

Jules Petros left The Flamingo that night by the back door. It was late, but as owner he always made sure to personally count the final take. It had been a long day; so much so he had already forgotten about his earlier meeting with Frank and Mario.

“Hey, pal!” he heard as he walked to his car.

The parking lot was full of cars but empty of people, and Jules turned to see Frank approaching out of the darkness. He walked up to Jules and slapped his face so hard, Jules’ neck crackled. Petros recovered slowly, one hand clinging to his car, the other on his cheek.

“What the fuck?” Jules flared, but Frank aimed a gun at his face.

“When I ask you a question, I expect an honest answer!”

Jules carried a gun, but knew he wouldn’t be fast enough to retrieve it. “What do you want?”

“I asked you a question. I want the right answer this time.”

“Jesus Christ! I told you I don’t fucking know anything!”

Frank shook his head and lowered his gun. “I asked you nicely, twice. Now I ask you not so nicely.”

Jules heard movement from behind him. Mario swung a tire iron against his lower back, and Jules stiffened as if struck by lightning. His face reddened, his eyes bulging, and he slammed down to his knees, and then his face. His bladder released.

They callously turned him over. Frank put his gun in Jules’s mouth while Mario held the photo of Leo before his eyes. Frank said, “Now, I’ll ask you again. Have you seen my friend?”

Jules could not speak, could not move the air in his throat. His heart was thumping in his chest.

Frank pulled back the hammer of the gun, the echo resonating in Jules’s mouth. Jules moaned, trying to speak. Frank extracted the gun, but rested the barrel at his right eye.

Petros whispered through the pain, “Was here...with girl.”

Frank looked at Mario, then back to Jules. “Long black hair?”

The pain at the base of Jules’s spine was excruciating. “No...red hair...gold car...NY plates...BMW. She came in complaining...oil...leaking oil. Was at Baker’s...they did it wrong...he helped her...they left together.”

Frank looked at Mario. A smile erupted across his face. “Baker’s,” he said.

Mario nodded. “Traceable. They keep lists.”