

“I’ve seen the S.O.B. selling,” he said.

George must be getting old, I thought. The man I knew would have given the guy a .44 caliber enema if he even thought it was happening.

“You’re sure it’s weed?”

“Will, I know what weed looks like. But I was thinking, if you can get a buy off him, maybe you can flip the bastard. Find out where that crap is coming from.”

No, George wasn’t getting old. He was just cagey. I wondered who he had learned that from.

“Who is it?”

“Michael Martinez. Know him?”

I’d run the name through NCIC/CCIC (Crime Information Database) tomorrow morning. But the name meant nothing to me.

“Used to be a soldier,” George said. “He didn’t go to Iraq.”

“Too bad we didn’t run into him when I was working narcotics.”

“Well, I’d like him out of my place. It’s hard enough running a reputable business without scum like that around.”

“Let me get hold of my man. Does he come in every night?”

“Weekends mostly. Especially if we have a band.”

“Perfect.”

Jewell and her band would be playing there Saturday night.

2-ANOTHER SATURDAY NIGHT-

“I’ve been looking at the books,” RJ told Max Laurie. “Until we get more money from Tio Sam or Tio George, this will be our last mission for a while.”

“Yeah,” Max said. “All good things must come to an end.”

What was coming to an end was this grant round from George. We’d burned through that money buying what we needed. But some also went to a special functions in addition to the drug operations.

Two months before, the Sheriff, RJ, and I were called to the County Administrators office. I hated those meetings. Most involved unwelcome news and I wondered who was suing us this time.

“Guys,” Michael, the County Administrator, said. “We’ve been given a rare opportunity and I want to take advantage of it.”

“Go on,” the Sheriff said.

“The Wall is touring America, and we can be one of two places in Colorado that hosts it,” Michael said.

“The Wall? What’s this?” RJ asked.

“It’s like the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial in Washington,” Michael explained. “This exhibit moves around the country. Hence the name, ‘The Moving Wall.’”

“And they asked if they could bring it here?” the Sheriff asked.

Michael said, “I made some phone calls.”

The Vietnam War memorial had been open since 1982 and I remembered well the controversy that surrounded it. When unveiled, it again showed the division that had once rocked our country.

It wouldn’t be until the year 2000 when I’d get to visit it. I recalled how it cut across a long grassy area like a black scar and was covered with names on tablets that formed a wall that kept the small hill back. A walkway stretched in front of it and benches were spotted every so many yards.

Some people had expected something like the Iwo Jima statue or such. Instead, they got black slabs with the names of every soldier that never came back. Love it or hate it, it made a powerful statement.

A man named John Devit had attended the ceremonies when it was first opened. He was so moved by the emotion poured out at it, that he felt every American should see it. It became his mission to bring it to the people who would never be able to visit the one in the nation’s capital.

“It’s coming here,” Michael said. “I need to come up with some money.”

Michael had lost a boy in that hellhole and his name was one of thousands on the Wall. That made it important to him. If it was important to him, then it was important to us.

He outlined the things we had to have. We had to have a large area to hold it and we had to provide security.

That meant paying officers to guard it. Even after over two decades, emotions were still raw over what it represented. There had been attempts at vandalism, theft, and even demonstrations.

But bringing the wall could be a good thing. It was a place for remembrance and tears and healing. It was something we had to take seriously.

“We can take three thousand of the money George gave us,” I said. George had said we could use some of it for special operations. This was as special as they came. “Can we match that with some county funds?”

Michael was hoping I’d say that. It saved him the hassle of asking for it.

“And that’s why we’re almost out of money” RJ said, getting back to the here and now.

We were in the Detective’s Office and planning our operation for the night. By “we,” I meant RJ, Max, Pam, Jewell, and Chief Robert Gallegos from Antonito PD, and myself.

RJ was at the blackboard and had written down information on tonight's mission. He’d gone to the Spur, photographed the inside, and verified where Martinez usually sat. There was an interior diagram and he’d circled the perps table with a big red circle. He also taped pictures from the Spur alongside the diagram and put up a picture of our perp on the board.

“We’ll have some more money soon.”

“Maybe,” Max said. “Anyway?”

RJ saw I was looking at the blackboard with more than casual interest. “Don’t be too impressed there, Perkins,” he said. “I read your FMs (Field Manuals).”

“That’s what they’re for,” I responded. He’d executed an almost textbook perfect recon and put together a first-class briefing.

