THE UACS STUDENT MAGAZINE

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STAR GAZER

20 YEARS University American College Skopje

A Legacy of Excellence



MIND AND MOTION
WHY AREWESOOBSESSED
WITH TRUE CRIME?

INTERVIEW CORNER
VENERA KRLIU

OUR LOCAL 5
A HIT OR A MISS?

LEGEND, WAIT FOR IT … DARY!
A TALK WITH ILIJA MUKAETOV

AND MANY MORE INTERESTING TOPICS!
READ TO FIND OUT MORE

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

As we lay to rest our pens and paper, we feel it worthwhile to reflect on the events of this past year. Marked by innovation, milestones, hardships and turbulence, that truly present a world moving faster now than ever before, the pages of our second issue ask you to slow down and read through them thoroughly and thoughtfully. We dedicate this to you, in hopes that something inside will resonate with you, spark some curiosity, or bring some comfort to your soul.

When Stargazer first came to life, we envisioned it as a platform where students can express their imagination, their creativity, their uniqueness, and where they can speak up on what seems unfair in the world. To follow our vision, embedded in this issue, you will encounter various articles, some rich in history, some in creativity, and some in experiences. This issue is shaped by voices familiar and new – so we encourage you to engage, reflect, and even disagree, as every article offers something different to our readers.

Embroidered within each story are traces of our delightful writers, who whole-heartedly devoted their time into making this second edition of our newspaper. Watching this idea come to life, so beautifully and feverishly, has been dreamlike. Therefore, we hope that you, as readers and students, will enjoy reading this issue, and be encouraged to engage with us on the next.

We had a marvelous time making this for you, and we hope you enjoy it.

With gratitude,

Jana Popova

CONTENT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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On the Horizon

Features on talented students, and their success stories in their hobbies and subsequent achievements

20 Years of UACS: Celebrating the Past, Inspiring the Future





In 2025, the University American College Skopje (UACS) proudly marked 20 years of academic excellence, innovation, and community. What began as an ambitious educational vision has grown into a dynamic university shaping future leaders across a wide range of disciplines. To honor this remarkable journey, UACS organized a series of memorable events celebrating its legacy, values, and future direction—paying tribute to the pillars that have made UACS the institution it is today. The anniversary celebrations officially began on May 10 with the 20th Anniversary Open Day, which brought together students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners on campus. The event reflected on the university's evolution while reaffirming its core mission: to provide high-quality, internationally oriented education grounded in integrity, creativity, and social responsibility.

Later in May, the celebration took on a warmer, more personal tone with UACS Family Day in Skopje City Park. Under the motto Family First, students, professors, employees, alumni, and their families gathered to celebrate the spirit of the UACS community. With music, smiles, and a relaxed atmosphere, the event highlighted that UACS is more than a place of learning —it is a space built on connection, support, and a strong sense of belonging. A particularly meaningful moment was the recognition of employees who have dedicated two decades of service to UACS, each receiving a special award for their loyalty, commitment, and lasting contributions—reminding everyone that strong institutions are built by devoted people.

In October, the celebrations continued with a formal Corporate Anniversary Event, which brought together representatives from the business sector, the diplomatic community, academic partners, and long-term collaborators. A key highlight of the evening was the launch of the "Honoring Legacy" Scholarship Program, designed to strengthen cooperation between academia and industry while supporting talented students. The event also marked a new chapter in UACS leadership, with Prof. Venera Krliu officially elected as Rector, symbolizing the beginning of a new era for the university.

And finally, the anniversary year concluded in November with the Academic Forum “Education for the Future.” The event, followed by speeches from UACS Rector Prof. Venera Krliu and Afrim Gashi, President of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, who underscored the national importance of education, was followed by UACS academic staff and UACS-affiliated international panellists who shared valuable insights on global education, innovation, and future challenges. Through a series of engaging discussions, students, scholars, and experts explored how universities must evolve in a rapidly changing world, reinforcing UACS’s role as a forward-thinking institution with a strong international voice. Together, these events captured the spirit of UACS’s 20-year journey—a balance of tradition and progress, community and ambition, reflection and vision. As the university looks ahead, it continues to inspire new generations to learn, lead, and make an impact, carrying the UACS legacy forward.











Mind and Motion

Why Are We So Obsessed With True Crime?

An interest that's ever growing in popularity, true crime is no longer just a genre of content, it's a full cultural ecosystem, spawning in the form of documentaries, podcasts, Reddit threads, amateur sleuthing communities, etc. But why are we as a society so compelled by stories of real violence? Psychology offers several explanations that are more complex than simple morbid curiosity.

Primarily, humans are wired to notice a threat and remember it. Essentially, our brains love danger (from a safe distance). This is called negativity bias (Baumeister et al., 2001), and it explains why our attention locks onto these stories. Learning about threats, even if it's through a screen, has adaptive value. By consuming true crime content, we are given the opportunity to mentally rehearse in a way.

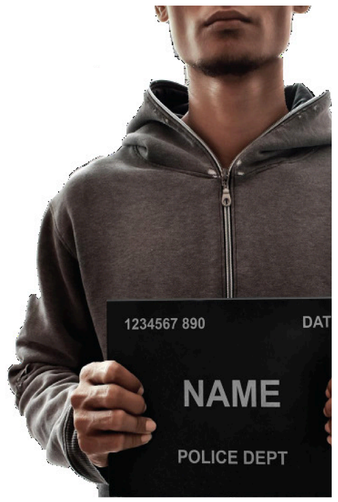
It allows us to ask ourselves: What are the warning signs? And what would I do in that situation? In a way, it's a form of socially acceptable hypervigilance.

Second, it provides an adrenaline rush without consequences. Physiologically, true crime activates the sympathetic nervous system, the same system involved when we feel fear. However, we know that we're safe, therefore this activation can feel not just controlled, but even pleasurable. Zillmann's excitation-transfer theory (1983) helps explain: heightened arousal levels from suspense can lead to intensified engagement, attention, and emotional payoff once the story is resolved.

Third, it's an attempt to understand the outliers of human behavior. Violent offenders are examples of extreme deviations from typical human behavior, so watching true crime is, in part, a way of trying to make sense of said outliers. Documentaries conveniently package these questions into narratives we can analyze.

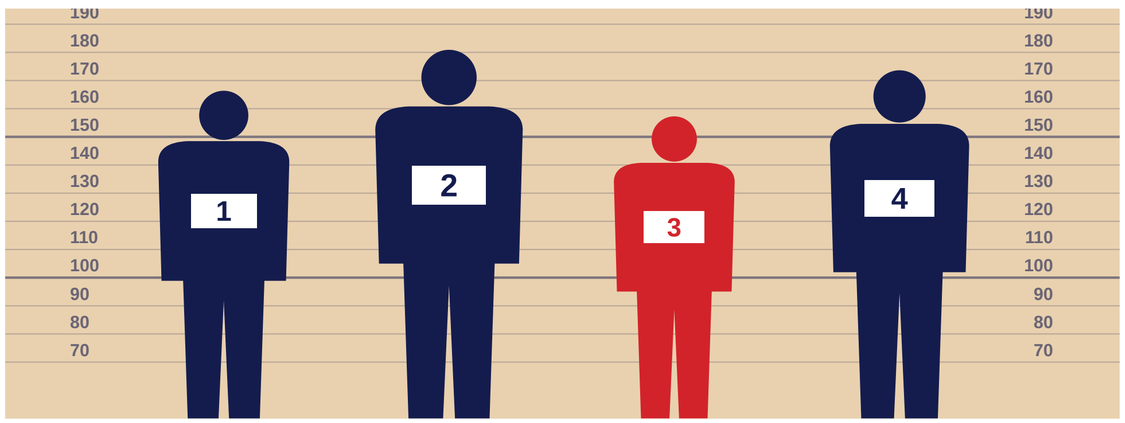
The aforementioned documentaries take chaos and turn it into a clear narrative with timelines and explanations. Humans possess a strong desire for something called cognitive closure (Kruglanski, 1989). Even when a case isn't fully solved, the process of organizing the chaos provides psychological relief.

Finally, it aids us in making sense of society. True crime has never been just about individuals; it's about systems. Social norms, inequality, policing, mental health care, forensics, and so much more. Consuming these stories assists us in processing how society responds to violence and where those responses sometimes fail. This is connected to social psychology's interest in moral judgement, justice, and collective responsibility.



In short, true crime sits at the intersection of curiosity, fear, and the basic human instinct to understand behavior that breaks social rules. It's ultimately both disturbing and meaningful, a way to confront the edges of human behavior along with its surrounding structures.

— MARTINA TODOROVA



Mind and Motion

Academic life, and later on work, is likely to cause stress or negative emotions in people, especially during important moments such as exam week. Such feelings often lead to engaging in coping mechanisms, but not all methods are healthy. You'd be hard-pressed to call substance abuse or overeating a good behaviour, for instance, even less extreme mechanisms, like social isolation or avoidance of problems, actually cause people to be more stressed in the long run. Humans are social creatures, so isolation can't bode well for us. Avoiding problems can often lead to procrastination or escapism, neither of which is good. Learning to deal with these negative feelings in healthy ways is crucial to maintaining mental health and to contribute to a pleasant work environment.

Stress can be very damaging to both your work and your health. It can often lead to negative coping habits – procrastination, dietary issues, substances, violence and so on. Even if you resist and bottle it in instead, it can lead to headaches, poor sleep, low mood or difficulty concentrating; all of which make academic pursuits more difficult. The potential issues are many, and in order to avoid them it is important to take some precautions before it becomes overwhelming, or measures to deal with it in a productive way.

Before we get into it, however, I would like to point out how UACS cares about its students' well-being, and this is best exemplified through its amazing counseling system. If you would like some advice or help, or just someone to speak with, you can always pay them a visit. But if you would like to tackle this subject yourself and get some tips on how to do so, please read on.

So, to begin with, I would like to cover some general practices that might prevent or at the very least lessen stress build-up in the first place. One way to do this is through breathing and meditative exercises. There are many techniques to choose from, such as box breathing or extended exhale, but for general instructions, take a deep breath and slowly exhale, while focusing on the air flowing through you. There are alternative ways to meditate as well; you could count numbers, for example. Walking can also be meditative – you simply need to close your eyes, and focus on either your body and movements, or on stimuli from your surroundings – some particular sound perhaps. Aside from the physical benefits, which also contribute to mental well-being, light exercises like these are good for de-stressing as well. Finally, you can combine all of the above through ancient eastern practices like Qigong or Tai Chi.

Of course, these methods aren't foolproof. You might get stressed out despite these practices, and you'll need to take further steps to properly calm your nerves. A popular way to achieve this is through athleticism. Going to the gym is the most common activity of this type nowadays, but a better option would be taking up a sport, even something simple like running or cycling. Another, less popular, but equally helpful method is writing, or specifically journaling. While any form of writing can be calming, writing about yourself and your thoughts generally brings better results.

And lastly, we arrive at the aforementioned socialising. A weekly meet-up with your friends over coffee or some other fun activity goes a long way to ensuring a healthy mindspace.

In conclusion, regular social interactions play a crucial role in maintaining mental well-being. Taking the time to meet with friends for coffee or engaging in enjoyable activities not only fosters connections but also promotes a positive mindset. By prioritizing these moments of socializing, we can enhance our overall health and ensure a more balanced and fulfilling life.

— DAVUD GALAPCHEV



Interview Corner

Be Bold, Be Wild, Love Yourself

A conversation with Prof. Venera Krliu, PhD, Rector of University American College Skopje



I sat down with Prof. Venera Krliu, PhD, Rector of University American College Skopje to shine light on who she is beyond the professional. She prefers early mornings, campus walks over desk time, and Sade's "By Your Side" on repeat. In her bag: glasses, lip balm, a pen — and, as she admits, at least a few things she doesn't remember putting there.

Her path to the rector's office has been defined by continuity rather than sudden turns. She holds a BA from Webster University and a PhD from University Euro-Balkan, and has spent much of her professional life at UACS, serving as Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior, Vice-Rector for Education, Chief Operations Officer, and Deputy CEO. She also served as Principal of American High School Skopje, working closely with students long before they reached university.

Her leadership development extends beyond Macedonia. She completed executive education at Harvard Business School, attending the European Entrepreneurship Colloquium in 2009 and 2015, and the Young Managers Programme at IEDC-Bled School of Management. In 2012, she received the Business Leader of the Year award from the European Business Association in Macedonia. In 2017, the state honoured her with the Mother Teresa Award for long-term humanitarian engagement. She is the fourth ever woman to be elected as Rector in Macedonia.

Credentials, however, only tell part of the story. The point of this interview is to get to know the real person leading our University. When asked what she hopes students remember from her time as rector, her answer is direct: the importance of self-love.

We sat down with her to talk about campus life, generational change, and the lessons that extend beyond a degree.

THE PERSON BEHIND THE TITLE

We start light. If you weren't a rector, what would you be doing today? She doesn't hesitate: "Running a charity organisation." Given her 2017 Mother Teresa Award, it's less a hypothetical and more a parallel life she's already living. Asked what would surprise people most about her, she smiles: "I am much stricter with myself than with others."

For energy, she turns to hip-hop or R&B. For calm, it's Sade on repeat — "By Your Side," specifically. She is firmly an early bird, a books person, and when given the choice between her desk and the campus grounds, she'll take the walk every time. Mountain or sea? "I love nature — but sea, definitely." And what's always in her bag? "Glasses, lip balm and a pen — and at least two more things I don't remember putting there."

STUDENT LIFE

When asked about her favourite spot on campus, she answers without a pause: the Networking Office. "Fun people," she says. The student tradition she holds closest is the annual Christmas charity — fitting, for someone whose own charitable work earned national recognition. When it comes to today's generation of students, she is genuinely admiring: "Today's students are more open about mental health, boundaries and asking for support. Self-awareness is a real strength."

LIFE ADVICE

The best advice she's ever received outside the classroom came in three words: "Speak your mind." The lesson that cost her the most? "Get ready to be hurt by close people."

We ask what one skill every student should master before graduating beyond their degree. She thinks for a moment, then lands on an answer that is harder than it sounds: "If being a decent person is a skill — then decent."

DREAMING FORWARD

If she could design any course at UACS, it would be a Life Hack Course: "how to tie a tie, how to wrap a present, learn to sew, shake hands properly, cook with three ingredients." The things, she implies, that matter long after the diploma.

Asked to picture campus life twenty years from now in a single sentence, she obliges: "A campus more digital but still human, without rigid borders where learning happens across disciplines and culture — also greener and definitely more inclusive."

If students remember one thing about your time as rector, what would you hope it is? She answers quietly: "The importance of self-love."

CLOSING

On difficult days, she laces up her hiking boots or goes for a run — and makes time for coffee with a friend. It's the kind of answer that tells you something real about a person.

We close by asking what she'd like to say to the students who will read this. She doesn't need a moment to think: "Do not hurry to grow up. Mistakes are not failures. Be different, be bold, be wild. Love life, live every day, help others, mind your own business, have fun, cry out, smile often, put boundaries. Love your family — most of all, love yourself." Coming from someone who has spent decades building an institution while never losing sight of the people inside it, Prof. Venera Krliu remains genuine and in touch with the students. It is a reminder that the most important things are rarely on the syllabus.

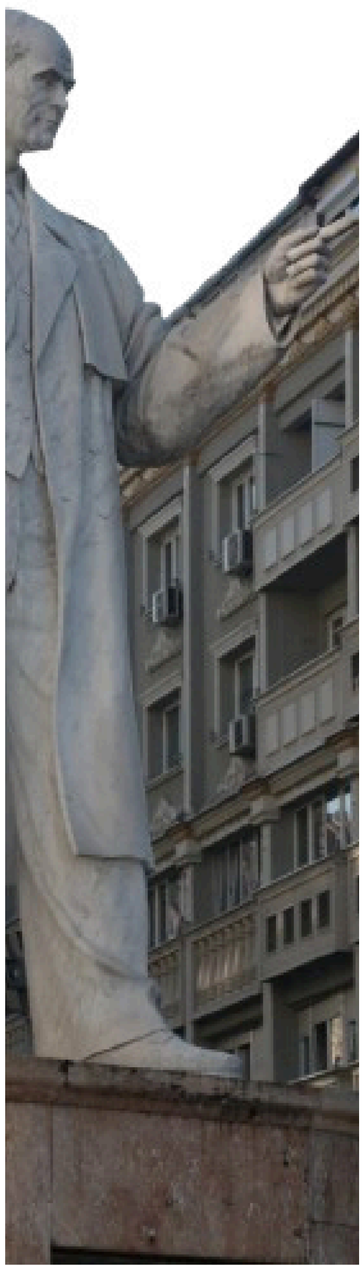
— MARTIN JOVANOV

"Do not hurry to grow up. Mistakes are not failures. Be different, be bold, be wild."

— PROF. VENERA KRLIU

Interview Corner

José's Experience: An Exchange Student from Portugal



For this section of our paper, I decided to conduct an interview with José Borges, a 21 year old exchange student from Portugal studying Political Science and International Relations at the Catholic University of Portugal. José was born in Setúbal, a coastal city located about an hour south of Lisbon. José has lived in Lisbon for the majority of his life, so the parallels between it and Skopje are quite entrancing.

José prides himself by having a broad range of interests, namely history, which guided him to pursue his chosen field of studies. He has previous experience with exchange programs; Macedonia was the most unfamiliar destination of the provided choices. Naturally, it aroused the most curiosity, and given his adventurous spirit, he had made his decision almost instantly.

Anticipating a place with character and authenticity, José's expectations were exceeded upon his arrival in Macedonia. From the moment he arrived, José realized Skopje was going to be different from what he was used to. One moment that stands out happened almost immediately: "Moments after arriving in Skopje, during the car trip from the airport to where I live, I came across several cars and motorcycles driving on the sidewalk to avoid traffic." It was an early reminder that he was definitely far from Portugal.

His integration into student life here was reportedly much easier than expected. He stated, "Being an Erasmus student, I end up having more free time than I did in Portugal. I am also much closer to the university, making the commute different and less tiring." The smaller class sizes and welcoming environment also made a strong impression. "I was received and integrated in an exemplary way," he remarked, noting that although he misses the large auditoriums back home, he appreciates the closeness between professors and students here. José was originally meant to stay only one semester, but he ultimately extended his stay to a full year because of how much he enjoyed his experience.

Socially, his experience has been positive. He had initially been concerned about the level of interaction between local and exchange students, but Skopje proved those worries unnecessary: "In other Erasmus destinations, foreign students didn't have a great level of closeness with local students... Here, the opposite proved true." Having already known someone beforehand also helped his early integration.

A few things stood out in terms of culture. Macedonian weddings particularly piqued his interest, describing them as "extremely lively and appealing." He also expressed admiration for how much people use public spaces: "One of the biggest differences I noticed was the number of people on the streets, even a lot after dark; you could see everyone from couples to children enjoying themselves."

The biggest challenge has been the contrast between life here and the busy household he comes from. "Being away from my family, fatherland, and the contrast between the noisy life I have at home... Here it is different," he noted. The language barrier has been minimal: "Almost everyone speaks English, making communication easy."

In terms of personal growth, José describes gradual change: "Being surrounded by a different culture and environment shapes my thought process positively."

For students interested in similar experiences, it's worth noting that our own university also offers Erasmus exchanges. Students are encouraged to look out for Erasmus calls, which typically open at the beginning of each semester. The contact information of the university's Erasmus coordinator, Viktoria Gombar, can be found on the UACS website for any questions or application guidance.

When asked about the future, completing his final year of university is certain, but what comes next still remains open. "I might do another bachelor's degree or continue to a master's degree. Traveling full-time is also an appealing choice."

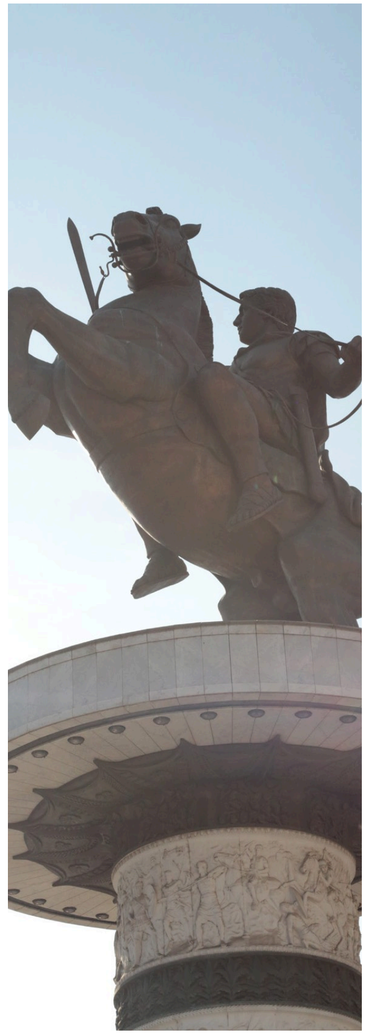
In response to the question of whether he would recommend Macedonia to other students, he responded: "Yes, definitely... For people looking for authenticity, Skopje is definitely the right choice."

In three words, José summarized his exchange experience as: "Uncertain, unexpected, and cherished."

— MARTINA TODOROVA







Our Local 5

Welcome to the different side of Skopje! This section is your invitation to step away from the busy and mainstream rhythm of the city. Our Local 5 is your guide to the new, the unexpected, and the quietly brilliant. These are the spots that remind us why exploring off the beaten path is always worth it.

Kombo

Have you ever wanted to grab a coffee, read a book and go thrifting all at once? If yes, you are in luck. Tucked away in Zhelezara, Kombo is the definition of a hidden gem. This is the place to go when you just want to be in a clear state of mind. It's a creative studio that offers a cozy and homey atmosphere for everyone. Owned by two sisters, you can definitely feel the warmth and love as soon as you set foot in. Writers, sketchers, and thinkers gravitate towards it because it offers space to breathe and create. Four stars for uniqueness and for proving that Skopje's most inspiring spaces aren't confined to downtown cafés.

RATING ★★★★☆

Brioche Artisan Bakery

This bakery is a rich story of ambition. The owner is my former high school classmate, and I salute her for being able to run her own artisan bakery at a young age. Such an achievement feels surreal yet completely deserved, and it serves as a great motivator and a symbol of what young Skopje entrepreneurs can accomplish. The pastries are buttery perfection, the sourdough is crafted with care, the soft cookies melt in your mouth, and the vibe is chic yet approachable. And the best part is that the bakery is located nearly 15 minutes away from our college, meaning that you can always grab a bite either before or after classes. Five stars for taste, inspiration, and proving that dreams really do come true, and hard work never goes unnoticed.

RATING ★★★★★

Soup Kultura

When winter bites, Soup Kultura is where you go to thaw out. Small and homey, it serves soups that taste like they were made just for you. The mismatched chairs, handmade décor, and the aroma of something simmering on the stove make it feel less like a restaurant and more like a friend's living room. Soup Kultura isn't just food — it's comfort you can eat. Four stars for being Skopje's coziest culinary accolade.

RATING ★★★★☆

Bad Wolf Bookshop

A new indie bookstore that is quickly becoming a cultural hub. It's small, curated, and cozy — the kind of place where you don't just buy books, you discover them. The shelves lean toward contemporary fiction, philosophy, and niche literature, making it perfect for students who want to read beyond the syllabus. With occasional readings and meetups, it's more than a shop: it's a community space. Four stars for proving that bookshops can be the new student hangout spots.

RATING ★★★★☆

MicroPub Skopje

For all of my fellow beer lovers out there – this is the perfect place for you. Located in the city center, MicroPub is a craft beer haven that feels like a secret shared among friends. It's small, intimate, and known for rotating draft selections that keep things fresh. The staff are welcoming, the prices student-friendly, and the vibe laid-back enough to make you forget you're in the busy center. It's the kind of place where conversations stretch late into the night, fueled by good beer and good company. Four stars for originality, affordability, and community spirit.

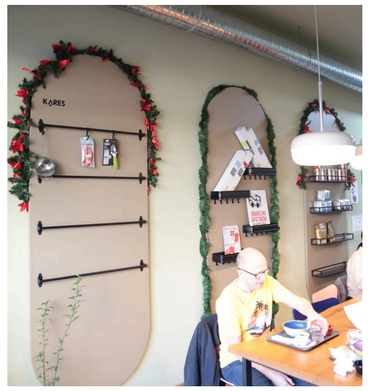
RATING ★★★★☆

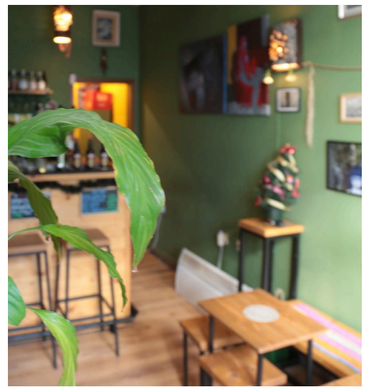
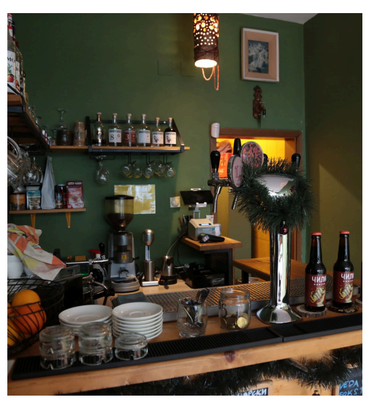
— ISKRA SMILEVSKA









Find all five

You'll find the location of every spot we recommended here — just scan the code.

Legend, Wait for It ... Dary!

Ilija's Captivating Life Path

A conversation with Ilija Mukaetov, UACS alumnus and President of the UACS Business Council

In the warm and lively offices of Philip Morris, I had the chance to sit down with Mr. Ilija Mukaetov, a distinguished UACS Alumnus, for an afternoon of captivating stories and advice, shaped by a life rich in hard work and persistence. Apart from his role as an alumnus, he is also the President of the Business Council at UACS, the Supply Planning Manager (TPM) – EU Region at Philip Morris, and a father to 2 loving daughters. Through our charming conversation, Ilija reflected on his journey from the days spent at university to his present-day life.

