

Chapter Fifty

Friday evening, following a lengthy and circuitous bus ride entailing numerous changes, exhausted, Mick finally arrived at the garage. He pushed aside the pile of pornographic magazines that had been resting on the meeting room's dirty old cot and fell asleep. With no wristwatch or clock, there was no way of telling time in the windowless room. His plan was to sleep as long as possible and then return to his profitable corner for more busking. But something had changed during the night; Mick was no longer himself.

"Ralph, wake up, mon," Griff urged, as he kicked the old army cot.

"Whot the fuck," Ralph exclaimed, a thick string of saliva hanging from one corner of his mouth, as the springs creaked beneath his weight.

"Get up, mon, it be the middle of the afternoon."

"Whot day is it?"

"Yah must have got fucked up last night, mon, it be Sunday."

"Sunday, whot happened to Saturday?"

"What you mean, mon?"

"Yeah well, what the fuck's the difference, oi ain't goin' to church. Lemme sleep."

"C'mon, there be talkin' to do, mon," Griff pleaded, as he kicked the bed once again.

"Yeah, OK," Ralph replied, wiping the saliva on his sleeve while rising to a seated position on the edge of the bed. "Yah got any coffee in this dump?"

"What hopen here, mon?" Griff asked, as he kicked aside pieces of a broken chair, knelt, then stood again while twirling a pair of thong panties on one finger.

Ralph rubbed his eyes and scratched his head. "Don't remember, old sod, but they ain't mine."

Griff stared at him for a moment, sniffed the thong and then stuffed it into his pocket. "Listen, mon, the guys wanna talk about the Russians, you up for it?"

"Yeah, they deserves some talkin' 'bout but oi ain't forgot Kerberos. E's got 'is comin'."

"Get youself movin', mon," Griff requested, while gazing at his wristwatch, "we be meetin' the guys in a half hour."

"Ain't this the usual place?" Ralph asked, while stepping into his athletic shoes.

"Yah mon, but not today. Today we be meetin' elsewhere."

Griff squeezed the old car into a tight space in front of a partially renovated row house in Haight-Ashberry. "We be here, mon," he said, as he undid his seat belt and opened the car door.

Ralph, who had been dozing for most of the trip, opened his eyes and yawned. "Ain't this hippie town?" he asked.

"Used to be," Griff said, then added, "hey, mon, get rid of dat coffee cup, it gonna spill over everything."

"OK," Ralph said, while dumping the contents of the half empty styrofoam cup out onto the sidewalk. "Who lives 'ere?"

"Couple of da guys," Griff replied, as he led the way up a planked staircase.

Ralph followed Griff through the unlocked front door. It was a two story apartment and it was bare, save for a few pieces of dilapidated furniture. The windows, covered with sheets of clear plastic, were in various phases of restoration as were the pockmarked plaster walls. The pungent odor of fresh paint filled the living room but he saw no evidence of its use. Still inexplicably groggy, considering that he had apparently slept for

almost two days, Ralph stared up at the ceiling, mesmerized by a series of cherubic bas-reliefs.

"Hey, Ralph, Griff," the telephone expert, Tommy, shouted.

"Hey, mon," Griff replied, while glancing quizzically at Ralph, "where be the girls?"

"Out working," Tommy remarked.

"Workin' at what, mon?" Griff joked, with a wink.

"Waitin' tables at some brunch place. Said they'd go along with whatever we decide."

"So, it's just the three of us, mate?" Ralph inquired, "where are the other two guys?"

"Outside somewhere but I got their votes," Tommy proclaimed.

"I ain't outside no more," a scar faced young man screeched, as he entered the room from a small terrace.

"Where's your friend, mon?"

"He couldn't take the paint smell; said he'd do whatever we want."

"Want a beer?" Tommy asked while rising from the floor.

"Nah, too early for me ... yah got any food?" Ralph asked.

"We got chips."

"That'll do," Ralph replied, "this your place?"

"Yeah, me an' the girls," Tommy gloated.

