



## Eyes of the Future through our Past

As the heavy cloak of grief draped over her shoulders, Celine, a Lebanese teenager, decided to visit her long distance grandmother after the death of her grandpa to celebrate Christmas with her and relieve her from her grief... Celine wasn't too happy or excited about it because she had plans of going to the club with her friends, but she had no other option. Arriving at the economically disadvantaged neighborhood, the air was thick with memories and unspoken longing as she sought solace in the attic, a sanctuary filled with forgotten treasures and bittersweet nostalgia. Yearning to be back once more in the warmth of her grandfather's presence, she longed to hear the echoes of his hearty laughter reverberating through the halls. The attic, with its dimly lit corners and the musty scent of ageing books, held within its walls a lifetime of shared moments between Celine and her beloved grandfather. And as she wandered through these familiar streets, memories flooded Celine's mind, transporting her back to a time when laughter echoed through every corner and joy filled the air, unlike the polluted haze that often envelops our bustling cities. Every simple moment of happiness they shared before the shadows of Alzheimer's cast their pall over their lives, before the death of her grandpa, showered onto Celine. Remembering these memories, Celine wished she appreciated each moment without regret for not doing so now that they are lost.

Celine's family arrived at her grandparents' house. After countless knocks on the door, an elderly woman opened. She looked at them with confusion, not recognizing them at first but after many tries, she recognized Celine's mom, her daughter; yet even though her grandchildren were right in front of her, she did not recognize them. Celine's mixed feelings couldn't be explained. She was shocked, her eyes teared up and her heart pounded. Her astonishment grew on her face, and she pondered, "When did time slip away? When did she have the opportunity to age so significantly and disconnect from us?". At this juncture, Celine took full responsibility, realizing that she alone bore the fault for disconnecting from her grandmother to the point where she forgot her. Engrossed in frivolous pursuits with friends, she neglected her presence, now aware of the limited time left to spend with her. Wiping their tears, they all hugged each other and slipped to the kitchen to start preparing for Christmas Eve. And the shock was that Celine's grandma, known as the best cook in the neighborhood and the chef that knew the way to everyone's heart, had no idea how to cook. Here, Celine knew it would never ever be the same. She started having flashbacks about how she used to gain infinite energy after tasting her grandma's food. So, she just helped her mother instead. She wasn't too happy about it, but her mom was too exhausted to finish all of the chores by herself.

When dinner was ready, Celine's mother asked her to call her grandma who was praying in her son's old room. Celine thought that she was praying in her own bedroom, so she went there. Entering the room, a familiar scent enveloped her, stirring memories that etched themselves indelibly in her mind. Her gaze fell upon the bed where her grandparents once slept, triggering a flood of poignant recollections. She recalled tender moments of herself nestled between them during family sleepovers, seeking refuge from childhood fears. Between their comforting presence, she found solace and security, cocooned in a haven of

warmth and love. Each memory unfolded like a cherished tapestry, woven with threads of nostalgia and profound emotion, painting a vivid portrait of familial bonds that transcended time and space. Driven by longing, Celine began to explore the closets, drawn to the familiar belongings that once belonged to her grandfather. As she sifted through garments and mementos, her fingers brushed against the fabric of cherished memories. Amidst the layers of clothing tucked away from sight, she stumbled upon a hidden box. Driven by a potent blend of curiosity and sorrow, Celine's fingers traced the edges of each photograph, each image a doorway to a bygone era. Beneath the images, dates and locations whispered tales of Lebanon's tumultuous past, drawing her deeper into the labyrinth of history. With each turn of the page, her thirst for understanding and connection grew stronger, fueled by the memories of her grandfather that flooded her mind. In the faded snapshots, she glimpsed moments of joy and sorrow, laughter and love, each one a cherished memory etched into the fabric of her being. Her grandfather's presence loomed large in the photographs, his face a familiar beacon amidst the swirling currents of time. As Celine lingered over each image, she longed for just one more conversation, one more chance to feel the warmth of her grandfather's embrace. Through the lens of the album, Lebanon's scars were laid bare, a testament to the resilience and hope that had sustained its people through the darkest of times. Continuing to delve further into the contents of the box, Celine stumbled upon a collection of love letters exchanged between her grandparents during the war, a poignant testament to their enduring love despite the challenges of separation. Their heartfelt words, penned in times of adversity, painted a picture of unwavering devotion and resilience. This stark contrast to modern relationships, often characterized by superficiality and materialism, underscored the depth and authenticity of their bond, serving as a poignant reminder of a love that transcends the constraints of time and circumstance. In the faces captured within its pages, Celine found echoes of her own story, a reminder of the strength that flowed through her veins, an inheritance passed down through generations.

