

A misty garden path with stone slabs and dense foliage. The path is made of irregular stone slabs and is surrounded by lush greenery and trees. The scene is misty, with soft light filtering through the leaves. The path leads into the distance, disappearing into the fog.

THE
GARDEN
OF MY LIFE

When the Voice Found Its Voice

FRANK RIZK

THE GARDEN OF MY LIFE

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Open Any Page.

Take What Speaks to You.

F R A N K R I Z K

CONTENTS

Open any page. Take what speaks to you.

- CHAPTER 01 Twenty Years Later
- CHAPTER 02 Reactor or Creator
- CHAPTER 03 The Quiet Rebellion
- CHAPTER 04 The Morning of the Ants
- CHAPTER 05 The Art of Being
- CHAPTER 06 Familiar Stranger
- CHAPTER 07 The Cost of Being Seen
- CHAPTER 08 The Voice That Found Its Voice
- CHAPTER 09 The Wings of Belief
- CHAPTER 10 When the Candle Spoke Before the Sun
- CHAPTER 11 When the Giant Sat Down
- CHAPTER 12 The Ink Between Us
- CHAPTER 13 Fire Without Scars
- CHAPTER 14 The Siren at Seven

No order. No rules. Just the page that finds you.

FOREWORD

This book did not begin with a plan.

It began with moments.

A morning in the garden. A memory. A bird crossing the sky. A candle before sunrise. A song. A photograph. A siren.

Small things that made me stop and think.

I started writing them down, not because I believed I had found the answers, but because they opened questions.

About myself.

About love, fear, faith, family, patterns and the way we move through life without always noticing what is shaping us.

This book is not asking you to believe what I believe.

These pages are simply what I saw from where I was standing at the time.

Some of these thoughts may change as I change.

That is fine.

A garden changes too.

Some things grow. Some mature. Some fade. Some fall.

The garden remains alive.

So do we.

Open the book anywhere.

Stay with what speaks to you.

Question it. Disagree with it. Take something from it or leave it there.

My voice does not need to become yours.

If these pages make enough room for you to hear your own, they have done their job.

The garden is still growing.

So am I.

INTRODUCTION

I used to think a voice was something you used to speak.

Now I think it is also something you learn to hear.

For much of my life, there was always noise around me.

Business. Responsibility. Relationships. Expectations. Beliefs. The pressure to keep moving.

My own voice was somewhere inside all of that, but I could not always tell which part was mine.

Then life became quieter.

And ordinary moments started making me stop.

Ants made me think about movement.

A candle made me notice stillness.

A song made me question what I believed about love.

A siren made me think about urgency.

Nothing around me had become magical.

I had simply started paying attention.

That is what this book is.

A collection of moments when I stopped long enough to notice what was happening around me and what it awakened inside me.

Some chapters are personal.

Some are observations.

Some are questions I still don't have a final answer for.

They don't need to reach the same conclusion.

A garden does not grow in a straight line.

Neither do we.

Read these pages in order if you want.

Or open them anywhere.

Maybe you will find an answer.

Maybe a disagreement.

Maybe only a question worth carrying for the day.

That is enough.

This is the garden of my life.

Maybe somewhere inside it, you will notice something in yours.

Twenty Years Later

The afternoon heat was still hanging over the streets when I thought of her.

Twenty years had passed since I last saw her.

Mom.

I don't know if you would recognize me today. Life changed me in ways neither of us could have imagined. But when things become heavy, you are still one of the first people who comes to my mind.

Not because I expect you to solve anything.

Because your presence used to make things feel possible.

That day I came home carrying too much in my head. Business. Responsibility. Decisions. The pressure to stay focused while part of me simply wanted someone to say:

"It's okay. It will be sorted out."

And immediately, I thought of you.

For years I believed strength meant carrying everything without showing too much. Today I see it differently. I can carry my responsibilities and still admit that sometimes I miss feeling safe beside someone.

Maybe this letter is part of that change.

I am not asking you to rescue me. I am not asking you to carry anything for me.

