

# Marijuana Smuggling Blues

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A marijuana smuggling operation goes wrong on the high seas.

Published on  
**Booksie**

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## MARIJUANA SMUGGLING BLUES

The mine had remained tethered to the bottom of the Atlantic for three decades after World War II had ended, before itâs chain, weakened from the deep currents moving it slowly back and forth, snapped. Camouflaged by slime and barnacles, it bobbed on the surface for years. Then, spurred on by the winds and waves of an offshore hurricane, it drifted into the Gulf of Mexico.

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The water was like glass.

Bales of marijuana and pieces of the trawler floated in an oil slick around the raft.

I thought it was the end for me. Everyone else involved in the plan was dead. I had seen everyone, except my brother, die with my own eyes. And I sure was wasnât expecting him to come popping to the surface to save the day like Lloyd fucking Bridges in Sea Hunt.

There was no protection from the sun. When I had hit the water, all I had on was a pair of boxer shorts and those had been torn from my body from the force of the water rushing in from the blown apart bow.

My body was being slowly basted in itâs own sweat. Skin a bright red. Eyes swollen to slits. The sun and the oppressive heat had rapidly drained the moisture out of my body.

The sharks discovered us the first day. When I had been able to sit up, I could see them circling the amongst the wreckage, their dead eyes peering up at me from the crystal blue water. Occasionally one of the bastards would run his snout up and down my back through the floor of the raft as if making sure I was still there.

Karl had been laying across his makeshift marijuana raft. His left arm blown off at the elbow. I thought that he had been dead the whole time, he never had responded when I shouted to get his legs out of the water. But when the shark had snatched him and started off the feeding frenzy, Karlâs eyes had snapped open like a ventriloquistâs dummy, his horrifying screams echoing across the water.

Karl, my brotherâs cellmate from Huntsville. My brother hadnât been in the joint a week when he had gotten ambushed in the showers. Karl had walked in minutes later, towel over his shoulder, only to find his cellie being ass raped by two big Brothers. One rapist had his jaw and cheekbone broken and lost an eye. The other one had checked himself into protective custody.

No one in the joint ever laid a hand on my brother again.

Six years ago, the Galveston cops, acting on a tip from a local snitch, had raided our beach house. I had dove out the kitchen window and ran down the beach, leaving my brother passed out on the couch with a couple of ounces of weed on the coffee table in front of him.

We had been running a small marijuana smuggling operation. Nothing major. For me anyway. I just needed enough cash to supplement my surfing and beer drinking habits. Every couple of weeks weâd drive down to Matamoros, catch a cockfight, drink some beer, bang a couple of whores, and cross the border with a couple of pounds of weed in the false gas tank of our VW bus. It was all a big hoot to me.

But Noah needed the cash. Two years prior to the bust, Noah had come back from Nam, after being released from the military stockade in Saigon, with a dishonorable discharge in his hand. He was bitter, unemployable, and hooked on China White heroin.

The cops tried to implicate me but Noah had taken the full fall. Hard.

Texas was Texas and the judge didnât bat an eye. Noah was sentenced to five to eight in Huntsville State Prison. When he was led out of the courtroom in shackles, I could read his mind when he glared at me sitting there with our father. Where the hell were you?

Paranoid and scared shitless, emptied my savings account, I gassed up my brotherâs Harley, acquired in trade for a kilo of Panama Red, and fled Galveston with no destination in mind.

When the money ran out and the bike was hemorrhaging oil, I found myself on another island. Kodiak, Alaska.

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I signed on at a fish cannery. Days I gutted fish. Nights I marinated my brain with booze and dope. About a year had gone by when I finally got the nerve up to send a postcard to our Dad. His reply had been short and sweet.

You are no son of mine.

I tried to let it all go.

Years rolled by in a blur. Time had no meaning.

