

SUNDAY DRIVE

John Boston

The Baldwin Family hadn't been much of a family lately. Too much pointless drama. Jon Baldwin was the oldest, he had just turned 17. The twins, Mary and Jordan were both 11, going on 30. Jennifer Baldwin was the mom and the glue that kept the whole mess together. Her dutifully elected husband was Jim. They were a family, as much as a family can be nowadays. Jennifer found that what destroys the family unit, isn't hatred or violence, though they certainly don't help. What slowly poisons most families is simply *time itself*. It's like the radon gas of our lives. Slowly pulling everyone apart. Seems harmless at first, like old dynamite, unfortunately, by the time you realize how dangerous it can be, it's too late, the damage was done. She had slowly drifted apart from her family over the years, as did Jim. Other than the occasional phone call on a birthday or holiday, there wasn't much communication amongst family members. His parents and hers were both so wrapped up in their pointless lives, they didn't seem to have much time for their grandkids. She hadn't even seen her parents in almost five years. It wasn't much better with Jim's.

It wasn't that they didn't like each other, or that they had done something to anger the rest of the family. They just simply drifted apart over the years. They lived out of state, away from both of their families. Jen knew the next time all of their family got together would be for one or both of their parent's funerals. They would cry together, then disappear from one another's lives for another twenty years, until it was their turn in the hot seat. Over the years, Jen grew to really dislike older people. She found the baby boomer generation to be the most selfish and self-absorbed generation in American history. Most of the time, her parents just reminded her of teenagers with arthritis and gray hair. Her grandparents had been nothing like that. Her grandmother pretty much raised her. They were the quiet, hardworking types that dotted the American landscape for generations. The kind who knew family wasn't the most important thing.....*it was the only thing*.

She did her best to pretty much be the exact opposite of her parents. She didn't want her kids to become like her and her sisters. Jim spent most of his free time with his son. His father was a good man, but he worked so much that Jim barely saw him growing up. It wasn't until he retired that the two seemed to spend any time together and it was rare when they did. They were almost like two complete strangers at that point. Jim wasn't sure why his father devoted as much time as he did to a company that devoted so little to him. The company went bankrupt following the 2008 stock market crash. His father seemed to crash right along with it. His entire life had been tied to his company's 401k plan and stock price, which was now worthless. Almost forty years of sacrifice and his father didn't have a pot to piss in, or a window to throw it out of. Jim was not going to follow in his father's footsteps. He was a clerk at a local supermarket. The pay wasn't great, but he was home every night for dinner and off on the weekends, which was what he really wanted. The company might own his ass Monday through Friday, but he got a furlough on the weekends to spend time with his son and daughters.

Jim's father had bought them an old Ford Mustang that needed complete restoration. He and Jon had put months of work into it. When they finally turned the key, it was almost magical. He wanted to show his son that hard work pays off. *Working hard is great, but working smart is even better.* They tinkered and toiled, neither one of them knew what they were doing, but they were learning together. One year and a lot of money later, they had a completely restored vintage mustang. Seeing his son drive away in it almost brought a tear to Jim's eye.

The family had struggled due to the relatively low pay of both of their jobs. John had his family on his insurance plan. It was a good bite out of his paycheck, but saved them thousands in the long run. He and Jen had to watch every penny. They had to forgo vacations and instead, take drives together as a family. Today would be another mini-vacation for the Baldwin family. Turns out, it would be a day they would remember for the rest of their lives.

They decided to go to Lake George. It was very warm for this time of the year and everyone brought their suits. The twins were arguing. They were always arguing. Sometimes they got so angry at one another, they forgot what they were arguing about in the first place.

Jon thought twins were supposed to have some kind of magical connection to one another. If there was, he certainly didn't see it with these two. They couldn't be any more different. They were maternal, not fraternal twins. He wasn't sure if that made any difference. If Mary wanted to go left, Jordan would want to go right, and so on. This time, they were arguing about which one's burps smelled worse. Jon just turned the volume up in his earbuds.

Wait till they start growing boobs.....then the fun will really begin. He thought to himself.

"Girls.....could you give it a rest for two seconds here. There's an accident up ahead," said Jennifer.

"Naw. Just a blowout. He'll be fine." said Jim

"Honey, it's an old lady. I'll pull over and see if she needs any help," said Jen

"She needs to quit driving. Nobody that old should be on the road," said Jim.

