

A LETTER BEFORE WE BEGIN

Let me tell you where the title came from.

A long time ago, a friend told me she had seen a reel on Instagram. It showed the POV of a woman who had to choose between two options. Option one: crying in a luxury car. Option two: laughing on a bike.

And as we already know, the majority did not choose either of those two options.

They chose: *laughing in a luxury car*.

Ha. Clever!

So the majority wanted to laugh in a luxury car, which tells us something. Laughing means feeling happy, right? And I think we can say that happiness is one of the basic needs of our soul. Maybe even the ultimate goal. But here's the thing: we often misinterpret what happiness actually is.

The truth is, true happiness is not a temporary feeling.

Think about it this way. Imagine you run into a long-time best friend on the street, and you agree to have a nostalgic conversation over coffee at your favorite café. You will be happy at that moment, genuinely, fully happy. Maybe it's one of the best moments of your week. But if you fail to maintain that friendship and eventually lose

that person again, the happiness fades. It can't sustain itself because it depended entirely on a single moment.

True happiness is not a feeling in a moment. It is an overall quality of life.

The Greeks had a word for this. They called it *eudaimonia*, roughly translated as "human flourishing" or "the highest good." Aristotle, who gave us the idea, meant something more durable than happiness: a state of living well, achieving one's full potential, experiencing deep fulfillment across a whole life. Unlike the temporary kind of happiness, *eudaimonia* is about a life of virtue, purpose, and genuine growth.

My favorite Indonesian writer, Henry Manampiring, in his book *The Compass*, translates *eudaimonia* simply as: a good life. *A quality life. A flourishing life.*

(I guess now you already know the reason behind the title of this book, and my website too!)

And here is the most important thing about *eudaimonia*, the thing that changes how we see everything else:

Because a good life is not a feeling, it doesn't depend on circumstances. You can have a good life even on the days you feel sad. And you can be smiling every day and still not have a good life. Don't judge a book by its cover. The quality of a life is built quietly, from the inside out, through character, through virtue, through the slow daily

accumulation of small right choices that eventually, without announcement, become who you are.

Aristotle gave us four virtues to build on: practical wisdom, frugality, courage, and fairness. Not abstract ideals, but practical ones, lived in the small daily decisions. Which coffee to order and which to walk past. Whether to speak the unpopular truth or stay quiet. How to be fair to your children without treating them identically. How to be brave in the ordinary moments, not just the grand ones.

These four virtues run through everything in this book, even when they are not named directly. They are the bones underneath the stories.

Cheers for a Good Life.

And I want to say one more thing about the title. You might notice I didn't write "Cheers to a good life." That would be a toast toward something ahead, something we're still hoping for, still working toward. I chose "for" deliberately. Cheers for a good life means we're already in it. Already grateful for it. Already living it, imperfectly, quietly, one ordinary Tuesday at a time. Not a wish. A celebration.

Not cheers for a perfect life. Not cheers for an impressive one, or a wealthy one, or one that looks a certain way from the outside. Cheers for the life that is

genuinely, durably, quietly good, where it counts most: on the inside.

I want to tell you something else before you read a single page of this book.

This is not a book about having it all figured out.

I haven't. I still rush sometimes, through conversations I should have savored, through mornings I should have held a little longer. I still catch myself performing, comparing, questioning. I still have seasons where the noise outside is louder than the quiet I've worked so hard to find inside.

But I've also learned, slowly, imperfectly, one small moment at a time, that a good life doesn't announce itself. It doesn't arrive with a dramatic before-and-after. It doesn't trend. It doesn't ask to be watched.

A good life is not something that arrives. It is something that accumulates, through the small, repeated, ordinary choices that nobody photographs and nobody applauds, until one day you look up and realize the life you've been quietly building is the one you actually wanted.

It just shows up, quietly, in a café in Jakarta where a couple is laughing at something most people would call a red flag. In a TV show you watched at nineteen that turns out to have been teaching you about money all along. In

the footsteps of your children, who are watching everything, everything, even when you think they aren't.

That's what this book is made of. Not grand theories. Not ten-step frameworks. Just moments I noticed, and what they said when I stopped rushing long enough to listen.

Let me confess.

