

Research-backed scripts for women
tired of swallowing what they mean

Say it Anyway

for when silence is no longer an option

She Surpasses

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[Tap here to listen: Hold Your Ground Audio](#)



How To Use This Book:

- Choose the section that matches the last conversation that still bothers you.
- Use the scripts as written or adapt them into your own words.
- And if a phrase resonates with you, save it somewhere you can find it quickly when you need it.



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Introduction

There is a sentence you have been carrying.

Maybe you know exactly what it is. Maybe it is less a sentence and more a feeling, the particular weight of something that went unsaid, again, in a conversation that has moved on. Either way, you know the one. You have been editing it, softening it, or burying it for longer than you would like to admit.

This book is for the moment before you say it. The moment when you started to say something and stopped. The moment when you said "never mind" but meant the opposite. The moment when you calculated the cost of speaking and decided, without quite deciding, that silence was safer.

That calculation is exhausting. The women who appear to explode from nowhere have usually been running that calculation for years. The anger that seems disproportionate is almost never disproportionate to the actual accumulation. It is only disproportionate to the last thing, the thing that finally made the calculation not worth running anymore.

This book is for before that breaking point.

The patterns in these pages are not imagined. They draw on research in conversation analysis, social psychology, attachment theory, and gendered socialization, alongside the lived experiences of women who have spent years doing what you do. When this book names something as a pattern, it is because the same dynamics have been observed, documented, and described often enough that there is terminology for them.

Each section addresses a specific moment. The moment when he said calm down. The moment when your idea came back to you through someone else's mouth. The moment when silence finally cost you too much to keep paying. For each moment, you'll find suggested words here.

This book helps you say the first sentence. What this book cannot do is hold the conversation in place after you say it: when he deflects, when he tells you you're overreacting or imagining things, when he turns the whole thing around and makes what you said about you instead of what he did. *Say It Anyway* gives you the first sentence. *Hold Your Ground* keeps it from being taken away from you. This is the first sentence. The one that makes you say it anyway.

– Renée

PART I

WHEN YOUR VOICE
IS BEING MINIMIZED





I'm Not Going to Pretend I didn't Hear That

group

work

public

What's Happening

He said something. In a meeting, at a gathering, across a bar, in a group chat. Something that landed exactly as it was intended to land, which was badly. And the room moved on, or laughed, or went quiet in that particular way that means everyone heard it and nobody is going to say so. And you are now doing the calculation: whether it is worth it. What it will cost you to say it. Whether you will be believed. Whether you will become the story instead of him.

That calculation is exhausting and it is also, unfortunately, rational. Research in workplace bias and communication shows the same pattern repeatedly: when women name harassment or discriminatory remarks, they are more likely to be seen as oversensitive, humorless, or difficult, and less likely to have their complaint taken seriously. The person who caused the problem gets to watch someone else manage the fallout of it. That is not a coincidence. It is how the dynamic sustains itself.

You are not required to let it go. You are not required to make it comfortable for everyone else in the room. And you are not required to decide in the next five seconds. You can come back to it. You can name it later, in private, directly to him. You can name it now. What you do not have to do is absorb it silently and carry it home.

What to Say

"I want to go back to what you said earlier. I didn't like it and I want you to know that."

If He Says It Was Just a Joke

"I know you meant it that way. It didn't land that way for me."

One Thing to Remember

The room moving on is not the same as it not happening. You know what you heard.



No Is A Complete Sentence

dating

family

work

What's Happening

You said no. He asked why. You gave a reason. He argued with the reason. You gave another one, more carefully worded. He argued with that too. And now you are twenty minutes deep into defending a position you were never obligated to justify, and somewhere in that back and forth, the no has started to feel conditional. Like something that might still be overturned if he finds the right angle.

It is worth reflecting on what just happened. You did not change your mind. You did not discover that you were wrong. You got worn down. Those are different things, and they produce the same outcome, which is why the technique works.

Women are socialized to justify refusals in ways men are not asked to. It begins early. Girls who say no are frequently pressed for reasons. The no is treated as the opening move

in a negotiation rather than a complete answer. By adulthood, many women have so thoroughly internalized this that they pre-load their refusals with explanations, anticipating the challenge, trying to present a case strong enough to hold. Research on consent and communication shows the same pattern: women report feeling pressure to manage other people's disappointment and are more likely to feel they owe a reason for saying no. The problem is that if the other person is committed to overturning the no, no reason you give will ever be strong enough. You will just be asked to produce another one, repeatedly.

