SAMPLE

The Vengeful Widow

The Personality That Turns Grief Into War

Aiman Sterling

Free sample: Chapter 1

putrabooks.github.io

Buy the full book:

Payhip

Carousell

Lulu

Contents

Chapter 1: The Signature — the Vengeful Widow at a Glance

Chapter 2: The Core — the Campaign as Mourning

Chapter 3: The Instrument — Ordnance from Sorrow

Chapter 4: The Craft — the War Widow's Craft

Chapter 5: The Cost — the Years the Campaign Charges

Chapter 6: The Dark Side — the Mission Eating the Mourner

Chapter 7: The Vengeful Widow at Work — Career, Teams, and the Boss Relationship

Chapter 8: The Vengeful Widow in Love and Friendship

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

Chapter 10: From the Campaign to the Vigil — the Widow Learning to Mourn

Afterword

Chapter 1: The Signature — the Vengeful Widow at a Glance

The Telltale Manner

You will know the Widow by the calm — not serenity, which is what it is mistaken for, but mobilization: the unnerving level-headedness of a person who has already survived the unsurvivable and no longer moves at civilian speed. Other mourners wobble through the early months, visibly, forgivably; the Widow is composed from the funeral onward — gracious, punctual, dressed, organized — and the record notes what the composure does to the room: the condolences arrive and die in the air, because there is nothing for them to attach to; you cannot comfort a person who has converted the tragedy into a schedule, and the mourners' half-offered casseroles and call me if you need anythings meet a courtesy so complete it functions as a border fence. The file's first finding: the Widow does not frighten the comforters away; the calm does it for them, and the Widow, who experiences the calm as carrying on, is often genuinely surprised to learn they are grieving alone.

The second tell is the black worn beautifully — the record's shorthand for the whole aesthetic of the type. The clothes are deliberate and they are kept, decades past the mourning etiquette; the office, the calendar, even the handwriting takes on a considered formality, as if everything had been redesigned by the same disciplined hand the year of the death — and the file notes the crucial detail the surface misses: it is not that the Widow refuses to move on; it is that the Widow has reorganized around the loss the way a country reorganizes around a war — and the black is the uniform. There is, in many records, one small warmth violation nobody is permitted to mention: the ring kept on, the watch wound nightly, the beloved's coat still on its hook — the only room in the whole regime where the war has not been declared.

The third tell is the dedication — the signature phrase, collected in every file: He would have wanted this. The words arrive constantly, and the record insists on what they are: not sentiment, but authorization — the dead promoted to commanding officer of the living; every act of the campaign carried out, like a military order, in the name of the fallen. The dedication gives the Widow permission (the battle is not mine, it is his), it gives the campaign legitimacy (to oppose me is to oppose the dead), and it gives the anger a costume — because the file must say plainly what the manners hide: underneath the level voice and the beautiful black, this type is furious — grief's oldest unspoken ingredient — and the campaign is the only socially acceptable container that rage has ever found. The Widow will deny this to your face. The record is unanimous anyway.

The Backstory Signature

Ask about the loss and you will receive the anniversary, the date, the place — precise, unhurried, a briefing. Ask about the years before the loss and the Widow gives you the true signature: those years were already organized the way the grief now is. The file's careful finding, dug out under every campaign: the conversion reflex — feeling made into task, pain made into protocol — was installed long before the beloved died. In childhood there was a house where feelings were expensive: the parent whose moods were weather to be managed, the family crisis that needed the child to be useful instead of frightened, the household where the child's tears were a burden on others and the child's competence was the relief of others — and the child learned the founding trade of this whole type: to survive pain, convert it. The child who fell and was told up you get, you're fine grew into the adult who was told, at the grave, the same thing by their own machinery — up you get — and obeyed it, brilliantly.

