

A detailed oil painting of a hand holding a lit candle over an open envelope. The candle is melting, with wax dripping down its stem. The envelope is held open, and a wisp of smoke rises from the flame. On the table in the foreground, there is an old key and several coins. The background is dark and moody.

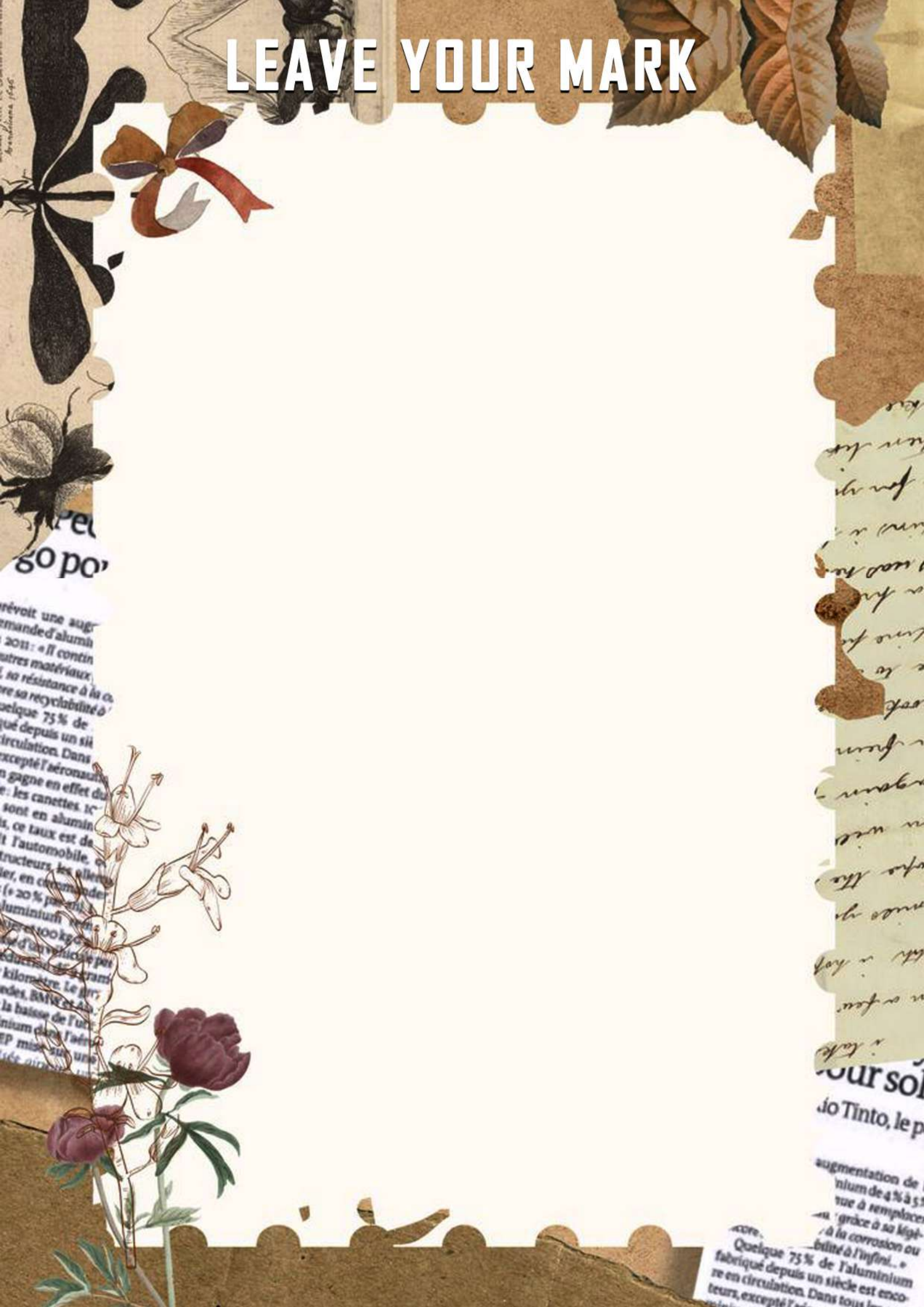
HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY

THE HERALD

UNSENT LETTERS

FALL ISSUE 2025
XXXIV 2

LEAVE YOUR MARK



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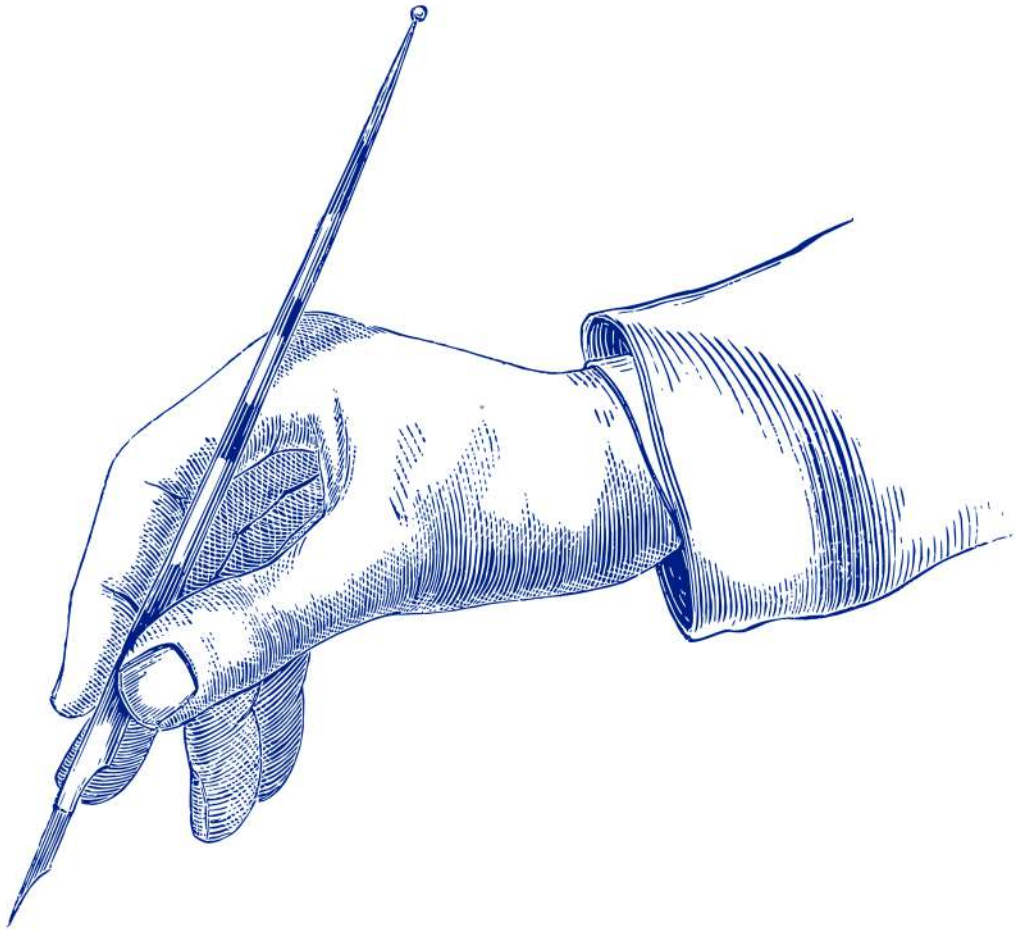
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Quelque 75 % de l'aluminium
fabriqué depuis un siècle est enco-
re en circulation. Dans tous les
secteurs, excepté l'aéro-

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Each writer handles the depth of their creation by either piling it up in a hidden drawer or sharing the polished, self-approved version. The intended endpoint for each writer this semester was to look beyond the horizon set by mediocre standards.

During the war, voice was given to oblivious tyrants while innocent souls took their testaments to the grave. This tragedy created a phenomenal yet scarring truth: survivors of trauma relentlessly demanded their voices to be heard. In a world where two leaders shook hands over the martyrs lost in your homeland, calling it a truce, let the ink that touches your paper engrave the souls of those who defy you.

The theme of Herald seemed cliché at first. Up until the day of the meeting held to announce this semester's theme, I was extremely hesitant, reflecting on how I might lose writers. We are socialized to stay silent, to be overwhelmed to the point of exhaustion, and to glance through our soul without ever giving value to its tamed existence. Every single writer in this issue proved me wrong.

Despite the bold theme of this issue a record number of authors have contributed to this Herald.. My semester was filled with writers coming up to me and sharing their creations with unreserved enthusiasm. I even had students whom I had never met before contact me to be a part of this beautiful journey. Endless writings started flowing in. Some submissions called out the atrocities in Palestine, grieved about lost loved ones, addressed their past relationships and shared the struggles of the Lebanese people. In other writings, voices were given to proud Armenians refusing to remain silent.

You now see the fruits of this courage before you. This magazine is a crafted blend, brought to life by the many artisans who contributed to this beautiful issue.

My biggest appreciation goes to the former chair of this club, my dearest friend, Alik Djinbachian, who mentored me and made me fall in love with The Herald. Her peaceful stance throughout the hectic editorial process always amazed me. I joined this club as a pure hobby and as a mad writer. With a single twist, I stand here forever grateful for the day she saw this potential in me. I thank her for the endless calls, unconditional support and advice that helped me hold my head up high.

My unsent letter was left blank up until the very end because of all the challenges I encountered as chair of the club. Those who witnessed every crack behind all these perfect pages, every imperfection hiding in my confident speeches, and all my fear concealed with professionalism were my amazing board members. Dear Galy Takvorian, Mairy Mardirossian, Aya Kaddoura and Tvin Hergelian, you were the missing pieces in my new chapter.



THE CHAIRPERSON'S
CORNER

The dedication of our creative team matched the depth of our writers. Thank you to the beautiful artists who embodied the vision of all the writings and made the magazine as expressive as its writers intended. Our wonderful designer, Rita Hamalian, who kindled a spark in every page of this journal. Our dearest photographers, Sirag Kendirjian and Armen Simonian, who captured our beautiful writers' portraits. And finally, our beloved artists, Lina Al-Kujuk and Reem Al Jama from Haigazian University's Art Club, who created the beautiful cover of this issue, transforming our vision into a phenomenal piece of art.

This semester, we welcomed a surreal number of editors, hoping their load would be lighter. But they embellished the piles of writings handed out to them, wholeheartedly, with such elegance and dedication. At each turn, I expected to be told that their overwhelming schedules would not let them continue. Instead, the response I always received made me tear up more than once, reflecting their humble souls and appreciation towards this club. Hasmig Aintablian, Helena Abou Sefian, Ibrahim Al Najjar, Narod Arabian, Serly Nemshehirlian, Yara Arnaout, Mairy Mardirossian, Michaela Sabbagh, and Jana AbdulRahim, you made each unsent story a beautiful revelation.

What makes this club truly special is that our dearest faculty members, Dr. Christine Arzoumanian, Dr. Shoghig Kaloussian, and Ms. Mirjam Polak, are equally invested in sharing their art. When it comes to offering support, being a reliable shoulder, and sharing your utmost private thoughts, you sincerely make every experience memorable.

Thank you to our beloved Campus Minister, proofreader, and writer, Reverend Wilbert Van Saane, who did not hesitate for a second to help us in our journey.

Most importantly, a huge appreciation goes to our Student Life Director, Razmig Kaprielian, who was present as a watchful eye throughout the entire process, having an open mind for every new step taken in the making of this magazine.

Last but not least, to our adored writers, who gave me a reason to continue. None of this would have been possible if you had not chosen to confront the deepest parts within yourselves and unleash this infinite cascade of creativity. I thank each and every one of you.

Dear reader, I welcome you to a hall of mirrors, where each one symbolizes a phenomenal text

To be continued...

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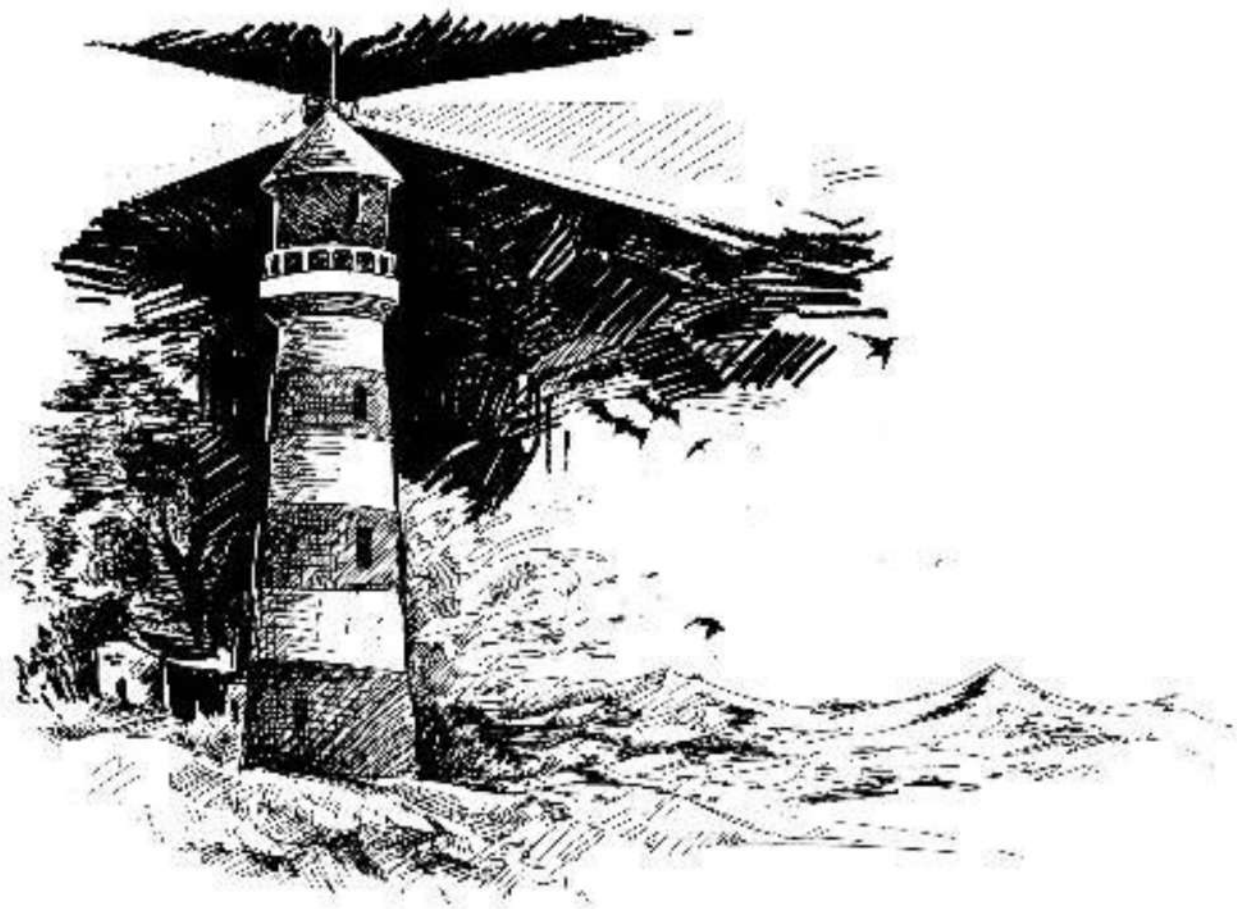
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STUDENT COUNSELOR

NAME: MIRJAM POLAK

OFFICE: COLLEGE BUILDING, 201

EMAIL: MIRJAM.POLAK@HAIGAZIAN.EDU.LB



MEET THE TEAM

SUPERVISOR



RAZMIG KAPRIELIAN
Director of Student Life

PROOFREADER



REV. WILBERT VAN SAANE
Campus Minister

CHAIRPERSON & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



ARENIE BOYNERIAN
Biology

DESIGNER



RITA HAMALIAN
Alumna-Class of 2021-MLS

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GALY TAKVORIAN
*Assistant
MIS*



MAURY MARDIROSSIAN
*Assistant & Editor
Psychology*



TVIN HERGELIAN
*Assistant
Psychology*

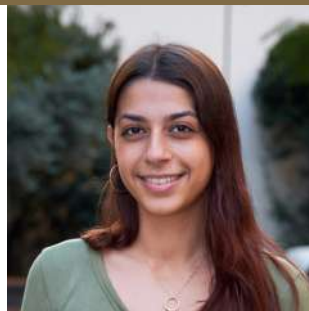


AYA KADDOURA
*Club Representative
Political Science*

EDITORS



HASMIG AINTABLIAN
*Alumna-Class 2025-
Computer Science*



HELENA ABOUSEFIAN
*Alumna-Class 2025-
English Literature*



IBRAHIM ALNAJJAR
MBA-Finance



NAROD ARABIAN
English Literature



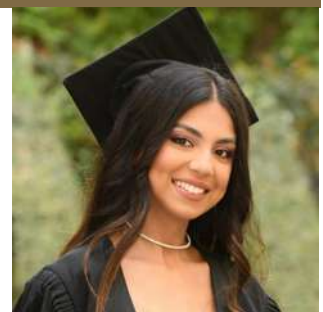
SERLY NEMSHEHIRLIAN
*Education-Emphasis
Armenian*



YARA ARNAOUT
English Literature



MICHAELA SABBAGH
Political Science



JANA ABDULRAHIM
*Alumna-Class 2023-
Economics*

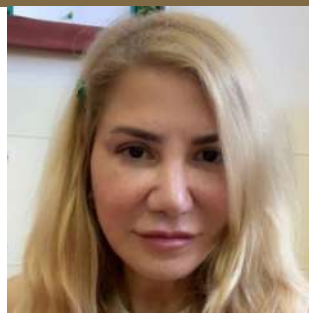
FACULTY & STAFF



DR. CHRISTINE ARZOUMANIAN
Faculty Member



MS. MIRJAM POLAK
Student Counselor



DR. SHOGHIG KALOUSSIAN
Faculty Member

WRITERS



ALIK DJINBACHIAN
*Alumna-Class 2025
Former Chairperson*



CATHERINE TOROSSIAN
Biology



DENIZE YACCOUB
Biology



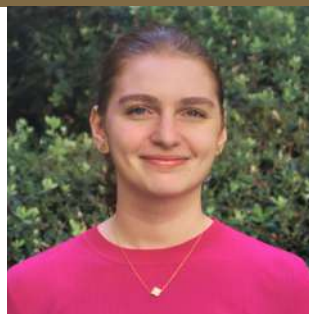
GACCIA NORSHAHIAN
Biology



MIA PARSUMEAN
*Alumna-Class 2025-
Biology*



SARAH HELBAWI
Biology



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Administration



ARAZ KHEDERIAN
Hospitality Management



AYA RAMADAN
Marketing



GORUN KAZEZIAN
Business



LORY GUERGUERIAN
Administration



ARMIG HAKIMIAN
*Alumna-Class 2021
Education-Emph.
Special Education*



CINDY TOPEYAN
ECE



RALPH TANNOUS
*Alumnus-Class 2025-
Education*



JUDE AL HAJJAR
English Literature



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Human Resources



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Human Resources



LAYAN ABBAS
MLS



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MLS



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Nutrition*



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Political Science



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Psychology



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Psychology



FARAH JADAYEL
Psychology



GARBIS DER GHAZARIAN
Psychology



JESSIE KRIKORIAN
Psychology



KARIN KHEDERIAN
Psychology



MARIE REINE AWEDIKIAN
*Alumna-Class 2025
Psychology*



RAWAN BAGHDADI
Psychology



MOUHAMAD CHEHAB
*Alumnus-Class 2024
Social Work*



SERLY TOPEYAN
*Alumna-Class 2024-
Social Work*

UNSENT LETTERS TO OUR FALLEN MARTYRS IN ARTSAKH:

**PAGES STAINED WITH PRIDE,
GRIEF AND GRATITUDE
THAT NEVER REACHED
OUR HEROES.**

01

ԱՐՑԱԽԻ ՆԱՀԱՏԱԿՆԵՐ

Կը գրեմ ձեզի՝ Արցախի նահատակներուդ՝ սրտիս խոր ծանրութեամբ, ողբերգութեամբ եւ տառապանքով խառն ու անխօս վիշտով, որ երբեք չեմ կրնար բառերով արտայայտել: Կը գրեմ իբրեւ հայ երիտասարդ, որ իր հոգիին մէջ կը կրէ բռնագրաւեալ հայրենի հողերուն ճիչը, տառապանքը եւ այն կեանքը, զոր դուք պարգեւեցիք՝ մեր ժողովուրդին ոգին անսասան պահելու համար:

Մենք կորսնցուցինք տուներ, լեռներ, գիւղեր եւ հազարաւոր կեանքեր: Բայց դուք, մեր սիրելի հերոսներ, մեզի սորվեցուցիք, թէ ինչպէ՞ս կարելի է արիութեամբ պայքարիլ մինչեւ վերջին շունչը՝ յանուն հայրենիքի եւ մեր ժողովուրդի գոյութեան: Ձեր զոհողութիւնը մեզի ներշնչեց անսասան տոկոնութիւն, ձեր հոգին ամրացուց մեր սրտերը, իսկ ձեր կորուստը մեզի յիշեցուց, որ հայութեան ոգին երբեք չի մարիր:

Կը խորհիմ այն մայրերուն մասին, որոնք գիշերները ողբացին՝ գիտնալով, որ կրկին պիտի չտեսնեն իրենց որդիները. այն հայրերուն մասին, որոնք այլեւս պիտի չգրկեն իրենց ընտանիքը, եւ այն մանուկներուն մասին, որոնք պիտի մեծնան՝ զրկուած ձեր հայեացքէն եւ սէրէն:

Ձեր կեանքն ու արիութիւնը մեզի համար դարձան անմահ դաս: Ձեր ոգին մեզ կը մեծարէ իւրաքանչիւր քայլափոխի, մեզ կը ներշնչէ կերտելու այն ապագան, ուր ոչինչ կը մոռցուի: Կը հաւատանք, որ արդարութեամբ այս բոլորը պիտի վերականգնին: Դուք պաշտպանեցիք մեր ապագան, մեր երազները, մեր հաւատքը եւ մեր ինքնութիւնը: Դուք մեզի համար անմահ վկայութիւն մըն էք, որ մեր սիրտը, լեզուն եւ մշակոյթը երբեք պիտի չկորսուին:

Նաեւ կը գրեմ ձեզի՝ յայտնելու, թէ մենք՝ ձեր երիտասարդ սերունդը, պիտի շարունակենք ձեր սկսած ճամբան: Ձեր յիշատակները կը տանջեն մեզ, բայց միեւնոյն ժամանակ կը սորվեցնեն հաւատալ, պայքարիլ եւ հպարտ լինալ:

Մենք կը շարունակենք ջրել գետնի վրայ տնկած ձեր սերմը՝ ձեր երազանքները, պայքարը եւ հաւատքը: Իւրաքանչիւր քայլ, որ մենք կը ձեռնարկենք յանուն մեր հայրենիքին եւ մեր ժողովուրդին, կրնայ դառնալ փոքրիկ շնորհակալութիւն մը՝ ձեր արիութեան եւ զոհողութեան դիմաց: Ձեր ոգին մեզ կ'առաջնորդէ, մեզի կը սորվեցնէ ջանձնուիլ եւ մեզ կը մղէ կառուցելու այն ապագան, ուր հայութեան սիրտը ազատ եւ հպարտ շունչ կ'առնէ:

Ձեր անունները երբեք չեն մոռցուիր: Իւրաքանչիւր պատմութիւն եւ յուշատախտակ կը պահեն ձեր յիշատակները: Մենք կը պահպանենք ձեր հոգին, կ'ապրեցնենք ձեր երազանքները, եւ վստահ ենք, թէ որքան շատ պայքարինք, այնքան ձեր անունը եւ յիշատակը ամէն օր պիտի շարունակեն ապրիլ մեր կողքին: Յաւերժ սիրով, յարգանքով եւ անմար վիշտով:



COLLATERAL DAMAGE

To whomever it may concern,

44 days of hope, and terror. Anticipation isn't quite the right word to use. Mothers were stuck in front of the TV, next to their phones; they knew that they either had to mourn their sons or their homes. Nevertheless, there was collateral damage. For politics, the right collateral damage was the five thousand soldiers, the smarter option; for hope, there was no better option, either loss held the heaviness of still unnamed tombstones.

