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Reading and Writing Women of the Middle East: A Story of War and Recovery

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Bridgewater State University

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Part Two

Chapter VII

My Heart and my Body

After spending a couple of days thinking about what Suzanna had told me, losing sleep over whether to lose my virginity to Joshua or not, I went to the only woman I knew I could go to, someone who would not judge me; my Aunt Nay. She had been battling breast cancer for couple years now and seeing her so fragile broke my heart, but she was the only woman that felt comfortable talking to about this subject. I knew my mother would freak out if I tried to talk to her about Joshua. She would yell at me for even thinking about sex. She would throw in my face that I would bring shame to my family. Although my family seemed very open-minded and understanding of me going out or having a boyfriend, like any Western family would, this subject would turn them straight Arabic on me. This would get them playing the honor and disgrace card. My Aunt was the only woman that always supported me no matter what the consequences were. When I told her what I was thinking she had only one answer for me.

“Do what you heart tells you under one condition: make sure you would never regret it for the rest of your life.”

She confided in me that she had slept with her high school sweetheart even though my grandparents never approved of him. These were the same grandparents that never approved of my mother either because she was a farmer’s daughter. These were the same grandparents that made her marry an older man that, on the night of his wedding to my Aunt discovered that she wasn’t a virgin and blamed them for giving him a “used” woman. I knew then that my decision was hard, but I also knew that my mind was set.

That day I went back home to prepare myself. I had no one else to talk to about my

decision because Suzanna was still not really talking to anyone, and she was always home staring at the TV. I told Joshua that we were having a late picnic in the caves where we first kissed, and that he should bring his swimming trunks because we were going to swim. I took my father's car that night and told him that I was going to spend the night with some friends. I picked Joshua up and went to the beach. We walked until we crossed the rocks and reached the other side of the beach where the water was peaceful and the moon reflected on the surface. It was a perfect night. After we found a level spot beside the caves that I believed to be a getaway for some ancient princess, we ate a little bit of the ham sandwiches I made. He looked at me.

“You look a little nervous tonight. Is everything ok?”

I didn't know what to say. How do you tell a guy that you love him and you want him to be your first? All I did was look down. For some reason it felt that he knew that he needed to spare me the embarrassment of telling him what was on mind. That what was on my mind was to sleep with foreign guy and dishonor my family's name. That what was on my mind was not only to make love to a guy, but also to make love to a Jewish guy. Was I taking revenge on Joshua for the pain my own country caused me and my generation ?

I didn't care.

All I cared about that night was that I wanted him; I wanted him to take me. Joshua stood up and gave me his hand to help me stand up.

“Let's go for a swim,” he said. “The water looks so warm. Back home you wouldn't dream of swimming at night. The water is always freezing.” We took our clothes off and went in. The water was all I needed to cool my heart. But it didn't help that he was so close to me because I could hear his. He suddenly lifted my legs and wrapped them around his waist. I could feel his body attached to mine, reacting with the pleasure of holding me so close. His hands were

caressing my back . I could feel his fingers running up and down my spine. My heart was about to explode right out of my chest. He looked into my eyes.

“I know what you want. You want me. I can see it in your face. I want you too. I have wanted you since the first day I met you. Why don’t you say it? Why are you still not honest with me. Why won’t you tell me that you want me. There is no shame in that.” I looked at him with the most puzzled face.

“It is easy for you to say. You are not from here. If my family knows what I’m doing they’ll never forgive me.” And I looked down. He lifted my face with his hand and said:

“But your parents aren’t here now, are they? I don’t see them. There’s only you and me here and that’s it. Just us. I love you. You need to trust me with your body like you trust me with your heart.” The only time in my life I forgot all about my parents, all about the fact that I was supposed to save myself for marriage, all about virginity and the fact that losing it this way was a sin, was this moment now. Why was it that sex was not a sin for my brother who bragged about his conquests in front of the whole family. He was considered a hero. If God said it was a sin to have sex before marriage then shouldn’t the rule apply to him as well? One time I was watching a ridiculous movie version of the book *The Scarlet Letter* and Ester’s daughter, at the end of the movie says: “Who is to say what is a sin in God’s eyes?” I feel certain that the movie version had nothing to do with the book, but for some reason, as a young girl, the hypocrisy in that movie reminded me of the incident in church with the ladies and their gossip about the cleavage. Well, who *is* was to say that whatever I was about to do was a sin in God’s eyes. I guess I decided to find out when I die. But for now I wanted my Jewish boyfriend to love me.

We started kissing and he started walking us out of the water. He held me in his arms as we got to the surface where our towels were laid on the ground. He laid me gently on the floor

and got on top of me. Before I knew my bikini top was not covering my breasts any more but it was his soft lips that were kissing them. The burning feeling that I had running through my veins kept my body warm. This mixed feeling of shame and pleasure was the most exiting feeling I had ever experienced. Thought of my parents disappeared. The voice of my mother telling me that a good girl would not let a man touch her before marriage; the voice of my father telling me that the family's honor was the most important thing in the world; my brother's voice telling the whole family that the girl he slept with was a slut because she gave it up too easy. They were all gone. The only thing that was left was the sound of Joshua's heavy breathing on top of me. And there he was; he was inside of me, inside of my body, inside of my soul and my heart.

The night seemed silent and peaceful. When the sun started to rise behind us out of the mountains we were still awake talking about my life here and about his life in America. What was going to happen to us? I didn't want to think that he was leaving in a couple months. He had invited me to go over next summer and visit him in America. I didn't feel like telling him that the Lebanese government didn't often give young people visas to travel for fear they would not come back. I preferred to keep the morning as beautiful as the night was. By eight, I knew I had to get up and go home before my mother started calling my friends houses, one-by-one looking for me. I knew that by now my dad would've called a taxi to go to work. We stood up to leave, and he took my hand and asked if I was ok. I told him I was, and I kissed him for a long time before my knees started shaking again. I dropped him off at his friend's house and went home. My mother's questions about my night didn't bother me that day and lying to her didn't feel as wrong as it felt before. I took a shower and slept all day dreaming about Joshua's skin on top of mine and about a life I could've had with him if I wasn't stuck here.

When I woke up, I decided not to leave the house that day so as not to give my parents a

reason to question me, but I stayed on the phone with my Jewish lover all night talking about what we would do if we were with each other at that moment. I wasn't worried about being overheard because I knew that my parents didn't really understand English. And when they asked I told them that I was talking to an Australian girl that I had met on the beach.

