

LAST SIX MONTHS

A photographer's reckoning with the art
that built him and nearly broke him

ŠIME BILIĆ

JANUARY

January

THE FIRST FRACTURE

It began quietly, slipping in like the grey January light that barely warmed the room. I was editing a client's shoot, routine work, just another set of images. They were fine, probably even better than fine, but for the first time, I realised I didn't care. I didn't care for colour edit or skin blotchiness, I just saw them as pixels on the screen, didn't care if they got posted, if anyone saw them, or if they just disappeared into the files. There was a hollow feeling there that startled me. A shift so small I almost missed it. But that indifference lingered, sitting in my chest like a stone, the start of something I couldn't ignore.

I wasn't letting myself feel properly at that moment, because of the work, but I could sense it in small ways. The set details that used to make me come alive, that excited me in every shoot, started feeling like obstacles. Of course there were days when I was tired, or a little bit down but nothing that little bit of good music or friends couldn't fix. This was different. The music, the lighting, all these things that used to feel essential were fading into the

background. And I was letting them. Days slipped past, each one blurring into the next, and I realised that I hadn't posted a single photo for a week. My work was stacking up, but it didn't matter. I was going through the motions, shooting as if for no one at all.

I'm a photographer, but for who?

The question lingered like an echo in a canyon. I tried to brush it aside, telling myself this was normal, just another phase like for any artist. But it felt like something larger, something I wasn't ready to face. It felt heavy, and with a heavy heart I booked a new shoot.

Feels like sitting in a cold shadow of a warm light. Maybe I'm just tired. One off-day or off-month doesn't seem to mean anything, right?

The set was built to perfection, or close enough to it. Deep grey walls framed the space, and soft shafts of filtered light cut across the room from a single, tall window. The model was flawless, her face set with an icy detachment, perfect for the fashion line's moody aesthetic. She wore a gown with deep, rich folds of fabric that caught the dim light, the soft sheen adding layers to the shadows. Her hair, sleek and glossy, fell in dark waves, framing her face in a way that should have struck me as cinematic, powerful, even breathtaking.

But instead, I felt nothing.

I was standing there, camera in hand, but it was like I was floating just outside myself, watching from somewhere distant. My hands moved to adjust the settings, one eye closing to frame the shot,

but it felt mechanical, like someone had dropped me into someone else's life. I could see every detail I'd once cared about, every element I would have meticulously adjusted and fussed over, and yet none of it registered.

The music, normally my anchor and teacher on set, was barely more than a whisper. Usually, I'd have chosen something dark, moody, maybe an ambient track with slow beats to bring intensity to the room. But now, the music was just there, filling the space without meaning. I couldn't remember if I'd picked it myself or if someone else had just put it on in my absence.

I went through the motions. I adjusted the model's angle, asked her to shift slightly, tried to bring depth into the shadows. I could hear my own voice directing her, the words tumbling out as if on autopilot. "Tilt your chin. Eyes over here. That's it, hold it." But there was nothing in my voice. No intent, no energy. Just hollow instructions hanging in the air.

Am I just overthinking this? It's not like this hasn't happened before. Alright, just focus.

As I looked through the lens, I expected to feel that familiar pull, the quiet rush that always drew me into the frame, blurring out the world until there was only me and the image. But this time, it felt as if I was staring through a thick layer of glass at a stranger. The camera, once an extension of myself, felt foreign in my hands. I steadied my grip, willing the weight of it to ground me, to bring me back to that sense of control I'd always found here.

Nothing happened.

I framed the shot with the precision I knew I could deliver, arranging her hand grazing her jawline, capturing the angle of her cheekbone as it cut through the light. I crafted each shot as I always had. And yet, none of it felt real, as if the images were slipping away even as I took them, leaving me grasping at fragments of something I was losing. It was a hollow kind of terror, a gnawing dread that crept in, whispering that this moment was slipping, that if I didn't hold on harder, it would take me with it.

Come on, it's just one shoot. Don't overthink it.

I forced myself to keep going, each shot a small act of survival. But with every shutter click, I felt myself fading further, like the light was draining out of the room. The model's face stared back at me through the lens, beautiful and serene, completely untouched by the storm swirling inside me.

Between shots, I drifted around the set, adjusting lighting, trying to create those cinematic shadows that once felt alive in my hands. The air felt heavy, almost suffocating. I watched the model shift, her movements practised and perfect, and for a second, I wondered if she felt it too, the emptiness that had filled the room.

The session wrapped up without ceremony. No laughter like there once was. It wasn't negative, it was just normal. Unhyped. First time that ever happened to me. The model relaxed, slipping out of the character we'd created together as the lights dimmed. We looked over the shots, the work technical and precise, exactly what the client needed.