Before I started writing, seriously, consistently, as a practice rather than an impulse, even though I felt pretty happy, there was this nagging emptiness. It seemed like something was still missing. I always tried to live a good life, be a better person, stay productive, but I knew deep down that I was capable of so much more than what I was doing back then.

I've always loved writing. I even had a blog once, but I kind of abandoned it when my focus shifted to other things. I always had so much to say in my head. And one day *I thought: this is it, I need to write again, no matter what*. So, just like a prophet who just got a revelation, I opened my laptop and started writing.

Honestly? It's one of the best choices I've ever made.

Sure, I want people to read my stuff and think it's decent. I'm just being real here. But that's not my main goal. What really matters to me is feeling complete and content by doing something good. Writing pushes me to

read more books. Reading helps me learn what's worth keeping and what's worth releasing. And through that, I try to evolve into a better person every single day. So it's way more than just writing, it has so much more depth.

Darius Foroux, in *Focus on What Matters*, put it clearly: the secret to living a happy, energetic, and good life is to engage in the activities that bring us fulfillment and joy and to give them our full focus. Seneca said the same thing two thousand years earlier in his own way: do something that will enrich your life, and give it your complete attention. Not for applause. Not for followers. Not for the validation the modern world dangles in front of us, whether it's the blue check mark, the likes, or the numbers climbing. Those are distractions. Seeking recognition pulls our attention away from what actually matters: the inner strength and self-reliance that come from real skill, discipline, and purpose.

Because here's what I've come to understand: fame can fade. Money can disappear. But a well-trained mind and a steady character? Those are assets no one can take from you.

That is what writing became for me. Not a platform. Not a performance. A practice. The place where I figure out what I actually think, where I remember what I actually believe, where, through the process of trying to

say something true, I become slightly more capable of living it.

This book is that practice, made permanent. Not a record of conclusions. A record of the thinking. The essays began online. Some of them you may have already read. Here, they've been expanded, arranged, and built into something that moves. Not a collection. A conversation.

And I offer it to you the way you offer anything that matters, not as an answer, but as company for the road.

My name is *Kirana*. My middle name, I always joke, is "observer." I am a writer and a life coach, and for the past several years, I've been thinking out loud on a small corner of the internet called *Cheers for a Good Life*. That space began as a place to put thoughts that were too long for a caption and too personal for a seminar. It became something I didn't expect: a record of one woman trying to figure out how to live well.

Not impressively. Not loudly. Just well.

I am Indonesian, a mother, a wife, a woman in my forties who came to Aristotle late and Marcus Aurelius even later, and who found them, finally, through an Indonesian writer writing about a Greek philosopher's idea, and felt the particular relief of someone who had

been quietly thinking something for years and found it written down clearly at last.

Living in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, and without doubt its busiest, you learn quickly that if you wait for the environment to become quiet before you find peace, you will wait forever. The noise doesn't stop. The traffic doesn't clear. The city doesn't slow down for you. You have to build the quiet inside yourself. That's what this book is, really, a record of how I've been trying to do exactly that.

The ancient questions about what makes a life good are the same ones we're all asking between school runs and board meetings and 3 a.m. scrolling.

Am I doing this right? Is this enough? Is this, finally, the life I meant to be living?

This book will not ask you to wake up at 4:00 a.m., maximize your productivity, or manifest a brand-new identity. We are told constantly that to have a better life, we must follow a rigid framework or become entirely different people. I don't think that's true.

But I also don't think a good life is something you just stumble upon or wait for. A good life is built. It is constructed quietly, daily, out of the small materials we already have. It is found in the way we direct our attention, the focus we give to our work, and the

boundaries we draw around our peace. It is about the things we repeat constantly, day by day, until they become habits. And those habits, over time, build our character. And a steady character will quietly rewrite our entire life.

There is an old proverb that captures this perfectly: *Watch your thoughts, and they become your words; watch your words, and they become your actions; watch your actions, and they become your habits; watch your habits, and they become your character; watch your character, and it becomes your destiny.*

A good life isn't loud. It isn't dramatic. It's just someone, choosing well, quietly, repeatedly, without announcement, until the choosing becomes who they are.

I think about the good life the way I think about good coffee: it doesn't need to be complicated to be exactly right. It needs to be made with care, savored without hurry, and shared with someone worth talking to.

The essays in this book have been sorted into five rooms, the way I think about the good life itself.