He stayed on the phone until I was about to fall asleep and the last thing we said to each other was I love you.

Chapter VIII

Where Was God?

My family seemed fine with me when I finally told them that I was dating an American guy. Of course I left out the fact that he was Jewish. I made him promise me to lie if they ever asked him his religion, to say that he was Christian. The conversation would have never gone beyond that because of their English. When Joshua finally came over, my brother kept giving him threatening looks. I knew that he was trying to warn him not to fool around with his little innocent sister; little did he know that Joshua and I had been with each other on the beach almost every night. I would've loved to tell him everything just to see the look on his face when he knew that his sister lost her precious virginity to a Jewish boy.

I had something on him as well. He had been doing tattoos in my father's barbershop for the past three months without him knowing. I knew that if my father knew that his only son was into tattoos, that he himself had five tattoos in places that didn't show, my father would've disowned him. Tattoos for my father were a sign of rebellion. In his opinion only prisoners had tattoos. So of course I never told him that my boyfriend had an eagle on his back either.

One morning Suzanna called me at eight in the morning begging me to attend a protest in Beirut with her. I asked her what the protest was about but she wouldn't tell me on the phone and made me promise to meet her at the bus stop in Byblos before the highway. I called Joshua to tell him that I was going; he hated the idea, and he thought it was dangerous. He was begging me not to get myself into anything that would get me in trouble with my parents. After a while, he gave up and told me to call him when I got back or meet him on the beach. I told my mother that I was going shopping with Suzanna. She gave me her permission right away. It was for Suzanna's sake. This was the first time since Rudy's death that Suzanna had called to make plans of any

kind.

In the end, that is why I went too. I knew that there was danger going to Beirut. I remembered on my way to the bus stop, the day my father took me on my first test drive. He drove me all the way to the end of the highway in Dbayeh, to the edge of Ashrafieh right across from Saint Georges' church; as he made a u-turn with the car he said, "Before I give you the keys to my car you need to promise me that this is as far as you can go. Behind this point I can no longer protect you. It is the Muslims' region, and you will be lost."

I knew the exact reason why he didn't want me to cross those limits. I knew that there was a girl from our neighborhood a couple of years back that got lost and that a street gang stole her car, raped her, and left her beaten and bleeding on the street.

Police never found out who did it. But we also knew that the police in Lebanon didn't really do the job they were supposed to do. Back in Byblos all they did was hang out in their brand new Jeep Cherokees, provided by the U.S. government, smoking and whistling every time a pretty girl passed by. Sometimes they would take some teenager's hash for themselves to smoke behind the churchyard. It was no secret what they were getting paid for. We all knew. They were always busy doing some useless government official's errands or terrorizing some poor merchant because it was a threat to another, richer, better-connected merchant. The truth was that they were really good at following the rules if the rules were the rules of corruption and greed.

And I didn't really want to leave Joshua either, but Suzanna had been my friend for a very long time, and she needed me more than I needed Joshua. Even I could see that. Suzanna told me that the protest was against the Board of Education. I saw in her eyes a hatred and anger I had never seen before. She had always been the happy one. She had always been the one with

the bubbly personality. She had always been so energetic. Now it felt to me like she had an old broken soul. Even if we had survived the war itself, many of us were either dying anyway from drugs, or reckless driving, or suicide, or, worse, living but only barely, the happiness drained out of our days, our souls. The consequences that we were all paying because of the aftermath of this war resonated in the lives of my friends around me. She explained that they were trying to get the Southern students and the Palestinians into our colleges without an entrance exam because they claimed that they were children of war and deserved an easier entrance. I felt my insides go black. As if what we went through for the past fifteen years meant nothing to us. As if we weren't children of war either. I got so mad that I felt my heart stop beating. I wasn't applying for college until next summer, but that didn't stop my rage from piling up. However, I knew that the entrance exam, which some of my friends spent months studying for, was mandatory for all Lebanese applicants. I was glad that she called me. I was going to be a part of this protest—it meant something to me.

When we got there, we saw over two hundred teenagers holding banners saying: “Stop this nonsense,” and “So what if they were children of war, what does that make us?” and “If we have to study the whole summer to pass the test so do they.” The complaints went on and on.

The crowd resembled a herd of wild hungry buffalos charging at a flock of sheep. Everybody was so loud and aggressive. After a while a fight started to breakout between the protestors. Some were saying that we should all take the test and some were saying Southerners and Palestinian refugees deserve a head start because most of them lost their homes and families. There was screaming and cursing. Suzanna and I got pushed around and around for what felt like hours. I realized that we were getting stuck in the middle of the fight. I immediately regretted going with her. I wished I had listened to Joshua and stayed home. Suzanna seemed to be

enjoying herself. She was throwing punches herself. It seemed that she had finally found an outlet for her rage over the loss of Rudy. Anger consumed her, and it left no space for common sense. I was not longer looking at my childhood best friend; she became a stranger.

I started to pull back from the crowd, but I couldn't fight my way out. Then we heard the sirens of the police coming. We knew they would be coming with water hoses. When they arrived they started shooting us with water in order to break up the fights. Suddenly, over fifty police officers started grabbing people randomly and hitting them with the butts of their rifles. I lost Suzanna, and I found myself being dragged across the ground by my hair by an officer who was throwing me into the back of a windowless wagon. I started screaming, begging him to let me go. It was go dark in the wagon. I could smell the sweat and the blood of the kids that were already arrested. I heard one of them crying and someone else yelled at the crying girl, telling her to shut up, that at least she got arrested for a good cause, that she should be proud of herself. We were left in the wagon for hours; my eyes had cried out all of tears they could shed, and I felt numb.

I kept thinking that they would post our names on TV, and my father would come get me anytime now. Then I felt the wagon moving. I thought maybe they were just taking us away from the crowd to yell at us and send us home. When the bus stopped, a man with a thick beard and a black t-shirt and cargo pants opened the door. The rifle in his hand was dripping blood. He looked at us.

“You think you're tough? Let's see how you do in this hellhole for a couple of days. That will teach you to play with fire.”

He started laughing. We all started crying then, begging him to let us go, promising that we would never do anything like that ever again. But he wasn't listening.

I recognized the voice of the boy who told the girl to shut up:

“You think you are a big deal? Wait until my father gets a hold of your neck. You are as good as dead, I promise.”

The officer lifted the bottom of his rifle and hit the boy as hard as he could in his face. The boy fell motionless to the floor. The officer crossed over him:

“Oh yeah? Let’s see if he can find you first.” And he left him there.

