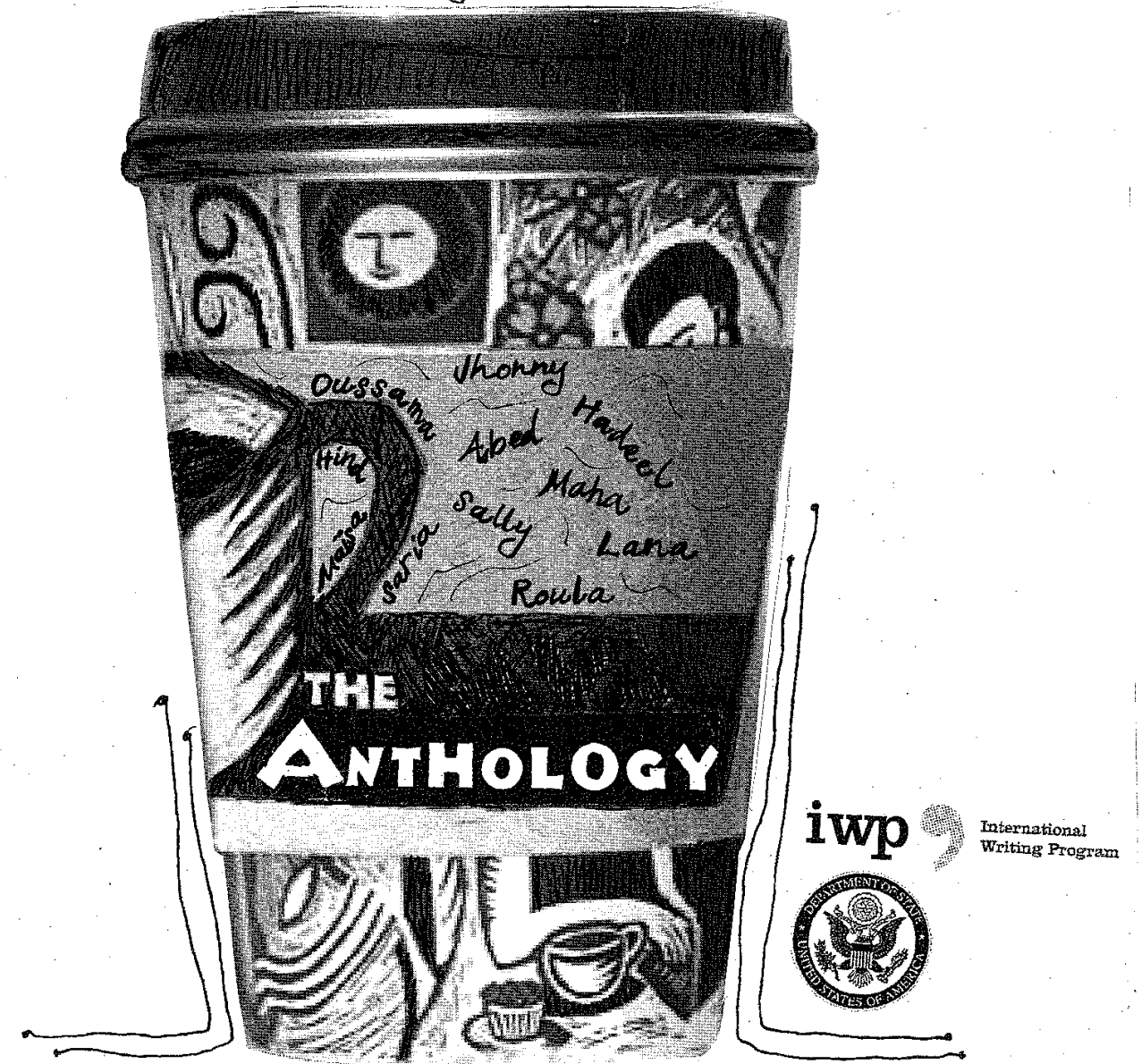




2011's brewing of between the lines



an arabic/english blend,  
crafted by the finest of writers

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بين السطور

# **BETWEEN THE LINES**

poetry, prose, and photos  
created by the participants of  
**Between the Lines,**  
a collaboration between  
the International Writing Program  
and the Iowa Young Writers' Studio,  
sponsored by  
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بين السطور





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حملتُ في السماء لأجدَ الشمس تتربّع شرقاً، وطيفُ للقمر يزغرد غرباً. إذا كانا يتراقصان هنا معاً، فمن يضيء للخيل طريقها في الوطن؟!

كم هلعتُ حين حولتني تلك الأفكار إلى وترٍ في عودٍ مصريّ! وأخذت تُقرعُ أمواج النيل لتتنسجها رنيماً يغازل الحرّية!

مع أنّ الراديو كان أخرسَ تماماً، إلا أن الفيروز صدّح:

"وبليل كلو ليل، سال الحقد بغيّة البيوت

والإيدين السودا خلعت البواب

وصارت البيوت بلا صحاب!"

ترك النّيليون "الحصان وحيداً" كي يونس بيوتهم، لأن البيوت تموت إذا ما غاب سكانها!



## Foreword

*Close the door. Write with no one looking over your shoulder. Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say.*

Barbara Kingsolver

This anthology represents the fourth year of Between the Lines, and was created during a time in history that has been especially momentous not just for the participants, but for the entire world. Young writers, representing eight countries across the Middle East and North Africa, brought themselves and their stories to Americans — fellow students, teachers, staff, and members of the local community — who were eager to learn from them, and eager to grow and share with them.

For all but one, this was their first visit to the United States. The fact that most of it was spent in a small college town in the Midwest might seem strange to many. However, Iowa City is not your typical town, and its dedication to writers and to the written word is so unique and storied that, as of today, it is the only UNESCO Creative City of Literature in North America. These participants join a large and very special multigenerational and international family of writers and readers who can call Iowa City a literary home.

Just as important, if not more so, is the community they have created among themselves. So much of a writer's work is done in solitude, and because of that, few things are more important than a support system consisting of people who will nurture and encourage their work and their efforts. It is a privilege to have played a part in bringing this particular group of writers together, and as always, the hope is that they will continue to strengthen each other now and in the future.

أرتشف منها قليلاً، اللعنة! لقد نسيْتُ السُّكَّرَ ثانيةً، طعمُ الماتَم!

كيف لم أتساءل مرّةً لم يقدّمونها مرّةً في بيوت العزاء؟! أليذكرونا بمرارة فقدان؟ إذا كان الأمر كذلك، فعلى المغتربين أجمعين أن يشربوا القهوة حنظلاً لِمَا فقدوه!

سَرَت رِيشةٌ في جسدي كلّها! إنها إنفلونزا الشوق لا محالة! توقيتها مأساويّ هذه المرّة!

حين تنتابني أشعرُ بقوةٍ خارقةٍ لأتحدى أباطرة العلوم فرداً فرداً! أولئك الذين يزعمون أن القلب عضلةٌ تقع يسار الصدر. أريد من أحدهم أن يفسّر لي لم يرتعش جسدي — لا فوادي فقط- حين تستلّبي ذكراه!

الغربة تعطلّ الفصول، تسلب الدنيا ألوانها فتغدو كتلفازٍ وخطّ الشيبُ سوادَ ذكرياته.

قال "واسيني" حين واساني بعَرَجِه ذات مرّة: "في الحبّ يختلّ منطق الأبديات"... \* جملة كنتك ربّنت على كتفي، وطمأننتني أنّي لستُ البشرية الوحيدة التي تجد في الحبّ والشوق اختلالاً ما -على اعتبارهما توأمين سياميّين من المستعصى الفصل بينهما.

كم أشعر برغبة في إطفاء الشمس، بأن أولّه أصابعي فأوقف اللحظة هذه! أتحمّم بالشروق والأصيل كما تتحمّم أخبار الوطن بألبابنا الحلزونية! نشمّ عبق احتراقه فندخل قوقعتنا ونردّد:

"حصل خير، يومين وبيمشي الحال! كلّو كويس!"

تمرّ بضع عشرات من الأيام ولا "يمشي الحال!"

نطلّ من قوقعتنا الباردة مختلسين النظر، فنرى السنة اللهب تلعلع في أفواه المحتجّين، نغار على الوطن -إذا ما قلنا بالغيرة حبّاً للتمكّ المشروع.

امتدّت يدي إلى أسطوانة عبّدت الغبار لقلّة استماعي إليها، "خطيرة" لشربل روحانا :

"سلام قبل الحكى، سلام بعد الحكى

سلامي إليك،

مع إنو ما فيه حكى، ولا حتى فيه بكى

فيه قلوب فيها الوجع

وإنت السفر والشوق وأنا، سلامي معك!"

كم أشعرُ بالدنّب! اقتادني ذلك إلى حضن جدّي حين كان يهمس لي:

"يا سيدي، اللي بدوّ يقنّى مهرة وما يطعميهاش، يمشي ع إجره أشرفلو!" لم أفهم ذلك وقتها، لكنّي أدركتُ الآن أنّي لا أستحقّ شوقاً يحرقني! ولا وطناً أتوق إليه! كان يرتدي كنزته الصوفيّة في عزّ الحرّ قائلاً: "منفاول عالدينا تا تشتي، فلبسناها!". ركضتُ إلى كوفيّتي أشتّمها!

كم أتمنى امتلاك رنتين أكبرَ ممّا لديّ! أعبّئ صدري بما أشاء دون حدود ولا ضلوع تكبّلني!

"لا هبي المسافة ولا هوّي الوقت اللي وقّف الحكى!"

إسمح لي، شربل! إنها المسافة والوقتُ سوياً!

"آه هبي الحال، وعصفور ما لُو نغم!"

أيّ حالٍ هي تلك؟! لم يترك سهيل الخيول التحريرية حالاً لنا!

