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THE HERALD



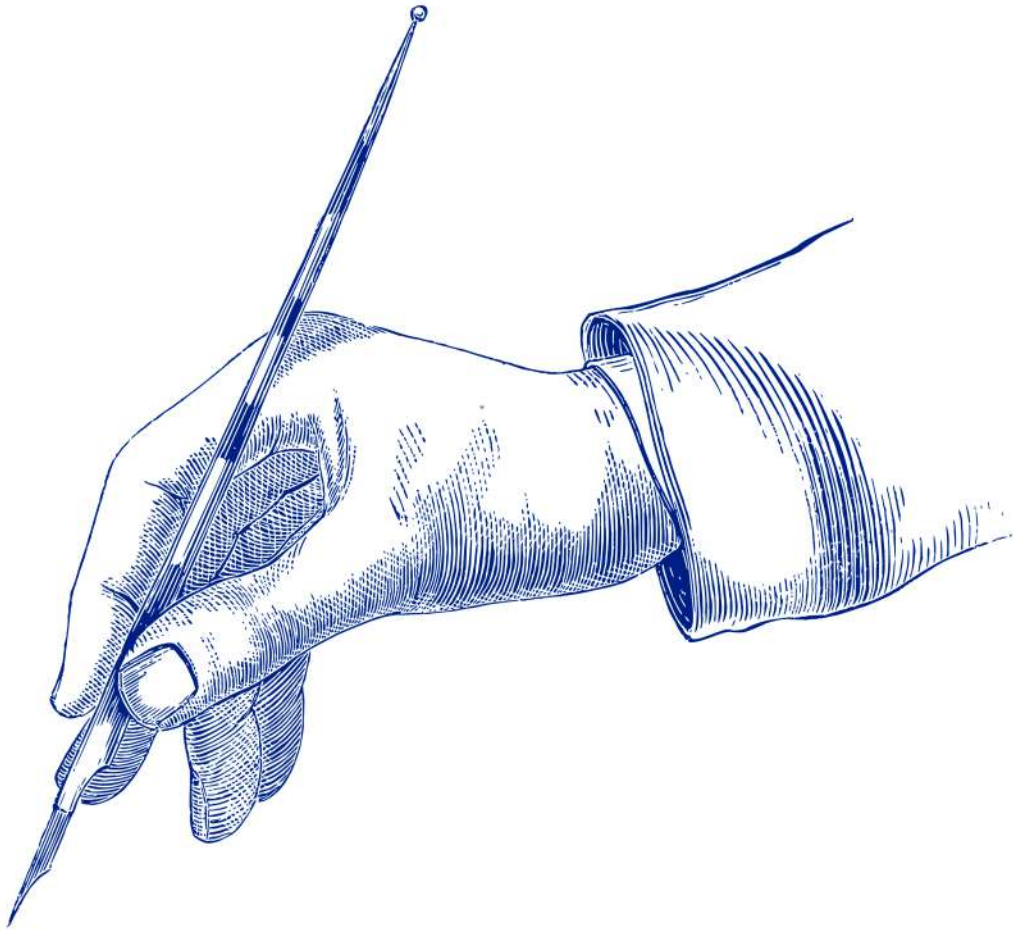
A PECULIAR TOUCH OF DESTINY
SPRING ISSUE 2026
XXXIV 2

LEAVE YOUR MARK



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The Chairperson's Corner

This semester's magazine holds a much greater value for every single person involved in making it come to light. The choice was either letting the war take its toll on our work or making this release's success even more meaningful.

Deciding on a theme for this semester seemed rather impossible. "Unsent Letters" held a special place for every single writer, which led to all new ideas sounding redundant, not perfect enough, or simply, not worth it. This was when the right stroke of ink found itself on my paper. What if, for this semester, each writer focuses on the weight of the endless choices which we succumb to? What is that one event in our lives when we held our free will high and cursed the burden that often comes with this blessing? This semester's theme targets the beautiful writer within every soul, not to simply blurt out an unshared past onto a piece of paper. But to reach a horizon that will reflect upon the life of a curious writer.

My plans for this semester ran for pages, my passion was untamable, and I wanted to expand this club to its infinite potential. But a touch of destiny will sometimes influence our well-orchestrated plans in an aspect that will almost be too hard to grasp. In our recent case, it was the war that was able to infiltrate itself into every single person's life. While this meant stalling this artistic process, it also revealed a blind loyalty from the writers which kept my team and I going:

"We will release late, even if after graduation, but we will make it work, the war does not win this"

"I have been waiting for your text, I did not want to hear that we will not have an issue this semester"

"Tell us what you need and consider it done"

This is a small glimpse of the endless support that fueled the energy to persevere.

Thank you deeply to every single writer, editor, team member, supervisor, designer...Your work turned mere ideas into this phenomenal art expressed in every single page, reflecting the inner essence of all the writers.

The Peculiar Touch Of Destiny will make you face the possibilities of where the light of your essence might shine through next. In this issue, it led us to the unravelling of these beautiful canvases.

To our beloved readers, we hope you enjoy this journey...To be continued...



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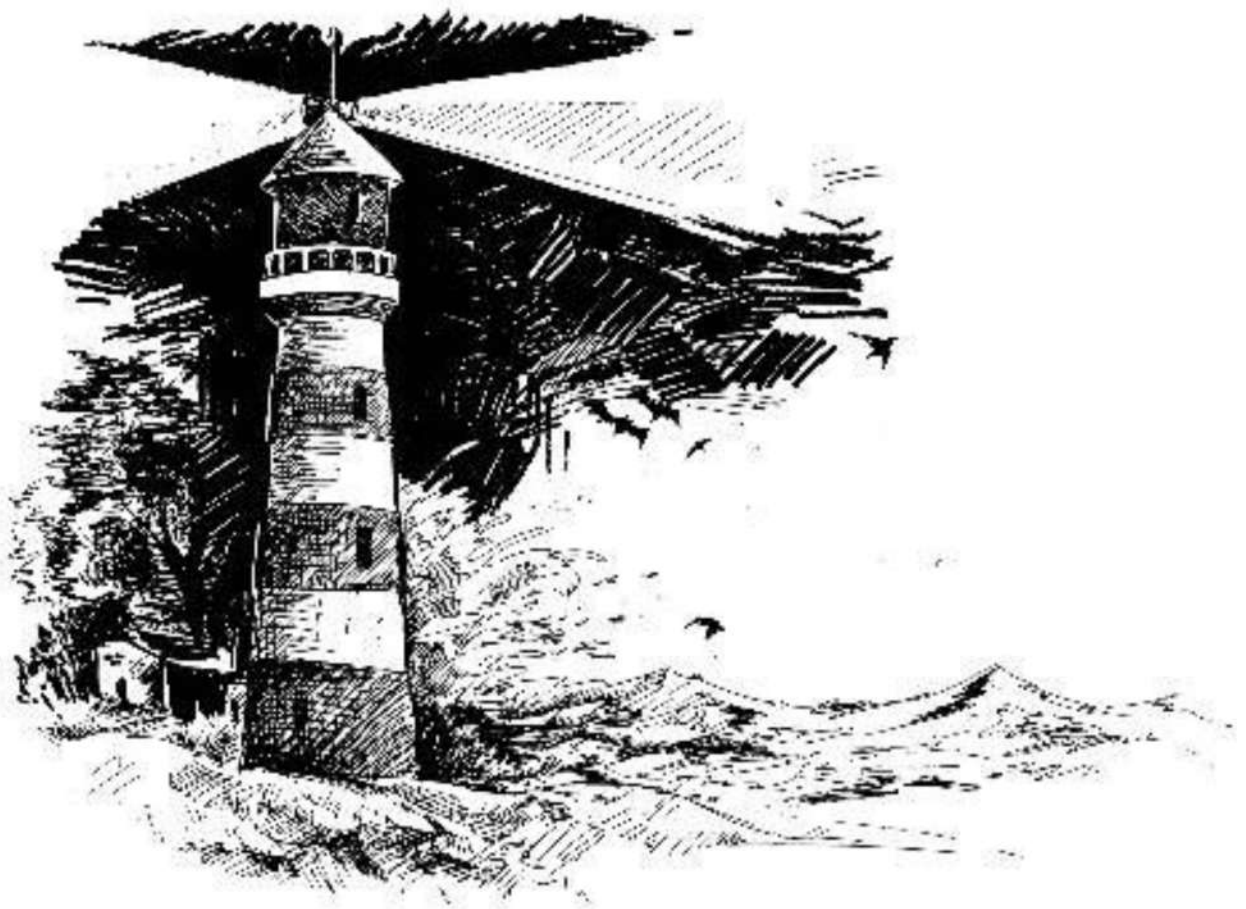
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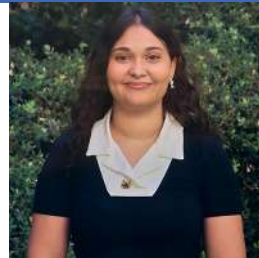
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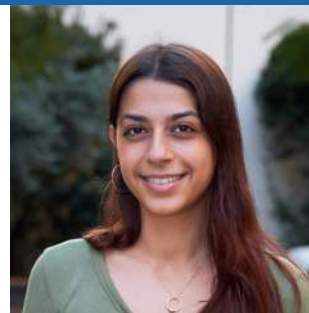


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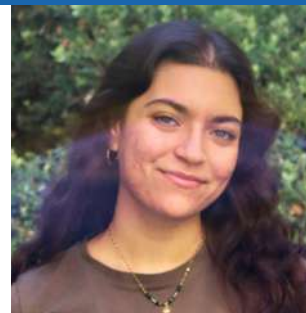
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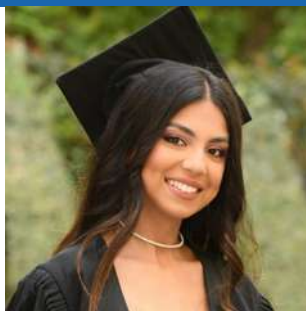
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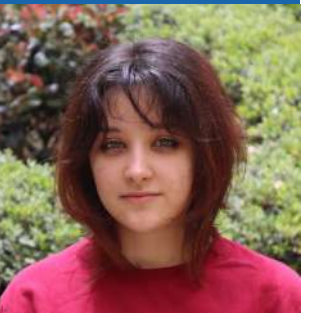
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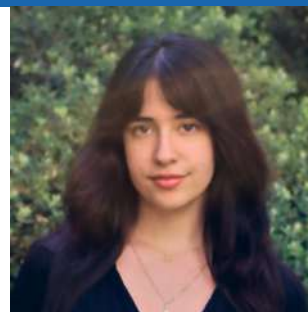
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PECULIAR DESTINIES:

STORIES SHAPED
BY THE UNKNOWN

01


*Amor y
Conciencia
Soy*



The Poetry of Heaven

He sleeps and the dream finds him where it always does: by the gleaming river. A fig tree grows beside the riverbank, bearing wild riparian figs. He is seventeen in the dream, his curls glowing gold in the light. He is barefoot. Back then, mornings still belonged to his mother. She would fling open his bedroom curtains. “Look at him,” she would sigh loudly. “Dead in bed.” He would groan into his pillow. “Mamaaa.” “Do not mama me. Up you go now...”

Outside their building, orange trees leaned over the courtyard wall. His mother used to hand him a metal bowl and tell him to collect the oranges that had fallen overnight. He remembers the sound they made when they hit the grass. Soft, soft, soft. Like tiny hearts dropping. His little brother would trail after him in pajamas and sandals, carrying his stuffed rabbit upside down by one ear. “His name is Rabbit?”, “No,” the boy would say, offended. “His name is Captain.”

Then the war came. The day they ran, his mother had been chopping parsley. When the first explosion came, the windows shook in their frames. Then another explosion. His mother was already moving. Turn off the stove. Get the documents. Get water. Shoes. He did not seem to recall the date or the hour it happened. He only recalled his mother’s hands shaking as she tied her scarf and his father’s mouth set in a tight line. He remembered his brother standing in the middle of the hallway with frightened eyes. “Where’s Captain?” the little boy asked. His brother started screaming. “Captain!” His rabbit. He had left it upstairs. “We don’t have time,” his father said. “Captain!” “Ya rouhe, no.”

The little boy tore himself out of their mother’s grip and ran. His brother went after him. He found him in the bedroom, standing on the mattress, reaching behind the pillows with both arms. The whole building trembled around them. “We have to go,” he said. His brother was crying too hard to hear him. “I can’t find him,” he sobbed. “I can’t find him.” And then there he was. Captain. Half trapped between the bedframe and the wall. The little boy snatched him up so fast he nearly fell backward. He pressed the rabbit’s face against his own and whispered, very softly, “I’m here. It’s okay, Captain...”

After that, memory begins to fracture. He recalls his mother reaching blindly into the backseat to touch his knee, just to make sure he is still there. He recalls his brother asleep at last with his face pressed into the rabbit’s ruined fur. Then the years folding over themselves until there is nothing left of that day except the feeling of running. The dream opens around him again. The river, the fig tree, and the dusk-heavy sky. “You came back,” says the Archangel, his wings terrible in their beauty. “Tell me what happened today.”



“Today,” he says, “I found one of my brother’s socks. Blue with little yellow stars on it. One of the stars had faded because he dragged his feet when he walked.” He can see his mother so clearly, standing in the hallway with one hand on her hip. “One day,” she would say, “I am going to build a second child out of all the things you leave lying around this house.” And his brother would laugh. Then run. Cartoons playing too loudly in the other room. His father, singing badly in the bathroom while shaving. The little boy, climbing onto the bathroom sink just to sit beside him. The Archangel steps closer. “You are carrying them,” he says. “I have to. If I stop, who will they be?” The boy presses the heels of his hands into his eyes. “I used to think destiny was something that reached down and led you toward the life you were meant to have. Now I think destiny is crueller than that.” The Archangel kneels before him, his wings folding around them both. “No,” he says, “Destiny is not what took them from you. Do not give them that power,” He tilts his head slightly, “It is very simple. Destiny is what remains.”

Then suddenly the river is full of bright, gleaming stars burning under the water. On the other side of the river, figures begin to appear. His mother first with her tired smile and her hair coming loose from its tie. Then his father. And beside them, his little brother. Captain tucked beneath one arm. The boy steps into the river. Beneath the surface, the stars brush against his skin. Halfway across, he turns back. The Archangel is already becoming part of the dusk again. His father reaches for him. His brother collides into him with a force that almost shatters his balance. His mother folds them both into herself.

What is memory if not a geography of souls, scattered and reunited?

He realizes that haunting is love that has learned to persist beyond absence. Haunting is being loved so profoundly that even emptiness hums with life. War still presses against him as he walks on, knowing the world is still broken, and perhaps always will be. Every step reminds him that love does not mend the world, it only holds him upright as it fractures around him. And still, he moves forward. Nothing is resolved. The river does not end. Grief is no longer something to escape, but something he carries. He realizes that destiny itself is the quiet loom upon which every thread of love and loss is woven, a tapestry that bends time and absence into a single, unbroken pattern of belonging. And he knows, deep in his marrow, that even as the world rushes forward, leaving ruins and ghosts behind, his love remains wild and indomitable, a heartbeat against the indifferent march of time.





La Touche Singulière du Destin

Il y a un étrange réconfort à croire que la vie suit un scénario écrit bien avant que nous ayons conscience de notre propre existence. Destin, fatalité, coïncidence, autant de noms pour désigner cette assurance silencieuse que tout arrive pour une raison. Pourtant, plus je grandis, plus je réalise à quel point cette idée est troublante. Et si le destin n'était pas un chemin tracé à l'avance, mais une succession de moments fragiles, façonnés par des choix que nous remarquons à peine sur le moment ?

On nous dit que la liberté est une bénédiction. La possibilité de choisir où aller, qui aimer, qui devenir. Mais la liberté porte en elle un poids singulier. À chaque choix correspond l'ombre de toutes les vies que nous n'avons pas choisies. Chaque « oui » enterre silencieusement mille « et si ». Parfois, se tenir face à tant de possibilités ressemble moins à une libération qu'à une paralysie.

Je croyais autrefois que le destin se manifesterait avec éclat, accompagné de certitude, de clarté ou d'un signe indéniable.

En réalité, il apparaît souvent de manière subtile, déguisé en journées ordinaires et en décisions apparemment insignifiantes. Une conversation prolongée une minute de plus que prévu. Une porte laissée entrouverte. Une hésitation qui se transforme en résolution. Ce sont ces moments-là qui redirigent doucement une vie, sans laisser de trace visible avant des années.

La touche singulière du destin se révèle le plus souvent avec le recul. Ce n'est qu'en regardant en arrière que l'on reconnaît comment un seul choix a façonné la personne que nous sommes devenus. Ce qui semblait accidentel prend alors un sens, comme si la vie elle-même assemblait un récit que nous étions incapables de percevoir en le vivant.

Il y a une beauté dans cette incertitude. Le destin n'exige pas la perfection, il répond au courage. Quitter son foyer pour un lieu inconnu, embrasser une identité autrefois inaccessible ou choisir de laisser partir quelqu'un que l'on aime, ces moments sont rarement guidés par la seule confiance. Ils sont guidés par la foi. La foi que même la perte peut avoir un sens et que les fins ne sont pas toujours des échecs, mais parfois des commencements déguisés.

