



## Memory Is What You Forget With

by Lesley Dawson

It was the first time she had been in Bethlehem at the time of the University alumni gathering. Amal had thought long and hard about attending. Had it been long enough for people to forget the scandal caused by her relationship with Marwan? Would anyone she knew be present? Would Marwan himself be there? She wasn't sure she could handle that.

It was surprising how nervous she was. Three or four outfits had been taken from the wardrobe and discarded before she decided that smart jeans and top would suffice. Why was she making such an effort? Most of the girls present would be in traditional Islamic dress anyway. She wished she could just throw a long coat over whatever she was wearing.

Walking into the Sansur Building was like walking back in time. The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end as she remembered the times she had waited for Marwan outside on the steps. It appeared from the list shown to her by a final year student in hospitality manning the reception that only a few of her graduating group were planning to attend. Israeli roadblocks made the journey from the north hazardous and tedious and no one would be here from Gaza as all exits were closed due to a rocket attack into Israel two days ago.

She picked up a drink of Coca cola, as usual served in disposal cups and wandered over to the table groaning with sfehas, falafals and Arab salads of all kinds and smiled as she thought how hard the hospitality students must have worked to produce this amount of food. Sitting down at one of the small tables scattered around the room, she nodded to people whose faces she recognized.

The noise of a group entering together drew her eyes to the reception desk. Before she had time to react there was Rasha trotting over to her and kissing her on both cheeks.

“Kifik habibti. Long time no see.”

Amal managed to pull herself together and returned the verbal and physical greeting. No one else from their cohort appeared so the two women sat and reminisced together. Both were very careful not to refer to anything too personal. They laughed at the odd foreign ways of their British teachers, the old-fashioned ideas of the girls from Gaza and the stupid antics of the boys.

“Do you have children Amal?” asked Rashi slyly and was not surprised when Amal admitted to being engaged to an American. “Oh yes, I think I heard about that.”

‘There was nothing secret in this society, I shall be glad to be away from here,’ thought Amal. Now, of course, she had to ask Rashi about her life too. It appeared that Rasha was married and had two children, a boy and a girl and because of this was no longer working outside the home. Children were far more important topics of conversation than fiancées or husbands and the time passed quite pleasantly with discussion about which of their classmates were now mothers. They were both surprised when people began to leave.

“My husband was not able to come as his clinic is very busy, but he said he would pick me up and take me home. You will remember him when you see him.”

A tall handsome man picked his way through the departing crowd and it was with a shock that Amal recognized Marwan.

“Ah, there you are habibti. Yallah, let us get home before the kids drive my mother wild,” he said looking affectionately at Rasha, who simpered with pleasure.

His eyes flicked to Amal, who was trying to maintain her equilibrium, at least externally. “Hello Amal. Kif hallik? I hear that you now live abroad. Mabruk iktir on your engagement.”

It was as if they had never been intimate, that they were just casual acquaintances who, though in the same cohort, had meant nothing else to each other. As she said goodbye to Rasha, her confusion turned to anger and she thought, “you little shit. You set me up for this.”