

18+

RESEARCH ON INNER AUTHORSHIP

BETWEEN YOU and YOU

A vertical beam of warm, golden light illuminates two silhouetted figures standing side-by-side in a dark space. The figures are positioned in the lower half of the frame, with their shadows cast onto the floor. The light beam is centered, creating a strong contrast with the surrounding darkness.

*Who is really making the decisions
in your life?*

S O F I L I A

Sofi Lia

**Between you and you. Who Really
Makes the Decisions in Your Life?
Research on inner authorship**

«Издательские решения»

Lia S.

Between you and you. Who Really Makes the Decisions in Your Life?
Research on inner authorship / S. Lia — «Издательские решения»,

A calm day ends and you snap at someone you love. Fatigue mistaken for a personality flaw. Guilt with no real cause, confused with true responsibility. This book exposes the space between stimulus and reaction, where decisions actually get made. It dismantles the self development trap: gurus, affirmations, reality shifting, and how the industry can quietly cause burnout instead of healing. Not another 30 day fix. A guide to stop reacting on autopilot and start authoring your life.

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Between you and you Who Really Makes the Decisions in Your Life? Research on inner authorship

Sofi Lia

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INTRODUCTION.

Two Voices in One Room

Half past five in the morning. The alarm hasn't gone off yet, but the eyes are already open. And before the body manages to move, the first phrase of the day sounds in the head: «Alright, get up, you're going to oversleep everything again.» The voice sounds demanding, almost like a stranger's tone — but this is no stranger. This is you.

And a fraction of a second after this phrase, something happens that a person usually doesn't notice, because it happens too fast: somewhere near this demanding voice a second one appears — quieter, calmer. It doesn't argue with the first and doesn't cancel it out. It simply registers: «There I go again, telling myself this. The same thing every morning.» This second voice doesn't decide anything and isn't in a hurry to go anywhere. It simply is present.

This is the moment where this book begins — not with a ready-made answer, but with an observation that can be repeated in one's own life on any day of the week: inside one person, at least two processes sound simultaneously. One is reactive, automatic, often anxious: it judges, rushes, blames, defends. The second is observing: it isn't necessarily calm, but it has distance. It sees the first process from the side.

Between these two points — between the «you» who reacts and the «you» who notices the reaction — there exists a space. Small, often unnoticeable, almost immeasurable in seconds. But it is precisely in this space, not in the reaction itself and not in the observation itself, that what can be called choice is located. The title of this book is not a metaphor, nor a pretty phrase for a cover. It is a literal description of the place where the decisions of your life are made: between you and you.

This Is Not Another Book About Mindfulness

You've probably already tried. Meditation apps with a soothing narrator's voice. «Life here and now» marathons. Morning gratitude practices, breathing techniques, talk about how you just need to «be in the moment» — and if you're already tired of these words, it's not because something is wrong with you or you didn't try hard enough. It's because almost everything sold today under the word «mindfulness» promises a state — calm, ease, enlightened equanimity — and a state, by its very nature, doesn't hold: it arrives during a meditation session and leaves with it, leaving behind the same fatigue and the same feeling that you failed again to be mindful enough.

This book is not about that. It is not about achieving a special state and holding onto it at any cost. It is about what happened in the very first second of this introduction, when a second, quieter voice appeared next to the demanding morning one — and you simply noticed it. That is real acceptance, and it doesn't begin where it's usually sought: not in a meditation pose, not in special breathing, not in twenty specially set-aside minutes of the day. It begins in that tiny, almost imperceptible gap between what is happening to you and what you think about what is happening — in the space between you and you, which this book will go on to discuss using the most varied material: fatigue, guilt, money, relationships, the search for mentors, attempts to escape from yourself under the guise of spiritual growth. Further in this book you will meet the stories of people very unlike you outwardly — in age, profession, life circumstances — and you will almost certainly recognize something of your own in some of them.

And here is what actually happens when this space begins to expand — something hard to call anything but a miracle, though it has nothing to do with mysticism. The storm doesn't disappear — it may return again and again, because human life by its nature is never without storms. What disappears is the war you waged against yourself inside that storm — the need to prove, justify, feel ashamed, measure up, save yourself. And with the end of that war comes back what it had been taking for years: strength, clarity, the ability to choose rather than merely react. This is not the effect

of a technique. It is what happens to a person when they finally stop being their own enemy — and that, not another way to become «more mindful,» is what this entire book is about.

Something Easy to Verify on Yourself Right Now

Ask a random person on the street: «Who makes the decisions in your life?» — and almost everyone will answer without hesitation: «I do, of course.» The answer sounds obvious. But ask them to clarify — who exactly is this «I» at the moment when a decision is made by a tired, frightened, or hurt person — and the certainty quickly disappears. Because in practice, decisions aren't made by some single, stable «I,» but by whoever happens to be at the wheel in that particular second: the hungry version, the sleep-deprived version, the version that just heard criticism directed at them.

This is not a philosophical subtlety. It is an everyday, mundane reality that's easy to verify on yourself. A decision to quit, written in a message at eleven at night after a hard conversation with a boss, rarely matches the decision made by the same person a week later, in a calm state, with a clear head. Words of love spoken in a moment of tenderness, and words of reproach spoken in a moment of fatigue that same evening, are formally uttered by one and the same person — but in these two moments it's as if not one authority but different ones are steering them.

It's important to separate one thing from another right away: the mistake is not that in the evening a desire arises at all to say something sharp or to give everything up — behind such a desire there is almost always something real and worth attention, not the invention of a tired mind. The mistake would lie elsewhere — if that desire turned into action at that very moment, bypassing the pause, bypassing that very space where the evening reaction could meet a broader, rested view. Not suppressing the evening version and not blindly trusting it, but a conversation between the evening and morning versions of the same person — that is what this book will call «choice.»

