

Ishmael

Chapter 21 - Filey

“Synchronicity;

The occurrence of events which appear significantly related but have no discernible causal connection.”



Deb Newman had been surprised at how straight the road had been. Maybe it was part of an old Roman road; the A165 was straight as an arrow. Pedalling the full twelve or so miles in a day was doable, but they'd have arrived in Filey quite late in the day. Somewhere near Reighton, there was a sign that caught her eye.

“A cat hotel Iris.....We can probably find somewhere to get under cover. I don't fancy stopping on the road, it's all a bit too open for my liking.”

Deb was feeling exhausted, though she wasn't about to admit that to Iris. Once she'd gone on cycling holidays, covering twenty five miles a day with ease. That was on proper touring bikes though, with decent gears and only her own weight to get moving. The rickshaw had Iris on the seat behind her and quite a lot of their 'must have' belongings.

“I hope it's not full of dead cats.” Said Iris.

“This is Britain Iris, where people care more about their fur babies than their kids. The guests will have all have been checked out long ago.”

The slight incline in the driveway was torture, she'd been right to break their journey into two parts. She was hardly able to get above a crawl on the flat roadway that lead up to what looked like an old farmhouse.

“Probably a farm until they realised there was more money in looking after spoiled felines.” Said Deb.

“I must admit..... It will be nice to get a rest and bed for the night, if there is one.” Said Iris.

Iris was one of those people who seemed to be able to sleep anywhere. Deb had seen her, fast asleep, drooling over the blanket since they'd barely left Bridlington.

“Yeah, all that hard core snoring must be tiring Iris.”

“I don't snore dear.”

A tractor in an open barn was evidence that some sort of farming still went on. Well off the main road and quite a way from any large town, yet someone had broken into the cat hotel.

“Vandals.....Nothing but pure vandalism.” Muttered Iris.

“We've done far worse.” Said Deb. “Probably hungry people who were here quite some time ago. I'll turn our hideous contraption around. The down gradient will give us a bit of extra speed.... If we need it.”

Iris helped her pull and tug, until the rickshaw was aimed back towards the main road. Deb trusted the locking brake on the ancient vehicle, though she still jammed a handy cobblestone up against the rear wheels.

“Alright Iris, we've done this before and we'll probably have to do it again in Filey. Keep behind me while we make sure there's no one inside the cat hotel.”

Deb had a few weapons ready for such tasks, including the large hammer that had been in a maintenance cupboard at the Brambles. Just holding it made Deb feel braver.

“I hate this.” Moaned Iris.

“Me too, I always seem to be the one who ends up with bruises.”

The front door had once been pretty, there was still just about enough left of it to show the paintwork. Nothing too twee, just bright colours and a few cats with smiling faces.

“Vandalism.” Muttered Iris.

Broken glass was dreadful to walk on, the crunching sound carried for large distances. There was so much debris to trample over, that they’d probably sounded like a dozen people entering the old farmhouse.

“Inside doesn’t look too bad.” Said Deb. “There must be a room we can barricade for the night.”

The décor inside was the same as the door had once been. Lots of cheerful primary colours and quite well drawn happy, smiling cats. Deb thought the employees there must have really been into cats, or they’d have eventually been driven crazy.

“Anyone here ?!” She yelled.

Nothing, not even the sound of someone moving about.

“I’m going further in Iris. Keep an eye on our rickshaw and shout if anyone tries to make off with it.”

To be honest, it would take a pretty desperate character to steal their contraption, but it did have all their food and clean water strapped to it.

“I will.” Replied Iris.

Deb found rooms that didn’t look too bad, though all showed signs of being searched with little care for the damage caused. Desks broken open, cupboards gone through, the contents strewn over the floor. Someone had broken open a box of cat food sachets, squashing a good number of them in the process. The contents had dried to a powder, which crumbled under her the weight of her foot.

“Whoever was here..... It was months ago Iris.”

“Shall I join you ?”

“No, watch the contraption, it has all our food on it.... Unless you fancy cat food ?”

