

Chapter Sixty-One

The flat was full of excitement and anticipation on Sunday morning. In his haste to build and install the release device, Mick hadn't given much thought to the explosion's actual timing. He knew that it had to be done after the young flower peddlers had left for the day and before their return, but within that time frame was an eight hour window. In addition, they had discussed the possibility that Kerberos might not be on the premises at the time of the blast and although he was Mick's primary target, the risk of his survival was accepted by all.

By nine A.M., all of the flat's occupants were seated on the living room floor.

"You know," Tommy remarked, while picking at a knee hole in his jeans, "I don't think we should send the signal from here."

"Why not?" the black haired girl asked, clad only in a flimsy robe.

"It might be traceable."

"Who'd be lookin'?" Mick inquired, an expression of disbelief spreading across his face.

"We're not doin' it from here, case closed!" Tommy cried out, his demeanor entirely uncharacteristic.

"OK, if yah feel that strongly, oi'll do it from one of them internet cafés but oi'm gonna need some money," Mick volunteered.

"Yeah, that's a good idea," Billy said, while sitting behind Tommy, rubbing his shoulders.

"If you like that, 'ere's another," Mick added, "oi won't tell yahs when oi'm gonna do it, this way you guys can't change yah minds."

"So," the black haired girl asked, "how will we know if it worked?"

"Ever been in an earthquake?" Tommy inquired, a smile of contentment on his lips, as Billy's strong hands relentlessly massaged his neck and shoulders.

"Earthquake?" she repeated.

"The grounds gonna shake when that thing goes off," he explained.

"There's that much stuff in there?" she asked, incredulously.

"Oh yeah," he replied, "enough for a small army."

"The money?" Mick reiterated.

"OK," Tommy said, shrugging Billy's hands away from his shoulders, "everybody ante up."

All he had to do was find an internet connected computer and sign on to their hidden laptop. After that, it was a simple matter of typing in the short string of computer code that Mick had written on the fly. If all went well, the explosion would terminate the connection and even without audible confirmation, Mick would know that the deed had been done. There was an internet cafe in the Haight but he had discounted using it for fear of being recognized. As he stood waiting for a bus, he realized that fulfilling his needs might not be that easy on a Sunday, so, he reversed course and headed for the Wharf district and the same row of stores that he had visited with the senator.

It was eleven o'clock by the time he had stepped off of the bus. Crowds of tourists packed the streets, causing mayhem for pedestrians and vehicles alike, but pushing his way through the throng was the least of his problems. Nary a single internet cafe could be found. Now what? he thought to himself. It ain't like I got all day, who knows how long those batteries will last. Hmm, I wonder if there's a library around here? He stopped at the nearest pay phone and dialed the flat. "It's Ralph, put Tommy on, oi got a problem," he said to the girl that answered.

"What went wrong?" Tommy asked excitedly.

"Oi can't find a computer. Where's the nearest library?"

"That would depend upon where you are, Ralph?"

"The Wharf," he snapped.

"Alright, don't get pissy on me, we'll find somethin'. OK, you can take a bus to the main library but that ain't gonna work."

"Why not?"

"You need a library card to use their stuff."

"You got one?"

"Why the hell would I need a library card?"

"Then you're gonna have tah do it from the flat," Mick said.

"No way, I'm not gonna take a chance on gettin' busted."

"So what the fuck do you suggest?"

"Well, you only need a library card to use their computers but not their WIFI."

"Brilliant, Tommy, but oi ain't got a frickin' computer!"

"You're on the Wharf, right?"

"Yeah, so?"

"There's a gazillion of those *goin' outta business* stores an' they all have overpriced laptops. Find one with built-in WIFI and steal it."

"So, it's not OK for you tah get busted but it is for me?"

"I'm thinkin' about the girls, Ralph, it wouldn't be fair for them to get involved."

"They are involved, you bloody idiot but OK, seein' as how we don't have much time, oi'll give it a try."

"Good luck, man," Tommy said, before clicking off.

Yeah, I'll need it, he commented to himself as he scanned the street for the perfect mark.

