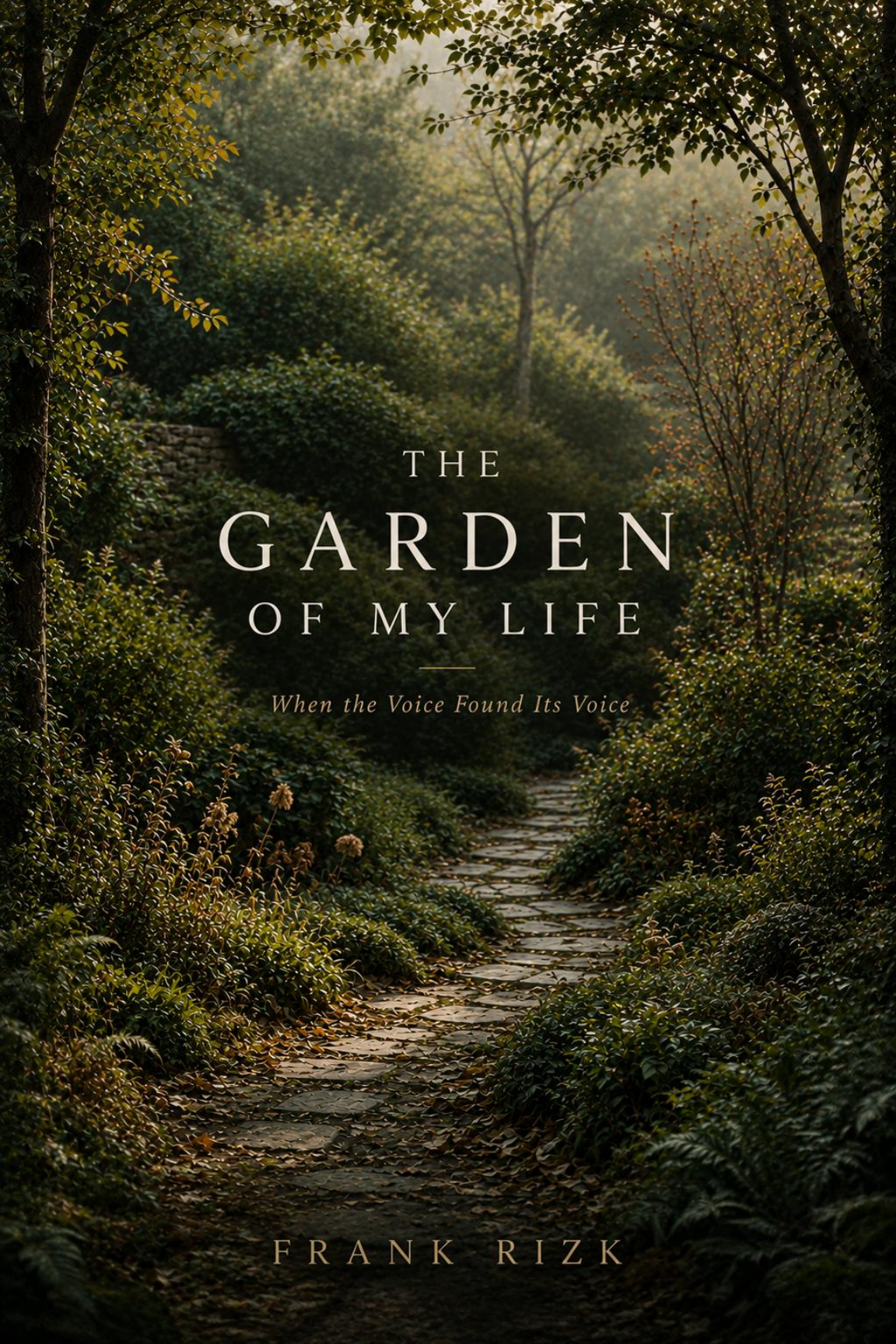

THE
GARDEN
OF MY LIFE
When the Voice Found Its Voice
FRANK RIZK

THE GARDEN OF MY LIFE

When the Voice Found Its Voice

Open any page.
Take what speaks to you.

FRANK RIZK

CONTENTS

Twenty Years Later

Reactor or Creator

The Quiet Rebellion

The Morning of the Ants

The Art of Being

Familiar Stranger

The Cost of Being Seen

The Voice That Found Its Voice

The Wings of Belief

When the Candle Spoke Before the Sun

When the Giant Sat Down

The Ink Between Us

Fire Without Scars

The Siren at Seven

Read in order or begin with a page that speaks to you

FOREWORD

Not a story you follow. Not a sequence you track.

A book you meet in moments.

A memory. A morning in the garden. A question that stayed with me long after the day had moved on.

I wrote because something inside me wanted to speak. Sometimes it came softly. Sometimes it came with a force I could not ignore.

These pages hold what I felt, what I saw and what began to change in me. My faith is here. So are my doubts, my love and the parts of life I am still learning to meet.

Open any page. Stay with what speaks to you.