As I packed up, I felt a strange sense of distance, like I'd just stepped out of a role I didn't quite remember playing. It felt subtle,

like brushing past someone in a crowded room, the sense that something had shifted just out of view. But the shoot was over, the camera's memory full of images, and for now, that was all there was.

It'll make sense tomorrow. It always makes sense tomorrow.

The night was cold, Zagreb's streets nearly empty, just a handful of people walking briskly, their heads down against the wind. My breath hung in the air as I walked, lingering before it faded. The sidewalks glistened, a faint shimmer from the day's rain, and the streetlights cast a dim glow over familiar cobblestones. A scene I'd seen a hundred times before. These streets, quiet and unassuming, a sort of simple, worn beauty in the way the light hit old buildings and empty alleys.

I tugged my coat closer, sinking into the walk, trying to shake the feeling that had settled after the shoot. I ran through the session in my mind, each frame, each detail, wondering why it all felt so hollow. Photography had always been something that grounded me, a way to turn these quiet streets into something full of life. But tonight, nothing felt grounded. I was walking, just moving through the city, more out of habit than anything else.

As I passed through the old town square, I looked up at the stone buildings I'd seen a thousand times before. There was something solid, enduring about them that used to feel reassuring. But tonight, there was a strange weight to the way they loomed over me, like they were watching. I shrugged it off. Remnants of a long day.

But the feeling lingered.

The air pressed closer, the cold biting deeper, and for the first time, it hit me. The thought I'd been skirting around, avoiding. Photography, this thing I'd built to bring meaning, had turned into something else. I'd poured myself into these scenes, these shadows, pulling depth out of empty spaces, and somewhere along the way, it had taken on a life of its own. The art I'd leaned on had shifted from a place of refuge into something with its own demands, its own people, its own weight.

I'd spent years finding beauty in deserted ideas and calling them depths, crafting a sanctuary out of solitude and shadows. But now it felt like that solitude was closing in on me, wrapping around my thoughts. Photography had always been about creating, pulling emotion into a frame, but now it felt like I was the one being pulled.

I stopped at a crosswalk, hands shoved deep in my pockets, waiting for the light to change. Faint sound of traffic in the distance, the only thing breaking the silence. This idea started to seep in: this art, this place I'd created, was no longer mine. It was a prison I'd built myself into, walls crafted from the same shadows I used to admire.

The light changed, and I kept walking, feeling a chill that went beyond the night air.

Back in my building, the familiar hallway stretched out in front of me, unchanged, quiet, almost comforting. But as I stood there, something different settled over me. Something I couldn't quite name but couldn't ignore. This fracture. It was more than just a rough day or some small moment of detachment. It felt like a crack in the foundation, something that had shifted enough to let heavy

questions slip through.

Had this crack always been there, a hairline fault beneath all the layers of work and habit? Or was it something new? I couldn't tell. I just knew that the feeling was there now, unmistakable, refusing to slip away.

I leaned against the wall, staring down at my hands, feeling the numbness that came with that question. Had my love for this faded, or was I just seeing it from a different angle? A strange thought, unfamiliar and distant.

And maybe that was all it was. A question, a moment to pause. But whatever it meant, it didn't feel like something I could ignore anymore. The crack was there, whether it had been waiting all along or had only just appeared.

I turned the key in the lock and stepped inside, feeling the quiet settle around me. Whatever this shift was, whatever it was asking of me, am I ready to see where it leads?

I only know there was no music that day. And there is always music.

FEBRUARY

February

THE ABYSS

My head was in chaos. A whole month had passed since I'd last posted a photo. The dread of it grew more intense, thickening each day until it felt like a weight I was dragging everywhere. I kept asking myself why, turning the question over until it felt like a thorn I couldn't pull out.

Was this it? Was my work really just for others?

I'd built my career on social media. In so many ways, it was the foundation of my work, the place that took an interest, a hobby, and turned it into something larger. Social media had opened doors I'd never even known existed, connecting me to people I couldn't have reached otherwise, bridging gaps between my art and a world that was eager to see it. It was a platform and a canvas, a place where each image I posted felt like it mattered, like it was building toward something.

*Maybe it's just a slump. Maybe I'll find it again once this passes.
But what if it doesn't?*

It was where I found my rhythm, where I shaped my style and honed my voice as a photographer. Every post, every like, every comment felt like a step forward. I could share an image, and within minutes, thousands of people had seen it, reacted to it, connected with it. That instant feedback wasn't just validation. It was fuel. It kept me pushing harder, reaching deeper. There was an energy in it, an urgency that kept me going, each post a new chance to reach someone who might see the world in a way they hadn't before.

For years, social media was where the heart of my work lived. My photos weren't just images. They were part of a narrative I was building, each one adding a chapter to the story. People connected with that story. They reached out, commented, shared their own experiences. Social media was my gallery, my platform, my audience. It was where I went to share not only my work but the process, the struggle, the parts of photography that went beyond the polished frame.

