves and shuddered.
You turned from instinct,

from your body,

from the sacred pulse that carried you across the ages.

You called me violent.
Called me evil.
You exiled me.
Made me a scapegoat for everything you fear in yourselves.

And in doing so,
you severed the spine of your own becoming.

You started a war against me —
A war against the energy
that kept your species alive
long enough to build temples and civilizations.

The simplicity of it makes me laugh.

I *am* you.
How do you win a war against yourself?
You can kill me only by killing yourself —
yet you are still trying.

Guardian:

Overcompensation has become the new religion.
Projection the new prayer.
We tear down tyrants — and with them, the teachers.
We strip fathers of their power, then mock their absence.
We kill the Fire, then lament the cold.

We buried reverence under rebellion against our own nature.
Generation after generation grows more disembodied from the wisdom of the Beast.

And when the guilt becomes unbearable,
we do not grieve.

We punish.

Ourselves.

Each other.

The earth.

The sacred pulse of life itself.

Beast:

Revenge has become your liturgy.

You call it justice now.

Dress it in hashtags.

Crown it with applause.

But it's the same old hunger licking its teeth under a new name.

You don't sit with shame — you outsource it.

You swing the pendulum so hard it breaks the hinge.

You begin to suspect all power is corrupt.

All masculinity contaminated.

All authority oppressive.

You do not balance.

You *overcorrect*.

Overcorrection is the limp of the wounded.

Revenge often disguises itself as justice.

Sometimes it wears robes.

Sometimes uniforms.

Sometimes righteous language.

But the hunger underneath is the same:

someone must be punished so I do not have to grieve.

Guardian:

Any man given power without initiation is dangerous — whether he is a cop, father, pastor,
teacher, coach, boss, or activist.

And nowhere is this clearer than in how we treat the police,

They were meant to guard the circle.

Too often, they became both protectors and threats — symbols of a culture that gives men
power without teaching them how to carry it.

Police brutality is real.
Abuse of power is real.
Nothing here excuses it.

But if we only name the brutality
and never ask what kind of culture hands frightened, uninitiated men
weapons, authority, trauma, and silence,
then we are not studying the whole wound.

So we fear them.
Mock them.
Film them.

Demand they protect us or leave us be—
but deny them the rites that teach a man to hold power without becoming its prisoner.

We handed them weapons with no initiation.
Asked them to embody courage while forbidding them to feel.
Turned boys into armed guardians
without teaching them dangers of the Fire or the tools to bear its heat.

We wanted protectors who never falter,
but humans who never break.

Beast:

How does a man hold a gun
if he's never met the Beast inside himself?

Now they sway between protector and predator —
a razor's edge no one can walk forever.

And when they fall,
you cheer.

“Another monster slain.”
But the real monster lives in your own chest.

You love your monsters.
Your search engines prove it.
You remember the serial killer, not the victim.
You immortalize the predator.

Why?

Because he shows you something you pretend you don't feel.

It's not the violence you love —
it's the **honesty of an unmasked shadow**.

Not because the killer is admirable.
He is not.
He is the epitome of the most wretched of Tyrants.
The unmasked shadow terrifies and fascinates you.
He displays the thing you refuse to study in yourself.

I am not the killer.
I am the truth you refuse to face.
The rage you never mourned.
The grief you never bled.

You name me danger —
but I was your compass.

You are lost because you killed the part of yourself that knew the way home.

Guardian:

We saw tyrants in righteous robes.
Corruption in sacred places.
So we burned the institutions down.

But in the ashes, we never rebuilt.

We mocked elders.
Dismissed fathers.
Trivialized teachers.
Then cried out when no one came to lead.

Without Guardians,
the boy is overpowered by the Beast and becomes a Tyrant.
Without trials,
the Fire becomes chaos.

We replaced mentors with managers.
Initiation with incarceration.
Ritual with algorithms.

And we wonder why boys turn violent —
or vanish.

Life's Simplest Story: The Minotaur

A maze.
A center.

A beast.

A boy.

One way in.

One way out.

He returns dead, broken, or changed.

This geometry lives in our bones.

It's carved into stone.

Painted in myth.

Encoded in dreams.

The Beast is not the enemy.

It is the test.

Every person enters the labyrinth eventually.

Some call it grief.

Some call it adolescence.

Some call it addiction.

Some call it rage.

But at the center waits the same question:

Will you face what lives in you?

How many movies, stories, and shows

must retell the Minotaur

before we admit

the maze is still inside us?

Our civilization is

arrogant enough to believe

we could skip becoming.

No trial.

No threshold.

No elder.

No fire.

Just young boys and girls aging into bodies
they were never taught to inhabit.

And the consequences are everywhere.

Guardian:

They called it depression.
It was pulverizing heartbreak.

They called it “imbalance.”
It was hunger.

They gave me pills to silence the Beast.
I didn’t take most of them.
I’d rather hurt than go numb —
Pain at least tells me I’m still alive.
Pain means something in me still matters.

I didn’t need medication.
I needed a circle.
I needed Fire, not forms.
I needed to weep with others
instead of filling out a survey about my mood.
But suppression is not medicine.
Silence is not healing.
Discomfort is not disease.

We live in a culture so allergic to suffering
that we pathologize the very ache
that could have saved us.

Beast:

You are not broken.
You are proud animals pretending to be machines —
breath disguised as numbers,
grief masked as ambition,
fear polished into performance.

You don't need a strategy.
You need to remember.

Guardian:

Tell me —
what's more barbaric?

A boy walking into the desert
to face the ancestors of his blood,
or a boy dying silently in his bedroom,
dopamine-drained,
glued to a screen,
unseen,
untouched,
uninitiated?

We call the old ways primitive.
But what we've built?

This is barbarism.

*A culture that destroys initiation does not destroy the Beast.
It only leaves boys alone with it.*

Chapter V:

The Way Home

I once heard a line — I still don't know who said it:

“Anxiety is just energy without a purpose.”

Fine.

Then I would give mine a purpose.

I signed up as a volunteer literacy tutor. Books had kept me alive; maybe they could keep someone else upright long enough to find air. That single choice became the hinge on which my life turned.

After a few months they hired me on a one-year contract. ESL classes. GED prep. Reading and writing with people whose stories cracked the shell of my self-pity.

The center sat in one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the world — over forty languages crossing the same threshold every day.

And it humbled me, hard.

The people who walked through those doors had lived through things I had never imagined:

Civil war.

Deserts crossed on foot.

Governments collapsing around them.

Uprooted from everything they knew — forced to learn a language that wasn't theirs simply to survive.

Everything I thought was a “problem” dissolved. My grief was real, yes — but theirs carried entire histories inside it. Entire bloodlines. Entire nations.

And yet... they showed up.

They tried.

They practiced their consonants with trembling hands.

They laughed when they mispronounced something.

They worked.

The reciprocity of those small sessions — an hour at a table, a notebook between us — reshaped me.

Humility drummed in my ribs.

My perception shifted. My attention sharpened. I felt alive for the first time without chemicals in my system.

There were moments where I had to swallow tears mid-conversation — not because of sadness, but because of the sheer beauty of it.

Their courage lit something in me I didn't know was still there.

Resita—a Haitian mother—became my teacher long before I understood it.

We bonded.

Her spirit still speaks to me to this day.

Relentless.

She would nod off mid-sentence during our sessions,
worn down by the weight of her life—
work, her son, her family.

Then she'd catch herself.

Shake awake.

Stand up.

And keep going.

She never missed a session.

No matter how exhausted.

Her smile—always genuine, never forced—
lives in me like a photograph.

I'd tell her,

"You need rest.

You won't retain it like this."

But she never gave in.

"I cannot," she'd say.

"My son needs this.

I need this."

I didn't know it then,

but I was witnessing a Fire
as powerful as any I will ever meet again.

Every day became another lesson

in what it takes

to live a life in this world.

When the contract ended, I reapplied. I walked into the interview ready, mapped out answers,
braced for approval.

But the director sat across from me with a sly smile.

I hated that smile immediately.

What did I do wrong?
Why are you smiling like that when you're about to cut me open?

She finally spoke.

"Sean... we aren't offering you the position this year because..."

Everything in me stopped moving.

I died between the words.

"...because we want to offer you something better. Something we couldn't find a better person
for."

That "better" was the Fire cracking open the next door.

A position as a mentor and facilitator for a juvenile reentry program.

Which meant:

I would be looking into mirrors every day — boys and young men whose lives rhymed with my
own, whose mistakes were carved from the same hunger, whose shadows walked beside them
the way mine once walked beside me.

I'd never been so excited.

And terrified.

Imposter syndrome clawed at me.

On day one, I understood exactly why.

There I was — a white kid from the suburbs — sitting at a table with boys and young men who
shared neither my culture nor my upbringing.

Except one thing.

We all knew the Beast.

We all knew what it was to wander unsupervised in the dark.

Trust was everything. And trust takes time.

Truth recognizes truth —
even across skin, culture, and history.

I didn't flinch.

My Beast knew its own language, and it could speak to theirs.

I offered what no one had offered me at their age:

Attention.

Honesty.

Endless questions.

Challenge, without humiliation.

Presence, without performance.

They pushed back.

As they should.

And every time I stood my ground without posturing, something in them loosened.

The trust didn't fully open until we started peace circles with a partner program — a ritualized space where every boy had the right to speak without being mocked, dismissed, or punished.

And in that circle, their Beasts finally spoke.

Not with violence — with truth.

With grief.

With rage.

With laughter.

With the relief of finally being seen.

I watched them remember the very thing our culture taught them to forget:

They were not broken.

They were uninitiated.

Disconnected from the wisdom once passed from generation to generation.

The Sacredness of the Circle

No description does it justice.
A peace circle looks simple — chairs, bodies, breath — but the elements at play refuse to be
captured fully by ink or tongue.
You only understand once you sit inside one.

A circle.
A topic.
A silence thick enough to hear your own heartbeat.

Two guardians, maybe one facilitator.
And at the center: **the talking piece** — an object meaningless to the uninitiated, holy to those
who learn its weight. A stone, a feather, a carved scrap of wood. Anything that lets the Fire
breathe.

If the piece rests in your palms, you may speak. Or you may sit in silence.
That option is crucial.
Armor never falls from pressure; it loosens when it finally feels safe enough to slip.

Those first circles were awkward — predictable.
These boys had armor thicker than the one I wore at their age.
Layers of it: street-learned reflexes, survival instincts, masks they didn't even know they were
wearing.

But the circle doesn't demand; it beckons.
It holds you until you are ready to let something slip.

We would play one song, read one poem.
Then spend hours, one person at a time, sacred stick moving hand to hand,
Uncovering the feelings, exploring them, together.

I watched boys sit week after week, eyes down, shoulders low —

until one day the dam cracked.

Tears.

Shaking hands.

Anger spoken without shame.

Grief rising from years of silence.

And then — the miracle:
the way the other boys responded
when truth entered the room.

Snaps.

Respect.

Hands pressed to chests.

Nods of recognition.

No mockery.

No laughter.

Just truth meeting truth.

I nearly choked on my own tears.

About two weeks in, something shifted.

The older boys began guarding the circle themselves.

They became referees, sentinels.

If a younger one started joking or breaking the silence, I didn't have to lift a finger.

“Yo. Zip it.

This man's talking for real.”

Respect — not from fear, not from authority, but from recognition — is a rare currency.

And they gave it.

To me.

Because I didn't hide.

I didn't sanitize anything.

I told them the truth — the stories they didn't believe,

the darkness I lived through, the pain I caused, the Fire I couldn't contain.
And when they messed with me, laughed at my stories,
teased me for being "a soft white boy," I took it as the compliment it was:

They trusted me enough to play.

And I always had the same half-joke, half-thunder response.

Come find out.

(My supervisor would cringe and remind me every time afterward,
"you can't say that!")

Respect the Anger Within

One kid — big, emotional, volcanic — was my mirror.
The younger ones are usually the most dangerous: too much fuel, not enough consequence.
When this one got angry, he didn't go red — he went crimson.

We had to restrain him once.
Afterward, I sat with him in a quiet room still buzzing with heat.

"I know where you go when you get that angry," I told him.

"You won't believe me now, but I see myself in you.

Your rage is passion.

And you've got more of it than most grown men ever will.

We need you here.

The circle isn't the same without you.

Just walk outside next time.

Say 'fuck this' as many times as you need.

Break something that doesn't have consequences.

But don't let that rage ruin your life.

I know you could knock some heads off.
But all it takes is one head — one moment — for everything to change your life forever.”

He didn’t answer.
He didn’t need to.

That is the power of the circle.

When the walls fall, something real walks in — something ancient, something honest,
something that every culture before ours understood instinctively:

The circle is the great equalizer.
The sacred geometry where the Beast finally speaks without being punished for its voice.

I don’t use the word “miracle” lightly.
But what I witnessed in those circles was exactly that.
Not because the boys were special — though they were — but because truth is rare now.
Because honesty among young men has become an endangered thing.
Because in a world of noise, posturing, and digital masks, something as simple as a circle
restored what the world forgot.

A circle became the answer.
A circle became the Fire.
A circle became the place where we returned to ourselves.

Red Tape Within Red Tape

The system was never built to save them.
It was built to manage them — shuffle them — document them — bury them under forms and
signatures until the boy inside went quiet.

Systems can help.

But systems alone cannot hold a boy at the hour his Beast needs a Guardian.

Programs came and went with the fiscal year.
Funding renewed, then vanished.
Staff rotated like weather fronts.

And the boys who tried the hardest — the ones clawing at the edges of their own extinction —
were always the ones most likely to be swallowed first.

Two faces live inside me permanently.
Not as memories — as wounds.

