

Dear Mia,

Unfortunately, you never saw me grow past my tomboy phase when we were twelve, but I can assure you that I have. There is something else that you haven't seen, perhaps that doesn't cross your mind very often. In fact, I wouldn't call it "something", because that term is too plain, too fragile for the reality I want to share with you. Maybe I should call it a gift, but that will make it seem as if it was handed to us easily. Perhaps, "a new beginning" is the right way to say it, but this may undermine the glorious eras we've encountered in the past or ignore the long battles that our nation overcame one after the other, sometimes many at the same time. For these reasons, I will simply give this "something" a nickname, or rather describe it by a brief summary: the microscopic impact.

I'm sure you remember the times we had at teta's when we were young; the breakfast table covered with the taste of our home village, surrounded by the love of our mothers, aunts and cousins waiting to greet us with the same affection everyday, the tree of yasmine making room for us under its leaves, forming a protective armour against the summer heat, and of course the bicycles we rode around the village that made sure we felt the air sweeping through our hair on the way.

We were blessed Mia, indeed we were blessed to have experienced a Lebanon so full of passionate love, one that some may have forgotten as they grew outside or never got to greet in the first place. But today I wrote this letter to tell you a different story: one that doesn't involve glorifying our past. A story that some were almost certain could never be written, for the simple reason that it was quite obvious that there were no writers, not enough ink, barely any storytellers in the first place.

This was our reality, the one we've always been used to, the one we were taught to accept; until we decided we can choose not to. We can *choose* to make a shift, a move, every single one of us. On an individual level, they were nothing more than atomic habits, so one might assume you wouldn't actually be contributing to any real change. Now imagine that these atomic habits were being found in every individual, merging together to alter our perceived reality: evidence that the microscopic world forms what we see.

What I am describing to you is not a theory, rather an observation of the last 25 years. You can do a lot in 25 years. You can graduate, build a career, meet new people, travel, start a family perhaps. The Lebanese decided to add one more accomplishment to that list: rebuild a crumbling nation. It would be reasonable to give you a general overview of the Lebanese world we live in today, one that I'm certain still shapes you, despite your distant absence. However, I would much rather go back to the microscopic level, and describe to you how these atomic

habits shaped my life, the same way they have shaped millions of others; a beautiful impact on the macroscopic world we perceive.

On Earth, the sun's warm rays are the first signs of a new morning. I think the golden layer of skin they trace on my arm is enough to make me get up. As my coffee brews on the stove, the right amount of wind passes through the window and gradually finds its way through a strand of my hair. This is an invite to look outside and ponder. I answer the invite as I always do, I take a few steps to the balcony door as if a new world awaits me. Of course, it's always the same view of Tripoli. A view so familiar yet so vibrantly dynamic and unique. Imagine looking at the same painting over and over again, but each time the landscape is telling a different story: that is Tripoli.

Some of the colorful dots are playfully chasing each other, some are patiently waiting for a manouche from the kind old man, and some are innocently observing the birds eating the crumbs on the floor. You feel a sense of childlike happiness when you remember every kid around Lebanon is not left out of this experience today.

You probably remember the fading color, the missing walls and the craters covering our homes. If you look around now, you will find that all buildings, even the ones of our grandparents, have either preserved or gained their identity again. Every colored wall compliments the one next to and across from it, every balcony decorates its building with blooming flowers, every home's safety is valued, and every home welcomes the other. They are comforting to the kids from the outside, and most importantly from the inside thanks to the generation that are now their parents.

Our bright minds looked up. Their view was blocked by the messy, disturbing strings that glued themselves onto our skies. So, instead of carelessly walking under them, we learnt how to light up our nights, holidays and festivals without them. Education was our tool to catch up with the innovation of the world, and even contribute to it on our lands. If you were an astronaut in space, looking back at one of the seas separating two continents of our home planet, you could now see not just a dot, but a brief trail of light covering the shore of the mediterranean sea. A trail of light that is nothing less than a symbol of our civilization.

If you zoom back in and head towards our mountains, the Milky Way trail will also wave back at you. We learnt to light up our cities without dimming our stars. We found balance between innovation, exploration, and conservation.

Hunger has spread across our country. Not the type of hunger that starves your body and weakens your soul. The type of hunger that enriches your mind with every discovery you make, with every problem you solve. The type of hunger that pushes you to strive for the best. This is how every thinker and passionate in Lebanon was able to support and be supported, to grow and nourish.

We started looking around us and asking the right questions, not jumping to conclusions. The flaws we saw on our streets are now our resources to build our cities and grow our crops. The technologies we didn't know how to use are now what we implement to ensure our prosperity and sustainability. The future we were afraid of is now the present we face everyday. The little boy that gifted you flowers on the street in exchange for mercy a decade ago is driving his kids to school as my coffee brews. You can think of Lebanon as a passionate engineer with cutting-edge ideas that listens to Fairuz and drinks tea as he explores his thoughts.

As you can tell Mia, we surpassed our canvas. It no longer fits us anymore. The existence of atomic change born in every individual, thought to be insignificant, silently announced a shift in our civilization. It is no longer microscopic.

If we return to our landscape and look slightly further, we will easily spot the medieval castle towering over the continuous river of Abou Ali welcoming the boats that carry curious explorers of our country. Who knew an ancient monument could fit on the same canvas as the modern world!

Of course, I should mention some aspects of the Lebanese world that will forever stay constant. Don't worry, the taste of our labneh and zaatar is still as delicious. Our tea is still as sweet, and our manouch will forever be a classic, along with our elegant dishes as well. You will still find the persian carpets covering the floors of our homes and the hand-made kebbeh in the kitchen. The only difference you will spot instantly is a land taken care of.

I could sit here and write you hundreds of letters about Lebanon because it misses you, and so do I. Maybe you should come visit sometime to see it with your own eyes (I promise everything I said is better seen than described). I hope Canada is treating you well, and I would love to know more about your life there. Was it hard for you to adapt? Do you think it has anything in common with Lebanon? I'm curious.

Can't wait to hear from you soon Mia!

Sincerely,  
Your cousin, Miryam