

# Sarah Tuttle-Singer 3/1/26

## **The People You Meet in Your Bomb Shelter When Your Bomb Shelter Is Literally a Byzantine Well:**

There are cities with reinforced concrete and government-issued instructions laminated on the wall.

And then there is Jerusalem.

Here, when the siren goes off, you descend into a 1,500-year-old Byzantine well beneath the Old City and hope the WiFi holds.

It may not be up to code, but it has survived Crusaders, Salahadin's brother in law, Mamluks, Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians — and now, apparently, this.

This is who you meet there.

### 1. The 90-Year-Old Armenian with the Keys

He has a ring of keys large enough to open half the Old City.

His family has been here longer than most borders.

He doesn't speak much, but when he does, it's very. Precise.

He has seen different flags, different uniforms, different promises. Same sky.

"We always stay."

It's not defiance. It's point of fact.

### 2. The Amateur Archaeologist

He insists the well survived empires and will therefore survive this. He runs his hand along the stones like they're old friends.

"Feel that?" he says. "Byzantine engineering."

He says it the way other men say, "Trust me."

He is not calm. He is performing calm for the rest of us.

### 3. The Broadcaster from East Jerusalem

Two phones. One on speaker. An entire extended family pouring out of little squares like the Brady Bunch — cousins, uncles, someone's sister's friend's mother's hairstylist. Advice. Prayers. Rumors. The well somehow has WiFi.

He keeps saying, "One second, one second," to both the people on the phone and the people in the room.

Everyone is talking with their hands and shouting.

It's a Woody Allen movie in Arabic.

### 4. The Existentialist

She is unimpressed by empires. Unimpressed by history. Unimpressed by all of us.

"If this well survived the Crusades, why doesn't it have better lighting?" she asks.

She scrolls. She sighs.

She was supposed to meet Tomer from Tinder later.

She'd rather be taking selfies on the roof.

### 5. The Father from America Who Wants Regional Analysis

He asks for an assessment of what will happen next.

Not tonight.

Over the next seventeen years.

He wants a 32-minute breakdown of geopolitical implications, regional actors, economic shifts, global realignments.

He is crushingly specific.

The siren wails above us and he says, "So strategically speaking..."

#### 6. The Small Boy Who Wants to Know If Wells Have Ghosts

He asks this without irony.

He wants to know if Byzantine ghosts speak Arabic or Hebrew or another language.

He wants to know if ghosts are afraid of sirens.

No one has a good answer.

#### 7. The Armenian Pit Bull Named Baku

He is having a regional crisis of his own.

He is vibrating.

He requires antipsychotics and possibly a UN envoy.

His presence alone makes this officially multinational.

He does not care about geopolitics.

He cares about chewing the historian's hat.

#### 8. The Rabbi, the Priest, the Imam — and the Armenian Electrician

They arrive slightly out of breath.

They still meet once a year for coffee during Ramadan, after Iftar and Shabbat. They argue about history.

They argue about God. They argue about whose mother cooks best.

When the siren peaks, each whispers something different.

They don't coordinate. But they all look up at the same time.

#### 9. The French Tourists Who Just Want a Cigarette

They did not see this in the brochure.

"Excusez-moi," one asks, peering upward toward the mouth of the well, "is it safe to smoke?"

Everyone stares.

The dog vibrates harder.

They apologize beautifully and then take a selfie with the stones.

Later they will describe this as authentique

#### 10. The WhatsApp General

He has no formal rank but enormous authority.

"Forwarded many times," he announces, as if citing peer-reviewed research.

He reads updates from three different groups: family, neighborhood, and something ominous called

"Security Real Truth."

His information contradicts itself every four minutes.

He refreshes anyway.

He has not been called up for miluim.

#### 11. The Amateur Historian's Rival

He gently corrects the Archaeologist.

"Late Byzantine," he says. "Possibly early Umayyad modifications."

If the siren lasts longer, they may carbon-date each other.

Their debate is oddly comforting.

If men can argue about masonry during a missile alert, civilization is intact

#### 12. The Woman Who Texts Both Sides

She checks on her Jewish cousin in Talpiot and her Palestinian friend in Beit Hanina at the same time.

"Are you safe?" she types, twice, in two languages.

Her face is tight but composed.

She does not make speeches.

She makes sure everyone replies.

### 13. The Reservist on Silent Mode

Phone face down. Boots dusty.

He hasn't been called up yet.

He keeps calculating how long it would take to get from here to his unit if the message comes.

He says nothing about it.

He eats sunflower seeds like it's a normal Motzei Shabbat.

### 14. The Shopkeeper Who Locked Up Mid-Sentence

He came straight from the shuk.

Apron still on. Change still in his pocket.

He locked the shop while telling someone, "One second, I'll be right back."

He says this every time.

He means it.

### 15. The One Who Can't Wait for Mashiach

"This isn't a war," he says, eyes bright. "It's Purim."

Redemption is HERE. Right around the corner.

He is already narrating the reversal.

The plot twist.

The downfall of enemies.

He quotes verses. He forwards voice notes. He smiles like someone who has read the last page and knows how it ends.

The siren wails and he nods.

"Geula," he whispers.

He is not afraid.

Or maybe he is — and this is how he metabolizes it.

### 16. The Fiddler on the Roof

He makes a cameo in the shelter after filming the missiles. He is neurotically energized.

### 17. The Person Watching It All

Not neutral. Not detached. Just noticing.

The absurdity of a regional war compressed into a stone cylinder beneath the Old City.

Armenians. Jews. Palestinians.

WiFi. Sirens. Sunflower seeds.

A dog named Baku.

A man analyzing the next seventeen years while we wait for the next seven minutes to pass.

All of us sitting on stones laid when theology was still being argued in sandals.

And the well — older than all our arguments — holding.

Above us, the siren rises and falls.

Below, history breathes through limestone.

Empires argue. Politicians posture. Analysts predict seventeen-year arcs.

But in the well, we share space. We refresh WhatsApp. We whisper different prayers to the same ceiling of sky.

And when it's over, we climb back up the narrow steps into whatever century is waiting for us — still here.