

# MASTER WHAT I AM

Stoic Poetry on Self-Mastery and the Inner Life



*Jane Devyn*

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MASTER WHAT I AM
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This book is a work of philosophical poetry intended for literary and contemplative purposes. It is not intended as psychological, medical, or legal advice. The reflections expressed in these pages are poetic interpretations of philosophical ideas and should be received as personal and artistic exploration rather than prescriptive guidance.

*For Dwayne and Jason,*

*May philosophy teach you*
*what took me so long to learn:*
*that strength is not in never falling,*
*but in mastering the rise.*

*For you.*
*You were looking for a book.*
*You found a mirror.*
*Now master it.*

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## PROLOGUE

A Letter to the One Who Seeks Without Knowing What They Seek

I know why you are here.

It is no accident. Books find us when we are ready to listen, and this one found you at the exact moment. Perhaps it was after a night when the ceiling felt too low and the walls too close. Or maybe on a morning when waking up felt like a sentence you do not remember signing.

I know that feeling: running faster and faster on a treadmill that goes nowhere, collecting achievements that sound impressive in conversation but feel hollow in the silence of three in the morning; smiling for photographs while, inside, something essential is quietly breaking—piece by piece, day after day.

This book was born from that fracture. Not only from my own, but from the collective fracture we are living through: an age in which we have more connections than ever and feel more alone than ever; where information rains down endlessly but wisdom is scarce; where we run so fast that we forget where we are going and, worse still, why.

Two thousand years ago, an emperor wrote in his military tent as his empire began to crack; a freed slave taught that true freedom has nothing to do with visible chains; a counselor navigated lethal conspiracies while keeping his inner center intact. They were not superhuman. They were people like you and me, facing the same question that still haunts us: how do we live when everything seems designed to break us?

The answer was never about controlling the world. It never is. The answer was something more radical: mastering oneself. Not with the rigidity of a martyr or the coldness of a cynic, but with the flexible strength of the reed that bends in the storm without snapping.

MASTER WHAT I AM is my attempt to translate that ancient wisdom into the language of our modern wounds. I chose poetry because there are truths prose cannot reach—truths that live in the space between thought and emotion, where real decisions are made.

Each poem is a bitter medicine wrapped in beauty, an invitation to look at yourself without the filters you use to survive your daily life.

I did not come to comfort you with sweet lies. You already have social media for that. I came to remind you who you were before the world convinced you that you needed its approval to exist; before you traded your inner compass for likes and followers; before you forgot that the only real control was always within you.

I warn you: this path hurts.
It hurts to let go of what you thought defined you.
It hurts to admit how much time you lost.
It hurts to discover how many of your problems you created yourself.

But there is pain that heals, and pain that only keeps the wound open.
This is the first kind.

On the other side of that pain, there is something I cannot promise you with words—because you would not believe me. You will have to discover it for yourself. I will say only this: the person who finishes this book may not be the same one who began it. And that person—the one waiting at the end of these pages—already exists inside you. They only need you to stop running and, at last, with whatever courage you can gather, master what you are.

Take a deep breath.
Let go of what you were carrying.
Let us begin.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

On the Philosophical Roots of This Book

This book is organized around eight philosophical paths, each corresponding to a chapter. It is not an academic treatise, but a poetic translation of ideas and traditions that have endured for centuries.

Each chapter responds to a specific tradition:

I. INNER MASTERY

Inspired by Epictetus and early Stoicism.
The distinction between what you control and what you do not.

II. PURPOSEFUL DAWNS

Based on Marcus Aurelius and his Meditations.
Daily duty and conscious discipline.

III. TIME AND FINITUDE

Rooted in Seneca and his philosophy of time.
The brevity of life and serene urgency.

IV. TRUTH AND NAKEDNESS

Inspired by Diogenes and Greek Cynicism.
Radical honesty and a life without masks.

V. SUFFICIENCY AND FRIENDSHIP

Based on Epicurus and the Epicurean Garden.
Sober pleasure and true friendship.

VI. VIRTUE AS HABIT

Rooted in Aristotle and virtue ethics.
Character as a daily practice.

VII. CLARITY IN DOUBT

Inspired by Pyrrho and Greek skepticism.
Suspension of judgment and peace of mind.

VIII. FLOWING WITH NATURE

Based on Heraclitus, Taoism, and Zen.
Constant change and flexible strength.