The first room is about **how we think** - the philosophy underneath daily choices, the Stoic wisdom that says we cannot control the wind, only the sail, the essentialist reminder that almost nothing is essential, and almost everything can wait.

The second room is about **how we love** - marriage, parenting, friendship, the invisible architecture of a family that makes people feel safe enough to become themselves.

The third room is about **how we use what we have** - money, time, generosity, and the uncomfortable question of whether our good deeds are as clean as we'd like to believe.

Three rooms. One house. One life, lived as fully and as honestly as I know how.

I should tell you who I had in mind when I wrote this.

I thought about the woman in her forties who suspects that the life she's been building is good, genuinely good, but has never quite stopped long enough to feel it.

I thought about the woman who is carrying more than anyone has officially assigned to her, and who has never once been asked if the weight is too much.

I thought about the parent who is slowly understanding that parenting isn't something you do to your children, but something you *do to yourself* first, in front of them.

I thought about the reader who picks up self-help books and finishes them feeling vaguely inadequate, like

they've been handed a recipe they don't have the ingredients for.

I thought about the person sitting with a nagging emptiness they can't name, the one who has everything that's supposed to work and is quietly wondering why it doesn't feel like enough yet. The one who knows, somewhere underneath the busyness, that there is something they were meant to be doing that they haven't started yet. Or started and abandoned. Or are doing quietly, without letting themselves take it fully seriously.

I thought about the young person in their twenties who wants to build their life right from the beginning, not after spending a decade building the wrong one and having to start over. You're earlier than you think. That's a gift.

I thought about the person with no children who wonders if this book is for them. It is. The parenting chapters are really about character, about who you are when someone is watching and learning from you. That's not just children. That's everyone.

I thought about the man who secretly wants to think more carefully about how to live but hasn't found a book that feels like it was written for him too. This one is.

I thought about the reader whose life isn't actually in crisis, whose life is, honestly, pretty good, but who has this quiet feeling that good could be fuller. Richer. More

intentional. You don't have to be drowning to want to swim better.

And I thought about the reader somewhere else in the world, a different city, a different language, different everything, who wonders whether an Indonesian woman's Jakarta-shaped, coffee-drinking, occasionally-sandal-throwing perspective will reach them. It will. The questions are the same everywhere. Only the coffee is different.

Start. Or start again. Seriously, this time.

And I thought, honestly, about my children, who will someday be adults sorting through what their mother left behind, looking for the version of me that existed before she became just "Mom." This book is partly for them. A record of how I tried to see things. What I believed. What I came back to, again and again, when the world felt too fast and too loud.

I'm not asking you to agree with everything I've written here.

I'm asking you to read slowly.

To let something linger, the way a good conversation does, even after you've closed the page. To notice the moments in your own days that are quietly trying to tell you something about who you are, what you value, and

what a good life might look like for you, in your city, in your family, in your particular, unrepeatable life.

Because that's always been the point of this.

Not to hand you my life as a template, but to walk beside you, the way a friend does, while you find your own.

There's an idea I return to, from Aristotle, the man who started all of this for me. He said that a good life wasn't about achievement or recognition. It was about how one lives, with character, with balance, with the feeling that life is complete rather than merely impressive.

Eudaimonia. A flourishing life.

Quiet. Ordinary. Unimpressive, perhaps.

And still, deeply, unmistakably good.

You can have a good life even on the days you feel sad. And you can have a bad life even on the days everything looks fine. The quality of a life is not measured in moments. It is measured in the slow, daily, honest accumulation of who you are becoming.

I hope you find something in these pages that helps.

And I hope that somewhere, in the middle of reading, you pause and realize: *Oh. This is already mine.*

That pause? That's *eudaimonia* saying *hello*.

Love,

Kirana Sidin - Jakarta, Indonesia

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PART I:

How To Think

"Life is simple, but we insist on making it
complicated." — Confucius

"Remember that very little is needed to make life
happy." — Marcus Aurelius

CHAPTER 1

Remember That You Will Die

It was a quiet and slow morning. The kids had already left for school. Breakfast made, lunch boxes packed, the house suddenly still in the way it only is after everyone has gone. It was just me, my book, and my coffee, with my husband in the other room, the particular domestic peace of a morning that belongs to you.

I love slow mornings. They are a real luxury to me. Something I genuinely value, not as an indulgence but as a necessity, the kind of beginning that makes the entire day feel meaningful rather than merely managed.