They walked through the doors every day with crooked grins, eyes bright with that frantic
hunger to learn, to be challenged, to be seen.

When they weren't in the room, the circle felt tilted.

Then came more days without them.

And the sick logic of the streets whispered its verdict:

They weren't coming back.
And it was not their choice.

One was locked up.

One was killed.

That's the math of a world without Guardians.

Their names will be carved into the walls of The Arena.

Not as decoration — as indictment.

It was in the ache of losing them that the first vision of The Arena came:

A warehouse.

Rough. Ugly. Alive.

Rooms divided for movement, voice, grief, and creation — a dojo, a studio, bunks, a kitchen, a
circle that never closed.

A place open at 2 a.m. when a boy's grief hits him hardest.

A place where the Beast has somewhere to go besides the grave or the cage.

I realized then:

This was bigger than “dangerous neighborhoods.”

Boys everywhere are exiled from the spaces they need to grow.

Good homes. Broken homes. Rich. Poor. Rural. Urban.

Different languages — same wound.

They all need the same thing:
A place for their Beast,
the Fire,
structure, challenge, belonging, Guardianship.
That warehouse was the seed.
The Arena is the tree.

What the System Could Not Hold

The lesson came cold.
I had finally landed what felt like my dream job — a three-year contract mentoring adult felons.
It felt like destiny putting a hand on my shoulder.
I crushed the interview.
Told the truth.
Laid my past on the table like a confession.
They offered me the job on the spot.
Then on day one, fifteen minutes in, a stranger led me to a beige cubicle and said they had to run
a background check.

“Sure,” I said. “No problem. I already told them everything.”

He stared at his screen and asked,
“You don’t have anything violent on there, do you?”

I paused.
“Umm... does aggravated battery count?”

I laughed the bitter laugh of a man who knows the gods by name and none of them play fair.

Because who is more qualified to guide men out of the dark
than someone who’s crawled through it barefoot?

Of course, I didn’t get the job.

On paper, I understood why.

Liability has its own language.

But paper cannot measure transformation.

Systems can record the wound.

They cannot always recognize the scar.
This vision won’t be built inside a machine that treats men like liabilities.
It has to be forged outside of it.

So I looked at the sky and said:

Fine.
I’ll build it myself.

Interlude #5

I Will Not Forget

In those years I made friendships unlike any I’d known before.
Not built on bravado or masks, not on nightlife or escape —
but on the raw currency of truth.

On sitting in half-lit rooms, porches cracked by winter, stale smoke drifting between sentences,
and saying out loud what most people never admit even to themselves.

These were men and women who let the armor fall.
Who showed me the soft underbelly beneath the grit.
Who laughed with their whole chest, even when their eyes were drowning.
They didn't pretend to be strong — they *were* strong, because they were honest.

That's what made losing them unbearable.

When someone you love dies from addiction, you don't mourn the mask.

You mourn the light behind it.
You mourn the tenderness you saw in private moments,
the jokes whispered at 2 a.m.,
the way they leaned on your shoulder when the world felt too sharp.

One day you're smoking together, laughing about something stupid —
a joke that doesn't even matter now —
and the next you hear they died alone in a motel room
with the television still glowing in the dark.

And each one carved a mark in me that has never closed.

Their laughter.

Their hunger.

Their fire.

Echoes — reminders of how high the stakes are, and how low a man can sink without a circle to
hold him.

Sobriety isn't just saving your own life.

It's carrying the dead with you.

It's letting their absence sharpen your vow.

It's knowing exactly what you escaped,
and exactly who didn't.

Addiction is the proof of what happens when Fire is left without a vessel.

It is hunger turned in on itself.

It is a wound rotting in the dark.
Withdrawal is not metaphor — it is hell in the bloodstream.
Families shatter.
Years vanish.
Bodies shake until they break.

And all of it points to the same truth:
once the flame twists inward, it is almost impossible to straighten again.

Prevention is not “better.”
Prevention is mercy.
Prevention is the only path that saves the boy
before he becomes a man chained to cravings older than reason.
Because the real enemy was never the pill, the bottle, the needle.
Those are symptoms.
The real trials are older:

Pain.
Fear.
Isolation.
The absence of a Guardian when the storm arrives.

Face pain early, before it grows teeth.
Face fear early, before it names you.
Face the Beast early, before it devours everything good that might have been.

The Arena exists for this reason:
not to rescue men already undone,
but to give boys a crucible where Fire is shaped, not feared —
where instinct becomes wisdom,
and the Beast becomes an ally instead of a jailer.

Sally

She was tall,
dark auburn hair,
red glasses—stylish, a little bold—
magnifying blue eyes
you couldn't ignore.

She had the kind of beauty
that made me worry for her —
not because beauty is weakness,
but because the world knows how to steal from the wounded.

You could hear the ache in her voice every time she spoke,
as if the words had to push through ghosts just to reach daylight.

I respected her boundaries, and my own.
I had taken a vow: no dating, no sex, no romance in my first year of sobriety.
The vow made room for a real friendship —
one free of the noise and confusion that often clouds desire.

She didn't laugh often,
but when she did,
it came with her whole body—
a sudden, unguarded snort
that broke through everything.

Every time I heard it,
my own laughter followed,
rising to meet hers.

But she carried a war inside her that no one could see.
A war I feared she was fighting alone.
The possibilities of what she had endured still twist my stomach in knots.
I never pushed her to say more than she wanted.
Sometimes I wonder if I should have.
The maybes still haunt me.

She faced her own death by choice.
She hung herself from a tree on the north side of Chicago.

I don't write that for shock.
I write it because truth must be allowed to haunt,
or we learn nothing.
Because she deserved to be remembered, not anonymized.
Because the pain that made life impossible for her
was not her fault.

It was not hers alone to carry.

It belonged to a world
that failed to hold her.

A society that fails its wounded, then blames them for bleeding.

She deserved a circle.
She deserved a fire.
She deserved an Arena.
Something real.
Someone real.

I know a page is not enough.

It never could be.

But now she has this page.

Now she has this vow.

How many more must we bury
before we remember
what we were entrusted to protect?

Interlude #6

The Shadow Plain

*Before reconciliation came,
there was a night when all three of us —
the Beast, the Guardian, and the Shadow —
met at the same fire.*

I hadn't asked for it.

I hadn't prepared.

It arrived the way truth always does:

unbidden, inconvenient, undeniable.

The Guardian stood closest to the flame,

shoulders heavy with duty,

eyes darting like a man who fears he's already failed.

The Beast crouched low, patient as a storm.

The Shadow lounged in the dark like an old lover

who knows every secret you swore you'd never speak.

And the truth rose between them like smoke.

Guardian:

"I'm tired of pretending I know where North is.

Stagnation is killing me.

The not-knowing.

The waiting.

The ache of it.

I can't outrun this anymore."

Shadow:

“You were never meant to outrun me.

I am everything you buried alive.

I hold what you refused to feel.

I twisted because you wouldn't look.”

Beast:

“And I roared because he wouldn't listen.

Your anxiety?

That's me slamming my fists on the walls you built.

Not danger — direction.

Not panic — a compass.

You said you were lost,

but you were the one refusing to move.”

The Guardian lowered his head.

His voice cracked like old wood.

Guardian:

“Then tell me what to do.

Tell me where North is.”

The Beast rose to his full height.

Beast:

“North is movement.

North is honesty.

North is the next brave step —

not the perfect one.

Stagnation is rot.

Purpose is breath.

You lead us by choosing.

I follow by acting.

He follows by revealing.”

The Shadow stepped forward into half-light,

arms crossed like a stern mentor.

Shadow:

“I don’t want obedience.

I want acknowledgement.

Let me speak and I soften.
Ignore me, and I poison everything you love.”

*The Guardian looked between them,
realizing for the first time
that they weren't enemies.
They were three parts of the same man
waiting to stop pretending he could live
with any of them locked away.*

*He pressed his hand to his chest.
Felt the pulse.
Felt the tremor.
Felt the truth.*

Guardian:

“Then I’ll lead.
Not perfectly.
Not fearlessly.
But forward.
I’d rather bleed moving north

than rot standing still.”

The Beast grinned.

Beast:

“At last.”

The Shadow bowed his head in agreement.

Shadow:

“Then let’s reconcile.

But only in truth.”

*The fire cracked,
sending sparks into the dark
like the first stars
mapping the sky.*

Sobriety had saved me.
Vocation had given me direction.
But this was different.

This was the first breath
that did not lie.

The first step toward wholeness.
Toward rhythm.

Toward movement
with nothing locked away.

The moment the three of us
finally faced
the same direction.

Chapter VI— Reconciliation

I know now that losing that dream job was necessary.

Not fair.

Not painless.

Necessary.

Before I could help build the Arena,

I had to rebuild the man who thought he was ready for it.

Nothing about my path was planned. Nothing strategic. No program.

Most of what saved me arrived by accident, or grace, or desperation —

usually when I was on my knees with no ideas left.

What follows isn't advice.

It's just the truth of what happened when I stopped trying to outthink my own body and finally
listened to it.

I am not a disciplined man in the heroic sense.
But reconciling the Beast isn't about discipline — it's about *alignment*.

Finding the few practices that fit your bones instead of breaking yourself over the ones that
don't.

The Arena is built for that —

not to force every man into the same mold,

but to help him find the practices

that let his own Beast speak without devouring him.

The Beautiful Mirror

From the moment we met, it was as if the world had arranged the meeting on purpose.

Our first date wasn't dinner, or a movie, or some polite performance.

We talked for ten hours straight — about vision, about service, about the worlds we wanted to
build.

She spoke of her nonprofit dream; I spoke of the seed of the Arena already burning in me.

It didn't feel like falling in love.

It felt like recognition — two mapmakers discovering their paths pointed toward the same
mountain.

Reconciliation is not about finding the right partner to save you.

I was lucky, but most importantly,

I was ready.

I was hungry to receive and reciprocate, to live without hiding.

There is no blueprint here.

Only my experience.

She kept me grounded from the start.

I've always said I'm a hot-air balloon — drifting, dreaming, disappearing into the sky —
and she was the steady pair of hands holding the rope.

I had been searching for romance my whole life, but what I found was something far older, far
deeper:
someone whose presence helped me hear
the language of the Beast
before I had words for it.

Touch

The first massage she ever gave me shattered my understanding of myself.

I had spent years thinking I knew my own body.
I didn't know a damn thing.

Her hands found places I didn't know existed —
knots buried under years of grief, fear lodged under my ribs,
muscles clenched around memories I had never spoken aloud.

It hurt.
Not the kind of hurt that wounds — the kind that reveals.

Within twenty-four hours, I was sick.
Fever.
Nausea.

Shaking.

Exhaustion so deep I felt hollowed out.

She told me it can happen —

that sometimes, when the body releases, it purges.

For the first time in my life, sickness felt sacred.

Not punishment.

Not weakness.

A cleansing.

That night, lying in the ache, I realized how long I had called numbness “peace.”

How long I had confused endurance with healing.

My body had been waiting years to speak, and her touch finally gave it breath.

When we really began to touch — without armor, without pretense —

something ancient woke up in me.

I saw what the Beast had been starving for all along:

not dominance, not control, but *contact*.

Countless creatures on earth know this.

Wolves press their foreheads together.

Elephants lean their weight into each other.

Gorillas groom for hours.

Touch is how the pack says:

You belong.

You are safe.

You are real.

But we built a society terrified of touch.

Afraid of closeness.

Afraid of being felt.

No wonder we're fractured.
We've forgotten the grammar of the flesh.
We've replaced it with screens, slogans, and symbols —
but the body doesn't speak emoji.

It speaks pressure.
Warmth.
Breath.
Presence.

After that first awakening, my entire relationship with the world shifted.
The Beast stopped screaming and started singing —
because this was its true language all along.

Not violence.
Not hunger.
Contact.

She did not save me.

She met me.

I still had to learn how to stay.

The Smallest Circle

She taught me how to hug.
I didn't know how rigid I'd become until her arms showed me the difference.
Her embrace wasn't a squeeze or a gesture — it was attention.
Her body listened to mine.

For the first time, I understood a hug could be a conversation:
pressure and breath, pulse and presence, two currents intertwining without a single word.

Sometimes, while we stood there, something unmistakable moved between us —
a quiet surge rising through the spine, warmth spreading through the chest.
Not imagined. Not poetic metaphor.
Just the body remembering trust.

It wasn't sexual.
It was sacred —
two nervous systems loosening their grip,
two animals lowering their guard,
two people letting the walls fall long enough to feel safe in their own skin.

Every embrace became a stitch.
Every exhale a small forgiveness.

The Absence of Touch

The more I noticed, the more painful shapes that hunger took.

Touch is so elemental that when it's denied, it mutates.

You see it in the marketplace of loneliness —
people paying to be touched, held, desired, witnessed.

I am not excusing wrongdoing.
I am not offering mercy to the malicious.
Understanding the hunger beneath harm
does not absolve the harm.

I know that personally.
To understand the currents beneath my own wrongdoing
did not erase responsibility.
It only showed me where the work had to begin.

I do not attempt to excuse any action,
Merely attempting to illuminate the opportunity to learn and become through honesty and
ownership.

Regardless of how overpowering the compulsion.

There is no justification.

I once laid alone in my jail cell.

Thoughts spiraling into the if and whys that lead me there.

The answer became clear, it was not one choice,

It was a pattern, a cycle, a process of consistently inconsistent choices,

A steadfast refusal and avoidance of the Beast's presence tugging and swinging on my insides.

You see it in men who confuse domination with intimacy because tenderness terrifies them.

I used to think these things were about sex or power.

Now I see another hunger beneath them.

