

# **THE YES THAT ISN'T YOURS**

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*How You Lost Your Voice  
and How to Take It Back*

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*The Yes That Isn't Yours*

*How You Lost Your Voice — and How to Take It Back*

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First edition.

*For anyone who has ever said yes  
when they meant no.*

## **A TABLE IN BEIRUT**

There is a table in Beirut. My father sits at one end. I sit at the other. He is not asking what I want to do with my life. He is telling me. Law school. The family name. A path with weight to it.

I am seventeen. I know, in my body, that this is wrong for me. The knowing is physical — a tightening, a quiet recoil before the thought has even formed.

And I say nothing. Not from weakness. From love. In that house, love had a price, and the price was agreement.

That moment — that swallowed no — is where your script was written too. Maybe not at a table in Lebanon. Maybe in a car, or a classroom, or the moment a parent's warmth cooled and you rapidly recalculated. The setting changes. The equation is always the same.

Compliance earns love. Resistance risks it. You learned it early. You ran it well. And somewhere between then and now, the strategy outlived the threat — but it never got the message.



## **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT FRAMEWORK**

This book is built on one insight: what you call people-pleasing is not a personality trait. It is a script. Written early. Running automatically. Mistaken, for decades, for who you are.

The Invisible Script Framework names the script, shows you where it runs, and gives you a single question that interrupts it — live, in real time, before the yes is spoken.

Each chapter follows the same structure: the real problem named, the script exposed, a direct application, and questions that make your version of this visible.

*Do the questions at the end of each chapter. Write the answers. The prose is what gets you ready. The questions are the work.*

PART I

# THE FORMATION

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*How the Script Was Written*

## **The First Yes That Wasn't Yours**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

There is a specific sensation in the body before surrender. It lasts less than a second. A tightening in the chest. A held breath. The clearest no you have ever felt — and then the yes comes out instead.

Not because you are weak. Because you are intelligent. You had already read the room and run the calculation before the question was finished.

Your script is not a character flaw. It is a survival strategy, built with precision by the nervous system, for that emotional environment.

The problem is not the strategy. The problem is that it never updated.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

When love is conditional, the child's body learns fast. Warmth follows agreement. Cold follows resistance. So the child stops resisting — not in words, in posture. In the way they dim themselves slightly before entering a room. In the way they check the parent's face before saying anything real.

This is where the script gets written. Not in a single moment. In thousands of small ones, each one reinforcing the same equation: your unfiltered self is a liability. The managed version is safer.

By the time you are an adult, the Invisible Script is so integrated it does not feel like a strategy. It feels like personality. It feels like who you are.

It is not who you are. It is what you learned.

### **THE SHIFT**

The first yes that wasn't yours was not your fault. It was the most intelligent response available in that moment, to that person, in that dynamic.

Understanding this does not mean continuing the script. It means you can interrupt it without shame or guilt. Because what was written can also be read. And what is read can no longer run invisibly.

### **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where your life becomes visible. Write the answers — not in your head. On paper.*

- 1.** Name the person whose approval you are still calculating for — even now, even after years. If more than one, name the earliest.
- 2.** What was the first thing you learned to hide, dim, or manage in their presence?
- 3.** What happened — or what did you believe would happen — if you didn't?
- 4.** How old were you when the dimming became automatic?
- 5.** Write one sentence describing the version of you that existed before the managing began.

## **The Unasked Review**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

Nobody hands you the criteria. You absorb them. In the shift of a parent's expression. In the warmth that arrives after the right answer and cools after the wrong one. By the time you are old enough to question it, you are already performing against a scorecard you never agreed to.

In families organized around honour or expectation, the performance review is not a failure of love. It is love, expressed through the only framework the parent had.

The parent believes: if I make you excellent, I make you safe. The child receives: I am only safe when I am excellent.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

Here is what happens when the original reviewer is no longer in the room. The need doesn't disappear. It relocates.

The reviewer moves inside you. It speaks in your own voice. It is with you in the morning when you make a decision. It scores every choice against criteria that stopped being relevant years ago.