"Go help her," she said as she pulled up next to the old station wagon.

Jim rolled down his window. He put on his best fake smile and even sprinkled it with some very special *fake enthusiasm*.

"Hi there.....you okay?"

The woman seemed genuinely confused. She was trying to drive away on a completely flat tire.

"Ma'am it's flat. Why don't you pop the trunk and I'll change your tire for you."

The woman seemed even more confused, but she did pop the trunk. Jim walked over and looked for a jack and took out the spare tire.

"It's a little soft, but it will do," he said.

Just as he was about to slide the jack under the woman's car, he heard what sounded like a roaring coming out of the sky. He looked up and could see three fighter jets, racing towards their vehicles. He stood up. Jon got outside the car to have a look. They seemed to be flying low.....*very low*.

The air almost seemed to break as the roar of their afterburners made them cover their ears.

"Where the hell are they going in such a hurry?" asked Jim

"I don't know. That was an attack formation. They must be running some kind of drill or something.

"At Lake George? On a Saturday?" asked Jon.

Jim began jacking up the car and when it was clear of the ground., he broke loose the lug nuts with his tire iron. He slid the tire off and laid it on the ground.

"Give me the new tire, Jon," he said, without looking back.

"Jon.....Jon, what the hell are you....."

Jim turned around to see his son staring at the sky. He turned and looked up and could not believe what he was looking at. A few thousand feet in the air was a massive, white pyramid, floating in the sky above them. It didn't make a sound as it hovered over them. There were two new fighter jets in the air, that buzzed the strange object floating in the sky.

"Dad.....what the hell is that thing?" asked Jon.

"I don't know son. Looks like a floating pyramid."

They watched the sunlight hit the side of it and the reflection was so strong it nearly blinded them. Two of the cars behind them had come to a complete stop. The occupants got out and a small group of people had gathered to watch the incredible sight around them. It was as if they were dreaming. All of them having the same incredible dream. Except, this was no dream. This was very real, as evidenced by the half dozen helicopters that were now flying around the object.

"Government's not gonna be able to cover this one up." said one of the people on the side of the road.

Almost all of them were recording the events unfolding in the sky with their camera phones. Finally, a NY State Trooper came up to them and told everyone to leave the area at once. No one really seemed to listen to him. He seemed almost hypnotized as well by the floating pyramid.

"We better do what the officer says. That thing could be spitting out radiation or something." said another person gathered around their vehicle.

"Daddy, what is that thing?" asked Mary.

"I think it's a UFO," said Jim.

"What's that?"

"He means it's from another planet," said Jon.

His words seemed to resonate with the group. It dawned on them that they were looking at something designed by beings from another planet.....maybe even another galaxy. Whatever this thing was, humans had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Jim changed the woman's tire and the family quickly took off back home. The highway was clogged with vehicles and people trying to see the object in the sky. Jim quickly discovered that whatever this thing was, it could completely shut off any power to anything, whenever it wanted to. It passed over their town for a few minutes and everyone lost power. It wasn't just the houses that lost power. It was everything. Radios, phones, communications, the internet....even battery-powered wristwatches became useless for several minutes. The thing in the air seemed to just suck every last bit of power out of their gadgets. No one really knew what to do. Finally, after ten long minutes, the power slowly returned. Jim turned on the radio first. Most stations were off the air. The TV finally came back on and most, if not all stations were reporting on the events unfolding around the world. Dozens of these massive, beautiful pyramids just seemed to come out of nowhere. They were clearly following a designated pattern. They seemed to be heading towards major population centers like NY City, Dallas, and Mexico City. Everyone was glued to their TVs or tablets. This was big.....*very big*.

So far, they had made no attempt at communication with anyone. That was a little weird. Surely, they must be communicating with someone in the White House or Pentagon. People might get the wrong idea if they don't say something.

This went on for several hours. They had moved towards the major cities of the world. What should have been a seemingly happy and euphoric moment had quickly turned to something else. People were beginning to get worried. After all, *they should have said something by now*.

"Dad, something about this doesn't seem right. I mean you don't send thirty ships on a mission of peace. That's an invasion force." said Jon.

"Maybe.....maybe not. I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

Shortly before 10 PM that evening, the White House had decided that if they do not respond to any attempt at communication, they have to be destroyed before reaching our major population centers. Of course, these were not your typical enemy. There was no telling what would happen should we start attacking them.