You do not need to agree with every thought to find something of your own.

No order. No rules.

Just the page you open, and the moment you meet there.

CHAPTER ONE

Twenty Years Later

The afternoon heat was still hanging over the streets as the sun dropped behind the buildings. A light haze floated above the asphalt, carrying the low noise of traffic in the distance.

In that quiet, I could see her face, the same as it was, even after twenty years. It had been two decades since the last time I saw her. Twenty years. I don't know if she would recognize me now, or even know me anymore.

I have changed so much. Life has shaped me, tested me, stripped me down, and rebuilt me into someone new. Mom,

Through these words, I'm speaking to you. It doesn't matter if it's right or wrong, or if it's through letters.

What matters is that it's coming from me, shaped into words, and I feel you hear them. When life gets heavy, the first instinct is to call you. You've always been there… for no reason other than love.

Your feelings, your care, your advice were genuine. Though most of the time, you didn't need to say much. Your presence alone was enough to give me strength. I'm holding myself together now.

Not because I'm trying to be a macho man, but because I want to say this right. I want the words to come through clearly. Speaking about this shows me how far I've come. I'm no longer shutting down my emotions.

I'm allowing myself to feel them.

Mom, I'm telling you this because I want to feel that it's okay. That everything will be sorted out. Being strong isn't easy. For years, being a man meant carrying it all in silence to me.

It's even harder when there's no one to talk to, no one to just sit beside you so their presence alone brings peace. Right now, I feel the weight of mountains on my shoulders.

And another weight, the responsibility to sort everything out while staying aligned, focused, and calm. And beyond that, a third weight, walking into an empty house at the end of it all, avoiding my own thoughts.

When I came home today, you were the first person who came to mind. Because all I wanted was to feel safe.

To feel that you'd tell me, "It's okay, it will be done soon." I will not accept from myself or from others anything less than giving my all. I am here to stand firm. And to keep going.

The last years… I like to believe you knew what happened. That somehow, you witnessed it. Those years changed me. They revealed who I am.

Today may be the first day I come back to you with these words, but I am here to introduce myself to you. My new self. I will not ask you to help me.

I will only ask for a little support, so I can stand firm on this ground and cover the last few meters I have left to reach my goal. I love you. I miss you.

And… if somehow you have received my words… let me know. Sometimes we don't reach out to be rescued. We reach out simply to be seen by the one who knew us before life changed.

The need to be seen is not a weakness. It's a reminder of the connections that built us. Let yourself be seen.

CHAPTER TWO

Reactor or Creator

Sunday began in silence. The house held its breath while the first light crept across the floor. Inside, only the low hum of my headphones broke the stillness as I lifted the weights. Between sets, I paused. Sweat cooled on my neck.

Through the wide glass doors, the horizon stretched pale and endless. A quiet sky that seemed to listen back. Something inside me tightened. Sharp. Undeniable. Words rose before thought could shape them.

I lifted my head and spoke into the emptiness, almost a shout: "Man, I know everything will be sorted according to Your timing, not mine. My role is to stay aligned and focused, that's where my responsibility ends. But I need clarity.

I don't want to waste time. I don't want to believe I'm applying the right things if they are wrong. Tell me, am I aligned? Am I doing it right? Or must I adjust, change, step into something new? Give me a clear answer.

White or black. No grey. Precise. Definite. Undeniable. I'll wait for Your reply today." The words lingered in the quiet room like a soft echo.

I lowered the weights and kept moving through the routine, convinced the reply would find me, in a song, a line, a stranger's call. Somewhere. Later, I showered, dressed, and slipped on my shoes.

By the tall mirror near the door, I paused, smoothing my hair. That's when it struck like lightning: This year marks ten years since I moved here. Ten years. A decade.

In less than ten seconds, memories of that first year rolled through me, each one sharp and alive. Then came the comparison, year one against year ten. The patterns were almost identical. I froze. Coincidence or a cycle?

The question stayed with me as the day unfolded, quiet but relentless. Every street I walked, every stoplight I waited at, the thought returned. By evening the answer was clear: My question was the reply.

The Creator had answered, not with an outside sign, but by letting me ask the question that opened every door. From that moment, the search began. And what I found stunned me. I began to see life through patterns. The same questions returning.

The same fears wearing different faces. The same choices bringing me back to familiar places.

I felt there was meaning in it. A design I was beginning to notice.

But the part I could work with was right in front of me: my response.

Where had I reacted from fear? Where had I waited for life to change before changing anything in myself? Where was I still giving the past permission to decide the next step?

That was the clarity I had asked for.

Look back at your own life. What keeps showing up? Which questions follow you from one season to the next?

I asked myself whether I wanted to keep reacting in the same way, or begin creating something different.

A different response. A different choice. A step that belonged to the man I was becoming.

Reactor or creator?

That day, the question became my answer.

CHAPTER THREE

The Quiet Rebellion

The house was silent except for the low hum of the AC and the soft click of a wall clock. Outside, the city was already waking, cars starting, towers catching the first light. But inside, time felt suspended.

