

Ishmael

Chapter 11 - Rebellion

“Chris Crawford had quite enjoyed the idea of returning home in style. With Matt Newman and a hundred or so of the best elite troopers. Even their helicopters had been specially converted to resist the electrical dead zones created by the aliens.”



There had been no hint of bad weather when the British Consolidated Airways flight had taken off from Heathrow. Almost at full capacity with eight hundred and seventy passengers, the AirBus 997 was built to cope with bad weather. But there was something about the way the mid-Atlantic storm had arrived out of nowhere.

“Can you give me a route to avoid the worst of it ?”

Pilot Ian Tull asked traffic control, for about the fourth time. He worded it differently and had been polite, but he badly wanted to go north over Nova Scotia.

“We’re looking at options flight 1187.”

Traffic control looking at options usually meant they didn’t have a clue what was going on. They’d told him he was imagining the storm the first time he’d asked for a route to avoid it.

“Better get them buckled in and ready for turbulence.” He told Tony.

Tony Zizala was his co-pilot for the flight, a college entrant who’d learned to fly as part of the BCA training programme and worked his way up. Ian had learned to fly with the British Air Force and liked to think he had skills you couldn’t pick up in a simulator. Tony pressed the seat belts button to alert the cabin crew.

“I noticed a lot of kids coming onboard.” Said Ian. “Who is our cabin crew supervisor back there ?”

“We got lucky, it’s Mary.”

“Great, she’ll get all the little monsters quiet and strapped in.”

There were a lot of nervous families on the aircraft, most trying to get home to somewhere in the USA before air travel stopped completely. With luck flight 1187 was going to take them all as far as Chicago.

“Crap, look at the weather radar.” Said Ian. “If they don’t divert us, we’re going to bounce them about back there.”

A plane full of scared people with kids. The last thing they needed was going through extreme turbulence.

“It looks like a hurricane.” Said Tony.

They wouldn’t like it, but Ian decided to pester traffic control.

“I could give you the air pressure readings, but I don’t think you’d believe me. We’re currently heading straight into a category five hurricane. I need an alternative route north or south.”

A lot of static, which was a by-product of the storm. The voice when it came sounded scared and nothing was supposed to rattle traffic control.

“Sorry flight 1187, we have reports of a similar weather system over Nova Scotia.”

“Christ !” Said Tony.

“I’ll take south.....I’ll take a diversion to just about anywhere at the moment.” Said Ian.

More crackles and then a different voice.

“Sorry flight 1187, we have a weather front moving over the Caribbean. We’ve already lost touch with two flights diverted to the Bahamas. Give me your fuel readings ?”

Ian did, knowing what traffic control were going to tell him.

“You don’t have enough fuel to reach a safe alternative airport flight 1187. You will have to continue with your current course.”

He didn’t add ‘and God help all of you,’ but Ian knew the traffic controller was probably thinking it.

“I can go high and try to get over the top of it.”

“We’re now showing high winds up to forty five thousand feet.”

“Look, I helped test fly these things, they can easily get up to sixty thousand feet, maybe even higher. Just give me permission.”

They were in the edge of the hurricane and the plane began to bounce around. Ian was about to ignore traffic control and climb, when the call came in.

“You have permission to climb above the storm..... And..... Good luck.”

“Thank you.”

Ian Tull throttled up to full power and made the huge AirBus climb. He hoped he wasn’t about to destroy the aircraft and everyone on it.

“Talk to them back there Tony, something calming. I’m going to be a little busy.”

The plane had modern efficient engines, which could air breathe to a far higher altitude than most people thought. Concorde had once cruised at sixty thousand feet, but if he ignored all the warning lights..... Ian was sure flight 1187 could go much higher.

“This is Tony Zizala, your co-pilot for today’s flight to Chicago. There is a storm front in front of us and sadly there is also bad weather on our preferred alternative route. The pilot is climbing at the moment to get above the bad weather. There may be turbulence, so please remain seated with seat belts on.”

“Wonderful, I feel more relaxed, so I’m sure the passengers are soothed a little.” Said Ian.

It broke several rules, but Mary had a special way of knocking on the cockpit door. Tony muttered to her for a while, before returning to his seat.