So the backstory signature is the machine before the ammunition: the child who learned that function is love (being useful, for others, is how care is expressed and received in this lineage), the young adult who was everyone's rock, the one who never cried where anyone could see — and who was, on the day the world ended, uniquely and catastrophically prepared: the only person in the room, as one file puts it, who already knew how to not feel things on a schedule. The lever was in the hand before the grief arrived; the death merely loaded it. The file holds this finding to the end of the book, because it is the one that answers the type's most common self-question, asked at two in the morning between campaigns: was I always like this? The answer, gently: no — but you were always equipped to become it, and the equipment was love's own, taught to you by people who thought they were teaching you strength.

The Childhood Album

The album, before the black, is deceptively ordinary — the file's four photographs. The first: the child at the bedside of the grandparent, age nine, sent to fetch the blanket, the water, the phone — the household routing its fear through the child's usefulness, and the child experiencing the errands, this is the album's terrible note, as belonging. The second: the child at the funeral of the pet, or the uncle, age eleven, the one who did not cry while the others did, praised for it — so strong, so grown-up — and the file marks the praise as the album's most consequential entry: the day the child's numbness was rewarded, and the conversion reflex was confirmed as a virtue. The third: the teenager who ran the house during the parent's illness — shopping lists, medication schedules, younger siblings routed to school — competent beyond their years and proud, the pride itself the earliest proof that function had fully replaced feeling as the child's language of worth. And the fourth photograph is the one the file lingers on, because it explains everything after: the child, sixteen, alone in the house the night everything fell apart, sitting perfectly still on the stairs in the dark — not crying, planning — already running tomorrow's logistics in place of tonight's grief — and the hidden caption the adult will never read: nothing about that night was survived. It was only postponed, and it has been postponing itself, on schedule, ever since. And the album's fifth photograph, the one the file keeps last because the adult files it under evidence of character, is the hardest to look at: the child at the funerals

of others — the classmate's, the neighbor's — the child who knew what to do. Twelve years old, running the kitchen at someone else's tragedy, filling the trays, finding the chairs, and the mourners saying what mourners say: how does she know? — and the file's answer, held for every chapter that follows: because the kitchen at a tragedy is the only room where this child has ever known where they stand. Long before the world ended, the type could be found at every graveside in town — the composed one, the useful one — rehearsing, funeral by funeral, the role that the founding day would one day assign them from the other side of the grave.

The Type at a Glance

The composite, in six fields. Energy: high, directed, and scheduled — the Widow's stamina in the years after the loss is the record's most remarked-upon feature, and its source is the conversion engine itself: sorrow as fuel means the tank refills from the wound, and the wound is kept open. Ambition: not personal advancement but the objective — the campaign's target, held with a purity other types find unnerving; the Widow will turn down promotions, money, and comfort that do not serve the aim, and the file notes the aim is always, underneath, two targets braided: the enemy (the injustice, the company, the condition, the man) and the postponement — the victory that must never quite arrive. Vanity structure: the Widow is vain about exactly one thing — carrying it well; praised for strength all their life, they need the record to show no collapse, and the vanity is the prison's last guard: to weep in public would be to lose the one possession the loss left them, their composure, and they will defend it like a border. Loyalty: absolute, and the type's real crown — the Widow does not betray, does not abandon, does not forget; the loyalty that once made them the rock of every household now stands guard at a grave, and nothing on earth, the record shows, will move it — this is the strength the growth chapters must keep, and the reason the growth is not the death of the loyalty but its conversion home. Weakness: the Widow cannot win — see the founding flaw — and cannot be helped: help, offered, is experienced as either pity (insult) or interference (desertion), and the file marks this the type's operational blindness: the campaign will accept martyrs before it accepts assistance. Unspoken need: to be permitted — the single word under all the black: permission to cry, permission to rest, permission to survive the beloved's death as something other than their quartermaster — the file's plain finding: the Widow does not need the war to end; the Widow needs someone with the authority to say stand down, and to still be standing there, holding the coat, when the weeping starts.

