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Prologue: The Frequency of Life

They say the body speaks what the soul keeps silent. But sometimes, the body does more than speak — it screams. It screams so that we finally stop, so that the noise of the outside world fades away and forces us to listen to what is happening within us.

The pages you hold in your hands are not fiction. This is a story based on real events, the account of a battle against hardship, but above all, it is the record of a profound personal transformation. I write these words because I am convinced that no one remains the same after going through a difficult trial.

Sometimes we move through life without paying attention to our health, believing we will always be fine. But through this story, you will discover that even in the darkest moments, or when you feel at your weakest, there is a strength within you waiting to be awakened.

I am not going to offer you a magical formula. Life does not heal overnight. What I hope to

offer instead is a different perspective: to understand that digesting life is, above all, an act of self-love. It means learning to embrace not only what is good, but also what hurts us or frightens us, transforming it into the energy that allows us to keep moving forward.

If today you feel the weight of life pressing heavily on your shoulders, or if you are facing illness or a difficult moment, let this story be a light along your path. Not to tell you what to do, but to remind you that you, too, can find your own way out. I have learned that true healing begins in the mind and in the desire to keep living, long before the body fully feels healthy again.

I invite you to walk beside me through this journey. Not only to read about what happened to me, but to discover within yourself a reason to believe in your own strength. Because in the end, all of us are learning how to digest this extraordinary adventure called life.

Juanqui Vital

Chapter 1: The Runner's Awakening

The silence of four in the morning in Lima has a texture of its own: dense, humid, and charged with a kind of anticipation that only runners know how to decipher. The thick fog we Peruvians call *panza de burro* drifted through the cracks of the window like a ghost inviting you to stay beneath the blankets. On that morning of July 24, 2022, there was no need for loud alarms; I woke up with the precision of a man about to meet his own destiny on the asphalt. I could feel the cold at the tip of my nose, but inside my chest, a small engine was already burning to life.

I rose carefully, moving with the precision of a surgeon, trying not to disturb the absolute stillness of the room. Every step across the floor was deliberate. I did not want to wake Maty, my wife. She rested peacefully, unaware for a moment of the adrenaline already racing through my veins. Yet the instinct of someone

who has known you for a lifetime is stronger than even the deepest sleep. Just as I was about to get dressed, I heard her soft voice — a whisper that warmed me more than any jacket could.

“Are you ready, my love?” she asked, slightly rising beneath the sheets. “Be careful, always. You’re going to do great.”

Inside the small universe of our bedroom, her words were more than simple encouragement; they were a shield against cramps, exhaustion, and doubt. I leaned closer, kissed her goodbye, and felt that small blessing settle over me like the lucky charm I needed before stepping into the unknown.

“Thank you, love. I’ll see you at the finish line,” I replied.

I stood there for a moment in the dim light, my eyes fixed on the outfit I had carefully prepared the night before. Draped over the chair was the bright red running shirt, glowing

even in the darkness, with the Peruvian crest stamped proudly across the chest and an inscription that felt almost like a military rank:

Kia Lima 113 Half Marathon.

Beside it, bib number 4526 waited to be pinned into place, while my Saucony running shoes — faithful companions through a thousand battles — seemed eager to bite into the pavement once again.

At that moment, my phone vibrated, breaking the silence. It was her.

“Are you up already, Juanqui?” The voice of my younger sister, Catalina, came through with the spark that had always defined her.

“More than ready, Catalina. Just finishing the ritual. How about you?”

“Nervous, naturally... but excited. I still can’t believe this day is finally here! Did you call the taxi yet?”

“Just about to. Swing by here and we’ll head out together. Bundle up — Lima woke up wrapped in its thickest gray today.”

Before leaving, I stopped by the kitchen. The night before, we had honored the sacred ritual of “carb-loading” with generous plates of pasta covered in red sauce. In the running world, that means filling the tank. Breakfast was light but strategic: a banana for potassium and water to wake up the system. I also made sure to tuck a few packets of energy gel and electrolyte salts into the pockets of my shorts — small doses of life that runners treasure like liquid gold whenever the infamous “wall” around mile nine threatens to bring everything to a halt.

With bib number 4526 now pinned firmly to my chest, I closed the front door behind me. The moment we stepped outside, Lima’s winter greeted us with its familiar damp cold. As I exhaled, I could see thin clouds of white vapor escaping my mouth.

Catalina arrived right on time, already dressed and prepared for her own 10K race. We climbed into a taxi headed toward the Historic Center. As the car rolled through the nearly empty avenues, I stared out the window at the heavy gray sky while my mind began racing faster than the vehicle itself.

I remembered that I had not always been this man — the one who woke before dawn to run thirteen miles through the city. There had been a breaking point, a beginning at the age of fifty that changed everything.

The taxi's engine hummed softly as my memory drifted back twenty years, toward the origin of the wound.

“I started running in 2008,” I said aloud, almost in a whisper. “But the seed had been planted much earlier, by a blow that changed the direction of my life.”

It was late 2005. I still remember the sunlight pouring through the windows of my mother-

in-law's house. My son was running around, his laughter echoing through the rooms — a challenge I, in the full confidence of young fatherhood, had no intention of ignoring.

“I'm coming for you!” I shouted as I rushed down the stairs with the agility of someone who believes himself invincible.

Caught up in the game, I tried to gain speed by jumping the last two steps. A miscalculation. A cruel trick of architecture. The low beam above the staircase appeared out of nowhere.

Crash!!.

My head slammed against the lintel, and the world stopped instantly. My legs flew forward, and I hit the floor like a heavy wooden board crashing to the ground.

“Dad, that was so funny!” my son laughed uncontrollably from the floor, pointing at me.

I tried to laugh with him, but all the air had been knocked out of my body. The floor of my mother-in-law's house — once warm and familiar — now felt cold and hostile beneath me. When I finally stood up, the room tilted sideways, as though the compass of my inner balance had been ripped from its axis.

“It’s nothing, champ. Just a little fall,” I lied as I walked toward the mirror.

There was only a scrape on the crown of my head, something superficial. But inside me, the machinery had already broken.

A week later, reality came to collect its debt.

I could barely sit down. I shifted from one side to the other, trying to escape the pain. My skin had turned a frightening shade of ashen gray, alarming everyone around me.

“Juanqui, are you okay? You look... drained,” people would tell me.

“It’s just exhaustion,” I would reply with the stubbornness of an engineer who believes everything can be fixed with a simple reboot.

But my wife was not fooled.

“You need to see the Swiss nun,” she told me one day. “They say she has a gift for reflexology.”

“Hmm...” I paused, skeptical. “What I need is a doctor.”

“You need help, Juanqui. And you’re going.”

But getting an appointment with Sister Martha was not as simple as knocking on a door. In Lima, her name was spoken in hushed tones, like that of a mystic who held the key to unexplained pain. Maty, with the quiet determination that defines her, stayed glued to the phone for days.

“It’s completely booked, Juanqui,” she would say, setting the receiver down with a mixture of frustration and exhaustion. “There are no

openings this week, or next week either. Getting an appointment with her is like trying to get an audience with the Pope.”

The reflexology center was a fortress of packed schedules. Every time she called, the answer was the same:

“Please try again next week.”

The stubborn engineer inside me secretly celebrated. No appointment meant no treatment, and I could keep pretending my spine was not slowly collapsing. But pain — that cruel tenant — cared nothing about schedules.

It was during a gathering with friends, somewhere between cups of coffee and half-whispered confessions, that the name of the Swiss nun floated through the air once again like a lifeline.

“We go to her all the time,” some friends told us with the complicity of people guarding a valuable secret. “Sister Martha has known us

for years. We're practically family to her. Let us talk to her and see if we can open a small window for you."

