

*Newcomers in an Ancient Land*

*EXERPT*

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**SUNRISE OVER THE GOLAN ©**

**I** crept along a dirt road under a black dome studded with stars on my way to my job as a volunteer in the vineyards of Kibbutz Dan. At four in the morning, only the chirping of crickets and the crunch of my work boots broke the peace along this deserted stretch of the pre-1967 border between Israel and Syria. Until the rest of the work crew arrived at six, I would be alone. Or would I?

Danger, Explosives, Keep Out warned the faded signs in Hebrew, English, and Arabic on a haphazard barricade of rusty barbed wire, broken concrete, thorn trees, and weeds. From just beyond, I could hear a faint braying, and I caught a glimpse of something white and flowing. A parachute? My heart pounded and my red hair stood on end as adrenaline surged through every cell in my eighteen-year-old body. But on closer inspection, it was only the billowing jellaba of a Syrian farmer tilling his fields with a hand-held plow drawn by a recalcitrant donkey. Such a biblical vision made it hard to imagine that conflict still racked this ancient land.

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One by one, the stars winked out, the sky turned pale, and a rosy glow backlit the massive shoulders of the Syrian hills hunched over the valley. I knew those silhouetted hills hid bunkers; and in those bunkers crouched soldiers; and in the crosshairs of their Kalashnikovs, I could be a target. Yet for a moment, a wild part of me dared imagine that the sight of a naïve young girl in khaki shorts and shirt might offer a welcomed distraction from the tedium of war.

By now, opalescent clouds of apricot, lavender, and magenta were gathering at fever speed. Just when it seemed the light could get no brighter, a blinding fireball burst over the mountains. Quaking in my boots, yet quivering with delight, I stood transfixed by the beauty and danger of this ancient land in which I was a newcomer.

intuition. But memories can be like snowflakes, distinct yet quickly dissolving on the wavy mirror of the mind. Even shared memories within a family can be wildly dissonant. So who is to say what is strictly true? I only know my words to be “truly true” when they resonate in my heart like a well-struck gong or the solid crack of a baseball bat on a home run.