الثامنة صباحًا بتوقيت ديك جارنا البغيض...

## Hadeel AlHaddad



## Bahrain

زق هاتفي المحمول جانبًا... عزفٌ رحيانيٌّ على البيانو، إلا أنّ مهمّته -إيقاظي- كفيّلة بجعلي أمقتها بشدّة.

طقوسي الصباحيّة الروتينيّة... أتخلّص من ملامح السّبات التي امتطت وجنتي وأتوجّه نحو محطّتي الأولى، صلاتي الروحية اليومية: خزانة أشرطتي الموسيقية.

عشوائية الترتيب هي، تمامًا كصفائر شعري الذي قد ينسدل فيستر كتفي بعد بضعة أشهر من الآن. لا أطيعه مكبلاً بأغلالٍ نلمع أو بتلك الرّباطات الملوّنة. أعليّ أن أجتزّ معاناةً ورديّةً لأعلن نفسي حواء؟!

ما زلتُ كما عهدت، صعبة المراس عنيدة لا أقبل الحدود حتى لو سُجنتُ بققصٍ من الذهب الإبريز!

بدأت أزاهير الرّاديوهات تتفتّح وتزغلل عينيها للأذان فتُنشئها.

هراء! لا أطيق الرّاديو، لا أطيعه ولا أتحمّل تحكّمه بالمستمع! أنا أختار لنفسني ما أسمع لا أنتم!

يا له من صباحٍ غريب الملامح، تلك النكزة في داخلي. كم خشيتُ أن يباغتني ذاك الذي لا يجِدُ وقتًا أنسبَ من الذي لا يُناسبني حتى يطعنني في الظهر.

(قبضَ ذلك على يدي وشدّني إلى دهاليز الطفولة حيث كانت جدتي تتعوّذ من الشيطان الرجيم حين يُذكر اسمٌ لمرضٍ خطفَ منها أحدَ أحبّائها، وتنهزنا بقسوةٍ إذا ما خطأت أسننتنا السّاذجة).

يا لي من حمقاء! كيف لم يخطر ببالي لمَ كانت كذلك -بقافها القروية- تتعوّذ عند ذِكر من سلبوها أرضها!

الثامنة والنصف..

لم أتعمّد التأخّر لكنّ تأملاتي الخرساء تلتهم دقائق بلا هوادة.

عُدت إلى خزانتني، أفروض الفوضى عليها تجدُ لها موطنًا آخرَ غير موسيقي. بالفعل، لا أدري ما المشترك بين الفيروز وتغريد حصي النّيل سوى ذوقي!

عالمٌ غريب! الفوضى تجدُ موطنًا أما نحن فنذوب في زحام الملامح، نعشق الرّحيل الضبابيّ، الضباب الذي أراه حاسّة سادسة لكل المغتربين، هو أمل دائم للقاءٍ مفاجئ حتى لو كان عديم الاحتمال، فيه عدم رؤية الآخر تعني بالضرورة أن الآخر لا يراك لكن ذلك لا ينفي أنه لا يشعر بك!

الآخر قد يكون وطنًا! ترطم به فجأة فتُصدم! تحملق في تكّدس الإعياء جفونه الثكلى، تلملم أشياءك، تعتذر له وتمضي.

هكذا نحن، يمتصنا الانتظار ونعزّي أنفسنا بتلك النظرية التي تنصّ على أن انتزاع السكين من القلب أصعب من الطعنة ذاتها!

أرتدي ابتسامتي وأرحل نحو بركاني المائي المنقّاز، أعشق الفكر الدرويشيّ حين ينطق بالجنون: "القهوة، لمن يعرفها مثلي، عذراء الصباح الصامت".

كان لا يحضّر قهوته إلا بيديه، لقوله أن حامل الطبق هو حامل الكلام، والكلام الأول يُفسد القهوة عذريتها.

لهذا لم أنبس ببنت شفة حتى الآن، ألقم البنّ بحركات طفولية، انتزع الركوة وألبسها غطاءً لا يناسبها البتّة! وأهرع...



# Maha Zeidan



## Israel

### If Tomorrow Never Comes

We sat at our table as the waiter passed out the menus. I excused myself and headed to the ladies' room. I was out with one of the guys out there. We decided to have this "outing," just the two of us, before he leaves tomorrow for his interview at Columbia. Andrew is such a dear friend of mine and in my head, and only in my head, we were more than that. And it's been this way for three years now. I've realized that both Drew and I have this barrier between us that prevents us from developing this friendship into something more. We are both extremely shy. I don't know about him, but I can never gather up the courage to tell him how I truly feel, afraid of rejection, of course.

After the waiter took our orders and menus, I snuck a quick glance at Drew. He smiled, and whenever he smiles in my presence, I get all warm and fuzzy inside. It happens so often that I'm starting to wonder if I'm a human being or a stuffed animal.

He took out a white rose and held it in front of me. "A rose for my princess," he smiled. He was acting really strange tonight, even more than usual. There was definitely something in his head probably rewiring his brain to make him act this bizarre. But I still thought it was sweet in a creepy crazy way, so I played along.

During the ride back home, Drew didn't let go of my hand the entire time. He'd keep his eyes on the road, then steal a quick glance at me and turn to the road again. I couldn't stop smiling either from the wonderful news that Drew had shared with me over dinner. He'll be able to stay one more day here because of the delay of his flight. Drew got up and walked towards the car. He came back as I stood up and caught a glimpse of my house right across the street, then turned back to him.

"I got you something," he said, as he handed over a pink box to me.

I looked at him. "Shouldn't *I* be the one giving *you* something?"

"Just open it."

I opened the box and held in my hand a purple teddy bear. "Drew! It's so adorable!" I kept the box on the ground and hugged him. "Thank you."

"I'm glad you like it." He pulled away.

"Come on, I'll walk you to your front door," he said as he bent down and handed the box over to me. He held my hand and smiled. I smiled as we crossed the road and stood on my front porch.

I wanted to tell him before he went home, and I knew he was waiting for me to say it. But I guessed that since he wasn't leaving for another day, I'd tell him tomorrow. He looked at me with those big brown eyes and smiled his sweet shy smile. He brushed the back of his soft hand against my cheek and neatly put my hair behind my ear. He slowly leaned in and kissed my cheek. It felt intensely heartwarming. I could feel my heart racing and my face burning and my cheeks turning rosy pink. I'm positive he noticed. Who wouldn't?!

"I love you," he smiled.

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't speak. I wanted with all my heart to say that I loved him too, but my voice was gone and my lips wouldn't move.

Walking backwards to his house, he never took his eyes off of me.

"I will always love you, Haley Scott," he smiled, standing in the middle of the street. I couldn't stop smiling back. But the smile faded just as fast as it appeared a while ago.

Have you ever had one of those times when you feel everything and every person around you is frozen for that one simple moment where you think something really terrible is about to happen? Are you now one of those few people who wish for the rest of their lives to have had the power to change one moment so that the one terrible thing would not have to happen?

A sudden flash of light coming from the side of the road grabbed my attention so I looked towards it. I turned back to Drew. I was about to witness a tragic accident. I was about to witness the most unfair sorrowful incident to ever happen in my life.

"DREW!!!" I screamed. I yelled out at the top of my lungs, but it was too late. I couldn't do anything to save him. The teddy bear fell to the ground, and so did everything else in my grasp. My legs stopped working. I collapsed to the ground. I lost all strength in me. My scream was so loud that it woke up the whole neighborhood. The next thing I knew, my parents, Drew's parents and all the neighbors were gathered outside. It was all such a blur from all the tears building up in my eyes and running down my cheeks. I literally felt my heart break into two. I couldn't feel anything else. I lost all strength to even believe in the chance of ever being happy again. How would I recover? He died. His body lay right there in the middle of the road lifelessly, and I witnessed the whole thing. I watched him die right before my very eyes, and it's tearing me to shreds.

I just sat there staring at his body. I didn't even have the strength to blink. My strength died the moment I saw his lifeless hand drop to that black, cement road. I watched the ambulance drive away carrying his body. I still couldn't move, though I felt something or rather someone lifting me up and taking me to my room. But all I could see was that tragic incident that ended Drew's life and possibly ended mine emotionally.

I couldn't believe it, and I've tried every possible way not to believe it. But how could I not believe something that happened right before my eyes? Trying to get that picture of him lying lifeless and soulless on that cold cement ground was like knowing the taste of water. It was useless. That image is a permanent part of my memory, and there is nothing I can do or say to change that.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009, Andrew Stevens was gone. My angel had gone to heaven.

## Nature

Nature is the greatest place you have ever seen,

It's wonderful to see that everything is green.

It's where you can get inspiration,

It's the only resource for your respiration.

The flowers are everywhere,

Animals here and there.

Jumping all over the place,

Makes you wanna put a smile on your face.

It's a place for poetries,

It's an open area with no entries.

A center of greatness,

An entry for happiness.

Nature is like a mother,

A cover from bad weather.

I wish that I could sing,

To this beautiful queen in the spring.

## Teacher's day

I don't know what to say,  
But happy teacher's day.  
Thank you for what you have done,  
But now I'm happy that you are gone.

It's a day to speak out,  
Without having to shout.  
I would tell you your positives,  
But I prefer to say the negatives.

