

Sultanieh

السلطانية

Danah Fakhreddine
دانة فخر الدين



For
Sultanieh, Lebanon

Acknowledgements

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Contents

Introduction / 1

Beit l Duwara / 6

Names / 8

Struggles / 10

Education / 12

Changes / 14

Death / 16

Spirits / 18

Religious Obligations / 20

Finish Your Food / 22

Men / 24

Good Deeds / 26

Water / 28

Hot Water / 30

Strong Women / 32

Wolf Attack / 34

“Sultaineh” / 36

Bombs / 38

All Kids Go to Heaven / 40

Destroyed and Rebuilt / 42

Celebration / 44

Epilogue / 46

Introduction

Upon a rugged mountain, a proud little village stands strong. Southern Lebanon has faced many hardships over the years due to the economy, water and electricity shortages, and war, but the village of Sultanieh has never fallen. The entrance into Sultanieh is discreet, easy to miss if the driver doesn't pay attention to the smaller roads branching off of the main Sultane road. Across from Sakka's cell phone store, one of these roads descends down the mountain and into Sultanieh.

As you walk down this road, you'll pass by many houses on both sides until you reach a fork in the road. On the right stands the Husseiniye, the village funeral home. That road will take you through a parking lot that belongs to the Baydar, a garden with a hookah café where young adults hang out. Special occasions such as graduation ceremonies or traveling markets are held in this parking lot, and the Baydar has a screen set up to watch the World Cup or popular television series during the month of Ramadan. Past the parking lot, the road narrows with the proximity of the surrounding houses until you reach Bashir's small grocery store. Here, the other fork comes back, and the road continues towards the Square café.

At the Husseiniye, the left fork takes you down past the village mosque to the cemetery. To the right, the road forks again; the right fork joins the original road at Bashir's, but the left fork goes down a newly paved road that descends deeper down the mountain, then loops and rises to pass by the village soccer field, and continues until it reaches the Square café where all the roads connect.

The Square café used to be really popular when it first opened, but then the Baydar opened and people preferred to go there because the garden has a nicer view than the white stone the Square is built on. Across from the Square is an old, gravelly basketball court, and to the right of the Square (if you are facing it) is a playground with colorful swings and slides. In the summer, during the daytime, this area is always filled. At night, the crowds go to the Baydar.

Back on the road, the path continues past this busy area and turns into what the villagers call "Tarek l Ein" (Road of the Well). It is called that because if you continue to take the road all the way down to the base of the mountain, then walk for hours, you will reach Ein l Zarka, a natural well where the villagers used to get their water before the village had plumbing. Now, people just walk up and down Tarek l Ein in the early evening for fun, chatting and catching up with any friends or family members they cross. Tarek l Ein is also littered with goat poop – small, perfectly round balls that crush softly beneath your feet – because the village goat herder's house is on this street and he brings his herd through every morning. At the end, the road forks three ways: to the right, the road leads up to Beit l Duwara, an abandoned house next to the water tower at the top of the mountain; straight down leads to Ein l Zarka; and to the left, the road leads down to Sultanieh's wilderness. If you go down this last path, you'll pass by a formation of rocks on your right as the road begins to steepen. My friends and I sit here for hours, enjoying the cool mountain breeze, talking, reflecting, and staring at the picturesque mountains in the distance. We spend our time here picking patches of trees in the distance to have our next picnics, or pinpointing mountains that we want to explore next. On these rocks, it feels as if the village is completely ours.

I was motivated to write about Sultanieh because nothing has been documented about this village other than some poetry from my grandfather and my uncle. Google doesn't even know about Sultanieh. I wasn't born there and I have only visited in the summer, but those trips alone illuminated the richness of this land and earned a permanent place in my heart. As a bicultural individual, I found a place that embraces the side of me that is missing here in America. Throughout these entries, I hope to illustrate a different and interesting location, adding vibrant life to the Middle Eastern culture that tends to be portrayed negatively in American media. Every house, every road, every rock, and every person that belongs to this village holds a unique story worth telling.

