

A THOUSAND PARROTS

by David Plumb

The parrots woke Eddie up. That and Rocker snoring in the twin bed. A thousand parrots flying over the motel? They squawked, God how they squawked. The room was dark. But he knew it must be getting light. They were green parrots. Eddie had seen them a few times when he got up early.

Eddie liked parrots. At least he thought he liked parrots. If only he could trap a couple hundred parrots; just a few of the thousand squawking green parrots that woke him every morning at six thirty-five. Where the hell did they fly to? They flew somewhere; if he could only figure out where they all landed. He tried to imagine what kind of money he could make selling parrots.

He figured two, three, four hundred bucks a bird, five parrots a day; eight on a good day. Parrot food was cheap. Water was free, and then the cages. Oh yeh. That's here the money was. Then he'd have to get a Van. He could sell the birds *with cage*, a package. Probably cut it to three birds a day *with cage* for a grand. He visualized himself swiping at parrots with a long stick with a net on the end. They'd be resting in clumps of palm trees. Squawking. Yes! No end to the possibilities. He'd snag them, slip them into a burlap bag and toss them in the Van. He'd have a whole set of cages set up inside. He'd fill the cages and drive to Georgia. He'd stop in any one of a hundred little towns.

They loved parrots in Georgia. He realized he'd have to go to the Federal Building in Monroe County, or Broward or Dade, or wherever...to find out about taking wild birds across state lines. Then he decided on a closed Van, so nobody would see the birds. That saved a trip to the Federal Building. Of course, he'd have to have air-conditioning for the birds, but not too much. And a heater in winter, and a good one because Vans are just like tin cans, they lose heat. Well maybe he'd have to insulate the Van, which would be a lot of work, which of course, would raise the price of the birds in

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Georgia, but he could still give the customer a deal, if they bought two parrots. Better if they bought two cages.

Eddie wondered where he'd buy wholesale cages. It occurred to him that if the birds squawked at six thirty-five in the morning, they might very well squawk in the back of the Van. He tried to picture himself driving into Savannah with a Van full of screaming parrots. He'd get stopped! The cop would want to see the permit and the invoices for the parrots. He'd want to know if they had had shots, or whatever parrots get. Heaven help him if they found a dead parrot in the Van. Then he'd get arrested for cruelty to parrots and he didn't want to go to jail in Georgia, or anywhere else again for that matter.

Maybe he and Rocker could share the driving. Maybe they'd need two Vans and they could switch parrots on a back road, if things go hot. He realized another thing. He was afraid of heights. He'd have to hold the ladder. Rocker could climb up and snatch the birds. Maybe they could rent one of those lifts for cutting trees and he could operate it. A cherry picker they called them. Now that he thought of it, the new ones could be operated by the guy in the hydraulic lift. That was even better. Then Rocker could control it and when he caught the birds, he'd drop to the ground and hand Eddie the bag and Eddie would sort the birds into cages.

They'd probably have to get a place in the Everglades. Maybe an old trailer stuck back where nobody cared. Better yet, they could rent a mini storage, which would be closer. Eddie decided that might not be such a good idea after the kid got bitten by the snake.

This kid with the black baseball hat turned backwards had been on the damn TV in the Motel. The screen flickered when a semi drove by. Damn, if they ever got a place with cable, it would be a seven day miracle. This kid sat up in his hospital bed and talked about his cobra, (they kept showing this pink-three-foot-mosaic-something-cobra) that bit his thumb. He only had fifteen minutes to get to the hospital before he'd be completely paralyzed. He said he could feel himself freezing up. He told how the anti-venom they flew

in (the news showed the guys walking away from the helicopter with a box, which Eddie guessed had the anti-venom) had saved his life. The kid said the minute they put the anti-venom in his IV he felt a cold creeping up his arm and he knew he'd live. He'd been feeding a mouse to his cobra when it bit him. "Sometimes the snake gets you," the kid said. Then the TV announcer said they'd taken all the snakes away from him, because he was keeping them in a MINI STORAGE, which was against the law. The kid said he was going to buy another snake. Then the TV showed several other people around the country who had been bitten by snakes and *they* were going to keep *their* snakes. Eddie decided mini-storage might not be such a hot idea.

He remembered what his Uncle Willard told him. Uncle Willard was finishing off a cord of wood behind his liquor store in Heartwellville Vermont. His breath puffed hard white in the December air. The axe clunked, the wood cracked with a sharp click that seemed to echo in the absolute stillness of the snowy hills. The sky was bright blue. Uncle Willard said parrots got mean when they got old. He said they bite. Now, twenty-two years later, Eddie still wanted a parrot, but as he lay in his February bed at the Baby Toronto Inn, "ParlezVous Français," on Route 1 just north of Hallandale, he thought maybe he'd check out some pet stores and test his uncle's theory before he filled up his Van.

For a second Eddie considered turtles, but then he'd have to have a tank and what the hell do turtles eat? Maybe Georgia had enough turtles. Maybe he should try and go back to sleep. Rocker had stopped snoring. Eddie considered snakes. He remembered he was afraid of snakes. The morning suddenly grew quiet. Eddie slept.

