

### Chapter Fifty-Five

Ralph was outside, waiting, when Griff arrived at the garage early Monday morning. Ain't even finished my coffee, he said to himself, as he tossed the cup towards the road, a sudden breeze slamming it against the VW. "Oi know, oi know," he exclaimed as he opened the door, "be more careful, right?"

"Yah, mon. Dis beetle, she be the love of my life."

"Yah want me to wipe it off?" Ralph sneered, the passenger door still open.

"No, mon, close the door, we be late," he replied, while putting the car in gear and leaving the curb, adding, "whot you been doin', you look like hell?"

"Oi ain't been sleepin' much."

"Why is dat, mon?"

"Nightmares, mate, bloody nightmares."

"The Kerberos killin'?"

"Yeah, 'er name was Mariel," Ralph lamented, "oi can still see 'er face; twas 'orrible."

"Too bad about dat girl, mon."

"That murderin' Kerberos," he grumbled.

"So, you think the guys will go for it, mon?"

"Go for what?" Ralph asked, his mind adrift.

"Usin' the senator to go after Kerberos an' the Russians."

"We'll know when oi tell 'em 'bout it."

"You feel comfortable with dat?"

"Comfortable? No, oi'd rather 'ave my own 'ands around Kerberos' neck but it's safer this way an' 'e's got more clout."

It had rained heavily during the night and the streets of Haight-Ashberry were awash. Finding a parking space was always an issue in that part of town but the flooded streets made it all the more difficult. After hopelessly searching for more than twenty minutes, Griff nudged the car into an almost dry no parking zone, hung a handicap parking permit from the rear view mirror and shut down the engine. "Where'd yah get that?" Ralph asked, gesturing towards the placard.

"A doctor, mon," Griff remarked, as they ascended the stairs to Tommy's flat.

"For whot?" Ralph hissed.

"I stubbed my toe."

"You got to be kiddin'."

"No mon, really, I hurt my foot."

"That wasn't whot oi meant an' you know it," Ralph exclaimed, as they reached the last step and entered the apartment.

The group gathered around a fake fireplace in the still unfinished living room. Griff busied himself with his unruly Rastafarian hair while Ralph recounted the details of his meeting with the senator. "So, whot do yah think of the plan?" he asked when he had finished.

"Might work," Tommy said, while lying on the floor tossing peanuts into the air and trying to catch them in his open mouth.

"Got my doubts," Griff interjected, now seated on the floor beside Tommy, swatting the peanuts as they fell from the air.

"Whot do yah mean?" Ralph asked, indignantly. "Gets the job done without risk, don't it?"

"How do yah know we can trust him, mon?"

"'e thinks they offed his bird, for God sakes ... 'e's got a hate on for 'em."

"Not what I meant, mon. He might wanna use us for further proof an' we got no protection."

"Maybe he'll chicken out," Tommy offered, "thinkin' that they'll go after him."

"Nah, they ain't gonna go after the senator, 'specially after 'e named 'em again in today's paper," Ralph proclaimed, as he dropped a copy of the San Francisco Herald onto Griff's lap.

"Yah, mon," Griff laughed, "maybe you right. Dat Kerberos, he probably callin' on the Devil for help right now."

"What if the Russians start clearin' all those missiles out," Tommy remarked, "then what?"

"Why would they do dat, mon?"

"The newspapers, rasta man."

"They don't say nothin' 'bout the compound, Tommy. You worry too bloody much."

"I still say we gotta hope that they don't clear the military stuff outta there before they get raided," Tommy repeated.

"So, we all agree 'bout leavin' it to the senator?" Ralph inquired.

"All of us who be here, mon."

"Hey, where's the little guy with the scar," Ralph asked.

"Had to work but said he'd do whatever we decide."

"An' the girls?" Ralph asked.

"The same," Tommy remarked.

"So, it's bloody over, right?"

"Guess so," Griff replied, "what we do now?"

