

Down on the Pharm

by Hugh Barlow

My Buick? Ain't she a beaut? I got 'er jes' a month 'r so ago in New Baton Rouge. Course she didn't look like this when I got 'er. I made a few modifications. See, the city boy I got 'er from thought she was some sort o' toy. Little did he know, she was perfect fer the swamps. When I got 'er, she was cherry red. That wouldn't do fer me. I had Virgil paint 'er up in the prettiest camo job you ever did see. He also helped me install the bumpers an' the cargo rack on the roof. Me? I'm your friendly local unlicensed recreational pharmaceutical salesman, Pierre LaPonte. Folks 'round here sometimes call me Pepe LePew 'cause I spend a lot o' time pickin' stinky weeds fer the Pharmers, but not ta my face. Last feller did that got a knife in the gut. Pretty much stopped folks from callin' me that out in the open, but I still hear the whispers now 'n' again. Anyhow, the reason I dressed Genevieve in camo is I got me a patch o' loco weed out in the swamps, an' cherry red kinda stands out, ya know? Though she was built here on Orleans, Genevieve has a German engineered 6 liter W12 pusher engine that runs on hydrogen. The lift motors 're electric, an' if I have difficulty with the pusher, the lift fans c'n limp me home at about 20 klicks a hour as long as I'm no more'n a hour from dry land. Any farther into the swamp, an' I better make SURE I do not have a mechanical failure or run outa hydrogen. I got a radio, an' in a pinch I can call on Virgil. He'll fire up his old Chevy flat bottom an' at least come pick me up if Genevieve is too hard ta tow home. That ain't happened but that one time, an' that wasn't 'er fault.

I'd jes' got Genevieve when I took 'er out ta the patch ta check on my crop. I snuck by the narcs on the edge o' town slicker'n snot an' I was out in the open where I could let Genevieve stretch 'er legs. It was the first time I had let 'er run, an' she was quite fast. I got 'er up ta 80 klicks in the swamp, which don't sound like much ta folks who're used ta highway drivin', but in a swamp, that is FAST.

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Genevieve danced about like a Belle at 'er sweet 16. I took the long way jes' fer the fun o' it. I got ta the patch in record time anyways. 'Till I got 'er, I thought my General Beauregard was the most beautiful swamp runner I ever saw. Hovercraft have it all over flat bottom boats when it comes ta maneuverability. Course, if ya want ta haul CARGO, ya can't beat the ol' General. A thousand' horsepower alcohol fueled V8 Chrysler powered pusher can move the world. It makes a HELL o' a lot o' noise doing it too! All the noise made it hard ta sneak past the narcs, which is why I went lookin' fer Genevieve. Dressed in camo, an' muffled nicely, ya can't hardly see 'r hear 'er from a few meters if I take 'er easy. All ya hear is the whisper o' what sounds like the wind. I got the money ta buy Genevieve from poaching constrictors in the deep swamp. The General was good fer that, an' since the narcs weren't too concerned 'bout illicit exotic animal skins, I was able ta get by with some light bribes, smuggler's bins, an' slick drivin'. You'd be surprised what ya c'n hide under some o' those smelly medicinals that the Pharmers 're willin' ta buy. I found my patch by accident whilst out picking medicinals ta cover a load o' dead constrictors. I tested the patch in the traditional way an' got a bit stoned on jes' a nibble o' a fresh sprout. Course, everyone knows the sprouts 're more concentrated than mature plants, but ya make more money on the mature plant. Can't let the city folks get the good stuff. Too much psychedelics, an' the idiots'll kill themselves. Can't sell loco weed ta a dead body. Weed is pretty much cut ta nothin' by the time the city folks get it anyway--maximizes profit. I hate ta THINK about what kind o' crap the offworlders get. Won't find me usin' stuff meant fer offworld--it'll likely kill ya, an' not in the way a young sprout will, see? No fun 'fore ya die, jes' agony from a belly full o' drain cleaner.

After I came down from my high, I loaded up the General an' snuck back into town I sold my constrictors ta Madame Melba, an' got ta the Pharmer's Market early ta dump my stinky weeds. Ever' little bit helps, an' whilst the pay fer stinky weeds wasn't hardly worth the trip into the swamps, it did pay fer the alcohol fer both me

an' the General. By noon I had finished my business at the market an' I hit the town. Now, I hadn't had a bath in a few days, an' I'm sure I musta smelled ripe due ta the swamp water, the stinky weed, an' the smell o' dead constrictors, but Mother Mabel put out a good spread fer me anyways. She made sure I had a corner ta myself, an' kept bringin' fresh cooked crawdads an' left a bottle fer my exclusive use. Loco weed makes ya VERY hungry after a high, an' the low makes ya want ta crawl into a bottle. I passed out at the table an' woke up in one o' the private rooms at the back o' Mother Mabel's place. The bottle was on the nightstand, I was freshly scrubbed, an' my clothes was washed an' folded on the chair next ta the bed. God bless Mother Mabel. I seem ta recall dream-like scenes where I was fightin' with one o' Mabel's bouncers as he held me down in a tub o' warm soapy water. I kinda remember hearin' a woman yellin' somethin' like, "Hold the fool still! All that thrashin' is gonna get 'im drowned! GOD, the stink o' that boy! Can't let 'im soil the sheets. They are hard ta come by." Don't know fer sure if it was real. I was real drunk at the time. I counted my money afore takin' another hit from the bottle, an' Mabel took a fair share fer the food an' lodgin' She's a good Christian woman. I wisht she had a daughter, so's I could marry 'er. I could use someone ta clean up 'round my place.

