## Preface

I set out to write this book because I needed to heal
out loud. Not in whispers. Not in secret.
But in truth, poetry, and power.

I'm not a therapist. I'm not an expert by title.
But I *am* an expert in surviving what tried to break me
and rebuilding from the inside out.

After decades of emotional wreckage,
trauma, shame, two divorces, and the kind of silence
that eats you alive… and then a betrayal that derailed
my progress and nearly put an end to me..
I finally said, *enough*.

I wrote this book to turn my pain into purpose
to help others feel seen, heard, and not so alone.

What I didn't expect
Was how deeply it would land.
How many people would say:
*"This is my story too."*

That cracked *me* wide open. Flamed my internal fire
because suddenly, this wasn't just about me.
It was about *us*.

When we stop chasing validation
and start loving ourselves first
we stop hiding who we are.

I've been the pawn.
I've hated the reflection.
I've danced with depression,
and begged the mirror to lie.

But still here I am.
Standing.
Shining.
Crown on.
Heart open.

Not because life got easier,
but because I finally stopped
asking for permission to be free.

So if you're holding this book…
You're not alone.
Not broken.
Just becoming.

Let's begin.

Carmen Lea
*Self-love first. Kindness always. Live from within.*

## FICKLE BITCH

Depression is a fickle bitch.
She whispers sweet nothings,
then slits your soul open
with silence.

You think you're fine.
You wear the mask.
Paint on the smile.
Go through the motions.

"Look how well she's doing," they say.
No one knows what festers behind the facade.
Inside, a black ache blooms.

A voice not yours,
but one that never leaves
echoes in your skull.
A siren song to the end.

*End the pain. End the pain.*

Life is a loop, a film on repeat.
You smile. You function.
You show up.
You lie. But then,

**WHAM!**

Like a sucker punch to the soul.
Like the sky dropped a thousand-pound scream
on your chest.
Out of nowhere, without warning.

And the tears?
Not poetic. Not graceful.

The ugly cry.
Snot-dripping,
guttural sobbing,
knees buckled on the cold tile,
begging:

“Please. Let me go.
Free me. I can’t.
Take it anymore.”

It hurts.
*Too much.*

Every molecule of your being
is on fire, and frozen.
You can’t breathe.
You want to sleep
and never wake up.

You try.
God, you try.

Happy music.
Cold shower.
The mirror pep talk.
“Gratitude, remember gratitude.”

But your brain is a broken compass,
spinning in the dark.
There is no North.
Only pain.
So much pain.

And then someone says,
*"Just let it go."* And you want to punch them
dead in the throat.

If letting go were an option,
you'd have done it by now.
You'd scream it, if you had the strength:
*"You think I want to feel this way?"*

But you don't scream.
You don't even flinch.
You nod. You smile.
You shrink.

Because depression doesn't need a reason.
She just shows up.
Uninvited. Unapologetic.
Crushing you with a sledgehammer
of despair.

And to the world?
You look fine.
Better, even.
Things are "going well."
You're "getting there."
But inside,

**Depression says: Nope.**
No joy for you today.
No light. No relief.

Only weight.
Only ache.
Only silence,
louder than a bomb.

You feel so alone.
So terribly,
terribly alone.

*And that's what she wants.*

Depression is a fickle bitch.
She loves you just enough
to keep you alive,
but is just cruel enough
to make you wish
you weren't.

## **The Self I Saved** *(Re: Innocence Lost)*

I once believed
the breaking was permanent.
That I would always carry
her haunted hush.
The girl with secrets in her bones,
and shame stitched into her smile.

I thought I was shattered forever.
Splintered beyond repair.
A mosaic of damage
that no light could pass through.

But she is not all of me.
Not anymore.

I carry her, yes.
I honor her silence.
I remember her ache.
But I am not just what was done.
I am what I chose after.

I am the voice
They tried to silence.
The boundaries
they never taught me to draw.
The breath that proves I'm still here.

I have learned to live
without apology.
To feel without shame.
To stand before the mirror,
and meet a gaze worthy of love.

I am not innocent.
But I am not ruined.

I am soft,
and unyielding.
Scarred,
and radiant.
Tender,
and true.

I am the self I saved
in the very moment
they tried to erase me.

The self who rose,
Even when no one came.

The self who stayed alive
long enough to become
the woman I am now.

I was not saved for them.
I was saved for me.

## Unshattered

If you had met me back then,
you'd have seen a girl cracked open.
Shattered like glass, into a million pieces.

Every sharp edge whispering:
Unworthy, unwanted, unlovable.
Life was hard. Life sucked.

And no one told me that the way we begin,
isn't how we have to stay.
But somewhere from within the wreckage,
A few angels appeared.
Some in shoes, some in books,
and some disguised as pain.

They handed me mirrors, to see my reflection
Not to see my flaws,
but to help me find the girl, buried beneath them.
I went inward. I questioned everything:

*I shifted*
My beliefs. My shame. My thoughts,
My need to suffer to feel seen.
And brick by brick, I tore down the prison,
I didn't even know I'd built.

I read. I cried. I forgave,
what I never got apologies for

*I released.*
I made peace with a past that would never change,
and a future that could.
I stopped chasing love, and
learned how to give it to the one
who needed it most.
**Me.**

I rose from the ashes.
Not polished, but powerful.
Not perfect but whole.
Each scar a stanza. Each crack, a chorus.
Each lesson, a light. That shines from within

*Radiant*
This is the self I saved. Piece by piece
Inner work, step by step.
And if you're reading this, you can too.
It's never too late to be new.
But if today isn't the day, that's okay.

Start with this:

*Be kind. To yourself.*
*And To the person next to you.*

You never know the burden someone carries.
The darkness they hide, the pain they bare.
And sometimes, a smile, a soft word,
a little kindness can save a life.

*Maybe even your own.*

Only YOU can fix the broken pieces,
And become…

***Unshattered***

## This Is What Freedom Feels Like

I wake up without dread.
I dress for me.
I speak with fire,
and don't ask for a permission slip.

I say no with love.
Yes with joy.
And goodbye without guilt.

I don't chase love.
I don't explain my worth.
I don't water dead things,
just to keep people comfortable.

I laugh louder now.
I cry when I need to.
I look in the mirror
and say,
"Look at you now! I'm so proud of you!"

But freedom isn't all sunshine.
The voice still creeps in sometimes;
the one that tells me I'm not enough.

Now?
I hear her.
I thank her.
And I choose truth instead.

Because I've done the work.
I faced the pain.
I didn't bury it.
I breathed through it.
Felt it.
Released it.

I took my power back.
And I built peace with my bare hands.

I live from within now.
My mood isn't up for debate.
My joy isn't crowd-sourced.
My validation comes from *me*.

I know thoughts become things,
so I choose mine with care.
I choose love.
I choose light.
I choose me.

I'm not perfect.
I'm powerful.

I'm not bulletproof.
I'm unshaken.

I am free.
Not because nothing hurts,
but because nothing owns me.

This is what freedom feels like:
Unshaken.
Unbothered.
Unshattered.

*Me.*