

NO REGRETS

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Chapter One: The Weight We Carry

There comes a time when the past stops shouting and begins to whisper. It doesn't fade away; it just changes tone — less accusation, more echo. At first, I mistook that quiet for peace, but it wasn't. It was memory softening its edges, testing whether I was ready to listen without defending myself.

The older I get, the more I understand that the past never leaves us. It settles in. It becomes the low hum beneath every decision, the scent behind every word, the weight behind every silence. We carry it — not because we want to, but because the road that brought us here is the only

one that exists. The question isn't *how do I forget it?* It's *how do I learn to live beside it?*

For years, I thought I could outrun it.

I threw myself into work, relationships, projects, even good causes — all with the hidden hope that constant motion would blur the outlines of regret. If I kept busy enough, I could stay ahead of the ache.

But regret is patient. It doesn't chase; it waits. It knows you'll get tired eventually. And when you do, it's right there, sitting on the porch with the same quiet stare as before.

I used to think regret was punishment. I see now it's just unfinished business — the soul's way of asking for reconciliation. It's the unreturned call, the apology never spoken, the grace never received

because pride stood in the doorway. Regret is the echo of love we never knew how to give.

Anger was my favorite disguise.

I wore it well — it looked like strength, sounded like conviction. It made me believe I was still in control of the things I'd already lost. But anger is a terrible traveling companion. It demands energy you don't have, and when it finally collapses, it leaves you stranded in the same place you started — only more alone.

The irony is, anger often begins as pain's bodyguard. It rushes in when we feel weak, promising protection, but over time it turns on us. The armor grows heavier until we mistake it for our own skin. We stop recognizing ourselves without it. We call it "passion" or "principle" or

“standing up for what’s right,” but really, it’s just fear in a louder outfit.

Somewhere along the line, I began fighting things that were never the enemy. People who cared. Faith that asked for trust. A God I couldn’t understand but couldn’t quite forget.

I thought if I stayed tough, I’d stay safe — but toughness without tenderness only breeds distance. You can win every argument and still lose your peace.

When I turned from God, I told myself it was about logic. That I couldn’t believe in something invisible while the world was breaking visible bones all around me. But truthfully, it wasn’t disbelief that drove me away — it was shame. I didn’t want to stand in the presence of mercy while still covered in the dirt of my own

decisions. Grace has a way of making you feel seen, and when you've spent years trying to hide, being seen can feel like exposure.

So I stayed busy — the modern form of repentance. I built careers, chased validation, filled every silence with sound. When life cracked open, I patched it with productivity. But the soul can't be tricked. It doesn't measure worth by output; it measures wholeness by honesty. And honesty eventually demanded that I stop running.

The hardest part wasn't facing the people I'd hurt — it was facing the person I'd become in the process of trying not to hurt anymore. The one who used sarcasm instead of softness. The one who measured success in applause instead of peace. The one who mistook distraction for direction.

When the noise finally died down, I met him in the mirror, and he was exhausted.

Regret has a strange gift hidden inside it.
It can become a teacher if you let it.
The lessons aren't pleasant, but they're pure:
You learn that apology is stronger than pride.
That forgiveness doesn't require agreement.
That love given late still matters.

You also learn that grace rarely arrives as a thunderclap. More often, it slips in quietly — through a friend's patience, a stranger's kindness, a sunrise that feels like a do-over. And when it does, you don't hear a voice say, "You're forgiven."
You just realize one morning that the memory doesn't sting like it used to. That's grace. It doesn't erase the past; it removes its permission to keep wounding you.

There are things I've done that I would never share on a stage, not because I'm ashamed anymore, but because they're no longer the point. The point is who I became *after*.

The point is how God kept showing up when I stopped showing up for myself. The point is that I am still here — a little quieter, a lot more grateful, and finally willing to see that even the ugliest chapters were part of the same book He was writing all along.

The truth is, you never get rid of your past. You just learn to walk with it differently. Some days it follows you. Some days it walks beside you. And on the best days, it steps aside and lets you lead.

That's the weight we carry — not as punishment, but as proof. Proof that we have lived, that we have loved imperfectly, and that somehow, in all the breaking and rebuilding, something in us still believes there is more to be written.

I used to think “no regrets” meant living wild and fearless, leaving nothing unsaid or undone.

Now I see it differently.

No regrets means looking back without hatred.

It means holding the pain without needing to throw it. It means saying, *I wish I'd done better* — and still believing that what remains is enough to make something beautiful.

