Coming Out of the Fortress

FOR THE ONE WHO WITHDRAWS

> *Your silence was never emptiness.*
> *It was a crowded room nobody visited.*

If you are the withdrawer, your quiet has been misread for years. It gets called indifference, coldness, not caring. The truth is usually the opposite. You retreat because it all matters too much. The criticism floods you, the sense of failing someone you love is unbearable, and going still is the only move that seems to prevent more damage. Your fortress was built out of caring, brick by brick.

But the fortress has one terrible flaw. From the outside it looks exactly like absence. Your partner cannot see you calming down in there, caring in there, hurting in there. They see a wall where a person used to be, and to an attachment system a wall means abandonment. Your best protective move delivers their worst fear.

Coming out does not start with big emotional speeches. It starts with narration, sending a few words through the wall while you are still behind it. “I've gone quiet, but I haven't gone anywhere.” “I'm overwhelmed, not indifferent.” “I need twenty minutes, and then I want to try.” Each sentence costs you three seconds and gives your partner the one thing your silence never could: evidence that you're still in there, and still in this.

SEND SIGNALS THROUGH THE WALL

1. Identify your retreat signature, the moment you leave the room without leaving the room.
2. Prepare three through-the-wall sentences ahead of time. You won't find words in the flood.
3. Use one the next time you retreat: “Overwhelmed, not gone. Twenty minutes.”
4. Treat the return time as a promise. A kept return rebuilds trust faster than anything.
5. Once a week, come out on your own: offer one feeling nobody had to dig for.

WHEN IT’S HARD

If talking mid-flood really isn't possible, use anything. A hand squeeze before you go, a text from the next room, a note. The medium doesn't matter. What matters is that “I retreat” stops meaning “I abandon,” and only a signal from inside can change that.

TO SIT WITH

What is it actually like inside the fortress? Has anyone ever asked you?

What would your partner need to do differently for coming out to feel less dangerous?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris