

— AWAKENING IN AN AGE OF ILLUSION —

COMING CLEAN

BETWEEN THE VEILS

DARYL FONTANA

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This is a work of creative nonfiction. Some scenes and dialogue have been reconstructed from memory, contemporaneous notes, and interviews; names and identifying details have been changed to protect privacy.

Between the Veils is the second volume in Fontana's **memoir-manifesto series** that began with *Dark Water Fountain*.

It bridges the visible and the invisible, the intimate and the global, following how a life changes when conscience outruns ambition.

With prose that fuses myth and realism, Fontana **maps how stories become systems—and how systems shape souls**. His question is disarmingly simple:

**“If much of what we’re shown is a mask,
who are we beneath it?”**

The answers **do not crown a hero; they test a human**—and suggest that awakening demands both courage and grace.

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PREFACE

READER'S MAP

This book stands on its own. If you later read *Dark Water Fountain*, you'll recognize earlier sparks and origin scenes; if you prefer chronology, read *Dark Water Fountain* first and return—either path will meet you where you are.

Coming Clean is comprised of two books in one volume. Book One follows six years lived under pressure—home, work, law, media—while a family is rebuilt and a public life tests its limits. It begins with a defining weekend—boxes and bedsheets—calm returning to a house that needs it, then the knock that ends it. From there, scenes carry the story—conversations on sidewalks and in kitchens, hearings and handshakes—and the way duty to children and clients collides with duty to truth. You will see what moved me, who stood beside me, and how the system works when it wants momentum, not justice.

Book Two widens the frame. The same questions—what holds fast, what we owe—are asked across longer arcs: lineage, myth, and the record we keep. Guides appear with distinct temperaments and tasks. The language sometimes lifts, but it stays tethered to places and objects you can touch. When cosmology enters, it does so with restraint and plausibility; the aim is coherence, not spectacle. Each chapter earns its place by consequence: a cost paid, a door opened, a choice made.

If you're new to this world, trust the scenes first—the reflections clarify rather than replace what happens on the page. Where a term matters, the story shows it at work. Where a claim is strong, it's carried by witnessed detail.

Read with patience; names and ideas will reveal themselves in time.

PROLOGUE

BEACH OF THE DEAD

The cure for anything is salt water: sweat, tears, or the sea.

—Isak Dinesen

Zipolite—January 17, 2025

Yesterday, I almost didn't come back. Not in the poetic sense of a metaphorical death, but a visceral, bone-chilling encounter with the void. As I write this, the Pacific crashes relentlessly just beyond my window, a constant reminder of the waters that nearly swallowed me whole. I am in Zipolite, Mexico. Locals call it the Beach of the Dead. Its reputation is no secret. I came here fully aware of the risks but never imagined how close I'd come to being another entry in its legend.

I came here with a purpose—to complete a work that has occupied my heart and mind for decades. *Coming Clean* is not just a book; it is an offering, a reflection on what I have learned, and a hope for something greater than myself. But yesterday, the ocean became my teacher, reminding me that every bridge we build—whether to others or within ourselves—must be forged with care. In that moment, it felt like the cosmos was urging me to consider the weight of what I was about to share.

The sun had barely reached its zenith when I stepped onto the warm

sand for my daily ritual: yoga, calisthenics, and meditation. This has been my anchor, a way to shed the doubt. Each stretch was a reminder of the sacrifices I've made to reach this moment—sleepless nights, strained relationships, and countless instances when the path forward seemed obscured. And yet, here I was, so close to completion, driven by a force I couldn't name. I pushed harder, doing the 50-10 workout. Fifty each of push-ups, lunges, sit-ups, then repeat sets of; forty, thirty, twenty, and ten. I was dripping, my mind wide open.

The clarity had come the night before, as the tide retreated and the sun set. I cast my gaze beyond the horizon. For the first time in years, I was connected to the same spirit that moved effortlessly through the younger version of myself—the man who began this journey with a fire in his belly and a vision so clear, it felt like destiny. I prayed that night, not for safety or success, but for the strength to finish what I'd begun. Even if it meant I would never see the legacy it leaves behind, I would see it through. That prayer was a pact with the universe.