Another officer put bags over our heads and led us into separate rooms. I couldn’t hear any other voices around me, and, with my hands tied behind my back, I couldn’t uncover my eyes. I was never so scared in my life. I was crying the whole time, thinking that any minute now my dad would be there. I never wanted to hear his voice calling me more than now. I kept asking myself where he was and what was taking him so long. I had no idea what time it was or how long I had been in that room.

Suddenly, I heard the door open and I heard more than one set of footsteps around the room. I started crying again begging them to let me go. But all I heard was the mocking voices of many policemen. Then someone set me down on a chair and took the bag off my head. I was in a prison cell with metal doors and a small locked window. There were three men dressed in all black and one of them had what seemed to be a razor in his hand. The rest of the room was empty except for a wooden bed without a mattress. How much worse this was going to get, I didn’t know, until the man in the razor kneeled in front of me.

“You know what we do to naughty little girls around here?”

I shook my head crying: “Please let me go. Please, I want to go home.” I started weeping with everything I had. He lifted my head:

“First we make them prettier. We give them a really pretty haircut.”

All the men around me started laughing, and he started shaving my head. I shook so bad that he cut me more than once, but I was so numb that I didn't feel the pain. I only felt the blood dripping down my face and tasted the iron in my mouth. I screamed more than I ever did in my life. The fear I felt in my heart was worse than the sound of bombs I use to hear when I was in the underground shelter during the war. It felt to me as if the war never really ended. After he was done he poured a bucket of ice water on my head.

“Oh look how pretty she is now. That will teach you a lesson little girl.” And they left me sitting there.

I dragged myself, crying, on to the wooden bed, calling out for my father until I cried myself to sleep. I had no idea what time it was when I heard the metal door open again. I thought maybe my father had come to take me home so I jumped up waiting for someone to put the light on. But it wasn't my father and no one had put the light on. It was so dark I couldn't see at all who was there. I asked who it was but no one answered. Then I felt a man grabbing my neck pushing me and saying:

“Another thing we do to girls here to teach them a lesson. We turn them into women.” I didn't understand what he meant until he threw me on the wooden bed and started pulling my pants down. I was motionless with surprise and horror. I didn't comprehend what was happening to me; everything seemed strange and sudden. I still had my hands tied behind my back so I couldn't fight him off. I smelled the stink of cigarettes on his breath. The only thing I could do was scream. I cried out as much as my voice could allow me. I begged him to get off. The feeling taking over my body was the worst I had ever felt, as if I had been stripped out of my soul and no one could stop it. He was breathing down on me and laughing. I begged him to stop before I felt his naked body touching mine. And then, without any mercy, I felt him inside me.

The pain was excruciating. With every motion of his body against mine, a bit of my spirit disintegrated. He was taking away from me every ounce of happiness I had left. I screamed and screamed and screamed for him to stop. But nothing stopped. My core shaking, I felt numb. I felt empty inside. I felt hollow. I gave up. He had won the fight. I lay there motionless wondering if that was the way God watches over his children. I wondered if that was his sense of humor. Was that the way he was punishing me for Joshua? I wondered if that was a test of my faith. And if it was, I had just failed because I no longer wanted to believe in him. I no longer wanted to believe that God loved me. If he did love me the way I was taught for thirteen years in a Catholic school that was a horrible way to show it. He was nowhere. He had abandoned me. I was alone.

I hated my father for not coming to get me; I hated Suzanna for dragging me into this. And I mostly hated God for watching me get raped without doing anything about it. I surrendered to the misery and hoped that it would be over soon. The only thing I felt were the tears going down the side of my face. Then, it was over. I was over.

Left on the floor of this prison, I had no hope of ever being found or rescued. Everything seemed empty: my soul, my mind, empty. It was my father's voice, after what felt like eternity, that woke me out of my nightmares. I couldn't scream any more or get up so he could know I was there. I heard the door open, and without any energy to open my eyes I smelled my father's scent in the room, felt his hands lifting me up.

"I am here now my child. It's all over." Of course it was all over, I thought to myself. I was over. Then I heard him say:

"You have no idea who you just messed with, you are all dead, and you are going to pay for every single hair you have touched. I promise you this is not the last you have seen of me."

I thought to myself if he only knew what else they have touched. Still numb all the way

home I had no idea what was going on around me, all these voices, all the cries. The only thing I felt was my mother's soft hand on my scalp. She said, crying, "My little girl, what have they done to you? What have they done?"

I felt her kissing my forehead and my face over and over. I felt her tears on my face. I had no idea how it felt to be secured. It still felt empty inside. I hear a man's voice that my mother called Amin. I knew that it was her cousin the doctor. Right when I felt him touching me and trying to unbutton my blouse for examination I started screaming with panic.

"Get off me. Stop hurting me." I heard my father's voice asking me why was I saying these words, and with the only energy I had left I said:

"He raped—he raped me." And then, I could no longer hear myself or anyone else around me. The only thing I saw was an imaginary hallway that narrowed and narrowed and I started seeing myself screaming and running until I no longer felt anything, it was darkness again.

Chapter IX

Loss after loss

The next time I woke up, I saw my mother sitting on my bedside. She had changed my clothes. The sight of her made me jump. I was so disoriented it took me a minute to realize that I was home, in my room, and I was safe. When my father heard my voice he got into the room and sat beside me. Before he could say anything I felt myself hitting him.

“Where were you? I was yelling your name the whole time to help me, and you didn’t come. You were supposed to save me, and you didn’t.”

He hugged me and explained that he had been looking for me in every precinct ever since Suzanna got home that day and told them what had happened. I broke down crying and told everything that had happened to me in that hellhole. I told them about the boy that was left on the ground bleeding motionless, about the shaving and about the rape. I don’t even remember the reaction I received from either one of my parents. Did they cry? Did they believe me? Did they even care? My mother gave me a pill that she said was to calm my nerves, and a short time after I fell asleep. Dr. Amin tried to examine me more than once, but I refused to be touched by anyone. I finally let him check the cuts on my head but he could not touch me anywhere else.

Joshua was coming over every day and spent hours trying to talk to me. But I couldn’t even get myself to look at him. I didn’t see Suzanna at all. I knew she was calling the house all the time. But I didn’t want anything to do with her anymore. It was over. Our friendship was over. After couple weeks Joshua came over to tell me that he had go back to the States, that his mother wouldn’t allow him to delay his flight any more. He hugged and kissed my lips and promised that he would call me right when his plane lands. I couldn’t feel anything. I couldn’t even find my voice to say goodbye to him. I didn’t want him to leave, but at the same time I felt

that I didn't deserve him anymore either. I felt that happiness was no longer something I could experience.