And then my phone buzzed. A text from friends, asking me to join them for coffee at a café.

Now, for your information, I am, deep inside, an extrovert. I gain energy from social interaction. I love being around people. So that text was a genuine temptation. I could already imagine the fun, the conversations, the laughs, and, not to mention, the coffee. Should I join them, or should I stay?

I'll tell you the answer in a moment. But first, let me ask you something.

Have you ever said yes to something and felt, immediately afterward, a kind of empty hole in your chest? A quiet regret. As if it were something you didn't truly mean, something you weren't truly ready for. You said yes because saying no felt rude, or because you didn't want to disappoint anyone, or because everyone else was going, and not going would make you the difficult one.

I've felt this. I think most of us have.

We say yes because we want to be liked. Because approval feels good and keeps our place in the social landscape. Because saying no risks confrontation, and we would rather avoid it. Because somewhere in the back of our minds, FOMO whispers: *what if you miss something?* And so we go. And halfway through, we wish we hadn't. And we come home empty in a way that has nothing to do with how the evening actually went.

This is what happens when yes becomes a default rather than a decision. When we haven't yet learned to ask the question that changes everything:

Is this truly essential? Will saying yes to this serve the life I'm actually building, or will it simply fill the space that is currently, beautifully, mine?

Back to my morning. Can you guess what I decided?

Yes, correct. I stayed home.

Not because I wouldn't have enjoyed my friends. God knows I would have. But at that moment, the slow morning was what truly mattered. It set the tone for my entire day. Reading in the morning made me feel accomplished, grounded, like myself. Had I gone, I would have been happy in the moment, but I would have arrived home feeling like I'd traded something essential for something pleasant. And those are not the same thing.

I tell you this not because staying home instead of having coffee is a remarkable act of discipline. It isn't. But because the practice of that question, asked before the yes, before the habit of compliance, before the anxiety of disappointing someone takes over, is where essentialism actually lives. Not in the grand decisions. It lives on an ordinary Tuesday morning, when your friends text and you have to decide, in real time, what your time is actually for.

There was a version of me who said yes to almost everything, who attended because I was invited, who showed up because it seemed rude not to, who filled her calendar as evidence of a life well-lived and arrived at the end of each week wondering why she felt hollow. But that was so yesterday.

That version learned, slowly, that saying no to something is not the same as rejecting the person asking.

The decision and the relationship are separate things. Protecting one does not require damaging the other.

And then one evening, a few months after I had begun practicing this, we boarded a plane.

It started as an ordinary delay.

Our flight from Kuala Lumpur was pushed back five hours, from 19.25 PM to 00.30AM, which is the kind of delay that tests everything: your patience, your sleepiness, your ability to find something worthwhile to do in an airport at ten o'clock at night. My husband and I did what we always do when life refuses to go according to plan. We ate. We drank coffee. We listened to music and watched a movie, and decided, without making a production of it, that this situation was beyond our control and therefore not worth our suffering.

Many other passengers were in exactly the same situation. Why should we feel sorry for ourselves when everyone around us was waiting too?

This, I realize, is a small thing. But small acts of acceptance are how the Stoic habit is actually built, not in dramatic moments of crisis, but in delayed flights and wrong orders and traffic that doesn't move. You practice letting go of the small things so that when the large things arrive, you are not starting from zero.

We finally boarded just before midnight. As the plane settled on the runway, one of the flight attendants called out a passenger's name. I wondered, briefly, what was happening. It turned out to be a birthday. With five minutes before midnight, the whole plane sang together. After a long, tired night, it was the kind of small sweetness that makes you feel unexpectedly glad to be exactly where you are.

Then the plane took off. I closed my eyes to sleep.

And then the shaking began.

The plane dropped. Not metaphorically, but physically dropped, the way a roller coaster does, that sickening moment when gravity asserts itself and your stomach rises and everything you thought was solid temporarily isn't.

When I think about it now, I can say with certainty that it was the most terrifying flight of my life. I have faced heavy turbulence before, but nothing like this. This was another level. In that minute, as the plane fell, a single thought crossed my mind: Death is close. I asked myself, *Is this it?*

Though every instinct wanted to deny what was happening, I surrendered to whatever would come next. I pictured my children's faces and felt a heavy, sorrowful

grief at the thought of them growing up without us. My husband held my hand, and later, he told me he felt the same way. But God is good. He spared us, allowing us and every passenger on that flight to safely reunite with our families.