Ilija was determined from the start; he knew that he would obtain his Bachelor's Degree at the University American College Skopje. His impression was that UACS is a University which offers modern education, practical experiences, and a professional approach to all students. He hoped the classrooms would be filled with motivated students and real-life business practices, and sure enough, reality met expectations. When reminiscing about the Professors at UACS, Ilija says what he values most is their commitment to teach every student how to apply critical thinking and always ask questions – this would become very useful throughout his career.

After getting to know him further, one interesting find is that both his professional and personal life have always revolved around the international scene. His career began with entry-level positions and progressed as he took on more responsibility. The first of this kind was at NATO, where he worked as a translator, but quickly moved to the telecommunications and logistics sector. Eight years later, he found himself in the automobile industry at Johnson Controls. This was the place where he gained a lot of knowledge and experience in operations and supply chain management. Ilija really moved out of his comfort zone when he continued his career in the fast-moving consumer goods industry, i.e., Philip Morris. He humbly summarises the success of his career as a combination of hard work, constant learning, and taking on challenges. It appears that the most helpful skills for him have been communication, strategic thinking, leadership, and continuous improvement. "Every opportunity given to one worker in terms of their advancement should be pursued," he states. Talking about what comes next, he remarked that the future holds further personal development within international frameworks and strong team-building as crucial steps in driving results and innovations.

On that note, another very important driver for success is teamwork. For Ilija, to lead by example and to love what you do are the essence of teamwork. Quite simple, yet endearing, isn't it? He says that a leader must be the person who shows how to move forward and achieve goals, but this isn't a one-man show, and the role of the team is vital. He goes on to say that his managerial style is horizontal rather than vertical, for he felt persistently the importance of every member feeling valued and contributing to the team. "In the end, the most important thing is to love your job, enjoy your duties, and achieve your goals through cohesion in the team."

Aside from his exceptional career, Ilija devotes his time to raising his two daughters and being their guiding light. For leisure, he is a part of 091 RUN CrW Skopje, and participates in marathons in the country as well as abroad. Although he enjoys running, his greatest love is basketball. So much so, that he states he would have been a basketball coach to young generations had he not pursued a career in management.

If there is one thing I urge you to take from Mr. Ilija Mukaetov, it's what he would say to his younger self, and advise all students in university. That is to be bold and be brave, take chances, don't be afraid of making mistakes, and ask A LOT of questions. He quotes Albert Einstein that "A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new". In his own words, patience and curiosity ALWAYS lead to results.

— JANA POPOVA



"A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new."

— ALBERT EINSTEIN, AS QUOTED BY ILIJA MUKAETOV

Be bold and be brave, take chances, don't be afraid of making mistakes, and ask A LOT of questions. Patience and curiosity ALWAYS lead to results.

Weblogs

Twenty-Freaking-Something

Being twenty-something often feels unbelievably exhausting, and you enter it with all these great expectations because you're so used to hearing "Those are the best years" from absolutely anyone and everyone who is older.

Truth is, I find myself thinking "Do I really fit anywhere?" much more often than I think "WOW! These truly are the best years".

And the thing is you DON'T really fit anywhere when you are twenty-something. You have nothing figured out yet.

(Which, as I'm getting older, I'm starting to think that no one ever figures it out — adults just get better at pretending. But I have yet to do extensive pondering on this topic.)

You don't have a stable career yet, if you're lucky enough to even have a career; your love life is an absolute immaculate mess, and friend groups change by the day. You are either someone who "lucked out" and got in a serious relationship when you were younger and when you got to twenty-something you realized you were bored of it, or you're someone who is rummaging through the trash of the so-called "hook-up culture," seeing what it has to offer.

Either way, you're fundamentally messed up.

So, what makes our twenties our "best years"?

I find myself constantly lost and having to find myself at least twice a day, and as soon as I do, I lose myself again. I have no clue what purpose I have in this world (if any). I don't exactly know my political stance, and I find myself asking and pondering big existential questions, but I have no answers to give.

I am very concerned with the state of the world right now. I think of it often. But I have no clue how to help or do my part. I feel unbelievably small and insignificant, yet the issues take a very big, significant portion of my thoughts.

And this is not my pessimistic view — believe it or not, I am very optimistic. But as time progresses and life spans get significantly longer, you get a lot more time to "figure it out."

I am finishing up my bachelor degree and getting ready to move abroad to study my masters in a desperate need to figure myself out, realizing that a change of scenery might be THE answer that all of us are looking for.

My career has been only attempts — some failed and some successful... for a little while.

My love life has been a failed pilot of a coming-of-age comedy with witty writing but a low budget. Actors who should have become voice actors instead, as they are not really pleasant to look at... and of course the main role, starring me — a manic pixie dream girl whose existential crisis is simply not big enough or entertaining enough to have viewers for a whole season. (I do have to admit though, I am VERY pleasant to look at so at least I get that.)

I luckily have one constant — the best one I could have asked for... my friends. My friends make me feel like I've won big in life, especially since, when meeting other people, I understand more and more how unsteady friendships are in your twenties.

I have three of the most amazing girls by my side, as well as two great guys. One of them pretty much HAS to hang out with me because we are blood related, but we are very close despite that. (Yes, I used "despite" correctly in case you didn't catch that.) The other one is a mirror of my behaviour in a male version — maybe because we were born three days apart, and astrology plays a part or whatnot.

My girls are the stars of the show though. I have around me three archetypes of female psychology. They are all so different yet somehow we are all so alike.

I am extremely grateful to be understood in times when I have the utmost difficulty understanding myself, and accepted when I struggle to accept myself. Yet, my friends open their arms so wide, and even when I feel uncomfortable to be loved and to be seen, they foster an environment where it is so safe to exist that I forget completely about my issues.

Maybe our twenties are so great because of our constant, unreal struggles. We gallop around in this society with no real issues except the ones we inflict on ourselves. And don't get me wrong — life has been totally unkind to me and I have seen struggle, but the struggles we face in our twenties — our issues with our identity, issues with the self, trying to find our purpose, our "tribe," our "the one," our career and our space — that is what is made up.

Truth is that nothing really matters, yet every single thing matters.

So how do you live?

How do you breathe in without suffocating on the idea that every little decision that you make now will affect your future and later your life?

— MARIJA ILIJOSKA



Do You Go Against Yourself to Please Others?

I'm sure most of you reading this know the term "people pleaser." If not, I'll explain it briefly. A "people pleaser" is someone who prioritizes others' needs and wants to gain acceptance or validation from them. It's something that you've most likely experienced time and time again, whether it was about something minuscule or something more important. People, in general, are prone to seeking approval from others around them, but why is that? That's because the need for validation is a completely normal, human desire for connection. In ancient times, humans joined tribes to survive, and over the years, it transcended into something deeper. Despite not needing to fit in to survive, we still seek out relationships and connections with others because that gives us a sense of comfort, knowing we aren't alone. Now, wanting to fit in with others isn't a bad thing at all; it's a perfectly normal thing to want, yet that doesn't mean that you have to change yourself for the sake of others' approval.

I can't remember how many times I've said, "You choose, I don't mind whatever," whenever I've been asked about plans. It's something I keep repeating constantly, and while it's mostly because I genuinely don't mind others choosing or making decisions instead of me, deep down, I know it's partly due to the lingering fear of being rejected. It's normal, I keep reminding myself, and it is, but there needs to be a visible line between letting someone else take the reins for something small and changing your whole character based on others' opinions.

There have been times when I used to be like that. A few years ago, I used to be meeker and shyer, often silently nodding along and accepting favors for people that, sometimes, I just didn't want to do. But I did so anyway, because that seemed easier to do than to have to face conflicts with those I considered close to me. It was easier to be the one who was always on stand-by, the one whom everyone could rely on, instead of having confrontations and needing to explain myself to everyone.

Today, there are times when I falter, and I find myself slipping into the person I used to be, but I've learned not to be so focused on what might be ideal for others, but for me. I can sit here and write that it's easy to stop pleasing others at the expense of yourself, that it's no big deal, and that you grow out of that phase, but I won't. It's taken me some time to come to the fact that I won't be liked by everyone, and that I can't satisfy everyone's needs, but I'm slowly getting there, day after day. That kind of feeling isn't something that disappears just like that. Sometimes, it'll catch you off guard, in the most unexpected moments, but you have to take a moment and remember what your main priority is. It's not important who you manage to impress or the number of people who like you; it's important that you stay true to yourself, through and through.

