SAMPLE

The Frozen Maiden

The Personality That Froze Its Feelings to Survive

Aiman Sterling

Free sample: Chapter 1

putrabooks.github.io

Buy the full book:

Payhip

Carousell

Lulu

Contents

Chapter 1: The First Glance — the Frozen Maiden at a Party

Chapter 2: The Core — the Engine of the Freeze

Chapter 3: The Instrument — the Composure, Taken Apart

Chapter 4: The Craft — the Practice Years

Chapter 5: The Honest Costs

Chapter 6: The Dark Side — the Shadow

Chapter 7: The Frozen Maiden at Work

Chapter 8: The Frozen Maiden in Love and Friendship

Chapter 9: The Matchups — Companions, Rivals, and the Other Types

Chapter 10: The Melt — Warmth Chosen at Last, in Doses the Self Controls

Afterword

Chapter 1: The First Glance — the Frozen Maiden at a Party

The Telltale Manner

At parties the tell is the even temperature — and the ice-core's first finding is what the type's presence does to a room's weather: nothing, reliably, in the middle of everything. The crisis, the gossip, the joyful shriek — the Maiden takes all of it at the same flat, gracious altitude; the laughter arrives on time and one degree below the room's; the compliment received with a smile that is perfectly polite and perfectly sealed. And the ice-core notes the party's specific, quiet dependence on this: the guest everyone stands near when the evening goes wrong — the argument, the fainting, the bad news arriving by phone — because the Maiden in a crisis is the most useful person in the building: the same composure that reads as cold at the buffet reads as command in the emergency, and the room, in its bad moments, is grateful for the ice it found strange in the good ones. And the small tell that marks the genuine article off from the merely composed: the temperature never changes — not up, not down, not once all evening — and the ice-core's margin note, held for the rest of the book: a thermostat is a machine; a person who is always exactly the same temperature is keeping something off, and has been since before they could explain why.

The Backstory Signature

The signature in the past is the house where feeling was dangerous — and the first freeze, assembled across a hundred case files, is always a variation on one architecture: pain that would have destroyed the child, arriving in a place where the child's feelings made it worse. The chaotic house, where tears provoked the storm it hoped to end; the strict house, where grief was insolence and fear was disrespect; the sudden house — the loss, the diagnosis, the collapse — where the family's survival required a child who did not add weight to the boat. And the child, brilliant in the way all children on this shelf are brilliant at exactly one solution, made the intelligent choice: stopped feeling. Not suppressed — the ice-core is precise here, because this volume's whole portrait depends on the precision: switched off — the line cut, the signal gone, the tears that would not come at the funeral and did not miss their cue, because the cue was never received. The freeze worked immediately and totally: the danger lost its handle; the adults, unnerved and impressed, called it maturity; the child survived what broke other children in the same house. And the winter that followed was mistaken for temperament — "she's always been a cool one" — the biography's founding misreading, entered by the world into the permanent record, and the child, the ice-core notes, never once corrected it, because the correction would have required the one thing the freeze had taken: the feeling that something was

wrong.

The Childhood Album

Open the winter-album and the photos are composed: the child at the recital, perfect; the child at the family crisis, tidy, helpful, dry-eyed; the school portrait year over year with the same gracious, sealed smile — the winter-album's weather never changes, and that is the finding. The recurring figure is the small adult: the child pouring the coffee for the guests, carrying the message between the warring parents, holding the household's ledger at nine — the composure already load-bearing, the house already leaning on its coldest member. And the winter-album's most telling feature is the absence of the melt: no photo of the tantrum, the sob, the wild joy — the temperature moments of childhood are simply not in the winter-count, because they were not in the child; the other children in the same frames are laughing with their whole faces, and the Maiden is smiling with exactly the front. And the margin note, written with the greatest care this ice-core carries, because it is this book's whole foundation: the winter-album documents a child who was never cold — a child who was kept cold, by a decision so intelligent and so early that it looks, from every angle afterward, like a nature; the winter-album's weather never changes because a nine-year-old set the whole climate to survive a specific winter, and nobody — not the child, not the family, not the world — ever remembered to go back and turn it on.

The Type at a Glance

Energy: Even, low-draw, and ration-gated — the wattage runs at a deliberate fraction of capacity: enough to be flawless, never enough to be warm; the energy of a system designed for endurance in a climate that punishes expenditure — and the climate, the ice-core notes, ended decades ago.

