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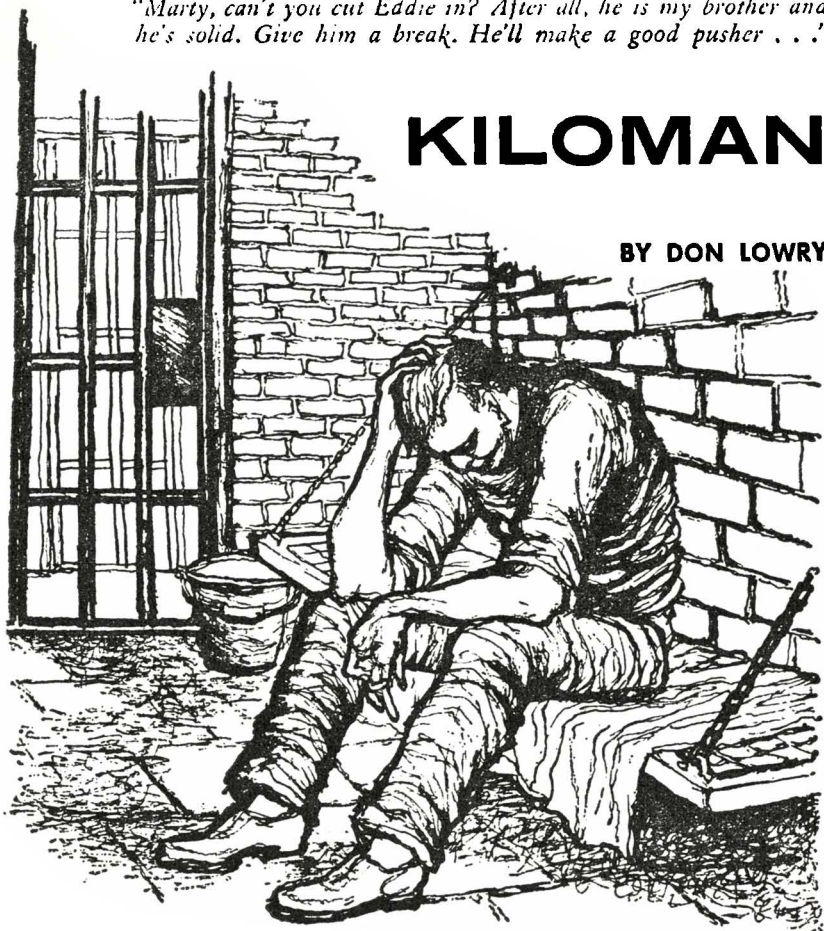
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"Marty, can't you cut Eddie in? After all, he is my brother and he's solid. Give him a break. He'll make a good pusher . . ."

KILOMAN

BY DON LOWRY



EDDIE TORRIO spelled it out for me. He was the number one front man for Mr. "B", the wheel who bankrolled the junk racket; who never touched the stuff and for all I knew never saw it; and whose lieutenants never handled less than a kilogram of H at a time. I was a small-time pusher with big-

time ambitions and a three-grain habit on horse. I finally made connections with Torrio and got over to him my pitch that I had enough on the ball to be more than a local pusher.

"I'll think about you the next time we have an opening," was his non-committal reply.

Nothing happened and the next time I made my connection for stuff I asked the courier if he had any news for me from Eddie.

"I don't know any Eddie and I don't know what you mean. And five minutes from now I won't even remember you, Marty. Why don't you get smart and stay cool with your customers—you've all the girls and hogs on the island buying horse from you and you get your own horse at cost. Be wise and stay in Galveston."

"You talk like my mouthpiece, Mannie and you're set like he is—nice car nice home and all the rest that goes with it. Maybe you guys don't want competition.

Manuel Del Rio moved away without a comment. He'd said more in that one piece of advice than I'd ever heard him say before. Torrio's connections were all the same—like clams and they never hung around. But they all had class and that I wanted—bad.

I picked up Marcia at the bar and drove back to Galveston. At least I got sympathy from her and she kept telling me that I had the makings of more than a pusher. And she wasn't on the make. Some weeks she brought home more than I did and who paid the rent depended on who was in the pad when the landlord came around. No questions asked. The kind of love she had for me wasn't the kind she put out for sharpies looking for a fifty-an-hour call girl.

I had to make a meet when I got back and dropped Marcia at the Buccaneer. Things stayed the same—for a week—and then I got a phone call:

"Don't bring that broad with you when you come down tomorrow."

That was all. I knew the voice but not the caller—and I didn't take Marcia with me to Brownsville where I connected for my stuff.

I saw Mannie coming out of the hotel and he made no sign that he had any stuff for me.

