

## Ishmael II : Pandora

### Chapter 22 – All Roads Lead To Filey

**“Jill had been a bit withdrawn since they’d returned with the news that the Kingdom’s headquarters in Combe Martin had been wiped out. She seemed to take it very hard, especially the death of Commander Archer.”**



Inka Malovic wasn't keen on there being yet another alien creature in the pens, though it did mean a rare family get together. A grandmother at forty, Inka hadn't imagined that would ever happen. Her daughter loved Darius though and they seemed happy together, which was all that mattered.

“A male Horace, I do hope they like each other.” Said Kata.

Like all young women in love, her daughter viewed everything as a potential romance. Inka couldn't remember being like that, though she probably had been. They were all there, the entire Malovic family, including Darius.

“They can't call this one Horace; it'll be too confusing.” Said Antun.

“None of us could pronounce the name of our female Horace.” Said Ish. “It means the pleasant warm wind in the valley, or something like that.”

His hip wasn't improving, she'd heard that from a few people. It wasn't just that he needed a crutch to walk properly, there was a look in his eyes now, an intensity that yelled about constant pain. He still smiled though and beckoned them forward.

“As you look after Horace, and we did invite you to see Horace when she first arrived.” Said Ish.

“Pandora and I would like to invite you to meet Metro.”

“Named after where they found him.” Said Dora.

“Metro...Cool.” Said Antun.

At one time Ish would have let Dora enter the pen first, but now Dora stood to one side for him. It looked like a behaviour born out of Ish being unwell. There was a brief touch of hands and a look on Dora's face. It made Inka feel guilty to think it, but she didn't think Ishmael McGrath would soon be able to walk at all.

“Metro has only been with Horace a very short time.” Said Ish. “We're not sure whether they'll get on, so we've put up a fence between them.”

“Hopefully it will only be temporary.” Added Dora.

“Oh, that smell.” Said Inka.

“Mum.” Said Kata.

“They're both nervous and the excretion from their skin get worse when they're anxious.” Said Dora.

The pen was the same one Horace had been in since she'd arrived on the back of a truck. Now the space was cut in half by a solid looking fence, that was about four feet high. Inka assumed it was to keep the aliens from harming one another if they squabbled. Her children loved the pens and they treated Horace as though the vile thing was a pet Labrador. Inka hated being there, though she knew her kids wanted her to be there to meet the new alien. It was a huge thing to them, almost as big an occasion as Christmas. Kata had even brought baby Mia in a carry cot, to meet the male version of Horace.

“Can I feed him ?” Asked Kata.

Her daughter was already handing her the cot with her baby in it, as though feeding the alien was a really special treat.

“Well, he didn’t bite me when I fed him, but they do have sharp teeth.” Said Dora. “I think he knows we mean him no harm, though I can’t guarantee that Metro means us no harm. He was captured after all, he’s not here of his own accord.”

“Oh, please.” Said Kata.

“Alright, but don’t blame me if he nips you.”

“And no, before you ask....No, Antun.” Said Inka. “Your sister is old enough to have a child, so she’s old enough to make her own choices. Not you though, not yet.”

“Be careful Kata.” Said Darius.

They all knew the creature was an intelligent being and not a domestic pet. The way her daughter stroked the beast though, as she fed it cabbage balls out of her bare hand. She was even talking to it, as though it was a kitten.

“I think he likes you.” Said Ish. “I think feeder of Metro is now added to your duties.”

“I don’t mind.” Said Kata.

“Can I at least feed Horace ?” Asked Antun.

All eyes were on her, which meant she couldn’t really say no. Besides, the boy had been helping his sister look after the alien for over a year.

“Oh, alright.” Said Inka.

“You’ll need to go out and through the other door.” Said Ish.

Both of her children were feeding and petting creatures from another world. Monsters who’d killed millions of humans, maybe billions. It felt so unreal.

“Can I ask what you’re going to do with the new one ?” She asked.

“We’re at the listening while Horace talks to him phase.” Said Ish. “That will be very gentle and last two or three days. I will enable us to record what’s said and build up our understanding of their language.”

“Then Ish and I will talk to Metro.” Said Dora. “I can’t give you details, but that part is likely to be far less gentle.”