“There’s an injured child from the turbulence we hit.” Said Tony.

“Damn, that was mild turbulence..... How bad is it ?”

“Pretty bad, a broken leg. Mary found a doctor and she’s dealing with it.”

“Well done Mary.”

Ian was still climbing when the first lightning flash went past the aircraft on the starboard side. Thunderheads went high, right up almost to the edge of space. With luck he might get the plane above the winds, but the lightning would still be dangerous.

“I think we’ve another aircraft behind us.” Said Tony. “No transponder, but that’s probably the storm. Coming up from seven o’clock at about a thousand feet above us.”

“Above us ! Damn, they must be trying to get over the top of the weather too. Talk to them if you can, get them to give us a little more room to climb.”

Ian kept on climbing, there was no other choice. The storm was mainly below them now, a hurricane too powerful for the aircraft’s weather radar to calibrate. He’d been so busy worrying about his passengers, that he’d forgotten about the population of the Eastern Seaboard.

“Damn, I wouldn’t like to be anywhere in Delaware right now.” He muttered.

“Unidentified aircraft, this is flight 1187 inbound to Chicago.” Said Tony. “You are right above us and likely to cross our path. Please acknowledge and remain at fifty five thousand feet.”

Tony was good, he'd carry on talking to them if it took them all day to respond. Ian carried on climbing, even ignoring the proximity warning as they went past the unidentified aircraft.

"Must be military, I'm still not seeing a transponder coming up." Said Tony.

"That was close, he should be swearing at us by now."

Ian levelled off at seventy thousand feet and there was still turbulence, but it was mild. The sort of turbulence that should be harmless, unless you were a small child who'd been allowed to run around the plane.

"He's climbing and turning towards us." Said Tony.

"Navy pilot I bet.... Come to ask for our license and registration. I'll probably have a lot of explaining to do when he reports a near miss."

"You did what you had to do Ian, I'll back you up."

They were due to land in Chicago at around dusk, yet there was little light. High above the plane the thunderheads were constantly sending out small bolts of lightning. Without that light, he probably wouldn't have been able to see the other aircraft. Tony was still watching the radar.

"It's still indistinct, but big..... Three times our size, at least."

"Damn, if I just buzzed a stealth bomber on patrol..... There goes my career."

"They're coming alongside, we should be able to see them."

The sun managed a few chinks of light through the storm and the lightning helped. Ian knew the craft wasn't a plane by the lack of wings or anything resembling an engine. Good curved lines though, whoever had designed it had thought about things like style and aesthetics. It looked like a sculpture made out of matt black iron girders, which surrounded a silver central core of some kind.

"That's not a plane, it's them..... The aliens." Said Tony.

The last thing Ian Tull ever saw was the flash of blue light, as the alien craft fired one of its weapons.

~ ~

Pamela Rath had the job of telling Juliet that Romeo was dead, partially eaten by an alien. She'd got the job because Richard didn't want to do it and that old chestnut, because she was a woman. Yes, Sylvie probably would feel better being told by a woman, but Pam wasn't enjoying the experience. She'd heard once that it cost a thousand adjusted pounds to get a box of tissues to the moon. The HR room in Mordor One had three of them on the desk. Pam pushed one towards Sylvie.

"When did his happen?" Asked Sylvie.

"Just after they arrived, Theo was one of the first to enter the base."

"Why was he first in, he wasn't a fighter? Theo hated violence."

"He volunteered, they all did. Gene says everyone put their hand up. He included Theo because.....To be honest he wasn't mixing well with the others."

Thankfully Pam had only had to tell a few grieving parents or relatives that they weren't going to see someone they loved again. People grieved in different ways, but the hate in Sylvie's eyes.... That was a first.

"Why has it taken a day for you to tell me?" Asked Sylvie.

"There is still concern about our comms being intercepted. Gene sent a full report by data burst via SatLink. I'd show you the report, but some of it is quite upsetting....."

"It was you wasn't it?" Yelled Sylvie. "You split us up and killed Theo. It won't work you know, it'll just make us stronger."

Later Pam could see where the paranoia was coming from. At the time though, it just sounded like madness.

"Make who stronger? I'm sorry about Theo, I really am. He did wander off on his own though."