And then there was the career itself. Social media wasn't just a place to share my work. It was where my clients found me, where projects were born and opportunities came to life. It was the bridge between the art and the work. I could post a photo, and within days, new clients would reach out, collaborations would spark, ideas would start to build.

But now, a month has gone by since my last post. The energy that used to fuel me felt distant, almost foreign. What had once been second nature felt out of reach. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was becoming a stranger to the very world that had once defined me.

The further I drifted from social media, the more I questioned what I'd built there. Had I relied on it too much? Had it become a crutch, a way to measure my worth that I hadn't realised I'd leaned on? Or had I genuinely been creating for others all along, and without that audience, my work felt hollow?

It was like trying to take a picture without the camera.

What happens if I can't get back?

The work didn't stop coming, though. Clients kept calling and emailing. Jobs lined up one after another, a steady stream that might have once felt satisfying. Now, each notification only felt heavier. I'd open them slowly, the words blurring as if they were asking something more than my photography could deliver. I was doing the work, but it felt hollow. A repetitive task. Something detached from me and my own vision.

One night, I found myself at a networking event packed with influencers, celebrities, and faces I'd recognized from countless shoots. The kind of event that should've felt familiar, even thrilling. But stepping inside was like entering a hall of mirrors, each face around me a distorted reflection. People I'd once worked with, photographed, connected with. Tonight, they all felt like strangers.

The room buzzed with voices, laughter, a lightness I couldn't reach. People moved with purpose, mingling, exchanging cards, taking photos. But every laugh, every shared glance only heightened the feeling that I was on the outside, watching through a layer of glass.

They're here for the connections. Am I here for anything at all?

Someone tapped my shoulder. A familiar face with a wide smile, and I tried to respond, to play the part I'd once mastered. But the words felt forced. As they talked, their words faded into the background noise. I nodded, my mind half-present, catching only fragments, a quiet panic rising. The room felt too small, the air too warm, the voices too loud. The laughter echoed like a dissonant hum.

The need to escape hit suddenly, like a wave crashing over me. I turned, pushing through the crowd, moving toward the back of the room. Found the exit and slipped out, stepping into the rainy night, the air biting cold against my skin. It hit me like a shock. I stood in the alley, gasping, feeling the darkness settle around me. The streets were empty, the rain falling in heavy sheets, each drop striking the pavement with a dull, steady rhythm.

I leaned against the damp wall, letting the rain soak through my clothes, grounding me as my breath came in shallow gasps. Eyes closed. Letting the cold settle in.

Had I been creating for others this whole time? And if I wasn't, who was I creating for now?

The realisation washed over me, heavier than the rain. I'd always thought I was creating for myself, that this work was mine alone. But standing there in the alley, with nothing but the dark streets around me, I couldn't shake the feeling that maybe I'd lost something essential. If it was all for others, all for the likes, the views, the endless faces passing by, then what was left when all of that faded?

Was any of it real if it's gone this easily?

I exhaled slowly, watching the vapour dissolve into the cold night air. The rain continued to fall, washing over the streets. There was no applause, no validation here. Just the rain and the emptiness. And it was almost a relief.

In that quiet, something stirred. A faint pulse somewhere deep, unsteady but undeniable, like a signal cutting through static. It wasn't hope. Not exactly. But it was real, something that reminded me there was still something left to fight for. I closed my eyes, listening to it, letting it sink in.

Maybe this was the beginning of something new, or maybe it was the end of everything I'd known. Either way, I knew there was no slipping back into comfort, no turning away from what lay ahead. If this was the start of a fight, I would face it. There was no enthusiasm in the thought, no rush of certainty. Just a quiet readiness to confront whatever came next.

The rain was still falling, relentless, and so was I.

MARCH

March

SHARP DOUBTS

A month had passed since that night in the rain, and I kept pushing forward, moving through projects and shoots, each assignment a deliberate attempt to drown out the emptiness. I surrounded myself with work, filling my days with details and deadlines, thinking that if I just kept moving, the questions wouldn't catch up.

Some days, though, in the midst of it all, I'd catch a glimpse of the photographer I used to be. One shoot was vivid, full of life. A fashion campaign in a hidden studio, the kind of setting that had once made me feel alive. The model wore deep blues and moody shadows, each frame alive with energy and purpose. The light was just right, filtering through old windows in slanted rays, casting a glow that seemed to breathe life into the scene. I could feel the thrill as I clicked the shutter, each shot sharper, more intentional than the last. For an hour, maybe two, I was there, fully in it.