Usually one of two false conclusions is drawn from this observation. The first: «That means I'm inconsistent, I can't be trusted.» The second: «That means the real me is only the version I like, and the rest are malfunctions.» Both conclusions close the very door where real freedom is located. This book offers a third path: not to search for the «real» version among the many states, but to learn to notice the space between a state and an action — that very «between you and you» — and gradually widen it.

Where This Journey Will Lead

You probably feel you already know yourself well — your habits, your weak points, the scenarios that repeat year after year. And perhaps that's partly true. But there is a part of you that isn't easy to see in a passing glance in the mirror each morning — the part that has for years hidden behind fatigue, behind the attempt to measure up to everyone, behind the voice inside that's too easy to mistake for truth simply because it sounds louder than the rest. This book was not written to tell you something new about the world around you. It was written in the hope that somewhere on these pages you will suddenly recognize what was always nearby — the real thing in you that is capable of remaining itself even in the middle of a storm, that deserves rest without justification, that can learn to be a support without a mentor, without anyone else's approval, without an endless search.

Along the way there will be the body, money, friendship, the search for mentors, the beloved dream of starting life from a blank page, and attempts to run from yourself under the guise of spiritual growth — not as a checklist of topics, but as recognizable scenes in which you will most likely recognize yourself more than once. This is the method of this book: not memorizing someone else's conclusions, but an honest meeting with your own experience, which you may have avoided for years. Answers here are not handed out in advance — they grow gradually, page by page, together with this recognition.

You won't simply read this book — you will gradually stop being a hostage to your own reactions and start becoming the author of what happens to you next. The inner war that has drained your strength for years will begin to quiet down not because life suddenly becomes simpler, but because

you will learn to be present with yourself at any point in it — without passing judgment on yourself, without fleeing, without needing to one day become someone else in order to finally earn the right to live.

A Small Example Before We Begin

A thirty-four-year-old man, at one in the morning, after a particularly exhausting day, adds to his online shopping cart a motorcycle he has long dreamed of but which objectively doesn't fit his current budget — and almost completes the purchase on credit, stopping only because the site froze for a second. In the morning, looking at the cart over a cup of coffee, he doesn't recognize yesterday's self: «What got into me yesterday.» The shame in that phrase sounds as familiar as in any similar story — as if the nighttime version was a shameful mistake to be forgotten as quickly as possible.

But the same structure is at work here too. At night, the decision was made by a person so worn out by the day that buying a thing that brings an instant sense of freedom seemed not like a whim but almost a necessity — and there was a real kernel in that desire: fatigue from routine, a longing for something that belongs to him alone. In the morning, the decision was reviewed simply by a more rested part of the same person, one with enough resource to weigh the desire against the budget and circumstances. Neither of these two versions was an impostor. There was one thoughtless rush — and one pause that happened just in time.

Before You Turn This Page

A few words about the language this book speaks — not for the sake of rigor, but for the sake of honesty with you. This book is not a systematic review of psychological research, nor a collection of references to other people's experiments. Its material is careful observation of recurring human stories, accumulated over years of practical psychological work. Where the text does contain a specific historical fact — and there are few such places in the book — it has been checked and is accurate. But for the most part its conclusions rest not on a citation but on what you can verify yourself: stopping to observe yourself over the course of one ordinary day. The words «energy,» «vibration,» «multidimensionality,» and «game» will appear here not as claims about how the universe is structured, but as the most precise available way to name what you already feel inside without any words at all — fatigue, a lift, the sense that more than one version of yourself lives in you at once. This book does not promise you mysticism. It promises you sobriety — that rare kind of sobriety today which actually heals, when everything else only promises to.

You will also notice that after many sections the book stops and leaves a separate question under the word «Pause.» This is not a rhetorical device or an attention check — it is the one place in the book where it deliberately falls silent and waits instead of answering for you. You don't need to write down an answer or dwell on it at length — it's enough to let your gaze rest on the question for a second and let it sound before reading on. One question will resonate right away; another will stay with you for a few days and return on its own, once it becomes not a line on paper but a question about what is happening in your life right now.

And one last thing. The question posed in the book's title — who really makes the decisions in your life — will not get a short, ready-made answer right here. Not because there is no answer, but because it doesn't work as someone else's formula that you can simply receive and memorize. It only works as something you gradually live through yourself, page by page, recognizing yourself in other people's stories — and once you have lived through this whole journey, you won't simply receive an answer. You will feel it as something that was in you all along — it was simply waiting to finally be noticed.

CHAPTER 1. You're Not Broken. You've Just Been Trying to Measure Up for a Long Time

A twenty-nine-year-old woman working in marketing, every evening as she goes to bed, mentally compiles a list of everything she did wrong that day. The list is long: answered a colleague too sharply, didn't make it to the gym, ate the wrong thing for dinner, spent an hour scrolling her phone instead of reading the book she's «long overdue» to start. In the morning the list disappears — not because the issues are resolved, but because a new day begins, and a new list. She calls this «working on herself.» In reality this is not work on herself but work against herself — and the difference between these two formulations determines everything that follows in this chapter.

Compliance Without a Verdict

There is a great difference between the phrase «this is happening to me» and the phrase «I am this.» The first formulation leaves room for observation: what is happening is temporary, it occurs to a person rather than constituting their essence. The second formulation slams that room shut: a moment turns into a personality, a state into a verdict. Snapping at your child in the evening is a fact about one particular evening. Deciding afterward that you are a bad parent is no longer a fact but a verdict, handed down on the basis of one episode and extended to the entire personality.