"Go over to the bar at the Ritz in Matamoras," was his only comment as he kept on walking.

I nursed a beer and heard Mannie again behind me.

"Come on outside."

I followed him into a green Ford and watched the boulevard as we drove out to the San Antonio.

"Torrio wants to see you. He's in Room 14."

A brunette opened the door into a second floor room of the San Antonio and I forced myself to look away from her to Torrio with his back to me looking out the window. He didn't even turn around.

"Think I'd forgotten you Marty?"

"No, but I wondered . . ."

"Well stop wondering. I think we can find a place for you. These things take time and we make sure we know what we're doing before we do it. You come from New Mexico. Albuquerque."

It wasn't a question—more like a flat statement. Like he was thinking.

"When I was a kid. I fell for possession and did a bit at La Tuna. Never went back."

"How long has it been since the local law around there was familiar with you?"

"Ten—fifteen—years ago. They've all changed by now."

"You still on horse?"

"Yes."

"How much you use?"

"Three—four—grains a day."

"You're going over to El Paso this afternoon. We've a plane leaving from Corpus around two. Abilio Guerra is our man there and he knows you're coming. The plane's a red and white Beechcraft and the pilot'll be on the lookout for you. We're going to keep Guerra south of the border and let you take over his territory. He'll spell it out for you."

"What's my end?"

Torrio ignored my question.

"Get one thing straight, Marty. You fell as a user and got a short federal rap. If you fill the bill at El Paso you're more than a user. There's an Act of Congress—Section 107 of the Narcotics Control Act to be exact—which makes you a target for Giordano and the rest of the bastards at the Bureau of Narcotics—a special target. Take a fall for selling and transporting and you can wind up with a life bit or a death sentence. You're not

just a user or a pusher; you're what the bureau spends its time trying to nail—a transporter and a distributor. You know the score and I don't have to paint a picture of your problems. See Abilio in El Paso and take it from there. He'll run it down for you."

"Can I use your 'phone, Eddie?"

"For what?"

"I want to call Marcia in Galveston and tell her I won't be back tonight."

"You forget your Marcia—and everybody else that you knew in Galveston. She knows all your business now and that's too much."

I'll call her from El Paso, I thought as I went out. The brunette didn't even smile as she opened the door. Torrio could have his window dressing around. I couldn't even 'phone mine.

To hell with Torrio, I thought, and called Marcia from Corpus Christi.

"Pick up my car at the Seaside Motel parking lot, honey. I'll contact you later and let you know the score" was my only reply to her dozen questions. I went along that far with Torrio in not talking.

The pilot was like a clam. He didn't even grunt and, other than some gibberish with control towers at Corpus and El Paso might have been a dummie as far as I knew. Guerra walked me from the plane to his car and we drove over to Juarez, through the town and out to a motel on the outskirts. He

ran his end down for me and I recognized a few names among his pushers in El Paso and Albuquerque. His take was good—half a buck on every cap—and from my experience with Mannie I knew he increased the number of caps with powder sugar.

He said he'd pick me up that night on his run to Albuquerque and I checked into the motel; cooked up and just moped until he came back. I forgot to call Marcia.

I didn't pay too much attention to the road. Guerra drove and I was still a little high. The first thing I knew we were stopped some place on 85 between El Paso and Las Cruces. I was clean but I didn't know what Guerra had—and I didn't have any time to ask.

"Get your hands on top of the car; back your feet and spread them—fast."

Expert hands frisked us and we were cuffed and in the other car without any questions being asked or answered. Only the flasher disturbed the night as the law car sped away with us. We were booked in some small town police station and right then I became suspicious.

"What's this pinch for?"

"Transporting narcotics."

"Who are you—feds? Treasury?"

"You'll find out in the morning."

"I want to make a phone call."

The reply to that question was a

slap in the mouth and a strong-arming into a cell. Guerra was still in the office when they hustled me down the hall. I knew it wouldn't be long before I needed a fix and the thought of what I was facing brought beads of sweat to my hands and face. They let me sweat it out for what seemed like a couple hours when a tall guy in plain clothes opened the cell door; shut it behind him; threw the keys to his partner and looked at me like I was so much dirt.

"That powder in the car belong to you?"

"What powder?"

"Inside the spare tire. I'm not saying what it is but I'll lay 15 to 1 the lab says it's heroin in the morning. Want to take the bet?"

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

"Your driver thinks you do. He says he was hired to drive for you and that he never saw the car before he got into it tonight; claims he's an El Paso truck driver and he has papers to prove it. He doesn't have any record and you're a junker from a way back. That help your memory about the H in the spare?"

