

# **DEEP END**

## **THE WRECK OF THE EDDIE FITZ**

Harry G. Pellegrin



*For my beautiful wife of eleven years,  
Elaine Denise  
and my daughters Veronica and  
Amanda,  
God's confirmation.*



## *It was a Low End, but it's only the beginning...*

My first completed novel, *Low End*, was a done deal, as far as the actual writing was concerned, by August of 2000. However, in that embryonic stage, as I see it now, I considered it only to be a source of entertainment for my small handful of friends. There were no grand plans of publication at the time; I merely sought to spin off a few photocopies to be distributed as Christmas gifts—dubious quality Christmas gifts at that!

Even with so little pretense in my strategy, the manuscript would still have to be bounced off one of my most literate friends, Keith Legg. “You know, I’m *really* busy right now” he said as I handed him the sheaf of paper, “so I can’t promise you I’ll get to it any time soon.” Well, at least it was in his hands, and Christmas was still four months away. Two days later, the phone rang. “You kept me up until four in the morning!” He explained in a voice fraught with fatigue. “At eight or so, I thought I’d just knock off a chapter of your book before bed. Couldn’t put the thing down! What a wild ride!”

With that manner of endorsement from a well-read English teacher, the plot thickened. Why not try to get published? *Get published*, who, me? As any neophyte author can tell you, you just can’t approach a major publishing house without a literary agent and you can’t get an honest literary agent unless some large publishing house has published something of yours already! This knowledge nearly discouraged me from the attempt, but I figured *I’ve got a day job, crummy as it is, I’ll just plug away at pestering publishers and see what happens*. A year of rejection, some kindly, some helpful, some downright nasty, ended with a contract with Bedside Books, a division of American Book Publishing based in Salt Lake City, Utah. The editing and pre-release chores almost filled the entire next two years. *Low End* was finally released for Internet sale in July of 2003 and slated for general retail on March 8, 2004, a date roughly between Rory Gallagher’s birthday and St. Patrick’s Day. A little bit of Mojo working there, eh?

Everyone who knows me and has read *Low End* has the same question: *You are Gary Morrissey, right?* And to everyone I have the same answer: No! Then they’d invariably say: *Come on, Gary is a musician, he was divorced and he lived in Yonkers—and that’s a good portion of your saga as well, isn’t it?* While that is all true, I simply picked and chose from among the baggage I have carried to supply Gary with enough *American Tourister* for a three-dimensional personality. Still, he is not me, I am not he.

*Deep End: The Wreck of the Eddie Fitz* is a continuation of characters introduced in *Low End*. I had become fond of our Gary, and from feedback I’d received from many readers; other folks have warmed to him as well. I had intentionally left the first novel with a somewhat open end. Life never delivers complete closure. The way I saw it, why shouldn’t art—my scribbling at least—imitate life? An *added* benefit of leaving some loose ends guaranteed that the chance for a sequel would always be there.

The book you are holding in your hands was actually an open file on my computer less than a month after my fateful conversation with Keith Legg, yet I didn’t stand with Gary and Brad in the parking lot of the New Rochelle Municipal Marina until July of 2003. Life got in Gary’s way, much as it had gotten in my way and for the two of us, three years had passed. It had required a solemn effort on my part to help Gary get back into the fray.

While *Low End* was a story of one man’s fractured ethics doing battle with another man’s paranoia, *Deep End* is a tale of religious delusion and one man’s compulsion to murder. The seed of the premise came in the person of Dr. Norman Dobbs, a minister and wonderful man of the cloth, who is battling voodoo’s stranglehold on the nation of Haiti. His recounts of spiritual

combat in the slums of what should and could be a Caribbean paradise are truly unique and inspiring.

The other brain-jog that kicked off this story was a question my nine-year-old daughter Veronica asked. “Dad, what is the difference between a serial killer and a mass murderer?” Kids ask the darndest questions, especially these days. I tried to describe Jeff Dahmer and Adolph Hitler, the examples that came to mind. My final answer to her? A serial killer enjoys killing and often culls from the same demographic group to select victims and frequently uses the same means of death. A mass murder harbors deep hatred for a group of people and kills them by any possible means in an attempt to achieve a very specific goal. I noticed as I spoke that my definitions had an overlapping area. What would you call a man who enjoys killing, wants a certain group of people dead to further a plan, and uses a methodological model or even models—in the plural—to craft his crimes? Is he a serial killer or a mass murderer? At that point do we merely use his tally as a deciding point? If so, what benchmark in the number of victims separates a serial killer from a mass murderer? I’m not a criminologist, psychologist or sociologist and have no real credentials or even a real need or desire to answer the question definitively, it is a very interesting point to ponder. I’ll let Gary sweat this one for me.