“No thank you dear.”

Every downstairs room had been looted in some way, even boxes of cat food by the look of it. Deb had to look upstairs, even if it meant leaving Iris on her own. She looked up the winding staircase to the top floor of the old farmhouse.

“Anyone up there ?” She shouted.

The only answering voice came from Iris.

“Are you going upstairs ?”

“I have to..... I’ll try to look around as quickly as I can.”

The beds would be upstairs, if there were any. Anyone who’d claimed the house as theirs was likely to be upstairs too. Deb and Iris had been on the other side of such matters, defending the Brambles again those wanting what little they had.

“I’m coming up!” Deb Yelled.

There was no one waiting to repel invaders, just water damage from where a tree branch had broken a window. Deb went from room to room, finding two bedrooms full of damp and one that was just about habitable. To be safe she even pulled down the stairs to the loft and peered into the gloom. Nothing, no one there, unless they were doing a spectacularly good job of hiding.

“Just us here Iris.” She yelled.

Iris wasn’t there and when she got downstairs, the door marked ‘Toilet – Staff Only’ was slightly ajar.

“Are you having a pee Iris ?”

“Really dear..... Really.”

“Sorry.”

Iris came out complaining that the toilet was filthy and refused to flush. She had a way of describing such things as though they were the worst problem in the world.

"I found one bedroom that's not too damp." Said Deb. "Not that nice, but the door looks strong and it'll do for one night."

"Did you find any food?"

"Just boxes of cat food, most of it in sachets."

"Ewww."

"I'm going to take as much of it as our wonderful contraption can carry." Said Deb. "The way things are going, we might be really glad to have it one day."

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For Tyler Bates it was his family's first contact with officialdom since the invasion had driven them out of their home in North London. Even though Britain had elected Akoni Lusk as its first black Prime Minister, Tyler hadn't noticed much improvement in the way black families were treated. There was still that distrust of the police, which he shared with most other black men and to him the army weren't much different to the police.

"Did you even find out if he's a proper Doctor." He asked Tirsa. "He might just be a field medic, or just a soldier who knows a bit of first aid."

"You weren't there dad, he's an officer." Said Tirsa. "You should have seen the way the other soldiers treated him..... So much respect."

"Still..... Does he know this isn't really our house? We don't need any trouble from the army."

Tyler had learned by experience that anyone official was to be treated with a healthy suspicion. Even though he had his own roofing business, he still treated all letters from the government with distrust, even those from the local council.

"It's not like that Dad." Said Zane. "Tirsa showed them how to deal with the drones. I'm not saying he's a nice guy, he definitely isn't. He only agreed to come because.....He thinks he owes Tirsa a huge favour. He won't give a crap whose house this is."

"Can we trust this army doctor?" Asked Liza Bates.

"They don't even know his name." Muttered Tyler.

"Dad, there are no GPs now, no hospitals." Said Tirsa. "I did the best I could and it took a lot to get him to come here. Sometimes..... I don't know what you expect. Tonya is really sick and we can't cure her."

His daughter was crying and Tyler didn't really understand why, or what to do about it. He put his arm around her shoulder.

"You did well." He said. "When did he say he'd be here?"

"He didn't dad, not really." Said Zane. "He said late, once he'd dealt with the wounded soldiers."

"You'd better both stay up." Said Liza. "As you know him and we don't."

When the three heavy bangs were struck on the front door, Tyler was determined to open it. As his daughter was known to the army doctor, he let her stand a little behind him and to his left. There were three men on their doorstep, but only one was wearing the long coat his daughter had described.

"Sorry to be so late Mr Tyler, we had a few casualties. There would have been more of them if it hadn't been for your daughter. You must be very proud of her."

"Well, yes..... Of course."

It was a cold night, but the two soldiers remained outside, guarding the door. Tyler had trouble keeping up with the Doctor, as he strode down their hallway.

"A sick child I believe, your daughter Tonya. If you can just show me which room?"