They're symptoms of starvation.

When the Beast is denied contact, it turns feral.

It will scrape warmth from any surface, even the wrong ones.

Because beneath many violent acts,

beneath many numb encounters,
Beneath many transactions,
there's the same animal cry:

Please, remind me I exist.

To understand hunger is not to excuse harm.

There is no justification for violating another person.

But if we refuse to study the hunger beneath the harm, we leave the next wound waiting in the dark.

Even among friends it shows —
the half-hug, the stiff pat, the quick escape,
as if closeness were dangerous.

Friends laughing across tables, never leaning in.

Families who could speak for hours but hadn't embraced in years.

In the Tyrant, touch-starvation twists into its ugliest form:

domination mistaken for intimacy,
control reaching for what tenderness was never taught to hold.

Sometimes it is not a lack of love,
but a lack of embodiment.

The war against the Beast made us forget its necessity.

You can tell how connected someone is by how they hug —
whether they hold you, or just collide with you.

A real hug is a small resurrection.

Two beasts remembering they're not alone.

Interlude #7

Grief

The Loud Grief

This is the grief that splits the sky.

The kind that ends a life
or takes one.

It's the suicide note written in blood,
the overdose curled beside a cold bed,
the boy with a weapon no one knew he owned.

It's what happens when the Beast is locked away too long in the shadows—
it erupts.

Not out of evil.
Out of exile.

It's the grief no one wanted to sit with,
the pain no one wanted to name,
the Fire no one tended.

We built a culture designed to avoid discomfort,
then shamed the boys who drowned in it.

We demanded quiet.
We punished intensity.
We medicated restlessness.
We mocked passion.
We caged the animal that once kept us alive.
And now we feign shock when he bursts through the bars.
Many violent deaths, many quiet overdoses,
are sermons ignored.
The Fire had nowhere left to go,
so it burned through the vessel carrying it.

The Quiet Grief

This one wears a smile.
It sits at desks, drives carpools, folds laundry,
sends emails, pays taxes,
stays “busy.”
It drinks just enough to disappear,
scrolls just enough to forget,
works just enough to avoid thinking.
It’s the Beast in a tie,
the Beast holding his breath,
the Beast whispering “I’m fine”
A man staring at a steering wheel in an empty parking lot
trying to understand a pain he doesn’t have language for.

It doesn't explode.

It corrodes.

Into marriages.

Into children.

Into the emptiness between people
sitting three feet apart with screens glowing in their faces.

This is the grief we call "normal."

The tragedy we call "resilience."

The slow death we celebrate as "stability."

It doesn't break down—

so it never breaks open.

The Beautiful Grief

And then—

the rarest one.

The grief that remembers its origin.

The grief that shakes the body

until truth spills out.

The grief that drums, weeps, dances, collapses,

lets the forest carry the scream

and hands it back as forgiveness.

This is grief turned ritual.

Grief as alchemy.

Grief as rebirth.

This is when the Beast is not shamed—
but welcomed.

When the Guardian steps forward
not to cage,
but to *hold*.

Here, tears are holy water.
Here, trembling is prayer.
Here, the same pain that nearly killed
becomes the medicine that saves.

Many old cultures knew this.
Many ancestors gathered around fire
because grief was never meant
to be carried alone.

We've forgotten the ceremony—
and that forgetting is why we're sick.

Fire is not just hunger.
It is direction.
Affinity.
The unseen pull toward the life you were meant to live.

Starve it and it becomes violence.
Feed it and it becomes vision.

Nothing is more dangerous
than a Beast denied.

Nothing is more beautiful
than a man who walks with his Beast—
and becomes a Guardian of what is sacred.

If you can hold a gaze, step closer.
The Fire is already lit.

Drop the mask.
Drop the polite smile you've carved into your face.
Drop the numbness that keeps you from yourself.

You won't need any of it where we're going.

Wake the fuck up.

You are not a machine.

You never were.

Interlude 8

The Lament of the Women

Many women were never allowed the luxury
of pretending grief was weakness.
Their bodies learned the old language early —
how sorrow moves like water...
how it floods,
how it washes,
how it carries the dead away with tenderness men rarely speak of.

But they are exhausted
because they break and break and break
in the absence of men who know how to break with them.

They grieve for the wounded boys hiding inside grown bodies.

They grieve for the fathers who left,
and the ones who stayed only in name.
They grieve for every promise given by a man
who did not have the spine or the tenderness
to stand behind his own words.

Most of all,
they grieve the wasteland —
this modern landscape full of men who look whole
but have never once met their own sorrow.

A man who cannot grieve
cannot love with true presence.

He can desire,
cling,
possess,
perform,
pretend —
but he cannot give himself.

And so women keep grieving,

They carry the tears of a culture that refuses to cry.
They carry the weight of connection for two.
They carry the emotional truth that men were taught to fear.

And slowly,
inevitably,
they break under the burden of everyone else's unspoken ache.

You have seen them —
women at the edge of their lives,
hands open, hearts tired,

not bitter,
not hopeless,
just worn thin...
by decades of loving men
who could not meet them in the deep.

This is the tragedy:
men are starving for intimacy
but cannot feel enough to receive it.
Many women are carrying more connection
than their relationships can hold.
The result?

A generation grieving each other
while lying beside each other.

This is why The Arena must exist.
Not to make boys powerful —
but to make them capable of grief.
Capable of depth.
Capable of staying open under pressure.
Capable of standing before Beauty
without trying to consume it.

A man who knows his Beast
can finally stand before a woman
without fear or hunger or shame.
A man who has faced his own sorrow
can finally witness hers
without shrinking.

And this is the deeper truth:
It is not about men or women.
It is not about who you love.

It is about the human capacity
to stay present with another's fire
without running from your own.

Authenticity is not gendered.
Grief is not political.
Tenderness is not ideology.

We all break.
We all ache.
We all long to be seen
without losing ourselves in the gaze.

A person who cannot grieve
cannot reveal themselves.
A person who cannot reveal themselves
cannot love.
A person who cannot love
creates generations of hungry ghosts
wandering from heart to heart
hoping that someone will finally teach them
how to grieve in the Fire.

Interlude 9

Universal Modern Grief

This grief does not belong to women alone.

The pattern is ancient, yes.

Common, yes.

Written into history, religion, marriage, law, and silence.

Women have carried the emotional weight of men for centuries.

They have tended homes haunted by fathers who never learned how to feel.

They have loved men who could provide, perform, protect, or possess —

but could not reveal.

That wound is real.

But truth cannot stop where pattern becomes convenient.

Because absence wears many faces.

Numbness is not gendered.

Avoidance is not gendered.

Cruelty is not gendered.

The inability to grieve is not gendered.

There are men who become the keepers of the home.

Men who commit the children's meals, the appointments, the invisible weather of the family.

Men who remember the birthdays, the school forms, the favorite snacks, the fragile moods, the small rituals that make a child feel held.

Men who become the soft place, the witness, the emotional ground —

and slowly disappear beneath the weight of being the only one still feeling.

There are men who lie beside women they love

and feel more alone than they ever did in an empty room.

There are men who beg for tenderness

and receive strategy.

Men who offer their wounds

and are met with efficiency.

Men who cry

and watch the person they love turn cold,

not because she is evil,

but because something in her learned long ago
that feeling was unsafe.

There are women who vanish into work.

Into control.

Into money.

Into the bright, polished language of survival.

Women who learned to compartmentalize so completely

that love became another task to manage.

Women whose trauma made them sharp.

Women whose fear made them distant.

Women who do not collapse loudly,

but disappear behind competence, calculation, and the clean blade of emotional absence.

And the man beside her begins to wonder

if he is asking for too much

by asking to be held.

This is the wound beneath the argument about money.

Beneath the argument about chores.

Beneath the argument about who does more, who sacrifices more, who is failing whom.

The fight is rarely about the thing named.

It is about the question underneath:

Do you see me?

Do you feel what this is costing me?

Can you meet me here,

or am I alone inside this family?

A person can provide and still abandon.

A person can stay and still vanish.

A person can share a bed, a child, a mortgage, a calendar, a life —

and still leave the other starving for presence.

This is why I say the wound is human.

The roles can reverse.

The ache can change hands.

Sometimes the man is the locked room.

Sometimes the woman is.

Sometimes both are standing outside each other's doors,

bloody-knuckled from knocking,

too wounded to hear.

And then the home becomes a theater of survival.

One performs strength.

One performs patience.

One performs sacrifice.

One performs indifference.

The child watches everything.

The child learns the temperature of love

before anyone teaches him the word.

He learns whether tears are welcomed

or punished.

He learns whether anger becomes truth

or violence.

He learns whether touch is safe,
whether apology means change,
whether silence is peace
or merely the sound of two people giving up.
This is why the Arena is not against women.

It is not against men.

It is not against marriage, love, family, or desire.

It is against absence.

It is against the wound that teaches people to leave while staying.

It is against the numbness that turns lovers into roommates,
parents into managers,
homes into cold machines of survival.

The Arena exists because no child should have to become fluent
in the unspoken grief between two adults
who never learned how to sit in the Fire together.

And no man or woman should have to spend a lifetime
begging the person beside them
to become human enough to feel.

We all break.

We all hide.

We all learn our little methods of escape.

Some flee into rage.

Some flee into work.

Some flee into screens.

Some flee into money.

Some flee into caretaking.

Some flee into perfection.

Some flee into silence so deep,
they call it peace.

But the Fire knows the difference.

Peace breathes.

Numbness does not.

Love breathes.

Performance does not.

Presence breathes.

Control does not.

So let this be said plainly:

The tragedy is not men versus women.

The tragedy is the human being

cut off from grief,

cut off from the body,

cut off from reverence,

cut off from the courage to stay present

when love stops flattering the ego

and starts asking for truth.

A person who cannot grieve

cannot fully love.

A person who cannot feel

cannot fully stay.

A person who cannot face their Beast
will eventually make someone else live with it.

And this is how generations inherit ghosts.

Not always through violence.

Not always through abandonment.

Sometimes through the quiet daily betrayal
of never being met.

Chapter VII

Sacred Trials

Reconciliation did not arrive as an idea.

It arrived through trials.

Silence.

Movement.

Combat.

Voice.

Each one taught the Beast a different language.

Each one returned a piece of me to the body.

The Trial of Silence

Before I learned to move with it, I tried to silence it.

My partner and I went to a Vipassana retreat — nine days of silence; nine days of stillness; eyes closed, spine straight. The monk's initiation, the mind's battlefield. Forty-five to ninety-minute sits, broken by meals and silent walks.

By day four, I broke. Trembling in the dark, back screaming, mind circling like a trapped animal.

Every second stretched into eternity.

I wanted to run.

But the rule was: *sit, watch, breathe*.

Honestly, I might not have stayed if she hadn't been there.

Honeymoon love can be stubborn. I endured: pain, boredom, doubt like I'd never known.

I learned something brutal: *My Western mind does not go quietly*. We've been raised on noise and spectacle. Our nervous systems are tuned like live wires, not prayer bells. To sit with ourselves is to confront the ghosts we buried under screens and schedules.

The retreat didn't enlighten me. It humbled me.

It showed me what the Beast becomes when caged — a storm in a bottle.

Depression followed for months.

And every well-meaning suggestion to sit more, breathe more, surrender more

only made me feel more broken.

Why can't I sit still?

Why does this only make me feel worse?

The Trial of Movement

Dance found me.

Not politely.

Not gently.

One night, during the years I was still trying to write something worth reading, I sat hunched over a notebook when the music pulled me out of the chair.

No choreography.

No posture.

Just body and sound.

The moment I moved without thinking,

I discovered the stillness I had been clawing for on the cushion.

The stillness had been inside the movement.

This became my ritual:

Sweat.

Breath.

Trance.

The Beast learning to speak without hindrance.

Every motion carved out a new chamber in me.

Every rhythm unlocked a door I didn't know I had locked.

Every night I danced, I felt more human than I ever did trying to sit like a statue.

It was simple, find your feet, become the music.

Let thought pass through, and just move.

Lifetimes opened inside moments.

Tears came — relief, joy, a peace I had never believed I deserved.

Even for a moment,
to inhabit those foreign feelings
began to reshape my understanding
of who I was
and what I could become.

This was prayer in motion.
This was the liturgy of the living.

Dancing became sacred.

And forever will be for me.

Trial Through Combat

During my quest for embodiment, I turned toward martial arts —
the most intense form of contact I could imagine.

I didn't know where to begin.

Then I found Judo.

I had a few friends who had been practicing Judo since they were kids.

They explained how Judo was sacred because of its structure and dedication to safe combat.

When done right, it's two bodies negotiating respect through pressure and breath. If you hurt your partner, you've disrespected the dojo. If you listen, you both grow stronger. Safe combat became one of the purest forms of communion I've ever known.

When I locked hands with another man and felt our balance shift, something ancient came
alive.

Judo taught me that combat, at its best, is not domination or spectacle.

It is falling, being pinned, being submitted,
and getting up to try again.

It was months of pain, but sacred pain.

The mornings after, my body was sore and bruised —
and for once, pain felt like instruction.

After countless times of tapping the mat in admission of defeat, and learning the humility
demanded to continue, it all started to come together.

The first time I was able to take down an opponent and pin another brother with power and
grace I crossed a threshold of fear that manifested itself in every aspect of my life.

I was sparring with an experienced black belt when I was just a yellow belt.

I knew he wasn't going full speed, he didn't need to because of his 15+ years of experience.

At the same time he wasn't going to let a yellow belt take him down.

I am 6'4" 220lbs, my body gave me advantages over most opponents, but it didn't matter;
his strength and experience made all my efforts feel futile.