Most people experience this as self-doubt — as the nagging sense of not quite enough. They think it is their own assessment. It is not. It is the script, running without the original author.

### **THE SHIFT**

The performance review was not designed to harm you. It was the only available expression of care.

What you can do now, which was not possible then, is name it. Externalize it. Recognize the voice as borrowed, the criteria as inherited, the script as one you never wrote.

Naming it does not silence it immediately. But it changes the relationship — from this is the truth about me to this is a script I was given.

### **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where it becomes real. The voice is loudest when you refuse to look at it.*

- 1.** Whose voice is actually inside the voice you think is yours? Name them.
- 2.** What criteria does that voice use to score you?
- 3.** When did you last hear it? Write down the exact thought.
- 4.** Is that criteria still relevant to the life you are actually living now?
- 5.** If that voice stopped scoring, what would you notice first?

## **Selflessness vs. Self-Erasure**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

Watch a people-pleaser walk into a room. They smile before they see whether there is anything to smile at. They adjust their posture, their volume, their opinion — before a word has been exchanged. The monitoring begins before the door closes behind them.

This is not sensitivity. It is a threat-detection script, refined over years, running continuously. The cost: the same attention that reads everyone else so precisely has almost no inward direction.

Ask a people-pleaser what they want. Watch the scan begin. They are reading you — when you asked them to read themselves.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

Selflessness comes from fullness. You choose to give, and the giving costs nothing essential. Self-erasure comes from fear. You disappear yourself to prevent disapproval. Same actions on the outside. Completely different experience on the inside.

The residue is different too. Genuine giving leaves you more yourself. Self-erasure leaves you less — each time slightly diminished, each time slightly less certain of what you actually think or want.

The paradox is precise: the very strategy designed to secure connection makes genuine connection impossible.

Because genuine connection requires showing up as you actually are — with real wants, real limits, real responses. The script does not allow that. It offers only the managed version.

## **THE SHIFT**

You did not choose to disappear. You were trained to.

The child who learned to become invisible did so in response to a real environment. The adult running that same response, in contexts that no longer require it, is paying a price that was never in the agreement.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*Don't skip this one. This is where the false version of generosity becomes visible.*

- 1.** Name three things you have given recently. For each: was it from fullness, or from fear?
- 2.** Where in your body do you feel the difference?
- 3.** Who do you consistently disappear yourself around? Name them.
- 4.** What would it cost you to show up as yourself around that person?
- 5.** What are you more afraid of — their reaction, or discovering the relationship was never what you thought it was?

PART II

# THE MECHANISM

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*How the Script Runs You*

## The Sequence

### THE REAL PROBLEM

Someone makes a request. In the moment it lands, something happens before you think. Your chest adjusts slightly. Your breathing shallows. Your mouth begins to form the yes before your mind has weighed anything.

Most people say: I just agreed. Or: I didn't even think about it. Both are true, and both describe the problem precisely. Something ran. Before thinking arrived.

### THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT

The script is an automated sequence. It was installed before you had language for it. It runs at a speed that precedes conscious thought.

Here is the sequence. Request arrives. The nervous system runs a threat assessment: is this person's potential disapproval dangerous? What is the cost of resistance? This takes under a second. The answer comes back: yes, is safer. The yes is spoken.

The conscious mind arrives afterward. It constructs a story about why you wanted to help.

This is the fawn response — the body's compliance mode. When fighting or leaving is not safe, the body appeases. Warm, cooperative, agreeable. Intelligent in a child who could not leave. In an adult who is no longer in that situation, it is a script running on a threat that no longer exists.

Many people-pleasers do not wait for the request. They sense the shape of one — a shift in posture, a slight tension in the room — and begin

complying before the question forms. This looks like thoughtfulness. It is the nervous system eliminating a threat before it arrives.

## **THE SHIFT**

The sequence has been running invisibly. It cannot run with the same authority once you can watch it.