"I want to see Gene's report."

"Some of it is unpleasant..... Perhaps in a few days, when....."

"Show me the report." Shouted Sylvie.

Back in Albion Base, Pam would have punished the girl for the outburst. Things were different now though, everyone needed each other. Reluctantly she handed over a tablet with Gene's report on it. Juliet smirked a little as she read it.

"Theo hated peeing inside an atmosphere suit, you at least got that right." She said.

"Sylvie..... There is no conspiracy. Theo went to pee on his own and died.... That's it."

"Do you know what was your first and biggest mistake ?"

Sending Kitty MacLaren to look for survivors in Albion ? Pam was beginning to realise that Sylvie and the members of her rebellion were more than just a vague threat. She remained silent, knowing that Sylvie would answer her own question.

"Taking away our weapons. You can't silence us Pam, we're onto you now, we will resist."

"Nonsense Sylvie..... We need to be working together....."

"Where will Theo be buried ?"

"I'm not sure..... Probably close to Mordor Two."

"I want to go there."

It was all getting out of control. Pam had a need to assert herself, she was second in command.

"No." She said.

"Very well."

Sylvie left the room, leaving Pam to wonder what to expect next.

~

~

Chris Crawford had quite enjoyed the idea of returning home in style. With Matt Newman and a hundred or so of the best elite troopers. Even their helicopters had been specially converted to resist the electrical dead zones created by the aliens. A multinational called Fifth West Corporation seemed to be running the show. It felt like storming in with the US cavalry in an old John Wayne film. The feeling of elation left him when he saw what was left of Gunther Springs.

"I don't get it.....Why destroy a crap town in the arse end of nowhere ?" He muttered.

The main street was just about the only street In Gunther Springs, and every building was a ruin, most burned down to the ground.

"First priority is to find any survivors." Ordered Matt.

The troops fanned out, all wearing Fifth West body armour and carrying Fifth West weapons. The government in Canberra had done the unthinkable, handing over the defence of Northern Australia to a privately owned multinational. He was too low on the pay scale to have the reason explained to him, but it had to have something to do with having resources and weapons that actually worked against the invaders.

"I was hoping my home town would have been..... As it was." He said.

"Look..... They've found someone." Said Matt. "Let's hope they're still alive."

Several men in uniforms waving yellow flags to show they'd found people who were alive. They had the trap door open in the floor of the General Store, the store his family had owned and run for three generations. He saw a face covered in dust, a face he recognised.

"It's Miriam..... Thank God." He yelled.

Half a dozen grubby looking locals came out of the cramped cellar which hadn't been used in years. By the way they drank from offered water bottles, they'd been down there for some time.

"We were stuck down there..... I saw those things eating people....." Someone was saying.

When it came the attack was so fast. Any other group of soldiers and many would have died, Chris was certain of that. The Fifth West guys reacted with a speed and confidence only gained by experience. It was one of the large aliens, the type Chris, Matt and Brenda had almost died while trying to kill. The monster appeared from the north, running at speed on three legs. It never even got a chance to use the long tubular weapon it carried.

"G Six loads only." Someone shouted.

"Yes sergeant."

Three weapons were fired and three projectiles hit the alien creature. They went deep into its flesh before exploding. Killing one of them had taken three of them and an entire box of AP45 rounds. The troopers had just killed one in a matter of seconds.

"Leave it Travis.....It might not be dead." Yelled Miriam.

Travis was an old timer, seventy five or six and not that good on his feet. He walked up to the dead alien and kicked it hard in what was left of its head.

"Bastard." He shouted.

Gunther Springs had only ever had a population of a few hundred, but the only survivors seemed to be the half dozen who'd hidden in the cellar under his general store. He hugged Miriam, it seemed the right thing to do.

"How long were you down there ?" He asked.

"Days.....Young Ben went out to get water..... We heard these terrible noises."

"They ate him..... Certain of it." Added Travis.

The main street wasn't very long and there weren't many places to look. A lot of blue flags being waved, which meant bodies to be buried. The flags were a good idea, less upsetting than troopers shouting every time they found a dead body. Chris had to ask the question, though he was dreading the answer.

"Have you heard from Margaret ?" He asked.