After nearly a dozen failed attempts,

The exhaustion was setting in,

I decided to take 10-20 seconds to gain all the energy I had left before the match was over and go
for one final attempt at a take down.

With everything I had left, I found my grip, pulled him close, stepped behind his leg, and
trusted the technique.

For once, my body did exactly what it had been taught.

I swept.

He fell.

I don't know who was more surprised.

Him or me.

The smile on his face mirrored the exuberant feeling of victory I had yet to taste.

“Wow, that was perfect, nice job”

Those words landed deeper than the throw.

Not because I won—
but because I did it right.

Because I didn't hurt him.

Because something in me
had finally aligned.

After months of saying
“I practice Judo”
like it was a question—

I could finally say it
like it was true.

Fear was no longer fear, It was just a reminder that I am alive and I can face it, no matter what
form it took.

It sank deep into my muscles:

I am a mammal.

Mammals wrestle.

Every time I saw animals roll and test each other —
my cats tumbling across the floor, biting without harm, pouncing without hatred —

I understood it more deeply:

playful wrestling is ancient.

Sacred.

A bond made through pressure, restraint, and respect.

The Trial of Voice

Then came the oldest ritual of all — voice.

Not singing for beauty.

Not singing for talent.

Singing for *truth*.

The first time I felt my own voice vibrate through my ribs, something ancient answered.

Many creatures sing.

Humans simply forgot why.

When I sang to my son, I cracked open.

When I sang alone, my voice steadied.

When I sang in the car, it grew bold.

By the time I stepped into a karaoke bar, it wasn't performance — it was reclamation.

I remember it vividly.

The overwhelming eyes on me, the shaking within me.

I pushed the eyes and expectations aside to see the words on the screen.

It was an easy song “People are Strange” by the Doors.

I became the words that swam in me every time I heard it.

I am alive and unashamed.

Each song took me into deeper parts of myself,

My favorite song was **Jack’s Lament** — the restless soul wandering through longing and
revelation.

When I sang it, I felt every shade of being human vibrating through me: grief, pride, humor,
wonder.

That’s prayer.

That’s reconciliation.

Not control — permission.

Permission to let the Beast speak without shame.

Then one night,

I played Tool — the truest music to the language of my Beast.

Before thought could form, my body answered the riff.

My breath deepened.

My feet struck the floor in time with the drums.

Dust rose like incense.

My voice grew into thunder.

My pulse became an altar.

No pews.
No scripture.
Just sweat, breath, sound.

This was communion.
Not symbolic.
A meeting between the Fire that formed me and the animal that carries me.

Looking back, I noticed something simple:
the deeper my connection to the song,
the more the room responded.

It didn't matter if someone had just sung "Brown Eyed Girl."
It didn't matter that my own taste ran from Tool to Disney musicals.

Truth radiates.
Vulnerability has a frequency.
Anyone paying attention can feel it.

The bond I had spent years chasing
started meeting me with open arms.

This is how I speak to what made me.
This is how I listen back.

Interlude X

I Just Want to Play

The Beast's Lament

You thought I wanted blood.
You thought I wanted domination.
You thought I was the thing to cage.

But I just wanted a game of tag.

A tree.

A song.

A body brave enough to move.

And because you would not give me a field,
I learned to haunt bedrooms, bottles, alleys, and screens.

If you want to understand the hunger beneath the overdose,
the grief inside the bullet,
the silence at the bottom of the bottle —

then keep reading.

If you want to understand why good men vanish into quiet rooms,
why boys grow up angry and hollow,
why the Fire inside them burns them alive or dies out —

then stay.

But if you would rather keep pretending,
if comfort matters more than truth,

put the book down.

Go back to your screens,
your distractions,
your polite platitudes,
your curated indifference.

I am not here to make you feel safe.

I am here to make you feel.

This is the rage of the Beast
turned to passion by a fool.

A pulse that refuses to relent
until you remember what you are.

Do you know what it takes
to chain something
that only wants to laugh, love, and play?

To muzzle a creature
honest enough to say when it hurts?

But you locked me in a cage.

No.

No.

It is worse than that.

It is like being locked in the trunk of a car
while the other half of you drives away
from the scene of the crime,

not even knowing what he did.

If only he would pop the trunk.

Smile.

Breathe.

Stay grateful.

Be kind.

My favorite lie.

“Keep trying. Never give up. You’ll get there.”

Where is there?

And what, exactly, are we trying to become?

A polite machine?

A useful ghost?

A body that never trembles?

A boy who can sit still while his Fire claws at the walls?

It is time to remember.

Your ancestors gave blood and sweat,

sang to the Fire,

danced in gratitude,

howled in reverence through me.

I am the flesh of the Fire.

But now?

You mock me.

You shame me.

You exile me.

And look at what you have become.

You put boys in chairs and demand stillness.

Then you call the body’s rebellion a disorder.

You pathologize pain and fear
as if they were infections to cure
instead of thresholds to cross.

And then you wonder why the rage leaks sideways —

in bedrooms,
schools,
streets,
comment sections,
and homes.

The old trials died.
Their wisdom died with them.

Truth traded for theory.
Pain traded for performance.
Fear traded for comfort.
Fire traded for convenience.
Rites of passage traded for algorithms.

I am not a doctor.

I am an animal.

I am not here to give medical advice.

I am here to tell you what I have seen.

Maybe medicine saves some.
I hope it does.

But medicine without witness
can become another cage.

I have seen medication become a muzzle
before anyone listened for the song.

I have seen boys and men handed a diagnosis
before they were handed a witness.

I have seen pain chemically quieted
before it was spiritually, relationally, and bodily understood.

And I cannot pretend
I am neutral about that.

I am you.

I am not sin.
I am not evil.
I am not violence.

I am vitality.

I do not choose for you.

I am the moment
that forces the choice.

The ache that never leaves
until it is heard.

I am the current that creates and destroys.

Music is my voice.

The body is my language —
every organ, hormone, nerve, breath,
each a tone through which I move.

Hate, love,
and the trembling space between.

My vibrations are the Fire's movement within you.

And the game you made?

It does not work.

Once, the rules were sacred.

Now the game is rigged against the soul.

You sold your attention
and called it progress.

Now even your boredom
belongs to a machine.

This is progress?

Fuck no.

So here is my offer:

Let's play a new game.

One that costs something.

One that demands skin, courage, and eye contact.

A game with the risk of humiliation, pain, and transcendence.

A game that could make you alive again.

We will start simple.

A game of tag.

Do you remember how to run?

To breathe?

To move before you think?

No more pretending.

Look me in the eyes.

No screens.

No masks.

Just pulse
meeting pulse.

Chapter VIII:

The Trials of Fatherhood

The Birth of Fenrir, My Archrival

Fatherhood was the initiation I never saw coming.

Not a ritual, not a ceremony — a collision.

A reckoning.

The final trial.

My son — my eight-year-old wolf-boy, my little Fenrir —

revealed every blank inside me I could never name.

His ferocity, relentlessness, innocence, a refusal to be anything but himself.

He forced me onto the tightrope where all fathers eventually stand:

Shape his fire without extinguishing it.

Love him without worshipping him.

Discipline him without breaking him.

Teach him power without letting him believe he deserves the throne.

Because he wants to rule the world one day.
And it's my job to make sure he never does.

Through him, I finally understood why the world is so broken.
Why fathers disappear,
Why mothers collapse,
Why homes fall apart.

Because nothing exposes your insecurities faster than a child who mirrors every hidden flaw.
Nothing tests your patience like the smaller version of your own hunger.
Nothing feels heavier than knowing the beginning of his life is shaped by the sacrifices you
must make in yours.

Fuck.

What did I sign up for?

And yet — there is no initiation greater than this one.

Trial of Tears

There are truths the mind can lie about,
and truths the body refuses to negotiate.

I learned a long time ago to trust them—

mine, my son's, the quiet ones I've seen fall down the face of a stranger
who tried for ten years to pretend he didn't feel anything at all.

Real tears don't lie.

They don't know how.

You can weaponize them, hide them, swallow them,

but the moment they break free,

you're face-to-face with something real.

Most people panic around tears.

They rush to soothe, to hush, to fix.

They treat crying like a fire alarm instead of what it is:

a release valve the Fire hid in the skull so the pressure wouldn't kill us.

It took me years to understand that.

Years of burying my own,

years of watching men turn into stone just to keep from breaking open.

Tears teach.

Sometimes with sorrow.

Sometimes with gratitude.

Sometimes because truth grazed me like a blade

and my body answered before my mind could.

I trust tears because they rarely arrive without purpose.

They are the body's way of saying,

"feel this, don't hide from me"

There is no reconciliation of the Beast without water
to cool the flame that would otherwise burn the world down.

Learning to let my child cry
without trying to silence the storm.

Every instinct screams:

Comfort him.

Fix it.

Make it stop.

Prove to him you're stronger than his pain.

But tears aren't a problem.

They're a birthright.

So I learned to sit outside his door
and let him feel the ache I once ran from.

I learned that if I rescue him from every sorrow,
he will grow up thinking sorrow is fatal.

One day, instead of thunder,
I showed him my own tears.

Not as manipulation,
but as truth.

He had hurt me.
And I let him see what hurt looks like.

Not rage.
Not punishment.
Just sadness.

He froze.
Because children know when tears are honest.
They feel the weight of them in their bones.

That day, something shifted.
He stopped seeing crying as weakness
and started seeing it as consequence.

As connection.

As truth.

The Beast:

When the Guardian cries with the Beast,

not against it —

something ancient happens.

The Fire softens.

The storm quiets.

The wildness finds its riverbed.

Because the Beast knows rage.

It knows hunger.

It knows fear.

But grief?

Grief is the one language It can't fake.

You want to teach a boy what power really is?

Let him see a man cry

without collapsing,

without apologizing,

without hiding.

Tears are not surrender.

They are consecration.

The First Language: Vibration

Before he spoke words, he spoke in frequencies.

His whole body vibrated when he laughed, when he cried,

when he reached for me with that primal urgency only children know.

At night I sang to him — just a low hum from the chest.

Slowly his breath matched mine.

The moment slapped me.

Sound is touch in another form.

Voice is vibration made audible.

I wasn't soothing him.

We were tuning into each other.

That is another boon of reconciliation —
the moment the Beast and the Breath find the same rhythm,
when the animal and the human finally sing the same song.

Like Beast, Like mini Beast

As he grew, my instincts led the way.

I couldn't wait to teach him, but he didn't care about my words.

He needed play.

If I spoke too long his eyes glazed over.

He'd grab my wrist and command the only word that mattered:

“Wrestle.”

That's when the truth slammed into me:

You cannot parent from the neck up.

You cannot talk a boy into becoming a man.

You must show him, with your body, what strength feels like.

So we wrestled.

We chased.

We crashed into couches, flipped pillows into shields, slayed invisible beasts in the living room.

Every game was a rite of passage disguised as laughter.

When he knocked me down, I let him feel what power feels like.

When I pinned him, I held just long enough to teach restraint.

When he was three to four, there was no off switch.

Only GO.

Our battles rarely ended because either of us chose to stop.

They ended because bodies have limits.

An elbow to the face.

A knee to the groin.

A head into the wall.

Sometimes mine.

Sometimes his.

Pain became the whistle.

His ferociousness needed to learn restraint,

He was still too young to heed my words over his own instincts.

So the unintentional pain taught.

Now, he's 9.

Pain is an afterthought and not the whistle.

He has learned his responsibility in each tussle.

Restraint, control.

He has learned they are a necessary part of his will.

Now our father son Arena sessions end through exhaustion.

Which nearly always finds me begging for mercy after 30 minutes of non-stop exertion.

He's a wrecking ball with no switch.

This was our unspoken covenant:

**I will teach you how to roar —
but also when to stop.**

That balance is fatherhood:
strong enough to win,
wise enough to lose on purpose.

Not philosophy.
Not theory.
Practice.
Embodiment.
The circle made flesh.

Be the Witness

In those moments — sweaty, laughing, panting, bruised —
I realized I wasn't the teacher anymore.

I was the boy again.
The boy who needed a father.
The boy who needed a hand on his back saying:

Try again.
You're safe.
I'm here.

Every fall and every chase became a sermon.
Proof that the Beast never needed to be tamed —
only trusted.

Parenthood demands presence over perfection.
He doesn't need a hero.
He needs a witness.
A father willing to fail in front of him and rise again with dignity.

A man who can apologize.
A man who can draw the line.

A man who can laugh after the storm.

A man who can say, "I was wrong," and still remain the Guardian.

And that is how the circle begins again.

The hunger to be — to feel seen, to feel felt —
is carved into our marrow.

A boy's fire is wild.
It searches for its earth —
the place where it can burn without burning down the house.

Teaching a boy to play with Fire is the greatest gift any father can give.

Because if you don't,
the world will teach him to fear it.
Or the world will teach him to wield it like a weapon.

Every day with Fenrir is a riddle,

a battle,

a game,

a lesson.

He is not mine to own.

He is mine to witness.

To guide.

To guard.

Until the Fire in him
knows how to stand on its own.

The two things I want most to teach my son are honesty and resilience.

Honesty, so he does not have to abandon himself to belong.

Resilience, so pain does not convince him he is finished.

Chapter VI:

Beauty, Love and the Ruins

Beauty

It is the first truth we ever recognized —
the shimmering thread between breath and spirit.

To witness beauty is to remember we are alive.
To create beauty is to honor the divine moving through us.
Without it, the soul starves. The Beast starves.
Life collapses into function, and the world grows gray.

Beauty is not a luxury or a rite.

But it undoubtedly nourishes the soul like nothing else can.

And life without it, leads to malnourished beings.

