

## Chapter 1

**Wednesday, July 12 – 10:45 AM**

The air was gone.

The diver was 190 feet down and had less than two minutes to figure it out. His tanks should've had enough air to last him ten more minutes at the sunken wreck site, plus enough to decompress and surface with air to spare. But he was hard sucking and only a pint or two away from dead empty.

The man's eyes darted in all directions searching for his dive buddies, but they were nowhere in sight. He looked up. There were tanks he could use stationed on the anchor line running to the dive boat above, but they hung ninety feet up the line. He'd never be able to swim up and tap into one before he passed out or, worse, be forced by his brain to involuntarily inhale seawater. Every movement was costing him precious oxygen and his life clock was ticking off its last seconds.

The diver had to do the unthinkable. Inflate his rapid-deployment lift bag and shoot upward to the tanks. If he missed the tanks and popped to the surface, the bends would likely kill him, but he might at least die with his lungs full of air. He yanked the release on the bright orange inflatable, which burst to full size and jerked him toward the surface like a dangling marionette. His lungs began to burn and he strained to draw the last cubic centimeters of air from his exhausted tanks. At 110 feet he stopped sucking on his collapsed mouthpiece and held his breath. He tightened his lips to resist inhaling. His chest ached and he knew in seconds he'd reach the inevitable point where he'd have to breathe. The fresh tanks were directly above him and approaching fast. He grabbed at the anchor line and pulled one of the reserve tanks to his chest. He tried to turn his fear into a determined anger and fought to hold on to get the fresh mouthpiece to his lips took and drew in hard. But no air came in.

*The tank can't be empty,* his mind screamed.

The man shook the tank and sucked again on the mouthpiece. His grip on the anchor line weakened and he floated upward on the lift bag. He lost the standoff with his brain and drew in water, choking and flailing. His blinking eyes caught flashes of the sunlight as he drifted upward on the lift bag.

The day shone dazzling bright as he breached the surface, then faded into darkness, silence ... nothingness.

\* \* \*

### **Wednesday, July 12 - 3:45 PM**

Detective Frank Dugan waited on the dock as the U.S. Coast Guard patrol boat arrived and tied up. A young lieutenant stepped onto the weathered planks of the low pier and approached.

“We were on our regular shark-spotting run and saw the orange lift bag floating more than ten miles out off Jensen Beach,” the lieutenant said. “Closer look and we saw the diver. Can’t be more than thirty.”

“Best COD guess?”

“Drowned.”

“Coroner’ll be here shortly,” Frank said. “Is the body where he can examine it?”

“On the stern deck. We tried to resuscitate him, but ...”

“That’ll work.”

Henry O’Dell, a man who could double for a beardless Abraham Lincoln, marched up the pier toward the boat, his kit bag clutched in a latex-gloved hand.

Frank pointed to the boat’s aft section and followed the coroner onboard. Henry stared at the young body lying on the deck for several seconds.

“Prime of life,” Henry said and knelt next to the lifeless body. “Always a shame.”

While Frank was certain the diver was dead, he watched as Henry checked the body for any sign of life, a perfunctory procedure the law required him to perform. He examined the young man’s eyes and looked into his mouth.

“The Coast Guard tried CPR,” Frank said. “Nothing.”

“Let’s get him to the morgue,” Henry said. “We’ll know more there.”

The radio on the patrol boat control center squawked to life. The lieutenant grabbed the radio mike and said, “Go ahead base.”

“We just found a line tethered to a dive buoy,” a man’s voice on the radio said. “We pulled up two empty scuba tanks and a boat anchor on maybe sixty yards of line.”

“Bring it all to the Martin County Sheriff’s Office on Monterey,” the lieutenant said.

“Roger that,” the radio voice said and clicked off.

“Did you get that?” the lieutenant asked Frank, standing within earshot.

Frank nodded and stared hard at Henry O’Dell.

\* \* \*

The autopsy at the morgue that night confirmed the diver had died from drowning, but the nitrogen level in his blood was so high that he likely would have died from that, even if he’d made it to the surface alive. It appeared so simple; cut and dried. But Frank Dugan had an instinct for anything out of place, like a well-equipped diver who drowns on a perfect weather day, attached to a substantial floatation device, with no dive boat, no other divers, and empty scuba tanks. Even if he’d over-stayed his time deep below, his fellow divers would’ve been the ones to either help him or, at minimum, find him and get him medical assistance. To abandon him bobbing on the Atlantic’s summer currents was unimaginable. Frank’s thoughts moved from outrageous negligence to something much more purposeful, something planned. Something like murder.

