

Ishmael II : Pandora

Chapter 1 - Faith, Hope and Charity

.....And so Ishmael II : Pandora begins. This is a direct continuation of book 1 and definitely not intended as a standalone story. Reintroduction of characters and locations will be minimal. Which is really a polite way of saying; read book 1 first.....



~ Faith ~

Faith can come in many forms. Faith in a deity of some kind. Faith in our loved ones to help us during difficult times. Faith in our own strength and abilities. For the aliens who'd decided to take over planet Earth, faith came in the form of too much faith in the artificial intelligence which ran most of their systems.

The war was over, the Earth defences completely beaten. There were pockets of resistance, which the fourth level systems had decided weren't causing enough damage to warrant the resources required for complete eradication. Soon the atmosphere would be toxic to human life.

It was hardly surprising that the first level systems weren't that worried by the human shuttle, whose trajectory indicated it had come from the far side of the moon. The craft was rolling end over end and twisting laterally. Obviously a derelict, all the moon bases had been investigated, the inhabitants neutralised.

The second level systems demanded descriptions though and names, they always did. Everything had to be identified and named, images catalogued and stored. It was the way it was always done. The derelict shuttle was identified as Chinese, though there did appear to have been some modifications.

The data on the shuttle was passed to the third level systems, who looked at everything in a fraction of a fraction of a second. The threat level of the derelict was calculated as less than a tenth of a nano, which meant almost none at all. A mistake of course, though the logic behind all those defences ignoring the converted Chinese shuttle made sense.

The shuttle from the Mao Zedong Base continued unmolested and just about survived the heat of a bad angle and speed for re-entry. An uncomfortable tumbling, hot re-entry, but the occupants of the shuttle weren't concerned with a little discomfort. The automatic parachutes kicked in and at a height of about fifty thousand feet, the onboard AI corrected the tumble and began aiming at the preferred landing site in Papua New Guinea.

"We're almost home my children." Said Vicky.

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~ Hope ~

Matt Newman looked North at what seemed like an endless ocean. They'd found a way up to the roof of a building quite near the cricket ground. It meant busting through a few doors, but no one was likely to send them a bill. The boat they'd found still tied to its mooring in Broome in Western Australia looked in staggeringly good condition, considering the war that taken place during the preceding months. Getting provisions together had been easy, the aliens seemed to have given up attacking small towns and villages. They probably didn't need to. Matt and Brenda Grundy had spent months travelling from the other side of the Northern Territories and apart from one native township that still looked to be thriving, they hadn't seen another living soul.

“Everything is ready, we should leave now.” He said. “Straight north and we have to run into the islands south of Indonesia Bren. Timor maybe, or Bali. The currents might take us further west to Java, but we’ll definitely hit land somewhere.”

“How far is it again ?” Asked Bren.

She’d asked quite a few times while they’d been bringing back supplies to the ocean going boat. As usual he gave the slightly untruthful answer.

“Three hundred kilometres, maybe a little further.” He replied. “This boat was probably a rich guy’s toy, but it can easily manage that distance. The fuel tanks are all full.”

A small lie, Timor was a good five hundred kilometres away, across some fairly wild seas. He was being truthful about the boat though, the ‘Eleanor’ should be able to do the distance with ease.

“You do realise that when I asked to go back to England with you.....We were fighting for our lives.” There was a grin on her face as wide as when they found the huge display of condoms at a local pharmacy. They’d taken it as a sign and were making energetic use of the stolen prophylactics. Matt loved his wife and he’d be faithful once they were together again. England was the other side of the globe though and their chances of getting there were tiny. Hope though, that was the thing, they were both being driven by hope.

“Broome has been good to us.” He said. “Even though we did find all those bodies in the IGA Supermarket. On the whole I will miss the place, but we can’t stay here forever.”

“It is tempting though.”

“Yes Bren, I’ll give you that....But I intend to go home to England.”

“And your wife.”

“Yes.”

An awkward moment, there had been quite a few of those. Broome had been good to them though, plenty of tinned good and even a couple of shot guns that might well prove essential on their journey. An abandoned home near the coast had provided temporary lodging and the IGA had provided them with a truck to move everything to where the Eleanor waited. After some of the vehicles they’d used to cross the Northern Territories, a market truck was luxury. There had been a kaka-sucker, a tanker used to empty septic tanks. It had safely taken them a long way before running out of fuel, but Matt was sure he hadn’t washed all the stink out of his hair.

“Come on then, before I change my mind.” Said Bren.