He turned to us and said, “Let’s get started.

“Tonight's mission is a simple one. We’re going to make a covert buy from a low-level pusher that has staked the Golden Spur out as his vending stall. Since we like the owner, we’re going to shut this operation down for him.

“This is our perp.” RJ had gotten a couple of pictures from the bar's surveillance system, and we had a mug shot of the pusher. “Michael Martinez. He’s a local boy from the Labatos area. He was in the military and has been out for about a year now.

“In that time, he purchased an impressive collection of cars. We were wondering how he was paying for them. Now we know.

“He’s been arrested twice. Once on a Drunk and Disorderly and then on a Failure to Appear. He spent a week in jail for the latter.

“Now he’s trying for the big time and we’re going to help him get there.

“We have five players. Will, you’ll be up with the band.”

“Hiding behind the amps,” Jewell teased me.

“Hiding behind the amps,” I confirmed. I held up my novel for the night. I was about a quarter of the way through Alan Dean Foster’s adaptation of the movie, *The Black Hole*.

“I remember that movie,” RJ said. “They went through a black hole and came out someplace else?”

“It was an okay movie,” I responded. “The effects were great, but the science was off.”

“I’m sure you’ll tell me why someday,” RJ said. “Now, Will and Jewell will spot the target for us. They’ll wait till he sits down and alert Pam and me. Will?”

I touched my ear. “I’ve got a team radio under my shirt and the wire running up to my ear.”

“Cool. Pam and I will go in together.” He looked at Pam.
“We’ll try to get as close to Martinez as possible. Max?”

“I come in about five or ten minutes later,” Max responded.
“I buy a beer, maybe dance a little. After a few minutes, I’ll approach Martinez. I’ll buy two dime bags and I’ll make sure you see it. Just keep an eye on me. I’ll spend a few minutes with him and then leave.”

“Max makes the buy,” RJ confirmed. “Pam and I see it. Once completed, Max you leave and give me a signal.”

“I’ll pull my hat down a little from the bill.” Max was wearing his old Massey Ferguson hat.

“You still have that smelly old thing?” I asked.

It was the same hat he’d worn when we worked DST (Drug Suppression Team). It had faded and a little more tattered from the years and had acquired a few new grease spots.

It worked perfectly in the bars and strip joints in Junction City. It cemented him as a good old boy who was out for a good time with the local riff-raff.

It would work even better here.

“Hey, it’s lucky!”

“It stinks,” I teased.

“It does stink,” RJ said, generating laughs. “Let’s get your wallet sanitized and then I’ll give you your money.”

RJ took out a white envelope from the desk. Opening it, he pulled out three ten-dollar bills. He’d photocopied the bills and recorded the serial numbers in the case file.

Max took out his big trucker-style wallet that was hooked to his belt with a silver chain.

“It’s already sanitized, RJ,” he said. He held it open for RJ to check. He’d taken all his money out.

RJ handed him the thirty dollars. “Buy a beer and get the receipt.”

“Receipt?”

“It’s just like DST,” I said. “We have to account for every nickel, dime, and penny.”

While with DST, we were issued one hundred dollars a week to buy dope and help keep our cover. Lt. Wilson always reminded us that we needed to get receipts.

My attitude was that a good old boy who gets a receipt for a beer must be a cop. What were you going to tell a suspect if they questioned it? That buying dope was an entertainment write-off? That wouldn't fly with the IRS, and it wouldn't fly with a pusher.

But the pushers never even batted an eye.

"Receipt," Max said. "Got you."

"Jewell and I have to leave here in a minute," I said. We had her keyboard and amp in the Jeep. We had to get her set up.

"What's the name of your group again?" Pam asked.

"We're the Boys plus One," Jewell answered and then smiled. "We do both kinds of music."

"Country and Western?" Pam ventured with a grin.

Everyone chuckled. Everyone except Max that is.

"I still don't get it," he said.

Everyone looked at him like he'd grown two heads.

"The Blues Brothers!" I finally explained. "Jake and Elwood in that bar in the sticks."

He looked at me blankly for a moment and then his face broke into a grin. "Oh, I see."

He still didn't get it.

"And you call yourself funny," I said. "RJ, will you cover the takedown plan."

"Robert, that's yours," RJ said.