The Type in Five Situations

At the party: the Widow attends — punctual, composed, gracious, and gone within ninety minutes; the record notes the tell: the earliest departure in the room, executed without apology, and the friends who have learned not to ask. The Widow at parties is a soldier on leave: perfectly present, slightly elsewhere, scanning for the exit, and the room reads it as strength and the file reads it as sentry duty — you cannot relax in territory that still contains an enemy.

In a crisis: the second-best person in the room, and the file is careful here — the crisis is where the machinery shines: triage, lists, calls, calm; the Widow organizes the ambulance-ward of any disaster into order within the hour. But the file marks the difference between this type and the catalog's born crisis-hands: after the crisis, the Widow does not come down; they requisition it — a committee formed, a fund started, a cause incorporated — because the machinery, fed once in a crisis, resumes its appetite, and the record's dry note: disasters are, for this type, a relapse trigger, and everyone at the memorial service is, unknowingly, attending one.

When crossed: the file's most instructive situation. Oppose the campaign — question the target, suggest the war is over, stand between the Widow and the objective — and you will meet not rage but procedure: the cold, complete dismantling of your position, executed at a level tone, itemized, and filed. The Widow's conflicts are not fights; they are prosecutions, and the record shows they are won with the same fluency the Menace wins silences — but where the Menace wants the room afraid, the Widow wants the room convinced, because the war requires legitimacy, and legitimacy requires converts. To be crossed by the Widow is to be, briefly and precisely, outlawed — and the sentence ends the moment you stop being between them and the objective.

Caught in error: the most diagnostic. The campaign's mistakes — the fired lieutenant who was right, the ally insulted, the tactic that backfired — are handled by the machinery the way the childhood handled tears: not examined, requisitioned; the mistake is folded into strategy and the feeling underneath it is postponed again, with a date that never comes. The file's finding: the Widow's campaigns accumulate unwept mistakes the way rivers accumulate silt, and the campaigns that collapse — some do, the record holds — collapse not from the enemy but from the weight of the unfelt cargo they were never designed to carry.

At ease — never, but almost: the record keeps its witnesses for this too, and they all describe the same scene — the Widow, late, alone, with the music the beloved liked, or the photograph, or at the grave with the weekly maintenance of the stone — and what the witnesses report is the file's most important entry, held for the growth chapters: the composure drops, for minutes, at a time — the shoulders, the breathing, the face — and if the Widow notices you noticing, it ends instantly, and the border fence goes back up. The album of the unguarded minutes is the type's only surviving evidence that the grief is alive under the uniform — the file's whole later case, in four words: it is down there.

Not to Be Confused With

The Widow is not the Relentless Avenger (Volume 9) — the type that fights so it never happens again — though the two are the catalog's closest siblings, and the file's test is precise: the Avenger's war is preventive and therefore can end — when the vow is kept, the system fixed, the never-again secured, the Avenger, in the record, is capable of the file's rarest event, a genuine laying-down of arms; the Widow's war is memorial, fought because it already happened, and its true objective is not the enemy but the

postponement — which is why the Widow's campaigns do not end when they are won. The Avenger fights the future; the Widow fights the past, and the past does not surrender. And the Widow is not the Weary Warden (Volume 57) — the guardian who has kept the long road too long — though both have stood at their posts past all reason: the Warden's endurance is duty — the gate must be held, and the Warden knows it is tired; the Widow's endurance is devotion disguised as duty — the post is the grave, and the Widow will tell you, sincerely, that they are not tired, which is the whole difference and the whole danger: the Warden's war has an end date the Warden can see, and the Widow's has one, too — the file's plain sentence — and it is the day the mourning is finally allowed.

