

Written By:  
Lynn Al Ghoche



Al Zaytouna



Al Samida

Illustrations:  
Lynn Al Ghoche, Rabih Al Ghoche, Lea Al Ghoche, Sylvana  
Youssef



This is Ayla, a nine-year-old girl living in Nabatieh, a small town in the South of Lebanon.



She loves her family's olive tree, Zaytouna.

Ayla loves spending time with her family and friends, but most of all.....



Everyday after school, Ayla likes to sit under the olive tree and finish her homework.



$$\frac{2}{10} \div \frac{3}{5} =$$



It helps her focus and get all the work done quickly!

Ayla also likes to spend time under it with her friends when they are over. Together, they make up fairy tales and act them out for fun!

Or they sit and have a picnic together.

Maahahaha, I am the evil witch and I will put you in an eternal sleep!



I will save you, Princess of Light!



Ayla, can you pass me the strawberry Mousraba?





WOOF!

Micho, Ayla's dog, loves  
the Olive Tree just as much  
as she does.

They both spend shared time  
together near it. They play  
fetch and cuddle together.

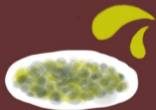
On many occasions, Ayla helps her Jeddo pick the olives during the winter time. With them, her family makes Lebanese Mouneh.



And others are enjoyed with a drizzle of Zet Zaytoun



Fattoush



Zaatar



Hommos

On weekends, Ayla's family gathers at her grandparents' house, and she helps her Teta make some Foul Moudammas for breakfast.



Ayla asks her grandmother for the recipe.



"Two cups of Foul,



And of course, a  
drizzle of Zet Zaytoun  
from our beloved  
Zaytouna!"



Two cloves of minced  
Toum, and some lemon  
juice. Bring them to a  
boil, mash them a bit,

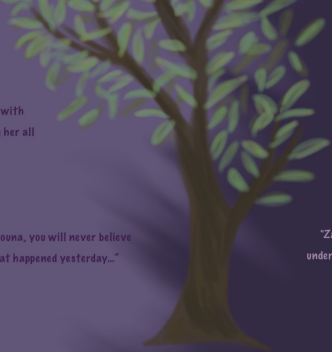


"Shoukran Teta!"

Then present them in a bowl with some

Bakdounis





All year round, Ayla sits with  
Zaytouna. She loves telling her all  
about her nice days.

"Zaytouna, you will never believe  
what happened yesterday..."

...And all about the bad ones.

"Zaytouna, nobody  
understands me like you."

She loves taking care of Zeytouna.  
She waters it and checks for any dead  
branches.

Sometimes, Ayla lays out  
flowers she picked around  
her tree to make it  
pretty.



Zaytouna means everything to Ayla  
and her family. She is an important  
part of their daily life in Lebanon.  
Zaytouna feeds them, listens to them,  
entertains them and comforts them.  
Zaytouna gives everybody hope and  
happiness in their life.



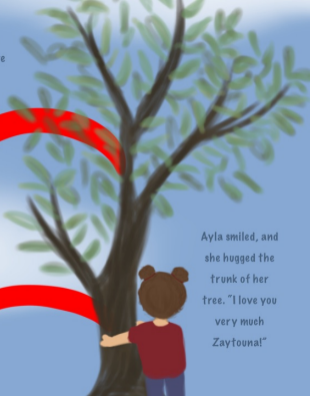
"Zaytouna, did you know how important you are to Lebanese people? Today, in school, our teacher taught us about the importance of olive trees! Olive Trees are usually grown for money, but they are so much more than that. Olives from your branches help us make our yummy traditional food. You know, like the very yummy Moutabbal I told you about yesterday? We drizzled olive oil on top of it!



But there is also a sad part to your importance. Olive trees remind Lebanese people who had to leave about their home lands because of a war. Olive trees are like special trees that connect people who have lived here. They have been around for many years!"



Ayla smiled, and she hugged the trunk of her tree. "I love you very much Zayfouna!"




The following week, Ayla started hearing a lot about a fight between Lebanon and another country.



She didn't understand the situation well enough, but her parents had told her that it could be dangerous for them to stay in Lebanon.



