

THE HERALD



FALL ISSUE 2022

A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing on a red notebook. The person is holding a red pen and writing on a white sheet of paper that is placed on top of the red notebook. The background is dark and out of focus.

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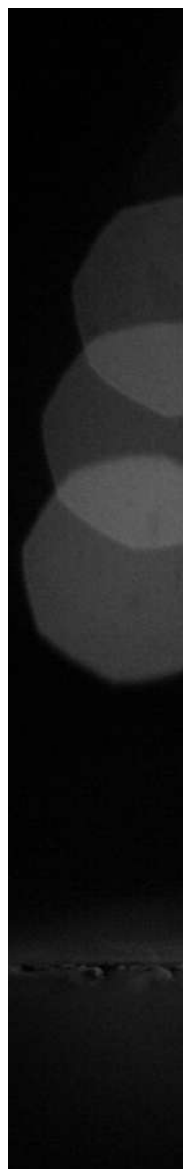
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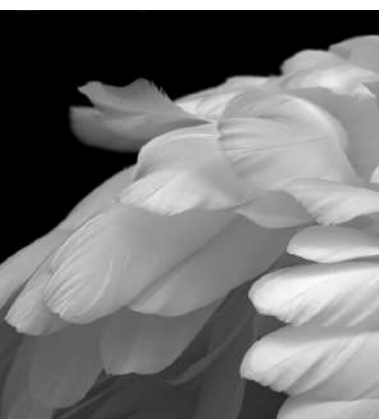
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EDITOR'S NOTE



As this magazine has come together, I've realized that this issue has been all about dualities—holding in one's mind two separate, sometimes contrasting things as part of a whole, while still moving forward. Since August, I've started many mornings by walking across campus, thinking about the present, how it continually becomes the past, and anticipating the future. With the future comes my departure, all things must end. I am delighted to find out what the editors and writers bring to fruition with the coming issues.

A special thanks goes to the editors Helena Abousefian, Layan Itani, Fadi Jawhar and club director Dania Al Boukhari. They have shown unmatched dedication and commitment to the Herald and its readers. Success through failure. Looking inside while looking out. How is one to reconcile these? This issue's theme is about a return to normal. A need to look forward. On the other side of campus, in the Mugar garden, I came up with a useful definition. "No Return", "New Normals are what we get". Things might be similar, but we should realize nothing's the same. So through everything, new normalcy has been established.

As we wrap up this issue, I'm struck by how much I learn, from students, faculty, and alumni. And I hope that we help you, our readers, do the same. I also hope you will be in touch and let us know how we could better use these pages to connect you with the Haigazian you know.

Andrea Khatchadourian
Chairman and Editor

Sunflowers, Art, Home

Chaos all around you. As the clock strikes six, noise conquers the streets, misery is sensed from the windows of the cars, and anger is heard from the honks of those driving in a rush, even when they are not. On the other side, peace is within you, the windows of your room are serving as barriers, and somehow you are not bothered by the chaos around you, as peace is within you.

Some things just take time to make sense. Even the littlest things take time to get a bit clearer, perhaps it is waiting for you to figure out some feelings, waiting for an emotion to make a move from inside, in such a way that the ideas which are in the outside world click with the ones that are hidden somewhere inside you. Look how your eyes sparkle when you see sunflowers while strolling on the streets, while at the same time holding the feelings of longing towards home in the depths of your heart. Sunflowers, your favorite flowers, have always been like that, though you never sought to know the reason behind it. It keeps you wondering, and finally, it hits you. It reminds you of home. A Van Gogh on a wall at your place, which has been there for decades, through your eyes, resembled both paleness and color, both chaos and serenity. The couch you lay on to view the piece from a specific angle, gave both conflict and peace. You feel you are all over the place, and it hits you once more when you spot those sunflowers dawdling on the streets. Perhaps it is a sign, perhaps you are on the right path. Perhaps you are feeling everything at once, but mostly, you are linking everything to home. “Connect yourself with the world”, you hear. You try breaking the barriers, and start opening the windows for some fresh air that is mixed with chaotic pollution. It irritates you, as it does not seem familiar, or is the fact that it was once familiar, the reason you put barriers in the first place? The thought takes you away, from one question to the other in your head, and your resilience takes over, as your thoughts remind you of how strong you once were, how long you could stay still, and what you were capable of achieving. Vigorously, you let go of the ideas which were holding you back from moving forward, which were holding you back from facing the reality, blocking your way while walking towards your aims.

“You only live once”, they say; “You do not have forever”, they continue. You may have had enough of these sayings, which with time turn into some clichés. Anyhow, start looking at them from your perspective, read them out loud, and link them to you, to the world around you. Remember the ones driving in rush, despite the chaos around them? They chose to wake up and walk a step closer to their dreams, a tiny step at a time, by honking all morning long and somehow ruining your peaceful morning. Dive deep into people’s eyes, go beyond their beauty, and find the hope which is keeping them going. Keep reminding yourself to connect with the world, keep in mind the songs you have yet to listen to, understand, the music you have yet to dance to, the art pieces you have yet to see, to warm your heart, the sunflowers your eyes will yet have to spot, to give you hope and call you home. After all, we are all a part of the chaotic world, simply trying to find our peace.

Alyag Momjian



A Call to the Mediocre

My dad once told me that I should never aim for a passing grade on a test. Reaching the average, or the medium, is what made someone mediocre by definition, he reasoned. From this thought, I decided to share a nugget of wisdom. Not about coping with parental expectations. My dad never cared much about my grades actually, so I'm afraid a cure to daddy issues will not be addressed. But if you seek some antidote to perfectionism, read on. You might pick up a thing or two about how to change the world. That is, without necessarily being a straight-A superstar.

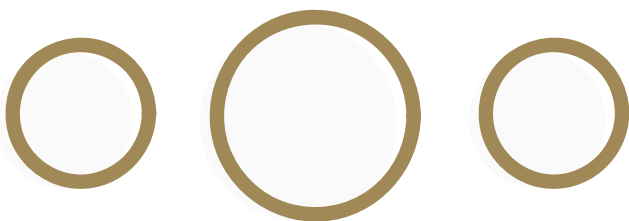
You see, changing the world sounds like a job for people who have colorful planners pinned to their walls, a triple or quadruple-digit on their bank accounts, and well-polished shoes that take steady steps. I don't doubt these people can do something about said world we live in, but I'll go ahead and assume that is not you dear reader. It was not me either.

When I started Haigazian, I changed my major within less than a week of registration, took fewer courses than I wanted because my family could not afford them, and barely knew where I was going. It occurred to me that people from humble backgrounds tend to seek financial aid before applying to institutions their families cannot afford. It was like realizing my fly was open since the beginning of the day. So, I signed up for basketball and made incredible progress in bench-warming taking the average temperature of match-certified benches to new heights! And, to certify my mediocrity-stamp, my grade in ENG 201 was the lowest of all my courses, telling me where I stood with my academic future. I mean, Advanced English Communications tends to be a big deal if you're majoring in the English Language. But in those early university years, I was already dissatisfied with the world around me, and seeing the need for changes, I tried seeking them one way or another.

I tried getting involved in student life to make the campus more vibrant and ended up supporting the UNESCO club which brought Mexican dancers, Nigerian dishes, and Japanese speakers to the front steps of the Mehagian building. I tried changing the respect of the Herald which used to be a free temporary umbrella for students and, thanks to the help of the team, today is imbued with diverse and intriguing content. I tried helping with the Writing Center, not simply to check boxes in a financial aid task, but to seek self-development, and today I lost count of students who were appreciative of the sessions we had. And even after waving goodbye to Mardig with a diploma in hand, I am still trying.

I'm trying to remember the names of rowdy and privileged teenagers who are stuck in a classroom with me most of the week. They might learn nothing from Shakespeare or Harper Lee but hopefully, they'll learn what it is like to be treated with respect. I'm asking editors to squeeze my stories into magazines, partially to get more people to read what I write and partially to acknowledge the communities and identities I try to represent. I've received heavy fire with rejections, but at least I got 1 yes. Plus, I'm just trying to be kind. There are days my hours of sleep are dwarfed by my list of responsibilities. My multilingual catalog of curse words emerges more readily to my mind than that of kind words. But everyone around me seems overwhelmed nowadays. So, even when I make stupid decisions or get nowhere near my objectives at work, I try my best to address others with kindness. A simple smile can already make someone's day.

So, if you believe you've been given a stamp of mediocrity, don't let that get to you. Pass the courses you can pass, fail (and repeat) the ones you need to, but do try to change the world. A mediocre attempt to change the world is a thousand times more valuable than the indifference of a top-scorer.



Timoteo Pereira Neves

A Few Steps Ahead Of Yourself

When you walk alone for a long time, you choose different roads to experiment with. Sometimes, you wish you had someone who knew better, who's standing a few steps ahead to guide you towards the right path to avoid falls, heartbreaks, and disappointments. For the next few pages, that person you were wishing for, will hold your hand and walk with you a few steps along the way.

1. You're clueless.

Someone must break this to you. No matter how much you read, learn, listen, and follow up with the latest news; you are as knowledgeable as you can be at this moment. This means that there is more to learn tomorrow, the day after, and in the future. Let this process ignite the passion within you to keep learning and growing.

2. You'll fall while you're trying to walk.

It happens. Not every attempt is successful and you'll have to fall a few times along the way. The scars you get as you fall are a reminder of your attempts. The best thing you can do is to continue walking despite your falls. You will only fail when you stop trying at all because stopping at the obstacle doesn't get you forward as time passes by. Don't forget that at times falling is bliss. Sometimes, we need to get down, stop, breathe, reflect, and choose to have a new beginning.

3. Occasionally, you just need to observe life as it is.

Don't try too hard or waste time chasing. Just lay, rest, and observe the simplicity of life as it passes in front of your eyes. Sometimes, all you need to do is to stop and take that rest.

4. You're not useless.

Your presence matters more than you think. Somebody started introducing themselves differently because of the way you showed them who they are. Another person thinks differently because of a discussion you had. Don't you see it? You're changing the paths of others from where you stand, even if you don't see yourself moving.

Your presence is like a butterfly: delicate and smooth, yet so impactful. Don't be unjust to yourself and deny your worth.

5. It's okay to do what works best for you.

- If groups are not your thing, don't stay.
- If you don't like your major, change it.
- If you like that person, go talk to them.
- Create the lifestyle that suits you best. No matter how long and how hard you try to carve that seat to suit you, it will remain uncomfortable. Be yourself, let things flow, and the seat will customize itself for you.

6. You will find your light again.

You may visit the darkest places, and often, you will not enjoy it and it may burn you to the core. It will feel overwhelming and more difficult the longer you stay there. But it's okay, the places we visit do not determine who we are. It's the decision to pack again and go to the next destination that matters.

7. Not everyone will like you.

Even if you do them no harm, many will still choose to not like you. And that's on them if that's what they choose. But you know what? It is on you as well. You radiate with success, love, and warmth on levels others may not reach. That makes people aware of all the traits they are missing making them angry. As a reaction, they choose to push you away and treat you as an outsider. In this case, remain true to your essence, choose to grow beyond the hate, and always choose love and kindness.



A Few Steps Ahead Of Yourself

8. Let go of the people who don't see your worth.

You may spend years upon years with these people, but they will still fail to see the true gem that you are. Leave. Just leave. It's not worth it. It's not worth losing more time. I know it's even worse when they are aware of the way they're mistreating you, but don't let this acknowledgment be a reason to forgive them and stay. In fact, this is a reminder of your worth and the quality of the people you need to surround yourself with. So go out to the world and attract the people you deserve.

9. Everything will be okay.

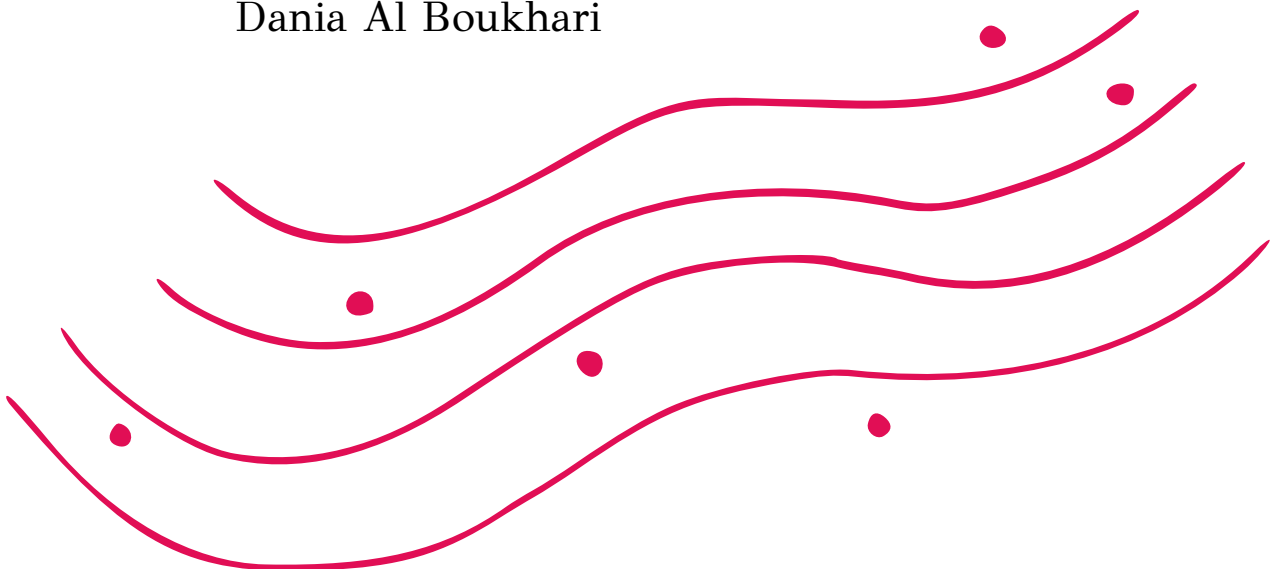
Don't worry even if you feel like everything's falling apart, God has your back and He will always push you toward the right path. Not every path might be our choice, but we're meant to pass by it to become stronger.

10. You're surrounded by a lot of love.

Open your heart, ears, and eyes wide to the world around you. It is giving you some melodies of love for you to dance to. Listen to it, watch it, and receive it for the world is walking alongside you. It is working for you. All you need to do is watch it come, and embrace it.



Dania Al Boukhari



A Book? What's That?

“I would love to get into reading but I don't know how to start.”

“I think you haven't found the right book yet.”

I know the struggle; I once faced the same issue. I thought reading was difficult, time-consuming, and unengaging. I never thought I would become a reader until one day as I was passing the library, something unexpected happened. I found myself looking at two books. I asked myself “what if I bought these two books and tried reading them?”. I started the first book and got lost in it, picturing how the story unfolds in my head. The first thing I noticed is the difference between reading something and watching it; reading allows you to imagine the events within your own perspective, whereas watching already visualizes the scenes for you, so it does not leave room for this freedom of imagination. After finishing the first two books I ever bought, I went on a quest to find new books that I might also enjoy. I wished I had a list of books that are beginner friendly because I stumbled upon some books that were difficult to get into as a new reader. To help you start your reading journey, here are some contemporary books that will make you fall in love with reading.

(Check for Trigger Warnings before starting any book)

One True Loves by Taylor Reid Jenkins:

In her twenties, Emma Blair marries her high school sweetheart, Jesse. They build a life for themselves, far away from the expectations of their parents and the people of their hometown in Massachusetts. They travel the world together, living life to the fullest and seizing every opportunity for adventure. On their first wedding anniversary, Jesse is on a helicopter over the Pacific when it goes missing. Just like that, Jesse is gone forever. Emma quits her job and moves home in an effort to put her life back together. Years later, now in her thirties, Emma runs into an old friend, Sam, and finds herself falling in love again. When Emma and Sam get engaged, it feels like Emma's second chance at happiness. That is, until Jesse is found. He's alive, and he's been trying all these years to come home to her. With a husband and a fiancé, Emma has to now figure out who she is and what she wants, while trying to protect the ones she loves. Who is her one true love? What does it mean to love truly?

