



GRACE IN THE SHADOW OF TEARS

Still, I Rise

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"Grace in the Shadow of Tears"

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Lee

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"Grace in the Shadow of Tears'

"If you've ever felt like giving up, read this.

It will remind you that grace still finds the broken.

Prologue

Grace in the Shadow of Tears

There are lives that unfold in the light where success is documented, joy is shared, and dreams are applauded.

This is not one of those lives.

This is a story that began in a dark alley, beneath a broken ceiling, where laughter never quite reached and warmth rarely stayed. It is a story of nights spent in silence, of days endured through clenched fists and hollow stares. It is about tears that fell not to be seen, but because there was no other way to survive.

And yet beneath those tears, something unexpected bloomed.

Grace.

Not loud, not immediate. But steady. Quiet. Like a thread of golden light weaving through the gray fabric of despair.

I did not write this book as a man who triumphed. I write it as someone who remains. Who did not vanish. Who, in the crushing weight of memory and shame, still chose to stand.

Every page you read is a map of scars yes.

But also, of mercy. Of forgiveness undeserved, yet give

And beneath all that sorrow,

There was grace.

Unseen, yet always nearby.

Quiet, yet faithful.

A hand that never stopped reaching for me.

This book is not a record of accomplishments.

It is a testimony of survival.

Of forgiveness offered when none was deserved.

Of a love not born of this world,

but from a God who never forgot my name.

Every page turned in this book holds not answers, but
echoes.

Not victory, but vulnerability.

Not perfection, but presence.

If you are holding this book with trembling hands,
if your life feels forgotten,
if your path is paved with regret and silence
Then let this be for you.

Even in the shadow of tears,
grace blooms.

And if it could bloom for someone like me,
It can surely bloom for you too.

Chapter 1: The First Cry That Bloomed in a Forsaken Alley

"Each night, I secretly cried, listening to the laughter beyond my window."

Laughter always came from the other side of the wall. It flowed like music, as if it were meant for me, yet I knew it never was. The sounds that drifted over the fence were those of children's playful giggles or drunken jokes from young adults. But inside my room it was dark, cold, and quiet I was always alone. In place of words, sighs hung from the ceiling, heavy enough to press down on me.

The house I was born in was less a home and more just four walls that shielded me from the wind.

What lingered beneath my feet as a child wasn't the warmth of a caring hand, but broken toys and moldy floors. Before I learned the touch of a parent's love, I learned to endure hunger. Before I learned trust, I learned to hide. At the end of an alley, hidden from the world, our home felt like a place designed to erase me from existence. People didn't know I was there, and I didn't want them to.

Often, I would look into the mirror and whisper, "Why are you even here?" My face sometimes felt unfamiliar even to me. My eyes were always empty, as if they had lost something. My lips, though silent, carried countless words. At that age, I had already learned too much silence. That silence became the language of my soul.

My mother was always busy. And "busy" meant she had no time for me. My father, even when home, felt absent. His presence came with the heavy stench of alcohol. Heavy silence, heavy sighs, heavy shoulders I had to fold myself smaller to survive in that space. I didn't want to make noise. I had learned too early that even if I cried out, no one would listen.

One day, it was bitterly cold. The wind pierced through the window frame, and I curled myself under a tattered blanket. Yet colder than the air was the silence of the dinner table, where I had to finish another evening without even a bowl of warm soup. For someone else, it might've been just

another day. For me, it was the end of another silent battle one more day survived, without anyone saying it mattered.

Even at that age, I wondered, "Why was I born here?" Other children dreamed of playing tomorrow, but I wondered if I could survive another day like today. My first cry wasn't the cry of a newborn; it was a protest of the cruelty of the world. No one heard that protest, but it planted itself deep within me, quietly dismantling who I was.

And yet, even as I crumbled, I didn't completely fall apart. Sorrow devoured me, but somehow also made me stronger. That cry that bloomed in a forsaken alley became my resistance. My hidden prayer.

I often gazed at the lights of other homes' families laughing under warm lights, the clinking of spoons, children's chatter. To me, those scenes felt like tales from another world. There wasn't even a streetlamp outside my window, nor any light inside me that I could call hope.

One day, as I picked up a marble rolling in the yard, I tripped over my father's shoe. That stumble led to another beating. My father didn't speak his hands, always came first. Fists before words. Commands before understanding. Silence before love. And I was torn quietly beneath it all.

Still, I prayed in my heart. "God, if You're there... please take me away from here. Or at least, help me sleep without crying."

Tears had become so familiar that they weren't emotions anymore, but a habit. If I didn't cry, I couldn't breathe. If I cried, something hot inside me would spill out. Some said crying was weakness, but I knew the truth my tears were a desperate struggle to stay alive. I cried so I wouldn't give up. So, I wouldn't die.

School was another battlefield. My clothes were always ragged; my lunch was often just a clump of soggy rice

sometimes not even that. The word "friend" was a luxury. I was always alone. Anyone who spoke to me usually came with ridicule or scorn. So, I clung to the walls. Corners no one noticed, paths no one passed. Those were my places.

Then one winter day, as I walked home from school, a cold wind howled through the alley. With no coat, just a worn sweater on my back, I walked with my head down. Suddenly, I stopped. From a small church at the end of the alley, a song flowed out. Despite the freezing day, that song felt warm in my ears.

"I hear the voice of the Lord He says He loves me..."

That was the first time I truly listened to the word "love." It didn't exist in my world. It felt foreign and yet desperately familiar. I walked up to the church door. Through the gap, I saw the soft flicker of candles and heard white voices singing. I couldn't go inside that day. But something very

small, very quiet took root in my heart in the hope that another world might exist.

That night, laughter once again drifted past my window. But strangely, I didn't cry. Maybe it was because I had felt a warmth I hadn't known before. That song from the church kept echoing in my mind. "He says He loves me..." It was as if someone whispered, "You, too, are worthy of love."

I often thought that must be a lie. But even that small possibility gave me one more reason to live. From that day on, I would linger near the church. I didn't have the courage to enter, but knowing the door was there gave me comfort. Even in the darkest alley, there was a path. And at its end, someone's light.

I began to let myself feel that light. I couldn't speak to anyone, but I was grateful just knowing someone was beside me. No one had ever taught me such feelings, but the heart always knows the way toward love. Perhaps

because the human soul is, by nature, made of longing, longing to be loved, to be understood, to never be abandoned. That longing helped lift me again.

Nights were still cold and long, but I no longer felt entirely alone. I still heard laughter outside the window, but now, I could imagine the world beyond it. I began to hope that one day, I might be part of that laughter.

And that kind of hope can only live in someone still alive. I chose not to let go of that hope.

My tears were no longer just sorrow. They became a declaration to the world.

"I'm here. I'm hurting. But I'm alive."

Chapter 2: A Home Colder Than Prison

"The outside was cold, but home was even colder. In a place where sighs lingered instead of words, I learned how to endure."