“Good.” Said Inka

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Tirsa Bates had been ill, they’d all been ill for a day or so. Her dad had been affected the worst, as though he’d had the flu. Lots of coughing and sneezing, though all the nasty symptoms hadn’t lasted that long. It was strange as they never really mixed with anyone, apart from the neighbours to the north, and that was rare. They’d been sick too and the people to the west, according to them. It was a mystery, but as they were all now fit and well, there were enough other things to worry about. Not that everything was doom and gloom in their part of Kent.

“We have your mum to thank for the candles.” Said her dad. “Her experiments with boiling up deer fat, finally paid off.”

“All by trial and error. Smelly, though they give off a good light.” Said her mum.

It was the official opening of the Bates family vault. Her dad had done most of the hard work, extending the basement under the house where the young couple had lived. They now had a large and well-ventilated bunker, a place to hide should the worst happen. There was even a short escape tunnel that came out among some hawthorn trees. Her mum had heard of tallow candles and once she set herself to do something, she rarely failed.

“I like it, we should live down here all the time.” Said Zane, her brother.

"It is nice.....Though I prefer our house." Said Tirsia.

"I even dug a drainage channel, so we shouldn't get flooded if there's a storm."

Her dad, Tyler, was obviously proud of what he'd achieved and Tirsia didn't blame him. Turning a small cellar into a secure bunker had taken her dad over a year of back breaking work. It wouldn't stop a determined attack by the alien's Bio-Bots. It was their place to hide and keep quiet, in the hope of not being found. It was their equivalent of silent running, if they needed such a place. Tirsia hoped they never needed to use the bunker for a real emergency. She kissed her dad on the cheek. "Thanks dad, though I hope we never need to hide down here." She said.

"Amen to that." Said her mum, Liza.

The deer fat candles didn't have a repulsive smell. There was a definite aroma though, like someone had burnt the breakfast bacon. Tirsia wouldn't have wanted to spend days in their new family vault, though she imagined they'd all get used to the smell.

"To celebrate, we decided you're both old enough for a drink." Said her dad.

Tirsia had taken a few mouthfuls from an older girl's bottle of cider, when she was fourteen. As far as she knew her brother had tried some beer at about the same age. But, if her parents wanted to make a big thing out of it, she thought they'd earned it.

"Besides, I can't see us getting raided by the cops." Said her mum.

Tirsia looked at her brother and rolled her eyes. Her parents were weird, though no weirder than most of her friend's parents. Her dad produced a warm bottle of pink champagne, an early find when the local shops hadn't been looted of just about everything. He filled the four glasses on the table, none of which looked the same.

"We said this stuff was for a special day." Said her dad. "This one feels pretty special to me."

Too warm, yet it still fizzed and bubbled in her glass. The taste took Tirsia back to a wedding reception in Tottenham when she'd been fifteen. A friend on the refreshment table had given her a glass of champagne. Life had been so different then; her biggest problem had been a morbid fear of her hair going frizzy.

"Oh, that is delicious." She said. "Is there any more?"

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Helen Lopez had thought it would be a hard sell, though in the end, it wasn't. It mattered to her that everyone agreed, it was a decision that might be a matter of life or death. Stay in Big Town and the alien machines might turn up, or the feral humans. Building a fence around their farm was possible, though even that wasn't likely to keep out a determined enemy. Or they could set off across Britain, relying on the Kingdom's map to find food and supplies on the way. Mateo had quantified their chances of getting to Filey without being attacked as zero. She tended to agree with him. After fairly setting out the risks and potential benefits of both choices, everyone around their kitchen table, had wanted to go to the Fifth West base in Filey.

"What will happen to the pigs?" Asked her daughter, Tina. "Can we take them with us?"

"How about the chickens?" Asked her son, Tom.

"No, we can't take the animals." Said Mateo. "We can swap them for things we'll need for the journey, like another cart and maybe a horse to pull it."

"We're not leaving immediately, there will be time to find them new homes." Said Helen.

Their children still thought of the animals as pets, even though they now accepted that the family's survival required those pets to have a relatively short life. A comfortable life, with lots of petting, but a short one. Now they were giving her that look again, the one that called her a murderer.

"What will the people we give them to do with them?" Asked Tina.

Thankfully Mateo must have decided to take some of the heat off her.

