

Any Other Name
By Mary Mahan

“I wanna move my wife’s brother,” the voice on the phone growled.

Frankie Lambrouscio sighed and reached for his order pad. He had a pretty good idea what came next, but maybe this time would be different.

“To where do you wish to move him?” Frankie asked.

“The river, pal, har! Har! To da river.”

Frankie sighed and put down the pen. Maybe someday he’d get to write an order.

“It’s not that kind of moving company, mister,” he said.

“Whaddya mean? Ain’t this Lambrouscio Brothers Moving and Storage? Ain’t you in the family business?”

“Actually,” Frankie said, “My father was a florist.”

“A florist! What is this? A game?” the man barked.

“No, this is a moving and storage -” Frankie trailed off as the dial tone took over.

“Another one?” his brother Howard asked.

“Yeah. Your deal,” Frankie said and picked up his interrupted hand of cards. The brothers went on with the game of gin they’d played for nine years, Frankie slightly ahead with twelve thousand seven hundred forty points. The game passed the time between phone calls when the brothers explained they were not in fact connected to the crime family that ruled the city but were a legitimate moving and storing company.

“Gina ain’t gonna like this,” Howard said as he did every Friday morning. Their sister Gina, who supported the two brothers until their business got going, came every Friday afternoon to look over the books. She’d stare at the meager entries in the expense column, sigh over the blank income columns, then close the dusty green ledger and smile gently at her two older brothers.

“Things will pick up soon,” she’d say, “I just know it.” Then a quick kiss on the cheek to each brother and her return to her high-powered (and highly paying) world for another week.

Although Frankie and Howard had never actually gotten paid to move

anything, they were confident they'd be good at it. Every Wednesday, they drove to the rented storage unit they used as a warehouse and practiced. They competed in speed and dexterity trials; to knot and unknit the bungee cords, speed up and down the loading board into the truck clutching cardboard boxes of rocks and race the hand cart back and forth across the bare concrete floor. If they felt a little silly doing this at the ages of 45 and 47, they never admitted it.

Every six weeks, they'd pack everything in their shared house, load it onto the truck and drive around the block before unloading. Gina used to let them practice on her house, until a year or so ago, when she tired of never being able to find anything. It didn't bother the brothers to hunt high and low for things. It helped to pass the time.

Which is one reason Officer Marvin Trueblood had so little trouble talking them into his plan. Unofficial and illogical though it was, it helped to pass the time.

Officer Marvin Trueblood longed to be a detective the way the brothers longed to be movers. He dreamed of golden-haired girl embezzlers, jailed jewel thieves, and crime rings decimated by his genius.

Officer Marvin's problem was two-fold. First, he didn't look like anyone's idea of a cop. In fact, he looked like a librarian. Something about his long thin hands, delicate jaw and mild gray eyes made one think of sleepy afternoons with thick dusty books. Trading his black horned glasses for contact lenses helped somewhat and he was saving up for dental surgery. No one, whether cop or criminal, felt it necessary to take him seriously, except perhaps some of the younger children who needed help with their homework.

Marvin's other problem was that police work was not his strong point. To be polite, he was not very good at it. To be blunt, he stunk. Bullets mysteriously fell out of his gun at the absolute worst times, tires went flat in the middle of chases, and once he had somehow managed to get his retainer tangled in his badge during a particularly tense arrest situation. Dreams of glory burning his brain, Marvin Trueblood had been walking a beat and directing traffic for twelve years.

Marvin had convinced himself that one of the storage units on his beat was used by a major drug cartel as a delivery point for high grade drugs. Something about the furtive looks of the men he saw leaving, the cars they drove, the way they carried themselves as though conscious of the firepower holstered under their sport coats, told Marvin major players with major money were around. True, he had no evidence, no cause for a search warrant, no reason to pass a tip onto the undercover boys, but he was convinced. Marvin knew this was the case that would make his career. Or at least get his patrol car returned.

Marvin was not much better at explaining things than he was at police work. And the brothers had eight years of pent-up energy to spend. When he approached them one Wednesday in the midst of a hand truck race and asked them to make notes about the people they saw, he naturally meant the people visiting the suspicious warehouse. But he did not specifically say so.

At the end of the week, Marvin was amazed at the three black pocket-size notebooks filled with cramped writing. Notes on cars, hair color, height, weight, car makes and models, times, and dates marched across the pages. Marvin's heart thudded.

