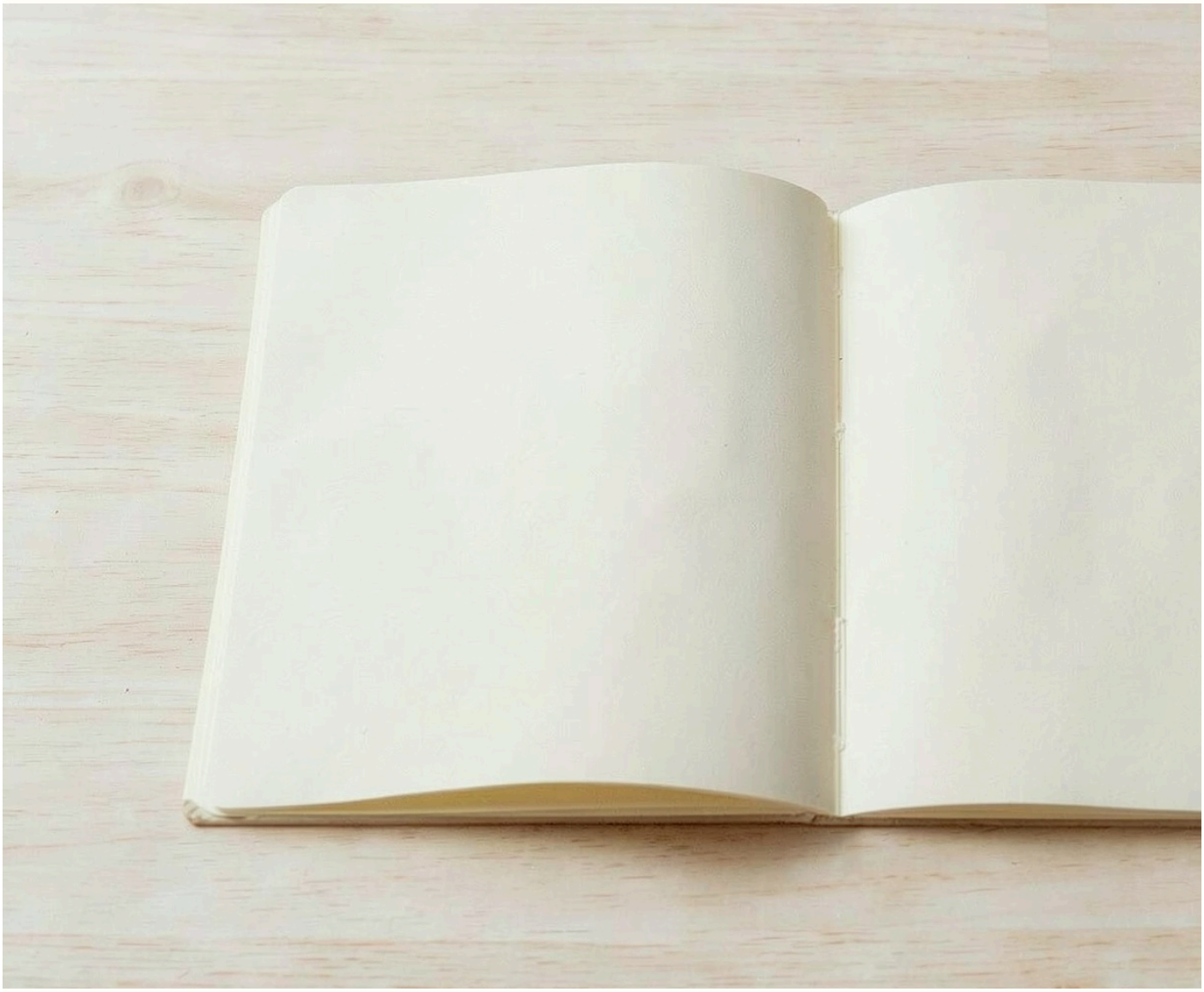
A Decision That Doesn't Hold All the Answers



مدارج



Eighteen-year-old Maryam used to imagine that a major decision would arrive in a moment of perfect clarity: a window would open, the whole answer would enter, and every question would become still. That was why she felt uneasy when months of research left her uncertain. She had two university offers: environmental engineering in another city and information systems at a university near home. She had twelve days to respond.

