



Source: Clancy Chassay, 'Lebanese accuse civilians of helping camp militants', *Guardian Unlimited*, 04/06/07.

Tags: [disenchantment](#), [diplomacy](#), [violence](#), [travel](#), [water](#)

Writer/s: [Michael Grosberg](#)

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This morning Luke was feeling benevolent, able to take anything in since the strangeness of the place was offset by kind smiles, unlike the people in the capital. He had arranged his things quickly, taken a coffee side by side with regulars and packed himself in a van heading for the countryside. Walking alone along the forested path only heightened his feeling of euphoria, as if this is finally what he came for, he thought to himself; to find solitude, to nurse his sorrows in an unfamiliar place, to dream of a world without repairs, to meditate on things breaking, not working, being fixed. He deliberately didn't bring a hat or water or a map, all of which would keep chance at bay. This is how one comes to resolutions he said quietly.

He had no reason to believe he was really all alone; after all there were signs of life everywhere, cut wood piled off to the side of the path, makeshift benches every few hundred yards or so and even once he thought he saw a small boy or girl running on the slope above him but he chose to ignore these and pretended to himself that they were merely the result of his active imagination.

He thought about the night before in the hotel bar where he met another foreigner who was dying to engage him in conversation. The man touched his drink gingerly, swirled his finger around the edge, and told him how his parents were no longer alive and he had come to this godforsaken place to make his way in real estate. He said he had a local wife, but he said it too quickly for it to be true. Luke imagined a young prepubescent girl in a small village somewhere in the south that one day had looked at him too long, and that attention was enough for him to imagine that they would marry.

Later in the evening, when the older man asked him to accompany him back to his room to retrieve another bottle, Luke peeked through the thin opening and saw another man hooked up to a respirator, decaying, watching television, defensive. He caught sight of Luke and immediately demanded to know who he was and what he wanted. Flustered, because he himself was unsure what he was doing there, Luke made his apologies, turned and walked as fast as he could out onto the deserted street where he took deep breaths of the warm, acrid air and repeatedly told himself that these people had nothing to do with him, that he was there for loftier reasons and that their fate would never be his.

He looked at the crooked masts, everything damp and grey, and wondered whether it was humanly possible to feel such an air of possibility in such a wretched place. And yet there was something about the condition of the port that felt liberating to Luke at that moment, the fact that there was no sign of luxury anywhere, the only hint that a concession was made to how one would feel looking at this place, was the battered sign that marked the entrance to the port inscribed in gold filigree.

Luke was so distracted by these thoughts that he wasn't aware of the two men dressed typically in tattered t-shirts and shorts, barefooted, until they were striding beside him, smiling and greeting him in broken English. He greeted them in return in what he thought was the local language, the only expression he knew, and quickly realized that the afternoon would no longer be one for resolutions since he was now burdened by having to politely rebuff them.

One of the men brushed past him as he reached to pick up a berry on the ground at Luke's feet. This is completely innocent he thought and was relieved when the man popped the berry in his mouth and gestured for Luke to do the same. Tired as he was from trying to make himself understood, from engaging in meaningless conversations meant to convey goodwill that always ended in monetary negotiations, Luke mustered his resources and did as was suggested, hoping just once that things would end as positively as they had begun.

The three of them had reached the pool at the bottom of the falls where earlier in the day Luke had hoped to lose the need for language; he looked up at the hundreds of small bats zigzagging just around the spray of water and felt a sense of loss. The conversation continued back and forth, graduating from pleasantries to more personal questions, all the while in a state of irritating bonhomie. Luke knew everything was ruined when one of the men held his stare for a fraction longer than necessary and assumed a sophisticated posture of pleading. Luke thought of the beggars in the city who put forward their children like pleas for mercy; but the children would only cooperate a minute at a time and had to be continually corralled to assume their positions.

His contempt reached new heights. Relieved of the burden to sympathize but anxious to be free, he grabbed several coins from his pocket and thrust them into the man's hands. But his hand squeezed the money slightly harder than was necessary; coins spilled through the holes in their fingers dropping onto the dirt and as he stooped to pick them up there was a sharp blow to the back of his head.

Carefully, at pains, they went through Luke's pockets, pleasantly surprised by what they found.

Later on, when he was lying bloody and on the verge of unconsciousness, his body sprinkled with waterfall spray, a dreamy silence compelled him to reveal his true ambitions to himself; somehow, through this circuitous route, the precise nature of what he sought became more and more clear and the prospect of doing unto to others what most people were too naive to admit—namely wanting to control them—became more palatable.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Michael Grosberg.*