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## A Secret Life

by Lesley Dawson

It wasn't until three days later that Amal was able to work things out. She had arranged to meet Faten for coffee at Notre Dame Coffee Shop. Arriving late after rushing up the hill from the Arab bus station in Jerusalem, Amal was out of breath and had to sit for a few minutes to recover. Faten took the opportunity to order two cappuccinos and sat down grinning.

"I hear that you met Rasha and Marwan last night at the reunion."

"How do you know? Let me guess. She has phoned everyone to tell them that they made a fool of me. And why weren't you there to protect me?"

"The way I heard it, you behaved with great dignity, although you were heard to swear after they had left."

Faten had been appointed the spokesperson for the girls in their set to explain the history behind the whole situation of Rasha's secret life.

"Do you remember being very surprised when Rasha supported you while most of the others condemned you for stealing one of the Muslim boys?"

"I admit I was very surprised but at that point I needed all the support I could get with only you not turning against me."

The story told by Faten made Amal more and more angry but she contained her temper as she wanted to know the truth.

It emerged that Marwan's family needing to restore their image as good Muslims had approached the families of all the Muslim girls in the set offering a very favourable marriage contract.

"Most of us declined the honour. I told my father the circumstances behind the offer and he just laughed at Marwan's father for being so naïve as to believe that the circumstances of the affair were not known."

"However, Rasha's father must have accepted the offer for his daughter."

There was a malicious glint in Faten's eye as she replied, "I reckon Rasha was up for it herself and persuaded her father that it was a good deal and he almost snapped Abu Marwan's hand off. After all he had four other daughters to marry off."

Apparently, all this had happened quietly soon after Amal was sent to Italy and Rasha just pulled out of school and went to live in the north with her husband's family.

"We all waited to see how they would get on, expecting him to divorce her when her first two pregnancies resulted in daughters. She was reprieved by the birth of twin boys and the marriage seems to have lasted. I even heard that they loved each other, but I'm sure he can't love her as much as he loved you."

"I now think that he didn't really love me at all but just enjoyed the sensation of novelty and danger as well as being in love with himself."

"He now has a very successful practice in Nablus and is reputed to be highly thought of by the doctors and community leaders in the area."

Having been the bad boy in the village, Marwan was now the favoured one, especially being the father of twin boys. His youthful sins seemed to have been forgiven and his family's honour restored. Rasha had become an important woman in the community and her gamble in marrying Marwan seemed to have paid off. Most mistakes can be forgotten in time when money is poured over the mix.