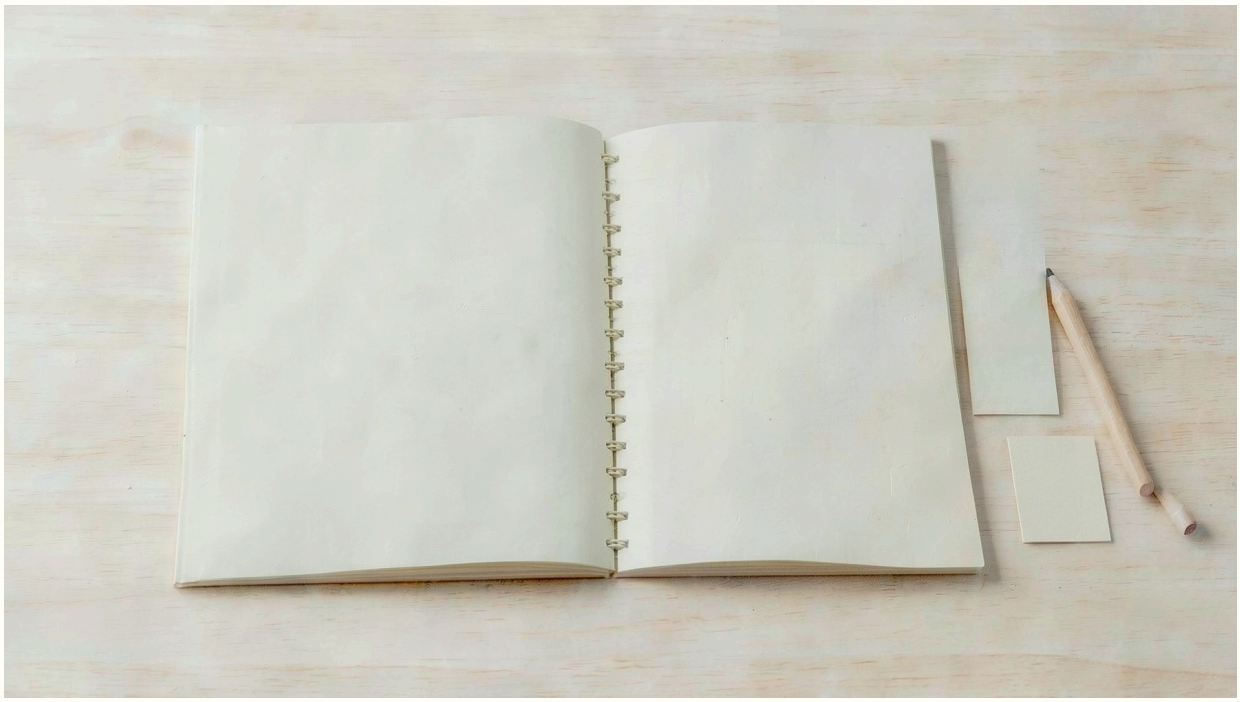
She opened a spreadsheet and titled the first column “What I know.” The second was “What I need to learn,” and the third was “What I cannot guarantee.” The division helped her see that uncertainty was not one single thing. Some of it came from missing information. Some came from fear of the future. Some came from wanting a promise that nobody could give.

She began with what she could investigate. She read both degree plans, calculated housing and travel costs, and asked the distant university about its scholarship and the conditions for keeping it. She did not rely on a short video promising “the career of the future.” The course descriptions showed that environmental engineering required more chemistry and mathematics than she had imagined. Information systems was not simply programming; it included business analysis, project management, and communication with people.

Maryam called two women who had recently graduated and asked about an ordinary workday rather than the most exciting day in their careers. The environmental engineering graduate described field visits, measurements, regulations, and long reports. The information systems graduate explained that a problem did not always arrive as broken code. Sometimes the real problem was a question nobody had understood or a process nobody had documented.

Maryam recorded their answers without turning one person’s experience into a universal rule. She searched for graduation rates, internships, and the possibility of changing direction during the first year. Whenever she found a fact, she recorded its source and date. When she found a broad promise such as “demand is always high,” she converted it into smaller questions: In which city? At what level? With which supporting skills?

On the fourth day, her twenty-year-old brother said, “You are creating more questions. Choose what you love and be done.”



“I’m not asking only to delay the decision,” she replied. “Some questions change whether an option is workable. If the scholarship is uncertain, the distant program needs a different financial plan.”

“When will you stop asking?”

She pointed to the third column. “When what remains cannot be known before I live it. I cannot know now which teachers I will meet, which friendships will support me, or how the job market will change in five years.”

