



Source: David Hirst, 'Hizbullah has achieved what Arab states only dreamed of', *Guardian Unlimited*, 17/08/06.
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He sat there for a long time in the dark. The great hall was empty, there was an echo even from his breathing. He stroked his beard slowly, slowly, he was trying to remember something, a memory in fragments from a long time ago, when he was very young, so young that the streets he knew now were new, the cobblestones even and the giant old trees which shaded the palace were mere saplings. The sun was a brighter yellow in those days, the people were peaceful and smiled a gentle smile of the meek and bright clear water ran from the fountains of the streets as he walked past. In those days everything was as it should be and in those days, there was a moment he knew, when he had seen the palace from above.

No-one had ever explained to him why that was the case, and as the years went by he had forgotten how it had come about, but in his eyes was the sight—the unmistakable moment in which he saw the sunlight gleaming on the top of the palace and the towers shone like silver, white birds in full flight around it, circling in the blue.

He was trying to remember.

The closer his mind came to the moment before, the more elusive it became, like water through the fingers, like wind through the door, he could not hold on to it, it fell from his grasp. The memory was somehow mixed up with a smell of jasmine and the feel of his mother's hair, long and brown, coming down in folds over him.

How had it happened?

He dared not speak of it, he dared not think of it, but in the silence of the great hall, when the perplexed and biting words of his advisors were gone, in the moment of the echo, of the shutting of the grand door, somewhere in the quiet, the memory would surface, the impossible—the certainty that once he had flown.

If he could remember this, he knew that the clue would be unlocked, the thing that had been lost could be regained, he would know how to make the streets gleam, the fountains flow and the trees bear fruit. The people waiting outside would have water to drink and they could rebuild their houses in a day.

Memory refused to open its door.

His people waited outside, beyond the darkness of the palace, their children in makeshift tents, their faces dirty

and marked by disease, licking at puddles.

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As the pale pink dawn creeps over the city of sticks and rags, the people begin to stir. The babies cry out and their mothers do not have enough milk for them. They nurse them with tears and wash their faces gently.

The great advisor stands before the people and delivers his speech: Brothers, sisters, I present to you: our achievement. We have, brothers and sisters, an unmistakable victory over the enemy. We have won, they have lost. We are strong, they are weak. We are right, they are wrong. Our hearts are pure, theirs are dark and evil. Their lust for our blood will never be satisfied. Our blood is brave blood and we will not allow them to vanquish us. We are the day, they are the night. We are the sun, they are the worm below the rock hiding from the sun. Much as they try, they will never be good. They will always be bad. The stars will fade the sun will cease to turn in its throne in the heavens and still we will be right. We will not forget this. We will never surrender and we will never stoop. We have won, brothers and sisters. Today is our day of glory.

As the speech is delivered, a little boy plays with his slingshot near by. The sun comes up, a strange white sun. The little boy looks up, shielding his eyes.

A few birds circle around the dry tree. He takes aim.

His mother is inside, under the shelter. She doesn't speak to him any more. She just sits in a corner. They have not found the others. He wonders, how long does she have to live? How many minutes? How many seconds?

One bird comes down with a thud at his feet.

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Inside the palace the old king stirs from his reverie. Again his memory has been silent. Again the advisor, the one of many words, the one they call the great actor, the one who loves war, has won.

The king stands up, slowly, his old hands and old legs rusty under the weight of time, his robes awkward and heavy. He takes a step down from his throne, teeters, and walks slowly across the great empty hall.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Anonymous.