

Noel H. Hodgson

I Thought I Was Carrying Notebooks. I Was Carrying Books.

When I left Nicaragua, I packed a suitcase.

I don't remember every single thing I placed inside it. Clothes, probably. Documents. The practical things one carries when leaving a country and trying to begin again somewhere else. But there is one thing I do remember with a strange clarity: I carried three notebooks with me.

At the time, they were just notebooks.

That is what I would have called them if someone had asked. Pages. Writings. Pieces of myself I did not know where else to place. They were not books yet. They were not projects. They were not part of a plan. They did not have covers, ISBNs, platforms, readers, or any of the words we use later when we try to make pain look organized.

They were only notebooks.

But they had already saved me more than once.

I wrote in them when I felt sad. I wrote in them when I did not know how to explain what was happening inside me. I wrote in them when silence was too heavy and speaking felt impossible. Sometimes I wrote with a pen. Sometimes, if I am honest, it feels like I wrote with tears.

There are pages that were not created from ambition. They were created from needing somewhere to survive for a while.

That is what writing was for me before it became anything else.

A place.

Not a career. Not a dream with a clear shape. Not even a promise.

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Just a place.

A place where I could put what had no room anywhere else. A place where I could say things that the world was not ready to hear from me, or maybe things I was not ready to say out loud. Those notebooks were small refuges. I did not always understand what I was protecting by keeping them close, but I knew I could not leave them behind.

That is the strange thing about certain objects.

Sometimes we carry them before we understand why.

We think we are only carrying paper. A photo. A letter. A notebook. Something old. Something sentimental. Something that maybe takes up space but still feels impossible to throw away.

But years later, we understand.

We were not carrying an object.

We were carrying proof.

Proof that we had felt something deeply. Proof that there was a version of us trying to speak before anyone was listening. Proof that even in the middle of confusion, migration, fear, loneliness, or sadness, something inside us was still gathering language.

I did not know that when I made that suitcase.

I did not know that fifteen years later, some of those words would find their way into books. I did not know that what once lived quietly in notebooks would one day be shared with people I had never met. I did not know that the pages I carried like a private wound would eventually become part of my public voice.

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And maybe that is why I have been thinking lately about timing.

We are so cruel to ourselves when something takes longer than expected.

We call it delay. Failure. Lost time. A lack of discipline. A sign that maybe we were not meant for what we wanted.

But maybe not everything that takes time is late.

Maybe some things are still becoming.

Maybe some dreams do not arrive when we first imagine them because we are not yet the person who can hold them without breaking them, rushing them, or apologizing for them.

I used to think that if something mattered, it had to happen quickly. That if a dream was real, it would show results. That if I was meant to be a writer, I should have known how to become one much sooner.

But writing does not always work like that.

Sometimes writing stays with you for years before it becomes a book.

Sometimes it waits while you live more.

Sometimes it waits while you lose people, leave places, change countries, become disappointed, become braver, become softer, become someone who can finally understand what the younger version of you was trying to say.

That is what moves me now.

Not only that those notebooks became something.

But that they waited for me.

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They waited while I became ready to read them differently. They waited while my voice changed. They waited while my sadness became less chaotic and more honest. They waited while I learned that not everything painful has to remain hidden to remain sacred.

This year, some of those old words finally saw the light.

And when I think about that, I don't feel like they arrived late.

I feel like they arrived with me.

Because the truth is that I could not have shared them the same way fifteen years ago. I did not have the same language. I did not have the same distance. I did not have the same tenderness toward the person who wrote them.

Back then, I was too close to the wound.

Now I can see the wound without letting it become the whole story.

Maybe that is what time does when it is not wasted.

It teaches us how to carry what once carried us.

Those notebooks carried me through moments when I did not know how to carry myself. They were not polished. They were not perfect. They were not trying to impress anyone. They were alive because they were necessary.

And maybe that is the kind of writing I still trust the most.

The kind that does not begin by asking, "Will this be successful?"

The kind that begins by asking, "Where else can I put this and still survive?"

I think we all carry something like that.

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Maybe not notebooks.

Maybe a dream we have not touched in years. A song we never recorded. A story we keep telling ourselves we will write someday. A version of ourselves we packed away because life demanded other things first.

And maybe we should be careful before calling those things forgotten.

Some things are not forgotten.

Some things are waiting for the season when we will finally have enough courage, enough grief, enough maturity, enough life, to understand why we carried them for so long.

I thought I was carrying notebooks.

I was carrying books.

But more than that, I was carrying a part of myself that already knew something I did not know yet.

That one day, those pages would not only remind me of what I survived.

They would remind me that even then, without knowing it, I was already becoming.