

Ishmael

Chapter 23 - Alejandro

“The platforms at Piccadilly Circus were empty, no more bodies. More shadows of creatures running away from their lights. For the first time there were sounds from the creatures as they disappeared into the darkness.”



Steve Penboss had never earned as much as he would have liked as a local radio DJ, but he'd done alright. After Bruce Grove Radio had closed its doors, he'd packed his bags and driven down to his weekend place near Staverton in the West Country. There had been no deliberate stockpiling; just buying quite a bit of tinned food in case his isolated house was ever snowed in. There were three large chest freezers in the basement, but their contents had been thrown out after the power supply failed.

“What do you think....Is cold Mulligatawny soup a breakfast thing ?” Asked Daisy. “We’ve got about three dozen tins of the stuff.”

“A bit spicy, but I don’t mind.” He replied.

Steve was middle aged, though he liked to describe it as barely middle aged. Daisy was half his age, though that didn’t seem to worry her.

“Just so long as your gut doesn’t start growing over your waistband.” She’d once told him.

Daisy had been the office manager at Bruce Grove Radio and they’d been having a bit of an ‘on and off’ thing for a few years. It felt right to invite her to his secluded hideaway, though he had been surprised when she’d agreed to come. Steve had an ex-wife who still lived in Tottenham, but he’d decided Daisy would be much less hassle and a whole lot more fun.

“Oh damn, the water tank needs filling again.” Said Daisy.

“Crap.....Alright, I’ll go out and work the damn pump.”

“Do you want me to come and help ?”

“No, stay in the warm.”

The house had a well, a fairly empty septic tank and a huge supply of wood for the fire in the lounge. It would have been an idyllic place to wait out the alien invasion, if it hadn’t been for the power going off. Now he had to use the emergency hand pump to fill the roof tanks from the well.

“Have you seen my outdoor boots Daisy ?”

“They’re by the back door, still covered in mud.”

Boots on and Steve reached for the shotgun that went everywhere with him. He hadn’t been that nervous, until a hungry Mastiff had attacked him. The thing was huge, a good ninety pounds even if it was starving. If he hadn’t been carrying the shotgun.....

“Shouldn’t be long.” He shouted.

There’s been a light covering of snow the night before, though it would probably be gone by mid-afternoon. The cupboard for the pump was someway from the house, more of a small shed than a cupboard. Steve opened the door and glared at the emergency hand pump.

“Fucking thing.” He muttered.

The real culprit was Daisy of course, taking two cold showers a day and washing her hair every morning. She liked to keep clean though and she did smell really good after doing her hair. Steve spent a good half an hour working the pump. Probably a good cardio workout, though he’d have

preferred to have been sat in the kitchen talking with Daisy. Steve had never really believed in much, certainly nothing as weird as the idea of synchronicity. Which was a pity, as it was about to play a massive part in his life and the lives of others.

“Hello..... We’re completely lost.” Shouted a male voice.

“Not that we know where we’re going.” Added a female voice.

The house was on the side of a hill in the middle of nowhere. No one had ever gone past the house, or if they had, he hadn’t seen them. Only the huge hungry Mastiff had ever made itself known. Steve didn’t raise the shotgun, but he did make sure it was well clear of his clothing. The man was smiling, while the woman beckoned a toddler to catch up with them. All of them were gradually moving closer to him.

“That’s close enough.” Said Steve. “Who are you ?”

As he said it, he realised it was a weird question to ask.

“I’m Alejandro Lopez..... We don’t mean you any harm.”

“Alex, all our friends call him Alex.” Said the woman. “I’m Tracy and the little one is Maria. We didn’t mean to come here, we just don’t know where we are.”

“We had a car.....Nothing works now.” Said Alex.

“Nothing electrical works, it’s the aliens doing something to the electrics.” Said Steve.

It was impossible of course, but the name Lopez was familiar, as was the name Alejandro. With three quarters of the population probably dead, the survivors hiding out as best they could.... It was absurd, impossible.

“I know this might sounds nuts.” Said Steve. “Are you related to a Jada and Luis Lopez ?”

“Granma.” Shouted Maria.

“Jada is my mother.” Said Alex. “They’re my parents.”