Maybe that's what redemption really is.

Not starting over, but starting *from here* —

the place where we finally stop rewriting our story

and begin to understand the one that's been unfolding all along.

When Anger Learns Your Name

I can still remember the sound of people laughing — not at jokes, but at me. The laughter came from the far edges of classrooms and playgrounds, always just loud enough to reach through the fog of my partial hearing. It had a rhythm to it, sharp and cutting, and though I couldn't catch every word, I knew what it meant. Children don't have to say your name to make you feel small.

When I lost half my hearing at two years old, the world became both too loud and too distant. I grew up half in silence and half in noise, learning early how to read lips, watch expressions, and anticipate trouble before it arrived. Survival

depended on attention. My eyes became my ears,
and my fists became my words.

By the time I was six, I had already learned
that cruelty was a language everyone spoke
fluently. The kids at school didn't understand
hearing loss; they only understood difference. I
was the boy who turned his head too often, who
asked "what?" too many times, who tripped over
his own feet because balance had become a
negotiation between what I heard and what I
didn't. So I learned to fight back — not because I
liked fighting, but because it stopped the laughter.

The first time I threw a punch, it wasn't
courage. It was communication. It said, *don't laugh
at me again.*

It said, *I can hurt you faster than you can hurt me.*

It said, *if I'm angry, you can't see that I'm afraid.*

Anger became my armor, and it fit better
than kindness ever did.

Kindness invited pity.

Anger demanded space.

At home, tension waited like a shadow. My
mother worked two jobs, her voice often frayed by
exhaustion. My sister lived in the aftermath of
someone else's evil, and the house carried the smell
of unspoken things — fear, shame, resentment.
Everyone in that house was fighting something
invisible, and sometimes, we fought each other
instead.

I loved my mother fiercely, but we were both
combustible. Her discipline came in waves, and I
met it with fire. I remember her yelling, “Why do
you always have to fight?” I didn't know how to

answer then, but I do now.

Because fighting was the only language I trusted.

When my stepfather was exposed for what he had done to my sister, the illusion of safety vanished. The world split into two kinds of people — those who hurt and those who refused to be hurt again. I vowed quietly that I would never be powerless, never be caught off guard, never be the one who couldn't stop it. And from that vow grew the version of me that would walk through the next three decades — armored, alert, always ready.

That kind of vow feels righteous when you make it. You mistake it for strength. But strength built on fear corrodes. It hardens into suspicion, and soon you start seeing enemies in every mirror.

In those years, I didn't understand that anger was just grief in a louder costume. I only

knew that silence made me uneasy. Silence meant thinking, and thinking meant remembering. So I kept moving. Kept winning. Kept swinging.

Every teacher who doubted me, every coach who criticized me, every person who looked down — they all became opponents in an invisible ring. I learned how to turn pain into fuel. It worked for a while. Awards came. Recognition came. But peace never did.

The truth about anger is that it always asks for more. It's a fire that doesn't want warmth; it wants wood. And eventually, the only thing left to burn is you.

I carried that fire into my teens and twenties like a badge of survival. I told myself it was drive, ambition, passion — and on the surface, it looked that way. But underneath, I was still that boy on

the playground, daring the world to laugh at me again.

When I lost my first love because I didn't know how to be gentle, I told myself she just couldn't handle my intensity. When I lost another because I couldn't stop competing with her, I said she was weak. The pattern was so clear in hindsight, but when you're still living inside your wound, you can't see its shape — only its shadows.

My mother and I eventually stopped yelling, but we never learned how to speak softly. Our love was unspoken, like a truce held together by exhaustion. I think now she saw in me the fight she wished she could still muster. And I saw in her the fatigue I was too proud to admit.

Looking back, I don't blame the boy who learned to fight. He was doing what he thought he

had to do. He wanted to protect something fragile — maybe hope, maybe heart — but he didn't know how. And no one had the words to tell him that being strong isn't the same as being safe.

There's a moment in every fighter's life when you finally see the cost of your own defense. For me, it came years later, long after the fights and the shouting, long after the adrenaline became exhaustion. I remember standing in a quiet room, looking at someone I loved — someone who looked tired of trying to love me through my walls — and realizing I had become everything I'd once feared. Not cruel, but closed. Not broken, but unreachable.

That's when the armor started to crack. Not from shame, but from the weight of carrying it for so long. Because you can't hold a sword forever; eventually, it begins to tremble in your hand.

