

ALAN LEZAN

ASYLUM

NOVELLA



A touching story of loss, a new beginning,
and the power of hope.

PROLOGUE – The Wind over Colemêrg

The wind that sweeps across the mountains of Colemêrg carries voices long silenced. It carries the echo of footsteps that will never return, and the whispers of mothers searching for their children in the night. It was in this wind that Nuda was born—a girl who learned early on that the world is not just, but that sometimes it holds a heart willing to open.

She grew up in a valley embraced by jagged rocks, guarded by soldiers, and woven through with stories told only in hushed whispers. Her brothers went into the mountains to fight. Her sister married too young, because life left no time for waiting. And Nuda, the youngest child, learned to smile even though the world gave her scarce reason to do so.

When she was sixteen, she decided she had to leave. Not out of courage—but out of love. Love for a mother who wept at night. Love for a father who could no longer lift his hands. Love for a future that lay somewhere beyond the borders.

She did not know where the road would lead her. She only knew that if she stayed, everything would fall to pieces.

And so, her journey began. A journey that brought her to a land she did not know. A journey that brought her to me. A journey she would call asylum—not as a legal term, but as hope.

1 – The Two Bananas

The sky over Frankfurt am Main was milky that morning, as though someone had drawn a pale veil over the rooftops. I walked toward the supermarket as I usually did, my hands buried deep in my coat pockets, my head filled with everyday thoughts. It was one of those unremarkable days when one expects nothing out of the ordinary—and precisely because of that, something sometimes happens that completely unseats life from its anchors.

She was sitting in front of the supermarket's glass door.

A girl, barely older than sixteen, with a face that appeared both beautiful and fragile at once. Her eyes were large, dark, and marked by that deep shadows only found in people who have had to see too much too soon. She held a crumpled paper cup in her hand, yet she was not actively begging. She was simply sitting there, almost like a silent part of the cold stone ground to which the hurrying passersby paid no mind at all.

Perhaps it was the way she looked at me—not demanding, not pleading, but simply anchored right there in the moment. I went inside, bought my groceries, and when I stepped back through the sliding door, I was holding two bananas in my hand. A small offering, almost absurdly tiny compared to what she truly needed.

Yet when I handed them to her, something happened.

She smiled. It was no mere polite smile. No fleeting word of thanks. Rather, it was a radiance that welled up from a depth rarely encountered on the streets of this city.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

I had actually intended to walk on. But something held me back—perhaps curiosity, perhaps compassion, perhaps an invisible bond that defies being put into words.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

She lifted her head, brushed a strand of dark hair from her forehead, and replied in English:

“I am Kurdish.”

“From which part?”

“North Kurdistan. Colemêrg.”

I knit my brow. “Colemêrg?”

She nodded thoughtfully. “The Turks call it Hakkari.”

Something began to resonate within me. It was the sudden memory of my own origins, of Dersim, of the jagged mountains of my homeland. I shared this with her briefly—and when I placed a five-euro bill into her cup, she beamed so brightly it felt as though I had given her an entire kingdom.

I walked on. But I took her with me—firmly anchored in my thoughts.

Two days later, she was still sitting there.

This time, she smiled toward me from afar, as if we had known each other for years. I approached her, asked about her lodging, and she answered softly:

“In an asylum shelter. In Friedberg.”

“How did you come to Germany?”

She lowered her gaze to her hands. “Illegally.”

Then she looked up at me abruptly, her eyes wide: “Are you a policeman?”

I laughed out loud. “No. Just curious.”

She joined in my laughter—a brief, bright chime that vanished just as quickly as it had come.

“You’re not allowed to work here,” I said quietly. “And your chances of receiving asylum are slim.”

She nodded in silence. Then her features shifted; her face grew soft, sad, painfully vulnerable.

“My parents are still alive. And I have three siblings. Two brothers... they joined the guerrilla. For three years they fought in the mountains. Then they died. One was nineteen. The other, twenty-one.”

She spoke without a shudder, without a single tear, yet I felt that every single word lay upon her heart like a ton of weight.

“My sister has three children. We have no money. I want to work here... just a few years... and then go back to buy a small kiosk. So that we all have work and can survive.”

I did not know what to say. Some stories swallow every answer whole.

The next day, I met Mrs. Amend in the stairwell, my 84-year-old neighbor. She was complaining that she desperately needed a cleaner. I didn't think twice:

“I can ask around,” I said.

And in that very same moment, I knew exactly whom I would ask.

When I told Nuda about it, a gleam of hope flashed in her eyes. She wanted to know immediately when she could start. But my eyes fell upon her clothing—thin, worn out, hardly suitable for proper work.

“I still have some T-shirts and trousers at my place,” I said. “You can have some of them.”

She nodded bashfully, filled with profound gratitude.

The following day, she came to my home. She showered, brushed her hair back, and put on a clean shirt along with a pair of my cargo trousers. And suddenly, an entirely different

person stood before me—no longer a neglected girl from the street, but a young woman with dignity and a future in her eyes.

2 – Mrs. Amend

Evening descended over the rooftops of the city like a soft veil as I stood with Nuda in front of Mrs. Amend's door. The twilight air was cool, though not cold; from afar came the muted rush of Frankfurt's evening traffic, blending with the last, faint chirping of the birds. Nuda stood close beside me, her fingers laced together, her shoulders held slightly tense. She was clean, neatly dressed, and yet deep within her eyes lay an ingrained insecurity that could not be concealed.

I pressed the doorbell. A few seconds elapsed, then the heavy wooden door swung open. Mrs. Amend stood in the frame—small, delicate, her face crisscrossed with countless fine wrinkles like an old, lovingly read book. Her dark eyes, however, were surprisingly clear, alert, and full of curiosity.

When her gaze fell upon Nuda, something in her expression shifted. A warm, genuine light spread across her features.

“Oh, how lovely,” she said in a fragile voice. “You can start tomorrow.”

Nuda smiled—a cautious, almost timid smile. I could physically feel the tension ease from her shoulders as she let out a quiet sigh of relief beside me.

The next morning marked her first day of work.

Mrs. Amend's apartment resembled a small museum filled with memories. Three rooms, each immaculately kept, each steeped in a history of its own that could be read in the objects around. The floor was made of terracotta tiles that shimmered warmly in the soft morning light, as if they had absorbed the southern sun over decades. The bathroom was tiled in white, simple, flawlessly clean—a space radiating complete tranquility.

Nuda stood in the middle of the living room and looked around as though she had landed on a foreign planet. I had stayed with her to show her around the space.

“It really isn't much,” I reassured her. “Just a bit of cleaning. Mrs. Amend is a very warm-hearted woman.”

Nuda nodded eagerly. “I will do everything,” she said softly. “I am so glad I am allowed to work.”

I looked at her. She meant every word. She was deeply moved by an opportunity that, to others, would have been a tedious chore.

The first week passed like a quiet, steady stream.

Every morning she took the bus from Friedberg to Frankfurt, and every afternoon she stood punctually outside Mrs. Amend's door. She cleaned with a meticulousness that felt almost loving. She wiped the terracotta tiles until they gleamed, aligned the spines of the books on the shelves, and polished the silver picture frames in which the old lady's past reposed.

And every time she finished, she came up to my apartment. She would knock gently on my door, step inside, and express her gratitude—not just once or twice, but so frequently and earnestly that at some point I no longer knew how to respond.

“Alan... thank you... thank you... thank you...” Her voice was soft, saturated with relief and renewed hope.

I usually just smiled bashfully. “Nuda, it really is nothing special.”

She shook her head resolutely. “To me, it is everything.”

One evening we sat together in my kitchen. The day had been long, and she seemed exhausted, yet strangely fulfilled. I brewed fresh tea, and the scent of mint filled the room. Nuda sat at the table, her hands wrapped around the cup as if trying to hold onto the warmth forever.

“You finished school back home, didn’t you?” I asked casually.

She nodded. “Realschule. Eight grades.”

I drew my eyebrows together. “In Germany, you need ten grades for a middle school diploma.”

She looked at me, and instantly a dark shadow fell over her eyes. “Then I am... nothing?”

“No!” I said immediately. “You are most certainly not nothing. You just have a bit more of the path ahead of you.”

She fell silent for a long time. Then she murmured quietly:

“I would love to learn. German. English. Everything. But... who will help my parents then?”

I saw her dark eyes fill—not with tears, but with a painful heaviness that reached far deeper. I knew that she sent every single cent she earned at Mrs. Amend’s back home. I knew she did not indulge in even the barest necessities for herself.

“With the money you earn here under the table,” I said gently, “you won’t be able to buy a kiosk back home.”

She lowered her gaze to the wooden table. “I know.”

“The real question,” I continued, “is whether you will even be allowed to stay in Germany.”

She raised her head. “I have a summons from the immigration authority next Monday.”

I felt my stomach tighten at those words. It was a sudden mixture of concern and a deeply felt sense of responsibility that caught me unprepared.

“I’m coming with you,” I said firmly.

She looked at me—surprised, grateful, completely overwhelmed by the offer.

“Thank you, Alan...”

The days leading up to the hearing dragged on slowly. Nuda kept working, memorized vocabulary, smiled—yet I saw the constant inner tension consuming her. Sometimes she sat at my laptop, typing German words into the search bar and repeating aloud sentences she might need. Sometimes she just stared mutely at the glowing screen, as if trying to outwit the creeping fear.

I was there. Not as a hero, not as a savior—simply as a person who had decided not to look away.

On Sunday evening, just a few hours before the appointment, she knocked on my apartment door. When I opened it, she stood there, her hands nervously clutching each other.

“Alan... I am so afraid.”

I stepped aside and invited her in. She sat on my sofa, and I could see her narrow shoulders trembling.

“What if they send me back immediately?” Her voice was barely more than a breath.

I sat down next to her. “Nuda... you are a minor. You are completely alone here. You have no one in this country except me. Germany does not simply send away young people like you.”

She looked at me, and in her eyes burned a heartbreaking mixture of hope and profound doubt.

“I only want to work,” she whispered. “Only help my people.”

I nodded. “And that exact honesty is what they will see tomorrow.”

She took a deep breath. Then she tilted her head and rested it for a brief moment against my shoulder—a quiet, delicate moment of utter vulnerability and absolute trust.

In that moment, I knew: tomorrow would change everything. For her. For me. For the path we had embarked upon together.

3 – The Hearing

Monday morning began gray. A fine, cool mist hung over Frankfurt am Main, as if the city had decided to soften its harsh contours to grant the people within a small measure of protection. I stood with Nuda at the bus stop, the two of us silent. She wore the cargo trousers I had given her and a simple shirt. Her hair was bound in a loose braid, though individual dark strands fell across her face as if they were too heavy to be held back.

I looked at her from the side. She appeared smaller than usual. Not physically—rather internally, as if drawn inward against the uncertain.

“Everything will be all right,” I said quietly.

She nodded in silence, yet I felt she did not believe me. How could she? She was sixteen years old, utterly alone in a foreign land whose language she barely spoke, whose bureaucracy she could not fathom, and whose future she could not grasp.

The bus rolled up. We stepped inside. The ride into central Frankfurt did not take long, yet to Nuda every minute seemed

to stretch into an eternity. She held onto the handrail with both hands, as though clinging to a final piece of something tangible. I stood close beside her. Though I spoke no words, my mere presence was like a warm coat wrapped protectively around someone's shoulders.

The Youth Welfare Office was housed in an unassuming functional building. Gray concrete lines, large windows, a sign beside the entrance that could easily be overlooked. Yet for Nuda, it was the place where her fate would be decided.

We stepped inside. A long corridor that smelled of dry paper and floor wax. A waiting area with chairs that were far too hard. People sat there speaking only in muted tones, as if fearful of disturbing the stillness of the room.

Nuda sat down. I took a seat directly beside her. She laced her fingers together, and I saw her hands tremble slightly.

“Alan...” her voice was barely more than a breath. “If they send me back... my mother... she will die of worry.”

I placed my hand calmly over her icy fingers. “I am here. I’m not going anywhere.”

She looked at me, and in her eyes burned a deep, unconditional trust. A trust that cannot be forced, but only grows when you do not abandon someone in the dark.

A door opened with a quiet click. A woman stepped out—the social worker. Middle-aged, with calm, gentle eyes and a voice that sounded like a warm cup of tea on a cold day.

“Nuda? Alan? We can begin.”

We stood up. Nuda took a deep breath, as if trying to draw courage into the very depths of her lungs.

The room was simple. A wooden desk. Three chairs. A window through which one saw only the veiled, gray November sky.

