

### Chapter Thirty-Six

Late Monday afternoon found Mick asleep in his chair, having been overcome by the tedium of computer programming. His well deserved nap was soon interrupted, however, by a soft knocking at the door. He yawned and faced the monitor in an attempt to appear busy. "I ain't wackin' off, if that's why you're bangin'," he shouted.

In response to his declaration came the sound of a key turning in the lock, followed by a soft thud as an attractive young woman kicked the door open with her athletic shod foot, her hands occupied by an overly filled food tray. "I've got dinner," the girl said, with a sweet smile.

Without rising from the chair, he scrutinized the sight before him. She was beautiful and the absence of makeup served

as testimony to that fact. Her skimpy tank top and tight jeans did as intended, revealing every aspect of her delectably athletic body.

"Not much room in here," she remarked, while still balancing the tray, her glazed look and plastic smile unchanged.

"Yeah, whatever," he replied and returned to face the computer.

"Where do you want this, it's getting heavy?"

"You can leave it here," he answered, as he pushed the keyboard to one side.

She slowly leaned across him and lowered the tray, pressing her right breast against his forehead in the process. "Nice try," he sneered, when she seemed to linger in that position.

"What do you mean?"

"The tit thing ... what's next, a hand job?"

A tear rolled down her right cheek and she quickly turned towards the door.

"Sorry, babe, I didn't mean that," he said, as he grabbed her arm and offered a tissue, "I just figured that maybe they was tryin' to soften me up or somethin'."

"I was trying to be nice," she replied, with a sniff.

"Ivano said that you were special."

"Me, special? That's a laugh."

"Well, that's what he said," she replied, demurely.

"So, have you been with special people before?" Mick asked, trying to delay her departure.

"Not here," she replied, as she tossed the tissue into a small wastebasket.

"But someplace else?" he asked with a wink, while remarking to himself that she could easily pass for a high priced hooker and she'd probably be worth the bucks.

As if his words had struck a sore spot, her demeanor changed and she glared at him. "You know the rules," she spat, "we don't talk about our past, we get to leave that behind."

"Yeah well, I figure you was livin' the life before here," Mick said, as he lifted one of the dishes from the tray, sniffed at its contents and turned up his nose.

"That's none of your business!"

"So, where's the old lady, why'd they send you?"

"How should I know and anyway, what makes you so special?" she asked, with a hand on her swaying hip.

"Damned if I know, maybe you can tell me."

"Humph," she muttered, as she flicked a stray blond hair from her forehead, pushing it back in the direction of her pony tail, while leaning over his shoulder. "What are you doing on that computer?" she asked.

"Writin' a program for your friend, Ivano," Mick said, as his fingers tapped rhythmically across the keyboard.

"They had to lock you up to do that?"

"Top secret stuff, eyes only an' all that shit."

She laughed, her firm breasts jiggling against his shoulder.

"Is it for the Mass?" she asked.

He gazed at her quizzically, weighing the risk of saying the wrong thing and then took a chance. "What mass?" he asked.

"You're kidding, right? Everybody's excited about the Black Mass ..."

"Oh yeah, that one," he interrupted, not having the slightest idea what she meant, "it's no big deal."

"No big deal?" the girl exclaimed, indignantly, "it's only the most important night of the year, a magical time."

"Magical huh? Well, I don't believe in magic but you can try an' convince me while I muster the courage to eat this shit," Mick said, as he tore open a fresh carton of milk.

"Like, I don't know if I should be talking to you about this stuff, you don't sound like one of us," the girl said, as she turned to face the door without making any real advance towards it.

"What's your name?" he asked, with a mouth full of cold chicken.

"Mariel."

He swallowed, wiped his hand on his shirt and extended it. "The name's Mick," he offered.

"So Mick, are you?"

"Am I what?" he asked, suddenly mesmerized by her right nipple as it protruded through the thin fabric.

"One of us."

"Used to be but now I ain't sure," he replied, trying desperately to break the spell of her inviting prominence.

Mariel took a seat on the floor near his feet and gazed up with a forlorn expression. "You know," she whispered, "you guessed right."

"About?" he asked, without facing her.

"The life. I did what I had to for survival and ..."

He dropped the chicken leg that he had been gnawing on, stared at it for several seconds and then softening, turned to face her. "I don't need to know all that," he said.

"Then what do you need to know?"

"This ain't the dating game, is it?" Mick asked, attempting to erase her sadness.

"It could be," she remarked, softly.

"Well, anyway, why are you here?"

"So I don't have to turn tricks for food and a place to sleep, that's why."

"That's cool, but I meant here, with me."

"Oh, well I was just trying to be friendly," she remarked, while twirling a strand of hair. "So, why are you here?"

"I told you, I'm writin' a program."

"That's not what I heard," Mariel said, in a child-like fashion.

"Oh yeah, let's hear your version."

"I heard that you just showed up and barged right in."

"Where'd you hear that?"

"From the guys you rode with."

Hmm, he said to himself, as he reached into his pocket and fingered the cereal box flap, I wonder. "Listen," he said, "since you're into magic an' all, how do you feel about secret messages?"

"I don't understand," Mariel said, while crossing her legs and readjusting her position on the floor.