While discovering that box, Celine's grandmother entered the room and sat behind Celine contemplating her, not knowing what she was doing, and unaware of what the box was. As they examined the delicate details, an inexplicable energy soared above them, spreading itself all over the room. Without any warning, they found themselves in a Lebanon different from their own. Celine closed her eyes, and took in a scent that she hadn't smelled before. But her grandma breathed in the cedar trees, filling her lungs with the oxygen that would revive her. With each inhalation, an echo of Lebanon's landscapes flew across her eyes, bearing her as a witness to Lebanon's serenity and prosperity. They took another breath, but the odor was a different one. They opened their eyes only to find themselves in bustling souks filled with vibrant colors where the air resonated with the scent of spices. The melody of merchants passionately haggled, creating a lively atmosphere that echoed the shared rhythm of the Lebanese society accompanied with laughter flowing through the narrow alleys replicating an atmosphere which reflects the joyous lives of the Lebanese. Celine took her grandma's hand, and they strolled through the timeless streets taking in the aroma of freshly baked bread wafted from bustling bakeries, humming to the distant sounds of music. As they reached the group of people singing and dancing, the painting of communal joy took its full form. The journey through the past revealed an interconnected society, where

diverse communities coexisted harmoniously. The familial bonds were palpable, with extended families gathering for feasts, sharing stories and traditions that transcended generations. Celine marveled at the resilience of a people who, despite facing challenges, found solace in unity and love for their homeland. The majestic landscapes of Lebanon unfolded before their eyes—the serene mountains, the azure Mediterranean, and the picturesque villages nestled among the hills. The simplicity of life was evident in every corner, where people took solace in the beauty of their surroundings, fostering a profound appreciation for the tranquility that characterized their existence. The joy that lit up Celine's face was indescribable as she embraced the opportunity to see her tour guide – her beloved grandfather! What stories he told, what beauty Lebanon had as he recounted tales of resilience and determination. He spoke of the profound unity that defined Lebanon, a unity that transcended religious and cultural differences, creating a mosaic of shared history and shared dreams. In this journey through time, Celine and her grandmother witnessed not only the external beauty of Lebanon but also the enduring spirit of its people. The button, now a conduit to the past, allowed them to relive moments of celebration, love, and camaraderie. It became a vessel for emotion, carrying the laughter of children playing in the streets, the warmth of family gatherings, and the indomitable spirit of a nation that had weathered storms. As they returned to the present, the room held the echoes of a bygone era, and the lessons learned in the past resonated in the hearts of Celine and her grandmother. The button, a talisman of shared memories and enduring bonds, served as a poignant reminder of the fragility of peace, the strength of unity, and the timeless beauty of a Lebanon that once thrived in harmony.

This bizarre box, now a cherished relic, held not only the power to traverse time but also the emotions, stories, and enduring spirit of the Lebanese people. The room regained its contemporary ambiance. Celine's heart swelled with a newfound appreciation for the heritage that shaped her identity. The bustling souks and vibrant alleys of old Lebanon lingered in her mind, inspiring a commitment to preserving the essence of a culture that had thrived through unity. The majestic landscapes of modern-day Lebanon, though touched by the changes of time, still echoed the timeless beauty witnessed during their journey. Celine found solace in the familiar sights of the serene mountains and the azure Mediterranean, realizing that the spirit of her ancestors lived on in the enduring landscape. These memories, once a conduit to the past, now served as a reminder of the fragility of time and the resilience embedded in the Lebanese spirit. With a renewed sense of purpose, Celine and her grandmother shared the tales of their journey with family during Christmas dinner, creating a bridge between generations and ensuring that the stories of old Lebanon would continue to thrive.

In the evenings, as they gathered for family dinners, the aroma of Lebanese dishes filled the air, linking the past with the present. Celine, armed with the wisdom gained from the journey, worked to preserve the traditions and values passed down through generations, keeping the legacy of unity and love that defined old Lebanon alive for herself and anyone willing to take them in.

The room, once a portal to the past, transformed into a sacred space where memories of both eras coexisted. The box, now displayed prominently, became a cherished artifact, a testament to the enduring bond between family, the strength found in unity, and the timeless beauty of a Lebanon that continued to thrive in the hearts and minds of those who called it home.

Taking the stage, the applause gradually subsided, and I wiped away my tears, preparing to share my story. "Hi, I'm Celine, and this is my story. As many of you may know about Alzheimer's disease, my grandmother is now in a state much like that of a paralyzed person. She can't walk, stand, or even eat without assistance. It's a painful journey to watch someone who was once so full of life become akin to a child, grappling with a world that's slipping away from her, day by day. And the cruelest part is that she has no memory. Every day, her condition worsens. Alzheimer is slowly stealing away her memories and her essence. Seeing her in this state brings tears to my eyes. She doesn't deserve this. Yet, even amidst this hardship, her will remains unbroken. She always dreamed of rebuilding Lebanon—the Lebanon of the past. A place characterized by unity, love, and collective effort for a better future. Striving to rebuild the Lebanon of her dreams, she lost her husband to Lebanese inconveniences. Yet her will, despite all the circumstances, fuels my determination. My plea to all of you is simple: cherish what you have now before it slips away. Listen to your grandparents. In their hands, they hold the key to the past Lebanon—the steps needed to rebuild it. Let's unite, hand in hand, with love, and work together to create a better Lebanon for us and the generations to come."