Before that night, I always carried a quiet, perhaps arrogant, assumption. I believed that because I tried to live a healthy life, live a normal life, and follow His commands, death was something far away, something waiting for me at the end of a long, old life. I believed God would keep me safe for a very long time.

Then, in a single minute, He answered that assumption. It was a hard lesson, but I paid it willingly. Perhaps God wanted to remind me that I am not special, and I shouldn't walk through the world feeling as if I am. As someone who claims to study Stoicism, I should have remembered the phrase *Memento Mori* — or rather, remember that you will die. That phrase does not exist to cause despair; it exists to keep us humble. It is a reminder not to become overly confident in our health, our power, or our time.

Now, I have to remind myself of this truth every single morning before the noise of the day begins:

"I could leave life right now. Let that determine what I do, say, and think."

"Remember, time is limited. Is this how you want to spend it?"

"If today was my last, did I live the way I wanted?"

That short minute on the plane succeeded in rewriting my perspective. Life is short, and death is near. Knowing that our moments are limited is exactly what turns the ordinary into the extraordinary: my child's laugh, a dinner with friends, or the morning coffee made by my husband.

Memento Mori: remember that you will die. Not as a morbid exercise, not as an invitation to despair, but as a daily discipline of perspective. Marcus Aurelius, who governed an empire and still found time to write some of the most quietly radical philosophy ever put to paper, used it as a kind of mental reset: I could leave life right now. *Let that determine what I do and say and think.*

It is not meant to scare us, but to wake us up. Stop treating today like it is unlimited. Focus on what matters. Love louder. Fail faster. Live deeper.

I had always understood this idea intellectually. I had written about it, thought about it, and considered myself reasonably Stoic in my daily life. I let go of things I cannot control. I try not to fight traffic, metaphorical or otherwise.

But the plane taught me that understanding something in the mind and having it arrive in the body are two entirely different experiences. I needed to feel death close before I could really understand what the Stoics were pointing at: not morbidity, but liberation. The freedom that comes from accepting, at a cellular level, that time is finite and therefore every moment of it is a choice.

These morning questions became my anchor. Not a ritual, not a performance. Just a quiet check-in before the day gets loud. And they needed a home, a practical framework that could turn the clarity of *Memento Mori* into actual daily decisions, a way of being applied not just in the dramatic moments but in the ordinary ones. Tuesday morning. The lunch decision. The meeting invitation. The shirt in the shop window.

I found that home in a book.

I still remember the first time I read *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* by Greg McKeown. I want to be honest about what it felt like: it was like someone had put language to something I had been trying to live without knowing how to name it. Like a door I had been pushing against for years suddenly opened because someone showed me where the handle was.

I need to say something clearly before I go further. The first compass of my life is the *Qur'an*: my faith, my deepest orientation, the source from which everything else flows. I don't separate that from the way I live; it is the way I live.

Stoicism has been my base philosophy, the lens through which I understand difficulty, impermanence, and what is and isn't within my control. Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Seneca; not just books I've read, but a way of seeing I've carried for years.

And Essentialism has been the practical expression of both. Greg McKeown's framework is, I believe, Stoicism in modern language, asking the same question Marcus Aurelius asked two thousand years ago, just in a different century: *Is this truly essential?* It is the operating system that runs underneath my daily decisions. The framework that makes the clarity of Memento Mori actionable in the middle of an ordinary Wednesday.

Together, they have shaped everything.

The central idea of Essentialism is deceptively simple: almost nothing is essential. And we spend most of our lives treating non-essential things as if they are.

Not out of stupidity. Not out of laziness. But because the world is extraordinarily good at making the non-essential feel urgent. Every notification, every invitation, every opportunity that arrives dressed as an obligation. The world presents them as things we must attend to, and we comply, and the days fill up, and we arrive at the end of them feeling busy and somehow hollow.

McKeown calls this the paradox of success: the more options we have, the harder it becomes to choose the right ones. The more capable we become, the more things we are asked to do. And without a clear internal compass, a genuine, examined sense of what actually matters, we become very good at doing many things that add up to very little.