These traditions do not always agree, nor do they need to. Despite their differences, they meet here around a shared question: how to live with greater clarity, discipline, and command of oneself.

You do not need to know the philosophers to understand the poems. But if you wish to go deeper, now you know where to look.

# CHAPTER I
# INNER MASTERY

The most dangerous enemy is not outside.
It is not the storm,
nor other people's opinions,
nor the chaos of the world.

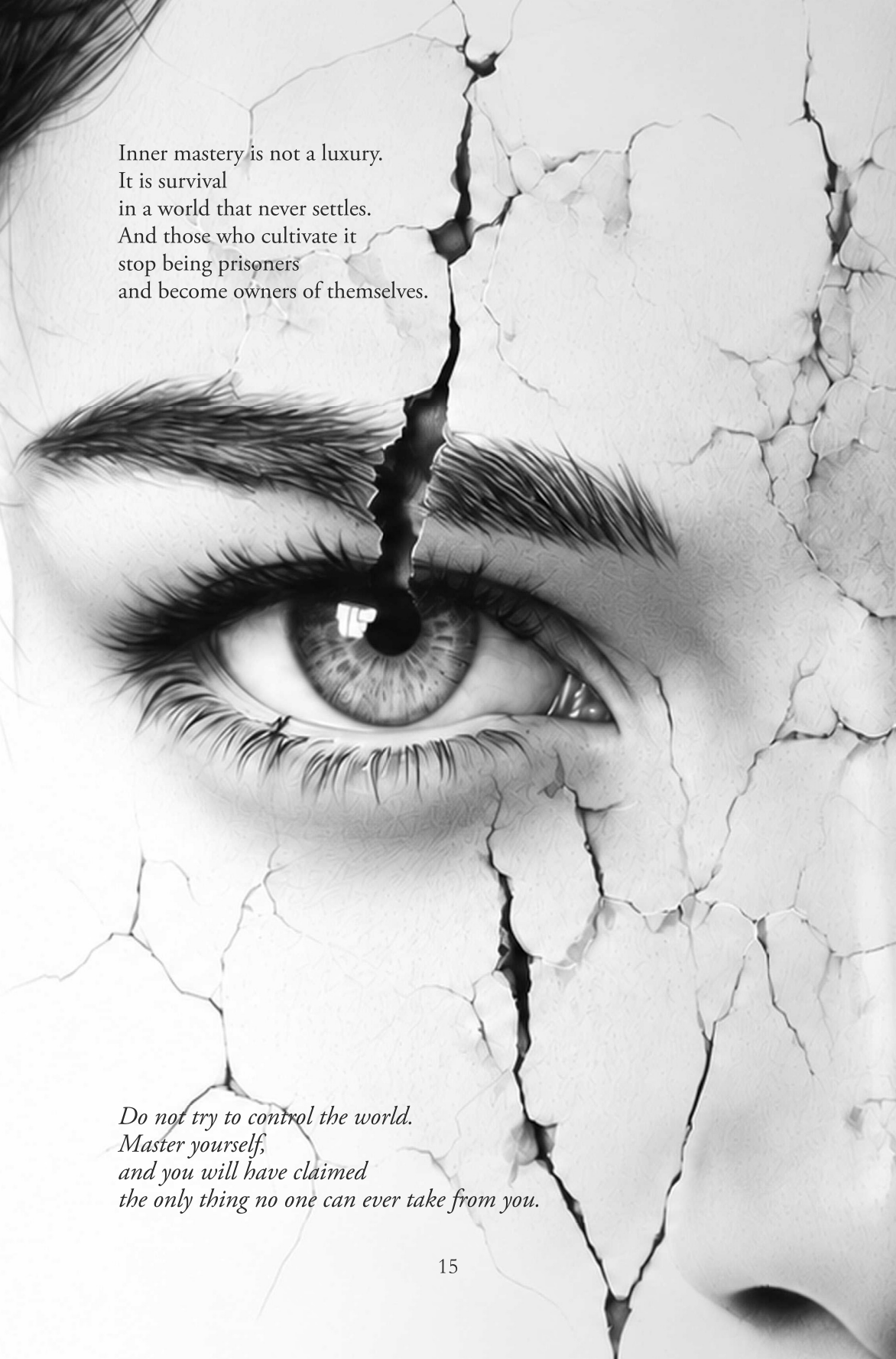
The hardest enemy lives within:
the judgment that magnifies pain,
the voice that cannot let go,
the impulse that reacts before it thinks,
the inner disorder that confuses desire with principle.