Or so I thought.

After my workout, I walked into the ocean. The Pacific has long been one of my primary charging stations—a vast and mercurial force. Serene one moment, ruthless the next. It mirrors humanity's dance with the unseen—those forces larger than us that shape our lives. I waded in, letting the swell move through me as it had so many times before. But on this day, powered with extra vitality, I ventured farther than usual—just a thirty-second power stroke straight out.

I treaded water for no more than twenty seconds before recognition folded in on itself. I felt it: the pull. Subtle at first, then tightening—an invisible grip dragging me farther from shore.

I turned and swam back. Same effort, same time. No ground beneath me. I tried again, still confident. But the water gave nothing. That's when I realised—my earlier workout had hollowed me out. Air came in shards; each stroke weakened. I've faced trials that tested every fibre of my being, I had crushed Ironman, but this was different. The distance

between me and safety felt infinite.

I shouted toward the beach, waving frantically. A man looked over, hesitated. His partner started toward the water—but they wouldn't reach me in time. If help came, they'd be pulling me back from the brink. Death was close. I felt it—not as drama, but as the world thinning at the edges.

And then it came—that voice, clean and unmistakable, cutting through the static: *How badly do you want this?* This wasn't just survival. It was the hinge.

The weight of everything pressed into that question. My family. My vision. The message I carried. I could see my hotel room—less than a hundred metres away—my laptop still open on the bed, window cracked, this book nearly complete. I saw it all: the victories, the failures, the years I'd given to this path. It didn't ask for platitudes. It demanded a vow. And what I had left became my answer.

I clawed through the water, my lungs ablaze and muscles aching as my body protested the effort. When my toes finally scraped sand, it felt like touching the edge of salvation. But the current tugged relentlessly—a final test. I caught a full breath before the undertow pulled me back once more.

This is it. Do or die. Swim.

Finally, solid ground. One of the men on the beach reached out, pulling me the last few feet to safety. An angel in human form—or perhaps a reminder that sometimes, salvation requires us to meet fate halfway.

As I sit here now, with the ocean's roar still faintly audible beyond my window, the question won't let go. *How badly do I want this?* "In that moment, survival wasn't enough—it was a reckoning. Rise—not only from the ocean's grip, but from the old doubt."

And as I look back, I realise:

My first encounter with these invisible systems wasn't in adulthood,

nor through books or mentors.

It struck in childhood—raw, sudden—a voice that wasn't mine

spoke, clean and unmistakable.

I couldn't name them then: constructs, manipulation, guidance, control.

But I sensed them; in my home, neighbourhood, and in the fabric of the world itself.

Like watching a flawless film stutter and reveal the scaffolding behind the screen.

That rupture didn't just alert me. It marked me.

From that wound, a hunger was born—not for a sanctioned version of reality, but for unvarnished clarity.

The kind you wrest from silence. That marks you. That remakes you.

This book isn't just stories or survival.

It's a call—for those who sense the undercurrent running beneath everyday life.

We live in a world shaped by forces—titans who hide behind algorithms, technologies, and institutions.

These modern powers curate perception—guiding what we see, what we believe we should want, often without our consent.

Like the undertow that nearly claimed me, they operate silently, yet powerfully.

To resist them, we must first see them.

To those who walked the corridors of *Dark Water Fountain*, I left you at the edge of uncertainty—and that choice was no accident. It matched the terrain of my own becoming: fragmented, unfinished, unresolved.

The cliffhanger wasn't a literary device. It was an aperture.

A man mid-flight between silence and revelation.

Now, in *Coming Clean*, I don't simply resume the course; I trace

the path cut through shadow and resistance. If *Dark Water Fountain* was a flare through the fog, *Coming Clean* is the steadier light guiding me—and anyone straining to see clearly in a clouded world—back home. If you haven't read *Dark Water Fountain*, you can start here. Still, wisdom asks for restraint.

History reminds us: some truths—some secrets—revealed too abruptly, exact a toll.

And so, I chose parable over proclamation—embedding realities in story.

