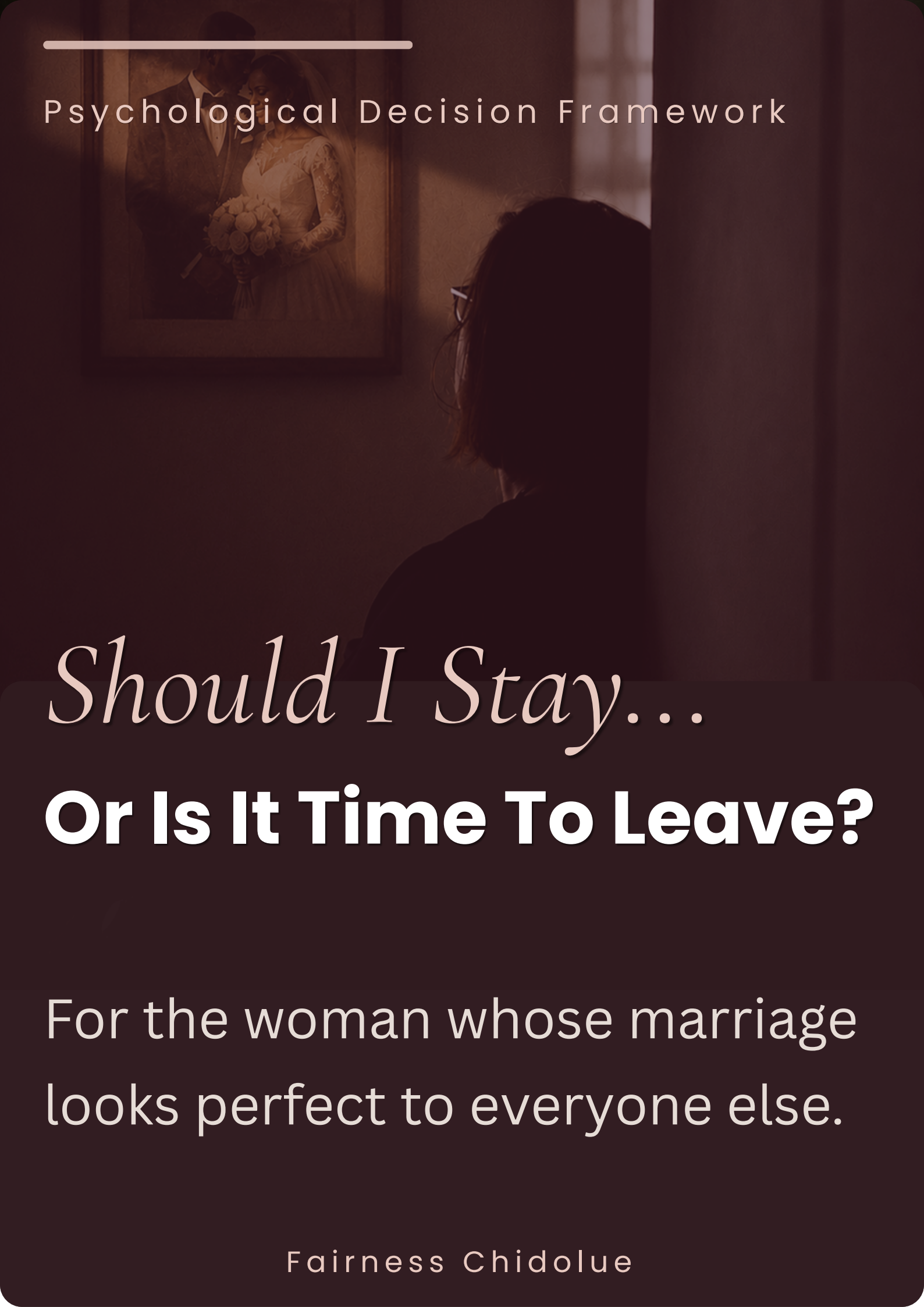

Psychological Decision Framework

A woman with dark hair and glasses is seen from the back, looking at a framed wedding photograph on a wall. The photograph shows a bride and groom. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, brownish tint. The woman's silhouette is visible against the wall.

Should I Stay...

Or Is It Time To Leave?

For the woman whose marriage
looks perfect to everyone else.

Fairness Chidolue

BEFORE YOU START

This is not a guide to save your marriage.

If you came here hoping for ten steps to make him change, or a prayer that fixes what's broken, this workbook will feel like the wrong door. What you'll find instead is something more useful and harder to fake: a way to think clearly again, so that whatever you decide next is actually yours.

This is for the woman who already knows something is wrong and has been carrying it alone. Maybe you've prayed about it. Maybe you've confronted him and gotten nowhere. Maybe you've told no one, because the version of you that everyone sees doesn't match what you're living through at home. If that's you, keep reading.

If you've already made your decision and simply need the courage to act on it, skip ahead to Chapter 7. The rest of this workbook is built for the woman still untangling her own mind, not the one who's already found her answer.

And if you are afraid for your safety, your children's safety, or your life, please set this aside and speak to someone who can help you directly today. A domestic violence support service in your country, a trusted family member, or local emergency services. You deserve real help, not a PDF.

Everyone else, welcome. In the next chapter, you'll meet a term you've likely never heard named out loud before, one that explains exactly why staying silent has felt like the only option. Once you see it clearly, you can't stay confused about your own life the same way again.

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HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This is not something to skim in one sitting. It's built to be worked through, in order, over a few days.

