



The Seed of Rebirth

“I died today. Or maybe, two days ago; I’m not sure.” To tell you the truth, Amara felt like she died a long time ago. She stole a few breaths from the world just like how the world stole everything away from her. It wasn’t always like this; there was once a time where everyone was happy. The trees danced with the wind, indulged in the soft melodies of the birds. They were all in sync, moving in harmony. But in this lifetime, everything is temporary. It was like a moment of epiphany, where everything changed. Amara didn’t know that time in the past would be the last

time she tasted happiness. She suffered life changing losses and at some point, she almost lost herself along the way. Destruction, not a single spec of green could be seen. It was a sickness; it controls you and drags you into nowhere. Lebanon was no longer the Lebanon Amara knew anymore; however, just like her name, she remained everlasting in resilience and hope. They thought she was delusional, who has hope under these circumstances? Amara believed that not all of Lebanon was lost, she believed in the survival of a place that she now only could dream of. It was a beautiful green garden decorated with flowers showered by the lullabies of the birds that sang in the life where she was once happy. "Stop dreaming, that life doesn't exist anymore! Hell, I'm starting to doubt that it was ever real from the start," her neighbor told her. Amara looked at her and said, "I have faith that somewhere, a place remains untainted by the evil of mankind. It is only a dream if you lose the faith you once had." Amara urged her neighbor desperate for any type of positive affirmation. "You girl, stop saying foolish things, everyone already calls you mad, do not give them more of a reason." Then the neighbor left Amara standing alone in disappointment.

She muttered angrily to herself, kicking a piece of wood on the floor. "They always call me mad, saying that I went crazy after the destruction, but nothing other than our broken hearts remained; however, I know it still exists. It's there; I can feel the garden's pulsating heartbeat. As a matter of a fact, those who have lost connections to their own roots can't possibly find a garden surely?" Amara's train of thought was cut shortly after she saw the sun set down, remembering that she was late to yet another gathering of families. Ever since everything went down hill, families would gather around to discuss resources and ways of survival.

As Amara reached the place, she already wanted to leave. Going to where her mother sat, the neighbor Amara previously talked to popped up. "Oh, Mila you should have seen what type of nonsense your daughter was telling me a few hours ago. I haven't had a good laugh in a long time. But mind you, keep her in check before she actually loses it," laughed the neighbor angering Amara. "It's real you people are just too limited." "AMARA! That's impolite, apologize now," her mother immediately jumped in. "Why should I? I did nothing wrong but tell her the truth; wasn't lying a sin, mother?" urged Amara. "Stop it with this nonsense already Amara. Just grow up." "This isn't nonsense-" "Enough! If Dunia was here-" Amara's mom, Mila, quickly stopped herself from losing her composure in front of anyone; however, Amara was fuming at the mentioning of her dead twin sister's name. She has always felt like sometimes everyone including her mother wished that she died instead of Dunia, but the world was cruel enough to keep her alive. "How could anyone treat me like this? Is hope a sin too?" Soon after, she found her legs moving fast, taking her as far as they could away from the hopeless.

After what felt like hours, her legs finally gave out. She felt rejected by this world, it was betrayal. And so, she found herself sitting at the foot of her sister's grave, the only place where she ever belonged, by her sister's side. Amara stared hard at the gravestone, her Dunia.

As she was staring at her sister's carved name, she spotted a hole. "Wait! What is that?" The hole got bigger, as Amara got closer, it got even bigger and bigger! Something rustled, then squeaked, then it JUMPED. "Is this the place I finally die in?" Amara wondered, closing her eyes bracing for impact. "No need to be afraid dear, hehe." Amara quickly opened her eyes to see a small, white talking bunny. "A talking bunny?!" And then suddenly everything went black.

Amara started coming back to her senses and as soon as she opened her eyes, there he was, with all his might, a talking bunny. "That was quite a fall dear, how ya' feelin?" She gaped at him but then a throbbing pain brought her back to reality. "Ow! Where am I? What happened?" She asked the bunny. "Oh! Little girl, you fell down the rabbit hole." Amara blankly stared at the bunny, "Is he serious?" Actually, she thought she was the mad one for talking to a bunny in the first place and falling down a rabbit hole. "Where exactly does this rabbit hole lead to?" That's when something hit her, a scent, one that has become only a wish to Amara, but yet again, how could she smell it here? The captivating aroma of the symbolic smell of Beirut, it was rose jasmine.

