

## The Hidden Garden of Beirut



Tony had always been a man of routine. For forty years, he had risen with the sun, dressed in his neatly pressed suit, and made his way to the office where he spent his days crunching numbers and navigating the intricate world of finance. He had spent his life working diligently, climbing the corporate ladder, and providing for his family. Now, at the threshold of retirement, he found himself facing an unexpected void. The routine that had defined his days for decades was suddenly gone, leaving behind an unsettling emptiness. The retirement had arrived like an unwelcome guest, disrupting the rhythm of his life, and leaving him adrift in a sea of uncertainty.

The first few days of retirement had passed in a blur of disorientation and restlessness. Tony found himself waking up at his usual time, only to realize that there was no office to rush to, no meetings to attend, no reports to review. The silence of the house seemed to echo with the absence of purpose, and he felt a gnawing emptiness settle into the pit of his stomach.

Hanane, his wife of forty-seven years, watched with growing concern as her husband Tony withdrew into himself. The light in his eyes dimmed, replaced by a shadow of sadness that seemed to deepen with each passing day.

Tony sat at the kitchen table, staring blankly at the morning sun filtering through the curtains. Another day stretched out before him, empty and daunting. Retirement had arrived like an unwelcome guest, stealing away the purpose and routine that had defined his life for decades.

At first, he tried to fill the void with different activities—gardening, reading, even attempting to learn a new language. But the emptiness persisted, a silent specter haunting the corners of his mind.

Each morning, he would wake with a heavy heart, the specter of suicide whispering its dark allure. He kept these thoughts hidden, buried beneath the facade of routine for fear of worrying his beloved wife, Hanane.

His wife, Hanane, moved around the kitchen, the clinking of dishes a distant echo in Tony's ears. She glanced at him; concern etched into the lines of her face. She had noticed the change in him, the heaviness that seemed to weigh him down like a leaden cloak.

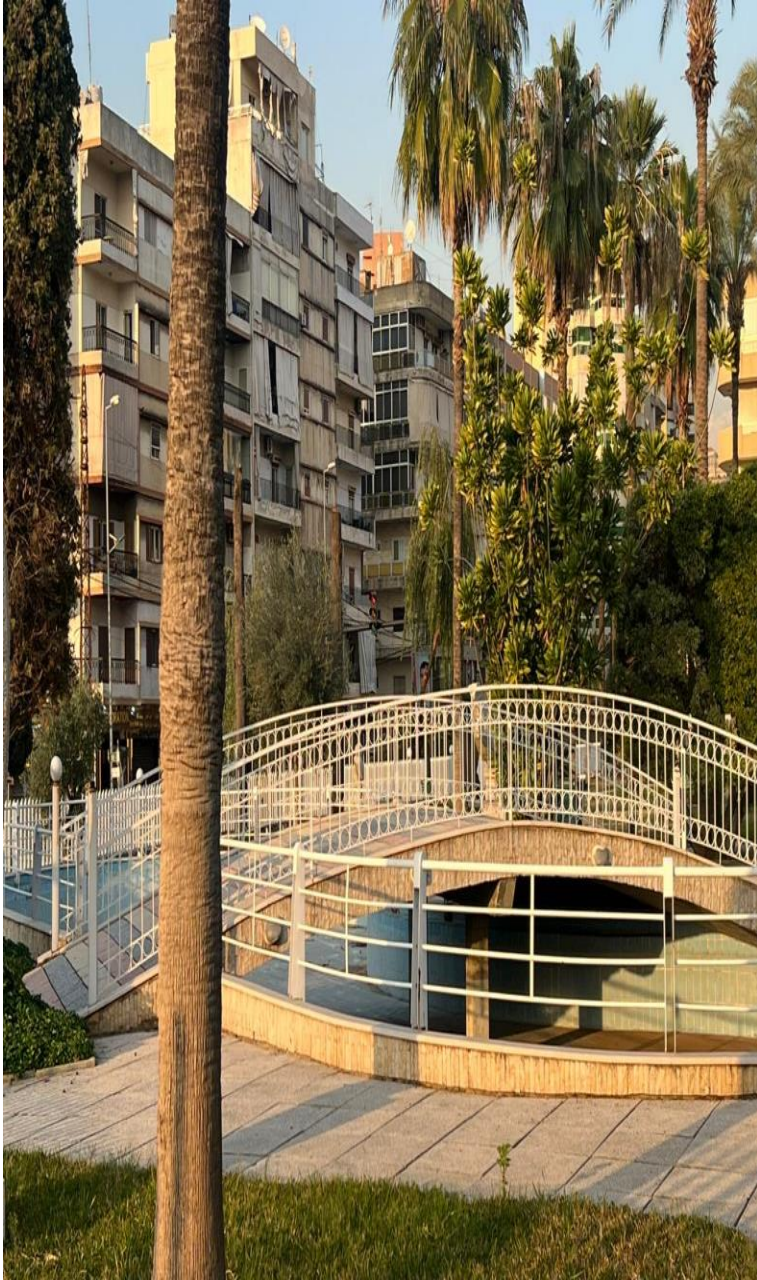
"Tony," Hanane said softly, placing a cup of steaming tea in front of him. "Is everything alright my love?"