"All these people came to the warehouse?" he asked, flipping through the pages.

"Well, sure some of them," Howard said. "And, uh, where else Frankie?"

"The mall," Frankie said, "and the street outside the office."

"Oh, yeah, the park, too," Howard added, "and the zoo."

Marvin saw his mistake clearly. He looked into their shining eyes and did not have the heart to criticize. "Well, thanks guys, I mean jeez, this is lot of work. Can you tell me which ones were at the warehouse?"

The brothers looked at each other. "No," Howard said, "we never thought of that."

Marvin patiently explained he only wanted to know about the people visiting the warehouse.

The brothers talked it over and decided that if they had a wireless phone, they

could stay at the rental unit all day and still answer any calls to the office.

“A moving company needs a cell phone to keep track of all their customers,” Howard said.

Frankie nodded. “Things are sure to pick up any time now, like Gina says.

The first day wasn’t too bad. The second wasn’t either. But by Thursday of the first week, both brothers were bored and chafing at the lack of exercise. Then Howard got his idea.

“Think Gina will spend a little more money on us?” he asked his brother.

Frankie, crouched behind a large moving carton filled with rocks, didn’t move the binoculars as he surveyed the closed storage shed. He shook his head. “I don’t know. We better wait and see how the cell phone goes over,” he said.

When Howard didn’t answer, Frankie turned to find himself alone.

He returned lugging a cardboard box of equipment. First, Howard drilled a hole through to the storage unit next door. He attached a mini camera to a telescoping rod they got at a spy shop and tried to poke it through the hole. It promptly tangled in the belongings of the late Marco the Magnificent, whose blackmailing skills were much better than his sleight of hand.

Marco left approximately \$4.38 income from his magic act and \$2.4 million in an offshore account. This stunning planning left his estate hopelessly snarled in probate for the last four years with no signs of being settled anytime soon. Thanks to Howard’s blindly poking around, the wire of the guillotine from his magic act was tripped and cut off. Years later the heirs would wonder why there was a partial piece of fishing rod and expensive mini cam in their uncle’s dusty magic stuff. And how and why one of the glittering dummies had been beheaded.

Gina found out about their new activity and sighed. Though their schemes and dreams sorely tried her patience, at least her brothers had something to think about.

“Can you just rent the unit on the other side of these alleged smugglers?” she asked. “It would make more sense than trying to poke through another full unit to get to it.” Her brothers looked at each other, the ground, the sky and finally allowed as how they’d think about it but there were a lot of other factors involved. Her car

was not even out of the driveway when Frankie dialed the number of the storage company.

Thrilled with the brilliance of “their” idea, the brothers found guiding the replacement minicam through the empty unit to the east of the smugglers’ unit a snap. “It’s a snap,” Howie said a moment before the rod did just that up against the wall into the smuggler’s shed, leaving the camera dangling and rotating into air.

“What do you see?” Frankie asked.

“I can’t tell,” Howie answered, “It looks like a pin or something, on top of a little metal pineapple.”

The blast from the fishing rod tripping the hand grenade was muffled by the bales of cocaine, fortuitously forcing the blast outward.

Marvin was patrolling nearby and ran to the site to find his two investigators excitedly pointing at a Buick that had just pulled into the lot. In the driver’s frantic try at reversing the car to flee, he neglected to notice the metal prongs in the pavement that promptly flattened all his tires. “Don’t he know what them things are for?” Howie wondered.

By the time Marvin’s lieutenant got there, the light rain had molded bits of bills with white powder into lumps along the parking lot.

“I don’t get it,” his lieutenant grunted, “but you were right about this one, Trueblood. How’d you get onto ‘em?”

Cornered, a frantic Marvin could only recall the police show he’d seen on HBO the night before. He drew himself up to his full height. “Identifying one of the suspects as the weak link sir, using established interrogatory techniques, I questioned him. He must have panicked, locked himself in the unit and in the dark set off one of the grenades.”

Three deafened and dazed suspects nodded in agreement with everything the detectives asked them. They thought they were filling out a complaint against the vandal that blew up their storage shed.

Frankie and Howard got a Crime Busters reward. They spent it on a new sign with their new name on it. “Moving On Movers” did a much better business.