You do not need to stop it yet. You need to see it. The seeing changes everything that follows.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where the body becomes the evidence. Slow down. Reconstruct the moment.*

- 1.** Describe the last yes you gave that wasn't really yours. What happened in the seconds before you said it?
- 2.** What did your body do? Be specific — chest, breath, jaw, gut.
- 3.** Who was the request from?
- 4.** What did you believe would happen if you didn't comply?
- 5.** Looking at it now: was that outcome likely, or was the script protecting you from a threat that is no longer present?

## **The Body Does Not Lie**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

A horse cannot be fooled. When I work with horses, I am required to be congruent — what I project on the outside must match what I carry on the inside. The moment it doesn't, the horse stops responding. It moves away. It signals uncertainty. It reads the truth, not the performance.

People-pleasers do the opposite of what the horse requires: project calm while carrying resistance. Perform yes while the body signals no. They do it so consistently they stop noticing the gap.

The body does not lie. It may be wrong about the nature of a threat. It does not lie about the existence of one.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

The body's verdict arrives before the mind's. This is not mysticism — it is how the nervous system is wired. The gut tightens. The chest closes. The jaw sets. All of this happens in the half-second before you have formed a conscious thought about the request.

Common signals: chest constriction before a yes you don't mean. Shallow breathing as you agree. Jaw tension, sometimes so chronic it has become invisible. A sinking in the gut that gets called anxiety — but is the body registering that what you are about to say is not true.

There is also pre-event exhaustion: tiredness that arrives before something, not after. If you feel depleted before an obligation, the body already knows the cost. It is trying to tell you.

### **THE SHIFT**

Before any significant response: one breath. Check the body. Not to analyse — to register. Is there contraction or ease? Closing or opening?

You do not have to act on what you find yet. You only have to start hearing it. The channel has been there all along. It was the listening that closed.

### **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where the body leads. You cannot think your way into this answer.*

- 1.** List the last three times you agreed to something and then felt exhausted immediately after.
- 2.** Which body signal do you trust least? (Chest, breath, jaw, gut, shoulders.)
- 3.** What has that signal been trying to tell you?
- 4.** When did you last override a clear body signal in favor of social ease?
- 5.** For the next 24 hours: name one moment where you will check the body before answering.

## **The Cost**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

It is Sunday evening. You have not done anything particularly demanding. But you are exhausted in a way that sleep does not reach. It is not physical. It is the tiredness of someone who has been on-duty all week — reading rooms, adjusting, anticipating, managing — and has not once been fully off.

Nobody checks on the people-pleaser. They appear fine. They are the person others come to when they are not fine. Nobody sees the cost. Often, the people-pleaser does not either — because seeing it would require examining what creates it.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

Every suppressed no creates a small debt. The compliance provides immediate relief — the tension is dissolved. But beneath the relief, something accumulates.

Resentment. Not the dramatic kind. The quiet kind — a low, persistent sense that something was taken, or given at a cost that was not acknowledged. The people-pleaser rarely names it. Naming it would require acknowledging that the giving was not free.

This resentment does not stay quiet. It shows up in the flatness of the yes over time — more effortful, less warm, more visibly costly. In a gradual withdrawal from the relationships that demand the most. In the body, where accumulated unexpressed truth lives as tension.

The deepest cost is identity. After years of managing others first, you lose reliable access to your own preferences. Ask a people-pleaser what they genuinely like — not what they perform liking. Watch the silence.

## **THE SHIFT**

My own collapse — the point where maintaining everything became impossible — was the body's final refusal to be overridden. It looked like failure. It was the most accurate signal my body had ever sent.

The collapse is not the end. It is the moment the signal becomes loud enough to hear. It is where the work becomes unavoidable, and where the most important change becomes possible.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where the cost becomes clear. Do not soften what you find.*

1. What are you resentful about that you have never said out loud?
2. Who is the resentment toward?
3. What was given — or taken — that went unacknowledged?
4. Write the sentence you have never said. You do not have to send it. Just write it.
5. What do you actually like — not what you perform liking? Write five things. If you can't, that is the data.

PART III

# THE RECOGNITION

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*Seeing the Script for the First Time*

## The Gap

### THE REAL PROBLEM

You may already know you have this script. You can describe it with sophistication. You know where it came from. You understand the dynamic. And you still — in certain moments, with certain people — say yes before you have finished deciding.