I never wanted to admit that that would be our last time together. Our last time could not be tainted with all the drugs that I had been taking, tainted by the rape and my bare, scabby head. There was a lot I wanted to tell him. A lot of feelings boiling inside of me, all selfish feelings. How could I ask him to leave his life behind and stay with me? When the main reason was, and I knew it deep inside, that he was my only escape to another life.

Days after he left passed by and my mother was still giving me those pills to be able to fall asleep, but I would still wake up screaming in the middle of the night.

Yes! It was a nightmare! But who was to say it wasn't real?

I kept smelling his skin on me.

I kept smelling his breath reeking of cigarettes.

I kept hearing his voice whispering into my soul reminding me how abandoned I was, how alone, reminding me that it was so real, what was happening to me, so true.

How could I have been so blind, I wondered How could I have actually believe that I was strong enough to support a friend when in reality I was fragile myself. Was I still dreaming?

It was only when I heard myself screaming and my mother's footsteps running into my room that I realized that it was a nightmare. When would it end? Never, my heart answered.

I looked at my mother searching for love and warmth, I found fear. She comforted me the best way she knew how: she gave me more drugs to sleep.

As I lay there drifting back to sleep the nightmares would return. The pills never really stopped them. All they did was paralyze my body and keep me from waking up, trapping me deeper in the hell of my dreams.

I decided I didn't need the drugs. I needed my mother back. The one who used to caress me to sleep not drug me. The one who used to sing old Arabic lullabies. Instead she said, over and over: "Soon we will all forget this ever happened. We can bury it and never speak of it again!"

All she wanted was to forget and never speak of it again. That was the easiest way, pretend it never happened. She couldn't even touch me like she used to before. I knew what she was thinking: I disgusted her. I was not this pure daughter of hers anymore. I was polluted. I was corrupted. She could tell that her presence in the room bothered me after a while. She was more of a reminder to me that I was not the same daughter anymore. I asked her to leave me alone. After thatn I saw her shadow beneath my closed door; I did not tell her to leave nor did I tell her to come in.

After that my Brother started sleeping on the floor in my room. I felt a little safer when I woke up to see him there holding my hand and telling me that he would never let anything happen to me anymore. All these years I felt like my relationship with my brother was gone. And for the first time in a long time I felt his presence in my life. One night after waking up screaming again, Charbel set beside me in bed and opened a book and started reading. He read *Le Petit Prince* for me just like when we were kids. I hugged him and cried the whole time he was reading. He was crying as well, but he did not stop reading until I was asleep again.

A month and a half had passed, and I finally got out of bed. All I wanted to do was to go see my aunt. I heard my mother tell my father in the morning that she probably wouldn't make it another week, and she was asking about me. When I got to the kitchen I told my mom that I wanted to go see her. She told me that no one had told her what had happened to me. I insisted on seeing her. Charbel didn't go to work that day and took me. All the way to her house I kept

wondering to myself about how I was going to tell her what happened, how I was going to break whatever was left of her body and soul.

Cancer had found his way into her entire body. It had all started five years earlier. It was breast cancer. Doctors had told the family she would be fine; the cancer was conquered; it was out of her system. It wasn't for too long. Five years later, she got diagnosed again. We were devastated. It started again with the other breasts and then spread into her liver, her stomach, her kidneys and her ovaries. Rania, her forty-year-old daughter, left her kids and husband temporarily and moved back with her mom to take care of her. She needed twenty-four hour supervision and around the clock care. When Charbel took me, I put on a baseball hat Joshua had given me before he left. I arrived at her house little after three. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and asked me what I had done to my hair? How could I lie to the only person that I had always been honest with? I had to tell her the truth. I broke down at her bedside and told her everything. She looked at me with shock and started crying. She took my hat from my head and kissed my forehead tenderly. She lowered her hooded sweater to reveal a skull with dry skin. I began to cry, for I had never seen what the treatment had done to her hair before. She always made sure no one saw her hairless after she started chemotherapy. She burst out crying and said:

“Promise me that you'll get over this episode in your life. That you will be a survivor. You are a fighter just like me. Don't ever let anything defeat you. You are a phoenix. You die; you rise from your ashes; be reborn a beautiful bird. Do you hear what I'm saying to you? I might not have a lot of time left for me, but I want you to know that I will always watch over you. I will always be with you. ”

I cried on her shoulders and promised her that I would get over this sooner or later, and I would not let anything defeat me. Sitting there with her for what I felt would be the last time, I

looked at her. She reminded me so much of my father and the way he used to be before we drifted apart. I realized that I would miss her so much. I realized how much I had been missing him as well.

As she fell asleep I sat there beside her stroking her arm, the same way she stroked mine the night she told me the only childhood story I knew of her and my father. It was the summer of 1992. I was eleven. My mother left to visit her cousin in America; I stayed with my aunt. My brother wanted to sit at the shop with my dad. That night my aunt told me a story about the boy my father had once been. I have always wondered what his childhood was like. All I had heard of it was that he was the son of a mother who was too busy to even breastfeed him and gave him to the neighbor to do so. I heard stories that he had to take care of himself since he was eleven. He started working, smoking, and partying.

I wanted to hear silly stories, a true childhood story of the man who raised me; I wanted to know the silly kid behind the strong man. The night was warm and magical. I had finished dinner and showered, as was the custom. I was enjoying a Popsicle when my aunt called me outside to sit with her on the balcony.

“Auntie can you tell me a story about when you were a little girl in Tannourine?”

She stopped and thought for a moment.

“Actually, can you please tell me a story about my dad too? He never tells us stories about his childhood. All he ever says is that he took care of himself since he was eleven, and he was independent. I want to know something silly about him.”

“You have to promise me that you won’t tell him I told you this because he’ll yell at me.” She laughed and gave me a wink. I settled down looking at her with the biggest eyes, hungry for any story about anything that would make grownups look silly. But I think I was mostly excited

because finally I had the chance to hear a story about my dad when he was a kid. I wanted to hear about the man who was always strong, strict with his rules, and yet the man who always allowed us to question his own rules.

“Back when we were kids in the fifties, in Tannourine, the only entertainment we had was running wild all summer long, picking fruit from the neighbor’s fields and letting out our grandmother’s chickens from the hen house. My childhood friend, Ghassan, was older than Habib so naturally we really never wanted him to play with us, especially because he would always run back to mother and tattletale just so he could get a little attention. And of course I would get the whipping.”

she sighed in some fake of despair before she went on.

