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## A dangerous monster

by Lesley Dawson

A dangerous monster threatens the community, we are told. We must stay at home to prevent the monster spreading from house to house. My grandfather sits on the balcony drinking his morning coffee and muses on events past and present. He would normally drink his coffee with his friends down at the local café but, of course, he cannot, because we are confined to home. He has got to the age when past and present intertwine so closely that it is difficult sometimes to work out to what he is referring.

“This reminds me of the curfews the Israelis placed on us during the First Intifada. You were not allowed to leave the house then or you might be shot. Only the women were allowed out for an hour each day to buy fresh bread,” he mutters, half to himself, but also to remind me that we have met this monster before.

“So how did you get through the experience last time Teta?” I ask, partly to keep him occupied while my mother makes breakfast, and partly because I can’t remember the curfews he mentions, I was just a baby.

“We would go to window, checking first there were no Israeli soldiers around and would whistle across to the neighbours who would come to their window and shout greetings to us.”

“We can still do that today Teta, I can open the window and called to Abu Daud so you can talk with him”

“So you can habibi, unfortunately my hearing is not so good now, so he has to shout louder.”

“Remember we can Skype him and you can see him and talk to him on the laptop. Surely that is better than shouting”

Teta smiles at me as he says, “thank God for such modern means of communication. But speaking to my neighbour on a screen is not as much fun as leaning out of the window.”

He sighs again more deeply “Then of course we were all here in this house. It was a bit crushed but all together to face the monster. This time, Nicola is in America and Manar is in England, so far away from home, among strangers when they should be with their family”

“When you talk to them on Skype they look well and Immi says they look healthy.”

“Yes, but they should be here where I can take care of them.”

Nothing can persuade him that his absent children and grand children are capable of looking after themselves.

His face takes on an even greater sadness when he remembers his grandson, Butros, who is in an Israeli prison, convicted of throwing stones. We have heard nothing from him for weeks and no-one is allowed to visit him. I can usually find something to say to my teta to cheer him up, that is one of my jobs in the family. However, today there is nothing I can say to about this and nothing I can do except squeeze his hand.