The wind outside bit my cheeks, but the air inside the house was even colder, seeping into my skin, deeper and darker. I came to call that place a home colder than prison. It had no iron bars, no locks, but it was the perfect prison. No one loved me. No one embraced me. I wasn't a child of that house I felt like I made a mistake delivered by accident.

As a child, I ran away from home more than once. On a snowy day, I ventured out barefoot, my toes numb from the frost. If only someone had stopped me and asked, "Why?" I would've broken down in tears. But no one asked. So, I crouched beneath a park bench, silent and shivering.

There I was, a crumpled leaf no one cared to pick up.

Eventually, a neighborhood woman found me. My mother brought me back without a single word or emotion. And once again, silence was all that awaited me at home then, and every day after.

To most children, "home" means warmth, a mother's touch, a comforting light. But to me, home was a place of silent punishment. I never heard, "You were a mistake," spoken out loud but those words hovered constantly in the air. When I played, I was scolded. When I smiled, I was ignored. What I needed wasn't food or sheltered was a simple sentence: "You're okay, just as you are." But no one ever said it.

Over time, I stopped speaking. Silence felt safe. A blank face became my shield. One day, my father said, "You're nothing but a burden to this family." His words are cut like a blade. From that moment on, I resolved never to trust anyone again. Trust only leads to hope and hope always returns as pain.

I spent my days peeling wallpaper in my room, staring up at the ceiling, asking again and again, "Why am I alive?"
"Would death be the end of it?"

Then one day, I opened a notebook. The moment I started writing, I began to survive. Writing became my only friend my silent SOS to myself. In a life where even writing "I'm not okay" wasn't allowed, I finally found a way to speak to myself.

At school, I was an outcast. During lunch, I ate alone in a bathroom stall or on the rooftop. In gym class, I was always the kid without a partner. No one called me by name. I became "that kid," or worse, completely invisible. The more they ignored me, the closer I clung to the walls. I folded paper cranes, boats, stars, each fold a piece of my shrinking heart. Eventually, I became so small, I couldn't be seen at all.

But then, something changed on a winter evening.

Walking home, I heard a hymn drifting from the small church at the end of the alley.

"I hear the voice of the Lord He says He loves me..."

Just one line but it struck something deep inside me.

The next day, I went back to that church. I didn't go in. I just stood at a distance, listening. Strangely, my chest felt warm. For the first time, I thought, "Maybe... someone could love me."

Eventually, I opened the door. My hand trembled as I touched the knob, but inside, the air felt completely different. Praying figures, faces bowed in silence, and peace flowing like candlelight. In that place, I felt alive for the first time.

From that day forward, I visited every week. I didn't need to speak I was quietly restored. "God loves you." Those words felt like a miracle. Even without anyone saying my name or holding me, I could endure just knowing I was loved.

Home remained cold. My mother still wouldn't look at me. My father was still indifferent. But I no longer lived solely in that prison. I carried a cross around my neck and a little hope in my trembling hands. I was slowly walking out.

The boy who had once cried to survive was now finding freedom in the simple fact that he could cry.

Epilogue Poem: A Prayer That Bloomed in a Cold House

There was a room,

But no embrace.

There were words,

But no warmth.

I grew up in tears,
Calling out my name in silence.

People didn't see me,
And I feared their gaze.
But one night,
When I wept like a prayer,
The ice within me quietly began to melt.

The wind still blew,
But that day I did not shake.
Even in that cold house,
I longed to remain with someone
Who remembered how to love.

Message to the Reader: To You Who Are Barely Holding On
If it had been a real prison,

At least someone might've visited,
And I could have known what my crime was.
But in the name of "family,"
You endured the silence
Without ever understanding why.

Let me tell you this:
Your tears were never unjustified.
Your pain has never been small.

This chapter was written
To remember the strength, you showed in simply surviving.

The world may still be cold
But you, your very being,
Its warmth itself.

As you close this chapter,
Please remember that truth.

Chapter 3: The Crumbling Wall of Time

"Life never asked me how I was enduring, or why I was hurting. It simply passed by and pushed me forward."

Time was never on my side. People often say, "Time heals all wounds," but for me, time was like dust settling on top of scars that had never healed. Unhealed wounds piled up, and the weight of it all pulled me down each day. Like a collapsing wall, my days cracked and crumbled without anyone noticing.

The warmth I had briefly felt at the church, the fragments of life I had discovered through writing, none of it could hold

against the heavy weight of reality. Like paper boats, they sank quickly into the water. I was sinking too, deeper and deeper into a place where even sunlight couldn't reach.

Entering middle school, I was forced to learn I could no longer be a child. I couldn't show my tears. I couldn't reveal my wounds. The word "friend" still felt distant. The more I blended into crowds, the more alone I felt. Being alone was bearable. But being alone in a world that didn't even know I was lonely, that was cruel.

After class, I always walk fast. Before anyone could call out to me, before they could ask a question, I had to disappear. Leaning against the window at the end of the hallway, I never made eye contact. I had learned early on: if someone saw into my eyes, they might see my heart. And if they saw my heart, they would hurt me again.

One day during lunch, I accidentally dropped my tray. Soup splattered across the floor, and every eye in the cafeteria turned toward me.

"It's him again."

"Probably got hit at home, that's why he's like that."

They whispered. I said nothing. I cleaned the mess and left. After that day, I became even quieter, living more like a shadow than a person.

I sat in the corner of the library, opened my notebook, and began to write. These were stories no one would see but I saw them. They held my pain, my anger, my silent screams. Everything I couldn't say, I etched into paper. It was the only way I knew how to prove I existed.

Around that time, I had a dream. In it, I was walking toward an endless wall. A gray wall that stretched so high it

blocked the sky. I walked and walked, but there was no end. Eventually, I fell to my knees and wept. Then someone appeared, gently placing a hand on my shoulder. Their touch was warm warmer than anything I had felt.

"You haven't broken," they said. "You've only knelt."

Tears fell from my eyes. For the first time, I truly felt it: I had not been destroyed. I was still alive.

The next morning, I opened my notebook again. I wiped my tears, and with trembling hands, I wrote:

"Today, I am still alive."

It took me a long time to write that single line. It was so simple, yet for me, it felt impossibly far. But from that day on, I began writing one line to myself each day:

"You held on well."

"Today, I was still me."

"It's okay to cry next time."

About a month later, my Korean teacher discovered my notebook. She called me over, sat me down, and without asking a single question, began reading it. Then she said:

"This writing... it could be a light to someone."

"You're stronger than you think."

It was the first time anyone had spoken to me with such sincerity. I carried those words with me, repeating them every night: "I'm stronger than I thought."

After that, I began to look forward to Korean class. One day, my teacher handed me a poetry book by Nam-Joo Kim. The words inside were sharp, yet warm. I copied them by hand,

hoping that one day I might write words that could reach someone else too.

And then my first writing contest. My teacher had applied on my behalf. I sat at a desk with a trembling heart, as if I were the only person left in the world. The topic was "Hope." I wrote through tears about my father's alcohol, my mother's silence, the silence of my room, and the hymn that once slipped through a church door. I pressed every ounce of pain into the page.