“We had the biggest house in the village and it was located on a hill that overlooked the town center. It had arches all around the entrance and the front gable had a beautiful metal rooster. The front porch was shiny white marble. It was one of the most beautiful houses in the village. One afternoon Ghassan and I wanted to go pick grapes from the vines behind the hill of our house. So that afternoon, Habib followed us and started yelling at us, saying that if we didn’t let him go with us he would run back and tell mom. When I was young I used to think fast on my feet so I said to him, ‘Habib, we are going to let you in on a secret mission we were assigned! We have to go into the vineyard and collect golden grapes, and we need a spy who is very smart and who can watch the gates for us, protect us from the evil guard with the big rifle who wants to capture us and stop us from completing our mission.’”

After she told me that part of the story she started laughing so hard that I started laughing with her.

“He looked at me with his big bright green eyes as if I had given him the key to a secret

world he never thought existed. I could see the sparkle and the disbelief in them. Then he got all serious and said to me with the utmost confidence that we shouldn't worry at all and commanded us to go collect the treasure. He would guard the gate for us. He turned around, found a stick and stood there with his back to us, legs spread apart, guarding the gate. I couldn't believe he believed us. He started marching left and right with his long blond hair shining under the soft sunlight. His chest lifted with pride. We couldn't stop laughing, Ghassan and I. First, that was our vineyard, and we didn't need any protection. We weren't stealing. Second, there was no guard at all. We made sure guarding the treasure distracted him, and we snuck around the back and went to the center of the village to play with our friends. He stayed there for over two hours guarding nothing until we had to go home. We went back and told him that the mission had to be aborted, and we would try again next day. We kept doing that almost the entire summer so we could keep him from following us and reporting back to our mother."

My Aunt was laughing at my father's naïveté in this story, but I wasn't. I started imagining this innocent boy, this beautiful blond boy with green eyes, my father, believing a lie. It took me a while to realize that my father wasn't that little boy anymore, and that he was more than capable of knowing a lie from the truth, but still, I felt overprotective.

When my aunt realized that I was on the verge of crying, she asked me to sit right beside her.

"What's wrong? You didn't like the story?"

"Why did you lie to him? He just wanted to play."

"Oh sweetie, we were kids, and we were just playing. Trust me. The summer after we were the ones begging him to let us follow him. He had discovered routes that lead to the neighbor's fields that we didn't know existed. He was the prettiest kid in the village, and all the

girls wanted to play with him. Come here.” She hugged me then and continued:

“Don’t worry about anything. Your father is my favorite person in this world, but don’t tell anybody I told you that.”

She put me down in bed and stroked my hair. I went to sleep that night thinking about my father and the way he was when he was a kid. It was the same man who always squeezed fresh orange juice for the family every Sunday morning. And, instead of forcing us to go to church, like most parents did, he would let us stay home, my brother and I, and watch French movies starring Louis De Funese.

“There is nothing you would learn in church, you couldn’t learn at home. Besides, what else do they want other than money in the basket!”

I fell asleep that night thinking about the sweet stuff about him from my childhood that seemed to have gotten overshadowed by the strength of his unyielding personality.

The next morning when he came for coffee, I looked at him thinking that this man was once a boy; a boy that use to play and was easy to be lied to. I guess I had never looked at him ever being weak and vulnerable. I never thought of him ever being manipulated by anybody. That remained the only childhood story I had about my father. No one ever told me another. As for my father, the story made me look at him in a different way, a better way. He was no longer that dictator forbidding me from staying up late, or going away to camp, to sleep overs at friends houses.

That was the same man, who, a couple of years after that story, would be standing guard, once again, over his treasure. But the treasure that time would be us, and the vicious giant was the Civil War. He protected us until he was told it was time to go home. For years after the war I would remember this story every time he was unfairly strict. I would remember that this was the

boy who believed in guarding golden grapes and believed that with a stick he could overpower the keeper of the vineyard behind the hills in Tannourine.

I thought of that summer night again and that story on the summer night I sat with my Aunt again. That same night, the woman who was once known as one of the most beautiful women in the city died. She died a strong woman. She died repeating the promise I had made her.

Standing at her bedside, I couldn't say a word. I just looked at my aunt and closed my eyes trying to remember her as she was once, beautiful and elegant. Silence and darkness filled the room. The single candle ran out of light and energy. She was gone. The funeral was miserable. People were too busy looking at my head and wondering why was it shaved and why was there scars all over it to properly mourn my Aunt. I was furious. I couldn't handle the staring and the questioning eyes. And mostly I couldn't handle the hired women that stood on top of my dead Aunt's body singing about her and making everybody cry more than they were already crying. My mother felt that I needed to be out of there fast, so she told my brother to drop me off.

Right when I got home I threw up all over the marble floor at the entrance of my house. The days passed by after the funeral I was still throwing up almost every morning. My mother said it was probably because of all the stress. But then one day she didn't know what to do to make me feel better so she called her cousin. He came over as soon as he closed his office. He went in my room and checked my stomach, my throat, and took my vitals. He gave me a very confusing look and asked if I would pee in a cup for him. So my mother gave a plastic cup and went with me to the bathroom. She took the cup to him and went back to the bathroom to help me clean up because I had no energy to do anything. When I went back to my room, I could see the doctor sitting on the side of my bed with his face in his hands. When he saw me enter the

room, he looked at me.

“If you would excuse me sweetie I need to talk to your mother in private.” I had nothing to say so I just nodded. After five minutes I could hear my mother scream and ran back to the room. She went down on her knees and hugged me. I pushed her away puzzled.

“What’s wrong with me? What’s going on?” my father followed with a terrified look on his face. She took my face and said in the most loving voice:

“You are pregnant! That animal that raped you got you pregnant!” Still on her knees, she looked over to my father.

“Habib what are we going to do?”

He looked over at me. “There is only one thing we can do Maryam. Only one thing.”

Startled I stood by my bed. “What do you mean one thing you can do? What are you going to do with me?” With my parents panicking I had no time to think that I had a baby growing in side of me. I had no time to realize that this baby might have been Joshua’s too. Did my parents mean they were going to send me away until I had the baby or, worse, that they were going to abort my baby? That was my baby, and I wasn’t going to let anything happen to it. Everybody in the room seemed to ignore my presence; they were plotting my baby’s destiny without asking my opinion like it didn’t even matter. After what felt like an eternity I screamed from the top of my lungs:

“Don’t you people realize that it is *my* baby who you are trying to kill? This is my baby and no one is touching me. And for your information it might be Joshua’s baby. Yes! I slept with him. I loved him and slept with him. No one is touching my baby.”