Frank stepped into the Medical Examiner’s office where Henry O’Dell shuffled through papers on his cluttered desk. Henry was a 65-year-old country doctor who turned to the forensic science of the dead after tiring of years trying to fix the living. He drawled like the rural North Carolinian he was and, ever since he’d arrived in Stuart to take over the duties of the county coroner, he picked up the nickname “Digger O’Dell.” Frank later discovered “Digger” was a character who portrayed an undertaker in popular radio shows back in the ’40s. Henry took the good-natured ribbing in stride, but regardless of the demeaning moniker, the simple fact remained that Henry Bedford O’Dell was the finest man behind a scalpel and rotary saw Frank had ever seen. Even the hard core kidders had to throw in on that score.

“Henry, I have a friend who’s a certified diver that I want to take a look at this man before we go much further than IDing him and finding next of kin.”

“He can stay where he is for now,” Henry said.

Frank got on his cell phone and called his sheriff, Roland Brand.

“Chief, I’m over at Henry’s. I want every dive shop canvassed for any recently rented deep dive equipment, and I want all charter boats checked for any contact with a dive boat seen today in waters off Martin and St. Lucie Counties. If anything positive turns up, I’ll provide the serial numbers I took from the dive gear. Get Rumbaugh to start on that right away. I’m going to see the Coast Guard to get statements and have the guy’s dive equipment brought to the station. Then I’ll be in.”

Frank ended his call and turned to Henry.

“What’s your take?” Frank asked.

“Not sure,” Henry said and tilted back in his desk chair. “Could go either way. People do make mistakes, even smart people. And making them in deep water is never going to turn out good. Coast Guard thinks he just had air in his tanks. Might’ve got oxygen poisoning, lost focus.”

“Wasn’t he *supposed* to have air in his tanks?”

“At the depth where he was judged to be when he died, he should’ve been using a tri-mix of oxygen, helium, and nitrogen, not just air alone. Compressed air below 180 feet can make your mind play tricks, make you hallucinate. Can be deadly.”

“So you think he could’ve run out of air, or thought he was out of air, shot to the top and drowned on the way up?”

“Maybe.”

“You figure I’m over-thinking this?”

“Maybe.”

“For a man who deals in exact science, you sure give out a shitload of maybes.”

“And I’ll keep giving them out until I can say some fer-sures.”

Frank moved to the doorway of the office and stared into the morgue.

“It can go several ways, Frank. Right now we need more information. Right now we don’t even know who this poor boy is.”

“You’re right. But my crap meter is way over on suspicious. You know, if someone murdered this guy, but afterward brought him ashore, or called the Coast Guard, I wouldn’t be thinking so much in the direction of foul play. But just leaving him out there? That has the hackles on my neck bristling high and stiff.”

“We’ll know more by and by,” Henry said and rose from his chair.

“One thing’s for damn sure,” Frank said, “That fella wasn’t diving alone out there.”

Henry stepped over to Frank and placed his hand on his shoulder.

“I know you want by and by to be soon.” Henry said. “Like you, I don’t want the truth to drown with that young man.”

## Chapter 2

### Thursday, July 13 - 9:10 AM

Orion “Orrie” Costello, Frank’s long time friend and proprietor of *Mariner’s Haven*, spread out a chart of the local Atlantic Ocean on his showroom counter. The chart showed the coastal area as far north as Vero Beach and almost to Palm Beach County in its southern extreme.

Orrie operated the biggest ocean diving business in the southeast of Florida. He owned and captained a state-of-the-art dive boat, and his vast storehouse of underwater knowledge Frank drew upon often. It was said that Orrie’s mind was an encyclopedia of marine lore that almost anyone could tap by asking him any nautical question.

“They picked up the body here, off Fort Pierce,” Orrie said and pointed to a location fifteen miles out to sea from the beaches off the thin barrier known as Hutchinson Island. “The gulf stream currents in that area could place the actual drowning from that point back to anywhere south. Any idea about how long he may have drifted?”

“Henry says the body’d been dead for three to five hours,” Frank said, standing beside his friend.

“That could put him somewhere around here,” Orrie said and placed his finger on the chart at a point closer to shore and farther south.