Welcome to Sultanieh.



Beit l Duwara

A Jewish princess ran away from her father's castle. She ran towards a small village called "The Jewish" where both Christians and Jews lived. By the time the princess arrived, she was Christian. She came with money and her servants and built a castle at the top of the tallest mountain. Some say she still resides there and watches over the village.

There is an abandoned house at the top of the tallest mountain in Sultanieh. The village elders call this house "Beit l Duwara" and the mountain is referred to as the mountain of Beit l Duwara. Construction on the house was never completed because war with Israel broke out in 2006 and the owners never returned, so now, this site is a hiking and exploration destination for the teenagers of the village.

In the summer of 2009, my friends and I hiked up to Beit l Duwara. We climbed up onto the wobbly stone roof of the unfinished house and started dancing dabke, a popular Lebanese dance that involves holding hands and stomping to music in a certain pattern. Then, we sat on the edge, legs dangling, and watched the sun blanket the village in its setting rays as we tossed rocks at the world below.

Names

علي و دانة
فخر الدين حسن فخر الدين

- العبدو إن أرضت فعاله ربه
كافاه عن تلك الفعال ودانه (1)
فكأنما ارضيت ربك مؤمنا
فحبك طفليك العلي ودانه (2)
هذاك أتمن درة مكنونة
ولأخته أعلى النفااس دانه (3)
فاجعلهما عبدي إلهك في التقى
قد فاز من رب البرية دانه (4)
فاقرضه قرضا تلقه يوم اللقا
ما ضاع عبد ربه قد دانه (5)

-
- (1) دانه : أعاد له الدين على فعاله.
(2) دانه : اسم البنت.
(3) دانه : حبة الجمان أو اللؤلؤ.
(4) دانه : جازاه و كافاه.
(5) دانه : أعزه.

Translation:

Ali and Danah

If you'll be good and please your God, he will reward you with good deeds.

It looks like you (Mohamad) have done that, so he rewarded you with two kids, Ali and Danah.

Ali is a real precious jewel, and even more so is his sister Danah.

May God make them good people, and whoever pleases him is a winner.

Lend your God good deeds, you will find them when you need them.

**This poem is written to Mohamad, Ali and Danah's father. The clever aspect of this poem is that at the end of each line, the author uses the same word دانه but each time, it has a different meaning. The Arabic language has the ability to do that frequently.*

Since the village is so small and hidden away, everyone who lives there is related somehow. People are identified immediately by their last names, and most of the villagers fall under the popular names like Fakhreddine, Yassine, Sakka, Saleh, Meselmeni, and Abbani. However, few of these names are originally from the Sultanieh area. “Fakhreddine” is originally from a city in northern Lebanon called “Baalbeck,” “Sakka” is originally from Palestine, and “Abbani” is originally from another village called Abba.

Every day, I would visit my grandmother after breakfast and she would ask me the same questions: “Have you met anyone yet? Who are these friends you keep hanging out with?” Just by their last names, she would know their parents and determine for me if they were good friends. I would list them to her: Mohamad Fakhreddine, Aline Yassine, Hussein Abbani, Laura Meselmeni, Ali Saleh, but she stopped me at Ali Karaki. “Karaki? That name isn’t from the village. What’s his mom’s maiden name?” “Saleh.” “Oh! Wafak? I know her, they’re good boys. I don’t know that last name though, their dad must not be from the village.”

Struggles

احذروا موتنا في الجنوب
جودت فخرالدين

حين تدهمنا الطائرات،
نحاول ألا نخاف،
و نجهد أن لا تفارقنا غبطة الشجر المتأهب للإخضرار،
نحاول أن نشبه العشب في الشوق و الإنحاء،
تقولين : نأتي من القصف،
نأتي من الخوف،
أو من عواء الصدى.