Then came the other shoots. The ones that felt like an assembly line, routine assignments that stripped the work down to technical

motions. The lights were set, the angles predetermined, each frame calculated to capture exactly what the client expected and nothing more. I moved through them like a machine, adjusting settings, directing poses, framing the shots with mechanical efficiency. There was no thrill, no sense of creation. Just repetition.

The contrast was stark. One day, I'd be immersed in a moment, feeling the creative energy ignite. The next, I'd be a ghost, moving through the motions. And with each shift from inspired creation to mechanical repetition, the question grew louder.

What am I doing this for anymore?

"Hey, you alright?"

Her voice cut through my thoughts like a pin through silk. I looked up, startled, and there she was. Leona. Someone I hadn't worked with in over three years. Familiar in that jarring way only people from a different version of your life can be. Same eyes. Same laugh tucked behind the corner of her mouth. There was an ease between us once, like we were shooting on instinct, not direction.

I hadn't even realized she was on the schedule.

"Yeah," I said, forcing a smile that barely touched my eyes. "Just adjusting settings."

She raised an eyebrow. "If I remember you're usually faster than this."

There was a pause. Just a second too long. The kind of pause that isn't about the words. It's about what almost got said instead.

Her gaze lingered. Not in a flirtatious way. Not curious. Just quiet. Observing. Like she was right on the edge of asking something real.

"You've been off today. Different," she said finally. "Not in a bad way. Just different."

My fingers tightened around the camera body. I felt it. The moment she could've said something deeper, something that would make me really stop. Something like: Is this still making you feel something?

But she didn't.

Instead, she offered a soft shrug, as if walking herself back from the edge. "Anyway, just saying hi. It's good to see you again."

She smiled. Kind, distant, safe. Then walked off to grab makeup retouches like nothing had happened. And just like that, the moment passed.

The chance to be seen flickered, then vanished. Almost. I exhaled, sharp and silent, staring back at the LCD. Everything was still there. Framed, exposed, perfect.

Except me.

The camera felt heavier that day. Not in weight but in consequence. Like I was holding a weapon I didn't trust anymore.

My girlfriend and I at the time were laying the foundations of a new agency. An idea I had for a few months now. A venture that was supposed to bring excitement, promise, the kind of purpose that grounded you. She was there beside me, eager and determined,

grounding me in a reality I was starting to slip from. Her voice still calmed me, but I'd begun to fake more nods than answers. On the surface, I played the part. I made the calls, drafted the plans, structured the steps forward. She smiled as I explained the plan. I nodded too. But something in me twitched, like I was watching a play I'd written but couldn't act in anymore.

I should feel something more than this, shouldn't I?

Two months now without posting a single photo. Two months. Friends reached out, their voices filled with well-meaning encouragement. They complimented my work, told me I'd built something to be proud of. And I wanted to believe them.

Why can't I clearly see what they see?

Every compliment felt like it was bouncing off glass. I could hear the words, even believe their kindness, but they weren't landing. It was like they were talking to a version of me that had already left the building.

Their support, genuine, beautiful, started to feel like pressure. Not because they meant harm, but because I couldn't live up to what they still saw in me. And with every kind word, the fracture widened. It's insane, really. How a simple compliment can feel like a lie when you're hollow inside.

How can they still see something in me, when I can't even touch it anymore?

In an attempt to regain control, I turned my attention to the one place I thought I might find it. My own body. Returning to the gym was almost surreal. The weights, the movement, they were steady,

predictable, responding to effort in a way that was clean and clear. A relief from creative doubts.

I enjoy this, the pain and new friends, it's different from my world.

But the clarity was temporary. Each time I left, the effort dissipated, like steam rising and disappearing into cool air. The questions returned as soon as the moment ended. The workouts were only a distraction, a healthy one, but still a temporary fix for a deeper fracture. And yet, I kept going, not because it solved anything, but because it reminded me that some part of me was still here.

The depression had started to seep in quietly, filling the spaces between the questions. It was no longer something I could rationalise or brush aside. It was there, colourless and unfocused, settling in, feeding on every doubt I'd tried to ignore.

Am I holding onto something that's already gone? Or am I losing myself trying to find it again?

Photography had become a reckoning. Each frame held up a piece of my own psyche, and I hadn't prepared for that. The doubts and fears that had been mere background noise were now amplified, echoing back through the images. I saw it everywhere. In the way I held the camera, in the setups I chose, even in the fleeting moments between shots.

And then one night, alone with the screen, I noticed something I'd never seen before. I was scrolling through months of my own work, and there it was, quiet as a secret. I'd been cropping the same corner out of almost every frame. Not consciously. Not because of

composition. I'd been cutting out the same shadow, avoiding the same dark edge, for months. Maybe years. The moment I saw it, I couldn't unsee it. All that time, the thing I was trying to photograph and the thing I was trying to avoid were the same thing.

Is this what I want? Is this the answer?