A clown stood entertaining the would-be customers in front of an electronics store. Hordes of bantering children danced about as they waited in line for their balloon constructed animals, while their parents ogled the store's window display of gray market cameras, telescopes and computers. This might work, he said to himself, as he walked among the shoving mass of onlookers and stationed himself alongside of a laptop display. The machine was plugged into an extension cord and was up and running. He had already envisioned himself inciting an altercation among the spectators, in order to create a diversion, but an icon on the computer's task bar caught his attention. They've got an open browser loaded on this thing, he thought to himself, why would they do that unless it's connected to the net? He gazed from side to side but no one was paying him any attention, so, he clicked on *Internet Explorer*. The browser popped up with an active web connection. Now, this is service, he chuckled, while quickly typing in the string of commands that would simultaneously connect with their concealed machine and signal the relay's release. That done, he punched the enter button and rather than wait for the anticipated lost connection, shutdown the browser and casually left the store. But as he

reached the pavement, the ground shook beneath his feet. The store's plate glass window, not two feet from where he now stood, shattered into lethally large pieces and struck the ground with a frightening crash. Some pedestrians took cover behind parked automobiles while others ran about in a state of panic shouting, "Earthquake, earthquake." Mick flicked a few errant chunks of glass from his shoulder and surveyed the street. Now, he said to himself, that's what oi call an explosion!

The trip back to the Haight was uneventful, but with a heightened level of anxiety he had the distinct feeling that there were watchful eyes upon him.

The bus stopped a few steps away from a psychedelically adorned cafe, a holdout from the area's hippie past. From the street, he could see the colorful screen of a ceiling mounted television and he entered and stood by the counter. "Coffee," he requested, his eyes glued to the screen, watching for anything suggestive of their level of success.

"What kind?" the skinny waitress asked, pointing to a lengthy list of possibilities while her two inch nose ring bounced about.

"What about regular?" he asked.

"Oh that, yeah we got some," she groaned, as if there was something unsavory about his request.

Sports, he bemoaned to himself while staring at the screen, nothin' but friggin' sports.

"It's a buck fifty," the waitress said, as she slid a cup across the counter.

"For a friggin' cup of coffee?" he complained.

"You got a problem with that?" she asked, still grasping the cup.

He hesitated, reached into his pocket and withdrew a five dollar bill, the remainder of the money collected from his friends. "Here, I want change," he said. She returned and glaring at him, slapped three singles and two quarters on the counter. "Would you mind changing the channel to a news station?" he asked, pretending to leave the cash on table.

"Yeah, I would, I'm watching the game."

He drained his cup, picked up the cash, all of it, and walked the two blocks back to the flat.

The four of them, Tommy, Billy and the two girls were standing around the old TV when he arrived. They greeted him like a celebrity, all talking at once. "So?" Tommy asked, acting as the spokesperson.

"Oi guess it worked."

"What do you mean, you guess?" Billy roared.

"Well, either it blew like 'ell or we 'ad an earthquake."

"Wasn't no quake," Tommy sneered.

"Anythin' on the news?"

"Not yet but we heard a shit load of sirens about twenty minutes ago," the black haired girl said.

"Keep watchin', oi'm gonna take a nap."

He awakened to a darkened room, the clock blinking six P.M. Shit, he said to himself, I'll bet it didn't do much damage an' double shit, I forgot to call Melanie. Maybe it's not too late. He dragged himself into the living room, checked the second bedroom but there was no one about. All alone, he headed for the kitchen wall phone. House rules had limited its use to local calls only. He stared at the green device for several seconds, figuring that a collect call didn't count for long distance and it was then that he noticed the yellow Post-it dangling from its base with the phrase, *The compound is gone*, scrawled in red lipstick. I knew it would work, he gloated, while lifting the receiver and dialing the operator.

"Yes, operator, I'll accept the call," Melanie said, an edge of irritation to her voice.

"Mel, sorry to call so late ..."

"What's going on out there?" she interrupted.

"What do you mean?"

"It's been all over the news, something about a terrorist attack in San Francisco?"

"Terrorist, really?"

"Yes, every station has been carrying the story and photos. They said that there was a giant explosion in a commune."

"That's news to me," he lied, his lips stretched into a big grin.

"Well, current events were never your forte, Mick, but you're OK, right?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, just anxious to get back to New York."

"There might be a problem with that."

"Why?"

"According to the news, they've temporarily suspended all flights to and from San Francisco."

"You're kidding, all that for a little explosion."

"It wasn't a little explosion, Mick. They've already found remnants of military weaponry and according to the news, it leveled the entire structure."

"Anybody hurt?"

"Yes, there were some unidentifiable bodies."

"So, what am I gonna do, Mel?"

"Can you get to Sacramento?"

"There's gotta be a bus that'll get me there."

"Get the information and call me back with the bus schedule."