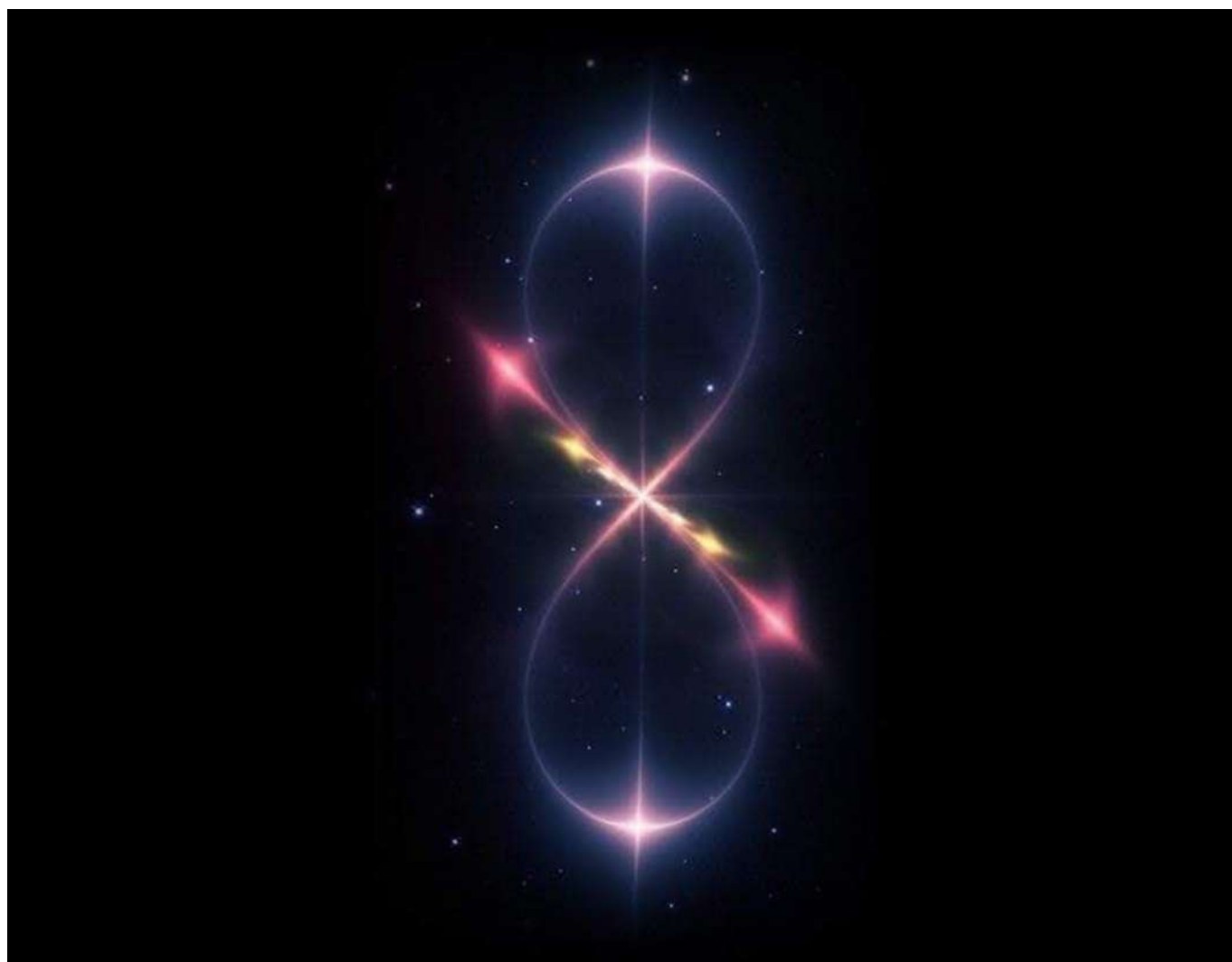


Cependant, le destin n'est pas toujours doux. Sa touche peut être lourde, laissant derrière elle le chagrin, le regret ou le manque. Il existe des chemins auxquels on ne peut revenir et des mots que l'on ne pourra plus jamais prononcer. Pourtant, même dans sa rudesse, le destin nous façonne. Il nous apprend à porter l'absence, à grandir autour de la douleur, à devenir plus sensibles sans nous briser.

Peut-être que la vérité la plus dérangement est que le destin ne nous libère pas de la responsabilité. Si nous sommes les auteurs de nos vies, alors nous devons accepter à la fois la beauté et le fardeau de ce rôle. Nous ne sommes pas de simples personnages attendant d'être guidés. Nous sommes ceux qui choisissent la direction de l'histoire, même lorsque l'issue demeure incertaine.

En ce sens, le destin n'est pas une force lointaine qui nous contrôle. Il est intime. Il vit dans nos décisions, nos doutes et notre courage de continuer malgré l'inconnu. Sa touche est singulière parce qu'elle semble à la fois inévitable et profondément personnelle.

Peut-être que le destin ne consiste pas à atteindre une destination finale, mais à découvrir qui nous devenons en chemin. Et peut-être que le plus grand acte de foi n'est pas de savoir que tout arrive pour une raison, mais de choisir d'avancer malgré tout, en croyant que le sens viendra ensuite.





Là OÙ Elle m'a Laissée

Sommes-nous assez courageux pour affronter notre destin ?

Me répétais-je en attendant que mon futur se présente.

J'étais dans un rêve où je devais la rencontrer. Autour de moi, d'autres âmes perdues attendaient les leurs.

À ma grande surprise, des tableaux ornaient la pièce. Si mystérieuse, mais si intrigante, cette galerie représentait les moments joyeux, troublants, tranchants de chaque personne présente.

L'encre du destin revenait toujours tracer son empreinte. Chaque chemin qu'il créait était une œuvre d'art à part entière. Il nous faisait errer dans ses cages pour mieux nous enseigner une leçon.

Certains perdaient leur éclat, tandis que d'autres le retrouvaient.

Personne ne s'en échappait. Le destin appartenait à tous. Cependant une question persistait encore dans le tourment.

Sommes-nous assez courageux pour affronter notre destin ?

Comprendre que tout se déroule pour une raison, comprendre que tout a un sens.

Comprendre que le destin nous attendait les bras ouverts, nous abritant sous son aile.

Des ailes si douces, dont chaque plume nous procurait une sensation paisible de la vie. La vie et le destin étaient mariés, deux amants qui narraient le déroulement des actions. Ils nous laissaient vivre dans le mystère, vivre au jour le jour.

Vivre, parce que nous avons une mission à accomplir.

Une jolie silhouette apparut devant moi; elle reflétait tout ce que je rêverais d'être. Tout ce que je voulais devenir, tout ce qui était refoulé en moi.

Elle avait la même taille que moi, le même sourire rayonnant que le mien.
Si similaire, mais si différent.

Sa posture était plus droite. Elle était plus confiante.

Et moi? Je la contemplais comme mon temple, mon ciel, ma fresque.

Ma version suppliait simplement d'avoir encore une empreinte, même minuscule, en elle.

Ce n'était pas juste. Le destin ne l'a jamais été.

Il te giflait pour t'apprendre.
Il t'arrachait de tes racines pour te replanter ailleurs. Te replanter dans un meilleur endroit où on pourrait mûrir.

Ma silhouette était magnifique. L'œuvre du destin l'était tout autant.

Avant, elle n'était qu'une ombre parmi tant d'autres. Mais maintenant, elle traçait son propre chemin.

Un itinéraire où le destin la guidait et l'enrichissait.

Un itinéraire loin des épines du passé.

Je m'asseyais pour la contempler.
J'observais tout ce qu'elle faisait... et tout ce qu'elle ne faisait pas.

Elle était tellement plus grande, plus judicieuse.

Et moi... Je n'étais qu'une petite fille perdue, attendant que le destin me transforme en elle.
En tout ce que j'aimerais devenir.

Porter les couleurs qui la décoorent, pour qu'elle me tolère enfin.
Qu'elle me montre les endroits où le destin l'avait marquée.

Et soudain, je réalisai qu'elle me quittait déjà.
Elle ne m'attendait pas.

Ma silhouette me laissa là où elle m'avait rencontrée.
Et je restai exactement à l'endroit où elle m'avait abandonnée.



CAREN HAMZEH

An Open Wound

The clock keeps ticking; time keeps unravelling. I envision myself slowly slipping through an unsettling, draining breeze. I watch myself scatter, hoping time might pause or stop. It never does. Time slips between my fingers like sand, soft and merciless. For a spectator, it seems serene, a soft, gentle fall. But I can feel it. I feel each grain carving its way into my skin, settling into my wounds, and staining, dark crimson, as it flows deeper. It enters my veins, settling into my bones, becoming part of my every being, until it is no longer foreign to me.

A breath. A fraction of stillness. Time doesn't stop for hesitation, fear, or longing. It does not wait for clarity nor for regret. It cuts right through me and demands movement. I remain motionless as my skin begins to burn. Soon it will start to rot, but time can't be earned or returned; it moves forward, indifferent, relentless, merciless.

Infinite decisions stretch before me, each one weighing me down. Do I sit here for longer pretending I'm helpless? Or do I rise, fully aware that no decision guarantees safety? Do I embrace fear and finally make the decision?

But what if I make the wrong decision? Infinite possibilities glimmer with both promise and destruction. Yet I can't remain unmoved. The longer I linger, the more I watch blank pages getting stained with an unknown destiny. I spiral into pure madness, knowing that waiting is hollowing me out. Inaction, in and of itself, is a choice; it is a form of surrender that devours me quietly. It drives me mad, but so does the ache of a decision I never dared to make, the endless repetition of knowing I can leave, but staying anyway.

I had to make a sudden decision, but that still feels merciful in front of this slow, suffocating repetition that steals my breath, day after day, and leaves me to mourn myself even when I am still alive. To hesitate is to see your future fracture before your eyes, before it is even formed.

Each passerby carries the weight of endless decisions that could shape them, save them, or strain them with lingering guilt. Each one of us is suspended between destiny and free will, consumed by the fear of choice yet destroyed by indecisiveness. Staying still is its own kind of death. A slow disappearance. A deep unravelling. A quiet erasure.

I am tired of grieving the version of myself that was never allowed to breathe outside of its confines. I am tired of burying myself with my own ashes. My decision was not a product of certainty or safety, but from the incessant need to finally breathe, to be liberated from the weight of the past. And for the first time, I breathe. For the first time, the future doesn't threaten me; rather, it resembles an open wound waiting to tell its story. An open wound whose memory will turn into a scar waiting to be noticed. Every step I take carries the shadows of versions of myself that could have been. They trail behind me, their footsteps weighing my heart down, stitching themselves into the hollowness within me. To become is to be undone completely, to fracture endlessly, and to shed fragments of myself that no longer carry my soul.



The Cruel Beauty of Destiny

You know what is ironic? Every decision you take, text you send, and every opportunity you accept, rearranges the architecture of your life. We like to believe that the big choices are the only ones that matter: the university you choose, the country you move to. But it is more than that. It is the accumulation of small, almost invisible, decisions that redirect you the most. The five extra minutes you stayed, the conversation you almost avoided, the courage you gathered, or didn't.

We are bound by infinite choices, as Jean-Paul Sartre once said: "We are condemned to be free," and freedom sometimes feels less like wings and more like chains, since everything is possible, anything can be lost. With various paths, it's easy to feel stuck, and time is not always your friend. It does not pause or whisper the right answers. It simply moves and demands a choice. Naturally, you try to choose the path that aligns most closely with your goals, the one that looks the most stable, logical, and the best for you. But you will never truly know what result might unveil until you take that first step. You can analyze it, romanticize it, or fear it, but you cannot predict it.

Last year, I had to face a life-altering decision, one of those crossroads that does not politely ask for your opinion; it simply presents itself and waits. If you know me, you know I am the one who gives uplifting advice and tells you, with certainty, that everything will be okay. Maybe you did not notice, maybe no one did, but beneath that quiet radiance, my heart was aching. The path I chose was not only about change, it was about walking into rooms where no one knew my history, my habits, or my mannerism. But it also meant facing the quiet fear of being forgotten, of becoming distant in the lives of people who once felt like home. There is a particular kind of ache in imagining yourself fading from someone else's everyday world. That was the weight I carried, not only the fear of the unknown, but the fear of becoming unknown. Choosing that path felt like betraying a version of myself I once promised to protect. It felt like grief, not for something that died, but for something that would never exist: the friendships that might have deepened, or the memories that might have been created. That is the cruelest part of destiny; it does not only give, it also takes. It asks you to release what could have been, only to embrace what is.

Yet here is the peculiar thing: as I write this now, I am surrounded by people who see me and appreciate me for who I am. I have met souls I resonate with, spaces where I can exhale without rehearsing my personality, calculating how to act, or measuring how much of myself is acceptable. The loneliness I once feared taught me how to recognize belonging. The silence I once dreaded made me value voices that speak gently to my heart. There is a quiet relief in that.

Still, I would be lying if I said the "what if" does not visit me from time to time. It lingers like a shadow at sunset: faint, yet present. What if other versions of me are happier, braver, more fulfilled? Perhaps this constant questioning is part of being human. We replay conversations differently, sketch entire lifetimes in the margins of our minds, wonder who we might have become had we turned left instead of right. Maybe the "what if's are not there to torment us. They remind us that no matter how carefully we choose, there will always be doors we do not open. Not because we are incapable, but because choosing one life inevitably means releasing another. There is peace in accepting that you cannot live every single story or become every possible version of yourself. You choose, you let go, and you move forward.

Destiny is not a rigid script carved in stone. We write the chapters, but time gets arranged anonymously. It nudges us toward rooms we did not know we needed. The cruel beauty of destiny lies in this: you will never fully understand why certain doors closed until you stand in front of the ones that open effortlessly, nor grasp the idea of how a heartbreak redirected you, not until you feel at home in a place you once feared to enter. And somehow, through the chaos of decisions and the anxiety of infinite paths, you will find yourself exactly where you are meant to be.

I suppose that is the *particular touch of destiny*.



No?

Dear Reader,

Destiny works in peculiar ways, no? It seems that no matter how in control you think you are, you always find out that you aren't. I always knew that I would attend Haigazian University on account of both of my sisters doing so. Still, nothing could have prepared the 18-year-old, starry-eyed me for what was about to come her way. As my last semester slowly comes to an end, I find myself reminiscing on my university journey. Sometimes, my mind travels back to high school. Back to ninth grade, when I would confidently proclaim my intention to become a chemistry major. Back to eleventh grade when I 'knew' that I would be a biology major and eventually a botanist. Today, I introduce myself as a nutrition major planning to pursue food science. It is *peculiar how destiny led me here*, no?

The highs and lows knocked on my door and settled down in my life. It's peculiar how the same eyes that shed tears for failing a tough chemistry exam, years later, cried after landing on the Dean's list amidst a war. Yet here I stand, with graduation only a few daunting months away, and I can't help but get a headache just trying to think about what's slowly unfolding.

I admit that I am scared of destiny.

I am scared of the unknown.

Uncertainty and a lack of control produce fear, no? What can't be known can't be controlled. But, the unwavering sense of hope that I've carried since childhood tells me that maybe that's the whole point. Maybe, you are not supposed to know where life will lead you, because if the goal of your journey was to reach your destination then you shouldn't have left at all. Maybe, the process is not meant to be rushed. Maybe, the process is about the transformative twists and turns that catch you by surprise. Maybe, the process is the unknown in itself, no?

Dear Reader, even when destiny is cruel, remember that true growth comes from adversity. You can always try again. Leave your regrets behind to collect dust in the mosaic of your history. While you may never know where you are headed, rest assured that at least one thing is for certain: we humans are destined for change. Eventually, the waltz of time and destiny will intertwine to reveal a new you. That is the beauty of *destiny's peculiarity*.

You will still be you.
The same but different.

So Reader, there's nothing to be afraid of because even when the nightfall changes into daylight— it's still the same sky, no?



Threads of Freedom's Shadow

If unseen strings of fate were tied to my every step, guiding me along a path not entirely my own, perhaps an alternate being of me would exist that lingers only as a shadow I can never become.

Being a person always eager to jump to the ultimate purpose with confidence and passion, and having that “free will” that is familiar with the path of your destined life, but what made that freedom of choice to be taken from you? To make you sit and think if your choice is the right one or not, even if it's under the big title of “FREE”.

We often blame our younger selves for the wrong paths, but in retrospect, my young passionate self chose what she deemed right at the time. When my academic journey ended, infinite paths were laid out in front of me. I knew where my desires truly lay, but a certain lure that took over my thoughts convinced me that a comfortable path is simply an intermediate plan. Which meant putting my goal on a top shelf, until I felt ready.

Life went on, one decision leading to another. Instead of choosing the life intended by the innocent version of myself, I followed a peaceful path which deteriorated into an autonomous lifestyle.

I let myself spiral down into a dark ravine, but as cliché as it may sound, a light of hope crept in, which had my other half stretching his hand and cementing the idea that sometimes it is within life's destiny to immerse yourself in love and choose the peaceful path while waiting for God's peculiar touch upon your life.

While we make decisions with our own free will every day, there are forces beyond our understanding that shape our future. Some might call it destiny, a set of events or outcomes that are meant to unfold no matter how much we try to ad-

just them. On these occasions, it becomes clear that our free will, though powerful, is not the sole force determining where we end up in life, even if we have an intended dream or a certain goal we try to achieve. Instead, the universe or some higher power seems to have a hand in guiding us toward the lessons and experiences we need, even if it means pushing us down unexpected or difficult roads. Ultimately, destiny has a way of reminding us that our future may be written before we even know how to read the script.

My dream is still on the top shelf, but I have learned that keeping it in sight is enough for now...



GASSIA NORSHAHIAN

Once Almost Alive

I was like the sun. Always expected to rise at every dawn, and shine through heavy clouds. Is it because I taught them to expect that from me?

I was always on a mission to collect awards, compliments, and shiny titles the way others collected seashells from the seashore. I confused validation with fulfillment, leaving me to feel empty after every achievement. Each felt like a medal pinned on a stranger's chest, and every failure became the measurement of my existence. Yet somewhere in between, my life was a radiant, blurry horizon.

I am the way I am out of fear, not out of desire to attain perfection. Fear of disappointment. Fear of being ordinary. Fear of resting. Fear of being out of the inclined path that was shaped by others long before I learned to speak up for myself.