The social worker sat down. Nuda and I took our seats across from her.

Shortly thereafter, another man entered—the caseworker from the immigration authority. He carried a thick file under his arm; his expression was matter-of-fact, detached, but by no means cold.

He sat down, opened the folder, and looked intently at Nuda.

“We shall begin.”

The social worker spoke first. Her voice was calm, composed, and devoid of any haste.

“Nuda is sixteen years old. She entered Germany unaccompanied. She has no one here who can offer her protection. Her two brothers died in the guerrilla war in the mountains—and I would like to strongly emphasize that guerrilla groups in conflict regions often find themselves in extremely dangerous, violence-ridden situations that are invariably life-threatening for young people. Her parents back home live in profound poverty. She is entirely on her own—and that makes her a minor in severe danger.”

Nuda lowered her gaze to her knees. I saw the muscles in her neck tighten.

The immigration officer slowly flipped through the pages of the file. “We have examined the asylum application thoroughly. Under the law, pure financial hardship does not constitute grounds for asylum.”

The social worker nodded calmly. “We are aware of that. But Nuda is not merely poor. She is severely traumatized. She suffers from nocturnal panic attacks and severe anxiety. She crouched on the streets and begged because she saw no other way to ensure her bare survival. If we send this girl back now, she will be defenseless and at immediate risk to life and limb.”

Nuda slowly raised her head. Her voice was quiet, yet carried an agonizing clarity.

“I only want to work... save money... build a small shop... so that my mother does not have to cry anymore.”

The caseworker fixed his eyes upon her. For a long time. Then he lowered his gaze back to the papers before him.

“She is unaccompanied. A minor. Without parental care on site. The Youth Welfare Office has firmly confirmed that a deportation is currently legally and humanely indefensible.”

The social worker leaned her hands on the tabletop. “She needs stability. Security. And time to find herself again. Germany protects children like her.”

The officer closed the file with a distinct sound. He took a deep breath.

“Very well. A formal asylum status will not be granted—but she stays. She will receive a humanitarian residence permit. Until she reaches adulthood, she remains under the direct protection of the Youth Welfare Office.”

Nuda stared at him. Her dark eyes grew wide before a thin veil of tears pooled over her pupils.

“I... I am allowed to stay? Truly?”

“Yes,” the caseworker said neutrally, yet gently. “Not on the grounds of asylum law. But because you are a young girl who cannot simply be left to her own devices.”

The social worker offered her a warm smile. “You are safe now, Nuda. And we will help you find your way.”

The man from the authority now turned to me. “Who is the gentleman at your side?”

The social worker answered immediately on my behalf: “This is Alan. He has been accompanying the girl for weeks entirely on a voluntary basis. She places great trust in him.”

I nodded calmly. “I am here to support her. She has no one else in this city.”

The caseworker nodded in agreement. “Very well. Then please feel free to remain with her. Minors have the right to a trusted companion.”

Nuda looked at me from the side. Her voice was now nothing more than a soundless whisper.

“Thank you, Alan...”

When we left the building a short while later, the air outside felt perceptibly clearer. The dense mist had lifted. The city appeared brighter, almost as if Frankfurt had finally decided to welcome Nuda at last.

She stopped in the middle of the pavement. She looked at me. And suddenly, tears ran down her cheeks—silently, quietly, like heavy drops that could no longer be held back.

I wrapped my arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. She rested her head against my chest, and I felt her entire body tremble.

“I am allowed to stay...” she whispered repeatedly against my coat. “I am allowed to stay...”

I nodded gently. “Yes, Nuda. You are allowed to stay.”

And in that single, boundless moment, her new life began.

4 – The First Morning of the Future

The day after the hearing began differently. Not brighter, not noticeably warmer—yet infinitely lighter. As though the air itself had decided to carry a small portion of the heavy burden that had hitherto rested upon Nuda’s narrow shoulders.

I stood at the window of my apartment, a mug of hot coffee held firmly in my hand, and looked down onto the morning street. Passersby hurried past, automobiles pushed through the traffic, somewhere a bicycle bell chimed—everything followed its accustomed rhythm. And yet the world was different. I knew that somewhere in a refugee shelter, a young girl was waking up who, for the first time in months, stood up without the usual knot of fear in her stomach.

I reached for my phone and typed a short message:

“Good morning, Nuda. Is everything all right with you?”

The answer was not long in coming:

“Yes. I slept so well. I will come to your place later.”

I smiled softly to myself. It was an unassuming smile, but it sprang from a deep, long-buried place within me.

Around noon, there was a knock at my door. I opened it—and there she stood.

Nuda seemed transformed. Not outwardly—she was still wearing my cargo trousers, the simple shirt, and the same worn-out shoes. But her face... Her face was as if unveiled.

The dark fear that usually nested behind her pupils like a watchful shadow had receded. In its place had stepped something entirely new: a delicate, cautious, but unmistakable hope.

“Alan,” she said softly. “I am so happy.”

I stepped aside and invited her in. She walked purposefully into the kitchen, sat at the table, and ran both palms slowly over the tabletop, as if needing to test first whether the world was truly holding stable now.

“I called my mother this morning,” she shared. “She wept. The entire time... for joy.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “That is wonderful.”

“She said... I must study with all my strength. I must remain strong. And I must never forget why I am here.”

I sat down across from her and looked at her. “And why are you here, Nuda?”

Her gaze met mine fully—a look in which the girl and the adult woman resided all at once.

“So that my family can survive.”

We sat in silence for a while. Yet the stillness was not oppressive—it settled warmly and protectively over the room like a soft blanket. Then Nuda stood up, headed toward my desk, sat before the screen, and opened the learning program.

“I must learn German,” she said resolutely. “I do not merely want to be tolerated here. I want to build something.”

I observed her from the side. How she carefully repeated vocabulary. How she tried out sentences. How she hesitated, made mistakes, and corrected herself immediately. And how

she laughed softly out loud when a word sounded particularly strange to her ears.

“Why is it actually called ‘Schmetterling’?” she asked abruptly. “That sounds... like a heavy stone flying through the air.”

I laughed out loud. “Yes, hearing it like that, that is probably true.”

She smiled subtly. “In my language it is called ‘kêvî’. That sounds much lighter. Like wind.”

“You are right about that.”

She turned back to the monitor. “I will speak both languages. And English. And maybe later French too.”

I raised my eyebrows in surprise. “French?”

“Yes. Why not? I am here now. I have permission to learn.”

I looked down at her and felt a wave of something that caught me completely unprepared: pride. Not the pride of a father, nor that of a teacher—rather the pride of a human being permitted to witness another human being begin to save themselves through their own strength.

In the afternoon, I accompanied her to the language school. The building was plain, the windows large, and the corridors flooded with daylight. People from all corners of the world crowded together there—Syrians, Afghans, Eritreans,

Iranians; people from regions whose names one usually only knows from gloomy news broadcasts.

Nuda looked around. Her eyes were wide, filled with a curious hunger and a little nervousness.

“This is where I will study?” she asked to make sure.

“Yes. Right here.”

“For six months?”

“For six months.”

She nodded firmly. “Good.”

We stepped up to the counter window of the administration office. A woman with motherly, friendly features took down her details, patiently explaining the course structure, lesson times, and rules. Nuda listened attentively, as if every single word were a precious key.

“The course starts tomorrow morning at nine o’clock sharp,” the clerk concluded.

Nuda beamed radiantly. “I will be there.”

When we stepped back onto the street, she stopped abruptly. She looked at the asphalt, at the passing pedestrians, at the sea of Frankfurt’s buildings.

“Alan... I am still afraid.”

I looked at her. “Of what?”

“That I am not good enough. That my head cannot manage it.”

I shook my head vigorously. “Nuda... you are strong. You are clever. You have an indomitable will. You will manage it.”

She looked at me. And suddenly tears ran down her face—not like the day before, when relief had burst out of her, but quietly, softly, like drops rising from a deep, ancient spring within her.

“I have never in my life had someone... who believed in me.”

I placed my hand firmly on her shoulder. “Then you have someone now.”

She nodded in silence. “Thank you, Alan.”

We spent the evening in my kitchen again. She studied tirelessly while I prepared something simple—rice, fresh vegetables, and a little chicken breast. She ate slowly, almost reverently, as though consciously receiving every single bite as a gift.

“I will achieve everything,” she said suddenly in a firm voice. “I will learn the language. I will get a school diploma. I will work. I will send money home. I will save my family.”

I offered her an encouraging smile. “Yes, Nuda. That is exactly what you will do.”

She fixed her dark eyes upon me. “And you will not leave me on this path?”

I shook my head calmly. “No. I am staying.”

She took a deep, liberated breath. Then she whispered softly:

“This is the very first morning of my future.”

5 – The Language of the Future

The following morning began early. The sun had not yet fully risen above the Frankfurt rooftops when Nuda stepped off the bus and stood before the language school building. She wore the same braid as the day before, the same cargo trousers, the same shirt—yet her stride was entirely different. Firmer. More resolute. As though the authority's decision had finally laid a solid ground beneath her feet, a foundation she had so bitterly missed before.

I stood a few meters away in the shadow of the building facade, watching her. Not out of mistrust—rather out of a quiet, deep solicitude that had imperceptibly taken root within me.

She looked around, took a deep breath of the cool morning air, and in the squaring of her shoulders I could see her nod inward to herself: *I can do this*.

Inside the entrance area of the language school, a vibrant, soft murmur of voices and languages filled the air. People from all parts of the world crowded together—some nervously lacing their hands, some curious, many marked by uncertainty. A man from Syria clutched a worn dictionary as if it were his most precious treasure. A woman from Eritrea gently rocked

her baby while using her free hand to try and fill out a German form. Two young Afghan men laughed softly, likely only to drown out their own tension.

Nuda looked around attentively. Her eyes were wide, open, and filled with an inquisitive sharpness.

“Alan,” she said softly as I stepped to her side. “So incredibly many people.”

“Yes,” I answered calmly. “But everyone is here for the same reason. Everyone wants to learn. Just like you.”

She nodded thoughtfully. “I am no longer alone.”

The lesson began punctually at nine o’clock. I stayed behind in the corridor while Nuda entered the classroom. I caught a final glimpse of her sitting down in the second row, placing a pristine notebook and a pen onto the desk, and directing her gaze attentively toward the teacher—a woman with light hair and a clear, engaging presence.

“Good morning,” the teacher’s voice sounded through the slightly opened door. “Today we begin with the fundamental basics.”

Nuda straightened her back completely. She was ready.

I waited in the hallway, pacing back and forth slowly. An hour passed. Then a second. Muted fragments of sound drifted outside—vocabulary repeated in chorus, stumbling attempts at sentences, quiet laughter when a pronunciation went awry.

Time and again, one voice stood out: Nuda's. It sounded immensely focused, sometimes still tentative, then surprisingly bold again.

When the classroom door finally opened and the language students poured out, I spotted her immediately. Though she walked slowly, her expression was filled with a lightness I had never seen in her before.

"Alan!" she called out as she approached me. "I can already speak real sentences!"

"Which ones?" I asked with a smile.

She smiled proudly, her chest slightly raised: "My name is Nuda. I come from Colemêrg. I am learning German."

I laughed softly to myself. "Excellent."

She nodded vigorously. "I will study every single day from now on. I will never give up."

In the afternoon, she traveled as usual to Mrs. Amend's. After a short while, the terracotta tiles gleamed mirror-smooth, the bathroom smelled freshly of lemon cleaner, and the window-panes opened up a clear view of the afternoon sky. Nuda worked with a meticulousness that possessed almost a meditative quality. She moved through the old lady's rooms like someone who had realized that even the smallest action holds a dignity of its own.

When she had finished, she sat down for a few minutes with Mrs. Amend, who was sitting in her wingback chair drinking steaming tea.

“You are doing that quite wonderfully, my child,” the old woman said, looking at her warmly over the rim of her glasses.

Nuda smiled modestly. “Thank you, Mrs. Amend.”

“You truly remind me of my granddaughter. She is just as industrious and conscientious.”

Nuda lowered her gaze briefly to her hands. “I haven’t had a grandmother for a long time.”

Mrs. Amend placed her wrinkled, vein-laced hand gently onto Nuda’s forearm. “Then starting today, I shall simply be a little bit of yours.”

Nuda looked up. Her dark eyes turned soft. “Thank you.”

She spent the evening at my place once again. She sat before my laptop, opened the language program, and immediately began to practice. I stood at the stove preparing a simple dinner. As the knife clattered against the cutting board and chopped vegetables, I heard her tirelessly articulating words in German from the neighboring room:

“House... street... friend... future... hope...”