Each chapter builds on the one before it, so resist the urge to jump ahead to the exercises. Read the chapter first. Let it land. Then complete the exercise that follows it before moving on.

You'll need three things: a quiet hour, a pen, and honesty. The exercises only work if you write real answers, not the ones you think you should have.

There is no timeline for finishing. Some women complete this in a weekend. Others take a week, sitting with one chapter at a time. Both are right. What matters is that you don't rush past the parts that make you uncomfortable — those are usually the ones doing the most work.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTRACT YOU NEVER SIGNED

Adaeze found the messages on a Tuesday.

She wasn't looking for them. Her phone was charging in the bedroom, so she picked up his to check the time, and a name she didn't recognize lit up the screen. She read three lines before she understood what she was reading. Then she set the phone down exactly where she'd found it, screen facing up, untouched.

She didn't confront him that night. She served dinner. She asked about his day. She listened to him complain about traffic on the Third Mainland Bridge and laughed in the right place, while something in her chest went quiet and cold and stayed that way.

If you're reading this, some version of that Tuesday has already happened to you. Maybe it wasn't a phone. Maybe it was a look he gave someone at a party, a story that didn't add up, or a feeling you've carried so long you stopped trying to name it. Whatever your version was, you remember the exact moment the ground shifted, and you remember that you kept standing anyway, because standing was what you knew how to do.

Here is what almost no one says out loud: you didn't stay silent because you're weak. You stayed silent because you were already inside an agreement you never signed and never read. Call it what it is. The Good Wife Contract. Unwritten, never discussed, binding anyway. Its terms are simple. You keep the home peaceful. You keep his reputation intact. You keep the children's world steady. You keep the version of your marriage that everyone else has already agreed to believe. In exchange, you get to remain what the whole community calls a good wife.

You didn't negotiate those terms. You inherited them, the way you inherited your mother's instinct to fix her face before anyone sees her cry. And once you understood, even without naming it, that breaking the Contract would cost you more than keeping it, you started paying without ever being asked. You plated his food the way you always had. You answered "we're fine" when your sister asked, twice, if something was wrong. You smiled at his mother on Sunday with a steadiness that took everything you had.

That's not weakness. That's a woman honoring a contract she never should have been handed in the first place.

Here's the part that matters most: the Good Wife Contract was never written to protect you. Read its terms again and notice who benefits from each one. Your husband benefits, because your silence costs him nothing. Your family benefits, because an intact marriage is easier to carry than a broken one. Even people who love you benefit, because your composure means they never have to sit with you in something uncomfortable. Every clause protects someone else's comfort. Not one clause was written for yours.

This chapter will not tell you the Contract is your fault, or his fault, or anyone's fault in a way that helps you today. Fault isn't the point. The point is this: every decision you've made inside that Contract, the praying, the confronting, the trying harder to be a better wife, has been an attempt to solve the wrong problem. You've been trying to repair a marriage while operating under terms that were never designed to let you see clearly enough to know what actually needs repairing. You cannot make a real decision from inside a contract you didn't know you'd signed.

That is exactly what the rest of this workbook exists to change. Not to tell you to stay. Not to tell you to leave. To help you read the Contract in full daylight, for the first time, so that whatever you decide next, you decide it as yourself, not as a woman fulfilling terms she never agreed to.

Adaeze didn't leave that Tuesday. She didn't leave for many Tuesdays after. But something shifted quietly, without anyone noticing. She stopped asking herself how to keep the Contract intact, and she started asking a question she hadn't let herself ask in eight years of marriage.

What do I actually want, once I stop paying into an agreement I never chose?

That question is where you're starting too. Not with an answer. With permission, finally, to ask it.

CHAPTER 2

EVERY CLAUSE YOU'VE ALREADY TRIED TO RENEGOTIATE

Adaeze prayed first.

Not the quiet, private kind. The kind where she stayed back after service, knelt at the altar until her knees ached against the tile, and asked God to soften her husband's heart the way scripture promised He could soften anything. She believed, genuinely, that if her faith was strong enough, the messages would stop and the marriage would heal itself from the inside, without her ever having to say a word about what she'd found.

Nothing changed. Not because her faith was weak, but because prayer alone cannot renegotiate a contract when only one party knows it exists.

So she tried confrontation next. She waited for a calm evening, chose her words carefully, and told him what she'd read. He denied it, called her suspicious, asked why she was going through his phone in the first place. Within twenty minutes, she was the one apologizing. She left that conversation with the same silence she'd walked in with, plus a new layer of doubt about her own judgment.

Then she tried being better. More attentive at home, more available, more of everything she thought a good wife was supposed to be, as if the Contract's terms could be fulfilled harder until his side corrected itself in response. She started cooking his mother's recipes from memory. She stopped bringing up the things that used to upset her. She lost weight she hadn't meant to lose, and one evening he told her, almost proudly, that she seemed happier lately than she had in years.

She said thank you. Then she went to the bathroom and sat on the edge of the tub for a long time.

If any of this sounds familiar, here is what needs to be said plainly. You did not fail. You were never given a version of this that could succeed.

Prayer asks God to change him. Confrontation asks him to admit what he's done. Over-attentiveness asks the marriage to reward your effort with his change. All three share the same flaw. They leave the Contract itself completely untouched. You can pray, confront, and perform as hard as you want, but if the underlying agreement, the one where your silence protects his comfort and everyone's peace depends on your composure, stays fully intact, you will keep arriving back at the same place.

Exhausted. Doubting yourself. No closer to clarity than the day you found out.

