

Double Sting

by Jerry Guarino

About 1500 words

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“I’ll take it,” said Frank. The man handed him \$500 in crisp, one hundred dollar bills. As he left the room, police arrested the Wall Street brokers for bribery of an SEC official. “Is that it for now?” Frank asked the attorney. “Yes, Mr. Jones, we have everything on tape. We’ll call you when the trial starts.” Frank nodded. “Thank you counselor. Glad I could help.”

Frank was an actor that police used in sting operations. But Frank had a secret. He was also a con man, good enough to fool law enforcement. Whether on the stage, conniving money out of a tourist or working for the police, Frank was a committed actor. He was always in character, a regular OCD in costume. Talk about hiding in plain sight.

Over on 42nd Street, Frank was playing Professor Harold Hill, the famous charlatan in *The Music Man*. Once a regular in the major theaters, he was still good enough for the off-Broadway revivals. “*Oh my dear little librarian. You pile up enough tomorrows and you’ll find you are left with nothing but a lot of empty yesterdays. I don’t know about you, but I’d like to make today worth remembering.*” Frank charmed his audience just like when he was pulling a con.

When he wasn’t in the theater or helping the police, he would like to wander through the bookstores in the city, signing fake autographs for tourists or otherwise pretending he was someone else. A woman in her sixties bumped into Frank as she was leaving the Barnes and Noble. Frank apologized. “So sorry, Miss. Are you ok?” The woman stepped away and excused herself.

“Oh, it was my fault sonny. I wasn’t looking. Say, aren’t you Frank Jones? You’re in *The Music Man*.” Frank smiled, “Yes Ma’am, that’s me.” She took out a playbill. “We saw you last week. Could I get an autograph?” Frank pulled out a felt pen. “Of course, what’s your name dear?”

After some small talk, Frank went into the bookstore and browsed. Then he saw her, the strawberry blonde clerk with horn-rimmed glasses, a crème colored cardigan

sweater, navy blue skirt, knee socks and clogs, putting books up on a display. As an actor, Frank knew how to approach women and his good looks belied his age, easily 15 years older than the coed working part-time. Frank took note of her nametag. “Susan, can you help me?” Susan put down the books she was holding. “Of course.” Her smile fell on Frank like a Hawaiian waterfall, complete with a rainbow. “I’m looking for the drama section.” Susan turned to her left. “It’s down here; let me show you.” Susan walked ahead of Frank in the narrow aisle. He could smell her perfume, a citrus blend and closed his eyes for a moment.

“This is one of my favorite sections. Sometimes an actor will come in and sign one of the copies.” Susan paused. “Are you in school?” said Frank. Susan nodded. “Yes, I’m finishing up at Columbia.” Frank realized this wasn’t one of those shop girls he could manipulate. “I didn’t catch your name.” Frank extended his hand. “Frank Jones.” Susan concluded. “Well, it was nice to meet you Frank Jones. Hope you find a book you like.” She turned to leave when Frank interrupted. “Aren’t you going to show me those autographed books?”

Susan pulled a couple books out. “All right. This is signed by Angela Lansbury, this one by Meryl Streep and this one by Carol Channing.” Frank tried to see a book on *The Music Man* while maintaining eye contact with Susan. “Do you have anything by Meredith Wilson?” Susan checked the books under W. “Oh, yes. Here’s one, on *The Music Man*. Do you like musicals?” Frank saw his opening. “This one, yes. I’m playing in it at the 42nd Street Theater. “I thought you looked like an actor,” she said modestly. “Do you have a playbill you can sign?”

Frank looked into Susan's eyes, smiled and offered. "I'll give you one and a ticket to the show. What time do you get off work?" Susan was pleased but held him back a bit, as she brushed her hair back. "I don't know, what about tomorrow?" Frank glided easily into his next line. "My dear Susan. You pile up enough tomorrows and you'll find you are left with nothing but a lot of empty yesterdays. I don't know about you, but I'd like to make today worth remembering."

In the elegant Italian restaurant, Frank wine and dined Susan. "Susan, I haven't felt this way in a long time. It feels like the first time I was on Broadway." Susan blushed. "Really Frank, you must have had too much wine." Frank touched her hand. "I'm not acting Susan. You're very special." She squeezed his hand back. "Check please" said Frank to the waiter.

Frank gave the waiter a fake credit card and a generous tip. Susan pretended not to notice but she saw the name, Frank Johnson, before he put the card back in his wallet. Frank took Susan's hand and they walked out. A horse and carriage was waiting, with a bouquet of flowers on the seat. "These are for you." He helped her into the seat and put a blanket over her lap. Susan nestled her head on his shoulder and held his hand under the blanket. After a ride through the park, the carriage pulled up to Frank's apartment on Central Park West.

Seeing the bakery next door, Susan whispered in Frank's ear. "Can we pick up some dessert?" Frank was confident now. "Whatever you like dear." Susan picked out two rich chocolate pastries with berries and whipped cream. "Mmm. These are perfect!" They walked arm in arm upstairs to his apartment and paused at the door.

Frank pulled Susan's face toward him and kissed her slowly. Susan leaned up against him and yielded.

Now inside, Susan saw the view from his living room window. "Oh, you have a view of the park." Frank took her coat and pointed to the couch. "Would you like coffee with dessert?" Susan relaxed on the couch, took off her shoes and felt the texture of the cushions. "Yes, please." After a leisurely give and take with coffee and pastry, Susan took Frank's hand and led him to the bedroom. Frank liked the assertion of this young woman and followed obediently. "Dessert isn't over yet," she said looking back with a wink.

Susan took off her earrings and necklace, placing them on the dresser. Frank took out his wallet and put it in the dresser drawer. "Excuse me for a minute Frank" as she went into the bathroom. When she came out, Frank saw the full beauty of Susan's 5'9" athletic frame, silhouetted against the nightlight from the bathroom. "I used your toothbrush, ok?" Frank would have agreed to anything at that point, but he merely smiled and touched her as he entered the bathroom. "Just give me a minute, gorgeous.

Susan quickly looked into the top dresser drawer and saw a credit card and passport with Frank Johnson's name. She also saw a gold bracelet with his name engraved on the inside. Taking out her phone, she snapped photos, then slipped into the bed, her dress draped across the bedpost.

After an intoxicating night of lovemaking, Susan made breakfast and they ate on the balcony. "Central Park is so beautiful at sunrise Frank." Frank stroked her arm. "All the more with you here." Susan ran her fingers through her hair. "So this isn't

some one night stand that you actors are famous for?” Frank seemed surprised. “Not a chance, sweetheart. I’ve been looking for a woman like you for a long time.” Susan, though much younger, seemed similarly smitten with him. “Then I expect you’ll make good on that ticket for tonight.” Frank made another offer. “I’ll leave a ticket for you at the box office. The performance runs from 7:30 to 9:30. Then we can have a late supper.” Susan finished her coffee and left to take a shower. “It’s a date. I have to get ready for work.”

Frank and Susan continued their romance throughout the week and met for brunch that Sunday. While Frank was paying the check, Susan excused herself. “I’ll be right back lover” and she kissed him on the neck. The waiter brought back the credit card, watched Frank sign it and gave it to the FBI agents who took him into custody. “Well, Mr. Jones. We finally discovered your little secret.” Frank walked out with his head down, like he had been hit by a Hawaiian waterfall, a big one, without the rainbow. Susan came back to see him in handcuffs. “Sorry my dear” he told her as they took him away. He never realized he had been set up.

“Nice work Susan. See you at the trial?” Susan put crisp hundred dollar bills in her pocket. “Of course. Have to get to my next assignment.”