

Joshua: Breaking Free (Joshua Trilogy Book 2), continues the story of Joshua and Mani, two aliens from planet Theos, who after escaping to Earth and making new lives for themselves, find that they, and their Earthling friends, are in serious danger. Protecting themselves and all they love, means they must go back home, in order to truly BREAK FREE.

Joshua: Breaking Free

by Patricia Miller

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BOOK 2

JOSHUA

Breaking Free



Patricia Miller

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First Edition

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EMERGENCE

My head is going to explode! Music blared louder and louder as the night went on at the party. The frat house, 3-storied and decked out with gold streamers and strings of lights, vibrated under my feet and in my chest as the bass bounced it and all inhabitants around on the down-beat. No, I didn't dance. Even after a year of dating, and a year of Emma's Earthly guidance, my dancing had not been improved. I thought I might be catching on. But, according to Emma...not!

So, I didn't dance. At least, not in public. Emma and I danced when we were alone. *Oh, Emma!* Even after all these months, I still looked forward to seeing her. Still knew my back glowed every time she called or stood before me. And again tonight, she stood before me. Her dress, shimmering gold, just like her hair, falling gingerly on her soft shoulders.

Neither I nor Cole were frat members, but one of us always seemed to know someone who knew someone, who knew someone, who knew someone, etc...It had been a long time before I felt ready to go out. For 2 months after my stand-off with Rick, I couldn't smile, let alone go to a party and enjoy myself. Finding out Rick was also an alien and commissioned by Theosian officials to bring us back for prosecution was nothing short of terrifying. But, being in his debt for protecting

Mani and I from that? Paralyzing! A long 2 months; I thought of nothing else. I obsessed! I was consumed. But somehow Emma was now bringing me out of it. *She made me feel alive...and hopeful!*

Mani, more mature yet still her spunky self, “graduated” from high school and enrolled in freshman-level college courses, right near us here in Rootstown. She and Cole were still together, dancing like mad in the corner across the room from Emma and me. They were both crazy happy, for sure. As for me, yes I still worried about Rick. Who wouldn’t? But no one needed to know. I had a life on Earth to live, which basically meant going to classes, working in the library, and hanging out with Emma. Paradise!! *If it weren’t for Rick, that is. My life minus Rick truly would be paradise!*

November in Ohio is dim and gloomy at best. Any sign of the sun was a welcome rarity. We weren’t lucky enough to have sun today. Outside it was dreary and cold. But, inside this frat house, it was bright and celebratory. I didn’t know what they were celebrating. They probably didn’t know either. But, that didn’t matter to them. They were whooping it up and having a blast. *Goodness, were they having a blast! I wasn’t, but I was here. I was finally out of my same four walls! That was something, at least!*

Emma leaned in toward me and stared directly into my eyes. Oh, those beautiful eyes! *Wait! Was she talking to me?* Yes, she was talking, but honestly, I was too busy staring at her gorgeous face to hear much of what she said.

“Josh, are you listening to me?” she said, in a tone telling me it wasn’t for the first time.

“Yes, yes I am.” I was *now*.

“What a great party,” she said, as the entire first floor broke into a rhythmic chant, in sync with the song. Not to mention the fact that clothes were starting to disappear...and some of the guests as well. Emma just looked at me and laughed.

At that moment, the lights blinked off and on, and the music as well. A tall guy dressed in a toga mentioned something about a breaker being overloaded. Only at a college party could a bed sheet become a costume. And the way his sheet was shifting as he danced, I couldn’t help but hope he didn’t have what Earthlings call a *wardrobe malfunction*. Emma and I walked into the kitchen area, realizing lights were blinking in there, too. We peered through a window looking out upon a large patio...the patio lights were blinking also. Is it possible every breaker in the house was overloaded? *Yeah, I didn’t think so.*

“You stay in here,” I said to Emma, giving her *that* look.

“Where are you going, Josh?” she asked. I managed to convince her by raising my arm, palm facing her. She nodded.

