

### Chapter Thirteen

Warmer days had arrived and although the Bronx snow had long since melted, its departure served as a reminder of the hidden squalor beneath.

It was late Sunday morning and Mick awakened with what he thought must be a hangover. Shit, what did I do last night? he thought to himself, while perched at the edge of the bed scratching his head and quizzically examining the raw knuckles on his right hand. Baffled, he threw up his arms and slowly headed for the coffee pot in the tiny, antiquated kitchen. Yesterday's brew, he mused, while inspecting the half empty flask and pushing the reheat button on the bargain basement machine. Following a quick shower, he returned, took a seat and filled his mug. "What the fuck?" he shouted, when the cold brown liquid passed his

lips, "the frickin' thing's broken again?" What next, he wondered, while remaining seated, his chin resting in the palm of his right hand. Shit, I really miss Mel. I've always looked forward to our Sunday mornings ... great sex, good food but most of all, someone who cared. He stared at the wall phone while drumming his fingers on the edge of the table and then, suddenly, rose, grabbed the device and dialed her number. "Hi, Mel, didn't wake you again, did I?"

"No," she replied, with an angry tone.

"What's wrong?"

"I just returned from the emergency room. Somebody beat the heck out of my boyfriend last night."

"Wow, is he OK?" Mick asked, not really caring one way or the other.

"Barely."

"Was it a robbery?"

"They didn't take anything."

"Did you see who did it?"

"No and neither did he."

"How is that possible?"

"I wasn't there, but it was dark and whoever did it approached from behind and pushed him to the ground. His face hit the pavement with such force that he passed out."

"Wow, no idea who did it?"

"No and the police don't think they'll find the perp since there were no witnesses."

He switched the phone to his left hand and examined the throbbing knuckles on his right.

"You still there, Mick?"

"Yeah, sorry about your troubles," he said, while rotating his wrist and reappraising the scrapes.

"How have you been? Are you still seeing Vigo?"

"Yeah, got an appointment in the morning."

"Is he helping?"

"Not sure."

"Well, was there anything else you wanted to discuss, I'm kinda beat?"

"I ... I miss you."

"C'mon, Mick, we've been there before, whenever you reach the end of your stick."

"No, Mel," he said, pleadingly, "I really mean it."

"OK, I'll admit that I miss being with you as well at certain times but you know that our personalities clash. Anyway, I'm too tired to get into it right now."

"Yeah, I understand," he said, dejectedly, "catch you later."

\*\*\*

"Well, Mick, is there anything you would like to tell me before I put you under again?" Dr. Vigo inquired.

"Somethin' real creepy's goin' on."

"Could you be more specific?"

"I awakened yesterday with scraped knuckles and I don't know how it happened."

"Hmm, a situation not unlike the facial wound you described previously."

"Yeah, guess so but this time I also had a bad headache, the kind you get after a bender."

"Had you been drinking?"

"I don't think so, well, maybe ... I can't remember."

"Alright, then let us see what your mind has hidden from your conscious self."

Less than ten minutes later, Mick was back in the now familiar hypnotic state.

"How do you feel, Mick?" Vigo asked, while gazing over his half glasses which were on the verge of sliding from the tip of his nose.

"Relaxed," he whispered.

"Allow yourself to gradually float back in time to the days of your childhood."

Mick sniffed a few times then moaned.

"Are you there?"

"Yup."

"What are you wearing?"

"My school uniform."

"Good. Now, I want you travel to the day you saw Father Ramirez pushed in front of the bus."

"Are you there?"

Mick squirmed in the recliner but did not answer.

"Mick, tell me what you see."

Mick remained silent as he attempted the impossible task of assuming a fetal posture in the recliner.

"Mick ..."

Suddenly, out of the silence came a frighteningly sinister voice with a heavy cockney accent. "Mick ain't 'ere," the voice said, "'e's gone on 'oliday."

Shocked, Vigo leaned forward to retrieve his half-glasses from where they had fallen to the carpet. Donning them, he pensively rubbed his chin. "Who are you?" he hesitantly queried.