"They will be their livestock then Tina, so they can do what we want with them. We can't take them right across England, so say your goodbyes to them, you too Tom.

"Alright." Muttered Tom.

Another unstated yet important factor in making the long journey was that their children were growing up. Sometimes when Tina glared at her, she did it with a very grown-up face. Soon, far too soon, the kids would hit puberty. Tina was already hard to control now.

"Can we take all our things?" Asked Tina.

"Yes of course, most of it, that's why we need another cart." Said Mateo.

There would be a little weeping of course, when the animals started to go, but Helen could see the excitement in her kid's eyes. Filey was going to be good for them, they'd enjoy it there.

"I know someone with a cart that would do the job." Said Jill.

"Great, we can go and see them tomorrow." Said Helen.

Jill had been a bit withdrawn since they'd returned with the news that the Kingdom's headquarters in Combe Martin had been wiped out. She seemed to take it very hard, especially the death of Commander Archer. She blamed herself, that much was obvious. As if staying to die with them would have been the right thing to do. Helen respected her loyalty, though she couldn't agree with her feelings. Mateo had tried to talk to Jill, but Helen suspected she needed plenty of the best thing to take care of bad memories, time, lots of time. Taking her to Filey would definitely help.

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Bren Grundy was beginning to get seriously worried as she trudged along the A165 towards a village signposted as Beeford. The aliens she was now quite pragmatic about, they'd either kill her, or they wouldn't. It was a simple 'either, or' and there was little she could do to affect the outcome, apart from being very careful. As for facing Matt's wife after sharing a bed with him all the way from Australia.....That terrified her.

"It doesn't look too bad." Said Ela. "The church is still standing; I can see the steeple."

"A bed for the night would be nice." Said Doug. "A nice big, comfortable bed and no small greens to worry about."

"Fish and chips.....I'd love to find a fish and chips place that's open, one that has miraculously survived the war." Said Matt.

Bren wanted to be back in Australia again, all alone with Matt in somewhere with sunshine and plenty of food. The steady Yorkshire drizzle had soaked her through to the skin.

"I'll settle for dry clothes." She said.

Much to her surprise all of their supermarket trolleys had survived, though Ela's had developed a bit of a squeaky wheel. She'd always thought the film with the guy pushing a trolley across the ruins of a post-apocalyptic America was farfetched. Now though, she thought that if you chose the right trolley, maybe it was achievable.

"Penny for your thoughts." Said Matt.

"Just wondering how many miles the average shopping trolley is good for."

And whether his wife was going to try and claw her eyes out, though she decided to keep that to herself.

"They're better built than I thought." Said Doug.

Villages they'd passed through seemed either destroyed completely, or left alone by the war entirely. There appeared to be no middle ground and luckily Beeford was one of the intact ones.

Close to a time when it was sensible to seek shelter for the night, the Tiger Inn seemed to have been

placed there just for them. Large and set back from the road, it looked the perfect place to spend the night. She could see Matt looking it over.

"We could do a lot worse." She said.

"Yeah, we'll give it the once over. Look out for nasties in the corners people." Said Matt.

All old hands at the game by now, Bren almost felt sorry for any small green they might find hanging from a wall. Matt broke open the back door, while they all watched. Together they went through the downstairs slowly, as though they owned the place. It was amazing, everything looked perfect. There were no bottles in the bar, and the stocks of junk food had gone, but otherwise it looked as though the Tiger Inn had just closed up after a normal busy day.

"If upstairs is as good as this, I think we've landed on our feet." Said Doug.

"What does that mean?" Asked Ela.

"That we've got a safe comfortable place for the night." Said Bren.

"As long as upstairs doesn't look like a hostel for Bio-Bots." Said Matt. "Come on, stay together and....."

"Be careful of nasties in the corners." Said Ela.

Not a single small green, or any nasties at all, in corners or otherwise. They must have let out rooms and one looked like the one used for honeymoons. She saw Matt eyeing up the king-sized bed, which looked dry, reasonably clean and very comfortable.

"We're claiming this room." Said Bren.

No one argued, there were at least another half a dozen rooms to choose from. Another sin on Bren's consciences, something else to make her feel guilty when she finally met Deb Newman.