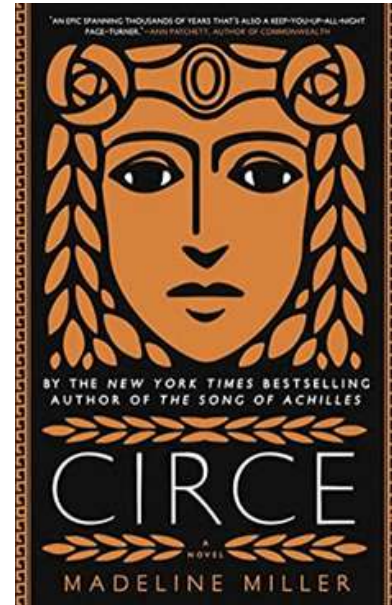


Fiction/Romance

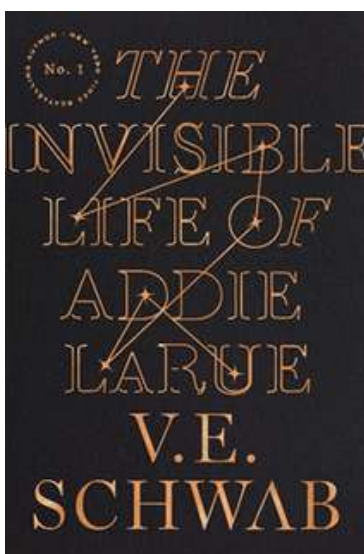
A Book? What's That?

***Circe* by Madeline Miller:**

In the house of Helios, God of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe is a strange child--neither powerful like her father nor viciously alluring like her mother. Turning to the world of mortals for companionship, she discovers that she does possess power: the power of witchcraft, which can transform rivals into monsters and menace the gods themselves. Threatened, Zeus banishes her to a deserted island, where she hones her occult craft, tames wild beasts, and crosses paths with many of the most famous figures in all of mythology, including the Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus, the murderous Medea, and, of course, wily Odysseus. But there is danger, too, for a woman who stands alone, and Circe unwittingly draws the wrath of both men and gods, ultimately finding herself pitted against one of the most terrifying and vengeful of the Olympians. To protect what she loves most, Circe must summon all her strength and choose, once and for all, whether she belongs with the gods she is born from or with the mortals she has come to love.



Fantasy/Greek Mythology



Fantasy

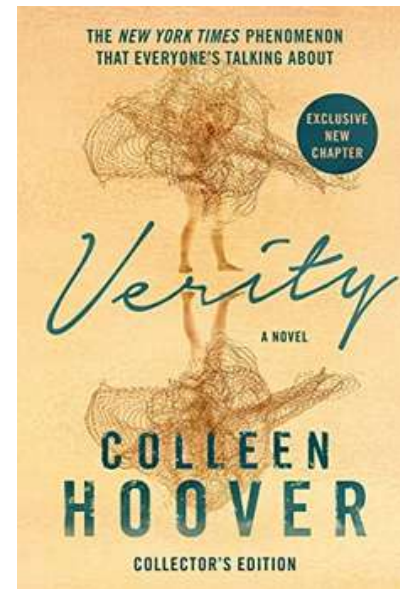
***The Invisible of Addie LaRue* by V.E. Schwab:**

France, 1714: in a moment of desperation, a young woman makes a Faustian bargain to live forever and is cursed to be forgotten by everyone she meets. Thus begins the extraordinary life of Addie LaRue, and a dazzling adventure that will play out across centuries and continents, across history and art, as a young woman learns how far she will go to leave her mark on the world. But everything changes when, after nearly 300 years, Addie stumbles across a young man in a hidden bookstore and he remembers her name.

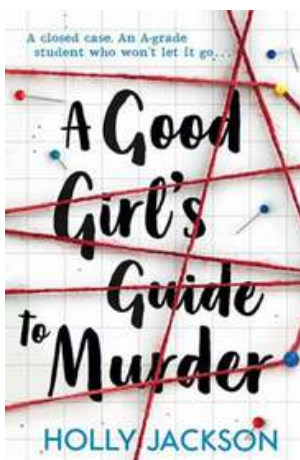
A Book? What's That?

Verity by Colleen Hoover:

Lowen Ashleigh is a struggling writer on the brink of financial ruin when she accepts the job offer of a lifetime. Jeremy Crawford, husband of bestselling author Verity Crawford, has hired Lowen to complete the remaining books in a successful series his injured wife is unable to finish. Lowen arrives at the Crawford home, ready to sort through years of Verity's notes and outlines, hoping to find enough material to get her started. What Lowen doesn't expect to uncover in the chaotic office is an unfinished autobiography Verity never intended for anyone to read. Page after page of bone-chilling admissions, including Verity's recollection of what really happened the day her daughter died. Lowen decides to keep the manuscript hidden from Jeremy, knowing its contents would devastate the already grieving father. But as Lowen's feelings for Jeremy begin to intensify, she recognizes all the ways she could benefit if he were to read his wife's words. After all, no matter how devoted Jeremy is to his injured wife, a truth this horrifying would make it impossible for him to continue to love her



Psychological Thriller



Crime

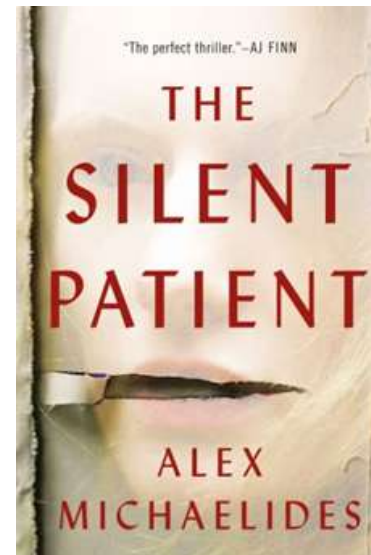
A Good Girl's Guide to Murder by Holly Jackson:

The case is closed. Five years ago, schoolgirl Andie Bell was murdered by Sal Singh. The police know he did it. Everyone in town knows he did it. But having grown up in the same small town that was consumed by the murder, Pippa Fitz-Amobi isn't so sure. When she chooses the case as the topic for her final year project, she starts to uncover secrets that someone in town desperately wants to stay hidden. And if the real killer is still out there, how far will they go to keep Pip from the truth?

A Book? What's That?

***The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides:**

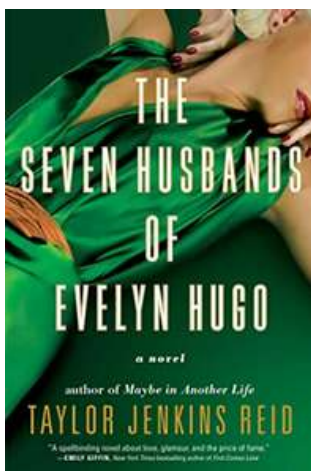
Alicia Berenson's life is seemingly perfect. A famous painter married to an in-demand fashion photographer; she lives in a grand house with big windows overlooking a park in one of London's most desirable areas. One evening her husband Gabriel returns home late from a fashion shoot, and Alicia shoots him five times in the face, and then never speaks another word. Alicia's refusal to talk, or give any kind of explanation, turns a domestic tragedy into something far grander, a mystery that captures the public imagination and casts Alicia into notoriety. The price of her art skyrockets, and she, the silent patient, is hidden away from the tabloids and spotlight at the Grove, a secure forensic unit in North London. Theo Faber is a criminal psychotherapist who has waited a long time for the opportunity to work with Alicia. His determination to get her to talk and unravel the mystery of why she shot her husband takes him down a twisting path into his own motivations—a search for the truth that threatens to consume him....



Psychological Thriller

***The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid:**

Aging and reclusive Hollywood movie icon Evelyn Hugo is finally ready to tell the truth about her glamorous and scandalous life. But when she chooses unknown magazine reporter Monique Grant for the job, no one is more astounded than Monique herself. Why her? Why now? Monique is not exactly on top of the world. Her husband has left her, and her professional life is going nowhere. Regardless of why Evelyn has selected her to write her biography, Monique is determined to use this opportunity to jumpstart her career. Summoned to Evelyn's luxurious apartment, Monique listens in fascination as the actress tells her story. From making her way to Los Angeles in the 1950s to her decision to leave show business in the '80s, and, of course, the seven husbands along the way, Evelyn unspools a tale of ruthless ambition, unexpected friendship, and a great forbidden love. Monique begins to feel a very real connection to the legendary star, but as Evelyn's story nears its conclusion, it becomes clear that her life intersects with Monique's own in tragic and irreversible ways.

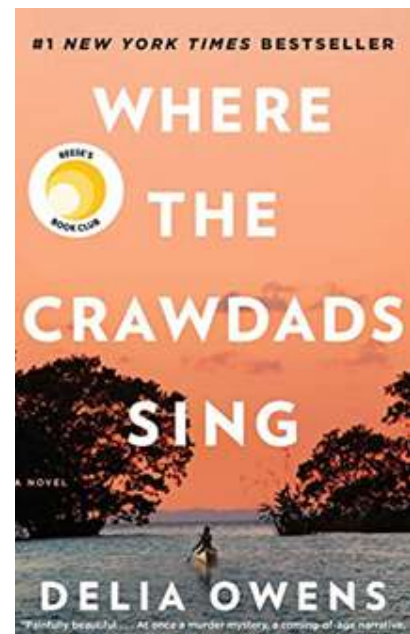


Drama

A Book? What's That?

***Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens:**

For years, rumours of the “Marsh Girl” haunted Barkley Cove, a quiet fishing village. Kya Clark is barefoot and wild; unfit for polite society. So, in late 1969, when the popular Chase Andrews is found dead, locals immediately suspect her. But Kya is not what they say. A born naturalist with just one day of school, she takes life’s lessons from the land, learning the real ways of the world from the dishonest signals of fireflies. But while she has the skills to live in solitude forever, the time comes when she yearns to be touched and loved. Drawn to two young men from town, who are each intrigued by her wild beauty, Kya opens herself to a new and startling world—until the unthinkable happens. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Owens juxtaposes an exquisite ode to the natural world against a profound coming of age story and haunting mystery. Thought-provoking, wise, and deeply moving, Owens’s debut novel reminds us that we are forever shaped by the child within us, while also subject to the beautiful and violent secrets that nature keeps. The story asks how isolation influences the behaviour of a young woman, who like all of us, has the genetic propensity to belong to a group. The clues to the mystery are brushed into the lush habitat and natural histories of its wild creatures.



Drama/Mystery

Fadi Jawhar

Where I can see you

Nature has always been a place of refuge for her. Ever since she could walk, the greenery captivated her away from the reality of life and instead swept her off into the woods, into wonderland. The only good she ever saw in life was the fact that her parents had an impeccable predicament; they bought a house near the woods, shortly after she was born.

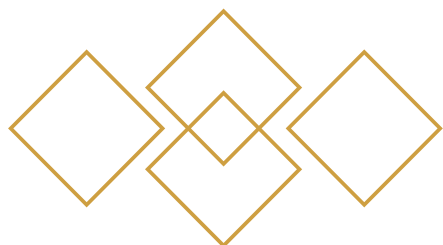
Being a lover of nature was both a curse and a gift. She would get lost in the scenery surrounding her, the calming silence and the air of freedom, that always led her further into the woods and left her parents to worry, she was just fearless. The forest green of her eyes even seemed to match the shade of the trees around her. The woods knew of her presence and showed her their respect in return. The gift of truly loving the most powerful presence on earth made her feel as powerful, an ability shared by very few. It was her great escape. Once she stepped through the imaginary portal leading to her escape, everything outside ceased to matter, life carried on and she would go and lead hers. It was where she felt at home.

When her grandparents visited, her grandfather would always tuck her in and tell her bedtime stories about the woods she always sought. Some were funny, some were sad and some were utterly magical and bewitched her, no matter if she understood them or not. She would write all of them down when she visited the woods later as if reliving the stories and watching them unfold in front of her. She would spend endless hours writing in her special notebook, a very personal gift from her storyteller, with a note; tell the stories to the world, keep all of them alive. Her love for the mysterious only grew larger after each hunt for the truth; the truth of life in the woods. The problem was she never got to the end of her hunt, the excitement only faded with the passing of her storyteller.

Nature's silence became a deafening sound and she escaped that as well. She became quiet, losing her carefree approach to life and its adventures. The woods understood this loss. It became their loss too. The mysteries were left unheard of, unattended, and uncared for. The woods became somber and colder and the trees lost their beautiful, bright leaves and became harsher to the touch; a mess of the heart.

Years went by and each year, on that day of grief, nature went still, the air humid, and the smell of pipe filled and surrounded her all around, reminding her of him. The wounds healed throughout the years not without leaving behind ugly scars. The once fiery and lively child had grown up to become a preserved and calm young adult. Hurt turned into denial, into anger, and finally emptiness of the heart. And for that reason, only the girl was accused of being weird, an outsider, someone who couldn't get past the loss of a loved one, and finally a lonely person.

One morning she woke up to a very strange feeling, although it seemed like a typical Friday morning. Lately, the weather had started getting colder and she just blamed it on that. And the crystal blue eyes searching for her own, as she arrived at school. When she looked back at him, he was nowhere to be found, just vanished like a ghost. She spent the rest of the day wondering about the boy with the pale eyes and the metallic smell of the air. She quickly stepped out from her bubble of thoughts, reminding herself that she no longer sought the unnatural and mysterious, but the evident and rational. Unfortunately for her, she was met with the same pair of eyes not too long after she stepped out and into the world again. She wondered about the pull and the familiarity, so she decided, then, to approach him. He was asked why he looked so familiar but he merely shrugged and smiled. He introduced himself as Bozo and only Bozo, which made her chuckle, reminding her of the clown.



Where I can see you

They kept on seeing each other in the same place, which later became their meeting point, way after school had ended and way after the time they should have been awake. They shared silly stories about their childhood, laughed together, and enjoyed each other's company. One thing she still found odd was the fact that she only saw him whenever it was necessary. But this one particular morning it all made sense, in some way.

This morning, he was there, waiting for her at their spot, which quite frankly surprised her, albeit it was a good surprise. Finally, he asked her to forget about school and just run away with him for the day, as they had a boring school trip planned. The thought alone both excited and terrified her, excitement won. This particular morning, he took her somewhere sacred, somewhere she had long forbidden herself to enter, a dark and somber place, filled with anger and grief. Yet she followed him.

She followed him into the banned woods, where she hadn't set foot ever since that one miserable day. She stopped exactly where the ground met the woods and a voice, a familiar voice called for her and it drew her in. That's all it took for her to let go and follow Bozo to the end of the journey he had planned. He just knew that eventually, her natural curiosity would win over any hesitancy, knowing that it was part of her. A whisper in the air around her encouraged her to go, it talked in hushed tones as if it were sharing the secrets of life, it told her to keep going while her broken heart screamed for her to turn back. She followed him deeper into the woods, deeper than she had ever gone to. What she saw made her stop in place and admire what was in front of her.

They were faced with an old and abandoned cafe and if she would guess, it probably dated at least five decades. Instantly, she wondered how she had never stumbled upon it or had never seen it; she had never been this far into the woods.

Bozo walked and stood, hand on the handle, in front of the worn door, and opened it, he waited for her to go in, warm crystal blue eyes staring back at her.