The thought ran through my mind that this was a set up and that I was being put out of the way with a neat frame.

"You can go to hell. I want to make a 'phone call."

I saw a million stars as he smashed my face in with a black-

jack and kicked me in the guts at the same time. He picked me up and knocked me down, throwing me up against the steel plate wall of the cell like a battered hunk of meat. When I came to he'd gone.

I threw up. Shook. It was cold. I felt my nose and face and just the touch of my fingers was like a toothache. Between spasms and stomach cramps I tried to think—and couldn't. These jackals couldn't be federal people—they didn't work that way. Couldn't be local law on the highway. Couldn't be state law—no uniforms and they didn't use the "beat 'em break 'em technique". I couldn't stop shaking and got sick again when the door banged open like a box car shunting into another. There were two of them this time and the tall one was accompanied by a black-haired sunuvabitch only one generation removed from whatever species gorillas claim.

"Use a fix, Marty?"

I knew this approach and the futility of asking.

"Get lost, you sadist."

This time I was ready for them. I braced myself at the back of the bunk with my feet against the steel slats. At least I'd kick him in his face if the tall one made another pass at me.

"Why try wearing us down, Marty? We've got the stuff. You've got the record and you're caught in the car with a driver who is clean. What kind of a story can you lay

on a judge or jury in the face of that evidence? Play it smart. Give us a statement; get a fix; and get looked after by a doctor."

I got sick again—all over the gorilla's shoes and pants.

"Pig," was his only crack as he threw himself at me and he didn't have to use a blackjack or feet. His hands were like fifteen-pound hams.

No cop alive would do this to even a narcotics trafficker, were my orbiting thoughts as I lost consciousness again.

They came again—twice, I think—before daylight and the last time I was so damn sick I didn't care.

I rolled over on the bunk and saw Abilio Guerra standing beside me. He was getting a fix ready and I thought I was dreaming. It was for me.

"How'd you like the treatment?"

"Treatment? You kidding? These bastards tried to kill me. Hurry up with that. How'd you score it? What happened? How'd they make us?"

I shuddered and sighed when the mainliner began to hit me. I went to lie back down again when I noticed the cell door was open and the sight of Eddie Torrio walking in—with no screws around—brought me up with a jerk that registered in every aching bone and muscle in my body.

"You spring us, Eddie?"

"Get him up and let's get out of here so a doctor can patch him

up," was Torrio's casual reply. He ignored me.

We walked out of that police station without anyone even giving us a second glance. A bull at the desk handed me my wallet and property.

"Have a pleasant night?" he quipped.

I rounded to swing at him and Guerra grabbed me.

"Wise guys like you can get hurt," he shot at the cop.

"Come on Marty, you can take care of him later."

We stopped at a house before we reached Socorro and a doctor patched me up.

"Another automobile accident, Mr. Smith?" the doctor asked Torrio.

"Just fix him up, Doc. No questions," replied Torrio.

"Feel better, Marty?"

I mumbled through bandages and we walked back to the car. On the way to Albuquerque, Torrio ran down to me the pseudo third degree and its necessity.

He had to *know* and Mr. Big insisted on his knowing how insiders in the racket would stand up under pressure.

In a town near the Texas-New Mexico border, I still don't know where it is today and it could even be south of the line, through a fix with the local law a prospective employee of the kiloman-crew is "arrested", locked in a cell, questioned and beaten by "officers". If

he talks he winds up under Dona, Ana sands or Sierra Madres rocks—he had the makings of a stool pigeon anyway. If he stands up under the staged but brutally realistic, "Third degree", he is "in" the ring. It's the most effective way discovered by kilomen to prevent infiltration by stool pigeons and Bureau of Narcotics Agents into their ranks.

It's a hell of a way to get into any racket. Pure hell.

The next day, at a ranch house owned by Torrio, they laid it out for me in detail and one by one Guerra's pushers and runners showed up. I knew two or three but they didn't remember me and the bandages and sun glasses didn't help anyone who might have.

Eddie and Abilio left that night and I was in business. As soon as their car pulled out of the yard, I thought of Marcia. I drove into Albuquerque and stopped at the first pay 'phone. No answer. I drove around for a while and called again. Still no answer. I phoned her girl friend.

"Marcia? You don't know, Marty? Where've you been?"

"Never mind the questions, Marie give it to me fast and straight."

Marcia was the victim of a hit-run driver who was not yet found by police. In the middle of a driving, Gulf coast rain storm she had been run down and killed on a side street.

"Like hell!" I concluded.

Marcia wouldn't go out in a rain storm for anything or anybody—well—maybe for a fix, but she had enough horse on hand to last her for a month when I left the pad. And I knew she wouldn't part with so much as a cap.