The understanding is real. The script is still running. Because the script runs faster than understanding.

The only move that changes it: catching it while it runs. Not in retrospect. In the moment — in the space between the trigger arriving and the yes being spoken.

### THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT

Between stimulus and response, there is a gap. In someone with a deeply conditioned script, this gap has narrowed to almost nothing. The request lands and the yes follows as a single event. No visible space. No apparent choice.

Pattern awareness widens this gap. Not by thinking faster. Not by rehearsing better responses. By noticing, in the moment, that the sequence has begun.

That act of noticing is enough to interrupt the automation. You cannot be fully inside a script and simultaneously watching it run. The observation changes what is observed.

The script does not run at the same speed with everyone. With certain people — those who carry the quality of the original conditional approval

— the gap closes completely. These are the relationships to watch most carefully.

## **THE SHIFT**

Each time you catch the script — even without acting differently — the gap widens slightly. More space. More time. More room for a choice to form.

The gap does not widen through effort. It widens through repetition of one act: noticing. Once per day. In one interaction. That is enough.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where you begin to catch it. You are looking for the mechanism, not the moral.*

- 1.** Describe the last time you noticed the script running while it was running. What happened?
- 2.** Who do you lose the gap with most completely? The person whose approval closes it fastest.
- 3.** What is similar between that person and the original figure your script was built around?
- 4.** For the next 24 hours, your only task is to notice. Not to act differently. What did you see?

## **The Effort Trap**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

You decided this time you would say no. You prepared. You felt the conviction of it in your chest. And then the moment arrived — the look, the silence, the tone — and the yes came out anyway. Not because you forgot. Because something older and faster than your intention got there first.

This is not weakness. This is how the nervous system is built.

Willpower operates from the prefrontal cortex. The script runs from the limbic system — older, faster, linked to the foundational structures of attachment and safety. In direct conflict, the script wins. Every time. The harder you try to overpower it, the more you activate the anxiety that drives it.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

Willpower suppresses. Awareness interrupts. These are not the same thing.

Suppression fights the script at the point of output — forcing a different response while leaving everything underneath intact. The script is still running. You are fighting it at the last possible second. Someone always loses.

Interruption does not fight. It steps into the sequence at the moment of activation and introduces the one thing the script cannot process automatically: your attention. The script relies on invisibility. Your awareness removes it.

The effort trap works like this: the harder you try to resist compliance, the more anxious you become. Anxiety reads as threat. Threat activates compliance. You have just fed the exact thing you were trying to stop.

Awareness exits this trap. Not by fighting — by watching.

## **THE SHIFT**

The shift is from fighter to observer. From combat to awareness.

This feels less heroic. It is more effective. You cannot white-knuckle a script out of your nervous system. But you can watch it until it loses its claim to invisibility. And once it is visible, it is interruptible.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where the effort trap becomes visible. Stop trying harder. Start looking closer.*

- 1.** Name a time you tried to force a different response. What happened?
- 2.** How did you feel the next day?
- 3.** What does it feel like to try to “be better” at saying no? Name the body sensation.
- 4.** If you stopped trying to override the script and only observed it — for one day — what are you afraid would happen?
- 5.** What do you lose by staying in the fight? What would you gain by stepping out of it?

## The One Question

### THE REAL PROBLEM

Every people-pleasing yes answers an unasked question: what do I need to do to keep this person's approval? That question runs automatically, below awareness, every time a request arrives.

What nobody taught you — not the culture, not the family — was the prior question. The only one that matters.

### THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT

The Invisible Script Framework is built on one question. Nine words. No preparation required. It can be asked in any interaction, in any relationship, in the half-second before you respond.

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***Is this yes mine, or is it the script?***

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Ask this question before you respond. Not the constructed answer — the body's immediate one. The one that arrives before the mind has built its story.

Sometimes the answer is: this is mine. I genuinely want to give this. That yes is clean. Give it without reservation.