Frankly, I’m slightly concerned about this book. Why? Well, there is always the famous *curse of the sophomore effort* to overcome. Aside from that aspect, readers who liked the depth of character development in *Low End* may not be as happy with *Deep End*. Are the characters less real? No, I did not wish to squander a huge quantity of redundant ink re-revealing Gary Morrissey to a reader who already knows him from the first book, that’s all. Does the reader *have* to have read *Low End* to enjoy this book? No, I don’t believe this to be true. With that said, I think there will be a better understanding and appreciation if *Low End* is read first.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this novel, you have my most sincere gratitude for picking it up. I had a great time writing it as I always enjoy spending a long evening with my dear friends from the old neighborhood. A Bronx pal emailed me a month back. He had used the line: *They were the best of times; they were the worst of times...* to describe the days we’d spent in bar bands, cheap studios, cheaper bars and our other tawdry haunts. These truly were the best and worst of times. Yes, the phrase fits. However, Dickens penned that one a long time ago. What a pity. I could have really used that one here.

Harry G. Pellegrin  
Scotia, New York  
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# Prologue

“I’m sorry, I just *can’t* do it!” As she spoke a single tear rolled down her cheek. She had tried to hold it back, but the emotions were just too strong. She felt the warm wetness of that big, fat, wet and salty tear crawling down her face, gaining speed as it made the transition from her incredibly high cheekbone to the velvet smoothness of an ivory cheek. She knew the saline bead was clearly visible and its presence made her feel frail. She had planned to remain business-like and simply turn down the offer. But this guy was different. Her emotions were all rubbed raw. He was intimidating. No, that didn’t really describe it. He was *sinister*.

The lamp on the desk cast a golden circle of light on the carpet. It illuminated nothing of his face. She felt that he was smiling. She couldn’t see it, but she felt it. He spoke slowly and clearly, trying to sound comforting. *Have a drink* he’d suggested. There was a sideboard close to her with a number of crystal decanters. She stood up, approached the liquor and selected the decanter with the little brass plaque marked *Brandy*.

After pouring a glass, she resumed her seat. A sip or two had her feeling a bit less shaky. He assured her that quitting the company was not in her best interest but that he certainly understood her concerns. *Was she certain of her decision?* Yes, she assured him, she was.

*Well, finish your drink and we’ll conclude our business.* He’d said, and she did just that, in one smooth motion. She felt all warm and comfy now. She’d be okay. Okay. Her head slumped back into the warm dark air behind the chair. The glass slipped from her fingers and fell to the carpet with a hollow ring.

*Such a lovely little body,* he thought as he carried her from the chair to the next room.

# Chapter One

“Damn!

Dave knelt on the swim platform and swore, gazing fixedly at the small trail of phosphorescent bubbles breaking on the water’s surface. It seemed to be wasted effort. The waters of Long Island Sound are murky enough in daylight. At night, they reveal nothing.

“Gary!” he snapped, “you ready to go?”

I nodded. The waters of the Sound were moderately calm and the boat hadn’t turned much at all on her anchor line. I stood on the swim platform with my fins in one hand, the other hand pressing my mask and regulator in place on my face. My gauge console and octopus—a spare regulator—were tucked under my arm. A large light array was mounted to my single Super 80 tank, but it wasn’t powered up. With the water only twenty five feet in depth, I would just walk off the platform right over the still-visible phosphorescence and bottom out right on top of Dave’s mask. That was our hastily conceived plan. I stepped off.

Diving at night didn’t bother me much at all. In fact, I enjoyed it more than diving in daylight. This was a far cry from a few short years ago. When my basic open water license was fresh, I’d insisted I’d never dive either on wrecks or at night. Now it seems I only dive at night or on a wreck—or at night *on* a wreck! Figures. I no longer insist on anything. My first night dive had been during an advanced certification class at Dutch Springs in Pennsylvania. The initial fear had been replaced by a sense of awe that no amount of terror could have displaced. In that crystal-clear spring water, the dive had felt like an extra-vehicular excursion in space. We hung weightless in an inky void illuminated by our small lights. The water was invisible to the extent that it no longer seemed to exist, three hundred sixty degrees of nothingness. That wasn’t the condition of Long Island Sound.

Muddied by shore runoff and decades of sewage and solid waste dumping, and further fouled by rapid tide changes, visibility in the Sound is, at best, about four to ten feet. Normally it is like diving in a tin bucket full of bile-green paint. At night, when the water is truly black, you focus more on what’s exposed by the beams of your lights and actually *see* more.