"Here..... We put her in the warmest bedroom." Said Liza.

The intention had been for his children to go to bed once the doctor arrived, but everyone ended up in Tonya's room. The army doctor slowed his pace right down, giving Tonya a chance to get used to him being there.

"Hi Tonya, my parents named me Maximillian....I know dreadful. You can call me Max. I'd like to examine you, is that alright? Your parents will be here."

"That's alright." Said Tonya. "Can you stop the pain?"

"I have some pills I can leave with your parents. I'm sure you'll start to feel better once the pain becomes manageable."

Max used a stethoscope on their daughter, checking her chest and then her tummy. He prodded and listened, asking questions when somewhere was obviously sore or painful. The large army doctor was transformed into a caring man, who didn't hurry.

"How is the pain Tonya? Better sometimes or always the same?"

"It used to come and go. Now it's worse than it's ever been."

He prodded again and seemed interested in something he could hear through his stethoscope.

"Is there any blood when you go to the toilet?"

"Yes."

Tyler knew there was some bleeding, but Liza surprised him by remembering details for the past six months or so.

"It used to stop and start, now she bleeds all the time." Said his wife.

It had to be the early hours of the morning before Max asked to see them alone, just him and Liza.

Tyler had guessed it was going to be bad, healthy kids don't bleed out of their bottom. They took him into the room used as a family lounge and Max refused a drink.

"I must be going.....Even army docs needs at least three hours sleep a night." He said.

"Thank you for coming." Said Liza.

"Please don't thank me.....If I just had a few more resources, even an X-ray machine. I am ninety percent certain Tonya has a blockage, probably cancer. These will help with the pain..... There is nothing else I can do to help her."

Max took several boxes out of his bag, he must have brought them with him, just in case. Powerful pain killers, Tyler recognised the name from when he'd fallen from a low roof and cracked three ribs.

"How long..... Until....?" Asked Liza. "How long do I have her for?"

"Not long, two months maybe."

His wife didn't cry, though she did lower her head for a moment. Max was still taking things out of his bag, a syringe and a small box of ampules. He placed them on their coffee table carefully, as though he was handling something boiling hot.

"Your decision if you use these or not." Said Max. "Give her two ampules if the pain is too much for her to handle..... You know what I'm saying..... She's too young to suffer."

"No, we could never.....Not that." Said Liza.

"As I said, it will be your choice when the time comes."

Tyler saw Max out, his poor men outside looked almost frozen. He came back and held Liza, while they both simply stared at the small box and syringe on the coffee table. Tyler knew he'd have to pick them up and put them in a drawer, but he couldn't bring himself to touch them.

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Ishmael McGrath missed Biff calling out to him, he simply didn't hear her. He'd been daydreaming more and more lately and putting it down to stress and fatigue. Her arms wrapping round him and the kiss on his cheek brought him back to reality.

"Are you alright Ish ? I know you can sometimes be a bit distant, but I called to you about five times."

"I'm fine, just a little tired."

"Where did you go to in your daydream ? You were actually muttering to yourself."

For Ish daydreams were like his real dreams, seldom remembered once he was awake and back in the real world. This time though, a few details remained in his head.

"Oh, I was dreaming about Horace of all things. I just..... Wish we could have done more to keep him alive."

She kissed him again, on the lips with affection rather than passion.

"I miss him too, so do Inka's kids." She said. "The only person glad to see him die was Inka. Look, your daydreaming is probably just stress and a little post-traumatic stress disorder, but I'd like to run a few tests on you Ish. Zoning out shouldn't be ignored..... Alright ?"

"Nothing invasive ?"

"I promise, just the usual blood and urine and maybe a scan of your head."

"You always said I needed my head testing. Why were you yelling at me ?" He asked.

"Maybe something to hear after you're properly awake."

"Tell me ? I'm fine, honest."

"Another Saint Sebastian died, that's the third. Actually fourth, though the parameters we set for the tests might have caused that one to die."