Everything around her overwhelmed her and she stood frozen in place. The moment she stepped in, she was jostled by the loud music, and laughter surrounding her as people enjoyed their meals and company, some even opted to dance adding to the jovial ambiance of the cafe. It just looked like a rusted and worn small building from the outside, that came to life as soon as she walked right in. Her awestruck expression didn't go unnoticed by her friend, who merely chuckled and led her further into the cafe to sit down in a booth. Finally, when he spoke for the first time in what felt like forever, he told her to just wait and to just absorb her surroundings. As they waited, she grew more fond of this phenomenal place she brought to and the warmth it radiated. Her daydreaming was interrupted when Bozo announced that it was time. Confused, she turns around to see what he was referring to, to have her heart stop for the second time that day.

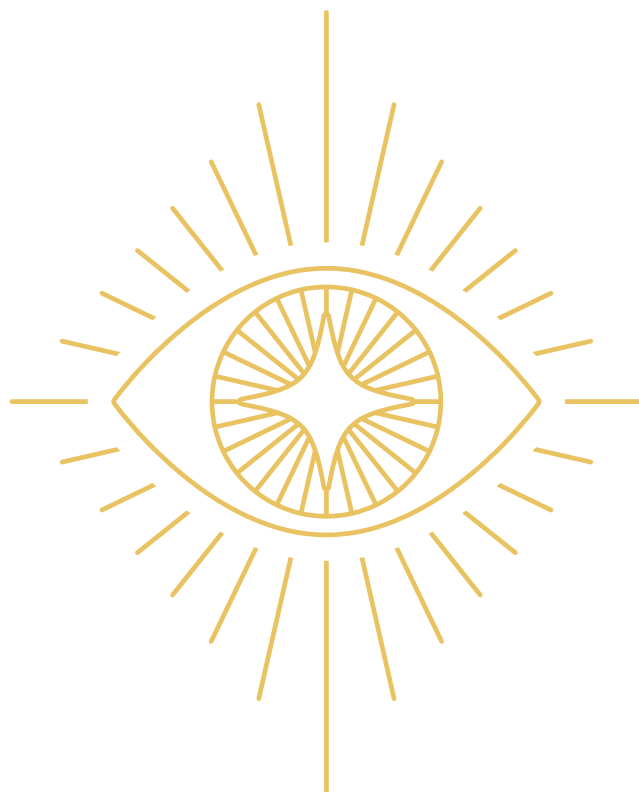
He was standing there, greeting everyone, smiling widely and lovingly patting backs, like he always used to do, as he went through the crowd of people. His wandering eyes finally landed on her wide ones and he started approaching, not at all fazed by her presence there. She could hear her fast heartbeats almost synchronizing with the clatter of his shoes. He just smiled brightly and held her dumbfounded gaze, she just couldn't stop looking at the man whom she had thought was lost to her and who led them to sit back down. She wouldn't dare blink in fear that he would disappear again and it would just be a sick prank on her. She was soon relieved of her own tormenting thoughts by the fact that she was very much awake and that this was very much real. He knew she demanded answers and he gladly obliged.

Where I can see you

He knew she was ready, even if she didn't believe so. He asked her to look around at all the people gathered together, and pay attention to their wrists; they all wore the same beautiful white, soft thread-like bracelet around their wrists, including him. That bracelet explained everything she needed to know, and she finally began recalling all the stories he used to tell her, about the people who lived around the woods. She gasped at her own realization; the woman with the frizzy red hair, the boy with the wooden leg, the man with the beautiful flower that sat in his coat pocket, they were all there. She remembered the white thread from all the stories, and the same one she saw on Bozo's wrist.

All became very clear yet new questions bloomed in her head. She understood the peace but not why she could see them all. As quickly as thoughts came, they vanished with her grandfather's mere touch, making her emotional at the possibility of being able to touch a lost loved one, one more time. Who's to say ghosts look the way we think? asked her grandfather, and she knew how everyone believed in that fantasy. It made her think of the person who imagined ghosts, looking like floating white sheets, who certainly has never seen one before. She felt the unanswered questions, that itched to be voiced as they were, a sense of mystery left to them and the fun in the unknown. What mattered most was that she understood why she had been brought here; making peace with the past. She started feeling that peace run through her body, she knew he was where he belonged, always watching over her, the forever guardian and storyteller.

The memories no longer pained her, no longer weighed, instead, they flew around in her mind all free and colorful, with a sense of renewal. A legacy passed from generation to generation, that became her life's mission to carry on. The tradition of storytelling, the stories of all the ghosts that guarded the woods, the people with the white thread bracelets, and the peacemakers. And if you are ever there at the right time and right moment, you could catch a glimpse of what you're missing.



Alik Djimbachian

No! You don't have OCD

OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder, remains one of the most misunderstood mental disorders and has become the subject of constant minimization and ridicule mainly by people who do not know well enough or are not aware of the severity of this mental disorder and how much pain it causes to its sufferers.

It is time to change how we look at OCD and bring about a much-needed shift in perception and a better understanding of this debilitating mental disorder.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is a type of anxiety disorder characterized by Obsessive recurring intrusive thoughts that trigger anxiety; the intense anxiety is caused by the obsessive fixation over thoughts that often do not make rational sense and cause fear and irritation to the person; the feeling of anxiety is too strong for the sufferer to ignore, compelling them to engage in Compulsions to control and reduce the anxiety; the compulsions can be physical [constantly checking/washing hands every few minutes] or mental [ruminating over mental images and phrases in the efforts of diminishing the intrusive thoughts]. However, the compulsions that the person feels the urge to do may only give a temporary relief but are ineffective in alleviating the anxiety and the intrusive thoughts; it reinforces the disorder by making the person believe that their thoughts may occur, or they may act upon thoughts they view as horrifying and unacceptable.

Some examples:

Washing hands constantly to the point of their hands burning, out of fear that they might catch an illness and die. Checking the oven 15 times in 1 hour, out of fear that leaving it open will cause the house to burn down, thus being late to work or university. Having intrusive thoughts that are considered blasphemous to a religious person, compelling them to spend hours on end praying, at the expense of their time and energy. Having thoughts of harming a loved one, causing them to avoid being around them, at the expense of their relationship. These thoughts often go to irrational lengths such as saying a specific word/phrase out of fear that a loved one will die if they don't say it a set number of times.

This mental disorder is sometimes mistakenly equated with a personality trait of being organized, clean, tidy, and vice versa; however, the difference is that people with a personality trait of being overly organized and clean do not obsessively fixate over irrational thoughts of something bad happening if they do not organize their stuff; consequently, their organization and tidiness is not a compulsion they feel the need to do to deal with anxiety, but rather something they enjoy doing and does not take up an unhealthy amount of time and energy.

It's important to understand that people with OCD having such thoughts do not want to nor do they wish to act upon them. It causes them a great deal of emotional pain, that they had such thoughts, often doubting their sanity and whether they are evil for having intrusive thoughts, especially ones related to harm. This is something that triggers intense shame and guilt. OCD sufferers do not enjoy washing their hands or organizing everything. This is unlike someone who loves cleanliness and organization, enjoys cleaning and organizing, and doesn't do it excessively; THIS IS NOT OCD!



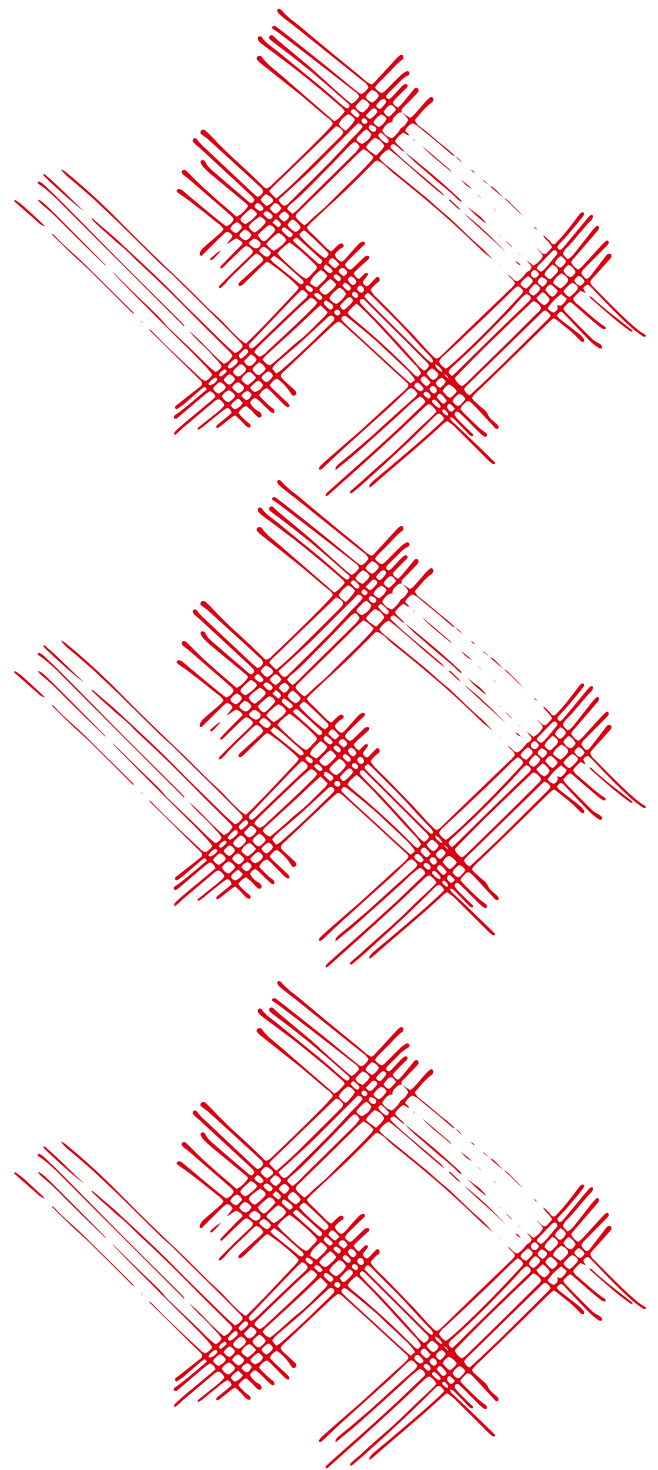
No! You don't have OCD

The reason why this disorder is widely misunderstood is due to ignorance about what it is and inaction towards changing how they are perceived in our cultures and societies. Someone who suffers from OCD wishes to be free of the cycle that they fall in, they wish that they can find a way to make peace with their thoughts, alleviate the anxiety and fear, and break free from the compulsions that consume a big part of their lives and limit their ability to live comfortably.

A major issue is that in pop culture, a person with OCD is usually portrayed as the incorrect version, that they are a clean freak, can't stand dirtiness, and must make sure everything is well organized and squeaky clean, or else he freaks out. This is taking only a minor aspect of the disorder and blowing it out of proportion for laughs and ridicule. It is very insensitive to take a disorder, that can impair a person's ability to function normally, and turn it into a joke or quirk that people laugh at or mimic. No! just because you don't like how the bookshelf is organized, or how something isn't symmetric doesn't make you OCD. No! you're not OCD because you meticulously clean your room every day. You're just organized and clean. Stop using such phrases and comparisons, you're only fueling the ignorance towards this disorder.

Thankfully, with the progression of the study of psychology and research on OCD and similar mental illnesses, effective psychotherapy treatments and medications exist to assist people with the disorder in managing their chronic condition and living a healthy and fulfilling life. This is something to be proud of in the context of human development.

Armen Simonian



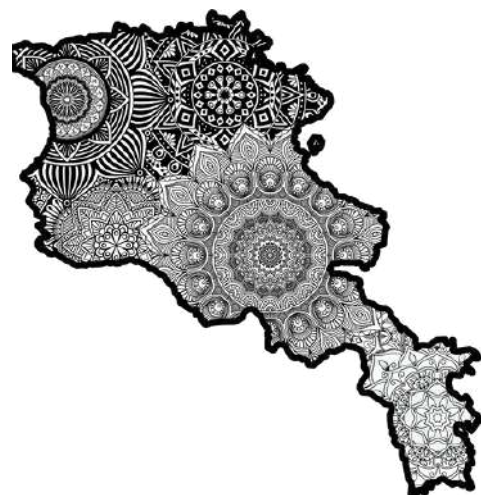
The Ache for Home

The time comes in everyone's life when they feel a calling. A voice from deep within their souls, so familiar, yet it comes from so far away. It is that of our ancestors calling us back home. However, that voice is particularly different for diasporans, descendants of those who have escaped oppression, imperialism, and genocide. That voice is not a warm calling, nor coming from deep within. This voice is born, with the first cry of a child. And it is not a cry of breath, but a cry of sorrow, anger, and mourning. Once again, the soul is born away from its heart. And as the child grows, the voice only becomes stronger, and so does the desire for home. It will seek out all that is familiar, all which reminds it of the homeland, where it should take shelter. From songs carried by the wind to the taste of its waters, the soul will grasp whatever it can.

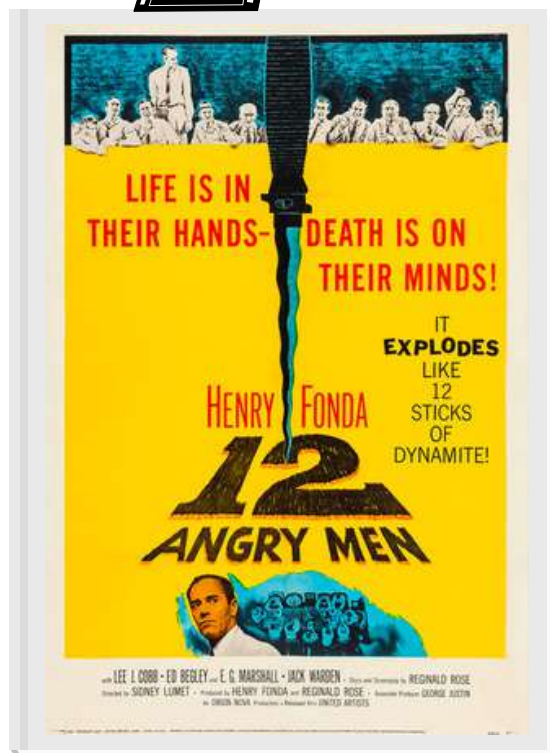
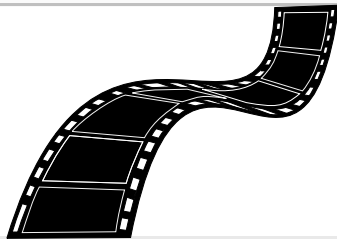
When I first visited Armenia four years ago, I felt a surge of emotions I had never experienced before. Joy, pain, sorrow, grief, and anger all mixed into an intense cry out to the Heavens, forever damning the moment my soul was born on foreign lands. As I felt the soil run through my fingers and gazed at our Sacred Mount Ararat, I felt my ancestors rejoice, for their blood is on free homeland soil, where it belongs. Upon my return, I felt as though the wound had gotten a bit smaller yet hurt even more. It had now gotten a taste of the cure and was yearning for more. And thus began a search across the unknown. Searching for other cultures and people, who are to this day wronged by history and never gotten retribution. The Scots, The Irish, The Natives of the Americas, The Palestinians, The Romanies and so many more I lost track of them. All oppressed, slaughtered, persecuted, and discriminated against for the greatest crime in the eyes of imperial powers: existing freely. Yet no feeling could ever compare to what Armenians went through, during the years 2020-2022.

The Second Gharapagh War and a full-scale invasion of Armenia, fueled by caviar politics Azerbaijan launched its merciless attacks on Armenians, the world standing by in silence as it had done in history. Our casualties were beyond comprehension, and so were the Azeri war crimes. Horrors, you'd think were committed by the Third Reich, they paraded loud and proud to the world, going unpunished yet again. During those times, I felt my soul burn, as what was once sorrow turned into sheer rage and anger. I felt paralyzed, only being able to scream into a void to no avail. I could not physically protect my homeland, as my lack of experience would burden the army: a thought many young Armenians had. However, my efforts to help from the outside proved useless. I saw the world cheer upon Ukraine's resistance yet remain silent sometimes even condemning our own. I saw the world punish and corner Russia, yet Azerbaijan continued to parade its atrocities, and be called a "reliable ally". A tree can only survive for so long with broken branches, till the roots give in, and that is what I fear for our future. Fear and anger, that is how you could describe the feelings of an Armenian for the last two years. And yet, I believe our people will prevail, and we will return once again. For Armenian diasporans, that call is a call for arms. To fight for the homeland in any way possible. The Armenian soil has been irrigated with the blood of her children for too long to remain silent. She will pick up her sword and call for battle. And may we answer her with might.