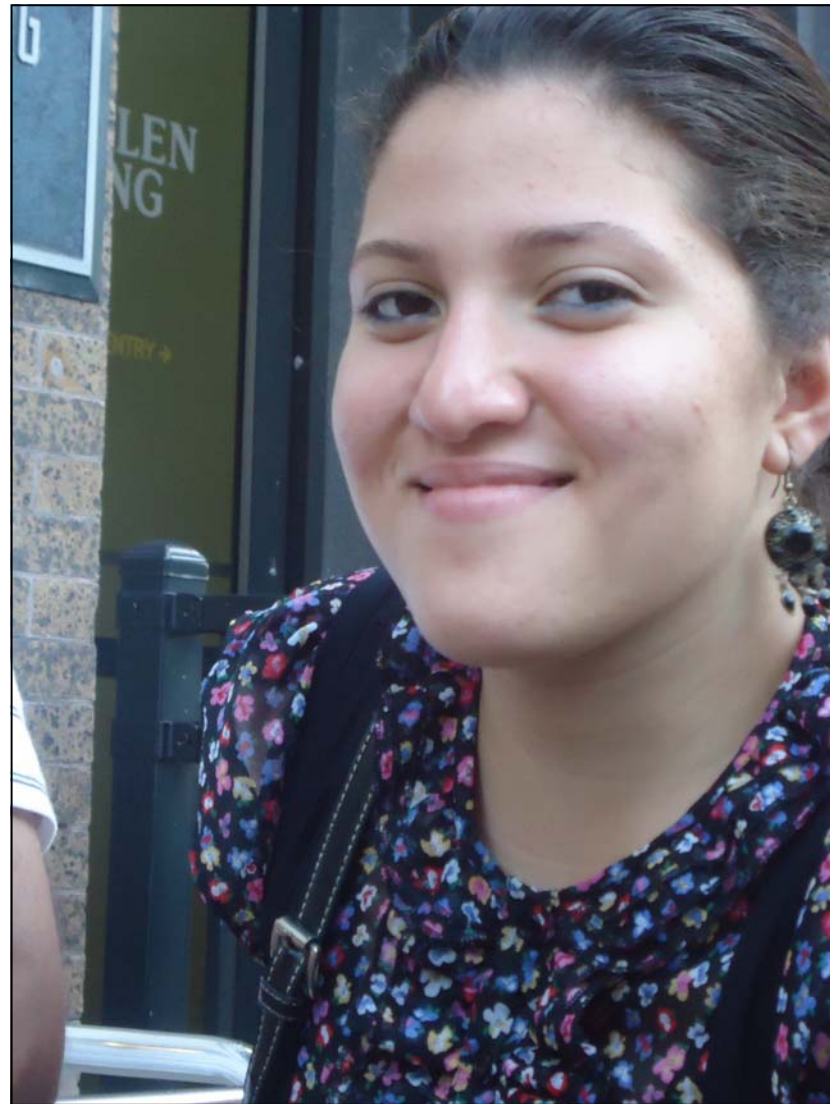
Maybe my head will be cut,  
But I prefer to be shot.  
You are very mean,  
In a way I haven't seen.

Maybe we are thirty-four,  
And very noisy to tell you for.  
To get the hell out of the class,  
Before we kick your ass.

Don't mess with us,  
Don't try because,  
We'll make you life like hell,  
In a way you can't even tell.



# Sally AlHak



## Egypt

### Every time

Every time you pass beside me,  
I feel like my heart has been taken.  
Every time you sit next to me,  
I feel like I'm in heaven.

Every time you say my name,  
Is like I'm on your list of fame,  
I don't know if you feel the same,  
You and I are in an endless love game.

Tell me everything,  
And I will do anything,  
Just to make you happy.

# Johnny Yaacoub



## Lebanon

### The wounds of freedom

Cairo, Tahrir Square

March 9, 2011

Being arrested didn't freak me out, but being arrested by the Egyptian military after the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution was really weird, and it was all because of a peaceful protest against some frustrating actions by the military.

"Bring all of these prostitutes," the officer said, pointing to the garden of the Egyptian museum, a cigarette dangling from his motionless lips). Voices of weeping and torture were everywhere, and the historical museum was turning into an ugly senseless place.

"Why the hell are you doing this?" I said fearfully. "It was a peaceful protest," I added.

Abusive words were the reaction, and strange strong hands tied me up on the museum's ground, slapped me over and over, and when my tears were mixed with my blood, they started to shock me with a stun gun.

The soldier kept shocking me while the officer kept repeating: "PROSTITUTE! Has your father taught you to spend your life at Tahrir Square; pretending that you're a cultured revolutionary rebel while you're ruining Egypt?"

"EGYPT!! His Egypt! Mubarak's Egypt, or our Egypt that we're doing our best to build!" I kept wondering.

To a military detention in the desert we were taken; it was an unknown place to all of us. Physical and psychological pain were the only feelings I had. I expected the worst but there was not enough power to allow me to imagine what will happen.

"Will they rape us!?" a lady asked.

I preferred silence, or, rather, the pain kept me silent until we were taken to a stupid military place.

"Take your pants off!" the General said.

I began to have a nervous breakdown at that moment.

"Virginity tests!! What?!" I said, trying to understand. They were doing their best to make us feel humiliated and take away our dignity.

There was no one standing during the test, except for the male doctor and an officer. But several soldiers were standing behind us watching the back side of the bed. I think they had them standing there as witnesses. But we could hear the sound of their mobiles' cameras taking pictures of the naked ladies to satisfy their hungry eyes and bodies later...

*We asked for a female doctor, we asked for a woman's hand, hoping that as it reached this secret place, she would be more tender, and that she would respectfully perform the check, them knowing but also not knowing that there was always safety in a female touching another female. The captors knew what war meant, and did not have to ask a male doctor, because women's vaginas have always been a battlefield. The women's bodies laid down, the male doctor who didn't have their agreement, and despite their clear rejection he broke into their delta of Venus terribly. The bodies cannot recognize a male from a male doctor under such circumstances. They can only recognize and feel: cruelty.*

“Fucking whores...”

Hahaaa...

“What did I expect? Most of them aren’t virgins!”

“If I’ve a girl like them, I’ll absolutely kill her.”

“Yeah, me too. What happened to the oriental girls? They’re becoming so virtueless! Where is their honor? The virginity test was a great idea, who knows; they can say that we raped them...”

I couldn’t help it! “HONOR? Do you even know what honor means?!!” I said hysterically.

A stun gun again and slapping over and over again...

Then I was in a completely dark and locked room...

I touched my wounds, I kept holding myself seeking warmth and safety, totally scared of the unknown, I closed my eyes and I smiled at the freedom and the beauty that will absolutely come...



“By the end of the week, I had it all figured out: The doctor must have made a mistake. He must have put my name on the wrong blood sample. So on Monday, I was at his office asking him to run the test again. It was no mistake.

“I told my sons. The doctor said I had two more years to live if I was lucky. I said I wanted to die anonymously. We moved to Virginia, left a home of 17 years, and I decided I did not want to be in any relationships. I wanted to die unnoticed.

“But here I am 17 years later, and I want to die loud! My advice for you is to take your life in your own control, and do not expect other people to protect you.”

Mary was not the only person who came to share her story with the students during Awareness Week. Dylan, a thirty-year-old black man, had a story to share too. It was very brief.

“I grew up in the ghetto with a drunken drug-dealer father and a dysfunctional family. I have done every vice and committed every sin. I would wake up in the morning not knowing where I was or with whom or what my name is. I am not sure what can I tell you about the way I got AIDS, because I simply do not know when it happened. I was almost unconscious for 6 successive months. And when I finally had a clarity moment, I realized that I was in the hospital and that I was in the final stage of AIDS. I blamed the doctor for not letting me know earlier before the HIV had spread out. I had money, I made money, I could have fought it back. But it appeared that the doctor had warned me about it, warned me about it three years ago! I simply could not recall, or remember, or apprehend the fact. And now it was too late. But nevertheless, I am getting better, I am making baby steps but they are in the right direction. I do not smoke or drink or do drugs or in any way jeopardize my health. We are a survival story, a miracle!

“Do you have any questions for me or for Mary?”

A loud confident voice from the back screamed “Yes!” It was Mrs. Martha Carrs, Government teacher. She said: “Why is your life worth my taxes?”

هناك, تحررت من مخاوفى, أردت أن أبكى حالى و كل المتاهات التى أرغمت نفسى على الدخول بها.

هناك شعرت بأصابع مريم تمر على جبينى و تخدرنى و تنقلنى إلى عالم طالما حلمت به, تشبثت بذلك النور و أنا لا أفهم و لا أريد أن أفهم, اردت فقط ذلك الصفاء و الصدق.

حمدت الله كثيراً لأن بحثى عن حقيقة ملموسة فى ذلك العالم الكبير قد طال, أسائل; لماذا قضيت معظم السنة السابقة أبحث و أفند فى الفروق بين الأديان و بين أسباب نزول الآيات و إن كان هذا يتناقض مع ذلك, و كل هذه الراحة موجودة هنا.

هناك, نسيت مادية الحياة و استمتعت بسلام أحاط بروحى, سلام جعلنى ألتصم مع الحياة و أتقرب من الله و أشكره كثيراً.

هناك, كانت كل منا على حقيقتها , أبهجنى أن أرى ياسمين متحررة من حالة لازمتها مؤخرًا , رأيتها كما أول مرة تقابلنا, تتحدث كثيرا و تحكى عما بأعماق أعماقها, تبتسم لتمرر ابتسامتها لمن حولها, و ربما تعاتب الماضى لكنها فى أقل من دقيقة تتصالح و تعرف أن ما مضى جعلها أقوى, أخذت تدندن كلمات أغنية "يا مريم" و هى تذهب بعيداً بخيالها إلى عالم جديد تبدأ فى بناؤه بنجاح.

أما صديقتنا جمانة , كنت أراقبها و هى تكتب رسالة إلى مريم, شعرت أنها تكتب بصدق, أردت أن أضحك عندما تذكرتها و هى تقول ساخرة :

"أبانا الذى فى السموات... تعبت!"