This is not a chapter about trying harder. It's the opposite. Every attempt you've made was never proof that you're incapable of fixing this. It was proof that a contract cannot be renegotiated from the inside, no matter how sincere the effort or how many times you try.

Which means the real work was never going to be found in a better prayer, a braver conversation, or a more devoted version of yourself sitting quietly on the edge of a bathtub, mistaken for happiness.

It's found in finally seeing what the Contract has actually cost you to keep. That's where we go next.

EXERCISE 1

WHAT AM I ACTUALLY AFRAID OF

Time: 15 minutes · Pen required · Do not skip ahead

STEP 1

List every fear, exactly as it sounds in your head

Don't edit yourself here. Write the fear the way it actually arrives at 2am, not the polished, reasonable version. If it's "I'll lose everything," write that. If it's "everyone will say I couldn't hold my home," write that too.

1. -----
2. -----
3. -----
4. -----
5. -----

STEP 2

For each fear, answer two questions

Go back to fear #1. Ask yourself:

Is this a fact or a feeling?

A fact is something that has already happened, or something you know for certain because you've verified it.

A feeling is an imagined future you're carrying as though it's already decided. Most fears on your list are feelings wearing the costume of facts. Write FACT or FEELING next to each one above.

If it is a fact, what is its actual size?

Not the size fear makes it feel. The real size. If the fear is financial, what is the actual number? If it's social, who specifically would say something, and does their opinion carry the weight you're giving it right now? Write one honest sentence under each fact-fear, naming its real, specific size.

STEP 3

Circle the one you almost didn't write down

Look back at your list. There is usually one fear you wrote quickly, or softened, or nearly skipped. Circle it now.

That one is usually the truest, and the one doing the most damage in silence. You don't have to solve it today. You only have to admit, on paper, that it's there.

You'll return to this page again in Chapter 4, once you have more information to weigh each fear against. For now, simply notice: *how much lighter does a fear feel once it has exact words instead of a vague, circling shape?*

CHAPTER 3

WHAT THE CONTRACT IS ACTUALLY COSTING YOU

Adaeze kept a list once, in her head, of everything she'd gained by staying quiet. The house. The children's school fees paid without argument. The respect of people who still believed her marriage was the one to model theirs after. For a long time, that list felt like proof she was doing the right thing.

She never kept a second list. The one of everything the Contract had actually taken from her while she wasn't looking. This chapter is that second list. Not to convince you of anything, but to make sure you're finally allowed to see the full price of what you've been paying. Every contract has a cost, and this one has never once shown you the invoice.

The cost to your body

You know the tightness in your chest that arrives before he walks through the door. You know the headache that shows up on Sunday mornings, right before church, right before you have to hold your face a certain way for two hours. This isn't dramatic language. It's simply what chronic, unspoken vigilance does to a body that's never allowed to fully rest.

The cost to your friendships

There is a friend you used to call every week, the one who asks a second question after your first answer instead of accepting "we're fine." You stopped calling her first. Then you started letting her calls go to voicemail, telling yourself you'd call back once things settled. Things never settled, so you never called back, and now an entire friendship sits quietly on the other side of a silence you built to protect a marriage she was never trying to attack.

The cost to what your children are learning

Your daughter watched you smile at your husband's mother last Sunday, the same smile you'd practiced in the bathroom mirror an hour earlier. She doesn't know it was practiced. She only knows that this is what a wife's face looks like when things are difficult. She is not learning from anything you've told her. She is learning from everything she's watched you become, and you don't get to choose whether she's learning it. You only get to choose what she's learning it from.

The cost to your money

You tell yourself the real financial risk is leaving, losing the house, starting over with nothing. But sit with the actual math of staying. When was the last time you opened an account he doesn't have access to. When was the last time you knew, to the naira, what you'd have if you needed to leave this house tonight with your children and nothing else. The Contract has convinced you that staying is financially safe and leaving is financially reckless. In truth, staying has been quietly costing you the one thing that would make either choice survivable: your own financial independence.

The cost to your own trust in yourself

This may be the steepest one. Every time you noticed something was wrong and talked yourself out of it, every time you called your own instincts dramatic or ungrateful or too much, you paid down a little more of your ability to trust what you know. That's not a small tax. It's the one that makes every future decision harder, because you've spent years practicing doubt instead of judgment.

None of this is presented so you'll feel angry at yourself for staying, or angry at anyone in particular. Anger has a place in this chapter, but aim it correctly. Not at yourself, for surviving the only way you knew how. Not yet at him, that's not this chapter's job. Aim it at the Contract itself, at the quiet, unfair architecture that made silence look like strength and made your exhaustion invisible to everyone but you.

Naming a cost is not the same as making a decision. You are not being asked here to conclude anything, not to stay, not to leave. You're only being asked to stop pretending the price is zero. Whatever you decide in the chapters ahead, you deserve to decide it with the full invoice finally in front of you, not the version the Contract has been quietly hiding from you all along.

CHAPTER 4

READING THE TERMS IN FULL DAYLIGHT

Adaeze bought a notebook.

Not for anyone else to see. A small one, kept in the bottom of her bag, unremarkable enough that no one would ask about it. In it, she started writing down things she'd never let herself write down before. Not feelings this time. Facts. What she actually had. What she'd actually lose. What her children actually needed, separate from what she assumed they needed. For the first time in eight years, she wasn't reacting to the Contract. She was reading it, clause by clause, in full daylight.

That is what this chapter asks of you.