Stinking of fish guts, I had gone straight to the bar after my shift. The bar's owner, Wendy, was my girlfriend. A follower of something going on in England called the punk movement, she had blown into Kodiak via London several years earlier sporting body piercings, purple hair and strange musical tastes. It was a slow night in the bar. We swapped stories, bought each other shots of Cuervo, and sneaked lines of Peruvian flake as pink as a newborn baby's ass.

The next morning I was roused by the sun streaming through her car window and a rapping on the passenger window. Squinting through ravaged, bloody red eyes, I looked down to find Wendy passed out with her face in my crotch. Leering in the window at her pierced nipples and shaved beaver was my trailer court manager. He was clutching a phone message between two nicotine stained fingers. By the front of his pants it looked like he had been standing there a while.

The phone rang in the hallway of a waterfront fleabag on Galveston Island. Captain Jack's had long been infamous as a home for the island's hookers, dopers, retards, drunks, welfare cases, and life's overall losers.

My brother's parole officer could now reach him at that address.

If Noah was concerned the phone was bugged he sure didn't show it.

We'd cruise the trawler down to Tampico to fill the hold with kilos of Mohican Gold along with ten pounds of brown smack to pay off the Coast Guard. All expenses and front money would be taken care of. All we had to provide was the boat and the labor.

In a smartass tone I asked him what the old man thought about all this?

He'd be dead for two years. The boat's mine now, was the smartass reply.

There would be a ticket waiting for me at the Anchorage airport.

There were debts to be paid.

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The hallway in Captain Jack's had an unbelievable funk. A combination of sweaty armpits, dirty bunnies, and White Owl cigars.

The door swung open on the first knock. The joint hadn't been kind to Noah. His hair was long and greasy and he had a jailhouse pallor to him. Never big to start with he had lost a weight. Scrawny would be the way to describe him and the graying, prison issued jockey shorts that he was wearing didn't help out his appearance.

His room didn't smell any better than the hallway did.

Lounging naked on the bed, smoking a joint and watching Barney Miller on a rabbit eared TV, her legs covered with scabs and tracks, was a vaguely familiar hooker. She gave me a once over with vacant eyes and went back to her show.

Bitch can suck start a Harley. Want some of this, bro? Noah dropped his shorts and spooned up behind the whore. We gotta a few minutes before Karl gets back.

The ride to Galveston had been quite the experience. Karl had picked me up at the airport in an ancient Oldsmobile, and without speaking a word, had driven ninety miles an hour all the way down to Galveston.

Thanks but no thanks. I opened up a cooler, pulled out a beer, and squatted against the wall. Get rid of the whore, man.

The hooker got up in a huff and pulled on a bathing suit. As she walked out she shot me the finger.

My brother sat up on the bed. You got some shitty manners.

I shook my head at him. Cut the bullshit. I sneered at him. Jesus Christ, Noah! Look at yourself.

It took one look at you and I knew why you wanted me here. You say it's because I owe you and maybe I do. But we both know that you're in no fucking shape to run the boat. How the hell did you stay hooked on junk while you were inside?

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He lit a cigarette and stared down between his feet. His voice a raspy whisper.

â You can get anything you want in the joint, man. Karl and his boys took care of me.â

â Yea, looks like they did a helluva job.â

â Oh, youâ re a real fuckinâ tough guy? You think you could handle hard time? You think you could take someone trying to turn you out? I donâ t fuckinâ think so.â

â Turn you out? Shit, Noah. You mean you gotâ !?â

Thatâ s when I found out about all of it. About the rape. About Karl busting up the Brothers. About Karl being a ranking member of a notorious prison gang.

Noah owed Fred for saving his ass. The rules of prison. And thatâ s what this dope run was all about.

Karlâ s gang found out that our family owned a shrimp trawler and making this run would square things with them. Karl had gotten released from Huntsville first, and five months later when Noah walked out the gate, Karl had been at the curb, waiting.

Waiting for payback.

I literally couldnâ t fucking speak.

â We gotta do it, little brother. If not, weâ re both dead.â

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We pulled out that night. Karl had never been on a boat before and was blowing chow before we got out of the harbor. Noah, strung out and shaky, wasnâ t in much better shape.