When I finished, I felt, for the first time, like I had truly accomplished something.

A few days later, I heard my name on the school intercom. I won an Encouragement Prize. It wasn't about the certificate. What mattered was that someone had read my story and saw value in it. For the first time, I felt the warmth of recognition. Like a small, flickering light. But it warmed me.

That warmth, though, didn't last long.

One day, I came home to hear my parents arguing. My mother's face was pale, and my father glared at me with heavy breaths.

"Why are you always hanging around here? It's like you don't even exist."

Once again, I was pushed into a deep chasm. I locked myself in my room and opened my laptop. For the first time, I shared my story with strangers on an anonymous online forum.

To my surprise, comments came.

"Your story brought me to tears."

"I'm going through something similar."

"You're not alone."

And I cried. In front of the monitor, in a home where no one said a word to me, I cried. For the first time, I felt I had grabbed a lifeline called empathy. My pain had reached someone. And that, in turn, comforted me. That night, I prayed for a long time.

"God, if You gave me this gift of writing... then I will try to live with it."

And so, I kept writing. Crawling between the broken walls of my days, I laid words over time cracked and bruised. Hoping that one day, they might become a light for someone else.

Epilogue Poem: In Front of the Crumbling Wall of Time

Time was a wall,

And I was trapped inside.

But a single ray of light

Slipped through the cracks,
And I called my name again.

They didn't hear my cry,
But I heard the voice within.
A quiet scream,
A small but firm resolve,
And one very old hope.

Beneath the rubble,
I stood once more
Realizing that the story I wrote
With bleeding hands...
Was me.

Message to the Reader: If There's a Crack in Your Wall

To you, who are quietly crumbling inside the wall you built
to survive:

I don't know how long you've endured,
or how deeply your wounds have grown.

But I believe this:

Even your wall will someday crack.

And through that tiny crack,
Light will enter.

May that light hold your life gently.

And may this story be that light,
whispering to you

You are not alone.

Your story, too, can be someone's light

Chapter 4: Within a Collapsing World

"Sometimes, a person falls apart without a sound. To collapse is not to disappear, it is to endure while swallowing every scream."

As I approached the end of middle school, my life once again began to descend into depths. The world seemed to offer its hand for a fleeting moment, only to let go without holding me. And so, I collapsed again.

High school was another battleground. Just like my school uniform, the weight of the world grew larger. Grades turned into numbers, and people into competitors. In the hallways where shoulders bumped in silence, I continued to chase

my own shadow. My classmates laughed and smiled, but their joy never included space for me. I remained invisible, expressionless. In a world that demanded survival, I learned to endure through detachment.

There were moments I wanted to speak. I wanted to say, "I'm not okay either. I want to lean on someone too." But those words never left my lips. Instead, I cried through my writing. I breathed and spoke through it.

One day, in literature class, we were asked to write our life in a single sentence. Others laughed, scribbling lightly across their pages. But I sat frozen. Then I wrote:

"I write so that I won't disappear."

My hands trembled. I was afraid someone might read that line and see me. And yet, a part of me desperately wanted someone to do just that. Caught in that contradiction, I was still just a child.

Around that time, my father's violence became more frequent, and my mother even more silent. Her quiet dinners hurt more than any blade. The coldest thing on the table wasn't the food, it was her eyes. At that table, I learned not how to chew food, but how to chew pain.

Then one day, my mother quietly said:

"Just endure it."

It wasn't comfortable. It was a sentence. And in that moment, I understood if I wanted to survive in this house, I had to embrace silence instead of words, resignation instead of dreams.

During this season, I often sit beneath an old tree behind the school. With a wrinkled poetry book in hand, I stared up at the gray sky and wrote quietly inside my heart. Stories no

one would see. Just mine. The wind whispered through the branches, and I turned those whispers into poems. The world still didn't know me but somehow, that tree seemed to remember I existed.

A small change began in the school library. Organizing books and updating old records was simple work, but within it, I found peace. Books didn't demand anything from me. Instead, they gave me a rest. One day, a senior came across my writing and said softly:

"Hey... this is your work, right? It's really good."

His words were like spring sunlight. Still a little cold, but warm enough to stir something within me. I couldn't say anything, I just nodded. But that whole day, I felt oddly lighthearted.

I began to peer into my own heart. Emotions I once avoided, memories I used to reject, I started to meet them

through writing. I was trying to understand myself, so I wouldn't completely break, even in a collapsing world.

Then came a psychological assessment at school. The counselor looked at me quietly and asked:

"Are you... very lonely?"

I broke. The tears burst without warning. For the first time, I exposed my heart outside a classroom.

In the counselor's office, I finally began to speak. It was painful but liberating. My words were rawer than my writing. They shook my heart.

"No one waits for me."

"Even if I go home, no one listens to what I have to say."

The counselor simply nodded and said:

"Then here, I will listen."

That single sentence held me up.

After that day, I visited the counselor weekly. Sometimes I said nothing, just stared out the window. But even in that silence, I felt it: in this space, I was not invisible.

One day, the counselor told me:

"You observe yourself very well. That's the first gift of a writer."

I chose to believe those words. Trusting again meant I was opening myself to the possibility of pain but also, to healing.

Around then, I began trying things beyond writing. I joined a club, participated in a poetry recital. With my own voice, I read my poem aloud. My hands trembled. My voice cracked. But speaking my truth before others became an unforgettable moment. Some clapped. Some wiped their eyes.

Only then did I realize:

Writing can touch a heart.

Words can move it.

For the first time, I believed my story could matter to someone.

One day, the counselor handed me a small envelope. Inside was an old notebook.

"These are writings from when I was a student," she said. "I wanted to give them to you."

Inside, her childhood unfolded. She, too, had been lonely. She had been hurt. She cried. I wept as I read it. And at that moment, I was no longer alone.

Yes, I had been breaking.

But I was also growing within the breaking.

I didn't need to be strong.

Even soft roots can break through the ground.

My hope, too, was quietly growing inside me.

Epilogue Poem: Within the Collapsing World

The world fell apart,

But I remained sitting within it.

I wasn't trying not to collapse

I was simply trying to breathe
even in the ruins.

Silence was frightening,
Words felt distant.
But a single glance, a quiet nod,
Sometimes, they were enough to keep me whole.

I trembled softly,
Broke slowly,
And then bit by bit
I began to piece myself back together.

And I said to the world,
in a small, careful voice:
"I'm here. I'm alive too."

And the world, with the gentlest smile,
embraced my existence.

Message to the Reader: To You Who Are Living While
Trembling

Life never collapses at all at once.
It just quietly cracks,
let's darkness in through tiny seams.

But through those same cracks,
light can also enter.

If you are trembling right now,
It means you're still alive.

Your trembling is not shameful.
It is the most human proof of life.

May this writing remain
as a gentle warmth in one corner of your heart.

And today may you live.
Not collapse but endure.

And if you wish to write, do it.
For the days you couldn't cry.
For the stories no one listened to.