I blew gently into my sinuses while squeezing my nose with my fingers. This pressurized my ears as the external water pressure increased. At twenty-five feet, I’d just barely be missing the one atmosphere of additional pressure that you pick up at thirty-three feet, so I could drop rather quickly.

Dave, my friend and dive buddy, had made the mistake of placing his rather expensive mask on the side of the boat and when He’d turned around with his scuba unit on, the tank had punted it over the side. I’d find it easily enough. My feet hit the bottom and I let my momentum slowly fold me into a seated position. It would be easiest to get my fins on in this position. I reached back and hit the switch for the lights. It was a bit clumsy with neoprene gloves on, but I got it on the second attempt. The sudden illumination startled a two or three-foot sand shark who took off in a hurry leaving only a string of shark crap to mark his passing. I don’t care how small one of those sand sharks is, I will unreservedly admit he spooked me.

With the fins on, I was able to assume a more conventional swimming posture and slowly turned on axis, Dave’s bright yellow *Cressi* mask was lying on top of the silt about five feet to one side. I picked it up and tapped a short blast on the inflator button to inflate my BCD, a *buoyancy control device*, slightly to get a bit buoyant. Exhaling continuously, I rose towards the surface, one arm straight above my head. One rationale for having the arm up is that, supposedly, it might keep a diver from taking a prop in the back of the head in heavily navigated waters. I don’t buy that one. My motivation—I didn’t feel like coming up under the boat and



beaming myself on it—been there, done that. I had rung my bell good and proper on the steel hull of the dive boat *Rebel* while ascending from an excursion down the Texas Tower.

A pale form loomed in the dusky haze, the bottom of the *Sea Snake*. I broke the surface at the foot of the ladder to one side of the outdrive. Dave took the mask I held at arm's length and readied to enter the water as well. I hung on the ladder and killed time. With Dave in the water, we took a compass heading from the boat towards Execution Rocks. Submerging to the bottom, we followed the phosphorus-coated needle.

The bottom in this area is fairly level and nondescript—mostly sediment and discarded car tires. Lobsters love car tires. Every so often we'd run across a baited lobster trap. There was little current at the moment and we were confident of our heading. Inside ten minutes the makeup of the bottom changed from silt to stone, then from stone to boulders. Our objective was approaching.

Three weeks before, Dave and I had gone to H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>verboard</sub> for particulars on dive charters, H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>verboard</sub> being a small scuba shop just North of Ardsley Road on Central Avenue, a bit south of White Plains. The manager there had turned us on to a charter boat, *Sea Snake*, berthed at the New Rochelle Municipal Marina. The boat, a thirty-odd foot fiberglass cabin cruiser, could take up to six divers out at a time, limiting their excursions to the confines of the Sound and specializing in nighttime lobster dives. There really isn't too terribly much more you'd want to do or see in the Sound.

Felix was the manager at H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>verboard</sub> and had been for four years. I became acquainted with him in the Summer of '90, just about a year ago. Dave and I went back a bit further. Dave and I had been together since basic open water at Martini Scuba class of October '87. During the year following our basic certification, we falsified our way onto some scheduled charters to A and A+ rated dives. Our first ocean dive had been a penetration of the stern section of the Norwegian tanker *Astra*, wrecked during a hurricane off the South Jersey coast. I'd weighed down my goody bag and pockets with Kelly bars in the *Astra*'s shaft room. I thought they were gold bullion. Turned out they were lead bricks used to lubricate the shaft bearings. More foolishness followed with Dave and I jumping at *any* opportunity to get into the water. We'd needed air fills rather late on a Sunday afternoon and Felix's was the only place we could find open. That's how we got to know him.

Felix was well aware of our propensity for foolishness and for this reason he'd had a proposition for us three weeks past. Among Felix's managerial duties was to wear the hat of scuba instructor. He was responsible both for pool sessions and classroom training as well as open water certification dives. His charter of choice for boat qualification dives was the *Sea Snake*. It was from this worthy vessel that he had taken a class out to a stony site near Execution Rocks that August. This area is marked in red on navigational charts since the bottom profile changes radically within a few tens of yards. Execution Rocks breaks the surface like an iceberg, only a small percentage of its mass above the surface even during low tide. Tendrils of stone extend out from its base, making the immediate area a hazard to boat traffic. All but dive boats avoid it. With about twenty feet of water between these tendrils, the location was ideal for his needs.