Translation:

Beware of our Death in the South

*While the aircraft attack us,
Try not to be afraid,
And strive not to leave the tree's embrace, who are prepared for greenness,
We are trying to be like the grass as it looks forward and bows,
You say: We come from the bombing,
We come from fear,
Or an echo's howl.*

Many smaller villages surround Sultanieh, but the closest one, Tibnen, is significantly larger than its neighbors. When the Lebanese government wanted to build an electricity tower for Tibnen (the specific date isn't documented), there was no room to host it there (despite its size), so Sultanieh offered a piece of land to host this electricity tower as long as Sultanieh could use it as well. This was agreed upon. However, when the electricity tower was built and running, the electricity went to about ten different villages, and Sultanieh wasn't one of them.

One of our favorite hangouts was the newly built soccer field. We'd go there at night and play in the poorly lit field, or just lay on the turf and talk. We could only go to this field every other evening though because Sultanieh and Tibnen take turns having electricity at night. On one of the dark nights, we decided to go to the field anyway and hang out, under the moonlight. That night, we laughed the most we had ever laughed. At one point, one of the girls got tired and asked what time it was; none of us knew because our phones were dead – the electricity hadn't come all day.

Education

عيد المعلم
فخر الدين حسن فخر الدين

أي عيد صداه ملء الثغور
يتسامى مضمخا بالعبير
أرسلته الأجيال زورق مجد
سابحا فوق لجة من عطور
هو عيد يمجّد البذل فيه
و نقا الخلق في المرابي القدير
هو عيد النفوس تزخر بالخبي
ر عميما وبالعطاء الوفير
انت يا باعث الحروف حياة
تتجلى فضيلة في الصدور
انت من يسلخ الضياء من عيون
ساهرات على سواد السطور
ليشع الضياء فوق دروب
سار فيها الظلام كل مسير

Translation:

Teacher's Day

*What a day echoes with smiling faces and rich, sensory air
It has been like a lifesaving boat for generations, floating over a sea of perfume
It's an occasion glorifying giving and good manner in the great teacher
It's a celebration for all good things and great giving
You (the teacher) make life from letters that live in the heart
You pull the light from the eyes that stay up studying the black printed lines
To shine the light over roads that have always been dark*

If you are at the graveyard and take the road that leads up to the Sultane, you will pass a tiny, single-room school on your left. This is the only school building in all of Sultanieh, and it is not in session anymore. It was built in the 1950s by the Lebanese government solely for the children of Sultanieh. A young man in his twenties named Fakhreddine Hassan Fakhreddine (my *Jiddo*, grandfather) applied for and got the job. He monitored the building of this school, was the boss, and became one of the most popular professors when it was well established. Students from other villages would come to this school just to be taught by him – his reputation was outstanding. When many other villages started building their own schools, Fakhreddine retired, taking the school's reputation with him, so the students stopped coming. The school is empty now, but it still stands there holding his memory. (He passed away in 2010)

My friends and I were playing billiards at a small place on the Sultane, and as we were walking back to the road that goes down to Sultanieh, we passed by a small school building. I stopped my cousin to ask her, "Isn't this where *Jiddo* used to teach?" "Yeah." "Man, it's so small." The whole building was just one classroom, the size of an average master bedroom, and there were about twenty desks inside, all dusty. "When was the last time they used this building?" "I don't know, I think they stopped when *Jiddo* stopped teaching." "Let's go ask him, he's probably sitting in the garden right now." "Nah, I don't want a lesson right now." "Okay fine, I'll ask him tomorrow morning after breakfast."

Changes

Some of the teenagers in the village claim that the Jewish-turned-Christian princess' castle on the mountain of Beit l Duwara turned into a pub over the years. They would go up there at night to party and drink, to the extreme displeasure of the religious elders in the village. They would always cause so much noise that every night, someone had to go up there and tell them to be quiet, or else they would keep the noise going until morning.

