THE KNIGHT'S HEART



CALEB ELIZONDO

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The Silent Cost of Strength

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This book is a work of personal reflection and emotional companionship.

It is not a substitute for diagnosis, psychological, psychiatric, or therapeutic professional treatment.

If the reader is in a situation of emotional crisis, seeking specialized help is recommended.

If you are thinking about harming yourself, do not wait: call your local emergency number or a suicide prevention line.

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Sample edition — Preface and Chapter I.

PREFACE

For a long time I thought men silenced their emotions.

I thought it because that is what we have been told, because that is how we are described, because that is how it looks from outside: men who keep going, who do not talk much about what they feel, who solve things and move on. Men who appear hard.

But I was wrong.

Men do not go silent because they do not feel.

They go silent because they learned that there is not always room for what they feel.

This book is born of listening.

Not of theories, not of speeches, not of an ideological stance that needs defending. It is born of real conversations, of long silences, of sentences said halfway, of glances that avoided the heart of the matter. It is born of ordinary men who were not looking to be justified or defended, but to be understood.

This is not an attempt to excuse cruelty or to romanticize harm.

It is not written to protect the man who wounds without taking responsibility. That is not what these pages are about. The interest lies elsewhere: in the man who tries to do what is right, who works, who sustains, who seeks to love well even when he does not always know how.

The Knight is not a perfect ideal nor a heroic caricature.

He is a silent figure, often invisible, who carries out his role without applause. He is the man who carries responsibilities he did not always choose, who stays firm because someone has to, who learns to endure even when no one ever taught him to rest.

Across these pages you will not find easy answers or quick solutions.

No slogans, no clear villains either. You will find scenes, decisions, surrenders, and costs that are rarely spoken aloud. Not to point fingers, but to look with honesty.

This book does not try to tell you who you should be.

Nor does it pretend to teach you how to live better.

It only pauses to observe what many men have learned to carry in silence.

The Knight rides out to war; if he does not die in battle, he comes home with his dead on his back, but with a good face for those he loves.

It is not hypocrisy. It is love in its purest form.

CHAPTER I

The Duty of the Façade

— — —

You stop.

It is eleven thirty at night. You are driving through a soaked city. The rain hits the windshield in a steady rhythm that leaves no room for thinking. The lights stretch across the wet asphalt. Everything looks blurry, even you.

The radio is on, but you do not hear a thing. The sound of the engine mixes with that old pressure in your chest whose beginning you no longer remember. You grip the wheel harder than you need to. It is cold. Hard. As if you needed to feel something firm to keep from coming apart.

The traffic light in front of you changes — red.

You do not remember when you started crying. You only know your eyes burn and you have to blink several times to focus. The impulse rises from your stomach, crosses your chest, and lodges in your throat.

You want to scream.

Not explain.

Not talk it through.

Not justify.

Just push the noise out.

You open your mouth.

And nothing comes out.

You glance at the car next to you. The driver looks at you for barely a second. His gaze hardens and turns away quickly, as if he had seen something he did not want to recognize. You close your mouth and the scream stays inside.

That is what you always do.

This scene repeats itself in other costumes: the bathroom with the door closed, the shower running so nothing can be heard, the dark room when everyone is asleep, the long silence before saying "all good" in a voice that even you no longer believe.

It was not one single thing that brought you here.

It was an accumulation.

Sometimes it was her.

Not a big fight. Not a slammed door. It was something worse: the small things. A message that appeared on her phone when she thought you were not looking. A name you could not explain. An answer that came too fast. A story that did not add up.

—He's a friend —she said.

But your stomach closed up.

Not out of distrust, but because something inside you already knew.

You started to notice different silences. Looks that no longer lingered. Conversations where you were present but not included. You realized you were building a house while she was already packing her bags.

You did not yell.

You did not make a scene like in the movies.

You only felt how something bent inside.

How the plans, the trips, the promises whispered in low voices crumbled without a sound.

It was not just the betrayal.

It was understanding that you had placed your heart in the hands of someone who was no longer holding it.

Other times it was money.

You walk with the weight of every cent your paycheck falls short, feeling every coin you do not have like an open wound in your ability to protect.

At the bank, you look around, as if someone might be watching you.

You feel ashamed of something you did not do wrong. You run the numbers in your head on the way to the car. You cancel expenses before getting home. You think about what to say. What not to say.

Your ambition is not money. Your ambition is only the disguise of an old fear that whispers to you that falling short on the basics is, in truth, ceasing to exist.

Fear that everything depends on you and, even so, that it is not enough.

Other times it was work.

They called you into a small office. Door closed. Measured tones. Rehearsed phrases.

—We're going to let you go.

They do not look you in the eye when they say it. They talk about restructuring. About hard decisions. About gratitude for your effort.

You nod.

You shake their hand.

You say "I understand."

You walk out with your back straight. You walk down the hallway as if nothing happened. You wait until you reach the car to release the breath you have been holding since the con-

versation began.

It is not just the job.

It is feeling replaceable after having given more than you owed.

It is asking yourself where you failed without finding an answer.

And then there is death.

The call that comes when you least expect it. The tone of voice that needs no explanation. The hospital. The smell. The strange silence of the hallways. The body that no longer responds. The cold hand.

They tell you "I'm sorry" too many times.

They hug you.

They watch you, waiting for you to react correctly.

But you do not know how grief is supposed to look when you cannot allow yourself to fall.

At the funeral you are standing, receiving condolences, while a part of you keeps thinking about what needs to be solved afterward. Papers. Family. Responsibilities.

You learn quickly that even mourning has to be functional.

All of it stayed inside.

Unprocessed.

Without pause.

Without permission.

And then, that night, the train.

You hear the whistle in the distance. You feel the vibration in the ground. The light is still red. For one brutal instant, the idea of no longer having to hold anything up presents itself as a way out.

Not as a plan.

As an impulse.

You wait.

You move forward.

Or do you stay in the middle of the tracks?

You do not.

But something dies there.

And for one second — only one — you do not think about those who love you.

Not about those who depend on you.

Not about God.

You think about rest.

About not having to be anyone else.

About not having to answer.

About not having to endure.

And that idea scares you more than the train.

The next morning is overwhelming.

Not because the pain has gone, but because life kept going without asking if you were ready.

You have to get up.

You have to function.

You have to deliver.

Someone has to hold the home together.

Someone has to stand firm because, if you break, something else breaks with you.

You stand for a second in front of the door. You breathe in deep. You change your face. You put on the armor.

You decide to live "like a man."

Put on a good face.

Keep going.

That is the Frontal Cuirass.

It does not protect from pain.

It protects from judgment.

From the "don't exaggerate."

From the "get over it already."

From the "you're strong."

You learned that being strong did not mean being okay.

It meant not showing it.

You walk into the house. The inside smells like it always does. You hear laughter, conversations, a life that keeps working. You wipe your face quickly. You straighten up. You square your shoulders.

—I'm home.

You smile. You hug. You answer in short phrases.

No one notices the weight you are carrying.

And that is the highest cost.

Not that they do not love you.

But that no one knows.

Not that what you feel does not matter.

But that you never learned to show it without feeling like everything would collapse.

You choose silence.

Not because you do not have emotions.

But because you learned that feeling out loud is dangerous.

And that is how it all begins.

Thank you for reading.

If these pages reached you, the rest of the book waits for you.

The Knight's Heart contains nineteen chapters — a complete journey through the silent battle the Knight learned to carry alone.

Supporting this work — by purchasing the full edition — is what allows it to keep reaching the men who need to read it.



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