

The Iron Man

One day Sonia wanted to go outside and explore the old walled city of Jerusalem. She normally stayed at home after school; she never went outside to play or hangout with friends. At school she didn't talk to anybody because no one liked her. She had no friends because she could not speak Arabic.

Tall, with light skin, blue eyes, and long ginger hair, she was thirteen when her family moved to Jerusalem from Brazil.

The only street inside the old city Sonia knew was Sa'adiyeh Street because that was where her school was located. So she decided to begin her journey there. When she arrived she saw a group of kids playing splashing around in dirty water; they were wearing torn clothes, and an old man was washing the streets. Sonia felt dizzy from the shouting and playing kids, the sound of buckets of water spilling on the stone street, and a tractor transporting supplies. She turned around and headed in the other direction of the souk to escape the annoying sounds.

Suddenly, she found herself in an unknown street. She was lost. She didn't know a soul, and had no phone to call anyone, so she kept walking until she saw a little boy standing against a wall and stamping with his feet in a puddle of water. She went to him and asked how she could find her way out of the maze, but the little boy stared with his mouth closed and walked away.

Sonia kept walking until she found a way to return to Sa'adiyeh Street. When she was walking she saw a group of tourists passing through the Christian Quarter. She followed them to see where they were heading, and suddenly she realized they were speaking Portuguese, her mother language. She joined with them, and was happy to make new friends. Discovering new parts of Jerusalem made her even happier.

After she left them, she remembered how someone from her class told her about shops in the old city where people work in the same way their fathers and forefather worked for ages— since ancient times! She was curious to see for herself.

She returned to Sa'adiyeh Street to see the shops. She was walking slowly, staring at the people and thinking of the many languages she heard. She stopped for a

while and saw an old man sitting on the ground and like her watching everyone. She went to him, and he said "Marhaba."

From his smile she knew he was friendly. Sonja began saying "Marhaba" to the other shop owners, until a young man replied to her by saying "Hello." After that she knew that Marhaba means Hello.

After she walked for ten minutes, she saw old fabric shops crowded together. She kept walking and looking at people, at the customers and owners of the shops. She saw that customers, wearing bright clothes, were waiting in a line to buy cloth and other materials.

Suddenly her eyes caught sight of a small shop where there were many young teenage girls interviewing to an old man. The small tailor shop was boiling hot and everyone was sweating. She too began perspiring and the air was so thick she had to go outside to breathe.

At the same time, a girl came out of the shop and began speaking English into her phone. Sonia asked, "Excuse me, can you translate for me what the old man in the shop is saying? Are you interviewing him?"

"Of course I will tell you." Her name was Lucie. She explained the story of the old man's tailor and laundry. Sonia followed Lucy back inside, where Lucy introduced her to the old man. He looked like he was eighty. With only a few teeth in his mouth he was speaking very carefully; his lips shivered and the words came out slowly. But he had a wide smile that reached all the way to his ears. He had a wrinkled face, white hair, a mustache; he was wearing clean clothes, and the belt holding up his pants was flapping. His blue eyes seemed to twinkle in delight at talking to the girls. He had a lot of hand gestures and he never stopped talking. Lucy whispered to Sonia that his name was Abd il Quader el Buchari.

The iron he was using to press the clothes, Sonia saw, was ancient. Thirteen year-old girls like her knew such irons only from movies.

The "Iron Man" spoke about his life. He had inherited the shop from his older brother, and he started working about sixty years ago. The shop provided him for his wife, three

daughters, and four sons. He also said there was no difference between his and his sons' generation. Work is work. Clothes need to be washed and pressed.

As he went on speaking, he told us about the international conflicts that have occurred since he began ironing clothes. He endured many problems after the 1967 war. There were tragedies that made it hard to stay in the city. But he did. He continued talking about how much he loved his job and wanted to die working.

Jerusalem is his city and he will never give it up and will never leave. He would be like a fish out of water if he went somewhere else. Sonia listened to him talking about being buried in Jerusalem. He had an honest face, his eyes and mouth were smiling, and she felt that he was a happy man.

By Nairy Shahanian