To whoever is reading this, I want you to know that you can't be liked by everyone. It's a hard pill to swallow for some, I know it was for me. You can't change aspects of yourself just to please others because, in the end, you'll lose yourself. You'll lose your purpose, your views, your character. If you're your authentic self, the right people will find you, without you having to change yourself for them.

— ARGENTINA BUNTESKA



History and Politics

Beyond Tradition: Young Women in Politics, Inspired by Sanna Marin

Sanna Marin, once the world's youngest serving Prime Minister, stands as living proof that leadership has no age and no gender. Her rise challenges theoldnotionthatpower belongs only to oldermen,apatternstill seen in governments around theworld. Marin's journey shows that it is possiblefor a young woman to reach the highest office, bringing energy, vision, and empathy to the very heart of decision-making.

Born in Helsinki in 1985 and raised in humble circumstances, Marin grew up understanding what it means to face challenges and persevere. She completed her secondary education at Pirkkala High School, becoming the first in her family to graduate. Later, she studied administrative sciences at the University of Tampere, earning both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees. While studying, she worked several jobs to support herself, experiences that shaped her understanding of fairness, equality, and the lives of ordinary citizens. Every challenge she faced became a lesson in resilience and ambition.

Her political journey began at a local level. In 2012, she was elected to the Tampere City Council, and a year later, she became its Chair, which is a remarkable achievement for someone so young. She continued to rise by entering Parliament in 2015, serving as Minister of Transport and Communications in 2019, and by the end of that year becoming Finland's Prime Minister at just 34. Her leadership was historic not only for her age but also for its inclusivity; she led a coalition government in which all five party leaders were women, many under 40, demonstrating that the future of politics can look entirely new.

Marin's story shines a light on the barriers young women face in politics. Too often, society doubts their maturity, questions their strength, or judges them harshly for stepping into rooms long dominated by men. Marin defied all these expectations. She showed that leadership is not about appearances or tradition, but it is about vision, courage, and the ability to lift others while guiding a nation. Her life reminds us that ambition, determination, and integrity can carve a path even through the most entrenched systems.

Her leadership also reflects the values Finland is known for: equality, social trust, and opportunities for all. Free education, universal healthcare, and strong social support form the backbone of a society where people are truly empowered. Finland consistently ranks among the happiest nations in the world, proving that a society flourishes when its citizens, especially the most vulnerable, are valued and supported.

Sanna Marin represents more than political achievement. She is a reminder to every young woman with a dream that the barriers around you are not permanent, and the world needs your voice, your courage, and your vision. Her story encourages the next generation to imagine themselves in positions of influence, to challenge old norms, and to shape a future where leadership is defined not by age, gender, or tradition, but by purpose, resilience, and the courage to lead with heart.

"The strength of a society is measured not by the wealth of its most affluent members, but by how well its most vulnerable citizens are able to cope." — Sanna Marin

— TAMARA EFREMOVA



Is Politics Two-Faced?

Is politics two-faced? Obviously, right? No matter your political knowledge or activity, a general belief is that it is. But why is it like that? Well, one “face” works in favour of the public, says what the public wants to hear, and offers minimal incentives to stay relevant and believable. The other side, hiding in the shadows, is the one that does whatever is necessary to stay in power. This isn’t a vacuum situation with perfect conditions; it’s real-world survival, it’s how real, modern politics function – perfect ideals on the surface and ruthlessness underneath. However, the main point of this article is obviously to dig deeper into the whole dishonesty, and lead you, yes, you, to evaluate and further unscramble such events yourself.

No matter the political system, local or international politics, it works on the same principle: interest. Take, for example, world conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, and the crisis in Africa. The information that makes it to the news is what the leaders allow the society to hear, but that is a standard, or is it? Isn’t it in the leaders’ interest, when they call for peace and stability, but still proceed to fund military equipment, block aid, and keep on neglecting and prolonging peace agreements?

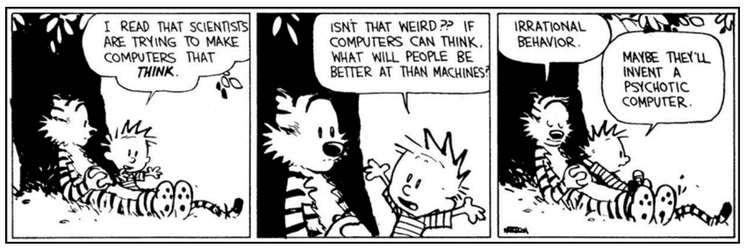
Let us take the world’s “Lieutenant”, the United States of America. In the Russia-Ukraine war, the United States began by firmly backing Ukraine, criticising Russia as the aggressor, sending military aid, and arranging the world’s support. But over time, U.S. commitment shifted. The capital declined to support a UN vote condemning Russia’s actions in February this year, signaling a change in the so-called “unlimited support”. It then pressured Ukraine into a mineral-rights agreement, a joint fund of Ukraine’s minerals where revenue is shared equally between the US and Ukraine. By pausing military aid, the US effectively used aid as leverage in accepting this deal. After Kyiv agreed (in a way), aid resumed. The U.S. then pushed for a 30-day ceasefire and began advocating for direct negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, reflecting a shift from full alignment with Ukraine to a more strategic, interest-based approach. Of course, one very important factor is the change in administration, however that only shows how much a single person can influence world politics. Clear two-faced actions, right? The interventions with the US alone can go on, but the point is set.

Perhaps we should dive a little into where the US is influential, but not as assertive, for now at least. The conflicts in Africa. African countries are in constant wars, but we will point out one situation – Sudan. The country is in a civil war between two forces and two leaders, although both are propagating that it’s a battle for sovereignty and freedom, the real aim is suspected to be getting hold of gold mines and pure power. It is a shame that this has led to many victims, but the leaders don’t seem to be worried, which exposes the title of this article itself. We haven’t seen much intervention or worry from the EU and world leaders as of right now, but when a real opportunity for profit presents itself, I am sure they’ll make the most of it.

As cruel as it sounds, all of those actions are called interests. The world’s leading countries stay instigating from the sides, keep on loaning equipment and money to the desperate nations with a plan which seems to serve self interest and exploit them, and their resources in the future. International communities and organizations like the UN, EU, NATO and OSCE, meant to take the right side and defend the truth, fail to effectively address these issues, instead, it seems they only make sanctions, condemnation, and restrictions appear only on paper or used when convenient, shelved when benefit is shown.

The problem with two-faced politics is that we pretend that it doesn’t exist; that is, because it doesn’t seemingly concern the average person, we stand from a safe distance and watch all the madness unfold. What are the consequences of it? Prominently, people suffer and lose their lives because we choose to stay quiet and let individuals work in their favour, no matter the stage, either international or local. What can we, ordinary people, do? We can stand up for what we believe in, we must exercise our right to vote, call out injustices and recognize cheap shots politicians try to sell. We must not accept apathy, but champion for strong institutions and peacebuilding, and we must uphold international law and human rights, as the only way to ever achieve politics centered around the people.

— DAVOR DESPOTOVSKI



Calvin and Hobbes by Bill Watterson

The Trial of Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great of Macedon today stands in the Courtroom of Human History as one of the best generals, if not the single greatest, that has ever lived. Ruling a vast empire in the 4th century BCE, it stretched from the mountains of Epirus, across Asia Minor, and deep into the lands of the Indus, incorporating much of the known world at the time. He is remembered for his unmatched military ingenuity and for the active spread of Hellenic culture across continents, carrying with him a legacy of heroism, conquest, and even divinity. But was Alexander a beloved king and visionary unifier, or a bloodthirsty autocrat driven by ambition and ego, indifferent to suffering in his wake?

Our actors today are Judge Justinski, Prosecutor Vinov, and Defense Attorney Spirshejkovski.

Judge Justinski: Order! Ord— **cough** Ugh... excuse me, gentlemen. I seem to have caught a rather unpleasant cold. A day off would be merciful, but history waits for no man. Now then, who stands before the Courtroom of Human History today?

Defense Attorney Spirshejkovski: Your Honour, this is Alexander III of Macedon, aka Alexander the Great. A military genius, king of Macedon, and the greatest general that has ever lived. He was not merely a conqueror, but a liberator from tyrannical rule, a founder of cities, and a promoter of culture and unity between peoples.

Prosecutor Vinov: Unity? Liberation? Wherever Alexander marched, devastation followed. Pillage, plunder, and death were his calling cards. Cities were sacked, populations slaughtered or enslaved, and cultures crushed beneath Macedonian boots. The siege of Tyre alone ended with thousands executed or sold into slavery. And Thebes, a proud Greek city, was erased from the map, its homes burned and its people scattered. If this is liberation, it is a grim one.