Ambition: Competence-shaped, not desire-shaped — the Maiden does not want; the Maiden performs: the flawless record, the composed crisis, the unbroken career, achieved with a machine's cleanliness; and the ice-core's quiet finding: the ambition is real, but it is the freeze's product — a life kept perfectly tidy so that nothing can be felt about it.

Vanity structure: The unbreachable composure — the quiet, total pride in never having cracked, in decades, in front of anyone; and beneath it the first freeze's arithmetic: my survival is my control — which is also the prison, because a self that survives by never leaking cannot ever be known, and the vanity and the isolation are the same wall.

Loyalty: Steady, understated, and expressed in acts at temperature: the crisis handled, the errand run, the dependable presence — the loyalty is real and total, and the ice-core notes its specific cost: the Maiden's people are loved in the only dialect the freeze permits, and would be astonished to learn the warmth underneath has never once been spoken, because the Maiden has never once felt it was there.

Weakness: The flat affect in the warm moment — this type cannot receive tenderness:

the hug goes rigid, the "are you okay?" receives a deflection so smooth it passes for an answer, the kindness aimed at the Maiden lands on the ice and slides off; and the blindness riding with it: the Maiden has no idea that the world reads the slide-off as rejection of care, and has been quietly hurt by people the Maiden never meant to wound.

Unspoken need: To be safe enough to thaw — to find, at last, the condition the first freeze deferred everything to: when it is safe; and beneath that, the need the freeze makes unspeakable: to find out whether the self survives the melt — whether the feelings, shelved in childhood and never once collected, are still alive in the vault, and whether the person who unfreezes them is still her, or someone the winter took.

The Type in Five Situations

At a party: the even temperature, the crisis composure, the one-degree-below laughter; the guest everyone stands near in the bad moment and nobody quite knows in the good ones — the room's quietest insurance policy, carrying a founding nobody has read.

In a new job: the unnervingly reliable hire — the deadlines met early, the feedback received without a flicker, the disaster handled at a flat calm that unsettles the office; the employer's discovery, made early and banked forever: nothing rattles this one — which the ice-core enters with care: the employer is right, and the reason is a child's survival decision, priced in warmth, and nobody at the office will ever be told.

Under sudden pressure: magnificent — the first freeze's whole training, deployed at last: the crisis hits and the Maiden goes flat and perfect — the voice steady, the plan immediate, the panic routed around like ice around a stone; the ice-core's honest entry: in the storm, this is the most valuable person in any building, and the world's gratitude is total, and the cost, as always, is invisible: the crisis is the one place the Maiden is comfortable, because the freeze was built for exactly this weather, and the calm everyone praises is a nine-year-old, still working, in the ruin.

In a boring meeting: the perfect note-taker with the sealed face — the composure so complete that the meeting's temperature never registers; and the meeting's quiet anomaly, noticed by exactly one observant colleague per case file: the Maiden never mentions what anything feels like — not the project, not the plan, not the reorganization that just ended half the department — and the colleague's private verdict, never said aloud: "I have worked beside her for six years, and I honestly do not know if she is happy. I do not know if she is anything."

On holiday: the flawless guest and the family's quiet mystery — the gifts perfect, the help constant, the warmth one degree below everyone's; the moment of grief or joy that moves the whole table moving the Maiden not at all; and the family's oldest misreading, entered into the winter-count at the first freeze and never corrected: "that's just how she is" — the winter, mistaken for temperament, one more generation.

Not to Be Confused With

Not the Cheerful Monk, the personality at peace with little — the confusion is instant, because both are calm, both are unreadable in the storm, and both are mistaken by the world for the same word. The hinge is the temperature of the center. The Monk's calm is warm at the core: sufficiency, gratitude, a self that wants nothing because it lacks nothing — the peace is fullness, and it leaks out at the edges: the Monk laughs with the whole face. The Maiden's calm is load-bearing architecture: a machine built by a child to survive a winter — the peace is a wall, and nothing leaks at the edges, because nothing is permitted to. The quick test, one scene each: give both a genuine kindness. The Monk receives it warmly — it adds to a full self. The Maiden goes rigid — it breaches the wall, and the breach is treated like an intrusion, and the ice-core's line on the pair: one is a lake in stillness; the other is a lake that has been iced over to bear weight — and only one of them has water moving underneath that anyone, including the owner, can still find.

