

## Ishmael II : Pandora

### Chapter 11 - Jersey

**“Horace was building something, that was the real problem. It had started off looking like a piece of abstract art, created out of test tubes, boiling flasks and titration equipment. All held in place by metal retorts and a lot of clamps.”**



Ishmael McGrath had claimed the seat next to Kitty MacLaren at the front of the helicopter. Usually he gave up such a claim if he was travelling with Biff, she loved to be up the front, where you could see the action. He outranked the entire scavenger squad though, so it had been easy get his bottom on what was probably intended as a co-pilot's chair. Right now, he was beginning to wish he'd stayed in the back.

“Crap MacLaren.....We nearly took the roof off that barn.” He said.

She was chuckling, actually chuckling. They were travelling faster than most passenger aircraft could travel and doing it at little above treetop height.

“A miss is a miss Ish, no matter how close.....Seriously you're looking at things that are too close us. We're travelling close to the speed of sound, so you need to look ahead of us, a long way ahead of us. Otherwise you'll get nauseous and maybe, just maybe, you'll drive yourself nuts.”

He shouldn't have been there of course, risking his life on a scavenging expedition. Francine would go crazy when she found out, and she was bound to find out. One of the scavenging squad was bound to mention him being with them. He hadn't even told Biff, knowing that she'd have given him a lecture for taking needless risks. Kitty shouldn't have been there either, not really. She was part of the Filey campus now, but she'd never flown a routine scavenger team before. Like him, she was going crazy being stuck in the campus twenty four seven.

“Admit it Ish, this is the most fun you've had in a while.” Said Kitty.

“It is, I'll give you that, if we survive. Why are we turning north ?”

“Doglegs Ish, we're flying doglegs. Go straight to the civil defence stores north of Headingley and anyone tracking us will know where we're going. At the moment I'm using an old civil aviation beacon that by some miracle is still broadcasting. When we pass over it, I'll turn a few degrees to the west. A longer journey than a straight line, but far safer.”

The main aim of their mission was to bring back the hundred or so powered gas masks that were on an old ministry of defence inventory. Normally used by troops needing protection from airborne pathogens while fighting, they'd be perfect for the campus staff looking after the farms and of course, the scavenger squads. Ish hadn't seen any designs, but he was confident he could modify the filters so they'd screen out the Green Death.

“Do you see that red blob on your screen ?” Asked Kitty.

“Yes....The one you told me to ignore a little while ago.”

“That's the one.....It's getting close now, too close. Now is the time to stop ignoring it. I could move weapons control to my screen, but as you're sat there doing nothing.”

It appeared the second chair in the cockpit was for whoever fired the weapons, which made sense when he thought about it. He wanted to panic a little, he hadn't bargained for being weapons officer. Kitty was right though, it looked like being a fun day.

"Alright, what do I do?" He asked.

"Is there a number next to the red blob?"

"Yes, a four."

"Right, that means four unknown flying objects are far too interested in us. Probably four of the flying saucers we're not allowed to call flying saucers. You need to use the control stick now, but don't press anything yet."

"I won't, I promise."

He wanted to add that he was too terrified to press anything, but if Kitty trusted him to use the weapons, he'd do his best.

"Move the stick to put the cross hairs over the blob and then press the right hand button." Said Kitty.

He did it and the screen changed, to a long range image of a few clouds.

"The screen has changed....I can't see the flying saucers."

"You won't, not yet. Now we need to power up the main electromagnetic weapon. Press the button on the left."

He did and there was a loud whirring sound, mixed with a steady hum. Kitty used a microphone to talk to the squad in the back.

"We are about to engage the enemy." She said. "Get into a seat and strap in nice and tight."

Ish didn't need telling. When Kitty began to tighten the straps keeping her snugly into the pilot's chair, he tightened his own.

"Have you still got a number on the screen Ish?"

"Yes, still four."

"Good, I do so hate unexpected guests. We're over the beacon Ish. I'm changing course a little to the west. That will mean we'll be heading straight at them. Watch the screen and when they're just about filling the screen, press the fire button. It's the big button, the one you haven't pressed yet. What usually happens is that the closest two are destroyed and the other two run for home."

"Supposing they don't run away?" He asked.