Garbis Der Ghazarian



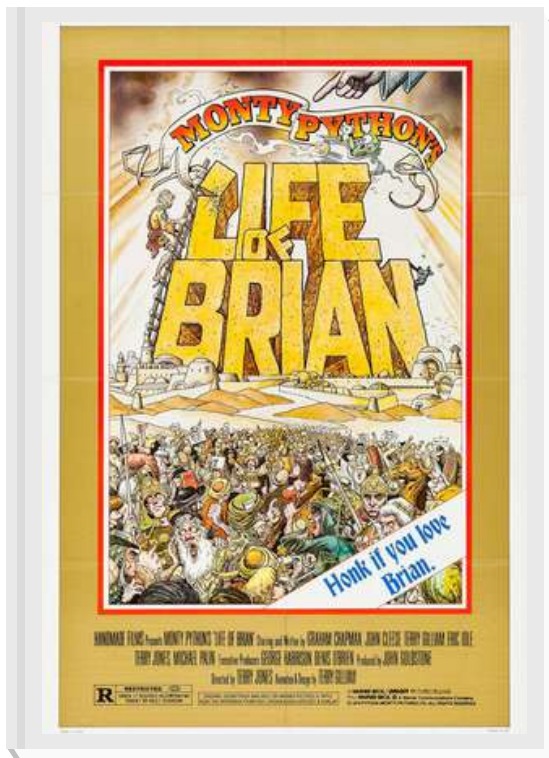
Movies to Watch During the Break



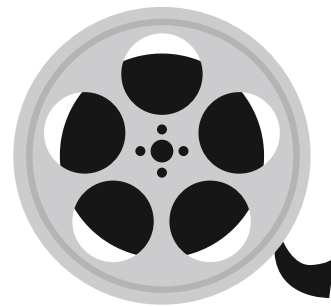
"No Country for Old Men" is as good a movie as the Coen brothers, Joel and Ethan, have ever made. The movie is essentially a character study, an examination of how its people deal with a man so bad, cruel, and unfeeling. Chigurh is so evil, he is almost funny sometimes. The movie opens with Tommy Lee Jones' hollow confiding voice. He tells the story of a teen murderer he had sent to death by the electric chair. The teen had murdered his 14-year-old girlfriend. The press called it a "crime of passion." "But he said there was nothing passionate about it. He claimed he'd been planning to murder someone for as long as he could remember. He threatened to kill someone if I let him leave. He claimed he was going to hell. He'd be there in about 15 minutes." The phrase seemed almost identical to me from McCarthy's novel No Country for Old Men, yet they're not. And their influence on delivery has been enhanced. Jones delivers it with vocal perfection and remarkable intensity, and it sets the tone for the entire movie, which looks at a thoroughly wicked person with awe as if amazed that such a ruthless person could exist.

"12 Angry Men" (1957) is a courtroom drama in form. It is intended to be a crash course in the constitutional provisions that guarantee defendants a fair trial and the presumption of innocence. It has a stark simplicity about it: With the exception of a brief prologue and epilogue, the entire movie takes place in a small New York City jury room on "the hottest day of the year," as 12 men consider the fate of a young boy accused of murdering his father. Except for the judge's brief, almost bored, charge to the jury, the movie shows little of the trial itself. His tone of speaking suggests that the decision is already made. We don't hear from either the prosecutor or the defense, and we only learn about the evidence from the jury as they discuss it. "12 Angry Men" isn't about whether the defendant is innocent or guilty. It is a question of whether the jury believes he is innocent.

Movies to Watch During the Break



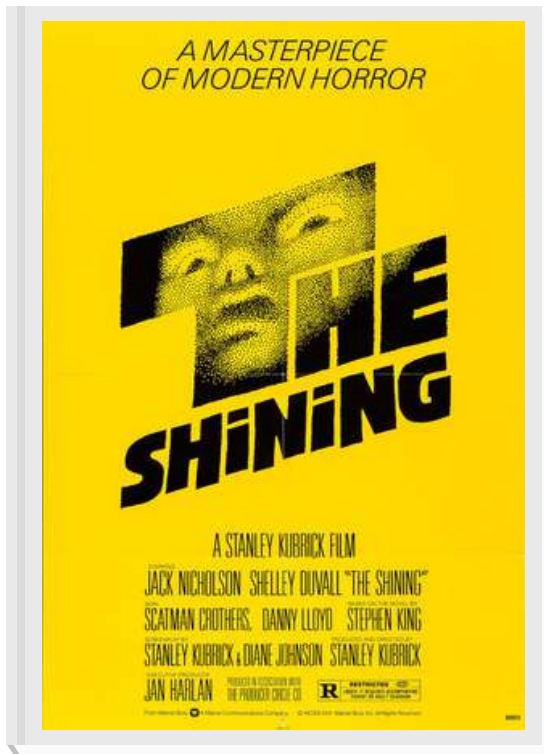
Stanley Kauffmann claims that Christ would have loved Monty Python's "Life of Brian" because he had a sense of humor, as seen by his occasional puns in the Bible. The movie depicts Christ just twice: once in the manger and once during the Sermon on the Mount. The plot revolves around Brian, who was born on the same day but in a different stable. As Kauffmann correctly points out, "Life of Brian" is not a parody of Christ's life, but rather of the life of one Brian, born on the same day but in the next stable. Maybe you won't find this funny. The movie plays on our primal instincts while attempting to enlighten them. The movie is the Pythons' most ambitious production to date, yet it was undoubtedly inspired by "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," which adapted King Arthur's stories. "Life of Brian" is more about cinema than religion: it derives from the innumerable Biblical epics in which Roman armies marched up and down while intrigue boiled over in Pilate's inner court.



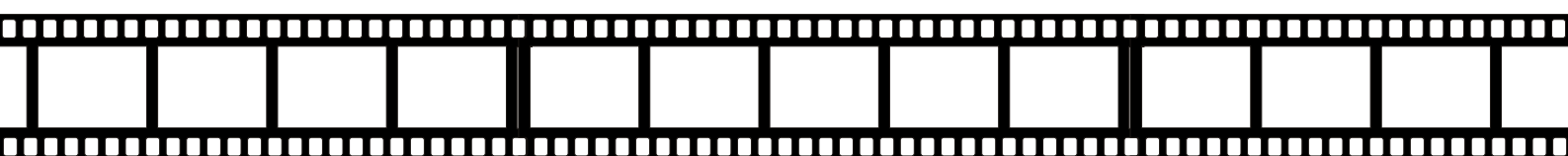
"Heat" is a movie that addresses the age-old tension in American action movies: the man with "men's work" and the female lead, who wants to tame him and keep him at home. The movie's protagonists are obsessed with their lives. There is a moment in which the robbers have all of the money they could ever have. They are free to leave. McCauley has even planned a trip to New Zealand. But then another job comes up, and they can't say no: "It's because of the juice. It's all about the action." These contemplative episodes are intercut with large, bravura sequences of heists and shoot-outs. It begins with a difficult armored vehicle robbery involving stolen semis and tow trucks. It then moves on to a perfectly planned bank heist. McCauley is the brains behind everything. Hanna has been tasked with predicting his next move.



Movies to Watch During the Break



Stanley Kubrick's chilling and terrifying "The Shining," asks us to decide who is the trustworthy observer. Whose version of events can we believe? The people appear trustworthy in the first scene of a job interview. We meet Jack Torrance, a father who intends to spend the winter alone with his wife and kids. He'll be in charge of the snowbound Overlook Hotel. His boss informs him that a past caregiver murdered his wife and two kids before killing himself, but Jack assures him, "You can be confident, Mr. Ullman, that's not going to happen with me."

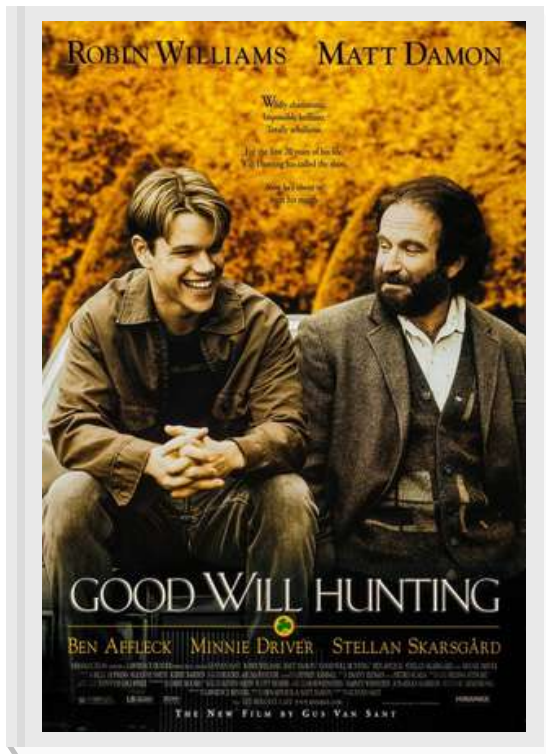


The main difference between "The Silence of the Lambs" and its sequel, "Hannibal," is that the former is terrifying, engaging, and unsettling, whilst the latter is only unnerving. Starting with "Hannibal" is a simple way to build a sitcom.

However, the key to "Silence" is that it's on the way to reaching at the cannibal (Anthony Hopkins) through the eyes and minds of a young woman. "Silence of the Lambs" is the narrative of Clarice Starling, played by Jodie Foster, an FBI trainee, and it follows her without any interruption. Dr. Hannibal Lecter lurks at the center of the plot, a menacing but endearing presence—endearing because he adores Clarice and assists her. But Lecter, as represented by Anthony Hopkins, is a prop. While Clarice is the main show.



Movies to Watch During the Break



It must be hard to admire true genius while falling just short of it oneself. A person can spend their whole life learning to be a mathematician, only to stand helplessly by as a high school dropout, a janitor, scribbles down solutions to questions that baffle professors. It's also tragic when genius refuses to acknowledge itself, which is the most perplexing issue in "Good Will Hunting," the brilliant, engaging narrative of a working-class child from Boston.



A movie about cultures, Yes, but there's so much more to "Babel" than the plot's central theme. The movie is not about how each culture inflicts hatred and violence on another, as one might think, but rather how each culture attempts to behave decently but is hampered by misperceptions. "Babel" might have been a typical recital of man's inhumanity to man, but writer-director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu had something deeper and nicer to say: When we are outsiders in a foreign place, we may bring problems upon ourselves and our hosts.

Andrea Khatchadourian

Bipolar Journeys

I was 7 years old when my father introduced me to him. From the first sighting of him, my mind would be filled with countless questions, while my heart was beating normally (considering the sugar rush as a typical process in a child's growth). His white color and the rope he held gave me both a curious and a slightly fearful combination of feelings. He stood still, waiting for me to approach, and my gullible mind was already processing it as "he sounds nice". My father would walk over to a man while I would look at the one who would shape an important part of my childhood. He didn't move nor look at me, yet I felt an attraction I couldn't explain at the time (nor the next 13 years)

The man speaking with my father looked me up and down then back at my father, stating "since it's his first time, we should start slow so he can get used to it". My father nodded and gave him the bills. This was my cue to take action. Looking at him more closely now, he seemed to be in quite a weird position, yet it seemed inviting enough. The gate was closed and locked. Reluctantly at first, I slowly got on top of him as instructed, and was warned to stay still.

"You won't feel a thing, ammo," the man told me. I gulped and looked in the direction of my father who was going to watch the whole ordeal. A wink and a nod from my old man were all I needed to comply with and trust the process.

Taking a deep breath, he finally started moving under me. I was shaken at first, his body moving up and down, unlike how I pictured him. I held onto a long stick with shaky hands while my surrounding was going in a circular pattern.

My father ordered me to open my eyes and I complied; a bit ashamed of showing such vulnerability in front of him. He didn't look at me yet his movements were slow and consistent. I could only smile, holding tightly to that weird-looking stick. I saw colorful lights with music in the background, making me feel safer yet increasing my hyperactivity.

I let go of the stick with one hand, waving my arm like a cowboy riding his horse through the desert. As he stopped moving, my father came up to me with a smirk that translated "can you handle another round?"

I looked down, thinking for a few milliseconds, then nodded enthusiastically, prompting my father to head over to the man in charge.

A couple of rounds later, my father told me it was enough for today so I hugged my new official partner tightly and left with my father. The man was busy getting a boy younger than me away from one of my partner's friends. He was wailing like a siren, getting me to blurt out "such a baby girl" (a kind reminder that I was only 7 and didn't know that the universe would throw "joke's at you" in the future).

On a
journey

Bipolar Journeys

This day in my life would be the beginning of a series of similar scenarios that would be repeated almost weekly for a whole 2 years (that felt way less).

It would be on a fateful September weekend, a few days after my 10th birthday, that my obsession would be focused on the Ferris wheel.

Just to ensure we're on the same page, for the dirty-minded, "he" was a horse I enjoyed riding on a carousel I had craved riding. When it got shut down and my mother suggested trying something different. Before ranting about another memory, that the whole world cares a lot to know about, I'll introduce some sense to the idea behind this anecdote.

We can all agree that life has its ups and downs, especially the latter, yet we don't always apply it when it comes to our daily lives. If we imagine a whole month filled with responsibilities and tasks from both the academic and non-academic, the idea of one event going differently than planned is enough to raise the anxiety meter.

Perfectionists or not, we all want to get the job done. Yet, it can't always be the case at every time we choose, even if we plan things day by day. Picture this timeline: **Going** from the best day of your life, a good grade on an exam, a friendly experience with your social group, your favorite meal for lunch, and a duty-free evening to the opposite the very next day, you couldn't arrive to class on time because of traffic or other Lebanese problems, you forgot about an important assignment due, and were assigned more tasks for the upcoming weeks, leaving you coming home late and in a horrible mood.

I might be going to extremes to some, or in a relatable fashion for others, but the idea of bipolarity in your daily life system isn't farfetched out of a Final Fantasy movie series.

"Keeping the balance" or "avoiding rock bottom" has always been the kind of motto we heard somewhere, sometime in our lives.

The concept itself holds a healthy and truthful intention but not the complete story in the message. You can try to dance under the rain and cheer a whole group of pessimists, but you can't escape from the rocks on the way. Be it in your control (miscalculation in the time you needed for a meeting) or not (saying goodbye to a loved one), we are usually warned about the dangers of the place known as rock bottom.

In the words of Richelle E. Goodrich: "There would be no cloud-nine days without rock-bottom moments left below."

With a reference to my previous article, experiencing an ambivert's lifestyle isn't filtered onto a utopian journey. You get to come across several personalities, backgrounds, and experiences, which was a highlight in this unique semester. The entry of a huge number of students presented an opportunity to acquaint themselves with new people while getting a "taste of the real world".

While hard to believe by a couple of people who know me, I can get stressed out when faced with a huge crowd, which the older folks/students would know wasn't the case a semester ago. Nevertheless, you can't stop things from going even if it's not your way.

I could ramble about every misfortune I have faced (and didn't face yet), but it would erase the point of this article. My journey through rock bottom and the "euphoric" were the best ones I had so far.

Let's go back to that Ferris wheel (kindly hold all the cussing and frustration for the end of the article). I didn't try it like every child in a movie would, I made a fuss and pouted till we went back home.

Bipolar Journeys

The trips to the amusement parks would be back when my siblings were old enough to speak and walk (just read). Carousels were for babies in my mind by that time and puberty was a new companion, not the best headspace. I was pressured by my father to try riding it and I got into that ride my childhood self would always reject at all costs.