Sometimes the answer is: this is the script. This is fear wearing the costume of generosity. You may still say the yes — the social cost may be too high today. But you will know the truth of the moment. And knowing the truth, even without acting on it, is a different position entirely.

## **THE SHIFT**

You do not need to answer the question differently every time. You need to ask it honestly every time.

One honest question, in the moment the script runs, introduces a pause. In the pause, a different choice becomes possible.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is the practice. The question is the tool. Use it live.*

- 1.** Ask the question about the most recent yes you gave. What was the honest answer?
- 2.** Ask the question about the next yes you are about to give. What is the honest answer?
- 3.** In which relationship is the answer most consistently “script”?
- 4.** In which relationship is the answer most consistently “mine”?
- 5.** What changes in your life if you ask this question once per day for thirty days?

PART IV

# THE RECLAMATION

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*Writing a New Script*

## **Sovereignty, Not Rebellion**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

When people first see the script clearly, the first impulse is often overcorrection. A new performance in the opposite direction — assertive, boundary-heavy, compensating for compliance with aggression.

This is not sovereignty. It is rebellion. Rebellion is still defined by what it opposes. You are still organized around the script — just running against it.

Sovereignty is quieter. It does not announce itself. It is the state of a person who has found their own signal and trusts it enough to act from it, without proving anything to anyone.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

A paraglider reads body weight, not intention.

When you stiffen through fear while trying to appear composed, the wing receives that tension directly. It doesn't receive your composure. It receives your grip.

You cannot perform ease through the harness. The harness transmits everything.

What you carry — not what you project — is what the wing responds to.

It reads the truth, not the presentation. People sense the same gap.

When your yes does not match your internal state — when compliance and resentment are running simultaneously — trust erodes. Not from the honesty of a no. From the incongruence of a yes that was never fully meant.

Sovereignty protects relationships. A clear no, from alignment, damages a relationship less than a yes carrying years of suppressed resentment. The yes that comes from fear erodes trust slowly, invisibly, until the warmth that was there is simply gone.

## **THE SHIFT**

Sovereignty is a practice, not a destination. The daily question: what is actually true for me right now? Not what is expected. Not what would be easiest. What is true.

From truth, everything else — genuine care, real generosity, honest presence — becomes possible in a way it never was when the script was running it.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where freedom is already present. You do not have to earn it. You have to stop performing around it.*

1. What are you projecting that does not match what you are carrying?
2. Who in your life feels the gap, even if they have never named it?
3. What would it mean to stop performing composure and let the wing respond to what is actually true?
4. Where in your life are you rebelling against the script instead of being free of it? (Aggression dressed as boundaries.)
5. What does sovereignty look like for you, specifically — not a principle, a scene.

## **The Honest No**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

Rehearsed no's fail. They are still operating from the same anxiety as the script — just trying to produce a different output while leaving everything beneath it unchanged.

The honest no is not a performance. It is the natural result of alignment — of having checked inward, found the truth, and trusted it enough to let it come out.

The work is not in the delivery. It is in the finding.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

The three-breath practice. When a request arrives that may be activating the script, do not respond immediately. Take three breaths, slightly slower than usual. In those breaths, ask the question. Check the body.

Is there contraction or ease? Closing or opening?

If the body says yes and it is genuinely yours, give it fully. If the body says no, respond from that truth. Simply. Without over-explanation. That doesn't work for me. I need more time. Not right now.

You do not owe an explanation. An explanation, in this context, is often a request for permission — asking the other person to validate your response before you commit to it. The honest no does not need permission. It needs only alignment.

The 24-hour practice: each day, find one moment when you feel the script beginning, and insert the question before responding.

The yes may still come out. The question will have been asked. Asking — consistently, daily — creates a new groove. A new habit of consulting yourself first.

## **THE SHIFT**

Over time, the practice becomes less effortful. The pause becomes natural. The body becomes a trusted source.

And the honest no — which felt, at the beginning, like a dangerous act — becomes something quieter. Just a statement of what is true. Just your actual response, without the script.