Things could go south, very quickly.

The Air Force threw everything it could at them. Cruise missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, nothing seemed to even slow them down. Whatever they were, it seemed almost indestructible.

Jim and Jon watched in horror as it became very evident that these ships weren't going anywhere. They weren't even fighting back. The rest of the world was waiting to see what the U.S. did. All we managed to do was piss them off.

The President gave the order to evacuate NY City and Los Angeles if it were even possible at this point. Within a few hours, the United States was turned on its head. *The excrement had hit the fan, so to speak.*

At 1:41 AM the President declared a national emergency. The U.S Military was placed at Defense Condition 2, which is a hair-trigger away from all-out war. Except, in this case, the war was over before it even started.

Who, or whatever was piloting these craft had made no attempt to communicate anything to anyone on Earth. Nothing that could be verified anyway. It had been four days since the objects first appeared. They had been parked over the main population centers all over the globe, which were hastily being evacuated. Problem was, you just can't evacuate a city the size of New York or Los Angeles. No one knew what these beings wanted. If they wanted to destroy us, they could very easily do so. Jim and Jen didn't think that was their plan. No, whatever they wanted, it was far more sinister and in many ways *far more evil* than anyone could ever have imagined.

Dozens of aircraft had been destroyed by attempting to get too close to the objects. They seemed to have some kind of force field or shield around them. If you flew into it, you were instantly destroyed. Nothing seemed able to get through it.

Finally, midway through day four, they began moving. Jim was following the one in NYC. A news helicopter was recording the entire event, only a mile away from the floating pyramid. It moved maybe five miles, towards Manhattan. It then opened some kind of hole in its base and a blinding light came shooting out, that sliced right through a luxury skyscraper. A moment later, two children were seen floating in the light, motionless. They disappeared inside and the light shut off. The rest of the pyramids all over the globe did exactly the same thing, scooping up seemingly random people from all different races and backgrounds. Most leaders were all looking at the United States for some kind of guidance. It was the cameraman on board the helicopter that summed up what everyone on Earth was thinking.

"God help us.....God help us all," he said whimpering.

The US military unleashed hell on the craft. Dozens of missiles and explosive objects were seen slamming into the pyramid. Jim counted over forty cruise missiles that hit it. None of them seemed to do any damage. It was at that exact moment that the power in New York City disappeared. Within seconds, there was nothing. No lights, no cars moving, no communication. Not even a flashlight seemed to be working. This went on for several hours. The population was beginning to panic.

"Jesus, are you guys watching this?" said Tom Hellstrom, their 72-year-old neighbor as he came running into their living room.

"72 years old, you think you've seen damn near everything," he said, almost out of breath.

"There's no power for a radius of a hundred miles around New York City. Nothing. Nothing that has electricity seems to work. Even battery-powered stuff is useless." he said.

"It's sending us a message," said Jim.

"What message?"

"They're letting us know they call the shots now, not us," said Jim glued to the TV.

"They aren't getting me without a fight. I was in Nam in 68. No way I'm going to give up and let those alien bastards take me."

No one had to say anything. The girls were scared shitless, but still too young to fully process what was happening. In the span of 24 hours, the planet Earth had been turned upside down. Nothing would ever be the same.

It wasn't until the fifth day, that the gravity of their situation became all too clear. Unless the power was restored the Nuke Plants, most would meltdown with a few hours. The situation at Indian Point was near critical. The area was already overwhelmed with refugees from the city. If the plant did meltdown, the results would be horrific.

Just as the plant was signaling the alarm to evacuate its workers, the pumps somehow all came back online. No one could figure out how the rods were able to suddenly drop over a thousand degrees within a matter of half an hour. At the very last moment, the plant had been saved, there would be no catastrophic meltdown. The same situation was repeated in France, Russia, Mexico, and everywhere else. Our visitors had just given us a glimpse of their power. They were calling the shots now. One of the pyramids began to move rapidly towards Washington DC. In less than fifteen minutes, it was hovering over the White House. Most of the staff had already been evacuated, but the Vice President stayed behind, in a seemingly genuine show of defiance. The light cut through the White House, through the steel walls of the emergency bunker, and lifted him into the sky. No one dared fire on the craft, not wanting them to shut down more of our power. These things had shown up and just taken one of the most powerful men on the planet and we were absolutely powerless to stop them.