It was truly a magical ride, especially the view from above and the serenity with it. I smiled as I felt the breeze in that altitude and the silence dominating, which made the rest of my week. It's intriguing how the simplest of things can make a difference in a person.

Linking the pre-Ferris wheel story, I don't believe the Ferris wheel would have had the same impact it had on me if I had done it at another time. The beauty of those dark times we go through, the pain they inflict, and the sorrow they cause, is the gratitude and appreciation we have for the smallest rays of light. Such experiences are like a rite of passage for us to persevere and come out stronger for future chapters.

They aren't scar-free but the same effect can be said about joyful and positive moments of our lives. Remember them on your darkest days, especially with a focus on what you have done. The main fact of having passed that phase without giving up is a reason for you to bow to yourself.

Currently, I may have faced a shaking semester but I'm still grateful for it. The ups and downs were mostly on the rock bottom side but there were still parts that played a role in both improvement and self-reflection.

To back up the words of dear Richelle, if I didn't fall into a dark pit, I wouldn't have sought the help of both precious friends and a therapist to gain strength by the end of the tunnel. When you reach rock bottom, how long you're there, and when you reach the brighter times aren't the problem, as long as your goal is not to stay there forever.

Life is like a carousel, you'll be running in a circle from the same things your whole life, so face what you have for it will eventually make sense one way or another at the right time.

I believe the best you can do is not to question the reason you're facing such a phase and instead follow what's in **bold**.

Hamza Damerji



On Existence & Suffering

Seven people in pain, and an observer hearing about it all. Each experiences life momentarily through a unique lens, yet all are unified by the internal dissatisfaction that has to do with that current feeling and that current state. They all exist within that moment in space and time, and all seem to be existing within a general state of suffering, unified by it, even though each is going through an individual process of pain, and so, suffering. The human experience maintains its unique aspects, even though this uniqueness is broken by the notable presence of suffering across the board. One cannot truly think of this regularly, without getting a hint of fascination, if not triggering an all in all existential crisis. It is the grand dilemma our consciousness, in collaboration with time and space, inflicts upon our innocent sanity; and it is the following: Why do we suffer, and should our suffering impact our existence?

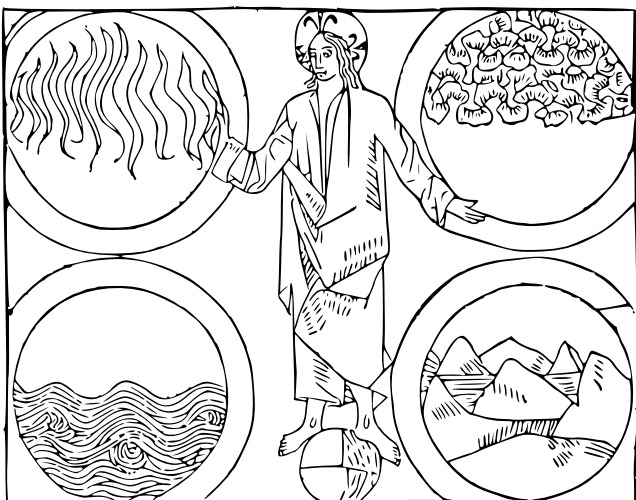
As I listen to classical music and write, I can proudly say that, in no shape, or form, will I be offering anything definitively new or revolutionary. Rather, this is an analysis; an interpretation of sorts, of one of many mindboggling questions that often roam the human mind at one point or another: The grand meaning of our existence! Said statement has had its implications all across history, and has been tackled by some of the greatest minds humanity has ever seen. Considering the statement is a purely subjective one, no one answer has truly survived and outshone others. This, in a way, resulted in the purpose of life fluctuating anywhere between the pursuit of fortune, pleasure, power, knowledge, and meaning, to no meaning at all. Yet, the existence of pain and suffering as correlated entities in the grander scheme of the question of purpose and meaning broadens the scope of the question in a new avenue, one mixing both suffering, and existence.

“Life is suffering” is a declaration that is concluded from seeing life through a lens of suffering and is one that is quite discussed here and there. As previously mentioned, people often find themselves unified by suffering, which in turn entails a sense of universality for suffering. It is the one aspect everybody everywhere worries about; people transition from worrying about matters of life or death to worrying about attempting to escape, or, if possible, decrease their suffering. Regardless of how much one tries, suffering persists. Such an aspect has pushed faiths and religions across history to encompass the matter within them, thus trying to find their answer to the question. Buddhism, for instance, maintains four noble truths about suffering: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. Such truths highlight the inevitability of suffering, and how much the process itself is as relevant as the cause, the effect, or the idea of suffering itself. Centuries later, German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer added to this set of ideas by proposing that the goal of life could be nothing more than a race between our pains and its elevation, that is, the pleasures that overcome. And so, the question is asked: Is the goal of life to achieve a surplus of pleasure over pain?

Schopenhauer also attributes a primary role to human consciousness, which directly has to do with the human perceptual experience, in how one perceives suffering, such that consciousness multiplies the pains of life without increasing the pleasures. All one can think of in terms of pleasures appears short-lived and desolate, as it's all subject to the rules of time. “Time,” according to Schopenhauer “is that by which everything becomes nothingness in our hands and loses all real value.”

On Existence & Suffering

Here, one can look at the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche for further backing to the primary question. Nietzsche shares Schopenhauer's origins yet draws his line regarding how suffering should be interpreted. While Schopenhauer saw grand suffering in life and the necessity for one to replace it with life's pleasures as means of overcoming it, Nietzsche believed in finding a way to live through the suffering, and even find "gratitude for existence". This gratitude, he suggests, finds its cores in meaning. All creatures are bound by rules of life and death; yet man finds himself superior over all other creatures in his ability to contextualize his suffering and, in turn, attribute a certain meaning to all that he is bound to go through. This meaning often makes a world of difference as one no longer goes through their suffering irrespective of what it might mean in the grander scheme of things, as once the meaning is introduced, it becomes much more relevant. Nietzsche wrote, "All that guarantees the future, postulates pain." Attributing meaning to suffering in no way means that the pain is decreased but rather molded into something more worthwhile, more beneficial. In a way, it does not take away the pain, but it teaches us how suffering can be part of a greater whole.



It is quite interesting how we perceive life, be it through all the shades, colors, and lenses through which it appears sensible to our minds, or through its constant inevitability: What starts at one point must reach an end at another. Life passes, and we are nothing more than specs of dust within the grander cosmic balance trying to make sense of something completely absurd. As random as it is, a close enough example is the myth of Sisyphus, the latter of which was punished by the Gods to push a boulder up a slope for the rest of eternity. French philosopher Albert Camus makes note of this absurd situation, finishing off his Noble prize-winning literature with a key statement, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." Regardless of how one views life, whether a great entity with predefined meaning, burdensome existence with nothing but suffering, or a grand search for the big "what if", one maintains the ability to attach meaning to their very existence however they see fit. For Sisyphus to not give in to despair over his eternal suffering, he has to cling to hope, regardless of how futile that may sound. Despite how absurd the task may seem, for it to be sensible to Sisyphus, he has to find happiness, or at the very least be content with his suffering.

By attaching such meaning to his absurd suffering, Sisyphus defies the Gods, making every step of his ascent more important than the final goal. Camus leaves Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain, just as the world leaves us on our knees from the grand weight of all our combined suffering. Yet, just as Sisyphus concludes that all is well, we too are given such a choice: To despair over our suffering, or, to see it differently, as a beneficial aspect to all that is to come? Here, the words of Nietzsche strike as a fitting way to conclude: "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering."

Hussein Mroue

What is ReAI?

In this age of technology and innovation, we seem to reach new heights of imagination. Art to a human being means communication, expression, memorization, and revolution. It seems to have no limitations, a form of constant human innovation. As people tend to constantly find new ways to draw, show patterns, and create an image in another's head, it seems that art is facing a crisis. It is facing something that many would consider a new form of art, though many would claim otherwise. So, what exactly is this matter you ask? The question at hand is, Is AI-generated art real art?

AI for those who don't know is an abbreviation for Artificial Intelligence. AI is usually created through algorithms that are the outcome of millions of trial-and-error cycles. Learning to recognize patterns of the human thought process. Human intelligence, which by itself is a feat of engineering, is a system so complex that we try to stimulate, manipulate, and even imitate. However, we are far from fully understanding the ability of the human brain to turn electric signals into ideas and images from the mind. All this is a means for showing our understanding of human intelligence. Now, what of artificial intelligence? Learning from a boundless expanse of human knowledge, seemingly endless thoughts and behavior on what humans are like, and dissecting the human psyche through numbers and patterns. All that doesn't mean AI is 100% errorless, but rather it tells us that it can notice and detect what makes us tick, though it is far from always being accurate. It cannot be enough to interpret human social behavior, yet it still manages to strike true in the field of entertainment.

So, what of AI art? What does it have to do with us? Well, since art is a creative field, we need to acknowledge that if that field is overtaken by AI and algorithms, this means millions will be out of jobs. As a result, this will create a second wave of automation and a loss of intellectual and creative jobs until there are none.

Okay, but is AI art even art? If you take a look at the images generated by sites such as "Mid journey", "DALL-E2", "Stable Diffusion, etc., you learn that yes, these sites can create such accurate and creative images from a simple prompt. It must be stated that these systems learn from millions of art pieces and artists, many of who didn't consent for their artwork to be used to teach and create such algorithms. So, morally speaking, many of these systems are not only threatening artists' careers but are also using their work to cause their downfall. Naturally, most artists would feel scared of this new invention that stands to take away their means of income, yet some still see it as a tool to be used by them. Though, as history has taught us, the majority are right to fear it. Corporations and companies wouldn't mind cutting costs by using these algorithms instead of hiring artists. Especially in an already struggling industry, because art is dying.

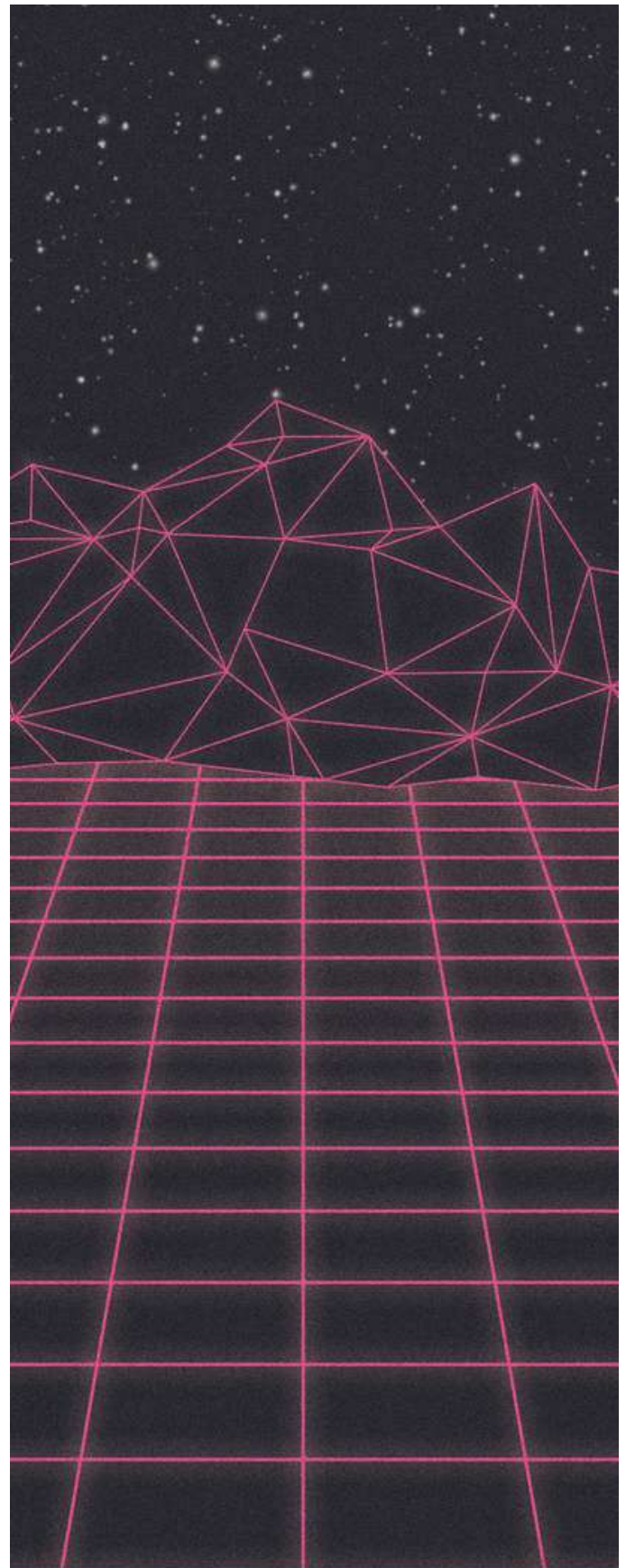


What is ReAI?

A question that has yet to be answered is, is this really art? Well, how would you define art? How would you depict it? Ideas, emotions, memories, fantasies, and absurdism all fall under what art tends to depict. So, what does AI art depict? What is the meaning behind it? Those emotions, those sleepless nights, those hours of work. Where is it? Is art just the final image or is it the amalgamation and fascination in the tale the piece tells, the history behind it, and the ideas and emotions it holds? Art in the dramatic sense cannot be made by an AI, yet here we are, unable to differentiate between AI-generated art and art made by artists. We can easily place meaning and ideas in a work of AI art, try to interpret it, reflect on it, and connect to it, even if it isn't real.

So, in this age, what is real? When algorithms can create new faces, new voices, and new worlds. It is hard to definitively answer the first dilemma mentioned, but I can say this "Art is not the visualization of our imagination, rather it is the realization of our sensation.". A conclusion I came upon long ago is that art is a demonstration of humanity's limitation in communication. So, may we realize our sensation to reach a destination of great inspiration.

Mohammad Chehab



The Armenian Soft Power Problem

Initially, I had written an article talking about Daron Acemoglu's book on state-building, the very famous "Why Nations Fail". But after watching "The Gate to Heaven" at an HU-sponsored event, I decided to write a completely new article. Here is why:

Ever since I was a very little kid, I have had a very dynamic range of interests. Whether it is subjects such as history and politics. Young adult entertainment such as shows like American Dragon, Ben 10, or books such as Percy Jackson, and Diary of a Wimpy Kid. Or, even video games such as the CODMW trilogy, Command and Conquer Generals, etc. I was genuinely very interested in trying to learn as much about the world through as many mediums as possible.

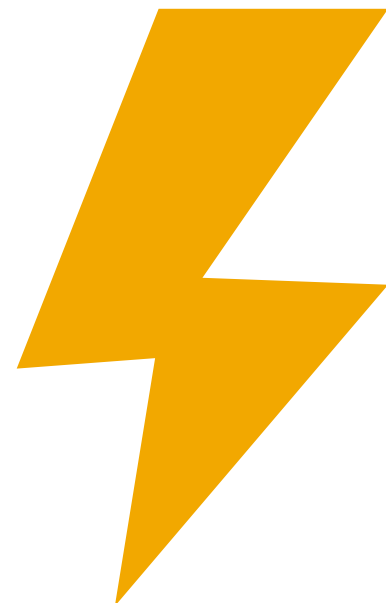
However, one thing that always bothered me was the lack of Armenian representation. As a proud Armenian, even back when I was a kid, there was always something off. A desire for Armenians to show up more in a variety of mediums. Whether it was history, which had an Arab (little to no focus on the pre-Arabian Middle East a.k.a. Babylonians, Sumerians, Armenians, etc.), Judeo, Sino, and Eurocentric feeling to it, or games which felt very American-centric, the lack of any Armenian references was very much felt.