"Rose jasmine?" Amara quickly squeezed her eyes shut "If this is a dream, please don't wake me up ple-" Bonk! "Ow! What did you do that for bunny?" Amara yelled. "First of all, I have a name, and it is Gwendolyn, so please address me by that, and second, my dear... you are in the wonderland, where lies a place like no other, a place full of wonder and mystery. To survive this wonderland, one must be as mad as the hatter." "What-" "We call it none other than, the garden of Beirut! Yes my child, your cries were heard, your plea for salvation, we heard every single one of them. We are real only for the believers hidden from the sight of the soulless. Amara didn't know if she was awake, but she felt alive as the breeze of wind hit her face but sweeping away the talking bunny leaving her in her own company. "It's real..." Amara shivered, "I can't believe it, the garden of Beirut actually still exists. I wasn't crazy," she kept muttering. She then finally started to move towards the garden. Every move was like magic, infecting her with the sweet poison of temporary belonging. Step by step, she started looking around the magnificence, spotting flying birds erupting in harmonious tunes resembling the songs of Fairuz she used to sing with her sister. Enchanting flowers and fruitful trees were spread everywhere, guarding this den of nature in which souls are nurtured affectionately. A stream of sparkling

water trailed down under Amara's feet that only seemed to end when looking towards the direction of the sun. The sun, as if set ablaze, shone above the piece of land, engulfing it with its rays of serenity. This garden was a work of art, so vibrant, so captivating, it was even better than Amara's dreams.

To Amara, it felt like seconds, but hours have passed, and the moon missed the sun too much, kissing it before the night arrived. Amara finally reached a circular part of the garden that seemed to be hidden, and at its center was a tall mirror. She looked at the mirror and at that moment she felt her heart drop at what was staring back at her. Although they were identical, she knew that reflection wasn't her own. "Dunia? Is it really you?". "You finally found me sister. I have been here waiting for a long time." Amara grabbed the mirror trying to feel her sister's touch, yet to no avail. "Are you alive?! What happened?! How are you here?!" Amara screamed into the mirror.

Dunia smiled, her pearly white teeth could light up any room. "My dear sister, I am not a part of your world anymore. Although my name reflects the earth, the angels mourned my time of living on it and demanded I return to them. The destruction we have witnessed is not fit for people like us, but your time is not up yet, sister. Soon, you will be living in your own heaven." "What are you saying? I don't understand anything!" "I'm sorry Amara, but you have to go back to Beirut where mother is, before it's too late." Amara fumed, "You can't take me back there. I feel saner here!" Amara's vision started to blur. "See you soon dear, I'll think of you when I watch you from distant skies," promised Dunia before everything went black.

Amara woke up on her back above her sister's grave yet again, it was a cool night, and the destruction was still as fresh as ever. She imagined the floating dust was stardust scattered from falling stars, refusing to believe that she was back to this reality. "Why would Dunia tell me that she would be seeing me very soon?" And then she realized, she couldn't leave without seeing her mother, no matter how bad things were between them. It was as if Amara could feel her soul slowly getting sucked out of her, trying to escape this land of destruction. And then she knew her time in this life was running out. She was dying, and the gardens of Beirut would claim her soul soon.

She went to her half-destroyed house where her mother sat staring at the wall blankly sipping her tea. Although Mila couldn't see her, she could sense her daughter's presence behind

her, any mother could. "You know Amara," her mother started with her back still turned towards her, "I was terrified, I lost Dunia right after she told me the gardens of Beirut still existed. She kept saying that until that missile took her away from this world. Soon enough you started acting just like her. I couldn't let history repeat itself. I tried to change your mind hoping that you would forget what was once in the past. I was scared to lose you too but instead I lost myself to this world. I am your mother, and I can feel you slipping away from here, from me. Your sister visited my dreams yesterday. She promised to take care of you, and I couldn't bring myself to accept this. I was supposed to take care of you both, and I failed. Now I realized that this life is worse than the place your sister is in now. So, I decided I'll watch the skies, even if it is for only one sight of your starlights." At this point, tears were streaming down Amara's eyes. She didn't want to say goodbye to her mother, not after what she just heard, but what could she do except console her? "I won't go like this, I refuse to." Amara decided that she would leave behind the only thing she had for this world, her hope. Not only for her mother, but also for the world that carries the future generations. "Farewell, my lovely mother. I'll wait for you on the other side." Her mother chuckled, "Don't leave me lost here forever. When the time is right bring me back to you, my Amara and Dunia."

After one last hug, Amara reluctantly turned her back to her mother, towards her sister's grave; the garden's calling was stronger than ever. She decided to talk to her sister from beyond the grave, "Sister, I know you can hear me, but when I go, I will leave my hope behind for this world." Amara waited for a reply. Five minutes passed, then ten with Amara standing firm in her decision. "My dear, your sacrifice is very honorable," her sister finally replied. Amara took one last breath before lying down for what is to come. She laid there watching the stars. It is not the end but the beginning, she was dying to be alive again. As she felt herself fade, the hope bled from her body seeping into the soil where Rose Jasmines sprouted all around her, forming a flower bed; she was the seed of rebirth.

And so, Amara returned to the hidden gardens of Beirut, where her sister awaited, in their heaven. Dunia embraced her filling Amara's heart with happiness, now that there is no barrier between resilience and the world. "Amara, how do you feel?"

"I died today. Or maybe, two days ago; I'm not sure." To tell you the truth, Amara felt like a newborn baby once again.

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