Robert had it figured out. "Once we confirm the buy has been made, I go in and take Martinez outside. I'll say someone backed into his car to get him out. Only, we arrest him when he comes out."

"And once we get him, we'll try to flip him," I said. "I wonder if this stuff is coming from the grow house El Perrito told us about?"

“I don’t know about what El Perrito gave you, Will,” Max said, shaking his head. “You’re treating what it as the Gospel According to Him.”

“Oh?”

“He was right about the low-level pushers. But things like the grow house? He said it was in Costilla County? We haven’t got a twitch on that. I think he was snowing you, Brother.”

El Perrito had mentioned a grow house in a potato cellar but didn’t know where it was. He thought it was in nearby Costilla County. That’s the problem with criminals who want to play “Let’s Make a Deal.” Sometimes you don’t know where the truth ends and the bull begins.

But he’d been right about everything else. Trouble was, he’d died within weeks of going into prison. And as they say, “dead men tell no tales!”

“We’re heading out,” I said, getting up.

“See you there,” RJ said.

Jewell and I left the Sheriff’s Office and as we drove to the Spur, we talked.

“You said the science was off in that movie. How?”

She knew how to keep me calm before an op. “No one knows what happens in a black hole. Near as we know, once you go in, you don’t come out.”

“Why’s that?”

“You know about escape velocities and such. You have to be able to go so fast to get away from the gravity of an object. With a black hole, you pass something called the Event Horizon. Once you pass that, the gravity is so intense, nothing, not even light escapes and since nothing can go faster than light, you’re doomed. There’s no going back.”

“And inside the black hole?”

I shrugged as we turned towards the Spur. “No one knows. One thing for sure, if you do get tossed out someplace else, you won’t be alive when you are.”

The short conversation got us to the Spur.

As roadhouses go, George had tried to make the Golden Spur look quaint and old. But that's difficult to do with a building that's less than a year old. The paint still gleamed and the neon glowed a little too brightly. Maybe in twenty years.

The Boys plus One had a rep for being one of the best country/rock cover bands in the Valley. Not only could they rock a place, but they could also pack it out. That wasn't lost upon the owners of the bars in the area, and they were willing to pay well to get them. They'd make it all back and then some from the sale of beer and drinks.

The rapidly filling parking lot proved that.

I didn't expect trouble at these gigs. But the recipe for trouble is take people, add alcohol, toss in a pinch of anger and resentment, and stir well. Allow it to cook for an hour and you can get a pot full of it.

That exact recipe had been served up cold less than six months before on Christmas Eve.

We pulled around back where the rest of the band was unloading.

"Hey, Joey," I said getting out of the van.

"Hey, Will," he said. "Hope we don't get any fun tonight."

"Me too." I brushed my hand against my hip. My Walther's was there.

The fun he was referring to happened on that same snowy Christmas Eve. Joey had pulled Jewelle down behind a big amp as a man shot his wife dead in front of four hundred plus people.

I still owe him for looking after her.

I opened the back of the Jeep and pulled out the case that held Jewell's keyboard and took it inside.

The rest of the band was busy hooking up their equipment. Alonzo was fixing a busted string on his guitar.

"Already!" I exclaimed.

"Going to be a good night," he responded. He stopped long enough to take a swig from the beer bottle he had on top of his

amp. “The worst thing that can happen, has. How are you doing tonight, Will?”

“Good.” I put the carrying case down and went to get Jewell’s amp and cord bag.

Jewell had struggled along with a small amp for years and in a crowded bar, you barely heard her piano.

The new amp had been purchased at the pawn shop in Alamosa and it changed that. It put out the sound, but it was an older model. It weighed in about the same as an Iowa class battleship and maneuvered through the door as well.

With Alonzo’s help, we got it up on stage. Jewell placed her piano on a folding stand and rummaged through the cord bag.

“Baby, where’s the surge protector?”

“Should be in there.”

She rummaged around in the bag a little more. “It isn’t.”

“It’s in my bag,” Alonzo said. “I picked it up by mistake last weekend.” He reached into his bag, pulled it out and handed it to Jewell.

“Thanks,” Jewell said, handing it to me. I got down on my knees, plugged the surge protector into an outlet and then plugged in the amp and the piano.

“You’re hot,” I told her.

“And you remember that,” she said with a smile.

Alonzo picked a few chords and then asked, “Jewell. How’s the girls doing.”

“They’re doing good,” she answered.