And this feeling of being left out would only intensify when I would watch Holocaust-themed movies like The Pianist, Schindler's List, Life is Beautiful, and others, where I would feel envious of the Jewish people for remarkably raising awareness about the Holocaust over and over again. Compared to us Armenians who barely had 2-3 movies about the Genocide, but were mostly targeting an Armenian audience while nowhere near a household name like the Holocaust movies.

And this angered me as a kid, as essentially in many ways both Armenians and Jews are very similar people. Both have faced millennia of persecution and are amongst the oldest and most widespread people in both the MENA region and the world.

So I would ask, why do the Jewish people have over-representation including in your everyday sitcoms, with "Jew," "Mazel Tov," "Kosher," "Bar Mitzva," or "Israel" being mentioned casually in most if not all shows on a regular basis?

And this is where I realized that as Armenians we had failed big time. We had ignored one of the most important pillars of power, a.k.a. soft power (we had technically also ignored hard power a.k.a. economics, military force, etc. leading us to lose the 2nd Artsakh war, but that is a topic for another day). Soft power is a form of power that encapsulates matters like entertainment, culture, language, and food to name a few, and others, which allow for nations/countries to have a soft yet important influence in politics.



The Armenian Soft Power Problem

And this is where the "Gate to Heaven" comes in. After watching that movie, which I highly recommend as I was blown away by the plot (basically expected it to be some cheesy love triangle movie but man was I wrong), I thought to myself, "wow, this could be a very compelling, artistic, and interesting pro-Armenian movie." A.k.a. an Armenian Schindler's List in a sense. And when I realized that it wasn't, and even though I had just seen the movie because of HU, I kind of felt ashamed and sad.

Just imagine this, if I had, for whatever reason, been unable to attend the event, I would have lost the chance to watch the movie. And most probably, even though it would have been slightly annoying short term, I would have quickly moved on.

And this is where Armenia's soft power problem comes in. If I as an Armenian don't care, why should a non-Armenian? Why should non-Armenians care about Armenian issues?

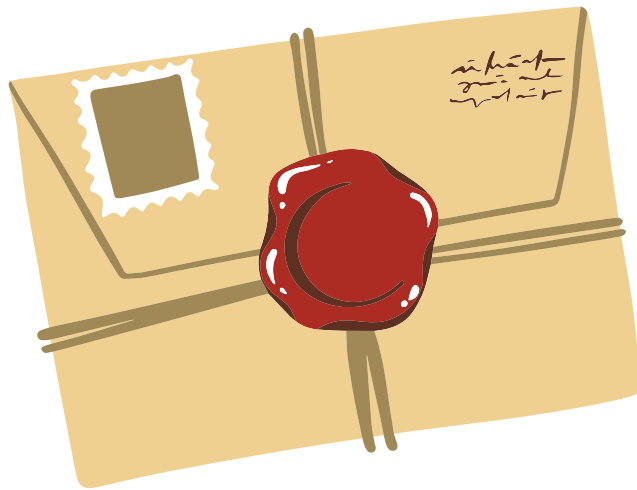
Basterma, Abris (bravo), Artsakh, Armenia, Vartivar (Armenian day of water fight based on Armenian Pagan tradition) and other Armenian quirks are not constantly heard or seen in entertainment.

And this for me is pretty sad. Fortunately, I think that not all is gloom and doom, and I am starting to see Armenians being mentioned more and more. Though, I think something more should be done. Not only should we ensure that films like "The Promise," "Mayrig," "Don't Tell me the Boy was Mad," and "The Gate to Heaven" be household names across the globe, but ensure Armenia and Armenian issues are as well known around the globe like the Israeli ones. It is time we learn from our historical relatives, the Jewish people, and make Armenians as well-known as possible.

Finally, both the Armenian elite around the world and the government in Armenia should understand the importance of soft power and support initiatives that would enhance it. If done correctly, it would help us in a lot of factors, including more diplomatic support to Armenia/ Artsakh, more tourism and investments in Armenia by foreigners, and more Armenia-friendly mainstream coverage, which all would help enhance our economy and military, to face the ever-looming threats from the Turko-Azeri axis.

Garen Kazerian





Letters From The Writers

A Letter to the First Years

Excitement, thrill, hope. The rush of emotions circulates my body as I sit impatiently waiting to witness what 12 years of my life have led up to. My advisor mutters words I have only heard come out of my older sister's mouth, as my eyes divert to the narrow crack left between the door. I admiringly watch students rush to class, notebooks in hand, they look mature, they look as though they have everything figured out, walking with a sense of purpose and passion. Exhaust, anxiety, doubt. The surge of emotions circulates through my body, as I sit here watching the leaves change color, the blue light of my computer screen pierces through my retina, unfinished assignments and unopened emails screeching my name. How odd it is, the consistent inconsistency of life.

Monday. 7:30 am. The sun peers through the cracks of my blinds, and another week begins. I make my way through the usual morning routine, choose a nice outfit, grab a store-bought croissant, and pet my dog goodbye. I'm early. I grab a warm cup of coffee and sit with my friends until my first lecture starts. Tuesday. Woken with a heavy jolt, at 7:50 am. I'm late. Throw on the first thing you can find, rush your way through the usual morning routine to look somewhat presentable, and make it to class. I pet my dog goodbye. I make it to class. Wednesday. I pet my dog goodbye. I make it to class. As the professor explains new concepts, I stare blankly at him, I can't shake the familiarity of this feeling. Thursday, my bed sinks me in, and the comfort of blankets piled up on top of me makes it difficult to remove myself. Completely paralyzed, I stare at the ceiling with an empty mind, and a feeling takes over. I stay. Friday, the end of the week. Friendships take over this day, a day full of laughs and hugs, many visits, and many offers to go out. The week has drained me, and Friday is unconcerned about the matter. I finally arrive home and collapse in my bed.

Monday. 7:30 am.

The days repeat themselves, the small pit in your stomach grows larger, and a constant worry you keep messing up somehow pollutes your mind. You look around, and everyone seems fine until one of your friends tells you they're not. You realize the change you've both endured with no warning of any sort. Not one person mentioned how you are forced to socialize every day, how you might not be able to keep up with lessons at first, how you'll feel completely lost and frantic. It's a calm and slow wave of frustration. You make it home at 8 pm, and you barely have time for your family or friends, hearing them say they never see you anymore, sleep, study, pick yourself up in the morning, and pretend to be perfect. No one warned you it would be this way, coddled by the school and then thrown headfirst into the chaotic world of college. And some powerful force decides you must struggle more, takes away something you love, or adds multiple obstacles to your journey. You mustn't breathe, only gasp for air. Stuck in a whirlwind.

Why tell you all of this? There's so much more to write about and to express, so why choose a mundane topic when love, grief, art, and poetry exist? What's the important takeaway? Truth is, I'm not so sure myself, I have handed you an unfinished chapter, the ending unclear. So to that, I answer, we'll have to find out together.

Lia Kalforian



The Devil's In The Details

Note by the author:

This piece was written on my 19th birthday to describe my journey throughout my teenage years up to this point. It aims to show the expectations I had in this journey and the reality they were met with. However, the twist is because it was my 19th birthday, I decided to have a little fun with it. So, I decided to write my experience using references from the 19th century that describe the emotions, experiences, and cathartic journey of being a teenager through poems, events, wars, hints, and history from this era and century. For example, Andromeda, which you'll get to know in the paragraph is known to be the 19th constellation of stars or the emerald reference which is the birthstone of May, and so on... And to add more to the fun, there are 19 references! Moreover, my birthday which was on the 7th of May happened to be the same day as the release day of This Love (Taylor's version) by the phenomenal Dr. Taylor Swift, and it also was the release date of Dr. Strange: Multiverse of Madness. I'm a huge "Marvelalcoholic", but being a Swiftie is in fact my entire personality. I hope you have fun spotting all the references and enjoy reading them as much as I did while writing this piece.

Please keep in mind that this is my FIRST TIME EVER letting others read my writings besides my mom, so I REALLY hope you like it!!!!



A presumption of a future beheld by the whims of childish innocence, where: The birth of a scientist, the destruction of Napoleon, the subside of slavery, the gold rush of the Victorian times, and the eminence of romanticism. All in the hopes of the recollection of past times to create a hopeless image of a free spirit to emerge out of nothingness.

But, in reality, it is met by the chaos of wars, the collapsing of empires, the freedom of Napoleon, a target of calumny, and the clarity yet depth of the sea. All coincide to form a flow of constructive waves reaching their limit to cease down into the Emerald fighting in the path that the soul designates, creating forth a display of calamity, agony, and despair. The golden but eerie time. Taken by the rising of a lily of the valley in a dark dim constellation of stars, maimed by the story of Alter and Vega, and solaced with the story of Andromeda and Peruses.

A chained lady in her own multiverse of madness, in silent screams, in wildest dreams, and in never-ending speculation of her future dreams...

Yasmina Nehme

On Grief

“... So I’ll tell you this, and God if you’d spare me a single hour’s worth of your time... I’ll say it. I’ll try to package it in neat wrapping and I’ll ask you to put it under your Christmas tree. Maybe then you, your kids and their pigtailed and toy trains, your mother and her white cardigan – would gather everything and everybody you love underneath those red and green lights and read it... read me. Would you understand, then? Would it spark anything in any of you? Do I even want it to? I don’t know.”

I’m gonna be talking now.. and you’re gonna be listening. That’s all that matters.

Grief. You wanted to know about grief and the person I became after it had spat me out clean and bare – it is not what the world says it is and I’m here to testify. You say it’s mourning a loss, and I’m telling you here that it’s the loss of mourning.

And I... well, I think that each of us is born with a woven time machine.

Under your ribs.. between your eyes, below your shoulder... an innate machine of time and passage. And I think that before the creation of the very first human – the innate time machine was supposed to operate linearly. That was the plan. Trip to the past? Sure. You’ve got your garnered memories. Present? Look around and breathe the present deep into your lungs. Future? Close your eyes and see a built-in future self staring right back at you. The human being was crafted of the thing of angels, a truly wondrous formation. But the grieving human is borne of the ones who’d fallen.

The hand of creation messed up on our machination, you know. Beneath my ribs is a time machine that carves my future self with the shrapnel of the past. Beneath my ribs is a broken time machine and grieving is the process of accepting the unpredictability of it.”

... Unpredictability?

Unpredictability. The realization that people are things you shed and that you’d had to shrug off premature skin to survive. You are now a skeletal vessel with no skin and are taking the whole world apart in the search for something similar to blanket this body with.

It’s standing in your living room, remote in hand, watching the TV fade into a blur for the fifth time that day. It’s crossing your legs and curling up on the ground – the couch is a second away but you can’t form a thought coherent enough to get you there. It’s closing your eyes and counting the stars behind your eyelids. It’s making constellations of them and hoping that pressing your eyes down hard enough would make a map that steers you back into your own body.

So... the unpredictability of a sudden disconnect. A cup of coffee swirling in one hand, the raconteur adjusts the film inside his recorder and places it back down on the table. Pressing the button, he stares down at his fidgeting legs and smiles to himself... “You wanted me to be honest about this. There is not a single way to put it that is not raw and.. horribly human. It’s..” He pauses.

I tried to write this down for you, you know. I was stuck staring at my screen for three whole hours – I can’t write the cracks in my voice down. I can’t write my heaving, the screams into my pillow, the scars on my skin like footnotes of every single time I’d failed to protect myself. Of... times I wasn’t even supposed to. I can’t write down how I can’t even keep my coffee steady in my hands, Goddammit. You hear my voice now and hear every single time I had to yell out my name in wait for an echo that tells me I am still real back to myself.

On Grief

You hear a kid who's tasted death before death was a word he could spell out in crayons. You hear it in the twists in my words and the way I have to pause and gasp out after every sentence as though letting my voice roll off my tongue is in itself a confessional to the world. One I'm not ready to make – that I want to be heard. That I will defy the laws and ground rules that have made me into who and what I am today and I will let you listen.

Grief makes you feel small. And I've always said that there is a kind of lore to smallness only the ailing understand. You make yourself smaller because you know and know and know that there is no other place for small creatures to live than in the heart of something bigger. You go small in the hopes of something larger swallowing you down, merging with you, and permitting you to tell the world that you've always been this big.

He laughs, This reminds me of when I was small and we were learning how to identify and translate our emotions in class. I was stuck on 'angry'. Blinking in confusion, I told the teacher I had no idea what she was talking about. She laughed and went, 'Sure you do! How about this – let's grab this marker right here and try to draw a little dot on all the places that feel bad right now, I may be able to tell you which one of them is anger.' She thought I would draw dots at my heart, my cheeks... where the flaring up happens, my stomach... I grabbed the marker and tried to eat it.

I got yelled at that day and was told that I would've choked had I swallowed it down. She shook her head... children, you know?

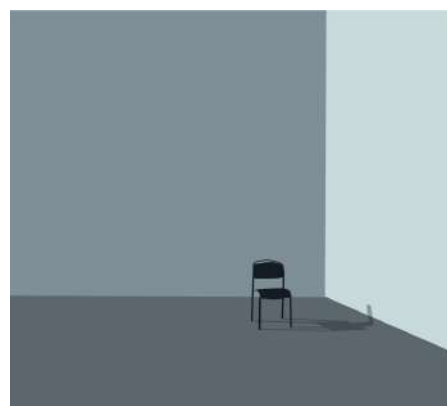
I didn't realize how right I'd been, that anger is exactly that. The consequence of swallowing down what you can't.

That it's bitter and poisonous ink your body mistakes for blood and uses as fuel to keep going – what's left of your blood goes tainted and soiled until it's just you and the black ink under your skin. I was my anger ever since I was a child and that was where my confusion came from.

He stood up, "I'll always be grieving. Grieving versions of myself I'll never really get to be... grieving what should've been said, what should've been done. I'll always be grieving everything that was taken away from me before I even had the chance to look down and see the hands dismembering my body. It's not anything I can or need to grow out of any time soon. But you know, if grief is what brought me here and had me sit down with you for this short while then it's not so overbearing, don't you think? It's not all bad. Sometimes it's coughing my lungs out, hands gripping my sink because my body malfunctioned on breathing, and other times it's the very thing giving me the ability to find myself everywhere. The ability to look at the belly of a flower and see something of me in it. And consequently, to find everywhere and everything in myself."

He wraps his scarf around his neck and makes for the recorder. To cradle this hope with bleeding palms and find something of the sun.

Jude



Truth Behind the Mask

Every day, when we wake up, we wear our masks and leave the house. Why do we wear this mask? What does it hide?

Behind every mask, you will see the reality, the truth, the real feelings, and the personality of that human being.

One of the reasons people hide behind their masks is because they are afraid that society will judge them. Another reason, they may think no one will care. Even hide their feelings so that others will not take advantage of their situation. Sometimes you might think, "Everyone is happy around me, and I am the only one suffering." That is not true because you are never alone. Although some are happy and satisfied with their lives, others hide behind their masks, hide their sadness or emotions, and pretend to be content with their life.

As stated by Ovid, "The grass is always greener on the other side." Everyone has problems; even if their life seems perfect from the outside, you never know what they are going through. Moreover, if you are going through hard times, know that they will not last forever and will pass eventually. Just keep going, believe in yourself, and you can get through it!

At the beginning of the semester, a kind-hearted instructor gave me this advice, and I want to pass this advice to you too. He said, "Everyone around you has their problems and challenges that they are facing. Stay strong, and do not give up. You can overcome this. Don't let the challenges win over you."

We never know what a person we are talking to is going through. So, try to be a listener and ask people about their day. Have deep conversations with your friends and always check up on them. You can also send funny, relatable, motivational, supportive "reels" or quotes to your friends to make their day. Anything to indicate that you are there for them whenever they need. Give compliments to people when you notice something nice about them. Sometimes the simplest thing can bring a smile to their face.

Through it all, do not forget about yourself. You are important. Take care of yourself, talk about your problems to someone you trust, and do not be afraid to express your feelings or emotions. At the end of the day, we all are humans and need to be there and support each other.