Steve relaxed enough to hang the shotgun over his shoulder and approach Alex with his hand out to be shaken.

“I’m Steve Penboss and you won’t believe the surprise I have for you.”

~ ~

Kata Malovic had been a little scared, after seeing the bodies near Covent Garden Station. When the soldiers had found a few more at Leicester Square Station, they’d all been ready for something. No one was sure what that something might be though. The soldiers were just keeping their rifles ready at every side tunnel and hole in the tunnel wall.

“Don’t worry, these can stop anything.” Darius told her.

He was holding his assault rifle towards her, as if offering it for inspection. It looked like something out of an action film. Large, complicated and probably dangerous. Seeing it didn’t stop her being nervous.

“That’s nice to know.” She told him.

The tracks became quite complicated as they approached Piccadilly Circus Station. Kata tried to step over the live rails at complex multiple junctions, but sometimes walking on the rails was the only way. When they reached a five way tunnel junction, the senior office brought them all to a halt. He spoke to Penny Brownie and the adults, but the tunnel was narrow and she heard every word.

“With the number of tunnels, we can’t properly check them all.” Said the officer. “Ideally I’d like to, but there just isn’t the time. The helicopters will only return so many times if we don’t show up.”

“No, I can see that..... So you’re advising us to proceed ?” Asked Penny.

Penny was scared and she wasn’t hiding it well. Even in the semi darkness of the tunnel, Kata could see the film of sweat forming on her forehead.

"There is another complication." Said the officer.

"You mean the creatures who keep running away from our approaching lights?" Asked Dora.

"I'm glad you've noticed them, it makes telling you about them easier."

"What creatures?" Asked Penny.

"I've saw one close up." Said Kata. "It was a hyena, I'm sure of it."

All eyes were on her. Kata felt the need to say more, to validate her information.

"There was a programme on BBC Midlands." She said. "Regent's Park Zoo had over fifty of them. Obviously some are now down here."

"If there's one here, they'll all be here." Said Ish. "It's what they do, how they behave. I saw that programme too, Hyenas are pack animals."

"Hyenas!!" Said Penny.

Poor Penny, she looked so upset.

"They can't be that dangerous if they're running away from our lights." Said Inka, her mum.

"My men have assault rifles." Said the officer. "No pack of hyenas can beat bullets. You'll all be quite safe, I guarantee it. Just obey any instructions you're given."

Her mum waited until the officer was well out of earshot, before delivering her opinion on him.

"That man is an idiot." She muttered.

"You should show him more respect." Snapped Penny.

Ish and Dora didn't say anything, but the grins on their faces probably meant they agreed with her mum.

"We're moving people." Shouted one of the soldiers. "Those carrying heavy equipment should keep to the centre of the group."

The platforms at Piccadilly Circus were empty, no more bodies. More shadows of creatures running away from their lights. For the first time there were sounds from the creatures as they disappeared into the darkness.

"I thought they laughed, but they're barking." Said Kata.

"Keep quiet if you can't say anything sensible." Said Penny.

"Leave her alone." Said Dora.

They took the wrong tunnel away from all the junctions outside of the station, though no one noticed for quite some time. Everything was dark and there were no signposts. If it hadn't been for Dora, they might never have realised they were heading north along the Bakerloo Line.

"We're going the wrong way." Said Dora.

"The soldiers have maps." Said Penny. "I'm sure they know where we're going."

"No seriously, I used the Piccadilly line all the time when I was at Medical School. I know how the tunnels look, you take it all in, or at least I do. We're definitely going the wrong way."

"I believe Dora." Said Kata

"Nonsense." Snapped Penny.

"Don't yell at my sister." Said Antun.

Her mother had been quiet for a while, ever since they'd decided to follow Ish and Dora on their travels. Her mum had another side though and they hadn't agreed to go anywhere with Penny and her soldiers.

"No." Yelled her mum. "Stop..... Stop everyone; we're going the wrong way."

"I think we must be following the Bakerloo Line." Shouted Dora.

Kata wasn't sure if the soldiers were a mixture of the army and Fifth West fighters, or just Fifth West people. The officer certainly acted as though he was in charge of everyone. There was a lot of shouting, which got worse when he tried to order Ish and Dora to follow him.