The Baydar used to be just a large field of grass, but this field of grass was the most popular place to hang out in the village. On eventful days, the field was used as a soccer field and teams from other villages would come to challenge Sultanieh. Everyone would come out and cheer. On non-soccer days, children and teens and adults, everyone, would come out during the cool, early evening air and walk, talk, and smoke hookah together. The Baydar still has that same social feel, but the grass field isn't there anymore; the Baydar is now a roughly paved parking lot and a small garden with Café Hadi catering to anybody's hookah and/or refreshment desires. The government built a new soccer field with turf and lights and a fence (which has multiple holes in it now) for Sultanieh around 2005, and neighboring villages still come to play against Sultanieh, participating in mini competition series for a fake gold cup.

Arabs love soccer, especially Lebanese Arabs. During the 2014 World Cup, celebrations could be heard outside after every match, especially after Brazil or Germany or Argentina played (I'm still not sure why the Lebanese crowd feverishly supported those countries specifically). For the finale, Hadi set up a screen in the Baydar and everyone in the village came out to watch. There was a row of young males wearing Argentina jerseys sitting right in front of the screen, ready to stand up and yell in celebration or anger whenever the referee made a call. When the game ended and Germany won, a crowd of people gathered in the back started dancing and singing while fireworks lit up the sky from the neighboring village. The row of Argentinian fans left the café quietly. A few weeks later, the Lebanese national soccer team came to Sultanieh to challenge our players. It felt like the whole village was down there cheering on the team – I could barely see the field over the crowd.



The Baydar before and after.

Death

If you jump on one leg, a family member or someone close to your family will die. Some take this very seriously – others believe that it was a myth started by a parent who was annoyed at his hyper kid.

The mosque in Sultanieh broadcasts through its tower speaker when it is time to pray, when an important event is coming up, and the anniversary of a village member's death. Since this village is so small and everybody is familiar with each other in some way, whenever this last broadcast goes out, many go to the graveyard to visit their lost villager.

My maternal grandfather passed away from colon cancer on my brother Adam's 3rd birthday, on August 6, 2008. On August 6, 2009, we were in the village celebrating his fourth birthday, singing and smiling and eating cake. Through the celebration, I could hear the mosque outside saying to the village the name "Ali Abbani" along with some other words I couldn't make out. After all the kids had eaten their cake and run off to release their energy outside, my mother and I walked in the setting sun to the graveyard to visit her father.

Spirits

A woman dressed in white is known to appear in public places around the village. Her name is Salha, which means “good.” Those who believe she is an angel say they see her in the children’s playground during the daytime, watching over the children, then walking them home. Those who believe she is a ghost say they see her at night, on the roofs of houses, silently watching over everyone.

Most people in the Middle East believe in the curse of the evil eye. This curse is cast on a person by a malevolent glare when that person is unaware. Receiving the evil eye is believed to cause misfortune or injury. Charms and decorations with eye-like symbols are worn to repel the evil eye, and the charms themselves are commonly referred to as “evil eyes.” If the charm’s necklace or bracelet breaks, it is bad luck to fix it and keep wearing it – throw it out and get a new charm.

Friday nights are holy nights in the religion of Islam. The religion also says that playing card games is sinful. However, very few follow that restriction so playing cards remains a popular activity in the village. My friends and I were playing the card game Trix in my friend’s garden on a Friday night when a loud noise from the unfinished second floor of the stone house cut through the air. The entrance gate was still closed. Our village didn’t have electricity that night, we were playing under a battery light, so we stopped the game and went inside, nervous and frightened that a *Jinn* (ghost) had come after us. We learned the next day that it was just a dog.



Religious Obligations

Don't eat with your left hand. Recite the verse from the Quran, "Bismillah al Rahman al Raheem," before you eat. If you don't follow these rules, you are eating with the devil. There was a boy once who refused to say this phrase, ignoring his mother's insistence. He choked on every bite that meal.