I know this feeling intimately. There was a time when my calendar was full in a way that felt like evidence of a life well-lived. I attended events because I was invited. I said yes because saying no felt rude. I stayed busy because stillness felt suspicious, like I was falling behind in a race I had never signed up for.

And then Essentialism arrived and asked a question I had been avoiding:

Is this truly essential?

Not: is this good? Not: is this interesting? Not: will people think less of me if I decline? Just: *is this essential?*

To my goals, my values, the life I am actually trying to build?

The answer, most of the time, was no.

I used to attend fashion shows. I was invited, and I went because I was invited. And honestly? There was a version of me that genuinely enjoyed them: the beautiful clothes, the lights, the atmosphere, the sense of being somewhere that felt important.

But I sat with the essentialist question long enough to realize: this is not essential. It does not align with my values. It does not move me toward the life I am building. It is, in the most precise sense of the word, non-essential. Pleasantly non-essential, but non-essential nonetheless.

So I stopped going.

The only exception I make now is when I go to support a dear friend or a colleague who is a designer. When I sit in the audience of their show, I am not there for the spectacle, the fashion, or the scene. I am there to honor a relationship. Under an essentialist lens, that relationship is what is essential. The fashion show is merely the room where I choose to show up for them.

This sounds small. It was not small. Because the fashion show was easy. What Essentialism asked me to give up after the fashion shows were the things that were

harder: the commitments that felt important, the relationships that required constant availability, the version of myself that said yes to everything because she was afraid of what no would cost her.

And what Essentialism gave me in return, this is the part people don't talk about enough, was something that looks unremarkable from the outside and feels like genuine luxury from the inside. A slow morning with a book and a hot cup of coffee made by someone you love. The freedom to look at a high-gloss invitation or a trending demand and say, without guilt: *"That is beautiful, but it is not mine."*

That, I have come to believe, is what real luxury actually feels like. Not the fashion show. The morning I stayed home from it.

Essentialism also changed how I begin each day. I used to wake up and immediately reach for my phone, not for anything specific, just the reflexive sweep of notifications, news, messages, the world's morning delivery of things requiring my attention before I had even decided what my own morning required.

A friend once showed up at my door breathless about a politician's scandal she'd read in the news. She'd been consuming it all morning, visibly disturbed. I had heard

the same story, it had reached me too, but I had chosen not to open that door. Not because the information wasn't real, but because what it would cost me in energy and attention was more than it was worth. Almost nothing in the morning news is essential. Almost all of it can wait.

On the days when the stock market is falling, and there have been days, particularly in the aftermath of global economic disruptions, when the numbers on the screen looked genuinely frightening, I have practiced the same discipline. I can see the floating loss. I note it. I do not refresh the app every fifteen minutes because refreshing the app adds nothing to the account and removes something from the peace I need to think clearly.

What I can control: preparation, diversification, the decisions made before the storm. What I cannot control: the storm itself.

And then there is multitasking, which I used to believe was a skill worth cultivating. Cooking while on the phone. Ironing while watching a Korean drama. Reading while half-listening to a conversation. I was always doing two things at once, congratulating myself on efficiency, and arriving at the end of each day with everything half-done and nothing fully experienced.

The essentialist lesson: do one thing. The thing in front of you. Fully, for the time it requires. Then the next thing.

McKeown gives us four practical elements to hold this together. Essential intent - knowing your purpose so clearly that every decision becomes simpler.

Essential questions - asking honestly and regularly: *is this truly essential?*

Essential criteria - clear standards for what earns a yes. And essential boundaries - the ones that protect what matters most.

My friends know that weekends are not available. Not because I don't love them. Because weekends are family time, and family time is essential, and essential things require protection from the world's constant requests.

Boundaries, I have come to understand, are not walls. They are declarations of what matters.

But before I tell you about that, let me tell you how I got here.

Three years ago, I was new to the term Stoicism. I had heard the word, vaguely, in the way you hear words that belong to a world you haven't entered yet. And then I started reading. And slowly, without drama, everything clicked.

The Stoics, including Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Epictetus, were not academics writing from ivory towers. They were people under enormous pressure: an emperor, a slave, a man in exile. They were writing about real life, real loss, real moments of wanting to lose their temper or their hope or their faith that any of it mattered. And they were writing about how to stay steady anyway.