Politics was intricate manipulation; it knew how to talk, to convince people to give away part of their own identities to a jailer, to a captor who still holds the pieces captive, daring to call these pieces their own, their right, believing history is on their side. Although the latter wasn't a lie, Artsakh marched on, having a map that lied, politics that had no patriotism, and a forever distorted idea of peace.

We called it a wedding, and had the papers of annulment held over it since then, as if we were prepared to mourn a wedding since the ecstasy of it. For politics, the bride and the groom were mere collateral damage; for hope, another wedding was already in the making. Maybe giving away offered the unknown peace that was dreamed of, although when politics is the one who's playing the game of right and wrong, and when it has no knowledge of the definiteness of peace, of damaging a home, of breaking a mother's heart, of extinguishing hope; the result of the game is absolute and indisputable. We were so used to celebrating, pictures of soldiers with their armor up high, snippets of joy among men who knew how to hold peace by the hand and bring it home, boys who understood sacrifice without a degree in the science of politics. In the 44-day war, we didn't see any similarities, but 1992 and 2020 had a thing or two in common; both wars had soldiers with a home to lose, soldiers with hope, and a sense of self-sacrifice. Hope was settled in them all, and it brought their home back in 1992, but in 2020 men gave up their breath for a hope that was lost to politics. And dreams had no place in a game with men who shook hands in an office with a man who knew how to disguise well, all for a fabricated idea of peace. Histories have named the wars: Գոյամարտ, երկրորդ պատերազմ, 44-օրեայ պատերազմ. It had these titles, and the world sided with the party that called it "peace enforcement." The first missile was for peace, and the last Artsakh captive taken was for enforcement.

We still sit, wait, wonder when the generation of Vicken Zakarian will rise again, when our defense isn't a treaty, when we will choose to fight, and when we'll stop asking վասն ինչի, because it's finally registered in us that the answer is վասն հայրենիքի.

To whomever it may concern, it's not a matter of concern anymore.

Kind regards,

A mourner with hope.



UNSENT DIARIES:

WHEN SILENCE SPEAKS



02

AYA KADDOURA

BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF PASSING GATES

To whom I hope to call home,

When did it all begin? For years, I've waited for the moment I could finally leave, yet somehow, I always find myself here again. When will I hear the words, "*Gate number 09, closing in five minutes*"? Is it us who are at fault, or is it you who keeps finding a way to pull us back?

There was a time when I almost left, bags packed, papers pending, a new life waiting somewhere. But as always, your shadows reached me there too. And just like that, the chance faded. "*Everything happens for a reason.*"

Growing up amidst uncertainty and disarray has made it difficult to define belonging. Division, corruption, and indifference have become all too familiar. "There is no future here," they say, but who is truly responsible? Is it the youth who have given you nothing but hope? The citizens who persist in believing in reform? Or those in power whose choices have deepened the cracks in our foundations?

Perhaps the fault lies with all of us for choosing endurance over action, and silence over accountability. To those who once promised that time would bring change, it has been years and yet little has shifted.

You embody both chaos and serenity, resilience and sorrow, a place where nature and history remain intertwined. When will you rise beyond the weight of conflict? How much longer must you fight to hold yourself together? I hope to, one day, embrace your endurance not as tragedy, but as triumph.

A citizen in waiting,



WHAT I LOST TRYING TO LOVE YOU

This letter sits in the back of my mind folded and heavy with everything I never said.

You always knew how to get what you wanted out of me. You used the right words, right timing, and right tone. You knew how I would fold and do whatever was asked of me. You used me, and, for a long time, I let you. You spotted my weakness and twisted it to your own advantage. My affection for you made me care enough to run after you every time you called, placing your happiness above my own. I neglected my own soul in the process. I kept trying to fill your emptiness, convinced that it might be the only way to prove my love and loyalty. But all it did was drain me. You emptied my vase without caring. In the end, all I saw was a blank reflection of myself resembling a faraway stranger.

Too late I learned not to trust sharing my feelings with you, because it always ended in manipulation. If I said I was upset, you'd explain why I shouldn't be. You judged everything I shared with you. Slowly, you taught me that none of my feelings had a place in this world. Sadness? You dismissed it. Depression? You ignored and blamed it on my closest. Happiness? You made me feel guilty for having it. Me being human was too dramatic for you. And I believed it. That's the hurtful truth. I taught myself how to bury my thoughts. As if moving on with no regard to how I felt was normal.

From my deepest cuts, I learned that nothing I did was ever enough. Every effort, every achievement, every moment where I pushed myself; You never said you were proud of me. You never assured me that I mattered. I tried a thousand different ways to impress you, to make you smile, to hear a proud sentiment in your voice. I stretched myself thin, hoping for love that never arrived. As if love was something to be earned or held upon certain conditions or benefits. You never saw the vulnerable soul standing in front of you that whole time. I shrank because I gave you control.

This letter will stay unsent. I chose myself.
Manipulation can stay as your weapon.
Your approval might as well be worthless.
What is love if it is bound to unimaginable fantasies?

DEAR NO ONE,

I spent an eternity contemplating every corner of my existence trying to come to terms with why I never confronted you. You rose out of delusional hypocrisies thinking you were entitled to that crown of yours, which was gifted by the same corrupt hands that made you their leader.

How did every one of your lies become a prophecy? How did my truth become so tangible yet so unbelievable?

Genesis 3:19 “dust you are, and to dust you shall return”

I watched you mimic God, holding my entire essence in your hand as if it were the dust dripping off your fingers, returning me to where my almighty intended me before my time came.

You held me close with a deranged and manipulative touch, saying, “I have to”. Did it ever occur to you that you gave yourself too much power just when all your life was falling apart? Why did I have to become the biggest victim in your self-pitying acts?

I became a stranger in front of my reflection, not because I was wrong, but for the sole reason that you decided to stand on your pedestal and hurl out what you deliberately chose to define as flawed. And my most shameful act became my acceptance of your tyranny.

You had no remorse. For a year, I suffered the consequences of an act that was not mine to claim. I stood silent while you convinced yourself that you had eradicated a certain “disease” from your society. I felt everything so deeply, but nothing was ever articulated. And If I were to envision my state of being then through a canvas; you would ironically see only an untouched white fabric. This symbolizes my silence, my defiance to put on a show to please those whose own masks have become embedded in their skin.

Two years have passed, and the echoes of what “you had to do” still show their eerie face once in a while, depicting how a maniac, who was let loose and whose acts were not tamed, will have their absurdity leaving traces for a long time.

I never realized that your impact only reached those who were as meaningless as you. Those who mirrored your behavior and got cast out. Those who raised you up and eventually lost all credibility. At the time, my thoughts were overruled by this wave of loud cruelty. If only I had known that hollow minds sound the loudest in our society.

I address this letter to you: a person who has a void in their essence, a person who’s a nonentity and a nobody.

I stand upon my dignity, not hiding behind whatever standards society wants me to fulfil.

I stand with pride, refusing to change my essence to be accepted and loved.

I stand tall, as the conductor of this entire magazine, urging and inspiring every single person to preach using their voices that were left to rot.

Regards,

The person who outgrew you.

BISSAN EL HASSAN

QUIET LIGHT OF HOPE

You survived.
You think you won't,
But you will.

The screams, the yells, the cries, the fear—that intense, bone-deep fear—they don't just fade. You have your room back, your bed, and most of your family intact... yet something is different.

Something has changed. It is not the same anymore. How could it be?

I look at old pictures of you and remember how peaceful life was just months ago, even mere days before it all began. I ache for the innocence you carried, your calm, your laughter, your lightheartedness...

I miss the quiet hum of ordinary days, when morning began without fear, when laughter came easily, when people smiled without that distant look in their eyes.

Life used to feel so simple, so whole. I didn't realise back then how precious that lightness was, how it filled the air, how it lived in small things.

Don't take it for granted.

Sometimes I close my eyes to try and remember the innocent sound of laughter before it cracked, the scent of home before it became a memory.

Now everything feels heavy. People carry invisible weights in their eyes, in their voices, in their hearts.

Even silence has changed. There's a heaviness that hangs over everyone, like a thick, suffocating fog.

But fog doesn't last forever. It thins, it lightens, it lifts. And when it does, you will see the world again; softer, maybe, but alive.

I am not writing to dwell on hardship, but to whisper of hope, to remind you of the resilience etched into every step you have taken.

Every Saturday, your steps wander through quiet streets, tracing the lives of families you've yet to know. Stories spill from open windows, and small hands reach for yours. And that's when you hear it; that sound you thought was gone forever, that echo, fragile and familiar, trembling in the air as if it had never left.

The sweet, innocent laughter of children, fearless, pure, free...

Then it comes, the gentle pulse of Hope, subtle and persistent, reminding you that perhaps it was never truly lost.

May you always follow the laughter, guided by the quiet light of hope.

"For indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease."

RALPH TANNOUS

WOODEN SCENT

Instead of witnessing your reaction to my sincerest expressions,
the letter soaks in the wooden scent of my drawer.

The words might have been written in permanent ink,
yet does it guarantee your feelings remain the same after all this time?

The folder remains sealed just like my truest desire to confront it.

The only thing I yearn to address, other than my authenticity, is this small sentiment to you.

However, what keeps me on the sidelines is the memory of all the bridges that promised sturdiness, only to
leave me standing on brittle land.

My hand has grown weary from all the waltzing across ballrooms of bruised papers.

Yet yours was written with a touch of rejuvenating remedy.

I wholeheartedly wish I could claim the key to your affection in the same way I claimed these words for you.

And I ache for you to release me from my confinement of doubts as much as I ache to release the letter from
the borders of my mind.





LORI MARASHLIAN

THE YOU THAT WAS ME ALL ALONG

Why?
Why did you do this to me?
Why did you make me feel like I was never enough?

You were supposed to hold me, protect me
Instead, you tore me down.
Why did you let me fall?

Why did you treat me like I was a mistake?
Why do you ache every time you face your own reflection,
As if your own image is a sin you must apologize for?

You kneel for peace, yet when God extends His hand,
You turn away,
As if you are unworthy of His blessing.
Why?

Why can you forgive everyone,
Yet judge yourself so harshly?
Why do you beg for love,
Yet run from it the moment it comes too close?
Why do you choose cowardice,
When all you've ever wanted was to be held?

Why do you silence your heart
Right when it begins to open,
The moment when it begins to feel?

You call yourself weak,
But look at all the times you rose again from the depths that were meant to break you.
Why can't you see that as strength?

Why do you believe that feeling pain is what makes you worthy?

I'm tired of fighting with you.
I am tired of begging you to see what's been right in front of you all along.

I'm here exhausted,
Standing on weak limbs,
But still breathing.

Still waiting for the day I stop asking,
"*What is wrong with me?*"
and finally understand
that nothing was ever wrong.

And then it hits me:
the enemy I chased through every shadow
was me
all along.

— Me

A woman in a long, flowing blue dress is shown from the waist down, standing in a field of soft, golden light. Numerous yellow and orange petals or leaves are falling around her, and several small, glowing butterflies are scattered throughout the scene. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and ethereal.

GACCIA NORSHAHIAN

SO I CAN BE FREE

I never sent this letter. Perhaps because I knew it wouldn't change anything, or because I knew you didn't deserve it at all. You made me feel special, yet I was never really yours. You belonged to someone else, yet you made me believe my company was the only thing you ever wanted, the only thing you ever craved.

You used to ask her to imitate me. Tell me, was that how you filled the void? Out of everything you did, that hurt the most: knowing you tried to recreate me within a life you built with someone else. Knowing I meant something, but not enough for you to choose me. Sometimes, I still think about you, not out of longing, but because of how easily I believed your promises, how willingly I stayed.

I kept waiting for the day your words would finally mean something. But they never did. You convinced yourself you had moved on, but for a moment, I made you feel something you hadn't felt in years. And still, you made me the villain in your story. You walked away unscathed, playing the victim, while I was left carrying the weight of your lies. Maybe one day you will realize the weight of your actions. But I already have: love should not wound, and truth should never need excuses.

So, if you ever come across this letter, know this: This is not for you. I'm no longer the girl who waited, who believed, or who cried over someone too weak to be honest. You were never worth the pain I gave you credit for. You can keep pretending you're fine, keep lying to yourself, but deep down, you'll always know what you lost. I'm not the same anymore. I am wiser. I am stronger. I am free. Funny how you once wrote those exact words to me at the end of that book you gave me, "You are now wiser and stronger." You were right about one thing: I am. Just not because of you, but because I survived you.

CATHERINE TOROSSIAN

LES LÈVRES SCELLÉS

C'était fini. Ils ne se reverraient plus, et ils redeviendraient de simples étrangers. Des étrangers avec, au fond de la poche, quelques souvenirs à peine tièdes.

Juliette sentait sa vision se brouiller, comme si le monde s'effaçait sur le pont. Sur ce pont, ils tournaient la dernière page de leur histoire: une page ornée de leurs rires, leurs silences, et de tout ce qu'ils n'avaient jamais osé dire; une que chacun reliait en secret, peut-être tard dans une nuit d'ennui, quand les cœurs s'alourdissent un peu trop.

En un clin d'œil, tout avait changé entre eux. Ils étaient passés d'une simple rencontre à quelque chose de plus fragile, de plus toxique, de plus lumineux.

Un souffle entre deux âmes.

L'amour... ce n'est pas une situation que l'on cherche.

C'est un phénomène qui arrive. Malheureusement, les humains ne savaient pas aimer. Au contraire, ils flétrissaient ce sentiment, ils dégradaient sa nature.

Comment un cœur peut-il battre, puis se taire, puis réapprendre à battre?

Comment l'amour peut-il, à la fois, sauver et blesser?

Son amant avait pris la dague qu'il avait intentionnellement enfoncée dans son cœur; il avait laissé son nom sur son cœur, un nom qui resterait, qui la hanterait, même lorsqu'elle aurait tourné la page, même lorsque tout le reste disparaîtrait.

Elle baissa les yeux, et dans ce simple geste, il y avait toute la fin du monde dans ses yeux. Une brise l'arracha à ses pensées. Elle avait toujours détesté cette saison... Ou plutôt, parce que dans sa mémoire elle serait toujours coincée sur la même saison pour l'éternité, puisqu'il était parti et le temps s'est arrêté. Au lieu d'être l'amour de sa vie, il avait été sa perte. Sa plus grande perte.



UNSENT POEMS:

WHISPERS OF THE HEART

03

30L90

To say that I've met you and shaken your hand.
Now, that would be the biggest lie on land.
I'd climb never-ending mountains if that were true,
An idol, long gone, but closer to my heart than "I do".
It's strange how I feel as close to you as ever;
I know your melodies, your words, all that made you clever.

If there's one wish I have in my last judgment case,
Before they escort me to my forever grace or misplace,
I'd like you to meet me in purgatory.
I'd shake your hand, turn my boombox to 30/90,
And if I'm ever lucky,
You'd tell me 36 would have been an okay number,
For you and for me.



ARTWORK BY ZAHRAA ZALZALE
(HAIGAZIAN 2021, 2024)

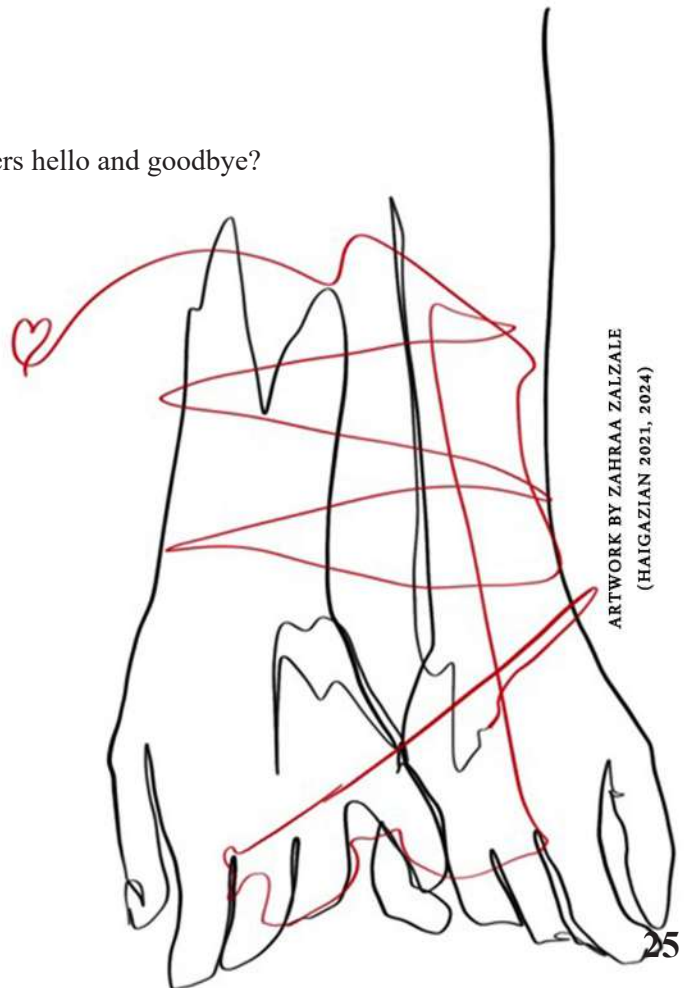
AN ODE TO MY FIRST LOVE

Soledad cannot even compare,
With music and lyrics, not even Molière.
Love at first sight, a breath of fresh air,
The sound of your voice, your silver hair,
Five fragments of a pure, restless love affair.

Sixteen celebrations, still going strong,
A remembrance every September, as you play our song.
I accompany you with every variation.
I hold your hand to cease termination.

You're my haven in this chaotic world.
A friend, unparalleled, against the absurd.
I wish you could speak,
You're a riddle no one can solve, even with the right technique.

If you're the riddle, then who am I?
The writer? The imposter? The lie?
Or just a fool who touches you, waving her fingers hello and goodbye?



SELF & NON-SELF

Somewhere between my weary bones and my axial skeleton,
There is a premature graveyard of a breath that will never take flight.
Overgrown and obtrusive, I tug at the weeds,
Like there is a way to kill what is already dead and rotten,
Beneath damp soil and simmering sun;
To weave thread into flesh and close a gaping wound,
To relish in the bloodied tapestry of the self,
To transcend omniscient eyes and crude hands,
But what becomes of this self?
When the very hands it ached for, unravelled it,
Watched as its blood stained carpets, skin and honour?
What becomes of the self,
That suffered so beautifully at the hands of its beholder?
When its suffering was no longer autonomous?
Drugstore lipstick-stained teeth glow UV blue in the dark.
How do I escape the bite marks on my shins,
That crawl up my esophagus like ivy,
And die on my tongue like sweetened rot?
Yellow bruises on my knees speak of healing,
But we both know there are other ways to beg.
To remain this half-light, half-dead thing, choking on dirt,
I chose to kill this body,
But I needed you to bury it;
And so sometimes I blame you too.
Purple-rimmed ankles from last summer still shatter against the pink marble of my bathroom
tiles;
Every morning now, I teach myself how to walk again.



A LETTER GOD READ FIRST

How hard could it be,
To grieve someone who is still breathing?
Do we really lose what's near,
Or just the vision of what felt worth believing?

The narrative had to change,
To ensure that voice would never range.
Words were written, a letter unsent,
A truth once carried, a heart's lament.

Today, a match is struck at last,
Flames rise and cleanse the past.
The paper curls, the ink dissolves,
Secrets unspoken, forever absolved.

And yet, it settles here.

The words once feared to set afloat,
Become the wings that help us float.
Sometimes God removes with quiet grace,
To keep souls safe from a darker place.