Silence fell in the room. They looked at me with great sadness and dissapointment. I couldn’t understand how they could claim to believe in a society with the highest family values

and yet still be willing to kill an unborn child because they feared facing a society with an unmarried pregnant daughter. I grew up listening to them criticize Lebanese culture for being narrow-minded and Islamic culture too, yet here they were submitting to their rules. They were willing to kill my baby instead of facing that same society. I remembered Joshua's words at that moment describing how women in America were willing to raise their babies and go through harsh conditions as a single mother instead of aborting their babies. Whatever my parents and the doctor were plotting on doing to me I knew that would protect my unborn baby at any cost.

My mother came over to me after talking to my father and her cousin outside my room.

“Why don't take these two pills and go to sleep my darling?”

I looked at her and said: “Mom you won't let anything happen to my baby right?”

“I don't want you to worry about anything now. Just take these sleeping pills and go to sleep. We'll talk in the morning, ok?”

I had no idea why, but I trusted her at that moment. I trusted that she would understand my need to protect my baby just like she would protect hers. I took the pills from her hand and swallowed them. I fell asleep that night thinking that I would call Joshua in the morning and tell him that the baby might be his, and maybe he would help me leave this country even if he didn't want to be with me anymore. Maybe there was a way for me to finally be saved.

Chapter X

What was left of me?

After I trusted my mother to protect my baby, and after she had given me the pills she had claimed were only sleeping pills, I woke up to the most unbearable pain in my back and abdomen. I woke up because of the screams that were coming out of me. I couldn't straighten my legs or breathe. I opened my eyes and barely saw through the tears that my mother, father and her cousin were right at my bed side. I tried to get up but I couldn't. Through the pain I tried to move my legs but I couldn't. I felt wetness all over my body. I pull the comforter my mother had covered me with before I drifted to sleep and saw that I was swimming in a pool of my own blood. I heard screams filled with agony and pain and then realized I was the one screaming. It was my voice. It was my pain. I couldn't understand what had happened to me. Why was I sleeping in blood? Why was I covered in blood? Why was I in so much pain? What had they done to me?

I trusted my mother, and she had failed me. I trusted that she would protect my baby like a real mother should. I felt like I was watching myself from the side of my room and wondering why I was still screaming. I couldn't make it stop. I would never hold my baby myself and protect her from the cruelty that her own family was doing to her. They had killed my baby. They had taken from me the only reason for me to live. They had taken whatever was left of my soul.

And then, the same feeling of emptiness that I had felt the day I was raped went through my body. Silence fell all around me. I can see everybody around me talking but heard nothing. I look over at the door of my bedroom to see Charbel standing there covering his ears, tears streaming down his face. I looked at him and couldn't help but smile the saddest smile of

despair. I wanted to tell him to take me away. I wanted to tell to make them disappear. I had no idea how, but he understood me. He ran to the room started pushing, punching and screaming at everybody to get out of our room. He had said our room. He was there to protect his me. He was there for me. After they left, he came over and lay right beside me in bed. He put my head on his chest.

“I am so sorry. I couldn’t protect you. This is my fault. Everything that has happened to you is my fault. I am your brother. I should’ve been there. I should’ve protected you even from my own parents. I had no idea they gave you these pills. I should’ve been there the whole time. I am so sorry.” He kept repeating that he was sorry over and over to the point that I couldn’t understand him because he was saying it and crying at the same. It was all over there was no need to say sorry any more. It was too late. He held me until I fell asleep from exhaustion.

I woke up and I was still in my room, still sleeping in my own blood. I barely had the energy to move my head to the side and there it was; the only thing that could save me. I pulled myself up and looked out my bedroom window. After everything that had happened to me in a short period of time, I saw the rain hitting the glass of my window. I pressed my hot cheek against the cold glass. The sky was filled with anger, raging back at me. The reflection I saw in the window revealed to me my hollow soul; tears fell from vacant eyes.

The sound of the storm buffered my cries as lights from the street flashed in front of me, flashed with it the memory of that bare back, the cold rough skin against me, the smell of sweat, mold and cigarettes.

I touched my head and felt the evidence that it wasn’t just a nightmare; my shaved head testified to the truth. I touched my belly, and the emptiness inside testified to my loss. How could this have happened? I wondered over and over. No answer. No reasonable explanation. I was

lost, confused, and the only answer I had was laying there next to my night stand. The answer was in the bottle of pills right in front of me.

My dear mother had forgotten the bottle of Xanax. She had been giving them me for the anxiety and the depression I was in after the rape and my aunt's death. All I saw when I was looking at the bottle was salvation. Release from the pain that I was in. I lost my aunt, Joshua, my best friend, I lost my soul when I was raped, and now I lost my baby. All I could see when I looked at the bottle was the end of pain and maybe a better ending. I took the bottle and swallowed everything that was in it. That was it. I was going to finally sleep. No more nightmares. I would sleep now and wake up and everything would be beautiful again. Maybe I would wake up and all this would be a book that I had been reading a book I hated so much I would burn it to ashes. Maybe the pain would go away. And then there was nothing but darkness.

“Can you hear me? Open your eyes. Open your eyes and tell me your name.”

Was I dead? Was it over? I had no idea who was calling me and why he would want me to open my eyes. Didn't he know that they felt so heavy? The voice was wearing glasses, a medical mask under his chin. He was staring down at me.

“Welcome back. You scared everybody around here. We thought we had lost you.”

I couldn't understand what he meant, but I saw people dressed in white robes roaming all around me. Suddenly, I felt a tube shoved down my nose, needles and tubes in both my arms and wires coming out of my chest. What the hell was going on? I realized I was in the hospital, and these were doctors all around me. I went back to sleep right away because my mind and my body were too tired to analyze anything around me.

I woke up again and the first person I saw in front of me was my mother, crying.

“Why did you that? You could've died?”

“Then you would know how it felt to lose a child.” And I closed my eyes and refused to open them again. But before I could go back to sleep I heard a very serious voice coming for the end of my bed. I opened my eyes and saw a police officer. When he saw that I was awake, he came over and asked me why I had tried to commit suicide. He explained to me that I was a minor and whoever was the cause of this would be held accountable.

“So you can put them in prison and rape them? Because as I know that is the kind of punishment you people hand out. I need you to get away from me and never show me your kind ever again.”