Marcia wouldn't be found—alive or dead—on a side street. Our pad was on a main street and she had a well-worn route—by cab or car—to the gulf coast hotels when she got a call. Side street, hell.

I was learning slowly how thorough Torrio and his Mr. Big really were. As far as they were concerned, Marcia was just another dame who knew too much. As far as I was concerned it was only a hunch. But from what I knew of Marcia—and we lived together two years—the “hit-and-run” story was as phoney as my “third degree”.

Right then there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it and I got back to business—the business Marcia had prompted me into.

“I'll be over the bridge at three tomorrow.”—a long distance call from Ciudad Juarez to a pre-arranged pay 'phone booth in Albuquerque—no names or places, vaguely indefinite but sufficiently clear for me to fall in line along the route which heroin travels from south of the border into this country.

This brief statement triggered the smuggling and transportation of a kilogram of pure heroin, part of an operation moving across in-

ternational borders from hidden laboratories to pushers and addicts. Mr. “B” was behind it; Eddie Torrio his front man and now I was one of the lieutenants. The cost for my end—so far—Marcia's life; a beating; and five years as a pusher. Those behind the operation made only one allowance for error: death for the one who erred.

The 'phone call announced—to me—the departure of a commonplace truck from Mexico. It bore plates and licenses required for legal interstate transportation. Its cargo and bill of lading appeared as respectable as that of any highway hauler. Its driver's credentials were letter-perfect. All state and federal laws were meticulously observed and obeyed—except the Narcotics Control Act—and the truck was watched every inch of the way. Even the watchers were watched. An innocent-appearing truck concealed a weekly shipment of pure heroin on its way to any one of the fifty states.

Mr. “B” paid \$4,000 for the kilo in France, Italy or the Near East. Couriers got \$500 for transporting it. As soon as it hit this continent its kiloman importer, Mr. “B”, made three pounds out of every two by adulteration with milk sugar. Originally 80 per cent pure, heroin is only 6 per cent pure by the time I get it to my pushers. Profit is fifty times that of the original cost. That's why even the watchers were watched.

My first move was to spot the truck as it headed north from Socorro to Belen in southern New Mexico. As it came north along the Rio Grande I drove leisurely south. I spotted it just before it crossed the Valencia County line. We made no sign of recognition no horn or headlight signal; not even a nod of a head as we passed on the road. Jose Herrera, the truck driver, recognized me and I recognized him and we both anticipated the meeting in that area. He continued north at the same speed. I drove south to Socorro; casually gassed up at a service station; and inconspicuously headed north to overtake the truck.

I passed it in Belen, parked innocently while Jose lunched with other drivers. He didn't have to see me or my car to know I was passing. That and every other move to be made was well known ahead of time by both of us—and others. As I crossed the Bernadillo County line Jose overtook and passed me. I let the truck stay ahead and watched as he pulled into a motel south of Albuquerque. I didn't even slow down and drove into town. If there'd been a tail on either of us we were not connected. Jose was just another truck driver pulling up for the night. My trip was neither unusual nor illegal. The heroin remained on the truck. Only Jose knew where. He would move it that night.

I sat in a bar of Albuquerque's

Old Town, sipping a drink and waiting for Jose. He knew I was there and I knew he would make the "meet" with me. Then and only then would I learn where to locate the *drop* he made. Again, both of us were *clean*. If either of us had been tailed the law would find nothing on us. All he had to deliver to me was information. He went to another table; lit a smoke; and ordered. He was just another customer on the town. After others at the bar had time to accept him as part of the scenery Jose followed me into the men's room.

"Pick it up at the south side of the fifth highway marker just over the Sandoval County line—it's in the sand," was Jose's only comment.

We returned to our tables and left separately.

I picked up where Guerra left off and, having been a pusher myself, was hep to their tricks before they tried to pull them on me. Weekly shipment after weekly shipment came in with only a few needed variations in the routine. My bankroll grew fat and I was reaching the "class" I'd admired in my Galveston mouthpiece and in Mannie Del Rio. I rarely saw Torrio and when I did meetings were so short and business-like I never had a chance to feel him out on Marcia's death.

There was soon another "Marcia" and nights with Jean compensated for run-of-the-mill troubles with pushers who wanted credit and

hopheads who brought heat on the racket. Every rape, crime of violence and screwball caper in the southwest was laid to actions of drug addicts and from time to time we had to lay off. These panics among the junkers only made business better when we turned the horse loose again on the streets. I could have told people that violent crimes and sex crimes were from the psychos and not from the junkies. The average junker steals—petty larceny, shoplifting and prowling—for one reason: to get the price of a fix. But who the hell was I to get quoted as the local expert for the defense? I soon had troubles of my own. Jean had a brother—

“Marty, can’t you cut Eddie in? After all, he is my brother and he’s solid. Give him a break. He’ll make a good pusher . . .”