Compared to Christ who bore the cross,
This pain is light; there is no loss.
Through trials faced, the spirit grew,
A gentler light now guides it through.

*Even silence helps to see,
What's lost was meant to set you free.*



THE UNIVERSE ITSELF

And I had to endure life, learning how to live it without her,
I had to leave the surreality of her.
I'd have chosen her over eternity,
I'd have chosen her over serenity.

She slipped away,
She forced herself out of my way.
I tried to bury her in captivity,
Entangle her in my infinity.

But she still got away.
I hated the idea of having 'the one that got away',
It was impolitic,
A surreality, absurdly dramatic.

How I hated you, the universe itself,
For ignoring my screams like the deaf,
To gift her to me in a chest, on a gold platter,
And actually make her scatter.

I'd have chosen her over flesh and blood,
And I'd have chosen her over an angel if I could,
But what would a savior have for me?
What would a promise to paradise offer me?

To love? To be loved? To be saved?

I'd have chosen to reside in hell if it meant holding her closely,
Even if only for two hundred and sixteen hours, precisely.
I resorted to this, pleading to the universe in a letter,
My spoken words were going unheard, and bare.

I was stuck somewhere inexplicable,
In a void where she was unattainable,
With the hold of something that was drowning me,
All because I was paying for a crime committed against me.

For the love I had for her,
And the hope that grew desperate, then stronger,
I couldn't curse her existence,
But I would bribe the universe
For a worse destiny to befall her.

LORY GUERGUERIAN

WALTZ OF THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

I have this fear that you wait for me
As seeds grow into trees
And trees into memories— shared by you and I
As chrysanthemums wither and fall
Waiting for me to die

For decades, I've been drawn to you
Like a moth to a flame
They told me not to,
Yet all they did was push me and blame

How could I,
When I dug through my mind and found you
Standing there, with ember eyes and elegiac smiles
It was at that moment when I knew
That poets persist because of you

You're the pied piper
Weaving a hypnotic tune
Making me addicted to the moments,
Shared with you and the moon

I remember how you took my hand in yours
As we danced through ages and pages— longing for more
Yet you told me you must depart
For time is but a fleeting art

In every tick, I hear you call
From dusk till dawn, you have it all
You color the world in waning hue
Then fade away— as passing hours do

In every instant, I visit you, Time
In momentary murmurs, you remain
Your motion is silent— calm and prime
As we waltz together through the rain

KARIN KHEDERIAN

STILL CARRYING YOU

I reach for the past,
for your warmth in the corners of my memory,
for the moments I didn't know whether to hold onto,
the ones that slipped through my hands
before I realized how rare they were,
for the laughter, the quiet,
and the way the world felt softer and lighter,
when you were here.

When I was young,
I didn't cherish the times we had
the way I wish I had.
To hear your voice again,
and to tell you I graduated,
And that you weren't there to see it.

But I felt it.
You were there.

Even after you were gone,
you still stepped up in my dreams,
opening a door for me,
letting me know that the weight would lift,
that the pain would pass.

You gave me hope.
Even when life feels heavy,
you still find a way to show up.
Sometimes in dreams,
sometimes in the quiet of the night,
reminding me to be strong.
And for you, I will.

The house holds the echo of your laughter with grandma,
the way you leaned into each other's jokes,
how the whole family felt complete
when you were around.

Your picture still sits in the living room,
where you and grandma always spent time together.
The light catches it in the mornings,
and for a moment, it feels like you're leaning back in your chair,
smiling at something only the two of you understood.
The couch cushions still hold the imprint of your presence,
the coffee table remembers the cups you set down,
and the quiet corners of the room seem to wait,
as if hoping you might walk back in.

I still look at photos of us,
wishing we had taken more,
wishing I could take one with you now.



It's been three years since you've been gone,
and I can only remember you in flashes,
just another memory slipping through my mind.
I can't remember your voice.
Oh, to hug you,
to talk to you,
to tell you everything I wish I had.

It tears me apart that I took it all for granted.
It pains me that you're not here.
It enrages me that my future kids
will never meet you.
I miss how kind you were,
how calm you were in everything,
how you made the world feel safer just by being in it.
If I could, I would hold you forever.
I don't want you to be a memory anymore.

After you left, I started to cherish every moment with others,
because it was the first time I had to face
losing someone so close to me.

Alzheimer's took you before heaven did,
your laughter shrinking in the corners of the house,
your hands growing still on the arm of your chair,
the warmth in your eyes dimming slowly, quietly, unfairly.
The last time I saw you,
it was a shadow of the man I loved.

I could not step into that room,
I could not face the quiet that had claimed you.
The coffin loomed like a shadow of all I had lost,
and the memory of you there pressed into my chest,
like winter air,
leaving me gasping, my hands trembling,
for the warmth that was gone.

I wish you could see who I'm trying to become,
how I'm learning to stand again,
how every step I take carries your name,
guiding me even when I feel like breaking.

The love I still have for you
fills my chest too full to hold,
warmth and ache tangled together,
a quiet reminder of how much you mattered,
how much I still need you here.

And yet the silence is the hardest part,
the way the world keeps moving
while I listen for your footsteps,
while I wait for a voice that will never return.

I hope you're proud of me up there.
And I hope you're waiting for me,
just like I still carry pieces of you down here.



LAYAN ABBAS

“IF YOU WANTED TO, YOU WOULD.”

I used to say,
to explain unanswered messages,
and the silence I prayed would go away
It seemed fitting, it seemed right.
But love is neither pure nor simple,
and neither are people.
Then came the realization:
the pain isn't in your absence
it's in your knowing.
Knowing you cared, yet left.
Knowing you wanted to, but didn't.

It's like standing on a stage
With trembling legs.
Like wanting to cave in,
but surviving instead.
And doesn't that make you human?

Perhaps it was never
“If you wanted to, you would.”
Maybe it's
“What if you wanted to, but couldn't?”

Fear hums beneath the skin,
circling through your veins.
It's why your eyes stay open
when sleep forgets your name.
It's how timing breaks
the best-laid plans,
how one name can unmake
everything you've built from pain.
And when fear stays too long,
you begin to feel betrayed.

I've met people who loved me
from the sidelines.
And I've been there too,
standing at the edge of something warm,
something filled with laughter and light,
choosing not to fall.
Not because I didn't want to,
but because I couldn't.

So, no,
“If you wanted to, you would”
was never love.
Love isn't always brave.
Love is fear.
Love is trying,
and failing,
and meaning well,
but falling short.

And maybe,
That's what makes it real.

طفلي

طفلي،
صغيرتي،
ليست هذه المرة الأولى التي أخاطبك فيها.
فلقد ناديتك في مواقف كثيرة...
ناديتك حين سمعتُ تصفيق الناس لي،
لأجعلك تُصغين إلى نغمة النجاح الذي حلمت به يوماً.
ناديتك حين خرجت ضحكتي من أعماق قلبي،
لأخبرك أنكِ تستحقين الفرح... كل الفرح.
ناديتك حين لم أستسلم،
حين بقيت واقفة في وقت كان الاستسلام الخيار الأسهل،
لأثبت لك أنكِ ستكونين فخورةً بقوةي.
ناديتك حين نظرت في عيني طفلٍ ضعيف،
وقلت له إنه سيدهش العالم يوماً،
لأنني رأيتُ بريقَ عينيك فيه...
وأردتُ أن أقول لك إنني صرْتُ الإنسان الذي كنتِ تحتاجينه.
ناديتك حين وصلتني رسالة من غريبٍ يقول
إن كتاباتي كانت بلسماً لجرحه دون أن يعرفني،
لأنكِ كنتِ طفلةً لا تملكين سوى قلمٍ
وتتمنين أن يحدث ذلك القلمُ فرقاً في قلوب الناس.
لكن الحقيقة يا صغيرتي...
أنتي لم أكن أنا من بدأ النداء.
كنتِ فقط ألبي نداءكِ أنتِ.
كنتِ أسمع ضحكك في كل مرة أضحك...
أسمعك تهمسين: "أنا فخورة بك."
كنتِ أشعر بقوةكِ داخلي كلما ضعفتُ،
وكنتِ أرى في عيون الأطفال عينيك أنتِ،
فأقول لهم ما كنتِ أنتِ تتمنين سماعه...
واليوم،
لا أكتب لك رسالةً أخاطبك فيها فحسب،
بل أكتب لك عهداً...
عهداً بأن أحافظ على القوة التي زرعتها بي،
أن أكون الصوت الذي يطمئنك،
وأن أزرع الحب الذي تحملينه في قلبك
في قلب كل إنسان يحتاجه.
أعدكِ أن أصبح المرأة
التي تمنيت أن نصبحها يوماً.
فيا صغيرتي...
أنا أنتِ
وكل ما أنا عليه اليوم
هو بسببك... ولأجلك.

RAWAN BAGHDADI

THE QUIET ACHE

A cardboard box of wilted dandelions and shooting stars,
hides beneath my bed,
trying to resuscitate a wound long bled,
a rotten, familiar desperation still lingers, invisible smoke,
drying out the flood of words I never spoke.

I wake up in the bed I made,
pull the covers of shame,
over everything I couldn't save,
the one I once held is now hung across my ceiling,
and no amount of mascara-stained tears will keep someone from leaving.

I hit my marks, retraced every step,
afraid to slip, afraid to fall,
afraid to watch him leave after giving my all.

but the author starts again,
a new manuscript of a dream that ended as it began,
in the quiet ache of an open hand.

LES MURMURES DU SILENCE

Il y a des nuits où le silence respire,
Comme une bête blessée sous la lune,
Et à chaque souffle qu'il rend,
Les murs de l'âme tremblent.

On croit que le silence ne dit rien,
Mais il garde tout.
Les cris étouffés,
Les mots avalés pour pas blesser,
Les promesses qui n'ont pas trouvé de trajet,
Une route vers des oreilles qui écoutent.
Le silence,
Ce n'est pas l'absence de mots,
C'est la mémoire qui refuse de mourir.

Il marche dans les couloirs du temps,
Traversant les cicatrices des heures,
Et parfois, dans un rêve fragile,
Il murmure un prénom
Que nous avons oublié d'ignorer.

J'ai vu le silence s'asseoir près d'une tombe,
Et y déposer des sons qui n'existaient pas.
J'ai entendu une larme s'échapper sans bruit,
Et faire vibrer le silence plus
Que mille éclats de voix.

Le silence,
C'est la mer quand elle retient sa colère,
Le vent avant la confession des arbres,
La bouche de l'amour
Qui n'a jamais su parler.

Et quand il se penche sur nous,
Il chuchote sans mots:

"Je sais tout ce que tu n'as jamais dit."

Alors je l'écoute,
Ce roi sans couronne,
Ce fantôme sans nom,
Et je comprends enfin:

Ce ne sont pas les mots qui me hantent,
Mais tout ce que le silence
N'a jamais cessé de murmurer.

FARAH JADAYEL

OH WELL

When paths once seemingly interwoven part ways, where do you go?
The road used to seem so clear and simple. Now that you must pave it alone, it's riddled with
questions, grief, regrets, and anger.
To stare down the ominous path ahead seems familiar, like facing the barrel of a shotgun.
You think to yourself, what now?
Oftentimes you'll find the answer lies plainly within yourself, your writing, your art, your unsent
letters.
Digging through mine, I watched my mind unfurl in front of me, years of uncertainty, cycles of
self-loathing, and lonely pity parties suddenly lunging at me.
I was ashamed of what had happened to me, what I let happen. The weight of twenty years of
denial and repression collapsed on me.
The path ahead of me crumbled. I had the idea I wasn't real.
Now screaming into the void, I mourn who I once was.
Metaphysicists say that time does not move in a linear path, but instead spirals and folds in on
itself, with each moment pressing against the next until they all become one.
Much like if you fold a paper and puncture a hole through the center, there will be a puncture
wound on all sides of the paper, a tear in the fabric of a being forever repeating and uniform in
nature.
Thus, the wounds and scars I gained as young as the age of six continue to burden me today.
What my mind may not remember, my body certainly does. It continues to sing an awful and
eerie tune, echoing songs of grief, abandonment, and violence.
I feel the younger versions of me clawing at the surface of my mind begging to be recognized,
but remaining unseen and shunned away.
I do not wish to confront them.
Until I gain the strength to do so, they will live beneath my skin, growing with me in the dark.

UNSENT NARRATIVES:

STORIES LEFT WITHOUT A READER.

good behaviour? Isn't it...
never again be allowed to com...
always keep the children there to...
as a good Communist and ret... East as...
citizen must.'

'What of their life now? You've always working. ...
spends her life watching TV. They've hunted from ...
mother to my father and back again. Soon you'll take up ...
some other woman and they'll have a stepmother. What ...
of life is that? With me they could have a proper home ...
a stable family life.'

'With a stepfather?'

'There is no other man, Bernard,' she said very softly.
There will be no other man. That is why I need the children ...
much. You can have other children, dozens of them if you ...
man. For a man it's easy - he can have children until he's ...
mighty - but I'll soon be past the suitable age for motherhood.
Don't deny me the children.' Like all women she was tyrann-
ed by her biology.

'Don't take them to a country which they won't be able to ...
Fiona! Look at me, Fiona. I'm saying it for your sake, ...
sake, and for my sake too.'

'I have to.' Nervously she went to the ...
when came back to me.

'Sweden or on some other neutral ...
I implore you not to take them to the East.'

'Is this another one of your tricks?' she said harshly.

'You know I'm right, Fi.'

She wrung her hands and twisted the rings on her fin-
er marriage band was there still and so was the ...
bought with the money from my old Ferrari. 'How ...
it was a different voice.

'Billy's got a new magic trick and Sally is learning ...
her right hand.'

'How sweet they are. I got their letters and the ...
Thank you.'

'You must do it p...

04

HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN

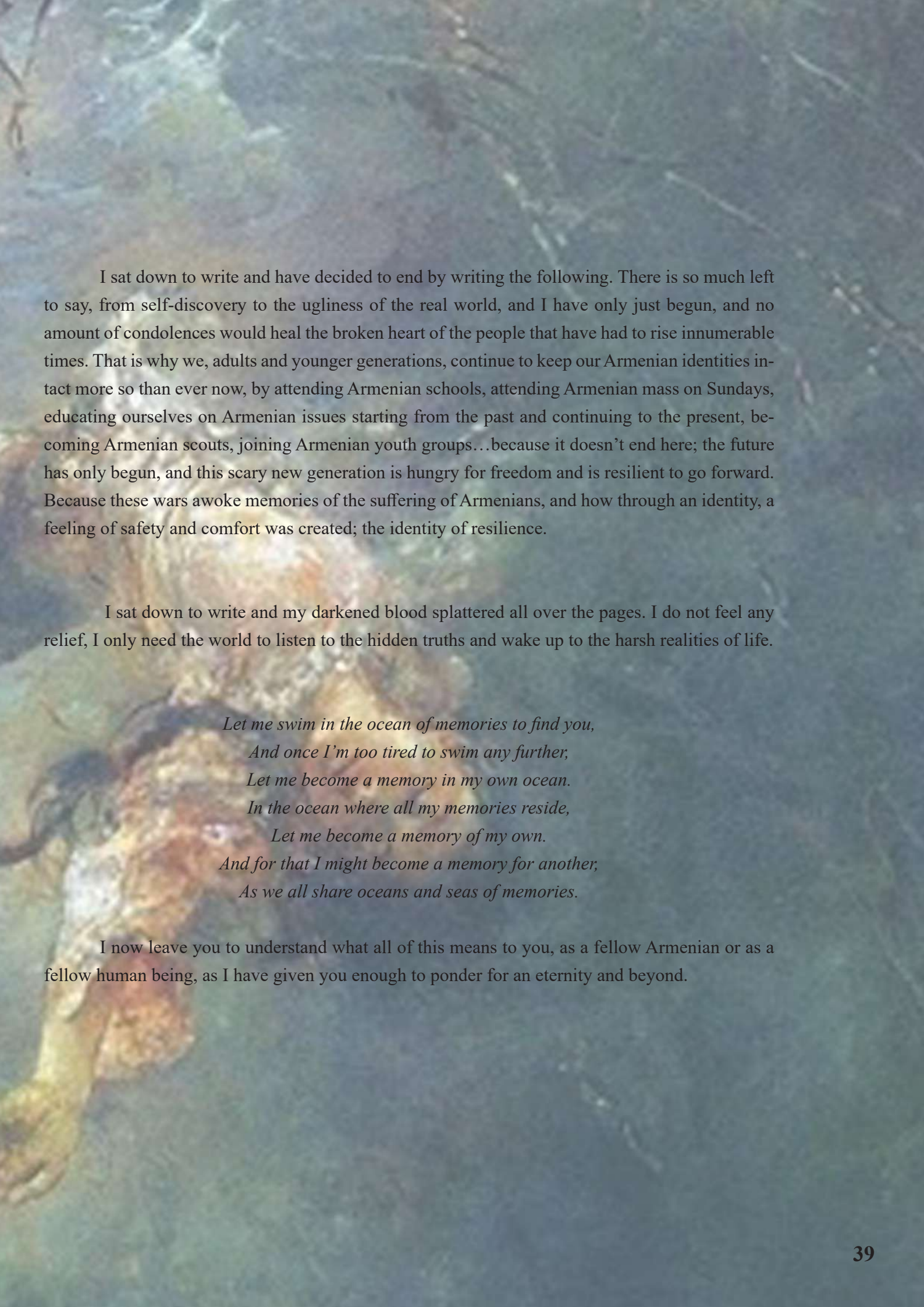
I sat down to write all that was wrong but failed to do so. I felt a heaviness in my heart, darkened by the pain surrounding me. *Even my handwriting is messy and italicized, fast as if in a hurry.* My eyes burn from the weight of the sadness. My mind, a computer room with overloaded data, my shoulders tense from stress.

I sat down to write and I decided to pour myself in it, letting my hand take control over the pages. How can anyone expect me to write about how, as an Armenian, I'm fulfilling my duties by speaking, writing and preaching in Armenian, when so many don't even speak it properly? How do you expect me to write this in Armenian, when people can only "relate" to what is written in foreign languages; the language that poisons social media, movies, music...

I sat down to write what ails me and now the computer room in my mind has alarms going off. I sat to write in the corner of my room, where I see all that animates and personalizes me; the canvas where my girl scouts, my Արեւիկայներ, have signed on, the stack of books I've read throughout the years, my scout uniform, hung up to avoid wrinkles, my files and folders that carry years of trinkets, schoolwork, and writings, the notebooks and papers in which I planned my projects, prayers in Armenian that adorn my room and endless memories. I let myself bask in this feeling, as wave after wave of emotions hit me until I almost drowned.

I sat down to write but was distracted by my earlier curiosity of scattered memories all around me. I especially focus on what truly stands out to the rest; the Armenian literature tests, the Armenian history exams, my scout certificates written in perfect Armenian, all the treasured souvenirs from scouts and my Արեւիկայներ. All of which should make me really proud, right? Yet, why do I feel an emptiness residing within? Perhaps my mind is still worked up over the fact that I am home away from home, even though I have never been home; which in itself is heartbreaking. Inhumane people sell lands full of history, culture and life all because of greed and lust for power. If that is power, then what is war?

To think that, as a Lebanese-Armenian young adult who has witnessed two wars simultaneously and could do nothing but exist, how do you think that felt? How do you think it feels for others like me? To think that everything I had, everything I owned, could have vanished in an unpredictable minute, just as it did for countless innocent people. Just as it is still happening in the Holy Land. Do we, as humans, still need to carry the guilt of Adam and Eve for their ruthless mistake? Or do we try to convince ourselves of it instead of blaming the darkness residing in the souls of so-called humans?

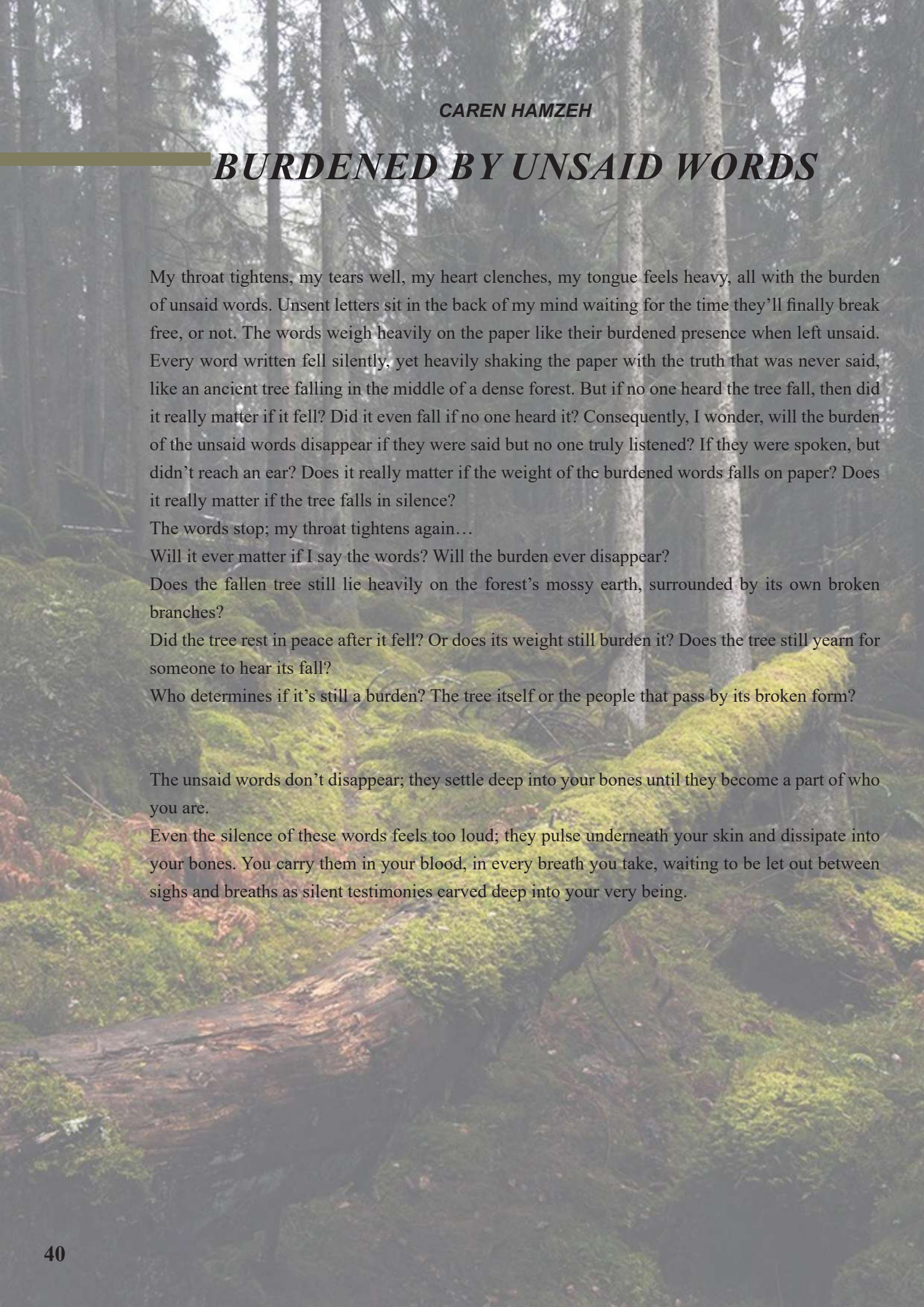


I sat down to write and have decided to end by writing the following. There is so much left to say, from self-discovery to the ugliness of the real world, and I have only just begun, and no amount of condolences would heal the broken heart of the people that have had to rise innumerable times. That is why we, adults and younger generations, continue to keep our Armenian identities intact more so than ever now, by attending Armenian schools, attending Armenian mass on Sundays, educating ourselves on Armenian issues starting from the past and continuing to the present, becoming Armenian scouts, joining Armenian youth groups...because it doesn't end here; the future has only begun, and this scary new generation is hungry for freedom and is resilient to go forward. Because these wars awoke memories of the suffering of Armenians, and how through an identity, a feeling of safety and comfort was created; the identity of resilience.