“That’s still over twelve miles out off Stuart. That’s deep water.”

“More than 200 feet, give or take a few fathoms.”

“What’s of diving interest near there?”

“Well, they sunk an old navy ship, a small cruiser, not far from there about five years ago,” Orrie said, “but it’s only in maybe a hundred-and-thirty feet of water. Recreational diving depth.

Wanted to create a reef for the sea life. Divers find those old wrecks irresistible for some reason.”

“Ever dive one?” Frank asked.

“I have, but it’s not as tempting to me as it is to others. Dangerous. Many a diver’s been tangled up inside those old scrap heaps. And for what? They always remove every worthwhile thing off a ship before they dunk her. Me? Give me the ancient galleons. Rotten wood and all.”

“If they’re ancient, I imagine there’s not a whole lot of wood, rotten or otherwise.”

“Aye to that, but what’d been stowed in her belly when she took the plunge, now that’s the magical stuff.”

“Like the things Mel Fisher pulled up from the *Atocha*?”

“Precisely. Gold artifacts, silver coins and ingots, bronze bells. Sleeping treasures and a library’s worth of rich history.”

“And what have you found so far?”

“Great Kodak moments and a couple of silver coins, but there’s more out there. A hell of a lot more, covered by a wee bit of sand.”

“What’s a ‘wee bit’ amount to?”

“Could be ten, fifteen feet of it.”

“If it’s under fifteen feet of sand, how do you know where to dig?” Frank asked.

“Ah, and that’s the tricky part. But I’ll save telling you how we do it for another day.”

Frank missed investigating cases with his Irish-American friend and called on him whenever his police work could use an extra set of trained eyes. Orrie had moved his charter boat company from Portland, Maine to Fort Pierce and specialized in sunken treasure exploration and underwater photography. Frank knew that a lot of ships went down off the eastern coast of Florida, old ships from back as far as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, fleets laden with gold and silver that have never been uncovered. Frank trusted that Orrie one day would find his *Atocha* and make history in the bargain.

“What did you think about Henry’s assessment?” Frank said.

“The lad drowned. No doubt about that. I’ve seen too many like him. It’s *why* he drowned that needs to be answered. I want to see his gear.”

“In the evidence room back at the station.”

\* \* \*

Orrie met Frank at the Sheriff’s Office in Stuart late in the afternoon. The diving equipment was laid out on a table in the caged evidence room lit by a fixture directly above, a special light that could duplicate bright sun, gray overcast, a sunset’s amber glow, and several varieties of artificial light. Orrie took particular interest in the gauges connected to the air tanks and adjusted the light to maximum brightness.

“They show no air,” Orrie said. “The fella had to see that.”

“Maybe he was sure he had plenty and didn’t check it until it was too late,” Frank said.

“He checks it early into the dive and he has full tanks. Later he starts having trouble getting air, but knows he shouldn’t be out. He makes sure his valves are fully open. No help, so he switches to his reserve tank. It’s out too.”

“How deep is he?”

“By his approximated nitrogen level, deep. Maybe over 180 feet, but time spent at that depth can vary the level.”

“What’s he do then?”

“Gets air from his dive buddies.”

“And he can’t find them,” Frank said.

Orrie began acting out the scene, swimming with his hands and darting frantic glances from one side of the room to the other.

“Panic sets in,” Orrie said. “He’s too deep to shoot to the top, but he has no choice. He inflates his lift bag and heads up, fast.”

“How long does that take?”

“Too long unless he can suck a last breath from the tanks. There should be reserve tanks up on the anchor line for the divers’ decompression stops. If he reaches one of them, maybe halfway up and switches mouthpieces, he could be okay.”

“But he wasn’t okay. He drowned.”

“Aye. He shot to the surface dead or dying. The irony here is that he had air in the lift bag that might’ve saved him.”

“Why didn’t he use it?”

“Inexperience, I suspect. Inexperience and panic, a deadly combination.”

“What were his chances if he had made the surface with air in his lungs?”

“Ascending that fast from 180 feet would put you in a serious situation for the bends. The nitrogen bubbles trying to leave his blood would cripple him or kill him, unless he could get immediately into a hyperbaric chamber, and I mean immediately.”

“Why was the anchor line tied to a buoy and not a boat?” Frank asked. “Where’s the boat that should’ve secured it? Where are those diving buddies?”