لكنى ابتسمت عندما شعرت إنها تبدأ رسالتها بتلك الجملة, هى كانت لا تتحدث كثيرا كأنها تريد إن تتيقن إن كل هذا السلام حقيقى, تريد أن تلمس اللحظة و تحتضنها حتى يستمر صداها لأبعد مدى و تزيل كآبات الدنيا و التعقيدات البائسة, هى تملك الكثير من التفاصيل التى يمكن أن تُحكى و تصنع قصة مشوقة , لكنى فقط أريد أن أحتفظ بما رأيت فى وجهها و هى تذهب بعيداً جداً عما حولها و تسمح لهذا النور أن يتسلل داخل أعماقها و يداوى وجع قديم و يحفر طريق جديد.

أما أنا, فكنت أعود لتلك الفتاة الصغيرة داخلى, التى لديها الكثير لتقوله لكنها لا تستطع, لمست حقيقة ما و أنا أجلس على هذا المقعد الخشبي المهجور وسط أرواح تعذبت فى الماضى من الحياة لكنها الآن تخلد فى سلام فى دير مار جرجس كما سنخلد جميعاً فى نواحي الأرض , كنت أشعر بأننى فقدت وزنى و الذى أسعدنى أننى فقدت مخاوفى التى لا تفارقنى للحظات, كنت أشعر بأننى لا أشعر , أخذتني رائحة البخور الآتية من كنيسة صغيرة بجانبى, ربما لسبب ما أو دون سبب, حفرت إسمى على هذا المقعد, إبتسمت لذلك الفعل الذى لا يأتى إلا من طفلة...

و مثلهم أخذنى و طهرنى ذلك النور القادم من شبك صغير فى الكنيسة المعلقة, لا أريد أن أبرر أو أن أحلل ما شعرنا به لأنه لا يُكتب و لا يُحكى, فقط يتسلل و يخطفك بعيد.

إشترت كل منا تمثال مريم المعدنى الصغير, حالهم كحالى, اصطحبت كلناهما مريم فى بداية يومها مثلئى, أعرف أنها ستظل مصدر لسلام داخلى و طوق نجاة و الأهم أنها أنها ستذكرنا بذكرى عشقناها و لن تفارقنا.

أعرف أننا سنردد كثيرا تلك الكلمات المقدسة التى قرأناها, تلك التى كانت محفورة على الحائط:

" سلوا تُعطوا... أطلبوا تجدوا... أقرعوا يُفتح لكم".

فقد حفرت أيضا بداخلنا!

أشعر بحضن كلاً منهما الآن, أنا غالبا لا أعلن احتياجى لأحد لكن معهما لم يكن لدى اختيار إلا أن أغمض عيني و أتنفس ذلك الدفء و أذوب بين ذراعيهما شاكرة لتلك الحالة و الأمان.

ستعود كل منا إلى تلك القطعة من السماء مرارا , باحثة عن الراحة, و مبتسمة لذكرى مليئة بالدفء و الصدق و الحب, و متذكرة لحضن دافئ طالحت حاجتنا إليه.

تغرورق عيناى بالدموع عندما أتخيل كلتاها تقرأ تلك الكلمات و تستعيدا كل التفاصيل , خاصة احتياج الذوبان فى حضن صديق, لكن ابتسامه تغلبنى عندما أتخيل ياسمين توقف العالم من حولها و تكتب... و جمانة تغلبها الحالة و تدخلها فى عالم مليء بالتناقضات الجميلة و الحزينة لكنها فى النهاية ستكتب...

\* \* \*

تحررت ابتسامتى صافية من شوائب الحياة عندما تسلل هواء الأسكندرية إلى روى بعد فترة طويلة من الغياب, تسلل بين خصلات شعرى ليجعلها أكثر حرية, و حرك داخلى كل ذكرى دافئة لتلك المدينة الساحرة...

رأيتنى و أنا أتأمل شوار عها طفلة شقية ضاحكة, ترسم ابتسامه على وجه كل من حولها..

رأيتنى أنضح و أعود إلى هنا معه , فابتسمت بصدق عندما تذكرت رقصتنا الأولى معا, كنا نرقص بشغف و جنون مراقبين على ألحان إسبانية فى ليلة رأس السنة, كانت خطواتنا متوافقة مثل توافق ألوان ملابسنا, تركنا أجسادنا للموسيقى تحركها, و شعر كلا منا بسعادة ستدوم إلى الأبد فى أعين الآخر ...

إستمعنا بوجودنا معا لكننا كنا أكثر حريه و وضوح من أن نحدد علاقتنا, أردنا فقط أن نتذوق التجربة معا...

على ذلك المقهى رأيتنه يضحك ساخرا منى عندما سعلت و أنا أدخن "الشيشة" للمرة الأولى , استطعت أن أسمع صوت ضحكاتنا معا و أشعر بنعومة خصلات شعرة الطويلة بمثل لون شعرى بنية, كان حقا جميلا... فضحكت!

إلى هنا أعود بدون تلك الفتاة التي كانت بداخلى العاشقة للحياة و أعود بكثير من الذكريات الدافئة المبهجة و المؤلمة أيضا لفقدانها ...

أعود هاربة إلى وحدة أنا خلقتها فى محاولة لاستكشاف مدينة أعشقها, تركتني أتوه بين شوار عها باحثة عن أى أثر لليونانيين الذين أحببتهم و أنا أقرأ عن تاريخ الأسكندرية, وجدنتى أبتسم إلى طفلة رأيتها بالترام و تذكرتني عندما كنت أجلس بجانب النافذة بجسدى الصغير لطفلة تمتلك من العمر 8 سنوات و أظير منديل أعبت به فى الهواء و أستمتع بأبتسامه أمى الدافئة...

و عندما شعرت بألم يجد طريقه بسهولة إلى صدرى, هربت من نفسى إلى الإزدحام , فشعرت باستياء فركضت فى محاولة أخرى للبحث عن الجمال و الدفء فوجدت الكثير منه عند أصدقاء سكندريين أحببتهم!

## An AIDS Story

“My name is Mary, I’m from New York. I am the eldest girl amongst five siblings. My mother died when I was eleven, and I had to take her responsibilities along with mine. I thought I had grown up, and that the experience had made me an adult, and that I was mature enough to have my own life, my own family, since I’d been taking care of one since I was eleven.

“When I was coming home from high school at the age of 17, I saw a man in a military uniform. And I gotta tell you, I have a thing for men in uniforms: cooks, bus drivers, policemen, doctors, doesn’t matter... I thought: ‘Boy, that man is drop-dead gorgeous!’ I was looking at him and thinking, ‘He’s hot! But chill out, girl, ‘cause you’re not!’ I was this short skinny ugly girl who had no confidence whatsoever in herself as a woman. And that man, he followed me! Me, the short skinny ugly girl, and he asked me to date him. I thought: ‘Thank you God! I love you!’

“So we dated, and did all the stuff you do. He asked me to marry him as soon as I got out of high school. I thought about it for some time; I thought about it for 30 seconds, and I had it all figured out: I am going to get married. I am ready for the responsibilities, because I’ve been managing a house and raising kids since I was eleven. I knew all the stuff. I thought when somebody loves you, he protects you. I got married during my senior year. I come from an Italian Catholic background and that was what you did back then: you got married and had kids. I didn’t ask all the questions you’re supposed to ask. I knew that he went out with the guys, played basketball and drank, then played again, then drank again, and so on until they’d fall unconscious. I thought it was a thing guys do. Men do that, women do not. I didn’t realize I was marrying an alcoholic. And two years later there I was with two little boys, a drunken husband and a house to run. I realized I knew nothing of all the things I thought I knew. Five years later, my husband died. I had no job and two kids.

“I went to the first job opportunity I got to run the phone section at a company for minimum wage. Two years later, they promoted me. Two years after that, a second company liked the way I did things and they hired me. I was making 40,000 dollars. That may seem little, but after a period in my life when I couldn’t afford to buy milk for my kids, that seemed like a fortune. I finished high school, but I never attended college, but I still became the woman I wanted to become: self-confident, respected...

“That was when I met Charlie; a bus driver. Yes, another man in a uniform. He became my second husband.

“Then, one day, a Friday, I remember the exact date, I was feeling sick and went to see a doctor. He gave me meds and suggested I get HIV tested, he yelled it out the door when I was leaving. Some time later, I got sick again, and this time he insisted I get HIV tested. And so I did. When I went back to his office, he said the words that changed my life. He said: ‘You got AIDS.’ And then he literally kicked me out of his office, and on the sidewalk I stood and cried. On the phone, Charlie asked me about my doctor’s visit, and when I told him, he hung up on me! My husband hung up on me! And he hasn’t been back home since.

“I was thinking: If that was my doctor’s reaction, and if that was my husband’s reaction, how would the rest of the world see it? I couldn’t understand. Why me, me who haven’t done anything wrong! How could this happen to me?!



أعود إلى غرفتي محملة بكثير من المشاعر يغلب عليها الخوف و الرغبة في الهروب و أتساءل "أين ذهبت الطاقة المليئة بحب الحياة داخلي" , فأهرب إلى فراشي بجوار النافذة التي تطل على البحر أحببت دائماً حضن البحر ...

و تملأ موسيقى "ديبوسى" الغرفة فأترك قلمي يكتب كلمات تحملنى بين حروفها:

"أشعر بأننا مغلفين بطبقة من الحزن,السعادة تلمس أطرافنا فقط,لا تحرك ما بداخلنا رقصا...نقتع أنفسنا فقط بأننا على قيد الحياة و نبحث عن السعادة"

و أعود لأتساءل متى أصبح الحزن هو الشعور السائد....

للمرة الثانية تنتزع الفتاة من أعماق أفكاره .

