

# There's No Business Like Drug Business

By Rodolphe Cuzon

St. Barts. F.W.I.

Playground of the rich and famous, an eight-square-mile gemstone in the middle of the turquoise ocean. Beautiful girls, beautiful beaches (*topless* beaches), warm crystal clear water...

A speck of Eden.

Life in a French beer commercial.

It doesn't take long for me to realize how rampant cocaine use is in this place. In addition to the obvious hardcore night revelers, I'm surprised to discover that even some supposed 'pillars of the community' dabble. It seems like the entire island is doing blow, which helps alleviate my initial guilt for falling off the wagon a couple of weeks ago.

It's early October, the end of the hurricane season. Locals have started coming back from their yearly summer trip and businesses are reopening, but things are still relatively quiet - the official start of 'the Season' won't come until Thanksgiving Day. For now there's just the wave of young French ex-pats arriving, vying for jobs before the island Grand Opening. According to my new friend Seb, these naïve newcomers are easy targets that will buy almost anything, no matter how cut the product is, and we have specially marked bags just for them. Also, if I'm to believe my new business associate, most of the women are readily available for what he calls 'trade-fuck'.

Seb and I rapidly fell into a pattern. After snorting a few lines, we hop from one welcoming watering hole to another then circle the small island a few times at full speed on our motorcycles to let off steam before hitting the clubs. We invariably end up wired to the gills on a deserted beach, talking endlessly in the moonlight until the pewter dawn. Then, horny as hell, we drive home to our respective women.

While she was naughtily amused the first few nights, Daphnée is growing tired of waking up at sunrise to my coke-induced hard-on, my jaws locked from the lines of 'mucho' (as the French call coke on St. Barts) and the thirty cigarettes I've smoked. "I'm starting to feel like some whore you come to fuck when you're high," she told me yesterday, and I suppose it's a pretty accurate description. I still like Daphnée a lot but I've been so busy with Seb and meeting so many hot girls recently that I've been distracted. Distracted enough to avoid any contemplation of my choices of late anyway, and certainly enough to keep me from worrying about Daphnée's feelings. The only real soul searching I've done in the last few weeks is to wonder whether I should have jumped into another relationship so soon after escaping from my previous one - which is why I came here in the first place.

Tonight our first stop is La Mandala, a bar and restaurant overlooking beautiful Gustavia harbor. We get there after warming up with a few Ti Punch - the local cocktail, about four ounces of hundred-proof rum with a squeeze of lime and dash of cane syrup - at Seb's house and a quick delivery at *Ginette's*, a locals' hangout famous for the potency of its drinks.

It's around nine o'clock. La Mandala, usually quiet at this time, is mobbed. Waving and yelling angrily, the crowd desperately competes to get the bartender's attention. He appears completely overwhelmed by this horde of thirsty Huns ready to

scale the counter and pour drinks themselves. The instant he recognizes us, however, his tense face shimmering with sweat breaks into a huge grin: we are the U.S Cavalry and his uphill battle just got a hell of a lot easier.

“What up?” Seb asks him, nonchalantly sliding a matchbook on the counter under the palm of his hand once we’ve fought our way through the throng.

“Birthday party or some shit,” answers the bartender. “What are you guys drinking?”

I immediately hear the people next to us complain but I ignore them and get a beer for Seb and a Ti Punch for myself. The old magic is back: not only does the bartender serve us drinks before anyone else but he opens the register and gives us change on an imaginary hundred-dollar bill.

“Thanks a lot, guys,” he says before abruptly disappearing under the counter.

Like a drug-peddling android, Seb methodically scans each face in the crowd and declares, “We’re gonna stay a while,” just as I notice a tan girl glancing bashfully at me from a crowded couch in the lounge. “I see lots of potential customers here.”

“So do I..” I say, preoccupied.