Your writing may one day
save you.
And maybe... someone else

"When I felt abandoned by the world, God wiped my tears and whispered, 'Let's go.'"

The word release sounds romantic in theory. But when the iron gate finally opened, my chest swelled with emotion and yet a strange emptiness followed. "So... I'm really going back into the world."

Reality was cold. The world had not waited for me. The streets were unfamiliar, the people looked the same yet felt distant, and I like a ghost returning from behind the walls of time wandered invisibly through it all.

Freedom came with a leash. Under parole, I watched it again. I had to check in regularly, receive unexpected calls from the precinct, and meet the sharp gaze of my supervising officer. The prison had confined my body, but

this surveillance made me invisible among people. I lived under the knife of judgment unseen but always felt.

I tried to be brave. I knocked on doors, seeking work. But the moment they noticed the gap in my résumé, or hinted at my past, I froze.

"Have you... ever been incarcerated?"

The question shattered everything.

"So this is what it means to be branded."

Even my smallest hopes were shattered in the face of society. Sometimes, I caught myself thinking: "Wouldn't it be easier to go back? Out here... it hurts too much." There's a cruel irony to it: that the rigid walls of prison could feel more forgiving than so-called freedom.

But God held onto me again.

One rainy night, while walking in desperation, I stumbled upon a small church at the end of an alley. I never expected warmth. But the pastor silently handed me a warm bowl of rice, took my hand, and prayed:

"Lord, do not remember this son by the crime the world knows,
but by the masterpiece You created him to be."

That prayer felt like permission to live.

Tears wouldn't stop flowing. Something inside me something human, long forgotten slowly rose again.

I began again from the bottom: sweeping streets before dawn, working as a day laborer in factories, greeting customers in supermarket aisles. I couldn't afford to choose.

Each day was survival. I lived bowed low, kneeling before the simplest forms of life. And in that low place, I prayed not to fall again, but to endure. To rise.

Yet the world didn't easily forgive me.

One day, near my rented room, an officer stopped me.

"There was a theft at a convenience store nearby. Can you confirm your whereabouts at the time?"

I had no idea such an incident had occurred. But just one question turned me back into a suspect. I sat for hours, questioned. Humiliation and bitterness burned through my veins.

"Why me again... why always me?"

At night, I swallowed tears and screamed silently toward the heavens:

"God... are You really there? Why must I suffer like this, be so alone, so cast away?"

And yet, after the screaming always came a whisper:

"I am with you."

Not a thunderous revelation. Just a quiet voice in my heart. And that whisper became the only thread connecting my life.

I clung to that thread and began going to church every dawn. I cried while praying. I prayed while crying. Sometimes I rag at myself. Sometimes I despaired over the world. But always, I returned to prayer. In God's presence, I was most truthful and most small.

The world still called me ex-convict.
But God was giving me a new name.
Not criminal, but grace-touched soul.
Not abandoned but chosen.

One day, I found work at a small-town library. No one asked about my past. I simply shelved books in silence. And there, for the first time, I felt the true meaning of peace.

A young child came up to me one day and asked,
"Mister, why do you like books?"

I paused, then smiled.

"Because... books don't ask questions. They just listen."

The child nodded solemnly.

"Same for me. That's why I come every day."

And I laughed truly, freely for the first time in a long time.
That laugh saved me.

Life didn't become easy. Government aid was denied.
Loneliness crept in often. But I had learned who I was. Why
I needed to live. Who owned my life. And it was not the
world it was God.

So, I made a vow:

"From now on, my life will not leave traces of sin
but traces of grace."

People might still look at me and see my past. But that's
okay. God sees my present and prepares my future.

I am paving my path with tears.

And now, I believe:

At the end of this road,

There is light.

Though my body bears scars,

Though I sometimes clench my fists in shame,

I continue forward

with tears, with prayer, with silence.

Epilogue Poem: A Road of Tears, Leading to Grace

In the place where tears brought me,

I found breath again.

Even when I thought I was abandoned,

God's hand rested on my back.

When no one believed in me,

When I nearly gave up on myself,

He called my name:

"My son, come."

Even where there was no road,

I paved one with prayer.

Even in front of closed doors,

I knocked with tears.

And finally,

At the end of that road,

There was light.

Message to the Reader: To You Standing in a Place of Tears

If you are standing right now

In a place of weeping

Then you are already walking the road.

My tears are not weak.

They are the language closest to God's heart.

Your pain is not in vain.

Your shaking, your scars

All of it will one day become

traces of grace,

And light to someone else.

Even if the world judges you,

God embraces you.

With that faith, walk again today.

The light that blooms on tears

is always the most beautiful.

And I am living proof.

Chapter 6: Surviving in a World Without Forgiveness

"I repented, and God forgave me... but the world labeled me a 'criminal for life.'"

"That's the guy, right?"

"Isn't he... a convict?"

"Hey, be careful. I wouldn't feel safe having him around..."

I've heard such words countless times. The voices that whisper behind my back often cut deeper than those

spoken to my face. In their eyes, I saw fear, suspicion and quiet contempt.

Yes, I committed a crime.

Yes, I had served my time.

Yes, I had repented, and God had forgiven me.

But the world didn't.

Even after I was released, I walked daily with the shadow of my past. Wherever I went, as soon as someone discovered my record, things began to crumble.

At the first factory job I got, people treated me well. They said all I needed to do was work hard, so I did without complaint, pouring sweat into every task. But after about three months, someone spotted my criminal record on a document left on the manager's desk. Everything changed.

No one sat with me at lunch. Colleagues stopped speaking to me. Some even requested transfers, saying they felt unsafe.

A few days later, I packed my things in silence. No one stopped me.

Sitting on a park bench outside the factory, the world suddenly felt more suffocating than prison ever had. I muttered to myself,

"I thought I was forgiven... but I guess not."

I knew then people don't just withhold forgiveness. They often want to erase the person's existence altogether.

Still, I had to live. Because God hadn't let me go.

I started from scratch. I delivered newspapers at dawn with a bag on my back, washed dishes in restaurants, and did hard labor at construction sites. These were places where no one asked questions, no one cared about the past. Those places were my only breathing spaces.

Yet I remained invisible.

When trying to rent a room, I had to disclose my record. I had to provide a guarantor. My résumé carried a ten-year gap and even the most indifferent interviewers couldn't force a smile at me.

Society said, "There are no second chances."

But I knew differently. God forgives not once, but seventy times seven. Infinite grace.

So, I chose prayer over anger.

Patience over tears.

Love over wounds.

One day, a pastor at a small church said to me:

"Brother Kim, it's okay if the world doesn't forgive you. God already has. He calls you His son."

At those words, I felt like my body melted and wept uncontrollably. In that moment, I engraved a truth deep within me:

"I am a sinner, yes but I am a forgiven child of God."

That truth gave me courage. It gave me a reason not to give up.

Around that time, a cleaning company took me in without hesitation. Even after I shared my history, the owner simply said:

"Then let's live right, from now on. I've had my share of wild years too."

He felt like someone God had sent.