"There must be a cellar." Said Matt. "We need to look that over before we settle down for the night."

"I'll go." Said Doug.

"We all need to go." Said Matt.

"It'll be alright, I guarantee the cellar will be as wonderfully free of nasties as the rest of the place."

"Oh dear, that sounds like famous last words." Said Bren. "I'll come with you."

"I'll go with him." Said Ela. "I can always yell for help if he gets eaten."

"Fine.....Look for candles while you're at it, we could do with a few more." Said Matt.

It took quite a while for Doug and Ela to appear again. She and Matt had rigged up a few candles in bottles on the ground floor. Not enough really, the lighting was more creepy mansion than comforting den, but there was enough light to make sure no one fell over anything. The first hint Bren had that not all was well, was when Ela began vomiting over the lounge bar carpet.

"Oh Crap.....You guys need to see this." Said Doug.

"What did you find?" Asked Matt.

"Easier if you come and see for yourself." Said Doug.

Ela followed them down the stairs behind the main bar, with Doug showing them the way. He had a small flashlight, he always claimed to be saving the batteries for a rainy day. He was waving the flashlight about a little, moving it over an open door. Bren noticed a definite musty smell in the air.

"They were piled up behind the door, probably trying to get out." Said Ela.

"It took us a while to push the door open." Added Doug.

With some apprehension, Bren walked through the open door. It must have happened right at the beginning of the invasion, what had once been human bodies were now nothing but bones and rotting clothing.

"The door was bolted from the outside." Said Ela. "Why would anyone do something like that?"

"We'll probably never know." Said Bren. "Maybe someone locked them in the cellar to protect them.....And then they didn't come back to let them out."

"Oh no, look at the back of the door." Said Matt.

No wonder they'd had trouble opening the door, at least a dozen bodies must have been piled up behind it. If they hadn't been reduced to bones and rags, Doug and Ela would never have been able to shove the door open. Men women, even small sets of remains that had to be children. The most horrifying thing were the deep scratch marks in the door, where desperation had caused them to attack the bolted door with their bare hands.

"All told, there must be fifty or sixty bodies down here." Said Doug.

"We can't stay here tonight." Said Ela.

"Yes we can, we're not wandering about in the dark." Said Matt.

"It is safe here Ela." Said Bren.

"These people must have thought they were safe." Shouted Ela.

Ela smelt of fresh vomit, but she needed a hug, so Bren hugged her.

"It's safe upstairs Ela." She said. "We'll sleep here tonight and leave in the morning. We don't know what happened here and we'll never know. It happened years ago....This is a safe place."

"Or at least as safe as anywhere is after the invasion." Said Doug.

Bren wanted to hit him, though Ela didn't react to his words. Whatever terrors had lodged in the girl's imagination had gone; she was now calm.

"How about a real feast for dinner.....We still have the tinned salmon." Said Matt.

"That's be great." Said Doug.

Ela was quiet, hugging her, holding onto her in the semidarkness, but at least she wasn't demanding to leave the inn. On the way out, Doug began to close the cellar door.

"No.....Don't shut them in.....Not again." Said Ela.

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"We have to find food and water." Said Daisy. "We can't survive for much longer without at least finding clean water."

"I've heard physical exertion is dangerous for people with severe concussion." Said Tracy.

"Can't be more dangerous than dying of thirst." Said Jada.

"It'd be nice if I could hear his replies." Said Steve.

He glared at them, hoping the light coming through the shed door was enough for them to see he was glaring. Steve Penboss knew about cognitive testing; he'd had them used on him a few times. There had been a brief period of amphetamine psychosis in his teens, when he thought all cars of a certain make were stalking him. He'd stolen several and dumped them in the local lake, before the cops had finally caught him. So yes, Steve knew all about mental competence tests.

"What is your full name?" He asked Alejandro.

"Alejandro."

"Your full name please."

"Alejandro.....Lopez."

There had been a pause, which definitely wasn't a good sign. Earlier Alejandro had tried to go outside and had walked straight into the wall, rather than through the open door. It would have been comical in a TV cartoon, but it was dreadful in real life.

"Who was the last Prime Minister of Britain?" Steve asked.

"Oh, it was.....I know....Erm, the black guy Akoni Lusk, I think."