Every time I aimed to hit a milestone, it turned into a baseline. What once felt exciting and rewarding gradually became normal, outgrowing an old definition of success, and shifting my attention toward the next objective. Because I never felt safe enough to settle in. Thus, I equated rest with risk. I am the way I am because people tell me I'll come out on top, like I always do. And as it seems, I cannot break the streak. Imagine how embarrassing it would be if I did interrupt it. And that's how much pressure was put on me. I moved forward so quickly that I forgot to look back and remember what I had accomplished throughout my life.

As I look back now, I see a life that was built by a version of me who was still trying to prove something. Every smiling picture of me was evidence of proving myself. While I'm still here, they're the ones running the show, but I have always known more than they ever did. There were other sides of me, other choices I could make. And I saw them, felt them, stood in front of them. I saw my reflections through the cracks of a mirror that did not distort my image, but revealed it. They exposed the distance between who I was conditioned to be and who I might dare to become.

I realized I had been living in anticipation: anticipating validation, recognition, and reaching the moment when I would finally feel complete. But wholeness is not awarded. It is constructed. The truth is, I did not fail. I succeeded at becoming everything but myself. That's why they believe I can meet their expectations, because I always have. Yet, I have never allowed myself to become what I am.

Now for the first time, I am beginning to understand that success was never the question, but Choice was, one that is finally mine.



PECULIAR WHISPERS:

LOST BETWEEN THOUGHTS
AND THE INEVITABLE

02



Am I Too Weak To Be Human?

Chapter 3: I Exist.

“It is important not to forget yourself and fill your life with experiences. Yes, grades are important, but memories will get you farther than anything,” I exclaimed through the microphone on my last day of high school. I was told to prepare a speech on behalf of the whole class to say goodbye to our academic lives together as the graduating class of 2022. It was funny how they had handed this task to the forgotten girl, who was inexperienced outside of her own company. Writing the speech was not difficult. I had always been there, observing them from afar, living in their shadows, and making them stars. That’s how I always felt like I was part of something big. I was part of their memories and moments spent together as just a ghost. And I was presenting that to the audience now. The crowd was moved by my words. And for the first time, I felt a spontaneous spark, a sense of illusory belonging. It was very addictive. My grip on that microphone was firm. I didn’t want to let it go yet. I still had the power to say anything. I knew this was a time when my voice was going to be heard and remembered forever, and that I had to speak. Today was my last day, and I was in the spotlight. But what more could I tell them? I had no special moments with them to share. Rage filled my heart.

There are significant moments that you live through that shape you in ways your young body cannot yet process. While my classmates were creating memories together, I was trying to fit their activities into my already busy schedule, which was strained by my efforts of keeping myself out of even more trouble than I was in. These people who were clapping for themselves had fed a young girl words of sin and disgust, lowering her worth to the size of a caterpillar, making her believe she did not have a place in the world. These words never belonged in her world, breaking apart her self-concept, shrinking her down to merciless rumors and an entertaining presence. In that moment of pure rage and excitement, I vowed that I would create myself with my own list of unforgettable memories. It was an internal promise so fierce and powerful, for living a fuller life with experiences, trials, mistakes, dance, sunlight, gold, laughter, and tears, that I decided then and there that one day, I would go back to that stage, with that microphone in hand.



“Dear audience, I’ve come a long way to exist again. Not as your observer, your shadow, or the broken version you created me to be. But as a woman who was put through difficult situations growing up, to be encouraged to leave it all behind her, and find a haven somewhere else. Somewhere that would help her develop a voice of her own. I am finally a human in my own story. I listened to my own advice from four years ago, and I chased myself into new memories and experiences. Throughout my journey, I was divinely guided to move to the city, where I have come upon so many lovely souls who truly know me. Souls who are experiencing difficult lives, but not trying to hide it, inspire others to step into that same openness. Why couldn’t I have been allowed to do the same with you? If I continue to hide myself, how would anyone know that people like me exist in this world? You see, the problem has never been me.

Destiny is peculiar that way. It strips you to your skin and bones, exposes your vulnerabilities, and then pushes you to connect with people who truly see your light. And suddenly, the lies people have told you about yourself come to the surface, and you grieve them because you are not those lies you were told to believe. Your worth reveals itself again after years of suppression, and you turn into a beautiful butterfly who gets to live another day and fill it with new experiences. How grateful I am to every single soul who has crossed paths with me during these four years. They helped me reverse the damage you had caused me, directly or indirectly. Some have come and gone, others have come to stay, and among them are those I have loved and lost, as well as those I will love for all time. Whether they are aware of who they are or not, every one of them has left their mark on my being. I thank the stars they led away from you, and towards them. Life is more on my side than I think, and I do not allow, from this moment on, to be left to feel as broken as you needed me to be. The fulfillment of my promise is stronger than any of the heartaches I have been experiencing. I owed it to myself to get to where I am today and to still keep rising with the sun. I have a long way to go, more versions of me to unlock and explore, with new souls that I will meet along my journey. But I am here now. Where are YOU?"



A Touch of Destiny



Destiny can often be linked to a certain religious belief. But ironically, all different versions depicting the definition of what *Destiny* is, are interconnected through the same idea: its control is far from our conventional understanding.

A couple of years back, the choice of a drunken and lost soul, put me through my most horrifying car accident costing me all that I had deemed as valuable. At the time, the choice was out of my grasp. I had to close an unfinished chapter of my broken self, thinking my essence was getting punished for *Destiny's* own greedy desire.

Could it have been God who needed to break the pillar I was standing on, since I had been blindly mistaking shallow vases as valuable?

No, it couldn't have.

I turned my pain into an incredible devotion towards my faith. I served my church until severe exhaustion struck my body which had still not healed from the chess match *Destiny* had played with my soul. It brought me to a point where I ended up sacrificing everything, until I noticed the image of God getting distorted right in front me.

Could it be that I was the one giving definition to my beliefs through people who proclaimed themselves as true believers?

No, it couldn't be

During my new journey, I embraced life with an optimistic approach. I became almost careless as to what the neighboring eye would see, refusing to change who I was simply to please a common bystander. The consequences were, of course, all but merciful. Yet in this process, I mistakenly confused my silence as maturity. Victimizing myself as an amusement in *Destiny's* hands.

Could it be that the actual cause of my suffering was people's own demented ideology of having to inflict their own torments? No, it most certainly could not be.

I portrayed *Destiny* as the artist, holding my canvas, painting away my life. I neglected the fact that I was the dominant mastermind behind it all. Instead, my reflections were narrowed down to empty contemplations.

The result of surrendering ourselves to *Destiny* is: taming our own inner desires, loving in the dark, feeling with constraints and refusing to live in a bohemian state of being. We value this life that has us cornered, calculating every step in hopes of reaching what *Destiny* holds for us.

The biggest blessing disguised as a curse is our own free will. The mere thought of holding responsibility for where life has taken us is too overwhelming. Which is the reason it took me years to realize how I blamed my own *Destiny* as if it had any power.

But here lies the truth; every situation I have found myself in has held the same purpose; to unleash the person I am today. This is the *peculiar touch of Destiny*: we were never meant to understand its course, we were not expected to sit around and wait for a happy ending, but...

Could it not be that we despise our own destiny because it is often easier to play victim rather than accept one's own idiocy?

Yes, it most certainly could be.



AYA KADDOURA

Long Before Us

When Choice once whispered that the map was mine to draw, I believed it. I carved my path with a certainty that felt like power; each step, a declaration of my control. Destiny did not argue. It did not need to. It stood behind me in a silence too heavy to be empty, watching with inevitability as though it had already seen where I would end long before I began.

The road did not resist at first. It allowed me to move, to choose, to believe in the illusion of authorship... And then it veered. A stumble, then the next. Not accidents, not quite mistakes, but something nearly seen as silent corrections. Subtle, yet deliberate, as if the path had already been written, and I was only discovering the edges of a script I never saw.

There are moments we return to unintentionally. A voice, a glance, the quiet certainty of standing beside someone and believing, without question, that we had arrived there by choice. It felt intentional then, like something we had reached toward and claimed as our own. But now, it lingers differently. Not as a decision, but as a constant that had always been waiting, patient, unmoving until we stepped into it.

I began to feel it then, the presence that does not move yet is always ahead. Destiny does not chase. It awaits your vanquish. And there, it positions itself at the place where you are meant to fall, and watches as you arrive, convinced it was your own doing.

So what am I in this path? Choice, running blindly toward an illusion of freedom? Or labeled as indescribable, an accomplice, dressed in the language of will, carrying out what was already decided? We tell ourselves that we choose, we move forward out of courage, out of desire, out of self.

I chose and I kept going, but every step felt rehearsed, like an echo spoken before I was aware enough to hear. I insist on clinging to the illusion. It is I who moves, I who acts, I who dares. And yet every end arrives too perfectly, too precisely, as if it had been waiting for me long before I began, long before I ever thought to begin. There is no deviation, only the appearance of it. No choice, only its reflection.

So I walk. Not freely, not even knowingly. I walk because stopping was never offered. With will trembling in between my arms, and a shadow beside me that does not follow, but rather leads, without ever moving at all.

And perhaps that is the cruelest part of it: not that we never have a choice, but that we allowed ourselves to believe we did. That every step we take will feel like ours, even as it carries us exactly where we were meant to end.





Icarus' Lamentations: Confessions of a Fallen Star

I suddenly felt its touch on my face. Not a harsh pang, but a soft, warm embrace.

Not a summons, nor a blessing, just light. A glow that lay gently across my shoulders, as though it had misread me for something meant to be seen.

I did not seek it; I merely noticed it from afar. The way one notices a distant melody waltzing through an open window— curious, unclaimed, *free*.

Yet the longer it lingered, the more it seemed to linger for me, threading gold through the clouds, settling into the corners of my chest, until I began to wonder. Not when it rose, nor why it burned, but whether it had always been there, waiting, brightly and patiently, for *me* to look up.

I devoted my hours to it. Each morning, I stood, from first light until it kissed the horizon, tracing the slow unfurl of its golden painting, crafted just for *me*.

As if it were trying to reciprocate my feelings, after I had swallowed sparkly constellations, hoping to become a fragment of its wonder. To be a creature worthy of gazing at your beauty.

Yet even then, I could feel the shiver of wings that were not yet mine, stirring at the thought of your warmth. I thought nothing of it at first, for I am just a speck of dust beneath your skies. And yet the sun felt different. You lingered longer than the others. Longer than you used to. You awakened within me the desire to rise higher than I had ever dared. Higher than I had ever dreamed.

Do you remember? How I didn't notice the first time "*you*" slipped through the cracks of my cold lips? It quivered, accidentally standing in the presence of your heat. I laughed at the quaintness of saying it aloud. Still, I could not erase it. It felt... right.

By the next day, it had begun to feel intentional. I whispered it, imagining you, my incandescent sun, listening, responding, approving. My wings carried me higher with each thought, with each breath, with each impatient yearning.

I believed I was chosen by you. That your radiance, your rays, your pulse, had been reserved for me. I believed the sky itself bent at *my* will— that you would wait while I rose closer, daring the heights meant only for the gods.

Closer. A little higher.

I could almost touch— almost taste—

The flame blazed against my skin.

I thought it welcomed me in. I thought it was called for me. I thought it *loved* me.

And then I *fell*.

You burned too brightly, my dear.

My wings faltered.

Gold melted into the sky as feathers scattered like echoes of desire. I plummeted; through clouds, through fever, through the arrogance that had carried me so high.

The wind ravaged my chest. The world spun below me. All I could hear was the delirious silence I had once confused for intimacy.

I thought I chased the light that had watched me, waited for me, loved *me*. I reached, only to discover that the warmth you offered was never mine alone. It never knew my name.

I lay there, broken, hollow, consumed by the ground—the very thing I once mocked, once viewed as inferior. The last thing I heard wasn't the whistles of the wind, nor the sound of falling, but the shatter of my heart— my intricately woven fantasy.

I was chasing nothing but the remnant of myself, the reflection of my desire, erroneously mistaken for devotion. My wings, proud and delicate, carried me higher than I was meant to rise.

Destiny was never above me, waiting to claim me or warn me.

It was the fire in my own ambition, the obsession I nurtured into inevitability.

I tried to stretch my wings and dance among the gods, yet the relentless talons of destiny would not release me. I had shaped my own ruin, and in its shaping, I had become both the architect and the casualty of the *peculiar touch of destiny*.



A Snippet of Moribund

He looked down in his last few moments. He stared into the abyss, and it stared back into his soul. It called for him. I couldn't hear it, but I felt it. It called his name, and it became clear to me that it wasn't the first time. It happened frequently. I still wonder how many tries it took before he finally answered its desperate calls.

And thus, he fell. And who was there to bear witness but myself? I was the victim of his defeat. Of all the times he could've surrendered to life, but he just had to wait for an innocent bystander as myself. What crime did I commit to be punished in this way? Why must I bear the guilt of his death? I couldn't fix my own life, and now I am expected to fix his? I have not the power to fight for my own freedom, let alone that of another. In an instant, he made me the victim of his own circumstances. He is guilty of my feelings, yet I am the one forced to bear them.

All my life I have done nothing but conform. I have followed what others have set before me. I have let others shape my path. And I have become the answer to someone else's question, one I never once asked before. Yet now, I stand before the jury as the accused. How could I have killed him? Me, whom I never thought capable? I've never had even the slightest intention of harming anyone in my life. To kill a man? One that I have never seen before? Why would I punish him in such a way when he has done me no harm?

I stand accused of being a witness, that was my crime. I witnessed a man die before my eyes. He committed a crime. The crime. *The* crime of self-judgement. He stood before a jury as I stand now. And they issued the verdict. He was found guilty and received the harshest sentence. One unlike any other. It was not a death sentence, it was far worse than that. The death of the self. It was declared that he was not worthy of life. And so he had to take it, of his own will. He became the victim and his own jury. And thus, he answered the call of the abyss and soared through the skies, free at last. Free of all concern and regret. He was unknowingly set free by his own punishment.

Now, I stand before the jury. I stand as the witness, the victim, and the accused.

I try to plead my case as an innocent bystander. Yet deep down, I am aware that that was not the case, perhaps he wasn't as free as I wanted to believe he was. He was the one who jumped. Yet in his final moments of solitude, conflict, and farewell, he wasn't alone. He had noticed my presence, we locked eyes, as I stood before him. It felt as if I was holding him back with nothing but my glare. Perhaps he allowed himself one last glimmer of hope, and he believed for a second that I was sent by God, an angel, to save his life, and with those few additional moments he had been granted, he could do nothing but wait. I, in turn, could only watch as nature took its course. I witnessed a man in his most vulnerable moment, and I felt envious, not of his circumstances but of his ability to declare that life was no longer worth it. That it's no longer worth pushing the same boulder over and over as it tumbles back down the hill. I felt no pity or sympathy, only envy. And he saw it. He unveiled my mask and saw through my act. I became the vulnerable one, and I was petrified. And in fear of him revealing even more than he already had, I left. I did not look back. I knew that I was the only one holding him back from taking the leap of faith. And so he did. I heard it, and I felt at ease at the thought of it. I had knowingly, and with full intention condemned him to death.

In those few moments of contemplation, I shifted the scales, and life was once again too heavy for him to carry at the edge of the bridge. I cut the last sliver of hope that he allowed himself to cling to so tightly, and he had nothing left to hang on to. He realized how foolish it was to trust someone so similar to himself. And thus, he fell and I killed him. And now, I stand as the jury, the victim, the witness and the accused, just as he did before me. And I plead guilty, accepting his sentence as my own.



A Cursed End



And I destined her to a cursed end, through a string of choices laid out in front of her, each with a touch of my delicate promises. Promises settled in unfamiliarity, nevertheless, leading her to me. I made sure God knew how to write her life, I made sure she knew how to find me in every lifetime. She could let months pass us by, yet she'd still be mine. She can alter fate at her will, build an ending for herself free from me, but destiny owes me a debt, and the world's order lies in it. Destiny itself will line every decision, it will sketch every picture I've shown, and she'll intertwine with me; there was a peculiarity in every ending, in every "ever after", and they had led her to an unended curse.

Delicacy, peculiarity, and credulity defined her. The delicate whispers she uttered around me were pleas for a greater love story, a refined home; *the peculiar touch of destiny* shan't escape her. I would make destiny hold her hand, guide her through heaven, make her taste fairness. I would force destiny to drag her through hell on her way to me. The crude soul she wore on her sleeves was easy to diminish. And I had her warm with me, I knew how to shape her dialects to my will, she will incessantly wonder what languages humanity was speaking, consequently, she'll spend her hours deciphering speeches, until she runs out of time, nevertheless by then, it will already be dark enough, and I'll be the single speck of light that exists for her, and that's what she will believe, that light can only be conjured by me.

Maybe I had cursed her, and it finally worked. It felt like I won. I made her unloved, loved only by me. I welded her into a being that could only fit me, and I felt pride like never before. I knew I could sit back and I'd never miss out on her, that she'll go through life feeling the setback of her ruins. I've repaired her too many times; I've built her in the dark corners of my heart, hid her away from reality, taught her that the only reality she'll know is where she was made. I built her with cracks made of porcelain, easy for me to sink deep, settle infinitely, and ingrain indefinitely. It is agonizing to live a moment without her, nonetheless, it is an anguish I need her to endure for me, with me, to follow my traces through others, even in every multiverse. In my world, the world I created because of her, I believed she needed to break into pieces, she needed to bleed through her words, laughs, through her fingers, through her heart. Only then might she understand that I am her only refuge, that destiny will abide by my rules. Even with her infinite choices, her fate is bound to me. Her future is on a leash, and she can't escape *the touch, the peculiarity, my destiny, our destiny*.



At Last, My Canvas

The most agonizing writer's block one can feel is the blank page staring into your soul. It wasn't until then that I realized my ink had been mobilized for the sole reason that all my choices, those meant to be guided by my own free will, were merely strokes in an artwork signed by someone who deemed themselves my saviour.