"Recharge the weapon and start again, though I've never known it come to that. I have control of some missiles, though in every encounter I've heard about, the surviving saucers break off the engagement."

"Do they ever fire back?" He asked.

"It has been known Ish, it has been known. These helicopters are pretty tough, we can take a bit of punishment."

First it was just four circular blobs on the screen, though they quickly grew in size. Obviously heading straight at them in a tight square formation, the craft really did look like the flying saucers in all those B movies. Difficult to judge their size, though the numbers on the side of the screen might have told him, if he'd known the right ones. Flying saucers with a gold tinge to them, that became a darker gold towards the centre. Ish put everything else out of his mind, as he watched the enemy hurtle towards them.

"I can see them through the front screen now." Said Kitty. "They're coming up fast Ish."

Ish left it until the four saucer shaped craft were filling the screen. He then pressed the fire button. He hadn't known what to expect, it was his first time in the weapons officer's chair. All that electromagnetic energy had to affect the helicopter's metal shell in some way, they began to buck and shudder. On the screen he could see what looked like fire, a wall of fire.

"You got one.....I'm going to climb out of the way of the debris." Said Kitty.

There were still strange groaning sounds coming from the helicopter's structure as they climbed. Kitty seemed unconcerned, or at least she was taking no notice, so he assumed it wasn't an issue. His screen was now showing just the sky, as was the main forward screen Kitty was using. Briefly the big screen went dark, as it automatically stopped direct sunlight from dazzling them. Kitty levelled them up and it was just another sunny day again, as if the battle had never happened. Ishmael was learning, he checked his screen.

"Just one left.....We got three of them." He said. "The survivor looks to be accelerating away from us."

"Getting three on your first time is fucking good Ish." Said Kitty. "Well done....Sadly I'll need to do a few more dogs legs before I land, just in case."

He didn't need to ask in case of what. Kitty seemed to like something to use as a way point, even if it was an old private airport beacon, or a transmission from a destroyed army base. They seemed to have travelled the full length of Yorkshire several times, before kitty was happy to say....

"I have the Headingley facility on visual. Looks intact, we're landing."

Ish hadn't expected the exterior to be anything exciting, civil defence bases were designed to be nondescript, intentionally boring. Jarvis had once given him the info on the places he liked to go scavenging after a few beers one night. Jarvis had been a corporal in the British Army, though he'd quickly proved himself as a first class scavenger. It was amazing how often Jarvis had found just the right piece of equipment.

"I'd promote him to colonel or something." Andy had once said. "It's just that I can see the army getting a bit upset if I did."

Only a few weeks before and after far too much campus brewed lager, Jarvis had given chapter and verse on his favourite places to scavenge. He'd been quite loud, telling all who wanted to listen and probably a few who didn't. Not that anyone had been brave enough to tell the large Yorkshireman to shut up.

".....of course the best places are still the old civil defence bases. Built in the nineteen fifties at the height of the cold war, though most have been regularly updated. The people tasked with looking after them told their families, there was no attempt made at secrecy. Gradually though, over the decades, the civil defence sign on that local building became part of the neighbourhood. Nothing exciting ever happened there, it had probably been abandoned. Re-designating them as stores was the final piece of genius needed so that large underground facilities could hide in plain sight. Very few have been looted, the public simply assumed they were no longer used."

The Headingley facility was just a building behind an unrepaired chain link fence with holes in it. Very few knew there were two underground areas containing millions of pounds worth of equipment and supplies. Enough weapons, clothing and ration packs for hundreds of men, should the unthinkable happen. Water too of course and an entire fleet of reasonably modern trucks and APCs. Less a stores and more a basement with enough supplies to fight a minor war. It was just a pity that no one had thought the unthinkable might come from outside planet Earth.

"I'll land to the north, near the allotments, just in case." Said Kitty. "We might have been tracked, despite the doglegs."

Headingley in Yorkshire, described once as 'laid-back' and 'popular with a large student population.' There were signs of the alien invasion everywhere, nowhere had escaped intact. The allotments looked fine though, still full of someone's favourite's flowers and vegetables. All abandoned now of course, left to be reclaimed by nature. There were signs of a fire in the civil defence base and the front gate had been knocked flat.