You are not required to win an argument in order for your no to stand. The no stands because you said it.

What to Say

"I already said no. I'm not going to keep explaining it."

If He Says He Just Wants to Understand

"I know. The answer is still no."

One Thing to Remember

The moment a no requires a reason good enough to satisfy him, it has stopped being a no and started being a

negotiation. Those are different things and only one of them belongs to you.



I Wasn't Finished

group

family

work

What's Happening

You were saying something. He started talking. The conversation moved on. And you let it, because stopping everything to say "I wasn't done" feels like making a scene over something small. Except it keeps happening. And each time you let it go, something small accumulates into something larger: the steady, low-grade experience of your voice being treated as interruptible.

The data on this is worth knowing. Studies on conversation dynamics and workplace communication consistently find that women are interrupted more often than men, and that men interrupt women more frequently than they interrupt other men. It happens in meetings, in informal conversations, and in relationships. It is not always deliberate. But intention does not change the effect.

What makes it hard to address is the gap between how it registers for each person. For him, it probably felt like

natural conversational energy, like engaging because he was interested. For you, it felt like being talked over. Both of those things happened simultaneously. Your experience of it is not an overreaction. It is a description of what actually occurred.

What to Say

"I wasn't finished. Can I finish?"

If He Seems Surprised It Bothered You

"I know it felt like a natural moment to jump in. I'm just letting you know I wasn't done. I'd like to finish what I was saying."

One Thing to Remember

The discomfort of saying "I wasn't finished" lasts about ten seconds. The resentment of never finishing your sentences lasts considerably longer.



That Was My Idea

work

What's Happening

You said it. In the meeting, in the conversation, in the group. It landed softly or not at all. Some time later he said it, reworded slightly, and it was received completely differently. The room engaged. He was credited. You sat with the particular flatness of watching something you produced get attributed to someone else, and you said nothing, because what do you say that doesn't make you sound petty or difficult or like you are making something out of nothing.

You are not making something out of nothing. This is one of the most consistently documented phenomena in research on women in professional and group settings. Women's contributions are attributed to others at higher rates. Women who speak up are evaluated more negatively for the same idea delivered by men. Women who do credit themselves are frequently perceived as aggressive or self promoting in ways that men are not. The system makes

staying quiet costly and speaking up costly. That is not a personal failing. It is a structural problem you are navigating in real time.

Crediting yourself is not arrogance. It requires practice if you have spent years being trained out of it. But it is accurate, and accuracy matters.

What to Say

"I want to come back to what I raised earlier about that."
Then say it again. The whole thing. With your name on it.

If He Seems Unaware That He Did It

"I just want to flag that I mentioned that earlier. I'm glad it's getting traction now."

One Thing to Remember

You are not being difficult by naming what is yours. You are being accurate. Those two things have been conflated for long enough.



I Wasn't Asking For A Solution

dating

family

What's Happening

You were telling him about something difficult. Not difficult in a way that needed solving. Difficult in a way that needed someone to listen. You wanted him to be in it with you for a moment, to acknowledge the weight of it, to not move so quickly toward fixing it that he skipped the part where you just needed to be heard. Instead, within about ninety seconds, he had identified the problem and outlined what to do about it. He looked satisfied. You felt lonelier after being honest than you did before speaking; he had solved the problem without noticing what you actually needed.

This is not a character flaw and it is not indifference. Research on gender and communication shows consistently that men are more likely to respond to expressed distress with problem-solving, because problem-solving is how many men process their own difficult emotions. Feeling helpless in the face of someone else's pain is uncomfortable. Offering a solution resolves

that helplessness. The intention is care. The effect, for the person who needed to be heard rather than fixed, is abandonment.

The frustrating part is that it is so well-intentioned that being upset about it feels unreasonable. He was trying to help. You know that. And you also walked away from the conversation feeling more alone than before you started it. Both of those things can be true at the same time.

What to Say

"I don't need you to fix this. I need you to listen. Can you just do that for a bit?"

If He Keeps Offering Solutions

"I hear you. I'm not there yet. I just need you to hear me out before we explore solutions."

