

Write Me a Cup

I look at my watch and hurry down the lane. They will all probably be there waiting for me by now. I close my umbrella and push the heavy door of the café, trying to balance my bag, notebook and phone in my free hand. *There they are*. The three of them are in the middle of a conversation and don't notice me until I approach them.

"Good afternoon all. Thank you again for agreeing to meet me! I'm sorry I'm late, my train got delayed," I offer with a smile as they make room for me.

"No problem, we were just catching up," Diego nods. "Would you like some coffee as well?"

"You should try the Chai Latte," Freya sighs with delight, "they make the best one in town."

"I will have one then," I leave my coat and bag before making my way to the barista. They all sound so friendly that the part of me that was previously nervous is now buzzing with excitement to start those interviews.

"So, should we begin?" I ask when I return to the table and start setting up my recorder.

"Sure, we are all yours." Maria salutes me with her tea.

"Fantastic! Would it be okay to start with you then, Maria?" I receive a nod from her as she is sipping her drink. "Thank you for meeting me today, Maria," I start as the green light indicates I'm recording. "I would like to talk about this club the three of you set up during your undergrad years, *Write me a cup*. How did this idea come to life?"

"Well, it all started as a joke really," she shrugs. "We were, in fact, here, in this very café, and we were all chatting about the usual things... Assignments, probably?" She chuckles and turns to Diego, who nods. "One thing led to another, and we got talking about how we wish there was something that would keep us accountable with our creative endeavours as the university was making it difficult to still focus on our hobbies. That is pretty much what got us thinking about such a club and a few weeks later, *Write me a cup* came into life."

"I know that at that time, you were studying Creative Writing. But this wasn't your first degree, right?"

"That's right, yeah. I was 30 when I came to study here. Before this, I did 6 years of medicine and practised for another 3 before I realised this wasn't my vocation, and I wasn't happy. However, back where I am from, you don't really have much choice in terms of what you can study. The options are three: you are either a medic, a lawyer, or a failure," she laughs lightly and shakes her head. "Jokes aside, when I was fresh out of high school, my parents persuaded me to study medicine, but a part of me always knew that writing was my passion. So fast forward, one day I decided that it was high time to do something I loved,

and I moved here," she rests her hands around the steaming mug. "I admit that I was worried at first, with me being foreign and being older than most first-year students, but it was this very club that made me feel welcomed."

"This is very beautiful," I smile back at her. "So, what would you say it means for you to collaborate with others in this way?"

"Hm, it means that you belong," Maria pauses for a moment. "That you have this safe space where you can share your thoughts and your passion, and where there are others who want to listen and do the same. It makes you feel part of something bigger than yourself."

"Thank you, Maria. And lastly, I know that you recently published your third poetry collection. Would you like to share something from it with us?"

"Of course," she rejoices and takes out her poetry collection. "Let me see."

Why is it so that we never realise
how good a moment is until
it turns into a memory?
Until the laughter and the jokes
are but a distant echo in the wind?
Until the people smiling
are but strangers from some dreams?
Happy ones, yet simply
untraceable ghosts of the past.

Maria finishes reading, and the rest of us snap our fingers in appreciation.

"I must add," she says, "that this wouldn't have been possible without Diego. Throughout those meetings we had with *Write me a cup*, it was him who gave me the confidence to pursue publishing my works and helped me believe in them."

"Ah, you flatter me," he grins. "You just needed a little push to realise that you are good at this."

"May I turn to you, Diego, now then?" I ask.

"It would be my pleasure!"

"So, what did you think about the club when you all first started meeting?"

"I remember being so excited before every meeting we had. And as the word got out, more and more people started joining us until it became this regular thing we did every two

weeks. And let me tell you, the atmosphere was impeccable! Even the café owners said so after we started gathering there. Remember?" he turns to the two girls. "They said they were so happy to see us every time as we brought this new creative energy to the place. And no two meetings were ever the same. It all felt alive if you know what I mean? Each time, different people would join us and collaborate on various things, and the vibe of the café would change with them."

"And what was the greatest thing that happened to you thanks to *Write me a cup*?"

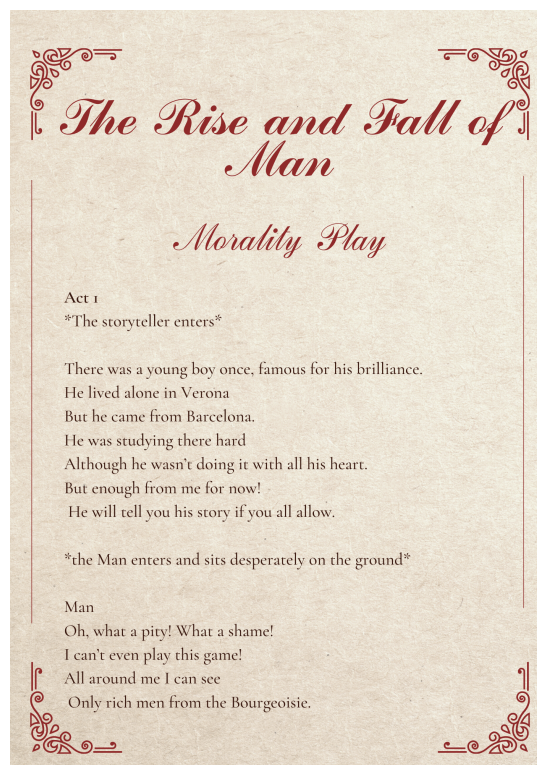
"Well, I will be cheeky and say that it was getting the opportunity to network with the right people at the right time. I was working on my first big script for a play at that time, and at one of those meetings, I got to talk to this lad who was part of a theatre troupe. I read him my thing, and he invited me to go and talk to their director. Fast forward a few months, I got to see my play on stage in Edinburgh."