I called Wendy collect, at the bar, just before we pulled out. I told her the whole story. She had cried, I had never heard her cry, and wanted to know why I was going through with this.

I didnâ t have an answer.

Ten miles out we were hit by a spotlight. Coast Guard! It was pitch black out and the light was blinding.

â This is the spot, fucksticks,â a voice shouted out. â This is were Iâ ll be and you goddamn better have my shit. I donâ t play games.â

Fueled by white cross and caffeine, I never left the helm all the way to Tampico. Even when we pulled in and swarthy, dangerous looking men with machine guns loaded thousands of pounds of marijuana on to the trawler, I never stepped down from the wheelhouse.

Finally, when we were halfway back to Galveston, unable to keep my eyes open, I relinquished the wheel to my brother and crawled into my bunk.

It was still dark when I woke up. A warm front had rolled in and I was bathed in sweat. I rolled out of my bunk and shuffled into the small galley where I washed down some amphetamines with a Coke.

I glanced up into the wheelhouse. Karl and Noah were illuminated eerily in green by the instrument panel.

Noah, obviously wired, was chattering on like a monkey about some convict on â Eâ block who had the â worldâ s biggest dickâ when he suddenly shut up and backed the engines down.

â Shit! Karl, do you see something floating out there?â

I stepped up into the wheelhouse when I felt the bump.

There was a blue flash.

And I was in the water choking on diesel fuel.

I didnâ t remember climbing into the life raft. The sun was burning in the sky when I came around. Just before dark, Karl was gone, and I knew that in my present condition I wasnâ t far behind.

In a watertight pouch I found a flare gun and six flares. That night I shot a flare off every couple of hours, saving one in case I spotted a boat or a plane.

I donâ t how long I floated.

The sound of water splashing woke me up. Barely able to lift my head and peering through slits, I saw someone standing on the bow of a small boat poking at the remaining bales of weed with a boathook.

â What the fuck happened out here?â he screamed.

I recognized the Coast Guard agentâ s voice.

â Whereâ s my smack? I didnâ t put my ass on the line for you assholes just to come up empty!â

I shook my head and laid back down. â All gone.â I muttered. Where the hell did he think it was?

â Wake up, asshole!â

When I opened my eyes, the agent was over me, the boathook raised like a spear. â Any minute a chopper is

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going to get scrambled. So you either tell me where my heroin is or I'll gut you and throw you to these fucking sharks.

I raised my arm and fired the remaining flare in his direction. I don't know if I hit him. All I heard was something hitting the water, and then screaming.

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It made major news. The wreckage of a mysteriously sunken boat surrounded by floating bales of marijuana, one survivor, AND a missing Federal agent. How couldn't it?

I was being held in protective custody, handcuffed to my bed. Everyday a FBI agent with a split personality would visit me.

One day he would be fatherly;

"We can protect you, son." As he patted my foot. "We know that Walsh (the Coast Guardsman) was dirty and that the load was financed by the Texas Nazis. They're already looking for you. Just tell us what you know and we can make it all go away. Witness protection, baby." He'd give a sly wink.

The next day he'd be raging;

"You better come clean you punk motherfucker." His face beet red with spit flying out of his mouth.

"You'll never make bail so you're gonna rot in this shithole."

But I stuck to my story. My family are shrimpers. Accidents happen in the shrimping industry. I don't remember a thing.

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Three months into lockdown passed. I was in the exercise yard when a guard handed me her letter. Wendy had sold her bar to post my bail. She'd be in Galveston within the week. From there we'd work our way to Canada and then catch a flight to London.

Sweet Jesus Christ! Freedom!

I was so caught up in the letter that I didn't notice the guard walking away and that I was suddenly unsupervised. There was a whiff of jailhouse brew in the air. When I looked up there was an shirtless inmate standing in front of me. A large swastika tattooed on his chest. The steel shank in his hand was shining in the sun.

"It's just business," he whispered.

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