One Thing to Remember

Being heard is not a lesser version of being helped. For most women, in most moments, it is the whole thing. The solution can come later, or not at all. The sharing cannot be skipped.



I Didn't Ask For Your Opinion On This

family

work

dating

What's Happening

You shared something. A decision you had already made, a plan you were already executing, a direction you had already chosen. And before you finished the sentence he had a view on it. An unsolicited assessment of whether it was the right call, whether you had thought it through, whether there was a better way. You did not ask. That did not seem relevant to him.

This is worth naming because it happens so consistently, and because the women it happens to frequently absorb it as feedback rather than recognising it for what it is: an assumption that your thinking is available for review. That the decisions you make about your own life are open for comment. That your judgement, on its own, is probably not quite sufficient.

It is not always delivered unkindly. That is part of what makes it hard to push back on. But unsolicited evaluation of

your choices is not care. It is a quiet assertion that he knows better. And you are not required to receive it as though it were something you asked for.

What to Say

"I wasn't asking for your thoughts on whether it's a good idea. I was just telling you."

If He Seems Surprised You're Not Grateful

"I know you meant well. I've already made this decision. I just wanted to share it."

One Thing to Remember

There is a difference between a man who offers support and a man who offers a verdict. You did not call for a verdict.



"Calm Down" Is Not A Direction I Can Follow

dating

family

What's Happening

You were upset. Legitimately. Something happened and you were in the middle of saying so when he said it. Calm down. And now you are not just upset about the original thing. You are upset about that too. Which he will use as evidence that you need to calm down.

Notice what just happened. The conversation moved. What you were actually talking about, the thing that mattered, the reason you were upset in the first place, is now gone. In its place is a conversation about your emotional state. Your tone has become the subject. His behavior, whatever started this, has been quietly removed from the table.

This is not always intentional. Sometimes it comes from genuine discomfort with conflict, a learned reflex to reduce the temperature rather than engage with the source of heat. But the effect is the same whether it is deliberate or not. You are now defending how you are saying the thing

instead of being heard on what you are saying. And at some point in that process, most women either escalate because the frustration of being redirected compounds the original frustration, or they go quiet because staying in it costs too much. Either way, the original issue gets buried. He gets to feel like he de-escalated something. You are left holding whatever you came in with.

Psychologists call this content shifting. It appears frequently in relationships where one partner has a low tolerance for expressed distress. It is a way of managing the discomfort of being confronted rather than actually engaging with the confrontation. The solution being offered is not to your problem. It is to his.

What to Say

"I need you to stop saying that. It doesn't help and it makes this harder. What I need is for you to hear what I was saying."

If He Says He Was Just Trying to Help

"I know. I'm telling you it doesn't help. Those are two different things and both of them can be true."

One Thing to Remember

A woman asking to be heard and a woman being out of control are not the same thing. He knows the difference. Choosing not to use that knowledge in the moment is itself a choice.

PART II

WHEN YOUR REALITY
IS BEING DISTORTED





The Anxiety I Feel Around Him Is Not Chemistry

dating

What's Happening

He keeps you slightly off-balance. You never entirely know where you stand. He is warm and then withdrawn. He initiates and then goes quiet. When he comes back, the relief is intense, and you have been calling that intensity connection. You have been telling yourself this is what it feels like to really feel something.

Here is what the neuroscience of this actually shows. Anxious activation, the state produced by inconsistent responsiveness, shares a neurological signature with excitement. The elevated heart rate, the hypervigilance, the preoccupation: these are stress responses. Your nervous system is on alert because the environment is unpredictable, not because the relationship is electric. The two feel nearly identical from the inside, particularly if anxious attachment developed early for you. The relief when he comes back is real. But relief is the resolution of anxiety, not the presence of love.

Consistency is not boring. A relationship that feels calm and secure is not a relationship that lacks passion. It is a relationship in which you are not constantly braced for the next withdrawal. That steadiness is not a lesser version of connection. It is what connection actually feels like when it is not contaminated by fear.

What to Say

To yourself, honestly: when I am with him, do I feel calm and present, or am I always monitoring, always waiting to see which version of him arrives today?

If You're Trying to Work Out Whether to Stay

"Am I drawn to him, or am I drawn to the relief I feel when he is good to me?"