“Not to worry, some attempted looting was to be expected.” Said Jarvis. “All the good stuff is below ground level.”

Yes Jarvis was with them, the corporal who should really have been a colonel. He’d been quite keen on scavenging the Headingley base for some time. Filey to Headingley was only about seventy five miles, treble or quadruple that for doglegs. It was just that there had always been other priorities than simple scavenging for the sake of it. Now they knew the facility behind the flattened gates probably held something they needed.

“You two....Bryant and Crossley.” Yelled Jarvis. “Stay with the helicopter and look after it.”

“Anything happens to her and it’s a long walk home.” Added Kitty.

They spread out crossing what had once been a main road. Mercifully the weather and scavengers tended to leave little in the way of recognisable human remains. It was a rare thing, but the boy Ish had to walk around still had some flesh on the bones, a gooey one as the soldiers referred to them.

“I have another over here.....Really gooey.” Someone shouted.

“Something bad happened here and it wasn’t long ago.” Said Jarvis.

“How long ago.....Roughly.” Asked Ish.

“Two weeks tops.” Said Jarvis.

Two more roads to cross, they’d need to find trolleys to move what they might find, or Kitty would have to park the beast of a helicopter a little closer. They saw a few more fairly fresh bodies on the way and two inside the perimeter fence of the civil defence base.

“Looks like two rival gangs fighting a turf war.” Said Jarvis.

“Let’s hope they didn’t empty the place.” Said Kitty.

“Probably just grabbed guns, ammo and what they could eat.” Said Jarvis. “Everything else.....They more than likely left on the shelves.”

The inside of the building was dark and smelt of burning, never a good combination. Everyone needed to use flashlights, which did little to lift the dystopian atmosphere of the place. No ignoring the dozen or so offices, each might contain a member of whichever gang had won the turf war. Every room was thoroughly checked over, but by the end of all the checking they did know where the stairs and elevators were.

“The doors to the stairs have been broken open, but the stairs are a last resort anyway.” Said Jarvis.

“Only a few flights of steps, but it’ll be hard work carrying all the supplies we might want to grab. Are the elevators useable Tovey ?”

Tovey was female and most of the scavengers called her Becca, but not Jarvis. Ish still couldn’t work out if he was old school or just perpetually grumpy.

“No, both useless.” Said Becca. “Power packs are supposed to last a century, but it looks like they’ve been shorted out. Got the doors open to the main goods elevator and there’s a body inside.....Looks like there was a hell of a fight here a while ago.”

“So....Looks like we’re using the stairs.” Said Kitty.

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It was a little misty as their small flotilla of small boats entered the harbour at St Aubin in Jersey. Despite the mist and the early hour, it was still possible to see Jersey had escaped the horrors of the invasion. No burned out buildings, no flattened streets where people had once lived. There were even a few lights in windows, though they’d been told that was kept to a minimum. For some reason the alien armada had considered Jersey to be harmless, despite nearby Guernsey suffering dreadfully from high altitude bombing. Of course there was the chance that Jersey being left in peace was nothing but pure luck. Jada felt her optimism about coming to Jersey had been justified.

"It does look wonderful after living in that ruined manor house." Said Daisy.

"At least we'll soon know our final destination." Said Luis.

Despite being told the Blue Moon did have a captain, they've never seen him during the entire voyage from Combe Martin. An older member of the crew gave them a brief speech before they all disembarked.

"We're putting you ashore in St Aubin because there are the most available homes here. We're trying to spread new arrivals across the island to minimise problems with the local islanders.

Tomorrow you'll be taken to St Helier and greeted properly in the government offices."

"Is there much friction with the locals?" Asked Steve.

Typical Steve Penboss of course, looking for every glass to be half empty.

"A little, but mainly on the eastern side of the island. You'll be fine in St Aubin."

And that was basically all there was in the way of an introduction to Jersey. They were deposited on the quay along with their luggage and told someone would be along to collect them. Someone with a horse drawn cart, which had excited Maria. There was no timetable for arrivals in St Aubin, or so it appeared. Boats from the mainland arrived when the weather and tides were favourable, rather than when people wanted to arrive. It was nearly two hours before an old man arrived with a large cart pulled by two very large horses.

"Sorry.....Been waiting long?" He asked.