Every decision you've made so far, the praying, the confronting, the trying harder, was made from inside a fog of fear, love, guilt, and exhaustion all tangled together. You cannot make a clear decision from inside a fog. You can only make one once you've separated what's actually true from what fear has been telling you is true. That separation is the entire purpose of the Decision Matrix.

This is not an exercise in talking yourself into an outcome. It's an exercise in seeing three realities clearly, on their own terms, and then reading them against each other, since a matrix is only useful once you stop looking at each part in isolation.

THE DECISION MATRIX

Work through each reality in order. Answer with facts, not fears. Where you don't yet have a fact, write "I need to find out," and note what you'd need to do to find out. Not knowing something is information too. You will return to this exact page in Chapter 7, to see what's changed.

REALITY ONE — FINANCIAL

What do I currently earn, and is it in an account only I control?

What do I currently own outright, in my name alone?

If I needed to leave this house on short notice, what would I have access to within a week?

What would my minimum monthly cost of living be, on my own, today, not someday?

What is one step I could take this month toward financial independence, regardless of what I decide about the marriage?

REALITY TWO — EMOTIONAL

When I imagine staying exactly as things are, with no changes, what do I feel in my body, not my mind?

When I imagine leaving, what do I feel in my body, not my mind?

Is there any version of staying that doesn't require me to keep silencing myself?

What would I need from him, specifically and concretely, not vaguely, for staying to feel survivable rather than endured?

Have I ever asked for that specifically, or have I only hoped he'd arrive at it on his own?

REALITY THREE — CHILDREN

What are my children actually witnessing right now, not what I assume they're too young to notice?

What do I want them to understand about what a marriage is allowed to require of a woman?

Is staying protecting them, or is it protecting the appearance of a stable home while something unstable happens quietly inside it?

What would need to be true for leaving to be the more stabilizing choice for them, not the more disruptive one?

READING WHAT YOU'VE WRITTEN

Go back through all three realities now. Circle every answer where you wrote "I need to find out." Those are not gaps in your character. They're the next concrete actions available to you, the actual next steps toward clarity instead of more waiting.

Now look at what remains unmarked, the answers you actually know. This is the true shape of your situation, not the Contract's version of it.

HOLDING THE THREE REALITIES TOGETHER

A matrix is only useful once you stop reading each reality on its own. Now hold all three side by side and answer two more questions:

Which single reality, left exactly as it is, makes staying truly unsustainable, not just uncomfortable?

Which single reality, if it changed, would make staying feel survivable rather than endured?

Those two answers are closer to your real decision than any one reality could ever be on its own. If the same reality answers both questions, you've just found the exact place where your next real conversation, whether with him, with yourself, or with a lawyer, needs to happen.

The Contract wants you to believe you're choosing between certainty and chaos. Reading it in full daylight usually reveals something less dramatic and far more useful: you're choosing between two different kinds of hard, and only one of them requires you to keep disappearing to make it work.

You are not deciding anything yet. You are simply, for the first time, deciding with the truth in front of you instead of the fear.

CHAPTER 5

THE CONVERSATIONS THE CONTRACT WAS BUILT TO PREVENT

The Contract's most effective clause was never the one that silenced you completely. It was subtler than that. It let you speak, just not clearly. It let you raise things, just never in a way that could actually be heard. You've had the confrontation already, in Chapter 2, and you know how it went. Not because you said the wrong thing, but because you were negotiating inside an agreement designed to absorb exactly that kind of conversation and leave everything unchanged.

What follows are three scripts. Not because you don't know how to speak, you clearly do, but because clarity under pressure is a different skill from clarity on paper, and the Contract counts on you never having the second version ready when you need it most.

Use these as starting points, not scripts to recite word for word. Read each one aloud to yourself first, alone, until the words feel like something you could actually say and mean.

One thing before you go further. You know this man and this home better than any workbook ever could. If saying any of this out loud could put you or your children in danger, do not use Script One. Set it aside, turn to the resource note at the back of this workbook, and reach out for real support before you say a single word to him. Your safety is not something a script can account for. It comes first, always.

SCRIPT ONE — THE CONVERSATION WITH HIM

Use this when you're ready to name what you know, without asking for permission to feel it, and without letting the conversation become about managing his reaction instead of stating your reality.

The goal of this conversation is not to make him confess, defend himself well, or fix anything on the spot. The goal is simply to say the true thing out loud, in your own home, without apologizing for having found it out.

"I need to say something, and I need you to let me finish before you respond. I know about [what you found/what you've observed]. I'm not asking you to explain it away tonight, and I'm not looking for an argument. I'm telling you because I'm done carrying it alone while pretending I don't know. I need some time to think clearly about what this means for me, and I needed you to know that I know, before I do."

If he denies it: *"I'm not here to debate what happened. I know what I know. What I need from you now is honesty going forward, starting today."*

If he tries to make it about your reaction: *"How I found out isn't the conversation. What happened is."*

If he apologizes immediately and asks you to move past it: *"I hear that. But an apology isn't the same as things actually changing, and I'm not ready to pretend it is."*

You do not owe him a resolution in this conversation. You only owe yourself the truth said out loud.

SCRIPT TWO — THE CONVERSATION WITH FAMILY OR IN-LAWS

Use this when someone close to the situation, a mother, a sister, a mother-in-law, is pushing you toward an outcome before you've reached your own clarity, whether that push is "manage am" silence or premature pressure to leave.

You've likely already heard the exact phrase this script is built to answer. Manage am. No marriage is perfect. Think of the children, think of what people will say. That advice isn't cruel, most of the time it comes from people who genuinely believe silence has kept their own homes standing. But you are not required to justify your process to anyone, even people who love you, and you are not required to let their fear of "what will people say" become the timeline for your own decision.