With gratitude, I cleaned more sincerely than anyone bathrooms, offices, stairwells. Wherever my hands went, it felt like something was coming back to life.

One day, the boss said to me:

"You've got sincerity. I can feel it."

I bowed my head, but my eyes burned with tears. From that moment, a fire rekindled inside me.

I saved little by little, bought second-hand equipment, and eventually started a small cleaning business. It was humble but it bore my name, and I poured my heart into it.

I hired two employees. I never asked them about their past. I didn't care if they had records or not. Because I knew better than anyone is not their past. People are their present.

One day, an elderly man at a job site said to me:

"Mister, the restroom smells lovely today."

I hadn't realized how warm that one sentence could be. To know that my presence had positively touched someone else's day that gave me life.

Another time, one of my employees confessed:

"Boss... I had a rough history too."

I simply smiled and replied:

"That's okay. You're living well now. That's what matters."

And that day for the first time, he wept in front of me.

Once again, I learned:

People are ultimately connected by the heart.

I wanted to create a space where no one would be asked about their past.

A small world where wounds were met with understanding, not judgment.

So, I hung a sign in my office:

"Here, we only ask your name.

Your past belongs to God

Your today is in your hands."

A customer once read it and said,

"That's a beautiful line. This place feels warm."

And I smiled.

I never imagined I'd hear the word "warm" associated with my life.

But God had wrapped everyday moments in small, gentle miracles.

Yes, there are still those who call me a criminal.

But God calls me His restored son.

And that voice keeps me walking, day after day.

I now know:

Forgiveness isn't just about being forgiven.

It must grow into the strength to forgive others

And that strength becomes a hand that saves the world.

When we extend the grace we received,

Then we are truly alive.

Epilogue Poem: A Restoration Deeper Than Memory

People remember the past.

But I walk toward the future.

God walks with me today.

When I was a sinner,

He called me Son.

When I ran away,
He opened His arms.

I am not my past
I am proof of grace.

Even if the world refuses to forgive,
He will never let me go.

Even if it rains along my path,
I don't mind.
That rain becomes repentance,
And flowers bloom upon it.

Message to the Reader: To You, Silenced by the Weight of
Memory

Are you still crushed by the weight of your past?

Still believing you're nothing more than a sinner?

Do you feel as if no one sees your sincerity,
as if your courage is always ignored?

If you are reading this now,
then remember just one thing:

God sees more than your past
He sees your potential.

People remember.
But God restores.

So, rise again.
From your very steps,
The path of grace is opening quietly.

And I'll be waiting
to meet you on that road.

Chapter 7: Australia's Wall, and My Brush

"¥450,000, a thread of hope, and a journey to a land of
unimaginable miracles..."

"This is all I have... I'm really sorry."

With those words, my friend pulled ¥450,000 in worn bills
from his wallet and placed it in my hand. Tears blurred my
vision. I bowed my head, wiped my eyes when he wasn't
looking, and said awkwardly,

"Thank you..."

That one word carried all my pain and every drop of resolve. And so, with nothing but ₩450,000 in my pocket, I boarded a flight to Australia. No one guaranteed me a future. My visa was uncertain, my English clumsy, my body already worn and weary. But there was one thing I still had hope for.

The first air of that foreign land felt unexpectedly warm. A friend's acquaintance picked me up from the airport. After an hour's drive, we arrived at his home a small, single-story house. He offered me a room in his converted garage. It was bare, windowless, and cold. But the yard outside was green. Trees swayed in the breeze. Well-trimmed grass and nameless flowers glistened in the sun. As I looked out, I whispered to myself:

"Someday, I'll bloom again... like this green field."

That night, lying on a thin mat, I made a promise:

"Start over. This time, don't collapse."

The next morning, I began working. I had no visa, so I couldn't be officially hired. I took whatever jobs I could cleaning, painting, tiling, assisting carpenters, moving furniture, even hauling construction waste. I couldn't afford to choose. The work was rough, I couldn't communicate well, and wages were often withheld. But I never thought of leaving. Enduring was the only way to survive.

The language barrier loomed large. Every day, I studied English memorizing signs on the street, copying words I heard at work, reviewing them each night. Some mocked my pronunciation, but I smiled. Even though that was proof I was becoming human again.

Then one day, everything crashed.

A visa broker trusted, forged documents and vanished. Overnight, I became an undocumented immigrant. Job offers vanished. Strangers' stares grew colder. The sound of police sirens made my heart stop.

But I didn't give up.

No hardship could shake my faith.

"God, even in this wilderness, please... don't let me go."

I prayed every night. At dawn, I opened my eyes and went back to work. Anywhere that would take me. The hardest jobs. The roughest conditions. I wanted to rebuild my life with my hands, my sweat.

Then came the turning point.

I got a part-time job organizing tools for a paint company. The boss was curt but professional. I stayed quiet and

worked hard. My hands became stained with paint, my knuckles cracked but that brush felt like a new pen in my hand. A tool not just to paint walls, but to repaint my life.

A few days later, the boss said:

"Kim, you're really diligent. Ever thought about learning the trade?"

His words struck like lightning. I lit up inside.

That's when I began to learn how to paint. At first, I was clumsy with the brush. I couldn't mix colors properly. But I kept at it. I painted over failed walls, smiled without compliments, kept going without reward.

Time passed. I became skilled. One day, I was teaching others.

As I repainted battered, cracked walls, I realized this work wasn't just about color. It was restoration. My life, too, was being painted anew.

Then—an impossible thing happened.

I received official notice from the Australian immigration office. I was eligible to apply for permanent residency.

I couldn't believe it. My hands trembled. I checked the documents over and over. I filled out the forms with prayers woven between the lines.

And months later

I became a citizen of Australia.

It made no sense.

A man with a 12-year prison sentence.

An illegal immigrant.

A penniless foreigner.

And now an Australian citizen.

That night, I sat on a beach and wept. The sea was quiet;
the waves caressed the sand. I whispered to the sky:

"God... You didn't abandon someone like me."

My Korean record was gone. My name no longer bore the
stain of criminals. I had a new life. A new name. A new
language. A new land.

In Australia, I got my own home. I bought a van. I started
contracting paint jobs by myself. Slowly, I grew my business
and hired other immigrants.

I never asked them about their past. I only looked at their sincerity and potential. Because someone had once done that for me.

One day, an employee asked me:

"Boss... why do you trust guys like us?"

I smiled and said,

"Because I used to be like you.

And because God trusted me,

I want to trust you."

He nodded, and we painted the floor side by side. That day, the color was bright white like we were repainting our lives.

I know

Life is neither fate nor a plan.

But choice is possible.

The choice to be brave.

The choice to endure.

The choice to believe in someone.

And when God's hand rests upon that choice, miracles
happen.

Even now, this very moment

I stand in the heart of one such miracle.

Epilogue Poem: A Prayer in a Foreign Land

A foreign language.

A foreign street.

A cold floor, without blankets.
Eyes closed in the silence of night,
I whispered:

"God... can You see me here?"

That prayer rode the wind.
The years hardened my hands
But not my heart.