I follow Seb through the soft candlelit atmosphere of the dining room and into the bright clangor of the kitchen. Jack, the chef, comes out from behind the hot line to hug him almost as soon as we enter. Cooking grinds to a virtual halt while the staff surrounds us and money and drugs change hands. Suddenly I feel like a trader in the pit of the New York Stock Exchange; word has spread that we’re in the house and two waiters burst through the swinging doors as if the restaurant was on fire. In the span of just a few seconds we’ve made almost a thousand dollars.

Armed with an assortment of nasty looking blades, the captain and his crew of tattooed buccaneers eagerly cut lines on the stainless steel countertops while I light a cigarette.

“You guys hungry?” asks Jack before inhaling long and hard.

“You’re kidding, right?” Seb smiles.

“Duh,” Jack shakes his head. “What am I saying? But how about something *for later*? Huh? Jay? To cook when you get home? I’ve got these great guinea fowls—tonight’s special - already stuffed with herbs and everything! They just need to be popped in the oven! I’ll give you the sauce in a container.”

He seems so excited about his dish that I don’t have the heart to refuse and exit the kitchen carrying two dead birds in a plastic bag. We return to the counter to get fresh drinks. The bartender is now coolly working the crowd, cracking jokes and flirting.

What a difference a bag makes.

“Oh shit,” exclaims Seb with his Cheshire cat grin, staring in the direction of the lounge. “The sisters are back. Come, I’ll introduce you... and we could be in for a little treat!”

I follow him to the big leather couch where the girl was checking me out earlier. She’s still there, with three of her friends. “Oh my god—*SEB!* It *is* you!” one of them cries with joy. “I *thought* I’d recognized you in the crowd. Please, sit with us.”

“This is Jay, my business partner and old friend,” exaggerates Seb, slinging an arm around my shoulder. “Jay, this is Nathalie.”

In a miniature reenactment of the parting of the Red Sea, the girls make room for us in the center of the couch. They eagerly introduce themselves: Sophie, Tatiana, and the one who was looking at me, Anouk.

“What’s in the bag?” she asks me with a smile.

“You don’t want to know,” I answer mysteriously, as though it contains a freshly severed head.

“Where’s your sister?” Seb asks Nathalie.

“Looking for blow. Can you believe we’ve been here three days already and haven’t done a single line?” she complains. “I mean, what the fuck has happened to this place?”

“Hey, it *is* still a bit early,” smiles Seb. “The season hasn’t even started yet. What are you doing here so soon anyway?”

“We were in Ibiza but we just couldn’t *stand* the people there.” She pouts after a disgusted grimace, as if she were a pre-1917 countess forced to spend the Russian winter in a barn with her serfs.

Nathalie and her sister Fiona are the daughters of one of France’s leading gun manufacturers. Trust fund babies. Seb explains that dear old Dad owns a huge villa on the east side of the island but scarcely has time to take long meditative walks on the beach these days. His darling progenies, however, have nothing *but* time and spend their young lives crisscrossing the globe.

Fiona comes back a couple minutes later. She’s the eldest, at twenty-one; Nathalie is only nineteen. They’re beautiful but look older than their age - their ceaseless partying no doubt - two blond and tan Barbie dolls. When Fiona recognizes Seb on the couch, she starts running and jumps on his laps, kicking her heels in the air and kissing him on the mouth in a mock-Hollywood way. I have only to glimpse those long golden legs and I begin to get an erection.

“My prince has arrived to save us!” she exclaims once she’d done with Seb’s lips.

Again I notice Anouk looking at me, this time in a much less equivocal manner.

“Actually,” Seb says gravely, resting his hand on Fiona’s naked thigh, “I won’t have anything until tomorrow night... sorry, girls.”

I look sharply at him. Between the two of us we’re carrying more than fifty grams.

What’s he up to?

The girls look as though they’d been told that all their money was gone and they had to get a job. Seb whispers something in Fiona’s ear, his hand slowly creeping up under her white miniskirt like a bald spider.