One Thing to Remember

The relationship that makes you feel safe is not boring. You have been taught to mistake calm for absence. They are not the same thing.



That Feeling I Keep Dismissing Is Information

dating

family

What's Happening

Something happened and you noticed it. A comment that landed wrong. A moment where something felt off. A pattern you have clocked twice now, maybe three times. And each time it surfaces you do the same thing: you name it internally, then you build a case against it. He was tired. You were in a bad mood. You are probably reading into it. You are doing to your own perception what you would never let someone do to your work: dismissing it before it has been properly examined.

Intuition is not a mystical faculty. It is pattern recognition running below the threshold of conscious thought. Your brain is processing information about this person continuously, drawing on everything you have observed, comparing it against everything you know about how people behave, and sometimes it reaches a conclusion before you have the conscious evidence to support it. Neuroscience and decision-making research both describe

this: the nervous system registers a pattern and generates a sense of alarm or unease before the rational mind can explain why. That conclusion is not nothing. It is your nervous system having done work you have not caught up with yet. The research on this is consistent. People who override gut-level discomfort in the early stages of relationships often report, in retrospect, that the signal was clear and that they had good reasons not to trust it at the time. The reasons felt logical. The signal was accurate.

What to Say

Nothing yet, necessarily. Start by simply not talking yourself out of what you noticed. Let it be there. See if it is still there in a week.

If You're Trying to Work Out Whether It's Worth Raising

Ask yourself: if a friend told me she had noticed this in her relationship, what would I say to her?

One Thing to Remember

The feeling you keep dismissing has not gone anywhere. It is sitting there, intact, waiting for you to take it seriously. The question is whether you do that now, or later, when the

cost is higher.



What I Did With My Life Was Not A Mistake

family

What's Happening

He has a version of what your life should look like. He has probably had it for a long time. And when your actual life diverges from that version, the divergence gets treated as an error. Not always loudly. Sometimes it is just a look, a silence that runs a beat too long, a question with a particular inflection. The message is clear enough: you went the wrong way somewhere.

The choices that get second-guessed most often are the ones that broke from expectation. The career that wasn't "practical." The relationship that didn't follow the expected sequence. The path that made sense to you and to no one else in the room. Research on gender norms and women's careers shows how strong those expectations can be: women who take non-traditional paths, delay or refuse motherhood, or prioritize work that matters to them are more likely to be judged as selfish, irresponsible, or unrealistic, even when their choices are consistent with

their own values and capacities. What is rarely examined is the expectation itself: where it came from, whose life it was designed for, and whether it was ever actually yours to follow.

Your life does not require his retrospective approval. It did not require his approval when you were living it either. That is harder to hold when the person is someone whose opinion has mattered to you for a long time. But it is still true.

What to Say

"I know you see it differently. I don't need you to agree with it. I need you to stop trying to steer my course."

If He Says He's Just Worried About You

"I hear that. And I need you to trust that I know my own life."

One Thing to Remember

A life that makes sense to you does not have to make sense to him. That was always the deal, even when it did not feel that way.



You've Been Telling Me Who I Am For A Long Time

family

What's Happening

He has a version of you. He built it years ago from things you said, things you tolerated, ways you reacted when you were still becoming. And he has been carrying that version forward ever since. You changed. His version did not.

Being known by someone is not the same thing as being trapped inside their outdated idea of you. One is intimacy. The other is familiarity mistaken for truth.

The difference is whether someone updates what they see when you show them something new, or whether they force every new version of you back into an old narrative they already decided on.

Psychology calls this the "looking glass self." Over time, the way important people see us can become so internalized that their perception starts to feel objective, even when it is years out of date.

That is why it can feel disorienting when someone insists you are who you used to be. Especially when they say it with certainty. Especially when they say it with love.

But affection does not make an outdated perception accurate. You are allowed to outgrow who someone decided you were. You are allowed to correct a version of yourself that survived long after you changed. His memory of you is not the same thing as knowing you now.

What to Say

"I know you think you know me well. I'm asking you to look at who I actually am now, not who I was."

If He Says He's Just Telling It Like It Is

"You're telling it like it *was*. That's different."

One Thing to Remember

The people who have known you longest are not always the ones who know you best. Sometimes length of acquaintance is just accumulated assumption.