The Baldwin family, minus the daughters, who were in bed, sat and watched in stunned silence, as did the rest of America. No one in the world had a good night's sleep that night. No one knew if they would be next. Over the course of the next few weeks, the pyramids simply grabbed an assortment of people from all over the place and took them inside their craft. No one had any idea what happened to them once they were inside. Were they killed? Were they subject to some kind of horrible torture or experiment? No one knew.

There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to whom they took. The victims were mostly white, but not all. An Air Force General had taken his family to Cheyenne Mountain, home of NORAD in an attempt to keep them safe. One of the pyramids sliced through half a mile of mountain and bedrock to get to his wife and pull her inside. The mountain was designed to withstand a blast from a Russian ICBM and the craft cut through it like it was made of paper. No one was safe. No one would ever be safe again. The boogeyman was real. He just came from another planet. We

were now all like children holding the covers over our heads, hoping the evil boogeyman would go away, hoping just to make it through the night and live for one more day.

Some were convinced they were demons and this was Judgment Day. Others saw the victims as being taken by God up to heaven. Most people, the Baldwin's included, thought our planet was just at the wrong place at the wrong time. A little bit of hell had come to our lonely planet. For the first time in human history, we had stopped fighting one another and turned our wrath towards the pyramids in the skies, who were given several new names: *the floaties*, *the white devils*, or *Jim's favorite..... "the fuckers."*

World War 3 wasn't fought with nukes. It wasn't even fought between humans. Something from far, far away had shown up on our planet and kicked sand right in our faces. Problem was, there wasn't a damn thing we could do about it. We were like bugs trying to fight an Abrams Tank. If things were bad in the United States, they were even worse in other countries.

Russia had thrown everything it had against the invaders. They had lost over fifty thousand men trying to bring down one, just one of the pyramids. They had even used a tactical nuclear weapon on one of the craft when it hovered over St. Petersburg. It had no effect. You may as well have thrown a giant water balloon at it.

Things were pretty much the same in China. The Chicoms exhausted every missile and bullet they could find at it, even using their EMP weapons. All it did was fry the power grid over their country. Pilots were flying their jets as fast as they could right into the craft in a kamikaze attack. It did nothing. China disintegrated within a matter of weeks, as did most of the world.

So far, several countries were not touched by the pyramids. Cuba, Surinam, Angola, even Chile had no pyramids.....for now. They seemed to be going down a list in some kind of order. By the end of the first month, a total of forty thousand people had been taken by the floaties and that was just in the United States. By the last count, there were thirty-eight floaties in the skies. No one even understood how they got to Earth, or even how the pyramids worked, or how they could possibly hold all these people on board, but they did. As disturbing as the abductions were, most figured that once they had their quota, they would simply leave and go back to their planet. Maybe they were going to take them to another planet and make a new Earth. If they wanted to destroy humanity, they could easily have done so. Some thought that's exactly what they will do once they leave. Maybe they would, maybe not. The only thing the Baldwin family and the rest of the planet could do was wait them out. Wait for them to finish their mission and then leave. They would be gone and we could finally put the pieces of our planet back together. Of course, Mr. Hellstrom had heard differently, he listened to the *internet*.....he was in the know, so to speak.

"Look, it's just a rumor, but it's not really a rumor, cause some people have taken pictures and video and stuff. We still don't know what these bastards want. We have no idea. Maybe they will just take some of us, then leave. Maybe they will take all of us. Until there's no one left. We have to do something for Christ's sake, we can't just sit here and do nothing." he shouted one afternoon in the Baldwin living room.

"So, what are the government going to do?" asked Jon, who knew better than to get the old guy going, but he figured it was the only way to get him to leave.

"It's horrible.....almost too horrible to think about, but it might be the only way."

"Only way for what?"

"Our government has a few thousand nukes. Thirty-two hundred to be exact. Various yields. Most are just in the kiloton range, but some are enormous, in the twenty megaton range. The Russians have about the same."

"Ok, so?"

"Our government could nuke every single city in the United States. Flatten them, destroy them all. Subs would wipe out the rest all over the world. We will nuke our own cities, rather than let these bastards keep taking us out of them. I don't think we're much good to them if we're dead or radioactive."