“Good questions all. With nary an answer right now.”

Frank’s cell rang.

“Dugan.” Frank said.

Frank looked over at Orrie as he listened for almost a minute to his phone.

“Got it,” Frank said and ended the call.

Orrie stared at Frank.

“His name is Chadwick. Michael Chadwick. Age twenty-eight from Jensen Beach.”

“Fingerprints on file?” Orrie asked.

“Yeah. Former Marine,” Frank said, his voice low. “Afghanistan vet. Bronze Star, Purple Heart. Wife and two little ones.”

“He survives international warfare, only to come back home to die prematurely in his own country.”

“He didn’t just die,” Frank said. “Somebody’s killed that man.”

\* \* \*

**Friday, July 14 - 8:05 AM**

Sheriff Roland Brand sat tilted back in a big leather chair at his desk in the Martin County Sheriff's Office in Stuart and bunched his mouth as he stared at a note on his lap. Frank Dugan leaned against the wall near a window, his arms folded.

"Make any sense of it?" Frank asked.

Roland turned toward Frank, pushed his reading glasses up onto his forehead, and looked at him for a moment.

"You got enemies in New York City?"

"That where it's from?"

"Yeah, midtown. Should be easy enough to track down. Couldn't be more than a couple a million folks living there."

"Read it again."

Roland flipped his glasses back onto his nose and read.

"*'The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones.'*"

"Shakespeare," Frank said. "Mark Antony's speech at Caesar's funeral. Why send that to me?"

"Who do you know in New York?"

"A couple of cops from my Baltimore PD days. An FBI agent or two. No literature scholars or Thespians."

"This is sent to your attention. *'To Detective Frank Dugan: The dead diver's best friend.'*"

"Well, one thing's for sure. Michael Chadwick didn't die by accident. By this note, somebody just as well as confessed."

"And somebody wants you to know that," Roland said and popped his chair upright, shifted his abundant frame forward, and tossed the note on his desk. "And that somebody knows you."

"I got nothing."

"Well, you'd better *get* something," Roland said. "'Cause I got a strange feeling this somebody ain't gonna stop until he gets your undivided attention."

Frank recalled from his college history classes that Casca had been the first assassin to stab Julius Caesar in the Roman senate on March 15, 44 B.C., followed by several others; an Ides of March bloodbath that ended with Brutus plunging in one of the final daggers. That recollection

was reinforced by the coincidence that Frank had once acted in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* when he was a student at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

More thought-provoking was the fact that Frank had played the part of Marcus Junius Brutus.

### Chapter 3

#### Sunday, July 16 - 10:40 AM

Frank Dugan watched the newly-widowed Keely Chadwick dab her eyes as she departed from her husband's graveside ceremony in Jensen Beach. He hated to ask her questions at such a moment, but the clock was not his friend when investigating a murder case whose clues were so time-sensitive, dwindling and cooling with each passing day.

"Ms. Chadwick?" Frank said as he approached her car.

"Yes?"

"I'm Detective Dugan from Martin County."

"Oh ..."

"I know this is not the best time to talk to you, but if you feel up to answering a few questions, I think it will help us find Michael's killer."

Keely stepped away from her car door and leaned on the fender.

"Ask away. I'm a Marine's wife. I always prepared for the worst."

"The worst shouldn't befall a warrior in our country."

Keely dropped her eyes.

"Do you know any details about Michael's dive last week?" Frank asked.

"Not a lot. Said he'd met some people who knew where an old sunken ship was that had carried gold and silver.

"Not even where he was meeting the dive boat?"

"Off Fort Pierce ... somewhere."

Frank nodded, but Fort Pierce specifics would not be an easy pin-down. Frank knew there were at least twenty docking piers and boat-launching marinas in St. Lucie County along what was called the Treasure Coast, and all of them lay outside of his police jurisdiction. Running down leads from the St. Lucie Inlet to the Sebastian Inlet would be exhausting, time-consuming, and probably turn up nothing useful.

“What time of day did he head out?” Frank asked.

“Uh ... dawn, I think. He kissed me goodbye in the bed ...”

Keely pressed a tissue to her eyes.

“It was almost dark outside,” Keely said, “but I do remember one thing.”

Frank leaned closer.

“Mike said the boat was a Zodiac, whatever that means.”