Sometimes her tongue got caught on a hard sound. Then she would pause, start anew, and speak the word again and again and again—until the sound was absolute, pure, and correct.

“Alan,” she suddenly called out to me. “One day, I want to speak German so perfectly that no one on the street notices anymore that I come from a foreign land.”

I paused and looked over at her. “Why is that so important to you?”

“Because I want to belong. Completely.”

I gave her a sincere nod. “You will belong, Nuda.”

She smiled softly. “I hope so with all my heart.”

Later, as we drank tea together and the steam rose from the mugs, she opened up and shared something she had kept locked deep within herself all these weeks.

“When I arrived here in Germany,” she began in a fragile voice, “I was surrounded by such an overwhelming loneliness. I was terrified of everything. Of the strangers. Of the gigantic streets. Of the police. Of every coming day.”

I listened silently. She spoke deliberately, as if every single word had to be painstakingly drawn up from a bottomless well.

“In those first few weeks, I often thought that I would die. Not by a knife or a bullet... but simply from this icy loneliness.”

I swallowed hard. “Nuda...”

She looked directly at me, her eyes shimmering in the lamp-light. “But now... now I am no longer afraid. Because I finally know that I am no longer alone in the world.”

I felt something tighten firmly in my chest—a feeling that was at once painfully heavy and wonderfully warm.

“You are most certainly no longer alone,” I said softly, but with absolute certainty.

She nodded quietly. “You are my true friend, Alan.”

I smiled. “Yes, I am.”

When she set off later to catch the bus, she lingered in the doorway for a long moment. She looked at me intently, as if wanting to imprint every detail onto her memory—my face, the sound of my voice, the unshakable calm of this room.

“Alan,” she whispered softly. “Thank you for this day.”

“Always, Nuda.”

She offered me a small, delicate smile. Then she turned around and walked down the stairs. I remained standing in the hallway, staring at the closed wooden door, knowing with absolute certainty: this had not merely been an ordinary day. It had been a decisive step. A step into a life that she was now fighting to win for herself, piece by piece. A life that, in this very moment, was truly beginning.

6 – The Days That Quietly Grow

The weeks following the start of the language course passed like a calm, steady river. Not rushed, not loud—rather unstoppable. Every day brought something new with it, something small that might easily have been overlooked had one not watched with attentive eyes. But I watched. And day by day, I saw with increasing clarity how Nuda was changing.

She arrived at the language school on time every morning. Without exception, she sat in the second row—never at the very front in the spotlight, never at the very back in the shadows. She listened with intense concentration, meticulously writing down every single German word in her notebook as if securing a precious treasure. Sometimes her gaze drifted to the teacher, sometimes to her classmates, sometimes it simply rested in silence upon her own hands—and I sensed that in those brief moments, she was attempting to completely reshape her inner self.

After class, she often came up to my place. She opened my laptop, sat at the kitchen table, and began to practice tirelessly. I heard her in the next room repeating words, constructing sentences, and correcting her own mistakes. Sometimes she laughed softly out loud when a term sat particularly awkwardly on her tongue. Sometimes she knit her brows when a grammatical rule eluded her. And sometimes she looked at me with a questioning glance, as if trying to read in my eyes whether she was good enough.

“Alan,” she said abruptly on one of these afternoons. “Why is it ‘der Tisch’, but ‘die Lampe’?”

I couldn't help but smile. “Because the German language is complicated.”

She shook her head vigorously. “No. German is not complicated. German is crazy.”

I nodded. “True enough.”

She smiled subtly. “I will master it anyway.”

Her progress bordered on a small miracle. After two months, she was capable of holding simple everyday conversations. After three months, she was reading short newspaper articles. After four months, she was writing short essays independently. And after five months, she conversed with Mrs. Amend without my having to intervene as an interpreter even once.

“You speak remarkably well, really,” the old lady praised one day as Nuda explained to her in fluent sentences that she had just wiped down the refrigerator.

Nuda beamed. “Thank you, Mrs. Amend. After all, I study every day.”

“And one can certainly hear it,” the latter replied with an approving nod.

Yet it was not only the language that grew during those weeks. It was her entire being that blossomed.

She began to rediscover and savor the unassuming things in life. The scent of fresh bread from the bakery on the corner. The soft drumming of rain on the tin sill of the window. The carefree laughter of the children down in the shelter's courtyard. The afternoon conversations with the other residents who came from countries she had barely heard of before.

Sometimes she would tell me about it in the evenings.

“Alan,” she said on one such evening, “today a woman from Eritrea showed me how they bake bread back home. It tastes completely different from ours in the mountains. But really good.”

“That sounds wonderful.”

“And a young man from Afghanistan played an instrument and sang a song. I didn't understand a single word, but the melody was so endlessly sad.”

“Very many old songs are sad.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “But beautiful.”

She looked at me. “I like that here I meet people who have to struggle just as much as I do.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “Every one of you carries their own story with them.”

“Yes. But mine... mine is especially heavy.”

I looked at her. “And yet you take another step forward every day.”

She smiled softly. “Because I have no other choice.”

One day, directly after class, she came to my place and proudly laid a page covered in writing onto the table.

“What is this?” I asked.

“My very first real German text.”

I took the paper in my hand. The handwriting was neat, the sentence structure clear, the grammar nearly flawless. She had written about her family—about her mother, who wept silently in the night; about her father, whose hands were marked by hard labor; about her sister, who was raising three children alone; and about her two brothers, who had found death in the unforgiving mountains.

The text was simply phrased. But it possessed a haunting honesty. And a strange, distinct beauty all its own.

I looked up. “Nuda... this has turned out poignantly good.”

She smiled modestly. “I sat over it for hours, too.”

“Every single minute was worth it.”

She nodded in silence. “One day I want to write an entire book.”

I raised my eyebrows in surprise. “A book?”

“Yes. About my life so far. About Colemêrg. About my family. About everything that happened.”

I gave her an encouraging smile. “Then you had better start today.”

She looked at me, a knowing sparkle in her eyes. “I started long ago.”

The months drifted by. The language course neared its end. Nuda took the final examination—and not only passed, but finished as one of the top students. The teacher congratulated her effusively, her classmates applauded in the room, and Nuda stood in their midst, her hands pressed tightly together, her eyes shining with pride.

“Alan!” she called out overjoyed on the way home later. “I actually made it!”

“Yes, you did.”

“I am no longer just a nameless refugee.”

“No, you never were.”

“I am a certified student.”

I smiled. “And soon a graduate.”

She nodded firmly. “I will keep learning forever. I will stay strong. I will reach my goal.”

I looked into her resolute face and knew with absolute certainty: she meant every single word. She would walk her path. Nothing in this world would stop her now.

That evening, as she sat in my kitchen drinking her steaming tea, she said something that would etch itself into my memory forever.

“Alan,” she began softly, tracing the rim of her mug with her finger. “Today I felt deep inside that I am no longer the same person I was back then.”

“What do you mean, exactly?”

She looked me straight in the eye. “I am no longer the terrified girl who sat helplessly on the cold ground outside the supermarket.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “No, you are far from that now.”

“Today I am a person who possesses a future of her own.”

I smiled. “Yes. That is exactly what you are.”

She exhaled deeply and with relief. “And you helped me find this future in the first place.”

I looked at her. “You found it all by yourself inside you, Nuda.”

She shook her head gently. “No, Alan. You were my true beginning.”

I swallowed the slight swell in my throat. “Perhaps...”

She offered me a small, infinitely delicate smile. “Thank you for everything.”

7 – The School That Opens Doors

Summer took its time arriving in Frankfurt. Not abruptly, not with a loud clash—rather like a quiet, cautious guest who first gently feels his way through the city before filling it entirely with warmth. The days grew noticeably longer, the evenings softer, and the streets filled with people seeking the late daylight.

For Nuda, this summer marked a decisive turning point.

The language course was completed, the examination successfully passed, and now the next major step lay ahead: a regular school. A real German school. A place where she would no longer merely cram vocabulary, but belong completely.

The day of enrollment was filled with warm summer sun. The light lay over the rows of houses like a golden veil, and the air carried the fragrance of freshly mown grass. I stood with Nuda in front of a Frankfurt comprehensive school—a sprawling complex of buildings with wide window fronts and a bustling playground where teenagers laughed, ran, debated, and played; doing all those things young people do when they feel safe and secure.

Nuda stopped abruptly. She looked up at the facade as if an unconquerable mountain lay before her.

“Alan...” her voice sounded very quiet and fragile. “I am afraid.”

I looked at her encouragingly. “Of what, exactly?”

“That my German isn’t enough. That I won’t be able to follow the lessons. That the others will laugh at me.”

I shook my head firmly. “Nuda... you learned a foreign language within a very short time. You mastered a difficult exam. You worked and fought your way through. You have survived worse things than this. You will manage this school, too.”

She fixed her eyes on me. And I saw a small, inextinguishable light ignite deep within her eyes.

“All right,” she said softly, but composedly. “Then let us go inside.”

In the school administration office, we were received by a woman with friendly eyes and a calm, clear presence. She accepted Nuda’s documents, conscientiously reviewing the language course certificate, the attestation from the Youth Welfare Office, and the papers from the immigration authority.

“Under the School Act, she is subject to compulsory education until age twenty-one,” I added calmly.

The secretary nodded in understanding. “Yes, that is entirely correct. We will place her directly into the tenth grade.”

Nuda swallowed audibly. “Tenth grade?”

“Yes,” the woman explained kindly. “You completed eight school years in your homeland. Here in Germany, you need ten school years for the intermediate school certificate. But do not worry, you will manage it.”

Nuda looked over at me, seeking help. I gave her a firm nod.

“I will help you with it.”

The first day of school was a whirlwind of sounds and impressions. Teenagers joking, arguing with one another, listening to music through headphones, or complaining loudly about the first homework assignments.

Nuda stood in the middle of the courtyard, clutching the straps of her backpack with both hands, looking around. She was by no means the only new student—yet she was likely the only one who came from a place whose name most people here could not even pronounce correctly.

A girl with brown, shoulder-length hair walked up to her.

“Hi,” she said casually. “I’m Lea.”

Nuda smiled cautiously. “I am Nuda.”

“Where are you from?”

“From Colemêrg.”

Lea raised her eyebrows in surprise. “Where is that?”

“In North Kurdistan.”

“Ah, I see. Cool.”

It was only a brief, casual conversation. But it was a beginning. A first thread being woven.

In the afternoon, Nuda came to my place. She sat down at my desk, spread out her new textbooks, and I noticed her fingers trembling ever so slightly.

“Alan... it was so hard today.”

“What exactly was hard?”

“Everything. The pace of the language. The many strangers. The tasks. I still don’t understand so much.”

I looked at her calmly. “Then we will sit down now and learn it together.”

She raised her head. “Together?”

“Yes. Step by step.”

I fetched paper, pens, and reference books. She opened her notebooks. And we began to work.

The first few weeks demanded everything of her. Sometimes she sat at my table and wept softly out of exhaustion, because the meaning of a German factual text did not reveal itself to her immediately. Sometimes anger gripped her because the nuances of grammar confused her. Sometimes despair overcame

her because her classmates could answer much faster during lessons.

But at no point did she give up.

She studied every afternoon. She read every evening late into the night. She crammed tirelessly.

And I was there. Throughout it all. Not as a stern teacher—simply as a reliable constant that does not waver when things become complicated.

One evening, as we sat over her homework together once again, she said suddenly out of the blue:

“Alan... I think I am truly going to make it.”

I looked at her, surprised. “Why are you suddenly so sure?”

“Because something important became clear to me in class today.”

“And what is that?”

She smiled subtly. “That I am not unwise. I am simply new to this world.”

I nodded in complete agreement. “That is precisely how it is.”

“And that I do not have to walk this path alone.”

I smiled back. “Precisely.”

She looked at me. “Thank you, Alan.”

The months flew by. Week by week, Nuda grew more confident. Her grades improved steadily. The teachers did not stint on praise for her unyielding diligence. She made connections—not large cliques, but genuine, deep friendships. She laughed freely again. She spoke German fluently and articulately. She even began to learn English with great enthusiasm. And most importantly of all: she began to value herself again.

And when the report cards were handed out at the end of the school year, she stood beaming before me, holding the paper firmly in her hands, her eyes shining with pride.

“Alan... I made it!”

I scanned the column of grades. Good marks, very good marks, a few solid averages—not a single bad evaluation.