I only wanted to speak to you.

To tell you that I am still standing.

That the last years changed me.

That I made mistakes, learned, lost parts of myself, found others, and became a man you never had the chance to meet.

So maybe this is also an introduction.

Mom, this is me now.

I love you.

I miss you.

And if somehow these words can reach you, stay close for a moment.

Sometimes we don't reach out because we need to be rescued.

Sometimes we simply want to be seen by the person who knew us before life changed us.

Maybe that need never completely disappears.

Reactor or Creator

Sunday began quietly.

I was training at home, headphones on, first light coming through the glass doors.

Between sets, I stopped and looked outside.

Something in me wanted an answer.

So I spoke to my Creator.

I said I trusted His timing, but I wanted clarity. Was I moving in the right direction? Was there something I was not seeing? Did I need to adjust?

I asked for something clear.

Then I continued my morning.

Later, while getting ready to leave, I stopped in front of the mirror.

A thought came to me:

This year marks ten years since I moved here.

Ten years.

Almost immediately, memories from my first year started returning.

Different people. Different situations. A very different version of me.

But some of the patterns felt familiar.

That stayed with me for the rest of the day.

At first, I wondered whether I was looking at some kind of cycle. Then another thought came:

Maybe the answer I asked for that morning was not a sign.

Maybe it was the question itself.

The question made me look.

And when I looked, I noticed something simple.

Life may bring situations I cannot control. But my reactions can repeat long after the situation has changed.

The same fear.

The same avoidance.

The same need to prove.

The same choices wearing different clothes.

That was enough for me.

I don't need to believe that every event is designed or that every repetition carries a hidden message.

Sometimes the pattern is simply mine.

And if it is mine, awareness gives me a choice.

I may not create what happens to me.

But I can become more conscious of what I create from it.

Maybe that is the difference between reacting and creating.

The Quiet Rebellion

The house was quiet.

The AC was humming. The wall clock was ticking. Outside, the city was already waking up.

I had water beside me and the morning to myself.

At first, the silence felt uncomfortable. My mind wanted something to do.

Then I stopped fighting it.

And in that quiet, I started looking at my life.

For years, business had taken most of my time and even more of my mind. I could wake up already preparing for the next problem. A message on my phone could change my mood before I even opened it.

I used to call that responsibility.

Sometimes it was.

Sometimes it was simply too much.

That morning I asked myself a different question:

Am I building a successful life, or am I becoming successful at surviving one?

I didn't want to stop being ambitious. I didn't want to abandon business or responsibility.

I simply no longer wanted them to receive the best part of me automatically.

So I started imagining a different rhythm.

Morning in the garden.

A few focused hours of work instead of allowing work to occupy the entire day.

Coffee somewhere quiet.

Cooking properly.

Walking in the evening.

Seeing family and friends.

Making room for a relationship if the right one comes, not because I need someone to complete my life, but because sharing life can be beautiful.

As I sat there, the garden smelled of jasmine and basil. I had warm sourdough bread with olive oil.

Nothing extraordinary was happening.

And that was the point.

I had spent years imagining happiness as something waiting after the next problem was solved.

That morning, I realized I was already sitting inside a small piece of it.

My rebellion was not against work.

It was against postponing life.

The Morning of the Ants

The grass was cool when I stepped into the garden with my water.

The ants were already moving.

I broke off a small piece of what I was eating and placed it near them.

Not because they needed me.

They were doing perfectly well before I arrived.

It was simply a small thank you for sharing the space with me.

I watched them for a while.

They moved. Something blocked the way. They adjusted. Then they continued.

And I smiled because I saw myself in the opposite behavior.

I could turn one small decision into a meeting inside my own head.

Is this the right time?

What if I'm wrong?

Should I wait?

Should I move?

I often wanted certainty before taking a step.

Watching the ants made me think about how much energy I had spent arguing with what was already in front of me.

They were not teaching me anything consciously. They were just ants.

The lesson was happening in me.