Not the Moonlit Blade, the personality that moves unseen — the confusion is subtler, because both are concealed, both are cooler than the room, and both are misread as mysterious on purpose. The hinge is what the cold conceals. The Blade's chill is an instrument: ambition, intent, calculation, held under the ice as strategy — there is fire under the Blade's surface, banked deliberately, and the Blade can warm tactically whenever the mission wants it. The Maiden's chill conceals nothing that is running: the line was cut, the signal is off — the ice is not hiding fire; it is hiding the absence the freeze created, and the Maiden cannot warm tactically, because there is no tactician with access to the furnace. Watch both at the same party: the Blade is cold like a closed door you want opened; the Maiden is cold like a season — and the ice-core's sharpest line on the pair: the Blade's composure is a choice made hourly; the Maiden's was a choice made once, at nine, and never revisited — which is why one of them melts when they decide to, and the other has to learn how.

And the glance file appends the temperature chart nobody at the party thinks to keep: the Frozen Maiden, across an evening, is the only constant in a room of weather — the host's crisis, the drunk guest, the argument by the door — and the chart's finding is the tell beneath the tell: the Maiden's range is narrower than everyone else's, and the narrowness is legible two ways — the room reads strength (the calm everyone leans on, and leans on, and leans on) — and the ice-core reads rationing — because composure, the engine chapter will show, is not a temperament; it is an economy, warmth budgeted by a nine-year-old accountant who declared the spending season over, and the chart's honest line, entered for the host who keeps calling the Maiden the strongest person she knows: the strength is real — the winter-count never disputes the ice — and the rationing is also real, and the strongest person in the room is the one who has not bought anything warm for herself in twenty years — and the ice-core's last field note on the glance, the one that predicts the whole book: watch what the Maiden does when the party thins — the composure, so flawless in the crowd, loosens by exactly one degree in the emptying room, and the degree, so small the room never sees it, is the entire spring this volume is about, held in reserve since

the first freeze winter, ready, at the edge of the ice, waiting only for a season the self certifies as safe.

The glance file's postscript, the compliment tell, entered because it reverses every other type's signature: hand the Frozen Maiden a compliment and watch the delay — the half-second before the thank you, so exact, so even — and the delay is not modesty and not deflection; it is the triage — the compliment, arriving warm, must be assessed for breach (is it asking for something; is it observing the self too closely; does it require feeling now) — and the finding underneath: the compliment that passes triage is the specific one (the handoff saved the shift), and the compliment that fails is the general one (you're amazing — unbankable, no place in the vault to file it, requesting warmth on delivery) — and the ice-core's field instruction for the people who love this type and keep missing: be specific, be brief, and leave — the compliment delivered like a package, not a request — and the winter-count's last note on the tell: the Maiden files the specific ones; the vault, the recovered cases report, has a shelf for them; and the shelf, kept for decades, is the first proof the ice-core ever held that the freeze was never the whole self.

Chapter 2: The Core — the Engine of the Freeze

Every archetype on this shelf runs on a childhood answer that worked, and the Frozen Maiden's is the only one that looks like an engineering decision — a child, in a house where feeling was fatal, reaching for the only switch the self had and turning the line off. The first freeze, assembled from a hundred case files: pain that would have destroyed the child — the chaotic house, the strict house, the sudden house — arriving, always, in a form where the child's feelings made it worse: the tears that provoked the storm; the grief the house banned as insolence; the fear that made the dangerous adult more dangerous. And the child, reading the environment the way all children on this shelf read it — for survival — made the intelligent move, the one the ice-core will defend through every chapter of this book: stopped feeling. The tears that would not come were not numbness of spirit; they were a decision — and the decision worked, immediately and totally: the danger lost its handle on the child, the storm passed over the small cold self like weather over stone, and the child survived what broke other children in the same rooms.

So the engine installed itself: composure as survival architecture — warmth rationed, feeling deferred until it is safe, and never quite safe. Then there is the return on it all: a mechanism of two strokes, which the winter-count must specify precisely — no adult story parses without those strokes.

The first stroke is the survival itself — and the ice-core enters it first because the world always forgets it: the freeze worked. The child who did not feel the household's worst years arrived at eighteen intact — functional, observant, fluent in crisis, and walking, which the ice-core notes with the full weight of this volume, is not the default outcome of those houses. The survival is the engine's founding wage, and the gratitude the type owes the freeze is real, and this book will never once ask the Maiden to regret it: the decision was genius, the timing was perfect, and the child who

made it saved the only life the child had.