“Nuda... that is a fantastic achievement.”

She smiled with her entire face. “Starting next school year, I can even transfer to the Gymnasium.”

I looked at her and felt a deep sense of fulfillment. She was no longer the desperate girl who had crouched helplessly on the cold stone in front of the supermarket. She had become a person who possessed a future of her own. A real, hard-earned, magnificent future.

8 – The Path into the Light

Autumn came over Frankfurt am Main like a quiet, majestic visitor. The leaves along the avenues turned a rich yellow, vivid red, and deep brown; the streets appeared as though an invisible artist had painted them with warm, melancholic colors. The air grew noticeably cooler, though not icy, and over the city lay that very special fragrance that only this season brings—a fine mixture of damp earth, falling leaves, and the quiet promise of change.

For Nuda, this autumn meant a complete fresh start.

She was now a student in the upper school of a Frankfurt Gymnasium. She had made friends. She possessed an orderly daily routine. She had a real, tangible future before her eyes.

And she had me.

The first few weeks in the academic track demanded more of her than anything she had experienced so far. No longer primarily because of the language—which she now spoke fluently and with surprising nuance—but because of the breathtaking pace. The teachers taught quickly, and her classmates debated even faster. The homework was extensive, the analysis of non-fiction texts demanding, and the topics highly complex.

Sometimes she came up to my place after school, sat exhausted at the kitchen table, and I saw her narrow shoulders hang tiredly under the weight of her impressions.

“Alan... there is still so extremely much I don’t understand,” she confessed quietly one day.

“What is worrying you so much?” I asked.

“Mathematics. Physics. The historical analysis in history. Just everything.”

I offered her an encouraging smile. “Then we will sit down together as always and go through it step by step.”

She looked at me intently with her dark eyes. “You truly help me every single time.”

“Yes. Of course.”

“Why do you actually do this?”

I did not answer immediately. I looked at her—this sixteen-year-old girl from the jagged mountains of Colemêrg, who had lost two brothers to war, who had fled across borders entirely on her own, who had crouched terrified on the cold stone floor in front of the supermarket, and who now sat at my table studying with an indomitable will.

“Because you fight from the very depth of your soul,” I said quietly at last. “And I help people who do not give up.”

She offered me a small, infinitely warm smile. “Thank you, Alan.”

Our evenings together became a fixed, comforting ritual. After school, she came to my place. We studied together for hours, not infrequently late into the night.

I explained mathematical formulas and the logic connecting them until the penny dropped. She read German texts aloud to me to refine her pronunciation even further. We debated historical upheavals, political systems, and the world as a whole.

Sometimes she laughed heartfully when I made a careless mistake while calculating. Sometimes I laughed softly when she articulated a cumbersome German word with particular effort. Sometimes we simply sat side by side in silence for minutes, each immersed in our own thoughts—yet it was never a lonely silence.

One evening, as the autumn rain pattered incessantly against the windowpanes and steam rose from our tea mugs, she told me something she had never voiced aloud all this time.

“Alan... when I arrived here in Germany, I had absolutely nothing.”

I looked at her. “I know, Nuda.”

“I had no friends. No language. No money. Not even the smallest hope for a future.” She looked down at her folded hands. “I was actually made of nothing but naked fear.”

I remained silent. Sometimes it takes no words to fill another person’s silence.

“But now...” she slowly raised her head, and her gaze held an astonishing clarity. “Now I finally have something.”

“What is that, Nuda?”

She smiled gently. “A life of my own.”

I felt something move deeply in my chest—a feeling of great warmth and simultaneous reverence for her strength.

“Yes, Nuda. You have fought for a life of your own.”

“And you have become an inseparable part of it.”

I swallowed the slight swell of emotion in my throat. “That means a great deal to me.”

She nodded in silence. “To me too.”

With every passing week, her academic performance improved. Her grades climbed steadily. The teachers did not stint on recognition for her exemplary discipline. At school, she found classmates who valued her—not out of pity or because she had a story as a refugee, but simply because of the person she was: clever, attentive, industrious, and filled with a natural warmth.

One afternoon, she came to my place beaming with joy and called out right at the door:

“Alan! I got an A on my English paper!”

I smiled. “That is outstanding!”

“And a B in mathematics!”

“That’s really good, too.”

“And a B in German!”

I looked at her in astonishment. “That truly is an extraordinary achievement, Nuda.”

She nodded proudly. “I crammed disproportionately hard.”

“You worked hard for it.”

“Yes. I did.”

She sat down in her usual spot at the kitchen table, looked at me calmly, and said softly:

“I am definitively no longer the terrified girl who sat helplessly on the street.”

I nodded with complete conviction. “No, you haven’t been that for a long time.”

“I am somebody now.”

I smiled gently. “To me, you were always somebody.”

She shook her head slightly. “No, Alan. Only now am I a person with a real future ahead of her.”

With the approaching winter, she began to change further. Not in her outward appearance—rather in her entire inner essence.

She gained a strong self-confidence. Her voice sounded firmer, more decisive. She laughed more frequently and more light-heartedly. She went to the cinema with classmates, met in small cafés downtown, or strolled through Frankfurt's parks. Step by step, she began to enjoy life to the fullest.

Sometimes she told me excitedly about her outings.

“Alan... we went to the museum together today. I saw modern paintings that, to be honest, I didn't really understand at all.”

I smiled. “That's how most people at the museum feel.”

“But they were beautiful to look at nonetheless.”

“And that is precisely what matters.”

“And I met a girl who is originally from Spain. She is incredibly nice to me.”

“Good friends are something very precious in life.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I have real friends now.”

I looked at her with delight. “I am happy for you with all my heart.”

Yet despite all these new connections and obligations, one thing remained unchanged: she still came to my place regularly. No longer every single day—but consistently.

Sometimes to go through tricky homework. Sometimes simply to speak about life. And sometimes just to sit quietly and enjoy the familiar tranquility.

One evening, as we sat over tea once again, she abruptly said a sentence that touched me deep within:

“Alan... you are my true home.”

I looked at her, surprised. “What do you mean, exactly?”

“I have my small room in the shelter. I have school. I have my new friends. But... whenever I am here in this room with you... I feel absolutely safe and anchored.”

I swallowed hard. “Thank you for those words, Nuda.”

She smiled warmly. “I mean every single word just like that.”

Winter finally passed. The ice melted, spring arrived in the city, and the trees along the Main put forth their first green buds. And with this new season came the herald of something entirely unexpected—something that was to bring a whole new turn into her life.

A boy.

A name.

A entirely new, delicate feeling.

9 – A Name in Spring

Spring arrived over Frankfurt like a soft, liberating breath. The trees in the park behind the school bore their first delicate buds and young leaves, which appeared like small green promises in the sunlight. The air was mild, soaked with the scent of fresh earth, lukewarm rain showers, and that unmistakable feeling of new beginnings. For most students, it was simply another season. For Nuda, it was an entirely new outlook on life.

A feeling she had never known before. A feeling she had never expected. A feeling that from now on bore a very specific name:

Tim David.

She noticed him for the very first time on an ordinary Tuesday morning. The spring sun shone obliquely through the tall window fronts of the classroom, and the dust motes dancing in the light ray seemed like tiny stars. Nuda sat as usual in the second row, highly focused on following the teacher's complex poetry interpretation. She diligently took notes, word for word.

Suddenly a voice sounded directly behind her. Warm, clear, and with a pleasant, slightly deep tone.

“Excuse me... may I for a moment?”

She turned around in surprise. And there he stood.

A boy, perhaps seventeen or eighteen years old. Dark-blond hair that fell casually across his forehead. Eyes of a bright, alert shade that radiated openness. His face appeared friendly, winning, and free of any pushiness.

He smiled at her. “You left my pen over there.”

Nuda looked astonished at her folder. Indeed—right next to her notebook lay a ballpoint pen that did not belong to her.

“Oh... I’m sorry,” she said embarrassedly and handed the pen over to him.

“No problem,” he replied casually. “I’m Tim, by the way.”

She gave a cautious nod. “I am Nuda.”

He smiled again, an honest, open smile. “Beautiful name.”

Nuda instantly felt a sudden warmth rise to her cheeks. In that moment, she did not even know what was happening to her.

In the days that followed, she encountered him more and more frequently. In the busy hallways, in the courtyard, in the cafeteria. Sometimes he gave her a friendly nod in passing. Sometimes he offered her a smile. Sometimes he called out a brief, easygoing “Hi!” to her.

And every time, Nuda felt a strange sensation in her chest—a delicate pull, a quiet glow, an involuntary tremor.

She had never experienced such a feeling in her life before. There had never been room for it in her past. In the jagged

mountains around Colemêrg, there was no carefree youth romance. There, only existential fear, hard labor, and daily survival held sway.

But here... Here everything suddenly seemed to be different.

One afternoon, as class ended, Tim stepped up to her desk quite abruptly.

“You’re really remarkably good at German,” he remarked appreciatively.

She looked up at him in surprise. “I study extremely hard for it, too.”

“One can tell right away.”

She smiled modestly. “Thank you.”

“Tell me,” Tim continued, “do you feel like coming downtown with us? We want to go get ice cream together.”

Nuda hesitated. She had never done anything so carefree in her life so far. She had never had the time, never had the opportunity for it. She had never had classmates who simply wanted to take her along.

“I... I don't really know...”

“Just come along,” he encouraged her gently. “It will definitely be nice.”

She looked at him. His eyes radiated an earnest warmth. No hidden pity, no mere curiosity—simply honest friendliness.

“All right,” she whispered softly. “I’ll come with you.”

Together they walked into central Frankfurt. Tim, two female classmates, another boy—all from her grade. They laughed, shared anecdotes, took silly photos with their phones. Nuda mostly remained quiet, but a lasting smile rested on her lips. For the first time, she felt neither foreign nor out of place, nor critically scrutinized.

She simply felt... like she belonged.

When she was handed her cone at the ice cream parlor, Tim turned to her.

“Do you actually like chocolate?”

She nodded radiantly. “Yes, very much.”

“Me too!”

She laughed softly out loud. “That is good.”

He smiled at her. “Yes, absolutely.”

That same evening, she came up to my place. She sat in her usual spot at the kitchen table, but instead of opening her school supplies, she left her notebooks closed. She looked at me, and I recognized immediately that something decisive had changed within her.

“Alan...” her voice sounded very soft. “I went downtown with a few classmates after school today.”

I smiled at her. “I’m very happy for you, Nuda.”

“Yes...”, she briefly lowered her gaze to her hands. “And there was a boy there, too.”

I raised my eyebrows in surprise. “A boy?”

“Yes.”

“What is his name, then?”

“Tim David.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “And then?”

She looked straight at me, her dark eyes huge, warm, and filled with a quiet confusion.

“Whenever he looks at me and smiles... I feel something very strange deep inside me.”

I smiled gently. “That is something completely normal.”

“What kind of feeling is that exactly, Alan?”

“Perhaps... you simply like him very much.”

She thought about it silently for a few moments. “Do I really like him?”

“Perhaps you do.”

She looked down at the tabletop. “At any rate, it feels... beautiful.”

I gave her a sincere nod. “Then it is just right that way.”

In the weeks that followed, Tim became a fixed part of her daily school life. He sat with her during breaks, helped her patiently with tricky assignments, and inquired sincerely after her well-being. He spoke to her openly about his family—his father worked as a respected lawyer, his mother as a gynecologist; both were considered open-minded, warm-hearted people.

Sometimes they strolled home together after school ended. Sometimes they sat on a bench in the park talking about life and everything under the sun. „Sometimes they laughed together about those things that only teenagers their age truly understand.“

And every single time anew, this wonderful feeling surged through Nuda—this warm, light, brightly shining feeling.

One afternoon, as they sat together on the grass in the park, Tim said abruptly:

“You are quite different from most girls our age.”

Nuda looked at him in astonishment. “What do you mean by that?”

“You have a very special... inner strength.”

She smiled softly to herself. “I had to be strong very early in my life.”

“I know,” he said quietly, looking at her intently.

She plucked up her courage, looked him directly in the eyes, and whispered: “Tim... I like you very much.”

He smiled happily. “I like you too, Nuda. Incredibly much.”

She felt her heart instantly beat faster, a pleasant warmth flow through her hands, and the world around her suddenly appear so much brighter.

“Alan will surely be overjoyed,” she murmured softly to herself.

Tim laughed gently. “Who is this Alan, anyway?”

“My best friend,” she explained proudly. “He has helped me with everything from the very beginning.”