Morning rituals shaped the opening of the day: water, breath, stillness. These small movements keep carving the man I am becoming. At first, the silence felt like a cage. Four walls. Still air. A mind looking for an exit. But something in me shifted.

I stopped resisting. No sadness. No regret. I let the moment hold me. Resistance, I realized, is the real prison. Every heavy minute carries its own lesson, but only if I stay still long enough to hear it. So I stood, unarmed and open.

As the day stretched, slow, almost uneventful, clarity arrived like a sudden draft of cold air. I looked at the life around me: the feeds, the cafés, the shining streets, the constant movement. Everything seemed to offer something else to do, somewhere else to go.

And I wondered how often I used that movement to avoid sitting with what I felt.

And I recognized myself in that constant movement. Ninety percent of my time is consumed by business. Ninety-nine percent of my thoughts are chained to stress. Before my eyes even open each morning, I brace for the next crisis.

Every buzz of the phone lands like a warning. I told myself this grind wasn't a rat race. That it was noble. That success would make it worthwhile. But yesterday tore the veil: I have not been living. I have been surviving.

And the truth is simple: I don't deserve to reduce my life to this. I will be successful. I will be wealthy. But I will not sacrifice life itself for the illusion of success. Because today I decided: I will live on my own terms.

Everything else can wait. I see how thin my ties to family have become, how friendship has faded, how empty the evenings feel without someone to share them with. That will change. I am too precious to accept a life reduced to stress and solitude.

A new rhythm is set. Mornings begin at 5:30 in the garden, stretching the quiet before the heat. Business gets no more than four or five hours.

The rest of the day belongs to life: coffee and a small cake in a quiet café, evening walks, meals cooked with care. The city on my own terms, not theirs. And I am ready now for a partner. Not forced. Not searched for.

Received, organically, when the timing is true. Because my life, my time, and my happiness are priceless. As I wrote these words, the sun had not yet risen. The air smelled of jasmine and fresh basil cut from my garden.

Olive oil on warm sourdough bread. Silence. Nature. Peace. This, I realized, is happiness. What I was living in this quiet morning was something I had spent years looking for elsewhere. "Happiness is not built on towers and noise.

It is a piece of bread, a breath of jasmine, a morning lived on your own terms."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Morning of the Ants

The grass was cool when I stepped outside with my glass of water. Beside me, the ants were already awake, moving without pause. Every morning they are here, loyal to their rhythm. Watching them, my own restless thoughts begin to quiet.

Today, I broke a small piece of what I was having and placed it near them. Not because they needed me, but as a quiet thank you for their presence, and for the life that surrounds me.

For a moment, I just watched. Their pace. Their focus. Their order. No hesitation. No pause to wonder why. It took me years to understand movement this pure. I used to overthink before taking even the smallest step.

I waited for signs, for perfect timing, for someone to say, "Now it's safe." But the ants never wait. They see a path and move. They see a block and change direction. No complaint. No drama. Just action.

Their simplicity felt almost divine — a mirror to everything I once complicated. I remembered how I used to resist. How I wanted things to happen my way, on my terms, and in my time. But the ants don't argue with reality.

They flow with it. They work with what is, not what should be. Watching them, I realized that stillness doesn't mean doing nothing. It means doing the right thing without noise. It means moving with life, not against it.

In that quiet morning light, something opened in me. I saw how much energy I had spent trying to prove, to plan, to perfect. And there they

were — tiny, silent, unstoppable. The ants taught me what true alignment looks like. To accept. To respect.

To move when the way opens. To give without talking about giving. Gratitude, I understood, is not an emotion we feel once a day. It is the way we walk, speak, work, and act. It is the movement that keeps us alive.

The garden was still. The ants kept moving, unbothered by my presence. They didn't need applause. They didn't need to be seen. They just were. And I smiled. Because I finally understood what they had been showing me all along.

Gratitude is not something we say. It is something we do one small, clear step at a time.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Art of Being

It started like any other morning. Two meetings ahead, a few errands after, and the usual conversation in my mind about what to wear. For a moment, I thought maybe today I'll go casual. Nothing dramatic.

Just a small adjustment to fit both the meetings and the dinner plans later in the evening. But as I stood there, looking at my wardrobe, I realized something: that version of me no longer exists. It wasn't about fashion anymore, it was about truth.

The clothes I choose are not fabric; they are statements of alignment. Every piece I put on my body either reflects who I am, or it doesn't.

And if it doesn't, I feel it immediately, like a silent disconnection between who I am inside and what the mirror shows me outside.

So I chose the way I always do: with presence, with intention, and with the quiet conviction that I would rather stand out for being myself than blend in by pretending. The first meeting went as planned. Numbers. Ideas. Decisions, all part of the game.

But what I didn't expect was what happened after. The elevator doors opened with that soft mechanical sigh. Inside, the air felt still, heavy with the faint scent of perfume and metal. I stood beside my friend, still talking about the meeting.

