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Keeping watch

by Sho Botham

Carly dried the glass of the long black camera lens with a piece of lint-free cloth and wrapped it in what appeared to be, a cotton, chintz sleeve that matched the seaside-colours of the curtaining. The 600mm lens enabled her to see detail that previously she could only have dreamt about. She poked the sleeved lens between the two curtains. The camera, tripod and Carly, remaining out of sight for anyone looking up at the balcony. She could do this set up, blindfolded, after spending almost all of lockdown watching Missy through various lenses.

Carly had moved recently to this apartment. It was more or less the same layout as the previous one, with its similar balcony, overlooking the beach. The move was necessary when it became obvious that Missy was aware she was being watched. Not wanting to cancel the surveillance, Carly was installed in the new apartment where the watching of Missy continued.

At Monday's online briefing, Carly's boss disagreed with her. Even after all this time, he didn't believe that Missy was who she said she was. Carly knew what was coming next. It was his mantra.

"I believe everything out of the common. The only thing to distrust is the normal."

He explained, "Missy is showing us she is normal. All that meditating and yoga on the beach. It's her disguise. She's definitely, way too normal, to be trusted. We need to continue to watch her until she slips up and shows us what she's really all about."

The walls of the apartment's second bedroom were plastered with images of Missy. Missy walking. Missy sitting on the beach. Missy standing on the beach. Missy opening her arms outwards as if embracing the world. Missy performing a novice, salute to the sun. And Missy heading home.

Leaving the lens in situ, Carly pulled her spotted rucksack over her bare shoulders and left the apartment. Following in Missy's footsteps, she walked along the beach path before turning left and stopping when she arrived at three streets back from the beach. Looking up, she saw the colourful windows of Missy's apartment. She stood for a moment, feeling the sun on her back before ringing the bell for flat 15.

Carly took off her spotted rucksack before sitting down on the old, worn but still comfortable, colourful sofa. Missy sat opposite on the padded, footstool, elbows resting on bare, suntanned legs, chin resting on her hands. She had a quizzical expression on her face as she stared at Missy without saying a word.

Opening the spotted rucksack, Carly pulled out a bulging cardboard folder, leant forward and held it out to Missy. She hesitated for a moment before grabbing it and emptying its contents all over the cheap, beige carpet. Her own face stared up at her from the floor. There she was walking, sitting on the beach, standing on the beach, opening her arms outwards as if embracing the world, performing her salute to the sun. Missy was silent. She knelt down and picked up a sheath of typed papers stapled together in the top left corner and began to read.

Carly stood up and went to the window. She knew the beach was not far but she couldn't see it. The apartment building opposite, blocked the view. Her breath was barely audible when she spun round to face Missy. "They would kill me if they knew I was here sharing this with you," she said.

Missy, looked at Carly's face, before getting up off the floor. With a smug smile, she said, "what do you think they would do to both of us if they knew that you're working with me?"