Tony looked up, meeting her gaze for a moment before dropping his eyes back to the table. How could he burden her with the darkness that consumed him?

"I'm fine, Hanane," he muttered, forcing a smile that felt brittle on his lips.

But Hanane was not convinced at all. She could see the shadows lurking behind his eyes, the emptiness that seemed to swallow him whole.

"Tony, please," Hanane said, her voice gentle but firm. "Talk to me. I can't bear to see you like this anymore."



Tony sighed, the weight of his despair settling heavily upon him. How could he put into words the overwhelming sense of emptiness that gripped his heart?

“I don’t know what to do with myself, Hanane,” he finally admitted, his voice barely a whisper. “Retirement... it feels like I’ve lost everything. I’ve lost myself. Like I don’t know who I am anymore.”

Tears welled up in Hanane’s eyes as she reached across the table, taking his hand in hers. “You haven’t lost me, Tony. You are still the man I fell in love with, Tony. You are still the man who worked tirelessly to provide for our family, the man who made me laugh, the man who held me close on cold winter nights.”

Tears welled up in Tony’s eyes as he looked at his wife Hanane, her face etched with concern and love. How

had he become so lost, so disconnected from the world around him?

“I just... I don’t know what to do with myself,” he admitted, the weight of his words hanging heavy in the air.

Hanane squeezed his hand gently, looked at him with love and said: “We’ll figure it out together, my love. I promise we will figure it out together. We always have.”

And so, they began to navigate this uncharted territory together. They began to search for a lifeline amidst the sea of despair that threatened to drown Tony. They tried new different hobbies—painting, gardening, even cooking classes, went on short trips, visiting old friends, visiting their family—but nothing seemed to bring Tony the sense of fulfillment he so desperately sought, nothing seemed to fill the void that had opened inside him.

One day, as they sat together as usual at the kitchen table, sipping their morning coffee in silence, Hanane spoke up. “Tony my love, I was thinking... what if we visit a new place? Maybe a change of scenery would do us good. Let us try, maybe it will help us.”

Tony looked up, a spark of interest igniting in his eyes. “A new place? What do you mean? I don’t know, maybe. Where would we go? Tell me.”

Hanane smiled, her eyes twinkling with mischief. “What about going to Jdeideh garden? We haven’t been there in years, and I’ve heard the place has changed so much since then. We should go and try, maybe this will help both of us.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, Hanane, my love.” Tony said, a faint smile playing at the corners of his lips. “Let’s go back. Let’s go to Jdeideh garden.”

As they stepped through the wrought iron gates, Tony felt a sense of calm wash over him. The garden was a sanctuary of green, a refuge from the noise and chaos of the city outside.

Inside the garden, they were greeted by a symphony of colors and scents. Lush greenery surrounded them, with winding paths leading to hidden corners and secluded benches.

The air was heavy with the perfume of blooming flowers—jasmine and roses.

The sound of trickling water from a nearby fountain filled the air, creating a soothing melody that seemed to lull the soul into a state of peaceful contemplation.

Ancient trees stood tall and majestic, their branches reaching towards the sky as if in silent prayer. Shafts of golden sunlight filtered through the leaves, casting dappled patterns on the winding paths below.

Stone benches dotted the landscape, nestled beneath the shade of towering trees, or tucked away in secluded alcoves. Here, visitors could pause to rest and reflect, surrounded by the soothing sounds of nature.