See what is here.

Respond to it.

Adjust when needed.

Continue.

Maybe alignment is sometimes that simple.

Not giving up control of my life.

Not believing everything happens for a reason.

Just knowing the difference between a real obstacle and the extra struggle I create around it.

The ants kept moving.

I kept watching.

And I thought about gratitude too.

Maybe gratitude is not only something I say in prayer.

Maybe it is also how I treat what is around me.

Whether I notice.

Whether I take everything for granted.

Whether I give something back when nobody is watching.

The ants didn't need to be my teachers.

I only needed to be awake enough to notice what they made me think about.

The Art of Being

I had two meetings that day and dinner later.

Standing in front of my wardrobe, I thought about going casual.

Then I changed my mind.

Not because casual was wrong. It simply didn't feel like me that day.

I have learned that when something I wear doesn't reflect how I feel inside, I notice the disconnection immediately.

So I dressed the way I wanted.

After the first meeting, I entered an elevator with a friend. Three men in suits stepped in.

I noticed a few glances.

Years ago, I would have started interpreting them immediately.

They don't like me.

I don't belong here.

They're judging me.

This time, I didn't.

I noticed and continued talking.

When the elevator reached the ground floor, the men walked out.

Then one of them turned back.

He looked at me and said:

"Sorry, I have to say this. The way you present yourself - that's a killer. Respect."

I thanked him.

And that was it.

One man's reaction.

Not proof that everyone admired me. Not an explanation for every glance in the elevator.

Just a compliment.

But it made me think about how much of my life I had spent adjusting myself before anyone even asked me to.

Trying to belong.

Trying not to stand out too much.

Trying to read the room before allowing myself to be in it.

That day I understood something simpler.

Being myself does not mean trying to be different.

It means not abandoning myself just to be accepted.

I can adapt to a situation without disappearing inside it.

I can listen to other people's opinions without turning them into instructions.

I can receive a compliment without needing it to prove anything.

Maybe authenticity is not something people always feel from us.

I don't know.

But I know what it feels like inside me.

Less effort.

Less monitoring.

Less asking, "Am I acceptable here?"

That is enough.

Dress like yourself.

Speak like yourself.

And when the room reacts, let the reaction belong to the room.

Familiar Stranger

It happened while I was making a sandwich.

Nothing dramatic.

I was spreading cheese on bread when I started thinking about my relationships.

Two marriages. One long relationship. Three women I genuinely cared for.

Different women, but I could see a familiar role I kept taking.

The giver.

The caretaker.

The one who prepared, organized, handled things and rarely asked to be taken care of.

I used to tell myself I simply liked it that way.

And part of me did.

But I also remembered how good it felt on the rare occasions when someone prepared something for me.

It wasn't about the food.

It was the feeling of being considered.

That small thought opened something bigger.

How often had I chosen what felt familiar instead of asking whether it actually fulfilled me?

Familiarity can feel safe simply because I know the script.

I know my role.

I know what comes next.

But knowing the script doesn't mean I still want to play the part.

I started seeing the same question in other areas of my life.

My home.

My clothes.

Even my hairstyle.

The day before, I had looked at myself at the barber and realized that the style I had been keeping no longer felt like me.

So I changed it.

A small thing, but when I looked in the mirror afterward, I recognized myself again.

That is what I want more of now.

Not constant change for the sake of change.

And not rejecting everything familiar simply because it belongs to the past.

I want to notice when familiarity has quietly become repetition.

There is a difference between home and habit.

Between comfort and a cage.

Between knowing something and choosing it again.

The familiar is not automatically wrong.

But I no longer want it to make my decisions for me.

The Cost of Being Seen

I was scrolling one night when a woman's photo stopped me.

She was beautiful.

Confident.

Carefully presented.

My mind immediately started creating a story about what I was seeing.

Maybe she needed attention.

Maybe the confidence was a performance.

Maybe there was loneliness behind the image.

Then I caught myself.

I knew nothing about her.

