



We, the Interstices

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In a little quiet bar in one of Beirut's old streets, I sit in seclusion, as is my habit, lost within my own white pages. With letters un-conforming, I try to trace the shape of tables and chairs, of conversations, of sounds of cutlery and plates being removed and moved, and of wafts of cigarette smoke and clouds of hot coffee. Today, I wanted to befriend my thoughts. I have always been consoled by my own solitude and words more so than any human presence in my life.

You sit at a nearby table. You write. You contemplate the smoke of your cigarette rising. And you smile, as if in secret, as if in pleasure. The colour red lingers on your fingers. It deftly spreads itself a little bit more every time your hand draws nearer to your lips. Stealthily, my eyes steal their glances at you.

As if reclaiming a denied right, I contemplate the eloquence your lips could move in red. I indulge in my contemplations and the imagined conversations occupying their space between us, all reigned by a redness, unrivalled. On the table with me sits my companion, an old book by Foucault. I sense your interest when you smile at him in intrigue. But at that moment, Foucault breaks his secret pact with you when you fail to light your cigarette anew. My time has come. With courage I never admitted I possessed, I offer you my lighter. You approach me. You thank me. Your hand is now at level with your mouth. A slim light casts itself on the details of your face. You catch me. You smile with gratitude and pleasure. But you do not move. I resist turning into a child in your eyes. I sedate my beating heart in feigned control as Foucault plunges in to the rescue of us both. You admit your interest in the French philosopher. And three hours wander across from us like a bat of an eyelid.

Our conversations settle at the bottom of our shared bottle of wine, fusing with the remnants of the last few drops, competing for colour with your lips. You share your recent writings with me. We relinquish the reality of the bar around us so that the few hours we spend together pronounce themselves a world more real. Another hour passes before you suddenly rise. 'Until we meet again', you say. And you leave.

I take my time watching you leave. I light my own cigarette, and I start waiting. The streets of this city resemble you; you are both worth waiting for – with every tread from my feet and with every line that I note down on pages which seem to have lost all structure upon meeting you. My words have become loosened, unfettered, undisciplined. I can safely say that today I write without any adherence to consequence. My father has always accused me of living in literature and through it. He has always been disdained by the fact that I do not seem to belong to the real world, that I dwell in between my lines, and imagery, and characters, and stories. So much so that they become my reality. So much so that I divorce the real, tangible world.

I write what I cannot live. Or at least, that is what I had thought. I used to receive his comments with pleasure and derision that I would hide too well. Ever since I was a child, I would await my father's diagnostic comments. He used to regard my poetry far off from what poetry should be, and my prose confused as it impinges on prose's forms and structures. You see, my father, with the assiduousness of a devotee, reveres literature proper, its confines of elegant grammatics, structures, rhymes and rhythms. But I blaspheme every

chance I get, breaking structures and forms that confine the literary content of a prose or poetic text, and constrict its movement and the flow of its imagery.

Today I am certain of the extent to which my father is at fault. Today, after meeting you, after longing and waiting for you, I discover that I can live my life the way I do through books and novels, the way I experience poetry, and even the way I write it. Today, I discover that I am free when I write, and that I do not substitute life by transforming it into a literary text. On the contrary. Each morning when my words flow in their novelty on a new white page, I am birthed anew. I tidy random thoughts, I scatter others rhythmically, and I gather what the dreams and the nightmares of the night before have left behind. I discover that I am closer to myself every time I add a new line to my little black book.

Today I discover how much you resemble my city and my poems, in the image best fitting to how I envision you: rebellious, free, beautiful. So I wait for you. I take comfort in absence. I indulge in waiting and I substitute you with writing through you, and at rare times in your name, and even more rare a time, about you. I search for beginnings to return to you, to find my way back to you. But by nearing you through writing, I get closer to the narrator and the writer in me simultaneously. The poetic I fuses with the creative process that engenders it so that all imagined possibilities become realised truths through articulation and transmutation. My eloquence conspires against me, so I transform my reticence and silence in waiting into interstices of speech, that my pen would no sooner infiltrate and tear apart and dissect. So I find us in the details. My journey begets no torment, but a pleasure of seeking what lies in between the lines and the stanzas, a pleasure in relishing the aesthetics of language, the eloquence of speech and meaning in hypothetical worlds. I write to strike out each line and start anew. Every beginning is potential for the discovery of an interstice, or an image, or a reflection. Every novelty is a meaning undressed and a contouring of the details of my becoming. My journey becomes transformative, a journey towards self-realisation and unsilencing, a journey towards writing over the secrecy that have always penned my thoughts and constricted it under pseudonyms and heteronyms and voices and a foreign tongue no one will understand should they find the drafts tucked in hiding under my bed.

You once told me that you started writing after listening to me performing at a poetry reading. You said I had inspired you. But you have never once written to me. That did not sadden me. On the very contrary. I do not seek to hold the burden of those to whom or for whom you write. I have no ambition in being turned into a fictional character you can control whenever she in turn takes over your thoughts and feelings. It is enough for me that I be an incentive, and an inspiration of passion that will sketch the beginning of a new poem or a new story. I have no ambition in being a heroine of a single story, or its victim. I cannot accept to be reduced into a mere possibility, submissive under a single strike of pen, or a single blotch of ink. I refuse to write about you for the same reasons. You shall instead be the multitude that contains my passion for writing and my obsession with beginnings, for worlds that do not resemble one another in anything, for worlds that have nothing in common save the fact that it is I who created them. So I move across them as I please. I sink in beginnings and recreate them. I reorder their events, their history, and their dates, like you do your lipstick, each day in front of your mirror.

I start anew each morning. I float around the first beginning which resembles you in its renewal, and my relationship with you. So that each time I see you, you resemble the first moment of creation, the first beginning: rebellious, fleeting, violent, soft, present, absent, eternally renewed, for you do not repeat yourself. A moment I wait for as I wait for you. Each morning is new. A thought that departed from the moment I first met you and branched out from there in multiple possibilities and along different paths – like the full redness of your lips when you speak, the wine streaks still stuck to our glasses intoxicating our conversations, and the voluminous drafts of poetry that we birth.