By the end of the month, I found myself without answers. Only the knowledge that the fight was real, that it was no longer just a question of skill or vision. It had become a confrontation, like standing in a ring where my opponent was myself.

And somehow, it felt fitting that all of this was happening in March. A month dedicated to Mars, the Roman god of war. Like the universe had its own twisted sense of humour, dropping me into an existential showdown right on cue. If Mars was watching, I could only hope he was amused. Because, gods or no gods, I'd make it a fight worth watching.

Either way, I was losing blood. Just not the kind anyone could see.

APRIL

April

BREAKING POINT

April arrived quietly, but with an undercurrent, a pulse I could feel beneath the surface of every day. In Zagreb, spring was creeping in, weaving warmth into the air. It wasn't spring in the full, vibrant sense yet, not with the chill still lingering, but it was enough to lighten the city's usual greyness. Sunlight filtered through budding trees. Cafés filled with people sitting outside, faces turned toward the sun like flowers straining for light after a long winter. Zagreb was gorgeous in spring. Its stone façades softened by the light, each street corner blooming with life. Even the trams seemed to move with a certain ease.

And somehow, even my own thoughts felt lighter in the sun. Depression had been my shadow for months, always present. But in the softness of spring, it felt less heavy, like it had drifted into the background, muted by the brightness of each day. My mind, still heavy with its questions, felt almost distant.

It's alright. This too shall pass.

I could almost believe it. That was my go-to mantra in all my years on this planet. In those moments when the streets bustled with voices, with friends greeting each other, I could feel myself softening into the rhythm. The light had a way of melting my thoughts, thinning them out until I felt I might dissolve into the sunlit streets of Zagreb.

It was there as I sat in a café I'd frequented countless times. One of those rare mornings when everything felt almost airy, like the world had softened its edges just enough to make it easy to sit still. Sunlight danced across the table. People chatted, voices low. There was nothing demanding my attention, nothing pushing me forward. For once, I could just exist.

As I sat there, watching the light play across the terrace, two elderly women made their way up to the café entrance. They moved slowly, careful with each step. One leaned heavily on a crutch, while the other held her hand firmly, as though the two of them together formed a single, rooted presence. They were fragile, visibly worn by age, yet they radiated a quiet resilience that spoke of countless springs before this one. Hand in hand, they shared glances, silent words exchanged without a sound, steadying each other as they found their way to a table just across from mine.

Even with visible limitations, their friendship moved them forward. There was something beautiful in their slow, deliberate pace, a kind of defiance against the body's own frailty. They hadn't given in to the struggle. They'd woven it into their lives. They leaned close, heads together, and for a moment, it felt like their laughter brushed away the shadows of age, like spring itself was something they shared with reverence.

How do they do it? How do they carry that weight so lightly?

And then, at the edge of this moment that almost brought me to tears, I felt it. The crack. Not a flaw in the scene, not something I could tune out. It had become a quiet companion, slipping into moments when life felt simple. I could feel it there, even in this moment of peace, reminding me that calm was only temporary.

It had started so subtly. A faint fault line in January. In February, it had widened, slipping into every frame. By March, it was there at the edges of every thought. The crack was no longer just part of the image. It was part of me.

But maybe the question wasn't about removing it or fixing it. Maybe it was about acknowledging it, like those women with their friendship, moving forward despite their frailty.

Is it a flaw, or something I've always carried?

And then, for the first time, I saw it differently. Not just a crack in the frame but a wound. A wound that wasn't the result of any single moment or failure, but something I'd always held and maybe we all have as humans. A part of me that had been quietly present beneath everything else. It was raw, tender, something that had been there long before I'd given it a name.

The wound wasn't demanding to be healed. It was asking to be seen.

It had deepened over time, each failure, each moment of doubt adding another layer. The wound wasn't just pain. It was the place where all my uncertainties had pooled, the sum of every doubt and fear I'd carried with me. And it had stayed hidden until now.

It's the root of what I am? Of who we are?

I remembered a story I'd read long ago. A Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula K. Le Guin. There was a moment when the protagonist, Ged, confronts a shadow he's unwittingly summoned. That shadow, much like this wound, wasn't an enemy to be defeated but a part of himself he needed to understand. It was his own darkness made real, a constant companion that seemed to feed on his fears, yet held a truth he couldn't ignore.

Unlike Ged's shadow, though, my wound didn't feel like a curse. It felt older. Almost timeless. As if it was rooted in something ancient, a part of the human experience that we all carry but rarely acknowledge. The hidden part of ourselves where all the things we've rejected are stored, waiting for a moment to surface. Not just a flaw to overcome but a reservoir of potential, a source of creativity, if you're willing to confront it.

I sat back, watching the people around me, feeling its silent presence. It wasn't here to answer questions. The wound was here to provoke, to unsettle, to keep me searching.