“FUCK!” shrieks her sister, startling me. “*I don’t believe this!*”

She appears about to cry. Or maybe pee on the couch.

“I’ll tell you what - why don’t we all meet at your villa tomorrow night?” Seb says, extricating himself from under Fiona. “Jay and I actually have to run.”

“All right,” says Anouk, her eyes on me like blue magnets. “Tomorrow night then.”

“Night ladies,” I wave. “Nice meeting you all.”

I follow Seb out onto the dark slanted street where our motorcycles are parked. I drop my dead birds in a garbage can.

“Uh, explanations, please,” I demand.

Seb looks at me and I see him grinning. Music and bits of conversations float through the night.

“We’re going to Shell Beach. The girls are meeting us there in about ten minutes. I told Fiona that we had barely enough blow for the two of us, but that we might be willing to share with her sister and her - *if* they were nice.”

“You bastard,” I chuckle.

We drive to the beach and wait there, straddling our bikes in front of the ocean. I light the small joint I rolled earlier at Seb’s house. “I can’t stand those two rich cunts,” Seb says.

“Could have fooled me.”

“They do give great head!” he laughs.

We hear a car approaching then see headlights illuminating the curve of the road; seconds later an old Bug convertible pulls up alongside of us.

“Excuse-us, gentlemen,” Fiona says, leaning out the window, “but you wouldn’t know where my sister and I could get a hold of some cocaine by any chance?”

“Could be,” answers Seb. “You girls want smoke some of this first?”

“Sure.”

Seb puts his bike on its kickstand and walks around the Volkswagen to the passenger side. “Nat darling,” he tells her, opening the door, “why don’t you get in the back with Jay.”

While the girls finish the joint, Seb cuts four lines on a CD case. He inhales two and hand me the rest.

“Hey, what about us?” complains Fiona.

“Head first,” comes Seb response. “*Then* blow.”

“My God, Seb,” giggles Nathalie, “you can be such an asshole sometimes!”

One by one, her hand releases the buttons of my shorts. I sigh and lean back into the seat, gazing up at the bright stars, feeling almost as if I were floating into space.

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The following night, we reach the Merchant of Death’s compound mere seconds before a typical Caribbean downpour. I follow Seb through one luxurious room after another while mad rain machine-guns everything outside with a deafening row. By the time we reach the pool on the ocean side of the villa, the deluge has all but stopped and the girls are emerging from the protection of the thatched roofed bar, warily looking up at the blackened sky.

“Good evening ladies,” announces Seb.

Their heads turn toward us wearing dazzling smiles.

“Were you guys caught in that?”

Fiona approaches to greet us.

“We made it inside just as it started to come down,” answers Seb, briefly hugging her.

It’s the same posse of girls as last night, dressed in revealing pareos and bathing-suit tops.

“What would you like to drink?” Nat asks us after kissing me on the cheek, casually, as though it wasn’t her that had gone down on me on the backseat of a Volkswagen.

Anouk is standing next to her, staring at me. Again.

She’s beginning to unnerve me.

“Is that Champagne you’re drinking?” I ask her.

“Yes,” she smiles.

“Then I’ll have that as well.”

Seb lights a cigarette and we follow our hostesses to the nearby bar. Nat hands us each a delicate crystal flute filled with ascending golden bubbles. I notice a large humidifier on the counter.

“Cigars?” I ask.

“Help yourself,” says Fiona, before turning to my friend. “So. We wanted to buy two eight-balls.”

“All right.”

Seb pulls the merchandise out of his pocket while I select a long Cohiba, dark and fragrant and as soft as silk. Thick smoke and bewitching aroma of cedar and worn leather surrounds my face. Several minutes and another bottle of champagne later, Anouk hands me her straw again and I inhale a couple of the numerous lines cut on the bar. I stare at her erect nipples almost poking through the fabric of her bathing suit; this girl *definitely* has something on her mind.