"We do not react to events. We react to our judgment of them."

That line changed something for me. Because if our suffering is produced by our interpretation rather than by the event itself, then the suffering is, at least in part, ours to manage. Not always. Not completely. But enough to make a difference.

I started practicing the four Stoic virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and self-control. Not as rules to follow, but as questions to ask. *Is this wise? Is this just? Am I being brave here, or merely comfortable? Am I in control of myself?*

Stoicism became, quietly, my base philosophy. The operating system underneath everything else.

I'm telling you this because I want you to know that none of what I'm sharing in this book comes from a place of having always known it. I found it slowly, imperfectly,

in the middle of an ordinary life. And that, I think, is exactly the right place to find it.

Amor Fati. Love your fate. Not resignation, but love. The embrace of what is, not because it is always comfortable, but because it is yours, and it is real, and it is, in ways that take a long time to understand, exactly sufficient.

Darius Foroux writes: *"If you hold happiness above all, everything else must be valued less."* The moment happiness becomes the goal, the thing we are optimizing for, measuring ourselves against, chasing through the right circumstances, we have made it fragile. Because happiness arrives and departs on its own schedule, indifferent to our wanting.

But a good life? That is something we can actually build. Moment by moment, decision by decision, slow morning by slow morning.

I think about that birthday song at midnight on a delayed flight. Five minutes before the new year of someone's life, strangers singing together on a plane, tired and a little grumpy, yet unexpectedly moved. A moment that existed only because the flight was late. A memory that would never have happened in the version of events that went according to plan.

There is one more thing I want to tell you about accepting what we cannot control.

It was April 26, 2025. My second daughter was about to have her sweet seventeen garden party at our place. The plan was simple: a garden party. All outdoors. All beautiful. We checked the forecast, and it looked like the weather would be on our side. The dry season was coming. It had been a week since the rain had last appeared. We were confident. The food was ready, the decorations were all set, the sound system was good to go, the guests were rolling in. Everything was going smoothly.

And then, out of nowhere, a small thunderstorm decided to crash the sky. I was in denial. It was just thunder, right? It couldn't be a sign of anything. (*Oh, silly me.*)

And then, bam. The rain showed up. Crashed the party. Acting like it was the main character. Did it really forget that it was my daughter's special day?

What happened next was history. We managed to continue the party and save the food, the most important thing, obviously. Even though the plan was ruined and the decorations were messy as hell, the party went on. My daughter and her friends were still happy. The night was saved.

But here's the thing: this was already the fourth time I had tried to throw an outdoor party only to be betrayed by the rain. Fourth time. For crying out loud. At some point, you have to wonder: is the rain personally against me? Jealous, maybe?

(I'm kidding. Mostly.)

After the party, I started thinking: why did I keep blaming the rain? Because honestly, rain is a gift from God, especially in Islam. It is seen as a blessing, a sign that He cares. It waters the plants, fills the rivers, and is considered a perfect time for prayer. When it rains, we Muslims should appreciate it. So the rain wasn't against me at all. God sent it to bless us. *(I really want to keep believing this and hold on to this positive vibe.)*

Which means, if someone had to be blamed, it was me.

I kept throwing outdoor parties without preparing for rain. Four times. What on earth was I thinking?

The Stoics have a practice for exactly this kind of failure: *Premeditatio Malorum*, the deliberate premeditation of bad outcomes. Instead of pretending bad things won't happen, we calmly imagine them in advance. Not to be pessimistic. To be resilient, realistic, and genuinely grateful for what we have when things go right.

If I had practiced *Premeditatio Malorum* properly, I would have had a backup plan. Kept the food inside. Had a tent ready. Prepared for the rain instead of confidently assuming it wouldn't come, for the fourth time.

Amor Fati and *Premeditatio Malorum* are the same philosophy viewed from different directions. One says: love what comes, even when it's not what you planned. The other says: plan for what might come, so you can love it when it arrives.

Together, they are the complete Stoic answer to a rained-out garden party.

And to everything else.

The morning after that flight I sat with a cup of coffee made by my husband in my hand. The house was quiet. And for the first time in a long time, I felt what I can only describe as gratitude, not for anything in particular. Just for the morning. Just for being there to feel it.

Because one day, you won't get a "later."

"I could leave life right now. Let that determine what I do and say and think." — Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*.