Three men in suits stepped in. Their shoes echoed on the floor; I could hear the rustle of fabric as one of them straightened his jacket. I noticed a few glances. A shift. A moment of attention.

I had seen that before. For years, I would have taken it as rejection, as a sign that I did not belong.

That day, I kept talking to my friend. I did not need to settle the meaning of every glance before feeling comfortable with myself.

When the elevator reached the ground floor, they stepped out. But one of them turned back. He looked me in the eye and said, "Sorry, I have to say this. The way you present yourself, that's a killer. Respect." It wasn't about ego or pride.

It was about resonance. In that moment, I understood something I had never fully grasped before — The feeling of alignment. When who you are inside and who you appear to be outside finally match, people feel it. It's not loud. It's not forced.

It's like air, you can't see it, but you can't deny it's there. For years, I tried to belong, to adjust, to fit, to blend in. But now I know that true belonging doesn't come from sameness; it comes from authentic resonance.

Being different is not rebellion. It's self-respect. When I dress a certain way, speak a certain way, or carry myself a certain way, it's not to impose. It's not to prove. It's simply to allow. To allow the truth within me to breathe freely.

To flow naturally, like a breeze, unseen, yet unmistakably felt. Each of us is a masterpiece. Not one of us is identical, nor should we be. But the masterpiece only becomes visible when we pick up the brush ourselves. We choose the canvas.

We mix the colors. We design the tone, the rhythm, the contrast. And though others may offer their opinions, some helpful, some not — it's still our hand that decides which strokes stay and which are erased. Balance, I've realized, is born from contrast.

Just as flavors need spice, and art needs shadows, the world needs difference. A dish made of identical ingredients tastes flat. Life without individuality is the same — colorless, tasteless, hollow.

To know yourself is to accept that your beauty and your presence do not need to blend in to belong. They can bring something of your own into the room. You are the spice, the contrast, the essence that adds meaning to the collective dish called life. That day, the elevator became my mirror.

Not the kind that shows your reflection, but the kind that reminds you how it feels to stand comfortably in yourself. For the first time, I felt alignment in how I felt inside and how I chose to show up outside.

And it wasn't because I tried harder. It was because I stopped trying at all. True power doesn't shout. It doesn't chase. It simply is. Like air. Like light. Like truth. When you finally know who you are, you no longer need to impose it.

You just let it flow, and those who are meant to feel it, will. So dress like yourself. Speak like yourself. Live like yourself.

Let the masterpiece breathe.

Because the world doesn't need another copy.

It needs the original you.

CHAPTER SIX

Familiar Stranger

It happened over something as simple as preparing a sandwich. I realized how often I've walked back to the familiar, not because it was right, but because it was known. Familiarity feels safe. It whispers, "You've been here before." But safety is not always peace.

Sometimes, it's just a soft cage with beautiful wallpaper. As I stood in the kitchen, spreading cheese across the bread, faces appeared in my mind. Two marriages. One long relationship. Three women I truly cared for.

All different, yet the same rhythm echoed through each story. They never enjoyed cooking, never cared much about food, and I, the man who loved to create, to serve, convinced myself that I liked it that way. I told myself it was love.

But today, I can say it was role-playing. The caretaker. The giver. The one who never asked to be given to. Still, I remember how good it felt the rare times one of them made something for me.

Not because of the meal, but because it felt like someone saw me. For twenty years, I've been loyal to that pattern, unconsciously searching for the same dynamic in every woman I met. I confused responsibility with purpose, and duty with love.

I was searching for the familiar, not the fulfilling. Because the familiar doesn't question you. It doesn't challenge you. It just repeats you. Now I see why I chose this place. Unfamiliar walls. Unfamiliar silence. Unfamiliar air.

Here, nothing resembles my old life, and maybe that's the point. I cannot live differently if I keep repeating the same setting. Even the

furniture, the light, the scent of the air, everything must speak my language now.

The place, the energy, the people who enter, should all reflect me, not the echoes of who I used to be. Yesterday, at the barber, I looked into the mirror and saw a stranger.

The hairstyle I had been keeping — I thought it made me blend in. But it made me fade. It hollowed my face, aged my presence, dimmed my fire. So I changed it.

Not to return to the old look — but to return to the truth of my face. Now, when I stand before the mirror, I don't just see a man who looks better. I see a man who finally recognizes himself.

Everything obeys the same principle. The home, the clothes, the meals, the choices, even the women I attract. I've outgrown the need to belong to what I've already known. The familiar no longer defines me; it only reminds me of where I stopped growing.

Now, I have space only for what aligns, what reflects, what's real. If it doesn't exist yet, I will build it, because creation begins the moment familiarity ends. Familiarity may feel like home, but the truth is the place where you finally start living.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Cost of Being Seen

Night fell quiet, except for the glow of the screen.

I wasn't searching for anyone. Just scrolling through perfect faces and perfect frames.

And then I saw her.

A woman so striking, I stopped.

I looked at the picture and found myself wondering about the person beyond it. What did her voice sound like? What made her laugh? When did she feel most like herself?