Defense Attorney Spirshejkovski: Your Honour, Alexander acted as any ruler of his age would have. Thebes rebelled and murdered Macedonian soldiers; its destruction served as a grim but effective warning to prevent wider Greek revolt. Without decisive action, Macedon itself may have collapsed. As for Tyre, the city resisted for months, inflicting enormous casualties. When discipline broke, it was the excess of soldiers hardened by siege, not an order for senseless cruelty from Alexander himself.

Prosecutor Vinov: Let us not pretend this brutality was isolated. Alexander’s pattern was consistent. And long before Asia, even in his youth, he showed signs of arrogance and instability. While Philip II lived, Alexander was restless, resentful, and easily swayed by ambitious companions. Raised with privilege, educated by Aristotle himself in ethics and philosophy, yet he learned restraint from neither.

Defense Attorney Spirshejkovski: These claims are speculative at best. Alexander’s youthful defiance never crossed into treason. On the contrary, he proved his loyalty at Chaeronea, saving his father’s life in battle and securing Macedonian dominance in Greece. The accusations of plotting against Philip or murdering his half-brothers are largely the work of later hostile sources. If blame must be assigned within the royal court, Olympias’ ruthless intrigues are far better documented than Alexander’s.

Judge Justinski: Saving one’s father in battle is the most admirable of acts. I could barely save mine from a bad temper. **cough** Please, continue.

Prosecutor Vinov: Your Honour, Alexander’s ambitions soon grew beyond kingship into delusion. He proclaimed himself divine, demanded proskynesis like an eastern despot, and believed destiny entitled him to rule the world. This was no statesman seeking balance or diplomacy. He conquered through force alone, ignoring any notion of restraint. Even Hammurabi’s ancient laws must have shuddered at the treatment of civilians and prisoners.

Defense Attorney Spirshejkovski: The peoples of the Persian Empire often welcomed Alexander as a liberator from heavy taxation and rigid imperial control. He preserved local administrations, respected customs, and adopted Persian practices to stabilize his rule. Yes, he sought universal kingship — but ambition alone does not make a monster. If the desire to rule widely is criminal, then history’s court would condemn nearly every empire-builder who ever lived.

Prosecutor Vinov: Then let us speak of ego, Your Honour. Alexander founded cities obsessively, Alexandria in Egypt, Alexandria in Arachosia, Alexandria Eschate, and many more, stamping his own name across the map of the known world. This was not merely administration; it was self-glorification. These cities were monuments to his vanity, designed to immortalize himself rather than serve the people who inhabited them. A ruler secure in legacy does not need to carve his name into every horizon he conquers.

Defense Attorney Spirshejkovski: Or perhaps they were instruments of governance. These cities became centers of trade, culture, and administration, spreading Greek language and ideas far beyond the Aegean. If Alexander named them after himself, it was consistent with ancient tradition, and unlike many tyrants, his cities endured long after his death. Is it egomania if the foundations laid continue to shape civilization?

Prosecutor Vinov: And yet, he burned Persepolis, the ceremonial heart of Persia, an act of symbolic humiliation rather than necessity. He cut the Gordian Knot rather than unravel it, choosing spectacle over wisdom. He took hostages, crushed dissent, and marched his exhausted army ever eastward, deaf to their suffering, chasing glory rather than stability.

Defense Attorney Spirshejkovski: Persepolis was also retaliation for Persian atrocities in Greece. The Gordian Knot symbolized decisiveness, a ruler who acts when others hesitate. As for Darius III’s family, Alexander treated them with honour, granting protection and royal

status rather than humiliation. These are not the actions of a mindless butcher.

Judge Justinski: *cough* I believe the court has heard enough. History, as ever, refuses to be simple.

Alexander the Great stands neither fully innocent nor wholly guilty. He was a visionary general who reshaped the ancient world, a bridge between civilizations and a man of extraordinary ability. Yet he was also ruthless, ambitious, and undeniably driven by ego, a ruler willing to sacrifice cities, lives, and even stability for glory and immortality.

The Courtroom of Human History adjourns, as it so often does, without judgment. Alexander the Great leaves as he entered: undefeated, unquestioned by law, yet endlessly questioned by posterity. Whether visionary unifier or ruthless conqueror, liberator or autocrat, his legacy remains deliberately unresolved.

And perhaps that is history's final word, not a verdict, but a debate that never truly ends.

EPILOGUE

What Alexander himself thought of loyalty, sacrifice, and his own legacy is perhaps best captured in his speech to the Macedonian army at Opis in 324 BCE. What follows is an excerpt from his great speech that day. After the speech, the soldiers begged

> *"These were the advantages which accrued to you from my father Philip; great indeed if looked at by but small if compared with those you have obtained from me! Though I inherited from my father only a few gold and silver goblets, and found myself burdened with debt, nevertheless opened for you the passage of the Hellespont, when the Persians held mastery of the sea. I added to your empire Ionia, Aeolis, Phrygia, and Lydia; the riches of Egypt and Mesopotamia are yours. Babylon, Susa, and Bactra are yours. You are viceroys, you are generals, you are captains. What then have I reserved to myself after all these labors, except this purple robe and this diadem?*
>
> *Come now, whoever of you has wounds, let him strip and show them, and I will show mine in turn; for there is no part of my body remaining free from wounds. I have been struck with sword, arrow, and missile for the sake of your lives, your glory, and your wealth.*
>
> *And now, if you all wish to depart, depart. Go back and report that your king Alexander, conqueror of Asia, was deserted by his own men and left to the protection of conquered foreigners.*
>
> *Perhaps this report of yours will seem glorious in the eyes of men... worthy in the eyes of the Gods. Begone!"*

"History, as ever, refuses to be simple."

— JUDGE JUSTINSKI



The Creative Pulse

Sign from the Moon

It was one late night when the moon shone and waned, that the night felt most alive, and it was on a night like this when our writer met HER.

She was a reflection of the moon's beams directed at the mirror, which gave the illusion of an endless lake on the surface of the mirror.

This story begins with a writer, who was once a great one, but like all humans who peak too soon he likewise burned just as fast.

His literature consisted of many different works, all passing through different genres. But all that was left to create was a blank sheet with no more or no less words, than there was a year ago.

For us humans, despair is the easiest feeling we come across, the darkness that consumes us and makes us think "What was it all for?" It is a feeling most easy to fall prey to, for unlike our predecessors, our resolve is weak and the life we lead doesn't give us the proper tools to fail and get up again. It taught us it is easier to let go and move on than stand and fight, and while letting go is right sometimes, other times it is the ones that stand like statues and roar like lions, that make the biggest change.

But in our case our writer had lost his stance and became bendable, causing his roar to fade with the wind.

Showing interest and talent since young about words, and honing his skills, was the easiest thing he had done, unlike climbing and relationships, words were his forte. But what happens when the thing that was once your salvation becomes the key to your cage, and your head fills with the deepest darkest words till all that's left is black and nothing else?

Our writer was never a night owl, but on a night like this, he turned and fidgeted until he could do so no more. He took one last stroll to get some fresh air, but it was the moon that left him feeling empty, and it terrified him when a voice asked why he was so sad and miserable.

It took him a second to realize that the voice came from the mirror, though it looked like a mirror no more, but like an endless lake that could swallow you whole and let the numbness take you away.

The voice repeated the question once again, waking the man from his trance. He woke to the feeling that he had to think not of the strange occurrence, and not of this situation, but that he could compute nothing at all, thus all he could manage was to ask: "Why?"

The mirror paused for a bit and then said, "I have seen man build and burn, create and destroy, fight and flee, but the saddest that came to be was the unwinding of mankind."

Our writer thought for a bit and asked: "What do you mean?"

Then she replied: "Once upon a time as you like to say, you all had a role, a purpose and a fight. Life was much too different.

The greatest difference of all was that, whether in a group or alone, you have the chance to truly connect with yourself."

> *"Today you travel, make friends, learn different things, but none of that will fulfill you if the person you're most afraid to be with is yourself."*

The writer was baffled. She was right. Even after all his success he felt empty, always looking for the next thing, the most interesting story, the most esteemed people, yet none of the endless talks had ever made him whole and the only thing that did was no longer viable.

So he asked: "Pray tell, what does this have to do with my writing?"

The mirror replied: "All or nothing, the reason you no longer see any light is not because your well is dry, but simply because you have reached the end of the code that society and expectations imposed on you. Your writing was not for you, but for others. You still have not discovered what it means to be with yourself. When you do, you will finally be able to write with a white pen over the darkness that blocks you. Only when all you desire is to wake up another day, see the sun rise once more, and realize that it is not the place or the people that make you unhappy, but that it was you all along, can you truly be yourself."

"And with that our time is up," and so just like it began, it all went back to black.