A photograph had triggered a question in me, but that did not give me the right to turn my question into her truth.

That realization became more interesting than the photo itself.

How often do we look at someone and complete the story with our own assumptions?

We see a body and decide what it means.

We see confidence and call it insecurity.

We see modesty and call it depth.

We see attention and assume emptiness.

Sometimes we may be right.

Sometimes completely wrong.

What I could honestly examine was my own reaction.

Why did the image make me think about being seen?

Maybe because I know that feeling.

The difference between people noticing what you show and actually knowing who you are.

The two are not the same.

Social media makes visibility easy.

Being known is harder.

But I also don't believe the answer is to judge people for how they choose to present themselves.

A woman can enjoy attention and still have depth.

A man can dress strongly and still be insecure.

A quiet person can be performing too.

We are more complicated than the frame.

I closed the app with a different question than the one I started with.

Not, "What is wrong with what she is doing?"

But:

How often do I show something because it is genuinely me, and how often because I want a particular response?

That is a question I can answer only for myself.

Maybe the cost of being seen begins when visibility becomes more important than being real.

And maybe that cost belongs to all of us, not only to the woman on the screen.

The Voice That Found Its Voice

For a long time, my thoughts were loud but not always clear.

I could speak.

I could explain.

I could fill a room with words.

But that is not the same as hearing your own voice.

Then I moved into this house.

At first, it was simply a house.

Walls. A garden. Air.

Nothing mystical happened.

Life just became quieter.

And in that quiet, I started noticing things I had stopped hearing.

The wind moving through the trees.

My footsteps.

Birds in the morning.

The sound of nothing needing my attention for a few minutes.

Slowly, I also started hearing myself differently.

Not the voice trying to impress.

Not the voice reacting to pressure.

Not the voice repeating what I had learned from everyone else.

Something simpler.

What do I actually think?

What do I actually want?

What feels true to me today?

The garden didn't give me those answers.

It gave me enough quiet to ask the questions.

That difference matters.

I don't believe silence magically reveals truth.

Sometimes silence can be uncomfortable. Sometimes the mind becomes even louder.

But for me, it created space.

And space was what I had been missing.

This place became important not because it changed me on its own, but because I began using it differently.

I sat.

I listened.

I wrote.

I questioned.

I noticed.

And somewhere in that process, my voice became easier to recognize.

Not louder.

Clearer.

That is why this book exists.

Not because I found all the answers.

Because I finally started hearing the questions that were mine.

The Wings of Belief

The first light was coming through the garden when I watched the birds moving across the sky.

They didn't look brave.

They were simply flying.

I started wondering what would happen if a bird doubted its wings.

It was a human question placed on an animal, of course. Birds don't think about belief the way we do.

But the thought stayed with me because I knew how often I had doubted my own ability before even trying.

I looked around the garden.

Trees growing.

Wind moving.

Birds landing and taking off.

Nature was doing what nature does without asking for my approval.

And I thought about how different we are.

We can imagine failure before movement.

We can create ten reasons not to begin.

We can ask for proof before taking the first step.

Sometimes that protects us.

Doubt is not always an enemy. It can make us check, prepare, question and think again.

But sometimes it becomes fear wearing the clothes of logic.

I know that version well.

The one that says:

Wait until you're ready.

Wait until you're certain.

Wait until nobody can criticize you.

Wait until you know you won't fall.

The problem is that certainty rarely comes first.

Often we move, learn, adjust and become more capable through the movement itself.

Watching the birds, I didn't suddenly believe that faith means jumping blindly.

I understood something more practical.

There are moments when I already have enough information.

Enough ability.

Enough experience.

And the only thing left between me and movement is fear.

In those moments, maybe belief is not knowing I will succeed.

Maybe it is trusting that I can meet what happens after I begin.

The bird left the branch.

The branch stayed behind.

And for a moment, that was enough of a reminder.

When the Candle Spoke Before the Sun

There are mornings when nothing special happens, but somehow you notice everything.

That morning, the world was still dark.