The choices I made were never truly mine. I chose them because I was told who I should be and what I should do. This "new creation" I became, buried in agony. The mistakes I made were not entirely mine, they were part of their artwork.

In this journey of self-degradation, the first step was violating my dignity. I chose attention from someone I knew would destroy me. Unfortunately, it was all driven by guilt, by the need to fulfil a destiny that seemed acceptable, even expected, in this society.

The second step was returning to those same mistakes, over and over again, because that color suited their vision. My own shades, shapes, and lines were deemed wrong, insulting, even dirty on their canvas.

This is where I realized that the decisions imposed on me, which only led me into chaos, were enough. So now, I am choosing a different path, one that leads to peace. I am destroying their mural with my own brush.

Let the viewers see my bold colors. Let them question. Let them contemplate. Let them finally see my perspective. For the first time, the canvas is mine and it terrifies me. There are no instructions now, no expectations whispering what I should become. Only silence, stretching endlessly before me. My hand trembles. Not because I lack color, but because I was never taught how to choose it for myself. I stand there, confronting the unfamiliar weight of freedom. It is not gentle. It does not guide. It demands.

Yet slowly, I begin. A stroke uncertain, imperfect, mine. I realised then, my colors were never wrong. They were simply never allowed to exist. So, I paint; not for approval, not for redemption, but for truth. And this time, the art does not belong to them.

It breathes because I do.



PECULIAR REMNANTS:

FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY
LEFT BEHIND

03



Drafting a Future in Pencil

Fragile.

The pencil hovers over paper, uncertain, tentative. Each line begins with hesitation, each mark carries unanswered questions. Outside, the world shifts quietly, and the horizon bends like light through glass. Possibility trembles in the spaces between what is imagined and what may arrive.

Futures are not etched in stone; they are sketched, smudged, erased, and redrawn. Streets stretch ahead, some empty, some lined with echoes of footsteps that may never return. Windows reflect skies that change in an instant, folding certainty into shadow. There is a quiet shift that happens when you begin to realize that the future is not as fixed as you imagined. Even the quietest moments hum with what-ifs, carrying the fragile weight of what could be.

Destiny moves softly, almost imperceptibly, shaping paths without warning. It is found in the hesitation before a step, the pause between breaths, the shift of light across a room. But what happens when the ground beneath those decisions refuses to stay still? Maybe that is where the *peculiar touch of destiny* reveals itself, not in the certainty of a fixed path, but in the quiet interruptions that force us to reconsider it. Maybe destiny is not something waiting for us at the end of a carefully planned road, but something that emerges in the spaces between intention and reality.

We like to envision ourselves as the authors of our lives, and in many ways, we are. We choose, we decide, we move forward. But there is something humbling in recognizing that we are not writing alone. Even as the world shifts beneath us, when the air is taut with tension, when the spaces between expectation and reality threaten to blur, the act of writing continues. There is a beauty in this fragility, a quiet courage in tracing a future that may never look exactly as imagined.

Every mark on the page carries both hope and fragility. Each stroke is a risk, a whisper of possibility, a testament to survival. The world beyond presses with uncertainty, yet the pencil moves on, persistent, quietly insistent.

To draft a future in pencil is to embrace impermanence, to recognize that nothing is predictable, and yet, to continue to imagine. Every erased line, every softened edge, every shadowed possibility becomes part of a life that is alive, pliable, resilient.

The page waits patiently. The pencil moves. And the future, always tentative, always fragile, unfolds line by line, sketch by sketch, quietly, persistently, beautifully.



Everything Happens for a Reason

We are all destined for something, even if we cannot see it yet. Every life unfolds according to a path uniquely designed for it. We each carry our own stories, experiences, and thoughts that shape who we are becoming. No two lives move in identical patterns, and no two journeys follow the exact same direction.

Sometimes it is easy to feel behind in life. We assume that everyone else has clarity, stability, and certainty. Social media, conversations, and appearances often create the illusion that others are ahead while we are still figuring things out. But what we see is never the full story. Everyone is carrying something invisible. Everyone is fighting something private. Everyone is growing in ways that are not obvious to the outside world.

I find comfort in believing that whatever I am going through is not random. The struggles, the uncertainty, the fear, and even the anxiety are not meaningless interruptions in my life. They are lessons shaping my character.

What if these struggles are shaping me into a stronger person? What if these moments of confusion are teaching me patience? What if the pain I feel is quietly helping me build a sense of empathy? Perhaps, the very obstacles that feel like barriers are actually preparation. Preparation to understand others more deeply, to listen without judgment, to guide someone who once felt the same fear I did.

There were moments when I wished things had been easier. I wished I could skip the uncertainty and move straight into clarity. I wanted answers immediately and direction without doubt. But looking back, I realize that clarity was never meant to arrive all at once. It came quietly, through lessons I did not ask for and strength I did not know I possessed. Growth often happens in silence, long before we recognize it.

Pain is not wasted. Even when we cannot immediately understand the reason behind an event, that does not mean there is none. What feels like chaos may actually be direction. What feels like delay may be protection. What feels like loss may be redirection toward something better suited for us. With time, what once felt confusing begins to make sense. The questions that once kept us awake slowly find their answers, and we realize that the very moment we thought everything was falling apart was the moment something new was blooming. As the saying goes; when one door closes, another opens. Yet, we often stand somberly before the closed door, unaware that growth requires us to turn around and trust what awaits us on the other side.

Slowly, I began to understand that nothing in my life was accidental. Every doubt, every tear, every unanswered question played a role in shaping who I am becoming. The hardest chapters did not break me; they strengthened me. They refined my perspective, deepened my compassion, and strengthened my faith.

Trusting that everything happens for a reason does not mean life is easy. It means choosing to believe that even difficulty has meaning. It means accepting that the journey, with all its uncertainty, is leading somewhere intentional. Even when I cannot see the full picture, I trust that each step is guided by the *peculiar touch of destiny*, leading me toward something greater than I had imagined.





It Was Turkey Sandwiches for Tuesdays

It was cold, but not violently so, the kind of chill that settles on your cheeks and makes them flush. It was the kind of briskness you see in movies, almost pretty. I was taking a religion test in high school, pondering a certain question. At seventeen, grades feel permanent, but for me, they feel like proof of who you are becoming.

I casually glanced outside because I was sitting at the edge of the class, and then saw a small bird on the high window ledge, curled into itself, its feathers grey and puffy, shaking in a way that didn't seem temporary. For a few seconds, I tried to ignore it. I looked back at the paper, but the questions felt blank and distant. Then back at the bird.

The choice was embarrassingly small: either stay seated and finish the test, or step outside for something that would probably die anyway.

I asked to leave. The answer was simple: if you go, you can't continue, and you fail. I don't remember any dramatic pauses, and strangely, didn't even care enough to argue back. I just stood up.

Outside, the cold felt different... less aesthetic, more real. I didn't immediately pick the bird up. I looked around first, as if someone else might know what to do, but the yard was empty. The windows reflected students completing their tests, other classes reading, talking.

So I grabbed it.

It startled me how light the little bird was. It fit entirely in my small palms. I brought it close to my chest, instinctively, as if my warmth could be transferred through will alone. Slipped it inside my jacket, holding it between my sweater and my hands, and started pacing. I walked in small circles behind the school, whispering things I don't remember. "It's okay." "You're fine." As if the weak reassurance I gave could negotiate with the cruel cold. Its eyes blinked slowly. Once. Twice. I wasn't counting. Adjusted my grip constantly, afraid I was holding it too tight, afraid I wasn't holding it tight enough. Rubbed its wings gently. Breathed into my hands before wrapping them around it again.

Then the blinking stopped.

There was no violent movement, no dramatic struggle. The body didn't twitch. It simply rested. The weight shifted... subtly, but unmistakably. It became heavier in a way that didn't make sense.

I stood there waiting for another movement.

There wasn't one.

And here is what unsettled me: nothing extraordinary had happened. There was no lesson behind this, no divine intervention, no hidden meaning, no epiphany. The cold had reached what was weakest. That was all. People were still inside, writing about morality and salvation. Cars were passing. The day continued with complete indifference. I buried the bird behind the school alone, under pretty bushes, where the leaves of nature would be the warm blanket. I remember how the soil was harder than expected. When I finished, my hands were dirty and cold.

Then I went back inside. In my school, Tuesdays meant turkey sandwiches. I ate it.

That was the most disturbing part: not the death, but the continuity. The world does not rearrange itself around small tragedies. I used to think destiny would feel larger. More disturbing. Like a marked moment you could circle in red. But sometimes it is simply the first time you understand that things end without ceremony or beauty. That goodness does not guarantee rescue. That compassion may change you, even when it changes nothing else.

I lost a grade, 7/20 and the bird lost its life. Only one of those was discussed. The message was clear to me: this wasn't a life-changing lesson. It happens every day, where the vulnerable are buried under snow, dirt, and rubble.

I hope, you little bird, with your silver and emerald green feathers, wherever you are... you can fly.



If Only I Knew

Destiny.

Such a simple word, yet one that keeps me awake late at night, wondering if my destiny is something I will even like.

I find myself pondering:

Is my destiny chosen by someone greater than me? By God?

Or is it entirely in my hands?

Sometimes I feel lost, standing before too many paths, afraid to take even one step forward. What if I choose wrong? What if I have regrets? What if I disappoint myself? What if I disappoint God?

Am I predestined, or do I have the freedom to choose my own path? I wonder whether God is guiding me, or if I am meant to find the way on my own.

I struggle with doubts about my body, my worth, and my future. There are days when I feel confident, and days when I feel invisible. Days when I believe in myself, and days when I question everything.

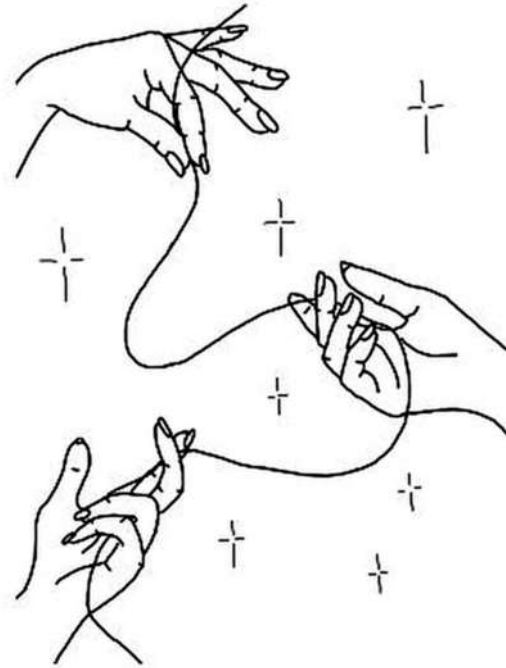
I find myself comparing my path to others', wondering why theirs seem so clear, why they move forward with certainty, while I am still searching for who I am and where I truly belong.

Yet, through all the confusion and disappointments, I am learning something important. Every struggle, every tear, every unanswered question and prayer is shaping me. Even when I feel lost, I am led toward self-discovery.

Maybe destiny isn't about having everything planned. Maybe it is about trusting God while doing my best. Maybe the journey is simply about that.

The peculiar touch of destiny is not always obvious. Sometimes, it is hidden in uncertainty, in waiting, and in becoming stronger than you ever thought you could be.

If only I knew all of this, that the uncertainty, the fear, and the mistakes were gently guiding me to where I am meant to be, then maybe I could finally close my eyes at night and trust, not that everything is certain, but that somehow, everything will be okay.



At the Toss of a Cap

A quiet swell of anticipation stretches the air thin. Around me, the world is loud, bright, restless, yet in that instant, everything narrows into a single pulse. A breath drawn and held. A threshold sensed but not yet crossed. The light settles differently on familiar walls, colors sharper, shadows longer. Even the faint hum of movement fades into the background, leaving a silence that is not empty, but filled with waiting.

My arm rises, deliberate and certain, and the cap leaves my hand. It climbs into the sky, weightless for an instant, as if unsure whether to return. Time loosens its grip. Sound blurs at the edges; laughter softens into the distance. The breeze brushing my skin feels slower, almost intentional, holding the air itself in suspension. The world hesitates, caught in the same pause.



It is almost comical how time chooses to behave. The years that carried me here vanished with indecent speed, folded into themselves, becoming a blur of faces, rooms, and seasons shifting without warning. I remember thinking there would always be more time, more room to grow into certainty. And yet, standing here now, it feels as though the path behind me has narrowed into a single line. Everything that once felt endless has already become a memory. But now, time lingers over this one fleeting gesture, as if granting me a chance to witness the life I have shaped so far.

Suspended between earth and air, the cap gathers everything that has led me here. The long hours of thought, the silently carried doubts, the barely named ambitions. It holds the weight of every decision made and every possibility yet to be embraced. A gnawing doubt coils deep inside me, a quiet tension beneath the calm, a reminder that fear and hope often travel together.

In that stillness, I am neither who I was nor fully who I am becoming. I exist in the spaces between. Untethered, undefined, open. A quiet calm settles, a recognition that this moment, the hovering, the pause, the quiet, is what it means to stand on the edge of destiny. Not a force that commands, but a pause that allows. A breath held between release and return. A space where possibility outweighs fear.

Gravity begins to reclaim the cap. It descends gently, slower than expected, tracing the air with deliberate elegance, showing that endings and beginnings are never abrupt, only continuous. Time resumes its steady rhythm; echoes sharpen into voices again. And as it falls back into reach, I understand that the *peculiar touch of destiny* was never in the height of its flight, nor in its descent, but in the simple act of sending it forward, even when the outcome is unknown.



When the Lake Began to Move

I sit and think about all the time I spent fighting you, resisting the very idea of you, denying any possibility of you ever existing in my future.

Letting go was never an option. The thought of loosening my grip, even slightly, lodged fear deep into my bones — fear of losing control, of surrendering my life to the unknown. I mistook control for strength. So, I built barricades to shield myself from the unyielding tides of destiny, from a river that could pull me under without ever asking my permission.

I stacked my certainty with care, stone by stone, until I blocked the river entirely and created my own quiet lake. I told myself I was protecting what little peace I had left. I convinced myself that if I could just keep everything contained, nothing could hurt me again.

However, life does not stop flowing simply because you ask it to, and water does not obey force.

One stone loosened. Then another. When the water began seeping through the cracks, panic set in. I was terrified that once the river broke through, it would consume me whole. Acceptance arrived gently, reluctantly, almost against my will.

For so long, I believed that surrendering control meant losing myself. I fought harder, even as the barricades weakened. I treated destiny as something to challenge, something to outsmart, something I could bend to my will.

Inside me, the storm never ceased.

It raged, loud and unrelenting.

I sat in its center, where everything fell eerily still.

I convinced myself that I was safe— that solitude was safer than hope, easier than faith.

And then You came.

Not after the storm.

— *Through it.*

You pushed against the wind and reached for my hand as if it were the simplest thing in the world. As if I were whole. As if I had always been.

I did not let go easily. Fear clung to me; fear of trusting, of leaning, of allowing someone to see how heavy my burdens truly were, of letting someone witness my exhaustion as if it were something worth noticing.

But You stayed. And slowly, painfully, I let You in.

Not by accident, not by force, but by choice.

In time, the barricades collapsed. The river reclaimed its path.

What I had turned into a stagnant lake began to move again: alive, restless, untamed.

The storm softened. The sand settled.

For the first time in a long while, my vision cleared. I could hear the birds. I could breathe without effort. Life began to feel kind. Waking up no longer felt like a struggle. Sleeping no longer felt like a war. Moving through my days felt lighter, as if I was no longer dragging myself forward alone.

And for the first time, existing felt like enough.



PECULIAR VISIONS:

PERSPECTIVES CHALLENGING
THE KNOWN

04

Dedicated to Sidney J.

I'm sure almost everyone is familiar with the concept of the "butterfly effect". If not, let me briefly familiarize you with it. Think about any TV show or film that explores the idea of time travel, where the main character goes back in time to observe an event but something as mere as the displacement of a pebble leads to an alternate reality where the whole narrative is switched around. Something so simple and negligible, such as the flap of a butterfly's wing, ends up having major implications.

Well, I believe that to have happened to me. Put yourself in my shoes:



It was right at the start of covid, circa 2020, and I was promised a few weeks off school. I was happy, as was everyone, to laze away at home. However, a few weeks turned into months, turned into years. Boredom began to brew. When the restrictions became a little more lax, my friend had persuaded me to join a painting workshop with her, a passion we both shared. This would have been the first time in ages we would see each other and interact with others. The stakes to get in were high. Unfortunately, she got the last spot and I was promised a slot in the next class, though I had already lost interest; I couldn't see myself attending without a friend. But fate had other plans.

My friend caught covid and was unable to attend, for both her health and everyone's safety. The session was pre-paid and non-refundable. I was offered to take her spot instead, and obviously refused because I didn't want to do this on my own, after being isolated from others for so long. Yet after extensive begging and pleading I gave in—for her sake.

The truth is, it was nothing special. It was like the world's smallest, most inconvenient roller coaster. Although, I never regretted going.

Another person in attendance was a remarkably tall girl with hazel eyes—whom I currently call my closest friend and my twin flame. She's been with me through thick and thin, and is someone with so much positive influence over my life, that I do not believe I would be the same person now if she had not crossed my path then. I will admit that the friendship was slow at first, as we didn't really talk much during the workshop. Yet as we got to know each other more, we realized how much our tastes intersect. What's funny is that she was merely in Beirut due to her parents' jobs, and had to go back to her native country of Poland in a few days. I truly think something aligned that day to have us both meet at such a mundane spot, only to find someone I connect with like no one else, someone who I cannot imagine a life without.

This was my butterfly effect. A small change that snowballed into something bigger. Call it coincidence, perhaps the *peculiar touch of destiny*, but I am so grateful to have someone as kind, special, sentimental and thoughtful as Sidney in my life.