"Jesus, Tom.....that's insane."

"Jim, this whole goddamn situation is insane. It might be the only option we have left."

"So, you think they're just going to pack up and leave? What about the rest of the planet? It would mean the end of humanity!" shouted his father.

"Look, don't yell at me. I just wanted to warn you guys. These are the end times. One way or another, we're toast. I guess the only question left is will it be over quickly, or drag out for a few more years?" he said.

"I think you might want to stop visiting those websites on the internet. Anyone can post anything they want and not have to deal with the repercussions of their actions," said Jim.

"I understand that Jim, but once in a while, they're right. This may be that once in a while."

The Baldwins were trying as best they could to remain a family throughout all of this. Jon still went to school. Jim still went to work, but most of the time, the shelves were empty and he did nothing but pull guard duty. His boss had given him a 9mm and told him to shoot any looters. Jen was still working at the hospital, but things were deteriorating so quickly, all she did was bag and tag the dead bodies. So many were dying from lack of medicine and prescriptions or just plain suicide, she was having a hard time keeping up. She figured that this was a test from the almighty. In his own, bizarre way, he was trying to make humanity better by allowing this to happen. God works in mysterious ways, sometimes horrible ways, but the ends always justify the means....or maybe it was the other way around. At any rate, she was determined to keep her family together and survive. They had made it this far. They were going to see this thing through till the end. The Baldwins were going to come out of this horror show smelling like roses.

So far, none of their extended family had been impacted, let alone taken aboard one of the ships. For now, things were still ok. If the ships were to simply leave tomorrow, they could simply put

this behind them. Jen was determined now, more than ever to see this nightmare through till the very end. She and Jim both felt that the ships were going to leave once they had filled their quota. Her family thought pretty much the same way. The ships could easily have destroyed us. We are no match for them or their technology. We hadn't even managed to damage a single one of their ships. Everyone was curious as to what the aliens looked like. Did they look like us? Were they hideous? No one really knew. Throughout all of this not once, did the ships attempt to communicate anything to anyone.

The twins seemed to be having a hard time with all of this. They had refused to sleep in their own bed. Jim had moved two cots into their bedroom. Jon still slept in his room, but at night, he didn't do much sleeping, not did anyone else. The ships would simply dematerialize, then reappear over someone's house and scoop them up. Sometimes they would hover motionless over a city for hours, then, seconds later, they would be hundreds of miles away. There was really no way to track them, so no one knew just how many there were. They had estimates, but that's all they were.

Everyone was wondering if they would be next. Wondering what would happen to them once they were on board. Some thought it was going to be glorious. There was a small group who were actually begging to be taken away.

"The green hair crowd. You can always count on them to be the one out of a hundred that does it differently," said Jim.

No one really wanted to be alone, yet they didn't want to be in the company of other people either. Mr. Hellstrom was clearly losing it. He had stopped bathing and showering, stating:

"The hell's the point? We're all going to be dead soon anyway," he said one afternoon after stopping over.

"Tom, talking like that is not going to help anything. We've made it this far," said Jim, giving him a very unmistakable look of disapproval.

"Yeah, maybe you're right, guys. Maybe this will all be over soon. I just sit in bed at night and wonder what it's like to be inside those giant pyramids. Those big, beautiful, pyramids. Are we taken to some other world? Are we just appetizers for hungry aliens? If we just knew what they wanted, I think I might actually be able to get through this without touching booze again."

"How long has it been Tom?" asked Jen.

"I took my very last drink May 10th, 1988. Haven't had a drop since. I opened up a bottle the other day. I almost took a sip, but I poured it down the drain. It's been 31 years since I was drunk. I'm a lousy drunk."

"Most people are, Tom," added Jim.

"If you haven't had a drink in over thirty years, why did you have a bottle in your house?" asked Jon.

Tom seemed to ignore him. He didn't come over to chew the fat. He was not well and he was hoping his adopted family would hear him out.

"You know, they say the ones who are going to be taken, they almost seem to know it. They can sense it, feel it. I know it sounds crazy, but I think I'm going to be taken. I just can't shake the feeling. Jim, you'll shoot me first, right? You won't let them take me, now will you?" he said tearing up.

"Is that what you really want, Tom?"

"I think so. If you shot me, I wouldn't hold it against you. You might be doing me a huge favor."