The photograph could not answer. But it opened a question that stayed with me.

How often are we visible without feeling seen?

A face can receive attention while the person behind it remains unknown. A picture can be admired without anyone asking what the day was like, what matters to us, or what we are carrying quietly.

I thought about the difference between being wanted and being known.

The first can happen in a moment. The second asks someone to stay.

I could not know what that woman wanted from her photograph. The reflection it opened was mine. And it reached beyond her, toward anyone who has ever wanted to be seen for more than what they show.

If I could speak to that feeling, I would say this softly:

You are more than what someone scrolls past.

There is poetry in your eyes that a picture cannot explain. There are parts of you that no filter can capture. Your presence has a life beyond the frame.

Enjoy your beauty. Let it be yours. And leave room for the rest of you to be known too.

Applause can feel good. But I know how easily the wish for a response can become a hunger. One reaction arrives, then I begin waiting for the next.

That is when I need to ask myself: am I sharing something that feels true to me, or slowly handing my worth to whoever happens to look?

I closed the app and saw my reflection in the dark glass of the window.

The question was there for me too.

The world does not only need another picture. It needs presence. People who can sit with each other, listen and look beyond what is easy to see.

For a moment, I wanted nothing from the screen.

I wanted life on the other side of it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Voice That Found Its Voice

My words had rhythm but no music. My thoughts kept running, but not toward meaning. Even silence felt crowded as if the world had followed me inside. Then one day, I arrived here.

Not by plan, not by design, just by the quiet pull of something that wanted to be heard. At first, it was only a house. Walls. A garden. Air. Nothing more, nothing less.

But as the days began to breathe with me, I noticed the space shifting, or maybe I was.

I started hearing things I had forgotten existed: the morning wind humming through the trees, the sound of my own footsteps, the soft rhythm of life happening without permission. It wasn't teaching me anything new.

It was reminding me of what had always been mine: the voice beneath the noise, the self that had never really gone anywhere. That's when I understood: silence is not the absence of sound. It's the beginning of truth.

It's the space where your voice stops performing and starts remembering. Now, as I sit here, I know this place was never meant to be just mine.

It was built for anyone who once lost their voice in the noise of doing, and is ready to hear it again. If you ever come here, don't come to escape. Come to arrive.

Because that's what this place became for me: not an end, but a return. The place where I met myself again. And maybe… you'll find your voice here, too.

CHAPTER NINE

The Wings of Belief

The first light broke through the garden. Soft. Gold. Catching the wings of the birds as they moved across the sky, free, effortless, alive. For a moment, it felt like time itself paused to remind me what faith looks like when it isn't questioned.

It was early. The kind of morning where silence still has weight. My neighbors were trimming the trees, the hum of the saw rising and falling like a pulse through the air. And yet above the noise, the birds sang.

They flew, they landed, they fought, they fed, completely unbothered by the world's disruptions. They were simply being. I wondered, what would happen if a bird ever doubted its wings? If, for even a heartbeat, it questioned its ability to fly. The thought felt strange.

Watching them, I saw an image of the trust I wanted to feel in myself. As I stood there watching, I realized this wasn't just about birds. It was about everything God created. The trees grow without questioning the sun.

The wind moves without asking permission. The sea never wonders if it's too much or too loud, it just is. There's no hesitation in creation. No part of nature pauses to ask if it's enough. Everything seemed to have its place, its movement, its rhythm.

And it hit me, how often I let doubt hold me in place. I used to think doubt made me humble. That questioning myself was a sign of awareness. Sometimes it was awareness. But sometimes it was fear disguised as logic.

Somewhere along the line, I began to forget what was natural. I thought about the way a child keeps trying. A baby keeps trying to walk, long before it knows what it is doing. That morning, belief felt like something I was remembering.

We spend our lives doubting what the world already sees clearly. The birds don't ask the wind if it will hold them. They just leap. Meanwhile, we stand on the ground, waiting for signs, for proof, for reassurance.

The tragedy isn't that we fall.

It's that we never take off. I thought of all the moments I hesitated. All the times I clipped my own wings because I feared I wasn't ready. And yet, readiness was never the point. The sky doesn't wait. It opens for whoever dares.

The garden quieted again. The last bird left the branch, vanishing into the light. And I understood. We already have the wings. We already have the feathers, the mind, the breath, the rhythm. We have something to begin with today.

And tomorrow, there will be more to learn. Growth keeps us alive.

We were never meant to swim through air. We were meant to fly through fear. And faith, real faith, is remembering that we always could.

CHAPTER TEN

When the Candle Spoke Before the Sun

There are mornings that arrive quietly, without sound, without wind, without voice, only the hum of being.

You read about alignment, you hear about stillness, but then one day, it stops being an idea, and becomes a presence. A quiet visitor that sits beside you in the dark. The world is asleep, but something in you is awake.

You look toward the horizon, still covered in night, and notice two shy lights glowing through the mist. The candle you made by hand burns gently, its flame trembling, as if whispering to the sun that its time is near.