With a single brush in hand,
Painting unfamiliar walls,
I repainted my life.

And wrote upon it:

"Grace blooms anywhere."

Message to the Reader: To You, Setting Out for a New Land

Are you standing somewhere unfamiliar?

Afraid to start again where no one knows you,

Where no one expects anything of you?

Then may the road I walked

Be a small lantern for yours.

~~¥~~450,000, a thin mat, a windowless room

That's where my life began again.

Now, that life holds a brush

That fills empty spaces with color.

Your new beginning

Can start right where you are.

May God's hand

Rest upon that beginning.

I sincerely pray for it

Chapter 8: The Failure Named Love

"The tears of a man who couldn't protect his family speak through silence, not excuses."

By the time my life in Australia had begun to find some stability, I got married. We met in that distant land, both carrying wounds hers deep, mine even deeper. Perhaps that's why, when we first looked at each other, there was a quiet compassion in our gaze. In our first conversation, a fragile warmth.

"As long as I'm with you, I can endure anything."

When she said that, a small flame lit deep within my chest. I took her hand, holding my past in the other. Words came later being together came first. Promises followed our actions.

We vowed, quietly and desperately, to start again.

Before long, children were born. The moment I held my first child; I wept in silence. I never knew that one word "Dad" could carry such weight. Every time I held their little hands; I made a silent promise:

"I will not pass down the pain I've received."

That became my prayer. My vow. My direction in life.

But promises alone couldn't preserve a family.

By day, I labored under the weight of physical exhaustion. By night, I returned to children, chores, and fatigue. We sat across from each other at the dinner table, but over time, the words between us faded. Love still existed, but we didn't know how to sustain it.

I wanted to be a good husband. But I was clumsy with words. I didn't know how to show emotion. The more tired I became, the more I stayed silent. My silence turned to coldness. That coldness slowly sank into her heart.

At first, she tried to understand. But as time went on, her gaze dulled. Not because she stopped loving me but because she no longer had the strength to endure that love.

One day, a minor argument filled the living room. It would become our final conversation.

"I... I just can't anymore."

She spoke without tears, quietly. She held the children's hands, turned, and left. I didn't stop her.

I couldn't.

I had hurt her too much and realized it far too late.

That night, I sat in the middle of our now-empty home and broke down.

"God... I've failed again."

The clothes the children left behind, their toys, the crayon drawings on the walls, everything screamed my failure. Each morning, I remembered them. Their laughter. Their sleeping faces. The way they called me "Dad." That love now sat in my chest like a punishment.

Love was never light.

And a love you fail to protect makes even explanations meaningless.

As time passed, I began to understand:

Love is not just about starting

It's about enduring.

More than emotion, love requires care.

Because of my immaturity, I lost my family.

There was no one to blame but me.

Sometimes I find photos of my children online. They've grown so much. And the curve of their eyes just like mine

makes it even harder to bear. My trace lives in them. But I am no longer part of their world.

On their birthdays, I can't do anything.

No cake. No celebration.

I just write in a small notebook:

"I'm not by your side,

But I still love you.

And that will never change."

But I never reach out.

I'm afraid I'd only bring them pain again.

I learned too late that love requires responsibility.

So, I pray every day:

"God, please let them grow without scars.

Let them never cry because of me."

Even now, I whisper their names alone in the dark, and my eyes well with tears.

After a long season of wandering, I met the woman who is now my wife. She reached out her hand to me, shadowed as I was by my past. With no condition, she said:

"It's okay. Let's begin again."

With that single sentence, I stood back up.

Together, we worked. We opened a small shop and slowly rebuild our lives. She sometimes walked ahead, lighting the path. Sometimes I stood behind me, pushing me forward. Together, we raised two daughters.

They share no blood with me,
But they have received my love, my time, my prayers.

I walked them to school.
Helped with their homework.
Pulled blankets over their sleeping forms.

And each time, I prayed:

"God, let these children grow safe and whole.
Let them never know the darkness I have known."

Now they are grown young adults who understand me,
worry for me, and love me.

But now, I live in Korea.

And they are still in Australia.

We can't eat meals together.

We can't see each other every day.

This distance carves a quiet ache in my heart.

To them, I want to say this:

"You are truly precious to me.

You are truly loved.

Time together creates a family.

And love shared builds bonds stronger than blood."

One day, when you read this,

I hope you know:

I loved you with all my heart.

And that will never change.

You were the warmest gift I ever received

Halfway through my broken life.

Epilogue Poem: Where Love Once Was

Love, unspoken,

Lingered in the place where it left.

More than tears,

I spoke love through long silences.

Unkept promises

Still stain my heart.

But now I know

Love must be learned again.

The person I am today

I can no longer hate who I was then.

I only pray

That I may never lose love again.

Message to the Reader: To You, Who Still Carry a Departed

Love

Are you living with the ache of someone who left?

Was love too great to put into words?

Too precious to hold tightly without fear?

If so please remember:

Even failed love

It was once love.

And because of that,

You lived.

You gave.

You grew.

And maybe one day,

That very painful

Will become your gentlest strength.

Chapter 9: A Letter to My Daughter

"I never abandoned you, my daughter. I only lacked the right to come close."

My beloved daughter,

Today, once again, I whispered your name dozens of times in my heart. I cannot raise my voice to call you. I cannot reach out my hand to touch you. But know this my heart has never once left you.

The day I first held you in my arms, your warmth was the most tender and living moment in my life. Every breath of your tiny being etched deep within me, leaving behind

marks that have never faded. From that moment on, every step I took with your hand in mine was a prayer. A gift.

When you first said, "Daddy," it felt like the world stopped. Even the guilt and darkness that lived inside me seemed to disappear in that instant. Your gaze, your laughter, the way you babbled they became the reason for my existence.

But I failed to protect that love.

Heavy days that cannot be captured in words... In trying to hold on to life, I let go of the most precious thing you.

I lost my family. I am sending you far away. And the distance between us grew wider with each passing day. If I could turn back time, I would grasp even the smallest ordinary moment like reading you a book at bedtime.

There was a day when I stumbled upon a single photo of you on social media. Just one image but it shook my entire world. You had grown so much. Your eyes, your smile... even your stance reminded me of myself. That one photo felt like a message from a faraway land, as if your presence was still calling out to me.

But still I could not reach out.

I couldn't say hello.

Couldn't ask how you were doing.

Because deep inside, I felt I had no right.

I wasn't there for your growth. I wasn't by your side when you cried. I wasn't the father who read you stories, celebrated your wins, or listened when you struggled.

And still, my daughter, I hope you will know this:

I never stopped loving you. Not for a second.

You live in every prayer I offer. Every breath I take. Even now, I often stop in the middle of a busy day, thinking:

"What would she be doing right now?"

I imagine you walking to school, talking with friends, laughing, sometimes crying. I picture it all. And I pray:

"Lord, let my daughter be safe. Let her be well. Let her never carry the weight of my mistakes."

Every birthday you've had, I've remembered.