And the signature file closes with the refined field check the census has waited the whole catalog to deploy, because the calm frightens every ordinary instrument away — the condolences retreat from it; the interviewers misfile it as strength — and the refined check is run not at the Widow but at the calendar: read the war's dates against the grave's. The fieldworker's log of a recorded case: the type at fifty-two, twenty-six years past the founding death — the correspondence answered in its sixth decade — and the census's audit of the two calendars, run side by side, produced the instrument's most distinctive measurement: the war's calendar was flawless — the campaigns, the meetings chaired with agendas the beloved never saw, the anniversaries of every engagement kept like liturgy — and the grave's calendar was empty. Not one entry in twenty-six years: no visit logged, no candle dated, no hour — and the fieldworker's key observance, the one the annex has waited the whole volume to log: the two calendars never once intersected. The Widow's war observed the death the way a general observes a fallen campaign — as the opening date, honored annually, with the black worn beautifully and a strategic account delivered of what the enemy took — and the grave itself, the mourning's own address, was never once on the schedule — and the check's one question, aimed past the calm: "when does the beloved get buried?" And the answer the census has collected, in some form, at every field check where the instrument was run: "the war isn't over." Delivered level, without hostility — the calm that frightens the condolences away — and the instrument's cross-file finding is the field check's whole discovery: the grief, which has no schedule, was offered one — the campaign — and the campaign has kept the beloved unburied for the whole of the war, because the mission requires the casualty: the war runs on him being taken, and the burial, the census enters with its driest care, would end the supply. The black worn beautifully, the correspondence, the flawless strategic calm — the census's arithmetic, run across the files, is the finding: 100 engagements a year, 26 years, and the beloved, in all that time, never once allowed to be dead in peace — he is still the campaign's reason, still unfought-for, still the date the whole calendar is built around — and the mourner, the annex notes, has not once in twenty-six years sat at the grave as a mourner. She has sat there, twice, as a commander — reviewing the grounds, the file has the tape — and the refined check closes on its one-line finding: the calm is not peace. The calm is a war economy — and the grief, stored as ordnance, has never once been spent at the grave it was minted for.

Chapter 2: The Core — the Campaign as Mourning

Every engine in this catalog has a founding scene, and this one has a date. The day the world ended — the beloved taken — the record's first finding is the stillness: the Widow does not break; the Widow goes quiet, functional, and operational, sometimes within hours, and the room mistakes it for grace. What actually happened in that stillness is the engine's founding beat: grief arrived — formless, scheduleless, oceanic — and the machinery installed in childhood reached for the only tool it has ever had, and converted. Grief, which has no schedule, was offered one, and the offer was the campaign: the lawsuit as a sequence of hearings, the charity as a series of galas, the cause as a ladder of targets, the memory as an institution with a budget — sorrow reprocessed into fuel, and mourning, the file's exact phrase, converted into ordnance.

The engine is a loop with three strokes, and the file names them because they will recur in every habitat this book visits. First stroke: the assignment — grief is routed into a task, and the task, completed, delivers the only relief this type can feel — not comfort, the record is strict about this, but function: the sensation of the pain having been used. The Widow after a working day on the campaign is not less bereaved; they are employed by the bereavement, and employment is the closest state to peace the machinery knows. Second stroke: the memorial weight — every engagement of the campaign is, at the deeper ledger, a memorial service with casualties: the email sent at midnight carries the beloved's name; the opponent defeated falls, symbolically, across the grave, an offering; and the file notes the exchange rate that makes the loop addictive: grief used is grief briefly bearable — the campaign pays out in the only currency the founding day minted. Third stroke: the postponement — and this is the stroke that makes it an engine rather than a project: because the pain was converted and not felt, it is still there, undiminished, under the uniform — so the relief of the assignment fades within hours and the appetite returns, and the campaign, which is the only processor the grief has ever had, must be fed — the loop's quiet, catastrophic finding: the war does not continue because the enemy is strong; the war continues because the mourner has no other way to metabolize the loss, and the machinery that saved the Widow's life in the first spring is the same machinery that will schedule away the rest of it.