Every Thursday night, a *duaa* (passage) is read from the Quran to worship Allah, and this recital is broadcasted to the village from the mosque tower. Out of religious respect, most of the people hold out on their nightly entertainment activities until the *duaa* reading is over. Then, on Fridays, the mosque calls upon all the villagers to come and join their mass midday prayer.

Some of my Lebanese friends do not speak English very well, translating certain phrases in the most ridiculous ways. One night when we were walking back from having dinner on the Sultane, we started shushing each other to be quiet as we were passing the graveyard. You are supposed to recite *al-fatha* (the first chapter in the Quran; al-fatha also means "the opening") every time you pass a graveyard to keep the spirits at rest. When we began to quiet down, Ali decided to remind us what we have to do in English. "Come on guys, let's recite *the open*," and he opened his arms wide to emphasis his translation. No one could stay serious after that – we kept laughing and making fun of him until the graveyard was far behind us.

Finish Your Food

Angels hold up your tray of food when you are eating and they won't leave until you finish all of the food. They are good angels, they won't harm you, but you don't want to make them wait. Whatever food you don't finish during your life, you will have to pick it up with your eyelashes on judgment day.

Abou Jamil was known around the village as being a very big man with a very big appetite. His whole family was coming in from Beirut one evening to have dinner with him, so his wife had prepared a meal of 60 stuffed zucchinis. The family arrived and right when they sat down at the dinner table to eat, the electricity went out. They conversed in the dark while they waited for it to come back, and when it finally did, all of the zucchinis were gone. Abou Jamil turned and asked his wife with a mouth full of food, "where's the meal?"

"You're so skinny, eat, eat!" My grandmother would always shout this at me every time I sat down to eat a meal with her. She would also say that to my cousins, my aunts and uncles, and anybody that was sitting next to her, even if they were the largest person and really wanted to lose weight. To her, everyone should always be eating. Whenever my friends and I would go on picnics, we always made too much food and could never finish it all, but my cousin and I never missed the opportunity to look at each other and say in our grandmother's voice, "eat, eat the rest of those fries, you're too skinny!"

Men

Batah was a dog that served as the village police. He would take care of all matters regarding the villagers' safety, for example, he wouldn't let any foreigners in and he would always walk people home late at night. He was regarded as a hero. One day, he got hit by a car when he was crossing the Sultane to get medicine for someone. The villagers wrote a poem for him to honor his death.

In Islam, a man is allowed to be married to four women at once as long as he can support each of them equally. It is also written in the Quran that the man should inherit twice as much as the women because he is the provider for the family.

When my friends and I were around 15 years old, we found a small, dark green snake in the dark. He looked so harmless, so I was really calm when I called to the guys and pointed their attention to the snake. Their reaction wasn't so calm – they pulled me and the other girls back, away from the snake, and said the men would take care of it. They took care of it by throwing rocks at his head until it died, then held him up on a stick like spaghetti and flung him in the air.

Good Deeds

There is a saying in Arabic that says: "Do good, then throw it in the ocean." A man with a steady job walked past a homeless man one night. He was feeling kind, so he took the homeless man to his house and provided him with a place to sleep, shower, eat, and feel safe. And then the man threw the homeless guy into the ocean.

The Arab culture demands respect for elders. There are nursing homes available in Lebanon, but most of them are understaffed and unoccupied. Instead, most of the elderly prefer to stay in their own homes with a maid. The majority of maids in Lebanon come from the Philippines, Africa, or Bangladesh, and speak either English or Arabic. These maids are supposed to be like another family member, caring for the elderly person like a child cares for his/her parents, but because there are so many stories of maids robbing their owners and then fleeing, they are not trusted.