I closed my eyes and hoped that he would just disappear. And, for the first time, my wish actually came true. I saw from the big glass window to my left that he was talking to my father, and then he left and never came back. A few minutes later, my father came over and said:

“You are going to get through this. We are going to take you home soon and everything is going to be alright again.” I looked at him with tears in my eyes.

“Again? Things were never alright in the first place.” And I turned my face and asked him to tell Charbel to talk to me. When Charbel came to the room, I saw in his face the look of defeat, like a bird with a broken wing. He smiled at me.

“I am not going to lie and tell you everything is going to be ok and life is beautiful.” I thought at least he wasn’t demented. I took his hand and said:

“Please, don’t let anyone come near me anymore. That’s all I am asking you.” Before he turned to leave I asked him, “Why didn’t you let die? Why did you let them bring me hear?”

“Because Aunty Nay made me promise that I would never let you hurt yourself. When you were outside with Rania the night she died she told me that she was scared you might hurt yourself, and she made me promise to tell you every time you felt that way to remind you that

you are going to be ok and that she is still watching over you.” Then he left.

Was she watching me the whole time I was in the hospital? Was she disappointed because I tried to end my life? I knew that she would've understood why I did what I did. Maybe if had been alive she would've been the one protecting me and my baby, like the time I ran away from home when I was eleven because I had a fight with my mother over my math homework. She was the one who knew where to find me. She knew I would be hiding in one of those caves leading to the Roman castle on the beach. Wherever she was, the words my brother said lifted my spirits a little bit. Maybe I didn't die because I had a purpose. Maybe my story would be heard one day, and my misery might change another girl's life.

Recovery at home was dreadful. The whole family visited and brought me flowers wishing me get well from the food poisoning they thought I had. My parents lied to the whole world and told them that I got food poisoning from restaurant food. Life after that was worse than before. I couldn't accept living in the same house as my parents anymore.

One night I put my clothes on and walked down to my father's barbershop. My mother and father kept asking where I was going, but I felt no need to tell them anything about me. There was something that had happened to the way I looked at them, and I believed that no amount of affection and care they provided for me would make up for what they had done to me. So without any explanation I walked out of the door. I knew Charbel was still at work, maybe tattooing someone. He always stayed after hours. My father always thought he was just hanging out with some friend. But this time he was alone. When I walked in he was smoking.

“Please don't tell dad that I smoke.”

I smiled and said, “I think I am the last person to tell your dad anything. Are you busy? If not, I want a tattoo. Tonight. I want a Phoenix on my whole back. It might take all night. But I

have time. You can call your parents and tell them that we are going out together.” Immediately, he put on his surgical gloves and uncovered his machine.

“Anything you want little sister. Anything you want.” Little sister he said. Nothing about me felt like I was a little sister. And there I was. I took my shirt off with my back facing my brother, laid on the sofa in the salon and closed my eyes.

“I’m ready whenever you are.” The first time the needle touched my body it tingled; it hurt but it was exhilarating. I needed it. Pain made me feel alive for the first time in a long time. I got used to everybody destroying me, but self-destruction felt surprisingly rewarding. Every time the needle touched my back it felt like a click of a movie that I kept rewinding in my head. Thoughts started racing through my mind. Here I was tattooing the Phoenician Phoenix on my back. A culture that Christian people decided to adopt as an identity so they could reject being called Arabs. We created this fake identity to feel superior to everybody around us. They claimed they were the heirs of Phoenician forefathers. They adopted a lifestyle closer to the French and the West, claiming that they were more civilized than all the Arabs around them.

I saw them—us, all of us—as the most hypocritical people I had ever known. They led a fake life all those centuries, denying that, when came down to it, they were more Arab culturally than they cared to admit. They would rather murder unborn children than face society and say: “Yes, my teenage daughter is pregnant. Get over it.” They would rather claim that Jesus forbade sex before marriage instead of educating their kids about the subject or teaching them to make right choices, regardless of what their neighbors thought of them. They would raise their boys with the utmost freedom yet deny their daughter the simplest joys in life, because society won’t forgive.

History says that the Lebanese people are survivors, fighters that stood in front of the

Othman Empire and won, the Roman Empire and won, French colonization and won. They fought the Syrians, the Palestinians, and the Israelis and even fought each other, yet they survived. But how can they win over their own sense of what is right in society? Maybe once and for all, I thought, we should take a look at each other and stop living the illusion that we are better than anybody else. Maybe we needed to realize that just because we are dressed in the latest European fashion we are no different from the other cultures around us. My thoughts kept racing along with the rage and anger building in me.

After the war I wondered if I ever could forgive my country for the horrible time I went through, now I wondered if I could ever forgive my family or this society I lived in. I started to form a plan.

“Would you mind buckling your seatbelt miss?” I heard the flight attendant say the words, but I had forgotten where I actually was. I looked over and there she stood, a stewardess wearing a maroon skirt. She was leaning on top of me with a smile on her face. I smiled back and fastened my seatbelt. I look over the window to my left, and there it was: Beirut’s International Airport, and I was finally leaving. After my tattoo my parents decided to send me away for some time to my mother’s cousin in the United States. All I knew was that she lived in a state called Washington in a city called Seattle. The only thing I knew about it was that the movie *Sleepless in Seattle* was made there and that it rained a lot. Corruption in the government finally worked in my favor. My father had a friend that was an officer at the American embassy. He had stamped the visa good for five years on my passport without even meeting me.

So here I was confused about whether I should cry or smile. I had just seen my mother

cry saying her goodbyes to me. My father held me so close as he gave me the last piece of advice he could give me: to take care of myself. He said that they would be seeing me soon. My brother was the only one that made my heart break as I said good bye to him. He had said nothing. He just held my face in his hands, kissed my forehead and gave me an envelope to open on the plane.

He looked at me, and he didn't know what to say. I knew that in his eyes he was admitting to failing me all these years.

I had tried to be there for him through his marriage. I had believed my parents' show of tolerance for other religions. All those years growing up, my father taught us to love and respect all people of all religions, especially Muslims, but that came down crashing on both of our heads, my brother and me. Not in a million years would I have thought that my father's beliefs were nothing but an act. The problem was that he, himself, did not really know it either. Once my brother told them that he loved the name of girlfriend and he wanted to marry her and spend his entire life with her, my parents showed their true colors as Lebanese Maronite parents. The idea of tying their life with the life of a Muslim family scared them, and once again a social wall, a social barrier, forbade them from seeing what was obvious: their son's happiness rather than their community and society's judgments. When would it ever stop? When would they just see us in front of them without the shadow of an entire world of norms and rules that would not only degrade us as humans but also create an even deeper valley between Charbel and I and our parents?