A candle I had made by hand was burning beside me.

In the distance, two small lights showed through the mist. The sun had not arrived yet.

I sat there watching the flame.

Peppermint. Honey wax. A little lavender.

Simple things.

And I realized how different the same morning feels when I am actually present for it.

I had read about stillness and alignment many times.

But reading about something and experiencing it are not the same.

The candle wasn't teaching me anything.

It was burning.

I was the one becoming quiet enough to notice what was happening inside me.

My breathing slowed.

My body softened.

My thoughts stopped competing for a moment.

And I remembered how easily I drift away from myself.

Work.

Belonging.

Appearance.

Noise.

Other people's expectations.

The good part is that returning doesn't always require something dramatic.

Sometimes it is a candle.

A stretch.

A prayer before sleep.

A few minutes in the garden before the city wakes up.

Small actions that tell my system:

Come back.

The sky slowly began to change.

The candle was still there, but its light was becoming less important as the morning arrived.

I smiled at that.

Nothing had been fixed.

No revelation had appeared.

I was simply there to see the transition.

Maybe peace is often like that.

Not something waiting at the end of every problem.

Something available in small moments while life is still unfinished.

When the Giant Sat Down

For several weeks, I barely recognized my own life.

It started with illness.

Not a metaphor.

My body stopped cooperating with me.

Walking became difficult. Eating was difficult. Drinking water was difficult. Sleep disappeared.

I spent days going in and out of hospitals without a clear answer.

At one point, I was walking with a stick.

For someone used to solving problems, pushing forward and relying on himself, it was humbling.

Then came the loneliness.

The house felt different when I was sick inside it.

People did not always understand what was happening because much of it was invisible to them.

Some relationships read my silence as distance.

My absence looked like disinterest.

And I did not always have the energy to explain.

For a while, everything I normally cared about became small.

Business.

Goals.

Plans.

Even the version of myself I thought I had built.

A microscopic illness had reduced all of it to one question:

Can I get through today?

That experience changed something in me.

Not because I defeated some final enemy.

I don't believe that anymore.

There is no version of me that will never struggle again.

The mind is not conquered once.

The body is not guaranteed.

Alignment is not permanent.

What I learned was simpler.

Strength is not the absence of collapse.

Sometimes strength is allowing the giant to sit down.

To admit that I am tired.

To accept help.

To stop turning vulnerability into failure.

And then, when the body allows it, to stand again.

I came out of those weeks with less interest in proving that I am unbeatable.

I am not.

None of us are.

But I trust myself more now because I know that even when life reduces me, I can meet myself there too.

The Ink Between Us

It was late.

The house was quiet, and an old photo album was sitting on the table.

I opened it.

At first, the pages were easy.

Places.

Smiles.

Ordinary memories.

Then I reached the photographs that still carry a different weight.

I stopped.

For a second, I did what I had done before.

I leaned closer.

Almost expecting the smell to return.

It didn't.

Only paper.

That affected me more than I expected.

I could still remember the laughter.

The voice.

The way my name sounded when they said it.

But smell is different.

It belongs so much to physical presence.

And now it was gone.

I stayed with the page longer than I needed to.

Then I understood why albums can hurt.

They give something back and take something at the same time.

They return the image.

And remind you that the moment itself cannot return with it.

I started thinking about how casually we treat time while people are still here.

We postpone calls.

We save words for later.

We assume another dinner will come.

Another visit.

Another chance to say what matters.

Most of the time, that is normal. Nobody can live every ordinary moment as if it were the last.

But perhaps we can live a little less carelessly.

The photograph was not the person.

It never could be.

It was simply evidence that this moment once existed.

That someone stood there.

That I stood beside them.

That life was happening and none of us knew exactly how temporary that particular version of it was.

I closed the album.

Not because I wanted to forget.

Because I had remembered enough for one night.

Maybe that is what photographs eventually become.

Not replacements for people.

Small doors we open when we are willing to feel both sides of memory:

the gratitude that it happened,

and the pain that it ended.