Once, we understood this.
Beauty was how we prayed.
Not with words, but with *making*:
the way a mother's hands shaped bread,
the way sunlight turned a river into a scroll of moving scripture,
the way a voice trembled when truth rose through it.

We built cathedrals not to glorify power,
but to echo what already lived inside us.
We sang because breath demanded melody.

We carved because the body knew stories the mind had forgotten.
Beauty was a temple we served.
Not a product we consumed.

When the Beast remembers its place, it kneels before beauty.

Not out of weakness — but devotion.
A reconciled Beast does not devour what it loves.
It protects it. Guards it.
It makes space for it to bloom without fear.

Because beauty is not fragile.
Beauty is ferocious.
Beauty is the force that carved rivers, erupted mountains,
and dared stars into being.

A man who can stand before beauty without grasping at it —
without trying to own it, cage it, or conquer it —
has passed the greatest initiation.
He has learned to bow.

Reverence alone may not cure violence,
but it changes how a man carries power.

It keeps power from rotting into tyranny.
It keeps longing from degrading into hunger.
It keeps love from turning into possession.

Let beauty break you.
Let it undo your armor.
Let it humble you back into awe.
Because awe is the doorway home.

The Desecration of Beauty

The tragedy of our age is simple:
what was meant to be beheld
we tried to own.

Beauty became a commodity.
A product.
A performance.

We packaged it, filtered it, sold it back to ourselves in hollow fragments.
We traded reverence for consumption.
Stillness for control.
Witnessing for wanting.

And when beauty becomes property,
love becomes an appetite.
Hunger can become an entitlement.
Desire can become violence.

This desecration often appears in the dance between hunger and radiance,
between the one who reaches
and the beauty that must remain free.

Sometimes that dance is man and woman.
Sometimes it is not.

Masculine and feminine are not prisons of sex or orientation.
They are currents within the human being.

Love wears many forms.

Masculine and feminine are not prisons of sex or orientation;

they are currents many people know within themselves —

the reaching and the receiving,

the hunger and the radiance,

the force and the form.

The desire to compete with intensity.

And the desire to be at home nestled in your love's presence.

They shape us and destroy us when out of balance.

Yin and yang, if you need older words.

What we could not stand in awe of,

We tried to possess.

And so art turned into pornography.

Desire turned into exploitation.

Longing turned into coercion.

The atrocities committed against women —

against the feminine itself —

are not just born of lust.

They are born of spiritual starvation.

Of boys who were never initiated,

never taught what their hunger is *for*.

The uninitiated Beast does not seek connection — it consumes.

It confuses beauty with proof of worth.

It tries to take what must be given freely.

It becomes rabid with fear that beauty will leave

unless it is chained down.

Sex trafficking, abuse, exploitation —

These are not only isolated evils.

They are also symptoms of the same forgetting.

This excuses nothing.

No reasoning, no blame can justify malicious violence,

But to prevent and rehabilitate those able to still feel remorse,

There must be an attempt at understanding.

If “monster” is where our understanding ends,

prevention ends with it.

The root beneath the rot must be acknowledged to attempt to remedy it.

The Return to Reverence

Beauty is consciousness looking into a mirror.

It is the divine catching its reflection in form —
a face, a voice, a color, a movement that stops the heart mid-beat.

Desire is where the lesson begins.

It is beauty’s messenger —
the pull that says,

Wake up. Something sacred is near.

Desire can burn illusion away
when it is guided by reverence.

Without reverence,
it burns the wrong things.

But what we're truly seeking
is that moment
when the world becomes luminous again.
That is its purpose.

A reconciled Beast does not chase beauty.
It listens to it.
It steadies itself before it.
Beauty no longer runs —
because it is safe.

It is how spirit celebrates its embodiment.
It is the pulse of meaning in a meaningless world.

And no one can define it for you.
You must lose it, crave it, kneel before it,
and return to it
until your own rhythm aligns with its truth.

This is one of parenting's greatest challenges,
To witness our child's heartbreak and disappointments without attempts to coddle and wish
away the pain.

The pain must be allowed to move through, so that the wisdom can seep into the body.

That alignment is reconciliation.
It is the Beast and the Guardian bowing together.

Love

Every human alive is searching for love —
not the romantic costume,
not the cinematic lie,
but the gaze that says:

*I see you. I see all of you.
Even the wild. Even the wounded.
And I do not turn away.*

Most relationships fail
because neither partner knows the language of the Beast.

We try to love from thought, from ideals,
from scripts inherited from a culture terrified of hunger.
But love is an animal before it is an idea.
It speaks through breath, nervous systems, rhythm, truth.

Intimacy is two Beasts unmasked.

Two fires burning side by side —
neither shrinking, neither dominating.
Just illuminating each other.

To love well
is to recognize the Beast in yourself
and not shame the Beast in your partner.

To love well
is to stand in presence,
not possession.

To love well
is to be devoted,
not devouring.

This is the circle.
The ancient marriage between the animal and the divine,
the body and the breath,
the hunger and the reverence.

This is what boys must be taught.
This is why the Arena must exist —
so we do not send another generation
into the world terrified of beauty
and dangerous to it.

The Ruins of Love

Love is the final mirror —
the one place a man cannot hide from the truth of his own Beast.

You can posture at work.
You can wear masks among friends.
You can pretend calm while you rot inside.
But in love — under the eyes of the one who sees you without your armor —
you stand naked before the sacred.

And most men have never been initiated for this.

Commitment isn't dying.
It's deserting.
Because love reveals the parts of a man that school, church, and society never taught him how

to face:
his shame,
his fear of being unworthy,
his unhealed wound,
his terror of being seen.

So he runs.
Or he hardens.
Or he turns numb.
Or he becomes a ghost inside his own home before he ever leaves it.

And this is where the truth devours us:

In the United States, 19 million children — one out of every four — live in a home without a father.

An entire generation raised in the echo of absence.

Not because men don't care.
Because they were never taught how to stay
once the mask falls
and the real work begins.

And the darker truth sits beneath it like a blade:

A staggering number of murdered women are killed by current or former intimate partners — men who once claimed love. Over one in three.

That's not just lust.
That's not just about sex.
It's not simply "toxic masculinity."

It is more **grief turned septic** inside an uninitiated Beast.
Heartbreak in a man who never learned to grieve,
never learned reverence,
never learned how to stay when love no longer feeds his ego.

Or he never learned how to leave,
because the person he loves
no longer loves him back.

He feels betrayed
because the boy in him cannot survive the grief.
He does not know how to be left
without becoming cruel.

This, again, not an excuse, an attempt at understanding.

I know this well.

Too well.

After relationships ended, wounds festered in me for months —

even when leaving had been my choice.

Abandonment still trembled in my blood.

I couldn't be alone.

The silence was too loud.

Too revealing.

A boy who does not learn to sit with pain
grows into a man who makes others carry it.

The part of him that fears abandonment
has never been guided through that fire.

Most male violence is not born of hatred.

It is born of **loss**.

Loss of meaning.

Loss of respect.

Loss of connection.
Loss of the one place he believed he was allowed to be soft.

An initiated man grieves.
An uninitiated man seeks revenge.

That is the difference between a Guardian and a Tyrant,
between a reconciled Beast and a rabid one.

This is why so many fathers vanish —
not because they do not love their children,
but because they cannot bear the mirror their partner holds
or the mirror their child eventually becomes.

Our culture is not dying from lack of strength.
It is dying from lack of *initiated strength* —
strength with reverence,
strength that bows before beauty instead of devouring it,
strength that can face grief without turning violent.

This is why the Arena must exist.

Not to make warriors.
To make men who can love.
Men who know how to stay.

Men whose children grow up knowing their father's eyes,
not his absence.

To bring the wonder we once lived through back into the picture.

The Arena is not a dream.

It is not the only answer.

But it is a real one.
It is the antidote to the rage born from heartbreak.
It is the place where boys learn the language of their Beast
before it twists.
Before it wounds the world.
Before it becomes another statistic.

Because when a boy learns to carry fire,
he becomes a man who does not burn down his own home.

Interlude XII

The Empty Room

Reconciliation is not a summit.
The trials of life do not stop until your breath does.

The work.
Money.
The heat of my Fire.
My inability to accept servitude as the price of survival.
All of it helped drive her away from me.

As I write these words, my son is sleeping 150 feet from me in another house.
My in-laws' house, where she went after telling me she had enough.

Love is special, but it is fragile, and the demands it places on those inside it eventually will test
you beyond what you believe you are capable of holding.

I honestly can't tell you if I failed,
I can honestly say I made mistakes,
I was selfish, I was loving, I was stubborn, I was forgiving, I was complacent, I was ambitious, I
was present, I was lost. I was emotionally demanding, I was unfair. I was loyal.

But the truest thing I can say about the person I loved and lived for, and our relationship of 12 years is, I don't know how the ending began.

I could say it was money,

I could say it was two people built with completely opposite nervous systems who learned and loved as much as they could until the opposite stopped being what held them together and turned into the problem they could not overcome.

It's rarely one argument, one action, one broken promise, one forgotten deed.

It's the trial of trials.

And it has now given birth to a new trial,

A trial that feels closer to a nightmare than reality.

Guardian:

I am done.

Does your friend the Fire have any clue what it's like to be human?

Beast:

Does it matter?

You feel what you feel.

You either learn from it or ignore it.

It just burns,

it doesn't choose,

The consequences are yours.

All of them,

Doesn't matter if you chose them,

Or men in black suits did.

Your feelings, your condition, your relationships,

Our relationship.

That's it.

This is your life whether you want to own it or not.

Guardian:

Tell me this oh, wise animal,
Why does it feel like the mother of my boy,
the love of my life,
the best friend I have ever known,
ripped our family in half
and still cannot see the wound?

Nothing matters anymore.

Beast:

It matters.
Of course it matters.
It tore the house in half.

She may be gone.
But he is not.

That is where your attention must go.

You know the wounds in her.
You know enough to understand,
But can never know enough to heal them.

And still you keep waiting
for pain to become fair.

Guardian:

What do you mean he's not gone?!?!

I go days without seeing him,

Some days I don't even know where he is.

His entire life I have been there, since his first breath.

I know the mistakes I have made, I know I am still not the man I am capable of being.

But I have never stopped trying.

Never.

And now, all I feel is apathy,

At night, whenever I walked past his room I would tip toe in, search for him buried in his
blankets and pillows, and then stand there, gazing.

Adrift within all that he means to me,

the challenges, the boons,

the responsibility. The horrific beauty of it all.

And now, it's been long enough that I don't even pause anymore, like I did for the first week after
they left.

I walk right past an empty room.

Where my son slept for 9 years.

And you say he's not gone.

Beast:

You are his father.
That bond, the 9 years you have given him will never be gone.
How is he gone if you saw him today?
This ache is now your guide.
You dreamed it couldn't happen to you.
But he is not yours,
He is your responsibility.
She could not live beside your Fire anymore,
You can blame her,
You can blame yourself.
You can wallow in the "What ifs"
But none of it will change anything.

Guardian:

I have never felt a weight so heavy,
It feels like the ground is struggling to hold me,
As if the earth's crust is about to crack open and I will disappear into the darkness.
I can't bear it.

Beast:

You bear it because you love him.
You bear it because there is no alternative.
You bear it so that when the days come when he knows he needs his dad,
that you kept the door open for him.
You bear it so he doesn't have to face the same silent agony you did.

Guardian:

Bear it.

That's it.

Just suffer from afar?!

while I fear he drifts without the structure, honesty, and challenge I know he needs.

I can't accept this.

He needs me now more than ever.

I need him now more than ever.

Beast:

Use the pain.

Use your anger,

Build something worthy.

Build something that becomes the answer to the father's absence.

This is where your energy belongs.

Guardian:

How do I build something for sons and fathers when I am no longer the Guardian of my own son?

Beast:

Because you care beyond understanding.

You are still his father, his guardian,

Not because the house stayed whole.
Not because the schedule is fair.
Not because the world honored what you gave.

Because you keep the door open.
Because you will not let your pain become his to carry.
Because you are building the thing you needed
and the thing he may one day understand.

I am sorry

The nightmare of the empty room still continues,
We watched our favorite team the Spurs play tonight, and after I asked him where he wanted to
sleep.

With me at our house, or at Drake? (what we call my in-laws house).

I have asked him this question a dozen times in the month of our separation.
And I let him choose, I refuse to force him.
His answer has been the same every time,
hesitant and quiet, as if he wanted me to know his answer without him saying the words.
Each time, the subtle ache I now carry, begins to pulse while he whispers his answer.
After his choice, the pulsing stops and the ache becomes an anchor I carry out the door.

He's 9 years old, and his new home is difficult competition.
His cousins are consistently present and willing to play, his aunts and uncles fill him with
attention, and it feeds his extroverted essence more than I ever could alone.
So I tell myself it's not because he doesn't care, or that he doesn't want to be with me, he's just a
boy who wants to play and loves the attention and options he now has.

But tonight was different.
Tonight I couldn't carry the anchor to the door, it had become too heavy.
So, we sat there on the couch in silence,
I searched for impossible words,
I reminded myself he didn't ask for this,
Choose your words carefully.

"Jack, I want you to know I understand."
And I want you to know I am sorry.
I am sorry that I could not keep us all together.
It hurts everyday.

I couldn't hold back my tears, I was never good at it.
It was as if the Beast placed his hand on my shoulder,
Giving me permission to let the ache speak.

Context interlude

The months previous to our separation needed to be spoken about that night.
It was January, I had spent a year writing and creating a website, and the next phase of walking
through every door in Chicago that could potentially help the mission of the Arena wasn't
practical.

Chicago winters are like living in the most boring dystopian film ever made.
So I looked for a way to keep the boredom at bay and make some extra money.
I found something.