I walked out the back door and across the lawn behind the house. *That feeling!* I sensed something behind a large tree in the distance. I had to see what was behind it. Once past it and out of Emma’s sight, I stood frozen in the moonlight, at the outer edge of the property line.

At first, I just found multiple roots and twigs half in the ground below my shoes. The nighttime breeze was cool and chilly, and starting to pick up a little. And then a tree branch crackled behind me. Quickly, I turned on my heels and gasped, but was not *entirely* surprised at what I saw, or didn't see.

EMMA

It was getting harder and harder to keep his mind occupied, and away from worrying about Rick. Yes, I'm worried, too, and I know we have to accept that he is a very horrible part of our life from now on. But, why worry about something till it happens? That's just wasted energy in my opinion.

Worrying wasn't always typical for Josh. At least, not before he and I started dating. Emotions of any kind were totally off limits back then. But now, sometimes he seemed more of an Earthling than anyone I knew. If he wasn't occupied, he was lost in serious thought. I was determined to keep him from worrying as often as possible. Why? Because I loved him. *I love an alien. Now, I'm thinking that might make a great book. Ha!*

At least he agreed to come to this party. I was glad for that. He needed some fun. And equally glad he didn't insist on dancing, or trying to dance. The one thing he just can't seem to master...and I didn't feel like being embarrassed tonight.

The crowd became a little rowdy as they chanted and danced throughout the living room of the frat house, including Mani and Cole back in the corner. It was getting hotter and hotter inside. I wasn't surprised when layers of clothing began to fly through the air and

land randomly, balancing precariously on various items in the room...including other people!

“Great party, huh?” I said to Josh. *Only took 3 times to get his attention.*

His facial expressions were hilarious! He looked a bit embarrassed at the sight of a piece of female under-clothing flying past him; I was just about to suggest we head for the kitchen anyways. But before I could, the lights in the living room started to blink off and on. I think the music skipped, too. Those dancing noticed, smiled, and continued gyrating. They probably thought they were supposed to be blinking on purpose. Either that or they just didn’t care!

A rather plump kid in a sheet, arranged around his body like a toga, piped up. “It must be a breaker getting overloaded.” But he didn’t seem to care one way or another, as he swished down what remained in his bottle of beer.

Josh furrowed his brow and rose, walking toward the kitchen. I followed. As we entered and walked past loads of empty bottles littering the counter tops, the lights around the stove and above the sink began to blink off and on, too. What made it crazier was that they were not blinking in unison.

Not saying a word, Josh then walked over and peered out through sliding doors, which led to a rather large, rectangular, cemented patio. Leaves of brown and gold left it cluttered, and it was lit with a string of gold party lights, in keeping with all the other gold decorations.

“Huh” was all he said as we both stared through the doors, our mouths hanging open at the sight. He nodded, turned to me, and told me to stay where I was. Josh wouldn’t tell me where he was going. He did, however, walk out the back door, across the patio, and through the backyard, between trees reaching nearly into the woods themselves. Soon I couldn’t see him, and that bothered me, but I stayed put.

3

APPEARANCE

The blustery winds of fall were something I couldn't seem to get used to on Earth. I shivered under my hoodie, but if I was honest, the temperature wasn't the only thing making me shake. I lifted my chin as if to summon courage, as I stepped closer and closer to the outer line of the woods. Before I stepped into the thickness of the trees, *that feeling* returned. Well, it was about time he showed his face. *Stop this game! Come out already!*

"Come on. I'm alone. Let's talk then." I tried to keep my tone somewhere between firm and congenial.

As I looked from left to right and left again, he slowly appeared before me. Rick, standing firmly about 12 feet in front of me, donning a sweat shirt, jeans, and an arrogant grin. *I hated that grin!* Tall, with a square build and a now-shorter, prickly-looking haircut. *I hated everything about him, actually!*

"Expected to hear from you before now," I said with very little patience. I turned to make sure Emma was staying back. She was nowhere in sight. *I can't believe she actually did what I asked her to do!*

"No point meeting till it matters." The words nearly snarled out of his mouth, the outer edges of which were curled up.