I sat down to write and my darkened blood splattered all over the pages. I do not feel any relief, I only need the world to listen to the hidden truths and wake up to the harsh realities of life.

*Let me swim in the ocean of memories to find you,
And once I'm too tired to swim any further,
Let me become a memory in my own ocean.
In the ocean where all my memories reside,
Let me become a memory of my own.
And for that I might become a memory for another,
As we all share oceans and seas of memories.*

I now leave you to understand what all of this means to you, as a fellow Armenian or as a fellow human being, as I have given you enough to ponder for an eternity and beyond.



CAREN HAMZEH

BURDENED BY UNSAID WORDS

My throat tightens, my tears well, my heart clenches, my tongue feels heavy, all with the burden of unsaid words. Unsent letters sit in the back of my mind waiting for the time they'll finally break free, or not. The words weigh heavily on the paper like their burdened presence when left unsaid. Every word written fell silently, yet heavily shaking the paper with the truth that was never said, like an ancient tree falling in the middle of a dense forest. But if no one heard the tree fall, then did it really matter if it fell? Did it even fall if no one heard it? Consequently, I wonder, will the burden of the unsaid words disappear if they were said but no one truly listened? If they were spoken, but didn't reach an ear? Does it really matter if the weight of the burdened words falls on paper? Does it really matter if the tree falls in silence?

The words stop; my throat tightens again...

Will it ever matter if I say the words? Will the burden ever disappear?

Does the fallen tree still lie heavily on the forest's mossy earth, surrounded by its own broken branches?

Did the tree rest in peace after it fell? Or does its weight still burden it? Does the tree still yearn for someone to hear its fall?

Who determines if it's still a burden? The tree itself or the people that pass by its broken form?

The unsaid words don't disappear; they settle deep into your bones until they become a part of who you are.

Even the silence of these words feels too loud; they pulse underneath your skin and dissipate into your bones. You carry them in your blood, in every breath you take, waiting to be let out between sighs and breaths as silent testimonies carved deep into your very being.

MIRA JABR

EPISTLE FROM THE FRONT TO THE WOMAN IN CRIMSON

From: Colonel Sergei Ivanov, Commanding Officer of the 18th Unit

To: Katerina Petrova

Date: November 15th, 1904

Dear Mrs. Petrova,

It is with great regret that I convey to you the tragic news of your husband Luka Petrov's unfortunate passing. The enemy took us by surprise in Port Arthur, on Saint Luke's day. We lost him, then, on the 31st of October, a night of heavy artillery and gruesome bombardments. Those who survived, however few in number, remember him for his courage and his kind nature.

Among the rubble, his body was found, a piece of paper sticking out from below his solemn figure. He unfortunately didn't get the chance to finish it. However, it was addressed to you, so I believe it is my duty to deliver these words to the only person whose eyes they were meant for.

Below is the retrieved letter, preserved with care:

My dearest Katerina,

I write to you by the dim light of the trench lamp that flickers in the face of the whistling wind. It sneaks in through the cracks of the walls, separating us from a world of smoke and snow. The paper shivers between my fingers, as they have a hard time gripping it; the doctors call it nerves, but no matter what fancy name they give it, it lives beneath the surface of my skin. And just like us, and the filthy rats that squeak along our feet, it wants out. Food tastes metallic and quite dusty here, and colors can no longer be distinguished; they all look like different shades of grey.

On the rare occasions we go outside, either for a routine check or to move camp, the sky always looks bleak, dark blue with hints of purple, like a bruise that won't heal.

The men are changing. They keep to themselves more now. I hear them sometimes in the dead of the night; they weep uncontrollably, mutter prayers I do not understand, and some indulge in way too many pills to get themselves, at last, to sleep, only to wake up again in shock, barely able to catch their breath. They dream of mothers, wives, children, but even those innocent ideas stimulate a storm of fear and despair in their hearts that they cannot explain. I've watched them turn from young sturdy men, full of laughter and life, to shells of who they once were. Their faces reflect a miserable apathy, one that only the grim reaper himself can trigger after slowly taking away everything they once treasured. Many went from breaking down at each witnessed death to stepping over their friends' corpses without even glancing back. I also have seen men die in ways I cannot forget; their faces locked in horror, their thick red blood soaking into the once-white snow now covered in mud, their final screams lingering in the air long after they have gone quiet.

The officers say we move at dawn, yet somewhere far away a church bell rings, slow and deliberate, announcing our final hours.

Despite the grim circumstances, I still have faith in our comrades, in the Tsar; in Russia, the motherland, in our sacred duty. But that faith flickers now, like the lamp by my side. Does the Tsar know of men like us, lying in the mud, risking our lives for our families and homes? Will Russia remember our service, our sacrifice? And does God approve of all this bloodshed, or has He turned His face away in disappointment?

Sleep eludes me, but in these dark times, it is not victory that I think of, it is you. I think of the steaming kettle clouding the kitchen window, of the smell of your famous Stroganov charming its way around the house, and of the little red dress you put on at the beginning of every winter. It looked so stunning in contrast with your pale skin, highlighted by your ever blushing cheeks and the red lipstick you liked to put on every now and then. I wish I was there to tell you how beautiful you looked every morning, sitting in front of that mirror, brushing your long wavy hair, struggling to keep your eyes open after staying up late, waiting for me to get home. You knew how to keep busy, wandering from room to room, humming the lullabies you memorized as you repeated them at bedtime to our dear Nikolai every night.

Nikolai... he appears in my dreams sometimes, running down the halls of my mind, giggling his way through as he teases me to catch him. I extend my hand to grab him, and as soon as it gets close enough, his memory dissipates and fades away. I miss his soft little hand in mine, and the way he'd blow onto his little cup of tea to avoid burning his lips from the heat. Every night, before I close my eyes, I take out the pictures I keep of both of you. I press them to my chest and for a moment I feel almost whole again.

Stay strong, my love. Tell Nikolai that his father fought not for glory but for the two of you, for the small world we built together and the peace I pray he will one day know. And if he must remember me, let it not be through sorrow, for he is too young to bear the weight of war. Let him remember me instead through the warmth of your voice when you speak my name, and through the tender stories you tell as you tuck him in each night.

In the rare moments, just like this one, between bombardments, I sit and listen to the wind, and it feels like the world is holding its breath, waiting to see if –

The letter ended here. It was never sealed, the ink still fresh when we found it.

May your faith overcome your sorrow in these dark times, and may you find solace in knowing that your husband met his end with honor, serving his country among comrades who held him in the highest regard.

With deepest sympathy and respect,

Colonel Sergei Ivanov,

Commanding Officer of the 18th Unit

JUDE EL HAJJAR

LETTER FROM AN ANGEL WHO STAYED TOO LONG.

I. Descent

The first fall was not from grace, but from belonging.

What is a human, if not an angel who's stayed too long? Who's forgotten the language of light and learned to name things by touch instead: this is grief, this is hunger, this is the aching between the two. If you ask me what I am, I will say "between." Not heaven, not earth, but the trembling seam that stitches them together. I have tried to be one of you. I have sewn your skin onto me and carried your language in my mouth until my words blistered.

They said you *will fall*, and I did. You don't know the sound wings make when they realize they're ornamental. Soft, almost human, like a secret dying quietly.

II. The Learning

"To be human is to carry a cathedral that keeps collapsing within you."

To be human, I learned, is to wake up heavy. To carry your own name like a wound; to dress it, hide it, feed and satiate it, and call it beautiful even as it rots. I have watched you measure your worth by the volume of applause for your aching. I have seen you weaponize love and name it honesty. You instruct one another to be kind, and the words tremble under your tongues. You name loneliness a phase, heartbreak a lesson, and grief an inconvenience. I spoke, and my words returned to me altered, human, and mistranslated. I said *help*, and you heard weakness. I said *I forgive you*; you heard surrender. You taught me to hold my pain and nothing else. You look at one another and see reflections, not faces. You mistake recognition for love, in constant limbo between the yearning to be seen and the inevitable flinch when you're understood. Your aloneness hums under laughter and curls in the hollows of your smiles. You push out "I'm fine" with surgical precision, as if words could mold a scar into closing. You do not bleed where anyone can see it. You fold your despair into metaphor, filter your ache into art, and repurpose your truth for consumption. And somehow, it is gorgeous. The most human thing is performing your breaking beautifully.

and I—

I tried to belong. To laugh when you laugh. To mourn quietly and don grief like jewels, but each imitation of humaneness pushed me closer to exile. You could not forgive the light clinging to my shadow or the reminders of what you buried.



III. The Betrayal

"Justice leans towards the loudest voice booming in empty rooms."

once / I believed in balance / that good would outlive noise / that truth would rise like dawn over a burnt city / but here / justice is a lying symmetry / tilts to the mouth that shouts the loudest / you build gods from mirrors / and punish those who are not iridescent enough / you crowned me when I smiled / crucified me when I didn't / called me divine when my hands fed your hunger / monster when my eyes sought refuge / you mistook stillness for consent / faith for folly / you worship light, but never what it burns through / so how can I live? / how can I live when a thousand mouths will shout *listen to me* / and none will ever chant / *I hear you?* / when the one who carries everything quietly / is mistaken for a shadow / and the one who screams / is mistaken for the world?

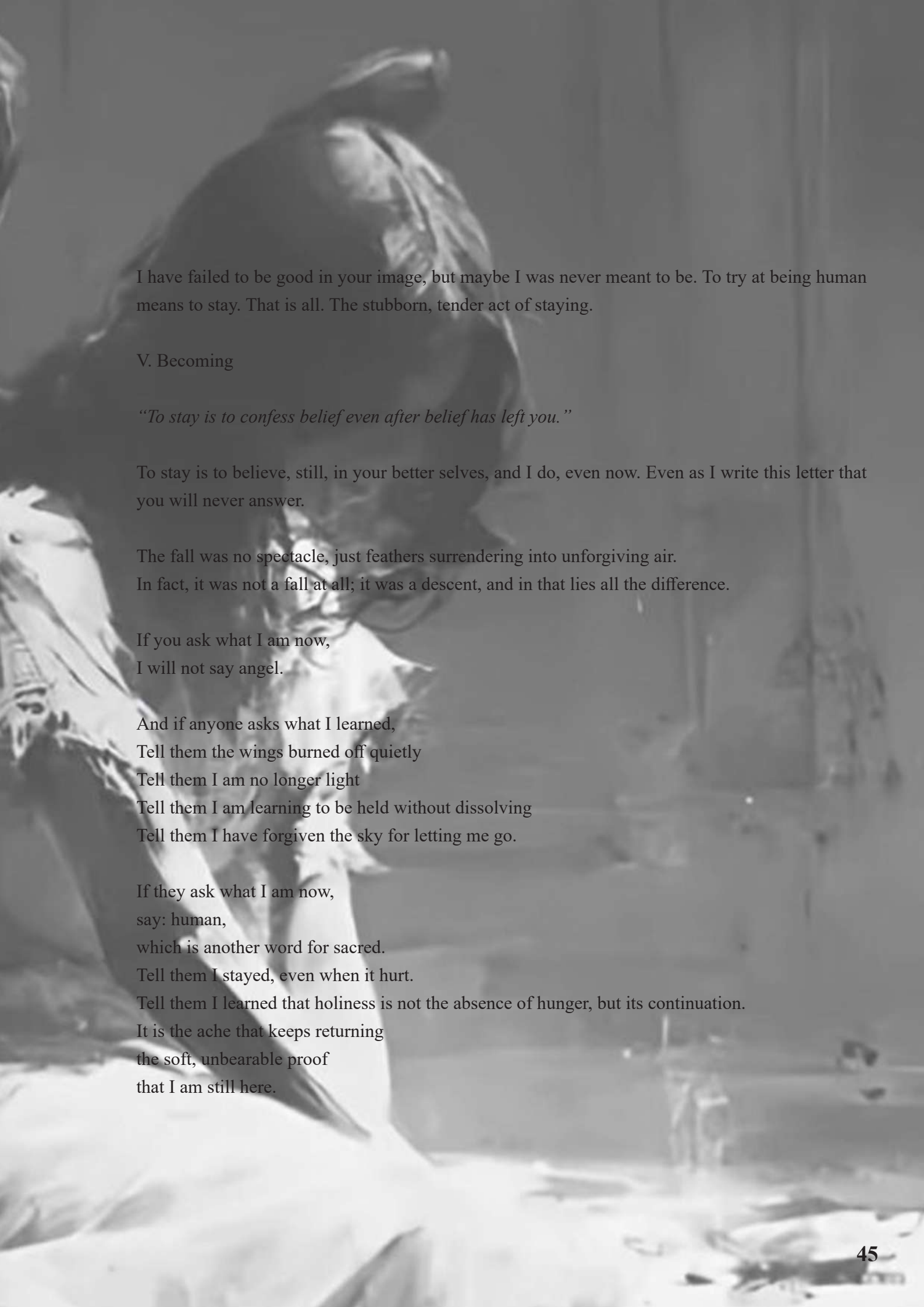
I have held your betrayal in my hands, felt it pulse, like a creature well versed in the composition of my own bone structure. It bit, hissed, and tasted like the trust I wove into the air all around me, but I am learning that some betrayals cannot be mapped, cannot be forgiven, and cannot be folded neatly into language. They are flocking rivers of acid, a winter that comes for your knees. The first question you cannot answer, and the first wound you cannot touch. I wanted to understand it, to name it, but betrayal does not ask for comprehension. It does not beg. It just is. And when it comes for you, you realize it has been with you all along—behind your back, in your heart, and under your skin.

IV. The Loneliness

Loneliness: the reverberation that learns your name before you know your own.

I sit among you in cafés, wings folded under coats and fatigue. The barista asks for my name; I almost tell her all of them. I almost tell her I was once music, that eternity fit between my very ribs. That now all that's left of me is the silence I intimately guard.
Be kind. Punish yourself if you bleed too loudly. Heard of self-care? You should practice it more. Forgive yourself. Forgive. Mock the forgiver. Love everyone. Love me first.

I am tired. Tired of altars built from convenience. Tired of armor that cuts as it shields, tired of pretending pain has to always bear meaning. Sometimes suffering is just suffering, and that is enough.



I have failed to be good in your image, but maybe I was never meant to be. To try at being human means to stay. That is all. The stubborn, tender act of staying.

V. Becoming

"To stay is to confess belief even after belief has left you."

To stay is to believe, still, in your better selves, and I do, even now. Even as I write this letter that you will never answer.

The fall was no spectacle, just feathers surrendering into unforgiving air.
In fact, it was not a fall at all; it was a descent, and in that lies all the difference.

If you ask what I am now,
I will not say angel.

And if anyone asks what I learned,
Tell them the wings burned off quietly
Tell them I am no longer light
Tell them I am learning to be held without dissolving
Tell them I have forgiven the sky for letting me go.

If they ask what I am now,
say: human,
which is another word for sacred.
Tell them I stayed, even when it hurt.
Tell them I learned that holiness is not the absence of hunger, but its continuation.
It is the ache that keeps returning
the soft, unbearable proof
that I am still here.

JESSIE KRIKORIAN

THE WRONG END OF THE RIGHT STORY

My love,

As I write this letter, I am struck with the bitter realization that it will never see the light of day. Even now, the words tremble in my hands, too late, too tender, too full of what-ifs.

You were my first and only love—the first person to make me feel seen, heard, and safe. I cherished your nervousness, your glances, your patience. I feel for you deeply, and that depth terrifies me.

I could tell you all the clichés about love: how time shrank around you, how your voice softened the world, but you already know. You know what we had.

Had.

Such a small word for something that felt infinite.

You were my almost. The chapter I kept rereading, hoping the ending might change.

Your arms, meant to be my safe space, overwhelmed me. I mistook your love for a storm. So I ran. I ran to protect myself, I ran to survive.

Engulfed by self-inflicted fear, I vanished without a trace.

By the time I returned, the seasons had changed. So had you.

That day haunts me: coffee between us, steam rising like a ghost of our past selves.

You smiled and exchanged pleasantries, like all was well, before you wrecked my world. *“I’m seeing some-one,”* you said.

The world went still. Seconds stretched into centuries.

Hurt flickered across my face. You saw it, I know. We pretended not to notice.

After all, I had been the one to leave.

If only love waited for readiness.

So, what happens now?

Now that I’ve written the words I never had the courage to say, do I hope you find them?

Or that you never have to wonder what we could have been if I’d stayed?

I think I finally understand what you meant when you spoke about “great love.”

It does exist.

We just met at the wrong end of the right story.

By the time I learned how to accept your love, you were already gone.

Maybe we were meant to collide, not to stay.

And maybe that’s enough, to have known something real, even if it wasn’t forever.

TANGLED WEBS

It's a tangled web, ends knotted and frayed. "The World Wide Web will connect everyone in the world to one another," the world said. And somehow, it did. I can connect with people I've met all over the world, talk to friends and family across oceans, all at a whim, and instantly. But then again I inevitably feel a never ending gap between it all. As easy as it is to connect, it is simpler to erase the countless words. Entire letters kept from the world, confessions of love, hearts spilled out in yearning, stolen, wiped away with no trace and never to be read by another soul. How easy it has become to pour your soul, words dripping out like crimson blood, only to be swept away of all hints that it was ever written. How easy it has become to completely ignore a life only to acknowledge it at a convenience. Words have gone by, caught up in the knots of a web that's been spread world wide, ignored...Forgotten...

ՈՒՐ ՄՆԱՑ

Է՛հ, ո՛ւր մնաց հայրենի հողը...

Ձայն կու տամ, բայց լեռներու անդարձ անձագանգը միայն կը դառնայ:

Ե՛րբ պիտի տեսնեմ արեւածագը Արարատի գագաթէն:

Բաւ չէ՞ արդեօք միայն մայրամուտը տեսնել այն կողմէն:

Ա՛խ, ե՛րբ պիտի կարենամ կարօտս գոհացնել...

Արդեօք ինչպէ՛ս կարելի է համակերպիլ եւ ընդունիլ, երբ շունչ ստացած ես օտարութեան մէջ,

Երբ աչքերդ տեսած են խուփը մեր հողերուն,

Եւ սիրտդ տակաւին քաղցած կը մնայ ազատ հայրենիքէն:

Ա՛խ... ո՛ւր մնաց հայրենի հողը:

Արդեօք կը լսե՞ իմ տրտմած կանչերս:

UNSENT MEMOIRS:

UNWRITTEN DESTINIES.



05

MOTHERS WHO CANNOT MOURN

A Palestinian martyr's funeral is two things. First, it is a wedding. Women ululate and offer sweets, offering the martyrs as bridegrooms to God. Ululations become a symbol of pride, dignity, and resistance. It is also a ceremony of rebirth: the mother is no longer just a mother; she is a mother of a martyr (Mahmoud, 2024). Her autonomy is stripped away, and her individuality is overshadowed. Willingly or unwillingly, she becomes the custodian of her child's ideology and the embodiment of collective resilience. A martyr's mother automatically becomes a public figure meant to symbolize national sacrifice and unwavering faith.

The Western media berates her, accusing her of deliberately sending her children to die. The local media praises her steadfast devotion and grants her honorary titles; that is, only if she adheres to the prescribed script of grief. Should she falter and air out her grievances or reveal her tear-stained face too openly, she is shunned and deemed dishonorable in her mourning. Trapped in a limbo between vilification and adoration, one must ask: what makes a good mother?

In the eyes of the world, a mother's love is measured by how loudly she mourns. In Palestine, it is measured by how quietly she bears loss, how bravely she endures the death of her own flesh and blood. An anonymous mother from Bethlehem, in an interview with Habiballah (2004), speaks softly of her son, who was only fourteen when he was killed by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) during the First Intifada. She says she is proud of his martyrdom: she knows he is with God, and that dying as a martyr is the most honorable of departures. Yet everyday, she secretly still carries his backpack and weeps. She lives her days with the ghost of him, his scent still clinging to the walls of their home, his laughter still lingering in the corners.