Jewell turned on the piano and then the amp. The power light glowed like a red eyeball. She put her hands on the keyboard and began playing Gershwin’s *An American in Paris*. She stopped after a few minutes, satisfied that everything was working.

The band would start in fifteen minutes and everything was ready to go. Everyone left the stage to take care of restroom breaks or get something to drink. Once they got started, there

would be no stopping except for a few ten-minute breaks. And if the place was jumping, they might not take many of those.

I kept an eye on the equipment till they returned. When they got back, I went to the Jeep and got my folding chair which I put behind the amps.

For tonight's mission, it was the perfect place to be. Sitting behind the amps and with the band between me and audience, made me almost invisible. People tend to look no further than what's in front of them. So, I was able to watch and attract very little attention by sitting back here. It was a technique we'd honed well during my time with DST.

At eight PM, the band took the stage. There were over two hundred people drinking beer and talking around tables. I was looking up over my book and watching the crowd flow in.

Veronica, George's wife was at a table by the door. She was taking people's cover charge and stamping their hands with red ink. The ink would take days to wash off.

"Breaker one-nine for Deputy Perkins. You got your ears on, good buddy," said a voice in my ear.

RJ and I had long ago hung nicknames on one another. He'd started calling me "Perkins" after the deputy on *Dukes of Hazard*. I called him "Mr Ewing" after the character Larry Hagman had played on *Dallas*.

I clicked the talk button near my hip. I'd kept my hand near it and was able to click the button without drawing any attention.

"Right here, Mr. Ewing," I responded quietly and trying not to be too obvious about it. "Our buddy hasn't shown up yet."

"Rodger that. We're headed your way. Should be there in about ten minutes."

"Copy that."

The band started with Garth Brooks *I've Got Friends in Low Places*. I realized I had a problem. The loud amps made sure I wasn't going to hear a thing.

For being an experienced undercover operative, I hadn't thought that one through.

"RJ," I radioed. "Can you hear me?"

The tidal wave of sound almost washed his voice away.

"Barely," he answered.

I turned the volume up to maximum for the earpiece. The best I could do was hold the microphone close to my mouth and cover it with my hand. The amp hid what I was doing from the audience and if anyone was looking and saw I had my hand over my mouth as I read, they wouldn't think much of it.

A new couple came in the door. I looked up and pretended casual interest as I turned the page.

Our target had arrived.

Martinez was walking in with a local girl. She'd recently graduated high school and wasn't much more than a minute over eighteen, if even that.

She'd drink Coke tonight. It was about the best she'd get since this was a 6 percent (alcohol content of the beer) bar. She'd get carded and word would go around that she was too young to be drinking.

Martinez had probably snuck in a bottle of whiskey and would pour a little into her drink. He had his sights on other things regarding her and the alcohol would lower her inhibitions.

We hoped to ruin those plans.

Jewell turned away from her keyboard as if to check her amp, made eye contact with me and mouthed, "He's here."

I nodded a little.

"Your target is here," I radioed. "He's with one of the Gomez girls. They're heading for his table."

"Copy that, Perkins," RJ came back. "We're a few minutes from hitting the door."

"10-4, Mr. Ewing," I radioed back. "I'll keep an eye on things from the crow's nest."

He gave the girl some money and sent her to fetch herself a drink.

A guy came over and sat with Martinez. They talked for a few minutes. They kept their hands out of view, but their arms moved some. A few seconds later, the guy got up and left.

“Mr. Ewing,” I radioed. “The store is open.”

“Roger that, Perk. Shutting down my radio now.”

“10-4.”

Everyone knew RJ and Pam were cops and a radio bud in their ears would be a tip off they were working. It was bad enough they’d be in close proximity to Martinez.

The girl returned with her Coke. I’d watched as she went to the bar and George carded her. He nodded and made eye contact with one of his waitresses. She’d spread the word that the girl got only soda tonight.

I kept watching over my book. It was funny watching the buying and selling at the table. Only once did someone seem concerned that there was a cop in the room. But Martinez laughed, nodded in my direction and I could almost hear him say, “The man is into his book. Besides, these county mounties aren’t even in my league.”

The girl acted like she didn’t want to know what was going on. When Martinez was selling, she was always looking away.

Or was she a lookout?

I watched a couple of other possible buyers approach. Every time they did, the Gomez girl looked away. She wasn’t scanning the room for threats. She just didn’t want to know what was going on.

