



Source: Souad Mekhennet, Michael Moss and Michael Slackman, 'Chaotic Lebanon risks becoming militant haven', *New York Times online*, 07/07/07.
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Lauren held the mail above her head and ran for the shelter of the back verandah without closing the lid of the mailbox or the front gate. By the time she got indoors the letters and her hair were limp with the rain. She was smiling. Rain on her skin! She was laughing out loud. It had been raining all day, so she'd had hours to come to terms with the new set of disasters which would flow from a downpour as heavy as this.

She dried her hands and hair briskly with a tea towel from the stove rail and spread the letters out along the bench in the poor light of the window. She recognised the untidy handwriting instantly as that of the man who'd deserted her and binned it without ceremony and turned her attention to making tea instead.

Hard to think that time at the start of the year had ever happened. She was in love, she was not in love. She was engaged, she was not engaged. She was planning a child, she was not planning a child and just as suddenly as all of these things she was alone again on the farm which her uncle had left her as sole surviving relative and beneficiary.

She had been on the farm less than a year to date but the locals had endured eight unbroken years of drought. The previous week had made more than seven months without a single drop of rain having landed in the region. Ever since, time had been measured against before and after that earlier rain which she had begun to worry she'd imagined.

She'd show him, she'd said to herself back then, blinking tears into the hot dust. Concreting a man's job! And what's a girl to do with no man about then? Were there whole towns, entire countries, virtual communities of women across the planet without so much as a square inch of concrete to stand on? She found the shovel and the rake, brought in sand and screenings and bags of cement, borrowed trowels and taken all manner of advice from her neighbours, and got to work. If she was to move on she had to start somewhere, and she'd decided she would extend the path so that it reached the front gate from where it presently terminated in the middle of the dry patch of dust which had been the garden.

Before she had time to admire the result of her work a large drop of rain landed in the middle of the glistening cement. And then another, and another. She'd raced to

the shed and found two tattered tarpaulins, which she spread across the surface and ducked back into the house to watch the rain.

The water formed in little puddles on the garden path of successful concreting past and ran to join the rest of the mess beyond.

She watched the trowels floating across the patio in the rain and she watched the pooling blue material brimming with water in concave imperfection and she watched the soil trailing away down the short concrete path that led from the gate into the paddocks which sank down to the creek bed. As she stood and watched, three alluvial grey streams of concrete sludge divided by blue tarps trailed away from the form work she'd staked out. More water puddled and pushed at the cement which seemed to give up any fight it might have made to solidify.

It was irrelevant now anyway. The rain had come. She watched the last golden stubble and all of the dusty topsoil carried down to the creek in a steady stream to join the raging torrent of the river which ran through the township from the feet of the mountains behind her.

And now it had been going all day without cease and the sky and the mountains all around were a dark grey merging into the vast brown of everything else.

The patter of the rain on the roof, on the verandah, splashing on the steps of the porch, down the spouts and drainpipes, spattering loudly on the fields, through the trees, all objects in her field of view were joined in the same moment in space and time by the rain that fell constantly.

She looked out the window at the rain and the hills dropping away in the distance peopled with houses and cars, the branches of the gum trees waving surreal, funereal in the cold air, against the glare of the pale sky.

Oh well, she said, oh well, and sipped her tea. Strange currencies these days, she figured; time, and the elements. But in the end these were all you had, and better to pin your hopes on them than some of the other alternatives.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Craig Doolan.