Between Two Shores

In high school, I often felt my father's rules were heavy,
a constant reminder of customs I didn't fully understand.
While my friends seemed to float freely, gilded by their own ease,
I found myself tangled in expectations I didn't yet see value in.

He came from Lebanon, a land where family and tradition shaped every step,
and he brought that world with him when he moved here.
I would ask, "Why do I have to live by these ancient rules?"
My frustration would build quietly,
expressed in small moments of distance.
I longed for a place where I could feel at home,
where the world outside felt like a natural fit,
where I didn't have to choose between two cultures.

But my father saw what I could not.
He wasn't tying me down,
he was anchoring me
to something deeper,
something older than both of us.

His strictness wasn't control–it was care,
a shield for a history
he feared would sift through my fingers like sand
and dissolve into the dunes of a foreign land.

Now I see him as he was:
a man standing between two worlds,
trying to carry one on his back,
so I wouldn't forget where we began;
navigating the other with his steps,
so I could walk freely between them.

The customs he asked me to follow,
the words he urged me to speak,
the stories he told again and again,
they weren't barriers.
They were bridges.

Albeit preposterous,
I once feared my own culture,
its seemingly large weight and demands,
the way it made me feel exposed.
But now I wear it like armor,
woven from his sacrifices,
his love,
his determination to keep our roots alive,
and of the hundreds who have come before us.

I embrace the melodies of my past,
the taste of za'atar, the call of the oud, strength of the cedars,
the warmth of a people,
I thought I couldn't claim.
What I once resisted,
now lies at the top of my mind
and the core of my heart.

I see my father's love in every tradition,
his quiet hope that I would come to understand.
And I do.
It took years, but I do.
His roots are my roots,
And they are what hold me as I blossom.