Ish didn't think his zoning out was due to stress, or he'd have been lying comatose on the lab floor.

"Crap ! What does the Fifth West AI make of it ?" He asked.

"Now that is infuriating and curious. JV's clever machines can analyse the green gas and replicate it, without understanding it."

"That's impossible."

"You wouldn't think that if you'd ever written a small child's name on something for them. They know the lines and squiggles are their name, they may even be able to copy them. They don't understand the individual letters though or what they mean. Most importantly they don't understand how the letters fit together."

"You're calling the Fifth West AI a small child, which is a bit scary Biff."

"Are you really alright ? Well enough to hear what I think ?" Asked Biff.

"Yes.....Tell me the worst."

"We either find an antidote to the green gas or.....It's time for mankind to move to another planet."

"Yeah right."

The look on her face was telling him it wasn't a joke. For a fraction of a second Ish did think he might end up as a twitching heap on the floor. Luckily the feeling passed fairly quickly.

"There is a third option of course." Said Biff. "We all accept our fate, do nothing and die out."

"Fuck..... Does JV know any of this ?"

"I sent him a data burst an hour or so ago. While we're waiting to hear back from our lord and master..... Time to do those tests on you."

Ish had expected everything to be done on an automated diagnostic couch, but Biff was searching around in an equipment drawer. He didn't like the delight on her face, as she held up a piece of sharp and shiny medical equipment.

“Hey..... You said nothing invasive Biff.”

“Hmmm, I might have lied about that.”

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Matt had left Owen to get the civilian refugees settled in, he'd even given him a title. Brenda Grundy wasn't sure if giving Owen the title of 'Civilian Liaison Officer,' had been a good idea. She liked Owen, they all liked Owen, but there was a bit of a control freak lurking beneath the surface. Bren was sure he'd have all the refugees lining up for morning exercises. That was a rainy day problem though, the structure on the coast was a problem no matter how busy they were.

“Now that is something I hadn't expected.” Said Matt.

“No wonder they were digging, it must go a long way down into the ground.” Said Duncan.

The soldiers had got the school bus, while Matt, Duncan and her were hanging over the side of a truck. The huge structure on the coast was still some distance away. It might have been miles away as distance can be difficult to judge with anything that massive.

“The tower I understood, but this..... What the hell is it ?” Asked Matt.

Bren had always been good at puzzles, everything from the classic Rubik's Cube, to find the difference competitions in magazines. She still might not have understood the purpose of the alien structure if they'd been closer to it. It looked like one of the concrete grooves for people to park cycles in. Large at either end with a slow graceful curve downwards towards the centre. When she saw the solution it became obvious.

“Crap..... It's a landing site for one of their armada craft.” She said. “A fucking huge one.”

“But they're too big to land.” Said Matt. “That's about the only thing all the government boffins seem to agree on.”

“We're not talking about something the size of a small moon.” Said Bren. “Something big though, probably big enough to hold half a million of them. A real armada vessel that might well still touch the clouds after it's landed.”

“It explains the why though, why the Northern Territories.” Said Matt. “I'm no expert but I bet the ground is stable here, just right to land something large and heavy on.”

“No army nearby either.” Said Duncan. “Thinking about it..... There might be other sites like this, all along the coast.”

Bren looked through her binoculars, observing not just the size of the structure, but also the hundreds of defence robots. Drones patrolling too and a lot of the large lizard bots.

“They might have let the tower fall, but they've got some serious defences here.” She said.

“We'd need a lot more men than we have to destroy that.” Said Duncan. “Explosives too, we have barely enough to scratch their paintwork.”

It was hard not to panic at the idea of dozens of such landing sites dotted along the Australian coast. The government had only known about Ramingining because a patrol had decided to investigate reports from the local population.

“Do we still have a decent link to base Bren ?” Asked Matt.

“Yes, we've been lucky. The aliens are sure to land a blocking device soon.”

“Take pictures of everything from here Bren, no being brave and getting closer. Tell them what we think it is and the idea there might be many more. Tell them we need further orders.”