"These are my samples, my mission." Yelled Ish. "You are here to help and protect us as required. Dora and I are in charge though and we're telling you ! We're heading the wrong way."

The arguments became worse and louder, when the officer threatened to use the soldiers to force them to follow him. Kata sat on a rail and listened to it all, with Antun sat next to her.

"Adults are stupid." He said.

"Yes, they are." She agreed.

Such a chance thing, Kata spun around when she heard a noise behind them. Her flashlight showed a small dark furry rat running away from her light. It also showed a rather grubby looking cabinet with writing on it.

"Where are you going ?" Asked Antun.

"Come with me, I think it's important."

Her brother was thirteen, there shouldn't have been a need for her to hold his hand. As his fingers found hers in the dark, she gripped them.

"Hold the light for a moment..... That's it, keep it aimed at the writing."

It meant getting decades of tunnel dirt on the sleeve of her cool looking Fifth West jacket, but Kata had to see the words clearly. She wiped the dirt away and the lettering became far clearer. No one seemed interested in the loud argument, which was still going on. The soldiers had decided to take an unofficial break, one even offered her a cereal ration pack as she walked past. There was no time for politeness or quiet. Kata pulled hard on Dora's arm and yelled.

"We are going the wrong way Dora..... You need to see this."

It worked, she was soon aiming her flashlight at the writing on the panel.

'Bakerloo Line – Switch Gear – Ref 990145.'

Everyone seemed to relax, though no one was happy at the prospect of going back the way they'd come.

"They might reuse these cabinets." Said the officer.

"Don't be an idiot." Said Penny.

That was it; they were quickly heading back towards Piccadilly Circus Station. Going they'd been towards the rear of the group, now they were close to the front, far too close. The hyenas were now easy to see, as they looked right into their lights before running away.

"Is it me, or are they getting braver ?" Asked Darius.

"Still not laughter, but their barks do sound like a cackle." Said Kata.

"They stink..... Or something does." Said one of the soldiers.

They were walking through Piccadilly Line Station when the first hyena refused to run away.

"The size of that thing." Said Darius.

A huge brute of a beast, it stood there, barking right into their lights, standing its ground. Darius had to yell at it and wave his assault rifle at it, before the brute grudgingly walked away.

"They're not stupid." Said Ish. "They've been watching us for a while now and don't see us as a threat. You need to shoot one or two Darius..... Or they might attack."

"I can't shoot anything without orders."

"Then get them." Said Penny. "Now, quickly."

The tunnel to leave the station going in the right direction was easy to find coming from the direction they'd arrived from.

"There, that lighter coloured section of wall." Said Dora. "I've been past it so often, we're going the right way now."

Kata was going to check the first cabinet they passed, but there was no need to wipe her sleeve over it. The signalling on the Piccadilly Line had finally been refurbished, the box was new.

'Piccadilly Line – Signalling – Ref 556432.'

Was easy to see, right from the other side of the tunnel.

"Can't be far to Green Park now." Said one of the soldiers.

It seemed to take a long time for Darius to return and he didn't look happy when he did.

"I have permission to shoot at the hyenas." He said. "Single rounds only to conserve ammunition."

"Did he give you a hard time?" Asked Dora.

"It wasn't pleasant."

As if to make a point of using his new orders, Darius fired at every shadow that seemed to be the source of a cackling bark. There had been no sound, no yelp or cry in the darkness. The hyena's body was in the centre of the tracks, blood still forming a pool around it.

"Now they know we pose a threat." Said Ish. "A significant threat."

"Do you think they'll leave us along now?" Asked Kata.

"I think so Kata, they're not stupid creatures." Said Dora.

Penny had been looking at her watch a lot, continually running her flashlight over it. She left it until they could see the platform at Green Park, before ruining everyone's mood.

"No need to hurry now, we missed the first pickup time."

"When is the next?" Asked Kata.

"Two hours, we'll need to find somewhere to get under cover, somewhere near the park."

~ ~

Daisy Lorhan hadn't enjoyed being dragged out into the cold, especially to help a family of strangers. Strangers could be dangerous and Steve seemed to forget that. The family did seem nice though and Steve had taken a bit of a shine to them.

"At least the snow is clearing." Said Steve.

