

Preface

I lived in Beirut during the civil war that raged in Lebanon thirty years ago. We stayed at first in a flat in the ruined centre of the city. There was no furniture. Some of the windows had been blown in, and lines of bullet holes ran round the walls of the bare sitting room. Our six-month-old son slept in a suitcase on the floor.

Thousands of refugees, fleeing the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, had found shelter in similar flats. They crammed in wherever they could, several families sharing each room.

Later, when we had a place of our own, we would watch the destruction of the city from our balcony, hearing the dull crump of the bombs and seeing billows of smoke rise from the buildings.

I took my son out for a daily walk. The soldiers on the checkpoints would put their guns down when they saw him and lift him up in their arms, reaching inside their camouflage fatigues for a sweet to put in his hand.

Once, when we were driving home, we realized that the streets were eerily empty. The market had been abandoned. A fruit stall had been knocked over, and bright golden oranges were still running down the street. The air crackled with the tension of the battle that was about to start.

It was these and other memories that inspired this book. When I wrote it, I didn't know that Lebanon would plunge back so soon into a nightmare. Caught up in that nightmare are children like Ayesha and Samar, whose lives political leaders so easily throw away.

Elizabeth Laird, 2006