"No, not since you left..... She is a long way out of town." Said Miriam.

"I have to check on her, but I will be back."

There were no vehicles in working condition and he couldn't ask Matt to give him their one precious APC which was being carried by a double rotor helicopter. Chris collected his backpack and began to think of the quickest cross country route to Margaret's house.

"I saw you skulking off, where do you think you're going ?"

Damn, Miriam had seen him getting ready to leave and Matt had followed her.

"Hardly skulking..... I need to see if Margaret is alright and.... You know."

"You're officially on secondment to the Australian Army." Said Matt. "Try to leave without permission and I can have you arrested."

Damn, if only he'd made it into the trees, they'd never have noticed he'd gone.

"I will come back."

"Bullshit, you know why we're here and who we're looking for." Said Matt. "Rumours of a Brit woman with a serious attitude problem in Dundee Downs. It has to be Brenda."

"You can find her without me..... I just have something here that I can't ignore."

"No, we don't split up again Chris, you agreed. Who is this Margaret anyway ? Someone you had a fling with in your teens ?"

"More than a fling, there's a child." Said Miriam.

"Shut up !" Shouted Chris.

All the years he'd had to put up with so much crap for getting the prettiest girl in town pregnant. She'd only been eighteen and her father had given him a beating to remember.

"Really.... The girl in that house is your daughter?"

"Yes, now will you let me go?" Asked Chris.

"No, I'll do better than that. Once we finish here we'll all go, the entire small army of troopers and helicopters. No matter what we find I'll give you two hours. Then we leave and fly to Dundee Downs.... Agreed."

"Fine, I agree."

~ ~

UniConsortium Moon Base Two wasn't as pleasant as Mordor One, the place MacLaren now thought of as her temporary home. Norma had hacked her way into the base AI and discovered some interesting facts. Not everything of course, the really confidential files were locked behind three layers of encryption.

"Officially Mordor One and Two are owned by the same consortium of multinationals. A group of corporations into everything from food additives to health care, with a little munitions thrown into the mix." Norma had told her and Gene. "In practise they were in competition with each other. From what I found, Mordor Two were heavily into bio-weapons and something called Project K. I have no idea what that is, but Gregory Ustinov who ran Mordor One was also trying to get the project."

"Sounds like we need to look at Project K before we leave." Said Gene.

None of that caused Mordor Two to be an unpleasant place to be. A place so unpleasant that a decision had been made to return to Mordor One as soon as possible. The problem was hundreds of bodies decomposing where they'd fallen. That and the small alien creatures who seemed to have remained to feed on them. Kitty MacLaren was currently watching one of the creatures as it clung to a wall near a doorway.

"See how it's easy to see sometimes?" Asked Norma. "This one is twitching a little too, though not all of them do that. Every one we've seen has problems, faults. I don't think they were left behind as guards, they were abandoned because they're faulty."

"You make them sound like machines." Said Gene.

"Oh they are, I'm certain of it."

Norma was officially sent to Albion to carry out research into plants in a low G environment. She was also a skilled 'techie' and was fast becoming their science Guru when Pam wasn't around.

"So, do you want me to kill it or not?" Asked MacLaren.

"Just a pity we have no way to capture one and study it." Said Norma.

Gene was nodding at her, he knew the best way to handle the aliens was to kill every one they saw. So far they'd lost Theo and an exchange student called Cathy from Zimbabwe. MacLaren didn't want any more of the students to die. She aimed carefully, making sure the pulse rifle slug would dig itself deep into the floor after going through the alien. As always the sound of the shot was like a small explosion in the confined space.

"Number thirteen.... Unlucky for some." Said MacLaren.

"Lucky there weren't more of them..... We'd have been in real trouble." Said Gene.

There were just six in their group, Gene was trying to leave the students together in the main lounge. The kids now went to the bathroom in threes and slept in shifts. So far the tactics had worked, there had been no more deaths since Cathy had died. They came to yet another junction in the corridors, this one a five way split.

"They didn't seem to like signs in Mordor Two." Said MacLaren. "I wonder how often they got lost?"

Norma was holding up her tablet, moving it about to match the corridors. The base AI had been a bit uncooperative and they were all hoping it wasn't leading them towards a dead end.

