



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Islamic Jihad sees little to gain from moves for peace', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 16/07/05

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Ali got most excited and, paradoxically, most calm, when he saw the backpacks. It was then that he knew he was doing the completely right thing. Knew that he belonged to this group and to this plan. Because there they were, four shining backpacks, each exactly the same and folded up neatly in their own individual plastic bag. They were light blue, with red and white trim, not colours that he would normally have chosen, but somehow, that too seemed right. Later, when the backpack was full of all the gear, he loved that it sat so innocently and jauntily on his back for all the world like any little kid's backpack with the usual assortment of stuff: CDs, sweets, clothes, pencils, tissues, gum, and a sock or two. Only it was not so in his. Or Jeremy's, or Alex's, or Hassan's.

Everything was in order. Mr. Smith was an extremely well-organised man, and funny and passionate too. There was the name, for example...quintessentially English, white, middle-class, Christian. Mr. Smith. What a joke. Over the last few months he and the others had met with Mr. Smith once a week. Mr. Smith had usually begun with a small speech, about right ways of living, and the decline of many aspects of the society around them. It was not fanatical. No, Ali had no time for fanatics. It was just clear. Then he and the others would rehearse their roles over and over again with Mr. Smith...what to do if eventuality 'a' occurred, or 'b' or 'c'. They knew everything backwards.

And often, at the end of a session Mr. Smith would get in his Rover and drive back down to London, and they'd all go to the fish and chip shop and get a cone of chips each and walk home, talking about cricket, and who had what chances in the up-coming season. He was happier than he had ever been.

When the 173 bus came along Piccadilly Circus he knew even before he could read the little identification number, 57, that it was the right one. It seemed to gleam as it slowly trundled along towards him through the peak hour traffic. He gently touched the straps of his backpack. Two strokes each side. It sat calmly on his back. Waiting. For

the right time. As he got onto the bus, he saw one of Mr. Smith's colleagues getting off. The man didn't acknowledge Ali, but he knew that the man had seen him. Had known he was playing his part in the plan. Was doing it right.. Calm swept through him. It was all so smooth. All of the forces were working with them, coming together and heading towards this moment. It was like chaos theory. Things may seem messy, random, incoherent; and then there is that magical moment, when the pattern becomes clear, all of the particles adhere into one magnificent, pure form. A tiny moment of enlightenment he supposed. He hoped. That was, after all, the point.

He climbed the stairs and sat towards the back, as per the plan. Not right in the back row, but towards the back. One of the only vacant seats left was next to quite an old lady, with very white hair. Ali's arm brushed the skin of her hand as he sat down and it was so soft that he found himself hoping, just for a second, that this lovely old lady would get off the bus very soon, at the next stop. But then he shut that thought down. That thought was not helpful. That thought did not belong.

He counted to ten, slowly, as Mr. Smith had taught them to if panic began to arise, and then he concentrated on the last, crucial moments which lay before him, visualising them, laying them out before him in his mind, and then pushing them aside as they were completed.

Past the red post box on the left.

Past the Boots shop. Yes, this world needed a shake-up. It is time.

Two strokes of the straps.

Past the three storey office with the red door.

Thank you Mother, Father.

Goodbye Tubby.

Turn the corner.

Catch sight of Holborn tube station.

All Praise Allah. Go.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Caroline Lee.*