The second stroke is the world's payment — and this is the first freeze's subtler bequest, the clause that keeps the engine running long after the danger ends: the composure was rewarded, everywhere, by everyone. The adults called it maturity; the teachers called it remarkable; the households leaned on the cold child, and the cold child bore the weight without a flicker — and the world, the ice-core notes with care, has been paying the freeze ever since: the unnerving calm promoted at work, leaned on at funerals, married for its steadiness, applauded at every crisis — the architecture works, socially, everywhere the Maiden goes, and no one ever asks what it costs, because no one can see it: the cost is precisely the absence of everything the ice refuses to leak.

And the engine's secret clause, the one that organizes the whole shadow chapter, was written in the first freeze's weather rather than the child's heart: feeling is deferred until it is safe — and it is never quite safe. The condition was never defined — no age, no address, no person was ever named at which the line would be reconnected — because the danger never formally ended: the chaotic house faded rather than stopped; the strict house never apologized; the sudden house's grief was never, in any founding in this ice-core, formally finished — so the freeze's founding premise, it is not safe yet, was never once falsified, and the line stayed off. And the adult biography runs accordingly: the warmth rationed to the minimum viable dose (functional, polite, one degree below); the feeling deferred, decade over decade, into the vault; the thaw, when warmth arrives uninvited — the hug, the kindness, the grief that ambushes — experienced not as gift but as breach; and the intelligence that made the decision so brilliantly at nine has never once been asked the adult's question: is it safe yet? — which is the one question this entire book exists to ask, and the thaw chapter's whole work to answer.

The engine keeps honest books, and the honest line is this: the freeze is real wisdom — the ice-core's respect is total, and the redeemed cases in this volume thaw only because they kept the intelligence that froze them; the child who chose the winter saved the person who will outlive it. The error is not the freeze; it is the calendar: the decision was correct for the first freeze's weather and was never revisited when the weather changed — the temperature set at nine and never checked, the "never quite safe" running on the first freeze's evidence, decades stale; and the adult discovery the thaw chapter will engineer is the whole book in one sentence: it is safe now — it has been safe for years — and the feeling, tried in small doses by the same intelligence that froze it, turns out to be survivable: the thaw is not the flood the first freeze promised, and the self, unfreezing, does not die. It arrives — the same person, at last, at a temperature she chooses.

And the core file appends the freeze's warranty, because the winter-count owes the engine its provenance in plain terms: the solution was perfect — the ice-core has said it and will keep saying it — a pain that would have destroyed a nine-year-old answered with a system that froze it, filed it, and kept the child alive and functional through what should have been a demolition — and the warranty's terms, which the

type has never once read because the nine-year-old who wrote them did not include the manual: the freeze was designed as survival architecture, not as a residence — built to get the self through the winter, with an implied spring — and the core's appended finding is the quiet tragedy restated as engineering: the system worked so well that it outlived the weather — the war ended, the house stood, and the self, having no protocol for peacetime, kept the winter running because the winter was the only season with instructions — and the ice-core's line, entered where the type will find it: the freeze was never broken; it is overqualified — a bomb shelter, maintained beautifully, by a woman living in a climate that has not bombed anything in decades — and the thaw chapter's whole work, stated once at the core so the chapters can refer back: not the demolition of the shelter (the ice-core would sooner let the shelter stand) but the reopening of the door — the same intelligence that built the freeze, applied at last to the schedule for ending it.

The core file's postscript, on the one degree — because the engine chapter owes the first freeze scene its full measure, and the measure is this: the freeze was never total, in any biography, not even at nine — the child who shut the line down kept one circuit open (the pet, the notebook, the one cousin allowed the full temperature) — and the ice-core's finding on the surviving circuit, which the type should locate in her own history before doubting: the open line is the proof of mechanism — the same self, in the same winter, running feeling at full depth through exactly one channel — and the postscript's arithmetic, entered at the core's full weight: a system that kept one channel open was never a disability; it was a reservation — the nine-year-old preserving a route for the spring she could not schedule — and the thaw chapter's melt, the winter-count has verified it in every recovered case, runs through the original channel: the pet's successor, the notebook's descendant, the cousin's wedding — the thaw never opens a new door; it widens the one that was never allowed to close — and the ice-core's last line at the core, for the Maiden who knows exactly which channel this paragraph means: that is not a coincidence; that is the design working — hold it open one more season; the spring, when it comes, already knows the address.