Frank knew that Zodiac manufactured a variety of mostly portable boats kept afloat by an inflated tube surrounding the bow and sides of the vessel. The Coast Guard used them for sea rescue and as chase boats to nab illegal drug running, and many larger boats used Zodiacs as landing crafts and lifeboats. The popular models were light, fast, and could be easily carried or towed by any mid-size land vehicle.

“That seems like a strange choice for a serious treasure dive,” Frank said.

Keely shrugged.

“If you can send me a recent photo of your husband, it would help my investigation,” Frank said and handed her a business card.

Keely nodded.

“Well, thank you for your time,” Frank said. “My very best thoughts to you and your family. If I can be of any help to you, please don’t hesitate to contact me. Any help at all.”

“Police officers do that?”

“It’s not a police gesture. Mike and I are members of a much more exclusive club.”

“What club is that?” Keely asked, her eyebrows knitted.

“The Semper Fi Club.”

\* \* \*

The next morning Frank set out for St Lucie County. There were seven popular boat launching ramps in the Fort Pierce area of north Hutchinson Island. Frank had visited four of them in the past and knew they all had one thing in common: they were free and unsupervised. Permit data and rental records wouldn't exist for these ramps, making his pursuit of that angle for clues futile. A couple of divers with a Zodiac could launch their boat, park their vehicle, have a day on the water, and later depart without a witness to their presence. There had to be some other way to nail down a lead on Mike Chadwick's expedition on the day of his death.

Frank wandered around the station in Stuart like a window shopper looking for something exciting enough to make him stop and go inside. He'd checked the bulletin board, the mail boxes, the duty roster, and even the evidence log. Nothing gave him the answer he needed, that all-important starting point to launch his investigation. Sheriff Roland Brand's office came into view on his third tour through the station. He stopped at the door and looked in at Roland who clutched an oversize coffee mug and seemed rapt in the local newspaper. After a moment, Roland looked up at Frank.

"You look like you just lost your best friend," Roland said. "Oh, wait, I know. Working on Sunday depresses you."

Frank stepped into the office, ignored the remark. "I can't get a handle on the Chadwick case."

"Not a lot to go on. You got a body and little else."

"It's different when the crime is committed in a building, in a house. There are always clues. Blood, DNA, fingerprints, trace, people who saw something. The Chadwick crime scene is an ocean."

"Tell me something I don't already know," Roland said and took a generous pull on his coffee.

"Whoever they were went on this dive on a Zodiac. If they bought the boat new, specifically for this crime, a purchase order might be on record at the manufacturer."

"Let me get this straight. You think someone came down here, bought an expensive boat and motor, took Mike Chadwick out to sea, and rigged his equipment so he drowned.

"Well, what do *you* think?"

“I think they already had the boat and everything else to do the deed. Why would they spend all that money and leave a trail back to a recent purchase?”

“All I’m saying is it’s possible they bought everything new for the job. Probably hauled it away when they left.”

Roland slapped the desk with his palm. “You’ve chosen the least likely scenario. A boat and motor alone would cost thousands new.”

“Here’s a flash: Some folks make more money than cops. I’m living testimony to that.”

Roland crumpled his paper and tossed it in his trash can.

“Maybe you’d make more if you come off these way-out-beyond-Pluto ideas,” Roland said.

“Some folks down in Palm Beach buy Lamborghinis, drive ’em around for a couple of weeks, then give ’em to the hired help. Maybe our killer’s a Richie Rich Afghani who hated Chadwick.”

“Maybe,” Roland said. “There’s a hell of a lot of maybes in this case.”

“I don’t know why you have other detectives here when I’m the one doing all the detecting.”

Frank exited the office and double-timed it for his desk and his PC.

Roland boomed out a parting shot.

“We are blessed to have you, Sherlock.”

\* \* \*

## **Tuesday, July 18 - 10:10 AM**

The Zodiac Marine Company, an international corporation, sold thousands of their unique watercrafts around the world annually. When Frank refined his search to the United States in the recent six months, he learned that most had been shipped to large organizations, such as the Coast Guard and departments of natural resources in many U.S. states. Large yachts and commercial shipping ranked next in percentage of American sales. Lastly, there had been a few recent orders coming from their distributors for individuals. The list was still daunting, but Frank decided to level his attention to those sales originating in Florida and then move up the east coast. He didn’t have to run far down his list before he struck criminology pay dirt.