"I know you care about me, and I know you want this settled quickly, one way or another. But I'm not managing this the way you think I should, and I'm not deciding anything on your timeline or anyone else's. When I have something to share, or something I need help with, you'll be the first to know. Right now, what I need most is space to think without an audience."

If they invoke family shame or reputation: *"I understand this affects how the family looks from outside. But I can't make a decision this important based on what people will say. I have to make it based on what I can actually live with."*

If they push for details: *"I hear that you're concerned. I'm not keeping this from you to hurt you. I'm keeping it close because I need to think clearly, and that's harder to do when I'm managing everyone else's reaction to it too."*

If they pressure you toward a specific outcome, stay or leave:
"I know you have an opinion, and I'm not asking you to hide it forever. I'm asking you to let this be my decision, made in my own time, not the family's decision made for me."

You are allowed to love people and still keep them outside this particular room until you're ready to let them in.

SCRIPT THREE — THE INTERNAL SCRIPT FOR WHEN DOUBT RETURNS

Use this at 2am, in the bathroom, in the car before you walk into the house. The moment doubt shows up and tries to convince you that you imagined the whole thing, or that you're overreacting, or that a good wife wouldn't be considering any of this.

Doubt at this stage isn't a sign you're wrong. It's usually a sign the Contract is trying to reassert itself, because a woman who's stopped doubting herself is much harder for an old agreement to hold onto.

"What I know, I know. I am not confused, and I am not imagining this. I am allowed to take my time deciding what to do about it, and taking time is not the same as being weak or dramatic. I do not owe anyone a quick, comfortable resolution to something that was never comfortable to live through. I trust what I've written down more than I trust this doubt, because the doubt arrives at night and the truth was written in daylight."

Read this as many times as you need to. Each time you read it and choose to believe it anyway, the doubt gets a little quieter, and a little easier to recognize the next time it shows up.

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

You don't have to use all three scripts this week, or ever, in this exact form. Some of these conversations may happen naturally, in your own words, once you've read them enough times that the shape of what you want to say becomes familiar. What matters is that you now have language ready, so the next time a conversation the Contract was built to prevent finally happens, you're not improvising against eight years of practiced silence.

CHAPTER 6

WHO GETS TO KNOW YOU'RE RENEGOTIATING

Adaeze's sister found out first, by accident, the way most people eventually do. She caught her staring at nothing for too long over jollof rice at a family lunch and asked, quietly, if everything was alright. Adaeze almost said the automatic thing, we're fine, before she stopped herself and said something closer to true instead: not really, but I'm handling it. Her sister didn't push. She just reached over and held her hand under the table, and that was enough.

Her mother-in-law found out differently, three weeks later, from a cousin who'd heard a version of the story from someone else entirely. By the time it reached her, it had already turned into something Adaeze barely recognized, and the first conversation they had about it wasn't Adaeze's to control anymore. It was damage control, not disclosure. She spent that entire conversation defending herself instead of being heard.

The difference between those two moments wasn't luck. It was that Adaeze had already decided, without quite realizing it, what her sister was allowed to know before her sister ever asked. She had never made that same decision about her mother-in-law, so the decision got made for her, by rumor, on someone else's timeline.

This chapter is about making that decision on purpose, for everyone in your life, before circumstance makes it for you.

The Contract has a clause about this too, one you've likely never seen named. It insists that everyone with a claim on your family, in-laws, extended family, church community, has an automatic right to know everything, immediately, in full detail. In many of our families, silence about a marriage is treated as suspicious, even disloyal, and a woman who doesn't report her troubles upward is sometimes seen as hiding something shameful rather than simply protecting something private.

That pressure is real, and it is not your job to fight all of it at once. But you are allowed to decide, deliberately, who is actually inside this renegotiation with you, and who is simply owed a version of "we're working through some things," and nothing more.

THE BOUNDARY MAP

Draw three circles, one inside the other, like a target. Then place people from your life into each ring, based on this question, not on rank, obligation, or who would be offended to find out they're not in the center: who has actually earned access to the real details of what I'm deciding?

INNER CIRCLE — Full access. The one or two people who get the whole truth, as it unfolds, including your uncertainty and your fear. Not because they're owed it by title, mother, sister, best friend, but because they've shown you, already, that they can hold difficult information without judging you, gossiping, or pushing you toward their preferred outcome.

Who belongs here, right now, honestly?

MIDDLE CIRCLE — Aware, not detailed. People who should know something is happening, out of respect or practical necessity, but don't need the full story. This is often where in-laws and extended family sit. They get a version like "we're going through something difficult right now, and I'm handling it," not a play-by-play.

Who belongs here?

OUTER CIRCLE — No access, for now. People who feel entitled to know, by tradition or proximity, but have not earned real access, whether because they gossip, because they'd push you toward an outcome before you're ready, or simply because it isn't theirs to carry. This can include people you love. Love and access are not the same thing.

Who belongs here?

If anyone in your middle or outer circle pushes past the boundary you've just set, you already have language ready for that exact moment. Return to Script Two in Chapter 5.

THE CHILDREN QUESTION

Your children don't belong in any of the three rings above. They're not part of the adult renegotiation, and they shouldn't be handed adult-sized information to carry. But they are watching, closely, and "protecting" them by telling them nothing at all is not the same as telling them nothing is happening. Children are rarely as unaware as we hope.

The goal here isn't disclosure. It's honesty sized to what they can actually hold, at whatever age they are, without frightening them or making them responsible for your feelings.