It was a bit of a trudge into Staverton and they'd seen drones flying over the small town. Leaving the relative safety of the house was something neither of them enjoyed, but Steve was one of nature's clowns, or born entertainer as he liked to describe it.

"Think of their faces Daisy." He'd told her. "Talk about a one in a billion coincidence."

Daisy trudged over the sodden ground and wished that Steve Penboss was a little more ordinary, with a little less of a twinkle in his eye. But then again, she probably wouldn't be with him if he wasn't a little crazy.

"DJ's, they're all mad." She mumbled.

"What was that?" Asked Steve.

"Nothing..... We're getting close to the church." She said. "I saw a drone flying round the church about a month ago.... We all know the routine."

"What's a drone?" Asked Alex.

"Crap.... Where have you been the last few months?" Asked Steve.

"We've been going from place to place." Said Alex. "Eating what we could find. Clothing is easy to find, though poor Maria always seems to be in clothes two sizes too big."

As if to prove the point, their little girl did a twirl and her sleeves extended well past the end of her fingers.

"It's a miracle you survived." Said Steve. "Tell them how not to get killed by a drone Daisy, you tell it better than I do."

"The drones look like flying saucers, honest.... Like something out of an old movie. They crackle a little, so if you hear a crackle stand still, really still. A second crackle means it's flying away."

"The drones aren't smart, but their weapons are really nasty." Said Steve. "Electrical maybe, or some sort of laser. We've seen bodies still bubbling hours after being hit."

"Christ." Said Tracy.

"Yes, really nasty." Said Daisy. "If you hear a crackle, you play statues.... Understood?"

"Yes, thank you." Said Tracy.

"We had no idea..... Is there anything else we need to watch out for?" Asked Alex.

"There are metal robots in the towns, but not out here." Said Steve. "We've heard they can be nasty, but we've never seen them. It is a miracle you people are still alive."

They had a look about them, the sort of people who'd last less than a day in a large town. They still had a look of disbelief on their faces and they hadn't checked the sky even once. Still.... They'd learn and Staverton was a quiet place. Daisy hoped they'd learn, they seemed like nice people.

"Here we are, this is the station." Said Steve. "You bang on the door Daisy, she likes you."

Which translated to the middle aged couple not being keen on Steve. Daisy was worried as she approached the door. Not for her own safety, she remembered a reality show once, where it had ended in tragedy. A middle aged couple were reunited with a grown up kid they thought was dead. The mother had died on the spot, a heart attack probably. As Daisy thumped on the door, she hoped she wasn't about to cause the death of Jada Lopez.

"Open up it's Daisy." She Yelled. "I brought someone to see you, someone you will really want to meet."

Nothing, though one set of grubby curtains definitely twitched. Daisy thumped the door again.

"Come on, I know you're in..... I saw the curtains twitch."

The door opened and a face appeared. They didn't see Jada that often, but they were friends. Jada was carrying a rifle, she carried it everywhere. Daisy imagined she slept with it. The weapon went on the ground, as Jada obviously recognised the people stood outside.

"Alejandro.....What.... How ? This is impossible."

They hugged as Daisy watched the sky for drones. It seemed to her the Lopez family were idiots who needed luck to survive. Luck and decent friends.

"Do we get an invite for tea and cake?" Asked Steve.

"Of course, of course." Said Jada. "Come in.... Please come in..... Luis ! You won't believe who I found outside."

~ ~

While his brother was reunited with their mother, Mateo Lopez was climbing over wreckage to get back inside the bunker. Getting out had been bad enough, but there had been a lot of fighting in the bunker, much of it carried out with assault rifles and grenades. Water pipes had been ripped open, whole sections of the ceiling brought down. Worst of all was the air, or rather the lack of it. The automatic recycling and filtering systems had packed up. Add on the smoke and it was probably pure luck that there was enough oxygen in the air to keep him alive.

"Tina ! Can you hear me !" He yelled.

The gunfire and explosions had been their constant companions on the way out, but now they'd gone. Not silence, there were the noises associated with wrecked buildings and structures. The sound of water running somewhere and what sounded like tunnels collapsing. Mateo saw the

entrance to the section of tunnels he'd once thought of home. A fire had started where he'd once shared a bed with his wife. The sight of the flames left him feeling angry, as though someone had violated his home.

