

Chapter Sixty-Two

"Over here, Mick," Melanie shouted, her waving hand towering above the crowd at JFK arrivals.

Mick pushed his way ahead of the line, his battered overnight bag slung over one shoulder, as he ran towards his benefactor. With a big smile, he dropped the bag to the ground and leaned forward, offering his lips. "What's wrong?" he said, when she turned away.

"Do you have to ask?" she replied, her displeasure unmistakable.

"Sorry, I guess."

"Is that all you have?" she inquired, gesturing towards the small bag.

"Yeah, that's all."

"OK, then let's get out of this madhouse," she said, while heading for the exit.

"Where's your car?"

"It's in the lot."

They walked in silence through a maze of parked cars until she stopped alongside a red BMW. "This yours?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes. Why, is there something wrong with it?"

"No, it's just that I never thought you'd fall in with the rest of your crowd."

"What the hell did you mean by that?" she scowled, stopping midstream in the process of unlocking the driver's door.

"The Sand's Foundation an' all that money an' shit."

"Look, I didn't come here to argue," she declared, her face drawn tight with anger, "just get in."

"Sorry," he whispered, as he fastened his seat belt and settled into the supple leather.

"So, how was the flight?" she inquired, with some disinterest, while exiting the lot.

"Food sucked."

"You're lucky that you got any at all," she replied, a subtle smile, barely visible, appearing for the first time since his arrival.

"Yeah, guess so," he breathed, gazing out of the window as he spoke.

"Where's your horn?"

"Don't ask."

"What do you mean?"

"I lost it," he replied with a grimace.

"How in the world did you manage that?"

"I have no idea," he responded, as she came to an abrupt stop behind a taxi.

She turned to face him with a look of genuine concern.

"What's happening to you, Mick?" she asked.

He continued to stare out of the window as he pondered her question. What can I say, he remarked to himself, when I don't even know who I am?

"Mick, are you paying attention, I asked you a question?"

"I'm OK," he replied, hoping that she would change the topic.

"And your other problem?"

"You mean the Vigo crap?"

"Yes."

"Not so good. I need to see him sometime soon."

"Uh," she hesitated, "I'm afraid that won't be possible."

"Why not?" he asked, while stealing a glimpse of her powder blue panties, her short skirt having risen above her thighs.

"He passed away."

"Fuck," he cried, "now what am I gonna do?"

"Have a little compassion, Mick, the man's dead."

"Yeah, but I ain't an' I need help an' the idea of startin' all over ain't appealin'."

"We'll find another psychiatrist through the foundation."

"But they won't understand," he whined, "an' I ain't goin' through all that hypno-shit again."

"Don't worry, it'll work out."

"Huh, what?" he whispered, a barely audible voice making an unintelligible declaration, a voice that he had been trying desperately to ignore.

"Did you say something?"

This better not be happenin' now, he warned himself, not now, stay the fuck away!

"Are you daydreaming?" she asked.

"No," he lied, "I was thinkin' about you an' your boyfriend. What happened between you two?"

"Just didn't work out."

"Just like that? C'mon, there's gotta be more."

"What do you want, Mick, the gory details? It's over, isn't that enough?" she asked, as she slammed on the brakes to avoid a weaving taxicab while shooting a bird at the turban sporting driver.

"Hey, you tryin' to kill me?" he shouted, his hands braced against the dashboard.

"Why don't you ask that putz?" she hissed, pointing at the cab that had taken a position in front of them, his brake lights flashing in an obvious attempt at provocation.

"Hey, I was just jokin', calm down."

"So, am I taking you to your apartment?"

"I'm probably locked out. Haven't paid the rent in awhile."

She shook her head in disbelief. "Why did I even ask," she volunteered.

"Do you think I could stay with you ... just until I get things together?"

"I don't know, Mick. I've tried to move our relationship to a different level."

"You know, there ain't been no one else for me. I still think about us."

"That's what I'm talking about, you still see an *us*, where I don't."

"Yeah, I guess you wouldn't want a nobody like me, you bein' a lawyer an' all."

"That's not it and you know it."

"OK, I'll be on my best behavior. You can even stick me in the frickin' guest room an' lock the door."

"I might just do that," she said, as she exited the highway onto the street leading towards her condo.

He awakened the following morning to gentle knock on the guest room door. "Yeah, gimme a minute, I'll be right there," he called out.

"It's not necessary. I just wanted to tell you that I got you an appointment with Dr. Dolores Dacosta," she said.

"Who's he?" he asked, through the still closed door.

"He is a she, a psychiatrist with the foundation."

"Oh great," he moaned, while opening the door wrapped in a bath towel.

"Still sleep au naturel, huh?" she chuckled, his towel threatening to come unraveled.

"Only one way to know," he teased, reaching for the knot.

"That's quite alright, *res ipsa loquitur*."

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"It speaks for itself!"

"Sounds good, Mel."

"What?"

"The lawyer speak, it fits you."

"Look, about the appointment, don't make me look bad. I had to pull some strings to get it so soon," she warned, handing him a sheet of her personal stationary with written directions.