When a ray of warm sunlight hit our author, waking him up, the first thing he did was look around and call to the mirror. Still, no response came. He soon realized it had all been a dream—very vivid and pleasant. In the end, it was just a dream, and there was nothing he could do with it except tuck it away in a corner of his mind. Without realizing its importance, he went back to sleep. In our day and age, dreams and fantasies are often reduced to mere figments of our imagination, their meaning and significance forgotten.

— ANIDA ABDURAIMI

The Knight That Returned

He did not fall in battle.
That would have been easier.
No trumpet marked his wound,
no enemy claimed the strike.

He rode back at dusk,
armor intact, banner unbroken,
yet every step of the horse
was a question his ribs could feel.

The sword was clean
unused in the moment it mattered most.
Not because he feared the fight,
but because he refused to swing
where love still stood unarmed.

They will say he won nothing.
They are wrong.

He learned how heavy restraint is,
how mercy bruises the hands,
how dignity bleeds slowly
but never rots.

He learned that not every wound
comes from steel
some come from holding the line
when the heart begs to charge.

The horse knows.
That is why it walks gently.

The knight stays upright
not because he is unhurt,
but because collapse would mean
forgetting who he was
before the battle taught him cost.

He will dismount soon.
He will rest.
He will tend the wound.

And one day,
when the armor comes off,
it will not smell of rust or shame
only of a man
who loved without conquest
and survived.

— JOVAN NASHOKU



Poem

Das tuas pupilas penetrantes
E nós encarnados olhos lagrimantes
Resvala, quente e salgada
A faiscante lágrima em teu rosto
Que afortunada sois
Tudo dava para te ser
E por um momento a sua face escorrer

Num minuto te percorrer
E que nesse instante desejado
Ser por outros cobiçado

From your piercing pupils
And in your crimson, tearful eyes
Slips, warm and salty
The sparkling tear down your eye
How fortunate you are
I would give anything to be you
For a moment flow down your face

In a minute let it run down
And in that desired instant
To be coveted by others

— JOSÉ ELIAS GARCIA BORGES

Ти & Falling Out of Love

Ти

Кога одиш,
воздухот се влече по твоите чекори.
Движи и по твоето тело, се врзува околу
твоите прсти.
Застанува на носот,
се потпира за да е поблиску до твоите очи.
Кога зборуваш,
зборовите кружат низ собата.
Отскокнуваат од секое рамено на луѓето
кои се во собата,
и патуваат желно за да застанат
на сечие уво.
Кога погледнуваш,
светлината се витка околу облините на
предметите,
зракот се преклопува во секој ќош.
Кога легнуваш да спиеш,
сонцето засрамено се крие и месечината
гордо му го завзема местото.
Твојата душа создава мелодија.

Нота по нота, внимателно ја компонира
и ретко кој ја слуша,
но тој што ќе ја слушне почнува да танцува.
Навидум, полудува бидејќи танцува во туѓа
тишина.
Но со тие што може да слушнат, дели магија.
Ти си она тоа што уметниците пробуваат да
го прикажат со секое нивно дело. Ти си муза
за секој оној што има жед за живот.
Ти си совршениот главен лик во еден
прекрасен љубовен филм, што сите наивно
се надеваме дека постои во вистинскиот
живот.

А можеби и постои?
Кога конечно те сретнав – за мене беше тој –
главниот лик од мојот љубовен филм.
Се прашував дали живеам во заблуда.
Се прашував кој дел е реалност, а кој
фантазија.
Се прашував дали навистина постоиш?
Потоа сфатив дека ти не би постоел доколку
не постоев јас.

Барем, ти не би постоел како што постоиш во
овие напишани зборови, како навистина ќе те
доживував доколку не постоеја моите
зборови и моите очи.

Доколку не постоеше мојата перцепција,
што е полна со разнобојна фантазија и богат
речник,
дали ќе постоеше магија?
Дали твојот допир ќе предизвикуваше еежење,
дали твојот поглед ќе предизвикуваше гласни
крици на мојата душа?

Дали ќе танцувавме врз нашите зборови, врз
тишината што за нас ечеше? Дали
сијаличките ќе светеа потивко околу нас,
дали ветерот ќе беше понежен врз нашата
кожа,
како што беше кога бевме еден до друг?

Сфатив дека поезијата има смисла,
инспирацијата се раѓа,
лисјата што паѓаат се во облик на срценца,
боите дречат,
а пак црно белите филмови привлекуваат,
и насмевката се удомува на лицето,
само за луѓето кои што се заљубени.
За сите околу, е сувишно.
Така што –
за да постојат моиве зборови,
мора да постоиш и ти.

Но за да постоиш ти,
мора да постојам и јас за да те создадам.

Falling Out of Love

Falling out of love with you,
was a pain,
an endeavor I was not ready yet to face.
There was nothing left to gain,
and nothing left to chase.
flowers started blooming in my room,
sunlight fought hard enough,
to peek through.
but somehow,
I still felt oh so blue.
Because I lost it.
I lost my poetry.
and there was something so poetic in
hurting about not hurting anymore, or
should i say ironic?
because poetry was here no more. I did
lose it,
after all, you were not my muse anymore. and
so

I realized that I lost either way. When I
loved you,
the blood i bled,
made pretty little words dance,
but i still ached.
and when i stopped,
i finally caught my breath,
but the words left.
was my pain,
worth so i could create?
or should i try to live,
another day,
with nothing to say?

— MARIJA ILIJOSKA



Short Poetic Story

— NIKOLA JAKIMOVSKI

The Clash of The Wielding

Clashes of the hatchet,
Subliminal signs painting broken matches,
Burning the desire of the bestowed,
Crinkling a light of the abode.

They fought and puffed,
eyes piercing each other's glares.
As fields lost their color,
mountains divided, causing the creation of craters,
across the gardens,
where fairies took place to sink and rest.

Heads clung the tallest cliffs,
watching the battle that had taken the final turn for the fool.
The winner of the clash,
vanished in the duel.

The last words spoken,
'look for a clue'.

When The Head Loses Its Grip

Dainty were the palms that had made the fool fill the room with vulnerable breaths.
Laying the sentence,
confining the unspoken abnormality in his psyche.

As the fractured torment fell upon the mythical,
So did the head of the fool.

Stain the ground, until you are the last one standing,
Splashing lavender liquid, leaking onto what his spoken intrusions could not illustrate.

It did not take long,
It happened in an instance.
It didn't matter,
A chilling sight,
seen when the head finally loses its grip.

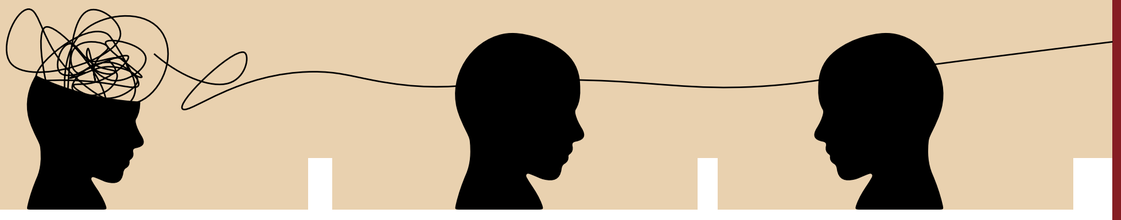
Applaud Me, My Beloved

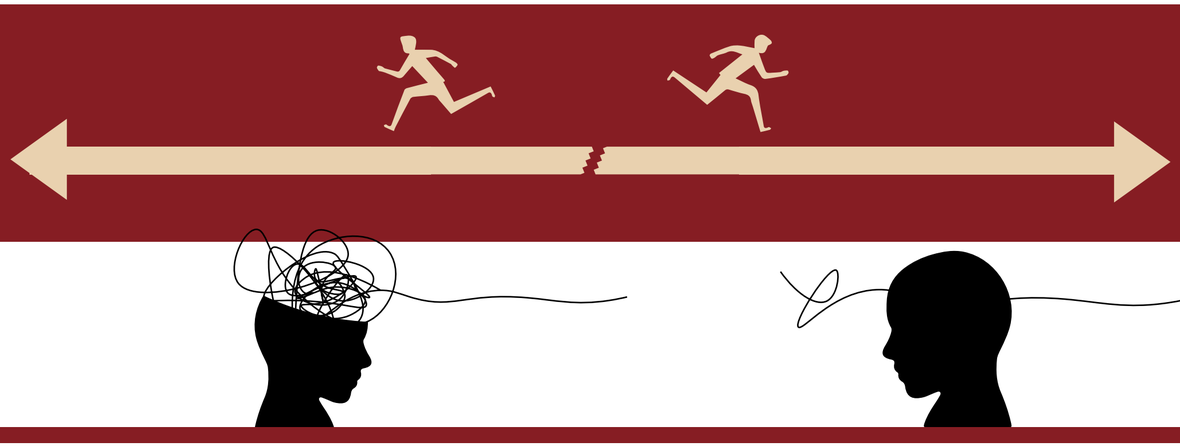
Halls that spelled 'empty',
applauded the fool's ghost in the aftermath.