"Tina ! It's Dad !"

"She ran past a few minutes ago. I seemed to scare her."

Ray hadn't died in the blast in the tunnel, he was sat on the chair where Helen sat to do her hair and look in the mirror. Ray was alive, though not uninjured. A shirt covered in blood, though his face was the worst thing to look at. Something from a B movie slasher film, only the destruction wrought on Ray's face was all too real. Mateo could see Ray's teeth through the holes in his cheeks.

"You..... This was all your doing." Said Ray.

Not the voice Mateo recognised anymore, though the words were still understandable. Ray barely looked like the friend he'd once known. His left eye was still there, crushed and jammed into his head by some sort of blow. He had a gun in his hand, a huge revolver, a real museum piece.

"You..... Your fault..... All of it." Said Ray.

The revolver began a slow arc that would end up with it aimed in his direction. Mateo remembered seeing the weapon once before. It had been in a drawer and rarely saw the light of day.

"Belonged to my great, great, great grandfather." Ray had once told him. "He used it at the siege of somewhere or other when Britain still had an empire."

A Webley revolver that weighed as much as a small child. Ray slowly but inexorably brought the huge weapon around, until it was aimed at him.

"What.... No apology at least..... You could at least say sorry. Cat got your tongue ?" Asked Ray.

"This isn't my doing. I wanted out; the explosives in the tunnel were my idea..... But this carnage.....I meant to harm no one when I left."

"So not your fault. Nothing is ever Mateo's fault."

"Where did Tina run off to ?"

"Must be my fault then, everything is my fault."

"Ray..... Where did Tina go ?"

"She's there.... Behind you."

Mateo turned and saw Tina stood out in the tunnel. She seemed to be coughing.... He was coughing and it hadn't really registered.

"My fault, I must be punished." Said Ray.

When he heard the boom of the ancient revolver, Mateo expected pain and then oblivion. Instead he turned and saw what was left of Ray's head. Like most people, he'd seen many heads hit by many bullets, but only in films and online dramas. Reality was far worse. Reality meant feeling the hot blood where it had splashed on the side of his head. Reality meant the strange metallic odour. Reality meant seeing an old friend with most of his head blown away. Mateo only realised he'd been deafened by the shot from the old Webley, when he heard Tina screaming. A quiet scream, that sounded as though his daughter was miles away.

"Tina..... I'm so sorry." He said.

She should never have seen that happen, no eight year old child should have seen that happen. He picked her up and hugged her.

"I thought I was alone Dad..... It was terrible."

"Come on Tina..... We have to leave this..... Dreadful place."

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Brenda Grundy thought the orders coming in were too important to simply tell Matt verbally.

"You should come and read these yourself, on the screen." She told him.

"Just give me the highlights as usual."

They were now sleeping in separate beds, though they still seemed to spend most of the day in each other's company. There was no such thing as a clean break in the military.

"No Matt.....These orders are crazy. Come and read them."

"I trust you and you know me..... I might skip over an important bit."

She'd already used his code to request a confirmation, just as she usually did with orders that seemed a little strange.

"I have received a confirmation. It's a death sentence if you obey these orders, for us and the civilians we've been nursing back to health."

"I'm sure you're being melodramatic."

"No I'm not Matt." She snapped.

"Tell me then.... Tell me what those idiots want us to do?"

The orders were long and detailed. Someone had given their pictures of the alien landing site to intelligence, who in turn had shown them to a few technicians, who in turn....

"It's a dog's dinner." She told him. "Their experts think that if we attack the lowest part of the structure, we've a good chance of rendering it unusable. They've even sent a schematic, showing where to place the charges."

"Hmmm they might be right." Said Matt.

"But the retaliation. They'll send drones to destroy Base Crawford, you know they will."

He did it sometimes and it always annoyed her. After insisting on only getting her verbal take on their orders, he'd come over and read what was on the screen. He read their orders, slowly and then he read them again.

"Not a bad plan, apart from very few of us surviving." He said.

"But the civilians Matt, they'll all die too."

Until recently there'd have been kissing, touching. Some of the touching might have even been quite intimate. Now he sat on the floor reading the screen, not even holding her hand.