Armed with that new connection, Maty launched another offensive. I don't know what strings she pulled or what urgency she carried in her voice, but that very afternoon she walked into the living room with a different light in her eyes.

"I did it, sweetheart. Not tomorrow — Thursday. Six in the morning."

"At six?" I protested, already imagining the bitter cold of Lima's dawn. "At that hour, the city streets don't even exist yet."

"That's the hour when she sees most clearly," Maty declared, ending the discussion. "So get ready, because we're going."

That appointment — wrestled from time itself and from impossibility — felt like a golden ticket. It was more than a medical consultation; it was a temporary truce granted

by fate before the wall of pain finally closed in around me.

We arrived at the reflexology center while Lima was still nothing more than a smear of damp graphite beneath the dawn sky. The building did not try to attract attention. It was a modest structure with white walls stubbornly resisting the grime of the city's smog, standing quietly on a street where even footsteps seemed to echo with unusual restraint.

The moment we crossed the threshold, the world shifted to a different frequency.

The first thing that struck you was not the sight of the place, but the smell — a gentle wave of fresh eucalyptus, lavender, and the faint undertone of beeswax that recalled the old sacristies of Europe. It was nothing like the sharp, sterile scent of a hospital. This smelled like a forest that had been carefully tamed for healing.

The lobby was an exercise in Swiss minimalism transplanted into the heart of Peru. The pale tiled floors shone so brightly you could almost see the reflection of your own doubts while walking across them. The walls displayed no loud diplomas or medical advertisements, only small paintings of Alpine landscapes and, in one corner, a simple wooden crucifix that seemed to watch silently over the entrance.

“Make yourself comfortable, Juanqui,” one of the assistants whispered, moving with the lightness of someone walking on clouds.

The furniture was made of solid wood — heavy, enduring wood, the kind that survives a hundred years without a single creak. An almost sacred silence ruled the room, broken only by the distant trickling of a water fountain and the rhythmic murmur of Sister Martha speaking somewhere beyond the adjoining wall. Tall windows allowed the pale six o’clock morning light to filter through

white linen curtains, creating the atmosphere of a small cathedral.

Sitting in that waiting room felt like the beginning of healing itself. There were no gossip magazines, no televisions flickering in the corners; only the ticking of a wall clock and the strange sensation that, inside that small corner of the city, time moved more slowly so the body could finally hear itself think.

It was in that silence, while waiting for my turn, that the pain in my tailbone became impossible to ignore — as though the moment I stopped running and working, my spine had finally been granted permission to complain out loud.

Then the wooden door opened.

She appeared framed against the white light of the consultation room, ready to read in my feet the story of my fall.

She was a woman whose presence filled the room without ever needing to raise her voice. Her face, framed by an immaculate habit, was a map of wise wrinkles carved by the sunlight of the Alps and the humidity of the Andes. Her eyes were steel blue — so clear and piercing that I felt they were not looking at my face at all, but scanning directly through my vertebrae.

“Sit down, Juanqui,” she said. Her accent was fascinating — the firmness of German consonants softened by decades of Peruvian warmth.

She used no stethoscopes, no noisy machines. Instead, she took out a small pendulum, a polished piece of wood hanging from a silk thread. Slowly, almost ceremonially, she passed it over my body. The pendulum swayed calmly until it reached the base of my spine.

Then it began spinning violently, as if it had discovered the epicenter of an earthquake beneath my skin.

Sister Martha froze. The air in the room seemed to grow colder.

“You have suffered an accident,” she said firmly, in a tone that left no room for argument. “You have a serious spinal injury.”

“Well... I fell down some stairs, but it was just a bad fall,” I stammered, suddenly feeling like a child caught in a lie.

She barely acknowledged my explanation. Instead, she asked me to remove my shoes and gently took my right foot into her hands. Her fingers carried the strength of an iron craftsman. She searched for a precise spot along the arch of my foot and pressed down.

Pain shot through my body like lightning, racing straight to the back of my neck.