Birds flitted among the branches, their melodious songs adding to the symphony of nature. Butterflies danced on the breeze, their colorful wings a fleeting flash of beauty against the verdant backdrop.

Here and there, statues and sculptures peeked out from behind verdant foliage, adding a touch of whimsy and artistry to the garden's natural beauty.

It was a place of serenity and tranquility, a sanctuary amidst the chaos of the city. In the heart of Beirut, this garden was heaven on earth and a space to rediscover the simple joys of life.

In this tranquil oasis, time seemed to stand still. The worries and cares of the world melted away, replaced by a sense of peace and contentment. The garden was a place of magic. It was like a dream.

"It's just as beautiful place, like a dream," Hanane said, her voice soft with nostalgia. "I love this place."

Tont nodded, a lump forming in his throat. "Yes, it is."

They wandered hand in hand along winding paths, the scent of blooming flowers filling the air. Tony felt the weight on his shoulders begin to lift as memories of happier times flooded back.

They found a quiet bench beneath the shade of an ancient tree, and as they sat, they began to speak of days long past. Stories spilled forth, painting vivid pictures of their youth, of love blossoming amidst the chaos of a city torn by history.

In that moment, surrounded by the beauty of the garden and the warmth of Hanane's presence, Tony felt a flicker of something long dormant within him. It

was a sense of peace, of contentment, of being exactly where he was meant to be.

With each visit, they discovered new corners of the garden, each one holding a piece of Beirut's history.

As they continued to visit the garden, they began to meet other regulars—fellow retirees, young couples in love, families with children running wild. Each encounter brought a new spark of joy to Tony's heart.

One day, they struck up a conversation with an elderly couple who had been coming to the garden for years. They shared stories of Beirut in its glory days, of bustling souks and lively cafes, of friendships forged in the crucible of war.

Tony found himself enthralled by their tales, a sense of nostalgia washing over him. He realized that Beirut was more than just a city—it was a living, breathing entity, pulsing with history and culture.

As the sun began to set, casting a golden glow over the garden, Tony realized that he was no longer consumed by thoughts of despair. The idea of suicide, which had once loomed large in his mind, now seemed like a distant memory.

He looked at his lovely wife, Hanane, her face illuminated by the fading light, and felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude wash over him. She had been his rock, his anchor, his reason to keep going when all seemed lost.

“Hanane darling,” Tony said, his voice filled with emotion. “I want to thank you for bringing me here. This garden, this place, this heaven on earth... they have given me a new lease on life.”



In the days that followed, Tony and Hanane returned often to the Garden. They met new friends, fellow travelers on the path of life, each with their own stories to tell. They laughed and shared meals, their hearts lightened by the simple joy of human connection.

As the days turned into weeks, Tony and Hanane found themselves immersed in the life of the garden. They tended to its flowers, sat in quiet contemplation by its tranquil ponds, and shared stories with newfound friends.

With each visit to the garden, Tony felt himself coming back to life. The darkness that had threatened to consume him began to recede, replaced by a newfound sense of purpose. The garden became a sanctuary, a place of healing and renewal. And as the seasons turned, he found himself embracing the beauty of the present, no longer haunted by the shadows of the past.

One afternoon, as they sat watching the sun set over the city skyline, Tony took Hanane's hand in his.

"I never thought I would find peace again," he said, his voice filled with wonder. "I was lost, Hanane," he said, his voice filled with emotion. "But you brought me back. This garden, these people... they saved me."

Hanane smiled, her eyes shining with unshed tears. "We found it together, Tony, in this garden. We found our way back to each other, Tony my love."

And so, surrounded by the beauty of the garden and the warmth of newfound friendships, Tony found peace. The idea of suicide, once a constant companion, now seemed like a distant memory.

And so it was that Tony discovered a new lease on life. The darkness that had threatened to consume him was banished, replaced by the light of love, friendship, and the enduring spirit of Beirut.

As they walked hand in hand out of the garden, Tony knew that he had found his reason to live. He knew that he had finally found the peace and contentment he had been searching for. In the embrace of Hanane’s love, surrounded by the beauty of Beirut, he knew that he would never again be lost to the darkness. In the heart of Beirut, amidst the blooming flowers and whispered memories, he had found home. And he would never let it go.

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