“We can't attack that, it'd be suicide.” Said Duncan.

“We're soldiers Duncan.” Said Matt. “If we're ordered to attack, we will attack.”

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While her husband examined the alien structure in the heat of an Australian summer, Deb Newman was pedalling a heavy rickshaw along the A165 towards Filey. It was a cold winter's day in North Yorkshire, which was helping control the sweat building up on her brow.

"We'll use a rickshaw I said, it'll be easy I said, only twelve miles I said..... I must have been stark raving bonkers." She muttered.

"Are you alright dear ?" Shouted Iris.

She'd had to shout above the icy cold wind, which had been picking up speed all morning. Of course, by the laws that govern the cussedness of such things, the wind was blowing straight into Deb's face. "Just ignore me, I'm fine Iris. Just another two or three miles. We'll be there in time for an aperitif before dinner."

"You don't sound alright."

"Do you want a turn at pedalling ?"

"No dear."

It wasn't the side road that made Deb slow down, it was the sign pointing down it.

'Fifth West North Yorkshire Campus.'

Nice friendly yellow letters against a blue background, but again they weren't the reason she brought their wonderful contraption to a halt. The name Fifth West brought back memories of more than one conversation with Matt.

"The MOD keep giving them new development contracts." Matt had told her. "They produce good equipment, but there's something about Fifty West. A feeling nothing more, that they're the corporation most likely to."

"Most likely to what ?"

"I don't really know, that's what bothers me."

Deb believed in harmless coincidence as much as the next person, but there was something about seeing that sign. Matt had never mentioned a Fifth West campus near Filey, though they did seem to be building new places all the time.

"Why did we stop ?" Asked Iris.

Why had she stopped ? Deb didn't really have an explanation, or a reason for beginning to pedal down the narrow side road. She just knew it was impossible for her to go in any other direction than towards the Fifth West Campus.

"Where are we going now ?" Asked Iris.

"Trust me, we need to go this way."

It was a little unfair, actually quite a bit unfair. The rickshaw was building up speed and Iris was quite elderly. Unless the old lady fancied jumping from a moving contraption, she had no other option than to trust her.

"You said we'd be in Filey before dark." Called Iris.

"We're going where we need to be."

Something definitely wasn't normal with her thinking, though the invasion had changed the way she thought about the world. If anyone else had said it she'd have thought them insane. Deb suddenly believed in some kind of destiny though, a real need to follow the road.

'Campus closed until further notice.'

Said the sign above the security office next to the gates, there was even a telephone number to call.

Not that there were any working telephones anymore. It was a campus not a prison, the gate designed to stop vehicles, not people. There was a gap to the right of the gate, a few feet of grass between the gate and a concrete planter full of weeds.

“Slow down, you’ll kill both of us.” Shouted Iris.

Deb didn’t slow down as they just about got through the gap. A sharp turn on the handlebars to get back on the road and the rickshaw was up on two wheels. Poor Iris was screaming, but whoever had built their contraption, had built it well. It crashed down, back onto three wheels when they were once more running on tarmac. Deb had no idea what Iris was shouting, but it included the words madwoman quite a few times.

“Calm down Iris, we’re almost there.”

Deb ignored the road ending and carried on across paving stones. She pedalled right up to the double doors of what looked like the main building. Nothing stirred, nothing moved, not a single alarm or warning light. For all intents and purposes the campus was closed and dead. Deb applied the brakes to the rickshaw. It was time to make friends with Iris again.

“I’m sorry Iris..... With luck you’ll soon be safe and warm.”

“I don’t want to be here..... Take me to Filey.”

“Here there will be electricity, I’m sure of it.” Said Deb. “Decent cooked meals too, probably a hot shower every morning. What you’ll really love will be the clean toilets with a flush that actually works. Or if you want we can go to Filey and sleep in a damp barricaded bedroom above a burnt out shop. Your choice Iris, here or Filey ?”

“It looks dead dear.”

“So you want to go to Filey ?”

