



emma milton

office@emmamilton.com

secret mission

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As she approaches the station entrance, discretely concealed in her customary burqa, Yasmin feels uncomfortably conspicuous. It is a blazing summer's day and although she could for all purposes be completely naked beneath the all-encompassing black robe, and the jostling crowd would be none the wiser, she is appropriately not. Her bulging rucksack weighs heavy and is certainly a burden to bear. The inescapable sweat clings to her back in quiet desperation and her tired legs ache from the long walk. In a well rehearsed and perfectly executed manoeuvre, she slips past the inattentive security guard and confidently enters the grand Victorian building. She is on a secret mission for 'The One She Serves' ...how fortunate she is: how blessed.

She joins a faceless queue and uses anonymous cash to buy her 'Zone One' ticket from an unprejudiced machine before beginning the long descent into the bowels of the earth. Escalator after extended escalator draw her ever downwards until she is at long last faced with the over-populated platform. The atmosphere is electric and an ill wind blows ominously through the unrevealing tunnel, signalling the tense approach of a charging train. Without checking the destination, she randomly boards the packed tube; just one more sardine in a fateful tin. She thinks of her beloved family awaiting her in paradise. Today could be the last day of her life on this earth and she will live it as such, in dutiful respect for 'The One She Loves'.

There is barely an inch to spare as the tightly-packed carriage rattles along at break-neck speed. The unchecked perspiration is in full flow and even her dark sunglasses are now misted and obscure. This endurance test will be short lived however, as time hurtles past in the fast-paced underground. Screeching brakes and a harsh jolting urgently announce the imminent stop. Without a moment to prepare, Yasmin allows herself to be taken with the surge and in an instant is frantically ejected, almost thrown to her knees. She has no idea where she might be, but this is as good a place as any for the appointed task. The cruel over-tightened straps of her purposeful backpack are simply killing her and she longs to be relieved of it.

Yasmin knows full-well that what she is about to do would be judged very harshly, even by those closest to her; yet she honourably fears only the fair and

righteous judgment of 'The One Who Guides Her'. This is no foolhardy mission based on some fleeting whim; she has thought this through carefully, prayed earnestly and respectfully read her Holy Qur'ān. Although she has kept her secret close, she has nevertheless sought council and listened intently to the wisdom of her Imam, and dear uncle, Hakim. Just as Ibrahim was prepared to sacrifice his son, she will blindly follow wherever she is led; trusting that 'The Ever Merciful' will send a preventative angel should she be in danger of overstepping the mark. She must keep her eyes peeled and her wits about her.

Upon completing the ascent she stares in wonder at the glorious glass ceiling suspended high in the heavens above, held impressively by majestic stone pillars. A mass of people swarm beneath, oblivious. At the foot of one of these incredible columns she finds what she is seeking: public lavatories. She waits her turn and enters a toilet cubical to prepare. Having fastened the rickety door, she at last loosens the load and places it carefully on the tiled floor beside her. A mistake now could seal her fate, so she calms her nerves with a softly spoken prayer in her native tongue. She extends the zip its full length and gently eases the brown paper package from the sack and sets it on the freshly cleaned, pristine covered seat. Resting in the bottom of the carrier is her treasured Qur'ān. Caressing it lovingly, she seeks final guidance in order to be absolutely certain. Given the go-ahead; now is the time.

Yasmin takes a deep breath and slowly removes her sunglasses, laying them neatly on the plump package. Next she slowly removes the burqa and places it inside the rucksack. She feels no shame, knowing that she is ever naked before 'The One Who Created Her'. Her undergarments consist of faded blue jeans and a modest lace blouse, crisp and pure white in the ultra-violet light. Scraping her hair back into a tight ponytail, she secures it firmly and replaces her sunglasses. Transformation complete, she lifts the lightened bag and throws it loosely over one shoulder. Opening the cubicle, she turns to the package; exactly where she had left it.

She has no reason to fear the security guard as she approaches the station exit. Nobody would dare 'frisk' (secretively grope) a 'liberated western woman': she is untouchable. He pays no attention to her, the load on her back, or the brown paper package borne boldly beneath her arm. She smiles and skips the steps as she enters the sunshine.

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The beleaguered beggars cannot believe their luck when the kind friendly stranger invites them for a picnic in the park. Apparently it would have been her late husband's birthday today, and as she unravels the large brown paper package, bursting with all his favourite dishes, she tells of how he taught her to live each day as though it were her last. Sitting on the grass together, gratefully

enjoying the unexpected feast, a traditionally veiled lady passes discretely on a nearby path.

“Bloody foreigners” exclaims one of the group loudly, and the others nod their heads as he continues “wouldn’t have anything to do with them, me.”

Yasmin blushes. She is thankful that they are all clearly colour blind, and is pleased too that she has made the effort to dress appropriately for the occasion; even if it had meant breaking a few sacred rules along the way. How fortunate she is: how blessed.

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