

## Concealment

A blanket of fresh snow covered the bodies. Mula Prakriti, Mother Nature, was doing her best to blot out the horrible events of a few hours ago.

Tanisha shivered in her hiding place. Snow or no snow, she had seen and heard what those men did. *Why had they come? Who were they?*



My best friend, Fakhriyya Ahmad, invited me over for dinner. Her family came from Syria and moved into our quiet neighborhood adjoining the woods over a year ago. We are both in our twenties and share one primary passion---computer hacking. I got her a job with the security firm where I work. We hack into our clients' servers to expose weaknesses. Fakhriyya's father is an engineer, and in his free time has indulged us by creating secret rooms and passageways on their land. As a Hindu, I find it a rare treat to be best friends with a Muslim.

When I arrived for dinner, the aromas emanating from the kitchen were delightful, a testament to Fakhriyya's cooking abilities. I walked into the kitchen and kissed her on both cheeks. That's when I noticed that she was looking past me to make sure her parents' attention was otherwise engaged. She motioned hurriedly for me to follow her to the back corner where she hastily retrieved a small padded envelope.

"Here," she whispered, pressing the packet into my hands, "if anything happens to me or my family, you must get this to your trusted reporter friends in the hacker group."

"What are you talking about?" I queried, perplexed.

"Never mind for now. Just keep this with you always, and be ready." Her eyes focused intensely on mine.

"Ok," I replied, and tucked the packet into my backpack with my laptop.

Just as we all sat down, there came a knock at the front door. As her father went to see who was there, Fakhriyya grabbed my arm and pulled me toward the garage. "Run! You must get this info out. Go, before it is too late!"



My heart is racing as I move stealthily through the secret door into the garage, cross to the bookshelf on the far wall, and press the hidden latch. The bookshelf swings toward me and I quickly enter the dark space behind it, pulling it shut behind me. I feel the familiar handrail and swiftly follow the steps down to the underground tunnel. My feet splash through puddles as I race

toward the other end. I climb up the steps and crouch at the top, listening. The woodland animals sound serene and I climb up to our modern day treehouse.

Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!

Silenced gunshots! My hands tremble as I bring my phone out and capture what happens next on the back porch. Several men drag the bodies of my beloved friends out and lay them in odd positions in the yard.

I promptly send the video to my reporter friends and place the phone in the hidden cavity under the floor. *Breathe!* Opening Fakhriyya's packet, I shake a thumb drive into my hand and have a look at the first document on my laptop.

"By the time you read this, we will be dead. Our executioners will take our DNA and fingerprints and use these to 'prove' that we were plotting all along to assassinate the former President. Because we are Syrian refugees, this fake news will spread quickly. The real murderers were hired by those in the current President's cabinet. There are numerous files on this drive that will reveal the truth."

I watch as the laptop struggles to send the data over low bandwidth. *Come on, come on!* When the last file is finished, I quickly hide everything under the floor.

Scrunch---Scrunch---Scrunch.

*What was that? Surely they do not know of my hiding place!* I take some steadying breaths as I cautiously lean over the edge of the treehouse and peer down.

The sun has set, but I can just make out a man standing by a nearby tree, his gun pointing directly at me. *Thank the gods the information is now safely with the reporters.*

Thunk!



Gently falling snow begins to blanket the newest body.