Felix told an intriguing tale. After a certification dive, and with the class back aboard the *Snake*, Felix had gone back down to free a snagged anchor. He'd followed the anchor line back towards the base of the rocks and had found, nestled into one of the junctions of stony tendrils, what looked like the ribs of a large vessel. Only a very small portion was visible above the silt, six inches in height, and maybe ten feet or less horizontally. He blew away silt revealing an ever-larger structure. What really caught his eye was the vessel's construction. Heavy brass pins or spikes held the hull sheathing together. Many heavy brass spikes. Breaking one away from the rotting timbers, he shoved it into his BCD and returned to the boat.

A single brass spike, about fourteen inches long and two inches in diameter lay on the counter at H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>verboard</sub> glowing with a deep golden warmth in the dim light. Felix had cleaned and

polished it for a nice, slick presentation. Dave spoke in hushed, reverential awe. “How many of these do you think there are?”

“If this was a average sized schooner barge, figure about eight thousand of them, give or take. Some are probably down in the silt so far, we’d never find ‘em anyway.” Felix was running his right hand through his beard, one eye squinting as he ran the calculations in his head. “Figure about two or two thousand five hundred pounds of them.”

“A *ton and a half*?!? That’ll take forever.” I was astounded that he thought a few divers could collect and remove that much brass.

Dave turned to me and waved his hand up and down with the usual sign to shut up and simmer down. “And what exactly would be in this deal for us?” I could see the glint in his eye and the little half smile on his face. Dave could always be a shrewd bargainer.

So was Felix. “How about one fifth the scrap price of brass by weight retrieved, minus one fifth the expenses, free air fills for the rest of your natural born days, and all the lobster you can eat.”

Dave looked at me and winked. “Throw in some really decent light arrays and a couple of *Mares* regulators, with gauge consoles, maybe with dive computers, and you’ve got a deal. Unless Gary wants to add anything.”

“Dude, you’re killing me!” Felix’s mouth may have said one thing, but his expression said *done*. Secrecy would be required. It wasn’t as if anyone would have any better claim to the wreck, but salvage rights belong to the first person on the wreck. We couldn’t guard it. We didn’t even know if this salvage right thing extended to Long Island Sound. Yeah, and look at the trouble Mel Fischer had with the Atocha wreck!

I had no idea what I’d gotten myself into. Three nights a week, Thursday through Saturday, we’d board the *Sea Snake* at the New Rochelle Municipal Marina at eight PM, sometimes Felix, always Dave and I, eight 80cf scuba tanks each filled to 3000psi, and the *Snake’s* crew of two. I figured they had to be in on the cut too. We’d proceed to a spot about a hundred yards Southwest of Execution Rocks. Once there, we’d be in the water just as the sun had left the sky. With four tanks apiece for Dave and I, and considering we’d be working at a depth of no more than twenty feet, give or take, we’d be in the water for the better part of seven hours. It does take a few minutes to swap out tanks and have a quick sip of hot cocoa. Figure the *Snake* would be back in New Rochelle by six or six thirty in the morning. This made for a long day at work on Friday and an even longer night on the boat. I’d sleep on the brief ride out. This was smart, as I get seasick easily.

So we paddled, me with one arm straight ahead, the hand on my other arm holding the gauge console that housed my tank pressure indicator and depth gauge. A timer self-started as I passed the fourteen-foot depth mark. This time value would be critical for figuring blood nitrogen levels on deep or lengthy dives. It would prevent a crippling and deadly problem called *the bends* if correctly calculated with a conservative dive table. This malady had been called Caisson’s disease. The men who’d worked on the footings of the Brooklyn Bridge’s towers had worked within pressurized caissons. When they’d come up at the end of their shifts, they’d suffer from excruciating pain in the joints. After prolonged exposure, and if they didn’t die, their joints would deform and they’d twist and buckle into little men of limited mobility, hence the common name ‘the bends.’ Our depth—or lack thereof—and duration would be too wacky a dive profile for any dive table, be it recreational or the US Navy chart. We weren’t really going to be saturating our bodily tissues with nitrogen.

We swam on; I followed the halo of Dave’s light array. I was using a small flashlight, in an attempt to conserve batteries. Eventually we spotted the familiar ribbing and keel of our schooner barge. We never would know the name of this vessel, but we couldn’t pass up the opportunity to give her a name. We’d called her the *Eddie Fitz*. You will, no doubt, appreciate the pop-culture reference. The site had taken on a very familiar aspect. Working the wreck was now just another day at the office for us.

The timbers were rotted and soggy from years of salt-water immersion. All that was needed to pull a spike was some light crow bar work. We'd harvested the brass above the silt by the second night. Now we had to move muck to get to fresh spoils. Felix didn't want to run a vacuum to pull the silt—in the chance another boat passed by, we couldn't use the excuse of diving for lobster, not with a vacuum.

