

The Lebanon of my Dreams...

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TW: SENSITIVE TOPICS

It's the 4th time this night that I wake up to this thunderous sound. I know it's just this very atrocious weather; however, it gets me every time. I keep on thinking at first that something bad just happened. What was it? A bomb? A clash? Our enemies attacking? This is how my brain is programmed now. I can't help it. I am used to it. I am Lebanese. Well, this is not the only thing that is normalized around here. Walking down the streets with a fat wallet just to buy some bread that you can barely afford for your kids, so they won't go to sleep at night with an empty stomach. That is normal. Opening a bar for you to put some drugs in your customers' drinks and assault them when they pass out; and not being sanctioned because you have political connections that covers your perversity. That is normal. Fearing honking when you drive because you don't know if the driver in front of you is angry and will pull a gun to your head. That is normal. Being raped by a ravenous man that your family force you to marry just to save its reputation. That is normal. Being beat every night by your partner and not being helped because this situation is common in more than half of the Lebanese households. That is normal. There's no limits. There's no protection. There's no rules. Don't expect to have any if, the people in power that should've preserved those, are the biggest criminals. However, what if we live in our ideal, civilized, and peaceful country; where everyone is kind to each other, help each other, and where corruption is an unfamiliar concept to the Lebanese consciousness. How would it be? How would it feel?

Imagine this.

You woke up this morning, to the squeaky voices of happy children playing all together in the neighborhood. Their laughs, their screams, their footsteps, their games' rules, are the things you first hear every Sunday at sunrise. You always drawl at first; but then, when you see their smiles from your balcony, you couldn't resist but forgive them for waking you up this early. Now, here comes the smell. The one that makes every Lebanese's day. The scent of the traditional "man'oushe". Who can resist this incredible smell? Well, neither you nor me. Therefore, you directly grab the first jacket that you can find and go down the stairs; destination: the "foron". The funny part of living in this small neighborhood is that you keep on crossing the path of the exact same characters with their typical attitude. Two houses away from yours, you can find "tante Rosa et Marie". They are known to be the gossip girls of the area like we say it in Arabic "neswen el foron". The hilarious part? Rosa's husband, Samir, is the sweet old man that owns the traditional Lebanese bakery down the street. Since her 4 children are studying abroad and has nothing much to do home, she sometimes goes down to her partner of 43 years' workplace to help him out but, we all know deep down she is mainly collecting some juicy stories worth spilling over a cup of coffee in the afternoon with Marie. Marie? She is Rosa's cousin and Samir's sister; so yes, that means two cousins married each other's. Expected, huh? Are you really Lebanese if you live in a small town and don't marry your cousin? I guess not. Anyways. Moving forward, there is this small plain and mundane house on the left that everyone keeps avoiding. I will let you take a wild guess... well, this is the residence of "3ammo Wajih". In Lebanon, every

neighborhood has a grumpy grandpa. He is ours. "3ammo Wajih" hates to be disturbed. It feels like he hides the whole day behind his curtains, searching for a target to yell at. Unfortunately, the miserable kids are always the victims of his bad temper. They all got him running after them with a wooded stick waiting to hit them either on their forehead or on their fingers.

How cute and traditional this little picture is. It brings comfort to every Lebanese's heart. I really do hope, as a woman, that one day I will be able to walk down the 'foron' without getting catcalled for once. I really do hope that I won't be judge by society anymore for wanted to have a taste of life's sweetness. I want to experience how 'cool' it would be to become a successful woman in Lebanese politics and be taken seriously without being objectify. I want to become a Muay-Thai champion but, apparently, it is not 'girly' enough. How many times did you wish that the kids on the streets were somewhere, far away, in the educational system and not in the street bothering you, knocking on your window, in the middle of a 2pm's traffic when you are stressed on your way to your next meeting? How many times, when you start bonding with a significant other, did you ask yourself which religion are they? How many times did you fight with your parents because when you were young you fell in love with someone from a different religion? How many times, as a woman, have you heard someone telling you "You can't wear those clothes out"? or "this skirt is too short"? "This top is way too revealing. It seems like you are asking for it"?

Sometimes, I wonder how it would be to live in a peaceful community. However, I also wonder if I will value peace, inclusion, tolerance, respect, in a utopian society as much as I value them now. For example, if I was to live in a country like Sweden and Finland, where everything is organized and everyone is civilized, will I value life like I do right now? They have the highest rate of suicide among the developed countries thus the government had to promote mental health. They were bored and depressed, to a point where they had to unalive themselves because they couldn't see the purpose of living anymore. They saw everything in life. They had everything.

Maybe, this is the beauty of chaos. There's a perfection in every imperfection.

If Lebanon was perfect and ideal, would've we saw beautiful start-ups, initiatives, NGOs, and social enterprise brought up into this bitter world? If Lebanon was perfect, would've we saw this poor man on the street offering the kids the last pieces of chocolate that he has? If Lebanon hadn't had any history, would've we saw children on Hop-On and Hop-Off tour buses, pointing with their little fingers and with an amazed look, the only vestiges and monuments left from our history? Would we even have history without chaos?

This is the paradox of life: humans need madness to live. A little bit of madness is what is keeping us sane. It's just like the yin and the yang. There's some good in the bad, and some bad in the good. The balance of things is keeping us lucid.

This is not a story romanticizing Lebanon. It's the complete opposite. It's a story that points out our country's flaws and sordid conditions. Let's be rational. Let's not live in denial. Nevertheless, let's not be blinded by the darkness. It is not the bigger picture that is going to make you dream,

nor is the comparison to more developed countries. Or at least, it's not going to be the right dream. Faith and hope don't come from focusing on the large scale; it comes from the beauty that enlightens every alley. It comes when you see the kids playing together in the streets. It comes when you see this sweet grandma waiting for her husband to come home after a long day on her balcony. It comes when you see this teenager listening to music and painting some graffiti on the wall to give the city more life. It comes when you see this young couple giggling, hand in hand, on the side of the road. It comes when you hear those parents bragging about their child's success. This is what gives hope and make you dream in a sorrowful country.

Would you have a dream if there was only perfection?