I asked around and nobody had anything bad to say about the kid. He’d done a couple bits—car theft and B&E—and had a good reputation both in the joint and on the street.

“Besides,” I rationalized, “he’s a hophead and Jean’s keeping him on my bankroll. Might as well put him to work.”

I stayed out of the picture and told one of the regular pushers to give him a piece of the neighborhood and keep my name out of it. And I warned Jean to keep her mouth shut about my doing the kid a favor.

The phone rang a few minutes after midnight. It was the pusher who I told to break Eddie in.

“The kid’s pinched.”

“I don’t want to hear about it or any of your other goddam troubles. Call a mouthpiece. You know better than to call me and you know damn well I don’t want any part of anybody’s pinch. That’s your baby.” I was hot and he knew it.

“Well, I thought, like him being Jean’s brother . . .”

“You thought. I’ll do my own thinking, you . . .”

I hung up and did some fast thinking. I had to get Jean out of town and out fast. She was nuts about her kid brother and I didn’t want a wacky dame on my hands crying for me to spring her brother.

“Jean, Jean, come on inside.”

She walked in from the sunporch where she liked to sleep when I was busy at night and what I saw almost made me change my mind about sending her away—that night anyway.

“I’ve got an envelope that I want to put in my safety deposit box in L.A. and I want it there in the morning. Be a good girl and make the trip for me.”

She didn’t bat an eyelash. I’d started to bank in Los Angeles when things got good and she’d made occasional trips there for me. As far as she knew it was just another payoff I’d received and it

was a chance for her to run wild in Wilshire Blvd. shops."

It was a good thing I got her out of town. The punk panicked; tried to make a break from the law and was shot. Papers made a big deal out of the kid being a hophead *and* a pusher and the resulting heat was felt all the way to the poppy fields where the horse comes from.

I 'phoned Torrio.

"One of my pusher's got bumped by the law and all hell's broken loose out here."

The cool bastard reacted like a machine.

"Hang on for a minute while I put a stop on the next shipment—it shouldn't be on the road yet."

During that minute I made up my mind to lam to L.A. and pick up Jean there. Torrio came on the 'phone again.

"Turn it off for a few days and get out of the state for a while yourself. Get in touch with me the next week. And put that broad out of circulation—permanently. When she hears about the kid she'll run amuck. The law will be looking for her and they'll tie her to you. Are you with me, Marty?"

I wasn't "with him" one inch of the way but I said I was. This time he wanted me to be the hatchet man. I wondered who he sent to do the job on Marcia.

"I'll handle things, Torrio." I hung up.

I packed a couple bags; threw them in the back of the sedan; and

took off after Jean. I had to get to her in L.A. before she saw the morning papers.

"To hell with the house and everything in it," I thought. The minute the law finds that kid's sister has been shacking up with me, they'll be out here in carload lots. I'll be dead if they nail me—with-out a trial."

There was little traffic and I did some thinking on the road.

"I'll cop out to being a rotten sonuvabich in a rotten racket but I won't be a *murdering* rotten sonuvabich for Torrio and all the Mr. "B"'s in the world."

I wasn't sure where I would head—if I could talk Jean into coming along—and I wasn't sure just what sort of a dame she would be when she blew her top over her kid brother.

I found her at the Commodore and she was just getting to sleep when I knocked at the door. She looked like a tousled-haired kid when she opened it in reply to my voice.

"Marty. How come you're here? What's the matter? How'd you get here? Is there something wrong?"

I couldn't see any point in stalling and I gave it to her straight. She was a junker herself and knew the score. But she was also the kid's sister. Jean didn't bawl, scream, cry or rave. She just sat and stared. Then she started to talk.

"Who can I hate, Marty? The

bulls who shot him when he took off? The pusher who was supposed to keep him in line? You? Or myself?"

"Take it easy, baby. Hate won't bring Eddie back and it won't replace love. I went through that once myself and it didn't work."

Jean looked at me as if I were a complete stranger and walked over to lie on the bed. She buried her head in the pillow and just lay there. No sobs. No words. Hardly breathing.

I wanted to ask her about tomorrow and the need to move while I had a chance but one look at her still body told me this wasn't the time to talk.

"I'll see you in the morning, baby. I got things to do."

"Don't go out, Marty. I don't want to be alone."