Nare Koronian



I opened my eyes. Looked to my right and saw my three-day-old empty water bottle, my unfinished book, my dusty labradorite, and my golden hoops. I looked to the other side and saw my sister's bed empty and crooked. I tried to get up, but the warm air caught me by surprise and went through my hair. The sunlight felt like a Marseillesque view, and my lungs which once were full of despair felt crimson and pure.

What is happening? Where did the void go? Why don't I feel like drowning in my grey sheets holding my grieving heart into my crippling knees? Well, I have an undefined answer to these screams telling me, yes Albert Camus was right indeed "we must give the void its colors". It may not seem like it at the moment, but existing purely for bliss and not a grander scheme of plans and ignorance feels much more liberating.

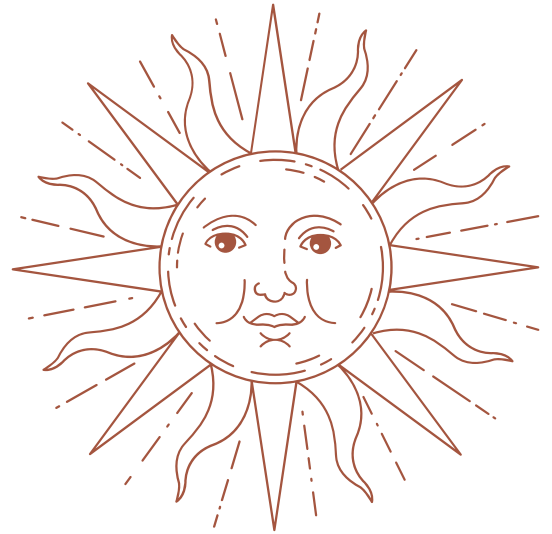
I may not have a purpose in seeking the sandy shore, but the refreshing water feels exhilarating. We are too busy hanging Pinterest boards, writing chalk wishes on beige walls, counting dollars, and indulging in a capitalist world full of burnout and flaws. Applying clay masks while writing our never-ending "to-do list" engraved in sins and claws. Losing track of time, and fearing the excruciating pain of never achieving our dreams or having a mother-in-law. But then, in the fleeting moments of complaint, we look around and finally see we aren't here in vain. We are here to bring our display to life, to duplicate the beauty and madness. To imitate nature and its grandness, it's not a masquerade. It's the universe experiencing life in a cup full of love and blades.

Mira Ghraizi

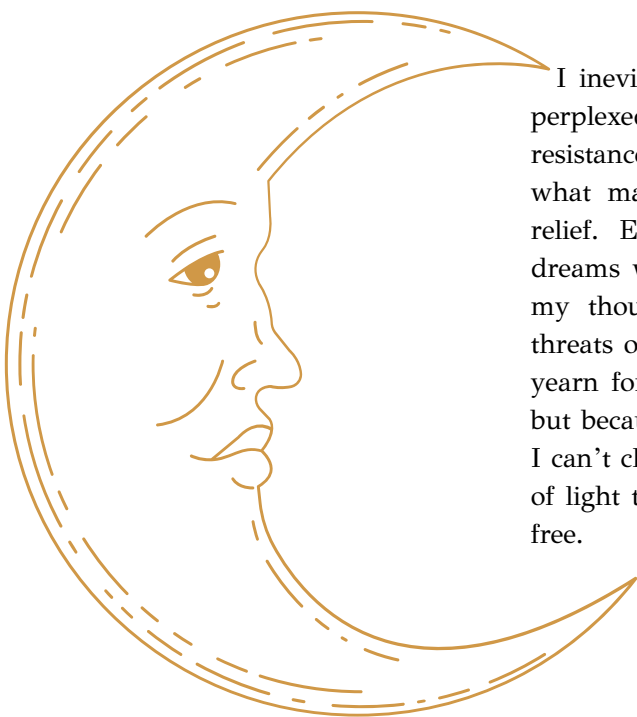


On Reality

In an elated environment, my eyes rest shuttering. In the sheer vision of reality exists immortality in imagination. It grants me leisure by taking me where I long to be. Though there's no consistency, my heart gnaws at feeding this curiosity. By this tingle, I'm drawn to close my eyes and ride in the reverie of this instant inclination and seize trying with no speculations to this peculiar thought. I ponder this ambiguity, conceiving ideas that will be the change I wish to encounter.



I can be anything. Free from the restrictions of labels and their limiting space to originality. Distracted by the thrill of the new inclination, I'm flustered by the concept of labels from those who hold the answers. It feels like a promising start, engrossing every fiber of my being as though I'm the only one alive. I can be anything, anywhere, anytime. For what I want to be is a reflection of what I see, and what I believe is waiting for my embrace, intertwining all at once with no expiration. Yet still, I close my eyes to this haze. The weight of the light is so slender as if I have found the answers I wasn't even seeking.



I inevitably open my eyes to the blur of a vivid image, perplexed by the thought of consistency. There is no resistance but adherence to your moralities rather than what makes you feel. I try to close my eyes for sweet relief. Even so, there's only a pure drove of expired dreams where I'm stuck with answers that once liberated my thoughts. Now scared of my expectancies and the threats of its absence. With my eyes wide open I refuse to yearn for these days. Not because they can't be retrieved, but because they once wanted to be everything all at once. I can't close my eyes for I'm scared of the crushing weight of light that cryptically distorts my reality. I am no longer free.

Rachelle El Souki

Chapter 1: Death of a Child



My aunt's house burnt down the day I was supposed to sleep over. Lucky me, I guess. Both my aunt and I were hungry, and since all the food was burnt at her place, we decided to eat out.

My aunt had planned a fun weekend for the both of us, but due to the fire, everything had gone in vain. That's why she decided to take me to City Mall, so our night wouldn't be completely ruined. In City Mall, we ordered pizzas and sat in the dining area to eat. We were silent, focusing on our food and our thoughts when a woman's shrieking scream just a few feet away from our table caused my head to jerk up to the sight of her; a mother, carrying her 5-year-old daughter in her arms. She was screaming her name to the dead-silent dining area. Everyone, including me, was frozen. And in a millisecond, the child's body weakened and lost all motion. It felt like nothing was in her anymore. Not a breath, not a heartbeat, not a thought. Just blankness. My heart dropped to the floor. Terror started climbing up my body from the ends of my toe nerves up to my hair ends. The mother sank to the floor, screaming so sharply that my entire body got covered with what was left of the lingering cries in her voice. You could hear her harrowing pain. You could still hear her screams while she performed CPR on her daughter. The Kid is not breathing. A kid is dying before my eyes. I shot my hand up to cover my eyes, already feeling the tears form at the corners. I'm not strong enough to witness this. I kept asking my aunt what was happening with a shaky voice, and she tried to comfort me by saying that nothing ever happens to a child as long as their mother is beside them.

Death was lurking over her, over the room. It was so strong that I felt it in my bones. It was cold and empty, in the cruelest form possible. Why is it familiar? And suddenly, the screaming stopped. Death was no more around. Someone had pushed this darkness away. A mother's wish is stronger and more willful than any evil. How strong was she to face death while in a state of utter vulnerability?

The room became brighter and alive once again. Chattering filled the hall. But the dark shadow still hung heavy on my eyelashes. A kid almost died in front of me... what if that kid was me? Would my mother have done the same as her? Would she have fallen to her knees, doing anything and everything to breathe air into my lungs again, or screamed so loudly that the shadow just disappeared so that I could live? I could not stop the tears from falling. It was even harder to stop them once I saw a glimpse of the mother wiping her tears. That woman was losing her kid just a minute ago. Why are YOU crying? And why did your tears intensify at the sight of the weeping mother who was almost going home by herself, with emptiness in her embrace and her heart?

Maybe it was the human in me that was witnessing the death of a child, maybe it was the human in me that would never expect care and love from others if I were the one dying, or maybe it was my shattered inner child that grew up saving herself too many times from the dark shadow, that now, she was the one dead...

To be continued....



Tvin Hergelian

A Farewell Letter

To say that I never thought I would make it this far is, while cliché, a drastic understatement.

My life has been measured and designed around milestones. I finished school, then graduated from high school, and the next understandable step was to graduate from college. But then what? Forget about that; am I actually living my life if I keep jumping from one expected milestone to another, without ever thinking of looking around at my present?

While I was running towards the college graduation finish line, I grabbed the hands of some runners or maybe they grabbed mine. I don't really know. Sometimes one of us fell down, and other times we all had to stop because we were so exhausted. In certain instances, the finish line seemed miles away and we just enjoyed the view. But now, we have made it, and I don't know if we should hold on to each other or simply let go, and if we let go how far away from each other will we be?

There is only one question haunting each of us: what do we do now? Finishing the milestones, we forgot how to live and we forgot how to want anything beyond what the mainstream society dictates.

Regardless of what happens to me, or the people around me, I know I couldn't have been where I am without them, I couldn't have been who I am without them, and I am grateful for the growth gained through college and relationships.

If you are lost, lonely, unmotivated, confused, or even angry, know that you are not alone; you are bound to find at least one person who feels the same way. When you do, hold on to them and connect, it will make the ride easier. Ask as many questions as you want to, take as much space as you need, trust yourself, and know that everything will be okay in the end. Always remember to take a second to breathe and accept where you are, because every upcoming stage is both better and worse than where you are now.



Samaher Al Yehya



Spectra

I Saw My Face In A Painting Once

I saw my face in a painting once
But it looked nothing like me.
It was more of a reflection, maybe a recollection
As I had never seen myself that way before.

Frozen in time, frozen in place,
The air in the museum took a mischievous tang to it.
Eyes sweeping across bright tangerines and deep royal blues,
The eyes in the painting only shining of silver.

How I knew of this woman's fate,
How I knew the soft symbolization of tangerine; blood,
How it matched the scar on my right temple,
And how each passing moment I merged with her; into one

The walls started bleeding of blues and oranges,
Creating a war between warmth and cold.
The floor, as blue as the sea,
The ceiling was as orange as the dying sunset.
We reached out to hold each other's hands,
My left one finding a home on her bloody cheek
Where she rested her heavy head;
The secret touch of a past lived.

She whispered to me her life,
She showed me the reason my veins were blue and not green,
She drew me the meaning of my earthy skin tone,
She painted my every scar with a matching color.

Slowly, she tilted my head
To, suddenly, see all the few people left,
Realizing they all were seeing their faces in paintings.
Realizing we were facing a portrait of a past life of ours.

My wandering gaze led me toward a man close by,
The man who saw his face in a painting.
Our matching scars and colors can write enough stories to go
down in history,
Our sea and sunset, dancing on earthy ground.

We knew of everything and we knew of nothing.
I saw my face in a painting once
But it looked exactly like me,
Under the dying sun, my scars shone a little blue.

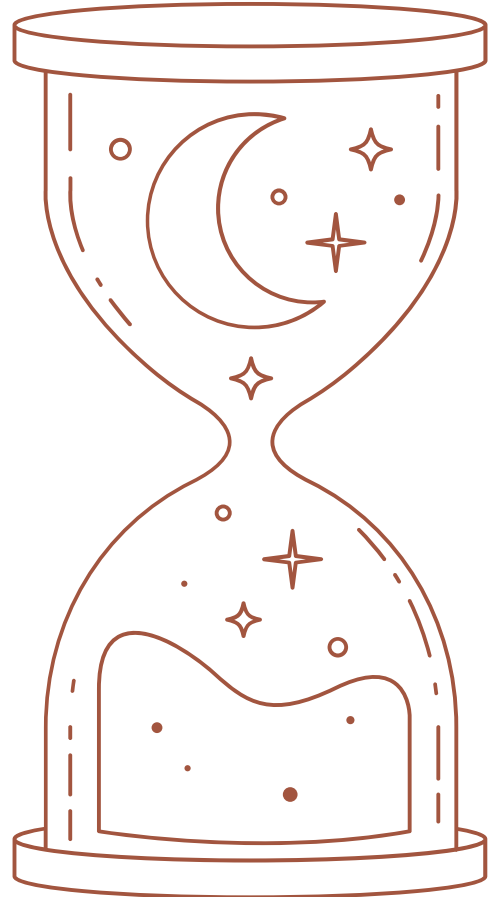
Alik Djimbachian

Is it ReAI

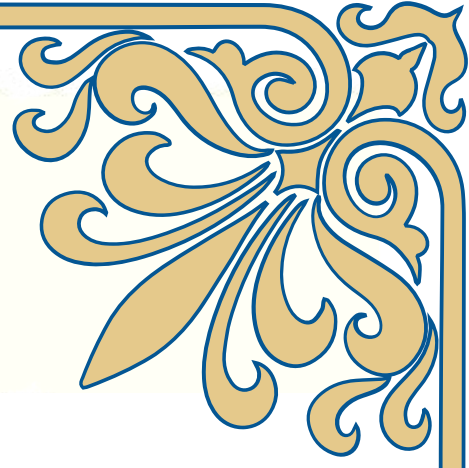
Lines and shadows
Shade in the meadow
A sight to be seen
Images on a screen
Taken from a dream
Faces turned clean
Smiles made lean
Eyes that cannot see
Ye who asks to be
What horrors you've brought
Like waves of raging sea
Flooding discourse in a spree
An abomination, a sight unseen.

Made with words, and a million thoughts
The work of many in one
Unimaginable awe is ought
A system, AI, is such fun
Learning what masters are taught
Noticing patterns and work well done
Building from pieces, each in a slot
From humans to the sun
In endless numbers, you sought
Going through images a ton.

Looking at what is made
Is it art or an artist's aid?
Is it new or the old overlaid?
Where does humanity start
where does it fade?
To what end?
A new beginning or the end?
Words said by machine or friend?
AI is here to stay; will we fight or make amends?
From lines and codes did it ascend
Taking us on, one by one, unable to defend
In houses, jobs, between our hands
Taking jobs and playing pretend
Is this humanity's descent?
Is this Creativity's end?



Mohammad Chehab



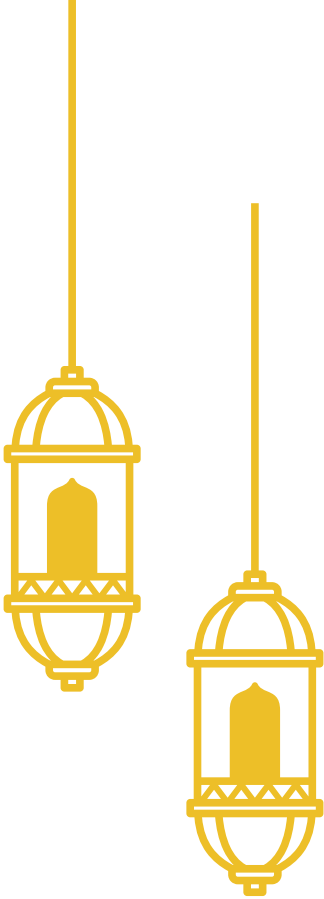
أتوق إلى العدم لكن الله يمنعني، وكل ما في هذا الكون
سجين

فمن إضمحل لا يضمحل، بل ينتقل من وجود إلى آخر
أما أنا فأتوق إلى إضمحلال كلّي لا عودة منه
أتوق إلى موت لا موت فيه، فالموت وجود آخر
أما أنا فأخاف عبودية الجنة وظلم جهنم
فما الحياة إلا سجن أكبر
لا مهرب من البقاء

لا مهرب من الإستمرار في لعبة الله
لا مهرب من وجود فرض علينا
وهمنا أن الكون فان، وهمنا أن الموت فناء
وتعلمنا حب الخلود، وفتنا بالحياة والأحلام والكون
تعلمنا أن نخشى حتمية الموت، لكن لم نذكر الرعب في
حنمية بقائنا، فنحن باقون، باقون، باقون...
كل ما أتوق إليه هو العدم، حيث الظلام والسكون، و أذوب
مثل نقطة حبر أسود في بحيرة حتى أختفي

أريد الفناء خارج فناء الكون
أريد لا وجودي
أريد أن يقول الله للعالم كن، فلا أكون...