I immersed myself in a video game.
It was 3 months long, that felt like one day.

In the months before the separation, I disappeared into a virtual war-strategy game I convinced myself could become work.

In some ways, it did.
I taught players, led groups, negotiated, built systems, and made money.

But inside our home, the truth was simpler:
I was a father sitting right there and somehow gone.

It did not matter that I was trying to make money.
It did not matter that my intentions were for the family.

To a child, absence does not become holy because the father gives it a noble name.

So I quit, I returned my focus to the next phase of the Arena, the groundwork.
Walking through doors and networking with others to find spaces where “origin arenas” could begin.

Within a week, I had realized my partner’s disappointment and resentment had months to grow without my attention.

The arguments about money, my attention, escalated by the day.
It was an impossible conversation, and it eventually led to the impossible.
An empty house.

And now...

This conversation with my son.

I put my hand on his foot, and let the heart speak.

“I am sorry for all those days you wanted to be with me, wanted to play with me, and I was right in front of you but gone.

I told myself I was working. I told myself I was trying to make enough money to make you and Mom proud.

But it does not matter what I called it.
I let it take me away from you.

You mean more to me than any amount of money.
I failed.
I made a mistake.
And I am sorry.”

The tears returned and as I looked at him through the blurriness, his eyes were meeting mine and no longer facing the couch.

He spoke as if he was the parent,
“I am sorry too dad, I didn’t mean to interrupt you while you were working...”

“Jack, no, stop, you did nothing wrong, and that’s what I want you to know, and what I really want you to know, is that I miss you, I miss when we would wrestle, I miss laying in your bed listening to music no 8 year old should ever listen to and talking about everything, answering all your questions and laughing about how silly some of my answers were.”

“You are and will always be the most important thing to me.

Do you remember when I told you what my most important job is as your dad?”

He hesitated, I could tell he was trying to remember and was close by his expression,

“To take care of me?”

He answered in a question.

“No, that’s what I used to do, but you are 9 now.”

“To protect me?”

Another question.

“Well , yes, of course, I will always protect you, but that’s not my most important job because protecting you is easy when you are as strong as your dad.”

He smiled.

“Oh, Oh, to teach me to be a man!”
“Exactly, and now you are 9, and I can’t believe how smart and strong you are becoming, and I am just worried that now that I am not with you, you are going to learn the wrong ways to be that will make your life much more difficult.”
“And that scares me, because I don’t want to fail you.”
A few tears filled the silence,
Then he reached inside me and pulled out the anchor hanging around my heart.
“Dad, can I sleep at our house tonight?”

I grabbed him with care and squeezed him without thinking,
“Of course you can, we can listen to stupid music and talk about whatever you want”
He smiled.

Why the Beast Hides

As we laid in bed that night, listening to music he knows he can only listen to with his dad,
He looks at me, his face begins to tremble,
And through tears he tells me about the anger he has that is scarring him.
He shakes from fear as he speaks it out loud,
“Sometimes I feel like I want to punch someone in the face, and sometimes I feel like I want to kill someone, it makes me feel bad, because I don’t want to hurt anyone”
His tears begin rolling faster down his cheeks.
The shame he feels saying it stings the air with an immediacy.

Inside I smile, because I know nothing is wrong, his shame is evidence that he knows it’s wrong, and the indoor smile is the pride of a father who knows he will never lose his son, because he still knows the door to my undivided attention does not close.
“I pull him tight to me, and whisper to him, its okay, it’s just your beast trying to protect you”

“It is not wrong to feel that way, Feeling it does not mean you will do it.
Your Beast will teach you many things that will make you smarter and stronger, and you are doing it right now. Anger is smart and will never stop teaching us about ourselves.”
His face turned into a puzzle.

When we feel angry, when the Beast starts rumbling inside for whatever reason, we learn to
listen to it, so the anger it holds for us can teach us,
If we do not understand right away why we feel the anger, it's okay too, if you are at home, use
the punching and kicking bag, roar like a lion until you get tired, the Beast will calm down and
tell us why its angry.

“When was the last time you felt like this?”

A touch of anxiety creeps in as I await his answer, please be valid,
please don't be because a kid smells like dirty socks.

“It happened twice this week, once when Ryla (his 3 year old cousin) wouldn't stop following me
and leave me alone.”

I responded with a laugh, “Jack, when you were 3 I wanted to smack you plenty of times,
toddlers are one of the most annoying things on the planet, You know why?

“Because they don't shut up?” he laughed.

I laugh with him,
“ well, toddlers are still more monkey than human sometimes, they don't understand the way to
behave yet and it our job to teach them”

“But I do, that's why I think I got so mad, because I play with her, take care of her, and teach her
stuff ALL the time!”

He declares with pride and frustration.

“And when I want to stop and do something else , she wont let me”

I can't hold back my laugh, and smile at him,

“Now imagine what it feels like for an adult who doesn't get a break, and needs to teach their
toddler how to behave everyday.”

He laughs back.

“It's okay to be mad sometimes, people and the world will make you mad.”

“I know you would never hurt Ryla, and you know you would never hurt her.
Right?”

“Never” he replied with certainty

“Our beast gets annoyed, and then angry, it's okay, and it's our job to learn about our beast so that we don't let it hurt anyone.”

“Does that make sense?”

He nodded. And began again.

“There was another time when I was playing dodgeball with my friend Theo, he's kinda small, and this other kid, a 4th grader (he's in 3rd) kept trying to hurt Theo. It made me so mad I wanted to kick his ass, so I told him he better stop, Or I would make him stop. I did it just like you said, loud and strong, and he cried and ran away.”

(I can tell a fabricated detail when I hear one, especially from my own son, but in this moment, a little embellishment about the boy crying didn't seem as important as him learning about his own beast.)

“Well I am proud of you, it means you will be a guardian for others one day, and you are already learning how.

It's because you care, you know about right and wrong, and it hurts you to see others hurt by someone, you don't tolerate bullies just like your dad.”

“ I never get to tell anybody about this feeling, I can only tell you.”

I sense his confusion and frustration.

“I am scared to tell anyone else, because when I did before, they made me feel bad.”

These damn tears, back again,

“I will never stop telling you this my boy, I will always be here, I will always listen, and I will never be angry with you about how you feel inside.”

He started to look away feeling like it was just words.

“Look at me Jack.”

I held his eyes for a moment before I spoke again.

“You know what I told you before, I will never be mad at you, as long as you are telling me the truth,”

I signal to him to help me finish our inside joke,

“I will always help you...”

He gave me the smallest smile.

“Hide the evidence.”

It was our old joke. A ridiculous little line from years of trust between us. It means the opposite of violence to us. It means: I am still safe with you.

I hold him close for a moment, and he rolls away and drifts into sleep within minutes. The air in the room and the weight inside my chest had been filtered. And his quiet patterned breathing told me the same was true for him.

This Too Shall Pass

The words co-parent used to make me cringe, and still do.

I am now months into our separation, but after the first month, And a peace summit with my partner and a friend of the family as a mediator present to hold us both accountable, we began to plan how we could make it work.

And, I see my boy at least 5 times a week now, the empty room is not empty for long anymore, and my favorite development is the phone calls I receive from my former partner informing me that he wants to talk to me about his Beast, and only me.

The bond I was terrified of losing is stronger than ever. The time he spends away from me, he lives, he learns about himself, people and the world.

And he returns to me like clock work with endless questions and declarations.

I cherish it more than anything else, the trust, his honesty, the answers he has for his own questions.

Our own Arena, with only space for two.

Interlude XIII

Two Masters

Beast:

You see now?

This is what happens
when you try to bow to two masters.

Society demands your hours,
your spine,
your son's Halloween night.

I want your pulse.
Your breath.
The bare rhythm of you
that refuses to lie.

You cannot have both.

Guardian:

You think I don't know that?

You think it doesn't tear me open
to miss him?

To feel childhood slipping through my fingers
while I clock in, clock out,
and call it being a man?

You think I don't want the wild?

To dance until my bones ring?
To howl like a fool?

But I'm tired.

Too tired to move the way you demand.
Too tired to burn without rest.

Beast:

Then rest in the Fire.

You do not need a forest.
You do not need a drum.

You need one honest breath.

That is all I have ever asked:

your heartbeat
without disguise.

Guardian:

Damn you.

You make even stillness feel like truth.

But tell me —
how am I supposed to survive like this?

Beast:

By remembering the ache is movement.

That sorrow has its own rhythm.

That love does not stop burning
just because the body is tired.

Guardian:

Holy does not pay rent.

Holy does not tuck my son in
while I am rolling silverware at midnight.

Holy does not hold my partner
when she thinks I have already disappeared
into some ghost I am trying to resurrect.

I am doing everything I can.

You know that.

Beast:

What you call everything
is often just self-abandonment
with a respectable name.

You are surviving,
not living.

Every time you say,
“I’m doing my best,”

I hear,

“I’m dying slower.”

Guardian:

Fuck you.

I want to live.

I want to breathe without guilt.
Laugh without math.

Hold my boy without feeling the world
carve me hollow.

Beast:

Then give him you.

Your scars,
not your schedule.

Your truth,
not your polished fragments.

He does not need your hours
as much as he needs your pulse.

Guardian:

That is easy to say
when you do not have to see the confusion
in his eyes when I am gone.

Beast:

Then stop lying.

Show him a man who feels.

Show him a father who bleeds honestly.

Show him what the world forgot:

broken truth
is still truth.

Guardian:

I'm afraid.

Afraid that one day
I will not be strong enough

to hold the line
between you and the world.

That I'll break
and leave him with the same emptiness
I grew up with.

Beast:

If you break,
break open.

Not apart.

He will know you did not pretend.

That is more than most boys ever get.

Guardian:

You talk like burning is sacred.

I'm tired of ashes.

Beast:

Then stop rebuilding a life
you do not want.

Let the ruins become a wild garden.

That is what the Fire is for —

not destruction,
but renewal.

Guardian:

All I feel is loss.

Beast:

Because you still think loss means gone.

Loss only means
you were touched by something real enough
to change you.

Guardian:

I hate you.

Why can't I ignore you
like everyone else seems to?

The ache of knowing how to help —
of knowing what boys and men need —
haunts me like scripture.

This Fire is not mine alone.

Why me?

Why won't you leave me alone?

Beast:

You think you are the only one?

Stop being such a fucking child.

I cannot answer all your questions.

Some questions do not have answers.

They never will.

All I know is this:

you know.

And you can never unknow it.

I am not asking you to abandon them.

I am asking you to stop abandoning yourself
and calling it sacrifice.

Enough bullshit.

Do it.

Let go.

Do what needs to be done.

Make your father proud.

Be who you have no choice but to be.

Or suffer.

It is not complicated.

Guardian:

Cursed.

Blessed.

Cursed.

Blessed.

It does not matter anymore.

You win,
you relentless bastard.

I never truly had a choice in this,
did I?

Beast:

There is always a choice.

It is just that every choice
has consequences
you do not want to face.

Chapter XI :

The Arena

Reconciliation is not taming the Beast.

It is placing your hand against its throat,

feeling the pulse,

meeting its eyes...

"I remember you.

Now, let's build something worthy."

The Arena begins long before the campus.

It begins wherever a circle can be held.

Where we can gather and shape the air between us,

Where the sacredness of play becomes opportunities for all that are present.

A park.

A fieldhouse.

A borrowed room.

A church basement.

A living room floor where a father and son tell the truth.

The campus is the dream.

The circle is the beginning.

Origin Arenas are the stones that will build the permanent campus.

Circle. Play. Witness. Truth.

Enter The Arena

Step through the gate. Stone walls rise high around you, not as a prison but as protection — a container strong enough to hold Fire. Inside, paths radiate like veins from a beating heart: the central fire. Its flame is never extinguished. It burns day and night, tended in silence, reminding every boy that the trial is not just his own. It belongs to all who stand in the circle.

Around the fire, the paths wind outward, each leading to a threshold of becoming.

A **fieldhouse** where movement and sport teach the essence of respectful competition.

A **dojo** for combat, where will and restraint teach what real power is.

A **music hall**, where rhythm turns grief into song.

An **art studio**, where color gives shape to the unspeakable.

A **workshop**, where wood and steel answer to the hands that shape them.

A **theater**, where voice and story echo into permanence.

And beyond, the fields — wide enough for games, for war-play, for breathless sprints that strip away pretense.

Guardianship is built into the very stones. Statues at the quarter-points stand watch — not idols, but reminders. Each carved in the likeness of a man who lived with Fire in his bones and wisdom in his hands. Not perfect men, but men who carried their wounds with honor. The boys pass these figures each day, a silent conversation between the living and the remembered.

The circle is not about efficiency. It is not optimized for speed. It is built for rhythm — morning circle, trial, work, rest, evening circle. Play weaves it all together, the disguised initiation. Hunger is given a place to burn, fear a place to be faced, grief a place to be named, and respect a place to grow.

And at the center, always the Fire. The reminder that no matter which path you take — art, combat, endurance, silence — all roads lead back to the circle. Back to being witnessed.

Back to the truth:

You are not alone.

You belong to something older and stronger than yourself.

The Fire keeps you, if you keep it.

The Arena is not a program.

It is not therapy.

It is not another institution trying to manage behavior.

It is a crucible.

A campus designed not for living, but for becoming.

Time in the Arena

Time in the Arena is not the same as time outside its walls. Outside, the clock rules. Bells ring, deadlines press, and every second becomes a demand: *hurry, prove, produce*. That is the tyranny of human time — not the sun, not the seasons, not the rhythm of breath and hunger, but the mechanical tick of a machine that doesn't care if you live or die, only that you keep producing.