I was so busy watching that I missed seeing RJ and Pam until they were halfway to their table. They were holding hands and looked like two kids in love. Both were very comfortable with each other and since they were living together, there was no pretense involved.

RJ and Pam sat with some of RJ's cousins and he planted a kiss on her head as she sat. Then he went to the bar and got a beer for himself and a soda for her,

It was pure luck that RJs cousins were at that table. That put him and Pam within a few feet of Martinez. We couldn't have planned this better if we'd tried.

I watched Martinez for a few minutes and wondered how he'd react to two police officers not fifteen feet away. He looked over, but RJ and Pam were doing a first-class job of acting like they weren't at all interested in him. Local cops or not, they were just two kids out on the town as far as everyone was concerned.

And to prove the point, they did something that would have removed all doubt.

The band finished one song and went into Billy Ray Cyrus's *Achy Breaky Heart*. The song had barely began when RJ and Pam went out on the floor and started line dancing.

"Well, I'll be," I muttered to myself.

I watched them with some amazement. It didn't surprise me that Pam knew how to line dance. Country western dancing was as much a part of her DNA as her hair color.

The surprise was that RJ knew how. For the record, he wasn't bad. And it helped secure their cover that they were there on a date and enjoying themselves.

Line dancing involves turns, moves, and so on. It's more a group dance than anything else and takes some degree of coordination. It was something that was beyond me.

About a dozen or so other couples joined them on the floor. It looked like some poorly-choreographed Broadway number. But no one got hurt and it was fun to watch.

I almost missed Max showing up.

Max paid his cover at the door and wore the old Massy Ferguson hat tilted back on his head. He was looking around. He scanned past me and then looked over at the dancers. He

smiled like he was watching the dance, but I knew he was looking at Martinez.

Then Max turned away. Some people have a weird sixth sense and know when someone is looking at them. We wanted to avoid that.

The place had filled up even more. Now there were maybe four hundred people in the Spur. Bar capacity was six hundred and things had barely gotten started.

Max smiled as he watched a couple of girls walk by. By pretending to check out the girls, he was using them as a reason to look past them and in the direction of his prey.

Max went to the bar and ordered a beer. Then he leaned against the counter, drank his beer, and watched things through the mirror behind the bar.

A young woman approached Martinez and his date looked away. The girl bought something from him and then left.

The guy was moving the merchandise. Max needed to make his move before the shelves emptied.

After a few minutes, the music stopped and there was a big round of applause. People rapidly left the dance floor to take their seats, talking as they went.

Max pushed himself away from the bar. Taking his bottle of Coors with him, he walked across the dance floor.

The band started playing Brooks and Dunn's *Neon Moon*. It's a great slow dance song and people began filing back onto the dance floor.

RJ and Pam were at their table. That put them in position to see Max do his voodoo.

Moving slowly but steadily through the crowd, Max approached the Martinez table. He readjusted his cap like a man who just wanted to make sure it was still in place. It was his signal that he was going in.

He spoke to Martinez for a second and then sat down. They talked for a couple of minutes and then Max reached for his back pocket and pulled out his wallet.

He moved just enough so that RJ, Pam, and I got a glimpse of the cash. He handed the money to Martinez, something both RJ and Pam later confirmed seeing.

I didn't see the handoff, but RJ and Pam later confirmed they did.

Max slipped something into the inside pocket of his coat. He talked with Martinez for a few minutes before getting up and walking across the crowded dance floor towards the bar. As he walked, he pulled his hat down a little from the bill.

That was the signal that the buy was complete. Max bought another beer. Once he finished it, he left the empty on the bar and walked out into the night.

A minute later, RJ got up. Instead of following Max, he angled around to reach the door by the dance floor's perimeter. He left the bar, leaving Pam sitting with his cousins where she could keep an eye on things.

The band stopped the number amid a round of applause.

"We're going to take a quick break," Alonzo announced. "So, don't go anywhere." He picked up the beer he'd been nursing and toasted the crowd. "Enjoy."

Guitars came off from around necks to be placed lovingly onto their stands. I stood, stretched, and felt my muscles protest.

"I'm getting too old for this," I heard Alonzo tell one of his brothers.

Amen to that, I thought as I put Alan Dean on the chair. I got up on stage from my hideaway behind the amps.

"How's it going, Baby?" Jewell asked.