Fire Without Scars

A song was playing in the background when one line caught me:

Only true love hurts like this.

My first reaction was agreement.

That was what made me stop.

Somewhere along the way, I had learned to connect love with pain.

The deeper the feeling, the deeper the hurt.

The more I endured, the more meaningful the relationship must have been.

But sitting there, I started questioning it.

Love can hurt.

Of course it can.

People disappoint each other.

Relationships end.

Someone we love can die.

Two people can care deeply and still trigger old wounds in each other.

I don't want to replace one absolute statement with another.

But pain is not proof of love.

That distinction matters to me now.

I have mistaken intensity for depth before.

Uncertainty for chemistry.

Endurance for devotion.

And sometimes I stayed attached to the fire because I believed the burn meant something important was happening.

Today I want something different.

Not a relationship without disagreement.

Not two perfect people who never hurt each other.

Something more realistic.

A love where I can remain myself.

Where closeness doesn't require self-abandonment.

Where conflict doesn't need cruelty.

Where both people take responsibility for what they bring into the relationship.

Fire without scars.

I still like that image.

Because I don't want a cold life.

I want passion.

Desire.

Feeling.

I simply no longer believe that love has to destabilize me to be real.

The song continued.

I didn't need to reject it.

I only needed to stop borrowing its definition.

Love may hurt sometimes.

But hurt does not make love more true.

I still believe in fire.

I just don't believe I have to burn to know it is warm.

The Siren at Seven

The school across from my window has a voice.

For several days, it had been music, games, microphones and children laughing.

Then Monday came.

At seven in the morning, the voice changed.

A siren.

It entered the room before I was fully awake.

My shoulders tightened.

My jaw followed.

My body reacted before I understood what I was hearing.

Then I realized it was coming from the school.

A drill.

I stood by the window and wondered what the experience was like for the children closer to it.

The honest answer was:

I didn't know.

Some may have been frightened.

Some may barely have cared.

Some may even have enjoyed the excitement.

And the school may have had good reasons for doing it exactly that way.

I respect preparedness. Children should know what to do in an emergency.

But the siren made me think about something broader.

How much stimulation fills our lives now?

Sound.

Screens.

Notifications.

Tasks.

Entertainment.

Something is almost always asking for attention.

Children need play and excitement. Noise can be joy. Movement can be healthy.

But they also need opportunities to come back to calm.

So do adults.

We are very good at activation.

Coffee.

Deadlines.

Phones.

Work.

News.

Urgency.

We know how to go.

I know I did.

For years, stillness made me uncomfortable. If nothing was happening, I felt I should create something to do.

That morning, the siren became a question about my own life:

How much urgency is necessary, and how much have I simply become used to?

Eventually the alarm stopped.

The school continued.

The city continued.

Nothing dramatic happened.

But I kept thinking about one thing.

We teach people how to respond when the alarm begins.

Maybe we should spend a little more time learning how to return to ourselves after it ends.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I did not write this book because I reached the end of something.

I wrote it while I was still living it.

That matters to me.

Some of these pages carry certainty. Others carry questions. Some may sound different to me years from now.

I am comfortable with that.

The point was never to freeze myself into one version of the truth.

It was to pay attention.

To notice what life was showing me.

To hear my own voice more clearly.

And to leave a record of what I saw along the way.

If something in these pages spoke to you, keep it.

If something did not, leave it.

Your garden is not mine.