يحيى حيدر



وظننتُ أنني التَّأطُّرُ والكونُ منظوري
و ظننتُ أنَّ كلَّ الألم والمعاناة و الحبَّ و السَّعادة والجمال كانوا
في المشهد

ظننتُ أنني المُراقِبُ
ظننتُ أنني الشَّاهدُ، لكنني لم أَكُنْ إِلَّا على نَفْسي أَشْهَدُ
أنا الشَّاهدُ و المَشْهُودُ و المَشْهُدُ
أنا الكاتبُ و المكتوبُ و الكتابُ

اليومَ إستيقَظْتُ وغابَتِ الأطيافُ، وسقطتْ ستائرُ الوهم، ولم
يبقى سوى الحقيقةِ نَحْدَقُ بعيونِ بعضنا
نُحَدِّقُ غير مدركين أيِّ مَنَّا هو الآخرُ

لا نعلمُ من يبدأ ومن ينتهي، متى يبدأ وينتهي، أو إذا بدأنا، أو إذا
إنْتَهَيْنَا

فنحنُ اللَّحْظَةُ و اللَّحْظَةُ أَرْليَّةٌ سرمديةٌ
لحظةٌ لا قبلها ولا يليها شيءٌ
عددٌ لا عدَدَ فيه، كُلُّ مَنْ دونِ أَحَدِيَّةٍ، ذاتٌ بلا ذاتية...

يحيى حيدر



حُقوقُنَا تحوَّلتْ إلى أخلَامٍ
و صار الهَدَفُ مِنْ كَانَ يا مَكَانُ
مِنْ أَيْنَ أَبْدَأُ في هذا الزَّمانِ
و قَدْ غَلَبَ اليَأْسُ على الإيمانِ
لكنْ في أَحَدِ الأَيَّامِ، و بعدَ كفاحِ الشُّجعانِ
وَصَلَّنا إلى الهَدَفِ بِأَمَانِ
هذه الدُّنيا قاسِيَةٌ لكنْ لَيْسَ على مَنْ قَلْبِهِ عامرٌ بالإيمانِ
هَلِّمُوا يا شَبَابَ لُبْنانِ
ارفعوا رُؤُوسَكُمْ و إلى الأَمَامِ
انْقِذُوا ما تبقى من وطنِ
أَسْرَهُ الحُزْنُ و لم يَعْذُ كما كان
فنحنُ شَعْبٌ لم يَذُقْ أَبَدًا طَعْمَ الإِسْتِسلامِ

ابراهيم النجار



طلّبتُ منّي أن أصفه
فكّرتُ مليّاً وحاولتُ أن أجد الوصف المناسب
فتبعثرتُ أفكارِي
ووجدتُ نفسي أسأل السّائلَ بدلاً من أن أجيبه
فكيف يُمكنُ للحُبِّ والكره أن يجتمعا في شخصٍ واحدٍ؟
شخصٌ يجعلُكَ تتمنّى الرّحيلَ في كلّ دقيقةٍ
لكِنَّكَ عاجزٌ عن تركه ولو لدقيقةٍ
شخصٌ أحبّبتَهُ بالفِطْرةِ
لكِنَّكَ تحاربُ من أجلِ هذا الحُبِّ في كلّ لحظةٍ
شخصٌ أعطاك كلّ ما يملكه
لكِنَّكَ لم تعد تملك شيئاً وأنت معه
شخصٌ يقدمُ لك ألف سببٍ لتنفّرَ عنه
لكِنَّكَ تجدُ نفسك بعد كلّ سببٍ تقتربُ منه
كيف يُمكنُ لشخصٍ واحدٍ أن يخلّقَ هذا المزيجَ من المشاعر؟
غريب...
أَيُعَقَلُ أن يكونَ الشّخصُ قوَّتَكَ
وفي الوقتِ نفسِهِ نقطةَ ضعفِكَ؟
أن يكونَ مَصْدَرُ أَمَلِكَ
رُغمَ كلّ خيباتِ الأملِ التي سبّبتها لِقَلْبِكَ؟
أَيُعَقَلُ هذا؟
فقاطعُ أسئلتي وقال مستغرباً: لكنّني لم أسألكَ عن شخص...
أُدرِكُ ذلكَ جيّداً
فقد حاولتُ مراراً أن أصفه
لكن في كلّ مرّةٍ وجَدْتُ نفسي ضائعةً في متاهةٍ مشاعري
فَخَلَقْتُ شَخْصاً وهميّاً في داخلي
لأحاولَ أن أفهمَ تلكَ المشاعرِ
لكن لكلِّ امرئٍ اسمٌ
فأخترتُ له أجملَ الأسماءِ
وأسميته لُبنانَ

جنى عبد الرّحيم



لم يَتَغَيَّرْ شَيْءٌ
ما زالَ الوَضْعُ كما كان وما زال النَّاسُ كما هُمْ
يعانونَ نَفْسَ المعاناتِ وَيَمُرُّونَ بِنَفْسِ روتينِ الحياةِ
يُحاولونَ جُهدَهُمَ بالاستمرارِ على قَيْدِ هذه الدُّنيا
ما الذي يَشُدُّنا نَحْوَ البَقَاءِ؟ ما العَائِقُ الذي يَقِفُ بيننا وبين
التَّوَقُّفِ عَنِ المُحاوَلَةِ؟
إِنَّهُ التَّعَلُّقُ إِلَى حَدِّ الجنونِ-
إِنَّهُ البَقَاءُ رُغْمَ البُعَادِ
وهو نِسْيَانُ من تكون ولما تكون
هو عَدَمُ مَعْرِفَتِكَ بِنَفْسِكَ
هو التَّخَلِّيَ عَنِ سِوَاهِ
التَّجَرُّدُ من حَقِيقَتِكَ كإنسانٍ فُتِمَسِيَ شَيْئًا آخَرًا
لم تَعُدْ تَعْرِفُ من أَنْتَ
إِعَادَةُ البِنَاءِ من جَدِيدٍ
تَعِيدُ طَرَحَ كُلِّ المسأَلِ بِطَرِيقَةٍ مُخْتَلَفَةٍ لِتَحْصَلَ على إجاباتٍ
وقواعدَ جَدِيدَةٍ كُنْتَ تَنْفِيهِها من قَبْلِ أو أَنَّها حَتَّى لم تَكُنْ موجودَةً
في قاموسِكَ
تَحاولُ البَحْثُ عَنِ هَوِيَّتِكَ خَوْفًا مِنَ التَّجَرُّدِ أو التَّلَاشِي
تَرى الجَمِيعَ متواصلين بالسَّعْيِ
كُلُّ يَبْحَثُ عَمَّا يَنْقُصُهُ
في أَمَاكِنِ الاختِباءِ مَقْصَدُهُمْ
ولكنَّ مُبْتَغَاهَهُمْ وَسَطُ العَيْنِ وَجَدَ
لا يَريدُ الإنسانُ سِوَى راحَتِهِ في هذه الدُّنيا
ولكنَّ لِيَتَهُ يَعْلَمُ أن ما هِيَ إِلَّا لِلتَّعَبِ والشَّقَا

زهراء الأمين



Leen Has Something To Say

Leen's favorite hobby is reading
She likes it a lot, but she doesn't like speaking
In front of everyone, her voice starts freezing

.....

She hides herself in her room
Opens her schoolbooks to read and bloom

....

She does this when no one is there
In front of her doll and her teddy bear
Each one sitting on a chair
They listen to her carefully and stare

....

After she's done, she finally goes to sleep
Hoping that tomorrow she'll feel confident to speak

.....

In class, she knocks her head on the table
She knows that she's not able
To recite publicly a speech that may be unstable

....

It's her turn now, she knows she's going to suffer
She told herself You can do it, Leen, today you won't stutter

.....

The teacher suddenly called out her name to come
But Leen was nervous about the outcome

....

She can hear her friends mocking her "Look at her, she can't talk,
what a shame!"

All that happening but the teacher had no one to blame

.....

"If you practice enough, you'd recite better," the teacher said

A lot of thoughts started popping up in Leen's head

She wanted to defend herself but instead

Her hands started shaking and her face turned red

.....

"Sit down Leen", the teacher ordered
"Tomorrow you'll be more prepared" Leen nodded

.....

She went back home to tell her parents she wasn't alright
But she found them screaming, having their daily fight

"Mo-o-m w-when-n
I-I..." I'm tired, Leen. We'll talk at night

.....

The next day, Leen was going to recite again
Standing in front of everyone, a war inside her began

.....

Her only wish was that this trouble could go away
Her last option was to run away

.....

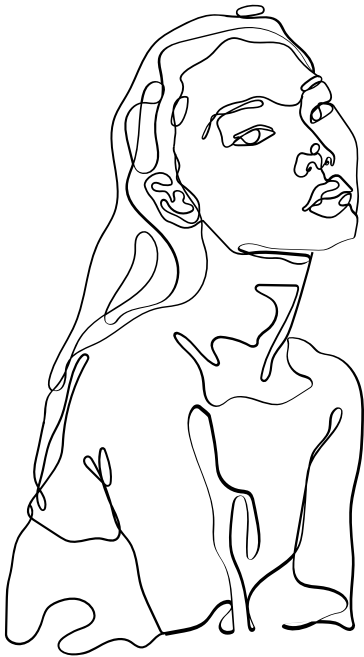
But she remembered that this is a never-ending fight
Which she always needs to be searching for light
Leen just needs to let her words flow
Even though the pace may seem slow

.....

She can be stuck on phrases or pause before a word
But her voice is still important to be heard
Leen could be a lesson to each one of you
To speak up and liberate all the beauty within you
To release all the butterflies from your chest
Your voice matters. Go ahead, you deserve all the best.



Imperfectly Perfect



Allow yourself to grow
so you can reveal
your buried talents they never ventured to explore,
an invigorating flower,
in submerged tunnels,
or opaque eyes that reflect
the complex hour
You are not flawless,
you are not supposed to be flawless,
but you are still somehow perfect.
-To be imperfectly perfect-

For years now, we have been clustered in chaotic fear trying
to find ourselves in the rising flood of insecurities and
norms; when in reality, all we really want is to not peek
behind after every step we have taken forward, to reach the
end stop of the land of broken visions, to unhook the
gripping ropes and ties and be released.
Empower as you get empowered, inspire as you get inspired;
don't be afraid to explore the precious brilliance that carries
around you before withering away unnoticed.....

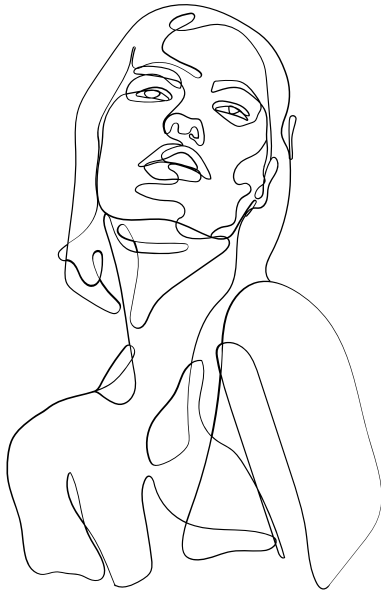
They call you fat
and you know, don't you?
you have memorized
the geography of this body
broken bird
mapping the earth, it is bound to a toad
it sits at the edge
of the pond, and you call it a mirror.



Heavy and sticky
painted on with
bursting curves-
marred,
a form of fitting light,
you had feathers,
once, you think
but you do not remember.
the memories bleed
and wound.
the hunger carved sharp
and hollow into your bones.
rotting the soil from inside out,
and you name it virtue.
but you, nameless
the vessel of something unholy
a lonely whiteness to the white-hot shame
lodged in your chest
burning the skies.

Imperfectly Perfect

You cover yourself
with a mask
hiding the flaws you hate
not realizing someone craves
those imperfections
you conceal.



My dear,
you are a canvas
and all your stretch marks,
acne, freckles, scars
are the artwork obtained
as an artist
of your body.
-Don't ever be ashamed-

Invisible yet fully embraced;
reveling in the exhilarating sensation of being alive,
liberated from the burden of just
existing.

We frequently experience the pure joy of sitting
around a group of friends, burying our heads in our
hands; smiling not at their words, but their laughter.
Or while leaving a crowded movie theatre, where
everyone is preoccupied with placing views on the
narrative, we are captivated by the light of the night.
A period where we feel secure remaining invisible
yet fully embraced. A time where we feel that we
are existing without any obligation being.



Imperfectly Perfect

The lingering aroma that you leave behind,
like the faint and unheard footprints in the
signature inscribed by you to the world
without awareness of the same.”

It is the smallest characteristics to associate us with
The way our nose wrinkles when we laugh, the
subtle tug of our eyebrows
when our eyes approach them to kiss them in a
moment of pure shock, or the
lingering fragrance that we allow air to convey from
us to the world.

And like a signature, it is imprinted in people’s
minds, in items that
they borrow from us, or in the paths we have
traveled upon.



The euphoric sensation you get when you make
someone you love laugh,
recognizing the dimples on their cheeks
or the smile lines that you can’t help but admire.
The glittering eyes that light up in a glassy reflection of
their raw emotion,
allowing you to discover the beauty within their soul.

The detailed maps of wrinkles revealing all about their
smile and times of joy.
As though you’ve discovered the secret to their soul’s
honest rumblings.
Absolutely warm, inviting, and beautiful.

Imperfectly Perfect

She is poetry.
and not the facile kind.
She is the most radiant,
chaotic thing I have ever seen.
A tangled-up disarray
of thinnest thread.
She was a book that was left untouched by many,
read by a quantity,
but was not seen beneath her exquisite words.
I noticed light and fragility in her eyes,
which drew me in as my heart sank to my chest.

Her eyes contained a hint of stories
you would want to read so eagerly.
They deepened me with indescribable emotions
and lifted me up with light.
I saw her. No, I did not just see her,
I saw right through her pierced wounded heart.
She was purely a work of art that I couldn't seem to let go of.
She was flawlessly imperfect.
My heart pounded loudly in my chest
when I was lingering near her.
It almost felt like it was about to explode.
It left me wondering if she could hear it too,
and she could.
The stories were within her,
she was an untold mystery waiting to be revealed
by only one person who could truly understand her.
Her little shrugs and agitation revealed so many
words to me.
She made me feel alive again,
but in the end,
she stopped loving me,
and I didn't know how to be okay with that.
Sometimes the most beautiful stories
do not end with happy endings,
but rather agonizing ache
of a buried heart.
The truth is,
Sometimes, we chance on people
who have one foot outside the door. - almost



Imperfectly Perfect



What you need to understand is this:

You are not a paper doll,
shoved between fire embers,
ready to be degraded into ashes.
You are not a paper doll,
that can be controlled
with something so simple,
like a breeze of wind
or... a pair of hands.
You are not a public locket
with the keys thrown away
in every person's pocket.



If I were to describe the beauty of people,
I would say they are like paintings.
I would hold a paint brush,
and turn them into poetry.
I would highlight the smallest details of
their imperfections,
that sets them apart from others,
creating them into a masterpiece.
I would gently stroke the paintbrush
and my fingertips across the canvas,
permanently carving them into history
others would deeply embrace.

You are not a cello
with a box
handed down to everyone.
You are the fire itself.
You are the artistic portrait
hung on top of the wall
at a famous museum,
with the sign,
“DO NOT TOUCH” over it.
You are the storm,
and “you”, as I tremble with my voice,
and look you so deeply in the eyes,
with every fiber of my body
screaming out,
“you, you are worthy and loved.”

Sky Kumbarji



A special thanks to the writers of the Herald, who continue to show their resolve in these hard times. To the readers, thank you for continuing to be our inspiration and for trusting us with The Herald.

The Herald



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