A REVIVAL EXPERIMENT

MUSTAFA FELICIANO

A REVIVAL EXPERIMENT

Mustafa Feliciano



Clifton, New Jersey



Henry's a Nice Guy!

There was this guy in my neighborhood named Henry.

He looked old to me, but I was a kid, so I don't know how old he really was. He always wore spandex pants pulled up way above his waist, a fisherman's baseball cap with the colored visor, and square, simple frames. He had steely eyes and twitchy hands.

Something was off with Henry, and everyone knew it. Something was wrong with every member of his family, we heard. His parents were close relatives, and it affected all their offspring in some way. Despite learning that it's an old wives' tale to connect familial relations with mental illness, personal history is often at odds with lectures.

"Do I know you?" he'd ask with his eyes darting everywhere as he spoke and his fingers tickling the air as if ready to snap.

"You seem like a nice guy. Are you a nice guy?" he'd say next in his squeaky voice.

After we assured him that we were, he'd start complaining about people in the area who weren't nice guys.

"The guys at the park, they wanna wrestle. They wanna wrestle me with their shoes off. Do you wanna wrestle? With your shoes off?" He'd grow a little louder, more agitated when he'd complain about the not-nice guys.

"The guys at the store, they always make fun of me. They're always touchin' me; they make fun of me. The

guys at the store are not nice guys." He'd raise inflection with every syllable, before the smile returned to both his cheeks and brow, and he'd ask again, "Are you a nice guy?"

"Yes, Henry. We're nice guys," we'd say. And we always were nice to him.

We never met the guys who touched Henry or wanted to wrestle him with their shoes off. Sometimes we would ask him to point them out so we could teach them to be nice guys. The only clues we'd get were "at the store" and "at the park." Which store? Which park? Which guys? There were a lot of not-so-nice guys in our neighborhood who could have bullied Henry or taken advantage of him in a worse way. There were also plenty of nice guys who gave Henry a fair shake.

The only ill thing we did regarding Henry was repeat the same sentences he always said to us back to each other, word-for-word, doing imitations of his high-pitched voice and twitching fingers. Sometimes, before he could speak, we'd ask him first if he was a nice guy.

Other times, we'd say we weren't nice guys to see how he'd respond. He would reset and start from the beginning. "Do I know you?"

There were times we couldn't understand a word he was saying, and we thought he'd finally lost it for good. We figured out that for one-out-of-ten Henry experiences, he'd do the exact same routine, but in perfect Latin.

One of our friend's fathers told us he could speak Latin. I asked him to talk to Henry so we could see if he was more coherent in the other language. I realized that most adults were frauds when he refused. I don't know if

he really spoke Latin, or if he was trying to impress us. Either way, I soon learned most grown people speak with less sense than Henry. At least Henry was honest in whichever way he could be.

Every time I've found myself about to do something bad, I hear Henry's voice in my head, "Are you a nice guy?"

It's not that I've forgotten
what you did,
I just no longer think about you.

Sun. 5/3/26 12:20 AM

Adept

Being adept is hard
with impatience.
If you fall asleep
waiting for fools,
they'll catch you napping
and blame you
for not carrying your weight
or weighing their carriage.

Being adept and principled
is a real drag.
After listening to attempts
at convincing you the right way ahead,
you're expected to bite your tongue
as those mistaken double back,
go the way you alluded to,
and convince the crowd
it was natural discovery.

Being adept at loneliness
really soils the whole experience.
Being lonely is a challenge enough,
now it's even lonelier.

Tues. 5/5/26 9 PM

Mountain, Man

I'm a mountain of a man.

That means I move mountains
the size of men
and men
the size of mountains.

That means my core and my peak
are solid stone.
That mean my base and my frame
are wide and stable.

That means birds flock here,
while insects burrow deep below.

That means when I stretch,
the whole world shifts.

Even the hardest ink
softens
before drying up.

5/24/26 8:45 PM

Running Pigments

They say orange matches blue –
do they mean I burn when I feel sad?
or the color of my skin near the sea?
the color when the shin bursts
    after the bruise and before the blood?
Oh – he's listening to the broadcast
    of the game at the Garden?
They say blue matches orange –
I see the brightest flames
    dancing as both.
Are you matching my beard
    and my eyes?
Nah – that's dirty blond
    and hazel.
Close enough doesn't count
    for matters such as these.
You used the word "match"
    too often for me
    to not look for
    direct roads –
    not feelings and whispers.
I say red matches green –
pay up or leak out.

