FREE EXCERPT

Surrounded by Loved Ones

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PREFACE

I did not author this book for applause.

I wrote it for remembrance.

I wrote it for the part of you that has always known you were meant to be wrapped in love, even if your life has often felt like a long walk through the absence of it. I wrote it for the person who needs to remember—not with their head, but with their body—that they were born worthy of tenderness.

The idea for this book did not come to me in a single moment of inspiration. It came the way most true things come: slowly, across decades, through the accumulation of losses and redemptions, through the therapy rooms where I have sat across from human beings in the full weight of their pain, and through the mirror of my own unfinished healing. It came from surviving a night that should have taken everything from me—and from slowly, painstakingly learning what it meant to rebuild.

This book is shaped by therapy rooms and prayer rooms, street corners and journal pages, ancestral memory and everyday miracle. It draws on the best of contemporary psychological science—attachment theory, self-compassion research, Internal Family Systems, Polyvagal Theory, and positive psychology. But it also draws on something older and harder to quantify: the knowledge that people who have been through fire

carry, the particular wisdom that is only available on the other side of suffering.

I want to be clear about what this book is not. It is not a self-help book in the conventional sense—a ten-step program for instant transformation. It is not a clinical manual, though it is rooted in clinical practice and research. And it is not a religious text, though faith and spirituality run through its pages like an underground river, shaping the terrain without always announcing themselves.

What this book is, I hope, is something rarer: a companion. Something you can return to when the world gets cold. A voice that says, in the silence after a hard day, that you are not alone in here.

Surrounded by Loved Ones is not a book of instructions. It is a book of invitations.

It invites you to see emotions not as fleeting states, but as sacred presences—companions that can travel with you through the ordinary and extraordinary terrain of a life. It asks you to reconsider the idea that love must always come from the outside. It offers the radical notion that maybe, just maybe, you can surround yourself with what you have been waiting for all along.

This is not self-help.
This is soul-help.

It is a soft rebellion against emotional scarcity.

It is an act of sacred reclamation.

> *The chapters move in three arcs. The first arc explores the wound. The second arc introduces the loved ones themselves—each of the four central emotional companions given a chapter to breathe and become real. The third arc is about building: the daily practices, the architectural work of constructing an inner sanctuary, and the way that inner work eventually ripples outward into how we hold others.*

May this book hold you as you read.

And may you, in turn, become the kind of presence that holds others.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is for you if you have ever felt alone in a crowded room. If you have sat with people who love you and still felt, underneath everything, like no one quite knew what you were carrying. If you have given more care to others than you have ever allowed yourself to receive. If the word *compassion* feels accessible when it is directed outward and almost foreign when you try to turn it toward yourself.

This book is for you if you have survived something and kept moving—because moving was the only option available, because stopping felt impossible, because the city or the family or the job or the decade did not pause long enough for you to process what had happened. If you are carrying something you were never given adequate space to set down.

This book is for the person who does not need to be convinced that love matters—who already knows, in the body, the difference between a life lived inside genuine care and a life lived outside it. Who is tired of being outside it. Who suspects that something different is possible but does not yet have the map.

Here is the map.

You were made for connection. Not only with others, but also within yourself.

This is not a poetic statement. It is a biological fact. Human beings are the most socially

dependent mammals on earth. Unlike almost every other species, we are born profoundly unfinished—neurologically incomplete, physically helpless, entirely dependent on the presence, warmth, and responsiveness of other people for our survival. What we experience in those early years of dependency does not merely shape our personalities or our memories. It shapes the architecture of our nervous systems. It shapes our brains. It shapes, in the most literal and measurable sense, who we become.

Psychologists call this *attachment*. It is the invisible thread—discovered by the British psychiatrist Bowlby and elaborated by the developmental psychologist Ainsworth—that ties us to our earliest experiences of love and safety. When those threads are secure, when we are responded to consistently, warmly, and predictably, we grow up with something profound living inside us: an inner sense of being held. A felt knowledge that we are lovable. A conviction, below the level of thought, that the world is safe enough, and that help will come when we need it. This internal experience, what Bowlby called a *working model of attachment*, does not fade when we leave childhood. It travels with us into every relationship, every crisis, every quiet moment alone.

But when those early bonds are frayed or missing—when the hands that held us were hurried, distracted, frightened, or simply absent—the world can feel colder and harsher than it was ever meant to be. A different kind of working model takes hold: one that says love is unpredictable, that help will not come, that we must manage alone. And so, piece by piece, a story begins to write itself inside us. *I have to manage this life on my own. Perhaps love has other places to be. There is no one coming to comfort me.*

This book offers you another story.

What I have come to believe, through years of clinical practice and through the long, slow arc of my own healing, is that the working model we carry is not fixed. It is not destiny. The most remarkable discovery in the field of attachment research over the last three decades is this: that even when our early bonds were inadequate, we can develop

what researchers call *earned security*. We can, through intentional practice, through the cultivation of specific emotional companions, through what therapists call reparative experience, rebuild our inner world. We can surround ourselves—on purpose, with awareness, through practice—with what we always needed.

That is what this book teaches you to do.

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THE FULL JOURNEY AWAITS

Meet the Four Companions who will travel with you.

Compassion. Kindness. Grace. Empathy. Each has a chapter. Each has been waiting for you.

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