Even if I couldn't send a message,

Even if I couldn't be near

I've marked each day in silence.

One day, when you are older and if by chance you come across this letter, I hope it reaches you like a gentle breeze. And I hope you'll remember:

You were never abandoned.

I simply stayed away... because I thought I didn't deserve you.

But now, I know.

Love is not something one deserves.

It's something that remains.

Even when unseen.

Even when silent.

So, I will keep living. For you.

And I will keep praying. For you.

Even if I never hear your voice again,

Even if we never meet

Know this:

You are loved, and you always were.

From your father,

who still walks with your name hidden in his chest.

Epilogue Poem: A Letter Never Sent

At least once each day,

I whispered your name.

I knew it would not reach you,

But I called anyway like a prayer.

Your name was my breath.

It was the shape of my longing.

Even as a forgotten shadow,
I wanted to remain in your memory.

The love I couldn't speak of
It weighed heavier than I imagined.

Only after you were gone
Did I learn how much unsaid love can ache.

But remember, my daughter:

I am still living for you.
And I always will.

Message to the Reader: To You, in a Broken Relationship
Are you living with the ache of a loved one now far away
So far that you can't even reach them with words?

If the love you couldn't express
Still sits in your heart like a stone,
You are still someone living inside that love.

Love cannot always be spoken.
Sometimes, it is carried into tears.
Sometimes, in silence.
Sometimes, in longing for myself.

Even if there is no opportunity,
Love them in your longing.
Because sincerity will reach them
Someday.
In some way.

And please, never hate yourself.

The love you gave

Even if it was never returned

It was meaningful, simply because it was true.

Chapter 10: What Can Only Be Seen After Everything Falls Apart

"The sky I never looked up at... began to speak to me after I
had lost everything."

There comes a moment in life when you collapse not
dramatically, but quietly. Not because something major
happened, but because everything slowly chipped away.
And one day, you simply can't stand it anymore.

I experienced that moment.

After years of struggling to survive, building up hope piece by piece, I once again faced a wall. Business slowed. Debt crept in. My body, worn from years of labor, began to protest. People I had trusted began to distance themselves. Even my wife, though supportive, could not hide the exhaustion on her face.

It felt like the end of everything.

At first, I pretended to be okay. Smiled, made excuses, said things like, "We've been through worse." But deep inside, I was unraveling. Not in noise but in silence.

Then came the day I sat alone in the café we had opened, staring out the window, unable to move. No customers. No laughter. Just the ticking of the clock and the whisper of failure.

I put my head down on the table and wept.

Not for a single thing.

But for everything.

For the years of wandering.

For the child I couldn't protect.

For the second marriage I feared I might ruin.

For the business I might lose.

For the man I once dreamed of becoming but never became.

In that moment, I cried not because I was weak, but because I had held on for too long.

That night, I walked without direction. I looked up. The sky was darker than usual, but for the first time in a while—I saw

it.

A single star twinkled in the corner of the sky.

It wasn't bright. But it was there.

And I heard a whisper deep in my soul:

"Even when everything crumbles,

I am still here."

It wasn't a voice from outside. It came from within. The God
I had called out to in desperation, the One I often felt
distant from He was still with me.

That night, I did something I hadn't done in a long time:

I knelt.

And I prayed.

"God, if You are still with me,
then help me see what I couldn't see before."

And slowly, very slowly, things began to change.

Not my situation. That was still difficult.

But my eyes began to change.

I began to see the hands that held me.

The quiet presence of my wife.

The worn shoes of my children by the door.

The loyalty of one old customer who kept coming back for
coffee.

The silent prayers offered in the corners of my day.

These were all there before

But I couldn't see them until everything else had fallen.

There is a kind of vision that only comes after collapse.

A clarity born from the dust of shattered plans.

A depth that comes only from sinking.

And in that depth, I found truth:

That I was never alone.

Not even once.

I used to think that falling was failure.

But now, I believe

Falling is sometimes the only way to truly rise.

After that night, I picked myself up. I apologized to my wife. We talked truly talked for the first time in months. I met with staff. We cut costs. We simplified the menu. I spoke honestly to customers.

And slowly, life began again.

Not grandly. Not suddenly. But honestly.

And that honesty held more strength than any plan I ever had.

Epilogue Poem: After Everything Falls

Only when I lose everything

Did I see the one thing I still had.

When strength fails,
Faith remained.

When the light disappeared,
The stars appeared.

The world didn't change
But my eyes did.

And so, I walk,
Not in triumph,
But in truth.

Not because I won
But because I survived.

Message to the Reader: To You, Lying in the Rubble

Are you collapsed right now?

Too tired to explain yourself,

Too broken to even cry?

Then let me say this

You are not over.

You are simply passing through

a sacred place called "rock bottom."

It's where illusions break.

Where pride is stripped.

Where truth finally breathes.

And from there

You will rise.

Not as the person you were,

But as someone new.

Stronger. Softer.

More real.

And when you rise,

The sky will still be there.

Still waiting.

Still shining.

Even on your darkest night.

Chapter 11: Back to Korea, A New Beginning

"Even in the place where I once lost everything, I dared to return with love in my hands."

After many years in Australia, my wife and I made a decision that surprised even us we would return to Korea.

Some might call it a step backward. Others asked, "Why leave when you finally found stability?" But our hearts had heard a deeper call.

My wife's aging parents were ill. As their only daughter, she could not ignore their fading health. And as her husband, I could not ignore her longing to be by their side.

We knew it wouldn't be easy.

Korea had never been a gentle place for me. It held too many memories, too many scars. I was returning not as a

victor, but as a forgiven man with a long story. Yet we believed if we came in love, then it would be enough.

We arrived with little more than a few suitcases, a small sum of savings, and hope.

We moved to a modest city on the outskirts of Seoul. The air was familiar but distant. The streets had changed, but the coldness in people's gazes remained the same. Still, we pressed on.

We found a small commercial space near a subway station humble but clean. And there, with our bare hands and a lot of borrowed courage, we opened a café.

"Ten Percent Coffee."

That was the name.

Because we didn't have one hundred percent of anything.

But we wanted to offer at least ten percent of hope.

Our first customers were curious.

Then skeptical.

Then silent.

Days passed with only a handful of sales.

My wife and I worked from dawn till closing yet profits
barely covered rent.

At night, we counted coins more than we dreamt.

But we refused to give up.

We baked our own bread.

Roasted our beans with prayer.

Cleaned the shop until it gleamed.

We placed soft music near the window and handwritten messages by the counter:

"Welcome. Your day matters."

"You are precious. Even if no one says so today."

And slowly people began to return.

One by one, they came back.

Some said they liked the coffee.

Others said the atmosphere felt warm.

A few whispered that our space reminded them of something they had forgotten.

A woman once sat alone in the corner, crying quietly. When I placed a napkin on her table, she simply said:

"This place feels like someone understands."

And I knew then this café wasn't just a business. It was our second life. Our altar.

We weren't just serving drinks.

We were offering something far more sacred:

Presence.

Then came the challenges.