The behavior that follows differs far more than the words themselves. A person who acknowledges the fact of the outburst can, a minute later, apologize to the child, work out what drove them to that flare-up — lack of sleep, accumulated irritation, a specific trigger — and think about what to do differently tomorrow. A person who passes the verdict «I am a bad parent» on themselves is no longer defending the relationship with the child but the verdict itself: either they exhaust themselves proving the opposite, or they resign themselves and start behaving as though the verdict were fair. Neither helps the child, nor does it help them.

***Pause.** Notice one action today dictated not by choice but by fear of someone else's judgment.*

The Invisible Condition

Freedom is not an abstract state somewhere in the future, after everything finally falls into place. It begins with a very small, almost imperceptible pause that is available right now. Not with some special enlightened state, and not with a promise to never make a mistake again, but with a simple, almost boring fact: right now I am thinking this; right now my body is tense; right now I am afraid; right now I want to give up on everything. The pause itself doesn't solve the problem. It does something else — it restores the problem to its real size, instead of the catastrophic size it takes on in the dark, without an observer.

This can be verified with a simple everyday example. A man receives a message from his partner: «We need to talk.» Five words — and inside, an entire scenario is already unfolding: breakup, accusation, catastrophe. The body reacts before the mind manages to step in: the stomach tightens, the pulse quickens. If there is no pause at this moment, the person either lashes out in defensive aggression before the conversation even happens, or spends the whole day in anxiety, rehearsing justifications for an accusation that doesn't exist. If there is a pause — even ten seconds — a chance appears to notice: «I'm catastrophizing right now based on five words.» The five words remain five words. Their real content will become clear in the conversation, not in panic invented in advance.

***Pause.** Where do I call my own personality a state?*

The Moment of Automatism

One of the most persistent myths about growing up goes like this: an adult is supposed to know the answers. In practice the opposite happens: the ability to remain an adult at exactly the point where there is no answer is one of the precise markers of maturity. Uncertainty does not mean an absence of authorship over one's own life. Sometimes it is precisely the willingness not to close a question with the first convenient version — because the convenient version calms things down fastest — that allows one to see more than one possible course of events.

Here it's easy to confuse two different states: calm uncertainty and anxious haste that passes itself off as decisiveness. A person who panics and grabs the first explanation at hand — «he doesn't love me anymore,» «I'm professionally unfit,» «something is simply wrong with me» — is not displaying willpower but fleeing the discomfort of not knowing. And far more often than we'd like to admit, it is precisely such a hasty explanation that we believe most strongly — to the point of conviction that leaves no room for doubt. Real stability looks far less impressive: it looks like a person who says to themselves «I don't know yet» and doesn't fall apart because of it.

Pause. What decision am I making out of exhaustion while telling myself it's a conviction?

What Happens in the Body When Movement Is Born of Shame

In this book the idea of growth is not abolished in any chapter — only the source from which that growth springs changes, and the source matters far more than it seems at first glance. If movement toward a goal is born of shame — of a deep-seated sense that one's current self is not enough and needs to be replaced as soon as possible — then even achieved success brings no relief. The body remembers not the result but the original threat that made it necessary to run. So a person gets the promotion, the recognition, the ideal figure — and shortly afterward feels lacking again, because the lack was never about external circumstances but about an inner relationship to oneself that has stayed the same.

If the same movement is born of acceptance — «I'm curious what will come of this, and I want to try» — the goal stops being an exam for the right to exist and becomes what it actually is: creation. The difference isn't visible from the outside: both people may be doing formally the same thing — running in the mornings, learning a language, building a business. The difference is felt from within, in the body, in whether relief comes after reaching the goal or the next bar immediately appears.

Pause. What in me is asking not to be fixed, but to be paid attention to?

What This Looks Like on an Ordinary Day

It's easier to check your own inner contract with yourself not through grand declarations but through everyday trifles, because it's precisely in the trifles that there is the least self-censorship. How do you talk to yourself right after a mistake — out loud or to yourself? What happens inside when you allow yourself to rest: calm, or guilt? How do you react to someone else's displeasure — do you check the facts, or do you immediately believe you're guilty? What goals do you set when you know for certain that no one will find out or evaluate the result?

Going through this same set of questions, a woman in her thirties noticed something simple: she never praises herself out loud, but ceaselessly criticizes herself even alone at home. «Idiot, how could you do that,» she says to herself after spilling coffee, in exactly the tone her mother used when she was a child. This observation doesn't instantly change anything by itself. But it removes some of the guilt: it becomes visible that the tone of the criticism isn't her own invention but an inherited habit, one that can be viewed from the outside rather than necessarily continued automatically.

Pause. What price am I paying for the need to keep becoming better all the time?

Why the Old Strategy Seems Reasonable

A person rarely changes their explanation of their own life purely out of curiosity. A new explanation is usually sought when the old one has become too tight — has stopped bringing relief, stopped explaining what's happening. This is a natural, healthy process. But there is a trap worth naming directly: a new explanation — a new diet, a new spiritual practice, a new theory of personality — can also become a cage, if it demands that a person constantly measure up to it just as rigidly as the old one did.

The sign that a new concept has turned into a new cage isn't hard to recognize: it starts producing not relief but a new kind of anxiety — «I don't have enough mindfulness,» «I'm doing the practice wrong,» «real spiritual people wouldn't react this way.» Any idea — including the ideas in this very book — should ultimately return the reader not to a more complicated theory, but to the simple ability to notice what is happening and to choose. If a book starts demanding that you be its model follower, that's a signal to stop and return to the first question: what am I actually feeling right now?

***Pause.** Which of my goals has stopped being a desire and become a piece of evidence?*

The Cost of the Inner Argument

Not every impulse deserves belief. But not every impulse deserves a war either. Between blind obedience to the inner voice and its total suppression there is a third, far less dramatic path: hear what exactly this impulse is trying to say; understand what function it once served; assess what consequences following it now would lead to; and only then — choose. The impulse to quit in a fit of hurt may carry a legitimate kernel («I'm not respected at this job») and at the same time be poor guidance for immediate action.

