

Chapter Fifty-Eight

Ralph waited for his ride on Tuesday morning but Griff never showed. He had planned to confront him about the cash and credit cards, hoping for a chance to fill his empty pockets. As for the costume, he had decided to leave sleeping dogs lie. If 'e's got a kinky side, he had said to himself, that's 'is business. With no other place to go, the garage's gloomy atmosphere getting to him, he walked to the bus and made his way to Haight-Ashberry.

Groggy and hungover from a night of alcohol and sex, he awakened Thursday morning to the touch of his black haired bedmate.

"Good morning, Ralphie," she cooed while gently squeezing his manhood.

"Go away, lemme sleep," he groaned.

"C'mon Ralphie, you've been sleeping for almost two days straight, I want some lovin'."

"Go away I have a headache."

"That's my line, you can't use it," she said from beneath the covers, her tongue tracing the length of his shaft.

Damn you Ralph, he thought to himself, what the hell did you get me into?

"Do you like this, babe?" she slurred, her mouth now full of his erection.

"Yeah, that's good," Mick whispered, then added, when she had removed her lips and popped out from beneath the sheets, "why'd you stop?"

"Something's wrong."

"What's wrong?"

"You!"

"It's the same dick, it ain't no different than last night."

"No silly, it's like you're a different person all of sudden," she replied, a quizzical expression upon her face.

"I don't get it," he declared, while pointing to the tented sheet at his midsection and gesturing for her attention.

"You sound different," she explained, her hand now beneath the sheet rubbing rhythmically.

"Oh that," he replied with a strained voice, while approaching orgasm.

"Yes, that," she giggled, as she withdrew her hand and wiped it on the sheet.

"OK," he exhaled, while sticking his tongue out at her, "yah see, I've been working on my diction so I can sound like everyone else. You know, fit in better?"

"Well, you've done a remarkable job, considering you've slept through the past thirty some odd hours," she offered with disbelief.

Think Mick, he said to himself, this ain't workin'. "Sod off, babe, I ain't even awake yet," he pleaded, hoping that his conscious version of Ralph would prove convincing.

"Still different," she said.

"Whatever," he replied, as he rolled over on his side and reached for her breast.

Naked, she slid from the bed, turned on an old TV that sat across from them and headed for the bathroom.

This Ralph thing is wearin' the shit outta me, he remarked to himself, it would frickin' help if I knew when he was comin' and goin'. Irritated by the barrage of commercials, he reached across to change the channel, briefly stopping at an early morning cartoon station before continuing to surf. He finally settled on a news station that was in the process providing a weather report when suddenly, it was interrupted by the news caster.

This just in. In a bizarre turn of events, Senator John Raymond, whose scandalous allegations have irreparably rattled the international banking industry, was found dead this morning with his throat slashed. His body was left lying at the base of

a tree on the outskirts of Golden Gate Park. You may recall, that not long ago, the senator's wife was found murdered in the same approximate location causing some sources close to this investigation to question a possible link. At this point, however, state and local representatives have discounted that notion. As of this reporting, the responsible party or parties have not been named. Police representatives have refused to comment about any possible connection between the senator's death and organized crime, vis-a-vis NAPCO and their alleged Russian Mafia affiliations. Stay tuned for further updates.

"Shit, did you hear that?" Mick exclaimed excitedly, as the girl returned from the bathroom wearing a moth-eaten robe.

"Hear what?" she asked, brushing her hair as she walked.

"It's over, the senator's dead."

"Say that again."

"Somebody killed Raymond, the only connection between us and the Russians."

"I guess that's good for us but not for him."

"Yeah."

"How do we know that he didn't tell someone about his source of information?"

"Good point, girl. Guess there ain't no way of tellin' for sure."

"You think they did it?" she asked, while dropping the robe and stepping into a pair of panties.

"Who, the Russians?"

"Who else?"

"Yeah, probably ... he got dumped in the same place as his ol' lady," he nonchalantly replied, while inwardly concerned that the senator may have talked to someone about his meeting with Ralph.

"I'm gonna make some coffee, want some?"

"Yeah. Hey, have yah seen my trumpet?" he shouted to the departing girl.

"What are you talking about?" she frowned and asked.

"I had my trumpet with me when I left the garage ... I think."

"Trumpet? I never saw you with a trumpet, Ralph. See, I knew there was something different about you. When you wanna talk about it, let me know," she remarked as she turned to leave once again.

Fuck, I'm really goin' nuts, he said to himself, while standing over the toilet. It's gettin' harder to separate me from him. Even the airhead knows that somethin's screwy but hell, she sure is a good lay. But the trumpet, where the hell could I have left it? I gotta find it.

With Tommy working the night shift and the girls off to their table waiting jobs, Mick was left to his own devices. Although not a stranger to depression, he had always managed to

cope. But things had changed and Mick was no longer able to compartmentalize the two very different personalities. Who is the real me, he wondered, Mick or Ralph? I can't tell anymore. "Well, I'm Mick today," he mumbled to himself, while peering out of a window and munching on taco chips, "an' without my horn I ain't got nothin'. I sure as hell can't stay here much longer without makin' some dough an' I ain't gonna wait tables." He returned to the bedroom, turned on the TV and leaned back on the bed. Nothin' but news, he thought to himself, as he reached forward and spun the dial, stopping abruptly at the sight of a screen splash that said, *Late Breaking News*.

This just in. Sources close to the Senator Raymond investigation have indicated that the authorities are now holding a male Jamaican suspect in custody whom they feel may also be responsible for Wednesday's vicious garage-warehouse fire that damaged several buildings in the general vicinity ...

Jamaican? Garage fire? Oh shit! Mick remarked to himself with alarm, hope that ain't what I'm thinkin'. He ran to the trash in search of the prior day's newspaper but the bits and pieces that remained made no mention of the fire. "Fuck," he whispered, "the trumpet, I hope I didn't leave it there but hey, who says it's the same garage? An' why would Griff wanna kill the senator? This is gettin' too fucked up, I gotta get outta here."

"I have a collect call from a Mr. Michael Carrera to a Ms. Melanie Sands," the operator announced, "will you accept the charges?"

"Yes, operator," Melanie replied.

"Mel?" Mick said, a hoarseness in his voice.

"Mick, is something wrong?"

"No, it's just ... I miss you."

"Where are you?" she inquired, her tone void of emotion.

"San Francisco."

"Still playing with that Jazz group?"

"No, that fell apart when the club burned down."

"So what are you doing with yourself?"

"Not much of anything, right now."

"Tell me, Mick, why have you called after all this time?"

"How was graduation?" he asked, not knowing what else to say.

"It went fine, Mick, but you haven't answered my question."

"I told you, I miss you."

"Let's not go down that road again," she hissed.

"OK, how's your boyfriend?"

"It's over, we broke up last week."

"Sorry, Mel."

"No you're not. So, when are you coming back to New York?"

"I need a plane ticket."

"And you don't have any money, right?" she asked, tersely.

"Yeah, but that ain't why I called ..."

"I know you, Mick," she interrupted, "but that's OK, it would be nice to see you again."

"Seriously?"

"Yes, when do you want to leave?"

"As soon as possible."

"Alright, I'll call the airlines and see what's available.

What's your number?"

"I'm calling from pay phone."

"OK, call me back in an hour."