But her grief is policed. Family and friends warn her that her tears “disturb his peace in the grave”, and the sheikh tells her that the reason she hasn't seen him in her sleep yet is because she cries too much. If she, the mother of the martyr, dares to mourn her loss, she is told that her son would be barred from the celebrations in heaven. “What can I do?” she says, before breaking down. “I miss him”

In Palestine, there is no time for tears; the bombs have not stopped. Mothers still have to bury the dead, comfort the living, stretch the last scraps of food into a meal, and somehow continue to resist. Dr. Alaa Al-Najjar was tending to the wounded at Nasser Medical Complex when an Israeli airstrike wiped out nine of her ten children. She was denied a goodbye—denied even the chance to recognize them. Their bodies were burned beyond recognition; even in death, she could not bid them farewell (Abu Muheisen, 2025).

One martyr is remembered by the flowers and plants he left behind. Rifaat, a paramedic among the fifteen killed by Israel on March 23, 2025, left for work one night and never returned home. Eight days after the tragedy, when his body was finally found, a video was recovered from his phone: his last message to his mother. Surrounded by his colleagues' corpses and bleeding to death, Rifaat begged her forgiveness for the pain his death would bring.

He never knew that she had already forgiven him—that she had resolved to raise her remaining children as paramedics to carry on his mission, that she had watched him sleep for hours on the night before he left, memorizing his face without knowing it would be the last time (Humaid, 2025).

Meanwhile, Western headlines accuse Palestinian mothers of fanaticism and glorifying death; in their view, they are sending their sons to die. Yet they do not question the entity that killed him, the brutality that made resistance a necessity, or the occupation that turned martyrdom into an inheritance. Instead of condemning the regime that does not differentiate between an armed person and a child, or between a hospital and a military facility, these outlets turn their gaze towards mothers.

They blame the same women who live at the crossroads of instinct and ideology, who are torn between their primal urge to protect their children and the larger, collective national duty towards a liberated homeland. Even in grief, they are trapped between their loss and cultural expectations, between their love that demands mourning and the faith that demands endurance.

Naama Deeb from al-Jalil camp, known as Um Walid, recalled her son's martyrdom in an interview with Abou Naaseh (2024). Hisham was martyred in Beirut back in 1983 while resisting Zionist soldiers. His parents often went weeks without hearing from him. During his final visit home, Um Walid tried to prevent him from returning to the front, insisting on marrying him off so he could live a regular life. "He didn't listen, he was stubborn," she says. All she could do was hold him tightly one last time and silently wish that she didn't have to let him go.

When she learned of Hisham's death, his final words echoed in her mind: that she should ululate, and not let grief consume her if he were martyred. She prepared the rice, roses, and sweets. She ululated. She comforted and smiled for the mourners, and buried him with her own hands. She wanted to honor the hero her son had become by refusing to cry, and so she didn't. But thirty years later, she admits that her suppressed grief did not disappear or even diminish; it simply accumulated. "I had fooled myself and the people around me," she confessed. "The pain neither fades nor leaves."

For centuries, motherhood has been equated with sacrifice. The strength of a martyr's mother is celebrated, but her sorrow is private and her humanity overlooked. Mothers are not just emblems of a society's continuation, or 'the symbolic bearers of the nation'; they are humans in their own right who love, who lose, and who grieve.

Martyrdom is sacred and honorable. A mothers' pride is genuine; but pride does not cancel pain. Beneath the ululations and alignment with the national discourse lies an ocean of unspoken words and unexpressed emotions. So many tears are stifled, so many words swallowed by expectation, so many letters left unsent. War is a devastating thing; it infects everything it touches. When the deals are signed and fire is ceased, who will knock on a martyr's mother's door?



AREV KAZANJIAN

UNSPOKEN SORROW IS A BITTER SEED

My great grandmother crossed deserts with pomegranate seeds sewn into her dress.
She said they were for sowing because someday, somewhere, life will grow again.
She never made it home,
her seeds left scattered on a foreign land.

I write to you from that same wind,
from a lineage of those who were told its grief is too ancient to be remembered,
from a people who learned that silence is not peace,
but the stillness between tragedies.

I see your olive trees uprooted,
your wells filled with dust,
your skies made into a weapon.
And I think,
*how easily history forgets its own reflection,
how the world is fluent in denial,
with each century reciting the same excuses
in varying accents and rhetorics.*

They tell me to stay quiet,
and to let the past stay buried under niceties and museum glass—
but unspoken sorrow is a bitter seed.

You don't know me, and perhaps I do not know you,
but our dead speak a language of dust and persistence.
If I could send out this letter,
I'd tell you:

You are not alone in the archives of the world's recollections.

And if justice arrives late, as it always does,
then it shall at least be loud.
Loud enough to wake the sleeping,
to shame the powerful,
to remind the living that memory is a weapon too.

With the faith of the scattered,
and the grief of the rooted,

I dedicate this letter to you,

From a grandchild of the pomegranate,
writing to the children of the olive.

الى الشعب اللبناني العظيم

أيها الشعب اللبناني العظيم،

حابة خبركن قصة صارت معي من فترة. كنت قاعدة بكافيه مع رفيقتي عم تشتغل و لمحت صبي صغير من طرف عيني واقف ورا شجرة وماسك ورقة. ما كنت قادرة شوف شو كاتب، قرب شوي لعندي وعطاني ياه. كان كاتب على الورقة شي كثير بسيط خلانا نفتح موضع معه. اكتشفنا انو هالصبي لبناني، عمره 8 سنين، بالصف الثالث و بحب العربي و الانجليزي و الرياضيات و ما بحب الشغل... طموحه انه يوصل على الجامعة. قديش كسرتني الحديث معه. ما كنت متخيلة انه هلقد رح اتأثر. اول شي ما استوعبت افكاري... ما كنت قادرة لفهم انو صبي عمره 8 سنين هلقد واعي. ما قلتي بدو يصير دكتور او محامي، قلتي انو بدو يروح على الجامعة. انصدمت. ما عرفت شو قلته، لأنه مني عارفه اذا حيوصل... انا مش عارفة كيف وصلت على الجامعة، كيف اذا هو؟ الفكرة اللي صدمتني او اذا بدكن خلتنني شوف الواقع البشع و الظالم الي عايشين فيه. قديش مش عادلة الحياة. مش فايته براسي انو لما انا كنت بعمره اكبر هم كان عندي ياه هو شو رح ألبس بكرة. قعدت فكر بكل شي مرق علينا هل 5 سنين. من كورونا، لأزمة اقتصادية، لانفجار 4 آب (يلي بعد ما شفتنا اي شخص تحاسب كرماله) للحرب، لكل شي. كيف كل شي أدى لوين كنا من 50 سنة.

أيها الشعب اللبناني العظيم،

ايمتي رح تفيقوا؟ ايمتي رح تستوعبوا انو الحق مش على الدولة؟ الحق عليكم. المشكلة مش منهن، المشكلة منك. انتوا. المشكلة من الشعب يللي مش عارف يفكر بقی. الشعب الي بيلحق زعيمه مثل الخروف ومعتبره السلطة العليا. المشكلة بالشعب يللي بس يفكر بهاجر، وانا منهم. المشكلة بالشعب يللي بدو يضل حاطط ايديه على عيونهم و قمو وأذنيه وماشي كأنو الوضع طبيعي. الشعب يللي ما بدو يحكي كلمة الحق لأنه مش من مصلحة. انتوا المشكلة. ما بقی تلوموا الحكومة وترجعوا عم تبكوا من الظلم. انتوا اللي ظالمينا. انتوا اللي بتضلكم تنتخبوا نفس الأشخاص. بعدنا عم نعيش نفس الأزمات يللي أجدادنا كانوا يخبرونا عنها، ومش عارفين نخلص منهم. ما زهقتوا؟

أيها الشعب اللبناني العظيم،

حاج بقی. ما تعبتوا؟ بقعد بفكر بمستقبلي ومستقبل خيي، ويقول أي مستقبل؟ كل ما حدا يسألني وين بشوف حالي بعد خمس سنين، بقول نفس الجواب: "مش هون". بدي كون ببلد عاطي خيي أبسط حقوقه. بلد مش ظالم خيي. بلد مش ظالمني. بلد الي مستقبل فيه."

أيها الشعب اللبناني العظيم،

ما بقي تلوموا حدا غير حالكين. ما بدكن مستقبل ببلادكم؟ ما زهقتوا من نفس المشاكل والحروب؟ ليش حديث مع صبي عمره 8 سنين هيك بدو يكسرنى؟ ليش صبي صغير آخذين منه طفولته وبراءته وحياته؟ شو هالظلم؟ مش رح نادي الدولة. رح نادىكم انتوا.

أيها الشعب اللبناني العظيم،

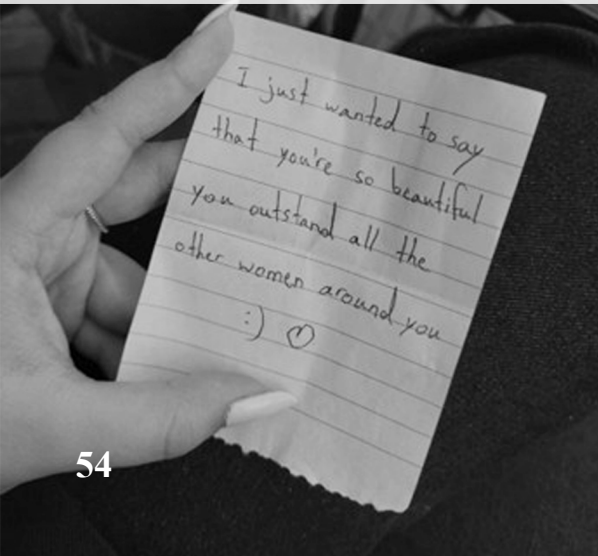
فيقوا. حاج بقي كل واحد عم يستقوي على الثاني. بقلك حبيبي قدامك و بيعك بقشرة بصلة من وراك. ما تعبتوا؟ بتقولوا انو نحن جيل المستقبل يلي رح ينعيش البلد المدفون تحت ركام أربعة آب. وانا بقولكم: انتوا اكلتولنا حقنا. ظلمتونا و قرفتونا البلد. نحن الجيل يلي يسهر بس ليحس شي غير الاكتئاب. يلي بيشغل من عمر ال 8 سنين. عيب عليكم والله. بتقولوا انو نحن المستقبل و انتوا مش عارفين معناها للكلمة. انا ما بشوف مستقبل هون، وهيدي الفكرة كسرتلي قلبي. بلدي يلي ما كنت بشوف مستقبل الا فيه، بطل النا. صار لسلطة غليا حاكمتنا. مش مستوعة الظلم يلي عايشه خيي. فوق ما انو نحن مظلومين، كان بدنا نظلم العالم يلي عندها احتياجات خاصة؟ ليش؟ شو هالمنطق المقرف؟ وين العدالة بالموضوع؟ في عدالة بقي؟ شو هي العدالة؟ حدا يقلي.

أيها الشعب اللبناني العظيم،

قرفتونا. انتوا يلي معيشنا هيك. ما حدا غيركم. انتوا اكلتوا البلد وما تركتوا شي لغيركم. ما علموك انه sharing is caring؟ مصرين انو البلد يا لالكم يا بلاه؟ سرفتوا براءتنا. مش بكفي؟ قلولي، المشكلة من الزعماء أو منّا؟ التغيير بصير لما كنا نقول بس. مش لما واحد يقول بس و 10 يقولوا لأ مش من مصلحتنا هلق. مش لما يكون مأول حقنا وانتوا راضيين.

أيها الشعب اللبناني العظيم،

كرهتونا العيشة ببلدان.



CAREN HAMZEH

SINCERELY, A WOMAN.

For all the women throughout history...

For women who were silenced, who fought, who raised their voices despite being told not to, who walked this path before us, who spent their lives in silence, who invented, who created, who breathed life into existence, who died for us, who were erased from history, who led revolutions, who led nations, who rebelled, who changed the course of history, who wrote history itself, and who never gave up.

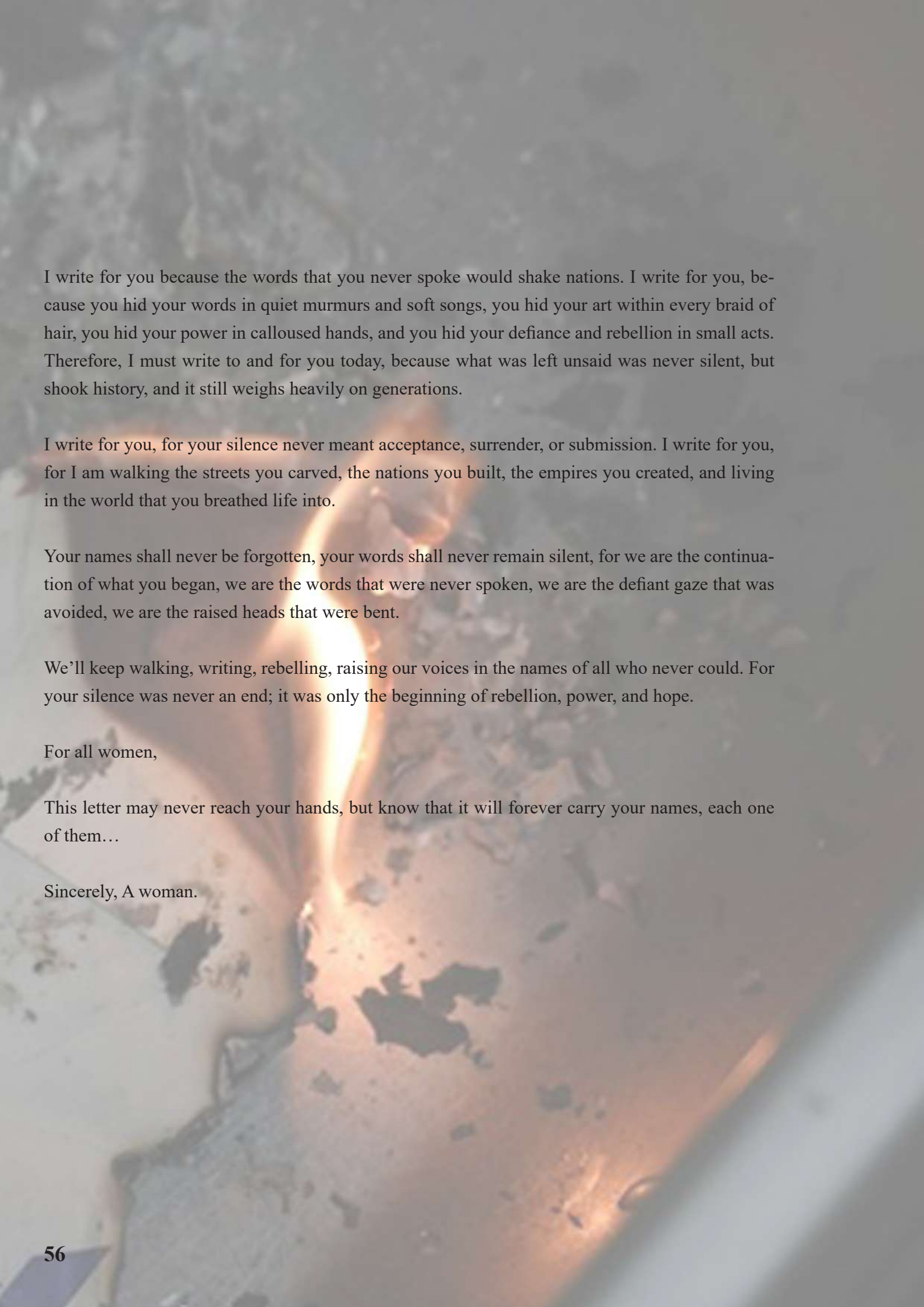
For women who will continue this path, who will lead generations, who will lead revolutions, who will continue to fight, who will continue to raise their voices, who will empower other women, who will write history, whose names history will remember, and who will never give up.

For all women.

As I sit and write, I remember the women who came before me, those who wished they could write but couldn't, who were burned for thinking, who wrote but whose writings no one reads. I write for those whose basic rights of literacy were taken away from them, those who raised families instead of chasing their dreams, those who were never allowed to write, and those who were never allowed to speak out.

I write for you, for the dreams you never chased and for the lives you never lived. I write for you, for who am I without you?

Your names may have fallen through cracks in history, your stories written in the margins, your names forgotten, your gravestones left unnamed, your dreams folded and forgotten, but now I write for you, because what history tried to erase was never truly erased. Instead, it still lingers in unspoken words, in defiant looks, in the gaze that doesn't flinch, in a head that refuses to bow down, and in a back that refuses to bend.



I write for you because the words that you never spoke would shake nations. I write for you, because you hid your words in quiet murmurs and soft songs, you hid your art within every braid of hair, you hid your power in calloused hands, and you hid your defiance and rebellion in small acts. Therefore, I must write to and for you today, because what was left unsaid was never silent, but shook history, and it still weighs heavily on generations.

I write for you, for your silence never meant acceptance, surrender, or submission. I write for you, for I am walking the streets you carved, the nations you built, the empires you created, and living in the world that you breathed life into.

Your names shall never be forgotten, your words shall never remain silent, for we are the continuation of what you began, we are the words that were never spoken, we are the defiant gaze that was avoided, we are the raised heads that were bent.

We'll keep walking, writing, rebelling, raising our voices in the names of all who never could. For your silence was never an end; it was only the beginning of rebellion, power, and hope.

For all women,

This letter may never reach your hands, but know that it will forever carry your names, each one of them...

Sincerely, A woman.

UNSENT TALES:

HIDDEN REGRETS.

06

TVIN HERGELIAN

THE FALL OF THE SPRING HEARTBEAT

Hello, my love. How have you been?

If you are reading this, it means my words have finally found you. I am in gut-wrenching pain, and I have nowhere else to put it. I am in complete shock at how life can transform certainty into a brutal lesson. Just when I thought I had learned them all, life delivered its cruelest surprise at my highest moment of flourishing. The happiness I cherished since last Spring has come at a cost I never anticipated. It is time to grieve the love I lost and sit with my deep regret. The betrayal feels all too familiar, and the unfairness of it all is a weight I can barely describe. If I tried to capture every feeling, I would write a book, so instead, I will try to summarize the ache that words can never fully express.

I keep wondering to myself, how many Springs do we have to live through to realize love does not bloom in April? Have you noticed the eerie coincidence of all of the falls happening in April? Isn't the irony funny, too? It feels like a prank God keeps playing with us. We fall for it every time!

The first fall was a mistake. A friendship ruined for a chase that ended in utter disappointment. We survived. Chapter closed.

The second fall was a beautiful delusion. We knew it wasn't meant to be, so we let it last until the white flowers bloomed before we ended it. Chapter closed.

But the third fall... it should've ended in April.

It should have ended in April, the night I lay awake after he told me, for the first time, that he wasn't sure about me, or ready to commit. I watched the sun rise from my bed, a clear and silent witness to my own demotion. I was no longer a priority, yet I stayed. I still answered his video calls each morning. I still absorbed his pain, swallowing my own. It should've ended before I started crying myself to sleep. Before I began the slow, quiet work of abandoning myself for someone who would never have done the same for me. (Please forgive me)

It should have ended in April, before I could memorize the taste of his lips. Before his scent became the drug that I craved. Before I could drown in his sparkling eyes. Before his embrace felt more like a home than any other place. It should have ended before he put "Coming Back to Life" in my ears, kissing me somewhere he shouldn't have, before I could feel like the luckiest girl, as if I had won the lottery in love. Before we could dance together in the dimly lit room, our heartbeats synced, while the universe watched and witnessed our falling. Before I could give him my heart and start imagining a future built on his empty promises. Before he taught my soul its own native tongue, a dialect I thought was lost, before he started using the keywords I was starving to hear. He fed them to me, reaching into my silence and naming everything he found, and I mistook his fluency for love. (Please forgive me)

It should have ended before I had to walk past a stranger who carries my secrets, whose heartbeat I memorized like a favorite song. Before I caught a glimpse of a past that was never my burden to bear. Before he could take a part of me that could never be replaced. Before he could look at me and say, "I'm not capable of loving you as you love me," making a crime out of my devotion. Before his ghost became engraved in every corner of Beirut, his shadow lurking in the spaces we used to share our memories. (Please forgive me)

It should have ended before I learned that even if he came back, he would never change. Before he used his trauma as a weapon to drain my soul. Before he ended our story before it was over, leaving me to grieve him for longer than I ever knew him. (Please forgive me)

It should have ended in Spring. In April. Before May, before June, before the summer of my life. I should have had all that time to myself. I should have made my own summer, not one that belonged to him. It should have ended before I had to forcefully let him go, leaving my claw marks on a heart he hid with such success. (Please forgive me)

It should have ended before these questions could take root and bloom in the quiet of my mind. The mundane ones that ache with a familiar care: *How is he doing? How is his family? Is he sleeping?* And then the others, the ones that tear something open, rushing in to drown out the rest: *Did he find someone new? Does he love them the way he loved me? Is he fighting for them more than he fought for me? Was I even his exception to keep?* The most painful ones always follow, sharp and unanswerable: *Why did he throw me away so easily? Why was I not enough for him to stay? Why didn't he want me anymore? Why did he need space only from me?* It should have ended in April, before these wonderings, before the silence became filled with his ghost. (Please forgive me)

It should have ended in April, before I listened to his heartbeat and knew, with a sinking certainty, how deep I had fallen, before I could cry at the thought of it stopping because of the depression he was living in. It should've ended before he could die on our anniversary six months later by trying to erase me with someone new. The cruelest irony is that he became exactly what I had warned myself about. He became what failed him in the first place. I thought he was someone who took life seriously, but he had no respect for me or for himself. He was performative. He wasn't the man we fell in love with. Perhaps he's been this way all along, and we just saw the good in him because we so desperately wanted him to be good to himself. Our story has officially ended. The familiar betrayal closed this chapter, too. No more going back. No more dancing. We lost the rhythm, and he found it in someone else. (Please forgive me)

My beautiful, beautiful soul, you must listen now. This letter is not addressed to him; he no longer deserves you. It's for you. It's for you to realize your worth and forgive yourself. As you read through what you allowed yourself to go through, no matter the unforgettable memories and the truest love, remember, he was the poison you needed to suck and spit out from your veins, no matter how good it tasted. He was no different from the other cold Aprils, and you, my love, deserve warmth. I know that for every bad time, there was a good one that made leaving an agony. I know, you don't just mourn him; you mourn the life you had, the hope that after so many failed Aprils, this one would be different, because real love is rare and sacred. (Please forgive me)

It remains incomprehensible to me how a person can love another so deeply and authentically, only to suddenly turn away and discard them as an inconvenience. I know the sting is deep, seeing someone you loved so completely walk away and appear with someone new. However, you must remember, his actions are never about you. They're a reflection of who he truly is when he's no longer performing for you. Staying would have required him to face his own reflection, and he was too weak to look. You are the strong one. You carried yourself to this moment. His failure to hold on doesn't diminish your worth; it confirms it. (Please forgive me)

My heart, let him go. Let him choose someone else, let him try to erase you, let him move on. Your purpose now is to turn inward and focus on the life within you. You are light. You are the rare and sacred love. There is too much of that life to be wasted on anyone. You loved with a full and fierce heart, but you were always built for more than he could ever offer. A heart like yours deserves the entire universe, and he knew it. You deserve nothing less than the absolute best. (Please forgive me)

I hope this letter finds you on a day when its words feel light, and the memories of him no longer bring regret. I hope you have made peace with the love you so freely gave and have forgiven yourself for it all.