“Then he must truly be a great person.”

She nodded with full conviction. “Yes. He is.”

When she arrived at my place later that evening, a single look was enough for me to comprehend the change within her. She was transformed—not outwardly, but deep inside her being.

She sat across from me, looked at me with a glow, and said outright:

“Alan... I think... I am in love for the first time in my life.”

I smiled at her calmly. “I know.”

She stared at me in surprise. “How do you know that already?”

“One can see it in every fiber of your face.”

She smiled blissfully. “It is such a beautiful feeling.”

“And that is exactly what it should be.”

Yet then a brief shadow settled over her features again. “But I am also a little afraid.”

“What are you afraid of, Nuda?”

“That this happiness will be taken away from me again.”

I shook my head calmly, but firmly. “Nuda... you have had to suffer and lose so much in the past. But this here... this is something entirely new. Something you have earned yourself through your courage and your heart. Something you completely deserve.”

She nodded thoughtfully, and the worry receded from her eyes once more. “Yes.”

“And never forget: I am still always here for you.”

She smiled, deeply moved. “Thank you, Alan.”

Spring progressed. And with each passing day, something wonderful grew inside Nuda—something delicate, sublime, warming; that feeling that human beings have called love since time immemorial.

Yet all of this was merely the tender beginning of a much larger story.

10 – The World Grows Larger

Summer returned to Frankfurt am Main, but this time with a warmth that did not merely shimmer in the air, but radiated deep into Nuda's life. The days grew long and flooded with light, the summer evenings soft and lukewarm, and the city seemed to open before her eyes like a precious book whose pages were only waiting to be read. For Nuda, this summer was different from all those she had experienced before. It was not heavy, not gloomy, not marked by panic and fear. It was light. It was radiantly bright. It was new.

And it began with a boy who knew her name and understood how to pronounce it as if it were the most beautiful thing in the world.

Tim David.

They spent more and more time with each other from day to day. After school, they often strolled down into the park grounds, sat on a shaded bench beneath the mighty canopies of the old chestnut trees, and talked about everything—about daily school life, about music, about dreams and plans; about

all those things young people share when they are deeply fond of one another.

Tim spoke to her openly about his family. His father, a respected lawyer who often sat over files until late at night, yet always found the time to listen to his son attentively. His mother, the gynecologist, who possessed a reassuring, warm-hearted aura and met people with deep empathy. His family home—large, flooded with light, filled with countless books and works of art.

“You would definitely like my mother right away,” Tim remarked on one of these afternoons. “She is unbelievably friendly and open.”

Nuda smiled bashfully. “To be honest, I am still a little afraid of meeting strangers.”

“But why?”

“Because I never know whether they will accept and like me.”

Tim looked at her intently. “They would love you for sure, Nuda.”

“How can you know that so precisely?”

“Because I love you, too.”

She instantly felt her heart leap violently, a pleasant warmth surge through her hands, and the entire world around her take on even brighter colors all at once.

One day, as they strolled through the city center together, Tim stopped abruptly before a fork in the path.

“Come with me,” he said, smiling. “I want to show you something very special.”

She followed him willingly. They walked through small, winding alleys, past lively cafés, bookstores, and old building facades with flower-adorned balconies. Finally, they came to a halt before an imposing, modern complex of buildings whose massive glass facade reflected the sunlight in shimmering glimmers.

“What kind of place is this?” she asked in wonder.

“This is the Museum of Modern Art.”

She looked at him questioningly. “Why are we coming here?”

“Because I want you to see with your own eyes how endlessly vast and diverse this world is.”

He gently took her hand. Not tightly, not demandingly—simply carefully and warmly.

“Come inside with me.”

Inside the museum, a reverent silence reigned. The exhibition rooms were spacious, the walls brilliant white, the paintings large-formatted and full of vibrant colors. Some works seemed abstract, some enigmatic, some breathtakingly beautiful.

Nuda walked slowly through the galleries. She absorbed the colors, the bold shapes, the dynamic lines. She could not grasp the deeper meaning behind much of it right away—yet she felt an enormous emotional power.

“Alan would love this place here above all else,” she whispered softly to herself.

Tim smiled understandingly. “Tell me, who exactly is Alan to you, anyway?”

“My best friend,” she answered without hesitation. “He helped me when I had nothing at all. He is... like a big brother to me.”

“Then he is a very important person in your life.”

“Yes. The most important beginning.”

She stopped in front of a gigantic canvas painting. It consisted of rich layers of paint—vibrant red, deep blue, brilliant yellow—that overlapped in complex ways, as if speaking to one another in a mysterious language.

“What exactly is this supposed to mean?” she asked, fascinated.

Tim shrugged his shoulders slightly. “Maybe it doesn't mean anything in particular. Or maybe it simply means everything.”

She smiled subtly. “At any rate, I like it very much.”

“Me too.”

That same evening, she came to my home. She sat in her usual spot at the kitchen table, and I noticed instantly that something decisive had changed in her demeanor. She appeared taller. Not physically—rather in her inner presence.

“Alan... I was at the Museum of Modern Art today,” she shared.

I smiled at her. “Together with Tim?”

“Yes.”

“And how was it?”

She looked at me with wide eyes. “The world is so incredibly large, Alan.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “Yes, it is.”

“I didn't know that before at all.”

“You were never really able to see it until now, either.”

“But now I finally see it.” She smiled blissfully. “One day I absolutely want to travel.”

“Where to?”

“Everywhere.”

I laughed softly to myself. “That is an excellent plan.”

In the weeks that followed, the horizon of her world indeed expanded at a breathtaking pace. Tim took her on an extended weekend to Berlin. They stood together beneath the imposing arch of the Brandenburg Gate, feeling the breath of world history and the pulsating expanse of the capital. They strolled through the streets, casually ate currywurst, and laughed amusedly at tourists staring directionless at their city maps.

“I feel so endlessly free here,” she said in wonder.

“And that is exactly how you should feel,” Tim replied gently.

She looked at him. “In my wildest dreams, I never thought I would ever be allowed to travel.”

“And now you are simply doing it.”

“Yes. I am doing it.”

A short while later, they even flew to Barcelona together. There, Nuda saw the open sea for the very first time in her life. She stood at the shore, her bare feet buried in the warm sand, gazing at the foaming waves that washed rhythmically onto the beach as if wanting to whisper an ancient message to her.

“Alan absolutely has to see this,” she whispered, touched.

Tim smiled warmly. “Then we’ll simply bring him along next time.”

She nodded firmly. “Yes. We will.”

She looked out at the endless horizon. “I would never have thought it possible that I would ever stand in such a place.”

“But you are standing here, Nuda. Quite truly.”

“Yes.” She smiled, deeply moved. “I am simply happy.”

When she finally returned to Frankfurt, she visited me immediately. She sat down at the table, looked at me, and in that first second, I saw how profoundly these experiences had changed her.

“Alan... I saw the great sea,” she said in a reverent voice.

I smiled back at her. “And how was it?”

“Huge. Beautiful. Loud. And so warm.”

“And how did you feel?”

She looked straight into my eyes. “I was completely free.”

I nodded with deep emotion. “I am happy for you with all my heart, Nuda.”

“In the past, I would never have dared to hope that I would ever truly be free.”

“You have honestly earned every piece of this freedom.”

She smiled serenely. “I am simply so happy.”

I looked at her and felt a great calm within me. She was long since no longer the terrified, broken girl who had once crouched defenseless on the cold stone floor in front of the supermarket. She had grown into a human being who beheld the world with awake eyes. A human being who loved life. A human being who was ready to conquer her own world.

11 – Between Two Worlds

Summer drew to a close as Nuda gradually began to feel that her life was moving in two distinct directions. One direction was light-flooded, lighthearted, and filled with carefree laughter—it led her straight to Tim. The other was calm, warm, and marked by the deepest constancy—it led her back to me time and again.

She loved both worlds from the bottom of her heart. Yet in those days, she did not know how to embrace and hold onto both worlds at once.

Day by day, Tim became an even more firm fixture in her daily life. They met immediately after school, strolled into small cafés, sat on the lawns in the park, or rode their bicycles together through the summery streets of the city. More and more often, they spent their afternoons at his family home.

The David family residence was spacious, luminous, and modern in design. The walls shone in pure white; the furnishings were simple and refined, and the rooms were filled with books and contemporary art. It was a house that told its own stories at every turn—stories of education, of financial ease, of absolute security, and of unlimited possibilities.

When Nuda crossed the threshold for the first time, she stood in the wide hallway in reverent silence. She looked up at the high ceilings, saw the huge window fronts and the expressive paintings on the walls.

“Tim... this here is impossibly beautiful,” she whispered, touched.

He smiled gently. “I’m very glad you think so.”

“I have never stood in such a beautiful house in my entire life.”

“Then it was high time for it.”

She looked at him cautiously. “To be honest, I’m afraid I might accidentally break something here.”

He laughed softly and warmly. “You certainly won’t break a thing, Nuda.”

Tim’s mother, the gynecologist, greeted her with a refreshing warmth from the very first second. She looked at Nuda as if she were a young girl she had already taken into her heart years ago.

“So, you are Nuda?” she asked warmly.

“Yes, I am.”

“Tim has told us so extraordinarily much about you these past few weeks.”

Nuda lowered her eyes modestly. “I hope only good things.”

“Exclusively wonderful things,” the mother replied beamingly.

Tim’s father, the lawyer, showed himself to be calm and matter-of-fact, but by no means distant. He listened attentively when Nuda shared something about her school life. He asked questions that were never driven by mere curiosity, but by deep respect.

“You truly are diligent and determined beyond measure,” he praised her one evening as they all sat together at the large dining table.

“I simply have to be diligent,” Nuda answered out of deep conviction.

“That is one of the most valuable qualities of all.”

She smiled gratefully. “Thank you very much.”

Yet despite all this comfort and warmth, something remained deep within Nuda—a quiet pull, a silent thought that rose to the surface time and again.

Alan.

She thought of me when she laughed heartfully. She thought of me when she sat intently over her books. She thought of me even when she was out with Tim. Not because she missed me like a lover. But because I was that person who had borne her unconditionally when she possessed nothing at all anymore.

I had been her beginning. Tim was her future. And she stood with an open heart right in between.

One evening, as she sat in my kitchen once again, she shared quietly:

“Alan... I visited Tim’s family again today.”

I smiled at her. “And how was it this time?”

“Very nice.”

“I am sincerely happy about that.”

She looked at me. “His parents really like me a lot.”

“Of course they do.”

“Why do you find that so self-evident?”

“Because you are a thoroughly wonderful person, Nuda.”

She smiled, moved. “Thank you, Alan.”

Yet then her expression suddenly turned very serious.

“Alan... I am still very afraid.”

I looked at her with concern. “Of what?”

“That I am slowly losing you along this path.”

I swallowed the emotion in my throat. “Nuda... you will never lose me in this life.”

“But I am no longer here with you nearly as often as I used to be.”

“That is the completely natural course of things.”

“I still have a guilty conscience because of it.”

I shook my head firmly. “You have absolutely no need for a guilty conscience. You are living your life. You are growing every day. You are loving. That is the most beautiful thing that could happen.”

She looked at me intently. “But you are and remain my true home.”

I smiled at her sincerely. “And that is exactly what I will always remain.”

She exhaled deeply, relieved. “Thank you, Alan.”

In the weeks that followed, her life gathered pace rapidly. The academic demands in the upper school increased significantly. Her relationship with Tim gained depth. Her circle of friends expanded visibly. Her entire world grew larger and more colorful by the day.

Sometimes she came up to my place only late in the evening. Sometimes she didn't manage to come for days. Sometimes she dropped by for barely ten minutes just to say a quick hello.

Yet every single time she stood in the doorway, I saw anew how much she was continuing to evolve.

She radiated a heightened self-confidence. Her voice sounded firmer, braver. She laughed more carefree. She had become a thoroughly happy young woman.

And I felt an infinite pride in her. Not the pride of a father, nor that of a teacher—rather the pride of a person who was allowed to witness at close range how another human being found her true self.

One evening, as she sat with me drinking her tea in peace, she said:

“Alan... I talked very extensively with Tim today about my family and my past.”

“And how did he react?”

“He said he has infinite respect for my strength.”

“He is completely right about that.”

“He promised me that I will achieve everything in life.”

“And that is exactly how it will happen.”

She paused for a moment, looked down at her cup, and then whispered: “He told me... that he loves me.”

I looked at her warmly. “And what do you feel?”

She smiled blissfully. "I love him too, with all my heart."