"Impressive," he whistled and said, while pointing at her official letterhead.

"Never mind that, just make sure you keep that appointment."

"Yeah, yeah, don't worry. So where are you goin' all dressed up at this hour?"

"I have an interview."

"At six-thirty in the morning?"

"Yes, Mick, some people actually get to work before sunup."

"Is this an interview for a real job?" he taunted.

"Yes, a Manhattan law firm."

"Don't yah have to take some kind of test before workin' as a lawyer?"

"Yes, the Bar exam but most big firms help you prepare for that and this is one of them. Look, there's food in the fridge, just don't make a mess, the maid quit two weeks ago," she said as she turned to leave, adding, "gotta go, don't want to be late."

Through the closed door, he could hear the sound of her heels clicking on the marble covered hallway. Man, she sure looked hot, he remarked to himself. But I guess it's over between us, after all, what would a rich lawyer want with a fucked up guy like me but, then again ...?

Following Melanie's departure, he had returned to the guest room for a few more hours of sleep. He tossed and turned but slumber resisted, thwarted by the sound of an unfamiliar tune. The walls in this place must be real thin, he thought to himself, as he wrapped the pillow around his head in an attempt to muffle the humming, without success. And then, realizing that the pillow had only intensified the droning, terrified, he jumped from the bed. Shit, he said to himself, the frickin' tune is comin' from my head! Oh fuck, Ralph, not now, go away. The humming ceased.

Melanie had thoughtfully equipped the guest bathroom with a new toothbrush, fresh towels and an assortment of toilet articles but Mick had a dilemma. With his only pair of jeans lying crumpled on the floor, he had nothing clean to wear. So, naked, he padded into Melanie's bedroom and rummaged through her closet. Maybe her old boyfriend left something behind, he thought to himself, as he carefully moved aside her dresses and gowns, stopping now and then to sniff the perfume saturated fabric. Nothing, he said to himself, but she does have a shitload of jeans and since we're the same height ...?

Removing a well worn pair from its hanger, he stepped into it and stood before her full length mirror. Remarkable though the fit was, there was no hiding its feminine intent. This ain't gonna work, he mused, as he began foraging through a chest of drawers in search of loose change, lingering when he came across her lingerie. He ran his fingers through the silky material, evoking memories of their intimate past, when suddenly, he heard a metallic clink. Still hiding it in here, he said to himself, while reaching to the rear of the drawer and removing a hand full of quarters and dimes. Well, this oughta be enough for the bus back to my old apartment. Now, I just gotta hope that the fuckin' superintendent ain't changed his ways an' that he's out somewhere, sleepin' off a drunk.

This place still stinks of bug spray, he remarked to himself, as he walked through the lobby of the old South Bronx building and walked to the elevator. "Whadda yah know, the frickin' thing's workin'," he hissed, as the door opened and he entered.

The hallway leading to his apartment was empty, save for the usual collection of scattered refuse. He walked to his door and inserted the key. I'm not surprised, he said to himself, when the lock resisted his efforts. Well, I ain't givin' up that easy. He turned and gazed at the frosted window that sat at the end of the corridor, the passage of last resort in case of fire. The window slid open with unexpected ease and he stepped out onto the fire escape. Vintage buildings often had numerous fire escapes on various sides of the structure and Mick's was no different. There was a two foot gap from where he stood to his old apartment's metal stairway. After looking about, making certain of his anonymity, he vaulted the distance, scraping his arm in the process. Peering through the window, spying his meager belongings stacked where he had left them, he began to push on the old wooden frame. "Ugh, he grunted, "I don't remember this bein' so hard to open." Then, suddenly, the resistance eased and the window slid upward a short distance and stopped but his body's momentum did not; the window shattered.

He flew through the opening, landing on the floor with a thud, and looked about as he flicked the shards from his clothes. Not wishing to remain longer than necessary, he filled a shabby suitcase with his limited wardrobe and rushed out of the building.

"I see you haven't forgotten where I keep the spare Key," Melanie remarked, a can of Pepsi in her hand as she sat on the couch.

"The old under the mat trick," Mick said, as he closed the front door, suitcase in hand.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"I needed a change of clothes, so, I went back to the hood to get my things but they'd locked me out."

"Then where did you get that?" she asked, gesturing with the soda can towards the suitcase.

"I got in," he gloated.

"Oh no, don't tell me that you broke in?"

"Then don't ask," he suggested, while walking past her to the guest room.

"OK, I won't," she giggled, as she rose from the couch and followed from behind, "but I have something to tell you."

"You're not pregnant, are you?"

"No silly, I got the job."

"Really?" he replied, with a disinterested tone, as he dumped the contents of the suitcase upon the bed.

"Aren't you happy for me?"

"Of course. It's just that you're movin' up an' me, well ... I'm nowhere."

"It doesn't have to be that way."

"Let's be frickin' real, what have I got tah offer?"

"Well for starters, what about your musical and computer skills?"

He sighed and kicked off his shoes. "You know what?" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"Today's about you, not me. Shouldn't we celebrate?"

"Yes! Put on your Sunday best, dinner is on me."