

Chapter Twenty-Five

It was Mick's second night on stage and Trivia had just completed three sets; it was time for a break. He lowered his horn, blew out the moisture that had collected in the tubing and carefully placed it back into the case. Why the hell was that guy from the audience starin' at me all night? he wondered. It was like he was tryin' to catch my attention or somethin'. Or maybe he had somethin' else on his mind. Shit, first the desk clerk, now him? There must be a frickin' sign on my back that says *do me*. I gotta make it clear that I ain't into guys?

One hour later, having completed their evening's commitment, the group congregated in the kitchen to scrounge up whatever food remained and to receive their allotment of the night's receipts.

"We had a good night, guys," Chips said, as he began handing out one hundred dollar bills to all except Mick.

"Fifty ain't gonna cut it, Chips," Mick growled, as he threw his half eaten sandwich to the table.

"Hey, man, the new guy always takes the bumps for awhile."

"Not the way I see it!"

"What you see don't matter none."

"Can you blow the horn, Chips?"

"You threatenin' me?"

"Look, man," Mick said, as he kicked his chair to the side of the room and stood, "I flew all the way from the big apple for this gig. I figure I'm doin' you a bigger favor than you think you're doin' for me."

"You doin' me a favor?" Chips retorted, laughing.

"Enough of this shit," the drummer said, as he reached into his pocket and placed a twenty dollar bill on the table.

"Yeah, fuck you, Chips," String added, as he and the others followed suit.

"Thanks, guys," Mick said, without reaching for the cash, "but I don't wanna handout. I wanna be paid like everybody else."

"The man's right," String chimed, standing nose to nose with Chips, "no more of this crap, he gets paid the same as the rest of us or ..."

"Yeah, or what?" Chips sneered.

"Or you can find another bunch of monkeys to rip off."

"What the hell do you mean by that?"

"C'mon, Chips, everybody knows that you been skimmin'."

"Hey, I don't wanna mess you guys up," Mick said.

"You're one of us, man," String replied, while gathering the bills from the table, "take the money, you earned it."

"Not from your pocket."

"Don't you worry none," String said, while glaring at their manager, "Chips here will pay us back."

"I owe you, man," Mick replied, as he grabbed the bills, lifted his horn and headed for the street. Halfway to the alley exit, heeding the call of nature, he stopped at a the nearest bathroom. He locked the door, unzipped his fly and before he could relieve himself, was startled by the now familiar inner voice of Ralph.

"Well, old son, you fucked up again," Ralph gibed.

"Leave me the hell alone, I have to piss."

"When you stop actin' like a prig, oi might."

Finished, he zipped up, gazed towards the filthy sink and deciding against it, picked up his horn and reached for the doorknob.

"An' where do you think you're goin'?" Ralph railed.

"Where you ain't; go the fuck away!" he shouted, as he opened the door and headed for the street. Two o'clock in the morning, Mick remarked to himself, as the rusty steel door slammed behind him, I'm hungry, maybe somethin's still open on Market street. As he approached the alley's edge, he noticed the

vague outline of smoke and the glowing tip of a cigarette and he stopped.

"Hey mon," a Jamaican accented voice said, "I been waitin', what took you so long?"

"Who's there?"

"It's me, mon, Griff."

"Griff?"

"Yah, mon. Where the hell you been, Ralph, we expected you back months ago?"

Mick, about to claim ignorance, was suddenly interrupted by the return of the inner voice, Ralph. "Don't do it, old sod, he knows the way," the voice warned.

"What?" Mick asked, as he stood in the darkness.

"I said, we've been ..." Griff repeated.

"Yeah, OK, gimme a minute," he interrupted, then, in desperation whispered, "what way?"

"The the gates of Hell, he knows the way," Ralph said.

"Hey, mon, what happened to your accent?" Griff asked, as he approached.

"Been tryin' to fit in better," Mick responded, with his best effort attempt at mimicking Ralph.

"Yah, well, needs more work, mon," he replied, while stubbing out the cigarette with his foot and coming closer.

"Listen, the rest of us are ready for an all out assault, you up for it?"

"I think I need to hear the details first," he said, while, thinking, I have no idea what he's talkin' about but the voice seems to think I should play along.

"It's pretty much the same as before, mon."

"Yah know, my head's all fucked up tonight, I don't remember it too good."

"Yah, mon, I hear yah--they done a pretty good job on us but we gonna mess 'em up some. You playin' tomorrow night?"

"Yeah."

"OK, I be waitin', same place. We'll meet the guys afterwards."