And in that soft dialogue between wax and light, you remember: the sun and the candle share the same duty to announce warmth in a world still half-asleep.

You realize how easily the mind drifts, how belonging pulls you toward noise, how appearances seduce you away from truth. But as easy as it is to drift, it is just as easy to return.

Awareness is merciful like that. It waits where you left it, without judgment, without time. You breathe, you stretch, you feel your body remembering your soul. And suddenly, the candle's flame becomes a teacher. It doesn't rush to prove its brightness, it simply is.

Then the scent reaches you: peppermint and honey wax, lavender still asleep beneath it. The air changes, the garden shifts, and you

understand how small things move entire universes. A candle, a stretch, a thought whispered to your Creator before sleep.

Each one, a seed of energy, planted in silence, growing in unseen ways. It's never just the candle. It's the calm that made it, the gratitude that lights it, the awareness that keeps it burning.

You smile, because now you know, peace isn't found after the war, it's born from it.

Stillness isn't absence, it's arrival.

And as the sky begins to blush, you whisper to yourself, "The light was never gone. It was just waiting for me to see it."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

When the Giant Sat Down

Several weeks. Weeks that didn't simply pass. They carved themselves into you. Weeks where your health collapsed, your clarity dissolved, your meaning disappeared, and the identity you thought was unshakeable shook. It started with a sickness. Not symbolic. Not emotional. A real biological collapse.

Your body became foreign terrain: You couldn't walk, you couldn't hold water, you couldn't sleep, you couldn't eat, you couldn't trust your own limbs. Ten days of hospitals. Ten days of hospitals where no one could give you answers.

Ten days where you moved with a walking stick like a man three decades older. Ten days where you felt the price of taking health for granted.

Then came the silence. The silence of a home without a shadow, the silence of suffering alone, the silence that isn't peaceful but predatory. Loneliness didn't enter your room. It sat on your chest. And what made it worse was the realization: You felt unseen.

You felt misunderstood. You felt alone. And the world doesn't pause just because you're breaking. Relationships misread you. Your absence was interpreted as disinterest. Your silence was misinterpreted as withdrawal. Your sickness was mistaken for apathy.

Two human beings, carrying different things, struggling to understand each other. And while your body fought for function, your mind fought for meaning — and lost. Life had no taste. Purpose had no weight. Your goals became meaningless. Your business felt pointless.

Everything you built evaporated in seconds under the pressure of a virus you cannot see with the naked eye. And for the first time ever, you saw the truth: the mighty can be collapsed by the microscopic. Several weeks.

Where sickness bent your body and silence bent your spirit. Several weeks. Where loneliness had teeth and your thoughts had claws. Several weeks. Where the giant inside you was humbled by something invisible. Several weeks. Where illusions burned, and all that survived was truth.

Several weeks. Where your identity cracked, your purpose dissolved, and your ambition went quiet. Several weeks. Where you learned that the war is never over, that the mind is never fully conquered, that alignment is never final. Several weeks.

Where you saw how your own thoughts could make an already difficult day heavier. Several weeks. Where the giant sat down.

And you learned that he was still there.

Tired. Humbled. In need of care.

Still you.

You did not have to turn against him because he could no longer stand. You could sit beside him until he was ready to rise again.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Ink Between Us

It was late. The house had already shut itself down. No music. No phone. Only the table lamp — still warm — and the album waiting where it always had. You didn't decide to open it. Your hand did.

The cover made that sound — soft, tired — like something that had been reopened too many times for the same reason. The first pages were harmless. Landscapes. Smiles that belonged to everyone. Then you turned one page too far. There they were. Same angle.

Same light. Same smile that once moved, once responded, once belonged to a living body. You paused. Waiting for what always arrived first. The smell. That instinctive forward pull. That brief lie that proximity could resurrect presence. Nothing. You tried again. Slower.

As if effort could restore chemistry. Still nothing. Only paper. That's when something sat down inside you. Not grief. Not tears. Recognition. You could still hear the laughter. Immediate. Undeniable.

You could still hear the voice — the rhythm, the way your name sounded when it was said by someone who meant it. But the smell was gone. And that was worse. That familiar smell had belonged to presence.

And paper could not bring it back. You stayed longer than necessary. Tracing the outline of the image without touching the face. As if restraint could delay confirmation. They weren't behind the picture. They weren't hovering near the page.

They weren't waiting for you to remember harder. In that room, you were the one holding the memory. You turned the page back. Then forward again. Repetition as defiance. As if physics might reconsider. As if time might feel embarrassed and correct itself. It didn't.

What remained was exact. The laughter survived. The memory still functioned. But the presence — that invisible mass that once filled rooms — was gone. That's when the truth surfaced. Sometimes we return to albums to remember. Sometimes we return to slow forgetting.

Over time, parts of the memory soften. Edges round themselves off. Details begin asking for confirmation. So we come back. Again. And again. Not often. Only when we can afford the cost.

