

### **Khan El-Khalili Bazaar**

Azim was a fixture in Cairo's Khan el-Khalili Bazaar. He knew almost everyone. With three decades of life working in the Khan el-Khalili he had more knowledge in his head about Cairo and Egypt and its people and its history than you would ever find on the Internet. He seemed very nervous at the beginning of this new day.

A woman in a long white dress watched Azim finish unloading some antiques from a compact van in front of his stall in the crowded Bazaar. She had been doing this daily for the past week from her vantage point across the road in the coffeehouse. Typical surveillance work. On this assignment, she was on a need-to-know basis, which meant she didn't know exactly what she was looking for, but if anything unusual happened, she was to call her handler.

After several days of this Eshe Hayes had seen nothing unusual. Three times a day she would sit with a coffee and a small plate of Umm Ali, reading Cairo's daily *Al Ahrām* newspaper. She would gaze into the street and people watch, just like thousands of others in the heart of Cairo. In this early morning surveillance, it was sometimes difficult to watch Azim because there were so many people, mostly Egyptians, walking by. Later in the day it would be the tourists who would get in the way, as this was a popular place to buy jewelry, antiques and souvenirs.

Azim, of course, had no idea he was being watched, as this elegant woman was pretty good at her job. And with her large dark lens sunglasses on, no-one could tell exactly what she was looking at.

As soon as the van left, a man pulling on an old donkey that was hitched to a cart shuffled slowly in front of Azim's stall. Nothing unusual. Eshe took another sip of coffee as she had done countless times before when her vision was blocked. She looked down and scanned the newspaper.

Eshe heard a loud scream. She looked up. A second later there was a flash of light and she was blown several feet into the back wall of the café. She fell into a crumpled heap as broken wood and torn cloth fell on her, dust swirling all around from the explosion. Her vision was blurred. Her ears were ringing, but she could hear muffled screams. She wanted to get up to see what had happened, but she felt as though something was pinning her down. Her body just didn't want to move or couldn't move - she wasn't sure which. She was bleeding, at least she thought it

was her own blood. There was an ugly four-inch long gash on her left arm just above her wrist, and blood on her other arm and both legs. Her dirty and stained white dress was ripped at the knees, and a small jagged piece of wood protruded from her lower abdomen.

A few moments later the dust subsided. She looked out to Azim's stall. It wasn't there anymore. There were bodies and body parts lying on the road and around her, and frantic movement and noise and screaming and crying and smoke.

Chaos. Her ears kept ringing and ringing.

A horrible burning smell pervaded the Khan el-Khalili Bazaar.

And then Eshe passed out.