"Actually, there were two others after him. Follow my finger with your eyes."

As Alejandro's eyes moved towards the light coming from outside, his pupils barely dilated and his eyes still had that dreadful dazed look. He needed taking to the nearest hospital's emergency department, immediately. A huge problem, as there were no hospitals anymore. Steve decided to use a more direct approach.

"If I helped you, do you think we could take a walk down the road?"

"That's not a proper question." Said Tracy.

Steve ignored her. In his experience from running a talk radio phone-in show for more years than he cared to remember, relatives of the sick and injured were rarely objective.

"Look Alejandro..... If we stay here everyone will suffer, especially the children. Do you think you'd be able to walk if I help you?"

"Yes."

"Great, I'll help too." Said Daisy.

"You might kill him." Said Tracy.

Steve wasn't heartless, he held Tracy's hand for a moment.

"Get your things everyone, we're leaving here." Said Steve.

No one looked that healthy, as they emerged from the council hut, blinking at the sun. Just a day or two without water did that, often before people realised it. Luckily no one had that much to carry. Every direction to get to the where a road should be, meant trudging uphill. Not much of a hill, though it wasn't going to be fun. Alejandro was walking alright, though he needed to be pointed in the right direction all the time.

"We'll find a road first, hopefully with a few signs to give us an idea of exactly where we are." Said Steve.

The road was a definite B road before the war and nature was now trying to reclaim it. They'd taken a good half hour to reach it, but Jada was moaning about the walk more than Alejandro. The road sign pointing to the left had dipped a little at the end, but it still readable as pointing towards Weymouth. No number of miles of course, it was a typical B road. The arrow to the right pointed towards somewhere called Osmington.

"I know Osmington, Luis and I came here once." Said Jada.

"What was it like?" Asked Daisy.

"Awful place.....Can we please rest for a while?"

"It's important to find water." Said Steve. "We'll rest when we've found some."

Poor Daisy, she was alternating between Maria up on her shoulders and Billy, before they entered the small village. The first decent sized building they saw, had a sign outside saying Osmington Village Hall. Steve tried the doors, finding them locked.

"I need something heavy." He said.

"We can't break into their village hall, like a.....Like a gang of hooligans." Said Jada.

"Will this do?" Asked Daisy, while holding a cobblestone the size of a house brick.

It took a few blows with the stone and several hefty kicks with his boots, until they were inside the village hall.

Synchronicity had been working hard on the Lopez family, ever since Ishmael had stayed at the Girona Guest House with his parents, when he was fifteen. Luis and Jada had run the Girona, though Jada wouldn't have recognised Ish if he'd been standing right in front of her. That was how it was with some people like Ish and Pandora. They were so crucial to so many major events, that their lives caused waves in synchronicity, the way a speed boat creates a wake in the ocean. Steve Penboss wasn't really part of the synchronicity, but he was about to find himself pulled into it.

"They've been dead a while." Said Daisy.

A man and a woman judging by their clothes, there wasn't much left of their bodies. Side by side on the floor, they looked to have been holding hands when whatever had happened, happened. It might well have been suicide, checking out before things got really crazy. The strange thing was....They looked to have been putting together food boxes, the room was full of cardboard boxes, all with house numbers written on them. Every piece of furniture was covered in food and essentials waiting to be packed, including dusty bottles of water.

"It's like an Aladdin's cave." Said Jada.

Steve cleared about four boxes of pan scourers off a chair, so that Alejandro could sit down. By the time he turned around Daisy was taking the top off a bottle of water.

"What's the date on it?" He asked.

"Does it matter? It's all we have."

Daisy drank about a third of a large bottle. They all drank the water, Daisy had been right, they had no alternative. Steve only checked the use by date, after he'd drunk about a pint of the stuff.

"Just three years out of date, no problem." He said.

Tracy made sure the kids got some water, before giving a bottle to Alejandro. There was something about the way Alejandro reacted, though Steve thought he might have imagined it. Plastic spoons had been outlawed a century before, buying them considered on par with a heroine addiction. The kitchen was at the back of the village hall and he found a dozen stainless steel spoons in a drawer. Steve put them all on the table near the food supplies and then he found a tin of peaches, Alejandro's favourite. He removed the ring pull lid and shoved the spoon into the soft fruit, before kneeling in front of Alejandro.