***Pause.** Where am I letting someone else's displeasure decide my life?*

The Difference Between Fact and Interpretation

When the pause before action becomes a habit rather than a rare heroic effort, an unnoticeable but fundamental shift occurs in the very type of question a person asks themselves. The question «what should I be?» is a question addressed to an external model, to other people's expectations, to an imagined norm. The question «what action matches how I want to live?» is a question addressed inward, to one's own values, which may not coincide with anyone else's expectations. Swapping one question for the other doesn't solve every problem at once, but it changes the very architecture in which further decisions are made.

***Pause.** What would change if rest didn't require justification?*

A Small Pause

Picture an ordinary morning. Nothing dramatic happened overnight. You open your eyes — and even before getting out of bed, you already hear the inner commentary: «Alright, need to pull it together, can't be late again, can't mess everything up again.» Life on this morning begins not with an event, but with an attitude toward a day that hasn't happened yet. It is precisely this attitude — not the day itself — that this book proposes to examine most closely.

It's useful to run a small thought experiment: what if that same morning began with a neutral phrase — «good morning, let's see what today brings»? The day won't objectively become easier because of it: the same tasks, the same deadlines. But the body will live through it differently — more calmly, without going on the defensive from the first second. The difference accumulates over months of choosing this initial tone, not over a single day.

Pause. What part of my life already exists, yet I keep treating it as preparation?

The Necessity of Not Rushing

From the outside, the same behavior can look completely identical, while on the inside it is built in an entirely different way. Discipline on the outside can conceal fear on the inside — fear that the moment you let yourself off the hook even once, the whole structure will collapse. Ambition on the outside can conceal the desire to finally prove your own worth — not to yourself, but to someone from the past who once made it clear that this worth wasn't enough. The same outward action doesn't reveal which inner place it was born from. That's why the only reliable way to understand yourself is to return, again and again, not to the outcome of an action but to its source.

Pause. Who am I trying to prove that I'm okay to?

What This Chapter Carries Forward Into the Book

The word «broken» in this chapter's title is not there by accident or as a rhetorical device. It is a word real people actually say about themselves — in conversation with a psychologist, in a diary, at three in the morning in a text exchange with someone close. «Something is wrong with me» is one of the most common phrases with which a person begins to seek help. And almost always, behind this phrase lies not a malfunction but a long, exhausting attempt to meet demands that no one ever stated out loud, but which feel mandatory: to be convenient, productive, calm, grateful, to cause no trouble.

This chapter does not claim that a person cannot have real difficulties requiring real help — there are things that genuinely need treatment, support, work with a professional, and this book replaces none of that. But it asserts something narrower and, at the same time, more liberating: exhaustion from endlessly trying to measure up is not a diagnosis and not a trait of personality. It is the consequence of a particular strategy, and a strategy, unlike a personality, can be reconsidered.

Where the Critic's Voice Actually Comes From

It's worth going a little deeper than the simple observation that a critical voice exists. It's useful to ask: whose voice is this, literally, in sound, in intonation, in the set of words it uses? Almost everyone, if they listen honestly instead of just waving the question away, will discover that the inner critic doesn't speak in abstract phrases from nowhere, but in a perfectly recognizable tone — the tone of a specific parent, teacher, or significant adult from childhood who once said similar words out loud. A child absorbs not only the content of the criticism but also its music: the speed of speech, the pauses, the falling intonation at the end of a phrase that signals disappointment before the mind even manages to parse the meaning of the words.

This is precisely why trying to deal with the inner critic through logic alone almost never fully works: logic addresses the content of a thought, while the body reacts to its sound, familiar on a level far earlier than language. When the inner voice says «everything's wrong again,» the body responds not to the literal meaning of the phrase but to its tone — the very tone that, twenty or thirty years ago, accompanied the real danger of losing an important adult's favor. The mind today knows the danger is gone. The body recognizes the melody before the mind manages to remind it of that.

This knowledge doesn't cancel out the work with the critic described earlier in this chapter, but it adds an important dimension to it: to hear not only what the inner voice is saying, but whose voice it is actually saying it in — and, having heard that, to separate the very fact of one's adult life from the childhood scene the voice was borrowed from. A parent's voice from thirty years ago is not obligated to run the decisions of a forty-year-old today, even if the body, out of old habit, still flinches at the first notes of that familiar melody.

Coming Next — Chapter 2

Within a single day, a calm version and an anxious one easily coexist — a strong version, and the one whose heart is still pounding an hour after one brave «no.» Both are real. Working out what actually happens in the moment when they hand off to one another is where everything that follows in this book begins.

CHAPTER 2. Every Version of You Is You

A lawyer, known among colleagues for her icy calm at negotiations, can sit across from an aggressive opponent for three hours without ever raising her voice. At half past seven in the evening she picks up her seven-year-old son from after-school care, and within ten minutes of getting home she snaps at him over scattered shoes so sharply that she feels like a monster for the rest of the evening. «At work I hold it together. At home I'm not myself,» she says. It seems to her that there is a real her — composed, professional — and some impostor who sometimes takes over in the evenings. In reality there is no impostor. There is one person with a different amount of resource at different times of day.

The Desire to Split Yourself Into Real and Not Real

Almost everyone has an inner list: this trait of mine is real, and that one is a mistake that needs to be erased. The calm me — that's me. The anxious one — that's not me, that's «just hormones» or «just a bad day.» The strong one who said «no» in the negotiation — real. And the same woman whose heart pounds and hands shake for half an hour after that «no» — as if that were a weakness to be hidden. But this division rests on a false premise: as if a person were one fixed state, and everything else were noise in the signal.