Maybe that was the truth of it. That this wound had shaped me into the artist I was from the very beginning. The wound wasn't a flaw. It was the core of creation itself. To be an artist is to take what is raw, what aches, what never quite fits, and make something from it. We take the sharp edges, the fractured parts, and hold them up to the light, searching for a way to translate them into something others can feel too. It's a strange thing, almost an alchemy, transforming what is broken into beauty, making pain into something that resonates beyond the self.

Maybe that's the cost of seeing the world through an artist's lens, that the brokenness stays with us. But it becomes a language. Every line, every shadow, every composition carries a part of that wound. And it isn't about mending it. It's about showing it in a way that finds beauty in the fractures.

The real question still lingered. Is this enough, am I nothing without them? Unanswered, building a quiet obsession within me. April became a month of watching the wound. It was something that defied definition, a shape shifting just beyond clarity, inviting me to keep looking while slipping further from reach.

The obsession grew, taking root, and I found myself turning to it in quiet moments, questioning it as if it could answer.

Why are you here? Do you exist within all of us, or did I invite you in?

The wound offered nothing. Only the quiet sense that it was watching, waiting.

April, from the Latin *aperire*, to open. It had indeed become an opening, though of a very different kind. Not a battlefield of swords and shields but the kind that requires no armour, where the only weapon is the courage to face what lies hidden beneath the surface. The world opened itself, stretching towards new light. But for me, April felt like a season where shadows darkened as the light got brighter.

The wound had become something more than a flaw in the frame. It was a silent commander, a force that hovered between what I knew and what I had yet to learn. It had stopped waiting for me to

seek it out. Instead, it began to come alive.

And as the days faded into late April, I felt like I was standing at the edge of that boundary, staring into something I could barely understand. This was a war within the self, fought in silence, without weapons, only questions. There was a kind of madness in it. The madness of pursuing an answer that I could feel but couldn't yet name.

Step deeper into the darkness to find an answer, or switch lanes, switch jobs and forget about it? Leave it unknown? Once you start questioning the core values, and break them apart to find a reason to keep searching, there is no coming back from it.

It's been four months since my last post.

MAY

May

RECKONING

May arrived as a quiet reckoning. The battle I'd been waging within myself was not just about survival anymore. It had moved to a place of transformation, reshaping me in ways I hadn't foreseen. The months of confronting something raw had left a mark deeper than I'd imagined. Like learning to inhabit a new body, one formed from everything I'd carried. And this adjustment, like balancing on a new bike for the first time, was both familiar and strange.

The weather mirrored this change. As summer inched closer, sudden storms became a constant, turning up with violent unpredictability. Particularly the Nevera. These Mediterranean storms, fierce and swift, had fascinated me from a young age. As a child, I used to watch them from a safe distance, feeling the thrill of survival in the face of nature's chaos. The Nevera would arrive almost out of nowhere, darkening the sky, flooding the earth, cracking thunder across the horizon. Standing in its wake, I would feel the pull to endure.

Now, years later, the storm wasn't just out there. It was within. Every time the sky darkened and lightning split the clouds, I felt a reminder of what I was building inside myself. A resilience not of resisting the storm but of moving with it, letting its energy flow through me without breaking me.

Amid all this, the work took on an intensity I hadn't anticipated. The agency my girlfriend and I were building was growing, with projects carrying more weight. We'd taken on something extraordinary, designing a product from the ground up, a drink we believed could change things. There was exhilaration in watching an idea take form. Yet, even as we moved forward, I felt a quiet pressure in the background.

The camera hadn't left my hands, not entirely, but my focus had shifted. I was now capturing products and landscapes, images with a certain detachment. My loyal Deserted Depth clients still returned, those who sought the moody, cinematic portraits we'd crafted together. But beauty, fashion, boudoir, the elements that had been my foundation, had taken a quiet step back.

I was beginning to see just how much my direction had been shaped by the influence of social media. The likes, the shares, the comments, all seemed to whisper that my work mattered only when it was seen. That unspoken influence had woven itself into my process, subtly altering what I chose to create, how I chose to create it, until the line between authentic vision and audience expectation was almost invisible.

The shift in May wasn't sudden. It was more like waking up slowly in a room you don't recognize, each detail coming into focus one at

a time until you realise you've been somewhere new for a while. I began to take on fewer assignments, not from lack of ambition but from a need to let the work breathe, to give myself space to discover what photography could mean without the filter of social media.

In stepping away from the endless cycle of shoots and posts, I found a clarity that had been buried under the noise. There was room for experimentation, for imperfection, for images that didn't need to perform. With each new project, each return to the camera, I felt that purpose become clearer, solidifying into something unbreakable.