"Hungry buddy?"

"Yes, very."

As Alejandro took the tin, there was an alertness in his eyes. The way he ate too, showing interest in what was coming out of the tin. Steve was no expert, but Alejandro Lopez appeared to be on the mend.

"The tinned creamed rice is delicious." Said Maria.

"I don't get it." Said Daisy. "This couple were obviously putting together food boxes for the entire village. You'd have expected someone would have come looking for them, if only to take away the boxes of supplies."

"When we were on the road, there were stories." Said Tracy. "Talk about so many small greens appearing in some places, that there were no survivors."

"That's a cheering thought." Said Daisy. "We'll need to look this place over before going to sleep."

"Yes kids, no exploring until the adults have made sure it's safe." Said Alejandro.

"Alright dad." Said Maria.

It was the first thing Alejandro had said since the accident, that wasn't a response to something said to him. Tracy smiled at her husband.

"Good to have you back honey." She said.

"I was just....A bit tired."

There weren't really enough beds for everyone upstairs, so Steve talked Daisy into sleeping on a rug in the middle of all the boxes.

"Come on Daisy, it'll be like dating again when we had to avoid your mum. I can remember when a thick pile rug would have seemed like luxury."



Daisy hadn't taken much persuasion and as the only people sleeping downstairs, they had enough privacy for a little adult fun.

Synchronicity was working hard in the background, though it had played no part in finding the food and water. Or maybe it had? Luck and synchronicity were like adoring twins, who sometimes fell out. One day they'd be walking hand in hand, the next ignoring one another completely. Of course, there are some very clever people who will tell you there is no such thing as luck. They may be right, or they might not be. Synchronicity really claimed the night at about three am, when Steve was wide awake and depressed about needing to get up and go for a pee.

"Twice tonight, all the way upstairs to the loo." He muttered.

It was all that water, though Daisy didn't seem affected by it. There she was, fast asleep, lying on his arm. He'd just reclaimed his arm, when he heard the helicopter go over the house. Not much noise, though he picked up the throb of powerful motors, when it passed directly overhead. He went to the front windows and saw a dark shape against the night sky. It landed not that far away.

"Daisy.....Daisy wake up."

"Why?"

"A helicopter just landed close by, a military helicopter."

"If this is just an excuse to wake me up for sex."

"No, honest. Come on, they might leave."

For once there was no moaning about pulling on the same grubby clothes they'd been wearing for days. Dressed and out of the door in a couple of minutes, without telling anyone where they were going. Steve slowed their pace down after bumping into a bush with sharp thorns.

"Wait, let our eyes get used to the dark." He muttered.

They neither had, nor wanted lamps, they had no idea if they were heading towards friends, or another local militia with dubious intent. Across a field, where thick grass seemed determined hold them back. When they found the helicopter there were two of them, complete with several armed guards. Steve really wasn't sure if their night time adventure had been a good idea, until someone used a lamp to do something close to the helicopters.

"They're Fifth West, I saw their name on the side." He whispered.

"What do they want in a place like Osmington?"

"Let's go and find out."

"We can't just wander over there." Muttered Daisy.

"Yes we can."

Steve started walking without even trying to be quiet. Daisy followed him, saying quite loudly that she thought he was an arsehole, who was likely to get them both killed. The people in uniform were dragging boxes out of a building inside a fenced off compound.

"Hey, didn't Andy say they needed more germanium telluride?" Someone yelled. "I just found a crate full of the stuff."

Steve was right on top of them before they noticed him, with Daisy right next to him. A light was pointed at them, but no guns. Steve thought that had to be a good sign. The light blinded him a little, until it was lowered away from their faces.

"Who the hell are you?" A large man asked.

They were all in uniforms with Fifth West across the left side of their chests. Most were wearing helmets with 'Scavenger One,' painted on them. The painted words looked untidy and no one seemed to have used the same colour, though most were a shade of red.

"We're survivors from Jersey." Said Daisy. "Our boat ran aground in a storm. We're with a family.....They have kids."

"We barely survived to get this far." Said Steve. "Can you take us with you?"

Another soldier approached them, though it was difficult to see his features in the dark.

"How many of you are there?" He asked.