I nodded in complete agreement. "I am incredibly happy for you, Nuda."

Yet then she looked at me again with large, anxious eyes. "Alan... I am still afraid nonetheless."

"What are you afraid of?"

"That in the end I will lose too much if I win so much new happiness now."

I remained silent for a long moment. Sometimes there are no words strong enough.

"After all, I have already lost so infinitely much in my life," she said very softly. "My brothers. My childhood. My entire home."

"I know, Nuda. I know."

"And now I suddenly possess so many beautiful things... I am simply in a panic that all of it will be torn away from me again."

I placed my hand gently over her trembling fingers.

"Nuda... you built this life all by yourself. With your own hands. With your indomitable courage. With your great heart. Something that has grown so deep within you can no longer be taken or swept away by anyone."

She looked at me, and the shimmer in her eyes turned very soft.

“Thank you, Alan.”

When she set off later, she lingered at the open apartment door for a brief moment, as she so often did.

“Alan... you are always there, aren't you?”

“Yes. Always.”

“Even when I am not here with you right now.”

“Yes. Even then.”

She gave me a beautiful, peaceful smile. “That is the most comforting feeling in the world.”

Then she turned around and left.

And I remained standing in the hallway, knowing with absolute certainty: she now lived in two different worlds. But in both worlds, there was a permanent place for me.

12 – The Responsibility That Grows Larger

Autumn returned to Frankfurt am Main, this time, however, with a peculiar heaviness that did not lie primarily in the cooling air, but nested painfully in Nuda's thoughts. The leaves fell from the chestnuts in dense cascades, the days shortened noticeably, and over the streets settled that melancholic

underlying tone that only this season brings—a quiet, relentless tone that whispers: *Everything is changing*.

For Nuda, this autumn meant a profound proving ground. Not at the desks of the upper school. Not in her delicate love for Tim. But deep within her heart.

She was now eighteen, almost nineteen years old. Although she still lived in the small room of the shelter, she was no longer the broken girl who had once arrived there. She was an ambitious student. She was a dependable friend. She was deeply in love. She had become strong.

Yet she also remained a daughter. And a sister. And a granddaughter. And that meant a burden of responsibility that weighed heavier with every passing day.

One evening, as she sat in my kitchen, a suffocating silence reigned. Her textbooks lay open before her on the table, yet she did not look into them a single time. She merely stared at her hands, which she held so tightly clasped as if trying desperately to cling to something that was slipping relentlessly through her fingers.

“Alan...” her voice sounded broken and barely audible. “I talked on the phone with my mother back home for a long time this afternoon.”

I looked at her attentively. “How is she?”

“Not good at all.” She swallowed hard against the rising emotion. “She just wept on the phone.”

I remained silent. Sometimes it takes no hasty words to give space to a person's pain.

“She told me... that they have absolutely no money left. My father is gravely ill and can no longer work. My sister is raising her three small children all by herself. They simply possess nothing at all anymore.”

She looked straight at me, and in her eyes, I saw a naked fear—not fear of the local authorities, not fear of deportation, but that grueling existential fear that overcomes a person when loving those who are suffering thousands of kilometers away.

“I’m already sending them every single cent I earn working for Frau Amend,” she whispered in despair. “But it’s nowhere near enough.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “I know, Nuda.”

“I simply have to do so much more.”

“But what exactly do you want to do?”

She looked at me helplessly. “I don’t know myself.”

In the days that followed, she seemed completely transformed. She hardly laughed anymore. She spoke only what was strictly necessary. Her thoughts constantly drifted while studying.

Tim noticed the change immediately. He asked her gently what was burdening her so much. She evaded and merely said, “It’s nothing.” Yet he felt clearly that this was not the truth.

Nor did anything escape me. When I asked her what was wrong, she brushed it off: “I’m just tired.” But I saw deep in her eyes that it was not physical tiredness.

She was carrying something inside that weighed a ton—heavier than all the school material, heavier than any relationship question, heavier than everything else.

One evening, as she sat with me again, the pent-up pressure finally burst out of her with full force.

“Alan... I am in such a panic!” she cried desperately.

I looked at her calmly. “What are you so afraid of, Nuda?”

“That my family over there will perish right before my eyes!”

I remained silent and let her speak.

“I sit here in safety. I go to a good school. I have wonderful friends. I have Tim. I have been given a real life. But they... they have absolutely nothing.” Her eyes filled rapidly with hot tears. “I feel so infinitely guilty for it.”

I stepped up to her and placed my hand reassuringly over her trembling fingers.

“Nuda... you haven’t done the slightest thing wrong.”

“Yes, I have, Alan! Of course I have!”

“No, absolutely not.”

“I live here in abundance, while they over there are starving!”

I took a deep breath. “Nuda... you are still a child yourself.”

She shook her head vigorously. “No! I am no longer a child! I bear the responsibility!”

“Responsibility for what?”

“For everything! For their survival!”

I looked at her intently. “You are eighteen years old.”

“But I am the only one in the entire family who even has the possibility to change something!”

I swallowed down the bitterness. “You are already doing everything in your power.”

“But it isn’t enough! It’s far too little!”

She leapt up, ran to the window, and stared down at the nighttime street, on whose damp asphalt the yellowish light of the streetlamps was reflected.

“Alan... I want to drop out of school and go to work full-time.”

“Legally, you are not even allowed to do that.”

“I don’t care about that at all!”

“You are subject to compulsory education until the age of twenty-one and have a great future ahead of you.”

“I need to earn money right now!”

She turned sharply to face me; her cheeks wet with tears.

“I can’t just stand by and watch!”

I stepped close to her. “You are not just standing by and watching. You study every day to the point of exhaustion. You are building a solid foundation for yourself. You will finish your school, enter a profession, and earn proper money. Only then will you be able to help them sustainably and permanently.”

She shook her head in despair. “Later might already be far too late!”

I placed both hands gently on her narrow shoulders.

“Nuda... you cannot save the entire world all at once.”

She looked at me with a pleading gaze. “But I have to try, Alan.”

“No. You cannot.”

“I can!”

“You will break mentally under this inhumane burden.”

She fell silent abruptly. Then tears ran silently down her face—quiet, steady drops that seemed to come from the deepest abysses of her soul.

“Alan... I’m simply so afraid,” she whispered helplessly.

I pulled her gently toward me and held her firmly in my arms. She rested her head against my chest, and I felt her whole body shaken by silent fits of weeping.

“I am here,” I said softly, yet unwaveringly. “I won’t waver. I’m not going away.”

She clung with her hands to my jacket like a small child seeking refuge from a raging storm.

“I simply don’t know what to do anymore...”

“You don’t have to know an answer to everything right now, Nuda.”

“But I have to do something!”

“You are already doing the most important thing of all.”

“What is that?”

“You are living. You are fighting your way through.”

She looked up at me through her tears. “Is that really enough?”

I gave her a nod of complete conviction. “For today, it is more than enough.”

In the weeks that followed, she became noticeably calmer. Not because her worries had dissolved into thin air—rather

because she gradually learned to carry this heavy burden without breaking under it.

She continued to study with discipline. She carried out her work for Frau Amend as conscientiously as ever. She continued to send every saved euro back home. She opened up to Tim and spoke honestly with him. And she spoke with me.

And very slowly, centimeter by centimeter, she began to internalize a mature realization:

Taking responsibility does not mean carrying the world alone on one's shoulders. Responsibility means not running away from life's challenges.

One evening, as she sat with me at the kitchen table drinking her tea once again, she said composedly:

“Alan... I spoke with my mother again today.”

“And what did she say?”

“She commanded me... that I should live my life here in Germany with all my heart.”

I smiled, touched. “That is a very wise mother.”

“She said... I shouldn't load the burden of the entire family onto my shoulders.”

“She is absolutely right about that.”

“And she said... that her greatest wish is for me to become happy here.”

I looked at her warmly. “And that is now your most important task.”

She smiled softly, yet firmly. “I will do my best.”

“You will manage it, Nuda.”

She gave a firm nod. “Yes. I know.”

When she set off later, she lingering in the doorway for a moment, as was her habit.

“Alan... thank you.”

“What are you thanking me for?”

“Simply for everything. For being there.”

I smiled back at her. “Always, Nuda.”

She gave me a small, yet remarkably strong and mature smile.

And I remained standing in the hallway, knowing: in these weeks, she had grown beyond herself once again. Not through school alone. Not merely through love. But through honoring a responsibility that had made her mature.

13 – The Voice That Awakens

Winter arrived early and with relentless cold in Frankfurt am Main. The air grew biting sharp, the streets damp and icy, and passersby hurried through the alleys noticeably faster, as if wanting to escape the city's frosty grip as quickly as possible. Frankfurt seemed muted, as though wrapped deeply in a thick coat of whitish-gray fog. For most people, it was merely the change of seasons. For Nuda, this winter was a crystal-clear reflection of her own soul.

A mirror in which she recognized herself—more clearly, sharply, and honestly than ever before.

She was now nineteen years old. She was a striving student. She was a beloved friend. She was deeply in love. She had become strong. She proudly bore responsibility.

Yet in those days, she had grown into something so much greater: she had become a human being who possessed a voice of her own that could not be ignored.

A voice that no longer whispered in fear. A voice that no longer trembled with uncertainty. A voice that no longer merely reacted passively to the world—but one that confidently challenged and spoke out.

It began on an ordinary afternoon during class. In social studies, the class was discussing highly explosive topics: migration, integration, reasons for flight, and state asylum policy. A complex set of issues that remained completely abstract and

far removed from reality for almost all of her classmates—yet a topic that for Nuda meant raw survival, blood, and tears.

A boy in the back row remarked casually: “A lot of refugees come here just because they want our money.”

A girl in one of the front rows nodded in agreement. “Yeah, sure, they just want to lead a better and more comfortable life here without much effort.”

Another student added dismissively: “Some of them just shamelessly exploit our system right from the start.”

Nuda sat completely motionless in her seat. She heard every single word. She felt something contract inside her—yet it was no longer blind rage, nor paralyzing pain, but a crystal-clear, inner resolve.

The teacher looked attentively around the room. “Would perhaps one of you like to offer a different perspective on this?”

Nuda raised her hand calmly and deliberately.

It was the very first time since joining the school that she had raised her hand on her own initiative in this large class.

The teacher gave a surprised nod. “Yes, please, Nuda?”

„Nuda rose slowly from her chair and looked attentively into the faces of her classmates — not with hostility, not with fear, but with calm dignity.“

“I am a refugee,” she said with a firm, clear voice.

The entire classroom instantly fell dead silent.

“I did not come to Germany because of your money. I came here because my family back home possesses absolutely nothing anymore. Because my beloved brothers died in the war. Because I had no future whatsoever over there. Because I suffered the mortal fear of death every single night.”

She took a deep, calm breath.

“I certainly did not come here to exploit anything or anyone. I am here to finally be allowed to live in safety.”

Some students lowered their eyes in embarrassment. Many stared at her spellbound. Tim looked up at her from the side—his eyes filled with proud warmth and deep admiration.

“I study every single day to the point of exhaustion. I work hard. I support my family. I fight for every single step forward. I am not here to take anything away from you. I am here so that I can later give something valuable back to this society.”

She looked straight at the teacher. “That is exactly what I wanted to say about this.”

The teacher nodded, touched and full of respect. “I thank you with all my heart for your honesty, Nuda.”

The class remained in a lasting silence. Not out of shock—rather out of deep emotion and respect for this courage.

When she came up to my place in the evening, she told me about that moment. She sat in her usual spot at the kitchen table, clasped a hot cup of tea with both hands, and said quietly:

“Alan... I spoke in front of the whole class today.”

I looked at her proudly. “And what exactly did you say?”

“I simply told them the bare truth.”

“And how did that feel for you?”

She smiled radiantly. “I wasn't afraid a single time.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “Because you have become an infinitely strong personality.”

“Yes. I think I truly am.” She looked at me intently. “I have never felt like this in my entire life before.”

“Like what, Nuda?”

“Like a person who possesses an actual voice of her own.”

I smiled back at her. “You always had that voice deep inside you.”

“No, Alan. Only now, through you and my new life, have I truly discovered it.”

In the weeks that followed, she began to use this newly found voice more and more often. Not loudly. Not aggressively or

preachy. Rather, always borne by clear logic and inner conviction.

She actively participated in lessons. She held profound conversations with her teachers. She opened up to her classmates. She debated with Tim. She exchanged thoughts with me.

And with every single sentence she spoke, her voice gained firmness and confidence.