There was no real option, the supply of tinned food would run out eventually, even with just the two of them as the entire population of Broome. It wasn’t a large town, barely a couple of kilometres from end to end. The Broome Port Jetty was just about as far south as the town went. Matt drove the supermarket truck that had served them so well.

“Is it wrong that I’m going to really miss this dump ?” Asked Bren.

“No, not at all..... I’m sure we’ll both be a bit nostalgic about the place, when we’re back home.”

Matt drove quite slowly, taking in all the images of a sunny morning in the town. They left the truck in their usual spot, the bay reserved for emergency vehicles. They hadn’t found any keys for the Eleanor, but boats tend not to have that many anti-theft devices. Bren had managed to get everything running in under five minutes. Matt still had that buzz, as the powerful engines came to life.

“Next stop Timor.” He said.

“Or maybe Java.” Added Bren.

Bren beat him to the controls and the large and very comfortable leather captain's chair. She took them south a little, before turning west for a few minutes. Broome Harbour was behind the peninsular, sheltered from the worst of the weather and heavy seas coming from the north. The Eleanor wasn't a huge ocean liner, but she handled the rough ocean water well, as they left the coast of Australia and headed across the Timor Sea.

"Now, right this moment Matt.....I think we might actually make it."

"We will Bren, I'm sure of it. We just need hope, massive piles of it."

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~ Charity ~

Pandora Gray rarely seemed to get out of the underground laboratory in Filey, so when she did, she made the most of it. Not a bad shot, certainly better after all the practise in the disused Tube tunnels under central London. She leant out from behind the armoured vehicle and fired an assault rifle at two alien Bio-Bots.

"Oh, you've done it now Biff. Another six or seven are heading your way." Said Ish.

Ishmael McGrath was the only person allowed to call her Biff, ever, under any circumstances. It was a personal name between them, with lots of feelings attached to it. Friends and family had always called her Dora, even her mum. She was still quite annoyed that Ish had told the story to so many of the people they currently worked with.

"So why Biff ? I promise not to think it's lame."

Lianne Verga had asked him during his first interview for a position with Fifth West. True good jobs had been hard to come by, but he could have avoided the question, or even made up a harmless lie.

"Pandora was born exactly twenty days after me, but she looked a lot smaller than me when we were kids. She still is quite small, but so is her mum, so it must run in the family. Anyway, I teased her a lot when we were about five or six, calling her titch and other silly things. One day she hit me, really hard, right in the face. It hurt, my nose bled and my right eye developed a bruise that lasted for days. Pandora said I was her best friend, but I deserved to be biffed on the nose. So, to me at least, she'll always be Biff."

He'd told Lianne, with little pressure, or so she'd heard some time later. It was her name, used only by him and telling Lianne still felt like a betrayal, even though so much had happened since. Dora aimed at the Bio-Bots again and had to remind herself she needed them alive. There were days though, when Ish, or even memories of his antics, made her a little crazy. She fired a burst of old fashioned bullets quite close to the Bots she was hoping to capture.

"Wow, you're getting them angry Biff, another dozen coming out of the woods." Said Ish.

"That'll do, I'm switching over to Fifth West electricals." She said.

All their communications were by shielded radio comms of course. Ish was at the top of a church tower at the edge of the village. A fairly beaten up old church, though the tower still looked fairly solid. She and Ish were lovers of course, only lovers can make you mad about inconsequential trivia. There was a whine, followed by a slight crackle, as the fighter next to her turned on one of Fifth West's electric weapons. He moved, as if about to use the weapon.

"No, I want to make the shot." Said Dora. "I can't remember the last time I was allowed to actually use a weapon..... So gimme."

He showed no signs of being keen on handing over device that looked like a cut down bazooka. His face had a definite stink eye look to it. She could have pulled rank, she was certain to outrank him. As far as she knew, she outranked just about everyone in the Fifth West Filey Campus. Pulling rank just seemed such an..... Arsehole thing to do.

“Please.....I might be stuck in the lab for another year.”

She was small and pretty, with a puppy dog look she'd been perfecting since secondary school. Of course he smiled and handed over the weapon. Dora instantly envied comic book heroes their superhero strength. The weapon felt heavy, really heavy.

“Any more of them coming out of hiding Ish ? I don't want any last minute surprises.”

“Fifteen are about to come around the corner from the ruined pub. No new additions though. Go for it Biff, get us some new monsters to play with.”