"Or, I could be interfering with God's work."

"I don't think God has anything to do with this," he said staring blankly at the TV.

They would just sit in silence and watch the news reports on the TV. Each day just seemed to get a little worse. They had stopped airing pleas and agony of the families who had loved ones taken. There were now so many, their voices were just drowned out. Everything was changing quickly. Perhaps *collapsing* would have been a better word. Our faith was beginning to run out. These machines were so cold and emotionless, yet hypnotic and beautiful at the same time. They could take your child from you in seconds, yet somehow, you would still admire their beauty, because in many ways, they were the most beautiful things to ever grace our little planet Earth,

Nothing really changed during the second month. Tom's theory about the government nuking our population centers was beginning to gain some serious traction. Everyone tried to go on as if this nightmare wasn't happening. Jon watched a news clip about a runway model who was whisked away in the middle of her runway. One second she was there, showing off a new line of swimsuits, the next minute, she was hovering a thousand feet in the sky. Some days the news was horrible. Some days, there was no mention of the pyramids. The talking heads were saying that once they hit 144,000 people, they would simply go home. That number came and went and the ships were still here.

Jon and his father watched one of them sail right over their heads. It was surreal and hypnotic. It didn't make a sound, if you weren't looking at it, you would never know it was there. There was no writing or markings on it of any kind. No one knew who they were, or what they wanted. They simply took who they wanted, when they wanted. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason. Poor, rich, old, young, black, white....mostly white, but certainly not all. If it was maddening for the Baldwins, it was even worse for the government.

The President would occasionally come on the air and give some kind of pep talk to the country. Sometimes, he was borderline incoherent and just rambled. No one was really listening to him anyway. He was only still in charge *because they let him be in charge*.

The family did have one bright spot, Jon graduated from high school. His ceremony was brief, his good friend Amanda Sykes was the class valedictorian. She gave a speech about friendship and hope, then broke down in the middle of it. She had to be helped off stage, No one could

blame her. Everyone in the audience pretty much felt the same way. If they weren't crying on the outside, *then they were crying on the inside.*

Tom Hellstrom came over that night to congratulate him. Jon couldn't stand him before this madness began and his opinion hadn't changed since.

Tom was a mess. He had clearly started drinking again and was semi-drunk, or completely drunk when he did show up. Jon just didn't understand why his parents let him hang around. He upset almost everyone, including the twins.

"Honey, I know he's a dumpster fire, but we're all he has. He's losing his marbles. If we kick him out, where's he going to go?" said Jen.

"Why is that our problem?"

"We've known him for years. He was always a good neighbor and a good friend. He's not a bad person, he's just not handling this well at all. He really thinks he's going to be taken by the ships."

"Mom, why in the hell would anyone want that old bastard?"

"They wouldn't Jon, but why do they take any of us? What possible use can we be to them?"

"You think they're evil?"

"I think they're indifferent, which sometimes is the most horrible evil there is," she said.

Food was now becoming scarce and when the trucks did fill up the shelves, the price was out of sight. There was no real economy anymore. There was just bartering and trading. The power company had been under Executive Order not to shut off power to anyone. Some just ignored the order and shut it off anyway. Jim came upstairs one night with his coffee cup. He never drank coffee at night. Jon immediately knew something was wrong. He didn't even have to ask.

"Son, we don't have the money to keep the power on. We haven't even paid for our cars this month. They've cut my hours so bad, I'm not bringing home hardly anything. Your mom quit because it wasn't safe in that hospital. We have some real hard choices to make. What little money we do have is going to pay for food. We have to feed Tom now too."

"Jesus dad, he's not our problem, he's not even family. He's just some old drunk you guys took in."

"He doesn't have anyone, his kids won't take him, his wife died a few years ago. He's all alone in this world. If we cut him off, it wouldn't be much different than killing him."

"So one of us has to starve in order to feed him? That doesn't make much sense either."

"Jon, We've known Tom for nearly twenty years. He's always bent over backward to help us out. Never once did he ever ask for anything in return. He got me the job at the store. Your mom and

I were just a few weeks away from being homeless. Tom made one phone call and I got hired the next day. He's had a very difficult life. He never knew his father and his mother was the town whore. He got drafted and went over to Vietnam to fight a war he didn't even want to fight. I guess at some point, he kind of became part of our family. He wasn't always like this. When he's sober he's a hell of a good guy. He'd give you the shirt off his back if you asked him for it."