Authenticity Barometer

The authenticity barometer
sounds the beacon
when years-seasoned premises
are challenged with seconds-old rebuttals.
The ears point;
the sniff shifts
at the questioning of sources
from those not of that tongue.
That's not a stretch; that's a collapse.
Semantic battles against multilinguists
that purposely mask rights
behind shifting meanings of momentum
crash the dial of reality.
Insecurity is a noise
not near the frequency of self-knowledge;
weak lips shouldn't spout off.

Sat. 5/30/26 12 PM

Stillborn Notes

I lost a fleeting idea
to chase another,
abnormally confident
that it would bounce back.
In my attempts
to recall the promise I lost in the fog,
I also lost the idea
I had sought
to replace it with.

I fear I lost the notion
that would sum up
everything else I ever believed
and put to paper.
My fear is well-founded
as I have lost all the faces
that meant to highlight
the slits in the darkness.

Ghostly Guidance

I empathize with those who run.
Empathy is afforded through shared experience.
Distant from something you love,
a passing connection hurts more
than a firm push away.
A reminder of somewhere you're not
is of help to no one
and pauses progression.
Sideways thoughts
and intangible touches
cause such living ghosts
to set themselves ablaze.
Being unseen in the scene
stings more than falling off the cushion.

We Agree

I distinctly remember you saying
sometime soon.
That's when I learned
the meaning of soon is relative.
Einstein's work explains
time and space, after all.
Thanks for the lesson!
You took a theory and made it practical!
You took the wisdom out of the equation
and threw it in my face!
I remember you nodding as I was talking
about not talking,
and doing instead.
Who knew how soon you'd flip that for me?
While I was waiting for soon to come,
you distracted me from many nows,
and even from a few laters.
By the time you arrived,
I'd forgotten I was waiting
in my state of decay.
You could have polished me new,
but instead you walked away frightened,
displeased at the condition
brought on by your neglect.
Is it acceptable to rot lessons away with a man?
Your final nod allowed me to slip out.

Sail away and back

I told you I'd never leave you,
and I lied.
Not because I chose to,
but because the weight of the world
pulled us apart.

I told you we'd be together again soon,
and I lied.
Not because I didn't want to move,
but because something somebody did
filled my shoes with cement.

Hopefully you don't count me
among the liars –
blame the unforgiving nature
of this filthy, ever-shifting landmass –
or seamass –
especially those who teach others
to be grateful for the air.

I pray that you know
what I told you
was – and is – true in my soul.

I pray you can notice
the blood on my chest
through the fog.

I pray to be held
to the standard
of my promises
by holding my foot
on the neck
of the waves and the hills,
allowing you free passage
to find the valley of joy
which has been locked away
from those of our tribe.

6/18/26 1:20 AM

Deepened Need

I build a relationship with my pens
to know which one's crying
and how to feed it –
how to nurture its deepened need,
to prove to their chosen custodian
they have the stuff
to turn my stuff
into true stuff.
When I hold an old friend,
I know where to press
to unload the volcano
which erupts inside the container.
I ask the pens for forgiveness
for choosing others more often –
family forgives without words.
I have to store some flavors –
of thought, display, or happenstance –
under caps, until we're both ready
to dance each other's dance.

Don't Forgive Them!

A Lady once asked me how I'm able to forgive people so readily. She also asked how I'm able to look past people's glaring flaws despite noticing them on sight and remaining entirely critical.

"First off," I told her, "I'm critical of generalities but take the humanist approach with individuals. Secondly, because I know deep down at some point during the day, unless they're a complete psychopath, every person has to address themselves and face the truth. Knowing that is enough to let things go. Also, I know the reality of man, and deep down, everyone's animalistic self is filthy. If you know what this means, you'll know just what to expect and never be disappointed. Finally, I used to want everything to make sense and follow a predictable pattern."

She leaned forward and placed her fist under her chin.

"I learned that man is volatile and generally unaware of the reality of why they act. Listening to their false, hindsight-driven justifications will not satisfy a seeker of complete, unfiltered reality."

"Yeah, but people hurt you. You know they're going to hurt you and still let it happen."

"The next move is not always set in stone. You need to give people space to grow, to learn, to make mistakes. Beyond that, if my only flaw is thinking well of my brother, I'll take the hit every time. I used to say: 'You can't change people; you can only change their perception of

you.' Be principled, hold your ground. They'll push you, you won't budge. They'll push you out, you'll leave a void, they'll want you back. And that's enough for most people's redemption."