We talked until the sun rays came through venetian blinds—or I let her talk. Jean told me of her childhood with Eddie their slum home—broken up when they were youngsters; and their need to live on their wits to survive.

When she dropped off to sleep I left a short note and slipped out.

I cleaned out my box at the bank, closed out two bank accounts and spent an hour waiting for the L.A. bank to close out my Albuquerque account and pay me off. It was one o'clock before I closed a deal with a dealer for the two cars and when I got back to the Commodore Jean was pacing the floor.

"I called my cousin in Albuquerque and she says the police are asking for me—and for you; they're staked out at the house. And somebody's been phoning here every few minutes for you. Who knows we stay here when we're in L.A.?"

I could see the picture in Albuquerque and I didn't answer the last question. This room was paid for the year around by Torrio. I should have thought of that last night but was so used to coming to the Commodore that I didn't give it a thought. I needed a fix—bad.

"Get packed, baby, we're getting out—but quick."

"Where . . . ?"

The 'phone rang before Jean could finish. I answered it.

"Marty?"

"Yeah."

"This is Abilio. Mr. Torrio wants to know if that problem is out of the way yet."

"I'm working on it."

"Marty, don't try to be a wise guy. Stick with the script. Know what I mean?"

"Yeah, yeah. I got things to do now. Want me to call back?"

"You know better. We'll call you—wherever you are; and we'll know where that is."

All that I knew. I had a fifty-fifty chance to get away from the law. Nobody in Albuquerque knew who I really was and I'd never been mugged or printed since I took over from Abilio Guerra. But get-

ting away and staying away from Mr. "B" was like escaping from an octopus in an aquarium tank with no outlet. For all I knew his L.A. people had me covered like a blanket and if I didn't do something with Jean they would.

"Baby, I think you already get the picture without me painting it for you. We've got to get out of here—so far from this part of the country that it will cost a buck to mail a five-cent letter to us. I'd like it to be the two of us but that you will have to decide. How about it?"

Her look and her arms did the real answering.

"Count me in, Marty. You shouldn't even have to ask."

"O.K., baby and I hope it'll always be this way. Now listen closely. All the bags stay here. Dump that trunk-size purse you carry and we'll put in it what's in my brief case—it's a cool half million in case you wonder how we'll manage to buy new luggage. We're going down and walk out the lobby door to a cab like we're making a normal trip. Play it cool and quiet.

We may have to shake a tail but we'll play it by ear and see what happens."

"Come on, Marty, let's get out of here."

What I thought was a pleasant doll to give class and beauty to the surroundings was turning out to be a real partner.

I passed the cab that pulled up and we walked to the back of

the stand for one that was pulling in,

"Drive out Wilshire 'til we make up our minds, driver. If you got a tail there's a C note for you if you drop it."

It was enough to make the cabbie blast off into space. He pulled up to lights just before they changed to red and then beat them. He knew more private driveways and lanes than map-makers in the city engineering department.

"If you want to make sure, boss, I know some canyons that will make a tail look like a tired hound dog on asphalt."

He had the right idea—a residential area and that would give me time to think of our next move.

"OK, go ahead. And here's your C note with a bonus."

The site of the canyon with its beautiful homes and landscaping gave me an idea.

"Know a quiet resort in the county, driver—quiet and respectable?"

"Sure, the Apple Valley Inn; not far from Victorville. Used to work there. Wanna look at it?"

"As long as there's no tail on the way."

"There won't be."

On the way, I ran it down to Jean. She didn't like it but she bought it.

"I'm going to leave you at the Inn. I've got some unfinished business in L.A. that may take overnight to finish. Keep this cab hired

at the Inn even if I'm gone a week. As long as the cabbie's out here nobody in L.A. can strong-arm him into telling where he brought us. I'll get another cab and double back to town."

As long as the C notes lasted the driver was happy to remain on tap for a year if necessary. It was OK with him. We checked in; got a receipt from the manager for the bulk of the bankroll; and had supper together. I left everything with Jean except a C note and my automatic. I didn't tell her what my "unfinished business" was all about but I had a hunch it would come to me without a lot of looking on my part.

"Come back quick, Marty, please."

"In the morning, baby."

I stopped in the manager's office and made out an order to deliver the bankroll to Jean if I were not back in seven days. I wasn't too confident I would make it back. The business could get rough.

I changed cabs five times between Victorville and the Commodore in L.A. to make sure there would be no back-tracking to Jean. The "business" was waiting when I opened the door to our room in the hotel. It was Torrio and the gorilla-like bastard that posed as a bull and beat my head in at the staged third degree grilling.

"Hello, Marty. Get the job done?"

"This afternoon."

"Any trouble?"