On the fifth day, Maryam sat alone with her mother. Her mother did not say, “It is your decision,” and then withdraw from the responsibility, nor did she impose her preference. Together they put the family’s actual

numbers on the table. Her mother read a message she had received from her husband, Maryam’s father, about the available money. It explained how much they could contribute toward housing in the first year without promising to cover every increase. Her mother said the distant city was possible, but it required a plan for housing, transportation, and emergency travel home.

The numbers were not merely an obstacle. They showed Maryam what to ask. She called the housing office and learned that the published fee did not include meals or transportation to some laboratories. She also asked about the refund deadline if she changed her mind. The policy was less flexible than she had expected. She added it to the spreadsheet, not to frighten herself but to see the commitment honestly.

“I worry that you might choose the nearby program only because distance frightens you,” her mother said.



Her mother then read another sentence from her husband's message: "And I worry that Maryam might choose the distant program to prove she is brave."

Maryam wrote down both sentences. They revealed opposite pressures without dictating an answer. Courage was not measured by distance alone, and wisdom was not measured by closeness alone. Travel could be responsible, and staying could be responsible. She needed to know why she was choosing and what she would need to carry with that choice.

On the sixth day, Maryam met her female school counselor. After reading the spreadsheet, the counselor asked, "Where are your values and interests? You have many facts, but numbers do not choose by themselves."

Maryam wrote that she wanted her work to have a visible effect, enjoyed analyzing problems, and learned best when she could see how information changed a real decision. She also admitted that she had never done real work in either field. The counselor suggested two small tasks: review a simplified environmental report and build a basic model for tracking water use.

Maryam completed both tasks over the next two days. In the environmental report, she enjoyed connecting measurements to the safety of a place, but she repeatedly returned to chemistry concepts she would need to strengthen. In the digital model, she enjoyed turning data into a practical decision, but she also saw how much patience the work required for invisible checking and detail.

She showed both tasks to her friend Sarah, who was also eighteen. Sarah had chosen her own major two months earlier and often said she “knew herself.” After looking at the water model, she said, “You clearly enjoy this. Why not decide now?”



“Because enjoyment is evidence, but it is not all the evidence,” Maryam replied. “I also need to know whether I am willing to learn the parts of the field that I do not enjoy. Every degree contains routine work and hidden skills that never appear in promotional videos.”

“Then you’re searching for an option with no weaknesses.”

“I was at first. Now I’m trying to understand which cost I can carry and which difficulty serves a purpose I understand.”

She did not turn either experiment into a prophecy. Two enjoyable hours could not prove that five years would be easy. Still, the experiments gave her better evidence than imagination alone.

On the ninth night, Maryam closed the spreadsheet. She made ablution, prayed, and asked Allah to decree what was good for her and help her carry it. She did not wait for a dream, and she did not search her phone

for a “sign” in the first video that appeared. Her prayer asked for guidance and help; it was not a contract promising a road without difficulty.

Anxiety returned in the morning. Maryam caught herself thinking, “If my choice were right, I wouldn’t be afraid.” Then she examined the thought. Fear did not prove that an option was wrong, just as excitement did not prove it was right. Both were feelings with a place, but neither could carry the decision alone.



On the tenth day, she chose information systems at the nearby university. No single reason decided it. The practical task suited the way she learned. The cost was manageable. The program allowed her to study data and sustainability. She added a first-year plan: an introductory analytics course, a visit to a team of women working with water data, and a review at the end of the year.