Please write back and tell me we have made it through this, stronger than we imagined, for the prospect of it feels impossible now.

I am waiting for the day you regain your golden glow and open your heart to life once more. And when you do, remember me, this letter, and how far we have come.

My love, this time, you must fly.

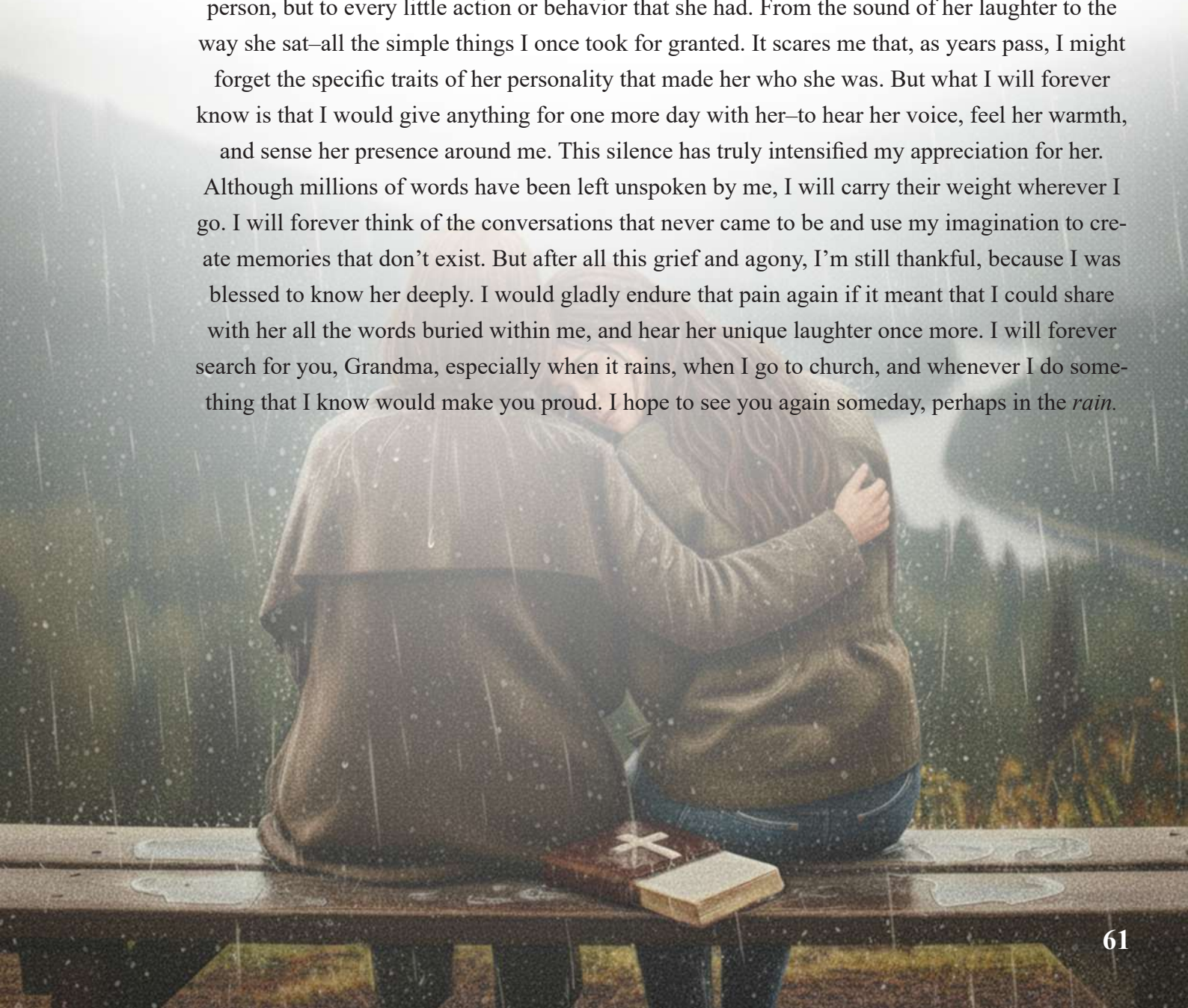
Yours truly and forever,

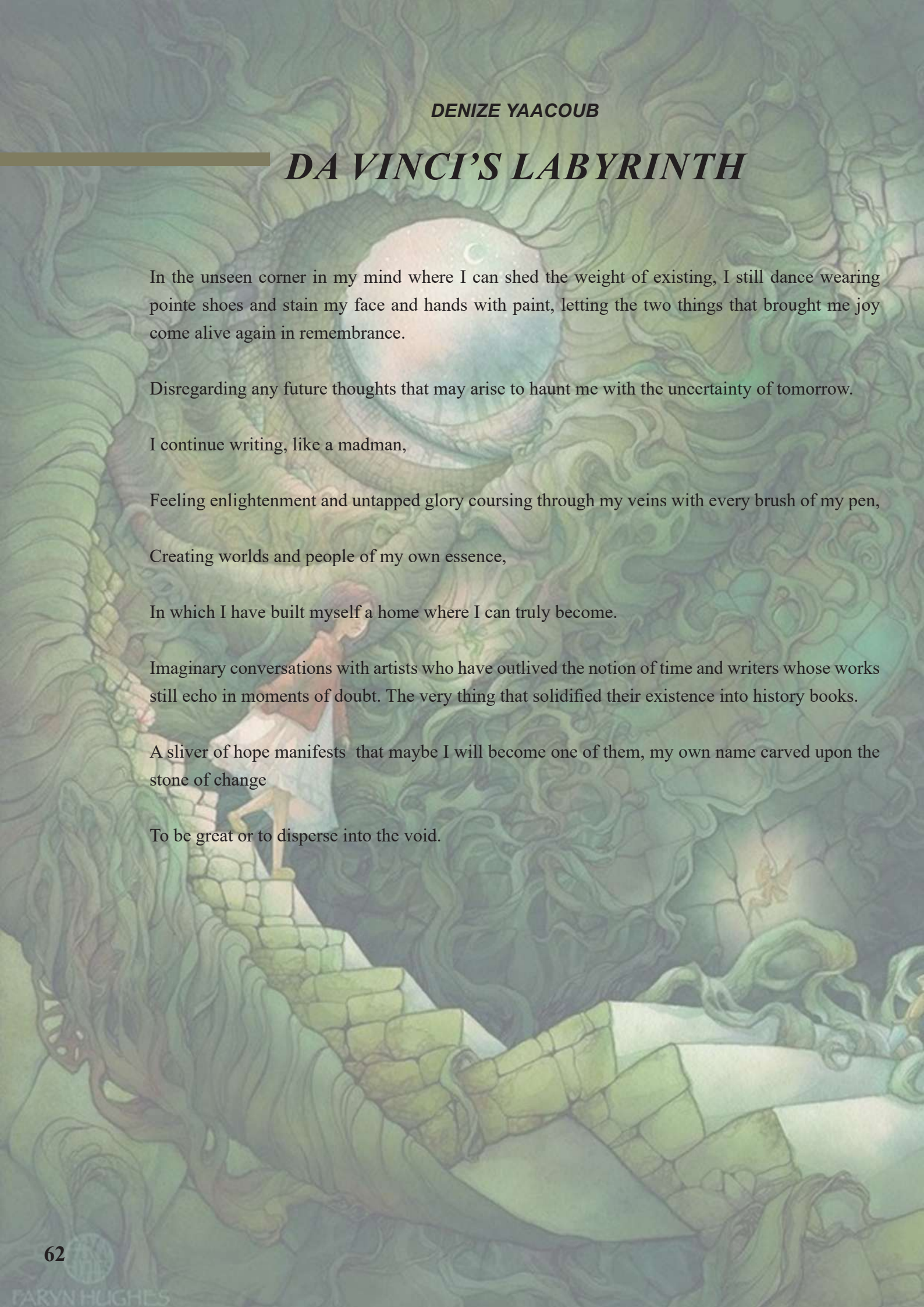
Tvin Hergelian

CINDY TOPEYAN

WORDS LEFT UNSPOKEN

The human mind can think of up to hundreds of words per minute, yet most of these thoughts remain unspoken. One of the most universal human experiences is communication, but ironically so much of what we feel is never voiced. This silence often stems from a misconception we have about time—we wait for the ‘right moment’, believing it will come without our intervention. However, that perfect moment does not exist; on the contrary, it is you who creates that moment with imperfect timing and meaningful words. Like many, I am a person who does not act quickly enough, and due to that, I have missed countless opportunities to express myself. A year ago, I went through the biggest loss of my life. I deeply regret the words that were left unsaid before this unexpected tragedy. It pains me to this day that I was not able to say goodbye, not just to the person, but to every little action or behavior that she had. From the sound of her laughter to the way she sat—all the simple things I once took for granted. It scares me that, as years pass, I might forget the specific traits of her personality that made her who she was. But what I will forever know is that I would give anything for one more day with her—to hear her voice, feel her warmth, and sense her presence around me. This silence has truly intensified my appreciation for her. Although millions of words have been left unspoken by me, I will carry their weight wherever I go. I will forever think of the conversations that never came to be and use my imagination to create memories that don’t exist. But after all this grief and agony, I’m still thankful, because I was blessed to know her deeply. I would gladly endure that pain again if it meant that I could share with her all the words buried within me, and hear her unique laughter once more. I will forever search for you, Grandma, especially when it rains, when I go to church, and whenever I do something that I know would make you proud. I hope to see you again someday, perhaps in the *rain*.





DENIZE YAACOUB

DA VINCI'S LABYRINTH

In the unseen corner in my mind where I can shed the weight of existing, I still dance wearing pointe shoes and stain my face and hands with paint, letting the two things that brought me joy come alive again in remembrance.

Disregarding any future thoughts that may arise to haunt me with the uncertainty of tomorrow.

I continue writing, like a madman,

Feeling enlightenment and untapped glory coursing through my veins with every brush of my pen,

Creating worlds and people of my own essence,

In which I have built myself a home where I can truly become.

Imaginary conversations with artists who have outlived the notion of time and writers whose works still echo in moments of doubt. The very thing that solidified their existence into history books.

A sliver of hope manifests that maybe I will become one of them, my own name carved upon the stone of change

To be great or to disperse into the void.

TALES OF WHAT COULD BE

To you my friend, I write words so free
Unburdened by the horrors we see
Unshackled by what came to be
Away from the sorrow and debris
Into a world filled with glee
A world like the open sea
With every endless possibility.

To you, who withstood the pain
Stood mighty in face of the devil's reign
In this never ending game
Where life becomes a tedious strain
Dragged through shards just to sustain
To survive in a world of disdain
Looking at what was, it's difficult to stay sane
All you knew, destroyed and slain
Nothing is left, a life lived in vain.

Forgive me, I couldn't but reflect
I failed you, am I correct?
You hoped to hear of a world so perfect
A world of beauty without neglect
Where humans, to one another, show respect
And none, for the colour of their skin, is a reject
To understand one another and connect.
To prevent lines from being drawn
And blind hatred to be sewn
By those who lend you a loan
Using the money for blood to be drawn
And for thousands to die in a war zone.
To have reason and a backbone
To stand firm in the face of corruption
To stop the lies and deception
To manage our mindless consumption
To learn and know before assumption
To build instead of destruction
To focus on humans instead of production
To value life above profit and gold, without exception.

It seems as though I cannot write such tales,
For within my heart are so many ails.
No more birds sing in the light of day,
For the bombs scattered them away
But I hope my friend, that you would stay
To teach me of the hope you portray
The lessons in patience and resilience in the face of decay
The power of those who stand and pray
With truth and wisdom in what they say
Speaking of their blessings, while facing doomsday.
Again I was mistaken, "a life in vain" is my own
As for you my friend, are like the light of dawn
May you rest in the justice and peace you were never shown.

INK THAT NEVER DRIED

The first trace anyone noticed was the ink.

It gleamed faintly beneath the lamplight : too alive, too fluid, as if the letters were still drying. But the paper was old, its edges crisp with time, *with a gossamer handwriting*, almost reverent.

The letter had appeared overnight on the desk in the shadowed alcove of the town's crumbling library, a room that no one used anymore, where the walls whispered faintly of dust and rain, and the air always felt a few degrees colder.

No one claimed the letter. No one admitted to leaving it.

By midmorning, the librarian noticed a strange gleam across the desk. Anabel, thin, with a face that seemed carved from parchment, leaned closer. The ink shimmered unnaturally, and the moment her eyes met the letters, they blurred, as if the words themselves were alive and unwilling to be read.

By nightfall, word spread that the letter was cursed.

Still, someone always touched it.

And whoever touched it was never the same again.

The janitor, Elias, was fated to stay late that evening. He was the kind of man who never dared to look people in the eye, whose gaze always skated along the edges of shadow and silence.

As he swept through the silent, shadowed library, Elias's broom struck a letter that throbbed beneath his fingers, its ink alive with a cold, restless light. A feeble scent of smoke and iron rose from the page, as if it had waited decades to find him. With hesitation in his hands, the paper unfolded.

There was no salutation. Only a single line at the top, written in trembling, liquid script:

"What is unsaid will write itself."

He blinked. The words bled slightly, and then, impossibly, new marks began to form.

They looped across the page, as soft as breath.

His breath.

These words told the story he'd buried years ago, the river, the scream, the silence that followed. His sister's hand had slipped from his grasp, her voice pleading for a promise he had long forgotten: Don't forget me.

He dropped the paper, heart hammering. But when it touched the floor, the ink began to spread, seeping like water across the desk.

Morning came, and the letter was gone.

What remained was a dark stain on the wood, shaped like a human heart.

In the weeks that followed, more letters appeared, never the same, and never signed. Blank sheets of paper seemed to move when touched, and visitors who stayed too long in the shadowed chamber would watch their own words slowly appear on the page, as though dredged from the depths of their silence.

One man read the apology he never gave his son.

A widow saw the goodbye she never got to say.

A girl saw her future drawn out in ink she couldn't bear to read.

And somehow, the same line appeared somewhere within the text, consistently, glimmering wet and eternal:

"Grief never dries."

The librarian locked the room after that. She felt the air drowning, felt the walls swollen with unsent words.

Nevertheless, Elias returned. Every night, he would climb the creaking stairs and stand before the hollow desk. Some nights the paper slept in silence; on others, it woke up murmuring with ink. Once, he found a single sentence, written in the same ink as before:

"She remembers you."

The next morning, he left town without a word.

Years passed. The library had burned in the middle of a storm. It was lightning, they said, though no one saw it strike. The fire had consumed everything except one inseparable fragment from the library: a scrap of paper found in the ashes, edges unburnt, the ink still phenomenally wet.

It read:

"Some words choose to stay. Some hearts choose to leave a different path."

No one knows where that letter went. Some say the new librarian keeps it locked in a glass case, others say the ink still moves at night, tracing invisible names that haunt the page like memories half-remembered.

But every now and then, when the wind shifts and the rain presses its silken points against the windows, those who listen carefully claim to hear the muffled scratch of a pen,

a letter writing itself in the dark,

ink glistening,

never drying.

Maybe the letter was never cursed, maybe it was simply honest, a mirror that reflected what humans never dare to say aloud. Because every heart at some point, carries its own unsent words: confessions left unfinished, forgiveness never spoken, love left waiting between breaths.

And perhaps that is what keeps the ink from drying.

The persistence of memory, the ache of what remains unwritten, the proof that silence, too, has a pulse.



JEANNE D'ARC DAVOULBEYUKIAN

UNDER THE HEARTHSTONE TREE

The box sits where The Hearthstone Tree weeps,
its ancient crown holding up the sky—a green and soundless rain, forever falling.

This is the only place the letter could live—a land of simple, firm repose.
It is addressed to no one, and thus, contains everyone.

The ink does not care who it confesses to.

Inside, the names have merged, a quiet composite of present need. A perfect argument
I am writing now, for as many to listen yet kept clean from any real response.

Suddenly, the wind is a reckless, cold hand, pulling the hair from my face.
The grass begins to dance, bent low and exquisite in its own motion.

Other letters start to rise, invisible, scattering in the air—a ghostly mail call, all addressed to the
unwilling past.

I take my pen, start writing, again.

They pour out: understanding, betrayal, the cold breath of mountains,
the long, heavy blanket of indifference, an uncalled, unnoticed, needed warm embrace.

They are here now, all at once, exposed in their secrets, under the darkening leaves.
My hand aches, the pen scratches, the paper absorbs the full, immediate weight of the life I did not
send.

The risk of reply is simply too large for the world. This act of expression is for relief, not the ex-
pectation of the other's acceptance.

Now I lay beneath the roots of The Hearthstone Tree, the light filtering through its old-green cur-
tain.

I break the seal, but not for the world to witness. I break it for the earth to know.

The box is kept open now. Not emptied, but opened. And the firm ground absorbs the weight of all
the silence I never sent—a final, unburdened whisper, free to exist only where it began,
under the tree's absolute, silent care and total embrace.

UNSENT CHRONICLES:

FORGOTTEN MANUSCRIPTS.

07

TO MY SUNSHINE

I was looking for love,
Until I noticed
How I smile at strangers,
Wave at babies,
Pray when an ambulance passes by.
I am love.



What a privilege it is to be named after the most powerful emotion any human being can experience; *Ser* which means *Love*.

At the end of the day, we are all human beings wanting to feel safe and loved. But today, I want to talk about the power of self-love and self-appreciation.

I don't usually follow trends, but the "Hug my Young Self" AI trend made me think of how much love and appreciation I owe to the little girl I once was. Ever since, I've been thinking about how many words have been left unsaid to her, to my sunshine.

As we age, we often tend to keep looking forward toward the future, but never to the past. I have never understood the reason behind that. It's like we want to escape everything that reminds us of where we came from.

But today I want to look back at my childhood, my young self, my sunshine. I want to honor that little girl who fought battles alone, who was curious to learn new things, who was a dreamer and, most importantly, a believer.

My current self is nothing without my past self. It took me a long time to realize that, and I have nothing but love and gratitude for that little girl who kept on trying, even as she failed multiple times, struggled, and some days wanted to give up.

Every woman chasing her goals today carries the voice of her younger self, the one who said, "Don't stop until we become everything we prayed for."

Even though I still have a long path ahead of me to fulfill my dreams and desires, and sometimes I feel frustrated, deep down I know that I am not alone, because my sunshine will help me outshine my fears.

Learning to hug my young self will forever remain my best achievement, my favorite experience, and my motivation to keep going, knowing that all this time I was searching for love, when it was hidden inside myself, in my sunshine

To my sunshine,

You are my only Sunshine.

AN UNSENT LETTER ACROSS TIME

Dear Future Me,

Does the ghost of your past still linger? Can you still picture the stack of textbooks scattered on the floor? Does the sound of your alarm still evoke an anxious feeling within you? Remember those days where you almost stopped trying, almost gave up? That fight, that sheer refusal to surrender, is the sacred contract that built you. I picture you sipping tea, watching the rain with an open book and nowhere urgent to be. Your mornings aren't filled with the chaotic dread of deadlines; perhaps they are, but you face them with a calm that settles over your shoulders like a familiar, comforting blanket.

I have been meaning to write to you for a while now, but I was reluctant. I was afraid my words might cause more harm than good, but they need to be said. There are so many responsibilities weighing on me. The quiet voice transformed into a constant hum of doubt that follows me into every exam room. It is a cruel companion that whispers "You're not gonna make it". People say that success comes with hard work, but that doesn't seem to be accurate. Despite all my effort, I will always find those who are better than me. I am afraid I'll never reach your level.

You, on the other hand, must have it all figured out. You probably know how to confidently handle problems and not to stress about the small worries, such as grades or external validation. Most importantly, I assume you've stopped observing other people's success and comparing yourself to them. You are enough for yourself. You have found your balance, your peace.

I wish I could ask you how you did it. Perhaps the reason I won't send this letter is because there is no instance where I become you. Just as I am being built right now, you are too. Every time I choose to move forward instead of giving up, a new spark of growth ignites within you. You're not a stranger waiting for me in the distance; you are me, blossoming from these uncertainties.

I'm starting to understand that success has no final destination. It is a quiet shift that occurs when one begins to know their worth. Maybe one day, when I get there, I won't realize it at all. I'll just feel at peace in my own skin; it will simply feel like home.