The confident woman who firmly told her boss «no,» and the same woman whose heart is pounding a minute later — are not two personalities, and not a «real» and «unreal» version. This is one person in two consecutive states. The firmness and the subsequent trembling do not contradict each other — they belong to one and the same event, simply at different points in time: first the action, then the physiological response to the risk that action carried.

***Pause.** Which of today's versions of me — ice, water, or steam — am I already willing to call real, and which do I still consider defective?*

The Metaphor of Water

It's useful to picture ordinary water in its three states: ice, liquid, steam. They look completely different, behave differently, need to be handled differently — you can hold ice in your hands, steam will burn you. But no one would claim that «real» water is only ice, and the liquid and vaporous forms are manufacturing defects. All three are forms of the same substance, changing under the influence of temperature and pressure.

The human psyche is arranged in a similar way: it changes under the influence of sleep, physical exertion, a sense of safety, stress levels, the quality of the relationships around it, and external circumstances. A frightened version of a person and a confident version of the same person are not two different characters but the same «substance» under different environmental conditions. Blaming yourself for the frightened version is as pointless as blaming ice for not flowing: ice doesn't flow at a certain temperature, and that's not a flaw in the ice, it's its physics.

***Pause.** What state am I in right now — and is it suited to the decision I'm about to make?*

Who Deserves the Wheel Right Now

Accepting yourself doesn't mean declaring any decision you make automatically correct simply because «you» made it. It means no longer being ashamed of the very fact that different states coexist within one person, and starting to ask a more precise question. The question isn't which version is the real one, but which version it's reasonable to hand the wheel to right now. The frightened part is yours too, and it doesn't need to be chased away. But that doesn't mean it should be the one writing the resignation letter at eleven at night.

Here the book's central line reappears — the space between you and you. When an exhausted version that wants to give up on everything and a sober version that remembers long-term goals sound at the same time, freedom doesn't lie in one of them permanently silencing the other. Freedom lies in a third position appearing between these two voices — not a participant in the argument, but the one who hears both sides and decides which of them truly deserves the wheel right now, on this particular turn. This third position — the one that hears both sides and decides — has a far more precise name and a far subtler structure than can fit into a single paragraph here. This book will return to it separately, when the time comes.

***Pause.** Who did I last hand the wheel to — not because I thought it through, but simply out of old habit?*

Example: The Different Versions of One Father

Consider a father who, at work, is a patient manager, able to calmly explain the same process to a new employee hour after hour. At home, though, putting his five-year-old to bed for the ninth time after the ninth request for «just a little more water,» he snaps and shouts — and spends the rest of the evening condemning himself: «What kind of father am I after that.» The problem isn't this person's character, and it isn't that «patient at work» is a mask while «shouting at home» is the truth. The problem is resource: after eight hours of patient explaining at work, the psychological reserve is spent, and putting the child to bed happens exactly at the moment when that reserve is at zero.

If this father keeps treating the evening outburst as proof that he's a «bad father,» nothing will change — guilt doesn't produce resource, it drains it. But if he notices the pattern — patience drops toward evening after a certain kind of workday — he gains a lever: he can restructure the evening ritual, ask his partner for help specifically at that hour, replenish his reserve in advance with a short rest before picking up the child. What gets fixed isn't the character, but the conditions under which the character shows up.

***Pause.** After what kind of day does my own supply of patience usually run out — and what do I do with that knowledge?*

Where the Part That's Long Been Pushed Away Goes

There's a difference between not handing the frightened part the wheel on a particular evening, and denying its existence altogether for years. The first is the reasonable distribution of authority discussed above. The second is a completely different, far more costly strategy, and it deserves separate attention, because a banished part doesn't disappear simply because it's stopped being let near the wheel. It continues to exist within the psyche and, finding no direct outlet, starts leaking out sideways — exactly where it's least expected.

A woman who trained herself from a young age never to show fear — not to herself, not to others — did not, in fact, stop being afraid. Her fear, deprived of direct expression, simply found workarounds: insomnia on the eve of important decisions, inexplicable sharpness with loved ones on days when objectively everything is calm, a nagging tension in the shoulders that no massage relieves. None of these symptoms was labeled with the word «fear» — and that's exactly why they were so hard to deal with directly: the banished part hadn't disappeared, it had simply changed the language in which it announces itself.

***Pause.** Take a closer look: a part of yourself you haven't let near the wheel for years usually finds a workaround — through insomnia, sharpness, tension in the body. Look for its trace over the course of today.*

The Question That Changes the Practice

The question «which of my versions is the real one» is a question without an answer, because it's misframed from the start: it assumes that among many states one constant one must be found and the rest declared false. A more useful question sounds different: which part deserves a say right now, in this particular situation? The frightened part — when it's a matter of real physical danger. The tired part — when it's time to stop and rest instead of playing hero. The ambitious part — when there's energy and a clear goal. No single part is meant to reign forever; the task isn't crowning one version, but flexibly distributing the wheel depending on the road.

***Pause.** Which part — frightened, tired, ambitious — deserves a say right now, in this particular situation?*

Why the Psyche Even Needs the Fantasy of a Single Version

It's worth asking more deeply: why is the very idea of a single, constant, «real» version of oneself so persistent that it's hard to let go of even after the mind has rationally accepted the metaphor of water with its ice, liquid, and steam? The answer doesn't lie in the individual psychology of a particular person, but in a much older, almost biographical demand that everyone absorbed long before they were able to question it: it's more convenient for the people around us — parents, teachers, partners, employers — to deal with a predictable, constant person than with a person who honestly changes depending on their state. Predictability lowers anxiety in the people nearby, and so from early childhood it's reinforced with approval: «you're always so responsible,» «we can count on you» — compliments that imperceptibly turn into a demand to remain unchanging at the press of any situation's button.