"Well..... Unless I got it wrong a few junctions ago." Said Norma. "The next corridor on the right will take us to Project K."

No signs, just a long corridor with several solid bulk head type doors, all left open. The corridor went down at a one point, probably going underground.

"Jeeezzz that's one way of getting in." Someone said.

The large heavy doors were still closed, presumably locked. The size of the hole burned through them spoke volumes about the size and width of whatever had wanted to get inside. Looking through the hole in the door just showed a section of corridor turning away to the right.

"MacLaren and I will go in..... The rest of you stay here." Said Gene.

She liked to leave Gene alone when he gave orders, she hadn't the slightest desire to lead a gang of students, or anyone else for that matter. Sometimes though, MacLaren felt the need to offer a suggestion. Usually offered as a low whisper.

"Only you and I have decent weapons." She said. "The kids with their pop-guns might get killed waiting out here. Probably best if we all stick together."

One day Gene was going to dig his heels in and tell her to fuck off, but not today. He nodded at her.

"Change of plans guys and gals..... Follow us in, but keep well back."

At the end of the corridor there had once been a set of light double doors made of aluminium. They were now destroyed, their crumpled remnants pushed to one side.

"Do we have to go in there?" Someone asked. "I'd quite like to wait out here."

"Don't you watch old horror movies?" Asked Gene. "It's always the guy who waits behind that gets eaten first."

Wrong in so many ways after what had happened to Theo, but it worked. No one was asking to be left outside. There was a notice on the wall next to the doors, though MacLaren hadn't taken much notice of it. Norma being Norma, was reading it.

"It talks about Project K, we're definitely in the right place." She said. "By entering here all staff are giving up their rights to take legal action against UniConsortium, or take part in any class action."

"Sounds dangerous, don't touch anything people." Said Gene.

"There's more, a lot more." Said Norma. "Wow, it mentions that you may be kept against your will and.....Actually killed if your DNA is found to be compromised."

"Definitely don't touch a thing!" Yelled Gene. "Helmets on too, until we know what we're dealing with."

Norma leant forward, taking a picture of the sign on her suit camera.

"If we ever get home I'm putting this sign on PopNet." She said.

"If there is a PopNet now." Said MacLaren.

The usual checking to make sure helmets were fitted properly and they entered Project K.

More like a museum than a research laboratory, glass cabinets full of specimens filled the walls. Like a kid given the keys to the sweet shop, Norma was filming everything.

"Can you imagine the expense of bringing all this crap to Lunar." Someone said.

"Not crap, this is the history of life on Earth..... Look around you." Said Norma. "The research here must have been incredibly advanced."

"Remember the bit about compromised DNA..... Touch nothing, even you Norma." Said Gene.

The bodies on the floor began to the rear of the large laboratory and the specimens inside sealed plexiglass cabinets. The specimens weren't new, that was the biggest shock. One of the large aliens was complete, no obvious signs of injury.

"The label says it was recovered from Ross Island." Said Norma. "Twenty years ago..... They knew about these things a long time ago."

"They managed to get a small one into a tank before it turned to gunge." Said Gene. "The label says it was dug out of a glacier in Norway.... Fifty years ago."

MacLaren walked around the cabinets. Some contained aliens they'd already seen and some were new to her. A few metallic robots were leant against a wall, one had been taken apart.

"Do you think Mordor Two made these things?" Someone asked.

"No, they were just doing what comes natural for large corporations." Said MacLaren. "They were trying to find out how to make money out of them, big money. Imagine the millions to be made out of turning out alien hybrid workers by the thousand. Workers who don't need pay or weekends off." Gene took his helmet off, a signal for everyone else to do likewise. The lab stank of death and corruption, but the air was breathable. They'd known, fifty years ago they'd found some advance scouts for the invasion. MacLaren was angry and wanting someone to blame, but every employee of Mordor Two was no dead.

"I've got a really old one here." Shouted Norma. "A metal robot found near Havøysund in Norway. Seventy five years ago people, they knew about the aliens a long time ago."

"Makes sense in a way." Said Gene. "All the finds are from desolate places on Earth, right out on the extremes of weather. Just the right places to send scouts to watch without being seen."