Your Approval Is Not Something I'm Looking For

work

family

What's Happening

You notice it in yourself: a particular alertness when his response comes. A slight adjustment of how you present something, depending on whether he tends to think it is a good idea. A quiet satisfaction when he approves, and a low-grade deflation when he doesn't, that takes longer than it should to shake off. You have been trying to earn something from this person for a long time. You may not have named it that way. But that is what it has been.

This is not a character flaw. It is what happens when someone's opinion of you got wired in early as something that mattered. Fathers, brothers, certain colleagues: some men get positioned, often without any formal appointment, as arbiters of whether we are doing well enough. The scaffolding is often built before we are old enough to decide whether we want it there. Research on attachment, approval-seeking, and contingent self-worth describes a similar pattern: when love, safety, or praise felt tied to

performance or compliance, it is common to grow up believing your value depends on meeting other people's standards. In that structure, his approval feels like proof; his disapproval feels like evidence. But you are old enough now. And the question worth sitting with is not how to finally get the approval that has been withheld, but whether you want to keep giving that much weight to his verdict on your life.

What to Say

Nothing to him, necessarily. But the internal shift matters: notice when you are orienting your choices around how he will receive them. Then ask whether that is actually how you want to make decisions.

If You Do Decide to Name It to Him

"I've spent a long time looking for something from you that I've realized I don't need. I'm telling you that because it changes how I'm going to be in this relationship going forward."

One Thing to Remember

The approval you have been waiting for was never going to fix the thing it felt like it would fix. That is hard to accept and also, eventually, a relief.

PART III

WHEN STAYING
QUIET COSTS YOU





We All See You

public

What's Happening

You did not choose this. You were in a public space, doing nothing except existing in it, when he decided your presence was available to him. Too close. Deliberate about it. Reading your discomfort and continuing anyway, which means he knows exactly what he is doing.

Public harassment by strangers depends on isolation. On you feeling alone, unsure whether anyone has noticed, unsure whether anyone would help if they had. It depends on the people around you deciding that not intervening is safer, and on you staying quiet until he finishes or leaves, then carrying whatever just happened entirely on your own. Studies on street harassment and bystander behavior describe the same thing: when responsibility is spread across a crowd, people are less likely to intervene, even when they can see what is happening.

What breaks that logic is visibility. Not confrontation, not

escalation, but the removal of the one thing he is counting on: the belief that there will be no record. Your phone changes the dynamic. It means there is evidence. It means he is no longer operating in the quiet he assumed he had. Men who are confident enough to harass a woman who appears to be alone often become significantly less so when they realize they are being recorded. The camera does not guarantee his behavior changes. But it removes his anonymity, and anonymity is often what he is most counting on.

What to Say

Turn your camera on. Say your location out loud into it. If you choose to speak to him at all, keep it short: "I'm filming this." You do not need to explain or justify it. The camera is already doing the work.

If He Says You Have No Right to Film Him

"We are in a public space." Then stop talking. If he tries to take your phone, move away and keep filming. If he becomes physically threatening, your safety comes first. Get distance, get to other people, get out.

One Thing to Remember

You are not escalating by filming. You are documenting something that already exists. There is a difference between making something happen and making something visible. You are doing the second one. He is the one who started this.



I'm Documenting This

work

What's Happening

You have decided not to let it go. Not this time. Maybe because it was too clear to dismiss. Maybe because you are tired of dismissing things. Maybe because something in you knows that if you do not write it down today, it will blur and soften at the edges the way these things always do, and in six months it will almost not have happened. You know that process. You have been through it before.

Documentation is not dramatic. It is not an accusation. It is a record. Date, time, what was said, who was present, how you responded, how he responded. Written down within 24 hours while the details are still precise, and send it to yourself by email so there is a timestamp. Legal and workplace guidance on harassment says the same thing: contemporaneous notes carry more weight than memories reconstructed later, and they make it much harder for other people to minimize, deny, or reframe what occurred.

What documentation does is transfer the weight of it out of your memory, where it gets second-guessed and minimized, and into something that holds its shape. It does not commit you to any particular course of action. It does not mean you have decided to report anything. It means that if you ever need to make a case, you have one, and the choice of what to do with it stays yours.

Most women who have successfully reported harassment say some version of the same thing: they wish they had started documenting sooner. Not because every record leads somewhere. But because having one means you are not standing on nothing when the moment comes that you need to stand on something.