From this is born a deep fear, rarely spoken aloud: if my behavior changes — now strong, now frightened, now generous, now irritated — people will stop considering me reliable, and therefore stop loving or respecting me. This fear isn't imaginary: to some extent it's grounded in real social experience, because indeed not everyone around is willing to accept another person's many-sidedness as readily as they accept water in its three states. But the price of constantly performing uniformity is disproportionately high: a person spends colossal resource not on being themselves, but on appearing to be an unchanging version of themselves in front of an audience that perhaps never demanded such a sacrifice — if that assumption were ever honestly tested rather than simply taken on faith in advance.

Coming Next — Chapter 3

That every version of you belongs to one person is clear enough by now. The harder question is one of practice: which of them do you hand the wheel to in the second when a decision has to be made right now, with almost no calm left for choosing? In that second, an intense state usually starts speaking in the voice of absolute truth — which is exactly why it's worth checking before submitting to it.

CHAPTER 3. When the Storm Speaks in Your Own Voice

At two in the morning, after three sleepless nights with a sick child and not a single calm conversation with her partner in two weeks, a woman opens the notes app on her phone and types: «I'm leaving. I can't anymore. That's it, decided.» She rereads what she wrote and feels not doubt but an incredible, almost frightening clarity — as if she has finally seen a truth she was previously afraid to admit. In the morning, having slept at least four hours, she opens the same note, and the first thing she feels isn't agreement with yesterday's self but mild bewilderment: «Did I really write that?» Neither yesterday's clarity nor today's doubt was pretense. Yesterday, it was simply the storm talking.

What the Storm Is

In this book, the «storm» refers to a state of intense accumulated stress: fatigue, anxiety, lack of sleep, and several unresolved problems piling up on top of one another at once. In such moments thoughts race, emotions sharply intensify, the body is so tense that even neutral events start being perceived as a threat. The paradox of the storm is that from the inside it rarely feels like chaos. More often it feels like incredible, crystalline clarity. A brain worn out by uncertainty desperately wants solid ground — and finds it by producing categorical, final conclusions: «I understand everything now,» «that's definitely how it is,» «I urgently need to change everything right now.»

In a state of intense stress it's physiologically harder to hold onto doubt and consider several options at once — that ability requires resource that simply isn't available in a storm. So thought during a storm becomes simpler and more confident than it would be in a calm state — not because it's more accurate, but because complexity is inaccessible to the psyche in that moment. A thought during a storm can be as destructive — «I can't do anything, it's all pointless» — as it can be grandiose — «I'm going to drop everything right now and start a completely new life.» Neither of these thoughts is necessarily false in substance. But their emotional intensity alone proves nothing.

***Pause.** What am I calling clarity right now only because I'm too exhausted for doubt?*

Intensity Is Not the Same Thing as Truth

One of the most dangerous conclusions you can draw in the thick of a storm goes: «I've never felt this so clearly before, so this must be the truth.» It's easy to confuse the intensity of an experience with its accuracy, because subjectively they feel equally strong. But these two properties of a thought aren't directly connected. A person can believe something false with absolute conviction — and suspect something true with only feeble doubt. The strength of a feeling speaks to the state of the nervous system at that moment, not to the quality of the information the nervous system is processing at that moment.

That's exactly why, before a truly important decision, it's useful to ask yourself a series of simple, almost boring questions that the storm particularly dislikes: have I slept enough? Am I physically calm right now, or is my heart still pounding? Do I really need to decide this today, or is this sense of urgency also part of the storm? Will this idea survive one day without action? None of these questions cancels out the idea itself. It simply postpones the moment of action just long enough to let the storm subside and check whether the idea still looks just as clear without it.

***Pause.** How strong is my conviction in this thought right now — and does that strength speak to its accuracy, or only to the strength of the storm?*

Example: The Resignation That Didn't Happen

A programmer who has worked three straight weeks of daily overtime before a release opens his email on Friday evening, after a particularly harsh conversation with his manager, and writes a

resignation letter — with no new job, no plan, no conversation with his family. At the last moment, cursor already hovering over «send,» he remembers a simple rule he once heard: important decisions made in a state of intense emotion are worth postponing for a day, if that's at all possible without catastrophic consequences. He saves the letter as a draft and closes his laptop.

On Saturday, having slept well and gone for a run, he rereads the draft. The indignation that drove Friday's letter hasn't fully gone away — behind it stood a real and legitimate problem: systematic overtime, a lack of gratitude, a manager who doesn't acknowledge other people's work. The pause doesn't cancel out the content of the storm — it separates the real problem the storm illuminated from the specific form of immediate action that belonged to Friday's storm, not to a sober assessment of the situation. On Monday he came to work not with submission, but with a different document: a list of specific conditions under which he was willing to stay, and a deadline by which those conditions had to be met. Two months later, when the conditions hadn't been met, he did resign — but with a new job already lined up and a calm head.

***Pause.** What decision, made in the thick of a storm, am I still holding onto as final, even though I've never once checked it with a clear head?*

A Pause Doesn't Cancel Out the Storm's Truth

It's important not to mistake this chapter for advice to never trust strong feelings and always wait for everything to settle. A storm almost never lies completely — behind it there is usually a real, accumulated, legitimate problem. The programmer from the start of this chapter really was being exploited. The mother of sleepless nights really was at the limit of exhaustion in a relationship that had long lacked support. The pause doesn't cancel out the content of the storm — it separates the real problem the storm illuminated from the specific form of immediate action the storm dictates. The problem, as a rule, will still be there tomorrow. The form of the response to it can become far more precise if it's born not of panic but of a sober look at that same problem.