What are my children already sensing, even without being told anything directly?

If they asked me directly whether something was wrong, what is the smallest true thing I could say, one that doesn't lie to them, but also doesn't hand them more than a child should carry?

If they asked me directly whether something was wrong, what is the smallest true thing I could say, one that doesn't lie to them, but also doesn't hand them more than a child should carry?

Once your map is drawn, children included, the boundary itself becomes easier to hold, because you're no longer deciding in the moment, under pressure, who deserves what. You decided already, in daylight, with a clear head. When someone pushes for more than you've offered, you're not improvising a boundary. You're simply holding one you already set, with the exact words from Script Two ready if you need them.

This is not deception. You are not required to perform total transparency with everyone who shares your blood or your husband's, especially not while you're still deciding something this important for yourself. Privacy, at this stage, is not the same as hiding. It's how you protect your own clarity, and your children's stability, long enough to actually reach both.

EXERCISE 2

7-DAY PRIVATE JOURNAL PROMPTS

Time: 10–15 minutes a day, one prompt at a time. Same notebook or pen each day if possible. Answer each prompt before reading the next, and give yourself at least a day between each one. If a day is too hard to sit with, wait until you can. This exercise has a shape, not a deadline. Keep these pages somewhere only you have access to, not in a shared drawer or a phone he can pick up. This is the most private writing in the entire workbook, and it deserves a private place.

Fog doesn't lift all at once. It thins, gradually, one honest page at a time. Each of the seven prompts below builds on the one before it, moving you from where you actually are today toward a clearer view of what you actually want.

DAY 1 — WHERE I ACTUALLY AM

Not where I tell people I am. Not where I wish I were. Describe, honestly, the exact state of your mind and your marriage today, in your own words, with no performance for anyone reading this but you.

DAY 2 — WHAT I'VE BEEN CARRYING ALONE

Name one thing you have never said out loud to another living person. Write it here first. Sometimes the page is the only place that can hold it before a person can.

DAY 3 — WHAT THE CONTRACT HAS COST ME THIS WEEK, SPECIFICALLY

Not the general costs from Chapter 3. This week. One specific moment, this week, where you noticed yourself performing calm you didn't feel, or silencing something you actually needed to say.

DAY 4 — WHO I WAS BEFORE I STARTED MANAGING EVERYONE'S PEACE BUT MY OWN

Not the general costs from Chapter 3. This week. One specific moment, this week, where you noticed yourself performing calm you didn't feel, or silencing something you actually needed to say.

DAY 5 — THE FEAR I HAVEN'T FULLY ADMITTED YET

Return to your answers in Exercise 1. Is there a fear underneath the one you circled, one you haven't written down anywhere until now? Write it here, exactly as it sounds in your head, however unreasonable it feels.

DAY 6 — WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY NEED TO CHANGE

Return to your answers in Exercise 1. Is there a fear underneath the one you circled, one you haven't written down anywhere until now? Write it here, exactly as it sounds in your head, however unreasonable it feels.

DAY 7 — WHAT I KNOW TODAY THAT I DIDN'T LET MYSELF KNOW BEFORE I STARTED

Read back through all six previous entries before answering this one. Then write, plainly, what has become clearer since Day 1. Not a final decision. Just the truth, as far as you've been able to see it so far.

Keep these pages, wherever you've decided is safely yours. You will return to them in Chapter 7, alongside your Decision Matrix from Chapter 4, to see exactly how far your thinking has moved, and to decide what comes next with the clearest possible view of where you actually stand.

CHAPTER 7

HOLDING THE NEW TERMS

Adaeze decided something, eventually. Not on a dramatic night with fireworks or a slammed door, but on an ordinary Tuesday morning, months after the first one, while she was making breakfast and realized she'd stopped waiting for him to fix what she'd already begun fixing in herself. What she decided isn't the point of this chapter. What happened in the thirty days after is.

Because deciding is not the hard part. You've likely already sensed that, somewhere in the last six chapters. The hard part is holding a decision once the fear that made you doubt yourself for years comes looking for you again, as it will, usually within the first month, usually late at night, usually sounding exactly like the old Contract asking to be renewed.

This chapter is not about which decision you've made. It's about making sure whatever ground you've reached survives contact with real life.

Go back to Chapter 4 now. Reread your Decision Matrix, especially the two questions you answered under "Holding the Three Realities Together." Go back to your seven days of journal entries too, especially Day 7. If real clarity is there, it was reached in daylight, with the truth in front of you, and the next thirty days are about protecting that clarity from the fog trying to roll back in.

If you've reached this chapter and you're still not certain, stay with what follows anyway. You don't need a final answer to begin holding yourself honestly for the next thirty days. Some women read this whole workbook and land on a clear decision. Others land somewhere more like: I know I can't keep living exactly as I have been, even though I don't yet know what changes next. That is not a failure of this workbook, or of you. It's simply where you are, and the plan below still works for you, aimed at holding your clarity about the problem, rather than a decision about the outcome.

THE 30-DAY HOLD

This plan works whether you're renegotiating the terms of your marriage and staying, letting the Contract expire and leaving, or still standing in the honest middle, clear about the cost, not yet clear about the path. The specifics differ. The structure doesn't.

WEEK ONE — NAME IT ONCE, OUT LOUD, TO SOMEONE IN YOUR INNER CIRCLE

Not for permission. For witness. A decision, or even an honest uncertainty, spoken to another person becomes slightly harder to quietly abandon at 2am than one that only ever existed in your head. Use your inner circle from Chapter 6.