"I just don't think having him around here is going to end well, for any of us."

"I guess we'll just have to wait and see. Just be ready to live with no power for a while. The store is now paying its employees in food, not money."

"Great, do you get extra food for working overtime?" Jon asked

"No, no you just get to keep your job. That's your bonus."

It was around four-thirty in the morning when Tom came running into the house. Jim thought it might be a burglar or some crazies. He grabbed his shotgun and ran downstairs, with Jen, right behind him. They found Tom, sitting on a recliner, just rocking back and forth. He was almost hysterical. He'd be laughing one minute, then sobbing the next.

"It won't be long now, Jim.....a few hours at most," he said between sobs.

"Tom, what are you talking about?"

"They're going to take me, Tom. I'm on the list. Don't know if I've been naughty or nice, doesn't fucking matter.....I'm going into that ship. It's my time. There's nothing I can do. No place I can run to. This is the end of the line for me. I'm going to ask you to do something for me. I want you to kill me."

Jim and Jen looked at one another. It really had come to this.

"Tom, you know I can't do that. Neither can Jen. We aren't murderers"

"You aren't killing me, you are saving me from a fate worse than death. I knew what they do to people on those ships.....it's too horrible to even put into words. They do things to us that would make Satan blush. I'm asking you.....hell I'll do it myself, just leave me the gun. Leave me the gun and go back to bed. I won't do it here. I won't leave a mess for you to clean up."

"Tom, you know they take you, even if you're dead. People have tried that, it doesn't stop them," said Jen

"They can have my body, but they won't get me. I just hope they don't bring me back somehow. I think if enough time has passed and I'm no longer around, I might get away. I'm going to do it whether you help me or not."

"Tom, what if they aren't going to take you. How can you be sure? It's been almost three months now? The reports are saying that they've slowed way down. They think it might be coming to an end soon." said Jen

"No, my dear Jennifer, they're just the first wave I'm afraid. There will be more. There will be more waves after them. One by one we're all going to be taken I'm afraid. No one will be spared. That's why the government is going to launch its nukes soon. They know it's over. It's going to happen within a few days, maybe even sooner, they just have to get the Chinese on board. It's over kids."

"Come on Tom, nobody knows anything at this point. It's all just speculation. There are new rumors every day, but it's just crap. No one knows anything."

"No, Tom.....you'll know I'm right when they take me away. Maybe there's someplace you can go with your family. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes and have to make those decisions. I'm sure you'll do the right thing."

"Tom, I'm not going to kill you.....I'm not....." no sooner had Tom said it when the roof to his house suddenly disintegrated and the blinding light seemed to pour everywhere. Tom turned and saw the light had moved him away from Jennifer. She had this horrified look on her face. He and Tom tried to grab her, but the light was far too strong. They couldn't even get anywhere near her. She was trying to talk and scream all at the same time, but nothing came out, nothing but light.

Jim aimed the shotgun at her. She slowly nodded up and down. It lifted her off the ground. She would be gone in a few seconds.

"JIM, FOR GOD'S SAKE, DO IT!" Tom shouted.

Jim aimed the shotgun at her head and squeezed the trigger. Jen's head exploded, leaving just pieces attached to her body. He racked another shot and squeezed the trigger again, this time, nearly cutting her in two. He fired again and again. The blood was dripping down onto his face. Tom put his hand on his shoulder. He pulled him in and Jim began sobbing on him. Tom looked up and saw Jon standing at the top of the stairs. The kid was in shock.

"What happened?" Jon asked

"They took her Jon. She's gone," said Tom as his father sobbed and collapsed on the floor of the house.

Jon ran down the stairs and hugged his father. They hugged and cried together. Tom sat down on the stairs next to them. He took out a cigarette.

"Haven't had one of these in almost thirty-five years," he said as he lit it up and took a deep drag.

"Jesus Christ.....Jesus Christ.....what the hell have I done.....what the hell have any of us done to deserve this? How the hell am I going to explain this to Mary and Jordan? How the hell am I going to tell them their mother was taken? They have nightmares about those ships!" asked Jim

"In a few days.....it won't really matter what you tell them," said Tom, wiping the blood off of his face.