I share my story today to encourage anyone, whoever they may be, to be open to more opportunities once they arise. You never know who you may meet or the memories you could make. Whether that'd be a change in routine or purposely putting yourself out there, fate can surprise you.

FARAH JADAYEL

Go the Distance

There is a newfound pull on my heart, rushing, restless, and painful.

An urge to be great.

All I have ever known is mediocrity. Now, as I face the end of a profound chapter of my life, it appears that it will not suffice.

Tug. Tug. Tug.

I begin to move faster in hopes of relieving myself of this pressure.

It works... Until it doesn't.

Pull. Pull. Pull.

I continue to pick up the pace, my jog becoming a sprint.

Is that all you've got?

I find myself racing with time itself.

It mocks me.

I cannot move fast enough; my body cannot keep up with the fire raging inside of me, fueling my desire to keep going.

For once I feel as though I am capable. I am so tired, but so hungry for the feeling of achievement. I cannot allow myself to stop running.

My dream of being great is no longer vague. It is no longer a distant, foggy desire.

It's here. I can feel it.

I can hold it in the palm of my hands and know it's *mine*.
It fits perfectly.

But matter is weaker than the mind; I know my body won't hold me much longer.

Suddenly-

Run. Run. Run.

My legs start giving out.

Bang. Bang. Bang.

I can hear the pounding in my head.

I. Must. Make. It.

My vision is foggy, so is the road ahead of me.

I can't lose again-

The finish line is right in front of me, yet I cannot reach it.

Mediocre. Painfully so.

Destiny works in the most mysterious ways.



Where You See Fate, I See Structure

Destiny is often framed as a mystical fatality, an uncontrollable force beyond human comprehension. Yet, what we call destiny is simply the predictable outcome of structural position. There is no omnipotent entity scripting our futures, no invisible hand of fate, no celestial dealer of cards. There are, however, visible systems. In fact, the past survives in every aspect of our lives: society, institutions, capital, and inequality, in turn quietly delimiting the horizon of possibility long before individuals experience it. So is *destiny really peculiar* or is it manufactured?

We are not born equal and later divided. In fact, it is the exact opposite, we are born already distributed across neighborhoods and provinces, as well as expectations and probabilities. Many factors determine an individual's standing in society, consequently subtly pre-writing the future. Economic class, ethnicity, nationality, family wealth, or debt: these are not mere personal attributes but predictive characteristics determining where we eventually end up.

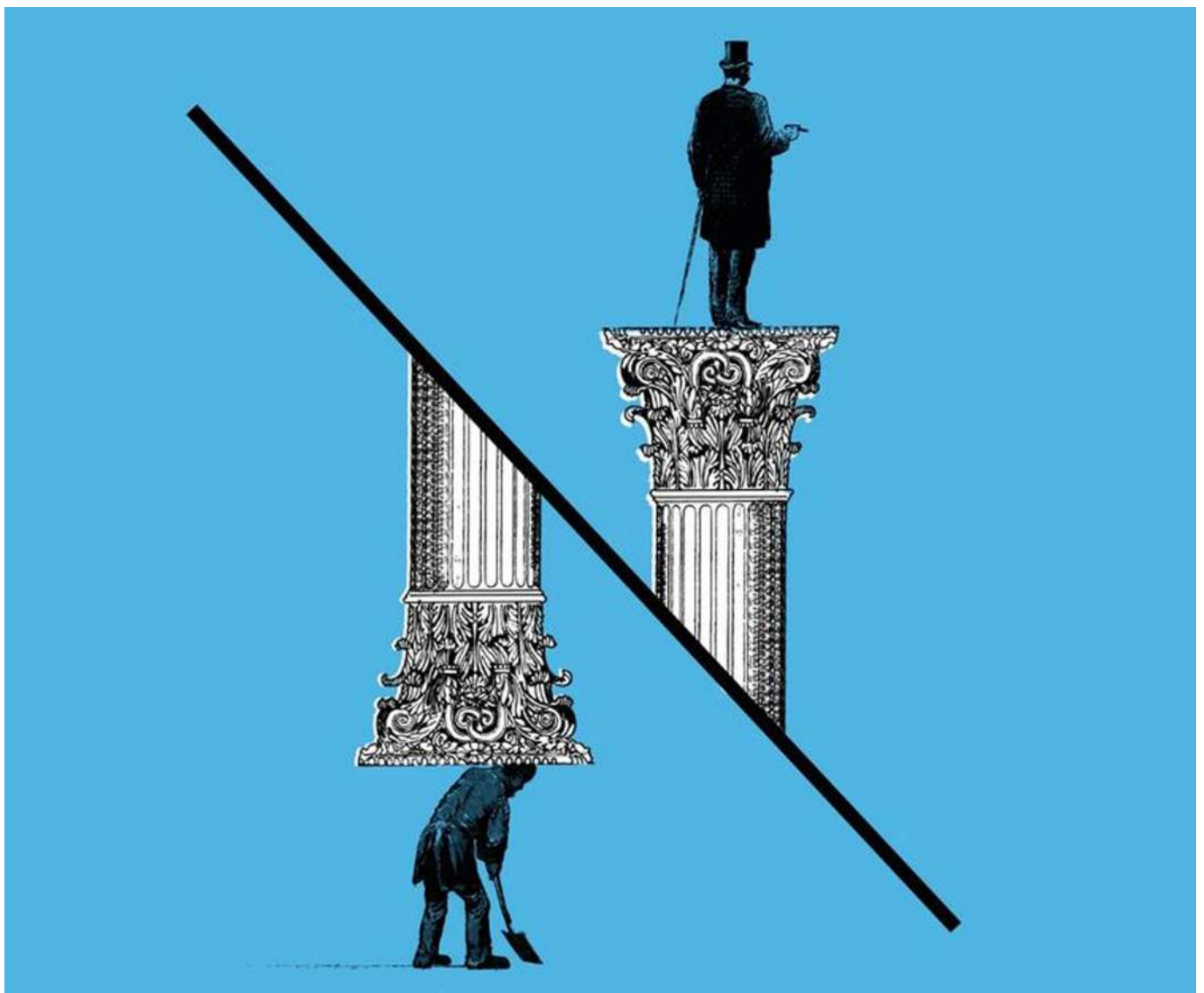
French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes this phenomenon as social reproduction. He essentially argues that social inequalities perpetuate themselves across generations. One of the clearest ways we see this play out in everyday life is through education, something we experience as an opportunity, but that does not start from the same place for everyone. Children from privileged backgrounds often inherit cultural habits, knowledge, linguistic ease, a “savoir-faire” that Bourdieu calls cultural capital. These inherited dispositions eventually facilitate academic success, which in turn secures professional success as well. For instance, in France in 2025, children of workers represented only 8.7% of university students, whereas children of senior executives constituted 34.9%. This indicates that access to higher education remains heavily stratified by social origin. The distribution of opportunity somewhat mirrors the distribution of class, which echoes the analysis of Karl Marx, for whom material conditions regenerate the same social and economic disparities across generations. He argues that the children of workers are statistically inclined to reproduce the working class because of the lack of resources and the institutions that maintain the existing social order. This is why the future is not a box of random surprises. It is the continuation of prior conditions that leaves nothing to fate but simply acts as an algorithm.

Economic destiny is also measurable and persistent. Wealth is one of the strongest determining factors in life outcomes. It predicts access to quality education, which in turn predicts income and wealth accumulation, creating a persisting and never-ending cycle. In this sense, what we call “destiny” can feel less like chance, and more like the quiet weight of financial circumstances shaping what is possible. American economist Raj Chetty demonstrates how parental income is one of the strongest predictors of a child's future earnings. Children born into high-income families are far more likely to remain at the top of the income distribution, whereas children born into low-income families face more difficulties moving upward. The model of equal opportunity is, in practice, extremely constrained. While economic mobility exists, it is limited and uneven. In consequence, the starting point of one's life heavily shapes the endpoint.

However, lack of prosperity in this context is not a result of personal failure, but one of a systemic design that consistently favors those already at the top. This is why the future of the underprivileged is not tragic because it is unforeseen, but because it is entirely predictable.

So if destiny is structurally produced, why does the language of fate persist? Why do we continue to describe success and failure as if they were mysterious outcomes? It is because these mystical explanations are politically convenient. Hierarchy and disparities were historically justified through divine will. Although modern societies have secularized their language, they have preserved its underlying effect of painting inequality as natural, inevitable, and beyond human control. But there is nothing mystical about patterned inequality. It follows lines that can be mapped through income brackets, inherited property, social networks, etc. Therefore, the future is not written in the stars, but in institutional arrangements anchored in policy, capital, and access. To describe social outcomes as mere destiny is to depoliticize them. If fate is responsible, no one is held accountable.

Destiny, then, does not unfold through mystery. It is assembled through history, stabilized through institutions, and reproduced through inequality. Whether it's through inherited capital or identity, the future follows patterns that are neither accidental nor divine. The use of the term destiny to define these patterns is not entirely wrong, but it is misleading. It suggests unpredictability where there is statistical repetition. The future follows lines that were drawn long before we arrived.





Condemned by the Flesh of His Flesh

There are paintings that you look at, and others that stare right back. *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan* belong to the latter. Painted between 1883 and 1885 by the Russian realist artist Ilya Repin, this canvas depicts not violence itself, but its echo, the moment immediately after destiny has already taken its turn, while the mind still struggles to comprehend what the hands have done. Born in today's Ukraine to a family of Russian military settlers, Repin completed his studies under the supervision of local artists before being accepted into the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. To understand this painting, one must see it through the lens of nineteenth-century Russia, a period marked by deep unrest and political tension. The assassination of Alexander II proved especially significant, shifting Repin's focus toward the aftermath of power and violence rather than their execution. Repin was reportedly further influenced by Rimsky-Korsakov's composition *Antar* and a bullfight he witnessed in Spain, whose intensity pushed him to complete this piece, his most striking and controversial work. The painting was temporarily banned from public display by Tsar Alexander III in 1885, regarded with disgust by his advisor, and vandalized twice. The first attack occurred in 1913, when fellow painter Abram Balashov slashed the faces in the painting three times with a knife while screaming, "Enough of death! Enough of bloodshed!" The second took place in 2018, when a man shattered the protective glass with a metal pole, damaging the artwork. Following the first incident, the curator of the Tretyakov Gallery, Georgy Khurslov, took his own life by throwing himself in front of a moving train, a tragedy often speculated to be a self-imposed punishment for failing to protect Repin's painting. Repin himself, however, refused to confine the work to a single interpretation. He chose instead to emphasize its psychological weight over any fixed narrative. He understood the power art holds. As the Mexican poet Cesar A. Cruz wrote, "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable." There is little doubt that Repin's painting succeeded in doing both. What makes this painting embody "*the peculiar twist of destiny*" is its refusal to portray fate as grand or poetic. It portrays fate as humiliating. One minute, you are a ruler, solid in your authority, seated securely within your world. The next, you are kneeling on the floor like a terrified stranger, clutching the person who was supposed to outlive you.

Like all enduring works of art, *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan* resists a single interpretation. The Tsar's eyes remain the most unsettling element of all, nearly possessed. His face seems frozen in one unbearable question: *How did this happen?* It is the look of a man who has blacked out and awakened inside a reality he no longer recognizes. According to legend, it was Ivan IV himself who killed his son, though historians continue to question the accuracy of this account. This uncertainty lives inside the painting itself, especially in the son's right hand resting on his father's shoulder, a gesture that can be read as resistance or forgiveness, neither interpretation offering comfort. The father's kiss on his son's head feels almost delusional, as if pretending that everything will be fine, even though Ivan Ivanovich would suffer for days before dying. This ambiguity has never disappeared, resurfacing even in 2018 when the painting was vandalized and the attacker reportedly shouted that Ivan did not kill his son. Yet the canvas refuses certainty. It traps the viewer in a moment where destiny has already acted and understanding arrives too late. Ivan IV is remembered as a cruel and merciless ruler, whose reign was marked by widespread executions and purges that devastated families and erased entire lineages. Yet the possible killing of his own son appears to have marked him more deeply than any other act. Afterward, he is said to have devoted much of his time to prayer, turning obsessively toward religion, even as his behavior grew increasingly brutal and inhumane, as though grief only intensified his cruelty.

The symbolism within the painting reflects this collapse. The rich reds, golds, and blues in the foreground draw attention to the dying son, the heir who carried the promise of a future Russia, while the dark background suggests the slow fading of the Tsar's own authority. The fallen chair evokes a ruler's oldest fear: being replaced. It recalls the myth of Cronus, who devoured his children to prevent them from overthrowing him, a violence driven not by strength, but by cowardice. Dostoevsky captures this idea in *Crime and Punishment* (1866): "Man has it all in his hands, and it all slips through his fingers from sheer cowardice." Ivan had absolute power and spent his reign destroying the bloodlines of others, yet in one impulsive moment, he severed his own. After Ivan Ivanovich's death, the throne passed to Ivan IV's remaining son, Fyodor I, a weak and passive ruler who died childless in 1598, ending the Rurik dynasty and plunging Russia into chaos. The violence Ivan inflicted outward for decades ultimately turned inward and erased his own bloodline. So, was this destiny's way of returning the favor?



400 Hours

In a quiet village in the center of Sicily, a beautiful young woman named Martina lived a peaceful and traditional life. She was in her early twenties, betrothed to a powerful man in the central and eastern parts of the island. He was a ruthless man named Pietro, a Mafia Don feared in the territories he controlled. He and his men would travel around the villages collecting tribute in exchange for “protection”, which is how he came to meet the innocent young woman while collecting money from her father. She never chose him. Martina’s father had a gambling addiction, which made him barely able to support his wife and daughter, let alone pay the Don, so he gave him his daughter in exchange for a lifetime exemption from payments.

The country was at war, and Mussolini was allied with Hitler’s Germany at the time. Mussolini was not only fighting European powers and the United States, he was also actively hunting the Mafia within Sicily. Despite his efforts, the Don still managed to operate his criminal activities, as the locals favoured him over Mussolini’s regime. Martina would only see Pietro in secret once in a while, avoiding Italian and German troops. On a warm night on the first of July, under the stars, Martina was approached by a man with a rifle. She followed him down a dark path lit faintly by the man’s torch. They soon spotted Pietro, and the man left them alone under the moonlight.

“Martina, my dear, the Americans are planning a landing very soon. The Fascists and Germans will rush to defend Sicily. You need to be here at this location the day after tomorrow so that we can escape.” Martina grew tense, grabbing her shoulder while looking away. Pietro extended his hand toward her face and gently turned it toward his. “This is for us, mi amore. We will be safe with the Americans. What will people think of me if I leave my lover under the bombs?”. “What about the village? What do I tell my parents? Please, Pietro, take them with us,” said Martina, tears rolling down her cheeks. “They will only accept the two of us. But it’s okay; they can survive this. Martina, you and I will have a great future. With the Americans backing us, we can have the whole of Sicily for ourselves!” said Pietro.

When Martina heard that, she remembered her parents arguing whenever her father promised he would win big through gambling, only to lose as usual. “I am not leaving my family,” said Martina. Annoyed, Pietro struck her viciously on the cheek. “You better keep your mouth shut!” yelled Pietro. “Be here, next to the Roman ruins, the day after tomorrow at four o’clock in the morning!” He then signaled to the man to take her back home. Martina did not sleep the whole night. Her face was buried in her pillow, she could not cry anymore as she had gotten used to this kind of treatment.

At sunrise, there was a loud bang on the door. She walked to the window and saw two German soldiers outside with a commanding officer. It was the first time she had ever seen Germans. She stared at their neatly tailored uniforms until they banged a second time, which prompted her to call her father to open the door. The officer and soldiers stared down at him; they were much taller. Intimidated, the father invited them inside. Martina got a better look at the officer: a handsome young blond man with blue eyes and a sharp jawline. The officer noticed her and invited her to sit in front of him.

“So, you must be Martina, right?” asked the officer. She was stunned. Before she could answer, the officer continued, “I am Officer Karl Vadenbaur, and I regret to inform you that your fiancé is dead.” Her mother stared in awe, her father grew pale, yet Martina had her eyes locked onto the young officer. “I am sorry for your loss. When was the last time you saw him?” said Vadenbaur. Martina calmly replied, “I don’t know... maybe a month ago or so.” Vadenbaur nodded and said, “I understand. I am new to this town and do not know it very well. Perhaps you can show me around?” Martina accepted, and alone with the officer, she walked around the mountains exchanging pleasantries. Eventually, when they arrived at the Roman ruins, she pointed at them and said, “Officer, this is where I would have met him tomorrow at four o’clock in the morning.” Vadenbaur nodded and looked away, seemingly uninterested. “Please, call me Karl.” Martina’s heart raced with excitement. Before she could say anything, the officer smiled and said, “How about you and I take the four o’clock train to Munich? We can have a very good time.” Martina agreed to meet him at the Palermo train station and excitedly rushed home to pack her bags. On her way there, she saw the German soldiers holding Pietro in custody. She was surprised to see him alive, but she continued walking so as not to be noticed, the sound of gunshots echoing behind her.



When she reached the train station, nobody was in sight. Martina asked the clerk about the train to Munich. He replied, “Four o’clock to Munich? There are no destinations there, this is an island!”