"A fair while, but you must be busy." Said Daisy.

"I am, you're the last out of eight new arrivals, all big families."

He made an odd clucking sound as he looked down a clipboard.

"You must be the seven members of the Lopez family."

"That's us." Said Steve.

Which seemed a bit of a cheek to Jada, though she let it go. Arguing that he wasn't part of their family would only complicate matters.

"Let me see....." Said the man with the cart. "You've done well, a new property out on Mont Arthur, a hacienda they're calling them these days....erm... You've got the entire ground floor. Lots of space, even for seven of you."

"Do we all get our own rooms?" Asked Tracy.

"Oh yes, big places up there, best property on the island."

The cart had rubber edges on its wheels, so the ride up the hill from the harbour wasn't quite as spine numbing as it could have been. Jada rolled up the bottom third of her coat and used it as an improvised cushion.

"Is it far?" Asked Maria.

"No, not far.....You could easily walk it, but not with all the bags."

The man with the cart drove up the short driveway, dropping them right outside the modern looking building he referred to as one of the haciendas. No key for the door, they were getting used to how the Kingdom of Devon and Cornwall did things.

"It looks beautiful.....Just the sort of house I was hoping for." Said Jada.

"Don't fall too in love with the place, it's only temporary." Said Alejandro.

"Get inside then." Said the man with the cart. "The other family are already here, get to know them. Someone will be here in the morning to take you to the government building."

No mention of a meal being provided and he'd gone by the time she thought about it. They dragged their bags inside and the hacienda was as gorgeous inside as it was outside. It really did look like a Mediterranean villa plucked off the coast of Spain and brought across the seas to Jersey.

"Where's my room ?" Asked Maria.

"Go and claim one, you can have first choice." Said Alejandro.

Maria had run off yelling with delight, before her mother realised a potential problem with allowing a toddler the pick of the bedrooms.

"She's likely to choose the largest room, you know Maria." Said Tracy. "Then she'll sulk for the next six months when we don't let her have it."

"Oh, you're right." Said Alejandro. "Maria ! Wait for me.....Maria !"

While he went hurtling after his daughter, with Tracy following him, Jada realised none of them had been given any breakfast, or even a hot drink that morning.

"There must be a kitchen." She said. "A really nice one judging by the look of this place."

Jada went to grab her bag, but Daisy grabbed it first. With Steve leading the way, they headed along a wide hallway with several doors leading off it. There was also a beautiful set of curving stairs leading up.

"No doors. No locks, I had guessed that." Said Steve. "I just hope we like whoever we've got as upstairs neighbours."

"I just hope they don't have lots of young children." Said Jada.

"Come on, the kitchen will be at the back of the house, they always are." Said Daisy.

"Lead on.....I'm starving." Said Luis.

The kitchen was huge and included a proper breakfast bar. A separate dining area had a pine table large enough to seat a dozen people. Daisy began yelling as soon as she opened the fridge.

"It's full....There's even fresh milk and eggs.....Who fancies scrambled eggs ?"

"Everyone I think." Said Jada. "And toast.....Is there bread ?"

"Anyone seen a toaster ?" Asked Steve.

There was a toaster and some bread, there was even a pot of homemade jam in the fridge. The kettle was filled from a tap with running water and placed on a gas stove that had to be linked to a gas bottle, somewhere. Daisy quickly became their expert on finding stuff, as they prepared a large feast of a breakfast.

"Bacon, there's bacon at the back of the fridge." Said Daisy.

"Makes you wonder whose house this used to be." Said Steve. "Maybe one of the local islanders who fell foul of the new Kingdom."

"That's not our concern Steve." Said Jada. "No waves please.....We need to fit in."

"I agree, we really do have to fit in." Added Luis.

"My worry is how we fill this fridge once we've emptied it." Said Daisy.

"I think we find out all that in the morning." Said Jessica Chase. "My guess is we'll be given some sort of work credits to buy what we need. The jam is nice by the way, but avoid the homemade chutney, the kids pulled faces after tasting it."

Jessica Chase stood at their kitchen door was a bit of a shock, but it seemed their upstairs neighbour was at least someone they knew. Daisy knew Jessica quite well, they seemed to seek out each other's company in Combe Martin.