And the album always offers the same exchange: I will give you the image. But you will feel the absence with greater accuracy. That night, another realization arrived. Quieter. Heavier. Not that they were gone.

But that when they were still here — moving, breathing, interrupting your days — you treated time as if it were renewable. You saved words for later. Touch for calmer moments. Attention for days that never came. You assumed tomorrow was reliable.

Now tomorrow lives between pages.

Ink where warmth once existed.

Paper where breath once passed. You closed the album. Not gently. Not violently. Precisely. Like something that can still injure without movement.

And you understood something you hadn't understood before: We take pictures to preserve moments. One day, when the moment is gone, the image is what we have left to hold. That night, the picture wasn't memory. It was proof. And the house remained quiet.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Fire Without Scars

I didn't expect a song to challenge something I had believed about love for most of my life. It was just background music. The kind you don't pay attention to. Until one sentence steps forward and refuses to stay background.

"Only true love hurts like this." For a moment, it passed through me without resistance. Because somewhere inside, I already agreed. That was the unsettling part. Not the words. The agreement. My body had gone still without me noticing when it happened.

The weight in my shoulders was lighter than it had been earlier. Breathing slower. More space between one thought and the next. The kind of physical calm that makes a belief easier to see. Somewhere behind me, the music kept playing. Low. Patient. Almost careful.

As if the moment deserved respect. And then memory began answering. Rooms I had loved in. Voices I had waited for. Silences heavier than words. Moments where pain was called depth. Where endurance was called devotion. For a moment, the sentence felt familiar.

For a moment, it felt true. Then something shifted. Not emotion. Not anger. Clarity. If I love someone, I want to care for them. If I love myself, I want to stop accepting harm as the price of closeness.

And if God is the source of love… how could love itself be designed to wound? Silence answered first. And inside that silence, the sentence cracked. I began to wonder whether I had been romanticizing pain and calling it love.

I had learned this idea so early that it sounded like wisdom. That love must hurt. That love must be hard. That love must cost you your peace.

Pain is not proof of love. What had I confused with love?

Fear of losing someone. The need to be chosen. Intensity that kept me waiting for the next moment of closeness.

Old hurt, speaking through a new relationship.

Pain is not proof of love. The love I want has room for quiet. It slows the breath. It softens the jaw. It lets the body rest.

It doesn't burn. It warms.

And I could see something in myself: when I asked love to fill everything missing in me, closeness could begin to feel like hunger.

I want to bring love into my life without asking another person to become the whole of it. The breeze kept moving. The music kept playing. But the sentence was gone. Not because the song was wrong.

But because I was no longer available to believe it.

Pain is not proof of love. Love can bring grief. People can hurt each other and need to repair what happened.

But I no longer want to call every wound a sign of depth.

I want fire that warms me.

I do not want to keep burning to prove that it is real.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Siren at Seven

The school across from my window has a voice. For three days it spoke in celebration. Music spilling over the walls, children laughing like loose coins, microphones filling the air, a festival filling the morning. From the outside it looked healthy.

From the outside it looked normal. From the outside I told myself: This is how childhood should sound. Then Monday came and changed the language. At seven in the morning, the voice turned metallic. Not music — a siren. Not laughter — command.

Not play — procedure. I was still warm from sleep when it entered my room, and my body reacted before my mind could translate. My shoulders lifted. My jaw hardened. Something ancient in the spine whispered… DANGER.

I was standing in my own bedroom, safe, untouched, alive… and yet my nervous system was already running. I thought… If this touches me from a distance, what is it doing to the children inside the sound? I respect safety. I respect preparation.

I am not arguing against fire drills. I am arguing against the hour we choose to scare a brain awake. Who decided that the first breath of a day should taste like emergency? Who imagined that a small heart needs alarm before it needs sunlight?

We teach them how to escape flames, but I wondered how much time we give to helping them return from fear. Then the last three days replayed in me. Three days of volume. Three days without silence.

Music stacked on top of games, games stacked on top of shouting, a marathon of stimulation sold as joy. And the noise brought me back to my own life.

For years, normal had meant busy. Alive had meant movement. Quiet had felt like something I should fill.

I knew how to work, respond and keep going. I had given much less time to learning how to settle.

Watching the school, I wondered how we could make room for both. For play and preparation. For excitement and quiet. For knowing what to do when an alarm sounds, and finding our way back when it stops.

I watched from the window as the drill continued. Teachers waving arms, guiding the children. Lights blinking like artificial thunder. Small bodies moving in lines, following the drill. And a simple question cut through me: Why seven? Do fires respect breakfast?

Is catastrophe allergic to afternoons? Would the lesson die if the day was allowed to wake gently? Preparedness matters. So does the way we guide people through it. What are we making room for in the day?

We teach mathematics, languages, discipline and competition. I would like quiet to have a place too.

A few moments without reaching immediately for a screen, a sound, a task or a distraction.

I know how unfamiliar that can feel. I have had to learn it myself.