Between breaks and food, changing tanks and resting, it was slightly to the dark side of 3 AM when I needed to go to my third tank. Dave, always a more strenuous worker and breather, was on his third bottle and not ready for a change. When it got this late in the evening, I'd often surface over the wreck and paddle to the *Sea Snake* on my back, gazing at the stars. No one would be cruising around on the Sound this late. Seemed like a good idea tonight as well. The tide had risen, but I still didn't need to put any air in my BCD to surface from twenty-five feet, I lazily paddled keeping the rock outcropping in sight. I rose slowly. The mask affords a type of tunnel vision. It's like watching television. At about the ten-foot mark, a small, impeccably pedicured foot and shapely ankle appeared in my facemask. There was a chain digging into the flesh of the ankle. I shuddered and flailed myself backward, dropped the flashlight and turned on my light array. Through the silt-laden, particle-heavy water, I could see a very attractively built blonde, clad in a ridiculously small bikini, extraordinarily well-manicured bikini lines, chained hand and foot to the rock. She was far enough from the surface that I didn't need to check for a pulse.

## Chapter Two

I sat on the dock at the New Rochelle Marina. The sun was full up, my lips tasted like dried salt, and I was thirsty to the point of pain and obscenely tired. The captain of the *Sea Snake* had radioed the Coast Guard who had called the NYPD who had sent a harbor launch. We'd answered a million questions. We had been fully interrogated by *both* agencies regarding our 'lobster diving' story, and were released, but told that we might be wanted for further questioning at any time—the old 'don't leave town' speech.

"Gary, I am wiped." Dave hefted his gear back up onto his shoulder and grabbed his one personal tank from the pile on the dock. "I guess the *Eddie Fitz* will be remaining undisturbed for a few days, eh?"

"I don't know, Dave. I'm sure the harbor boys will be all over the place looking for evidence. I guess our secret brass stash is gonna be public knowledge."

"Felix'll be *real* happy about that." Dave added. He winked. "Well, it was fun while it lasted. Catch you later, my man."

"Yeah, dude. I'll give ya a call when I wake up."

Dave hoisted his tank by the valve and trundled his load up the gangway to the parking lot. I watched him up the ramp and over to his car. There was a man standing close to Dave's car—and leaning up against mine. He nodded to Dave as he loaded his gear. Dave drove out of the lot. The man remained. He looked very familiar. In fact, I knew exactly who it was, and it wasn't a happy recognition. Crap, I guess I'd have to grab my gear and go face the inevitable renewal of an old acquaintance. Perspiration was beading on my forehead by the time I got my gear bag and tank up to the side of my little Fiat spider. It seemed as if was going to turn into a fine, hot summer day, however it was the fatigue and exertion that forced the sweat.

“Hi Brad.” I tried to smile as I spoke, but it just wasn’t going to happen.

“Vespi” He intoned, “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

“Coulda gone on for another decade or two, if my preferences had been respected.” I stooped to unlock the door. He didn’t seem to take note of my contempt, but carried on as if he hadn’t a care in the world. He probably didn’t.

“Heard your name pop up early this morning. Gary Morrissey.” He paused and rubbed his chin as if in deep thought. “Ya know what? Your name pops up in police business just a little too often for you to be on the straight and narrow.”

I interrupted “Can’t pin anything on me here, I’m totally uninvolved. Just out for a swim.”

“You seem to have this uncanny knack of turning up in places where dead people hang out.” He got between me and my car door.

“You still on the job in Yonkers?” I tried to look confident.

“Yup, fifteen years this September tenth.” He smiled—not genuinely.

“Then Long Island Sound’s a wee bit east of the shadow of your shield, ain’t it? *AIN’T IT?*” I was beginning to get more than slightly annoyed. You see, I knew Brad from an encounter a few years back, and it hadn’t been a barbeque and cocktail party. In a nutshell, his partner had tried to kill me. This good cop pal of his had been a Yonkers Homicide Detective who had gone on a one-man campaign to clean his city—both of drugs and loose morals. He’d even cleaned out the dead wood in his own family—and from amongst my friends as well. That’s all I’ll say.

It was Brad’s turn to get annoyed. “Listen buddy, *you* know that *I* know all about your involvement with O’Brien coupla years back. I also know that you probably were the anonymous caller to our 911 system—the one who ‘reported’ another homicide, a woman on Warburton Avenue. Ring any bells?”

“Let’s say—hypothetically now—that I know what you’re talking about. I believe that you arrested, tried and convicted two wannabe dope dealers on that Warburton murder. You know I had nothing to do with that.” I backed down a bit. “Seriously, Brad, you know I’m not *that* kind of person.” There was a possibility he could discern an honest look in my eyes, I don’t know. It seemed as if he lightened up a bit.