***Pause.** What real, legitimate problem is hiding behind the shape of yesterday's storm — and what would a more sober form of response to it look like?*

A Simple Check Before Deciding

A genuine thought — one that truly reflects something important about your life — usually survives a pause. A good decision doesn't have to vanish after a night's sleep; if it did vanish, that means it was a product of the storm, not a stable conclusion. And if, two days after the first flare-up, the idea still seems just as clear, that doesn't guarantee it's a hundred percent right — life is more complicated than any guarantee — but it does mean the idea has now passed a test not only by the storm, but by at least one calm morning. It's not a perfect test, but it stops a huge number of irreversible decisions made from a temporary state and passed off by the psyche as permanent truth.

***Pause.** Has my thought from yesterday survived even one night's sleep — or does it hold up only on the strength of yesterday's exhaustion?*

What Literally Happens to the Psyche's Field of Vision

It's useful to understand more deeply not just that the storm distorts thinking, but exactly how it does so — because understanding the mechanism makes the storm less frightening and more manageable. In a calm state the psyche is able to hold several competing versions of events at once, compare them, weigh them, postpone a final conclusion until new information appears. This is costly, resource-intensive work requiring free attention. In a state of intense stress this luxury becomes unavailable: an organism that perceives the situation as a threat to survival — even if the threat is no longer physical but social or emotional — economizes on precisely this function first, because in a

moment of real danger, comparing multiple options is an unaffordable waste of time, while a fast, unambiguous conclusion, even an inaccurate one, saves precious seconds.

From this arises the recognizable sensation that the storm passes off as depth of insight: the world suddenly becomes remarkably simple, black and white, free of doubt. This isn't insight — it's a narrowing of the optics, physiologically necessary for a fast response to threat, but poorly suited to decisions about the future, where speed matters far less than accuracy. That's exactly why the simplicity of a thought born in a storm is deceptive: it feels like clarity, but is in fact a byproduct of the psyche's narrowed, emergency operating mode, which is incapable of seeing what is perfectly visible from a broader, calmer state.

Coming Next — Chapter 4

The storm speaks in your own voice so convincingly that telling apart, within yourself, a signal that deserves attention from an order you don't actually have to obey is not a one-day task. One of the most common sources of such false orders has no addressee at all: it is a sense of duty toward someone who hasn't made any claim on you in a long time.

CHAPTER 4. A Debt That Doesn't Exist

A woman a bit past thirty turns down a colleague's birthday party because she's gone to bed at midnight for two weeks straight and dreams of spending Saturday home in silence. The refusal takes one short message: «Sorry, I can't, I'm really tired.» The reply comes back short: «ok.» That's it. No conflict happened, no one took offense out loud. But for the rest of the evening, one and the same voice keeps sounding inside: «You let someone down. You should have said yes. What will people think of you now.» She hasn't harmed anyone — she chose herself. And it's precisely for that choice that an inner voice is judging her, a voice far louder than any real reaction from her colleague.

Guilt That Has No Cause

There is a kind of guilt that arises not because a person caused someone real harm, but because they chose themselves over someone else's expectation. You say «no» — and feel like a bad person, even though objectively you've done nothing wrong. You decline to meet up — and inside, a feeling unfolds that you've let someone down, even if they accepted the refusal calmly. You lie down to rest in the middle of the day — and immediately hear a voice: «you should have done more.» This voice is usually called conscience, but more often it isn't conscience — it's an inner critic operating on an outdated set of instructions.

There was a time when this critic really did help you survive. In childhood, being agreeable, not arguing, guessing other people's wishes before they were even voiced out loud, was often the only available strategy for keeping the favor of the adults your safety depended on. A child who grew up in a family where a parent's displeasure was unpredictable and dangerous learns to constantly scan other people's moods and pre-emptively adjust to them — this isn't a weakness of character, but a working adaptation to specific childhood conditions. The problem is that adult life has long since stopped requiring that same strategy to the same degree, while the inner critic keeps operating on the old instructions, because no one has formally cancelled the order.

***Pause.** Whose voice is actually behind the «I should have said yes»?*

When the Mind Knows, and the Body Is Still Afraid

This is exactly why a split familiar to many arises: the mind understands perfectly well and can clearly state — «I have every right to say no» — while the body reacts with anxiety anyway: the chest tightens, the palms sweat, the same mute question circles in the head, «what if he's offended forever now.» This isn't proof that the decision to refuse was wrong. Most often it's the trace of an old survival strategy built on attachment and safety, one that activates automatically, regardless of how adult and reasonable the decision itself actually was.

It's useful to treat this bodily anxiety not as a sign of an error, but as an outdated alarm system in a house where the locks were changed long ago. The alarm can go off even when there's no real danger — simply because it's tuned to old parameters and reacts to steam from the bathroom just as loudly as it would react to real smoke. The task isn't to shame yourself for the alarm going off, but to gradually recalibrate its sensitivity — through repeated experience in which refusal doesn't lead to the catastrophe the anxiety warns of.

***Pause.** What old anxiety am I still mistaking for a signal of real danger?*

Responsibility and Guilt Are Not the Same Thing

Responsibility and guilt feel similar but are structured completely differently, and the difference between them is one of the most useful tools an adult can give themselves. Responsibility most resembles an itemized bill: it always has a specific amount, a specific recipient, and a specific reason

for the charge. If you broke an agreement, deceived someone, or genuinely caused harm — there is a specific action, a specific person, and a specific way to fix the consequences: apologize, compensate, change your behavior going forward. Responsibility always points to an action that can be taken — a bill that can be paid and closed.

