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## Another Manic Monday

by Lesley Dawson

Light was peeping through the blinds and Samira realised that a new day had begun and she needed to be up and dressed in order to finish all the arrangements she had begun the previous day. Life was always like this on a Monday but even more so today. Her heart was heavy with thoughts about the future for her beloved eldest son. She would miss him so much.

Her mind listed all the tasks she must complete; bake fresh bread, make more hummus and babaganoush, make a salad and pick oranges from the tree by the back door. So much to do and so little time to do it. Fortunately her two elder daughters were visiting with their children, they would help in the kitchen and the sounds of the children playing would soothe her bruised heart.

So much had been said and planned that brought her to this day and her mind went back to the numerous times the men of the family had sat around the table outside in the shade of the olive trees sipping tea, drinking arak and loudly discussing the future of her eldest son.

“I want my son to study medicine. That will give him a good start in life. It must be the best place we can afford”

“Of course you do, Abu Hanna. But surely the best place is Damascus?”

“I have sent my son there to study law. He is doing well and is living with my cousin Farid.”

“I have made up my mind that the Medical School in Istanbul is the best. That is where he will go”

That decision had brought them to this day when Hanna was leaving home, for how long, God only knew.

Samira remembered sitting with the other women, tears pricking her eyelids and a huge lump in her throat, listening to these men decide on the future of her beloved Hanna. How could they understand a mother's anguish at the thought of her son being alone in a strange place? Who would cook for him, wash his clothes, and make sure he went to Mass every Sunday. Anything could happen to him. She shivered as she thought of all the temptations to a good Christian boy in what was supposed to be a Muslim city but had the reputation of having all the evils of western culture.

However, she knew it was the custom that the men of the family, especially the father, made decisions about education and marriage in the family. Abu Hanna's word was law, after all he was paying for his children's education. She thought back to the times when young men had visited the house to be vetted as possible husbands for her daughters. She remembered how she felt when Abu Hanna had chosen a man from Mosul in Iraq for Amal, her eldest daughter and how they wept over each other the day the young couple left for their new home, knowing it would be months until they met again. Thank God that Rima had married a man in the next village and they were able to see her every month, but who knew how long they would be close at hand as Amal's husband had won a scholarship to Kiev in Russia.

Eventually all preparations were completed and Hanna had managed to find a place for all the food his mother had pressed on him for the journey. His protests about not having enough room in his luggage and having more than enough to feed him all the way to Istanbul and back were of no avail. His mother's love had to be seen in tangible form. What would the neighbours think if she sent him off with less than this? The whole family, mother, father, brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles plus a few close neighbours saw him off at the railway station, having been ferried in a convoy of taxis to Aleppo. So much kissing and hugging and weeping and hand wringing that Hanna couldn't bear it and prayed for the train to start.

He did not realise then that this farewell would sustain his spirit in the dark first days of his time in Istanbul. At last he climbed onto the train and closed the carriage door. Opening the window he leaned out to wave goodbye and kept on waving until his family were as small as specks of dust. Their last sight of him was a lone arm waving out of the window as the train gathered speed on its ten hour journey to Istanbul.