"Bloody nice," Ralph remarked, as he tore open a bag of taco chips and shoved a handful in his mouth. "So, who's gonna start?"

"We wanna get em," Tommy declared, with bitterness.

"No argument there," Ralph agreed, while crunching noisily, "but 'ow you gonna do it?"

"We could call the cops and tell them about their connection with the cult and drugs," the scar faced man offered.

"'Ere, that the best yah can think of?"

"You got a better idea?" he challenged.

"Big outfit like NAPCO gotta 'ave a lotta bloody connections, we need somethin' bigger to go for."

"Like what?" Tommy asked.

"Like them missiles. Yah can't stuff 'em in a bunch of flowers like them drugs and yah can't flush 'em down the toilet," Ralph proclaimed, shaking the bag in search of uneaten chips.

"You want to steal a missile?" Tommy asked, while seated on the floor, slowly twirling an empty beer bottle.

"Not exactly."

"Then what?"

"Don't you watch the frickin' tube, old sod?"

"Yeah, so?"

"Oi was thinkin' of a sting."

"Too dangerous, mon," Griff chimed in, as he picked at his unkempt dreadlocks.

"Oi figure it's the only way to bring 'em all down together."

"OK, mon, ain't sayin' I'm with the program but tell me how yah see it hoppenin'?"

"Oi ain't got it all figured out yet but somebody 'ere got to be a buyer. Tommy can do 'is listenin' on their phones and get us a name. Yah know, to make us credible."

"That ain't gonna work," Tommy declared, "all they got to do is call that person and find out if we're real."

"Don't matter," Ralph said, with a wry smile, "they gonna wanna find out how we know about them missiles, so, my guess is that they'll set up a meet."

"Then what?" Griff asked.

"We tell 'em that we gotta see the merchandise before dealin', to make sure it's the real thing an' all."

"Ain't yah gettin' ahead of yourself?" Griff remarked.

"Don't think so."

"But if dey already thinks we smell, why show us the goods?"

"Because them goods are really well hidden in a basement, a good fuckin' place to waste some bloody fakes."

"Gettin' us killed ain't a great plan, Ralph," the scar faced man declared.

"We ain't gonna get killed."

"Really?" Griff said, shaking his head in disbelief, "what we be doin' while dey is shootin', mon?"

"We'll be bloody shootin' as well but with a video camera."

"C'mon, Ralph, they be takin' dat camera out from our cold, dead hands when dey finish shootin'."

"Not if we ain't there. Look, oi figure Tommy can rig some of them internet cameras in the basement ..."

"Now just one God damned minute," Tommy bellowed, "I ain't goin' in there, I don't even know where it is."

"Oi think oi do," Ralph commented.

"How's that?"

"On moi last little visit, Ivano took me down into the basement for that Satan thing. Anyway, there was another door, a big mother, at the end of the corridor. They had it all covered like it was part of the wall but oi got a quick look at it. It weren't no wall and it weren't no regular door."

"What do yah mean, mon?"

"Looked like solid steel an' that ain't all. There was a box to one side with a bunch of blinking lights."

"I'll bet that's a coded entry, dude," Tommy exclaimed excitedly.

"Yah got any experience with that shit?" Ralph asked Tommy.

"Oh yeah, I love those things, it's kinda like a hobby. But wait a minute, it ain't gonna be that easy. They're not gonna tell us to meet them at their secret hiding place."

"Right, they won't but we're gonna tell 'em we already know where the stuff is an' that we know how to get through the 'K' man's security, so, that's where we wanna meet."

"Cool, mon. Dey gonna be pissed when dey hear that the security ain't worth a damn. But I don't know, Ralph, I still think you gonna get us killed for sure."

"Oi ain't sayin' there won't be some risk but we gotta get them buggers an' get 'em good."

"I still haven't heard how you expect to get me in and even more important," Tommy said, expectantly, "get me out."

"Oi'll get back to you on that, old sod, still workin' on it."