

## The Lebanon of our dreams

In the heart of Beirut, a city that was once the Paris of the Middle East, a group of young Lebanese dreamers gathered to imagine a brighter future for their country. They were tired of the political corruption, economic crisis, and sectarian divides that had plagued their nation for far too long. They knew that they had the talent, the passion, and the determination to build a better tomorrow, but they also knew that they needed to inspire their fellow citizens to join them on this journey.

One of these dreamers was Leila, a twenty-something artist who had grown up in the shadow of the civil war. She had witnessed the destruction of her neighborhood, the displacement of her family, and the trauma of her community. But she had also seen the resilience, the creativity, and the solidarity of her people. She had learned to express her feelings and her hopes through her paintings, her poetry, and her music.

Leila had a vision of a Lebanon that was not defined by its divisions, but by its diversity. She imagined a country where people from all backgrounds could live and work together, where the arts and culture could thrive, where innovation and entrepreneurship could flourish, and where the natural beauty of the land could be preserved and celebrated.

One day, Leila decided to share her vision with her friends and fellow artists. They gathered in a café in Gemmayzeh, a neighborhood that had been heavily damaged by the explosion of August 4, 2020. They sat around a table, sipping on Turkish coffee and nibbling on kaak, a traditional sesame bread.

Leila began by telling them a story. She spoke of a young girl who had been born during the war, but who had never known anything but violence, poverty, and despair. The girl had been raised by her grandmother, who had taught her to read and write, to sing and dance, and to love life despite all its challenges.

One day, the girl had found a seed in the rubble of her street. She had planted it in a small patch of soil that had miraculously survived the bombing. She had watered it every day, and she had watched it grow into a beautiful flower. The flower had attracted butterflies, bees, and birds, and had brought color and joy to her gray world.

The girl had realized that if she could nurture a seed into a flower, she could also nurture hope into a dream. She had started to imagine a garden in the midst of the ruins, a place where people could gather, laugh, and share stories. She had invited her neighbors to join her in this project, and together they had created a small oasis of peace and beauty.

Leila paused and looked at her friends. They were listening intently, their eyes shining with curiosity and wonder. She took a deep breath and continued.

"I believe that we can all be like that girl. We can all find a seed of hope in the midst of our pain and suffering. We can all plant it and nurture it until it grows into a dream that can transform our

country. We can all be gardeners of a new Lebanon, a Lebanon that is not defined by its scars, but by its resilience, its creativity, and its humanity."

Leila's friends nodded in agreement, and they began to share their own visions of the Lebanon of their dreams. Some spoke of a vibrant cultural scene, where theaters, galleries, and concert halls would be filled with local and international artists. Some spoke of a sustainable economy, where green energy, digital innovation, and social entrepreneurship would create jobs and prosperity for all. Some spoke of a tolerant and inclusive society, where people of different religions, ethnicities, and genders would be respected and empowered.

As they spoke, a sense of hope and excitement filled the air. They realized that they were not alone in their aspirations, and that there were many other Lebanese who shared their dreams. They decided to take action, to organize events, to create art, to start businesses, and to engage with their communities. They knew that it would not be easy, that there would be obstacles and setbacks, but they also knew that they had each other's support and encouragement.

Over the next few months, Leila and her friends launched a series of initiatives that aimed to inspire and empower young Lebanese. They organized a street art festival, where they painted murals that celebrated the diversity and beauty of their country. They held a music concert, where they showcased the talents of local musicians who had been struggling to find opportunities in the midst of the crisis. They started a podcast, where they interviewed entrepreneurs, activists, and artists who were making a difference in their communities.

Their efforts did not go unnoticed. People started to take notice of their message, and to appreciate their creativity and their courage. They started to believe that a better future was possible, that their country was not doomed to a never-ending cycle of conflict and despair.

Leila and her friends knew that they had a long way to go, that their work was just beginning. But they also knew that they had made a start, that they had planted a seed of hope that would continue to grow and blossom. They knew that they were part of a larger movement, a movement of young Lebanese who refused to give up on their dreams, who refused to let their country be defined by its past, and who were determined to create a better future for themselves and for their children.

As they walked out of the café, the sun was setting over Beirut, casting a golden light over the city. They looked up at the sky, and saw a flock of birds flying overhead, their wings beating in unison. They smiled, knowing that they were part of something bigger than themselves, knowing that they were part of the Lebanon of their dreams.

Leila and her friends' story is not unique to Lebanon. It is a universal story of hope, resilience, and creativity. It is a story of people who refuse to be defined by their circumstances, who refuse to give up on their dreams, and who are determined to make a positive difference in their communities.

Lebanon is a country that has faced numerous challenges throughout its history, from political instability and economic crisis to war and sectarianism. But it is also a country that has a rich cultural heritage, a diverse population, and a natural beauty that is second to none. The Lebanese people are known for their resilience, their creativity, and their hospitality, and they have always found ways to adapt and survive in the face of adversity. It is the people of Lebanon who have the power to shape its future, to build bridges instead of walls, to create beauty instead of destruction, and to inspire hope instead of despair.

Leila and her friends' vision of a new Lebanon is not an easy one to achieve. It requires hard work, persistence, and sacrifice. It requires a willingness to listen, to learn, and to collaborate. It requires a commitment to the common good, and a belief in the power of collective action.

Their story is a reminder that change is possible, that hope is not a luxury but a necessity, and that creativity is a powerful force for transformation. It is also a reminder that the future of Lebanon, like the future of any country, depends on the vision, the courage, and the determination of its people. They are the ones who dared to dream, who dared to imagine, and who dared to act. They are the ones who planted a seed of hope that will continue to grow and blossom, even in the midst of the darkest of times.

Their story is a testament to the human spirit, to the power of creativity, and to the resilience of the Lebanese people. It is a story that should inspire us all to believe in our own dreams, to nurture our own seeds of hope, and to work together to create a better future for ourselves and for our world. It is a vision of a country that is connected to the world, but also rooted in its traditions and its heritage.

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