

Chapter Forty-Two

"Griff, it's Ralph, oi need 'elp, mate," he begged, breathlessly, while leaning against an outdoor phone booth, blocks away from the compound.

"Where you been, mon, we been lookin' for yah?"

"Oi'm at a fuckin' pay phone an' no, oi don't know the where fuck oi am."

"What happened, mon, you sound stressed?" Griff asked, the sound of a female voice laughing in the background.

"Come an' get me, mate."

"I'm in the middle of somethin', mon."

"Yeah, oi can 'ere--do her later, mate."

"Uh, don't think so ..."

"Whot's more important, me or the bird?" Ralph interrupted, anxiously.

"Uh ..." Griff replied, heavy breathing in the background.

"Alright, get yah jollies. 'Ere's the number, 'ave Tommy do 'is telephone thing, find me, then 'e can come an' get me."

"It be late, mon, don't know it I can find him."

"Do it, after whot oi been through, ain't gonna spend the night sleepin' under a fuckin' tree."

"Whot took yah so long an' where's Tommy?" Ralph asked, as he slid into Griff's old VW, his clothing all sweat stained and reeking.

"He found your phone booth but told me it was too late for him to to pick you up, said I should get laid."

"So, whot 'appened to the bird?"

"She be hot for the rasta bone, mon, she waitin' at my place."

"Yeah, probably got nowhere else tah go," Ralph sneered.

"Hey, mon, da girl, she really digs me."

"Whatever."

"So, what hopen to you?" Griff asked, as he hit the brakes and the car skidded to a stop at a traffic light.

"Nearly froze mah bollocks out 'ere, waitin' for yah."

"Sorry, mon," Griff replied, while reaching under his seat and withdrawing a bag of red licorice. "Want some?" he asked.

"No thanks, mate," Ralph said, pushing Griff's hand away, "that color makes me sick."

"So, you gonna tell me what you be doin' out dere?"

"Oi seen an' done some pretty 'orrible shit in my time but tonight ..." Ralph whispered, his voice trailing off.

"What hopen', mon?"

"That Kerberos fucker, 'e's a mean radio."

"Radio?"

"'e's mental, nuts, crazy. Thinks 'e's the bloody devil. Oi saw 'im put a knife right into a bird's chest ... killed 'er on the spot, that fucker," Ralph hissed, his face contorted in disgust.

"You telling me that you went in dere mon, without us guys to back you up? Are you crazy, mon?" Griff shouted, the tires squealing as he swerved back into his lane after momentarily losing control.

"'ad to, old sod. Oi needed tah figure somethin' out."

"And did yah?"

"Not whot oi bloody went for."

"You sure he really killed the girl, mon?"

Ralph sniffled, while turning his head away from Griff and rubbing his eyes. "Never thought oi would be saying' this, mate," he remarked, "but me thinks we should call the bobbies."

"I don't know, mon, might screw up our plans?"

"The whole scene shook the shit outta me, mate. Oi think wee should act now."

"What about friends, mon?"

"Whot friends?" Ralph asked, a quizzical expression on his face.

"Didn't you make any while you were dere?"

Ralph remained silent for several moments while the horrifying image of Mariel lying on the altar, her blood dripping to the ground, danced before his eyes. "No, mate," he said, "didn't make no friends but ... I did get a strange message from somebody."

"What kind of message?"

"It said that oi was in danger."

"Who sent it, mon?"

"Oi don't know an' oi didn't 'ave time to find out."

"It wasn't signed or nothin'?"

"No, mate, was written on a piece of cardboard an' stuck under a dish."

"Too bad, mon, you coulda had dem call the cops."

"Yeah. So, whot plans would we be spoilin' by us doin' the callin'?"

"We got a whole lot more information 'bout dem Russians, mon."

"So?"

"Tomorrow, we be meetin' with the guys tomorrow, mon, wait till then."

Griff brought the VW to a halt just outside the hotel where Mick had been staying, stopping just long enough for Ralph to exit before rolling away from the curb. Ralph gazed up at the Marquis, momentarily confused by the flashing lights, then kicked open the front door and headed for Mick's room.