- الوقت لا زال مبكراً، يقول باحثاً عن عذر ، لا لشيء إلا لذكرى العيون الخضرة .القس الأكبر ليس هنا بعد .

- لكنك أبت ، وتملك غفران خطاياي. أود الخلاص ، لا أستطيع الإنتظار أكثر .

دون أن ترفع عينيها الساحرتين ، تسلى صوتها العسلي ، تدفق على مسامعه ، غمر كينونته . لا يملك الرفض. إعانة الفرد هي القيام بمهمة الرب ، قطعاً أهم من البروتوكول. القس الأكبر لن يحضر إلا بعد ساعات عديدة . والبرد قارس مستحيل الإحتمال ، والكنيسة نائية ، وعلى الفتاة الرجوع غالباً من حيث أتت. مجموعات عوامل يصعب تجاهلها. لا يستطيع الرفض.

تفضلي ابدئي متى تشائين ! -"

أنا حزينة يا أبتى. لفضلت الموت بألف خنجر على هذا العذاب . -"

نظر إلى عينيها، هي شفافة دامعة ، كمرآة النفس كما قال أحدهم ، بل قال نفس ذاتها تحميل الحب على السطح تهديه في نظرات قاتلة، عميقة القرار ، بلا قرار .

عيناها كبيرتان ، كعينا " غزال بين الرصافة والحجر " كما يقول نزار . غزال هي ، غزال مذعور ود الطيران لكنه لمح بصيص فوهة بندقية صياد خطير النوايا . تلقت دامية. لا يدري : من القاتل ومن المقتول.

شككت يا أبتى في الروح القدس . والروح القدس لا يشكك فيها. فتلك هرطقة و ... " -"

روح قدس؟ هي فعلاً روح قدس ، روح قد لبست جسماً ليس أقل قداسة : نضر، كالفاكهة الاستوائية ، جميل التفاصيل، حصان مكبوح الجماع، معربد . جسم سهل كالخيل، وديع كالحمل، مسكر كالخمر .

دفع ، هذه المرة ليس في صدره، وليس دفع الطمأنينة ، وليس دفع أصلاً. بل هو حرارة ، أو حريق نشب في كامل جسمه . دار رأسه لثوان ، فقد توازنه ، ود لو قفز ، لو رمى قبعته الطويلة السوداء ورقص !

انتابه شيء من الهديان اللذيذ ، صارت قشعريرة على عموده الفقري ، صب عرقه مدراراً ، وأرتعش جسمه . نشوة،

نشوة فلتخة ظاهرة للعيان على ثوبه الفضفاض الأسود .

لم يحصل هذا له أبداً خلال خدمته في الكنيسة . أحس بالإحراج بعد لحظات الجنون ، بالخجل ، كان هو الآن من يود لو مات بألف خنجر على هذا العذاب .

واسته الفتاة:

أبتي لا تظلم نفسك ، لا تكن قاسياً عليها ، ارحمها . إنه أمر طبيعي،وعادي ، أمر دائماً يحصل حولي. ""

إنتهى الإعتراف ؟ انتهت الزيارة . " لم يعلم أيغمغم أم يصرخ . -"

وقف ملبد الوجه ، وخرج. خرج من الكنيسة لا يلوي على شيء .

خرج يغطي بالنجيله إثمه

ظلام أولي، ظلام حالك مدقع بهيم ، كظلام الفراغ ، كظلام الكون قبل الكينونة ، كسوادها ما قبل البعث .

ساعات أولى من الفجر ، ولا النجوم تضيء ، ولا الشمس تفيق ، ولا النور يتسلل ثنائيا الفضاء الرحب. فضاء تقبع فيه كنيسة عجوز ، كجثة هامدة.

الطوب الأحمر الثقيل ، جاثمة ك كابوس ، ك غصت في حلق الحرية ، ك بناية اختزلت على مر السنين معنى الوجود. كتلة من

يسود هيكلها المهيب الرياح العواتي - وكان فجراً غائماً - ، والجدران صماء ، ولا تسمع أنسام هواء تمر في صدر الكنيسة ، فلا هي تستقبل التجديد ، ولا هي تهاب الركود.

شعاع يتيم خجول وراء السحب يطل ، ظلام كفيف البقاء يمل ، وصليل أبواب الكنيسة المغلقة - كقلب كافر - تعلن بدء يوم جديد.

يطل رجل، دقيق الملامح حزينا ، يطل ليخدم الرب ، - وهو على مدى سنين طوال يكرس نفسه للغاية السامية ، يعذب نفسه ، يتقشف ، لا معنا لجسمه على أية حال - ما دام بوسعه إنقاذ آخر.

## Saria AlMidani



يفتح الكاهن مصراعي باب الكنيسة ، كذراعي أم حنون، أم خلص حبها صادقاً شفافاً ، لكل بنيتها. أم سماحة مسبقاً ومطلقاً وأبداً ، كل الزلات الأخطاء، بل وعالجت جراح المعركة ، لم تنتظر إعتذاراً ، ولم يعينها تلقي اعتذار . إبتسم الكاهن، ف هو يؤدي مهمة عظيمة ، وقد رضي عنه الرب رضاه بنفسه . الطمأنينة دفء يغذي صدره .

لقد وجد الطريق، وقليل من وجد الطريق.

سمع أصداء خطى قدمين صغيرتين، انتزعت من حبل أفكاره ، من عالمه القدسي ، من حوارهِ اليومي مع الإله.

هناك زائر ، أو ربما سائل . المهم في الأمر أنه في هذه الساعة من الفجر ، لا يمكن أن يكون الأمر أقل من خطير.

هرع لإستقبال صاحب الخطى ، أو لنجدته . إستعاد رباطة جأشه قبل خطوتين من الباب. إستقام في مشيته ، مسح العرق عن جبينه ، تأنى.

لا يود أن يعكس صورة قلقه عن الرب . لن يسامحه الرب. وهو الذي أوكله مهمة تمثيلة -نداءه في الحياة-على هذه الرقعة من الأرض . وضع تعبير الحكيم الموقر، عارف سر الوجود، على وجهه. أضاف نفحات تفهم، ورشتي غموض.

هذب صوته لإخراجه عميقاً متعباً، كأنما سافر العصور للوصول إلى حلقه: "تفضل بالدخول، لا تخجل".

خبيت نبرة صوته أمله ، كان لا وعيه سبق عقله في استشراف هوية الزائر .كان بصوته لحن التوجس، - إن لم يكن الخوف. وكيف له أن يخاف غير الإله ؟ لم تكتمل الصورة.

حرقه ندم ، ذنب يكفر عنه لاحقاً ، بعد مغادرة الزائر...ة

دخلت منكسة رأسها، كأنها في حداد . إنحني ليسترق النظر إلى عينيها بحثاً عن جواب لسؤال لم يطرح. رفعت أهدابها المسدلة للحظتين . رأى روحاً معذبة تحاول الخلاص، ترتمي من مجرى بؤبؤها، تنهشم على زجاج القرنية ، وتظل حبيسة خضرة عينيها. العيون الخضراء !

كانت الكنيسة في عهدها الغابرة تحرق صاحبات العيون الخضراء ، تلك العيون الساحرة .

كانت مأساة العيون الخضراء التي قادته لأول مرة إلى الكنيسة مذ حوالي 20 سنة . عيون خضراء امتلكتها وظن امتلاكها حتى فقدتها في غفلة من ملاكها الحارس ومنه. زار الكنيسة عندها ليكائها، باحثاً عن رقعة في قلبه المشطور لا تؤلم ، رقعة تمكنه من الإستمرار ، من الإستيفاق ، من التنفس . بكأها طويلاً ، بكأها إلى حد نسي معه الحياة وراء تلك الجدران ، فبقي . شيد قلباً جديداً على حطام باقيه وأمن بغايات اصطفائه بالعيون الخضراء ، وبالله .

--أريد البوح بذنبي. يا أبتى. أود الإعتراف .

## Syria

# Roula Seghaier



## Tunisia

Music's trying to keep me safe  
as I sit in this dark room  
dying, as I crave  
for the unseen, mysterious bloom...  
Not knowing where this goes,  
or what parts of me are awake...  
all I know is that my life shows  
me that I keep on, break...  
in my heart, fear has no place  
it's filled, though, with darkened gray...  
my soul is covered with a new grace  
that I sure don't want to go away...  
In a phase, that is showing me no light,  
that is showing me, no white or black...  
in a phase that is alright...  
that is letting things be frank...  
in a phase that is totally rare,  
that gave me a strength to fight...  
I know that, for me, it's hard to bear  
but all I have to do, is simply... write...

## The Fight

I have thought of this day. If this day ever comes...

I thought of what would I be doing...

But here I am, doing nothing but standing under the rain...

I am all wet, I can feel the cold water all over my body...and, of course I can feel the warm tears on my cheeks.

I love the rain! So, I'm letting myself enjoy it.

The thought made me smile, which was a smile that didn't touch my eyes. It couldn't touch them.

Even though I thought of this day before, all I really want to do is to stand here, in this cruel, cold weather, where emptiness is everywhere. All I want is to stand here, and stare...

It stopped raining, and I knew that unfortunately, it was time to think.

So, I sat on the wet grass, and I stared at the sky... the sky looked very different.

This morning, I was gazing at a very beautiful gray sky with a lot of amazing clouds, and some great fall-yellow trees.

But now I see a different sky...even though only a few hours passed.

I can almost see it as a sky that looked like it was trying to comfort me... like it was reminding me of who I really am, since now I have a feeling that I don't know who I am anymore.

In my head, the same words kept on echoing, and echoing all over again.

The words coming out of the doctor's mouth, not seeming like words to be understood, nor to be believed...

Today, I found out that I have...cancer, and only a couple of months were left for me...

Odds of survival were not really...odds, or a chance.

