



How does it feel to be followed?

by Lesley Dawson

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I found out one wet day in November when I opened the door to my office. There on the floor was an A4 sheet of white paper. I picked it up and placed it on my desk while I divested myself of my waterproofs. After eight years I had finally got used to the winter downpours. No longer surprised by their ferocity I shook myself down and put the kettle on for a cup of coffee.

Now looking at the sheet of paper I saw typed in badly phrased English,

“Lesly Dawson. You are no longer welcomed in this country. It is not save for you to stay. You should leave imedaitely”

This should have made me afraid, but it just made me angry. How dare anyone say this to me. After all this time I considered myself half Palestinian. Who would write this?

If it was a student, then he had been encouraged in this by someone else. I knew it was a “he”. In fact I knew which “he” it was. I remembered the torn up exam paper I had found trampled in the mud the previous day. The owner had been so incensed by the grade he had received that he didn’t want to keep it.

I also knew which “he” had encouraged the student to write this. My Palestinian colleague was flexing his academic muscles. He had disagreed violently with my decision to teach physiotherapy and occupational therapy students together in some classes and this was his revenge.

I picked up the phone and dialed the number for the Academic Vice President's office.

"Sabahilkher Hannah, kif halik? I need to speak with Dr Manno urgently."

Hannah would call me when he was free. An hour later I sat in his office drinking Arabic coffee. He had even remembered that I drank it without sugar.

"OK Lesley. What is the matter? You never ask to see me with so much urgency."

I passed the communication to him. As he read his eyes widened and his face became almost fligid.

"This is disgraceful. You are a valued member of staff," he looked up at me, "has this upset you? We don't want to lose you."

"Who would do this?" I could hardly speak for my anger as I shared my suspicions, which unfortunately I couldn't prove.

He nodded wisely and picked up the phone. The next thing I knew a distinguished man in a police uniform arrived. He was introduced as Major Khaled the head of security in Bethlehem.

"Don't worry Doctora. We will send a police car every few hours to patrol the street where you live. This is my phone number if you need to call, use it day or night."

My safety on campus was assured by the university's own security staff who I knew well and exchanged greetings with each morning. I began to feel that I was being followed around as I went from class to class but instead of concerning me, this time it made me feel safe.