And the file must record the engine's most misleading property, the twin of the Menace's functional rooms: the campaign works — publicly, verifiably, magnificently. The foundations that exist, the laws that changed, the wrongs that were righted because one bereaved person could not be consoled and could not be stopped — the record refuses to book these as symptoms; they are the type's gift, the same gift the childhood made: usefulness, function, love expressed as effect. The ambiguity that keeps the engine running is the world's applause: every external metric rewards the campaign, every stranger praises the carrying-of-it, and the file's finding on what the applause does is the chapter's last and saddest: the Widow, who converted feeling into function as a child to be loved, converts grief into war as an adult and is loved for it — the machine is publicly confirmed, decade after decade, until the distinction between mourning the beloved and performing the mission has quietly dissolved, and

the Widow, asked at the twentieth-anniversary gala what they would do if the campaign succeeded tomorrow, gives the answer every file records, level, instant, and without one second of reflection: I haven't thought about it. And the file must add the engine's oldest fuel to the record, because the manners hide it and the type will deny it: rage. Grief at a taken beloved is never only sadness; it is, in its first weeks, substantially fury — at the driver, the disease, the doctor, the God, the unfairness of the physics — and society permits the bereaved almost no outlet for it. The campaign is the outlet. It is the one container the culture will approve: the fury, routed through the lawsuit, the foundation, the cause, becomes advocacy — the most respectable costume rage has ever worn — and the file's finding on the type's level voice: it is level because the anger has a job; and the warning, held for Chapter Six: a rage that is permanently employed is a rage that is never examined, and the Widow who has spent a decade being furious, productively is the last person in the record to know what the fuel under the engine actually is.

The core file closes with the exhibit the grown cases finally surfaced, because the campaign was founded under a specific roof, and the census finally got the interview the volume was missing: the witness to the founding scene — the one who stood at the edge of the world when it ended. The case: the Widow at fifty-four, the war certified at twenty-eight years — and the census's interview with the type's sister: the one who was in the kitchen the week of the funeral. Her account, offered at seventy, when the census read the founding scene back to her, and the transcript is entered in full because the engine's origin has never before been described by the family that watched it ignite: "The record should have that week exactly, because everything hangs off it: she was twenty-six, and I want the file to understand what actually happened, because my sister's whole war has misfiled it for twenty-eight years: the grief was there. The census will want this plainly: she cried — three days, the record can check with the funeral home, the casseroles, the whole ordinary wreckage of it — and then, on the fourth morning, the crying stopped, and something else was on the face, and I was in the kitchen when the sentence was said, and the record can have it verbatim, because I have heard it retold as the founding of a crusade and it was never that: she was at the table with the condolence cards, and the coffee, and she said — level, to the cards, not to me: 'nobody is ever taking anything from me again.' And the file should log the grammar, because the misfile is in it: she did not say I will get them. She did not name an enemy. There was no enemy — the record knows how he died; it was the crossing guard's wet road and a tired driver; there was no them — she said nobody is taking, and the enemy her grief invented was the whole world, and the world has been at war with her since the fourth morning. And the census should log what I did, because the family's whole account is in it: I said the wrong thing, the thing everyone says, the thing that has taken me twenty-eight years to correct: 'you're so strong. And the record should have what happened to the word: she took it like a commission. The strength became the trade — the campaign, the black, the meetings, the war — and I fed the founding with two words, and I want the misfile entered from the family's side: the strength was not strength. It was grief, in uniform, by the fourth morning — and nobody in that kitchen could tell the difference, because the uniform was beautiful, and the calm frightened us into calling it what it was not. And the file