"Hmmm our kitchen isn't quite as big....Alright though." Said Jessica.

Daisy hugged her and then there was a longer hug from Maria, who'd returned from room claiming with one thought on her mind.

"I've got my own room, all my own.....I can smell bacon, is there bacon ?"

"You must join us for breakfast Jess." Said Daisy.

“No, I’ve got an early lunch half cooked for the kids.....You’ll soon discover there are three connecting staircases, none with doors. We’ll try not to intrude too much, but I think we’re all going to get to know each other pretty well.”

Daisy walked with her along the hall a little way, where they shared a conversation, which included a fair amount of laughter.

“Well..... Daisy seems happy with the living arrangements.” Said Jada.

“I like Jess, we could have done far worse.” Said Tracy.

“I seem to remember her family has a lot children.” Said Jada.

“I’m sure you’ll soon get them under control.” Said Steve.

He winked at her, he actually had the audacity to wink at her.

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Pandora Gray was agreeing to all the requests Horace made for equipment, there was no other option. As the base AI now understood the alien’s language, Horace had begun to ask for massive amounts of processing time and resources. Telling Francine all requests were for finding an antidote to the Green Death meant instant agreement and the rubber stamping of all request paperwork. Andy had moaned about the increased use of the campus servers, but he thought it was her tying up time with the AI, not Horace. Dora had decided to be honest with Horace.

“I am taking a huge risk.” She said. “I only have a vague understanding of what you’re doing.”

“I mean you no harm Biff. Helping you survive so that you and your people can leave for a new home helps my own people too, though I accept they might not see it that way.”

Horace was building something, that was the real problem. It had started off looking like a piece of abstract art, created out of test tubes, boiling flasks and titration equipment. All held in place by metal retorts and a lot of clamps. After a few nights spent using the base AI, Horace had improved her creation, or at least it looked like it had been improved to Dora.

“Your device worries me Horace, especially after the insertion of a high yield medical isotope.”

A metal case had been added and an insertion device for the Caesium. Radiation treatment for cancer had been abandoned years before, once alternative therapies had obtained better results. A few chronic cases of lung cancer were still treated by radiation in a very tiny number of research facilities. It was a miracle that the Filey Campus had a small amount of Caesium-137 in the secure stores. Not much of the dangerous isotope, but enough to leave the site uninhabitable for a thousand years if it was used as part of a dirty bomb.

“You’re still emitting high levels of alpha waves during the night.” Said Biff. “Are you communicating with your own kind ?”

“No, I haven’t even tried for quite some time.” Said Horace. “For all I know they might try to kill me. You can trust me Biff, the radiation is essential. I need a device to change some of your existing medicines in very specific ways. This device of mine is a quick and crude method of doing that. It is all about making you a pill to cure the Green Death, nothing more.”

“And the alpha waves ?”

“I produce them when I dream.....Actually, so do some humans, or so I was told.”

“Oh.... Yes, now you mention it.” Said Biff.

“Why the sudden anxiety Biff ? I can feel it coming off you in waves, I’m good at sensing that kind of thing.”

It was honesty, or perhaps a little too much. Dora felt like a fool for asking Horace to be honest and then getting paranoid when she was. Some of it was Ish being away too and the fact that he’d never

told her where he was going. He'd gone with Kitty Maclaren on a scavenger mission, she was sure of it...The idiot.

"Alright..... We talked about an idea some of your leaders had about trying to share our planet. You admitted to not agreeing with that idea, that you didn't think it would work. Of course that worries me."

"Of course it couldn't work Biff, you know that too. There will always be a war. The people with the most advanced weapons always end up winning that war. Look at your own history and what happened to people with spears when the people with rifles arrived."

"So you really do think we're doomed?"

"Not if you leave to find a new home. I don't want humans to be wiped out, I don't want any intelligent civilised people to be wiped out. I will help you as much as I can, because I don't want to be wiped out either. I trust you to keep your promise to set me free."

"We will.....Ish will..... He's good at working out how to do things that seem tough to do."

"Good."

Horace went back to work building her medical device that was yet unnamed, or even properly identified. Talking about other intelligent creatures and the potential for one to wipe out the other, reminded her of Ish's dream about a chimera race of devils, seemingly made up from a lot of different strands of DNA, all dangerous and unpleasant.