“Alright, Gary. I know you didn’t rape and kill that woman. I don’t think you have that kind of thing in you, but I know you can take care of business when called upon to do so, and I also find you in interesting locales all the time. You know the old saw, ‘where there’s smoke...’”

“Come on then Brad, why are you leaning on me about this?”

“When I saw your name come along attached to another homicide investigation, even in another jurisdiction...” He wrinkled his nose and sniffed at me. “...I just want to see you face to face and make sure you are clean.”

“I must smell a little like low tide by now, but do I pass inspection?”

“I don’t know, maybe. The jury might still be out.” He glanced away, out towards the breakwater, and looked as if lost in thought for a moment. He didn’t look like he was all that many years older than me. Maybe eight, ten, tops. He resumed “But I do want to hear all about what you

are up to and how you, of all people, came to find a dead girl.”

“Okay Brad, I guess I owe you that much from how you handled the deal with O’Brien. Breakfast at the Thruway Diner? We’ll talk. *I’ll* talk.”

“Sure. Maybe I’ll even buy.”

The passage of another twenty-five minutes found us sitting in a horseshoe shaped vinyl-clad booth at the Thruway Diner on Post Road. I’d ordered scrambled eggs, sausage and home fries—and *coffee*. Just the thought of it perked me up, no pun intended. The air-conditioning was already going at it, but through the tinted, heavy plate glass I could still tell it was a scorcher. It was swelteringly hot that summer I’d first met this cop. Seemed like he was going to be a warm weather perennial. I looked briefly out at Post Road and wondered how many of those cars

heading north had Glenn Island and the beach as a final destination. It was getting close to Labor Day, so everyone wanted to cadge one last day of sun and sand. How many of these happy folk knew just what kind of horrors they might be sharing the water with? I, for one, didn't feel like getting back into the water just at the moment.

"So, tell me, *Diver Dan*, what exactly were you folks up to last night in the middle of Long Island Sound?"

"We were hunting for lobsters in the rocks."

"I hunt my lobster at the supermarket. The market bugs haven't been swimming in a toilet." Brad smiled.

"The water's a lot better than it was ten years ago. The selection is better than at the supermarket, you know. They're cheaper out in the Sound as well."

"What did you spend on scuba gear? How much does the charter boat out to the happy hunting grounds cost? Naw, they're cheaper at the market!"

"You got a point there, Brad. I'm all out of *argue*."

"So?"

"So?"

"So, what were you guys doing out there in the middle of the Sound last night?"

"Man, you are persistent. Will it make you feel better if I give you some insider information?" I didn't think he'd be renting a boat and running out to Execution Rocks to beat us out of our brass. It took a few minutes to explain about Felix and the *Eddie Fitz*. Brad sipped a tall iced tea and listened intently.

"Something about it doesn't sound legal, but heck, I personally don't care about that. Ain't my sphere of influence anyway. If I were you, I'd get out of the salvage business, though. I'm no expert on maritime law, but if that rock is government property, city, state or federal, anything washed up on shore—and I think they'd probably fight you on the fourteen, fifteen feet of water at low tide—wouldn't belong to you. Brass ain't gold, but the quantity you're talking about is still beaucoup bucks and some fat politico will want it."

"Yeah, I think you're right. Maybe I'll just keep one of those big, shiny spikes and call it a good day." I was succumbing to the previous evening's exertions and didn't wish to talk any longer. The food had arrived anyway. Then a thought burst into my head, it had been lurking for a while; it picked this moment to step into the spotlight.

"Brad?"

I paused for a think. Brad prompted. "Yeah?"

"Something stinks here, man." He raised an eyebrow, I continued. "I was just thinking. Someone chained that girl to the rocks. Had to do it at low tide. I mean, why else would you chain her to the rock except to drown her slowly. If it was high tide, you'd have to swim her down and chain her up – you might as well just drown her by throwing her into the drink with weights on."

"Gary, you are a bloodthirsty little turd, you know that? I agree though. I'm looking forward to getting a peek at the autopsy."

I waved my hand and interrupted him. "But how would anybody think they'd get away with chaining her up at low tide and not having someone come along – hear her yelling, whatever. Sound travels on the water—they might have heard her on shore! I mean even if they knocked her out somehow, she'd be visible to boating traffic. That's a heck of a big risk to take if you really want to kill somebody. She would have had a great chance of being rescued... and turning in whomever chained her up." Brad stared long and hard. I could tell he was chewing over what I said, not just his bagel and cream cheese. I got the feeling he knew something that he wasn't telling.