“Matters?” I decided it best to at least pretend not to be intimidated. *Shoulders back! Head high! Chest out!*

“Where’s the cute blonde?” he asked, looking behind me.

“Never mind her.” I was feeling my temperature rise. *We don’t need to involve her.* “You never did explain why you didn’t just turn us in.” *I said, Chest out!*

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“What’s obvious is that you like us being under your thumb,” I challenged.

“Yeah,” he said, widening his smile and stepping forward 2 steps. “That part’s really cool. But, there’s another reason.” He stopped short, surveying the backyard before continuing on. “We need to move this conversation elsewhere.”

“Why?” I asked.

“We just do. Tomorrow, 5:00, where we found Mani. I’m sure you remember where that is.” And with a snicker and a grin, he slowly lifted his hand to his temple and vanished. *He’s leaving already? What an arrogant idiot!*

As I turned and walked slowly back to the frat house, I thought about what just had happened. *I’m not optimistic. That would be stupid. But, his tone didn’t seem violent or dominant, for that matter. It felt...very different. But, he had us where he wanted us. No doubt about that. Maybe he was just toying with us!*

With leaves crunching under my feet as I walked nearer to the house, I looked up to see Emma standing

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on the edge of the patio, leaning against a post. *I'll take care of things. I'll take care of her...somehow.*

ASTONISHMENT

The day after the frat party, Mani and I met in the common room at her dorm. Yes, Mani had moved into a dorm. It was 3 stories high, with apartment-style dorms like mine. She was totally embracing this college thing, for sure. But she still liked her old mini-skirts, heels, and makeup, despite having donned a more mature attitude and demeanor.

"I'm meeting Rick today at 5. I think you should consider coming," I suggested.

"Yeah," she replied without hesitation. "Absolutely! I'll go. Glad you told me." She half sat on the arm of a chair, arms folded confidently across her chest. "How do you see all this playing out?"

"Not sure to be honest," I admitted, leaning my body weight on the pool table. "That day he revealed he was Theosian, it seemed pretty clear that he was in charge. After all, he is stronger. But, yesterday he was different."

"Different how?" she asked.

"I don't know. Less threatening for sure. All I can say is different." I was irritated at myself for not being able to put my finger on it. "When you come along, you can tell me what you think."

“Well, I’m there for sure,” she said. “This is a Theosian issue.” She snapped her gum. *Yeah, same old Mani...still in there somewhere...*

JOSHUA

Later that day, Cole texted me. It was obvious he was concerned about the meeting:

You sure Mani should be at that meeting? I mean, I don’t want her hurt, he messaged.

Yes, I’m sure. We’re just going to talk. Once it’s over, the four of us can get together and you and Emma will be debriefed. This seemed to placate him, for the time being. I was glad for this. Rick was enough on my plate to deal with, without protective Cole getting on my case. *This whole alien thing on Earth hasn’t exactly turned out quite as I planned!*

Mani and I drove to the spot in the woods by her old apartment, where we’d found her lying unconscious and sick quite some time ago. We parked as close as possible and walked in the direction of the ledge. I decided it best to try to stay somewhat close to the truck. Before we reached the ledge, Rick appeared off to our right. He smiled. *This bothered me...a lot! And so did the fact that we didn’t sense him before he appeared.*

“Glad to see you guys,” he said (rather too pleasantly).

“About time we talk. We...Mani and I...need to know what’s going on,” I said, as calmly yet firmly as possible.

“Well, what do you want to know?” he asked.

“First of all,” Mani said, “why didn’t you turn us in? Or is that still something you plan to do?” *Whoa – turn down the attitude Mani!!!*

“Wow! Nothing like getting right to the point. OK. Well, let’s see: I took a good look at both of you and thought about the situation, and I decided that you guys looked pretty happy. Turns out, this place was way cooler than I thought it would be, and...I guess I wanted to stay here on Earth,” he said without hesitation.

I didn’t know what to say. *Are you kidding me? He wants to stay on Earth? With us?* Gazing to my left, I caught sight of Mani’s facial expression...frozen! As for me, I really couldn’t believe what I was hearing!