## **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where the shift begins. You will not feel ready. Do it anyway.*

- 1.** What request, asked of you most often, is the right place to start practicing the pause?
- 2.** Which of these sentences are you most willing to say: “That doesn’t work for me.” / “I need more time.” / “Not right now.” / “No.”
- 3.** What over-explanation do you habitually use to soften a no? Write it down. Then strike it through.
- 4.** Who in your life needs the shortest version of your no?
- 5.** For the next 24 hours: where will you insert the three breaths?

## *Chapter 12*

# **The Reclaimed Life**

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

The self-help version of this story promises everything improves for everyone immediately. That is not what happens.

What actually happens is more precise, more interesting, and ultimately more worth having.

### **THE INVISIBLE SCRIPT**

The quality of energy changes first. The ambient exhaustion of continuous social monitoring begins to ease. There is more space. More capacity for things you actually chose.

Then the quality of connection changes. Some relationships do not survive the shift — they were organized around your compliance. When the compliance changes, they lose their structure. This is not failure. It is the practice working — revealing which connections were genuine and which were transactional.

The relationships that survive deepen. For the first time, the other person is meeting you as you actually are. A real person. Who can be genuinely met. Which is what both people have been longing for.

And then this: your yes, when it is real, means something. It carries weight. It is a gift rather than a payment. The people who receive it know the difference, even if they cannot name it.

### **THE SHIFT**

The reclaimed life is not perfect. The script still activates. What has changed is that it no longer completes without your awareness.

You see it running. You hear it. From that position — observer rather than automatic participant — a different response becomes possible.

Not perfection. Just awareness. Consistent, practiced, daily. The gap, widened by repetition until it is large enough to choose in.

### **WRITE THIS DOWN**

*This is where it matters most. These are the questions only you can answer — and only if you answer honestly.*

- 1.** Name a relationship that is organized around your compliance. What do you predict happens when the compliance ends?
- 2.** Name a relationship that would survive — and deepen — if you showed up as yourself.
- 3.** What are you most afraid of losing if the script stops running?
- 4.** What are you most afraid of discovering is possible if the script stops running?
- 5.** Write one sentence describing the life you would choose — if you were choosing.

# THE YES THAT IS YOURS

A different table. A different country.

I chose this table — the house, the city, the people around it. I chose what to say and when to leave. Small choices. Ordinary ones. But for a long time, they were not mine.

The difference between a chosen ordinary life and a performed one is the difference between a life that is yours and one that merely resembles it.

The script does not disappear. It no longer runs without your awareness.

You came to this book carrying a yes that wasn't yours. A script you were beginning to name.

You have been running borrowed instructions for a long time. The voice that said yes when you meant no was never yours — it was a translation. A learned approximation of who you had to be to stay safe.

***Give it back.***



## THE PRACTICE, DISTILLED

Three questions, in sequence, in the moment the script activates. Not in retrospect. Live — in the half-second before you respond.

Before any significant response, pause. One breath. Ask:

*Is this yes mine, or is it the script?*

Notice the body before the mind builds its story. The body knows first.

Check the body: chest tightening? Shallow breathing? Jaw set? Gut sinking? These are the no signal.

If the body says no, respond from that truth. Simply. Without over-explanation.

*I don't want to. This doesn't work for me. I need more time.*

Knowing the honest answer, you have a real choice — say it, or choose not to, while knowing what you are choosing. Either way, you are no longer on autopilot.

One honest question, asked in the moment the script runs, is enough to interrupt it. Not because one question fixes everything. Because it opens the gap. And in the gap, a different choice becomes possible.

One interaction per day. One question. That is the entire practice.



***You were never the script.***

***You were always the one who could stop running it.***

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Karame writes about the patterns that run a life underneath awareness — and the small, practiced interruptions that change them.

Born in Lebanon. Formed by it. Left, and discovered that geography does not change the script. Work with horses taught him what the body transmits. Paragliding taught him what happens when projection and truth diverge. A collapse taught him what the body does when it refuses to be overridden any longer.

He is the author of *How to Lose a Life You Love* — the book that preceded this one — and writes on patterns, sovereignty, and the work of becoming the author of your own decisions.



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