I used the public link in the room at Mabel's ta search fer a vehicle that would help me get my crop past the narcs. That's when I found Genevieve. I went back ta the docks at the Pharmer's Market, fired the General up, an' went home ta get the rest o' my stash. I had been savin' up my earnin's in a jar that I'd buried on my little island. I got my cash an' went ta Virgil's place. He took me ta town an' got me on the public hover-ferry bound fer New Baton Rouge. I'd contacted the city boy ta let 'im know that I was on my way, an' he met me at the docks with Genevieve. I tried ta pay 'im in cash, but he said that he had no way o' usin' it an' made me convert the cash inta credit at one o' the banks. I almost didn't go through with buyin' my baby 'cause o' the mess involved in convertin' cash inta credits.

The bastards at the bank wouldn't let me convert without ID an' a shit load o' fees. I used my Bartholemew Fitzgerald persona fer the transaction. He was pretty well used up with all the troubles I had gotten 'im in, so I figured I could afford ta throw 'im away on a large transaction. I really wanted Genevieve. The poor feller who's ID I stole is gonna get a call from the revenueurs in a few months once they see such a large transaction in cash fer the purchase. They's gonna wanna know where a feller like 'im came by such a large wad when he don't have the type o' job that would let 'im EARN that kind o' money. It will be an inconvenience fer 'im, an' he is likely ta be on the government watch list fer the rest o' his life, but that ain't no skin offa MY nose. The city feller transferred the title ta Bartholemew, an' after a few minutes I had the title in another name usin' a few shell companies ta hide the transactions. I dropped the feller off at 'is apartment in the city an' drove Genevieve straight ta Virgil's place. I had ta take it easy getting 'er home, since the plates were not legal. Like a buddy o' mine always says, ya do one crime at a time. Drivin' illegally whilst transportin' is jes' plain STUPID. Ya are jes' beggin' ta get caught if ya do stupid stuff like that. The posted limit on the route home was 80 klicks, an' I didn't even have a license ta drive a hovercraft, let alone have insurance on myself fer usin' one. Cops don't have a sense o' humor. I stayed with traffic all the way home.

Virgil an' me stayed up fer a couple 'a days workin' on Genevieve ta get 'er ready fer the swamp. The first thing ta go was the cherry red paint. We had ta cut through the carbon fiber shell in places where we was sure there was no hydrogen tanks ta mount the bumpers an' the roof rack. Coffee laced with crank kept us goin' an' Virgil sent 'is kid brother out ta get us food when the hungries caught up with us. Mostly the kid kept out o' our way whilst we was workin, since Virgil is mean when he is on crank. The boy sure hot footed it when Virgil called 'im though. I guess getting' shot at will make a feller cautious. Virgil found me some clean plates ta mount on Genevieve jes' in case I was ta take 'er inta town, not that I plan

ta do that. I got a ol' Nissan 4 wheeler ta drive about town It's parked at the public garage near the Pharmer's Market, an' if I need ta get ta the city, I c'n always take the hover-ferry. Anyway, after shakin' Genevieve down on 'er maiden run, I let the patch mature. I kept baggin' constrictors an' pickin' stinky weed ta sell ta the Pharmers whilst my little farm died off from neglect. Seems my own folks lit off in the middle o' the night one night. Mama had been makin' noises ta Papa that I was scarin' 'er. Papa kept tellin' 'er that there was nothin' he could do 'bout me since I was full growed an' could make my own choices. Mama had been takin' care o' the beans an' corn an' such whilst Papa worked at the hardware store in town ta pay for necessities. One day I come home from my patch ta find that the folks had done lit out. They'd not even left a message fer me. All o' their stuff was gone, an' the Ford was missin' at the garage. That left more room fer me at the house, an' I started invitin' folks over fer parties. I used the barn ta make the crank I sold at the parties, an' there was no-one ta complain 'bout the noise with the folks gone. Eventually, it was time ta harvest, an I snuck Genevieve past the narcs. I got ta the patch an' began the harvest. Once I was done, I decided ta celebrate with a hit. I nibbled some mature weed ta take the edge off my nerves when things got a bit weird. Seems I got a 'specailly potent strain o' weed. The hit I took knocked me out afore I could get inta Genevieve an durin' the high I had, I found myself strugglin' fer breath. I musta figured out somehow that I was bein' strangled by a constrictor whilst I was stoned 'cause I woke ta find that my right arm was inside a dead constrictor's mouth up ta my shoulder. It seems I had grabbed my pistol whilst gettin' crushed, an' it seems that the constrictor decided ta swallow my free arm first. I guess I musta shot the bastard whilst he was eatin' me. I could not shake the stupid beast off, so I climbed inta Genevieve an' called Virgil. I managed ta get ta one o' our meetin' places afore I passed out again, an' Virgil towed Genevieve back ta his place an' then cut the constrictor offa me. Virgil ain't so good with first aid, an' my arm had ta be amputated 'cause o' the poison in the constrictor's gut.

Anyway, that is the reason I'm sellin' the secret ta my patch an' sellin' the Buick. I c'n show ya the way ta the patch, but I can't drive with jes' one arm. Jes' give me cash fer Genevieve an the patch, an' I will show ya where ta find the loco weed. Virgil? What about 'im? Will he be upset 'cause I didn't sell the secret ta 'im? That bastard went an' SOLD my harvest without givin' me a cut. He even sold the carcass o' the constrictor that got my arm! He gets his crank from ME! What's he gonna do about it? I OWN 'im. 'Sides, my gun is bigger than his, so if he wants ta make a issue o' it, all he hasta do is come visitin'. Do ya hear that noise? Sounds like choppers. What the hell you pointin' that at ME for? NARCS? NARCS? You ain't no NARC! Virgil wouldn't send me no narc! Under-cover? What, is this about your brother? I didn't kill 'im, the idiot took too much weed. Fukkin' Narcs, I'll kill ya ALL! Where is my gun?