"I'm dying, "my head echoed, as some questions filled it, like:

How am I going to say goodbye? I've always hated goodbyes, but I'm sure that this is the most difficult one.

How am I going to say goodbye to everything? My loving, amazing family, that words can never describe.

My great, caring friends, the friends that were always there...

The girl I'm in love with, her beautiful eyes caught by mine, her voice singing "I love you" and then her cheeks reddening with a gorgeous smile...

How will I say goodbye to the small things?

The songs I listen to everyday, the cute bookmarker I always use...

My great morning coffee, the dawn I watch everyday...

The answers started to fill my brain.

Like: "I'm gonna live what's left of my life, "or "I'm gonna express my feelings to everyone..."

## The Jardin D'essais lake

When I go to Jardin D'essais my day is well organized. I've gone there so many times my path became the most predictable of all. I go there every time I feel like I'm losing myself, like I'm losing my way.

I walk through the gate and go on my way in the shadows of the trees on both sides of a long path. I walk until I get to the fountain. I stare at it for a while and continue walking to the end of the path, and on my way there I pass by people sitting: families, couples, individuals, groups of friends...but I never do more than walk by them, I never stop and join them. I reach the point where, along with the trees, the sides of the path become crowded with bushes of flowers, flowers of all shapes and colors. And right at the last flower, the large path divides into two long, oppositely directed roads. I take the one to my right and continue walking, passing by sculptures of people who I guess had a hand in the history of the place: three men and two women. I always wonder who they were but I never ask about it. I keep going until the lines of trees on both sides form a circle meeting at a point of it. That circle surrounds a lake, the last point of the garden, isolated, quiet and peaceful. I sit by a bench and look at the surface of the water and I see my reflection forming out of little pieces gathering miraculously. Once the last piece is put to order, my image is printed on the face of the lake, and with that my broken self is fixed once again, sadness turns into happiness...no!; joyfulness, and darkness is now glowing brightness. So I gratefully leave the lake with a heart as good as new and spirits so high they could touch the sky.

# Hind Rahmoun



## Algeria

In my brain, some answers began to make a plan.

But one weird answer I held onto tightly. "Cancer. "

Even though cancer was my enemy now.

I have to consider it my mate or my friend. My friend, who will do everything with me until...that friend ends me.

I stood up with an expression I'd never had. I was smiling and crying.

I started to run towards my life that I always loved.

Knowing that I gained something that will let me lose everything.

I gained something very precious that I'm allowed to spend a little time with.

I gained a new soul. The strangest one ever.

The one that is going to make me fight...



نظرت وتجمدت في مكاني، انظر إلى تلك الفتاة القابعة هناك في الزاوية، جعلت قلبي يخفق ويفكر، بشعرها الأشعث المغبر، وثيابها البالية الممزقة. وجهها الأبيض الذي طغى عليه شبح السواد بسبب دموعها التي تكاد ترى. دنوت منها على مهل، فتاة في فجرها تبكي على حطام ذكريات خلفها لها الزمان، تبكي وترتعد.

## Abed El Yaacoub



## Lebanon

نظرت إلي وكأنها تعرفني، ثم همت بالبده في كلامها، تروي حكاية مزقت قلبي: "في عصر ذلك اليوم كنت فرحة اللعب وأضحك مع والداي..."، ثم سكنت برهة! فنظرت إلى عينيها وإذا بحبتان من اللؤلؤ على وشك أن تنهرا فابتلعتهما وتابعت حديثها: "أمي وأبي أولئك الأبوين وكأنهما ملاكان من السماء... خرجنا في نزهة فوق الجبال نمرح على البساط الأخضر ونستمع بالشذا يعبق في الأرجاء، وإذا به ينقض علينا... حاول أبي حمايتنا، لكنهم فاقونا عدداً.

فتحت عيني لأجد نفسي نائمة في سرير ليس هو بسريري وغرفة ليست بغرفتي، أحاول أن أتذكر... أحاول، ولكن كل ما أذكره هو صراخ وبكاء لربما هو بكاء أمي.

حاولت فتح الباب لكنه كان محكم الإغلاق، فجلست متفوقة في زاوية أرتعش حتى خيل إلي أنني أستمع إلى صدى دقات قلبي يدوي في هذا المكان الذي وجد الضوء إليه منفذاً خلسة. انتظرت وانتظرت، حتى سمعت صوت وقع أقدام تقترب، وفوجئت برؤية رجل غريب يبدو طاعنا في السن، ذو لحية بيضاء وعكاز سميك يبقيه مترنًا. أغلق الباب خلفه واقترب، ثم هم بالحديث، لم أرغب في الإنصات، لكن كل ما ملأ أذني من صدى صوته الذي هزني، أرادني أن أعمل لديه في ذلك المكان القاسي الشروط لاستغلال الأطفال. أفكر أن أسباب كهذه حرمتني من حضن أمي؟ يا له من إنسان بارد القلب.

أردت الهرب، ولم يكن هذا بالشيء البعيد المنال وخاصة من رجل عجوز من مكان منزوي في غابة لا يسمع فيها صوت نجدة محتاج، أو صرخة متألم، فإذا بي أجد نفسي مرة أخرى في مكان غريب.

بحثت عن شخص يرأف بي ويعيدني إلى والدي، لكن دون جدوى، فأسطورة الفتاة المتشردة أبقتهم بعيدين، فهاهي هناك تنهش عظم المقتربين، فهاهي الأيام قد مرت والسنوات قد مضت وأنا أهيم من مدينة إلى مدينة محاولة استباق الأسطورة أنتظر عطف المارين، وأنا أكاد أحترق من الشمس وأتمزق من الجوع..."

ثم سكنت واسترسلت في البكاء، عندها لم يكن باليد حيله سوى تقديم المعونه لفتاة في ربيع العمر.

حاولنا البحث عن أهلها و لربما أي دليل يرشدني، ولكن دون جدوى. فلم تبارحها الدموع إذ أن أول شخص حاول الاقتراب ومساعدتها شاء القدر بفضله.

فأخذتها إلى منزلي عسى أن تلقى الراحة هناك. إلى أن جاء ذلك اليوم الذي قرأت به تلك المقالة في الصحيفة بعد أن باءت جميع محاولات الوالدين بالفشل.

طرقنا الباب... كانت أمها جالسة وحرقة في قلبها تكاد تكون واضحة من حرارة دموعها، إذ لم تستطع أن تنسى يوماً طفلة سكنت فؤادها وكيانها.

رأتها فقفزت من مكانها مشدوهة وكان الصدمة قد صعقتها. حضنت ابنتها و...

خرجت مسرعة وأنا على وشك البكاء.

# Lana Najjar



# Israel

## The Story of Prodigy

It was 1970, and seventh grade had just begun. As usual the first day of school began with the school bully beating up some small kid. By the end of the day the kid had a black eye and a sore arm. He went home hoping to find some peace and quiet, a little bit of compassion and relaxation, but instead he had another beating from his father for arriving home late and for not being able to stand up to the school bully and defend himself. His family had to survive harsh financial conditions that sometimes his father could not afford to support. His mother was an alcoholic; she worked hard through the nights to help her husband support their family. Although she was tough in the way she treated her son, she had a soft side for him, unlike his father, who was a cruel man. He had a problem with drug addiction so he couldn't think straight, but like any father he wanted nothing but the best for his child at any cost whatsoever, so in order to turn him into a man he kicked him out the house in hopes that life would teach him how to be a man.

Weak, poor, defenseless, and now homeless...he tried his best with his father so that he would return home but yet again he got beaten up. He roamed the streets of the city searching for some place to protect him from the cruel world, a place to call home. As he walked through the streets and alleys he cried; he had nothing but his tears to console him on his condition. He looked into the windows of homes, and saw the faces of children in their parents' laps sleeping happily and safely without any fear, knowing that their parents are sure to protect them. Meanwhile, he had no one to help him in the tough times.

He had no other choice but to find somewhere to sleep and something to sleep on. He searched in the dumpster in one of the alleys in search of some rags to cover himself with, but all he found was a small rag and a piece of cardboard. He lay the cardboard on the ground, then, squirming his body upon it, he covered himself with the rag and cried himself to sleep, hoping the night would end quickly and a new day would bring him a new and better beginning.

Late that night, it began to get very cold. He shivered and squirmed in order to get as much warmth as possible. He was shaking, his teeth rattled, and all of a sudden it began to rain heavily. He jumped out of his place and covered his head and body with the rag in order to protect himself from the rain as he searched for someplace where he could continue the night. He ran until he came upon a basketball playground. He took a look inside. Although it was windy and part of the playground was wet, at least it had a roof that would keep the rain away. He found a dry spot under the pole that held the basketball board. He put his cardboard under that pole, sat down, covered himself with his rag and wept through the night. Suddenly the world began to spin around him. He felt as if his body could no longer carry him. Finally he passed out in that cold rainy night.

He woke up in a small shed, and as he opened his eyes he heard a thick voice: "Oh! So you've finally woken up."

His first words as he replied to that voice were:

"Dad? Is that you dad? I'm sorry dad...please let me come home."

But the voice replied, "I am not your dad. Now try to sit straight and eat something to regain your energy. You've been out for two days now."

That day he found himself in the home of a man named Mark Jones, also known as Crazy Legs Jones. Jones happened to have found the kid unconscious in the cold the other day and took him in from the cold. Jones was a simple man who was even poorer than the kid's father. He had a long past and worked hard for his future. He presented the kid with some bread and a bowl of tomato soup. They sat down to have breakfast. "Now.... Tell

me what's your story? And why did you refer to me as your dad the moment you woke up? And how did you end up like this?" The kid sat down and told him everything that happened with him the past couple of days.