"There weren't moon bases seventy five years ago." Someone said. "Maybe there was a hidden level in Area 51 after all."

"Yeah..... And it was all brought here."

MacLaren wanted to say it was a crazy idea, but it might be right. Getting the contents of the lab to the moon must have cost billions, far too much for even UniConsortium to afford.

"This place must have had government funding." She said. "I'm not sure which, but a nation with money to burn. They knew, the bastards new about these things and never told anyone."

"Probably worried about public panic." Said Gene.

"More likely worried about losing all those juicy patents." Said Norma. "Think of the way technology has advanced in the last hundred years or so. A lot of influential scientists have said it was too fast to be the result of normal research."

"Bastards, we should blow this place up.... Destroy it all." Said MacLaren.

She was angry and it seemed the right thing to do. Place a few timed charges and turn Mordor Two into nothing but a pile of debris at the bottom of Pavlov crater. Scientific vandalism she knew, but it would make her feel so much better.

"Great idea, blow the fuck out of the place." Someone shouted.

Several more of the students seemed keen, but Gene was grinning at her. He was going to be the wise one now, telling her that destroying the base was a bad idea.

"I can understand how you feel." He said. "But this base is just about viable in an emergency. If we lost Mordor One for some reason..... It just seems sensible to leave this place intact."

She had to grin back at him, it was the sort of thing she would have said if she wasn't so angry.

"Fine..... But let's look at the armoury before leaving." She said.

"And I saw some tinned hotdogs in the dry food store." Said Norma.

~

~

They'd done well in reaching Bridlington without incident. In the world before the invasion people didn't leave cars across the road just after a sharp corner. In the world as it was now they did. Deb Newman had driven a lot slower after nearly driving into one.

'Welcome to Bridlington, twinned with Millau in France and Bad Salzflen in Germany.'

Said the sign, as their borrowed truck went past it at no more than twenty miles per hour. Time to wake Mrs Bouvard, who'd been taking a quick five minute nap, for the past two hours. Deb gently patted the old lady's knee.

"Iris..... Wake up.... We're almost there."

Where was it they were going to ? Deb wanted to reach the sea, maybe throw a few pebbles into the ocean. As a kid the sea had always meant holidays, somewhere safe, somewhere friendly. An idea persisted in her mind that throwing a few pebbles into the sea would make everything alright again. It wouldn't of course, nothing was going to be alright, ever again.

"Oh, you shouldn't have let me sleep for so long..... Where are we ?"

"The outskirts of Bridlington..... Not much further and I'm afraid you'll be back in the wheelchair for a while."

"Why would I want to do that ?"

Deb pointed through the windscreen at a group of vehicle almost filling the wide dual carriageway. She knew what was going to happen when they reached that spot.

"One of the alien things must be near here." She said. "When the engine dies we'll need to walk into town, or at least I will. Not far to push you though, a mile or so at the most."

"Do you think we'll see one of..... Them ?" Asked Iris.

"Not if we're careful and find somewhere to sleep before dark."

The truck was old and heavy, everything was power assisted. When the engine went the steering would need more strength than she had. The brakes too would become almost useless. Deb went right over to the wrong side of the road and slowed down to a crawl. When the engine died the truck rolled on for about twenty feet before coming to a halt, Deb standing on the brake pedal.

"Stay in here Iris, I'll get your chair."

"I'm hungry dear."

"I know you are, so am I. First thing will be to find food and then somewhere to sleep."

"Do you think we'll find a phone..... My granddaughter will be very worried."

Eventually Iris Bouvard was going to hear about the reality of life as it was now. Not there though, not inside a grubby truck by the side of the road.

"If we find a working phone you can try to call her."

There was an old tool box in the back of the van. Deb opened it up looking for something heavy to use as a weapon. A hammer would do, or a large spanner. She'd never been a violent person, but just having something would make her feel better. The old knife inside a worn out leather scabbard was at the bottom of the tool box.

"Are you coming dear..... I'm very hungry."

"Just a moment Iris."

The six inch blade had a few nicks in it, but otherwise the knife was perfect. Deb wasn't sure if she could actually stab anyone with it, but she shoved it into her jacket pocket. It was over a mile, quite a bit over a mile of pushing, when Deb smelt the ocean.

