

Chapter 03

The Stories We Live Inside

Long before we choose what we believe, we begin believing stories.

Most of them are never spoken aloud.

Some are handed to us by our families.

Others arrive through disappointment.

Some are born from success.

Others from heartbreak.

Little by little, they become the quiet narrators of our lives.

Eventually, we stop hearing them because they sound so much like our own voice.

A child reaches for a parent, the parent smiles.

Something beautiful is learned: *"I am welcome."*

Another child reaches; no one notices.

A different story quietly begins: *"Perhaps I'm on my own."*

Neither child chose those conclusions.

The stories simply settled into the architecture of their world.

As adults, we imagine we make decisions with our minds.

I wonder if we make most of them from stories we no longer remember learning.

Stories about worth, success, failure, God, stories even about ourselves.

Every story whispers an answer to the same question: *"Who am I?"*

Hospice has taught me something unexpected.

As life draws toward its close, very few people ask, *"Was I successful enough?"*

Instead they ask questions that sound remarkably different:

"Did I love well?" "Did my life matter?" "Was I enough?"

Those questions have probably been with them for decades.

They've simply become impossible to ignore.

I sometimes wonder if the deepest suffering in the human soul isn't pain, it is mistaken identity, living faithfully inside a story that was never true.

Not because anyone intended harm.

Not because someone deliberately deceived us.

But because fear has a remarkable ability to shrink the horizon.

Shame narrows our vision.

Loss convinces us that one chapter is the whole book.

Little by little, we begin calling the prison "home."

Then something unexpected happens.

Someone believes in us before we believe in ourselves.

Someone remains when everyone else leaves.

Someone forgives what we thought was unforgivable.

Someone sees beauty where we see only brokenness.

A different story quietly enters the room...

...not demanding... not arguing... Simply waiting.

Truth has always been remarkably patient.

Perhaps this is why genuine love feels so disruptive.

Love doesn't merely comfort us, it challenges the stories we've mistaken for reality.

Love gently asks, *"What if there is more to you than you've been told?"*

The older I become, the less I think transformation is about acquiring a new identity.

Perhaps it is the slow and joyful recognition of the one that has always been waiting beneath the noise.

Like an old painting hidden beneath centuries of dust.

The beauty wasn't created the day it was cleaned... it was revealed.

I cannot help wondering if this is why the life of Jesus continues to draw people...

Even those who have little interest in religion.

Jesus seemed to meet people beneath the stories they believed about themselves.

To the woman burdened by shame, He spoke dignity.

To the fisherman who doubted himself, He saw a shepherd.

To the tax collector everyone else despised, He offered a meal instead of a lecture.

Again and again, He seemed less interested in fixing people than in reminding them who they truly were.

Perhaps that is why so many walked away feeling as though they had somehow been found.

Maybe that is what grace feels like.

Not permission to remain asleep, but the gentle awakening from a dream that was never telling the whole truth.

Not becoming someone else.

Finally recognizing the One who has never stopped calling your name.

Sit With This...

What story about yourself have you accepted without ever asking where it came from?

Don't rush to answer.

Sometimes the first story to loosen its grip is the one we didn't realize we were living inside.