After hearing the kid's story, Jones looked aside and said "That's sad."

"Mr. Jones, may I ask you a question?"

"Sure you can," replied Jones.

"Well...what is your story, Mr. Jones? And why do people call you Crazy Legs?"

Jones smiled and answered:

"Have you heard of Michael Jordan? Well, we grew up together and had a passion for a game called basketball. We would train through the nights in order to master the moves until we could take on any team... we owned the court and the ball was a puppet in our hands, and our competitors fell one by one like pieces of domino. He was named 'Air Jordan' because of how high he could jump in the air, while I was called 'Crazy legs Jones' because I was a master at performing tricks. The speed of the ball and the movement of my legs was unbeatable. It was as if I were moving my legs crazily around the ball."

"Then why'd you stop?" asked the kid.

"One day when I was walking down the street on my way to the most important game in my life, that day there were talent scouts in search for a fresh generation for the NBA. A car went out of control and headed directly towards a kid so I ran with all I had and pushed the child out of the car's path, but as I tried to escape it was too late for me and the car crashed into me. That day I suffered two ruptured organs and five broken bones including my leg bones, which required a lot of surgery and a lot of rest. So only Michael was signed up for the NBA while I had to stand down and let go of my dreams. Now I am lucky that I can run and perform a simple lay-up."

The kid felt sad about what had happened with Mr. Jones but he didn't want to be a heavy guest so he felt that it was time for him to leave. He thanked Mr. Jones for his hospitality but before he left Mr. Jones told him: "I wouldn't mind you staying here. You could make this your new home. But I have a few conditions: one, you have to continue your education...two, you have to get a job...and three, you have to train hard and learn how to stick up for yourself." The kid was speechless. It was as if a door to a new beginning had been opened to him, and he accepted Mr. Jones' offer with all of its terms.

The kid was a bright student—one of the best in his class—so the first of Mr. Jones' terms was no problem. By the end of the day he managed to find a job at the local mini mart with a fine salary that would support his stay with Mr. Jones, so the second term was no problem either. But what opened up a can of worms was the third term because the kid didn't know what to train on or how he would learn how to stick up to anyone who tried to push him around. The answer was with Mr. Jones. He offered to train him on how to defend himself from bullies throughout basketball. He began training on the basics and learned to increase his speed and stamina. He also learned how to perform fakes, techniques, and maneuvers that required close-body contact. Through these tricks he learned to dodge, but it was not enough to put an end to the beatings he had to endure. Mr. Jones taught him how to become aggressive, how to be a fighter, how to talk back when struck with words and how to use his fist when forced to. Mr. Jones made a man of that kid. As the days passed, each day the kid grew closer to Mr. Jones. Their relationship evolved from student/master to father/son.





بعد أن أفرغتَ لَدَتِكَ الباطنة  
و استلقيت على ظهرك لاهتاً من فرط الجهدِ  
كَأَنَّكَ انتصرت في معركة حربية  
نَمْ  
كي تستريح قليلاً  
و انهض كي تراقب الجنين، و هو ينمو في بطن الأم  
و حين يأتيها المخاضُ  
قَبِلَ جبينها  
و ادعها للجلدُ  
فما هي إلا دقائق حتى تُعلنَ القصيدة ميلادها بصرخةٍ  
و تتنفسَ من خياشم الورقُ

Four years later, Jones looked up at the kid and says, “You know, kid, I am really getting to like you. You have become the son I never had... you’re a gifted young man and it’s clear that you have some sort of gift so you require a name suitable of your potential. From now on you will be known as Prodigy. And since I failed to make my dream come true I want you to try and do it for me.”

From that moment Prodigy began to train hard and took hold of every chance he had to impress talent scouts. It was his senior year, and he had a chance to become an NBA player. He was also popular amongst the girls. There was one girl who was crushing on him, but one day, as Prodigy was walking her home from high school, giving her his textbook notes, a runaway robber trying to escape the police managed to slip his gun into Prodigy’s open backpack. When the cops lost the robber in a group of students they took everyone in sight in custody in order to be questioned. They searched everyone, but when they found the gun in Prodigy’s backpack, Prodigy had an unfair trial, and he had no evidence to prove his innocence so eventually he was accused of violating the law by having an illegal firearm and was sentenced to 7 years in prison.

Mr. Jones believed in Prodigy and knew that he was innocent but he couldn’t prove it. “There’s no use. You’re stuck in there for seven years. Well, don’t waste your time. Keep on training and I’ll see you in seven years.”

Prodigy was lost. He felt scrambled. It took him a couple of days to adapt to the idea that he was now a convict and had to accept his sentence. He took by Mr. Jones’s advice to spend his time in doing something useful such as training, so he headed off to the basketball court. The moment he entered a group of convicts gathered around him thinking that he was challenging their authority over the court, and they began to beat him up. It was seventh grade all over again but this time without Mr. Jones to help him. Prodigy had to stand up to the convicts by himself. Although he suffered many injuries and was kicked out of the court, he put up a good fight and stood up to the convicts bravely.

A week later Prodigy entered the same court and challenged the convicts to show him their skills with the ball and not with their fists. He was surprised because he was expecting a beating, but the convicts accepted his challenge. It took a lot of guts to challenge the convicts; now he had to prove to them what he was made of. Two players, The Rock and The Stilt, ruled this court. The Rock was five-foot-nine and weighed 240 pounds. He was like an immovable barrier that blocked the way to the basket. The Stilt was seven-foot-two and weighed 220 pounds. He made scoring a point seem impossible.

After a fierce challenge Prodigy lost, but the players were amazed at how he managed to dodge their moves and attempt shots. He even managed to score more points than almost everyone they challenged. They were amazed by Prodigy’s mad skills. “What’s your story, kid?” The Rock asked and so Prodigy told them his story from its beginning till the end. It turned out that The Rock and The Stilt competed against the team of Air Jordan and Crazy Legs Jones, but one day they got involved in a gun fight and were sentenced to life. So The Rock and The Stilt befriended Prodigy and decided to train him to become a better basketball player. That made life in prison much easier for Prodigy, because of the backup he got for being friends with The Rock and The Stilt.

Five years later, Prodigy was released for good behavior. He rushed to see Mr. Jones to find out that Mr. Jones had passed away two weeks earlier from a heart attack. Prodigy sat in the court where Mr. Jones had found him and trained him; he cried for days, he didn’t have the will to eat or drink. His sorrow overwhelmed him. He found a letter to him left by Mr. Jones. It was addressed to “My son.” It stated: “I wish I could have lived to see the day you returned home to me and fulfilled my dream of becoming a NBA player, but my disease got the best of me. Although I never gave up and fought it all these years, I can’t fight anymore. I am proud to

have called you son and I know that my life's dream is in safe hands now, in your hands. My son, Prodigy, I bid you farewell.”

This letter made Prodigy more determined to follow the path that Mr. Jones drew for him and join the NBA.

Prodigy worked hard until he managed to rebuild himself, and managed to get a chance to play in the NBA.

Two years later, Prodigy had become a professional basketball player. He was now going to play the most important match in his life, career, and dream. He was going to play against Air Jordan.

The match was to be canceled due to the death of another team's player in a car accident and the players of both teams didn't want to play the match so they could mourn their friend's death. But Prodigy refused to postpone the match. Instead he came up to the microphone and said: “I too want to mourn our friend in the game, I too am sad for his loss. But he never was sad to enter the court... no, he loved it, he loved the game, so let us not mourn him, because he is not dead. He lives within us and through us, so let us play tonight's game in his honor.” These words inspired the players to stand up and play the game that was their life and through it they gave life to their viewers and loved ones.

It was the match of the century. There were freestyle techniques, dunks, lay-ups, tricks... the crowd couldn't sit down and the scores were close. In the last 30 seconds the scores were tied. Suddenly Prodigy ran an amazing run and dunked. The crowd went wild. In the counterattack Jordan had one chance to perform a dunk and tie the scores but as he reached for the sky he didn't expect Prodigy to fly above him and block his attack and beat him.

After an intense match, Prodigy managed to beat Jordan. After the match Jordan was surprised to see that Prodigy was Jones's student. Later that day Prodigy was chosen as MVP of the season. He dedicated this honor to the deceased Mr. Jones. In a press conference he declared: “I think that now I have fulfilled my main goal in joining the NBA. It is time for me to retire and step aside. Well, you may ask why...it is because I no longer any reason to continue to play. I had a rough life so I have the will to prevent other kids from having a life like mine and so I want to continue my remaining days helping every kid who sets foot into my court and is in need of help.” Prodigy returned to that very basketball court where it all began. He used what he saved up from his career as a pro basketball player to buy the court and the area around it and turned it into various playgrounds for kids to play freely. He spent his time training generations of players, helping them, hoping that they would have a life better than the one he had, hoping they would never have to endure what he had to live.

Thirty-seven years later, Prodigy was an old man. The kids called him Mr. Jones.

One bright spring morning Prodigy was found on the ground of the basketball court, under the pole where Mr. Jones found him the first time they met. He was dead, but he wore a smile on his face and in his hand was a sheet of paper that held his last words:

To whoever finds this paper,

This means that I am dead and will no longer see the light of day. I will no longer see the children enter the playgrounds to be children and live their childhood. I will miss this life, that surely I will. With all its ups and downs, I endured much to live it but I lived it to the max through the good times and the bad. I fulfilled my teacher's dream and made it mine, I continued in his footsteps and founded these playgrounds to make sure that someone will come to continue what we started. I donate everything I own to charity and to the needy.