One evening, as she sat with me again, she said thoughtfully:

“Alan... later in life, I want to do something that is of real significance for other people.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I want with all my heart to help other people.”

“In what way?”

“I don’t know quite yet. Perhaps as a social worker. Perhaps as a teacher. Or perhaps as someone who shows frightened people how much strength actually lies within them.”

I looked at her and nodded. “That fits your nature perfectly.”

“Yes, I feel that too.” She smiled happily. “I don’t want to merely exist on this earth. I want to actively change something for the better.”

“And that is exactly what you will do, Nuda.”

Yet parallel to her voice, something else was growing inside her: her indomitable courage for life.

She began to tackle things she would never have dared to attempt before. She volunteered for demanding school projects. She patiently tutored weaker classmates. She sought out conversations with teachers about social issues close to her heart. She simply began to show herself to the world unvarnished—no longer merely as a shy student, no longer merely as a traumatized refugee, but as an independent, strong personality.

A human being with a moving story. A human being with a bright future. A human being with a powerful voice.

One afternoon, as she sat together with Tim on a park bench, he looked at her for a long time and said:

“You have changed so unbelievably over the last few months, Nuda.”

She looked at him questioningly. “In what way do you mean that?”

“You have grown... so much taller.”

She laughed softly. “Physically, I am still quite short, though.”

“No, that's not how I mean it. You have grown on the inside. Your heart has become huge.”

She smiled subtly. “I actually feel much taller, too.”

“And why is that?”

“Because I am no longer frantically fighting every day for mere survival.”

Tim nodded from the bottom of his heart. “You are finally living properly now.”

“Yes. I am living.” She looked at him intently. “And I have learned to speak.”

“And how you speak!”

“Sometimes I’m just afraid that I talk too much now.”

Tim laughed warmly. “No, most certainly not. You speak exactly the right words at the right time.”

She smiled gratefully. “Thank you, Tim.”

Later that evening, she visited me. She sat down at the table, looked me in the eyes for a long moment, and said with deep seriousness:

“Alan... it became clear to me today that I am no longer the broken girl you once found helplessly in front of the supermarket.”

I nodded in complete agreement. “No, you haven’t been that for a long time.”

“I have become somebody.”

“Yes. You have.”

“I am strong.”

“Yes. Very strong indeed.”

“I possess a voice of my own.”

“Yes, a beautiful voice.”

She smiled with irresistible determination. “And from now on, I will use this voice for the rest of my life.”

I looked at her and felt a profound sense of emotion. She was no longer just a young girl searching for an uncertain future. She had grown into a mature young woman who had begun to shape her own future with her own hands and her own voice.

14 – The Strength That Remains

Winter settled over Frankfurt am Main with relentless severity. It was not merely the icy cold or the cutting wind, but rather that deep, leaden silence that descended like a heavy veil over the streets. The city seemed strangely muted, as if someone had turned down the volume on the familiar background noise of the world. Passersby hurried through the damp, reflective alleys with their heads pulled down, the evenings broke early, and the nights seemed to endure almost endlessly.

For Nuda, this winter meant an entirely new kind of trial of maturity. After that courageous moment in school when she had raised her voice publicly for the first time, it was no longer just about being loud on the outside. It was about withstanding

the quiet, internal strain that daily life brought with it. A harsh winter that brought vividly before her eyes how infinitely strong she had already become—and how much inner poise she still had to summon in order to continue her path undeterred.

She was now nineteen years old and heading toward her graduation. She attended classes with great zeal, participated uprightly in debates, and was deeply in love with Tim. Yet the courage she had gained in the classroom did not shield her from the very real worries that continued to reach her from back home.

In these cold days, she learned an even deeper lesson: that true strength does not mean never feeling fear or suffering setbacks, but possessing the inner fortitude to continue step by step despite all doubts and burdens.

One evening, as she sat in my kitchen once again, a long, reflective silence reigned. Her textbooks lay open before her, yet her thoughts were far away. She looked at her hands, which lay calmly on the table—no longer trembling frantically as they used to, but marked by a new, mature composure.

“Alan...” she began softly. “My classmates in school have been treating me completely differently since that day.”

I looked at her attentively. “In what way, Nuda?”

“They listen to me. Even those who used to speak dismissively. But... having a voice doesn't change the problems facing my family.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “Your voice gives you dignity, Nuda. It doesn't dissolve the hardships of the world at a single stroke.”

“I know,” she said, looking straight at me. “I spoke with my mother on the phone again today. The situation remains unchanged and difficult. My father is ill, money is tight, and the worries persist. In the past, that would have paralyzed me completely. I would have cried and wanted to drop out of school to go to work immediately.”

“And today?”

“Today I still feel the pain. But now I know who I am. I know that I am not helping them if I throw my education away. Using my voice in class was only the beginning. I have to build my life to the end in order to be a real support.”

I smiled, touched by this tremendous inner development. “That is a profound realization.”

In the weeks that followed, Nuda's new strength showed itself in daily life. When the worries about her family threatened to catch up with her, she no longer withdrew into silent despair. She opened up. She spoke to Tim about her fears without feeling like a burden to him. She conscientiously carried out her work for Frau Amend and continued to study for school with discipline.

Tim stood by her side throughout. When he saw that her thoughts wandered with a heavy heart toward her homeland, he did not push her, but simply listened. Nuda learned to accept help without feeling weak.

One evening, as the wind whipped cold against the kitchen window pane, she said to me:

“Alan... I used to think that being strong meant showing no tears and working through everything entirely by oneself.”

“And what does it mean to you today?”

“Being strong means standing tall, even when the wind blows harsh. It means speaking one’s own truth, bearing responsibility, and still not losing heart.”

I looked at her full of pride. “You haven’t just found your voice in recent months, Nuda. You have poured your inner foundation.”

She smiled softly and firmly. “I am still afraid of the future. But the fear no longer dictates my steps.”

When she set off later and lingered in the doorway, she looked back into the hallway once more.

“Alan... thank you.”

“What are you thanking me for this time, Nuda?”

“For showing me that my story has value.”

I smiled back at her. “It always had value. You merely made it visible yourself.”

She gave me a warm, unshakeable strong smile and stepped out into the Frankfurt winter night.

I remained behind, knowing with absolute certainty: she had grown through the courage found in that classroom, but in these cold weeks, her strength had become something that remained—a firm anchor for everything that was yet to come.

15 – The View from Above

Spring returned to Frankfurt am Main with gentle power, this time, however, with a sublime warmth that did not merely touch the streets and building facades of the city, but radiated deep into Nuda's heart. The chestnuts and lindens in the parks bore their first tender green, the avenues filled with strolling people, and in the mild spring air lay the unmistakable scent of new beginnings and hope. For many, it was merely the onset of a new season. For Nuda, this spring was a meaningful symbol.

A radiant symbol that she had now definitively arrived.

She now stood on the threshold of adulthood. She was a highly dedicated student at the gymnasium. She was deeply and overjoyed in love with Tim. She had become strong. She proudly bore her responsibility. She was a young woman who possessed a powerful, unmissable voice.

And she had become someone who had finally learned to appreciate herself and to celebrate her own life.

Her twentieth birthday—the milestone of full legal adulthood—was drawing near. A date that for many young adults

was merely a number on the calendar, yet for Nuda symbolized the sum of her entire life so far. Twenty years of existence. Twenty years of tireless struggle. Twenty years of profound loss. Twenty years of unshakeable hope.

She did not want to celebrate this significant day on a grand scale. She wanted no loud party, no overwhelming crowd of people around her. She wanted to share this moment exclusively with the two most important people in her new life: with me and with Tim.

The day arrived. A beautiful, mild spring evening on which the setting sun sank slowly behind the imposing skyline of skyscrapers, bathing the entire financial district in a warm, golden light. In that moment, Frankfurt seemed like a breathtaking backdrop waiting patiently for something truly special to happen.

Tim picked Nuda up, and shortly thereafter I joined the two of them.

We met at the foot of the Main Tower—that massive, modern skyscraper that looms proudly and majestically over the entire metropolis. A structure that towers far above the urban canyons and offers a view across the world that one never forgets.

“We’re going all the way to the top now,” Tim announced, beaming.

Nuda looked at him in wonder. “Why up there of all places?”

“Because I want you to see with your own eyes how endlessly vast this world truly is.”

She smiled subtly. “But I’ve already seen so much of the world.”

“Not in this way, Nuda. Trust me.”

We entered the building and stepped into the high-speed elevator. The heavy doors closed with a soft hum. The elevator set itself gently in motion. The digital display rapidly counted up the floors: 10, 20, 30, 40, 50... Nuda almost held her breath in awe.

When the doors opened again on the topmost floor, we stepped out onto the open, panoramic roof platform—nearly two hundred meters above the ground.

The wind up here blew fresh and cool, but by no means icy. The air was of crystal-clear purity. The entire city of Frankfurt lay spread out beneath us like a shimmering sea of countless lights. The cars on the streets appeared as tiny, gliding specks. The pedestrians as fine shadows. The wide avenues and the bridges across the Main resembled glowing veins that crossed, intertwined, and lost themselves back into the darkness.

Nuda walked slowly and reverently up to the glass railing. She looked far down into the depths. She looked up into the evening sky. She looked far beyond the horizon into the flat countryside.

“Alan...” she whispered, touched, while the wind gently moved her hair. “This is... indescribably beautiful.”

I stepped close to her side at the railing. “Yes, Nuda. It is.”

“In my wildest dreams, I never thought I would ever be allowed to see something so sublime in my life.”

“And yet now you are standing here, seeing it.”

A blissful smile spread across her face. “I am simply happy.”

Tim stood at her other side. He gently and lovingly placed his arm around her shoulders. She leaned her head against him quite naturally.

“You have achieved such incredible things in recent years, Nuda,” he said softly, yet full of admiration.

“I know,” she answered without a trace of false modesty.

“You are so unbelievably strong.”

“Yes. That is what I have become.”

“You are completely free.”

She looked at him with radiant eyes. “Yes. I am finally free.”

We lingered for a long, unforgettable time up there on the roof of the city. We talked, we fell into familiar silences, we laughed together in the wind. We looked down upon the vibrant city that had become a home to all of us in its very own way.

Nuda’s gaze drifted over the strings of lights below us. She recognized the streets through which she had once walked, lost

and abandoned. She saw the neighborhoods in which she had painstakingly learned to build a new life. She saw the places where she had wept silently, laughed warmly, and fought like a lioness.

“Alan...” she said suddenly, turning fully to face me. “Thank you.”

I smiled back at her. “What exactly are you thanking me for, Nuda?”

“For simply everything.”

“I didn't really do that much.”

“Yes, you did. You did the most of all.”

“Like what, for instance?”

She looked at me—with a gaze so full of warmth, deep emotion, and absolute sincerity that it struck me straight in the heart.

“You truly saw me from the very first second.”

I swallowed the emotion that threatened to tighten my throat.

“Yes, Nuda. I did.”

“You never saw me as an anonymous problem. Not as a poor, broken girl. Not as someone who is worthless and possesses nothing.”

“No, never.”

“You always saw me as a complete human being.”

I gave her a nod of absolute conviction. “Because that is exactly what you were from the very beginning.”

She smiled, deeply moved. “Thank you, Alan.”

Later, after we had descended again and left the foot of the tower, we strolled together through the nighttime streets of the city center. The metropolis hummed with life. People laughed outside the bars, cars swept past, shop windows glowed brightly.

Nuda walked in the middle between Tim and me. She appeared taller than ever before. Not because of her physical stature—rather through her inner, immovable dignity.

She appeared like a woman who had definitively arrived in life. Like someone who knows precisely who she is. Like someone who knows with complete confidence where her path will lead her.

When the moment of farewell arrived, she held me in a firm embrace. It was no brief, fleeting hug, but a deep, warm gesture borne of infinite gratitude.

“Alan... you are my absolute best friend.”

“Yes, Nuda. I am.”

“And you will remain that for the rest of my life.”

“Yes. Most certainly.”

She gave me a beautiful, peaceful smile. “That is the most wonderful feeling of all.”

Then she turned around and walked away. Hand in hand with Tim. Into a life of her own self-determination, which she had built for herself with indomitable courage, tears, and diligence. Into a future that she now proudly bore on her own shoulders.

And I remained behind at the curb—not lonely, not sad, but washed through with a deep, fulfilling clarity.

I had been permitted to bear witness to how a human being arises from the ruins of a fate. How a human being fights. How a human being begins to live.