Who have I told, and when will I tell them if I haven't yet?

WEEK TWO — TAKE ONE CONCRETE ACTION, NOT JUST AN EMOTIONAL ONE

If you're renegotiating and staying: this might be the specific, concrete change you named in Chapter 4's emotional reality, asked for directly, not hoped for silently. If you're leaving: this might be the financial independence step from Chapter 4's financial reality, actually started, not just planned. If you're still in the middle: this might simply be gathering the one fact you marked "I need to find out" in Chapter 4, so next month's decision is made with one less unknown.

What is my one concrete action this week?

WEEK THREE — EXPECT THE DOUBT, AND HAVE SCRIPT THREE READY

This is usually when it arrives hardest, once the initial resolve has worn off and the real, ordinary difficulty of the new terms sets in. This is not a sign you decided wrong, or that you're taking too long to decide at all. It's the predictable weather of any real change. Return to Script Three in Chapter 5 as many times as this week requires.

What does the doubt sound like when it shows up for me, specifically?

A NOTE FOR THE WEEK THAT DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED

You may miss a check-in. Week Two's action may not happen on schedule. Week Three's doubt may arrive stronger than a single script can hold in one sitting. None of that undoes the work you've done in this workbook. Come back to wherever you left off, without needing to restart from Week One. Holding new terms is rarely a clean, uninterrupted month. It's a month you keep returning to, even after it slips.

WEEK FOUR — REVIEW, DON'T RESTART

At the end of thirty days, reread your Decision Matrix and your seven journal entries one more time. You are not checking whether you made the right decision, that question rarely has a clean answer at day thirty, and if you're still in the honest middle, you're not checking that you've finally landed somewhere either. You are checking whether you are holding your new terms, whatever shape they've taken, or quietly slipping back into the Contract's old ones without noticing.

Compared to thirty days ago, am I holding new terms, or drifting back to the old ones?

A WORD ON YOUR CHILDREN, DURING THIS MONTH

Whatever you're holding this month, they will sense the shift in you, even the good kind. Children often read a mother's steadiness before they understand its source. Return briefly to your answers in Chapter 6's Children Question. Is there anything in how you're holding these new terms that they need a small, age-sized version of, even now, before anything is final?

IF YOU'RE RENEGOTIATING AND STAYING

New terms only work if they're specific and revisited, not assumed. Write the actual new terms here, the ones you and he have agreed to, or the ones you're requiring even if he hasn't fully agreed yet. Set a date, thirty days from today, to check whether they've actually held.

IF YOU'RE LETTING THE CONTRACT EXPIRE

Leaving is rarely a single day. It's usually a sequence of small, boring, necessary steps: an account opened, a document copied, a conversation with a lawyer or a trusted family member, a plan made quietly before it's made public. List your next three steps here, in order, with a rough date for each.

IF YOU'RE STILL IN THE HONEST MIDDLE

That's a real place to be, not a failure to reach the other two. Write down the one piece of information or clarity that, if you had it, would move you closer to a real decision. Then set a date, thirty days from today, to check whether you've gotten closer to finding it.

Whichever terms you're holding, hold them the way you read this Contract in the first place: in full daylight, with the truth in front of you, not the fear. Thirty days from now, you won't need this chapter to tell you whether you succeeded. You'll simply notice that you're no longer performing calm you don't feel, and that alone will tell you the new terms, whatever they are, are real.

CHAPTER 8

IF YOU RENEW THE CONTRACT, IF YOU LET IT EXPIRE, OR IF YOU'RE STILL DECIDING

There is no version of this final chapter that tells you which path was right. That was never this workbook's job, and if it tried to claim otherwise now, everything true in the last seven chapters would suddenly feel less trustworthy. What this chapter offers instead is honest guidance for wherever you've actually landed, without pretending one outcome required more courage than the others.

Read only the section that matches where you are today. The other two aren't failures you avoided. They're simply not your path right now. And that qualifier, right now, matters. Nothing in this chapter is a life sentence. If the path you choose stops being true in three months or three years, you're allowed to return to this exact page and read differently. Choosing again is not the same as failing the first time.

IF YOU'RE RENEWING

You are not returning to the old Contract. You decided to stay, but on terms you named yourself, in daylight, not the terms that were quietly assumed before you ever read this workbook. That distinction matters more than it might feel like it does right now, especially on an ordinary Tuesday when nothing feels different yet.

Renewing well means the new terms stay visible, not just remembered. Revisit what you wrote in Chapter 7 regularly, not only when something goes wrong. A contract only holds if both people know it's been rewritten. If he doesn't yet know the terms have changed, that conversation, using Script One from Chapter 5 if needed, isn't optional. Silence about new terms simply recreates the old ones.

Watch, too, for the specific way old patterns return. They rarely come back all at once. They come back one small accommodation at a time, one swallowed comment, one performed smile, until you're back where you started without a single dramatic moment to mark the slide. The Decision Matrix in Chapter 4 isn't a one-time exercise. Return to it every few months, honestly, and ask whether the terms are still holding or quietly dissolving. If they've dissolved, this chapter, and the "letting it expire" section beside this one, will still be here.

Staying, chosen clearly, is not settling. It only becomes settling the moment you stop checking whether the terms are real.

IF YOU'RE LETTING IT EXPIRE

You are not required to feel triumphant about this, and you are not required to feel destroyed either. Most women in this exact moment feel both, in the same hour, sometimes in the same sentence. That is not confusion. That is what it actually feels like to end something that held real years of your life inside it, even the years that hurt.