Anger had learned my name so well that it
answered for me before I could speak.

And unlearning it would take years.

But it began in that moment — that quiet, private
surrender where I finally admitted the fight had
become the cage.

I once believed strength was the absence of
weakness. Now I know it's the courage to feel
again.

Every regret I've ever had began with a
moment where I chose to strike instead of speak, to
prove instead of listen, to win instead of
understand. And every bit of peace I have today
began when I finally stopped.

The Myth of Escape

There comes a time when you mistake movement for healing. You tell yourself that the faster you go, the further behind your past will fall. So you run — not with legs, but with decisions, distractions, and dreams so big they can drown the noise inside.

For me, that race began in my twenties. I believed achievement was redemption, that success would silence shame. College, jobs, relationships — everything became an arena. I could lose the fight, but never the momentum. As long as I kept moving, I wouldn't have to feel.

The myth of escape sounds noble. It hides behind ambition, productivity, and praise. But it's just avoidance in a better suit.

I told myself I was chasing excellence.
Truthfully, I was running from the mirror.

When I entered the first college, I didn't go to learn. I went to belong. I played soccer like my life depended on it — because it did. The field became my therapy, the whistle my absolution. Every slide tackle, every sprint, every drop of sweat was proof that I could still matter.

Fighting was still there, of course — just packaged differently. Now it came with jerseys and cheers instead of hallways and fists. People called it passion, but I knew better. I was still trying to win a battle no one else could see.

When that chapter collapsed — kicked out of school, another bridge burned — I didn't pause long enough to feel the loss. I just moved to another state, another college, another beginning.

I believed fresh starts were the cure for old wounds. But every “new me” carried the same old ghost.

It took years to realize that unhealed pain is like luggage with no handles. You can set it down, but you’ll always be dragging it behind you.

Somewhere in those years I discovered the illusion of control. If I could stay ahead of consequences, I could pretend they didn’t exist. Work hard enough, charm long enough, achieve more than anyone expected — that was the script. And the world rewarded it. People admire those who never stop. They don’t see the cost.

Behind every new venture was exhaustion. Behind every new relationship was fear.

Behind every smile was a question I couldn't ask:

When do I stop running?

I became fluent in deflection.

If anyone tried to get too close, I'd turn the conversation toward them, ask about their lives, their dreams. They called me empathetic. I was just avoiding intimacy.

There were glimpses of beauty along the way — art that drew me out of hiding, laughter that cracked through my seriousness — but I never stayed there long. Joy made me nervous. It felt too temporary. Pain, at least, was dependable.

Then came marriage. And the thing about marriage is, you can't hide inside it for long. It's a mirror with arms. You see your own reflection in someone else's disappointment, and there's nowhere left to run.

My first marriage lasted months. The second, a few years. Each ended with the same script: *I gave everything I could*. But looking back, what I gave wasn't myself — it was performance. I didn't know how to offer my heart without a helmet.

I kept thinking love would fix me, that being chosen meant being healed. But love isn't a substitute for peace; it's a reflection of it. And when you haven't made peace with yourself, every relationship turns into another escape route.

By thirty, I was tired. Not the kind of tired that sleep repairs — the kind that seeps into your bones. The kind that comes from outrunning your own shadow.

I remember one afternoon, standing in a parking lot after a loss I couldn't even name.

The sun was bright, but I felt cold. It struck me that
I had built an entire life on effort — effort to prove,
to achieve, to impress, to survive.
And all it had earned me was exhaustion.

I had chased success across schools, states,
and relationships, believing it would buy me worth.
But worth doesn't live in outcomes.
It lives in honesty — something I'd been avoiding
all along.

I see now that running from regret only
tightens its grip. The more I tried to prove I'd
moved on, the more the past whispered, *I'm still
here*. Because you can't heal what you refuse to
face. And you can't face what you never slow down
to see.

Every era of my life carried that same
rhythm — build, burn, rebuild, repeat.

I'd finish one chapter by setting it on fire and write the next with the same match.

And I called that progress.

But grace has a strange way of finding cracks. It waits at the places where your strength runs out. It doesn't chase you down — it just stays still long enough for you to circle back.

My circling began in the quiet moments I once avoided — long drives, late nights, the seconds before sleep when all your distractions dissolve. That's where the first questions formed.

What if I'm not the victim here?

What if I'm the one who needs forgiving?