"Seven, five adults and two children." Said Daisy.

The Fifth West people had a muttered discussion and Steve heard that there hadn't been as much useful equipment as they'd hoped in the civil defence stores. A few looks in their direction and Steve wasn't sure if they were nodding their heads or shaking them.

"Alrighty, get your people and be back here in fifteen minutes. No more than one bag per person."

"We haven't got anything, not really." Said Daisy.

The soldier handed Daisy one of their lamps and smiled at her. Steve was really glad Daisy had come with him, everyone liked Daisy.

"We're leaving in fifteen minutes, make sure you're here."

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Judy Gray was determined to be useful, though there wasn't a huge demand for magazine feature writers in the Fifth West Filey Campus. Rod had been a keen gardener, it seemed he'd had a large allotment before the invasion and grew all his own vegetables. He seemed wonderfully happy working on the campus farms, so Judy had joined him one morning. Not the correct method of deciding how to earn your keep in the campus system, but she was Pandora's mother, so no one objected. Judy loved it, the whole process of planting seedlings and watching them grow, while hoping the birds didn't get too many. The annoying twinge of arthritis between her shoulder blades was a thing of the past too, though her knee joints seemed to think it was their turn to be an annoyance. On the whole though, she was enjoying her new life.

"I just wish people would treat me normally." Said Judy. "I just gave birth to Pandora; I didn't create her by sorcery."

"Enjoy the adoration while you can." Said Rod. "They'll soon get used to having you around and realise that like them.....You have feet of clay."

She gave Rod a look that would have sent Pandora's father running for cover. Perhaps that was what she saw in Rod, he met her gaze with steady eyes.

"Well, it can't come soon enough for me." She said.

"We're muck spreading this afternoon. Let them see you shovelling pig muck."

"Oh, I'd forgotten about that." She muttered.

No machinery of course, everything was being done by people power again, just like in the Middle Ages. The campus wasn't short on fuel, though it was all needed for essential aircraft and ground patrols. The main reason the farms had gone back to old tech had been summed up at her first lesson on the wonderful world of back breaking agriculture.

".....It's been sometime since a serious alien attack, but they haven't gone away. Avoid large groups outside, try to work in twos. As electrical apparatus and motors attracts their attention, there is only one method of doing most jobs on the campus farms.....You."

Judy grabbed another box of seedling and knelt down, onto the rich loamy soil. Her knees, her poor knees. They must have thought they were in for a cushy life, but oh no.

"What am I planting Rod?"

"Some new hybrid maize they want us to test out. The yield is supposed to be incredible. More a test for when we get up there.....You know."

“Ah, right. I’ll treat every seedling with extra special care.”

The tools she used looked old, though she didn’t mind that. Old, tried and tested, which suited her fine. Rod had the disruptor, usually one was allocated per group of three workers, though as she was Pandora’s mother, they had one for the two of them. Judy quite liked preferential treatment like that, it was the adoring looks that were creepy. They’d been told it was extremely rare for a weapon to be fired.

“Keep still dear....Very still.” Rod called out.

His tone of voice told her it was something serious, so she kept quite still. The alien machine that looked like a human wasn’t that close to her, though she hadn’t noticed it. They looked more like people now, according to Ish. They looked human and moved like humans, they even had the slight trace of body odour that everyone had. Humans expect to see other humans, they get ignored, for the most part. Rod had shot it, Judy saw it lying on the ground, sparking.

“Give me the gun Rod.”

“We were told not to go near them. We tell the supervisor and a clean up crew will take it away.”

“Rod.....Give me the damn gun.”

Bio-Bots Dora called them, the machines that didn’t know them, yet wanted to kill them. Judy was getting fed up with things trying to kill her. It lay there on the ground, right in the middle of some newly planted carrots. Some looked like young men, the one on the ground looked like a pretty girl in her late teens. Only the electrical sparking told her it wasn’t a human, and the metal machinery she could see through the hole the disruptor had burned in its body.

“Fucking thing.” She shouted.

Judy fired, waited for the disruptor to recharge and fired again. Twice into its face. The dreadful thing was still twitching and sparking, but it no longer looked like a pretty young girl. She handed the disruptor back to Rod.

“Thank you.....Now, tell me about the wonderful yield of the new maize ?”