"You know you're right. Evening low tide was what time last evening? Just low enough at 7 PM? She'd be visible to any boat traffic until sundown. High tide overnight was quarter to

three or so. It was a little after that that you spotted the victim. Next low tide is 10:30 this AM. What time did you guys get to the rocks last evening?"

I thought for a second. "I'd say we dropped anchor at about quarter of nine. Think it was ebbing. I'd say it wasn't slack tide yet"

Brad interrupted me. "Low tide was at 9:45 yesterday evening."

"Darn, you're good. Whaddaya have the tide tables memorized?"

"Heck, no" Brad smiled "but I sure checked into the tides when I heard the reports. I called NOAA."

"Who's Noah?"

"Not 'Noah', NOAA!"

"Oh, you mean NOAA. Gotcha."

"I thought you'd be up on all this nautical stuff. Or is it just music that you know about?"

He leaned back and reached for a pack of butts in his jacket pocket. "Mind if I smoke?"

"No, but that crap'll kill you."

"Being a cop can kill you."

"And being some pretty little young blonde seems to be inexplicably risky business as well. Just rhetorical, but why would someone want to kill someone in such a hideously inhuman way? I've never been that ticked at anyone." I felt a twinge of conscience and shut up. Brad knew my capabilities, when the brown stuff hits the spinning thing.

Brad looked at me for a solid minute, then shook his head as if to move on. "Why do they call that outcropping, sea mount, whatever, 'Execution Rocks? Do you know?"

"Yeah, I can tell you a bit. The stories are in most books about local lighthouses. I've looked through some. Also, most of the charter captains will tell you a little tale about the place if you're headed that way. 'Execution Rocks' pops up in various forms in various local dive yarns. I don't know whether any of this stuff is accurate, but I've both heard and read two predominate stories. So who knows which is truth?" I paused and took a slug of coffee.

"One dive captain from City Island tries to debunk the legends and tells people on his charters that the revolutionary war-era ship captains called it "Executioner's Rock" because the rock pile had claimed a large number of commercial vessels. I can't imagine any lives lost 'cause it's not all that far from shore and parked in such normally calm waters. That is the story you'll read in most literature."

"The most popular orally-related legend has it that the British took colonials who wouldn't tow the Crown's line, pay their tea tax, whatever, and take them out there at low tide and chain them up to rings they'd installed on the rock – well below the high tide mark. They'd chain the colonials to the rock and either elicit confessions or just let 'em drown. It must have been a great deterrent to civil unrest for the colonists to think they could be killed in such a slow and horrible manner."

"A lighthouse was built in the early 1800's and manned continuously. The US Lighthouse Service automated the light in the late seventies, so there are no longer any lighthouse keepers on duty. The whole area is off-limits, you can't land there. The place is fairly desolate—except for fishermen. I've heard it said at the marina that the place is haunted. But that's a pile of crap, I've been out there at night, and I'm probably the most easily spooked and superstitious person you'll ever meet." I shuddered. "Think about it. You'd have to be a truly sick crud to want to kill someone that way—or a total psycho." I'd said my piece, and decanted all knowledge of the subject in my possession.

Brad sighed. "Yeah, I'd say crime of passion or insanity. Those are the only reasons I can think of for someone to do something like that." He looked at me long and hard again. His suspicion exasperated me.

"Aw, come on, Brad, if you don't believe that I'm not involved, heck, I've got all the guys I was with last night who'll tell you I was with them the whole early evening. I was at work until five o'clock—with a twenty-five, thirty-minute drive to the marina... I'm clean!"

“No, I don’t think you have that in you, but you will forgive me if I don’t just blindly trust you and just give you a great big hug.” He shrugged and sat back. “Well, I know this ain’t my case, or even my jurisdiction, but I will check your alibi for last night—if only to make the two of us feel better. Okay?” He ground out his cigarette on his plate. “Tell you what. When the autopsy report comes available, we’ll sit down again and talk. Like it or not, you and your pals were closest to the scene at the only time it would have been possible for the guilty parties to chain the girl to the rock...”

“I told you we didn’t see...” I was starting to sound like a whiner to myself. Brad interrupted.

“Yeah, I know. But something went down out there at pretty much the same time you guys were either arriving or getting into the water. The *Sea Snake* was anchored on the opposite side of the rocks from the crime scene?”

“Yup. We didn’t want anyone associating our activities with the real location of the wreck.”

“Pity. If you’d really been lobster diving, you *might* have stopped this all from happening.”

“Damn. I wish you hadn’t said that. I was thinking it, and hoping the thought would just go away. Look Brad, I’m beat. Let me skip off home and call me when you want to talk, okay?”