A Zodiac had been purchased and picked up a week ago at AquaSport Marine Supply in Sebastian Inlet. A 140 horsepower Mercury outboard motor had been added to the purchase. The seventeen-foot Classic Pro boat was easily capable of handling a small ocean dive team and their equipment. The Zodiac could do forty knots and nimbly outrun almost any boat on the water. The problem Frank had with the choice of a Zodiac for a treasure dive rested in its difficulty to maintain a steady anchor line for its divers. Of course, in the Michael Chadwick case, the boat's captain hadn't bothered to concern himself with that important safety procedure.

Finally, Frank had a starting point that hinted promise. He would take the photo of Mike Chadwick that Keely had sent to the station and ask around at the marinas to see if anyone could confirm seeing him with the others in his diving group. Things were looking hopeful and Frank felt a boost of enthusiasm as he drove to Fort Pierce.

On another up-note, Roland had compared Frank's "far-out-beyond-Pluto" theory about the origin of the vessel used in the crime to parallel National Transportation Safety Board experts submitting calculated judgments as to what caused a plane to crash, only to find that the "alien attack" theory posed by an airline mechanic turned out to be the actual reason.

\* \* \*

## **Tuesday, July 18 - 12:40 PM**

AquaSport Marine Supply bustled with activity as Frank crabbed his way down the store's crowded center aisle to the service counter in the back. There, a bald man with glasses wore a gray uniform shirt with the name "Earl" embroidered over the left breast pocket. He looked up and smiled at Frank's arrival.

"How may I help you, sir?" Earl said.

Frank flashed his badge and ID.

"Detective Frank Dugan. Like to ask you a few questions—"

"Let's move over this way," Earl said with a gesture to the far end of the counter. "Is this about those men who killed the dolphin?"

"No. It's about those men who killed another man."

"Oh ... I don't know about that one."

Frank took the photo of Mike Chadwick from a small notebook and placed it on the counter in front of Earl.

“Recognize this man? May have been here last week. Wednesday.”

Earl studied the photo.

“I don’t remember seeing a fellow like him.”

“He might’ve been here with some people who just bought a seventeen-foot Zodiac and a Mercury outboard.”

“If they bought a boat, that’d go through Les Boggs out in the boat house.”

“He here?”

“Out next to the pier. Green building, says ‘Boathouse’ on the roof.”

“Les Boggs?” Frank said.

“If it has to do with any boat or motor sales, Les’ll know for sure.”

Frank grabbed the photo and stuck it back in the note pad.

“Many thanks,” Frank said and threaded his way through the milling shoppers to the outside.

An eighty-yard march later, Frank entered the boathouse. The only person inside was a redheaded man of about sixty, sitting behind a desk covered with marine parts, a computer monitor, and every size and color of paper clutter.

“Earl said you might be the man to see about this fella,” Frank said, holding up the Chadwick photo.

Les squinted and took a good look at the photo.

“Looks familiar,” Les said. “What’s this about?”

Frank gave Les a badge flash.

“He was murdered.”

“Here?”

“No. in the ocean off Stuart. Drowned.”

“How does that involve this business?”

“The people he went on a dive with bought a new Zodiac and a Merc motor. They’re the ones I’m interested in.”

“Seventeen-footer. Classic Pro with a 140-hoss Merc outboard. Yep, I remember them. Three of them. Your buddy there in the picture made four. Had a shitload of diving gear. The buyer said they were going wreck diving. Always means treasure hunting.”

“You don’t, by chance, have any video of these people?”

“Naw. We keep dogs here at night. Don’t need surveillance during the day.”

“Can you describe the three who purchased the boat?”

“Young. Dark hair. Twenty-five to thirty, maybe. Kinda Yankee talking. You know, like Boston, New York, Jersey.”

“They launched from here?”

“Yeah, but never came back,” Les said.

“That figures. They were returning a man short,” Frank said. “How’d they pay?”

“The buyer paid cash. Lots of hundred dollar bills. Had the office check them with one of them counterfeit pens.”

“All okay?”

“Good as gold ... or whatever the dollar’s worth these days.”

“Did you write him up a receipt? Get any signatures?”

“Just a cash receipt. Nothing else required.”

“Got it.”

Les looked at Frank askance.

“You asked if I wrote ‘*him*’ up a receipt.”

“Yeah ...”

“Well, this ‘*him*’ was a her.”