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Upside Down

by Lesley Dawson

So here we are spending the night, and unknown future nights, in this place that is not our home, with no prospect of going home soon. Thinking back to the moment the trucks set off for an unknown destination. Jorj voicing all their doubts, suppressed until now, muttered, "I hope we are not making a big mistake."

The news came just after the market opened. Every woman who could walk began filling her basket with food. After all, who knew when they would next have such an opportunity?

Jorj zoomed into the village on his ancient Lambretta scooter. It had seen better days but it could still cover the miles faster than the even more ancient telephone wires could when harried into action after the handle had been cranked at head office in the nearby town. That said more about the limited telephone service than the speed of the scooter.

"They are coming" he yelled as he jumped onto the pedestal surrounding the war memorial to make sure that all those gathered in the market place heard him. "Quickly. We need to be ready"

Nobody needed to ask who was coming. They all knew, all except Ned who everyone said was a bit simple. His mother nudged him to be quiet and dragged him off up the street and in through their front door.

The street gradually quietened as everyone disappeared indoors to get ready. The place looked like a ghost town with no noise to be heard except the wind whistling through the tall pine trees shading the grave yard. As dusk deepened the entire village gathered in the church with such belongings they could collect in the time available and the priest barricaded the door.

They came before dawn, knowing that it was the best time to catch people unprepared, before they were awake. The village expected doors to be kicked in, to be beaten and cursed and they clutched their small children close and hid their sons in the vestry and in the rafters. The men looked at each other and remembered the oaths they had sworn the night before. "If you are taken I swear to protect your wife and children" They took a tighter grip on the puny weapons they had managed to find or make. No match for the professional equipment of soldiers.

Imagine their surprise when the men who came did not break down the doors but knocked like civilised people and shouted "Can we come in?" Suspecting a trick, Adam, the village elder cautiously poked his head round the door, but not opening it wide and found that their visitors included both men and women, who looked serious but not threatening. His mouth opened but no words came out, he was so shocked.

"Please come with us" said the man who appeared to be the leader of the visitors "There is not much time. The soldiers are not far behind us"

Adam and those who could hear through the half-closed door, looked bewildered "Who are you?" someone asked "How can we trust you?"

"Look at us. Do we look as if we are coming to harm you?" The door was pushed slowly open so the women and children could see who were outside.

"We have come to rescue you from the soldiers. They are coming to kill all you men, rape your women and enslave your children. Please hurry we don't have much time."

"How do you know all this?" yelled Jorj from the back of the crowd.

"We have a spy in army headquarters who warned us that this village is next on the list for destruction"

As the men began to argue with Adam, Miriam stepped forward and took a closer look at those gathered outside "I would rather trust these people than wait for the soldiers to come. I have heard about them. They did the same thing at my cousin's village, got all the villagers to safety. By the time the army trucks arrived the village was empty but it was burnt down anyway"

After the usual endless discussion, Miriam's words seemed to convince Adam and the other men; they all piled into trucks, normally used for transporting food relief.

There was a slight hiatus as everyone had to leave behind some of their belongings and families fought over treasured possessions they were not willing to leave behind. As the trucks rolled out, they left behind a ghost village.