

(Excerpt from Chapter 10)

.... They could not have been prepared for what awaited them as they descended to the sidewalk. The traffic—both pedestrian and vehicular—on King David Street and where they turned onto Elimelech Admoni Street, George Washington Street, and then Keren HaYesod Street, seemed normal for a Tuesday. But on every corner of every thoroughfare stood a soldier wearing the fatigues of the Israeli Defense Force and shouldering an automatic weapon.

“It’s an armed camp!” Yasmeen mouthed as her forehead creased in alarm.

“I agree, it’s pretty shocking. But are you surprised? The Israelis have to fight for their lives and defend their country every minute because they’re surrounded by Arabs that want to wipe them off the map. They’ve pretty much been at war since they were founded during Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 to ’49. Then there was the Suez Crisis in ’56—when Egypt’s Nassar wanted to nationalize the Suez Canal, but after Israeli troops reacted he backed down.

“You remember the Six-Day War in ’67? Israel launched a preemptive strike against Egypt and Syria and ended up capturing the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Old City of Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. In the Yom Kippur War of ’73, the Arab coalition launched a surprise attack against Israel on their holiest day, and the aftermath upset a bunch of stuff.

“Moreover, remember the oil embargo that year? My college closed for a month because they couldn’t afford to heat the dorms. I actually had to go home to Atlanta. I’d rather have been tortured by terrorists—oh, come to think of it, I was!” Maria’s face froze in contempt as she thought of Betty.

After an uncomfortable silence, Yasmeen said, “You seem well-informed about Israel. Is it true that every young adult, man or woman, married or single, has to serve time in the military?”

“Oh yeah. Hadn’t you noticed some of those ferocious soldiers on street corners are women?”

“I’m all for women’s lib,” Yas said, “but I couldn’t see myself in the military—that’s for my brother.”

“Yeah, they wouldn’t let you bring your makeup case or wear your shiny hoop earrings,” Maria elbowed her friend playfully. “As for me, I might be a pacifist—I’m not sure. But I can’t imagine being part of an organization that kills people.”

“You’re an American. Doesn’t your government kill people through its military-industrial complex, either with actual bombs they send abroad or pollution at home?”

“You have a point. But then, isn’t Turkey the same? We’d have to go live on that mountaintop in Tibet to distance ourselves from the modern state. At least we can try not to participate in it to

the best of our ability, like not joining the Army or working for a defense contractor. As a couple of intellectuals, I think we're relatively harmless."

"Oh, so ideas are not dangerous?" Yas queried. "Philosophies, theologies, and political thought were never subversive?"

"Certain ideas—such as those that sparked the American or French Revolutions, or the Protestant Reformation—can be more dangerous than material weapons."

"As well as those that initiated the Civil Rights movement and the Women's movement in your country."

They continued their conversation as they walked toward Ben Yehuda Street, commenting on how modern the New City of Jerusalem differed from the Muslim cities they had seen in Morocco and Egypt and the urban centers in Greece and Turkey. "I think," said Maria, "it's because nothing was here before. It was just desert. The Israelis built this from the ground up. But I'm sure Sheila can tell us more about the history of the area."

"If we ever meet up with her," Yasmeen said.

Orthodox Jewish men in their long black coats and flat black hats, their sidecurls bobbing along with the fringe of their tallit—the ubiquitous blue and white prayer shawl worn by many Israeli men—bustled past them on the sidewalk. Neither Maria nor Yasmeen noticed any Orthodox women out and about. The rest of the populace appeared more Western, dressed as they were in contemporary attire and resembling Americans.

After crossing Ben Yehuda Street the women stood staring up at a small, older edifice sandwiched between two tall contemporary office buildings. *The Sentinel* appeared in red letters edged with black and green over the doorway. "This must be the place," Yas said.

They rang the bell and were admitted to a second-floor walk-up. Before they reached the newspaper's office they heard the clattering of typewriters, the rhythmic whoosh and clank of paper running through presses, and a minor commotion of discordant voices. Opening the door they encountered a receptionist, a raven-haired young woman clad in dark clothing with a black-and-white-checked Palestinian keffiyah wrapped around her shoulders like a shawl. "May I help you?" she asked in English, perceiving they were tourists.

Maria brightened. "Yes! We're seeking Sheila Jackson-Brown. She was expecting us in Jerusalem as of yesterday."

The woman's face blanched. She tried to say something but could only stutter an unintelligible squeak as she held up a hand to indicate she would be right back. She then turned and ran toward an office with a closed door.

Yasmeen and Maria looked at each other, questioning. "What was that about?" Yas murmured. "Beats me," Maria mouthed back.

A short, dark-completed man wearing wire-rimmed glasses and dressed in a tan safari shirt and jeans emerged from the doorway into which the girl had run. He attempted a nervous smile, and said: "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but Ms. Jackson-Brown is on assignment out of the country. Something came up."

"Do you know when she'll be back?" Yas asked.

The man drew in a sharp breath, looked down, then ran his hand through his hair before he answered without giving them eye-contact, "That's hard to say. You could check back next week."

"But don't you have a way to be in touch with her?" Maria persisted. "You must have a means of communication. She was expecting us from New York and was reserving a hotel room for us. We don't have a place to stay and we don't have a week to hang around."

The man—they assumed he was the paper's editor—began to appear vastly more uncomfortable as he shifted from one foot to the other and perspiration beaded on his forehead. "Uh, I can try to send word to her . . . but when a correspondent is in the field . . . sometimes it is . . . difficult to . . ." He trailed off as his breathing sped up.

The friends turned to one another and without a word decided it was time to leave. "Well, thank you, sir," Yasmeen said politely. "We appreciate your time. Perhaps we shall check back tomorrow."

As they descended the stairs to the sidewalk neither woman said a word. Only after they had walked about a block back toward the King David Hotel did Maria venture: "Something strange is going on at that newspaper."

"No kidding! Those two weren't merely nervous or uncomfortable. They seemed genuinely terrified."

"Do you think Sheila might have gone to some war zone, they can't get in touch with her, and are worried?"

"They did not seem anxious in that way," Yas said. "Something more is behind whatever they were agitated about, but I can't imagine what. She did say when we met her in New York that Israel is a dangerous place."

They continued to wonder what Sheila's absence from *The Sentinel* was all about, when, as they approached the King David Hotel, they saw Dr. Stansfield leaning into an Israeli military vehicle and speaking with an officer of the IDF. Coming closer, they stopped short and exchanged glances, shocked for the second time in less than an hour. . . .

You'll have to read *Climbing the Great Pyramid* to find out what happens!