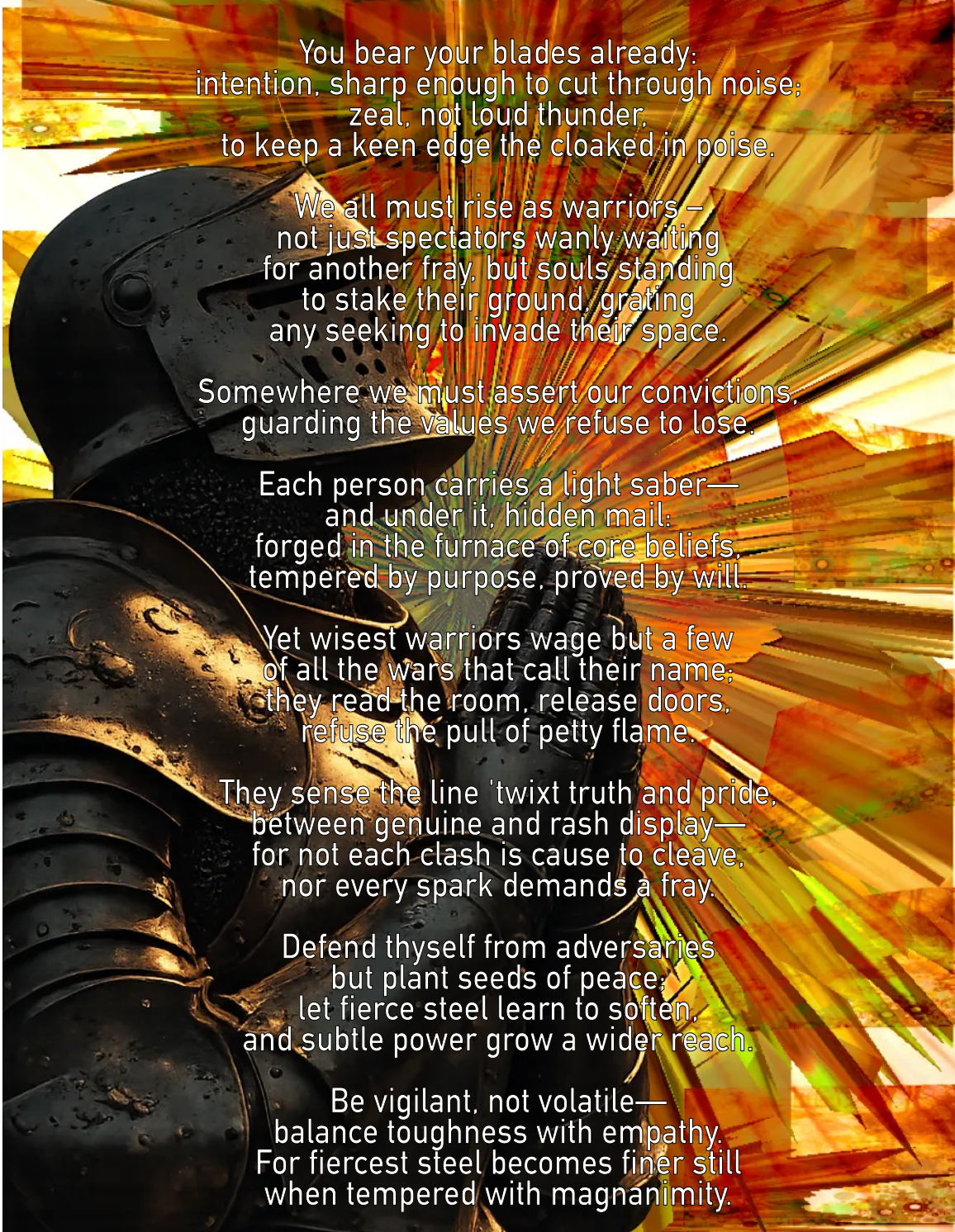


INNER WARRIORS:

A Field Guide to Spiritual Combat



You bear your blades already:
intention, sharp enough to cut through noise;
zeal, not loud thunder,
to keep a keen edge the cloaked in poise.

We all must rise as warriors —
not just spectators wanly waiting
for another fray, but souls standing
to stake their ground, grating
any seeking to invade their space.

Somewhere we must assert our convictions,
guarding the values we refuse to lose.

Each person carries a light saber—
and under it, hidden mail:
forged in the furnace of core beliefs,
tempered by purpose, proved by will.

Yet wisest warriors wage but a few
of all the wars that call their name;
they read the room, release doors,
refuse the pull of petty flame.

They sense the line 'twixt truth and pride,
between genuine and rash display—
for not each clash is cause to cleave,
nor every spark demands a fray.

Defend thyself from adversaries
but plant seeds of peace;
let fierce steel learn to soften,
and subtle power grow a wider reach.

Be vigilant, not volatile—
balance toughness with empathy.
For fiercest steel becomes finer still
when tempered with magnanimity.



Frida stood beneath the dim light of a local gallery-coffee shop. She'd read the last poem, then scratched at herself absentmindedly, as if the words had left an itch.

"D'you understand this?" she asked, tilting it toward her friends, her brow creased with a mixture of curiosity and irritation.

Satoru's brows pinched with curiosity and irritation. He wanted to simply sprawl in his chair, sip some beer, and avoid thinking.

"Nawh," he drawled, waving the whole idea away. "Insisting everyone must be a warrior? That's ignoring how different people are, né. Not everyone's built for battles. Sometimes the bravest thing is just getting out of bed."

Ying didn't look up immediately. She traced a line of text with her finger, her attention drifting away from the poem and towards her friends. "I'm more interested in how the author warns about overusing power," she said. She finally looked up, then spoke. "The sword's the easy part. It's choosing when not to swing that most folks have trouble with."

Frida nodded slowly, swirling her coffee until the surface went quiet. "Indeed," she murmured. "As you pointed out, how often do humans actually use power wisely?" The question lingered, heavy, as though the room itself hesitated to answer.

Dmitri offered a thin smile, the kind you wear when the conversation feels rehearsed. "There's irony there," he said. "People who really have power usually don't advertise it. Real power waits—shows up only when it must."

Frida let out a quiet breath and gave a small shrug, the motion somewhere between resignation and challenge. "Hmm," she said, tapping the paper lightly against her palm. "And yet... aren't most governments just elaborate machines built to mute the power people already carry?"