And in that moment, I knew with absolute certainty: she will continue her path unstopably. She will continue to grow. She will love life to the fullest.

16 – The Moment That Decides

Summer had flown by for good, and autumn returned to Frankfurt am Main—this time, however, with a crystal-clear, almost sharp penetration. The air cooled noticeably, the leaves of the trees transformed the avenues into a sea of warm red tones and fell quietly to the ground. Over the metropolis settled that very special underlying tone that only this season brings—a tone that announces without preamble: the time has come to make fundamental decisions for life.

For Nuda, this autumn felt completely different from all previous ones. It was not heavy with despair. It was not dark with grief. It was by no means filled with paralysis or fear.

It was filled with deep, existential questions.

Questions that only germinate in the mind when a person becomes fully adult.

She was now twenty years old. She was a determined student shortly before her Abitur examinations. She was deeply and sincerely in love with Tim. She had become strong. She responsibly bore the care for her loved ones. She was a young woman who possessed an unmistakable voice. She had fought for a tangible future for herself.

And she began to feel with every fiber of her being that her own life was infinitely larger than anything she had ever known in the dark shadows of her past.

One evening, as she sat in my kitchen once again, a quiet, almost sublime atmosphere prevailed. Her textbooks lay neatly open before her, yet she paid no attention to the pages. Instead, lost in thought, she fixed her gaze on the clouds of steam above her teacup, which was slowly cooling down.

“Alan...” she began with a completely calm, composed voice. “I had a very long conversation with Tim this afternoon.”

I looked at her attentively. “And what did you talk about?”

“He asked me if we shouldn’t look for a shared apartment after the Abitur exams and move in together.”

I remained silent for a moment. Not out of surprise or shock—rather out of deep respect for the weight of this life decision.

“What did you answer him, Nuda?”

She looked straight at me. “To be honest, I don’t know yet.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “That is a very honest answer.”

“I love him with all my heart,” she said softly and deliberately. “But I feel a strange fear deep inside me.”

“What exactly are you afraid of?”

She took one deep, heavy breath.

“Afraid... that I might lose myself along this path.”

She stood up slowly from the kitchen table, stepped over to the window, and looked out at the nighttime street, on whose damp surface the light of the streetlamps was reflected.

“Alan... I have spent almost my entire life so far frantically fighting for mere survival. I’ve actually never really learned how to lead an independent life.”

I looked at her warmly. “That is precisely what you are learning day by day right now.”

“Yes, that’s true. But if I move in with Tim right away... then that is a massive step. A step that changes my whole existence from the ground up.”

“That cannot be denied.”

“And I simply don’t know whether I’m internally ready for it yet.”

I stood up as well, walked over to the window, and gently placed my hand on her shoulder.

“Nuda... no human being knows in advance with absolute certainty whether they are ready for the next big step. One only becomes ready in the moment when one actually dares to take it.”

She turned around and looked at me intently. “And you, Alan?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are you ready to let me go?”

I swallowed the rising emotion. Not out of pain or fear of loss—rather out of the deep knowledge that this exact moment was the natural, beautiful destination of our shared journey.

“Yes, Nuda,” I said softly, yet unwaveringly. “I am completely ready.”

She looked at me for a long time, and in her eyes lay an infinite softness. “You have become a real home to me, Alan.”

“And I will remain that very home for you. Forever.”

“Even then, when I move out and go my own ways?”

“Yes, unconditionally.”

A gentle, happy smile illuminated her face. “Knowing that is wonderful.”

In the days that followed, she seemed deeply reflective. Neither sad nor insecure, but marked by a quiet, inner contemplation.

She exchanged thoughts sincerely with Tim. She sought advice from her teachers. She held long phone calls with her mother back home. She spoke a great deal with me.

And very gradually, centimeter by centimeter, a firm certainty formed within her—a decision that no longer sprang from fear or lack of direction, but from absolute self-knowledge and clarity.

One evening, as she was with me again, she looked at me firmly and said:

“Alan... I have made my final decision.”

I looked at her. “And what is it?”

“I will not move in with Tim immediately after the Abitur.”

I nodded in agreement. “A wise decision.”

“I will first concentrate with all my strength on my Abitur.”

“Very good, Nuda.”

“After that, I will look for a job and work.”

“Yes.”

“I will save up my own money.”

“That is sensible.”

“I will continue to support my family back home.”

“You are already doing that in an admirable way.”

She looked at me intently. “And above all, I will first find out entirely for myself who I actually am—without clinging to anyone.”

I smiled, touched. “That is perhaps the most important thing of all.”

“I don’t want to be defined merely as Tim’s girlfriend. I don’t want to be merely the hardworking student. I certainly no longer want to be perceived merely as the former refugee. And I am not just the caring daughter.”

“What exactly do you want to be?”

She took a deep breath, straightened up, and said full of pride:

“I simply want to be Nuda.”

I gave her a nod of absolute conviction. “That is exactly what you already are.”

“Yes. But I want to get to know and understand this Nuda now in all her facets.”

She sat back down at my kitchen table, looked me sincerely in the eyes, and said:

“Alan... it became clear to me today for the first time in my life how unbelievably strong I truly am.”

“You have always been that, Nuda.”

“I have understood that I am completely free.”

“Yes, you are.”

“I have understood that I alone have the right to choose my path in life.”

“That is precisely how it is.”

She smiled full of confidence. “And I choose this exact path now.”

I looked at her, and deep within me spread a profound sense of awe. She was long since no longer the terrified, broken girl I had once encountered helplessly in front of the supermarket. She was no longer the shy student with fear of the future. She was by no means the teenager who felt ashamed of her own survival.

She had grown into a mature, proud, and independent young woman who henceforth shaped her destiny with her own hands.

When she set off for home later, she lingered in the doorway for one last moment, as was her habit.

“Alan... I will always come back to you.”

“I know, Nuda.”

“Even when I eventually move into an apartment of my own.”

“Yes, I know that.”

“Even when I am fully grown up.”

“Most certainly.”

“Even when I’ve long been leading a life entirely of my own.”

“Always.”

She smiled at me. “You are my best friend.”

“And you are my best friend.”

She gave a firm nod. “That will remain so forever.”

Then she stepped out into the Frankfurt night. Her step was firm and unshakeable. Her gaze was clearly directed toward the future. Her heart beat strong and free.

And I knew from the depths of my soul: she was ready for everything life still had in store for her.

EPILOGUE – When Paths Remain

The evening was filled with a mild, velvety warmth as Nuda knocked on my door for what would be the last time for now, before her life definitively and unstoppably flowed into an entirely new direction. The sun already hung low over the rooftops of Frankfurt am Main, and for one sublime moment, the streets seemed to have decided to slow their otherwise frantic rhythm. It was one of those rare evenings when the metropolis did not feel loud and driven, but quiet and contemplative—just as if it were listening devoutly.

I opened the door. She stood there, exactly as I had come to know and cherish her over the years: calm, clear, with a gaze that radiated both youthful freshness and deeply felt, adult maturity. Yet something about her entire appearance had fundamentally changed.

Not the contours of her face. Not her simple clothing. Not the familiar sound of her voice.

It was the way she stood there. Upright, rooted, full of dignity—like a human being who, after a long, stormy journey, has finally fully arrived at herself.

She stepped inside as a matter of course and sat down at my kitchen table, just as she had done hundreds of times in the course of time. But this time she spread no textbooks out

before her. She accepted no tea. She did not start speaking immediately.

She simply looked at me.

“Alan...” she finally began, and her voice carried a deep, velvet-soft calmness within it. “I wanted to tell you something very special today.”

I nodded calmly toward her. “Tell me, Nuda.”

She took one deep breath. Not out of uncertainty or fear—rather out of an awareness of the historical significance of this moment.

“I picked up my permanent residence permit today.”

I looked at her intently. “The final one?”

She nodded slowly, and an indescribable radiance entered her eyes. “Yes. I am allowed to stay here forever. I am allowed to work. I am allowed to study. I am allowed to lead a free life.”

I smiled with all my heart. “That gladdens me more than words can express.”

“Me too, Alan. With all my heart.”

She briefly lowered her gaze to her hands. “I have waited so many years for this. Hoped for so long. Fought so endlessly hard for it.”

“You achieved it through your own strength, Nuda.”

“Yes. I achieved it.”

She raised her head proudly. “I am finally free.”

We sat together in complete silence for a long while. No agonizing silence born of embarrassment—rather a deep, peaceful stillness of fulfillment.

Then she broke the silence softly:

“Alan... I am going to begin a degree program right after the Abitur.”

“What would you like to study?”

“Social Work.”

I nodded slowly, almost relieved. “That entirely corresponds to your nature. With Social Work, you can help individual people directly. But when one studies Political Science, one acquires the knowledge to change entire systems and address structural problems. Political reforms can combat poverty at its root. Social Work acts on the individual level, Political Science on the societal level—both are important, but they transform different levels.”

She listened attentively, and I continued more softly: “We live here in a welfare state that helped you. Kurdistan, on the other hand, is rich in resources, and that is precisely why it is occupied. As long as colonial powers exploit this land, Kurds will live in poverty in their own rich country. I believe that is exactly what your brothers wanted to change.”

Nuda lowered her gaze briefly, then raised it again, clear and resolute. “I want to help other people with all my strength. Just as you helped me back then.”

I smiled, embarrassed. “I only accompanied you for a small piece of your path.”

“No, Alan.” Her voice was quiet, but firm. “You truly saw me back then.”

I felt my throat tighten. “Yes, Nuda.”

“You never treated me like a bureaucratic problem. Not like a burden. Not like a nameless stranger.”

“No,” I said softly. “Never.”

“You treated me like a complete human being from the very first second.”

I gave her a nod. “Because that is exactly what you were from the very beginning.”

She smiled, deeply moved. “I thank you for everything.”

She stood up, walked slowly to the window, and looked out at the silhouette of the city that had become her home over the years and had raised her.

“Alan... it has finally become clear to me today that I am long since no longer the shy girl who once sat lost in front of the supermarket.”

“No, you are long past being that.”

“I am no longer the terrified student who was afraid of every coming day.”

“No.”

“I am no longer the teenager tearing herself apart with feelings of guilt.”

“No, certainly not.”

She turned slowly toward me, her figure upright and full of pride.

“I am a grown woman.”

I nodded proudly. “Yes, you are.”

“I am Nuda.”

“Yes.”

“And I will remain Nuda forever.”

I smiled warmly. “And that is precisely as it should be.”

She returned to the table, sat down with me once more, and said in a firm voice:

“Alan... I will never leave entirely.”

I looked at her, surprised. “What do you mean by that?”

“I will build my own life. I will study. I will work. I will love Tim with all my heart. I will continue to support my family back home. I will travel the world. I will grow.”

“Yes, that is exactly what you will do.”

“But I will always come back to you.”

I swallowed my emotion. “That fills me with great joy.”

“You are my best friend.”

“And you are my best friend.”

She smiled radiantly. “That remains forever.”

Later, when the moment of departure arrived, she lingered in the doorway for one last moment, as was her habit. The hallway was completely quiet. Outside, the city rested. The spring evening was pleasantly warm.

She looked at me—no longer like a girl seeking help, but like a strong, independent woman who knows precisely who she is and where she belongs.

“Alan... thank you.”

“What are you thanking me for, Nuda?”

“For this wonderful beginning of my life.”

I smiled back at her. “Always a pleasure, Nuda.”

She nodded softly. “I am going my way now.”

“Yes. Walk it with pride.”

“But I will come back.”

“I know, Nuda. I know.”

She gave me a small, unbelievably warm, and unwaveringly strong smile.

Then she turned around and left.

I remained standing in the doorway, looking at the wood of the door that had closed softly behind her, and I knew with absolute certainty:

This was no ending. It was not even a farewell in the conventional sense. It was a sublime transition.

A transition from a life I had helped carry protectively, to a life that she now proudly, freely, and uprightly bore on her own shoulders.

A life that was vast. A life that shone brightly and full of hope. A life that went on, unstoppable.

And I understood in that quiet moment:

Sometimes the greatest gift one can give to a human being on this earth is not frantically rescuing them—it is space. Space

in which a soul can grow. Space in which a human being truly learns to live. Space in which someone chooses to stay, without having to stay.

Nuda had found that space. And I had given it to her.

This is only the true beginning. Not the end.

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Meaning of the word Asylum

The term asylum goes back to the Ancient Greek “áylon” and signifies a place that must not be violated—a space of refuge. Via the Latin “asylum”, the word entered many languages and today stands everywhere for protection, safety, and the hope for a new life.