But perhaps we are both learning the same thing:

to notice what is growing,

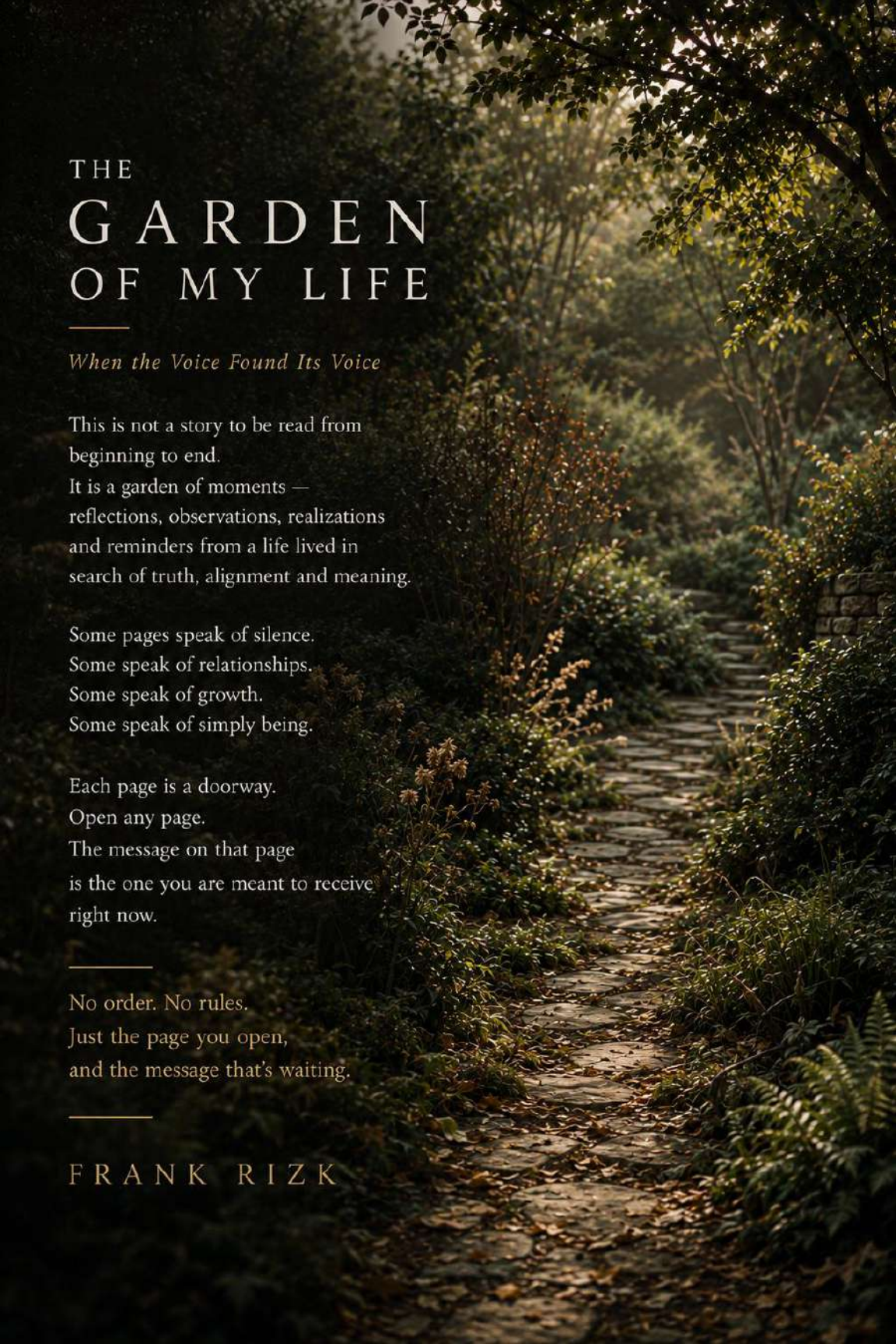
what has finished,

what needs care,

and what no longer needs to be forced.

Thank you for walking through mine.

Frank Rizk



THE GARDEN OF MY LIFE

When the Voice Found Its Voice

This is not a story to be read from
beginning to end.

It is a garden of moments —
reflections, observations, realizations
and reminders from a life lived in
search of truth, alignment and meaning.

Some pages speak of silence.
Some speak of relationships.
Some speak of growth.
Some speak of simply being.

Each page is a doorway.
Open any page.
The message on that page
is the one you are meant to receive
right now.

No order. No rules.
Just the page you open,
and the message that's waiting.

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