Inaudible footsteps took twists and turns, cleansing the prints left behind.
What an ironic scene,
played in sin,
of prideful disapproval.

Stamped on the ephemeral crisp of my undying letters,
now reading,

'Applaud me, my beloved'
as I got an applause,
coming in from the terrified onlookers.
Blood spilled my name in careless victory.





Burdens of The Fool

Lost exhibits,
visited by a wish of the unforgiven.

In a world of muses, he ended up being a foolish and unreliable creature.
Carried by the unwavering baggage of the past given to him by markings that held his body to the ground.

Bruises in disguise, signatures of souls he ripped away from existential bodies who couldn't exist in his inner world anymore.

The selected make a burden of the burdened.
Chosen to end the reign of the fool's endless cycles, as venomous as one can get used to.

In all, his burdensome trophies were too golden to catch rust.
The fool had been through so much, for it all ends with a catastrophic blow to his ego and pride.

Custodia, The Seeker

Golden roses intertwined in the edges of her locks,
Orbs painting oceans in the gaze she let through the clash,
Struggles kept her composure slipping,
as she was just a witness of the victor's final blow.

So was thought of a gentle soul,
she was not a sword nor a shield.
The only thing Custodia had was divine vision,
ruling along the tragic collision.

Her hums were a call to the victor,
softly she spoke...

'Hold steady,
see where he stumbles,
envision the weakness in his trickery,
only then will you deal the final blow'

As the fool fell,
so did Custodia vanish,
as she rang the golden bell,
she let the fool's body tarnish.

Long after the Fool's fall,
her flame lived on,
in the voices of the young,
who sang the tales of Custodia the Seeker.

Custodia's Prophecy

The crown fell into dust,
awaiting the victor to take position,
The Fool's absence left a hollow throne,
one that the pillars couldn't lead,
driven by the madness of defeat, gently worn.

As forests twisted their vines in bold strokes,
and the wind lost its tune,
that woman who once stood as a seeker left an unbreakable rune,
written in language never to be known,
a delicate instrument sewn in stone.

Without a ruler, purpose left tragedy open.
What was left to the people gave hope,
in golden letters read Custodia's Prophecy.

'He who listens to the rhythm of a prolonged heartbeat,
shall be the bearer of the clue.'

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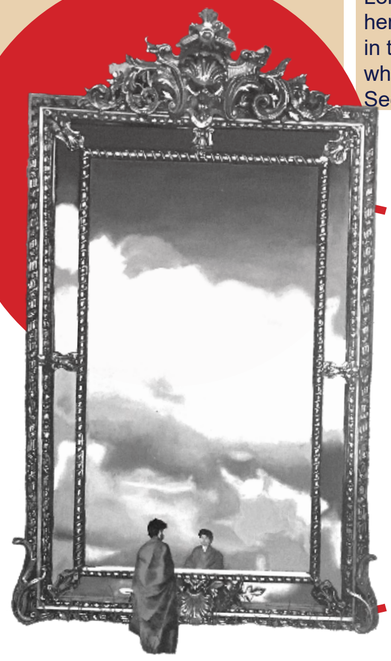


Photo manipulation - The Mirror Painting - Vito Volante



Day of The Coronation

A river of promises filled the sky's collapsed hands,
unraveling the rune left in echo of the pulse,
carried by winds,
signed in centuries awaiting the chosen.

The crown hovered,
not heavy, but in whisper of celestial tides,
swaying the majority's call,
longing for the tremor of eternal reign.

No step dared to question fate's giving hand,
balance exhaled the final breath,
painting the victor's steps.

As he took the final step,
words elevated the victor's deviance,
spoken from sorrow,
stating laws never set before.

Strongly he asked of the followers below,
a message no one dared not to show,
in kind retribution,
of tyrannical inhibition.

'Promise Me Something' (Speech)

'As the final fragment of your previous ruler burns in ash,
I shall not ask of you much beyond the clash,
as silence throws itself in the fear of voice,
dropping the crane of devious choice,
in making me a ruler meant to seize,
a harmonious decisive representation of Custwyn's breeze.

In this I have learnt to choose disciples,
that shall break the ruthless cycles,
of foolish tricks in vain of sorrow,
power of winds left of me to borrow.

For this I claim no crown, no throne,
only in regard I speak a passage I wish for you to clone.

So promise me this...

"That sorrow shall rot unturned,
that every shattered wind shall find its hum,
that eternity itself shall wield the kind,
the rhythm that we made,
intertwined in the mind."

For that I end my speech in peace,
no ruler shall be,
in an empire that healed through tragedy.'



Heartbeat Anew

The mystery of the rune was too cruel,
as it involved passing of a forbidden rule.
A collateral victim came to be,
the one who guided,
to bring celebration,
to see.

The victor's steps were fierce,
no longer subtle,
stopped in track,
grounded in sound.

As he got closer,
something opposed,
a heartbeat born,
coming from below.

Surround the rune,
grow petals,
invade the mind,
a sound unsettles.

In the blink of an eye,
thunder searched across the land,
the provoked fool,
undead, ready to conquer the heartbeat anew.

Birth of The Unclaimed

The rune pulsed,
felt by many,
a heartbeat nobody owned,
whispers of the seeker's presence in passing.

Then came the Fool's return,
with winds tearing the memory,
a storm of grievance,
painting howls sharpened in loss.

But from absence she rose,
Custodia, not seen, only heard,
her breath felt in a vast hurricane,
a guiding voice of promise.

Wind against wind,
Scream against the calm,
two swords fitted against the same shield,
each gust a question of who remains.

And yet,
a clash gave birth to stillness,
a breath belonging to neither,
a wind unclaimed,
as it settled between them,
in silence waiting to be named.

Custwyn's Balance

Balance was inevitable.
The dainty hand that once slayed,
now tapped on top the rune,
a touch, turning chaos into a silent tune,
humming the letters, a soft melody it played.

"The storms that once roared in hunger,
feeding on thoughts of fear,
shall be replaced under the arrival of cheer."

Custwyn's soul lingered,
a wind without a body,
a song without a voice,
Its pulse, the birth of balance,
a symbolic breeze in which people rejoice.

Veil Uplifted in Longing

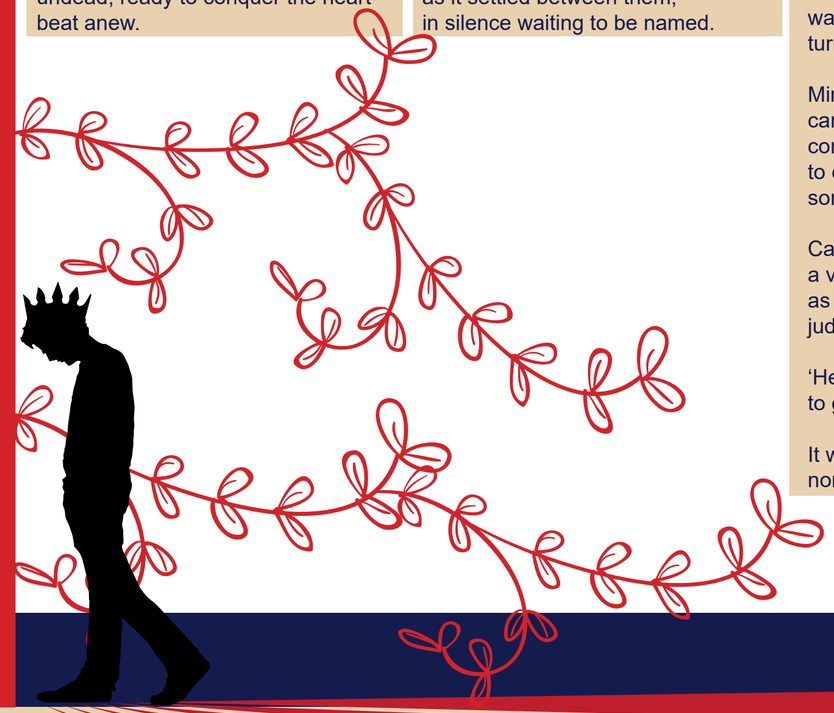
In the hush of balance laid the head of veil,
the echo of a crown to be,
on the world's silence blossomed
waves of the unwavering sea,
turning chaos to poetic glee.

Mirrors of the sky's divided reflection came to see,
communication taking spark,
to embark on a mission of taste to some degree.

Carrying the burden of the fool,
a victor's plea,
as Custwyn's words spoke in life,
judgement sealed alike.

'He who slayed the tyrant shall thrive,
to give the people unwavering delight.'

It was not yet crowning the ruler,
nor was it a pulse of aching hearts that



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