"Do you remember mentioning creatures in the jungles of South East Asia?" She asked. "I believe you used the word devils for them, though that word might not be right."

"Yes I do and knowing your language better now.... That word is very apt. I believe your own scientists may have created these devils. Not many of them I remember, but if they were to breed in large numbers...There are quite a few reasons why getting in your rockets and leaving this planet forever, could be a very good idea."

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Kitty had helped them carry the equipment up the stairs; she could hardly just sit there and watch them struggle. Gas masks mainly, all ignored by the gangs and still in their protective wrappings. Some weapons, she could have sworn Jarvis gave a loving look to a fifty calibre with its own tripod. Mainly though, the scavenging team had several trolleys loaded with the equipment they'd been asked to find.

"I want a long shower when we get back." Said Kitty. "Followed by a decent meal and at least two glasses of Campus wine."

She wasn't going to say it, but the shower would include using a lot of shampoo on her hair. They'd found a few bodies in the first underground level. Not huge numbers, about five or six dotted about, here and there. The ventilation had gone off with the power though and it felt like the smell of decay was stuck in her hair. Plus she wasn't used to that much physical exertion and although they say ladies don't sweat, they glow, and she'd glowed bucketsful.

"Can you bring the helicopter to us Kitty?" Asked Becca. "It's a long way to push the trolleys otherwise."

The room went quiet, someone had used the 'K' word, someone who wasn't on her very small list of people who were allowed to use it. She liked Becca, but it was important not to let it go. Otherwise they'd all be calling her Kitty and that road was sure to lead to madness and living on her own with a dozen cats for company.

"Sorry Maclaren." Said Becca.



Not enough and Kitty noticed it was raining outside and looked like it had been raining for a long time. You tend not to notice the weather if you're carrying boxes up several flights of basement steps. Noticing a quick flash of lightning gave Kitty the perfect idea for a punishment.

"Jarvis.....Is it alright if Becca relieves Bryant on guard duty?"

"Oh, fuck." Said Becca.

Bryant and Crossley would be breaking rules and sitting in the helicopter to avoid the rain. Of course they would, the scavengers were people not robots. The walk to the helicopter though, in the storm beginning to build up outside....That was a fitting punishment. Jarvis knew enough to go along with what amounted to a bit of hazing and gentle bullying.

"You heard the lady Tovey, get your arse out in the rain and relieve Bryant." He said.

"Yeah, ok....Fine."

As Becca opened the outside door, they all heard the crack of thunder was louder than the last.

"Unless it's an emergency of some kind, I don't recommend flying in this weather." Said Kitty.

"I guessed that, get yourself comfortable people." Said Jarvis. "We'll camp out here until morning. Can whoever has the comms unit let Tovey and Crossley know? Tell them to stay put."

"That's me.....Will do." Someone yelled.

Kitty was already looking for a spot to build a nest out of packing materials, somewhere well away from everyone else, just not too far away. Food was beginning to figure in her thinking too and whether their ration packs were still in the helicopter. Not that it mattered. There were boxes full of rations downstairs. Ish picking up his flashlight caught her attention, as he seemed to be preparing for something.

"Where are you going?" She asked.

"I know we found the essential we came for." He replied. "Now though...There's time for a good look along all the shelves. And we never even looked at the second basement."

"Isn't it just trucks and APCs down there?"

"In theory you're right..... It's just that some of the scavengers have reported finding all sorts of interesting things stored where they weren't supposed to be."

It was too tempting to ignore, a chance to look around two floors with more military supplies than some small nations.

"I'll come too Ish, you shouldn't go alone anywhere." She said. "We never really checked anywhere properly, there might still be bad guys."

"With all the noise we made! Though, yes I'd be glad of the company."

Flashlights on they went down the stairs and no one even asked where they were going. People must have seen them, yet not a soul enquired about what they were up to. In all fairness Jarvis and his people were engaged in the important business of heating up ration packs for their evening meal. As they reached the first basement the dreadful smell of death hit her nose again.

"Oh, that smell is beginning to get to me." She said.

"Don't worry MaClaren, we won't notice it after a while."

She'd brought one of the larger flashlights, which put out a bright white light through over a thousand tiny LED devices. Kitty played it over the shelves that had already been looted by the gangs and a few that were still full.

