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The Ministry of Utmost Happiness

by Christina Buchanan

The questionnaires from the survey had been returned and were sitting in boxes all round the hall, which was in fact a large disused warehouse rented specially for the task. Sophie had been lucky to get the job, only temporary of course, but much better paid than the various waitressing and cleaning jobs her friends had acquired for the holidays. She was to sort the questionnaires into piles under the headings Ecstatically Happy, Perfectly Content, Somewhat Pessimistic, Grumbling Troublemakers, and Lethargically Depressed.

It was the Grumbling Troublemakers the Government was interested in, of course, although a wary eye would have to be kept on the Ecstatically Happy as they were clearly delusional and may require sectioning at some stage. Somewhat Pessimistic was the only normal state of mind for citizens these days. The Perfectly Content and Lethargically Depressed shared the convenient attribute of keeping a low profile and not causing any trouble at all.

Sophie had undergone rigorous testing to get this job, the various tests being disguised as reasoning and deduction tests, standard IQ stuff. She was of course a 'Perfectly Content'. The Senior Undersecretary at the Ministry of Utmost Happiness had specified the requirements for the job himself. Somebody with the calm and unquestioning disposition to wade through thousands of questionnaires without being in any way upset by the answers, and not inclined to analyse any trends or wonder about the Government's motives.

Sophie settled down and opened the first box. There was not a soul in the warehouse apart from her, which suited her purpose perfectly. Dust motes floated in the bright beams of light from the high windows and spiders scuttled across the concrete floor. From the pocket of her jeans she drew out a tiny camera, cleverly disguised as her State ID card in case it should ever be found during a body search. She would photograph every questionnaire as she sorted. The data collected would be invaluable for her masters.