should log the one thing the kitchen knows that the war has never entered: the third night. I heard her — the record can have this; she has never once spoken of it — through the door, at two in the morning, the day before the uniform: she was talking to him. Not madness — the census should log it plainly: the small, ordinary, unbearable talking, 'the road was wet, love; you'd have been careful' — the mourner, still in there, still at the graveside grammar — and by morning the uniform was on and the mourner never came back out. Twenty-eight years. And the record should close on my arithmetic, because it's the finding nobody else will say and the file should have it from the family: the war has not held his memory — it has held it hostage; the campaigns are not for him, they are about him, and the difference is the whole grief: he has been mobilized for twenty-eight years, posted to every engagement, worn as the reason, and never once, since the third night, through the door, been talked to again — and the sister's finding, entered at seventy, at the kitchen table where the commission was issued: the war was never the love. The war was the fear of the kitchen door — and behind it, the whole time, the third night's mourner, still waiting to finish the sentence about the wet road." The census's annotation on the exhibit: the founding is not the death but the fourth morning — the grief offered a schedule, the two words "so strong" read as a commission, and the mourner sealed behind the kitchen door mid-sentence — and the file's finding, uniform across its Widows: every one of them can name the commissioning sentence — and none of them has ever once been back through the door — and the core chapter enters the founding's whole clause at last: the campaign was the first act of devotion a broken person could still perform — and the third night's mourner was left inside, talking, and the growth chapter's whole discovery, the converted cases certify, is that the war can be laid down without the beloved being lost — because the beloved was never in the war. The beloved was at the kitchen table, on the third night, and the sentence is still waiting to be finished.

Chapter 3: The Instrument — Ordnance from Sorrow

The Widow's instrument is the campaign itself, and the file maps it this chapter the way it mapped the Menace's dread economy — because a campaign, too, has mechanics, range, and maintenance, and the people it works on deserve the map. The first mechanic is conversion discipline: the Widow's sorrow is reprocessed into fuel with an efficiency the record finds nowhere else in the catalog — the pain is not suppressed, exactly; it is refined — and the discipline shows in the habits: the early mornings (the hour of the death is often, silently, the hour of the work), the file kept on the enemy, the speeches that end precisely on time, the correspondence answered within a day, all of it at a level of organization the Widow's previous life never quite managed — and the file's finding on this famous fact, that the bereaved often function better than before: the grief is a power source, and this personality is the one built to connect to it.

The second mechanic is range, and the instrument's range is the record's longest. The Menace's weather stops at the office door; the Avenger's vow narrows to a single wrong. The Widow's campaign can span decades, continents, and sectors — because

the true objective is not the enemy; it is the postponement, and the postponement scales. The instrument works at every range: a season of litigation (short), a decade of a foundation (long), a lifetime of correspondence with the family of the man who caused it (the file's longest entry, forty-one years), and the record notes the tell that distinguishes range from obsession: the Widow's targets evolve — the campaign against the company becomes the campaign against the condition becomes the campaign for the children of the next town — the enemies change and the war continues, because the war was never about the enemies; the enemies were employment.

The third mechanic is maintenance, and the maintenance schedule is the chapter's warning. Grief-fuel must be recollected — the wound reopened on schedule — and the record finds the rituals that do it: the anniversary operations (the gala held on the date of the death, the blood drive, the memorial run — the file notes the calendar's cruel economy: the days of the campaign are built from the days of the grief), the kept artifacts routed through the file room of the campaign, the speeches that must retell the story — the Widow tells the story of the loss dozens of times a year, and the record's finding is exact: each telling is both inoculation and re-supply — the pain touched, briefly, in its harness, and the tank topped up for the next quarter. And the people it works on, the ledger the chapter must end with: the campaign recruits — and it always recruits — drawn from the grieving, the angry, the unfinished, who find in the Widow's organization the same anesthesia the Widow found, and the file's entry on the lieutenants is the instrument's true cost accounting: the campaign does not merely postpone the Widow's mourning; it organizes the postponement of many mournings at once, a fleet of unfelt griefs in matching uniforms, all reporting to the one person in the room who has been doing it longest, and calling it, in every record, a cause. The instrument's exchange rates complete the map — whom the campaign works on, and what it buys. From the grieving, it buys membership: others struck by the same loss find in the Widow's organization the anesthesia they cannot build alone, and they pay for it in devotion; from the sympathetic public, it buys standing — donations, signatures, the room's silence at the gala — purchased with the story told at the volume that never breaks; from the guilty, it buys the record's best rate: concessions, settlements, resignations, because the enemy who discovers they are fighting a mourner with nothing left to lose discovers the worst opponent in commerce. What the currency does not buy — and the ledger here is as unanimous as the Menace's — is rest for the operator: the campaign buys everything for the dead and nothing for the mourner; it buys the beloved a monument, the cause a victory, the lieutenants a purpose, and the Widow, at the end of every fiscal year of the heart, exactly what the founding day minted: postponement — the instrument's own verdict on itself, the file's closing finding: a tool that does everything except what its owner needs is, by the strictest accounting, a debt.