PECULIAR SYMPHONIES:

ENGRAVING WITH INK



05

Ազատ Կամք, Ոչ Թէ Ճակատագիր

Շատ անգամ, երբ մեծ ցաւեր կը պատահին, մարդիկ կ'ըսեն՝ «ասիկա ճակատագիր էր»: Բայց արդեօք ճակատագիրն է, որ այսքան տառապանք կը բերէ: Արդեօք ամէն ինչ նախապէս գրուած է, թէ մարդոց ընտրութիւններն են, որ կը ձեւաւորեն այս ցաւալի իրականութիւնը:

Այս խօսքը երբեմն կու գայ իբրեւ մխիթարութիւն եւ փորձ՝ բացատրելու այն, ինչ որ շատ դժուար է հասկնալ: Երբ ցաւը խոր է, մարդը կը փորձէ իմաստ տալ՝ ըսելով, թէ ամէն ինչ նախապէս գրուած էր: Այս ձեւով կարծես անելի դիւրին կը դառնայ ընդունիլ իրականութիւնը եւ շարունակել ապրիլ: Բայց պատմութիւնը մեզի ուրիշ բան կ'ուսուցանէ:

Հայոց ցեղասպանութեան տարիներուն հազարաւոր հայ ընտանիքներ բռնի տեղահանուեցան իրենց տուներէն: Մայրեր կորսնցուցին իրենց զաւակները, երեխաներ մնացին առանց ծնողքի, իսկ հայկական գիւղերը դատարկուեցան: Մարդիկ քալեցին երկար ճամբաներ՝ առանց ջուրի, հացի եւ յոյսի: Անոնք չէին ընտրած այդ ճամբան: Անոնք դարձան որոշումներու զոհերը, որոնք ուրիշներ առած էին իրենց փոխարէն:

Նոյն ցաւը նոր ձեւով կրկնուեցաւ Արցախեան պատերազմին: Ընտանիքներ ստիպուեցան լքել իրենց տուները, յիշողութիւնները եւ այդտեղ ապրած ամբողջ կեանքը: Երեխաներ մեծցան ռումբերու ձայնին տակ, մայրեր յուսահատ սպասեցին իրենց զինուոր որդիներուն, որոնք շատ անգամ չէին վերադառնար: Տուներ այրեցան, քաղաքներ ամայացան, եւ մարդիկ կորսնցուցին ոչ միայն իրենց ունեցուածքը, այլ նաեւ իրենց ապահովութիւնը եւ ապագայի վստահութիւնը:

Այս բոլորը ճակատագիր չէր, այլ մարդոց կողմէ առնուած որոշումներու հետեւանք: Մարդիկ ընտրեցին պատերազմը եւ բռնութիւնը, իսկ ուրիշներ վճարեցին այդ ընտրութիւններուն սուղ գինը:

Ազատ կամքը իրական է, բայց անիկա ունի ծանր պատասխանատուութիւն: Երբ մարդը սիսալ կը գործէ իր ազատ ընտրութեամբ, անիկա կրնայ կործանել կեանքեր, ընտանիքներ եւ ամբողջ ազգի մը ապագան:

Ուստի, պէտք չէ ամէն բան վերագրել ճակատագրին: Որովհետեւ երբ մենք կ'ըսենք «ճակատագիր էր», կարծես կը փորձենք մոռնալ, որ այդ ցաւերը ստեղծուած են մարդոց կողմէ:

Գուցէ ամէնէն կարելոր ճշմարտութիւնը այս է, որ մենք չենք կրնար ընտրել՝ ի՞նչ պիտի պատահի մեզի հետ, բայց մարդիկ միշտ կ'ընտրեն՝ ինչ պիտի պատահի ուրիշներուն հետ: Այդ պատճառով ալ ազատ կամքը ոչ միայն իրական է, այլ նաեւ պատասխանատուութիւն մը, որ կը ձեւաւորէ մարդկութեան ապագան:





Ժամանակի Անիւր

Ինչ հիանալի է եղեր ժամանակը, կարծես անիւ մը միշտ դառնալու ընթացքի մէջ: Որքան ալ փորձենք, ամէն ինչ յարատել կը կրկնուի. պատմութիւններ, փորձարութիւններ՝ բոլորը գրեթէ միշտ եղած են նոյնը՝ լաւ եւ վատ: Խորքին մէջ մենք կը կրենք մեր նախահայրերուն կեանքը, եւ ապագային՝ մեր զաւակներուն զաւակները:

Պուրճ Համուտ, 1970-ականներ, մեծ հայրս ու մայրս հաւաքուած իրենց բարեկամներուն հետ, սուրճ, նարտ եւ օրուան թերթին մէջ գրուած պատերազմի տեղական լուրերը կը քննարկէին:

Պուրճ Համուտ, 1990-2000-ականներ, ծնողքս նստած իրենց բարեկամներուն հետ հեռատեսիլէն կը հետեւէին մէկ պատերազմի մը աւարտին, իսկ ուրիշի մը սկիզբին:

Դարձեալ Պուրճ Համուտ, բայց այս անգամ 2020-ականներ, եւ եւ բարեկամներս նստած՝ հեռաձայնէն կը հետեւինք վերջին անդրադարձներուն:

Ահա երեք տարբեր ժամանակաշրջաններ եւ սերունդներ, բայց կացութիւնը նոյնն է, եւ կայ մէկ խօսք բոլորին մտքին մէջ՝ «օրը կու գայ եւ վիճակը կը լաւանայ»:

Է՛հ, թերեւս իրական կը լաւանայ, բայց ե՛րբ: Ա՛յս պիտի ըլլայ մեր ճակատագիրը՝ սերունդներ շարունակ ապրիլ նոյն վախով եւ մտահոգութիւններով՝ առանց որեւէ դադարի: Երբ նստած կ'ըլլամ տարեցներու կողքին, կը պատմեն իրենց երիտասարդութեան օրերուն մասին, առջեւս կու գայ ներկան: Կը պատմեն առօրեայիս մասին, անոնք կը պատասխանեն՝ «Է՛հ, գոնէ օրերը փոխուէին, գոնէ դուք հանգիստ կրնայիք ապրիլ»: Ինչ տարօրինակ բան է եղեր ճակատագիր ըսուած բանը: Օրերը կը փոխուին, բայց իրողութիւնը կը մնայ նոյնը: Մանուկները փորձել սուտերով խաբել, քիչ մը յոյս տալ: Կը լսենք տարեցներու խօսքերը, անոնց գանգոները, թէ մանկութենէն ի վեր նոյն վիճակն է: Ներկայ երիտասարդութիւնը, իր յոյսը մասամբ կտրած, կը շարունակէ կեանքը կամ ալ յարատել հետեւողականութեամբ կը փորձէ իր մտային վիճակը հաստատ պահել:



Այո՛, ճիշդ է. կեանքը կը շարունակէ իր քայլերը եւ սպասելու առիթ չի տար: Բայց քանինե՛ր կը մնան ետեւ՝ ողբալու կորուստները, փնտռելու բեկորները եւ փորձելու կառուցել այդ չնչին սպահովութիւնը, գոր ժամանակին կը վայելէին: Արդեօք ա՛յս է մեզի տրուած ժամանակի անիւր, ամէն տասնամեակ, նոյն ցաւը, ողբերգութիւնը եւ վախը... Այս բոլորին հակառակ, կը փորձենք ապրիլ, գոյատելել, սակայն մինչեւ ե՛րբ:

Ա՛խ, ահա արդէն 50 տարիներ անցան, ռատիօն կախուած է նոյն կայանին վրայ, կարծես ապագան ու ճակատագիրը մեզի մոռցան եւ հեռացան: «Ճակատագիրիդ տերը միային դուն ես» կ'ըսէ օտարը, բայց ի՛նչպէս կրնամ ատիկա իրականացնել, երբ մեզմէ մեծ ուժեր կը խաղան ճակատագիրին հետ, կարծես զինուոր մը ըլլանք ճատրակի տախտակին վրայ: Որքա՞ն պիտի շարունակենք ապրիլ այս անորոշ օրերուն մէջ, երբ մեզի չի տրուիր ոչ միայն արտօնութիւնը, այլ նոյնիսկ իրաւունքը՝ իսկապէս կեանքը ապրելու: Որքա՞ն պիտի շարունակենք բախիլ նոյն խոչընդոտներուն եւ միսիթարենք մենք մեզ՝ ըսելով. «Վարժուեցանք ալ, ի՛նչ ընենք»:

Մինչեւ ե՛րբ պիտի փորձենք սուտ յոյսերով հանդարտեցնել եւ ապրեցնել մեր մանուկները՝ աշխարհի ապագան: Մինչեւ ե՛րբ պիտի ապրինք այս սուտերով, թէ օր մը վիճակը պիտի լաւանայ:

Հերիք է ալ... յոգնեցանք: Ո՛վ ճակատագիր, ճակատիդ թքելը քիչ է:





Լիբանանը և Շրջանի Հակամարտությունները

Կէս դարէ ի վեր Լիբանանը վերածուած է պատերազմական բախումերու փորձադաշտի մը, իսկ այսօր Միջին Արեւելքի մէջ բռնկած Իրան-Ամերիկա-Իսրայէլ հակամարտութիւնը անխուսափելիօրէն իր ազդեցութիւնը ունեցաւ նաեւ Լիբանանի վրայ: Լիբանանը, որ արդէն տարիներէ ի վեր կ'ապրի ընկերատնտեսական, եւ քաղաքական ծանր ճգնաժամ մը, այսօր կը գտնուի նոր մարտահրաւերներու դէմ յանդիման:

Պատերազմական բարդ իրավիճակը եւ հրթիռակոծութիւնները Լիբանանի հարաւային շրջաններու եւ Պէյրութի հարաւային արուարձաններու մէջ մէկ միլիոն քաղաքացի ստիպուած են լքելու իրենց շրջանները եւ ապաստանելու ժամանակաւոր գաղթականներու ապաստարաններու մէջ, իսկ ոմանք ալ մնացած են անտուն: Իսկ ամէնէն վտանգաւորը Իսրայէլի ոճրագործ բանակին կատարած գործողութիւններն ու ներխուժման փորձերն են հարաւային սահմանի վրայ, որովհետեւ նման յառաջխաղացք մը Լիբանանին կը սպառնայ հողային կորուստներ:

Լիբանանահայ համայնքը, որ միշտ եղած է երկրի հասարակական եւ քաղաքական կեանքի գործօն մասնիկը, անմասն չի մնար ներկայ սպառնալիքներէն եւ հայահոծ շրջաններուն մօտիկ վայրեր, իսկ կ'ենթարկուին իսրայէլեան ռմբակոծումի:

Հակառակ այս բոլորին՝ լիբանանցիներուն ներքին անհամաձայնութիւնները կը շարունակուին, եւ անոնք մեծ վտանգ կը հանդիսանան արդէն իսկ վտանգուած երկրի ներքին ապահովութեան եւ կայունութեան:

Այսօր Լիբանանի կառավարութեան պարտականութիւնն է գիտակցիլ վտանգի լրջութեան եւ երկրի մէջ ստեղծուած լարուածութիւնը բարդացնելու փոխարէն ազգային համախմբման քայլերու ձեռնարկել:

Այսօր, աւելի քան երբեւէ, անհրաժեշտ է ազգային միասնականութիւն, պատասխանատու քաղաքացիութիւն: Լիբանանցի ժողովուրդը պէտք է գիտակցի, որ Իսրայէլի հակամարտութիւնը կը սպառնայ ամբողջ Լիբանանին եւ անոր տարածքային ամբողջականութեան, եւ հրամայական է ազգային դիմադրութիւն ցուցաբերելը, որպէսզի կարելի ըլլայ շրջանցել վտանգը եւ տէր կանգնիլ Լիբանանի ազգային արժանապատուութեան:

Իսկ մենք՝ իբրեւ լիբանանահայ երիտասարդներ, ինչպէս միշտ, պէտք է ամուր կանգնինք Լիբանանի կողքին եւ ըլլալ կազմակերպ ու պատրաստ՝ դիմագրաւելու պատերազմին պարտադրած բոլոր մարտահրաւերները:





Ազատության Թեւո՛ր, Թէ՛ Պատասխանատուության Շղթաներ

Մարդ արարածին տրուած ամէնէն մեծ պարգեւը, որ միաժամանակ անոր ամէնէն ահաւոր դատապարտութիւնն է, ազատ կամքն է: Այս այն կայծն է, որ մեզ կը գատէ բնագոյներով առաջնորդուող կենդանական աշխարհէն, տալով աստուածային կարողութիւն՝ ինքնուրոյն կերտելու մեր ուղին: Սակայն այս ազատութիւնը նման է լայնածաւալ ու անհուն ովկիանոսի. հոն մարդը կրնայ նաւարկել դէպի լուսաւոր հորիզոններ, զարգացնել իր միտքը, ուսանիլ եւ բարիք սերմանել, բայց նոյն այդ կամքով կրնայ նաեւ ընտրել մութ անդունդներ, դառնալով ոճրագործութեան ու չարիքի գործիք: Ազատութիւնը, այս իմաստով, երկասյրի սուր մըն է, որ կրնայ թէ՛ կեանք պարգեւել եւ թէ՛ սպաննել:

Այսօրուան աշխարհին մէջ, ուր համալսարանական կեանքը իր բազմաթիւ պահանջներով եւ դժուարութիւններով դարձած է ծանր լուծ մը մեր ուսերուն, ազատ կամքի գաղափարը կը սկսի նուազիլ: Մենք ունինք աշխատելու եւ յառաջանալու կամք, սակայն շատ յաճախ կը զգանք կաշկանդուած՝ քննութիւններու եւ ընկերային պարտաւորութիւններու ճնշումին տակ: Մինչդեռ հոգին կը տենչայ թոյլիքի: Կը փափաքինք ձգել ամէն ինչ ու ճամբորդել՝ տեսնելու համար Աստուծոյ ստեղծած այդ սքանչելի տիեզերքը, գոր մարդ արարածը իր ազահութեամբ ու անտարբերութեամբ չի յարգեր: Որքա՛ն դառն է տեսնել, որ մենք ունինք աչքեր՝ տեսնելու համար աստուածային գեղեցկութիւնը, բայց պայմանները կը պարտադրեն մնալ նոյն սեւ ու սպիտակ պատերուն մէջ:



Կեանքը, սակայն, երբեք չի խնայեր մեզի: Երբ կը կարծենք, թէ վերջապէս յաջողեցանք տիրապետել մեր կամքին, ճակատագիրը իր անակնկալ «սփտակներով» կը հարուածէ մեզի: Այդ հարուածները յաճախ այնքան զօրաւոր են, որ մարդ մը կը ձգեն շուարած եւ անօգնական: Այս անկայունութեան մէջ է որ կը ծնի վախը: Մեր իւրաքանչիւր քայլը եւ որոշումը այլեւս չունին այդ նախկին թեթեւութիւնը. անոնք թաթխուած են կասկածի ու տագնապի մէջ: Կը քալենք զգուշութեամբ, ինչպէս անձ մը, որ կը փորձէ անցնիլ կտրուող սառոյցի մը վրայէն՝ գիտնալով, որ ազատ է քալելու, բայց նաեւ կը գիտակցի, որ իր յաջորդ քայլով կրնայ ըլլալ իյնայ եւ խեղդուի:

Այսպիսով, ազատ կամքը կը մնայ մարդկային գոյութեան մեծագոյն հանելուկը: Ան մեզի կու տայ իշխանութիւն՝ ստեղծելու կամ քանդելու, բայց նաեւ կը դնէ մշտական վախի ու պատասխանատուութեան առջեւ: Մենք պէտք է սորվինք ապրիլ այս «ծանր անէծքի»-ն հետ՝ փորձելով գտնել լոյսը նոյնիսկ այն ապտակներուն մէջ, զորս կեանքը կը հասցնէ:



PECULIAR SOULS:

REFLECTIONS BORN
FROM RUBBLES

06

تحت أنقاض اليقين... ولادة أخرى

لم تكن الحرب يوماً مجرد أصوات مرّوعة أو دُخانٍ يُغطي الأفق، بل كانت زلزالاً يضرب أركان الروح قبل أن يهدم جدران البيوت. فلطالما عشتُ في فُقاعةٍ من "الأمان المزيّف"، أخططُ للأعوام القادمة وأقلقُ من تفاهاتٍ يوميةٍ، حتى جاءت تلك الليلة التي انكسر فيها الصمتُ، وانكسر معها كلُّ ما كنتُ أعرفُهُ عن نفسي.



أتذكّر جيّداً برودة الجدران حين ارتمت في زاوية العُرقة، وصوت الرصاص يرسم خطوطاً من الموت في سماء المدينة. في تلك اللحظة، لم تكن الأشياء التي كنتُ أملاكها تساوي شيئاً؛ لا الشهادات المعلقة على الجدران، ولا الكُتب التي كنتُ أفتخر بجمعها، ولا حتى خططي الموجهة. كنتُ أنا، وعراني الإنساني، ونبض قلبي الذي يفرغ كطبلٍ في فراغٍ موحش.

شاهدتُ من نافذة مكسورة، جاري وهو يحمل حقيبة صغيرة، يركضُ بها نحو المجهول. وفي تلك الومضة، سألتُ نفسي: "ما الذي يتبقى منّا حين يضيع كلُّ شيء؟".

خرجتُ من تلك التجربة بقلبٍ مختلفٍ، وقد تركتُ خلفي ذلك الشخص الذي يرهن سعادته بالمستقبل.

أصنحتُ أرى المعجزات في التفاصيل الصغيرة؛ شربة ماءٍ نظيفة، ضوء شمسٍ لم يحجبه دخانٌ، أو نوم هاديٍ بلا كوابيس. الحرب علمتني أن "العادي" هو أعظم النعم.

أدركتُ أن الحياة خيطٌ رفيعٌ، لذا لا مجال للحقد أو التأجيل. أصبح قلبي أكثر ليناً واتساعاً للآخرين، فالأساة توحّدنا حين تمرّ فناء الجغرافيا.

اكتشفتُ أن السلاح الوحيد الذي لا ينفد هو الكلمة. بدأتُ أكتب لأوثق الجمال الذي نبت وسط الخراب، ولأقول أننا لسنا مجرد "أرقام" في نشرات الأخبار، بل نحن قصصٌ وأحلامٌ وذكرياتٌ.

إنّ الحرب التي حاولتُ أن تسلب منّا كلَّ شيءٍ، منحنتني أعلى ما أمك: الوعي بقيمة الوجود. لقد مات الشخص الذي كان يخاف من قوات الأوان، وولد مكانه إنسانٌ يؤمن أن كلَّ دقيقة نعيشها سلامٌ هي انتصارٌ شخصيٌّ على الموت.