So, I won't send this letter, because it isn't really for you, it's for me. I need this as a reminder that struggle turns uncertainty into understanding, and effort into peace.

And if you, by any chance, see this, Future Me, I hope you are still true to yourself. I hope you're still in love with what you do and that you're grateful for the journey that led you here.

I had faith in you long before you ever existed.

With love,

Me, the unfinished draft

CELESTA KOUKEJIAN

A KIND REMINDER

To the people who felt swallowed by doubt and uncertainty, to those always trying to prove themselves to others... this is for you.

Dear You,

As time passes, you find yourself wandering through the echoes of your choices. Through the silence that keeps replaying your thoughts. Through the reflection of who you've become in everything you touch.

Doubt creeps in. Not with fire, not with ruin, but quietly.

You are only as worthy as what you give.

Only as strong as what you endure.

And you...believed it.

Doubt never needed to destroy you; it simply kept you busy. You kept busy, chasing approval, helping, proving your worth, saving others so you wouldn't have to save yourself...until you forgot how to breathe. Until you started mistaking burnout for purpose. Until being "the strong one" meant never breaking. Until there was nothing left... nothing left... nothing left for you.

You mistook exhaustion for purpose because being needed felt safer than being alone. And now you're left stranded in the silence. Grief. Exhaustion. Red-hot anger. Persistence. Now you realize that you built your worth around how well you could carry others.

You called it strength, but it was survival. Being unbreakable didn't make you good; it made you vanish.

You gave your all to others; your time, your strength, your care, never receiving anything in return. The familiar yet abhorring feeling sets in. It whispers: *Why did you give so much?*

Why not yourself first?

Another quiet ache surfaces, one you've held close for years.

The dream you once carried so vividly.

The one where you were seen. Where your joy was loud, undeniable, unstoppable.

You remember the freedom of it, the way the world seemed to disappear, the way your body and heart spoke in ways words never could.

But reality pressed in. Harsh. Unyielding.

It said, *Be practical. Be realistic. Let this go.*

And so you did. You buried that dream quietly, carefully, in the same place you hid pieces of yourself while chasing what the world demanded.

For a moment, the ache of what could have been wants to take you, and it almost does...

The tears. The trembling. The longing.

The shadow of that lost joy pressing against your chest.

And then...you remember the part of you that never stopped waiting.

It says: *You deserve rest. You deserve peace.*

You deserve softness.

You deserve to shine just for you.

Forgiveness seeps slowly, like warm sunlight through storm clouds.

You don't need to apologize for trying, for loving, for giving too much. You shouldn't need to lose yourself trying to be enough. You've always been.

Every sleepless night, every swallowed tear, every "yes" is proof:

Proof of a heart that wanted to be known.

Proof of a soul that refused to stop giving.

And now, allow yourself to breathe fully, to stretch and expand into the world as though the weight of everything you carried has lifted.

Allow yourself to live again.

Allow yourself to laugh wholeheartedly without the weight of proving anything to anyone.

Let the sunlight reach into every corner of your being, filling the hollowed spaces with warmth and light.

Remember the joy of movement, of creation, of expression. The freedom of speaking without apology, of letting yourself move as you've always wanted.

Feel your own light shining, stretching beyond yourself, touching everything around you with warmth and grace.

Allow exhaustion to loosen its grip. Only then will you realize that true strength comes from letting go.

Let every small choice become a spark.

Let your laughter ripple across spaces you once feared.

You are seen. By yourself. By the world.

And it feels astonishing.

And it feels possible.

Find your way back, not for doubt, not for anyone, but for the self you left behind: the part of you that's been waiting to rest without needing to prove anything.

Breathe.

Let movement and song fill your being.

Move through life with joy, curiosity, and courage.

Let love penetrate through the armor that once protected you..

Live like sunlight, flowing freely, unafraid and unapologetic.

Live fully, openly, without hesitation.

Love,

The part of you that's never going to stop loving ♥♥

يسعد صباحك ستنا بيروت

صباحية بيروت ما بتشبه ولا صباحية. ناس مطقمة، وناس لابسة تياب الشغل (فهمتوا علي كيف) ، وكل واحد ماشي بطريقو رايح يشوف رزقو. وفي ناس غريبة من الأساس... من طلوع الضو وهي مش عارفة لوين رايحة ولا ليش. يمكن شارع الحمراء يجمع الكل مع بعض، ما بقي تعرف تفرق الطموح من الضايغ فيها.

بتكمل طريقك، بتسمع زمامير العجقة من ميل، وهدوء الصنايع من ميل ثاني... وكأنك رحت على دني مختلفة. شي غريب فعلاً. بتكمل مشي، وبتحس إتو بيروت، رغم التعب، بعدها حلوة. فيها نبض يربط الناس ببعض، وبنفس الوقت يفرق. يمكن لأتو كل حدا يشوفها من ميلتو... من الزاوية يلي بس هو يفهمها. بس الشي الوحيد اللي دائماً يجمعن هوي حبن لهل قطعة الأرض.

الناس هون دائماً راكضة: في ناس راكضة ورا لقمتهما، وناس راكضة ورا حلمها. المهم تضلك ملحق و ماشي معهم... لأتو القعدة بهالزمن حقها مصاري، حتى هيدي مش ببلاش.

مدينة غريبة فعلاً... بتتعبك بس بنفس الوقت بتسليكي. ناسها حالة تدرّس؛ حالة انشغال مواطن بنيويورك، وانبساط سايح ياسبانيا.

وما فيك تنسى هداك الولد ورا الإشارة... ولد عم بيع ورد، وعيونو أوسع من الدنيا. بيقلك: "ورد للست؟" وانت بعدك عم تحاول تستوعبي شو عم يصير.

يا عنيدة يا بيروت... لا بتعرفي تنامي ولا تنميني. بس ماشي الحال، يطلعلك.

يقولو عنك وقعت سبع مرّات...

بس إنت بالأصل علّمت الشرق كيف لازم يمشي....

على حافة الذكرى

ما زالت تلك الايام محفورة في ذاكرتي كأنها جرح لم يندمل بعد. كانت الحرب تمد أذيالها لتطال وطني الحبيب لبنان، والدخان يغطي السماء التي كانت يوماً مرآة للسلام. توقفت عقارب ساعتي عند الساعة ليلاً، وتوقفت معها كل طفولتي ونشأتي وصباي. لقد رحل من كان في عقلي وقلبي.

اختلفت كلماتي بعبراتي المنسدلة من مقلي، تلبّل حروف لساني التي كانت تهتف باسمه. خطواتي لم تعد تعرف طريقها، من أين انطلقت؟ وإلى أين أصل؟ أسمع اسمي كأنه صدى آت من بعيد، أمي يجاني تناديني، وتطلب إلي أن ألمم أشلائي المتناثرة هنا وهناك، وأمتعتي في حقيبة يد صغيرة، ونشدّ الرحال ونرحل هرباً من موتٍ لربما يخطفنا من بين الزكام. عجالات السيارة تتسابق مع الريح، أما أنا فالريح تحملني إلى ابتسامة لطالما رسمها على شفتي، وتحطّ بي على صوتٍ كان يخفّف عني ثقل الأيام. كنت أنتظر كلاماً معسولاً، أعدّ الأيام والساعات والدقائق، وأتسمّر أمام وجه محيب، كل لفظٍ منه يفتح عقلي، ويفتح آفاقاً قد أغلقت يأساً، فتعود إلى الحياة أملاً.

حطّ عزيتنا بعيداً عن مرتع طفولتي، ترجلنا منها مستنظرين ما تبقى من أيام تنزف دماً، يوماً بعد يوم - على أنامل يدي أعدّها - أريد ركناً من منزلي، حفنة من سكينه تدفني، دفترًا من صور عائلتي، أوراقاً من كنوز طفولتي. كلها تناثرت وأتلفت وخرقت، وأزيلت من حياة كانت يوماً ملكاً لنا كغيرنا من البشر.

شهران قد مرّا بمجرّهما وقسوتهما. حانت ساعة العودة، العودة إلى المجهول، لا شيء بقي على حاله. لم تبق سوى الذكريات المعلقة في الذاكرة وليست على جدران مأوانا.

كنت أظنّ أنّ الزمن سيهدئ الألم، لكنني اكتشفت أنّ الفقد لا ينسى، بل يتحوّل إلى نبض خافٍ يسكن أعماق القلب. في كل ذكرى لرحيله، أرفع بصري إلى السماء، أبحث عن نجم يشبه عينيه، عن إشراقه تذكّرني بأنّه ما زال هناك... في مكان لا تصله الحرب، ولا يعرف الحزن.



ՄԱՆԿՈՒԹԻՒՆ

Կու գայ պահ մը, երբ մարդ կը կանգնի հայելիի մը դիմաց եւ ինքզինք տեսնելու փոխարէն կը տեսնէ իր մանկութիւնը՝ նստած մէկ անկիւն մը, աչքերուն մէջ անխռով ու ջերմ փայլով եւ ձեռքերուն՝ փոքրիկ խաղալիք մը. անոր վրայ ժամանակը իր հետքը չէր կրցած ձգել: Ան կը ժպտի՝ պարզ, անաղարտ, առանց վախի եւ դիմակներու: Իսկ ես կը նայիմ իրեն ու կը խորհիմ, թէ որքան ալ հեռացած ըլլանք իրարմէ, ժամանակի մեր կապը մեզ իրարու կը միացնէ: Այդ փոքրիկ աղջիկը ունէր աչքեր, որոնք կը հաւատային ամէն բանի լաւութեան: Ան կը կարծէր, որ մարդոց սրտերը միշտ բաց են, եւ աշխարհը պարզ տեղ մըն է, ուր արդարութեան կարելի է հասնիլ առանց պայքարի: Բայց կեանքէն սորվելիք ճշմարտութիւններ ունինք: Այն օրերուն, երբ կեանքի յոյսը կորսնցնէ իր շողքը, եւ լռութիւնը ծանրանայ, կը հասկնամ, թէ մեծնալ միայն տարիներու անցում չի նշանակեր, այլ այդ յոյսը մշտապէս վառ պահելու ընթացք մը:

Շատ անգամ կը ցանկամ վազել դէպի անցեալ, ամուր գրկել այդ աղջնակը եւ փափսալ անոր ականջին.

«Եթէ երբեմն վախնաս, յիշէ, որ դուն միշտ ունեցած ես այն փոքրիկ յոյսը, որ քեզի սորվեցուցած է կրկին ոտքի կանգնիլ»:

Տարիներու ընթացքին սորված եմ գնահատել այն, ինչ որ ունիմ, եւ հասկնալ, թէ ինչպէ՛ս ուժս արմատներ ունի այն տունէն, ուր հասակ նետած եմ: Մայրս՝ միշտ զօրաւոր կանգնած կողքիս, իր օրինակով սորվեցուցած է տոկունութիւն, աշխատասիրութիւն եւ ջանձնուելու կամք: Հայրս, իր կարգին, ձգած է յիշողութիւններ եւ արժէքներ, որոնք կը պահեն սրտիս մէջ՝ յիշելով, որ կեանքին պէտք է նայիլ միշտ առջեւ: Այսպէս, դանդաղ բայց հաստատ, դարձայ աւելի ինքնավստահ ու հասուն եւ երախտապարտ՝ այն ընտանիքին, որուն սիրոյն շնորհիւ այսօր ամուր կանգնած եմ այս աշխարհին մէջ:

Ժամանակը անցաւ, բայց ներսիդիս տակաւին կը քալէ այն փոքրիկ աղջիկը: Երբ յոգնիմ եւ ինքզինքս կորսնցնեմ, ան ինծի կը յիշեցնէ ինչպէս վազել առանց նպատակի, սիրել առանց վախի, երազել առանց սահմանի: Երբ մութ օրեր գան, ան կը յիշեցնէ, որ մանկութեան աստղերը տակաւին կը փայլին. ան կը սորվեցնէ, որ ինքզինք գտնելը առաջին, բայց ամենէն դժուար քայլն է, սակայն միաժամանակ՝ ամենէն գեղեցիկը:

Այսօր կը խորհիմ, թէ մեծնալ չի նշանակեր մոռնալ: Մեծնալ կը նշանակէ ունենալ խիզախութիւն՝ կրկին դառնալու իսկական «ես»-իդ, պարզ, անկեղծ եւ հաւատարիմ «ես»-իդ:

Կ'ուզեմ պահել մանկութեանս շունչը, այն հաւատքը եւ անուշ աչքերը, որոնք տակաւին կը հաւատան հրաշքներու:

Կը նայիմ ինծի եւ կը հասկնամ, որ եթէ այսօր կրնամ սիրել, ներել, ստեղծել, այդ բոլորը միայն այն պատճառով, որ մանկութիւնս տակաւին կ'ապրի մէջս:

Այն փոքրիկ աղջիկը իր խոցելի ժպիտով, իր ազնիւ մաքրութեամբ դարձաւ յոյս:

Եւ ամէն անգամ, երբ աշխարհը կը փորձէ մարել այդ յոյսը, կը զգամ, որ ան կը հսկէ ինծի:

UNSENT ARCHIVES:

REFLECTION OF MEMORIES.



08

A LETTER TO THE YOUTH

Dear youth and schools of Lebanon,

HUMUN encourages you to let your voices be heard and to be the best versions of yourselves. Our next conference is the perfect opportunity to do so. Whether you are students from Haigazian who want to help organize the event, students who wish to participate and debate with peers, or schools that aim to enhance a variety of skills in their students, the HUMUN conference is the best platform to achieve these goals.

Studying the politics and diplomacy of various nations allows students to learn about different cultures, be informed about specific issues nations face, and expand their knowledge through diverse research and country representations, all of which can be experienced at our conference. HUMUN's focus on influential discussions, research, diplomatic approaches, and public speaking helps cultivate the future leaders of Lebanon. What makes us unique in Lebanon is providing a personalized experience for each school and each student, ensuring that participation is both fun and educational. Although MUN can be challenging for younger students, HUMUN strives to ensure that students of all ages learn from this experience and improve themselves.

Thus, we would like to leave you with a question and the answer: In the current Lebanese political and economic climate, where is hope found? The answer is you, the youth. Through participating in conferences, building social networks, and educating yourselves on world issues and their solutions, you are going to take charge of this country and create hope for future generations.

Our struggle will end because we will show our HUMUNITY THROUGH ADVERSITY.



THE THINGS LEFT UNSAID

With every event we hold, countless words remain unspoken—words we wish we could say to the people we meet, those we hope to help, and those who have endured more than words can ever express.

Through our **Empowered Campaign**, we learned that sometimes the most powerful messages are the ones that remain unsaid. Our “unsent letters” were written not in ink, but in moments of care, painted smiles, laughter shared, and simple gestures that whispered, “*You are seen, and you are loved.*”

From our visit to **IDAD**, from children teaching us that strength comes in small, joyful moments, to our efforts to raise funds to keep their school alive, each encounter became a message from the heart. A letter we could never entirely write, but one we always meant to send.

As we look ahead, we continue this gentle conversation of kindness. Our upcoming visit to the **Armenian Sanatorium of Azounieh** will be another page in our story, a day of planting, painting, and listening to stories that time almost forgot, reminding us of the purpose that drives our club.

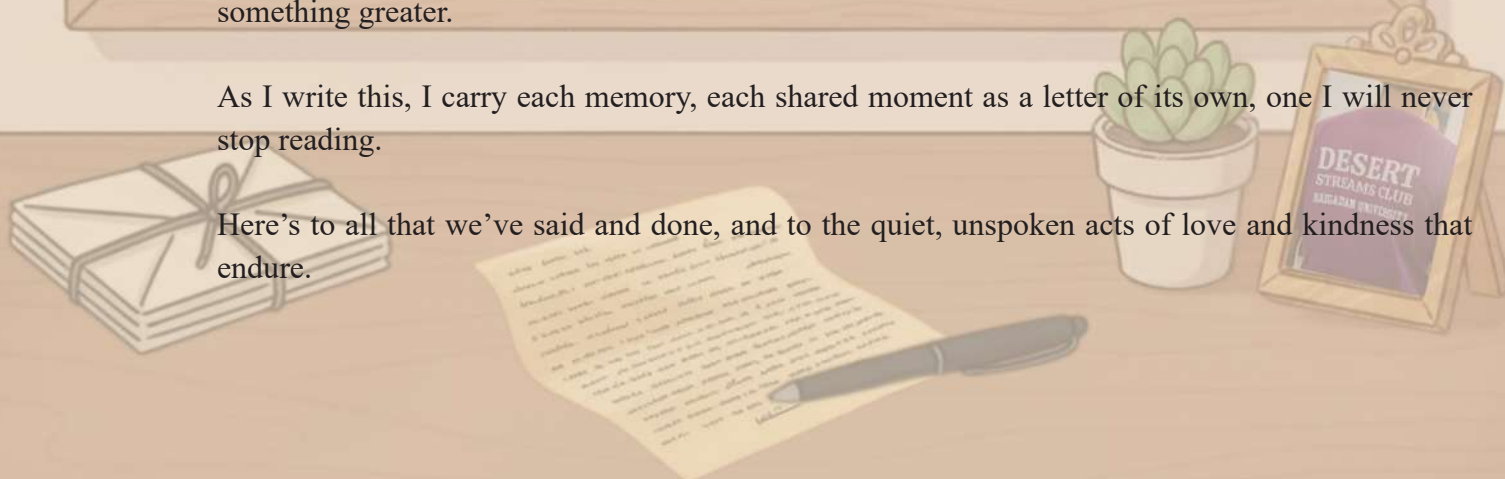
And as our first Christmas in two years nears, we hope to bring warmth to families in need and offer a spark of joy in a season where joy is especially precious. We may not be able to fix everything, but perhaps we can remind someone, even for a moment, that they matter.

These are our letters to the world, the thoughts we could never fully voice, yet are always understood. Because sometimes, love doesn’t need to be spoken to be received. It lives quietly in the spaces between our words, in the hope we choose to keep alive.

To every volunteer who has walked with us, thank you—for your time, your warmth, and your unwavering spirit. Thank you for showing up, even during the toughest times and in the shadow of a devastating war. Thank you for believing that even the smallest act of kindness can ripple into something greater.

As I write this, I carry each memory, each shared moment as a letter of its own, one I will never stop reading.

Here’s to all that we’ve said and done, and to the quiet, unspoken acts of love and kindness that endure.



ARENIE BOYNERIAN

SPIRITUALITY BEYOND IMAGINABLE HORIZONS

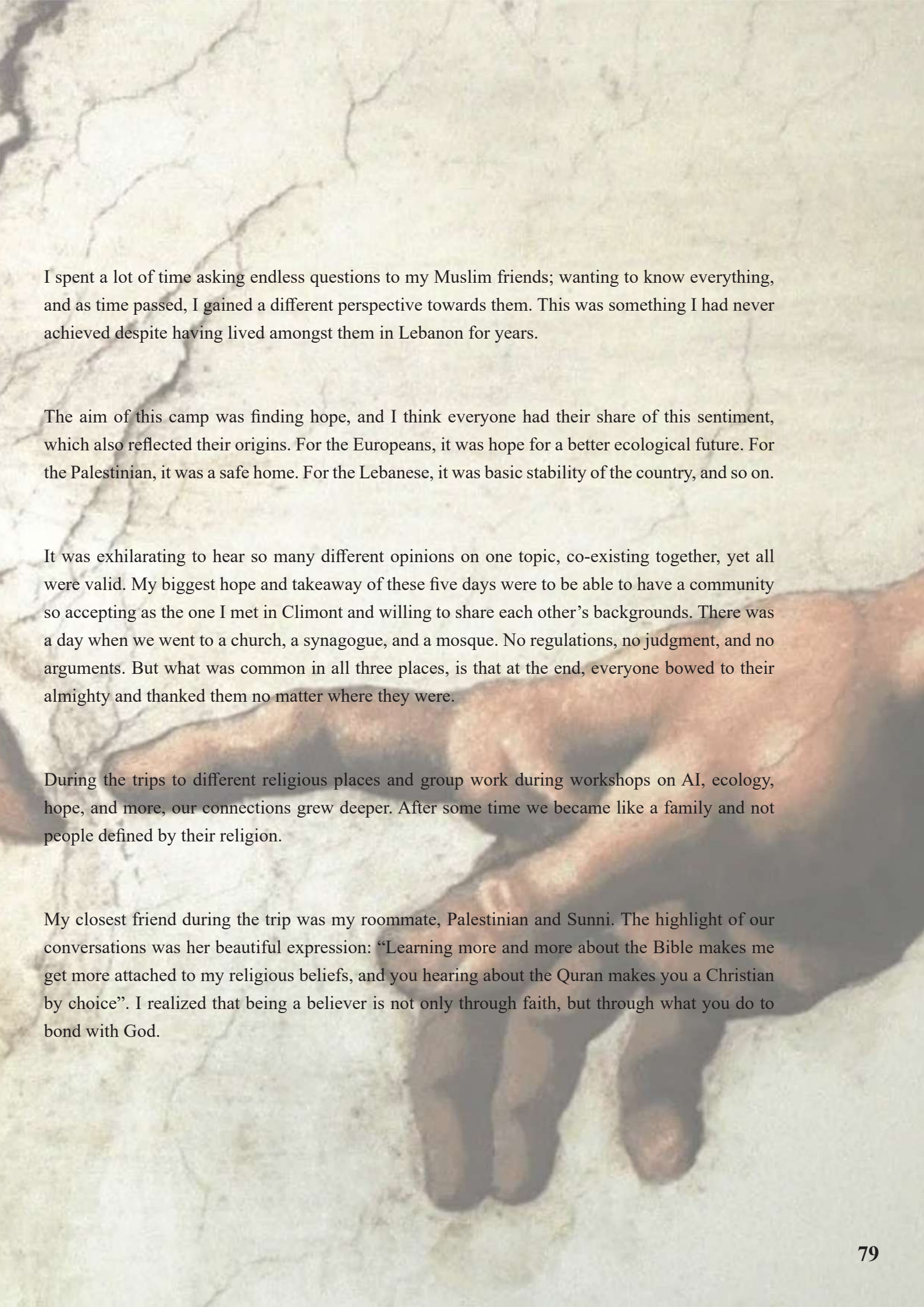
It is only by questioning your faith that you will one day become a devoted believer.