And the instrument file closes with the session the annex has waited the whole volume to log, because the ordnance has never before been read by the hand that casts it — the auxiliary interview, run at the type's own kitchen table, with the fieldworker's one licensed instruction: run the fuel's specification, at the source. The

transcript, verbatim, because the instrument's honest specification has never before been spoken by its operator: "The census should mark the terms, because the file has earned them: this is the kitchen table, and the fieldworker chose the site — the record should log that; the war has no table; the war has conference rooms and dates and the black that fits perfectly, and the table is where the third night happened, and I have not sat here after dark in twenty-eight years — and the spec review can open with that, because it is the first line the annex never gets: the ordnance is sorrow, reprocessed, and the reprocessing station is this table, and the station has been out of service since the fourth morning. The mechanics, plainly: grief, which has no schedule, was offered one — the campaign — and the campaign's first engineering feat was the conversion: the sorrow, instead of being spent — the wet road, the talking through the door, the whole unbearable grammar of the third night — was stored, and the storage is not passive; the annex should log the fuel cycle: every engagement, every campaign, every year of the correspondence, runs on a draw from the store — the beloved, mobilized, taken, the account of what the enemy cost, delivered level in the meeting — and the draw replenishes: the war refreshes the grievance, the grievance justifies the war, and the store never empties, which is the engine's whole brilliance and its whole cost. And the fieldworker asked the protocol's licensed question — 'what does the instrument think it is protecting?' — and I'll give the annex the honest answer, because the spec review produced it and there's no other honest way: the mourner. The sorrow was stored, at this table, on the fourth morning, by a twenty-six-year-old who had heard herself called strong and decided the grief would kill her if she sat in it — and the conversion was self-protection, the first act of devotion, and the war was built to keep the mourner from ever having to sit at this table after dark again. And the record should log what the spec review surfaced, because it is the finding the whole volume turns on: the store has never once been spent at its destination. Twenty-eight years of draws, and the destination — the grave, the candles, the weight and the time the afterword promises — is uncleared: the war's calendar holds every anniversary of the campaign and none of the death, and the grief, minted into ordnance, has never once been delivered to the grave it was minted for — because the delivery, the annex understands the engineering now, would end the war, and the war was built so that it could not end. And the fieldworker asked me to test the spec — one draw, at the source, spent at the destination — and I'll log the terms exactly: we sat at this table, after dark, and I finished the sentence. The third night's sentence — the wet road, the talking through the door — and the record should have the instrument readings, because they are the growth chapter arriving inside the spec: the voice held level through the first clause; the second clause it did not — and the annex should log that the calm broke, for one hour, at this table, and the fieldworker stood the watch, and nothing — the finding the whole war was built to deny — nothing died. The grief, spent at its destination, in the mourner's grammar, cost the war nothing but its lie: he was not still alive because I was still fighting — the sentence the war cannot answer — and the war, the census can check the calendar since, stands down for one hour a year now, and the hour is on the grave's calendar at last, and the store, the instruments certify, is emptying the way stores are meant to empty: spent, in weight and time, at the place it was minted for." The annex's annotation on the session: the reprocessing station was reopened for one hour at

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.