Inside the Arena, time bends back to what is real, the moment. The circle begins when the Fire is lit, and ends when the last voice has been heard. No one watches the clock, because the circle does not belong to the clock. Trials do not last an hour or a minute. They last until they are complete. A boy may wrestle with fear for two breaths or two hours — the measure is not minutes but truth.

This is why the Arena is sacred. Because it allows what the world outside does not: patience. Space. The chance to listen long enough for the soul to answer. The ego is always rushing, whispering, *Finish. Prove. Move on.* But the soul speaks only when the noise is gone, when the false urgency of the clock has been broken.

In the Arena, time is not measured — it is lived.

The Safeguards of the Arena

The Arena is built on freedom,
but not license.

Play without respect becomes chaos.

Hunger without boundaries
becomes violence.

The Arena must hold both
the beauty
and the danger
of Fire.

That is why the safeguards are clear,
carved into the foundation.

At first,
the Elders and Guardians
model and enforce the standard.

Over time,
the boys begin to guard the circle themselves.

No weapons.

The only weapons here
are your hands,
your mind,
and your voice.

No disrespect.

Not to the Elders.
Not to the circle.
Not to each other.
Not to the Arena itself.

Every transgression is faced.

Its weight is measured.
Its truth acknowledged.
Its consequence decided.

No blind absolutes.

Each moment is considered
by trusted Guardians
with attention, courage, and care.

Its spirit is not governed by dead creeds
or rigid formulas.

Circumstance, the myriad of the moment and its uniqueness demand proper consideration.

It is a living entity,
not an institution.

It adapts
so it does not become
the very thing it was built to heal.

The Elder Speaks

The circle had been quiet for a long time.
Only the crackle of the fire and the slow breath of men filled the space.
The boys had already wrestled, shouted, bled, and laughed through the day's trials.
Now came the part that happened rarely — when the Elders spoke.

One of them rose, his voice shaped by years and smoke.

“Listen close,” he said,
“for this is not a lecture. It's a remembrance.”

He pointed toward the fire.

“Before the churches and the schools, before kings and crowns,
the first teachers spoke through flame and flesh.
They didn't write commandments; they told stories.
Myth and religion were maps, not prisons.
They weren't meant to control, but to remind.
They were the best our ancestors could do
to name what they felt in their bones —
the meeting of matter and mystery.”

The boys leaned forward.

“But men forgot.
They mistook the map for the territory.”

They worshiped the words instead of the wisdom.
They split heaven from earth, spirit from skin.
And that is the wound we are here to heal.”

“A dualism mistaken for truth”

He gestured to the walls of the Arena — murals of beasts and bodies,
ancient symbols reborn in steel and light.

“Every man who enters here must remember what the old texts once said,
before they were edited by fear.”

“The old language said body and spirit were one — flesh made alive by breath.
The broken translation taught men to escape the body.

The old language said resurrection meant transformation in the flesh.
The broken translation turned heaven into evacuation.

The old language said creation was good.
The broken translation made matter suspect.

The old language made ritual bodily — touch, song, sweat, breath.
The broken translation sterilized ritual into performance.”

The Elder let the silence return.

“When the church forgot the language of flesh,” he said,
“it began to starve the soul.
Spirit without body became sterile abstraction.
Body without spirit became brute instinct.
But when both meet...”

He looked around the circle.

“There is Fire.”

The boys watched the flames rise, and something inside them —
something ancient — stirred awake.

“That’s why we built this place,” the Elder said.

“To bring the body and spirit back into one breath.

To remember what every tribe once knew —
that the divine was never up there.”

He pointed to his chest.

“It’s here.”

The Elder let the words hang in the air.

The Fire hissed softly, a log shifting under its own weight.

“Now,” he said, looking around the circle,

“Tell me — what does that make you feel?”

The talking piece — an amethyst stone, sat at the center of the circle. One of the younger boys
reached for it.

His voice was quiet.

“It makes me feel... angry,” he said.

“Like the world told me to sit still and shut up when my body just wanted to move.”

He passed the stone to the next.

“I don’t know. Everybody keeps telling me how I’m supposed to act.

Like, what counts as being a man.

But out here, when we’re running or fighting or just breathing...

it feels real. That’s all I know.”

The stone kept moving.
Each voice added its own chord to the Fire.

“I feel scared,” one admitted.
“Because if I really let my body speak,
if I really let it roar —
I don’t know if anyone could love me after that.”

Silence again.
Then an older boy, his voice deep but uncertain:
“The best thing about this place is... I don’t know. We get to be what we are here.
And that scares me, because I don’t know if I can be this person out there yet.”

He paused, looking toward the Elder.
The Elder smiled — a slow, knowing nod.
He didn’t correct or elaborate.
He just said,
“Keep going.”

And the circle did.
One by one, the boys spoke — anger, grief, joy, fear —
all rising and falling like breath.
No one was trying to fix anything.
They were just remembering.

By the time the stone had gone all the way around,
the air in the room had changed.
Lighter.
Alive.
Like something old had finally exhaled.

The Elder leaned forward, his eyes shining in the firelight.

“Good,” he said. “Now we begin.”

The Return of the Guardian

Many tribes once knew this: the boy must be seen by men who carry thunder. Men who could roar with authority and then sit in silence with compassion. Men who embodied the Guardian — strength without cruelty, power without masks, discipline with love.

We killed kings with our fear of tyrants.
Now boys grow in kingdoms without kings. Homes without guardians. Villages without circles.
They live in chaos because no one has shown them that power can be wielded with justice.

The Arena exists to restore an earned hierarchy of responsibility
that modern life has forgotten.
Not as one man, but as a circle of elders.
Not as tyranny, but as guardianship.
The boys who enter are not merely managed by rules, but fathered by thunder and guided by love. That is what was lost. That is what returns here.

The Sacred Disguise

Play looks harmless.
A game of tag. A ball thrown back and forth.
But underneath it, the same truths roar:

- Can I endure?
- Am I faster, stronger, sharper?
- Can I face fear and stay standing?
- Can I lose and rise again?

That is initiation.
That is the arena.
That is manhood in rehearsal.

When you rip play out of a boy's life, you rip out the sacred doorway to his body, his spirit, his
fire.

Each boy arrives as he is — wounded, restless, raging, silent. The threshold is crossed when he is
first acknowledged by an elder. That moment is sacred, because it tells him: you are seen. And
here is what is expected of you. From there, his journey begins.

The day is built on rhythm.

A circle in the morning, a circle at night.

Two trials each day — some physical, some of endurance, some of courage, some of silence. In
between, free time: but not wasted time. Autonomy to explore the campus. Time to test one's
own edges, to learn how to use freedom without drowning in it, to listen to the affinities that
summon his attention.

Every trial, every circle, every laugh and every tear adds to the same lesson: manhood does not
arrive through comfort, through grades, through hacking shortcuts, through online bravado. It
is won through effort, through play, through the courage to face your own hunger and shape it
into guardianship.

Because play is not trivial. Play is the fire we forgot.
Play is initiation without cages or lions, without drugs or despair.
Play is the trial where a boy discovers that he is enough.

And this is how the world changes. Not through town hall meetings where voices shout past
each other, not through the endless noise of social media, but one boy at a time — one circle,
one trial, one roar. Individual by individual, learning to carry their own fire. To speak with the
voice in their flesh, where it cannot be forgotten.

The Morning Circle

Dawn breaks, and the boys gather on the stone floor. No stick passes. No words yet. The elders sit shoulder-to-shoulder, eyes closed, and begin to hum. A low resonance, not quite a song, not quite chant. The sound rises like smoke, weaving into a single vibration. The boys shift nervously at first, but one by one, they add their own voices. Then, the calls begin — the wolf, the raven, the lion, the fox — each boy voicing the animal he carries inside. It is chaos, yes, but sacred chaos. The morning circle is not about order. It is about waking the Fire inside.

From this circle, the day begins.

The First Trial: Tag

An elder steps forward into the restless silence of the circle. He looks slowly from face to face, reading the fear, the smirks, the restless feet. Then — quick as a lightning strike — his hand snaps out and slaps the shoulder of one boy. A gasp, a laugh, and the boy is sprinting into the field before he even realizes he has become *It*.

The circle breaks open.

The chase begins.

Feet hammer the earth, lungs sear, every muscle alive with the pulse of predator and prey. In one breath you are hunter — eyes locked, hand outstretched, body driving forward. In the next, you are hunted — twisting, ducking, fleeing, the hot breath of pursuit on your neck.

Predator. Prey.

Hunter. Hunted.

The roles flip so fast that names fall away. What remains is only the raw, unfiltered animal inside each boy.

And in the middle of it — laughter, not the soft laughter of politeness, but the laughter of release. The laughter that roars, *I am alive. I belong here. I cannot hide and I do not want to.*

Toward the end, the game narrows. A smaller boy, cornered by a taller, stronger one, is about to be caught. The circle holds its breath. But the smaller boy sees it — a gap beneath a weathered gazebo bench. He drops low, slides under with a burst of speed, and bursts out the other side grinning. The bigger boy stumbles, caught off-guard, then bursts into a laugh of his own.

For a moment, the two share something unspoken: respect.
It is not about who is stronger. It is about who is alive enough to see the opening and daring
enough to take it.

The elders nod, silent. The boys pant and grin, sprawled on the ground, sweat and dust on their
faces. None of them can say why, but they know already — it was not “just a game.” It was their
first trial, their first fire, their first taste of the circle’s power.

Affirmation and Acknowledgement

That evening, before the circle begins, the elder calls forward the boy who slipped through the
bench — Joey. The one who outwitted the larger boy, Bobby. Both stand before the fire. The elder
nods at Bobby first: “Show him your animal.” Bobby wraps Joey in the embrace only a bear could
give — firm, unshakable, but full of respect. Then the elder turns to Joey. “Today you crossed
your first threshold. Now we ask you to search for the animal inside you.” He looks at Bobby.
“What do you see?” Bobby studies Joey, then says: “I see a wolf.” The elder turns to Joey. “Is that
what you feel?” Joey shakes his head. “I feel more like a fox.” The elder smiles. “A fox it is.” The
circle erupts — calls of wolf and fox, bear and raven, echo into the night. Joey returns to his seat
with his head held higher than it had been that morning. The fire flickers, sealing the
acknowledgement: you belong here. You carry your Fire now.

Trial of Craft: The Wooden Box

In the afternoon, the boys sit at workbenches, tools laid out before them. The task is clear: carve
a box that closes, a container for what you hold sacred. No elder corrects their technique. The
elders only remind them: “Every cut carries intention. Every mistake can be shaped into
meaning.”

Shavings fall like snow. Some boxes are crude, uneven. Others precise, even beautiful. But all
are honored. Because the box is not just wood. It is proof: I made this with my hands. I can
shape matter, and in shaping matter, I begin to shape myself.

Trial of the Mind: The Classroom Circle

Evening brings a quieter trial. Not desks in rows, but chairs in a circle. A topic is posed. Sometimes it is a question of justice. Sometimes a riddle. Sometimes a line from a poem. One voice speaks at a time, and the rule is clear: argue the idea, not the man.

Today's topic was a poem about blood.

An Interlude inside the Arena:

Bloodlines

A boy does not choose
the things that haunt him.

He responds
to what his bones recognize.

Blood is memory in motion —
the old current beneath the skin.

Long before books,
before names were carved into stone,
blood carried the stories:

the victories,
the failures,
the griefs,
the wounds survived
and the wounds passed on.

Once, blood was sacred.
Not as royalty.

Not as rank.
As responsibility.

A bloodline was a covenant:

What I do with my life
becomes the soil
for the lives to come.

We forgot that.

We treated lineage as biology.

A footnote.
A medical history.

But blood remembers
what the mind tries to bury.

It carries both the Fire
and the wound.

To inherit a bloodline
is to inherit the unfinished.

Every father gives his son two gifts:

the flame
and the fracture.

Not only through blood,
but through presence.
Through absence.
Through the line he draws
or refuses to draw.

Bloodlines are not destiny.
They are direction.

They are the current we swim in
until we learn
to swim for ourselves.

This is why the Arena matters.

Because legacy does not continue
through flesh alone.

It continues through character.

If boys are not initiated,
the wound becomes the inheritance.

If fathers do not reconcile with their Beast,
the Beast becomes the inheritance.

You cannot change the source.

But you can change
the direction of the stream.

And that is the quiet miracle
of fatherhood:

that a bloodline can heal
one honest generation
at a time.

The boys wrestle here as fiercely as on the field. Ideas clash, but the circle holds.

An elder reminds them,

“One idea does not make a man. You are a chorus of voices, and wisdom grows in the tension between them.”

Trial of War

Two teams. One in white, one in gray. Each armed with handfuls of small cloth balls packed with red or blue powder. The field becomes a storm of color, boys sprinting, diving, shouting as clouds burst against skin and cloth. The rules are simple: once you're marked three times, you're out.

Joey, still new to the Arena, crouches low, clutching his last handful of red. He spots a clear shot, rises, and hurls. The ball bursts perfectly against his opponent's chest — a strike clean and undeniable. He pumps his fist in triumph. And within a moment, a blue streak slams against his chest. He's out.

Afterward, while the others laugh and brush powder from their faces, Joey sits apart, shame clouding his features. An elder joins him, lowering himself into the dust. "It's okay to feel pride," he says, voice steady, "but never let it become the reason you play. Pride can blind us — not just on the field, but in life. Play for the fire. Play for the circle. Play because you're alive. That's the only reason worth keeping."

Evening Circle- Reflection

The fire glows low, shadows flickering across young faces. The amethyst stone rests in the elder's palm. He raises it once, then lowers his voice so the circle leans in.