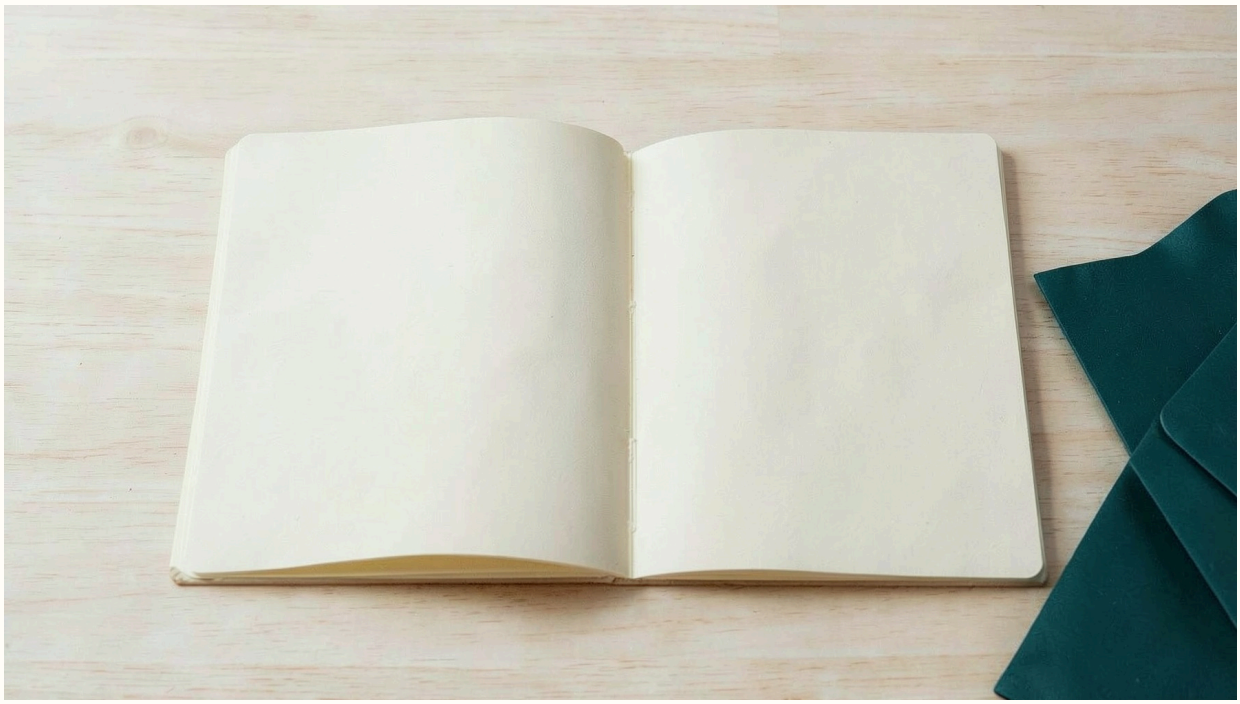
She also wrote two conditions for that review so it would not become an excuse for daily doubt. She would not reopen the whole decision after every hard assignment or boring lecture. She would review it at a set time, using evidence about her performance, interests, and opportunities rather than the mood of one day. If a strong reason appeared earlier, changing course would not betray her first decision. It would honor the purpose for which she had made it.

She declined the distant university’s offer before the deadline. She did not hold the seat simply to feel that every door remained open. Part of choosing was making room for another applicant and accepting that a real decision closes some possibilities.

Before pressing the confirmation button, Maryam wanted to open every link one more time. She asked herself, “Has new information appeared, or am I asking research to remove all risk?” There was no new information. She pressed the button and saved the receipt.

An hour later, she did not feel perfectly calm. The next day, she saw a photograph of an environmental engineering laboratory and felt the sting of “What if?” She did not reopen the admissions portal to punish herself. She saved the photograph in a folder called “Fields I Still Want to Learn About” and returned to her plan.

A few days later, a female relative asked, “Are you one hundred percent certain?” Maryam could have said yes to avoid looking hesitant. Instead, she answered, “I am certain that I followed a responsible process. I am not certain about everything that will happen. Those are different things.”



“Doesn’t that worry you?”

“Sometimes. But a decision does not require me to claim knowledge I do not have. It requires honesty about what I know, work with what I can do, and reliance on Allah for what I do not control.”

When university began, some courses were harder than she expected, while some fears never occurred. Her decision was not proof that she had known the future. It was responsible action based on what she could

know at the time, joined to reliance on Allah and a willingness to learn and correct her course.

During the first week, Maryam opened the old decision spreadsheet. She did not stamp it “The Final Answer.” At the bottom she wrote, “I gathered what I could, asked questions, prayed, and chose. Now the duty is to work.”

Then she closed the file and went to class. The whole road was not known, but the next step was: attend, learn, ask about what she did not understand, and review her choice at the proper time rather than in every moment of fear. It was less than knowing the future and more than enough to begin.

Inspiration and its limits

This is contemporary fiction. Its characters, dialogue and university choices are not historical events reported by the reference.

Conceptual inspiration: Madarej, Li-yatmainna qalbi — al-Yaqin, physical PDF pages 13, 29 and 65. A literary comparison does not establish the fictional events as facts in the source.

Page 65 begins a historical account; that limited page alone does not establish a conclusion about the timing of a promise. The story does not reconstruct that account. Prayer in this story seeks guidance and help without promising a dream, a sign or a future free of difficulty.

Source PDF, at the physical pages listed above: https://madarej.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/ليطمئن-قلبي-—-اليقين-—-R13.pdf.pdf

The illustrations are contemporary symbolic teaching arrangements, not depictions of the characters or verified historical possessions.