"So.....What are we looking for?" She asked.

"Not sure, though I'll know it when I see it."

"Nothing specific then?" She persisted.

"My dad used to love rooting through old second hand shops." Said Ish. "As a kid I used to ask him what he was looking for and....."

"He said he'd know when he saw it." She said. "I get it Ish, we're the browsers of the looting world."  
"Exactly."

It was fun to grab a large trolley each and simply browse, especially as no one was going to ask for a card or chip to pay for it all. Kitty let Ish drift away from her a little, though not too far. They hadn't properly cleared the basements and she was taking no risks. She even took her automatic out of its holster and tucked it down the back of her trousers.....Just in case it was needed in a hurry.

"Hey, what do you think of my hat?" Shouted Ish.

A hardhat with built in infrared sensors of some kind, it looked like something out a B movie props department.

"Great Ish, grab one for me.... Don't forget Dora, there are fatigues that don't look quite so.....Uber Military as the Fifth West ones."

If Ish was ever going to have a Eureka moment and find that must have item, it didn't come before they'd looked at just about every shelf that hadn't been looted or vandalised. Both with half the space in their trolleys unclaimed, it looked like they were on their way down the stairs to the second basement.

"Can we eat before trying the bottom floor Ish?" She asked. "I'm starving."

"Yes of course, there are boxes of rations and I've seen quite a few heater packs."

Ish grabbed a box of assorted ration packs off a shelf and began to dig through them.

"We hit gold MacLaren, there's every curry you could think of in this box....Out of date of course, but these things will....."

She'd been looking down, holding a pair of trousers up to her waist to get an idea of how well they'd fit. When she looked up, the young man had just stabbed Ish. He looked to have stabbed Ish at about belly button height, but over to one side of his body. Neither of them were making a sound, stabber or stabbee. Ish looked shocked and she was feeling shocked, the man seemed to have appeared from nowhere. He must have been following them around, keeping to the dark areas, biding his time. Kitty pulled the gun out of her belt and shot the man in the side of his chest three or four times, she couldn't remember the exact number later.

"You.....Bastard." She yelled.

They both went down and for a moment Kitty thought one of her shots might have hit Ish. He'd fallen over from shock though, or so it appeared. He was holding his hand over a patch of red on his trousers, right where his hip bone made a bulge.

"It's alright.....He hit bone, I felt it. His knife didn't go in deep."

"You're bleeding.....Keep still Ish, let me have a look."

Most of her attention was on Ish and the hole the knife had made in him, but part of her was still watching in case the now dead young man had any friends. On the floor, still glinting in the light from her lamp was the knife. A grubby knife, Ish probably wasn't the first person it had stabbed. It had no tip to the blade, just a ragged end. Kitty felt it wasn't the right time to give Ish that piece of information. She undid his belt and lowered his trousers a little.

"It's not bleeding that badly." She said. "A field dressing should do until we can get you back to the campus."

"I told you.....I feel fine."

By the time she'd stuck a dressing in place they were no longer alone. Four of the scavengers were there, weapons up and ready. Kitty couldn't have put a name to more than one of the faces, yet it still felt like seeing old friends.

"Any more of them?" Someone asked.

"I don't think so, but I can't be sure." She replied. "I need help to get Ish upstairs.....And someone grab the knife, they may want to see that when we get back."

They'd all had lots of experience of moving wounded friends, far too much experience. They easily carried Ish to the stairs, with him constantly shouting that he was quite capable of walking. The sounds of explosions and the ground tremors began when they were about two thirds of the way to the surface.

"Wait.....Wait for it to end." Someone shouted

Everyone seemed to be holding onto Ish, though he'd given up trying to struggle free. The ground tremors ended a few moments after the final loud sound of an explosion. Kitty MaLaren knew what had happened, though the scene upstairs was still a shock.

"They've bombed the allotments.....They bombed the helicopter." Someone yelled.

"I want two of you out there, searching for survivors." Shouted Jarvis. "Tovey and Crossley might have sheltered from the storm somewhere."

The front doors of the building had gone, along with a good chunk of the wall. Through the gap Kitty could see flames rising from what was probably the burning wreck of her helicopter.

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