"You taught me to be thorough, Eddie. When I do a job I don't have trouble. Incidentally, I'd like to do the same kind of a job on that bastard sitting there."

"Anytime, ya . . ."

Torrio interrupted before the gorilla and I could carry out our mutual invitations to mayhem.

"If you didn't have any trouble, why did you work so hard to shake the tail when you left the hotel?"

I played it straight.

"Who wants a tail when you're on your way to dump a broad?"

"Good question, Marty."

"And how did I know it was your tail?"

"You got the right answers—and I hope they turn out to stay right."

"They will." (I hoped.)

"I suppose you wonder why I'm here?"

"With that ape it could be only for one reason. To get the job done—on the broad and me—if I didn't come through."

He had the cruelty to laugh.

"That was only part of it. If you did have it done, Mr. "B" wanted to see you. If you didn't—well, he never wanted to see you again—alive that is."

"Mr. Big sees the likes of me for two reasons—a promotion or an execution. Spell it out, Eddie."

"You know, Marty, it's funny how a little dough makes a small-town pusher into a joker. One of these days your sense of humor

will fall flat and I'll throw you to Willie here—for keeps rather than for bruising. Mr. "B" will do his own talking and you and I will like what he says—whether we do or not."

A cold sweat broke out under my armpits when I realized the route Willie was taking. It was the route back towards Apple Valley. I kept up a time-passing conversation with Eddie Torrio, running down the Albuquerque fiasco to him. And I kept my hand on the automatic. If Willie turned in at the Inn, I'd dump both him and Torrio before any questions were asked.

I saw the lights of the Inn in the distance and its nearby airport and knew my own moment of truth might come in a few minutes—and that of Eddie and Willie would come more surely.

When the gorilla turned off at the airport, I felt only a little relieved. After all, Jean was only a short distance away—I hoped.

Then I saw the red and white Beechcraft at the far side of the airport and the muscle man swung the heavy sedan towards it. He could wheel a car like he threw his fists. Sure and fast.

Torrio didn't even get out of the car.

"In the plane, Marty. I got the boss's signal and he's waiting for you. When he talks he talks to one person alone and it's you he wants to see."

I got out and walked through the glare of spotlights to the plane. The same no-talking pilot pointed to the cabin steps and I went up them. The panel door slid open and a voice that sounded like a tape-recording cut the air:

"Come in, Bello."

I looked around the leather-upholstered cabin and found myself alone, but the voice went on:

"I'm in the cockpit, Mr. Bello and I can see you. It isn't necessary that you see me. Sit down and make yourself at home. There's liquor in the cabinet and smokes in the drawer. Help yourself. Or if you want a fix go right ahead and cook up. That, I understand, is your department."

The voice was cultured with an overtone of condescension and sarcasm. I listened and he talked.

"I'm afraid your value to us in the southwest has fallen off, Mr. Bello, but we always have room elsewhere for enterprising and experienced talent. Your conversation in Torrio's car came in to me on our own wave length and it filled in the picture for me with the information I already had on hand. So we can dispense with any further explanations or rationalizations on your part about Albuquerque—or Los Angeles. You do speak Spanish do you not?"

"Fluently."

"Fine, because you'll need it. I'm building up a new—ah—enterprise based on an island in the Caribbean

and I need someone with your talents there. No Russian by any chance?"

"Not a word of it."

"Your brevity almost reaches the point of rudeness."

"I just listen and do what I'm told."

"I suppose that's an admirable trait, Mr. Bello. At least's it isn't common anymore."

I let that one pass over and said nothing.

"This—ah—enterprise evolves around the purchasing and buying of cocaine. I'll let Torrio run it down to you and work out the details. You'll answer to him from the Carribbean and a word of advice—you have an unfortunate habit of becoming involved with the opposite sex—always a complicating factor in our business. Try to avoid it in the Caribbean. That's all. Nice talking with you, Mr. Bello. Goodnight. Ah, by the way, all this, I assume, meets with your complete agreement.

"Of course," I quipped. "Goodnight."

As Willie pulled away from the plane, I could hear its engines rev up.

"Goodnight." I thought.

"What about it, Marty?"

"About what?"

"The deal the boss offered."

"I'll buy it," I quipped, stalling for time. "He said to work out details with you."

"I know that. He's bringing Fer-

nandez back from the Caribbean to handle the southwest and I'll fill you in on the island deal."

"I hear you talking."

"You don't hear me talking 'til you show Willie and me where you dumped that broad this afternoon. I stand good for you and I never take anybody's word for anything. Never."

Right at that moment we were driving by the Inn and I thought, "Don't come walking across the lawn, baby."