"You say it so easily…"

"Maybe so, but reaching this vantage was quite the adventure."

"That means you've been hurt a lot…?"

"Much like any other type of mastery – and I must say, these are ideals, and I often slip into a more localized approach – success only comes after repeated practice. I've been stripped on display time and time again until I learned to staple my garments to my skin."

"That's not fair…"

"If life were fair, we wouldn't be having this conversation. In truth, we probably wouldn't know each other as one of the earlier 'soul mates' would have stuck."

"…"

"And now you see how people allow their emotions to override the melody which lets them taste the honey of harmony."

"Why don't you feed honey to one of the girls you wished were here in place of me?"

"You don't mean that."

"Tell me her name. We could track her down together! Let me prove to you I care about the truth which you seek!"

"I'll see my way out."

Man of God; Son of Man

I once knew a man
who stayed near the air conditioning
when he was hot
and cranked up the heat
when he felt a minor chill.
A man who blamed his boss
for being underpaid,
who shouted at his son
to stop crying
instead of making him feel safe.
A man who looked both ways
before he ran someone over,
who cut down the trees
because they were blocking
his view of the buildings.
A man who thought
his fill of pills
granted him vitality,
who only opened his hands
to ask for a bigger yard.

This man
tried to convince me
he knew God.

Note on the Text

I wrote this book by hand between April and June of 2026, but you already know the timeline if you checked the timestamps. After having my heart broken by the world, by my work, and by people and places I loved, I felt I had no choice but to return to the analog world of physical paper and pens filled with archival ink. Digital ghosts can't find you when you step away from the screens. But you also already know that if you read the poetry and prose contained in these pages.

Although I wrote everything in a nearly trance-like state over the course of those two and a half months, do not think any of it has been printed in the original stream-of-consciousness state. I painstakingly edited every single word of every single poem and story to make sure everything held its weight, there was no unnecessary exposition bogging down the message, and I didn't come across as whining. The purpose of this book, as the title indicates, is revival, not decomposition.

The notebook where I first expressed this book also contains the location for every piece. I decided to remove them because while I wrote some in Brooklyn, Newark, Paterson, and several other places, I wrote nearly everything in *C-Town* on my *Filthy Desk*.

In the revision process, I cut several poems, micro-thoughts, and drawings for clarity, redundancy, and quality. I also withheld five poems from the final release to circulate around literary magazines: *Red Stillness*, *Beluga*

Egg, *My Cipher*, *Quiet Explosion*, and *First Words are Inked*. I will slot these five back into their proper places in any subsequent edition of this book.

Although I produced *A Revival Experiment* over a short few months, the content has built up over years of lived experience, self-mastery attempts, travel, and deep reflection. Do not use the timestamps to think little effort went into the wordsmithing of the ideas I presented here. Instead, this was the time the crows of my nest hatched and took flight.

September 2026
Clifton, New Jersey

About Mustafa Feliciano

Mustafa Feliciano (also known as Thomas Feliciano) is a New Jersey-based writer, editor, and educator with two decades of industry experience who has lived, worked, and studied around the world. Most recently, he lived in Istanbul for the better part of a decade, where he studied under masters, chaired English departments, and led numerous publishing projects. As a trained journalist, historian, and theologian, his broad range of interests is complemented by his constant hunt for new skills. He is currently the Founder and Creative Director of Ihsan Imprint, a publishing house built on self-actualization through fiction, poetry, philosophy, educational content, and art. He is passionate about language, logic, humor, equity, and professional wrestling. Beyond sharpening his craft, his two wonderful children motivate his pen to never let the ink settle.

About Ihsan Imprint

Ihsan Imprint is a New Jersey-based publishing house built upon the concept of self-mastery, beautifying all actions, and improving the mediums by which we communicate. Fusing fiction, philosophy, poetry, educational content, and art in the purest definition, Ihsan Imprint is the lane paved by those without access to the road. If every voice is unique, then everyone has a story to tell, though the only stories with truth are those rooted in self-awareness. The works published are driven by the notion that if you do not know yourself, you cannot contribute to the world in a meaningful way. Success is only worth celebrating if it can be consistently replicated. The catalog of Ihsan Imprint serves to refine the process of crafting master tools.


Ihsan
Imprint