And in stepping away, I missed it. Not just the work but the immersive energy, the familiar faces, the rhythm of capturing moments that felt alive. It reminded me of how I'd missed those storms from childhood. The thrill of facing something unpredictable, being shaped by it rather than merely enduring it.

By the end of May, I understood what this fight had truly been about. Photography had always grounded me, changing my life in ways I hadn't fully realised. I'd never seen my work as a testament to resilience before, but now it felt like a record of every story, every transformation. With this understanding, I knew the road ahead wasn't about certainty. It was about embracing this evolving path, letting the wound, the storms, the very fabric of change carry me forward.

JUNE

June

THROUGH THE LENS, ANEW

June began with that quiet, unforgettable moment. A moment shared with a friend who had been there since the start of my photography journey. She wasn't just a model. She was a muse, someone who had stood with me in countless frames, her presence woven into my growth as an artist. Over the years, we had created countless images together, each one a silent witness to our friendship. She knew me well enough to recognize when my energy was flagging, and I could read the same in her. She carried her own weight, her own fatigue, yet she always seemed to radiate something genuine, something that reminded me why I started this journey in the first place.

The day was warm, the air thick with that slow heat that settles into your bones, coaxing you into a quiet surrender. We were far from the noise of the city, tucked away in a small, secluded oasis. A pool surrounded by nothing but sky and sun, the horizon stretching out in every direction. There was a deep quiet here, a kind of silence that only exists when the world falls away. And in that

silence, something sacred. An invitation to breathe without the weight of expectation.

In that quiet, it was as though everything we'd been carrying condensed and became clear. The stillness let us both see the reason behind our fatigue, behind the energy that had driven us all this way. The warmth of the sun, the slow dance of light across the water, the absence of urgency. All of it amplified the simplicity of the moment.

We both needed that silence. That space to pause and simply exist. It was more than rest. It was a re-centering. As she moved around the pool, sometimes laughing, sometimes slipping into her own quiet thoughts, I could see that spark in her, the same spark that had first inspired me to pick up a camera. And in that moment, I realised that this journey, with all its struggles and exhaustion, wasn't only about the finished images. It was about moments like these. The quiet spaces in between, where the art becomes less about survival and more about simply being present.

I was tired. Exhausted, really. And yet, in that exhaustion, there was a strange freedom. A liberation from expectation, a rawness that allowed for something pure to emerge. Burnout had hollowed me, but it was in that hollow space that a new energy, fragile and tentative, began to grow. The emptiness wasn't a void. It was a pause. A stillness that demanded attention. I hadn't anticipated that tiredness could feel so clear, like the air just before a summer storm, when everything is sharp and waiting.

As we sat by the pool, she confessed her own weariness, and there was an unspoken relief in sharing that weight. She began to move

around, each gesture carrying the languid ease of someone finally letting go. Her laughter filled the space, buoyant but tinged with the kind of lightness that only emerges after a heavy sigh. She played in front of the lens, her movements loose, as if for once, the camera didn't matter. The energy was both for her and for me. A reminder that creation is as much about the healing it offers as the art it produces.

*Strange, the way creation and exhaustion can sit side by side,
one feeding from the other.*

Then came the moment that would redefine everything. I stepped inside the small house to refill my glass, and through a narrow kitchen window, I saw her lying by the pool, sunbathing in blissful oblivion. Her figure stretched out along the edge, her hand resting on the cool stone, her hair damp and dark against her skin, her face turned slightly upward, absorbing the light.

In that instant, the world felt suspended.

She became not just a subject but a symbol. A reminder of everything I'd been trying to capture and everything I'd somehow missed. I raised the camera to my face, framing her in the lens, but I hovered, unable to press the shutter, as if photographing it would somehow diminish the purity of the moment. THIS. This was the reason. This was why I have such a desire to photograph, to pull live moments to neverending stillness.

And so, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, and pressed the shutter that bursted 10 photos in an instant. I let the camera fall.



I opened my eyes and simply continued to watch, letting the scene wash over me like a memory in real time. I saw her with a kind of reverence that felt as fragile as it was profound. Here was the truth I had been chasing. The beauty of simply being, unfiltered and

alive. For the first time in a long time, it felt like I could just be there.

Let me drink this peace you gifted me.

She must have felt my gaze because she turned her head, catching my eye through the window. And when she smiled, there was something in it. A warmth, a deep understanding, the kind of smile that reaches beyond words. It wasn't a smile for the camera or a smile for the moment. It was a smile that felt like homecoming.



In that smile, I found a kind of peace I hadn't felt in months. Maybe even years. The real victory wasn't in conquering anything. Because the real fight was never about victory. It was about learning to lay down the sword and become one with peace. Maybe

in that victory I did win something after all. Not land. Not glory. I won back my own silence. The moment. The surrender.