Chapter 3: The Instrument — the Composure, Taken Apart

The Frozen Maiden's signature tool is the composure — the flawless, even, unnerving calm — and the world files it under "strong," which is true and misses the mechanism almost entirely, because this composure is not a virtue here; it is architecture, and load-bearing architecture at that. Take it apart.

The Mechanics

The frost-gauge works three ways. First, the even temperature: the flat calm maintained at every altitude — the crisis, the buffet, the funeral, the promotion — and the mechanism's power is its predictability: the Maiden's people never have to guess

which version of her arrives; the weather never changes, and the world builds on ice the way it builds on bedrock. Second, the crisis command: the first freeze's original training, deployed on demand — the emergency, taken in hand at a flat, steady altitude that steadies everyone else; the ice-core's honest entry: the frost-gauge is socially priceless, and more than one institution in this record ran its worst day on one woman's childhood. Third, the sealed reception — the mechanism the world misreads most: the hug that goes rigid, the "are you okay?" that deflects so smoothly it passes for an answer; the kindness arriving at the ice and sliding off; the ice-core names the mechanism precisely, because the whole book turns on it: the breach protocol — warmth arriving uninvited is processed, by the first freeze's wiring, as danger: the line is off, and anything that reaches toward the line is reaching toward the wound, and the wound is where the danger always lived.

The Range

The range deserves the honest statement, because it is the highest steadiness range in the frost-catalog. The Maiden holds things: the crisis, the secret, the family's worst year, the ward's night shift, the institution's collapse — held level, without a flicker, for decades; the people around the Maiden are steadied by the Maiden the way a room is steadied by a foundation, and the ice-core's record is blunt: this composure has carried families, marriages, and institutions through weather that would have broken warmer constitutions in a season. The type is unbreakable in the short term — the first freeze built her for exactly that; and the type is trusted absolutely — the secrets kept, the confidence held, the emergency handled: the world's reliance on the Maiden is total, and the world's knowledge of the Maiden is close to zero, and the two facts, the ice-core notes, are the same fact: the ice that holds everything up is the reason nothing gets in.

The Honest Limits

The honest column, continued to its end without blinking. It cannot receive — tenderness slides off the surface; the kindness aimed at the Maiden lands on the ice and the giver walks away quietly hurt, and the Maiden never learns why, and the loss compounds for decades. It cannot crack in company — the tears, the rage, the grief, the joy at full volume: all of it rationed to zero, ever, in front of anyone; the vanity of the unbreachable and the prison of the unbreachable are one wall, and the ice-core's coldest entry: the Maiden has not been seen — by anyone, at any temperature — since the first freeze. It cannot name its own weather — the feelings, never consulted for decades, return answers the type no longer speaks: asked how she is, the Maiden reports conditions, not weather ("busy," "fine," "the usual"), because the interior report line was cut at nine, and the gauge, the ice-core notes with care, still works — it is simply disconnected from the display. And it cannot tell the danger from the warmth — the deepest limit, and the shadow's whole subject: because the freeze was built in a house where feeling invited danger, the wiring never learned that tenderness is not the storm's cousin; the hug and the blow arrive at the same perimeter, and the breach protocol fires for both, and the world's love has been hitting the same wall as the first

freeze's weather for forty years — which is the thaw chapter's whole work, and the book's quietest promise: the wall was built for a war that is over, and the door, learned, opens — in doses, on schedule, by the same intelligence that built it — onto a spring the nine-year-old was never told existed.

And the frost-gauge file appends the composure's service record, the one the self has never been shown: the calm, so flawless at every crisis, has been load-bearing for other people for decades — the ward, the office, the family: everyone's emergency routed through the Maiden because the Maiden does not add weather to weather — and the winter-count's finding, entered with the ice-core's characteristic double entry: the composure is genuine (the freeze is real architecture, not a performance of calm) — and the composure is also unpaid labor — the ice-core has audited the institutions in every biography and found the same line item: the calm one gets more crises, not fewer, because the calm one is where crises stop making noise — the Maiden's reputation, so hard-won, functioning as a triage address — and the service record's last entry, which the work chapter will price and this one only names: the composure, deployed flawlessly for thirty years, has never once been deployed for the self — the calm that saved every room in the building never once took the self's own emergencies, which were filed, at nine, into the vault and have been held there ever since — and the frost-gauge file's closing line, in the winter-count's even temperature: the tool is not the problem; the tool is magnificent; the problem is the customer list, which contains everyone alive except the person who built it.

