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It was love at first sight

by Lesley Dawson

We first met at the university Christmas party. I almost didn't go because in the past I had found the evening incredibly boring; same old people, same old talk, same old food. But that evening I squared my shoulders took a deep breath and walked into the staff common room. All my colleagues were there, dressed in their best clothes, wearing dutiful smiles, balancing plates and glasses in one hand. She was in the corner talking to the Vice Chancellor, a handsome man with a shock of white hair and a dazzling smile.

She turned towards me and I was lost. She was the most amazing girl I had ever seen. Being used to brown-eyed, black haired Middle Eastern beauties, she was a refreshing change with her cap of golden hair and piercing blue eyes. We were eventually introduced by a colleague and I discovered that her name was Kirsty and that she was a Scottish Quaker here to teach English for a year.

We became inseparable, both in the university and in our spare time and gradually discovered that, despite coming from different cultures, we laughed at the same things, enjoyed the same music and were both irritated by petty rules.

By the end of her year at the university we decided to marry and I would move to the UK. My difficulty was not just getting a visa to the UK but getting to the airport to fly to the UK. I was a Palestinian born in Bethlehem and, as such, I was not allowed out of the West Bank without permission from the Israeli Military Government.

Early one sunny morning I joined the long queue at the office on Hebron Road. Though it was moving slowly those waiting were in good humour swapping jokes and experiences about previous times waiting for some permission or other. An older man from Aida Camp said "Sometimes you can wait for days. It is always worth bringing your lunch with you."

Amid chuckles my neighbour's wife shouted, "Maybe you should have brought your wife along to cook for you. If you have to wait all day perhaps you should move your house here."

However the crowd were not so good-humoured as the hours passed and people began to complain and grumble at the officials as the sun got higher in the sky.

Eventually I sat in front of the army clerk and explained what I needed. He shook his head and said, "I cannot grant you permission to enter Israel until you have a plane ticket to prove that you are travelling abroad."

Now he must have known that all the travel agents were in Jerusalem, the other side of that magic Green Line. However, I reminded him that unless I got permission to travel to Jerusalem, I couldn't buy a plane ticket. Getting restless because there was still along queue behind me he shrugged and said, "What can I do?" These are my orders."

My heart sank as I thought of my fiancée in Scotland and the plans she was making for our wedding. This might be one wedding without a groom.