"No sweat, Eddie. Tell your ape driver to keep driving and head right up the road to Big Bear. I'll show you the spot and the results."

The isolated country was right up my alley and half way up the hill, just past the Permanente Cement Plant, I told Willie to slow down so I could get my bearings.

"Pull off at that clearing by the curve."

I got out first and made like I was looking in the rocks.

"Come on, Eddie. Here it is."

He came and Willie came with gruesome anticipation behind him.

I'll give Torrio credit, his only crack was jocular when I filled his guts with lead—on behalf of Marcia.

"A hophead with an automatic. Can't believe it."

Willie showed his true colors.

"Don't, Marty. Please don't."

I didn't give him the satisfaction of a slug. He was at the edge of the rocks and I kicked him over. His

screaming stopped 1500 feet below.

I drove the sedan back down the hill and parked it outside the airport. After wiping off finger prints, I walked the half-mile or so to the Inn. Jean was sleeping—high or tired, it didn't matter. I wanted some sleep and knew we had to be back on the road in the morning. I walked out to the parking lot and found the L.A. cabbie. He was asleep at the wheel and punched at the starter the minute he woke up.

"Where to, boss?"

Funny the loyalty a C note will bring.

"You can pull out now. We're through travelling around here."

"Many thanks. You've got some change coming."

"Keep it and this—with our thanks." I gave him another C note.

"If this keeps on boss, I'll give you a title to this hack. 'Night."

His goodnight had the only ring of sincerity I'd heard so far that night. I yawned and headed for the Inn again.

This time Jean heard me come in. She tumbled out of the bed and came drowsily to me and just clung to me for a minute before saying anything.

"Oh, Marty, I was afraid you wouldn't get back."

"Don't worry, baby, I'm back for keeps."

"You look awful. Where've you been?"

"As I said, looking after some unfinished business. Let's get some

sleep. We're getting out of here in the morning."

Jean's slow and rhythmic breathing, with her head cuddled on my shoulder told me she was dead to the world in which we were both so involved. Tired as I was, I thought instead of slept.

I had the worst kind of heat on me from the law—the Bureau of Narcotics and the FBI. Albuquerque wanted to see me. By tomorrow afternoon the sheriff's department here in San Bernardino County would be more than interested in the bodies of Torrio and Willie up the hill towards Big Bear. Be all that as it may, it seemed trivial to the kind of heat Mr. "B" would turn on us when news of Torrio's murder got to him.

I could think of lots of places I had a fifty-fifty chance to stay away from the American authorities, but right then there didn't seem a hole isolated enough to crawl into where "B" wouldn't turn us out—or bury us. I dozed off on the horns of this dual lamster's dilemma.

It must have been noon before I woke up and my arm and shoulder were cramped from the light weight of Jean's using it as a pillow. I looked down at her and my first thought was one of panic—we had to get the hell out of here—fast—or we'd never get out alive or without handcuffs.

"Mmmmm. You feel good, Marty," she murmured.

"We'll both feel better when we get far from here, baby. It's time to get on the road again. Still feel the same about coming along?"

"Stop asking, Marty. I *am* along."

"OK, baby, but before you keep coming 'along', let me clue you up on what it will mean—we'll be on the run from now on with one eye ahead and the other over the shoulder, doubting the future and dreading what's coming behind. The law and Mr. "B" will be both waiting around any curve ahead and always, always creeping up from behind. There won't be any ties with the past except memories—not even a postcard. There won't be any new friends because every stranger will be a possible bull or a paid torpedo from Mr. "B". How do you like that picture?"

"Marty, you're my past—and my future. I don't want to hear any more about grimness of life on the lam. It's been grim most of the time already."

It's been "grim" but even living a day at a time in an isolated Central American village has been better for me than the fate which would have been mine. And it's a better fate for Jean than that of Mar-

cia. We don't even see a newspaper from the states and, as I ran down for Jean, the past is only a memory—brought to life occasionally through a newscast on the radio. When boredom of the tropics becomes other than a routine part of life our mutual escape is the needle. We're its slaves in our own prison—a temporary escape from a haunting fear of apprehension which I know will come some day. Even a passing plane or rare incoming boat brings thoughts of how long and searching are the arms that still reach out for us.

One newscast brought word of another lamster—made that way legally through deportation to a European country—the great Mr. "B" eventually fell and Uncle Whiskers finally exiled him to his native country.

His threat—to a degree—to American life and welfare was removed. But to me, and to Jean, it remains. Jean's only consolation—from her own inborn philosophy—may perhaps sum up what's left, "que sera, sera."

As she still says, "We have each other—even if just for today, tomorrow may never come."