و حين ترى " الأنا " تتناول كغصن متمرد بين الفروع، و تعلن نفسها شجرةً

تناول شاقولك و اهو عليها

آه

ماذا فعلت؟؟

ألم تلاحظ أن الشجرة اتخذت بعض صفات البشر؟؟

حين ضربت الغصن ، فانتبهت إلى أنك قد قطعت حلم امرأة عارية

ها هو جذع الشجرة قد استحال فجأة

ساقا مدملجة لامرأة ، تُسيل اللعاب و ما من شأنه أن يسيل

قصيدتك غدت - منذ الآن - هذه المرأة المثيرة

هل ترى جلد الحبر يرتعش من الشهوة؟

إذا ..

خذ نفساً عميقاً

و .....

....

....

.....

..

.

حتى تشرع ذراته في مساءلة الخليفة  
لا بد من وجود خطأ  
لا شعر خارج بهو الخطأ  
.....  
..

تملص من رقيبك اللغوي  
الذي تلمع عيناه ببريق حاد يخفيه تحت نظارتيه  
و لا تفكر  
إلا في أبسط الأشياء بساطة  
كأن ...  
تأكل " مهلبية " في حيك عند " بن عبود " صاحب المقشدة

استقبل بحفاوة كل ذلك الضجيج والجلبة  
و الأصوات الصاعدة من لامكان  
و الإيقاعات المنفلتة الهابطة إلى هاوية الروح

تنمو نبتة على شغاف الماء  
و من أخطائه العديدة، تتغذى وتكبر

قصيدتك غدت - منذ الآن فصاعدا - هذه النبتة التي تحتاج منك إلى عناية

قصاً إذن زواندها  
و شذب الطفيليات

Never forget who you are, your causes, or your dream. Live to be alive, and as long as there is a single breath in your body, use it well. Never waste it on nonsense. We are now who you call legends but what we did was because of the love of the sport, not for money or fame. Remember us and follow in our footsteps.

I am happy to have died on the spot I love the most in the world. It is here where I met Mr. Jones for the first time and here it began. In my life the pain I lived because of the end of my family was the first step to the happiness between the members of another family.

These are the last words I want to say in my life and there is nothing more to say other than I am proud to have lived my life the way it was for the love of the game that gave me everything...for basketball.

I am the kid  
Also known as  
Prodigy



أولاً

قل لعقلك أن يقول لعقله:

تنح جانباً

## Maisa Farid



## Morocco

تمش

على مهلٍ

حافي الروح

إلى أن تبلغ النهر.

..... هناك

تتبدى لك القصيدة ماءً ترشفه الملائكة

تنضح جبهة الألهة عرقاً

فيجري فوق الجبل سيلٌ، جارفاً معه ذكريات ملونة

وحصى

أجمع حصى الذاكرة

وأرشق به صفحة الماء

الماء والمرآة سيان في الانعكاس

غير أن الماء، ينفذ منه كل صخب الألهة و كل الأحلام السرية و استيهامات اللاوعي، و أجواء الحرائق

بينما المرأة، ما إن ترشقها بحصى الذاكرة، حتى تتناثر شظاياها كبلور الروى

اجعل الماء يبدو كخطأ في التكوين

# Oussama Ghajjou



## Morocco

### Another frightening night

A detective came and queried me about what happened exactly. I told him what I knew and what I'd discovered. I even gave him the film I took of the thieves and the photos where the scar man appears. Next, he called an officer and asked him to take me to the ambulance for first aid. I was like a doll in a little girl's hands; I did what they wanted me to do, I sat in the ambulance and kept playing the role of the doll against my will. Moreover, I couldn't move or react because of my shock. About 30 minutes passed before I saw my parents; they rushed towards me with open mouths, wondering what happened. A policeman stopped them. When he understood they were my parents, he explained what happened during their absence. Mum's eyes were filled with tears and Dad was out of this world. They both pushed the police officer aside and came to hug me. Once they did, I lost consciousness ...

I saw a scar, the exact cicatrix that made me review my life, then I heard a lot of voices whispering. I recognised my parents' voices. I opened my eyes. I was aware I was in a hospital. Besides my father and mother, nurses were around me; I knew them from their white coats. One of them said: "Note she woke up at 16:19." I tried to move my hand to touch Mum but it was heavy; I felt a syringe in the skin of my arm and something in my nose. My mother touched my forehead and smiled even though it was obvious she'd spent the time crying, waiting for me to wake up crying. My dad murmured: "Sweetheart Missy, everything will be better than what you imagine." And just as I had opened my mouth to talk to him, I felt exhausted. Therefore, I closed it and fell over in a faint again.

I dreamt a beautiful vision. I had wings and I was flying away into the clouds. It was as deep as I felt it true. I got up smiling. It was night-time, and I remembered then what Chuang Tsu said: "I dreamed I was a butterfly, flitting around in the sky; then I awoke. Now I wonder: Am I a man who dreamt of being a butterfly, or am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a man?" I rested, unmoving, until I felt I was completely conscious. The entire room was obscure; I couldn't see anything clearly. I called mum twice, and received no answer; I was all alone in the room. I had a bad intuition, the dreadful feeling I fear, I wanted to leave my bed, but abruptly, I felt weak as if my blood was coming out from my body to the syringe, and as an automatic reaction, I put my hand behind me, intending to call a nurse, but instead of finding a motionless object, I felt a human hand. I could sense its heart beating, and only then could I hear the ticking of a watch. The hand moved, and I turned my head without even thinking. The darkness was filling the room. I couldn't recognise the person that was standing behind me. All I identified was a cicatrix, the exact mark that followed me everywhere. Then the man started laughing. I tried to stand up and run towards the door, but the thief who'd escaped was turning into a murderer. He tried to kill me using a kitchen knife. I fell from the bed as an instinctive reaction just after he injured my leg when he tried to stab the knife in my body. It wasn't so deep, but as a result of the fall, I broke my arm, and from the pain, I shouted with all the force I had left. He took the knife from the bed. I stood up and took a vase. I broke it and showed it to him as a defensive arm. However, something interrupted me; fresh air coming from the window. It was partly open. He was near it and the bed was between us. He got closer to put the knife into my heart, but we heard a noise in the corridor; the nurses were coming toward my room. I didn't want to miss my chance and let him leave without paying for the damage he caused me, plus I was convinced he would come back to finish what he had started. Hence, I threw the broken vase from my bloody hand in his direction. Unfortunately, it missed him. The nurses opened the door and he jumped quickly through the window. One of the women saw him, so she went to look out the window. She didn't say anything; she just put her hands on her mouth. The others came to see what had happened to me. My hand was full of glass and blood, my arm was broken, and my leg was injured. I could bear my wounds at that moment; I

only cared for that freak insane man. I went after the nurse, leaving the others looking at each other without understanding. I came nearer to the window and the nurse there tried to stop me from looking out. I pushed her aside, and looked. I was shocked: The man was lying on the ground, his knife inside him, a lake of blood around his dead body. Terrified, I screamed and fell back from the fright. I couldn't move any part of my body, I couldn't even sense it, my legs were unmoving, I wanted to stand up but I couldn't. I remembered what happened before he jumped, and for a moment of time, I imagined I'd killed him. I wasn't sure what caused his death. I started trembling. The nurses were around me, touching my forehead and, saying I was really hot, they carried me to another room and took care of me while waiting for the doctors.

After the doctors came to take care of me, a psychiatrist paid me a short visit. He tried to help me have a positive view on the subject and let go of my guilt. But all I did was look down at the floor, and the only sentence I spoke was: "I didn't kill him, I swear it wasn't me."

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#### From **Wasted Hope**

"Love sought is good, but given unsought is better..."

Each time I read the amazing Shakespearean play "Twelfth Night," I stopped on that line, repeating it around twenty times before continuing, and that passage about the intense feeling made me muse all the time about the possibility of falling in love, whether sought-after or not.

I knew I was going to find the one. I was so sure he existed, I only had to pay attention to every sign around me. I was also convinced that I would distinguish the charming prince so easily, reminding myself every time of those desperate girls in the movies seeking for love, and when it passes by them, they just don't see it and unfortunately sometimes, miss it when it becomes too late.

I'm Felicity Quinton by the way, and if anyone wants an idea about me, I would start by expressing my love of watching romantic movies over and over again, and taking some of the protagonist's characteristics with the purpose of adding them in my special recipe to bake my perfect man. But no worries, I never made an actual list, it was all in my mind, I mean the main ones: My charming prince has to be a noble gentleman, neat in how he speaks, how he dresses, and of course how he thinks. Besides his comportment with me, he must be able to make me feel genuinely special, and if he has green eyes, that is going to be the best; I am fond of men with green eyes. Those are the essential ingredients, and truthfully, I never found at least two of them assembled in one person. All the guys I formerly dated were strange, and that was just my opinion, because my best friend Amanda always thought they were perfect at that age. Nevertheless, I had this philosophy I never wanted to abandon even for a while. For instance, there was that baseball player I went out with back the previous year. He was handsome, popular, and everyone thought I had it all, but that wasn't true; they were only paying attention to the side of my life regarding him, and never saw the other sides, and I had to break up with him because he was too unwise to take life seriously. There was also the boy I met once I entered the college, and he was

the most old-fashioned person I've ever met. He was still thinking we're in the old era where women didn't have too many rights. I'm not even going to say what went wrong, although everything was wrong starting from the relationship that brought us together. I don't want to say I am perfect and empty of defects, but they just weren't the kind of boys I was looking forward to having a relationship with; moreover, they were absolutely not going to be the fruit of my hope.

The college changed my lifestyle. I became a grown-up, very popular amongst my classmates and professors, and that helped me, because I wanted to have good grades so as to take over the family business. My father is a businessman, and I always wanted to follow in his steps. Regarding my mother, she owns a fashion magazine, and that's why I grew up as a fashionista who had her own style. Having a wealthy family was the main reason I was still living with my parents. I wasn't ready to quit a princess life to become a damsel in distress.