The Bio-Bots that looked like toddler sized lizards weren't new. Like many other old favourites, they'd been modified and changed since the main invasion fleet had arrived. They were stronger now, with five fingered hands that could do most tasks a human could do. That made them a tougher enemy to fight, but it also made them useful for a job Ish had in mind. Not her, oh no, she wanted the fun of capturing them, but the crazy idea to turn the bots into their minions.... That had been all Ish's idea and he was welcome to it. A lot of resources were going into the project and Jaroslav Verga, the CEO of Fifth West Corporation had already started muttering.

“We're fighting a global war with dwindling resources Ish. We might well be the last hope for mankind and that means we can't be a charity for every wild idea.”

The old Ish, the one she'd known before the invasion. He'd have found a place to hide after such an attack by the boss. Not the new Ish though, the one she'd been pretending not to notice. He was far more assertive and he understood his own worth. Dora knew she loved Ish, no matter what persona he might have decided to wear for a while. At the moment though, she wasn't sure about the new Ish, so she would carry on ignoring the changes. He'd certainly given JV something to think about. “Charity JV, you've the nerve to consider me a charity case.” He'd yelled. “You'd know nothing about the aliens if I hadn't studied Horace. Their history, their biology, even their aim to take over our world. You'd have known nothing about any of that..... So don't you fucking dare talk to me about charity.”

No one got away with swearing at JV, no one, even JV's daughter Lianne was amazed Ish hadn't been removed from the Filey Campus by a security team. Ish had spoken the truth though and whether JV wanted to admit or not, the fate of humanity might rely on Ishmael McGrath. And her of course, Dora liked to think her research into the toxin slowly being pumped into the atmosphere might be important too.

“Don't let them get too close Biff.” Said Ish.

Crap ! She'd been daydreaming. Not a good idea when agitated Bio-Bots were heading towards her. Dora brought the heavy weapon up to her shoulder, aimed and fired, all in one smooth motion.

“Nice, very nice. I doubt if I could have done it better.” Said the soldier.

The modified robots didn't die anymore, if an electrical weapon was used on them, which was actually useful. They sort of flapped about, like large angry fish out of water. The effect lasted a while, long enough to get them into a holding pen deep underground. Getting them into an open backed truck though, that required hard work and old tech.

“Throw the nets..... Now !” Shouted one of the soldiers.

A large group of Fifth West soldiers armed with nets and cattle prods the science team from Base Albion had improved, giving them a bit more zap and longer battery life. Getting the creatures in the truck was back breaking work and it was potentially dangerous, if you didn't stay focused. Dora was banned from taking part since having her arm cut into quite deeply, by an angry Bot. To be truthful, she didn't mind watching the soldiers do all the hard work. Ish arrived just as the last two thrashing Bots were pushed up the ramp and secured in place.

“Perfect..... These ones are really brutal.” He said.

“They’ll be difficult to control.” She replied.

“Yes, but just think about when they’re fighting for us.”

Previous attempts to change the allegiance of the alien’s robot minions had resulted in quite a few failures, but there had been a few successes. Not just reprogramming of a technology built and coded in a language they didn’t understand, there was also the alien biology that needed bending to their needs. Deep down somewhere, if she hadn’t loved Ish since they’d both been kids, she’d have agreed with JV. Turning the alien robots did seem an impossible task....But Ish had achieved the impossible on a few previous occasions.

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~ The Bates Family ~

Even when Tyler Bates and his wife Liza had decided the family should stay put in their home, he’d had a few worries about the plan. The house was theirs though, there could be no thought of leaving it to find somewhere else. His daughter Tonya was buried in the garden and although maybe he hadn’t dug as deep as the local council cemetery might have buried her, a good four feet of soil covered his thirteen year old daughter. They’d claimed the house because it ticked most of the boxes on their list. It had taken violence to make it theirs, the death of a crazy person who’d tried to kill his family. It was theirs now though, having a child under the ground made it almost sacred ground for the Bates family. No title deeds or twenty five year mortgage could have made it any more their home than that. His adult daughter Tirsa was muttering under her breath about something he couldn’t make out. Probably something her younger brother Zane had done to annoy her.

“Keep quiet.....Both of you.” Hissed his wife.

The green lizard aliens usually arrived a few hours after sunset now, though they used to be creatures of the daylight hours. A lot had changed over the months since the alien invasion had filled the sky with huge craft and some so small they looked like tiny bright stars. The monsters who looked like people, but weren’t, had started to prowl around just after dawn. Tyler leant in close to Liza, holding her by the shoulders as he whispered into her ear.

“There are two of them..... I saw one rattling the outside doors to the cellar.”