"I hope you don't Bren..... But if you were to put the kids into the old bus and head south. I wouldn't send anyone to look for you. Crap, you know my memory. I'd probably forget to tell headquarters that you'd gone walkabout."

"You know I won't do that."

"Then we're both going to obey the orders. We're soldiers, it's what we do. It's why they gave us all those wonderful explosives and some reinforcements. Besides, their plan might actually work."

"If you die you'll never get to Britain to see your wife." She said.

It was mean and below the belt. Bren didn't want him to obey the insane and suicidal orders. Matt didn't look worried though. If anything his usual smile just got broader.

"You'll think I'm crazy." He said.

"Oh, I've known that for years."

"I just know I'm not going to die here, in Australia." He said. "I might not get back to Britain, but I know I'm not going to die here. I sort of feel it."

"Have you got religion all of a sudden?"

"No, nothing like that. I don't know what to call it. I just know."

"So, we're going to attack the aliens then?" She asked.

"Yes, use my codes and tell everyone. Duncan will enjoy himself, lots of explosives."

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They'd all been in the dark too long. They'd all had the terrible stench in their noses for too long. Inka Malovic wasn't a soldier, she was a mother. All mothers have an overdeveloped protective instinct which the misguided might call being neurotic. An alarm bell began to go off in her head, as everyone forgot about caution, as they ran up the stairs to get out of Green Park Station. Actually she wasn't the only one feeling edgy, Ishmael was resisting the urge to run up the stairs and into the sunlight.

"Help those carrying boxes." He yelled. "The fresh air will still be there if we take our time."

The officer in charge was nowhere to be seen. The last time Inka had seen him, he'd been at the rear, probably sulking. Dora seemed to pick up her moods from Ish.

"Stop..... The technicians carrying samples will need help." She yelled.

No good, like her the soldiers could feel the fresh air on their cheeks. There was no harm in running, they were there, free, past all the half eaten bodies and cackling hyenas. There was no need to be worried now, or cautious. Inka knew better though and so did Ish.

"We're going back down to the platform." He said. "They need help down there."

Ish had his own abilities of course, a high level of precognition she'd heard Dora say to one of the scientists in the London laboratory. For a moment her eyes met his and her mother's instincts met his ability to see the future. They'd seen the same thing, she knew it. He nodded at her.

"Can you use the rifle you're carrying?" He asked.

"I've practised a little." She replied.

"Inka can't come....Her children....."

"My daughter is quite capable of looking after my son..... Take your brother out of here Kata and keep him safe."

Kata didn't argue, she'd realised it was the wrong moment to argue with her mother. Inka held the assault rifle which she'd only fired a few times and none of those had been in the heat of battle.

"I'm ready." She said.

The three of them were going against the tide of people eager to reach the surface. Luckily most of the crush to get out into the sunlight was over, they quickly had the stairs to themselves.

"Too late, we can't save them all." Ish seemed to say to himself. "Run..... Run."

Inka heard the sound of an assault rifle firing somewhere below them, though the noise didn't last for long. The three of them ran like furies, arriving on the platform in time to see the Hyenas tearing someone apart.

"I think it's him, the senior officer." Said Dora.

Their lights were a problem, all three of them aiming flashlights at where sounds were coming from, leaving the rest of the platform in darkness. Sounds from their left, as a flashlight was aimed at them, blinding them.

"Help me, Randy is dead..... I think."

"Aim your light away from us." Shouted Dora.

As his light moved across the platform she saw the jaws coming for her. That's what the huge hyena looked like, an enormous set of open jaws. She fired and much to her amazement she hit what she'd aimed at.

"Fuck." She yelled.

"Short bursts and be careful..... There might someone still alive." Yelled Ish.

The sight of the bloody carcass she'd turned the hyena into, had given her confidence. Flashlight first and then short bursts at anything on four legs and covered in grubby looking fur. It wasn't their fault

of course, the creatures were just doing what came natural. Inka just knew she didn't want to become their next meal. She fired and kept on firing until Dora squeezed her arm.

"That's it..... The rest are running away." She said.

"I know he's dead, in my mind I saw him die ten minutes ago." Said Ish. "I still need to check the officer though."