What to Say

Don't tell him you are documenting. This is for you.

If You're Deciding Whether to Report

You do not have to decide today. Document first. The record gives you options. Reporting is one of them. Not reporting is also one of them. Having written evidence means the choice stays yours rather than becoming a question of your word against his memory of events.

One Thing to Remember

Writing it down does not make it real. It was already real.

Writing it down means you have something to stand on if you ever need to.



I Don't Owe You A Smile

work

What's Happening

He told you to smile. Or he said you'd be prettier if you smiled. Or he said cheer up in a tone that made it clear your current expression was somehow inconvenient for him. And somewhere in that moment you felt the familiar jolt of being pulled into a role you did not agree to. You are suddenly very aware that you are being watched and there is a small, unwanted tension in your body: the sense of having been put on a stage you did not choose, in front of a man you do not care about, being asked to perform something you do not feel.

The instruction to smile is not about your happiness. It is about your availability. A smiling woman signals that she is open, approachable, and willing to engage. A woman with a neutral expression signals that she has somewhere to be and people to attend to that are not him. The demand is for you to communicate, with your face, that you are accessible. It is a demand for a particular kind of

performance, delivered to you in public, by someone who has not earned the right to ask anything of you at all. Feminist writing on street harassment and objectification notes the same pattern: women are treated as if their bodies and expressions exist for public consumption, and non-compliance is framed as rudeness rather than autonomy.

What makes it hard to name is that it is usually delivered lightly, as though it is a gift rather than an imposition. As though he is doing you a favor by cueing you into how you should be presenting yourself. The lightness is the point. It makes a refusal seem humorless. It makes a boundary seem disproportionate. It is designed to extract compliance without appearing to demand it.

Your face is not a public amenity. Your warmth is not a service. And a man who feels entitled to dictate your expression in a space you both happen to occupy is telling you something specific about how he sees you.

What to Say

Nothing is a complete response. You can hold his gaze for a moment and continue on your way. If you want to say something: "I'm fine, thanks." Then keep moving.

If He Pushes Further

"I'm not interested in this conversation."

One Thing to Remember

You do not owe your warmth to strangers. Not even a little.
Not even to keep the peace.

Closing

You made it to the end. That means some part of you is ready for these conversations, or at least ready to consider them.

Here is what the research actually shows: the conversation does not have to go well for it to work. The point is not a clean resolution or a moment where he suddenly understands. The point is that you said it. You finished the sentence. You brought what you were carrying into the room instead of taking it home again.

Some of these conversations will land easily. He will hear you, and something will shift. Some will be harder. He will be defensive, or make your tone the subject instead of your point. You have language for that now. Some, if you are honest with yourself, you already know how they will go. That knowledge belongs to you too.

The women who read this book are not women who do not know how to speak. They are women who have spent a long time being very careful about when and whether to do it. That carefulness is not weakness. It is a learned response to a world that has not always made it safe to say what you mean.

You are allowed to put some of that carefulness down. Not all of it. You will still read the room. You will still choose your moments. That skill is not something to lose.

But the sentence you have been carrying? The one waiting for the right time, the right tone, the right version of him? The right time is not a feeling. It is a decision.

The decision to speak is the first problem. What he does next is the second one.

What's Next?

You said it. And sometimes that's enough.

But sometimes it isn't. Sometimes saying it is exactly where the harder problem starts.

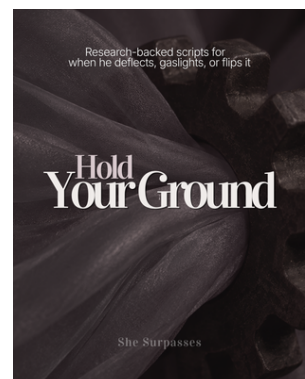
He tells you you're overreacting. He says that's not what happened. He turns the whole conversation around until you're defending how you said it instead of what you actually said.

That moment, right there, is what [Hold Your Ground](#) is for. It takes 22 specific things he says or does when he wants the conversation to end, and gives you the exact words to stay in it. So when he deflects, you don't soften. When he gaslights you, you name it. When he tries to make this about you, you hold.

You already did the hard part. You spoke.

The words for everything after are waiting for you.

[→ Access Hold Your Ground](#)



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