When the siren finally stopped, the field emptied like a stage after a storm. The day continued. The curriculum continued. The world acted as if nothing had happened. But something had.

I kept wondering what it would mean to make calm part of what we teach, alongside everything else.

Perhaps one day we will be brave enough to teach a different drill. Alongside knowing how to respond to fire, knowing how to breathe

inside silence. How to respond to an alarm, and how to return to center afterward.

To let a child know that peace is not laziness, that quiet is not wasted time, that a mind needs empty sky the way a seed needs dark soil. I closed the curtain and listened to the last echo fade. The school kept teaching.

The city kept rushing. The world kept insisting on speed. And I kept one stubborn thought: I want us to teach children how to meet a noisy world.

And to give them something quieter to return to.

A mind needs empty sky the way a seed needs dark soil.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This garden is still alive.

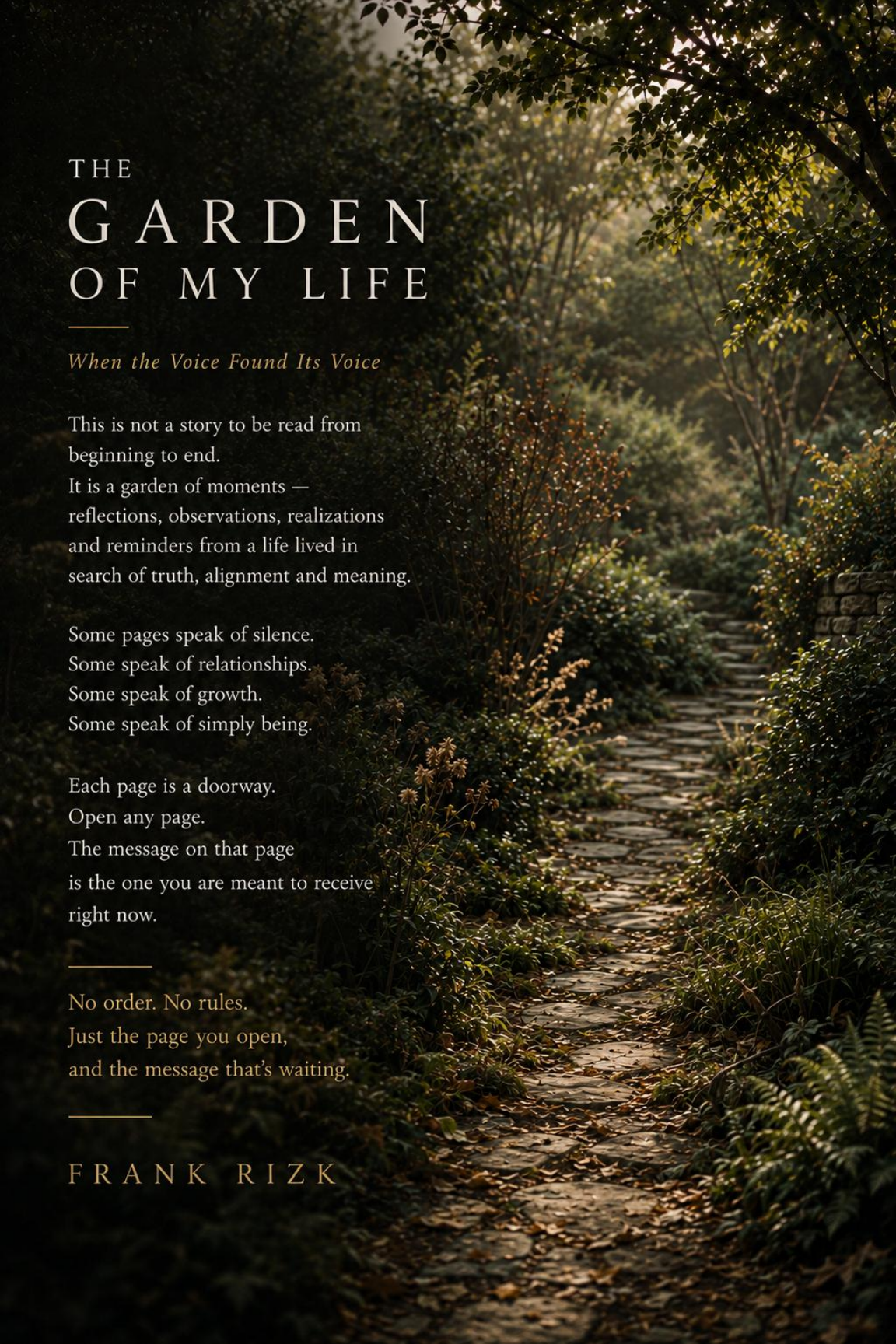
Some pages hold the man I was when I wrote them. Others hold something I am still growing into.

I have not tried to make every moment tidy. Life did not arrive that way.

I wanted to leave the feeling here: the warmth, the weight, the silence, the question. Enough for you to walk through it with me, without losing the sound of your own voice.

Thank you for spending time in the garden of my life.

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.

FRANK RIZK