I felt that as I held his envelope unopened. I ripped the papers out and there it was a small Phoenician Pendant figurine to put on with a note:

“Just to remember where you came from.”

Where did I come from? I couldn't help but wonder what if my past broke who I was

instead making me who I might be?

The sound of the engine took my mind out of the despair I was sinking in. Suddenly, I felt the plane depart from the ground and then there I was, out of Lebanon, out of my home. I closed my eyes so tight and when I opened them again I looked over and all I saw was the Mediterranean Sea. I felt warm tears falling down my face. Despite the anger I had towards that country it was still my home. Was I ever going to step in that sea ever again? Despite the resentment I felt towards my parents, was I ever going to hold them again? Was I ever going to read with my brother at bedtime again? I did not know what life had in store for me. I did not know if what it had in store was my ultimate destruction or a fresh new beginning. Whatever it was, it would not change what had happened to me, but maybe it would help me heal instead.

Epilogue

An affair with the Mediterranean

Summers on the coast of the Mediterranean are always a journey that takes me from the brutal heat of the August sun to the breeze of the salty air. As I walked by myself around eleven thirty at night, I realized that my relationship with the sea was not just a love affair between a

woman and the endless hope that the horizon brings, it was the therapy I needed every summer in order to survive another year away from home. Looking at the sparkling surface and trying to draw the circle that defines the moon reflected on the water, I wondered if it was cheating on my husband the feelings I had towards the sea. I wondered if I had confided in him that every minute spent away from this place caused the lit candle facing the fire he stirs in my heart to diminish year after year.

About ten years ago, I stood exactly where I was standing today. Except, I remember, my thoughts were different and my feelings weren't that serene. I had anger eating up my insides, consuming my spirit. I remember standing there looking at the exact same moon's reflection wishing any wave would take me away to any country on the other side of the horizon. My dream was to spread my wings wider than this country was allowing me to. To spread them wide to reach a place where existing wasn't such a daily struggle for me. My dream was to feel different sand wiggling between my toes. Anywhere but here!

But today, I take a deep breath; I close my eyes and release my other senses. I want the presence of the sea; I want its entity to fill up my entire body: the smell of the salty water filling my lungs with warmth and tingling through my veins from my nose all the way through my lungs, the sounds of the waves are my personal lullaby, soothing my nerves from my ears to my brain straight to my heart, and the mist of the waves caresses my face like a lover in the blindness of night. My entire body surrenders, my soul belongs to the sea.

Now this thought and this feeling bring a knot to my throat. My home, my neighborhood, my family, my friends! People who loved me unconditionally. A place I was never a stranger. Memories I created in this place would follow me forever: that careless summer with Joshua, my virginity lost behind the rocks, my confined confessions. On this is ground I am not an

immigrant; I am a trouble-making daughter, an annoying sister, a best friend. This place where I belong. Was it cheating? Am I cheating? I wondered! Can you only cheat on a loving husband with another human lover? Isn't cheating the thought that I might want to feel the Mediterranean holding me from underneath? This feeling that my soul is one with the water.

I remember a folk song made by the famous Wadih El Safi called Lebnan Ya Otet Sama, which means Lebanon a piece of sky. That song always brings tears to eyes every time I hear it. And for the first time I feel as one with the same piece of sky. We were one; nothing else mattered for that moment.

Yet again, how can I have been selfish all these years? My heart in one place and my soul in another; my heart belonging to a man, but my soul belonging to the sea. I feel torn between the two. I stand here divided.

Guilt is another heartache that suffocates my thought. I know the life I have beyond this horizon is safe, secure, happy and promising. But have I grown to love chaos? Is it embedded in my being to endlessly crave trouble? The same guilt made me think of the life my husband provided for me and for our daughter throughout these years; a loving comforting home. The life that I had dreamed of having when I used to stand here wishing upon a horizon.

I survived the destruction this same sea brought upon me. Yet I still owe it that I am who I am right now.

Before I leave again and go back to the organized life I have, I have to say goodbye again to the sea. I will always miss people in my heart. I will always leave people behind. The only road to recovery, I believe, is to learn how to deal with it. But how can I accept the fact that I will spend the remainder of my life in a world that will never accept me for who I am. I have to carry the burden of sacrificing one identity in order to earn another. After all, and most

importantly I have to learn not to let anyone other than myself pay the price for my own decisions. The sea had its chance and failed me once before. It failed to embrace my dreams and fulfill my desires. This has to end. We have to part ways. I look at the shiny surface and salute the lover with one single word:

“Farewell.” I knew the following years I would physically stand again surrounded by the same water, yet I would not let it reach my soul.

I suppose it was nothing but an affair with the Mediterranean Sea. And, like all affairs, physical or spiritual, they must end before anyone got hurt.

Yet again, weakness overpowers me every year; I’ve made this promise before.

I stand here facing the sea. I take a poem I hid in my pocket, the same poem I started on the plane the day I left home as a teenager. I open the pages and take a deep breath.

A Cry

A tear

A breath

A whisper

Turmoil, everything went numb

There was nothing left but a squint through unfocused vision

A whisper I heard pleasing me to come back

Come back to the light it wasn’t all lost

The breath I heard was the last one I was meant to hear

A tear

A breath

A whisper

I heard her voice asking why

Why is she asked a lost soul

They say you see a light at the end of a tunnel

Why is it that I heard a voice, a noticeable locution

She kept hollering yet the other end was wresting my remains

A tear

A breath

A whisper

Yet her voice began to allay the demons unraveling

The rage subdued, my whole rescued

Whole again, home again, a fissure was left unattended

A folk tale was told and the voice traveled

A soul was saved by a whimper of a mother

A tear

A breath

A whisper

They all start with once upon a time

That tale told by a fairy one night

A closed eye saw the dust twinkle

A ruffle on my soul felt nothing but a sublime

Ostentatious light I saw traveled into my internal temple

... A tear

Her unblemished tear in her eyes glimpsed, our souls intertwined

... A breath

Her breath annihilated my suffering, an existence of a divine

... A whisper

Her voice's harmony soothed, annihilated a past, a dream I see, tomorrow, a future

... A newborn's cry

... Hope

The air fills my lungs again, and, as I march forward towards the water, I gently lay the pages on the surface of the still shining water. With that I bare everything to the sea.