"We frickin' separate, mate. Be harder to find us if they do come lookin'."

"But the Russians don't know who we are, mon."

"Yeah, but there is a connection," Tommy said, while staring at Ralph.

"Whot are yah lookin' at me for?"

"The senator knows who you are."

"Oi ain't afraid," Ralph declared, as one of the girls entered the room, took a seat beside him and began to rub his thigh.

"You gonna be stayin' on at the garage, mon?"

"Nah, stinks in there. Oi was kinda hopin' oi could stay 'ere a bit," Ralph remarked, as he slid his hand into the girl's blouse.

"I don't mind, if it's OK with the others," the black haired girl giggled, as his fingers unsnapped her bra. "He could stay in my room."

"Know what, love, oi got to go back tah the garage tonight."

"No you don't," she pleaded, "stay here."

"Oi need to get my stuff."

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"You gonna be OK with just that sandwich, mon?" Griff asked, as Ralph exited the VW in front of the garage.

"Oi've managed with a whole lot less, mate. Just don't forget to come by in the mornin'."

He entered the dilapidated one story structure, slid the door shut and made his way to the rear. The building now belonged to Griff, left to him by his deceased grandfather. It had been several years since his demise and Griff, having little or no interest in running a business he knew nothing about had

been ignoring it. To add insult to injury, the garage and the small piece of property that it sat upon had limited commercial value and about the only recognition he afforded the place came with the arrival of the dreaded yearly tax bill.

Ralph sat on the edge of his cot eating a tuna fish sandwich. For some reason, he thought to himself, this place don't stink as much as the other night. Maybe oi should be thinkin' about stayin' 'ere. But then there's that black haired wench, oi wouldn't be passin' that up, would oi? He swallowed the last of his dinner, washing it down with a warm can of Pepsi, and began to gather his meager belongings; Mick's trumpet and the khaki compound outfit. With the whole night ahead of him and nothing to do, he began to rummage through the room's only closet. Maybe there's some shit in 'ere that oi could use, he said to himself, while kicking aside unopened boxes of artificial sweetener, abrasive hand soaps and bug spray. Bored with his seemingly fruitless efforts, the closet's contents now strewn about the room, he was about to quit when he noticed a poorly fastened board at the back of the closet. 'Ere, whot's this, he remarked to himself, while easing the strip of wood away from the wall. Hmm, Looks like grandpa 'ad hissself a secret hiding place. Reaching into the cavity and feeling something soft within, he wrapped his fingers around it and pulled. It was a beat up olive green duffel bag, the kind you might find in an Army surplus store and it wasn't empty. He dragged it over to the bed and pulled on the rusty zipper. One by one, he removed a collection

of variously named credit cards, driver's licenses and several rolls of cash. Got to be hot, these bloody cards are current, he commented to himself, while staring longingly at the rolls of fives and twenties. Oi wonder if Griff knows about this? Immobilized by the prospect of a windfall, he considered removing a few bills from each roll but his conscience got the better of him and he dropped them back into the bag, along with the credit cards. Removing it from behind the wall proved to be easier than replacement. Something must have shifted, he thought to himself, as he reached into the dark hollow, his hand coming into contact with a second fabric covered sack. Secured to the back wall with an unseen device, it resisted removal but after several forceful yanks, it came free. It's like Christmas, he marveled, while carrying his find towards the cot. The new black garment bag sagged at the bottom. He carefully patted its length, trying to guess the contents but his imagination failed. "Whot 'ave we got 'ere," he whispered to the empty room, as he opened the bag and removed a black leather costume and mask. Bloody Halloween outfit? he asked himself. Grandpa, you was a devil, wasn't you, he thought, while trading his jeans for the perfect fitting leather, an' you were just my size. Hmm, but new sack an' all, maybe it belongs to Griff, 'e's 'bout my size? After trying out the mask and frightening himself in a broken mirror, he stuffed both bags back into the wall and retired for the night.