"Sod off, oi don't 'ave to answer to you," the voice replied, with an offensive sneer.

"What have you done with Mick?"

"Told you, 'e's gone ... oi'm takin' over."

"Have you taken over before?"

"You ask to many friggin' questions but yeah, oi've been at it before."

"Why did you appear now?"

"You pushed the bloody wrong button, bugger, oi'm 'ere to stay."

"Can you tell me anything about Father Ramirez?"

"Maybe," the voice said, while nonchalantly examining his fingernails.

"Did you have anything to do with the death of Father Ramirez?"

Mick's form assumed a contorted posture, clenched its fists, then sat erect with its head forward. "Oi do whot oi friggin' 'ave to," the voice said with contempt.

With his hand less steady than usual, Vigo quickly wrote on his yellow pad:

*Startling emergence of new, potentially violent personality that appears to be the antithesis of the host. Dissociative Identity Disorder with clear evidence for co-consciousness.*

During the several seconds that it took for Vigo to make his notes, Mick's form had shifted from its usually withdrawn, reclining posture to one of self assuredness, his legs crossed.

"What shall I call you?" Vigo inquired, in an attempt to reacquire control.

"We ain't mates, you don't need a bloody name."

"Well, if you have taken the place of my friend, Mick, I must know how to properly address you."

"Yeah, alright, it's Ralph," he grunted.

"Fine, Ralph."

"Yeah, whatever."

"Perhaps you could help with an issue that Mick found rather perplexing?"

"You know, we don't exactly get along, me an' Mick."

"Oh, and why is that?"

"Truth is, mate, 'e doesn't know much about me."

"But you seem to know quite a lot about him, is that not so?"

"Maybe."

"Then prove it, tell me how Mick injured his hand."

"Friggin' easy, mate."

"So?"

"There was a bit of a go around with a bugger."

"Anyone special?"

"Just a bugger," he laughed, "who was havin' a go at Mick's ex."

"Tell me, Ralph, what happens to Mick when you take over?"

"Haven't got a clue, old sod ... probably goes off somewhere to hide. You know, mate, oi'm gettin' a tad pissed with you."

"I understand but I do have one very important question, would you allow me?"

"Right," he grunted, after a deep sigh.

"When did you first start taking over?"

"Tryin' to trick me, ain't you, mate?"

"No, not at all."

"Alright, mate, don't recall exactly but might 'ave been round about when Father Ramirez decided ol' Mick looked rather tasty, if you know whot oi mean."

"So, you appear when Mick is in danger?"

"You might say that."

"How do you feel right now, Ralph, are you sleepy?"

"No friggin' way, mate, just tired of all these bloody questions."

Vigo stared briefly at Ralph, then wrote on his pad:

*No longer convinced that patient remains in hypnotic state. The alter's appearance suggests some form of self-arousal mechanism.*

"So, Ralph, when might I expect Mick to return?"

Except for an exaggerated Cheshire smile, Ralph remained silent.

"Well, Ralph, you have been very helpful. I wonder if you could bare with me a little longer?"

"Yeah, oi might, whot's in it for me?"

"Are you able to tell me about the years prior to two thousand?"

"Bloody 'ell they was."

"Go on."

"Our boy, Mick, got hisself mixed up with a bunch of crazies ... some kind of religious freaks they was."

"Was this a church group?"

"Don't know, mate," he guffawed and snorted, "yah think Satan's a religious snot?"

"Satan, well then, we are talking about a cult, correct?"

"On target, mate."

"How did Mick get involved with them?"

"He'd 'ad enough of the church and all their shit, 'specially after the Ramirez thing."

"And?"

"Few years later a friend drug 'im in."

"Introduced him to the cult?"

"That's whot oi said, mate, ain't you listenin'?"

"Does this friend have a name?"

"Can't say, mate, but 'e was a squirrelly little bugger. Wore them metal glasses like yours," he said, while pointing, "are we 'bout through?"

"One last question. Do you know the name of the person who ran the cult?"

"A strange one 'e was, called hissself Kerberos."