Inka had no wish to see what she knew he'd find. There was the man to their left to look for, the one who'd dazzled them with his flashlight. Dora followed her and they found the young technician quite some way along the platform.

"I knew it was important, you said it really mattered." He said. "We stayed....But those things got Randy."

A young technician, he wasn't even carrying a gun. His friend Randy had been torn apart by the hyena pack, his bloody remains were on the train rails. The surviving technician was still clinging to a crate with 'Horace Samples' written on the side.

"Thank you, they are.....More important than anything else we brought with us." Said Dora.

"So you did cut him up." Said Inka. "I guessed you would."

"Yes, it just seemed best to lie. The children..... You must understand."

"Oh I do, and I won't be telling my kids your secret. The last thing I need is Kata sulking for the next month."

There were still sounds, whimpering coming out of the darkness, even the occasional bark. Dora ran her flashlight along the tracks, finding only Ish returning to them.

"Was he.....?" Asked Dora.

"Yes.....We need to leave here." Said Ish. "It might look like we killed a lot of them, but it was only a small part of the pack."

"Can you travel..... Any injuries?" Dora asked the technician.

"No, just a few scratches."

"Good. Ish and I can carry the crate and Inka can cover us."

"Me ?!" Said Inka.

"Yes you.... You seem pretty good with that rifle."

"Alright then."

~ ~

Only one thing was stopping Mateo Lopez from picking up his daughter and running through the hole in the tunnel wall. Tina wanted to go, she was still pulling at his arm.

"We have to be careful, the aliens will have noticed something is going on by now."

They'd landed a device of some kind directly above the bunker, maybe more than one. The initial explosion and people running away might have caught them by surprise. They'd be alert by now though and he had no idea what might be patrolling the hillside.

"Where are mum and Tom waiting?" Asked Tina

It seemed so close that he wanted to forget about caution and run. To risk his daughter's life though, after she'd already been through so much.

"Ignore the row of trees with no leaves, there...." He said, pointing. "The tall tree that looks like an overgrown Christmas tree. That's where they were heading."

"Please.....I want to go and see mum."

"We will soon Tina, I promise. I just want to watch for a while."

His daughter sighed at him. No point in telling her there might be aliens waiting in the treeline and getting her in a panic. Mateo watched and decided to wait until dusk to finally leave the bunker. At

dusk any alien flying craft would still be visible against the sky. With luck though, him and his daughter would be lost in the advancing shadows of night. They'd have to move carefully of course and use whatever cover there was, but as plans went.....It was the best he could think of. He saw three saucer shaped craft fly overheads, as he waited several hours for dusk. As for his nervous and over excited daughter ? Tina had leant against him and fallen asleep. He was actually having trouble waking her up.

"Come on Tina.... We're leaving."

"Oh.... I feel so tired."

"Stand up..... Move about. We need to leave before it gets dark."

"Alright."

He hugged her and made sure he had her attention, even if she did still seem half asleep.

"No noise, no shouting for mum. We don't know who else might be out there."

"I promise..... I won't make a sound."

There were hedgerows to their right, which hopefully would make them almost invisible from above. Tina was true to her word, following him past the bushes and shrubs, without saying a word. As a large saucer shaped craft flew overhead, he pulled his daughter into the branches of a crab-apple tree.

"Wow, that's huge." She whispered.

It was, a good fifty feet in diameter. As they watched it flew over the top of the hill and vanished from sight.

"Come on, let's go and find you mum."

The evergreen might well have really been a huge Christmas tree for all he knew. It had only been a point to aim for. Still enough light to see Helen and Tom weren't waiting in amongst its branches.

"Mum." Shouted Tina.

"Shush..... Don't worry, we'll find them."

Just far enough away from full darkness for him to see movement out of the corner of his right eye. Mateo was wary though, he'd probably never get over that. Before entering the bunker he'd thought of his mental state as normal. Now he knew a little paranoia had taken root.

"Mum."

No good shushing her, Tina had recognised her the same moment he had. Helen was hugging their daughter, kissing the top of her head. His wife looked up at him.

"Thank you." She said.

It was a wonderful moment, a memory to treasure. Until Tina had to tell her mum everything that had happened to her, all in one long rush. She started with...

"Ray killed himself, with a gun. I saw it happen...."

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