They weren't accusations. They were invitations. And for the first time in decades, I didn't run from them.

I had believed the myth of escape for so long
— that pain fades if you outpace it. But the truth is,
pain doesn't fade; it waits. It waits for silence.

It waits for honesty.

It waits for you to stop treating it like an enemy
and start listening to what it's been trying to teach.

That's how freedom begins.

Not with a door opening, but with you finally
standing still long enough to realize the door was
never locked.

When Silence Finally Speaks

For most of my life, silence felt like failure.
It meant I'd run out of words, out of arguments,
out of control.

Noise—any noise—was proof I was still winning.

Then one evening, after a day that hadn't gone wrong but hadn't gone right either, I came home and found the house quiet. No television, no phone ringing, no one asking for anything. Just stillness. I stood there, waiting for the noise to come back, but it didn't. And in that hollow space, I realized how foreign peace had become.

The first sound I noticed was my own breathing—ragged, shallow, the rhythm of a man who'd forgotten how to rest. I sat down, and something inside me gave way, not dramatically but like a seam that had been stretched too long. All at once, the stillness wasn't emptiness; it was invitation.

I thought of every fight I'd started, every bridge I'd burned, every conversation I'd filled just to keep from hearing the truth echo back. The

silence said, *You can stop now.*

I didn't believe it. I had built an entire life on momentum. If I stopped, who would I be?

Ki-Aikido entered my life around that time, though at first I treated it like everything else—a project to master. I showed up for discipline, not enlightenment. I wanted control, not connection. Yet from the first bow on the mat, something shifted.

We began each class with breathing—slow, deliberate, measured. I hated it. It felt pointless to just stand there breathing when I could be learning to throw someone. But the longer I practiced, the more I realized that the breath was the throw. The stillness was the movement. Every exhale was a surrender I didn't know I needed.

“Keep one point,” the instructor said. “Relax completely.” Simple words, impossible practice.

I’d spent decades tightening my soul like a fist, and here I was being told to let go. At first I resisted. My body obeyed, but my mind kept fighting.

But week by week, something began to change. My shoulders loosened. My breath deepened. The world got quieter—not because it stopped shouting, but because I stopped answering every challenge.

For the first time, silence didn’t feel like punishment. It felt like mercy.

Outside the dojo, that new rhythm followed me. Long drives no longer needed music. I could sit by water and not reach for my phone. I began to listen—to Melody’s laughter, to the sound of wind

through palm trees, to the quiet ache that used to terrify me.

In that stillness, I started to hear the smaller, softer truths that had been drowned out for years: that forgiveness doesn't erase pain, it just removes its authority; that peace isn't the absence of noise, it's the presence of grace; that God doesn't compete for attention—He waits for it.

One night during practice, my Sensei said, “The body remembers every impact, but the heart remembers every release.” Those words landed harder than any throw. I realized I had spent my life collecting impact—fists, failures, expectations—while forgetting the sacred art of release.

So I began to practice release everywhere.
With my breath.

With my words.

With my regrets.

I stopped explaining my past to people who hadn't lived it. I stopped defending choices I'd already made peace with. And slowly, I began to forgive the boy who had fought his way through childhood just to feel safe.

Silence became my teacher.

It told me that redemption rarely arrives with applause. It comes quietly, one surrendered breath at a time.

I would sit some evenings with my eyes closed and imagine laying each memory down—every argument, every mistake, every failed attempt at love—placing them gently on the mat before me. Not erasing them. Not excusing them.

Just letting them rest. And in that space of rest,
they finally stopped fighting back.

People often think enlightenment is an
explosion of light, but mine came as a dim lamp in
a dark room. Enough to see by, never enough to
boast about. It showed me the outlines of grace—
how it threads through every year I thought was
wasted, how it connects all the moments I tried to
forget.

That's the thing about silence: it doesn't fix
you. It reveals you. It shows you the difference
between peace and avoidance, between quiet and
absence. And once you've tasted that kind of
stillness, you can never go back to the noise
without noticing how loud it really is.

These days, when regret knocks, I don't fight
it. I open the door, let it sit beside me, and listen

until it has nothing left to say. Usually it just sighs
and leaves.

I once believed the road to peace was
upward—a climb toward perfection. Now I see it's
downward, into humility, into forgiveness, into
rest.

Silence taught me that God doesn't shout
over your chaos; He waits inside it.
And when you finally stop running, you hear
Him—not as thunder, but as breath.

That's when silence truly speaks.