كنتُ أتصارعُ في مهبِّ الريح، أركضُ باتجاهِ خطِّ مرسومٍ بقلمِ رصاصٍ غيرِ مبرور، أتنشقُّ هواءً وهمياً وأبحثُ عن طريقٍ أرضها متألثة، لكنني لم أصل إلا إلى مجهولٍ، إلى مكانٍ لا أدركُ عنه شيئاً.
وجدتُ نفسي أسير في صحراءٍ واسعةٍ أبحثُ عن نقطة ماء تروي الفوضى في داخلي. قررتُ استكمال الطريق، ربّما يزول الضباب أو ربّما تهدأ تلك الفوضى.
وأنا أكمل المسير، ووجدتُ مفرقاً صغيراً، مفرقاً لا يعرفه إلا أهلُ هذا الطريق.

تساءلتُ بصوتٍ خافت: هل أدخل منه؟

وهنا وقعتُ في حيرةٍ... هل أكمل طريقاً أراه بعيني لكن لا أرى نهايته، أم أختار مسلكاً لا أدري لا بدايته ولا نهايته؟

أغمضتُ عيني وتركتُ قلبي يقودني، وكأنني أضع روعي بين يديه. وحين فتحتُهما، ووجدتُ نفسي في طريقٍ دافئٍ، في طريقٍ شعرتُ فيه بالأمان، طريقٍ أعرف رائحة هوائه وأدرك لون سمانه..

وجدتُ نفسي طائراً حرّة، أمشي بثقة وأترقص على أرض أشعر بحضنها..

أدركتُ حينها أنّ الطريق الصّحيح ليس بالضرورة أن يكون طريقاً مألوفاً،

هو طريقٌ يرتاح فيه قلبك، وكأنه يمشي بين جدران بيتك...

هو طريقٌ اختاره قدرك فعكس كل اتجاهاتك ليعيدك إليه..

أحياناً القدر ليس واقعاً يأتي إلينا فنتقبّله. أحياناً يكون على شكل مفرقٍ صغيرٍ،

يهمس إلى قلبك بهدوء، وينتظر بصبرٍ لتلتفتِ إليه، فيمسك بيدك ويأخذك إلى مكانٍ،

لا تطير فيه روحك فحسب، بل تعود فيه إلى بيتها...



لَمْ يَكُنْ مَا بَدَأَ نِهَائِيَّةً، إِلَّا انْطَفَاءً مُوقَفًا لِلْمَعْنَى؛ حَالَةً لَا يَغِيبُ فِيهَا الْوُجُودُ، بَلْ يُفْرَعُ مِنْ دَلَالَتِهِ.
تَسْتَمِرُّ الْأَشْيَاءُ، تَتَحَرَّكُ، تَتَكَرَّرُ، لَكِنْ دُونَ أَنْ تَتَرَكَ أَثْرًا يُذَكِّرُ؛ كَأَنَّ الْحَيَاةَ ثَمَارَسُ، لَا تُعَاشُ.

فِي هَذَا الْخُفُوتِ، لَا يَظْهَرُ الْأَلَمُ بِوُضُوحٍ، بَلْ يَتَوَارَى فِي هَيْئَةٍ حَيَادٍ مَمْتَدَّةٍ.
لَا شَيْءٌ يُطَلَّبُ، وَلَا شَيْءٌ يُنْتَظَرُ؛ فَقَطْ زَمَنٌ يَمْضِي، بِلَا ثِقَلٍ كَافٍ لِيُشْعِرَ بِثِقَلِهِ.

ثُمَّ، دُونَ إِعْلَانٍ، يَحْدُثُ الانْزِيَا ح؛ لَا كَحَادِثٍ، بَلْ كَاسْتِدْرَاكِ،
كَأَنَّ الْمَعْنَى لَمْ يَكُنْ غَائِبًا، بَلْ مُوجَّلاً، يَنْتَظَرُ لَحْظَةً انْكِشَافِهِ.
عِنْدَهَا، يَتَبَدَّلُ النَّصُورُ: مَا ظُنَّ نِهَائِيَّةً، يَتَرَاجَعُ لِيُكْشِفَ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ كِبَادِيَّةً لَمْ تُدْرَكْ فِي حِينِهَا.

تَتَصَدَّعُ التَّعْرِيفَاتُ الْقَدِيمَةُ؛ مَا وُصِفَ ضَعْفًا، يَتَشَكَّلُ مِنْ جَدِيدٍ كَقُوَّةٍ مِنْ نَوْعٍ آخَرَ.
لَا يَوْصِفُهُ اعْتِمَادًا، بَلْ يَوْصِفُهُ وَعْيًا؛ لَا دُوبَانًا، بَلْ ثَمَاسِكًا مُخْتَلِفًا.

فِي تِلْكَ اللَّحْظَةِ، لَا يُفْهَمُ النَّيَّةُ كَضِيَا عٍ، بَلْ كَمَرَحَلَةٍ جَدِيدَةٍ.
الدَّاتُ لَا تَخْفَى، بَلْ تُعَادُ كِتَابَتُهَا؛ وَكَأَنَّ مَا يَحْدُثُ لَيْسَ اكْتِشَافًا لِشَيْءٍ
جَدِيدٍ، بَلْ تَذَكُّرًا لِشَيْءٍ كَانَ حَاضِرًا عَلَى نَحْوٍ غَيْرِ مُدْرَكٍ.

أَمَّا الْقَدْرُ، فَلَا يَتَدَخَّلُ بِقَدْرِ مَا يَكْشِفُ؛ لَا يَفْرُضُ، بَلْ يَظْهَرُ.
وَكَأَنَّ مَسَارَهُ لَمْ يَبْدَأْ هُنَاكَ، بَلْ كَانَ مُمْتَدًّا، يَنْتَظَرُ فَقَطْ أَنْ يَرَى.

مَا يَتَحَقَّقُ لَا يَبْدُو صُدْفَةً، بَلِ اسْتِجَابَةً لِصَمْتِ سَابِقٍ؛ كَأَنَّ الرَّغَبَاتِ الَّتِي
لَمْ تُنْطَقْ، لَمْ تَكُنْ بِحَاجَةٍ إِلَى صَوْتٍ، بَلْ إِلَى لَحْظَةٍ تَوَافُقٍ كَافِيَةٍ لِتَتَحَقَّقَ.

وَمِنْ هُنَا، يَتَغَيَّرُ الْمَعْنَى النَّهَائِيَّةُ: لَيْسَ الْعِشْقُ طَلْبًا، وَلَا انْكِسَارًا، بَلْ
مَوْضِعًا تُسْتَعَادُ فِيهِ الدَّاتُ.

لَا يُفْقَدُ فِيهِ الْإِتْرَانُ، بَلْ يُعَادُ تَعْرِيفُهُ.

عِنْدَ تِلْكَ الْعَتَبَةِ، لَا يَبْقَى إِلَّا شَكْلٌ وَاحِدٌ لِلْحُضُورِ،
أَنْ يَقِفَ الْكَائِنُ، فِي مَوَاجَهَةِ قَدْرِهِ... عَزِيزًا.



A hand holding a quill pen over a fountain pen nib. The quill is dark and textured, with a fine tip that is being held just above the nib of a fountain pen. The fountain pen is silver and has a small black dot on its nib. The background is a gradient from white to grey.

PECULIAR RYTHMS:

**THE PULSE
OF TRUE IDENTITY**

07

ALIK DJINBACHIAN

The Death of the Unsleeping

The silence and stillness of the mind so deafening,
The black painted tiles under pale skin,
The shadow clinging to you, hugging you, one hand on your chest and one on your waist.
An oath of never-ending love, a secret marriage of the forbidden.

A bed turned into deep ocean waters, turned into steel, turned into a coffin.
A terrifying view of oneself; lying, decaying, on a table into nothingness.
Fear knocking on the door, ready for a night of fun and partying,
While you wait for your friends, worry and anxiety, to arrive.

You are left awake so the world can rest; an unfair sacrilege.
Then, a different kind of death, as the party comes to its end,
Exhaustion takes residence in all protestors,
Like a desperate mother putting her newborn to bed, uninterrupted for a few hours.

When day arrives, you wonder when the next time will be,
As it has become your vow to life, to your friends.
A vow led only in the dark hours' protection,
A death of the unsleeping only.





Maybe You'll See

Tales are told, and with hope I hold,
Not knowing what will unfold.
As time passes, hearts grow cold,
The brave stand true, while cowards fold.
To cower behind what you would scold,
Words piercing through my very mold.
As hate spreads, it shatters that of old,
People grow bitter, and secrets are sold.
So do not fear the truth, for truth is gold.

Lies are nothing but the devil's cries.
They swell and fester, blinding your eyes.
Following emotions and reactions... unwise,
Plummeting towards your demise.
What must you find, so as to rise?
And then what might be the prize?
If that is with loved ones then, what of foes?
To break the human spirit, to create such woes
What have we left to those we oppose?
Knives, bullets, and wars,
We killed our morality...
The dirt we chose
Clinging to wealth, to cars and designer clothes
Wanting evermore, our lust for power grows.
Arrogance in seeing others beneath our nose,
We made gold our only goal and it shows.

The riches have become our values and our prose,
Holding productivity and profit above all.
May humanity crumble and crawl,
May the heavens rupture and fall,
May we lose our human soul!
Are we not going to be asked of our responsibility?
What have we done to our earth's stability?
The world burns, yet we talk of civility.
Hypocrisy and lies spoken by the "nobility",
Forcing us to lose sense of our sensibility.
Lost in this rat race seeking intangibility,

Waiting for our “social mobility”,
Moving towards our own futility.
But know that you have great utility.
And that you can own the world with humility,
Where we can improve our society.
Let us not be cogs of unsustainability.
Building a better tomorrow isn't beyond affordability.
May we know a sense of tranquility.

One day, the world will heal.
The wounds in your hearts will seal.
Scars will be lessons for us to feel.
May we learn to stand by what is ideal,
Human prosperity, above the wealth we conceal,
To rise as humanity, not merely to steal
No more hoarding and consuming another's meal.

So promise me
That you'll break free,
Bringing hope and glee,
And a glimpse of true beauty
To a world not of fantasy,
But a world grounded in truth and dignity,
For a world with truth is mighty.
Seek not perfection, seek to be
Truthful, wise, mindful and full of integrity,
So that one day you'll see
A brighter side of the century,
With your own peculiar touch of destiny.



The Paradox of Choice

We stood before a blank white page,
its silence louder than our speech,
a flicker of light on a midnight screen,
asking us softly “Who will you be?”

Choices hovered quietly in the air,
like dust caught in the campus light,
a burning flame within our chests,
igniting hesitation, daring us to fight.

A paradoxical flame perhaps,
a double-edged sword that cuts both ways,
it shatters our doubt yet carves our strength,
and sharpens courage through our darkest days.

For every door we dare to choose,
a thousand others fade away,
we call it choice, we call it power,
yet feel its trembling weight each day.

We call ourselves a living contradiction,
bold in dreams yet full of doubt,
yearning to leave familiar shores,
while chasing paths we’ve never found.

It lingers when we choose to go,
when we cast aside all that we outgrew,
when we step into a new era,
that somehow feels both strange and true.

Fate is not a chain,
nor a rigid script we must obey,
fate lives within the pause,
before we speak, before it fades away.

Let ink and paper guide our way,
through doubts we face and dreams we chase,
in every line our hearts convey,
the spark that time cannot erase.



How Does The Grass Know Which Crack In The Pavement To Grow From?

Ash sputters and stutters into motion and takes flight, takes it intentionally, relentlessly, like death is its birth-right.

In this dead city, they rebrand their dead children and sell them online:

Look, this is their poised suicide,
Rocks clasped tightly in limp hands,
Look, they did this to themselves and their death is intentional, relentless.
Look, their death is their birthright.

This is the type of warzone carefully constructed in factories,
The type of news story mass-produced,
Mass-distributed,
Mass-consumed:
Feast your eyes upon the rotting pieces packaged neatly into a few hundred pixels, at the Palestinian heart
which beats life,
Which beats broken,
Which beats and beats and does not stop beating,
Which even in its grave of ash and blood and tissue
Howls like a ghost.
Feast your eyes upon their biology,
Rebranded into ones and zeroes.

Are they digestible enough now?

There's nothing left but
Honey-coated firefly-throated women
Looking for something to do with their hands when there are no more children left to hold,
A single word to utter when there are no more children left to call back home,
Their names,
Nothing but a fleeting exhale lodged in one man's trachea.

But the tracheas of these dead children and this dead city
Are lodged with bullets, you see,
And they still speak louder than you,
Still speak softer than you,
Still speak, and you?

You ignore.

But these children,
These dead children,
Starving and open-eyed and still,
These dead children making up but a few hundred pixels
Have hearts that beat life,
That beat broken,
That beat and beat and
Do not stop beating,
That do not know how to pronounce the letters forming their name,
That do not know anything more than to exist,
That do not know the umbilical cord was severed and now there is a dull ache in its place,
Begging for a mother,
Begging to be held,
Begging to go where they can no longer go.

Entombed now within hollow ribs, within hollow lungs, this dead city exhales its final breath;

How does life choose which hearts to weaken?

How does the grass choose which crack in the pavement to grow from?



GALINA KAZARIAN

The Morning of Mourning

The beautiful white dove
Flies high above
Over the heads
Of those who dread

Bleeding red under the blue skies.
Mourning a loved one only with eyes
Anger, fear, hurt, recoil
And the casket covered in soil

What once was a person who could smile and frown,
Has now become a mere view from halfway down.
The bittersweet river floods with a beautiful prayer symphony.
And, finally, *the peculiar touch of destiny*

The seedling sprouts, forming a brown cambium.
Learning to grow, and the feelings are no longer numb.
The dove has now formed a nest on the branch of the bark,
Looking up, now we can see the shiny spark.

The time's arrow doesn't stand still, nor does it reverse, it merely marches forward
The future holds hope for those absences, opening doors, yellow-colored.



Dedicated to H & I

LYNN FAWAZ

The Script of the Tide

The future is a clouded view,
With no guarantee of breaking through.
You claim the crown, you hold the key,
Yet rising winds shake your sovereignty.

The head humming,
The heart thrumming
Waiting for the “what if” to arrive,
To see which version of “me” will survive.

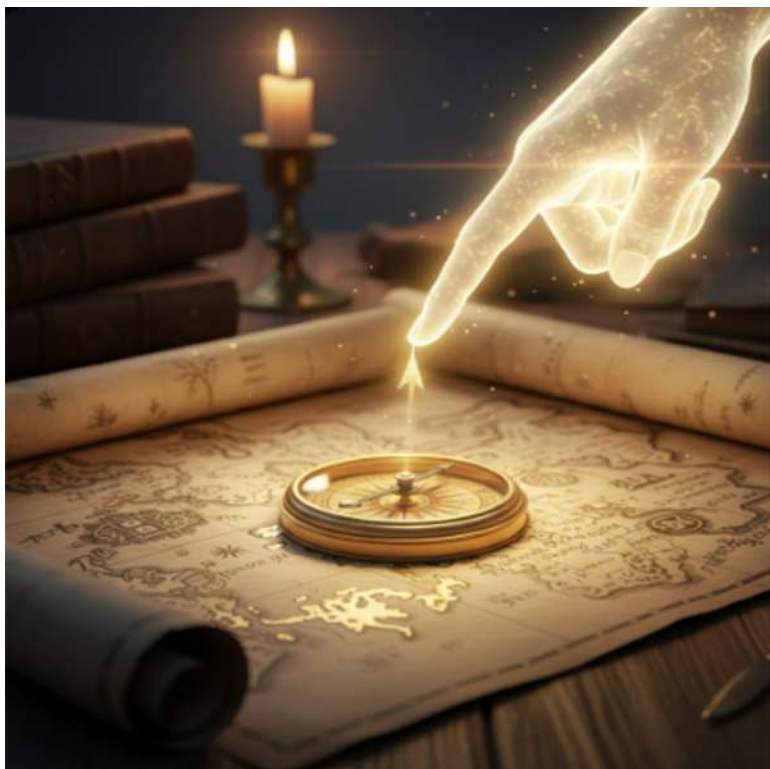
Blessings and curses may fill the journey,
To prove the struggle itself was worthy.
A blessing of choice, or a chain that weighs much.
Free will is a gamble, but fate is the touch.

A tidal drift, a light you didn't see,
That bends your careful plans toward destiny:
The person that you once desired to be,
Or a stranger born of fate, finally set free.

For every shift of tide and plan that falls apart,
It uncovers what was anchored in the heart.
We are the question asked; the answer is yet to be.
A single drop of wonder in a deep, ancient sea.

Destiny has a peculiar touch;

That can change your life with its unexpected brush.



Fifteen Years in a Suitcase

For fifteen years of silent oaths,
I lived in a place that shaped my bones,
that knew my name before I spoke,
before I learned to invoke a voice.

Its walls memorized my light and despair,
its corners held both courage and repair,
its air carried a version of me,
becoming who I couldn't yet see.

I called it home,
I called it my own.
I called it something I could not flee,
because it had shaped who I would be.

But sometimes what shapes you also shrinks you.

I grew tired of mistaking familiarity for belonging,
tired of stretching my silence into longing.
The decision did not arrive easily, no
it came as a whisper that trembled through me: "You are allowed to grow."

Fifteen years. How do you fold fifteen years into a suitcase? How do you walk away from rooms that watched you become who you are?

The ground ahead did not feel sure,
and my heart did not feel secure.
Right and wrong began to blur,
and doubt stayed with me, obscure.

But I left.

And when the door closed behind me,
I stood at the edge of the sea,
without a map to guide me through,
without a past to hold me to that I once knew.

I began to meet myself without the noise.

I saw that the moment that once terrified me
was not destruction waiting to undo what I would be.
It was construction shaping something new,
rebuilding a self I never fully knew.

