



Source: Andrew Shanahan, 'A recipe for disaster',  
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Writer/s: [Boris Kelly](#)

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Meera was walking along the footpath towards the supermarket when it happened. A car slowed down as it passed her and a man leaned out of the window and called out something terrible. He shouted out bad words, ugly words. Get back to Lebanon, he shouted. But he used the f word and then he shouted, you f...terrorist...But Meera had put her hands over her ears and stopped walking. Something landed on the pavement near her foot. It was a can of Coca Cola that began to fizz and spill out onto her shoe but she could not move it, she was frozen and could only watch as it oozed around her into a puddle. As the car drove off Meera tried to look at the number plate but her eyes did not work.

A man stopped and asked if she was alright but when she answered she could not hear her own words. The man walked on looking back occasionally over his shoulder. Meera stood in the puddle of Coca Cola for a moment longer before realising it and then she remembered the supermarket and noticed the green bags in her hand. Her brother was coming to pick her up, she had to do the shopping now. She began to walk slowly at first then more briskly away from the puddle but as she walked her feet stuck to the pavement so she walked to a patch of grass by the road and wiped the soles of her shoes.

Things had changed since the war with Israel began. Her parents had been on holiday in the family village in southern Lebanon when the bombing started. It was the beginning of the tourist season and everyone was very happy, very excited to be together again like a family. The bombing came without warning, quickly and savagely. It had forced her parents and relatives into the cellars and basements of the village until the buses came to take them to the sea port where a ferry was waiting to take them to Cyprus. On the way to the sea port they saw burnt out cars with dead bodies inside. They had to leave their family behind as the ferries were only for Australian citizens and when they arrived back in Sydney Meera's mother's face had changed. She looked different now and spent a lot of time lying down during the day.

Meera had to keep going to work but she also had to help her mother more than in the past. She had to cook and clean every night and make sure her father's clothes were ready and care for her brothers. This was the way it had to be now. Her mother was given some medication by the doctor but they would take a while to start working, he said. It made Meera angry to think about it. There was nothing about it on the news anymore, nothing about the people left behind in the villages.

What they said about Hezbollah was not the truth. Her cousins fought for Hezbollah to resist the Israelis after the

occupation in 1982. They were not terrorists. They were only Lebanese men defending their homeland just as Australians would defend theirs if the army was weak. This was only natural. The Hezbollah built hospitals and schools, helped people who were out of work and families in trouble. They always did what they said they would do. They set up businesses for people to work in. Their promises were not empty. In Australia, people were afraid to talk about the war in the open. They were afraid to criticise Israel at work or in the street because others might think they supported Hezbollah so it had to be spoken of quietly. Hezbollah was a terrorist group in Australia and to support them could mean trouble.

Meera took a trolley in the supermarket. She adjusted her head scarf and took out her shopping list. Beginning in the fruit and vegetable section she found the things she needed and moved on systematically, familiar with the location of the needs of the family. She found the tomato paste, the garlic and olive oil she needed to make a sauce. She wanted to make a lot of sauce so she could freeze it and use it during the week in different dishes. That was the good thing about a sauce, it could be used in different dishes. A good sauce was versatile. Her shoes only stuck to the floor a little bit now as most of the sole had worn off. Later she would clean off the rest from her shoes.

Her brother said he wanted to go and join the Hezbollah but Meera told him not to talk like that, not here, not anywhere. She told him not to talk to his friends about it, not ever. But her brother didn't listen to her. He wanted to go and fight with the Hezbollah and to learn something about weapons so he could fight the Israelis when they came back because they would come back, everyone said so. They made a mistake this time. They never knew how strong the Hezbollah could be, how clever Sheikh Nasrallah could be. He was a Lebanese nationalist, a hero of the people. The Hezbollah did not want to fight outside Lebanon, they had no interest in this, only in their own land. Her brother said it was his duty to go. Meera fought with him about this. But his mother said she would be proud if her son fought with the Hezbollah, especially now.

Meera came to the checkout. The girl was a Muslim and Meera knew her from school. She was a Syrian girl, her father was Syrian. They talked a bit and Meera could hear her words now, she could feel her hands and her eyes were working well now. It was normal again. She pushed her trolley full of green bags into the car park and waited for her brother.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Boris Kelly.*