The kids had learned a lot while they were rattling trolleys back to the house in Kent from the nearby supermarket. The huge out of town supermarket had been one of the top five items on their must have list. Tirsa and Zane had turned the daily transfer of tinned food and supplies into a game, even Tonya had joined in, though he wasn’t supposed to know that. They’d watched the various kinds of alien robots, including the saucer shaped flying bots.

“Here, you’ll need this.” He whispered. “It’ll probably come in fast at the front, once it hears me kill the one at the back.”

His wife looked at the shotgun and sighed, she hated violence. Sometimes though, the only way to get rid of a problem for good, was to kill it. Tyler had the huge rifle he almost worshipped. He had no idea what it was, but it looked like it could stop a charging elephant. He’d used it once against something large that had been wandering too close to the house one night. A creature escaped from a zoo probably, or a theme park. One shot from the huge rifle hadn’t left much of its head to identify. The two weapons had been found in the home of the young couple, after the alien creatures had killed them. The aliens tended to leave food and supplies alone, they were still gradually bringing tinned food from the house where the young couple had lived.

“Dad.... There’s noise coming from the young couple’s house.” Zane had told him.

Not that they ever found out their neighbour's names. Actually neighbour wasn't a good description, couple who lived three streets away was more accurate. He was white and the woman had a brown skin tone, though her features didn't look Asian. Tirsia did once talk to the woman outside the ruined pharmacy and thought she looked a bit Middle Eastern. That chat with Tirsia had been just about their only contact, apart from the odd nod of the head while both households were out looking for supplies. There was no animosity, it was just that resources were in short supply. No one in the area really got that friendly with anyone else. There was no frontier spirit, no wartime comradeship. Just lots of families keeping themselves well and truly to themselves.

"It's a weird grinding noise, the aliens will come for sure mum." Tirsia had said.

"Go and watch, but be careful Tirsia."

Noise brought the aliens, a fairly intuitive idea his kids had seen proved many times, simply by watching the other houses in the area. Keep quiet and the various robots and creatures would rattle doors and windows, as if trying to get a reaction. As long as you kept very still and very quiet, they'd go away after a while. It had kept Tyler's family safe, apart from the two times it nearly hadn't. Luckily the old shotgun they'd found in the house had dealt with the aliens on those occasions. Now they had the new weapons.

"The metal men came after a while dad." Tirsia had told him.

The metal men were the worst, even more dangerous than the saucers armed with lasers. The metal men were what his kids called the robots made out of bronze coloured metal. They were strong and armed with energy weapons that burned down houses and sliced through human flesh. It never was discovered what had made the grinding noise in the young couple's house. Whatever it was, it had cost both their lives. After a few days Tyler had gone through the house and Zane had helped him bury the bodies. Then they'd begun to transfer the supplies to their own house. There had been a disagreement with an old couple who tried to lay claim to some of the food. Tyler had shown them the large and impressive rifle and they quickly agreed a fair split of the tinned goods.

"Move a bit more to the left." Tyler quietly muttered.

The creatures who looked like men had better hands now, five fingers instead of three. The aliens obviously hadn't been idle, nearly all their creatures and robots had been improved in some sort of way. The creature grabbed the handles to the outside cellar doors and pulled hard. Luckily the Bates family had invested a lot of time in making sure every access point to the house was solid, strong and secure. The creature that looked like a man sniffed at the gap between the doors. What was it sniffing? There was nothing down there apart from wine, beer and a few boxes of candles.

"Do that again and it'll be the last thing you ever do." He mumbled.

The creature had put a foot against one cellar door, while it pulled at the other. Tyler brought the rifle up and carefully pushed it through the thick net curtains, until it rested on the single glazed window pane. Another sniff and the creature outside went crazy, pulling at the doors as if his life depended on getting them open. Enough.....Tyler had to act.

"Hey, stop that!" He shouted.

The strange human like face where all the features were right, yet still totally wrong in some way. Looked in his direction. Tyler knew they had a cry that would bring others more certainly than gunfire. He fired once into the creature's face and saw a burst of blood and bone. Now he had to help his wife before the creature at the front of the house had time to react. By the time he reached her, the wire reinforced glass in the front door had lost a battle with a shotgun shell.

'Boom.'

His wife fired the second chamber of the double barrelled shotgun straight through the whole in the front door, into the charging creature's chest. It stumbled, but refused to fall down. Worse still, it began the shrill cry for help. Tyler didn't hesitate, he fired three times into the dreadful parody of a human face. The shrill cry stopped, as the lifeless brute hit their front step as it fell.