Customers who stayed for hours without buying much.

Teenagers who left trash.

Neighbors who gossiped.

Rent that rose.

But every time we were tested, we reminded ourselves:

"We're not here to make money.

We're here to make meaning."

And meaning was something the world could never take away.

Even in Korea

A country where my past once strangled me

I began to walk again, not as a fugitive,

But as a father. A husband. A man with purpose.

And as the seasons changed, so did we.

One winter, I was cleaning the front glass when an old man came by. He looked at me and said:

"You're not from around here, are you?"

I nodded politely.

He smiled and added,

"Well, now you are.

This place needed someone like you."

That day, I felt as if the ground had finally welcomed my footsteps.

Now, every morning, I open the café with gratitude. I brew the first cup with prayer. I greet customers not as a businessman but as someone who knows what it means to fall, to rise, and to love again.

My wife stands by the counter.

Our laughter fills the empty spaces.

The scent of roasted beans dances in the air.

And I whisper to myself:

"You've come back not as who you were,
but as who you were always meant to be."

Epilogue Poem: A New Beginning, Poured in Coffee

The country I once fled from

Now holds my tomorrow.

In the place where I was most broken,

I found the courage to bloom again.

Not loudly,

But gently.

In the corner of a busy street,

We built a home with cups and kindness.

And in each sip poured with trembling hands,
Lies the quiet echo of grace.

Message to the Reader: To You, Who Are Starting Again

You may return to a place that once hurt you.
You may stand where your dreams once died.

But that doesn't mean you've failed.

Returning doesn't mean retreating.
It may be the bravest thing you've ever done.

Because to return
With open hands
With forgiveness
With love

It is to rise again.

So, start again.

Even if the soil is unfamiliar.

Even if your hands are shaking.

Because within your trembling,

There may already be seeds of resurrection.

And even cracked ground

Can bloom.

Chapter 12: And still, I Lived My Final Confession to You

"This is not a story of someone who succeeded.

It is the story of someone who, despite it all,
remained alive."

As I close this book, I ask myself what kind of man have I
become?

Not a hero.

Not a role model.

Certainly not a success story.

But I am alive.

And that, to me, is the greatest miracle of all.

There were countless moments I wanted to disappear.

Moments when I thought, "No one would miss me anyway."

But I didn't disappear.

I endured.

I stood at the edge of despair and took one step back.

Not because I was brave, but because someone prayed for me.

Because someone whispered, "You are not alone."

This book is a letter to everyone who has ever felt abandoned, unloved, invisible.

It is also a confession

That behind every broken piece of my life,

There was a quiet, unwavering grace.

The God I once doubted

Never let me go.

He didn't make life easier

But He stayed.

Through prison bars,
Through the silence of a broken home,
Through foreign streets and tear-soaked bedsheets,
Through the shame of the past
And the trembling of new beginnings

He stayed.

Even now, as I write these words,
I am not whole.
I still wake from nightmares.
Still flinch at certain memories.
Still pray more in sighs than in sentences.

But I no longer hate myself.

And that is a resurrection.

To forgive others is difficult.

To forgive oneself sometimes, nearly impossible.

But I've learned this:

If God still believes in me,

Then I can try to believe in me too.

I once thought I would die alone.

But now, I have a family I cherish.

I once thought I would never dream again.

But now, I dream of opening my café to the broken,

Of writing letters to the forgotten,

Of telling someone "You're still worthy."

I don't want this book to end with my name.

I want it to continue in yours.

In your life.

In your restoration.

In your courage.

So, if you are reading this, and your heart is trembling,

Know this:

You are alive.

And that means there is still hope.

Still a reason.

Still a purpose.

Even if no one sees it yet.

Even if you don't see it yet.

Your life is not over.

If this broken man could stand again,

Then so can you.

And when you do,

When you breathe through pain and rise again

I'll be here,

Smiling quietly,

And whispering:

You lived.

And that is enough.

Final Poem: A Life That Didn't Disappear

I was not brilliant.

Nor brave.

Nor blessed in ways the world admires.

But I remained.

In the dark alley, I remained.

In the freezing room, I remained.

In the silence of rejection,

In the Exile of memory

Still, I remained.

And from that long, trembling breath,

Life emerged.

One note of perfection

But of presence.

A single life

That refused to disappear.

Final Message to the Reader: My Last Whisper to You

If this book reaches you in a moment of despair,

Then let it be more than paper.

Let it be presence.

Let it be proof.

That someone, somewhere,

Walked through hell and returned

To tell you,

You are not alone.

You never were.

No matter how deep the night,

The morning will come.

And in that light,

You will see:

You are still here.

You are still breathing.

You are still becoming.

And that is enough.

That is everything.

That...

is grace.

Back Cover Summary

Even in the deepest shadows, light can bloom.

Grace in the Shadow of Tears is the deeply personal, hauntingly beautiful true story of one man's journey through abandonment, prison, immigration, failure, and restoration. From the cold corners of a broken childhood to the quiet faith rediscovered in a foreign land, this memoir invites readers to witness the raw, unfiltered steps of a soul that refused to disappear.

With lyrical honesty and quiet courage, the author weaves a narrative that is not about success, but survival about grace that found him not in his strength, but in his ruin.

This is a book for the wounded.

For the forgotten.

For those still holding on in the dark.

And for anyone longing to hear:

"You are not alone."

Once a forgotten name behind prison walls, Namjoo Kim is now a husband, father, café owner, and writer who has chosen to walk forward with honesty, faith, and quiet strength. Born into hardship and shaped by pain, he now writes to offer light to those still living in shadows.

Grace in the Shadow of Tears is his first full-length memoir an unflinching journey through sorrow, survival, and divine

grace. His story is not one of triumph, but of presence. Not perfection, but endurance.

About the Authors

(Kevin) Namjoo Kim is a survivor, a storyteller, and a man shaped by silence and faith.

Once a forgotten name behind prison bars and deeper regrets,

he now lives as a husband, father, and café owner writing not from conquest, but from compassion.

His life, scarred by loss yet softened by grace, offers a voice to those who feel unseen.

In this memoir, he presents his wounds not for pity, but as windows through which others might glimpse hope.

Kyung-Eun Lee is a writer, translator, and a soul who listens with her heart.

With deep empathy for those the world overlooks, she joined Namjoo Kim in giving voice to this story across languages and across pain.

She believes in the sacred healing that comes from sharing
sorrow
and in the quiet power of truth spoken tenderly.

Together, they offer this book not as a product,
but as a quiet offering
for those still trembling in the dark

Epilogue

I didn't write this book because I'm strong.
I wrote it because I survived.

Not because I overcame the world,
but because grace overcame me.

I have failed, fallen, wandered, and wept.
But I am still here.

Still breathing.

Still believing.

This book is my final confession
and my first true offering.

If you're still hurting, still doubting,
still waiting for your story to begin,
then take this as a sign:

You are not finished.
You are not forgotten.
And you are never beyond grace.

— Written by Namjoo Kim

— Translated & Co-authored by Kyung Eun Lee

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