Guilt without cause works differently: it's a bill without a single line item — just a feeling of owing someone something, with no recipient's name, no stated amount, no way of ever seeing it marked «paid.» It doesn't point to any specific corrective action, because there's nothing to correct. It asks a completely different, deeper, and more destructive question: «Do I even have the right to want something other than what others expect of me?» This question can't be answered through action — apology, compensation — because the question itself is misframed from the start. The right to want something different doesn't need to be earned through a deed. An adult has it by default, along with the right to sometimes be wrong about that wanting.

***Pause.** Does this feeling have a specific recipient — or is it a bill with no name on it?*

«You used to call more often, I guess I'm just not that important to you anymore.» A phrase tossed off in passing, not as an accusation — and yet after every such call, a heaviness lingered for the rest of the day.

Example: When the Calls Became Less Frequent

That's how one of the calls sounded, from a mother to her adult son, who had moved to another city and now called her twice a week instead of the daily calls that had been the routine while he lived nearby. He tried to resolve this guilt through calling — he started calling more often, even though he didn't want to and grew tired of conversations that turned into a report on his life.

Nothing changed until he asked himself a more precise question: had he caused his mother real harm by moving and changing his calling schedule, or was he simply failing to meet her expectations of what a caring son should be? The answer turned out to be the second. That didn't cancel out his warm feelings toward his mother and didn't mean her feelings weren't important — he could, for instance, honestly discuss with her a new rhythm of contact that worked for both of them. But it did cancel out the automatic guilt demanding compensation through a self-sacrifice that no one had actually asked for, only silently expected.

***Pause.** Whose expectations am I trying to avoid disappointing right now — and did that person ever say them out loud?*

What Place the Voice Is Speaking From

Trusting yourself doesn't mean considering yourself always right in every decision — that would just be a new, mirror-image version of the same rigidity, only with the opposite sign. Trusting yourself means being able to tell exactly what place the voice making the decision is currently speaking from: from fear of someone else's reaction, from a long-standing habit of being agreeable, from accumulated fatigue — or from a calm, adult choice made with a clear head. This distinguishing is precisely the space between you and you in action: not silencing the voice of fear, but hearing it separately from the voice that is actually capable of making the decision.

***Pause.** Did my last «yes» come from clarity, or from being tired of explaining a «no»?*

Practicing the Distinction

In practice, this distinction can be trained with one simple question asked in the moment guilt washes over you after a refusal: «Who exactly am I harming with this decision, and what precisely is

the harm?» If the honest answer sounds vague — «well, he was upset» or «she might think I'm a bad person» — that's almost always a sign of guilt without cause, not real responsibility. If the answer is specific — «I'm letting down someone who was counting on me, and it's creating real problems for them» — that's a sign of genuine responsibility requiring action. The difference between a vague and a specific answer is a reliable compass that requires neither a therapist nor much time — only honesty with yourself in the moment.

***Pause.** What am I willing to call guilt, when a closer look shows it's really just someone else's disappointment?*

How the Body Learns That Someone Else's Displeasure Is Dangerous

To really get to the bottom of causeless guilt, it's useful to trace where the nervous system got the idea in the first place that someone else's displeasure is equivalent to a threat. A small child is physically dependent on an adult — not metaphorically but literally: without an adult, they don't survive. That's why any signal that an adult is displeased gets registered by the ancient, pre-rational parts of the nervous system not as social awkwardness but as a genuine threat to existence, and the body responds to that threat with the same reactions it would use against physical danger: tightening, a racing heart, a desire to fix the situation immediately at any cost.

The problem is that this setting, entirely justified at an age when survival really did depend on adults' favor, keeps running on inertia long after a person is no longer physically dependent on anyone to that absolute degree. The adult mind understands the difference perfectly well: a colleague's, partner's, or even a parent's displeasure no longer threatens survival. But the body, so to speak, never read that memo — it keeps reacting according to the old, long-outdated instructions, because rewriting bodily memory doesn't take logical understanding but repeated new experience: living through someone else's displeasure again and again and finding that no catastrophe follows it. It is this repetitive, often boring, undramatic experience — not a single flash of insight — that gradually retrains the nervous system.

Coming Next — Chapter 5

Guilt doesn't always mean genuine responsibility — an important distinction, but not the final one: it leaves open the question of what should then measure the maturity of a choice, if not a habitual sense of duty. The answer turns out to be more down-to-earth than you might expect — found in the single most underrated condition of freedom, the one people endlessly trying to prove their worth usually lack the most.

CHAPTER 5. Rest as the Return of Energy

A smartphone at five percent battery behaves strangely: the screen dims, apps freeze, the camera refuses to focus, a call might suddenly drop. No one at that moment says «this phone is broken» or «this phone has a bad character.» Everyone understands: the phone simply doesn't have enough energy to function normally, and the solution is obvious — plug it in to charge. A person with a depleted resource behaves very similarly: getting irritated where they're usually calm, forgetting what they usually remember, reacting more sharply than they'd like to. But instead of a simple «I need to recharge,» most people at this point tell themselves: «What's wrong with me.»

Rest as a Reward That Must Be Earned

Most people grew up with the same unspoken belief: rest is a reward due only after everything has been done. The problem is that «everything» is never fully done. A to-do list is built so that a closed task almost always spawns a new one, and endlessly postponing rest until the list is completely finished means postponing it forever. As a result, rest is felt not as a natural part of life, but as something requiring separate permission, one that still needs to be earned with a sufficient amount of completed work.

A tired person doesn't become a different person with a worse character. They simply have, temporarily, less available psychological resource for flexible thinking, for self-control, for a sober assessment of the consequences of their words and decisions. That's exactly why one and the same unsolved problem can seem utterly unsolvable at night, in a state of extreme exhaustion — and completely manageable that same morning, after a few hours of sleep. The problem objectively stayed the same. What changed was the resource available to deal with it.

Pause. *What task am I holding as a precondition before allowing myself to stop?*

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