“Here, we’ll try here.....Sometimes Deb, you can be so argumentative.”

“Me ?!”

“Yes you..... Now help me out of this dreadful thing, I’m going with you.”

It took a while to get Iris out of the rickshaw and able to walk properly. The cold wind and damp air had worked their mischief on the old lady’s joints. They weren’t Thelma and Louise again, not yet anyway. Iris did smile at her as they approached the solid looking doors to the building.

“The trouble is.... If we do end up in Filey tonight, I’ll be so disappointed.” Said Iris.

There was a keypad next to the door with the usual microphone and speaker set into the wall next to it.

‘Visitors,’ it said above a large green button. Deb pressed it and there was no answering voice, just the sound of a click as someone listened.

“This is Deborah Newman and Iris Bouvard..... I think we might be expected.”

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Pandora Gray hadn’t appreciated the effect on the Fifth West staff of locking down the lab for hours. Penny was a professional, almost a fully qualified doctor of medicine. When the lights above the door turned to green, she was the first to enter the lab and she seemed in a panic.

“What did you find ?” Asked Penny. “Everyone knows you came here to analyse a few unknown alien compounds. Is one of them a pathogen ? I called JV, but he never returned my call.”

It was a terrible way for a Fifth West employee to react, Penny was actually breathing quickly and there was sweat on her forehead. Pandora could understand it though, human curiosity can’t stand gaps in knowledge. Like the village gossip, the human mind will fill in the gaps with all sorts of strange nonsense and conspiracy theories. The sad thing was that the rumours in the Fifth West London lab, probably weren’t as bad as the truth.

“Calm down Penny.” Said Dora. “I locked down the lab to give us a little privacy. I sent a report to JV and I can’t say anything else until he’s had a chance to look at it.”

"We're friends, you can tell me.... I'd tell you." Said Penny. "I know you killed four Sebastians, I get copied in on the requisitions for new ones. That's serious Dora, that means a deadly pathogen of some kind. I need to know."

"Not until JV makes a decision Penny. We have children here, you need to calm down. You'll get everyone in a panic if they see you like this..... Calm down."

Pandora wasn't silly, she knew that telling someone to calm down rarely works. There was no other option, apart from wrestling her med school friend to the ground and injecting her with a tranquilizer. As she expected, Penny wasn't calming down.

"I run this lab, you're just a guest here." Yelled Penny. "I will discuss your attitude with JV..... You haven't heard the last of this."

As usual Ish was keeping himself busy, cleaning and decontaminating equipment the automatic systems had already cleaned. She had the same healthy distrust of anything that wouldn't die if it messed up.

"Nearly done." He said.

"Sorry about that, she's just a little anxious."

Ish just pulled a face and carried on spraying everything with Decon2074. He tended to view her friends as nothing to do with him and he'd never really taken to Penny Brownie.

'Attention Required'

'Attention Required'

'Attention Required'

Was scrolling down the screen in front of her. She'd seen it while Penny was having her rant, but hadn't wanted to look at it with her there. It was probably just his test results and Ish looked healthy enough. Diagnostics systems were designed to be a little neurotic, everyone knew that. She allowed the system to go through his bloodwork results, which looked fine.

"I just got your test results." She called out to him.

"Are they alright ?"

"A slight elevation in the white cell count.... You might have a cold."

"But we haven't met anyone with a cold."

"That is one of the great mysteries of life Ish."

She was still chuckling when she got to his scan results. The system took her straight to the deep scan of Ish's head, before zooming in to the brain stem. His brain stem, the brain of the man she loved and had known all her life.

"I don't do panic attacks." She muttered.

"I don't do panic attacks."

"I don't do panic attacks."

The repetitions helped a little, she could no longer feel sweat on her lower legs, but it was running down her forehead. Breathing was the worst, she just couldn't get enough air into her lungs.

"Are you alright ?" Ish asked.

He ran over once she began to cry. It was ridiculous and unprofessional, but it was Ish for fuck sake. The brainstem on the screen was his.....It was really in there, in his brain.