"This is great, Diego. I know that you are now working on another play that will be performed in London this June, right?"

"Correct, and it will be awesome! You should definitely come to watch. But yeah, without *Write me a cup*, I doubt I would have known how to go about making this a reality."

"Would you like to tell us what your play is about?" I ask.

"I can do you one better," he smiles and hands me the first page of his play.



"I'm afraid this is all I can show you now," he shrugs with another of his warm grins. "For the rest, you must come in June."

"With pleasure!" I say and turn to Freya. "And what about you Freya? What was your favourite thing about *Write me a cup?*"

"Oh, um, if I had to choose just one, I'd go with the fact that it allowed me to be myself and do what I love. It inspired me and gave me something to look forward to."

"I know that before you went to university, you did ballet for almost 12 years. What made you stop dancing and study Illustration instead?"

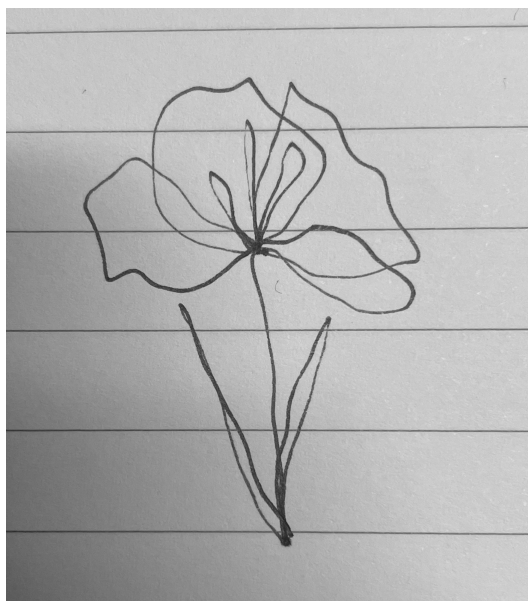
"I started doing ballet when I was 3, and it was my biggest love. Unfortunately, I had an accident when I was 15 that prevented me from continuing with my practice," she clasps her hands in front of her and studies them for a moment. "I must say Illustration wasn't the first obvious choice for me. I believe I felt lost for a year or two, and I wasn't sure what I could do with my life now that ballet was no longer an option. You see, I've spent so many years devoted solely to this. But I suppose one day, I caught myself feeling calm and content for the first time in a while. I was mindlessly doodling in an old notebook while listening to my favourite sonatas, nothing more. That started happening more and more as I realised that I found the same beauty and peace in drawing as I used to see in ballet."

"Thank you so much for sharing this, Freya. That is truly touching," I touch her hand and offer a small smile, which she returns. "And how has collaborative work helped with your career so far?"

"I'd say greatly! As an illustrator, I love working with authors and creating artwork to go alongside their piece. It makes me feel as if both of us are combining our experience to create something special, and I think this is beautiful."

"Actually, Freya is doing the illustrations for my new poetry collection," Maria chimes in. "You need to show her some of your work!"

"Oh um," Freya blushes. "It is mostly doodles, I can make one for you now," she offers and takes out a pen and paper from her tote-bag.



"Delicate and pretty," I smile, looking at the quick doodle she has just made. "I am excited to see this collection come out. I am very happy to hear that you are still collaborating creatively even after university."

"Oh yeah," Diego starts. "It's been five years since we graduated but *Write me a cup* is definitely still alive and thriving. The three of us still meet a few times a year here when we are all in town and chat about our creative work and projects, exchange ideas and inspire each other. And not just this, there are new and new creatives that meet here and keep the club going."

"Ah yes," Maria joins. "I joined them last month as they had a reading from a local novelist and stayed for the workshop they held afterwards. Honestly," she inhales sharply, "it made my week seeing all those people share their ideas and work together."

"Yes! It makes you think, huh? We created something so much bigger than ourselves." Diego shakes his head. "It's mad how creativity unites people! And you know, with the pandemic and everything that has been going on for the past two years, this club meant even more to those going to the biweekly gatherings."

"Most certainly," Freya adds. "People weren't able to meet and work collaboratively for a long time, so the moment this was allowed, it felt like a fresh start and *Write me a cup* was there for people. I was here for one of the first meetings after the last lockdown actually," she adjusts herself in her seat. "It was so poignant to hear people talk about the different ways the virus affected their work. It moved me. But what touched my heart even more was seeing how eager they were to work together once again; to be able to share their ideas and listen to others; to go out there and create. It felt so natural for them to come together and start working on those ideas that have been sitting lonely in their heads or dusty notebooks."

"Yes," I nod. "The pandemic took a hit on the creative sphere, but it is so nice to see creatives slowly coming back on their feet with this stronger thirst to create and put their work out there."

I stop the recording and close the notebook with my notes.

"Thank you once more for sharing your story with me! And thank you for making *Write me a cup* a reality. I found my home in it while I was a student as well, and it showed me that the arts weren't a lonely sphere but one full of lovely people who want to work together, to inspire each other and offer support. Thank you for giving us this safe space to be ourselves and express our souls."