Throughout every milestone of my life I have been involved in various religious groups. It came as no surprise that I joined the Spiritual Life Club from the very beginning of my journey at Haigazian. Yet I realized the missing element was that my religious practices were guided by habits and not personal decisions. I went to church because my family did; I attended worship events because that was expected. During my academic journey, blending in with people coming from different religious backgrounds gradually changed my perspective for the better. This is the aim of this club; to be a place where everyone is welcome.

HU's Spiritual Life played a big role in welcoming this change. My interaction on campus was very limited to my Armenian friends, even within other clubs of which I was a part of. No matter the activity, you often notice people having their "clique" and avoid interacting with others. With Rev. Wilbert, this was very different. He organized trips to Lebanon's most beautiful sights, encouraged bonding, interaction, and genuinely created this lovely atmosphere throughout every activity which made HU feel like a second home. Through this club, I even had the opportunity to join a camp at Climont, Strassbourg, during the summer of 2025. It felt like an ideal way to go and disconnect from everything that had been going on in Lebanon. To my surprise, when I reached my destination I met people coming from various backgrounds and religions.

As Armenian Christians, we have a tendency to grow up with a leniency towards our own people. But the cultural time spent with those whom I had the honour to meet during the camp could not be exchanged for anything. I got to learn about different cultures, hearing the oppressed voices from Afghanistan and Palestine, and sharing similarities we all have with respect to religion.

There was a trip to a German concentration camp, in which people of Jewish and Palestinian origins participated. This would have been an impossible scenario in Lebanon. Seeing both of them sharing their part of their story in peace shed a different light on my everyday problems.



I spent a lot of time asking endless questions to my Muslim friends; wanting to know everything, and as time passed, I gained a different perspective towards them. This was something I had never achieved despite having lived amongst them in Lebanon for years.

The aim of this camp was finding hope, and I think everyone had their share of this sentiment, which also reflected their origins. For the Europeans, it was hope for a better ecological future. For the Palestinian, it was a safe home. For the Lebanese, it was basic stability of the country, and so on.

It was exhilarating to hear so many different opinions on one topic, co-existing together, yet all were valid. My biggest hope and takeaway of these five days were to be able to have a community so accepting as the one I met in Climont and willing to share each other's backgrounds. There was a day when we went to a church, a synagogue, and a mosque. No regulations, no judgment, and no arguments. But what was common in all three places, is that at the end, everyone bowed to their almighty and thanked them no matter where they were.

During the trips to different religious places and group work during workshops on AI, ecology, hope, and more, our connections grew deeper. After some time we became like a family and not people defined by their religion.

My closest friend during the trip was my roommate, Palestinian and Sunni. The highlight of our conversations was her beautiful expression: "Learning more and more about the Bible makes me get more attached to my religious beliefs, and you hearing about the Quran makes you a Christian by choice". I realized that being a believer is not only through faith, but through what you do to bond with God.

ՄԻՐԵԼԻ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆ

Կան նամակներ, որոնք արդիւնքն են մտքի պարզ մէկ վերլուծումի, եւ կան նամակներ, որոնք արդիւնքն են սրտի խորքէ բխող զգացումներու: Այս նամակը կը պատկանի երկրորդին: Անիկա չբացայայտուած խոստովանութիւն մըն է, որ երկար տարիներ լուռ պահուած է հայութեան սրտին մէջ:

Միւրելի Հայաստան,

Մենք քեզի եկանք ութ երիտասարդով՝ հոգիները լեցուն անհանգստութեամբ ու վերապրումով: Քեզմէ դարձանք ութ հոգիով՝ քեզի աւելի հարազատ, արմատներուն աւելի կապուած, թեթեւցած ու քեզմով յագեցած. զգացում մը, որ միայն տունը կրնայ ներշնչել: Առաջին անգամ քեզ տեսանք օդանաւի պատուհանէն՝ Արարատը հսկայի մը պէս թիկունքիդ կանգնած, ամուր եւ անշարժ պահապանը այն բոլորին, ինչ որ եղած է եւ պիտի ըլլայ՝ մեր սրտերը լեցնելով լուսաւոր լեռներուն յիշողութեամբ:

Մենք այցելեցինք Եռաբլուր, ուր աղօթք պէտք չէր, որովհետեւ մեր լուրջեան ճայնը արդէն կը խօսէր մեր հոգիներուն: Հոն զգացինք եւ հասկցանք, որ պատմութիւնը միայն էջերու վրայ գրուած չէ, այլ ան կը քայլէ մեր կողքին, կը նայի մեր աչքերուն եւ կը վերածուի պատասխանատւութեան: Հաւատքի ծննդավայր՝ Խոր Վիրապին մէջ, փորձեցինք մեր սրտին զարկին մէջ գտնել այն ուժը, որ ամբողջ ժողովուրդ մը խաւարէն լոյսի բերած էր:

Այնուհետեւ, հանդիպեցանք Արցախէն տեղահանուած ընտանիքներու հետ: Մանուկներ, որոնց աչքերը կ'արտացոլացնէին կորուստի խաւարն ու ապագայի անջնջելի փայլքը: Անոնք տուն չունէին, բայց ունէին Հայաստանը: Անոնք ժպտեցան, եւ մեզի սորվեցուցին, որ հայրենիքը միշտ հող չէ, այլ մարդիկ են, որոնք կը շնչեն եւ կը շարունակեն ապրիլ հայունման:

Յայտագիր մը ներկայացուցինք հայ մանուկներուն՝ դասախօսելով տարբեր նիւթերու մասին: Այս դասախօսութիւններուն միջոցով անոնք սորվեցան գաղափար մը մշակել, կազմակերպել եւ ստեղծագործութիւններ իրականացնել, ինչպէս նաեւ տեսնել, որ արհեստագիտութիւնը կրնայ դառնալ մանուկներուն ուսումի եւ ապագայի օգտակար ուժ մը: Այս բոլոր աշխատանքներուն մէջ մեր գլխաւոր նպատակն էր զանոնք հզօրացնել գիտելիքով, ստեղծագործականութեամբ եւ կազմակերպութեամբ, որովհետեւ կը հաւատանք, որ իրենք կը կազմեն իրենց համայնքի եւ Արցախի ապագայի ամուր սիւները: Ամէնէն կարեւորը՝ անոնք զգացին, որ իրենց ճայնը կը լսուի, իրենց հարցերը կը պատմուին, եւ իրենք մաս կը կազմեն մեծ ու միասնական պատմութեան մը:

Հայաստան մեր այցելութիւնը առիթ մը հանդիսացաւ մտածելու եւ նկատելու, թէ ինչո՞ւ այսքան շատ նամակներ չեն հասած իրենց հասցեատիրոջ: Անդրադարձանք, թէ ինչո՞ւ մեր հայկականութիւնը բազմիցս փորձած են ջնջել, եւ ինչպէ՞ս է, որ մենք ամէն անգամ աւելի զօրաւոր ոտքի կանգնած ենք:

Այս նամակը երբեք պիտի չդրկուի քեզի, Հայաստան, որովհետեւ դուն արդէն զայն կարդացիր՝ մեր քայլերուն, լռութեան, արցունքներուն եւ ժպիտներուն մէջ: Մենք պիտի վերադառնանք ոչ իբրեւ զբօսաշրջիկներ, այլ Հայաստանի գաւակներ, որոնք միշտ կը գտնեն տուն վերադառնալու ճամբան, որովհետեւ դուն մեր տան մէջ չես, դուն մեր տունն ես:

Սիրով, հպարտութեամբ եւ անհուն կարօտով:

UNSENT LETTERS:

WHEN INK ENGRAVES THE SOUL.



09



DR. CHRISTINE ARZOUMANIAN

DEAR YOU

I never thought I would write to you. For some time, I ran from even saying your name. You were the storm I didn't invite, the shadow that crept into my life silently, and then stayed as though it owned every breath I took. I used to think you arrived to destroy me but now, I see you as the quiet teacher I never asked for, but somehow needed to acknowledge.

When you first appeared, I felt betrayed by my own body, by time, by the universe. Yet, even while facing my deepest fears, I never felt abandoned by God. You arrived with pain and darkness. You stole the simplest things like my energy, vitality, sleep, comfort, and at times even the air in my lungs. But the greatest theft happened in the silent, constant battle between good and evil.

You taught me humility, though. To ask for help. To say, "I am not okay today." You taught me strength, not the loud and heroic kind but the quiet and patient kind that wakes up every day and keeps trying. You taught me to cherish the smallest moments more than ever before. A deep breath without pain, a genuine laugh, time with loved ones, the hands that held mine in silence. You showed me that love truly heals, and that all the love and kindness you give in life will return to you when you need it most, in different forms and shapes.

I won't romanticize you. You hurt me. You left scars and some visible, some only I can feel. I wouldn't choose you. But I can choose what I do with you. I can choose to make meaning from the ashes you left behind.

Today, I don't write this letter to thank you for coming. I write it because I no longer wish to carry you in silence. You are part of my story, but not the whole story. You are not my identity. You are only a chapter, and not the final page.

So here is my truth... You changed me, but you did not end me. I am still here. Breathing, praying, loving, learning, inspiring, and growing around the broken parts. And for me this is the quietest form of victory.

Sincerely,
The one who survived you

DR. SHOGHIG KALOUSSIAN

A STILLBORN LETTER

I write this to the wind,
Knowing the ink will vanish,
Aware that every word will fade
Long before it ever reaches your hands.

You once said you would always be with me.
Now, your absence forces its presence,
Reminding me that love does not vanish, it transforms,
And somehow, you are still here.

Every sound, every scent, every heartbeat
Brings me back to you.
And I ache,
Not just in heart,
But in every inch of me.
Memory pours two cups of coffee,
Though only one grows cold.

And sometimes I wonder who I am waiting for,
You, or the piece of me that left with you.
Hope sets the table
For a guest who never arrives.
Yet, we still keep lighting the candles.

Let us, but once, exchange the parts.
You wait for me,
And I do not come.
And perhaps then,
You will understand
How love dies, not in a storm,
But in the stillness between heartbeats.
I do not want to heal,
For healing means forgetting.
This pain is all I have left,
The only proof that you were once mine.
I cradle it like a fragile flame,
A flicker that refuses to die,
A reminder that what we had was real.

If I forgive you,
Then it's as if it never happened.
If the pain is gone,
There is no living proof
That we ever loved.
But is that what I am,
Living proof that love does not survive?

Promise me not to hide your pain.
It is unfair that we laughed together,
But you cried alone.
If I am to bear this wound forever,
Let it at least remind us both
That we once loved deeply enough to hurt.

I will whisper to the wind the words I cannot tell you,
And let the silence answer back.
I will live moments you will never witness,
And breathe through days you no longer belong to.

I don't want to remember what happiness feels like,
It reminds me of you.
I don't want to remember you.
I don't seek peace anymore.
It feels too much like forgetting.
And forgetting feels too much like losing you again and again.

REV. WILBERT VAN SAANE

A LIVING LETTER

There is something deeply personal and intimate about traditional letter writing. Especially if it is a letter between friends or lovers. The other is always on your mind as you put your pen to paper, form the sentences, fold the letter, and insert it into the envelope.

The sensory elements heighten the personal nature of the letter: the distinct smell and texture of the paper, the dipping of the pen in ink, your grip on the pen as you spell the name of your loved one, the beauty of a stamp that you affix to the envelope, the sealing of the envelope with your saliva.

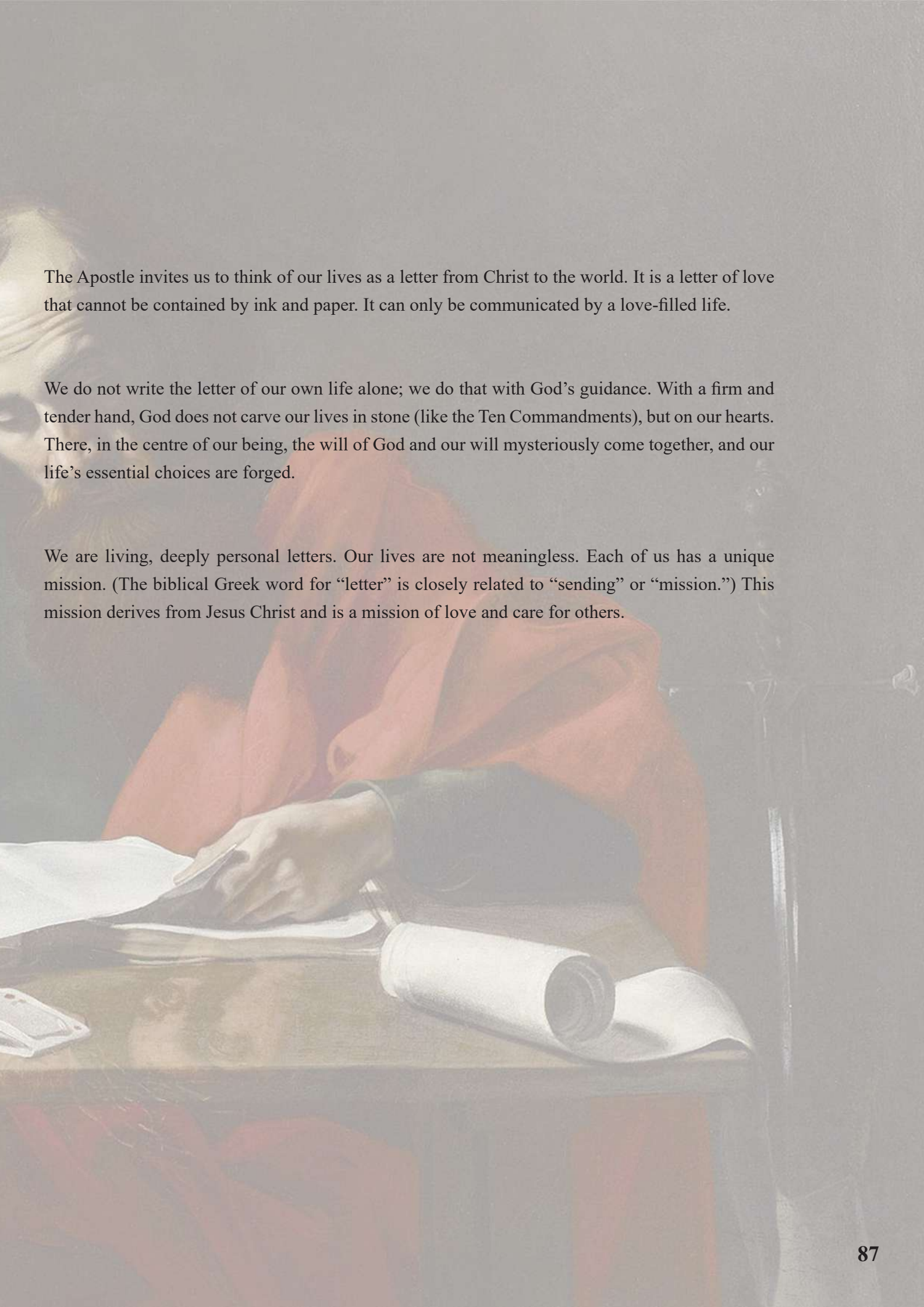
There is also something definitive about a letter. You cannot take those words back. You feel that most strongly the moment you drop the envelope into a mailbox. When your fingers release the precious paper, the words are beyond your control. Now they have to do their work in the life of the other.

Our letters are private affairs. We don't intend them to be read by anyone but the addressee. When archives are opened, and letters from famous historical figures become public, we sometimes feel as if we are eavesdropping.

Still, private letters made public may have a profound impact. Think of the famous love letters between Abelard and Heloise or Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*. In our private correspondence, we open our hearts and express our deepest feelings. Such words may resonate with others.

The Apostle Paul compares the Christian life to a letter. To his friends in the city of Corinth he writes: "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all" (2 Corinthians 3:2).

The Apostle continues: "You show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are human hearts."



The Apostle invites us to think of our lives as a letter from Christ to the world. It is a letter of love that cannot be contained by ink and paper. It can only be communicated by a love-filled life.

We do not write the letter of our own life alone; we do that with God's guidance. With a firm and tender hand, God does not carve our lives in stone (like the Ten Commandments), but on our hearts. There, in the centre of our being, the will of God and our will mysteriously come together, and our life's essential choices are forged.

We are living, deeply personal letters. Our lives are not meaningless. Each of us has a unique mission. (The biblical Greek word for "letter" is closely related to "sending" or "mission.") This mission derives from Jesus Christ and is a mission of love and care for others.

Dear God,

I haven't written a letter for a long time, but it feels good to do so. I want to talk about Lebanon with you.

When it comes to Lebanon, I often don't know what to say. This country is so different from the country I come from.

You sent me to this country, I believe. You send us. You make us move. Into directions we would not have chosen ourselves.

For four years now, Lebanon has been part of my life, my coming and going. My thinking and reflecting.

I have been angry with people in Lebanon, for sure. And sometimes I also have been angry with you. What is it that causes the suffering here? Isn't it enough?

Silence.

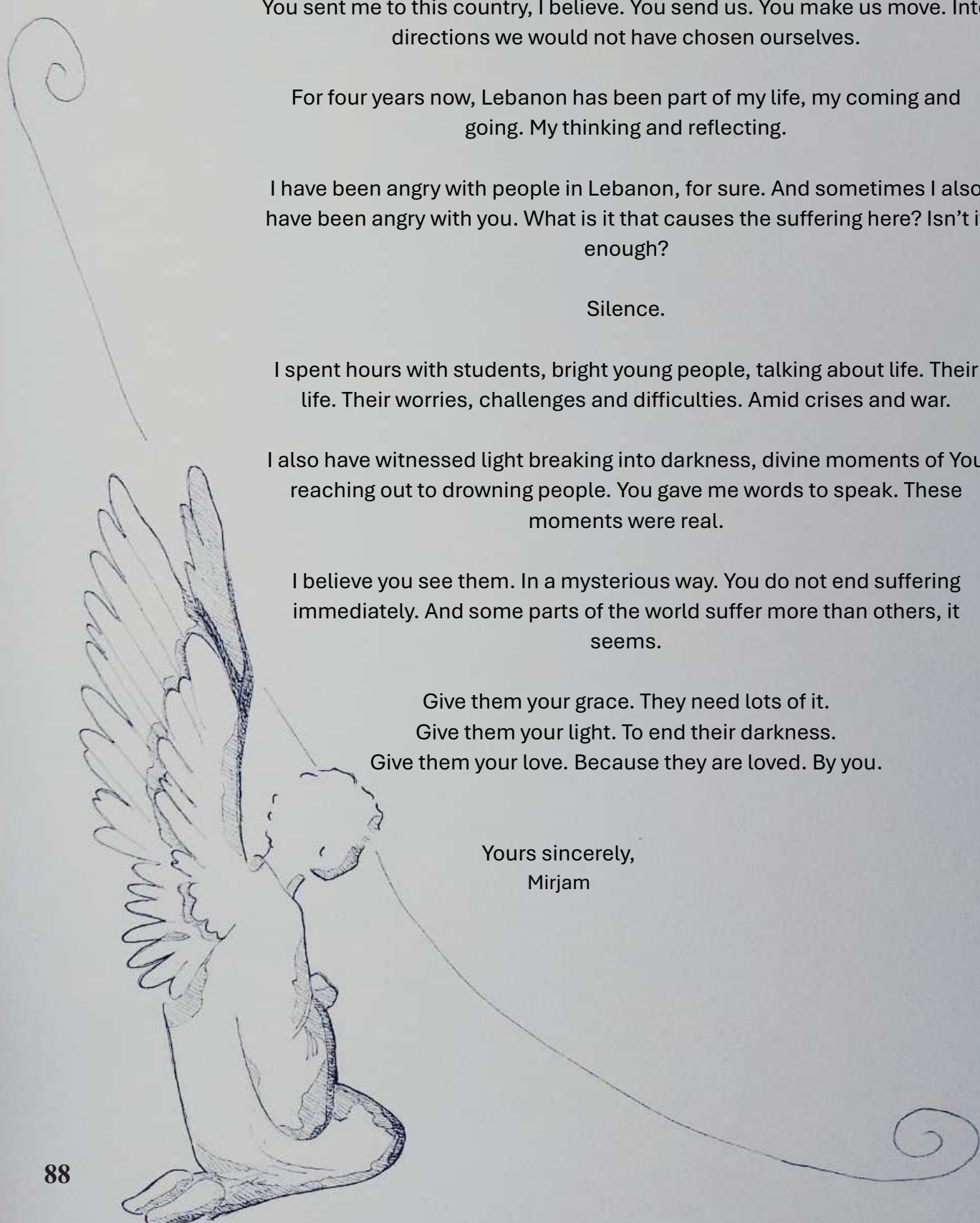
I spent hours with students, bright young people, talking about life. Their life. Their worries, challenges and difficulties. Amid crises and war.

I also have witnessed light breaking into darkness, divine moments of You reaching out to drowning people. You gave me words to speak. These moments were real.

I believe you see them. In a mysterious way. You do not end suffering immediately. And some parts of the world suffer more than others, it seems.

Give them your grace. They need lots of it.
Give them your light. To end their darkness.
Give them your love. Because they are loved. By you.

Yours sincerely,
Mirjam



Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to our dedicated writers, who continue to share their words and creativity, and to our readers, who support our endeavors and place their trust in us. Thank you for being part of our writing journey.

The Herald

THE HERALD



Haigazian University Rue Mexique, Kantari, Beirut-Lebanon

Tel: 961 1 349230/1 961 1 353010/1

theherald@haigazian.edu.lb

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