In that moment, she wasn't just a muse or a friend. She was a mirror, reflecting all the parts of myself I had tried to capture in others but had perhaps missed in myself. Her gaze held a quiet strength, as though she understood the weight I carried. Yet here, in her relaxed smile, there was a freedom I had longed for, a release from the pressure to shape the world around me. As if she was inviting me to set down my own weight for a while.

The light wrapped around her, soft and natural. The day had slowed to a quiet rhythm, cradling us both in an unspoken understanding. And in that simple, sunlit moment, I found the courage to let go of my need to control the frame. I think that moment was too sacred to capture, but I did. Eyes closed, no preview, no settings, just instinct.

One shot, then I let it go.

Didn't even check if it worked. Some images aren't meant to be perfect. Just honest. Her smile, that unguarded, knowing smile. Sometimes some beauty is meant to be felt, not captured. A beauty that teaches us to surrender, to be still, to simply see without the need to possess. They say thankfulness is the only true path to optimism. I understand that now. I still pressed that shutter, but this was the first time I did it with my eyes closed.

This was the heart of why I had picked up a camera all those years ago, and didn't even know it. To find moments like these, to share them with someone who could see as deeply as I did. The journey wasn't just about the art. It was about understanding, about

recognizing that the real beauty lies in the quiet connection between two people who see each other truly.

That smile told me everything.

And now, survival wasn't about endurance. It was about choosing to be part of the moment, to let the moment be part of me.

Sometimes, it's not about what you capture but what you allow yourself to see.

For the first time in a long time, holding the camera didn't feel like a burden. It felt like breathing. The wound, the battles, the endless push for something greater, all of it fell away, leaving only the quiet joy of that sunlit moment. And maybe that's what the fight was for all along. To come to a place where I could let go, where I could stand there, camera lowered, and see beauty without the urge to capture it instantly.

In that June sunlight, I finally understood what the wound was trying to say. Why I had begun creating in the first place. It was never just about the image, the perfect frame, or the grind of details that go into a set. It was about moments like these. A beauty that lived beyond the tangible, something that didn't need to be captured to be understood. It needed only to be felt.

One of our greatest freedoms, I realised then, is how we choose to react to the world around us. Photography had given me a means of reacting, of making sense of everything. But in the pursuit of perfecting that reaction, I had begun to miss the experience itself. I'd become so wrapped in the mechanics, the gear, the setups, the endless refining of technique, that I'd forgotten to simply see what

was in front of me. The art had become more about the industry, about external validation, than about the quiet reverence that had first drawn me to it.

I became self-aware in that moment. Photography and I, we had grown up together, evolved side by side, and yet, in that growth, we'd diverged. The camera, the medium, the art itself, these had become tools I wielded rather than experiences I truly lived.

I've always told my clients that I'm not just selling them photographs. I'm offering them an experience. I've promised them that they'll feel amazing, that they'll see themselves in a way they hadn't before. I'm there to create an environment that's electric with ease, where they can let go of insecurities and just exist in front of the lens. It's always been about more than just pressing the shutter. My belief was that if the experience was genuine, if the energy on set was rich, then the photos couldn't help but reflect that.

How could you take bad photos when the experience itself was that memorable?

But here's the thing. The more I poured into each shoot, each client, the more I felt myself questioning my own part in it. After every session, I'd feel utterly drained, and that feeling was my signal that it had gone well, that I'd given everything. But in giving so much, I'd often forget to leave space for myself.

It's all too easy to lose sight of your own wonder when you're dedicated to creating joy for others. I'd push myself into the background. It was as if I became the canvas, not the artist. And while there was fulfilment in that, it also left me feeling empty.

It's like I'd built a beautiful stage, complete with lights, music, and ambiance, for everyone else to shine on. And while I stood in the wings, I started to realise I was just an observer in my own work. The process became second nature, and that's when the doubt crept in. Did the photos mean anything beyond the experience? Did I even still recognize my own work?

In those quiet moments between shoots, I started to see how much I missed just existing within the art. How much I missed those days when every shot felt like a discovery. I missed the unpredictability, the feeling that each photo might surprise me rather than fulfil an expectation. And maybe that's what self-doubt is. A call to pause, to strip away all the polish and reconnect with the raw, messy beauty of why we started in the first place.

In that soft June light, I understood that the wound wasn't something to overcome. It was a reminder to stay honest. To recognize when the tools we use start to define us rather than serve us. I saw that this friction, this painful self-awareness, was a necessary part of growth. A reminder to choose consciously, to hold onto that freedom of reaction.

It was the realisation that I could reclaim photography, not by abandoning the grind but by redefining my relationship with it. By letting it be a witness rather than a barrier. This awareness was my freedom. The freedom to see, to pause, to let beauty exist without the need to capture it.

I alone am enough to witness it. I am enough.

"I thought I was just here to capture the moment, but I was really just trying to let it go."