Practically, this is not a single decision anymore. It's the sequence you named in Chapter 7, the account, the document, the conversation with someone who can help you make it official. Keep moving through that list even on days it feels too heavy to face, especially on those days. Momentum, more than motivation, is what carries this kind of decision through its hardest weeks.

One thing worth saying plainly, not to frighten you, but because it's true and this workbook has tried to be honest with you throughout: leaving is sometimes the point where a difficult marriage becomes a genuinely unsafe one, even in marriages that didn't feel unsafe before. Trust anything that shifts in how he responds to this decision.

If anything about his reaction makes you feel less safe than you did in Chapter 5, please involve someone beyond this workbook, a trusted person, a lawyer, a domestic violence support service, before you continue alone. That is not overreacting. That is the same clear-eyed reading of your own reality this whole workbook has asked of you.

Expect people in your outer circle from Chapter 6 to have opinions you didn't ask for, some kind, some not. You do not owe any of them a full accounting of what led here. You owe your children age-sized honesty, yourself patience, and no one else an explanation they haven't earned the right to hear.

Letting a contract expire is not the same as failing to renew it. Some agreements were never meant to last forever, and recognizing that clearly is not the same thing as having failed to try.

IF YOU'RE STILL DECIDING

If you've finished this workbook and you're here, you have not fallen short of what it was built to do. Some decisions genuinely need more time and more information than eight chapters can supply, and pretending otherwise would be dishonest in exactly the way this workbook has tried hard not to be.

What you do have now, that you didn't have before you started, is language for what's happening, an honest accounting of its cost, scripts ready for the conversations you've been avoiding, and a boundary map for who gets to walk through this with you. That is not nothing. That is, in fact, most of what clarity requires, arriving slightly ahead of the final decision itself, the way it usually does.

Set a real date to revisit your Decision Matrix and your seven journal entries again, not vaguely someday, but an actual date on a calendar. Between now and then, keep gathering the one piece of information you named at the end of Chapter 7. When that date arrives, come back to whichever section above finally fits. There's no penalty for needing more than one pass through this chapter.

Whichever of these is true for you tonight, you read the Contract in full daylight instead of staying inside its fog. That, more than any single outcome, was always the actual point.

Adaeze's story doesn't end in these pages, and it was never supposed to. What mattered wasn't which door she eventually walked through. It was that she finally got to choose it herself, with the truth in front of her instead of the fear. That's the only ending this workbook was ever trying to give you too.

A closing note before you finish: this workbook was built to help you think clearly, not to replace real support where you need it. If anything you've written down over these chapters points to danger rather than difficulty, please turn to the resource note at the back before you close this book.

A LETTER, BEFORE YOU GO

I want to tell you something honestly, now that you've reached the end of this.

I didn't write this workbook because I have a tidy answer for what you should do. I wrote it because I've watched too many women carry an impossible weight alone, convinced that admitting the weight existed would somehow make them less of a wife, less of a mother, less of a good woman. I wanted you to have something that never once asked you to perform strength you didn't feel, while you found your way to whatever you actually needed to decide.

Before anything else, I want you to know what you just did. You didn't skim this. You sat with eight chapters, wrote things down you'd maybe never said out loud, and gave seven honest days to a question most women spend years avoiding. That took real courage, separate entirely from whatever you decided. Whatever door you walked through, you did the harder thing first. You looked clearly.

If you take one thing from these eight chapters, let it be this. You were never required to sign the Contract you found yourself living inside. You inherited it, the way most of us inherit the unspoken rules that shape our lives, without ever being asked whether we agreed to the terms. The fact that you didn't choose it doesn't mean you're stuck with it forever. It means you finally get to read it in daylight, and decide, for the first time as yourself, what happens next.

I don't know which door you walked through. Renewing, letting it expire, or still standing somewhere honest in the middle. I wasn't trying to lead you toward any one of them. I was only trying to make sure that whichever one you chose, you chose it clearly, with your own eyes open, instead of drifting there by exhaustion or fear.

Whatever comes next for you, I hope you carry one thing forward that has nothing to do with your marriage at all. You are allowed to trust what you know. You are allowed to take up the space your own life actually requires. You are allowed to stop disappearing to keep everyone else comfortable.

That was always the real terms worth renegotiating.

Two small honest asks before you go. If any part of this reached you, there is likely a woman in your life right now performing the exact calm you used to perform, telling no one, assuming no one would understand. She doesn't need the whole story from you, just this workbook finding its way into her hands the way it found its way into yours.

And if this genuinely gave you something real, a few honest words left as a review on Selar, wherever you purchased this, would mean more than you know. Not for me. For the next woman quietly deciding whether this workbook is worth the risk of finally being honest with herself. Your words could be the reason she takes that first step too.

Wishing you clarity, whatever it ends up asking of you.

Fairness Chidolue

RESOURCE NOTE

This workbook was built to help you think clearly. It was never built to replace real help in a moment of real danger.

If at any point while reading this you recognized fear for your physical safety, not just unhappiness in your marriage, please reach out today, before you do anything else in this book.

In Nigeria, the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team operates a free, confidential helpline, available 24 hours: 0800 033 3333. If you're outside Lagos, the Federal Government's toll-free line for violence against women and girls is 0800 727 3225 5.

If you're reading this outside Nigeria, findahelpline.com lists free, confidential domestic violence helplines by country, with no sign-up required.

You don't need to be certain something is wrong to call. You only need to not be sure it's safe, and that's reason enough.