He wasn't surprised that his kids were beginning to shout questions at him, all pointless. It was what people did at such times. He'd worked most of his life repairing roofs, yet now he probably knew more about PTSD than most psychologists, all of it learned by experience.

"Quiet !" He shouted. "We need to keep quiet and very still for the next fifteen minutes."

Easy to say, but that kind of shock and tension needs to go somewhere. He hugged his wife, feeling her trembling, before realising he was trembling too. He ignored their children watching them and kissed her neck over and over again.

"We're going to be alright." He whispered.

"I know." Said Lisa.

He hugged both his kids, even though Zane always said he was now too old for hugs from his dad. After ten minutes Tyler thought they'd been lucky, there had been no other alien creatures or robots close enough to hear the noise and the cry for help. After fifteen minutes he began to get things organised.

"Tirsa come with me, we'll dump the body of the one outside the back door. Zane.... Help your mum dump the one outside the front door. Take it well away from the house."

"I know dear, we have done this before." Said his wife.

The window repairs could be done later, even the next day. Repairing windows was another skill he'd been getting quite good at.

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~ The Lopez Family ~

Steve Penboss, one time top DJ at Bruce Grove Radio, could tell something big was going on fairly close to Staverton in the West Country. As his house was on a hill quite close to that part of Devon, he was becoming more than a little concerned.

"We hadn't seen an alien robot for months." He said. "Daisy will back me up on that....Nothing for months. Now there are dozens of them every night, out near the old Brewhouse."

Daisy Lorhan had been the office manager at the same local radio station, until the invasion had made that part of North London uninhabitable. Now she was his lover and permanent houseguest until.....Actually he didn't like thinking about the until.

"Steve's right, we haven't had one near the house in.....Forever." Said Daisy. "We'd maybe see one following the track at the bottom of the hill, but that was a long time ago."

"Didn't you say there had been a fight with one ?" Asked Jada. "When you went out to the water pump."

"No Jada, that was a hungry Mastiff, the biggest damned dog I've ever seen. That's why I always carry the shotgun when I go outside."

"Not your fault Steve, she never listens to anyone." Said Luis.

"How dare you !" Yelled Jada.

They were off, about their third or maybe fourth row of the day. It didn't seem to really mean anything, just their way of communicating after years of being married. Jada and Luis Lopez had become his guests after their own home had been destroyed by robots, lots of robots. Like many in the area, they weren't locals and the old station house had been somewhere they'd borrowed until..... There it was again, that dreadful word....Until.

They'd been squatters really, though most of the surviving members of mankind were probably squatting somewhere. Had the aliens targeted the Lopez family, or were they clearing the entire town of Staverton to make room for something else? Sending so many of their minions after a couple on the wrong side of middle age, did seem a bit excessive. In the background noise he was trying hard to ignore, Jada was still giving her husband a tongue lashing.

".....give me one example where I've not listened Luis....Just one....."

"Oh mum, please stop it." Said Alejandro. "Every day you're like this....I'm beginning to get a permanent migraine from it all."

"Don't be rude to your mother." Said Luis.

It wasn't just Jada and Luis under his roof, their son and his family had been crammed into the station house with them. Alejandro, his wife Tracy and their daughter, a toddler named Maria. It was really Daisy's fault that the entire Lopez extended family had ended up on his doorstep one night, she'd decided to cultivate them.

"You're not good with people Steve, you don't even know the couple down the hill."

She'd told him, as though he needed some kind of therapy. Steve didn't consider himself to be heartless and his house was quite large. It was just that food supplies had been designed to feed two and not seven. Plus privacy had become a real issue, which was really messing with his sex life.

"No Steve, they'll hear us."

Had become something Daisy seemed to be saying far too often. Not that he didn't like the Lopez family, they were good people. He was even worried about poor Maria. The toddler had been injured when the family was forced to flee the destruction of the station house. A wound to her left knee that was probably a bread and butter repair to a trained surgeon, if there were any left. It was likely the kid was going to have a locked up joint for life, which concerned him more than he'd have admitted to anyone, even Daisy.

"I'm going for a walk." He said.

"I'll come." Said Daisy.

Their walks had become more frequent and tended to last longer than they once had. Winter had given way to a hot summer, followed by a bitterly cold autumn. They needed thick coats and decent boots on their feet to venture outside. The shotgun went with him too of course, he checked it was loaded, which had become almost a ritual.

"I do like them Daisy.... If it weren't for being stuck with them twenty four hours a day, they'd be my ideal neighbours."