"Houston, we have lift-off," I said while putting my arms around her. I missed her when she was playing.

Alonzo and Joey turned when I said that, but neither asked. They figured it was cop stuff and they'd best keep their noses out of it.

"Yes," she said in a subdued voice. "Max is smooth. And now they take him down?"

Assuming RJ and Pam had indeed witnessed the transaction. If they had, then probable cause existed to apprehend Martinez. If not, we'd have to wait for the warrant.

"You guys sound good tonight."

"It's a good crowd."

A waitress came over with several beers and two cokes. She also had half a dozen mixed drinks that various guys had sent over for Jewell.

Jewell wouldn't touch them. As she often observed, "Guys are dogs. Even when they know a woman is with someone, they still try to hit on her."

The boys and their girlfriends would drink them.

I sipped my soda and watched the door. The longer it took something to happen, the better. That meant RJ had witnessed it, collected the dope from Max, and was going over the takedown with the Antonito cops.

Since this happened in their jurisdiction, we'd give them the arrest and it would go down in the books as a joint operation. Things like that always looked good when it came to budgets and local politics.

We were about five minutes into the break when Chief Gallegos came in. He looked around for a moment and then made a beeline for the table where our target was sitting. Anytime a cop walks up to someone in a crowded bar, everyone gets interested. The voices tapered off enough for me to hear him greet Martinez and explain, "Someone hit your car. Want to come out and we'll look at it?"

"You sure it's my car?" Martinez asked. There was some panic in his voice.

"Red 'Stang? License plate comes back to you. We did a drive-through earlier and it was good. When we came back through, we noticed it right away."

"Shit!" Martinez exclaimed.

Yeah, buddy, I thought. It's what you just stepped in.

“It looks like a pickup backed into it,” the Chief went on.
“Your front end is all smashed to hell.”

And this year's Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor goes to Robert Gallegos as the cop in *I was a stupid idiot dope pusher*! Robert was so sincere about what he said that he almost had me convinced that someone had bashed in the guy's car.

Martinez said something to the girl and followed Robert out. I wondered if anyone would notice that he wouldn't come back.

“Let's get back at it,” Alonzo said, looking at his watch.

I gave Jewell a quick kiss and said, “Got to go make the doughnuts, Love of my Life.”

“How long are you going to be gone?”

“I'll be back in time to help you pack up.”

I got outside as APD was putting Martinez in the back of their patrol unit. I'm sure he was surprised to find out it was all a ruse that led to his arrest. RJ was standing out of the line of vision and watching him get hauled away.

“We got him, Perk,” RJ said as I joined him.

“Good work,” I said.

“We saw the whole thing. Max set this one up perfectly.”

“Not his first rodeo, you know. How did we do?”

“We arrested him and did a search.” He held an evidence bag up for me to see. “Eleven dime bags and a couple of quarter bags of what looks like coke. And five hundred dollars. Our money was in there. And I got the stuff from Max.”

“Not bad. What do you want to do next?”

“We're headed over to the jail. I want him in Interview Room One before he gets that phone call. Maybe we can flip him.”

Pam came out of the bar and joined us.

“We got him?” she asked.

“We got him,” RJ confirmed.

“I'll be watching from the dispatch office,” I said.

“OK. We're heading that way.”

I walked around the building to the Jeep and drove to the Sheriff's Office.

The sound of dispatch talking to our patrol over the radio greeted me the second I walked in. From the Detective's Office, I heard the sound of typing.

Max sat at my desk, a cup of coffee in front of him. He was at my typewriter and was working away at something. He was still the king of the hunt and peck method of typing.

He looked up as I came in.

"Just like the good old days," he said and went back to his typing.

"Where did you park?" I asked.

"Behind the church."

Good.

"Your statement?" I asked.

"Yep." He typed a few more words and pulled out the paper. Opening the desk drawer, he got a pen and signed it. "I have a lead for you on that grow house El Perrito told you about."

"Really?" Maybe El Perrito hadn't been blowing smoke after all.

"Martinez told me it's around here and he mentioned Tio Joe by name."

That made sense. Since Tio Joe was from Costilla County, we'd assumed it would be there. El Perrito had made the same mistake.

"There's a lot that's coming out of that place."

"Really?"

"Really. And I think you made a mistake taking him down so soon."

Of course, it was. But it's easy to second guess a play after you've done it.