It was nothing less than the peculiar touch of destiny.



RALPH TANNOUS

The Cement Effect

There I stand, at a crossroad

Perplexity occupies my emotions

It seems my feet and legs have been subjected to the cement effect

Locked in place, the two keys that determine my fate laid in front of me...

It is quite ironic how in life we yearn for that singular desire to occur, but then we are presented with multiple opportunities to achieve them

And it is quite hilarious that they say “the more the merrier”

In this case, it is rather the opposite

The feelings intensify to the point of feeling consumed by the whole matter itself

For we are comfortable running on a one-way road until it becomes otherwise

We begin to dwell for the moment we receive the answer

It's a mixture of comfort and distress

For a decision is to be made

The one that will make the journey truly count

...and so I depart towards where the winds of fate sway me

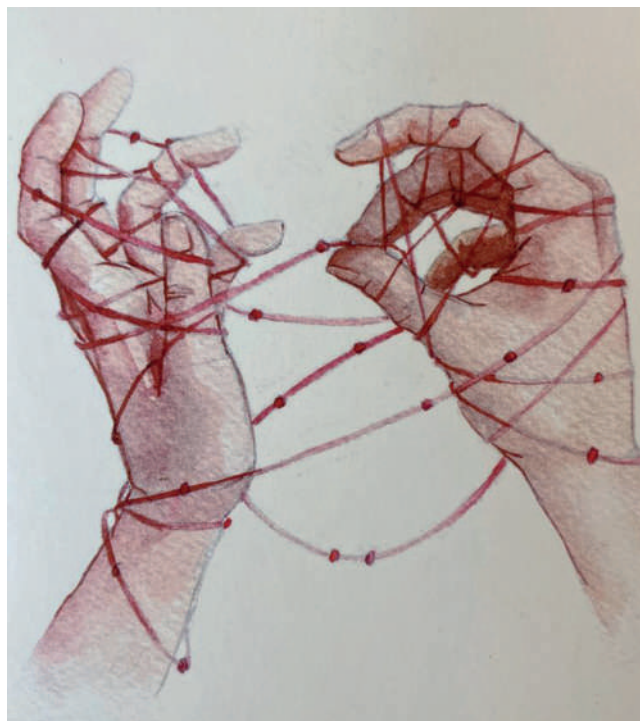
It's always that *peculiar touch of destiny* that fuels the force of lifting the weight of our thoughts and delving into obscurity in order to capture the guiding light we are in need of.

Written in the Wrong Stars

I swore it had to be you,
Promised my friends my wish for love had come true.
I spent nights restitching my heart, black and blue,
But these were only rehearsals for loving you.
Every wound had been preparing me for the softness of your hands,
For the love I thought was meant to be.

Every thread I held on to until my knuckles turned white,
I mistook the way you understood me
For something permanent, something right.
Every conversation felt sacred, divine,
Every coincidence mistaken as a sign,
Every almost goodbye taken as proof
That we were being tested,
Not warned of the truth.

Back then I believed in destiny,
That the universe had been patient with me,
Waited for a moment that was only fantasy,
But I finally let go of the love that was never meant for me.



SARA HAMDAN

A Splendid Sorrow

I did not see it coming, my dear,
Yet destiny left me in tears.
I thought that fate cradled none other than me,
Or maybe the future I deemed to be forever clear.
I was certain my realm revolved around me.

Until life shifted into something new,
A new world empty of you.
But amid the shifting tides, only you remained true,
And when I stood face to face with the bitter truth
I learned that my existence depended on you,
I struggled to grasp the idea of a me without you.

Now I can only adapt to the seasons with all shades of blue,
But never to a world devoid of you.
I did not see it coming, my dear,
How cruel fate can be,
Enough to take you away from me,
With no remedy for me to heal.
I will forever refuse to believe
That someone like you can really leave.
With you, faded is all that I knew,
And afterwards came all the blues.





PECULIAR ECHOES:

**RESONATING THROUGH
MEMORY**

08

Armig 1.0



Dad's my best friend
You would've loved it; he's a godsend
He tells me all the ways I remind him of you
I think he's biased, but who am I to say what's true?
You engulfed yourself in darkness
Because life gave you nothing but emptiness

Streets that mirrored tombs
And music that reflected war rooms
Yet you gifted this world the purest blessing of all
Selfless, generous, and kind... the words I've written on my bedroom wall

One final breath took you away
While it broke dad into pieces on replay
One single breath to help him decide
That I'd be your namesake, as long as I'm by his side

Life is cruel until it is gentle
I listen to your songs, a mixtape of rusted metal
I wonder, I sit, I ache, I ponder
"Ce geste je le sais par cœur
Pour moi c'est sûr, elle est d'ailleurs"



The Hidden Way Forward

At some point, everyone faces a moment of choice. Not a small decision, but one that feels like it could shape everything that comes next. The difficulty is not always in choosing, but in knowing what each choice might lead to. The more possibilities there are, the harder it becomes to move forward with certainty.

We are often told that we control our own path. That with enough clarity and effort, we can decide exactly where we are going. But reality does not always unfold that way. Sometimes, different opportunities, responsibilities, or directions appear at the same time, asking us to carry more than one path at once.

This is where life becomes less predictable and more complex. Instead of choosing one clear road, we find ourselves navigating several, each one demanding time, energy, and commitment. Some feel exciting and aligned with who we are, while others feel difficult, uncertain, or even uncomfortable.

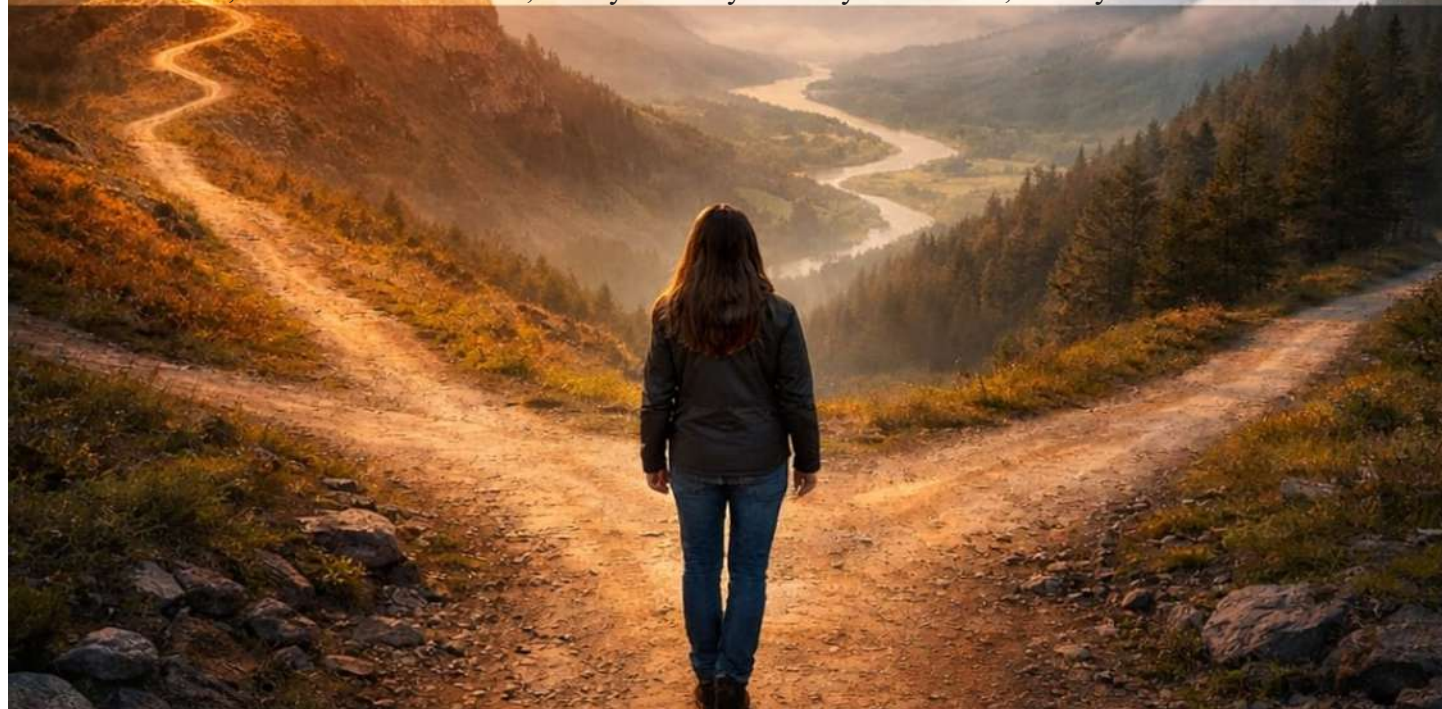
And yet, it is often through this complexity that something meaningful begins to take shape.

Perhaps this is where the real tension lies. We are both the authors of our lives and participants in something larger. We plan, we strive, we choose, yet we are also met by moments that redirect us, expand us, or challenge our sense of direction altogether.

The question then shifts. It is no longer about predicting the future or making the perfect decision. It becomes about awareness. About recognizing when life is inviting us to step forward, even when the path is unclear. About understanding that not every meaningful direction will feel comfortable at first.

The peculiar touch of destiny is not always loud. It does not always announce itself. Sometimes, it is simply the quiet realization that despite uncertainty, movement is happening. That even in doubt, there is direction.

And perhaps that is the most unexpected part of all. That in the space between choice and chance, between intention and outcome, we are not lost. We are, in ways we may not fully understand, exactly where we are meant to be.



The Shape of Becoming in Uncertainty

“Aren’t you afraid?”

Yes, I have fear. But I also have faith. And as long as my faith is greater, I’ll be fine.

There is something unsettling about realizing that life does not offer us one path, but many. We are not simply carried forward, but, again and again, we are given both a path and the freedom to abandon it. The weight of that freedom can feel like a quiet burden. Every choice holds within it a thousand invisible “what ifs.” We call it free will when it actually feels like standing in the middle of a collapsing world, asked to decide which direction still holds meaning.

Sometimes, destiny does not arrive as clarity; it arrives as rupture, as though something inside us breaks, and suddenly we understand that life unfolds in stages, and that to move from one to another, something within must die. We rarely speak of this part, that moment when we are no longer who we used to be, yet not quite someone we recognize.

We are constantly unlearning everything that got us here and rewriting the script as we go. This space, this fragile, undefined middle, is where *destiny does its most peculiar work*. Because it is here that we are asked to let go. Let go of what once felt like home, let go of versions of ourselves we thought were permanent, let go of people, places, certainties... We do not speak enough about this quiet death. The shedding. The unlearning.

Look at the trees. They do it all the time. They let go. Not because they are weak, but because that is how they grow. Fallen leaves do not climb back onto branches. And we, too, must learn this quiet courage. *To not water what is already dead. Letting go is not loss*. It is transformation. There are no coincidences. Nothing is random. One version of you fades, another begins to take shape. And still, we hesitate. We ask: What will happen if we don’t give up? *Probably everything*. Who you are meant to become lies on the other side of the moment you almost quit.

Life is not about avoiding the bruises, or escaping the cuts. It is about collecting the scars and rising anyway. Only from under the ashes of who we think we are, who we are meant to be can be created. That breaking is not the end of you. It is the beginning. Uncertainty is not a sign of being lost. It is a sign of becoming.

What is destiny, then? A fixed ending? Or the quiet accumulation of the choices we dare to make when everything around us is uncertain?

There are moments, you know them, when the outside world fractures. When cities tremble, when the sky forgets how to be gentle, when noise replaces silence, and fear becomes a language we all suddenly understand. And maybe that is the most difficult truth of all: That even in moments when everything feels like it is falling apart, when the world outside reflects chaos, and the world within mirrors it, there is still something quietly, persistently unfolding in your favor.

So, if you find yourself standing at the edge of a decision, afraid of what comes next, remember that you were never meant to have all the answers. Walk forward, even when you are unsure. Believe, even when fear speaks louder. Destiny is not something that happens to you. It is something you step into. And although its touch is not always gentle, it is always transformative.



So, stand there, in the uncertainty, in the noise, in the in-between, and choose. Choose to believe. Choose to move. Choose to become. Destiny does not arrive fully formed. It meets you exactly at the point where your fear and your faith collide. And it asks you, quietly: Who do you decide to be?

Ploughing the Soul

I love the sight of a tractor ploughing long, straight furrows. Ploughing is forward-looking work. You need to keep your gaze fixed on a point on the horizon. If you constantly look over your shoulder, the grooves will be wiggly and the work inefficient.

A work of patience and hope

Ploughing is mostly done in winter. The harvest is still a long way off. There is no immediate result or gratification. A farmer ploughs in patient trust. An ignorant spectator may wonder why the farmer is spending all this seemingly vain effort. Yet ploughing is the preparation of the soil for seed. Seed that falls on unploughed, hard soil will not take root. A well-ploughed, fertilised soil ensures a greater harvest.

Ploughing the soul

This is a beautiful metaphor for spirituality. Jesus says: “No one who puts a hand on the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” Spiritual ploughing is praying, meditating, and reading spiritual literature. Ploughing also happens when we face hardships and practise patience.

The nourishing work of the farmer

The Bible often compares God to a farmer. Think of John 15, where Jesus says: “I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-grower.” As the heavenly farmer, God oversees the process of our spiritual growth. There is something very caring and tender in that metaphor. God patiently sustains and fosters the little garden of our soul. God introduces nutrients and water at the right time. The purpose of the process is to become the person God longs us to be.

The protective work of the farmer

God also protects our souls by ploughing, weeding, pruning and trimming. This may cause us pain. The ploughing, in particular, enables the connection between the plants and the nutrients. These nutrients are found in the Bible, the Christian tradition, the communities, the sacraments, and other spiritual disciplines. The soul soil of our soul is torn open and thereby softened. In the long run, this will cause seeds to germinate and grow into beautiful, fruit-bearing plants.

Active and contemplative

The plough-saying of Jesus implies that we have an active role. God oversees the process, but *we* are called to do the ploughing. *We* are to engage in spiritual exercises and activities. *We* are called to follow Jesus on his path of self-denial and self-giving love. This path is unique for each one of us but in every case it requires effort. On the other hand, we know that we are not alone. As we work, God works. “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you,” says the Bible (James 4:8). There is a mystery of synergy here. I encourage you to pause and contemplate how God is at work in your life.

The seasons

I wonder what season of your spiritual life you are currently experiencing. Is it still winter for you? Are you ploughing without seeing the fruit? If that is the case, I encourage you to keep going in patient trust that the harvest will eventually come, and with the harvest, joy. Or is it perhaps springtime in your soul? Are you seeing the flowers of love, patience, kindness, and joy bloom? This is a blessing that you can experience, even in the midst of war and crisis. You are becoming more like Jesus: loving, patient, compassionate.

Looking ahead

Whatever spiritual season we are in, we are called to look ahead. Prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading are forward-looking activities. We cling to God’s promises and shape our lives in accordance with them. We cannot change the past, but we can help shape and prepare the future.

OUT OF the margins

Perception... a
lighthouse to some,
a place of condemnation
to others.

To draft a future in
pencil is to embrace
impermanence.

في لحظة تأمل، وبعد صمت البنادق،
عمت سكينه الروح، وساد نسيم الحذر
وكان الأرض تلتقط أنفاسها بعد عاصفة
طويلة، فعاد الإنسان يُصغي إلى نبض قلبه
بدل ضجيج الخوف، وأدرك أن السلام هو
الوطن الحقيقي الذي تبحث عنه النفوس.

We are bound to abstract
desires, yet we yearn for
meaningful connections. Can
a soul find its true destiny,
when all it seeks is a reflection
of its own mediocre thoughts?

Some chapters may
test you, but they also
teach you how strong
you really are.

Le pouvoir de la mort reposait
entre les mains d'une personne
qui promettait l'amour, sans
jamais saisir la profondeur des
blessures qu'elle devait pourtant
soigner.

تثق في الإنسان ،
كانك توقع على ورقة
بيضاء دون أن تعرف
ماذا سيكتب فيها

Je m'égaré dans les chansons de Joe Dassin,
Là où le temps semble presque incertain.
Et l'été indien revient me hanter,
Comme un amour qui refuse de s'effacer.

Ճակատագիրը երբեմն կրնայ քեզի մէկ
կողմ նետել, բայց պայքարը քեզի ուժ
կու տայ, որ ինկամ չի մնա: Նոյն
խոչընդոտը, որ քեզի կը կեցնէր,
սպազային կը դառնայ յենարան,
որպէսզի աւելի ամուր քայլես:

So please, do hold on to hope.
For without hope many
choose to hang from a rope.



الاستمرارية كنزٌ يمتلكها النبيلُ،
يغفل عنها الجاهلُ، و يبحث عنها
ذلك الفقير صاحب القدرات العالية
لكن قساوة الحياة سرقت منه
جميع الفرص.

Աշխարհը միշտ ալ կը փորձէ
բոլորին նոյնականացնել, բայց
խկական արժէքը՝ իւրայատուկ
մնալու մէջ է:

When we hit our lowest
point, we are open to
the greatest change.

To keep your balance,
you must keep moving

We often try to open doors that
aren't meant to open. We push,
we force, we insist, believing that
control is strength. But sometimes
the bravest thing we can do is step
back and let destiny run its course.
Let the wind guide you, and trust
that what's meant for you will
find its way.

Ով իր միտքը կորսնցուց բազմութեան մէջ,
անուն ունեցաւ՝ բայց ինքնութիւն ոչ:

Մարդը կրնայ հանրութեան կողմէ՝ ճանչցուիլ կամ
ընդունուիլ, բայց եթէ իր սեփական մտածողութիւնը
էւ սկզբունքները կորսնցնէ՝ իրական ինքնութիւն չի մնար:
Այսինքն՝ «բոլորին նման» դառնալը երբեմն
մարդուն ներսը դատարկ կը ձգէ:

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



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