Every time I go to Lebanon, I put away my American SIM card and buy a Lebanese line for the summer. It was mid-July when my mother called me from America and asked me where my SIM card was. I told her it was in my purse, that I hadn't touched it since I landed in Lebanon in May. She informed me that the T-Mobile bill had come to the house and there was \$900 charged to it from my number. She said she knew it wasn't from me because all of the phone calls were made to Bangladesh. The maid had stolen my card from my bag. I slept with my purse every night after that until my other grandma came to the village, then I left and moved in with her.

Water

Miss Red Teeth lives next door and she is always looking for children. If children are being excessive and ungrateful, their parents will threaten to lock their kids outside and call her name. There was a boy who loved to take long showers. He had emptied the water closet in his house twice already by doing this, and his parents warned him against doing it again. When the boy was in the shower later that week and there wasn't enough water for the dad to flush the toilet, the dad went out to call Miss Red Teeth.

Before every house had its own water closet and indoor plumbing, the villagers would embark on a long journey to a natural spring known as *Ein l Zarka*. They would ride donkeys down the mountain and carry metal gallons and homemade clay containers to carry the water. Sometimes, these clay containers would fall from their hands and break, canceling the whole trip. The water from this spring was drinking water. If the villagers wanted water to wash dishes or clothes, they would go to a natural pool in the middle of the village. The ground here resembled a mini valley and water would gather from the winter season and stay all year round. Over time though, the city built a water tower and extended pipes to houses so everyone had their individual water barrels. The village pool wasn't used much anymore, so they cemented over it. It is now a basketball court.

On a hot summer day, my friends and I changed into clothes we didn't care for and gathered plastic bottles. We hiked with these bottles down the mountain for over an hour. When we finally reached *Ein l Zarka*, my friends grabbed my arms and held me still, filled up the water gallons, and soaked me. I got my revenge though, and we had a water fight until the sun started to set. We walked back to the village with pruned fingers and shivering bodies. The shivering continued when I was showering in cold water, the only kind available, for five minutes only because then, my grandma started yelling at me to hurry up and stop wasting water.



Hot Water

Don't throw hot water down the drain at night. The village Jinn lives down there, and if you dump hot water and burn his head while he's sleeping, very bad things will happen. A maid once slipped and broke her arm while she was mopping the floors at night.

The village elders have an old practice of finding out who robbed your house after a burglary. If you leave lead in hot water for a while, it will start to take the shape of the robber.

Every time I would turn on the water heater, all of the electricity in the house would turn off. If I wanted to take a shower with hot water at my grandmother's house, I had to wait until the sun warmed the water closet on the roof of the house. Then, the cold faucet would bring down boiling hot water.

Strong Women

Many people are afraid to get water from the Jinn's well. There was an old lady that wasn't afraid of him though, and she would only go to that well. Whenever the Jinn would rise from the water to scare her away, she would hit him and make him go back down. She was the only person in the village brave enough to interact with him. She would scold him like a mother scolds a child.

Badr Al Naam was my father's grandmother, and she was known as the strongest woman in the village. Whenever she was angry at somebody, that person didn't dare walk past her house – he or she went around and took a longer way home. However, when someone was in her good favor, he or she could ask her for anything; soon-to-be brides would come to her house and borrow her jewelry for their wedding.

Arabs are very loud people, especially elderly women. They yell at their kids, their friends, or just random people walking by, and it's always confusing whether their words come from anger or love. When I was visiting my maternal grandmother and her siblings in the summer of 2009, I tripped and fell in the grass as I was walking towards them. She and her siblings started yelling and making hand gestures at me all at once, making it hard to focus on what they were saying, but I remember my grandma calling me *habibte* (a term of endearment) and blowing me a kiss before she turned back to her siblings and resumed the previous conversation. I said "hi" to all of them and shook their hands and kissed their cheeks, then turned away and left.

Wolf Attack

Hyenas and wolves can manipulate you with their urine. If you touch it, you fall under their spell and they'll come back to drag you to their cave and eat you. If it hasn't rained in the village, avoid stepping in any puddles.