Two police and someone from FEMA arrived at the house. They didn't even question Tom or John. They just took Jen's information and some recent photos of her. They were at the house less than half an hour.

Tom cleaned up the blood that was almost everywhere downstairs. Jin asked him for a cigarette and he gave him one.

Tom and the rest of the family sat in the living room in silence. The twins were crying, Jon was crying and Jim was just staring at the wall, rocking back and forth in his chair.

"Daddy.....are the floaties going to take us next?" asked Mary.

"I really don't know, honey."

She just buried her face in her arms and started crying hysterically. Jim looked at Tom and he knew what Jim had in mind. He slowly nodded.

"I think what this family needs is a nice Sunday drive. Get away from all this madness. Get some fresh air." said Jim smiling.

"Yeah, cause that will make everything all better," said Jon.

"Get dressed everyone. We are going on a nice Sunday drive in the country. Jon, help your sisters. I want to leave as soon as possible."

"Dad, are you nuts? Mom's dead. Maybe she's not dead, but she probably wishes she was dead. The hell are taking a drive for?"

"Because it's what your mother would want," said Jim.

Jon rolled his eyes and helped his sisters get dressed. Tom put his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"Do you think the kid knows?" asked Tom

"No. Do you have any gas?" asked Jim.

"A few gallons, not much."

"I think I know just where to go. The lighthouse. It was Jen's favorite place to go. She used to go there as a child with her parents."

"I'll go get the gas....and maybe some more smokes."

Half an hour later, the Baldwin family was on the highway, which was mostly deserted. No one said a word. Six months ago, the highway would be full of cars, bumper to bumper, now it was deserted. There were dozens of cars abandoned on the side of the highway. Some had dead bodies in them. There was no one to take them away.

"Dad.....where are we going?" asked Jon

"To the lighthouse, son. It was your mother's favorite place."

"Dad, mom's gone. Don't you think you should worry about the rest of us?"

"I am worried about you, that's why I'm doing this. You have to trust me, son. You can't start second-guessing me now."

"A bunch of people are going to try and take down one of the floaties. We probably won't do much, but we have to at least try. There are a few hundred thousand volunteers. I want to join them."

"Jon, if the Air Force, the Army, and the Marines couldn't stop them, what the hell makes you think you're going to do any better?"

"We won't, but I'd rather die trying to stop them, rather than just sit around and wait for them to take us away."

"Jon, in Vietnam we had a saying. It so aptly described the insanity of the war. They said *we had to destroy the village in order to save it.*"

"That doesn't make any sense Tom," said Jon.

"Not to someone who hasn't been to Vietnam it doesn't," said Tom.

"Did you ever kill anyone, Mr. Hellstrom?" asked Mary.

"That's not a very nice thing to ask somebody, but to answer your question, yes, probably about a dozen or so people. Not really something I like to talk about."

"Is that why you're a drunk?" asked Jon.

"Probably. I never thought I would see the day," he said.

"What?"

"We meet an alien species. First time in recorded history. We meet a species that is not human and they turn out to be more evil than we are. Maybe we aren't so bad after all." said Tom staring out the window.

John parked the car overlooking the harbor and the cliffs below. It was raining now, the slight drizzle had turned into a downpour. Jim got out of the car and looked at the rocks below. There were two other cars down below, or rather what was left of them. Clearly, he wasn't the only one who had this idea. He just couldn't get what Tom had said out of his mind.

You have to destroy the village in order to save it

You have to destroy the village in order to save it

You have to destroy the village in order to save it.

You have to destroy the family in order to save it.

Jim got back in the car and wiped his face. The rain beat against the side of the car violently. He looked over at Tom who just smiled and took the last drag off his cigarette. The twins were both sleeping. He looked over at Jon who was just staring out the window.

"I'm not going to make you do this. You can get out if you want," said Jim.

Jon looked at his father.

"Fuck you," he said and put on his seat belt.

Jim put the car in gear and floored it as fast it could go. The guardrail had been so badly damaged by the other suicide attempts, it barely slowed the car down.

The last thing Jim remembers is seeing Jennifer in her wedding dress, with her arms outstretched waiting to welcome him and the rest of the family into heaven....where there are no pyramids and everyone is happy. Just like the way things used to be.

Before the beautiful pyramids in the sky arrived and took away everything and everyone they loved.