

## Lebanon of My Dreams

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to see your dreams play out in a movie? To see your imagination come alive in front of your eyes? What if it's a dream of your country being all prosperous and perfect? A collapsed country regaining its beauty, stability, safety, prosperity and strength is the only thing that I have always dreamt about.

Here I am in my bed, the sun is tickling my eyelids, and I'm being taken by the hand. I open my eyes and I'm shocked to see a mini cedar intertwining its branches with my fingers. Confusion and questions are spitting off my tongue. Why is there a tree in my bed? Why is it alive, and why is it holding my hand? And as if this tree was reading my thoughts, it answers, "Hey, I'm Cedra, call me Ced. We've met before in your dreams, but now it's finally time for a proper meeting." She smiles, and I'm already smiling back. "An adventure awaits us; prepare yourself to be blown away," she says. And let me tell you, she did not exaggerate.

We're out of the house, marching towards the forest. Trees are getting wider, birds chirp louder, water drops faster, and the wind blows stronger. Then, I find myself in a room with countless doors surrounding it. Ced explains that we've arrived in the dreams' dimension, and every one of these doors holds a core part of the Lebanon of my dreams. "Shall we start our journey?" she asks. I swing the first door open and lead us inside. Nerves and excitement are twitching inside me.

The first thing that I notice is the thousands of chandeliers hanging off the ceiling illuminating the room, and drinkable water coming out of a water well. Basic life needs such as water and electricity are the pillars of this dream of mine. What a shame. I look over to Ced, and she's already drinking water. She urges me to do so, and as soon as I gulp it, its freshness cools down my stress.

We continue our adventure by entering the second door. I'm standing in front of a metro station. "Do we have public transportation now?" I ask. "Looks like we do. Is it safe?" We're about to find out. We hop on the metro. Everything is organized, and the chauffeur is driving responsibly. Every now and then, one of the guards checks up on us and makes sure that everything is okay. We arrive happy, safe and sound.

When we hit our destination, I'm surprised that it's a hospital. "What are we doing here?" I whisper to Ced. She doesn't answer but leads me inside, towards a family who by the looks of it is struggling financially. But before I can stop myself, I ask them, "Will you be able to pay the treatment fees?" The parents smile proudly and answer, "We've got free healthcare now. Times when we would beg someone to let us in are over. Everyone deserves to be treated equally in spite of their social class." Speechless, I just hug them, pouring all of my love and support into it.

We continue our journey, and this time we're facing a school whose principal is already welcoming us. "Finally! I've been waiting for you two to show up. I already know your questions, so let's get into it. The education system took an interesting positive turn. Education is now free and mandatory for all inhabitants, and no one has to worry about payment burdens anymore. We also changed the curriculum, focusing more on building students' personalities and life skills such as investment, taxes, paying attention to their hidden talents while helping them unlock their full

potential. We are also organizing exchange programs every three years so they can learn more about different cultures while also sharing theirs. Public schools are better than ever, allowing kids from different nationalities to learn. As a result of these changes, job opportunities have also extended, and no one is obligated to migrate or leave their loved ones anymore in order to make ends meet.

As for teachers, they're now among the highest-paid people in the country. Their hardships, dedication, and commitment are finally being rewarded properly."

I'm too stunned to reply, but the smile that spreads across my face is enough to show her my appreciation. We've been fighting nonstop for decades for a quarter of these achievements, but the fact that they're happening, even if it's just a dream, warms my heart. We thank her fanatically and open the next door. Now, we're in front of the governmental palace. This is where it all started, and this is where it will end. Greeted by the guards, we follow them inside to meet the president. I'm fidgeting nonstop with my hands. He amicably welcomes us, and we take a seat, waiting for the upcoming news (good or bad); we're about to find out.

He begins: "I will start with what I believe is the highlight of the past changes. We're officially a secular country now. The main issue in our country was the mix between religion and government. They were taking advantage of the people under the "for your faith" slogan. Most of the laws have also been rectified to make this country safer and better for its people. Everyone, despite their gender, religion, race, is now following one law and one law only. Rates of crime have dropped, and people are calmer, more patient, loving, open-minded, and supportive of one another. They're more united than ever.

As for our economy, it's also improving impressively. We started relying more on Lebanese production, exporting way more than importing. We developed both the agricultural and industrial sectors, and we're paying off our debts. It will take time and constant efforts, but the results are so worth it.

With that, he stands up and holds my hands: "I know it's hard to believe that we achieved all of that, especially after the constant crisis and struggles that we went through, but there's a light at the end of every tunnel. Don't lose hope because it's the one motive that keeps us going."

At the sound of that, I burst into tears, both of joy and sadness, but he's right, and I can confidently say that this president finally represents our people and is working for their interest. We hugged them goodbye and left.

I turn to Ced and ask, "Where are we heading off now?" She smiles and replies, "We're going back home." We walk in silence, trying to wrap our heads around what we experienced today. As the familiar trees appear in my view, I notice an elderly couple having a picnic in a flower field. They're chilling out, playing music, dancing... without a single care in the world. Ced tells me that elderly people have insurance now, so they can live the rest of their lives without any worries.

I sigh, feeling overwhelmed with both happiness and sadness. All of this is just my vision and a Lebanon that exists only in my dreams. Suddenly, a strangled sob comes out of my mouth, and I find Ced beside me. She doesn't even ask what's wrong; she just hugs me and wipes away my tears.

We're back on my bed. This day has been the most chaotic yet wonderful day in my life. These open doors will forever be imprinted in my mind, heart, and soul. It's such a harsh feeling knowing that all of this is just a dream. "It's too good to ever be true," I tell Ced.

She then looks at me with mischievous eyes and says, "Remember when I told you we'd enter the dreams' dimension? Well, I may have forgotten to mention that it was actually the future's dimension." She sheepishly laughs, "All of these scenes that you saw today are just snippets of Future Lebanon. But, as the president said, these changes rely on the youth and upcoming generations that have to fight for their country. It may seem impossible to change the current situation, and let me tell you, it won't be easy. But, it's not impossible; with the right mindset, willingness, and hard work, everything is possible. You just have to believe in yourself and in this country because it's a part of you, your identity, and forever will be."

"My time here is over, but I'm always guarding you," Ced continues. "And when we meet again, I know for a fact that this Lebanon of your dreams will become reality." She hugs me tight, and I hug her back even tighter. All of this is hard to process, but as they said: "When there's hope, there's always a pathway you can take or a door you can open."

**NOUR FAOUR**