

Name: Celine Sukkarieh

Grade 12GLS

Beirut Annunciation Orthodox College

August 4th Rewritten

“If you could go back in time and change one thing, what would it be?”, “If you could travel to the past or the future, which would you choose?”, “If you could find out how you die or when you die, which would you rather?”. I pity he who would change his life, he who cares to travel in time because he is not comfortable in the present, and he who does not know if he will die a brutal death at the hands of his brothers on the lands of his own country. I pity he who lives his life in fear of what chaos or disaster is to come next. Where I live, Lebanon, things have never been stable but they have always been good. We’ve had our fair share of scares and it makes me wonder what it would be like if the revolution had continued and if the economy had not regained stability, and what it would be like if the covid pandemic had reached our country and how we would’ve spent our entire summer on lockdown. I cannot even imagine what it would be like if things went completely south and what disasters we would have faced. To think our beautiful Beirut cannot overcome anything is to think foolishly. It has been rebuilt countless times and this time is no different. Or is it?

I wake up on the morning of August 4th and it is just a regular hot summer day. I look out the window at the gorgeous portside view I have from the city of Achrafieh, and it takes me a while to get out of bed as I indulge in the scenery. It is as if I were looking at it for the last time. I am suddenly startled by the doorbell indicating the arrival of my aunt and cousin Ghadi for brunch. After exchanging greetings, Ghadi and I immediately start working out a plan for the day ahead. We decide to head back over to my aunt’s apartment in Hamra with our parents and go for an evening swim in the rooftop pool. In the meantime, we waste time by playing cards with my older sister Leah and talking about the future with my mom. We always get into a heated debate over my plans to study abroad. She believes it would be safer to study here in Beirut, and I am starting to agree with her. Why leave such a beautiful country, my home, and my family when it is just as an equally good, if not better, plan to stay here? My thoughts are interrupted by a loud noise. It is my mother packing her shisha to take with her to Hamra so she can enjoy it with some evening coffee at my aunt’s. It is then that I realize how much time we had wasted. It was almost 6pm. As we prepare our things, we are once again interrupted by a loud noise. It was louder than my mother dropping something in the kitchen, louder than the slam of a random door in the house, and louder than anything that directly comes to mind.

I turn to look at my mother and her expression says it all. Fear. Danger. Panic. Time passed slowly as we were confused about how to act. Explosions, bombings, raids, and gunfire had not been heard in Lebanon in a long time. However, we know it would not be safe to

assume otherwise, because there was one lingering question on all of our minds: “What if?”. It is 6:06pm and it sounds like either fireworks or gunfire. We are unsure whether to celebrate or take cover. It is 6:07pm and it kept getting louder. We are unsure if we have time to put on the news. It is 6:08pm and the remote is shaking in my hands trying to find a news channel to help us understand. It is still 6:08pm when we gather around the TV to know our fate. It is 6:09 pm and it was a false alarm, just fireworks. I close my eyes, take a breath, and choose to celebrate.

After taking some time to gather ourselves and our thoughts, we all decide to head to Hamra immediately just to get a breath of fresh air and shift our moods back. I get into the car, I spot the aunties of Achrafieh having their evening coffee. They have vintage plates hung on the walls beside the wooden window frames of their pastel-colored balcony. They laugh and gossip as they sip their bitter coffee from the old-fashioned white cups, and I knew one day I would be like them. We drive across the city, and the sound of Fairuz’s music fades out as I look out my window at the large skyscrapers and old traditional buildings. I once again admire the mosque and the church built side by side near the Martyr’s Square, the busy streets of downtown, and the beautiful Mediterranean Sea as the sun begins to descend towards the water and change the colors of the clear sky as if it were the last time.

We reach our destination so Ghadi, Leah, and I rush out of the car to go buy snacks from the nearby mini mart. After picking out pyramid shaped pineapple juice and different flavored chips, we head back to the house and take the elevator to the rooftop pool. From the top of the building, you could see all of Beirut’s neighborhoods and busy streets. People sitting in cafes having shisha and playing cards, kids playing in old parking lots, families sitting down for a late lunch or early dinner, and headlights lighting up the city as the sunlight began to fade away. However, my focus was suddenly cut off by Ghadi diving head-first into the pool and Leah laughing at how he splashed my clothes. I quickly change into swimwear and join them. We laugh, swim, and dance to the music playing from the speaker connected to my phone.

When the sky turns red and the night approaches, we get out of the pool to dry off. My sister covers me with a towel as I slowly felt a growing pain in my left shoulder. The pain grows and suddenly the water in my hair turns into shards of glass, the pool water on my body begins to feel like blood, and the music from the speaker sounds like sirens penetrating my eardrums. I close my eyes as the world got loud and I could no longer shut it out.

I reopen my eyes, but I can’t breathe. It is 6:10 pm and the red sunset sky is now a dust filled darkness seen through a different eye. It is 6:10 pm and I wonder if I will make it till 6:11. It is 6:10pm when I realize it was not a false alarm. It is 6:10 pm and those were not fireworks. It is 6:10 pm and I am back in the real world where my life ended two minutes ago. Everything I felt after 6:10 pm was far from alive. I felt fear, disappointment, pain, grief, and anger but not alive. Beirut was gone and we were gone with it.

“If you could go back in time and change one thing, what would it be?” I envy he who would not change his life, he who does not care to travel in time because he is comfortable in the present, and he who is assured that he will die in the arms of happiness and comfort. I envy he who does not live his life in fear of what chaos or disaster is to come next. Where I live, Lebanon, I can’t remember the last time things were good. And although I cannot help but love my country, its sea, its mountains, cities, and people, I have to admit that every day my pain grows as the situation gets worse and my heart cannot help but to ache for its country. In the Lebanon of my dreams, this story is true. In the Lebanon of my dreams, the news announced a false alarm at 6:08 pm and August 4th didn’t need to be rewritten.