The religious goat herder of the village has an old practice he does to protect his goats from any wolves or hyenas. He prays on a folded knife and places it in front of the gate. As long as the knife stays closed, the goats are safe.

No one remembers how this started, but our friend Abbani is always referred to as a dog. Whenever we hear barking or howling outside, we yell at Abbani to shut up, or if he's not with us, we just yell into the night, "Abbani, shut up, you're annoying us!" During the 2014 world cup, we were watching one of the matches at Hussein's house, but we kept getting distracted by wolves howling in the distance. Abbani wasn't with us, he was in Beirut, so Hussein texted him and told him to shut up and let us focus on the game; Abbani replied back cussing us all out.

“Sultanieh”

A spirit named “La Misas” stands guard at night to the entrance of the Sultanieh graveyard. The spirit keeps repeating its own name, over and over, luring you towards him, but if you reach out and touch him, he will hurt you.

Sultanieh is now a Muslim community, but it used to be called “The Jewish” because of a lady who lived and owned a water station on the main road. She was the only Jew in the village. Whenever the villagers would go to her for water, they would say they were going to “The Jew.” Everybody knew her and visited her for water, and eventually, the village became known as “The Jewish.” The name changed around the early 1950s when the lady left and the village became mostly Muslim. The Muslims requested that the village name change, so they started calling the village “Sultanieh,” which was derived from the name of the Sultane road. The word *sultan* also means king in Arabic.

The Baydar is the most popular place to hang out in the village on a daily basis – the garden, café, and parking lot are always filled. Located right in the center of Sultanieh, this area is also used for special occasions. On those days, a stage is built in the parking area and appropriate decorations are placed around the stage. In the summer of 2001, the Baydar was decorated and transformed for an event in memory of the soldiers who had fallen to Israel. Sultanieh is very small, but its people are strong and proud. There was a live band that night that kept singing a song celebrating the village, the chorus repeatedly chanting “Sultanieh... Sultanieh...”

Bombs

At the end of Tarek l Eien, the road descends to the base of the mountain and fades into the wilderness. Howling can be heard at night from wild animals, and children are told that ghosts also live down there that howl even louder than the wolves. They are also told that they should not go down there alone because they might disturb the ghosts and bring bad luck onto themselves and their family.

The aftermath of the 2006 war with Israel left tiny bombs all over Lebanon. They are slowly found day by day by people who, unfortunately, come in contact with them. Hassan Kdouh, my mother's cousin, unknowingly stepped on one. He fell in a coma for weeks before he passed away. The elders always warn adventurous teens not to go to the base of the mountain because there are many bombs there, still hidden.



Once the road starts getting really steep near the end of Tarek l Eien, there is a formation of rocks on the right. My friends and I go sit there because the winds are cool and active, and the view of the mountains in the distance is breathtaking. We always look at the neighboring mountains and villages and imagine exploring new areas. One day, we did. We hiked down the mountain and up the neighboring one into that village. We got lost and started to worry because we heard the call to evening prayer from our village, and the sun was setting and the wolves were beginning to howl. We gave up on finding a path back and sat on the edge of the road, slid down on our bottoms, and hiked up the other side with tired bodies, mud-stained clothes, and bitterly amused expressions. When I got home and excitedly told my mother about the days' adventure, she yelled at me for going down there, telling me how it wasn't safe and asking the question I always answer smartly to, "What if you guys had found a bomb?"



All Kids Go to Heaven

A mother cries for the loss of her child – that’s expected – but that child sheds no tears and instead tells God to bring the mother to him/her. Little children always go to Heaven and take their mothers with them.

After the 2006 war, the village was destroyed. There were crumbled houses everywhere and the village playground needed to be checked for bombs. One young boy, unnoticed, went in alone one afternoon and started playing in the sandbox. He came across a bomb that exploded on contact. Israel hadn’t really left Lebanon.

