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Cousins

by Juliet Robinson

Overnight our neighbours began to look at us differently. We had always been on their radar as an odd pair, but having Altamura and Engis move in pushed things off their acceptable scale.

Altamura and her son Engis came from the year 2086. The year Earth dies. Vast amounts of energy had been needed to propel them back in time. They, and a handful of others, had used the energy of the blast that finally ended Earth's journey round the sun to power their time relocation.

We applied to host time refugees through a government scheme. We wanted to do something to help. After they came back to warn us, the least anyone could do.

This is where things get complex. Or as a famous Time Lord once said, 'wibbly wobbly timey wimey.' Time travel isn't simple, it turns out time isn't linear. Altamura and Engis come from a future, it's just not ours.

However, it is relatable. Their past mirrors our past. Their ancestors also came from Africa, crossing the Bab-el-Mandeb straits in the Red Sea. They colonised the world, had a palaeolithic, neolithic, bronze and an iron age. They had ancient and classical eras, industrial revolutions, and a considerably more successful space race. Pyramids were raised in their Egypt. Rome, in their timeline, was also not built in a day. There were differences. The American colonies never gained their independence. Nicola the 2nd of Russia didn't die at the hands of the Bolshevik revolutionaries, but by the hand of her advisor Rosalina years later. Shakespeare didn't exist, likely died of the plague, and Tolkien had been a woman. Men never gained the right to vote or own property.

So similar, but not. Globally the time refugees received a mixed welcome. Here in Northamptonshire, they were treated as a worrying spectacle.

Altamura preferred to be outside. he loved the blue sky; she had never seen one. The inhabitants of number eleven were keen gardeners, they would pause in their labours and openly stare at her. I overheard them muttering to each other.

‘She’s a brute.’

‘What is wrong with her teeth?’

They would stand, leaning a shovel or a rake, glaring until she returned indoors.

Number nine, their daughters had quite the thing for Engis. He was beautifully built, all muscle and copious locks of dark hair. He was exotic and exciting.

We took our guests out, we wanted to show them what our world had to offer. We travelled down to London for the day. They hated the crowds, unnerved by the number of people. The people equally seemed disquieted by our visitors. Hostile glares were more common than was comfortable.

Our group soon attracted a rather unsubtle police escort, officers following on foot. We began to understand why the displaced had been settled in quieter backwaters. They were still too much of a novelty.

We concluded our visit with a tour round the Natural History Museum, where else? We wandered the galleries, aware of our audience, but distracted enough to push them to the fringes of our attention. I had gotten ahead of everyone else and turned to see what was causing the hold up. Behind me our guests had stopped in front of a case showing worked stone tools. A museum guide had joined them, and they were clearly having an intense conversation. Joining the group, I slipped into their discussion.

‘So, you’re saying there’s no evidence of homo sapiens in your historic record?’ The guide flustered.

‘None. We had homo erectus and a few other sub species. Homo sapiens never came to flourish.’

Out of the corner of my eye I spied a cluster of school children pointing at Altamura and I understood why. Her people were different. A heavy protruding brow, a wide generous nose, thick bountiful hair and large teeth. The same, but different. I studied the gawking onlookers and wondered how many of them had traces of Neanderthal DNA.