"Yes, I agree...Really nice people. Sometimes though Steve, I hate them so fucking much."

"Maybe we could pack our stuff and runaway." He said.

They laughed, they usually did after venting a little of their anger and general frustration at having to share their romantic idyll with a family of five. Two of whom seemed to have been arguing with each other solidly since they'd arrived.

"I wanted to look at events in Staverton." He said.

"So there is a purpose to our walk today?" Asked Daisy.

"I've just got a bad feeling..... We can see right across the town from the old Brewhouse."

The ground was wet enough to be muddy and there was a stream to cross, just a small one. By the time they'd climbed up the fire escape to get on the Brewhouse roof, they were both muddy and tired. The view of the town stopped them moaning about it, or thinking about anything other than the view.

"Christ..... Look at it Daisy." He said. "I can't even see where the railway lines used to be."

“This is different, they usually just land on top of what’s already there.” Said Daisy.

The noise wasn’t loud, but it was fairly constant. The contours of the hills must have been taking the noise away from his house. Two huge machines on tracked wheels, were tearing up Staverton. Everything was going and for once, the aliens weren’t wasting anything. Trees were going into what looked like massive wood chippers. Houses were going into rubble crushers, even the stones from the old church.

“This is it, this is how they’ll be doing it.” He said.

“Doing what Steve ?”

“Destroying everything, leaving us with nowhere to hide. It might take them a few years, probably decades, but they’ll systematically destroy any trace of humans ever being here.”

“No, they couldn’t do that.”

“You’re watching it happen.... Village by village, town by town. Everything recycled to build their own towns and cities. We need to tell the others.... Time to find a new temporary home.”

It wasn’t going to take long for the machines to move on. His home would next to be pulverised, before going into the chippers and crushers. Daisy seemed in a daze until they were almost back at the house.

“I’ll go if you ask, but the others Steve.” She said. “Jada can only do a few steps, she’ll need to be carried. That’s if they even agree to come with us.”

“Then we go, just you and me. I remember reading a book on survival once, when the night time phone in crowd loved that kind of stuff. Never own more stuff than you carry while running it said. Damn good advice.” He said.

Daisy stood in front of him, hands pressed against his chest. Her actions might have been more dramatic, if one of the huge crushing machines hadn’t chosen that moment to appear over the side of the hill. It was heading in the direction of the old Brewhouse and the threat it posed was obvious.

“You can’t abandon them Steve.” Yelled Daisy. “They’re a pain the arse sometimes..... Alright most of the time, but you can’t abandon them.”

“If they refuse to go.... We’ll have to leave them Daisy, you know that.”

“Promise me you’ll try your best to convince them.”

“There isn’t time for this crap.”

“Promise me !”

“Alright..... Christ.... Alright, I promise.”

They’d heard a few loud noises in the house and of course, they were arguing about them. Jada had heard what she thought was the army coming to the rescue, while Tracy thought it was something alien about to do something nasty. Tracy was right, though even she didn’t seem keen on packing a few things and leaving the nice warm house, with its cellar full of tinned food.

“We need to leave, there are alien machines on the way.” Yelled Steve.

“Huge crushing machines, they’ve destroyed most of Staverton already.” Added Daisy.

A hard audience to impress, there was none of the running about he’d hoped for.

“But.....I haven’t finished my breakfast yet.” Said Tracy.

“They won’t care, I doubt if the aliens are bothered by health and safety.” Said Steve. “They’ll crush the house with you still in it, trying to finish your coffee.”

No reaction, not even a comment from Jada about his sarcasm. They just needed to be organised.

“Come on, Maria can help by getting tins out of the boxes downstairs. Tracy can put clothes in the cases in my room..... And Alejandro.... If you can get your family organised ?”

Nothing, it was as if he was asking them to join a strange cult, or organise a bank robbery.

“Come on people, get moving.” He yelled.

“I’m staying put.” Said Jada. “For the moment, I see no reason to leave where we are.”

“I agree.” Said Alejandro.

Steve had done his best with a really difficult audience. He looked at Daisy, trying to emote desperation through his eyes.

“I’ve tried my best Daisy.” He said. “Will you come with me ?”

Would she go with him ? He really didn’t want to be the only one putting his shirts, socks and boxer shorts into a case on wheels. Especially as he was certain the others would be dead by morning. He carried on looking straight into Daisy’s beautiful hazel eyes.

“Daisy ?”

She nodded, a definite nod.

“Alright Steve, we’re leaving.” She said.

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