The frost-gauge file's postscript, on the composure's blind spot, because the winter-count audited every crisis the Maiden has run and found the same gap in all of them: the calm is perfect for other people's weather and uncalibrated for her own — the frost-gauge, so exact under incoming fire, has no reading for the self's internal pressure — the Maiden will steady a whole ward through a code and then, in her own emergency (the diagnosis, the leaving, the loss), deploy the same composure against herself, the ice-core running flatly while the self floods — and the postscript's finding, which is the frost-gauge's honest specification sheet: the tool was built to detect external threat, at nine, because the external world was the threat — and the interior weather, having no sensor, reads as nothing — the self honestly reporting I don't feel anything in a week the vault is holding at maximum — and the ice-core's practical line, the one the recovered cases all act on: the composure, deployed at the self's own crisis, is a misuse of a working tool — the crisis run for others is competence; the crisis felt for the self is the actual job of the spring — and the postscript's last entry, held out at the ice-core's even temperature: the sensor for interior weather is language — one sentence, said to one person, about what the week is — and the frost-gauge, so beautiful, turns out to have had an input port the whole time: the mouth.

And the frost-gauge file's closing exhibit, the needle reading, entered because the composure deserves one honest compliment from the winter-count before the costs chapter takes over: of every architecture on this shelf, the Maiden's is the only one the ice-core has never seen fail under load — the Performer's stage collapses, the Duelist's standard bends, the Bonfire gutters — and the freeze, run for thirty years at any temperature the world applied, has never once cracked in public — and the

exhibit's finding, which the type should read slowly because the ice-core does not say it twice: the frost-gauge is not merely adequate; it is the most reliable structure in the frost-catalog, and the winter-count enters the compliment in the same even voice the frost-gauge taught it, with the follow-up the recovered cases all earned: and the spring, when you build it, will be built to the same specification — one degree at a time, load-tested for thirty years, by the only engineer on the shelf with a perfect safety record — and the exhibit's last line, at the ice-core's temperature: the thaw was never going to be amateur work; nothing this self builds ever was.

Chapter 4: The Craft — the Practice Years

The world files the Frozen Maiden under "born calm" — a cool nature, low-affect, wired even. The truth is a practice: the composure was trained — in the world's most unforgiving classroom, by a child who practiced feeling nothing until feeling nothing was flawless — and the practice years are the winter-count of a survival skill perfected past the emergency it was made for, until the skill outran the war and became the self.

The Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship began at the first freeze: the decision, the cut line, and the child's immediate discovery that the freeze worked — and the training ran on the child's real life, in the house's real weather: the storm practiced for — the tears drilled down before the dangerous room was entered; the face schooled flat before the evening began; the grief, arriving at nine, ten, twelve, on schedule and unspeakable, filed — each filing a repetition in the curriculum of the held: feeling noticed, routed to the vault, shelved against the safe day; and the child, the ice-core notes with care, got better at it than the adults — the composure praised, leaned on, promoted into the household's load-bearing structure, until the small cold self held the family's weight without a flicker. And the curriculum's core course, self-taught and mastered by adolescence: the even temperature — the practice of maintaining the same face at every altitude, until the face forgot there were altitudes; the world read the practice as temperament, and the child, fluent, let it — the winter mistaken for a nature by everyone, the ice-core enters, including the child.

The Repertoire

The adult repertoire is the apprenticeship, hardened into mastery: the crisis command (the flat steady voice, the immediate plan, the panic routed — the first freeze's original skill, deployed socially, priceless, and the ice-core notes the type's private irony, never spoken: the crisis is the one place she is comfortable, because the weather finally matches the training); the sealed reception (the breach protocol — the rigid hug, the smooth deflection, the kindness sliding off: the perimeter held for decades against warmth and weather alike); the conditions report ("fine," "busy," "the usual" — the weather never named, the gauge disconnected from the display since

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aiman Sterling is the author of The Archetype Series -- a library of personality portraits drawn the way literature draws characters: the great types of human temperament, recognized at a glance, understood in depth, and followed from childhood wound to mature strength.