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him I was interested in making a big buy and taking it to Colorado Springs. I had friends up there that would sell it to the soldiers. We could make a killing if we could find a reliable source."

I couldn't hold it against him, but Max had done some freelancing he shouldn't have.

"This was supposed to be a simple game. Make a buy and take him down."

"Will, you're beginning to sound like some of those officers we worked for. Besides, no harm done."

"Tell me about the conversation," I said, trying to recover a little from the sting.

"I told him I wanted thirty-five hundred dollars worth of product as a test and asked if this place could handle that. He told me it could and more."

I wanted to pop him alongside the head for doing this. We didn't have the money to go after the Grow House. But it was too big a lure to resist.

"He'll bond out in a couple of days if not tonight. I know how to get hold of him. Find the money and I'll set up the buy."

"Sitting it up isn't the problem. Where I'm going to get the money is."

RJ had explained that we had no money an hour before and wouldn't get more for a while. It had gone in one ear and out the other with Max.

Maybe we could hold a bake sale!

"No sweat, Brother. I jumped the gun a little. I can drag it out till you're ready."

But not by much. If Max drug this out too much, they wouldn't sell to him. In the dope business, money talks and BS walks.

"I'll see what I can do," I said. "Good night's work. We'll see if we can flip this guy."

"Good." He stood, stretched and looked at the clock on the office wall. "I do believe I'll head back over to the Spur. There's a young lady that's going to be heartbroken over what happened to her date," he said with a grin. "I'll just have to console her."

“You better be careful,” I told him. “I’m not sure she’s eighteen yet.”

He thought about it and then said, “I like them young and that’s a fact. But not that young. You can find yourself in a place where your dance card’s full every night.”

“So true.”

“And on that note, I say good night.”

Once he was gone, I put the statement in a folder and placed it on RJs desk. Then I got a cup of coffee and went into the dispatch office. James was running dispatch tonight.

“Hey, Will,” he said, looking up from his log entry.

“Hey, James.” James had turned on the monitor that watched over the interrogation room. RJ and Pam were sitting at the table with a couple of notepads between them. RJ had the guy’s driver’s license and was filling out a Miranda warning. Martinez would probably lawyer up, but sometimes you get lucky.

“Give me the headphones. Are we recording this?”

He reached into a drawer and handed me a pair of headphones. “Yes. Fresh tape.”

“Good.” I plugged the headphone jack into the system and then slipped them on.

“ . . . Good dance,” I heard Pam say. “Too bad we couldn’t stay.”

“It was just getting fun.”

I buzzed RJ on the intercom and he went over to the wall-mounted unit and hit the talk button. We’d purchased the system from Radio Shack and it made the same whistle as the intercoms on Kirk’s Enterprise.

“Yes.”

“RJ, Max was saying that Martinez told him that tonight’s product came from a grow house in Ortiz.”

“Roger that, Will. Maybe El Perrito had the wrong county.”

“I think so.”

“I’ll ask, assuming he doesn’t take the fifth.”

“Copied.” I leaned back in the chair to watch.

A few minutes later, the door opened and the jailor ushered Martinez in. He was in the orange scrubs the well dressed inmate wears.

“Mr. Martinez,” RJ said. “Please have a seat.”

Martinez sat down. I watched him closely, trying to guess what he would do. He seemed ill at ease. This was someplace he never expected to end up.

I thought he’s say he wanted a lawyer and his phone call and that would be that. It wasn’t until he sat down that I figured he might talk.

“Before we get started,” RJ said. “You understand why you’re here?”

Martinez looked at him and Pam as if they were men from Mars and he couldn’t understand a word they were saying.

“No? Well, let me tell you. Marshal Harmon and I saw you conduct a transaction of a green leafy substance.”

Properly phrased, I noted. It’s not dope till the lab says it’s dope.

“When we arrested you, we found several baggies of the same leafy substance. You also had several small coin-sized bags of what will probably test out as Cocaine. The green leafy substance field tests as Marijuana. We’ll be getting confirmation on that from the CBI labs in about a week.”

The guy didn’t utter a word.

“The penalty for pushing grass and coke in this state is rather serious. You’ll be sitting in jail for a while.”

RJ let that one hang out there long enough for the guy to say, “I’ve nothing to say,” which was more than he should have. It meant that the gravity of his situation was sinking in a little.

“You know that a field test isn’t enough to convict me on,” Martinez said.

