

### Chapter Fifty-Three

Ralph, having no place else to go, had claimed the garage as his own. With the pungent odor of spoiled gasoline and ludicrous collection of rusty old junk lurking about, it served as a challenge even to his limited standards. Following the Haight-Ashberry meeting and a six pack of beer, he had returned to the old army cot hoping for a good night's sleep but hope was all he had. After a helter-skelter search, he located the group's stash of instant coffee and managed to coax a still functioning torch to heat a pan of water. With a full cup in hand, that Wednesday morning, he trudged through the trash strewn garage. What a fuckin' mess, he remarked to himself, as he kicked away the empty cans and rags that blocked his path while in search of a telephone. However, a familiar voice put a stop to his quest.

"What you doin', mon?" Griff cried out, as he sauntered through the open, sliding front door.

"Lookin' for a bloody phone to call you, old sod."

"Why's the door open, mon?"

"Guess oi forgot to close it an' besides, it stinks like bloody 'ell in 'ere."

"Seems like you be forgettin' a lot these days," Griff remarked, as he walked past Ralph towards the meeting room and tossed a newspaper on the table.

Ralph followed from behind, plopped down into a chair and began mindlessly taping on the newspaper. "Oi got to find me a better place to stay, mate," he said "oi can't sleep with this stink."

"Sorry, mon, but my place be too small."

"Yeah well, twas a thought."

"Hey, mon," Griff asked, while gesturing towards a large scab on Ralph's arm, "where'd you get dat?"

Ralph glanced at his arm, as if unaware of the imperfection. "Not sure, mate," he replied, "probably did it on some piece of shit in this dump."

"If that be so, better clean it up, mon. No tellin' what kind of bugs this place has."

Ralph lifted his tin cup from the table and took a swig.

"Yah got any more of dat coffee?" Griff asked.

"Yeah, outside on the workbench," Ralph said, his voice trailing off as his attention shifted to the front page of the

San Francisco Herald. "Hey, mate, this is yesterday's paper, it's old news," he shouted.

"Have yah already seen it?" Griff asked, as he walked back into the room sipping coffee from a clear plastic measuring cup.

"No."

"Then it be new to you, mon."

"Hey, mate, 'ave yah read this?" he asked excitedly.

"Only the sports page, mon. Got to keep up with the soccer scores."

"Says 'ere," he commented, while repeatedly jabbing at the page, "that some senator's wife was offed and would yah believe that 'e's thinkin' that NAPCO's involved?"

Griff, carelessly leaning his cup on the table, spilled the contents as he stretched across to see the paper. "What you thinkin', mon?" he asked.

"That maybe we need to talk to this bloke."

"Why dat?"

"If 'e's got it in for the Russians, maybe we can 'elp 'im an' save us some trouble at the same time?"

"How you figure dat?"

"We tell 'im 'bout the drugs, missiles an' shit."

"Yah think he believe us?"

"After we show 'im the proof 'e will."

"Dat mean Tommy still on for tonight's job?"

"Afraid so."

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"How the hell am I gonna get in and out of there without gettin' caught?" Tommy asked anxiously, while sitting on the floor of a borrowed van loading a video camera and code breaking gear into a backpack.

"Oi got it figured out," Ralph announced, his mouth and fist full of red licorice.

"But the place is a fucking fortress," Tommy complained, as he adjusted a pair of binoculars and surveyed the compound through the van's darkened windows. "They'll see me before I get to the gate."

"Not if we tiptoe through the woods, mate. There ain't no cameras out there."

"How do you know that?" Tommy asked, yanking a strand of licorice from Ralph's fist.

"Who'd wanna break into a cult an' besides, oi got me a glimpse of their surveillance monitors when oi was lookin' for the mainframe. Ain't no view of the woods."

"Did you consider the possibility of motion sensors, Ralph?"

Ralph scratched his head and frowned. "Hmm," he replied, "guess we'll 'ave to be careful."

"It be almost time," Griff announced from the driver's seat.

"Yeah, lights out in five minutes. We go ten after that," Ralph decided.

"I sure hope they won't be calling up the devil tonight," Tommy mumbled nervously.

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"Well," Ralph, proudly whispered, "we didn't set off no alarms, did we?"

"We don't know that for sure," Tommy whispered, as he slowly panned the video camera about the room with Ralph holding the battery operated lights, "this shit scares me, man."

"Yeah, well, don't shit your bloody pants, they might smell yah."

"OK, think I've got enough," Tommy said.

"We only been 'ere for five minutes, mate," Ralph complained.

"This ain't no Hollywood spectacle, we got what we came for, period!"

"Alright, mate, but before we bugger off, oi gonna take me a sample," Ralph declared, as he aimed the light at a box marked *grenades*.

"You sure there ain't no cameras down here?"

"No, oi ain't, that's why oi'm takin' these," he replied, while stuffing several of the small explosives into his oversized pockets.

"Ever use one?" Tommy asked, taking several steps backwards.

"Nah, but looks pretty simple. See," he whispered, pointing to a protruding ring, "yah just pull this thing 'ere and run like fuckin' 'ell."

"You sure about that?"

"Yeah, saw it in the movies."

"Fine, let's get the hell outta here," Tommy urged, his equipment safely tucked into the backpack.

"Just one bloody minute," Ralph urged, while staring off towards the end of the room.

"What for?"

"'Ow yah figure they got all this shit down 'ere?"

"I don't know an' I don't care," Tommy nervously admitted.

"Look back there, mate, see what oi see?"

"No, what do you think you see, Ralph?"

"There's somethin' behind that big crate near the back wall," he whispered.

"OK, just a quick look, then we're outta here."

They tip-toed towards the large crate that was labeled, *Stinger*, in dull red block letters. "Look at this, mate," Ralph whispered, "a frickin' door. Bet it leads to the outside."

"Maybe, it looks big enough for a forklift."

"It ain't locked," Ralph said, while pressing down on a European style lever.

"Probably just from this side. C'mon, let's get outta here."

"Don't you wanna see where it goes?" Ralph asked, as he opened the door without waiting for Tommy's reply.

A rush of air greeted them along with the musty odor of damp soil. "Shit, it's a tunnel," Tommy exclaimed.

"Yeah, a frickin' long one at that," Ralph said, as he passed through the door into the darkness, "let's go."

They stumbled across the gravel covered floor, illuminating the path with the video light. The tunnel was several hundred feet long, large enough for a forklift or small pickup. It ended in the wooded area across from the compound and was camouflaged by a large fake tree stump. "This could be useful," Ralph declared, as he breathed in the night air and looked about.

"What for, I ain't goin' back in there."

"'Ere, 'elp me put this stump back and we'll get goin'."

They exited from the woods on the same side of the street as the van and ran towards it as fast as their legs would allow. Griff kicked the doors open from inside and they flew into the carpeted rear. "How'd it go, mon?" he asked, the tires screeching from their rapid departure.

"Got enough to make the evening news," Tommy replied, panting heavily from the run.

"You be outta shape, mon," Griff joked.

"No shit," Tommy said, "but no matter what, I ain't goin' back there again."

"Sorry, old sod, but yah got more work to do," Ralph chimed in, while rubbing his ankle.

"What happened to your foot?" Tommy asked.

"Think oi sprained it in the woods."

"But like I said, I ain't goin' back, if that's what you want."

"Relax, old sod, it's your telephone contacts that oi need."

"What for?"

"The home number of Senator John Raymond."

"But that could get me in trouble."

"Just do it, oi'll explain later. Oh, an' oi'll be needin' a copy of that video along with the NAPCO voice tapes."