The day after the holy month of Ramadan is Eid, our celebration day. It is like the Muslim version of Christmas. Those that have lost loved ones usually come to the graveyard and decorate headstones for the occasion. At the end of July 2014, I was visiting my late grandfather to bestow my Eid prayers to him, and I glanced over and saw my mother’s aunt and uncle cleaning their son’s grave. They were decorating it with bright colors and talking to his picture about what’s been happening in their lives since he left.



Destroyed and Rebuilt

Frogs are defenseless, innocent creatures. If you step on one and kill it, its spirit will be lost at first and wander, but then it will come back to throw you into the pool of Kawneen. This pool is full of Jinns that will haunt and torture you forever.

The 2006 Lebanon-Israeli war destroyed many houses in the village. A house that used to hold a family and their market still lays in pieces just below the mosque. The siblings have scattered off to live with various relatives, but nobody has stepped into the old home since the war because there are rumored to still be a few undiscovered bombs there.

In the summer of 2014, my aunt was determined to build a house. My grandmother had plenty of room at her own house to host her children, but my aunt wanted a house for herself, even though she also lives alone. She would spend countless days driving around the village, dragging me along to look at various designs and decorations. The engineer working with her on the layout would come to my grandmother's house late at night to discuss the blueprint. Once the map was finally agreed on, construction began on the land my aunt owned, at the top of a mountain with a gorgeous view overlooking the entire village below.



Celebration

The Jinn's wedding was a village-wide event, but not everyone was invited. The loud music could be heard all over the village and whenever people started dancing dabke, the stomping sounds made any outsider jealous not to be included. You could also see spirits flying into the air in celebration. Then, the music died down and the guests started singing in unison. The words were unclear and easily forgotten, but the phrase "misso misso" was repeated during the chorus, and every outside listener started repeating those two words.

Every year, the Baydar pulls out a stage and Sultanieh hosts a ceremony for graduates of any grade or age; anyone that wants to be honored will be honored. There is always music, lights, dancing, and a supportive crowd full of friends and family.

We were sitting in the Baydar one night, smoking hookah and talking, when we heard loud dance music coming from somewhere close by. "That must be the wedding Kasfe said he was going to." "He said it was open to everyone, do you want to check it out?" "Yeah, let's go." When we got there, the crowd was holding hands and dancing dabke, so my friends jumped right in and stomped along while I clapped and took videos. Afterwards in the Baydar, the celebration seemed to continue with a child who let off firecrackers from the recent Eid celebration. His mom came out soon though, scolded him, and dragged him back to bed.

Epilogue

Most of the year, Sultanieh is empty. Many of us live outside of Lebanon now, in areas such as America, France, and Brazil, where getting a good education and finding a decent job isn't so difficult. During the summer though, the village never sleeps. Whenever Lebanon is not in turmoil, all of us try to come back and spend our summer months in our beloved village.

The new road that forks off near the mosque and passes the soccer field was built for convenience purposes, to create a shorter walkway to the soccer field and enjoy the view of the neighboring villages along the way. However, people have started to buy land and built houses along this road. Electricity poles are appearing and the wire between the poles interrupts the view. People are also buying land at the end of *Tarek l Ein*, and a house is actually currently under construction right next to the rocks.

This shows that even though most of the villagers are gone, we all plan to come back eventually – all of these new houses are being built for retirement purposes. This is my dad's plan, and my uncle's plan, and my best friend's plan. My mother is going to Lebanon this summer to meet with an engineer and create a map for our future home. My grandmother has spent her whole life in the village, traveling to Beirut only in the winter when it gets too cold. When my grandfather passed away from colon cancer in 2008, he was in California, but his body was brought back to Sultanieh to be buried because we wouldn't want to rest eternally anywhere else. Sultanieh is such a small, simple place, unfamiliar to outsiders and unknown to the Internet, but every mountain, every turn in the road, every home, and every villager holds a story full of memories and emotions that will never fade.



The new road.