"What's wrong Biff ? You're scaring me now."

"Just give me a moment."

Concentrating on the image helped, as did reading what the AI thought about the tiny object attached to Ish's brainstem. Pandora became a doctor again, a curious doctor and most of the panic attack symptoms vanished.

"Sorry Ish, that was unforgivable.... I'm alright now."

"How bad can it be Biff ? We're already in a basement lab that might be nuked by aliens at any moment."

"They don't seem to use nukes."

"You know what I mean."

Ish was like that, she couldn't avoid smiling at him. She pointed at the tiny fish hook shaped piece of tissue attached to his brain.

"That shouldn't be there." She told him. "It's new, you weren't born with it."

"It's very small."

"It still shouldn't be there Ish. It's not a tumour, the AI tried to analyse it and gave up. It did say it was alien though, a definite match with the samples of Horace we brought with us. Of course the Fifth West systems didn't understand Horace's internal organs either..... It seems Horace wasn't just sharing memories with you Ish, he left you something before he died."

She'd have been devastated if it had been her brain on the screen, but Ish was smiling, as though he'd won the lottery.

"Wow, that explains the vivid dreams and zoning out." He said.

"This is serious Ish, it's on the brain stem and can't be cut out. Your immune system might decide to go nuclear on it at any moment. This isn't a good thing."

"No.... I saw a lot of Horace's memories, I'm sure he left me a gift, not a time bomb."

"I wish I shared your belief in Horace.... It might even enable them to track you here."

"No, I shared a piece of his mind for too long. I know what Horace was capable of and he wouldn't do that. JV might not be happy about it though, can you delete the results ?"

A weird thought entered her mind and refused to leave.

"Is that you asking that Ish, or the piece of Horace in your brain ?"

"Oh Biff, we've both been locked in this lab for too long."

"Sorry..... No, there is no such thing as deletion in any Fifth West lab. The best thing I can do is mark them as low priority, routine test results. JV and Lianne are so busy that I doubt if anyone will ever look at them."

"Thank you..... I'll be fine, I'm sure Horace left me a gift, not a threat."

"Alright, but we'll need to keep an eye on your immune system."

Inka and her children were family now, in any and every real meaning of the word. Kata and Antun had missed them both, bringing freshly cooked muffins with them. Much to her surprise, Pandora found herself enjoying the company of Inka and her kids.

"Did Penny tell you ?" Asked Inka. "It appears we're all being moved to another facility. London is too hot now it seems, too many alien bombardments."

"Penny said we're all going. She made a point of telling Antun and me." Said Kata. "She's such a nice lady."

Pandora just had time to roll her eyes at Ish, before Penny arrived, full of smiles and good vibes.

Penny was emotionally wrong to be a doctor of course, but so were half the doctors she'd ever met.

"Did you get the message ?" Asked Penny. "JV will call in about an hour, a direct link no less, we are honoured. I say we, because he asked me to be there."

Penny was enjoying her moment and Pandora didn't begrudge the triumphant look in her eyes. Let her smile and laugh while she could. In an hour she'd hear all about the deadly green gas and what it might mean to the surviving members of mankind.

"No, I didn't see the message. I was talking to Ish." Said Pandora.

“Do you know where we’re being sent to ?” Asked Ish.

Penny was old school, she’d printed the three or four line message out. While Penny quickly scanned the piece of paper, Pandora managed to beat her by looking at JV’s message on the screen.

“Filey Campus, wherever that is.” She said. “He says Andy Korenberg will be arriving with a few people from Norway. It all sounds very impressive. Typical JV, to tease us and leave us wondering about it for an hour.”

“I thought the Filey facility had been mothballed.” Said Penny.

“Obviously not.” Said Ish.

“Where is Filey ?” Asked Kata.

“Yorkshire, near Harrogate.” Said Ish. “I seem to remember us going there when I was really small. I think it rained all day.”

“Cool.” Said Antun.

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