Oh, someone either reads case law, or someone was educating them.

RJ chuckled. “Of course I do. But it does give us probable cause to arrest you.”

“That’s all I have to say,” Martinez said.

“We can arrange it so you do a year in county and two on probation. In exchange, you give us names and work with us.”

“Or?”

“Or you could choose not to and then you can go to Canyon City where you’ll be the belle of the ball.”

Martinez thought it over for a second, but he said, “I have nothing to say.”

“So, you don’t care what happens to you.”

RJ paused, letting it sink in a little.

“Trust me. Time here is a lot easier than Canyon City.”

The guy glared at RJ and I could see his lip quiver a little. Either he was angry with RJ or was about to cry.

“Think about it.” RJ held up the paper he’d been writing on. “This is your Miranda warning. State and federal laws require that I read it to you.”

He put the one he’d filled out by hand in front of Martinez and began reading from another. Martinez didn’t pick it up.

“Before I begin asking you any questions, you must understand your rights.

“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to represent you at no cost to you. You can decide at any time to stop answering questions and invoke your right to remain silent. If so, all questioning will stop.” RJ put the form down.

“Mr. Martinez, do you understand these rights?”

“Yes, I do,” he replied.

“Having these rights in mind, do you wish to talk with us now?”

The guy looked at him and then at Pam and said. “I want a lawyer!”

“Jesus,” I said, ripping the headphones off my head. It wasn’t a prayer on my part, but a curse. I turned red, realizing I’d misused my savior’s name.

Unless he changed his mind, there was no way we’d find out about this alleged grow house from him. Maybe if we played “Let’s Make a Deal” with his lawyer, he’d give them up.

I slipped the headphones back on in time to hear RJ tell him, “I’ll buzz the jailor, and you can make your phone call.”

Pam leaned back in her chair and said, “You might want to reconsider that, Mr. Martinez.”

“Why?”

“It’s your ass, my friend,” she said. “Not mine.”

Martinez stopped and glared at her. She’d scored with the remark.

“Think about it,” she said, continuing the attack. “You’re a good looking kid. They’re going to be lining up for you.” She paused, letting it sink in. “You really should reconsider.”

He knew Pam was playing with his mind “Bitch!” he spat.

“That’s enough,” RJ said standing up.

Martinez backed down and stepped away from the table.

“Like I said. It’s your ass, not mine. And if you want to save it, you know what we want. Think about it.”

Getting raped was a real possibility for him and she’d planted the seed that it could happen in his mind. Now time would water it. With luck, we’d get a crop and get what we wanted.

Seconds passed as Martinez thought about it.

“I want my lawyer,” he said after a moment.

RJ didn’t show it, but he was as upset as I was.

“If you change your mind, you know where we are,” RJ said.

The jailor appeared at the door, collected Martinez, and escorted him out.

“Well, there goes that,” RJ said after he was gone. “Let’s hope he changes his mind.”

Pam nodded. “Being raped doesn’t appeal to anyone. I think he’ll fold and talk to us.”

“Think so?”.

“Worst case scenario, we got one more pusher off the street,” she said.

“Yeah,” RJ responded. “I guess that counts for something.”

3-WAITING ON GEORGE-

“You know,” I said. “It isn’t fair.”

“If our Lord and Savior didn’t get off easy, what makes you think you will?” Pastor Morgan asked.

We were sitting in the church office waiting for George to arrive. Like George’s office, Pastor Robert Morgan’s office hadn’t changed much. It still had his rodeo and SEAL team pictures and the degree from Stanford on the wall.

The only thing new was the coffee pot. He’d traded in the old pot in for a new one. It made good coffee but was nothing like the old brew he used to make.

The old pot had been of the old school variety. You fill it with water, put coffee grounds in the basket, and let it percolate to its heart content.

What it produced was what Pastor Morgan called “Black Gang Coffee.” It had been a staple on steamships for at least forever and the recipe had been handed down in the Navy from ages past. Some went so far as to say that learning it involved a ceremony that could happen only at the dark of the Moon, chanting of the magic formula and with sea serpents and mermaids in attendance.

When I first heard the story, I asked if the acolytes had to wear bras on their heads. The guy who told the story didn’t get it.

But if that’s what it took to make that perfectly awesome cup of Joe, then it was worth it.

“You were ranting about running an undercover drug enforcement outfit.”

“I was not ranting,” I said.