What follows may not bloom all at once. Some truths arrive slowly, like seeds stirred beneath soil, waiting for the right season.

They find their way into those ready to receive.

To rise.

We stand at the precipice of an epochal shift—

A moment both perilous and full of potential.

This is *Coming Clean*.

My offering.

My challenge to you.

And to myself.

How badly do we want this?

BOOK ONE

THE HOLLOWING—SIX YEARS IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

*We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all
our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know
the place for the first time.*

—T. S. Eliot

CHAPTER 1

BETWEEN TIME AND MEMORY

Memory is the diary we all carry about with us.

—Oscar Wilde

I didn't meet Philo in a cathedral of marble. I met him on a bus, four hours after my release from U.S. custody. He spoke like a man testing a bridge—gauging if I could carry what I claimed to want.

At twenty-five, I fixed a vow: carry the work for twenty-five years, then lay it down clean. He was the first to test whether my spine meant it.

Our second meeting unsettled me as much as the first—at once a reminder of my path and a stark warning: I was being watched.

So when the doors finally blew open and the room filled with badges, I thought less about guilt than about authorship. Who writes the map? Who edits the legend? And where, exactly, did Philo fit?



The weekend of June 22 arrived as a rare interlude of calm. Helping Sharlene—someone I'd been seeing for six months—settle in felt surprisingly harmonious. I knew we were moving fast; a six-month trial under one roof seemed the straightest way to learn whether we were right for each

other. As we merged belongings, her African influences met my Native American aesthetics and the living room warmed. We arranged with the kids in mind—bedsheets washed, bedrooms rearranged, their weekend shoes by the door—because this wasn't a one-household story. The fusion breathed new life into the space, even as co-parenting boundaries and old tensions with Candace, the kids' mom, simmered at the edges, demanding conversations still ahead. For the moment, the house held: not just shelter, but a shared expression and a belonging you could feel.

My training business was rising—a clear sign my efforts were taking root. Attracting top local athletes and securing a partnership with the Junior A hockey team signalled a shift—proof the grind was paying off.

Before this weekend, I'd lived hard years—eight months inside, then the slow rebuild: studio opened, kids first, steady work. I'd learned to trust what holds under pressure and to keep my claims small: show the room, name the cost. Old allegiances fell away; a few stayed. I had help I could call and lines I wouldn't cross. Whatever I once argued in big terms—justice, duty, control—now got tested at a kitchen table with school forms, invoices, and bedtime questions I needed to answer plainly. I wanted one thing: for the house to hold. For the next morning to come clean.

As we rocketed into this new chapter, I felt the burden I'd been carrying begin to lift—replaced by a fragile, yet promising sense of balance. A reminder that even in chaos, harmony can find its way through.

But life—unpredictable as ever—likes to remind us: calm is usually prelude.

I arrived home with the boys the Tuesday evening after our weekend move. Mariah was with her mom that night and Sharlene was in the city, finishing her final week of teaching. I made the boys dinner and, after one of our usual wrestling matches, tucked them into bed.

As I settled into my chair for late-night reading, my son, Drédyn—ever the question-asker—was still on my mind. He loves the big ones: How do we know what's real if we can't see it? What holds the world

together? I'd already told my clients I was shifting Wednesday's fit camp to Thursday—granting a rare morning at home with the boys and a few extra hours tonight to read.

For weeks I'd been saving articles and papers: geopolitics, science, philosophy. One discovery in particular held me—the hunt for the Higgs boson, a decade-long effort nearing a decisive result. I skimmed coverage of SpaceX's Dragon capsule completing a mission to the International Space Station and returning safely. The U.S. election was heating up—Obama and Romney everywhere. Europe's crisis deepened; I'd been reading Yanis Varoufakis on remedies. Reports from Syria grew darker. Regulators fined Barclays over LIBOR.

After a while, I set the articles aside, stood, and crossed the hall to bed. As sleep pulled at me, the contrasts sharpened: breakthrough and setback, marvel and manipulation. I lay back, eyelids heavy, and sleep finally took me.

Even in dreams, the watcher in me returns.