This was blatantly obvious to Rick, I’m sure, as he looked from one of us to the other, again and again. *An awkward silence!* It was soon interrupted by what sounded like the *old Mani!*

“Let me get this straight: You agree to follow us here from Theos, to track us down for our planet’s government, so we can be taken back to Theos for prosecution, but instead you change your mind and decide you want to stay here with us, on a whim? How dumb do you think we are?” *Stop pushing him, Mani. He is a good bit stronger than you and I put together, remember?*

5

AMBITION

The smirk faded from Rick's face as the corners of his mouth sunk low. In a slightly condescending tone, he replied slowly...

"Yes, that is exactly right. You got a problem with that?" I opened my mouth quickly, jumping in before Mani had time to continue. *After all, if he sees a reason to spare us, then who are we to argue?* I scurried to find the right words to lower the temperature of the conversation, even if just by a few degrees. *Come on, Mani. Cool it down! Cool it down!*

"A problem? No, we don't have a problem with the idea of that. I mean, Earth is nice." I stepped forward, lightly tapping Mani's arm with mine, hoping she would get the message to cool it.

"I guess it's just surprising. Hard to believe. Hard to trust," she said. "Ya know?"

"Yeah, I get it." He tried to step closer, but Mani stepped back in a jerking manner, leaving him stopped short and staring. "And it's obvious. I guess I'll just have to prove to you that I don't have another motive other than that."

"That won't be easy," Mani quipped. "Your track record, with me especially, makes that difficult." *She had a point.*

“Yeah. Look, I managed to convince the official committee that I didn’t find you guys right away. Then, after I told them that I did, I convinced them into letting me observe first instead of going right in and scooping you both up,” he explained.

“Ok,” Mani chimed in, “but, for all we know, you might still be planning to do just that.”

I added, to try and soften the conversation, “Look at it from our point of view. What proof or assurance do we have?”

“Well, for starters,” he said, as he put his hand in his hoodie pocket and pulled out what looked like a newer version of a Theosian communicator. “Here’s all my communications to Theos on my transponder.” He held it up the metal device and handed it to me.

I looked at Mani, then downward to study it, pushing the buttons necessary to review the correspondence. After I was done speed-reading (as Earthlings call it), I handed it over to Mani, and she, too, used Earthling speed-reading, then handed it back to Rick.

“That’s somewhat reassuring,” I said. “But, it also leads me to have questions.”

“I’m sure it does, Josha...”

“It’s Joshua now. Or Josh, for short.”

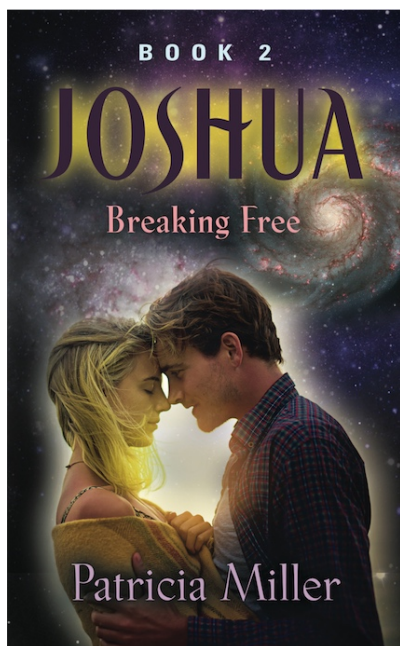
He smiled wider. “Very Earthling of you. Anyways, there’s a lot you need to know. The official committee has changed since you left. Many of the old officials have stepped down from their positions and the newer ones have been much more tolerant of my observing than the old ones would ever have been.”

“But, if they lose their patience, you’ll swoop us up and turn us in, in a heartbeat,” Mani asserted.

“There’s no need for that to happen,” he tried reassuring us. “You saw my correspondence. You see where I’m going with this. The new committee might be more open to learning about Earth from a direct source, meaning us.”

“Might,” I repeated. “They might be. But, then again, they might not, too.”

Rick pursed his lips, and up again came that smug grin. *Man, do I hate you!*



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