

*The Threads which Compose Me.*

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In the serenity of an Arabian night, I gaze upwards towards the innumerable stars and the crescent moon illuminating the dark cloak of night. The breeze of the middle east caresses my skin, in the distance I hear the ambience of the Qanoun complimented by the rhythmic Arabic Drum, followed by the mesmerising vocals, passionately proclaiming folkloric themes, and proudly chanting the great poetry of my people. As I sit on my balcony, situated on biblical land, I contemplate in the stillness, pondering upon how I am a thread weaved into a great tapestry. A tapestry composed of achievements, history, arts, culture. A grand tapestry, which the hands of God began at the dawn of time.

In the old souk, the distinct aroma of thyme and sumac envelops the atmosphere, almost masked by the strong smoke of lamb skewers on a charcoal grill. My eyes are captivated by the ancient architecture, my heart in awe of how perfectly maintained the souk is. As I progressed through the timeless marketplace, Arabic mixed with French and English can be heard. The locals seamlessly alternating between languages, creating a satisfying flow. As I hear murmurs of Arabic in the marketplace, I am transported to childhood memories of my grandparent's house, where the Arabic language was passionately used to discuss topics ranging from politics to the situation in Lebanon, or memories of our village. My being is comforted when I hear the Arabic language. A language so poetic and overflowing with theology, yet structured and filled with law. In a way it mirrors my personality, connecting me to a language through a subjective basis. O how this semitic language is a balsam unto my soul. The Arabic language provides the outlined patterns in the tapestry of which I belong, for the Arabic language stands as the vital pieces of thread.

The clear air of the Qadisha Valley, sanctified by the prayers of the early Maronites, refreshes my spirit and body. The golden sun pierces through the thick mist and embraces me with warmth. It was as if my ancestors were descending from heaven embracing me, reminding me of who I am, where I am from, and where I belong. As I dwelt in the peaceful silence, it was as if I could still faintly hear the hymns of the Maronite Labourers, working tirelessly in the valley. As I returned to my village, my ears were graced with the song of bells, harmoniously chiming. The solemn sound of the Maronite call to prayer coupled with the mountainous scenery, unblemished blue sky and lush valleys instilled within the depths of my spirit, a heavenly reverence.

It was as if I was stepping into a mystical land. As I approached the church for Sunday Divine Liturgy, my mind pondered upon the beauty and splendour of our churches, for they stood as a tangible and visual testament of the faith of my people, standing tall and unwavering like the cedars of Lebanon, even in the face of persecution. As I entered the church, the simple yet haunting hymns were amplified by the church walls, ravishing my heart and bringing upon it the bittersweet feeling of nostalgia. As the famous hymn dedicated to Saint Charbel was fervently sung, it brought back memories of my childhood, where my Maronite faith was imbued within me from my earliest years, and had become a crucial part of who I am. Thus, the tapestry in which I belong was almost complete, as the Faith of my people provided it with a distinct beauty and character, infusing meaning and filling in the outlines.

It had been an hour since I last satiated my hunger. Yet, as I advanced towards my grandparent's house for Sunday lunch, my appetite was reawakened, as my nose was greeted with the powerful scent of the Lebanese barbeque. When I entered my Grandparent's house, I was met with a loving embrace and three kisses on the cheek from my Teta. In turn, I greeted her and the rest of the family, as such was the custom. The men could be seen operating the charcoal barbeque, waving a piece of cardboard over it, dispersing the smoke which carried the scent of the finest Lebanese meats into the village air, stirring up envious and ravenous feelings within the passersby. Meanwhile, excited clamour could be heard from the women as they prepared salads, and authentic Lebanese dishes. Prevailing through the symphony of sizzling and clamour, was the "Best of Fairouz" playlist my Jedo was so fond of. Her abiding voice bringing refreshment and enjoyment, especially to me as I completed the tedious task of setting the table. As I placed the last dish upon the table, which was bountiful in dishes, I could not help but recognise the similarities between the Lebanese people and their cultural foods; Historic, intricate, tasteful and composed by making the best of what is around you.

As I took my place at the dinner table, located on the balcony, overlooking the grape vines and mountainous terrain of my village; I took a moment to appreciate it all. While my cultural foods, tradition, language and faith were vital pieces of my tapestry, all providing the colourful patterns and beauty, the most significant of these had been left out, put to the side and almost forgotten. The backbone of this tapestry, Family, which provides soul to the tapestry, and is the thread from which I descend and take my place, belonging to a grand tapestry, the tapestry of the Lebanese people.