"Do you smell that Iris ?"

"Yes, the ocean..... Ozone."

Deb had heard the smell was a mix of salt and seaweed, but she wasn't going to argue with the old lady.

'Best-One Food & Wine.'

It said over the shop. Deb was mainly interested in the food, but the wine had its attractions too. A small shop with no step up to get inside. Perfect if you were pushing a tired, hungry and increasingly grumpy woman in a wheel chair. Deb pushed and the shop door opened.

"Someone else has been in here." Said Iris.

"Hungry people like us, there's still plenty."

Deb released the catch to lock the front door. Probably not a brilliant idea, but people coming in behind her was more scary than anyone else being in the shop.

"Hello ! Is anyone in here ?" She yelled.

"Shush they'll hear us dear."

"That is the general idea."

There were a few tins on the floor and the cigarettes had been stripped out of the cupboard behind the till. It looked more like looting than hunger had been the motive. For a small shop there was a large selection of biscuits and junk food.

"What are your favourite biscuits Iris ?"

"Custard creams."

Deb put a packet on Mrs Bouvard's lap.

"These will take the edge off."

"I need a toilet."

"Let me look around first, I won't be long."

The flat above the shop must have had an entrance somewhere else, there were no stairs. The shop consisted of the area open to the public and two other rooms and a small bathroom. At the back, with a door opening onto an overgrown garden was a kitchen with a sofa against one wall and a large view screen on the wall. The only other room was a tiny bedroom with a double bed. The woman's body was sitting in a chair in the corner, the empty pill bottle on the floor next to her.

"I really do need to pee."

"Stay there Iris, I found a body..... Looks like a suicide."

"Oh dear."

Nurses are trained to move the dead weight of a body and Deb had just been through a refresher course. The trick is not to be squeamish about getting up close. She grabbed the dead woman from behind, noticing there was no bad smell. The suicide had to be recent, probably the night before. Dragging the body out into the garden wasn't that difficult. No time to bury the poor woman and no need, they'd only be using the house for one night.

"Sorry."

She said as she dropped the body next to the garden shed. There was disturbed earth near the shed. A buried husband maybe ? No way to know and there were probably dozens of similar tragedy's in Bridlington alone.

Dinner had to be cold and the food stock wasn't that brilliant. Deb chopped up a large tin of corned beef and covered it in tinned vegetable salad. Not exactly a banquet, but it would keep body and soul together. They drank a truly dreadful bottle of Chilean Muscadet, while Iris told her about her granddaughter.

~

~

Richard Martucci had thought the rebellion had been averted. He woke up slowly, his eyes adjusting to the gloom in the room. Pam Rath was stood looking through a gap in the bedroom door. He thought she looked good dressed only in her panties and his shirt. The MAG74 seemed a strange thing for her to be holding. His mind went from pleasantly awake to full blown anxiety in a fraction of a second. He was out of bed, looking for something to throw on to cover his naked body.

“What’s happening ?” He asked.

“I’m not sure..... Might be nothing. Could have sworn I was woken by the sound of gunfire.”

The ‘might be nothing’ he took as a sign that he had time to get dressed, though he did it quickly. He gave Pam the clothes she’d discarded the night before. She still hadn’t hung any of her things up in his wardrobe. Richard had his own MAG74, which he decided to carry but not turn on, at least for now.

“Have you tried calling anyone ?” He asked.

“I tried comms and the guard room..... No answer from anyone.”

Crap, it really didn’t sound good. The rebellion of course, the work of Sylvie no doubt. He cursed himself for not having the girl locked up. He turned on his own weapon when two MAG slugs hit the wall near the door. Pam fired back and he heard someone scream.

“Christ Pam..... You hit someone.” He yelled.

“Do you think I want this Richard ? That was Sammy, the boy I helped obtain funding for his research project..... It was him or us.”

“Is he.....?”

“Yes, I think he’s dead.”

Richard kissed the back of her neck, his way of apologising. He knew they were outnumbered and had few options. It was fight their way to comms and call MaClaren for help, or try to get outside and use Billy to escape. Escape to where though ?

“We can’t stay here..... Do we try from comms or Billy ?” He asked.

“Billy.”

~

~