An illustration of two hands, one larger and one smaller, holding each other. The larger hand is on the right, and the smaller hand is on the left. They are set against a background of a blue sky with a green grassy field at the bottom. The hands are rendered in shades of orange and brown.

Abdallah grabbed Ayla's hand and started heading towards the house,

One day, while Ayla was playing with her brother ,Abdallah, under Zaytouna, they heard a loud noise.

"Boudi, what was that?" Ayla asked with a worried tone.

"Don't worry about it, Ayla. We should go in and stay near Mama and Baba."

Ayla nodded, but she still felt uneasy at what had just happened. She didn't quite understand what was happening, but she trusted her brother. As they huddled all together in the hallway of their house, Ayla wished she could go back under her Zaytouna where she felt safe and protected.



She hoped that whatever the situation was, it would end soon, so she could be reunited with her beloved tree.



Unfortunately for Ayla, the following day, her Baba came up to her and informed her they will be leaving Lebanon soon.

"But Baba, what is happening?"

"The situation in the country is not very safe for us now, Habibti. It will be best for us to leave."

"But what about Zaytouna?"


"She will have to stay here. Don't worry, she will look after our house and keep it safe for us while we are gone."



For the next few days leading to their departure, Ayla made sure to spend as much time with Zaytouna as she could. She was very upset by the situation. She didn't want to leave her behind.



"Zaytouna, you have to promise to still be here when I come back." She took her silence as a response.



The day arrived. Taking a look at her tree one last time,  
Ayla whispered her goodbye with tears in her eyes.  
"Goodbye, Zaytouna."

Ayla held  
onto her  
brother's  
hand tightly  
as they made  
their way  
out of their  
home. Ayla  
still believed  
she would see  
her tree  
again one  
day.

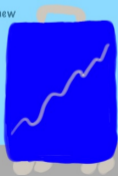
Ayla and her family moved to Canada.



It was very different from Lebanon, and much, much, much colder. But, it wasn't hard for Ayla to adapt and make new friends at her new school.



She even started a new hobby! Ayla was happy in Canada. But she missed her home country. And most importantly, she missed her dear Zaytouna.



Years went by, and Ayla grew older. She would often think about Lebanon, missing the warm sunshine,

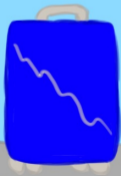


The delicious food, and the comforting presence of her family at gatherings. She missed the sounds of Zaytouna's leaves rustling and the feeling of peace she found under her branches.





One day, Ayla's family felt safe enough to return to their country. Ayla's heart beat with joy at the news and at the thought of seeing her homeland again, and most importantly, reuniting with Zaytouna.



As they stepped off the airplane, Ayla's excitement grew. She could not wait to be reunited with her family and friends,



And she could not wait to tell Zaytouna about everything that has happened over the past few years.

They drove through the streets of Nabatieh, Ayla's excitement was replaced with sadness. The town looked different.



Buildings changed, and streets weren't as loud as she remembered them being. When they finally arrived to their house, Ayla's heart broke.



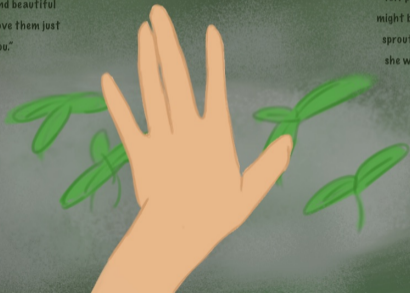
Zaytouna was no longer there, standing tall and proud in the backyard. As Ayla stepped out of the car and made her way to where her beloved tree was, she felt tears in her eyes. But, the closer she got, the more she could see several small olive tree sprouts. Her heart filled with hope as she touched one of the tiny trees.



"Zaytouna... you may not be here anymore,  
but your spirit will live on in these sprouts.

They will grow into strong and beautiful  
trees just like you, and I will love them just  
as much as I loved you."

And in that moment, Ayla  
felt peaceful. Zaytouna  
might be gone, but the new  
sprouts showed her that  
she will always be here.



Ayla would always carry Zayfouna in her heart, wherever she went, no matter what.