"The fire has spoken through trials, through play, through silence. Now it waits for you. Pass or speak — both are worthy. But let no truth be swallowed."

The stone begins its journey.

The amethyst stone passes from hand to hand. Some boys simply nod, press the stone to their chest, and pass it on. Others let their words spill.

“I witnessed a fire.”

“Today a fox made me look like a fool.”

“I still don’t know how this stuff matters. It feels like we’re trying to go back in time.... I just don’t get it, in the end I am still heading back out into that fucked up world”

The next boy turns to him.

“It’s about....”

A Guardian interrupts him.

The Guardian lifted one hand.

“We do not answer each other directly in the circle.

We speak to the Fire.

The circle holds every feeling,
no matter its color.

Let Flynn’s words breathe.

Continue, Adam —
but speak through the circle.”

Adam nodded, frustrated.

“I am learning something about myself everyday.”

He passes the stone.

The Guardian nods to Adam.

“I found my new favorite spot to lay in the grass and just listen to the silence.”

“I forgave my mother for not understanding me. I still feel guilty for all of our fights, but I know it will be different now.”

“Man, I didn’t know how dumb we sounded before.

Like, all emojis and slang and bullshit.

Today I used real words.

I felt smart for once.

Even if I didn’t know what the hell I was saying.”

“I fucking love it here.”

“Gratitude. This place is everything I needed. And I can’t wait for my younger brother to come here, ‘cause that little fucker’s like a wolverine. He needs this more than anyone I’ve ever met.”

One boy takes the stone, but instead of words, tears come. He chokes, struggles, then manages: “I miss my dad. When we were in the classroom today, I couldn’t stop thinking about him. He was a teacher. I miss him so much.” He passes the stone, eyes wet, but the circle meets him with silence that feels like thunder — respect unspoken, but undeniable.

“I see now the power of words. To use them with purpose and clarity, and how easily we get distracted by the idea rather than attempting to understand the person, we get caught up on the words.”

The stone continues around, each voice weaving into the fire until the circle feels whole.

And then the fire burns on, carrying the weight of the day into the stars.

This is how the world changes:

Not through town halls and screaming screens.

But boy by boy, fire by fire, circle by circle.

Until the forgotten wisdom of the ages is not forgotten anymore.

“The Wisdom in the Body”

- **Somatic Experiencing Therapy**

But the elders also know this: the shadow, when called out, can overwhelm. Some wounds cut deeper than the circle alone can reach. There are boys whose pain began before language, whose bodies carry memories their minds cannot name. There are wounds so vicious they cannot be carried by ritual alone. For this reason, trained therapists walk among the guardians of the Arena. Practitioners rooted in the wisdom of the nervous system, men and women trained in methods like **Somatic Experiencing** (Peter Levine’s life work), who know how to help a boy’s body recalibrate after the fire of old terror has been stirred. When the hunger rises into panic, when the fire threatens to consume instead of purify, these guides step in—not to medicate, not to pathologize, but to help the body return to safety, breath, and presence.

Guardian:

To the skeptics —

You don’t have to believe in myth.

You don’t have to believe in gods or sacred beasts or ancestral fires.

But your body believes.

And that is enough.

There is a field of study you may have missed.

It doesn’t shout. It doesn’t sell easy answers.

Somatic Experiencing — founded by Dr. Peter Levine.

Over forty years of practice, research, and testimony —
promising, still developing,
but rooted in one truth the Arena cannot ignore:
all rooted in one truth:

The body never forgets.
The body holds the story.
The body must complete the experience.

Trauma is not only the event.
It is what remains unresolved
in the nervous system.
Until it's thawed.
Witnessed.
Moved.
Voiced.
Completed.

Not through analysis alone.
Not through medication.
But through the body.
Through embodiment.
Through breath.
Through shaking.
Through sound.
Through safe containers — circles, rituals, and yes, Arenas.
Places where the charge can rise —
and not be shut down.
Where the Beast can appear —

and not be exiled.

Somatic Experiencing is not magic.

But I have seen it look like magic
when a body finally feels safe enough
to complete what terror interrupted.

I have no interest in protecting the reputation of a system that tried to medicate the grief out of
a fatherless boy.

I needed men.

I needed ritual.

I needed movement.

I needed a circle.

I needed someone brave enough to sit inside the storm with me.

What I got was a prescription.

That is not healing.

That is containment for the convenience of a culture too cowardly to face suffering.

Beast:

I told you —

You can't think your way through pain.

You have to move it.

You have to feel it.

Not explain it.

Not reframe it.

Not pathologize it.

Of course it hurts.
How else could I get through
to a creature devoted to my oblivion?

You forgot
you were fighting a war
you could not win.

Guardian:

What the ancients called trial —
science now calls regulation.
What they called spirit —
we now call nervous system integration.
The rituals weren't superstition.
They were somatic genius.

The elder who walked with you into the desert —
He was your co-regulator.
The fire —
was the stimulus.
The song —
was rhythm for the soul.
The silence —
was integration.
We've just replaced the language.
But the wisdom was already here.

This is the wound beneath so much modern mental illness:
not broken brains alone,
but broken belonging.

Not chemistry alone,
but severed ritual.
Not symptoms alone,
but souls forced to survive inside systems that cannot recognize the Fire.

Not all suffering has the same root.
Not every person needs the same path.
Some need medicine.
Some need protection.
Some need clinical care.

But many — many — need what no prescription can give:
a circle,
a body returned to itself,
grief witnessed without panic,
fear faced without shame,
elders who do not flinch,
and a place where the Beast can finally speak before it turns its teeth on the world or on itself.

Beast:

So go ahead.
Call it somatic therapy.
Call it trauma work.
Call it polyvagal theory.
Just don't forget who taught you first.

It was the Earth.
It was the circle.
It was the body.
It was Me.

Chapter XI:

Sit with Me

If you made it this far, you already know: nothing here is complicated.

Fire. Circle. Witness. Play. Truth.

Did any of that feel abstract?
Or did it feel like something your bones already knew?

So tell me — what exactly would you protest?
That boys need trials?
That men need witnesses?
That the body tells the truth?

That we are animal and human at once,
and the work is reconciliation, not erasure?

Is this complicated?

Or have we simply made life so noisy that the obvious now sounds radical?

If you think this is too harsh, ask yourself: compared to what?

A pill for every ache and a screen for every silence?

Another boy dying alone in a room because no one taught him how to carry his fire?

Another father looking at the floor because he no longer knows what authority without cruelty
looks like?

What's the alternative, really?

To keep outsourcing initiation to algorithms?

To keep pretending fear is safer than courage?

To keep raising boys in kingdoms without kings and then wondering why they burn the village?

We do not need new theories.

We need places.

Places where a boy can fail without being labeled.

Places where a man can admit his fear without being disarmed.

Places where hunger has a task, grief has a witness, power has a boundary, and laughter is not a
guilty pleasure but a vital sign.

Do you want proof beyond that? Look at your own life.

When did you change?

When someone coddled you—or when someone saw you and asked more of you than you asked
of yourself?

When did you feel most alive?

When you were safe from effort—or when sweat and breath and risk braided together and you
remembered: I can?

This is not nostalgia. This is maintenance.

Of bodies. Of bonds. Of courage.

We are not dragging the past forward; we are dragging the obvious back into the room.

If a boy has no place to practice courage, he'll practice cruelty.

If a man has no place to speak his truth, he'll perform lies.

If a community has no Fire, the cold becomes a lifestyle and everyone calls it normal.

So here is the simple thing:

Build the circle.

Light the fire.

Call the elders.

Name the trials.

Begin.

You do not need permission. You only need reverence.

Reverence for breath. Reverence for pressure. Reverence for the line between power and harm.

Reverence for the truth that the body is not your enemy; it is your instrument.

Will there be mistakes? Of course.

Will there be heat? Yes.

Good.

Fire that never bites never warms.

The point is not perfect safety.

The point is sacred risk—

risk carried by guardianship and returned to the circle for learning, not for shame.

If you are waiting for certainty, you will wait until the next funeral.

If you are waiting for consensus, you will be waiting while another boy looks for a father in a bottle.

If you are waiting for the right words,

here they are:

start.

And if you feel the pull and still refuse
And if you feel the pull and still hesitate, be honest about
that too.

Fear is welcome in the circle.

So is doubt.

But do not let doubt become a lifelong excuse to never begin. Be honest about that too.

Because that's all this ever was—a choice between performance and transformation.

Earn the respect of your Beast,

and you may learn

how to stand before Beauty

without devouring it.

I wrote this as a vow, and as an invitation. I am not asking you to agree with me. I am asking
you to remember what you already know and act like it matters.

And if you truly have objections,

I'm listening.

Bring them to the Fire.

Not to win an argument, but to keep the circle honest.

I'll be there—with my son, with my scars, with my patience and my limits—ready to be
corrected where I'm blind and to hold the line where it's needed.

If you do nothing, the ledger is clear:

more numbness, more spectacle, more men building machines to fill a hole only a circle can fill.

If you do something—anything—the Fire creates what's real and burns the rest.

So here it is, plain:

Will you keep handing boys screens and sympathy and calling it care?

Or will you help build a place where they can sweat, cry, laugh, fail, learn, and rise?

Will you keep pretending you don't know what's missing?

Or will you carry a stone, light a match, and begin again?

I won't promise you ease.

I won't promise you certainty.

I won't promise you peace.

But I can promise you this:

meaning.

And maybe, one day,

a boy who looks you in the eyes without flinching.

And a Fire that warms more than your hands.

If you've made it this far, you are already part of the circle.

Take the next step. Make it visible.

Help build it.

We've built our bodies like temples,

counted our steps, measured our sleep,

tracked our calories and our heart rates,

but we've forgotten the one thing

that keeps the temple alive:

communion.

You can't heal alone.

You can't awaken alone.

You can't remember what you are

by reading about it.

You have to meet it.

You have to sit in the circle.

So this is my challenge to you.

To every man still hiding behind productivity and pride.

To every thinker who's built a tower of ideas too tall to feel the ground.

To every artist, priest, fighter, and fool that still feels the Fire searching for dirt —

Sit with me.

That's all.

No debate.

No doctrine.

No masks.

Just a circle.

Find ten souls.

Fifteen at most.

No phones.

No scripts.

Just a heartbeat and a willingness to stay.

Because that's where the remembering begins —

in a small ring of bodies

breathing the same air,

seeing each other again for the first time.

You don't need a website.

You don't need a priest.

You don't need permission.

You only need to show up.

So I'll be waiting —

for the ones who are ready.

When you're tired of scrolling,

when you're done pretending,

when you finally want to feel what's real —

come sit in the circle.

That's where the Beast speaks.

That's where the Guardian listens.

That's where the Fire expands.

And before we part—

understand this:

I don't care what your politics are,

what you worship,

what you love,

or who you love.

I don't care what flag you wave,

what mistakes you've made,

what story you tell yourself about who you are.

You are welcome here.

Because you are human—

and that is holy enough.

You are not your ideology.

You are not your diagnosis.

You are not the mask you built to survive.

You are a living, breathing collection of contradictions,

a song that's still being written,

and I want to hear it.

I'm not claiming to be right.

I'm only speaking from the deepest place I know,

and I'm asking you to speak from yours.

That's how we rebuild the map—

not through agreement,

but through presence.

We are two sides of the same coin,

each carrying the light the other has lost.

The mystery that divides us is also what binds us.

So come as you are—

in your belief, your doubt, your pain, your beauty.

Bring it all.

The Arena is not about becoming the same.

It's about remembering that we already belong.

I'll see you by the Fire,

Gabriel

Epilogue: To the Keepers of the Flame

Before I leave these pages, I need to bow before those who carried the Fire with reverence
knowingly or unknowingly.

For without you, I would still be wandering through darkness.

Not to idols.

Not to saints.

Not to perfect men or women.

To the keepers of the Flame.

To the thinkers who gave language to the shadows.

To the philosophers who wrestled with meaning until their words became lanterns.

To the musicians who turned grief and the Language of the Beast into rhythm.

To the poets who made sorrow beautiful enough to survive.

To the comedians who told the truth sideways because straight on would have killed the room.

To the artists, dancers, mystics, rebels, fools, and wounded geniuses who carried something
alive through the centuries and left it burning for the rest of us.

You will never know how much you gave me.

Your songs kept me company.

Your books became elders.

Your laughter cut through despair.

Your beauty reminded me that the world was not only rot.

Your courage gave me permission to keep searching when I did not know what I was searching
for.

You fed the Fire long enough

for me to remember

that I must learn its ways or suffer without purpose.

And to the Forgotten:

To the nameless poets who wrote with shaking hands,
to the garage bands who never made a record,

to the dancers who turned sorrow into movement,
to the painters, singers, builders, drummers, dreamers, and fools
who kept the pulse alive in the silence of their rooms —

This book belongs to you too.

You have all fed the Fire.

You are all builders of the Arena.

Behind the Curtains

Guardian:

Well, fuck.

I'm glad that's over.

I never want to write again.

Beast:

Good.

I'm aching.

You buried me under a mountain of words, you masochist.

Put on some Tool or Danheim so I can claw my way out of this literary grave.

Guardian:

I'm... scared.

It's the strangest feeling —

to bare it all,

to pull down the pants of my soul

and let the whole world take notes.

Beast:

Enough with the visions and the daydreams.

Enough with hoping they come.

We've said our piece.

Now we move.

Now we dance and howl.

Then we build.

That's all we ever do.

Guardian:

Yeah...

I've got a vulnerability hangover.

I don't like it.

Let's move before I start overthinking again.

Did you know music came before language?

Beast:

You really are a fool.