Mastering the inner world does not mean erasing emotion,
but governing it.
It is not about armoring yourself with coldness,
but about building clarity and steadiness
in the middle of what cannot be controlled.

Epictetus repeated this relentlessly:
what lies outside you is not yours to command;
what lies within is.
And anyone who hands their peace over to the wind,
to offense or to rumor,
lives chained to forces they will never rule.

This chapter is not a passive refuge.
It is a training ground.

Here you will learn to hold the helm
when your inner world wants to break loose,
to recognize which burdens are not yours to carry,
to cut through the noise you manufacture in your own mind,
to forge a character so clear
that it becomes your only true armor.



Inner mastery is not a luxury.
It is survival
in a world that never settles.
And those who cultivate it
stop being prisoners
and become owners of themselves.

*Do not try to control the world.*
*Master yourself,*
*and you will have claimed*
*the only thing no one can ever take from you.*

## SAILS, NOT WIND

The wind blows without warning.
Sometimes a murmur that brushes past;
other times a roar that tears away roofs
and certainties.
It asks no permission.
It does not wait for me to be ready.
Neither does the sea,
and life even less.

I spent years cursing the storm,
asking for skies that never cleared,
dreaming of a calm future
so I could finally dare to live.

The storm did not change.
The sea did not change.
The world kept roaring
as it always had.
The one who had to change
was me.

Late, I discovered a fierce truth:
the wind is not mine.
The waves are not under my control.
I do not choose the force with which they arrive,
but I do choose how I hold the rope.

The sails respond to my steadiness.
They tighten, they fold, they open.
I can let them tear in fury,
or I can guide them with calm and firmness
and let the ship move forward
even in the middle of chaos.

I don't need the sea to be calm.
I need to not become the storm myself.
Not everything needs to be at peace—
what matters is that my character learns to sail.

That is the difference between sinking and moving forward:
not in asking life to be gentle,
but in training the inner strength
that turns any storm into movement.

*Do not wait for the world to calm.*
*Train your character until it becomes unbreakable.*

## THE KEY OF JUDGMENT

What deepens the wound
is not only what happened,
but what I keep repeating in my head.
Your gesture does not wound me;
the story I write about it does.

The event is a blow,
but judgment is the echo I multiply.
And the echo always sounds louder
than the original stone.

I was taught to react without thinking,
to call any brush an offense,
to turn into a mountain
the smallest shadow.

It took me far too long to see it:
the key was in my pocket.
The key that opens and closes pain.
The key that sets me free
or condemns me to be a slave to my thoughts.

Today I face the same event
with a different voice inside me.
What once was a punishment
is now only a marginal note.
What knocked me down yesterday
now barely pushes me
to straighten my back.

The world did not change.
People did not change.
I changed the name I give to things.
And with that, the weight stopped crushing me.

*Events can wound your peace;*
*but the story you build around them*
*can keep the wound alive.*

## WHAT I LET GO SETS ME FREE

I dragged too many things behind me.
Inherited guilt.
Words that were never mine.
Old wounds I turned into talismans,
as if clinging to pain
were the only way not to forget who I am.

I grew used to living weighed down,
to walking with invisible burdens,
to calling identity
what was really dead weight.

The past followed me like a shadow,
and I confused company with captivity.

Until one day I opened my hand.
And what I feared losing
was exactly what I needed to release.

It wasn't easy.
At first, letting go feels like dying a little.
It means saying goodbye to the version of me
that only knew how to walk hunched over.

But I learned it isn't about forgetting;
it is about choosing what deserves to stay.

So I set up my own returns window.
No anger. No speeches. Professionally.
"I'm sorry, this package was not meant for this recipient."

And I began processing returns:
the weather, other people's moods, public opinion,
someone else's decisions, the final outcome,
the luck of the day, the rumors.

None of that carried my signature.
They were letters addressed to
whoever runs the universe.
Not me.

Each return cleared a hallway.
Each release gave me back a room of me.
And when I chose to keep only what was essential,
I recognized myself—lighter, steadier, truer.

I did not become weak by letting go.
I became strong by daring to live without chains.

The world weighs the same,
but it no longer drags me.
Because what I let go
returns me to myself.

*Clinging to the past does not protect you;*
*it chains you.*
*Let go, and you will discover*
*you were always stronger without the weight.*