He sighed. “Alright, bucko. Still living at that Roach Motel on Van Cortlandt?”

“Still there.”

Brad squeezed his way out of the booth, with all the flatulent pop and fizz that vinyl seating typically delivers. I laughed. Brad raised an eyebrow. “Just been a long night, don’t mind me.”

“I’ll call you as soon as the report is in. Bronx boys tell you not to leave town?”

“Yeah. I’ve been warned by the NYPD.”

“Well, don’t.”

Mock saluting, I drained my coffee cup. Too much sugar in the bottom. I had kept an eye on Gina, my black Fiat spider, though the plate glass window all through my breakfast interrogation. My greatest concern was that the scuba tank riding shotgun in the passenger seat, even though down to 300psi, might still pop the pressure relief disk if left to bake too much longer. I paid my bill and sauntered out from the air-conditioning into the fine warmth of a late summer day.

With the top down, the old leather and wood of the cockpit looked very inviting, worn though it was. Gina was a 1977 model and was starting to feel her age. Even so, on a good day she could still breath a little fire and would always put a smile on my face. She had been a toy for me when my wife had left and she’d transported a good number of girlfriends in the years since. Captain Marty had loved to ride down the Cross County Parkway with his head up over the windshield. Poor Marty, gone these three years. Thank you, Detective O’Brien. I climbed in behind the wheel and patted the gearshift. “Absent friends.” I muttered out loud. God, I was tired. The engine coughed and backfired, then purred through the Abarth mufflers. That’s a nice sound. Time to head back to Yonkers

I pulled onto Wolfe Street and parked close up to the side of my building. In the daylight hours, parking was never an issue. After nightfall, it was darn near impossible. It was a rather easy task to get the gear bag and scuba tank into the basement and onto the elevator. The elevator dutifully climbed the six floors, with me counting the little round windows all the way. It’s an old habit of mine.

The scuba gear I tossed into the bathtub and filled it with cold water. I’d let it all soak for the rest of the day to get the salt water off and out of it. I was too sleepy to bother with much else. There was a breeze coming in the one of the living room windows. I crashed onto the sofa and lay there. Yesterday, I didn’t have a care, no worries aside from normal stuff, now, once again; it looked like I was going to be mixed up in something... No! I wasn’t going to be

dragged in. I knew nothing, I had seen nothing. No one was depending on me for anything. I was just going to cruise right on by this one.

Yeah, right.

The phone was ringing. Where was I? Who was I? I tried to open my eyes, but they were gunked shut. And when they finally did open, they just wouldn't focus. But the phone kept at it, unrelenting little cuss that it is. I rolled off the sofa crashing onto the floor. Graceful. The answering machine had died about a week before and I hadn't gotten a chance to pick up another. I spent a lot of unnecessary time talking to a lot of unnecessary salesmen. That'd teach me.

I made it through the glass doors between the living room and the foyer and slid to halt by the phone table.

“Lo!”

“Gary, get some rest, we're going out again tonight.

“Dave, you're kidding, right? It's too hot out there, the harbor guys musta been diving there all day. They'll probably go into the evening if they don't find anything, or if they do, if you get my drift.”

“Chill, Gary. I didn't say anything about the water, did I? Let's go out and hit a few places. We need some R&R, and I don't necessarily mean rock and roll, I mean some real down time.

“Sure thing, Dave, sounds better than what we've been up to. Whaddya got in mind?”

“How about Karaoke up at the Ground Round on Central Avenue? Lotsa fun, lotsa babes. Easy pickings, my man.”

“And meet you there when?” I figured some beer, some song, and maybe an armload of new ladies might be just the thing to lighten my load. We settled on eight thirty, we'd rendezvous in the parking lot.

I settled down on the sofa. On either side of my stereo cabinet a guitar stand was positioned. On one side stood a 1962 Fender Jazz bass, a permanent memorial to a good man taken from his friends by drugs and fear and my phenomenally historical insight that his paranoia had been thoroughly justified. On the other stand, a beautiful, creamy vintage white 1968 Stratocaster with a maple fingerboard stood waiting for my attention. My '71 Telecaster used to occupy that stand, but it'd been retired from constant use once Captain Marty had given me the Strat. The Tele still loomed large in my legend, but that Strat... What a nice guitar. Rory Gallagher had preferred the warmer sound of the rosewood board, but I like the snap of the lacquered maple board. This didn't keep me from picking up the Strat and playing snatches of Tattoo'd Lady. After an hour or so, I placed the guitar gently on its stand and went into the bedroom for a nap.