"It's simple, do you send secret messages?"

"What in the world are you talking about?" she asked, with a frown and a nervous giggle.

Realizing that she wasn't the one who had sent the box flap, he changed his approach. "Hey, I was just foolin' with yah," he said.

Mariel unfolded her legs and lithely rose from the ground. "I gotta go," she said, as she turned towards the door, "they'll be looking for me."

"No, don't go ... what about the mass?"

"I thought you said that it was no big deal?"

"Yeah well, I lied."

"You don't know what it's about, do you?" Mariel asked, somewhat sarcastically.

"Truth is, I don't remember a lot of things."

"Well, OK, I'll tell you a little bit. It's supposed to be a secret and only the chosen get to attend."

"Aw c'mon, tell me all about it--I'll give yah a chicken leg," Mick said, as he dangled one before her with an animated grin.

Maribel shook her head and pushed the poultry holding hand to one side. "I'll make you a deal," she said, "if you tell me why you're really here, I'll tell you all I know about the mass but you have to promise not to tell anyone where you got the scoop."

"Deal," Mick replied, knowing that he had no intention of revealing his real purpose.

She brought her lips sensually close to his ear. "OK, you first," she whispered.

"Me?"

"Yes, you," she replied, while returning to her position on the floor.

Mick scratched his head, remarking to himself that he had better spin a good yarn, and struggled to the floor beside her. "Yah sure yah don't want to do ladies first?" he asked.

"You go first or no deal."

"OK, here it is. I used to sell flowers like the rest of you, it was awhile ago, but I got crazy and left. I needed to be alone but bein' alone turned out to be a pile of shit an' I couldn't cut it, so, here I am again."

"I don't know, Mick, sounds kind of flaky to me."

"But it's the truth."

"So, how come you're not out with the rest of us?"

"You mean, sellin' flowers?"

"Yeah."

"Guess they figured I could earn my keep better by doin' this program."

"Still sounds kind of fishy to me. I never heard of anyone leaving this place and coming back."

"Yeah, well, I did an' if you don't believe me, you can ask your friend, Ivano."

"Then how come you don't know about the mass?"

"Like I said, there are a lot of things I don't remember."

"C'mon, how could you forget something like that?"

He gazed up at the ceiling, thinking, I need to tell her somethin' that nobody will question. "Ever do any drugs?" he asked.

"Some reds and blues and, oh yeah, coke when I could get it."

"Well, while you were livin' the life on the outside, I was shootin' up with the hard stuff an' it fucked up my head. There's a lot of shit I can't remember."

"Yeah, now I understand. I had a sugar daddy that tried to get me started on that stuff but I said nooo, I'm not gonna end up in some trash bin like some people I knew," Mariel said, with a sympathetic hand on his leg.

Her fingers were electric, their warmth magnetic and he tried, with little success, to ignore the growing tumescence in his groin. "So, help me out here," he said, "I really don't remember much about the mass."

With a devilish smile, she slid nearer, closing the small gap between their bodies, while her hand ventured further up his

thigh. "The day after tomorrow is the mass, the black mass," she remarked.

Certain that she was aware of the bulge in his pants and wondering if that was the destination of her wandering hand, he took a deep breath and exhaled. "Why are you whispering?" he asked.

"I think they're watching me and there could be someone listening at the door," she replied, her fingers approaching the point of no return.

"So, they sent you here to pump me, didn't they?" he asked, suddenly realizing the nature of his double entendre.

"I can if you want," she said, seductively, while her fingers softly stroked his inner thigh.

"Uh, that ain't what I had in mind but, hell, it feels good," he murmured.

Mariel smiled and gazed into his eyes as her hand traveled the short distance to his growing bulge. "How's that feel?" she cooed, while rhythmically squeezing his manhood.

"Real good," Mick replied, breathlessly, "but it's gettin' a little tight in there."

"I can fix that," she said, as she unzipped his fly, reached in and released his now full erection.

It's been a long time, he remarked to himself, man it's good.

"Put your back against the door," she whispered, while maintaining a fierce grip on his penis.

"What for?"

"In case someone tries to get in."

He spun around, his back coming to rest against the door with a bang as she slowly began to stroke him from tip to base in one continuous movement. Hoping to reciprocate, he reached forward to touch the tip of her breast and as she pushed him away with her free hand, lowered her head, her warm lips engulfing him fully. Release came with unexpected suddenness. She jerked her head back, reached towards the tray and wiped her mouth on a grease stained napkin. "I'd really better go before they come looking for me," she said, while rising from the floor.

"That was really hot, I ain't had nothin' like that in a long time ... you sure you gotta go?"

"Yeah, I'd better," Mariel said, with her hand on the door knob.

"What about the mass? You still haven't told me."

"I don't have the time now."

"At least tell me why it's called a Black Mass."

She bent towards where he remained seated on the floor, his fly conspicuously undone, and brought her lips to his ear. "I really don't know that much about the actual ceremony," she whispered, "it's my first, but a bunch of us are taking the oath."

"Oath, what oath?"

"The oath of devotion to the Prince of Darkness."

"Shit," he exclaimed, as she quietly opened the door and left, "devil worshipers, oh man, they're really fucked up."