“Wanna go for a dip?” she finally asks.

“I didn’t bring my bathing suit.”

Before long we’re all in the pool naked: five girls and two guys. I’m extremely high, floating on my back, again staring at the stars in a state of weightlessness. Anouk swims to me and I feel her hand caress my leg as she treads water.

“Let’s get closer to the shallow end,” she suggests.

We swim back to where we can stand waist-deep in the water. She slicks her wet hair back, then locks her arms around my neck and our tongues duel for a moment like two small and slippery animals. Her skin feels incredibly soft.

I’m about to kiss her again when she expertly grabs the base of my dick, wraps her legs around my waist and ferociously thrusts her pelvis against mine. She does all this with disconcerting accuracy and speed, not unlike an IKEA aficionado putting together a bookshelf.

*Firmly insert part A into part B as shown in fig. 8.*

She’s already breathing hard in my ear.

“Jesus - how *old* are you?” I can’t help exclaiming.

“Nineteen,” she gasps, now flattening her wet breasts against my chest.

We’re really going at it now. Some rhythm this girl possesses.

As I look beyond her bobbing shoulders, I see Fiona and Tatiana cornering Seb on the other side of the pool. I also notice Sophie swimming toward us with the unhurried confidence of a Great White, the underwater lights playing sinisterly on her face. I can’t see Nat anywhere. She’s probably honing her skills on Seb below the surface, not far from her older sister.

No doubt Daddy would be proud of his little girls.

We are recuperating on a U-shaped sofa in a sort of open-air living room facing the ocean, drinking Dom Perignon. We're all still naked and John Lee Hooker is playing low from invisible speakers around us. What occurred after a brief warm-up in the pool was straight out of an X-rated movie, a decadent orgy of flesh, drugs and booze. I've never had sex with more than one partner at a time before and my cocaine-fueled brain is still reeling from the luscious riot of body parts.

"Hey, do you have baking soda in the house?" Seb asks as the song ends.

"I think so," Nathalie says. "Why?"

"You guys wanna freebase?"

The girls look at each other.

"I've never done it," says Anouk with a gesture of her hand, bird-like, toward her chest.

"Me neither," adds Sophie.

"I've smoked crack once," Fiona informs us while combing her long blond air in front of her face with her fingers.

I'm enjoying another cigar from Mr. Death's well-stocked humidor. "I thought freebase and crack were essentially the same thing" I say, blowing a perfect ring in the still air of this memorable Caribbean night.

"It's better than crack 'cause it's homemade," Seb points out, distractedly caressing Tatiana's inner thigh next to him.

She's sitting Indian-style on the sofa, her shaved crotch staring me right in the eyes. I feel myself getting aroused once again.

"Okay," says Fiona, getting up, "Let's go look in the kitchen."

By the time I ride back home, sunrise is breaking and every square inch of skin on my head is vibrating. I feel as though I've recently had a facelift, either that or I'm growing a brand new set of teeth. Convinced that even my eyebrows reek of sex, I stop in the blue electric dawn of Saint-Jean beach for a quick swim but I can't relax as I usually do.

Once home I begin fidgeting around the kitchen like a wind-up toy, looking in vain for some alcohol to take the edge off. I go to the bedroom. The early morning light creeps slowly in through the windows revealing Daphnée's enticing naked silhouette behind the mosquito net.

I lift the gauzelike material and go to sit by her side. There's a note on the bedside table. It reads:

*I thought we were supposed to talk. Got tired of waiting.  
DON'T EVEN THINK OF WAKING ME UP!!!*

How the fuck am I going to sleep now?

As I carefully slide out from under the mosquito net to resume my pointless pacing, I notice my breathing has become strained. I check my pulse.

I have the heartbeat of a goddamn hamster.

I go look in the bathroom mirror: my mild anxiety switches to full-blown panic as I stare at my reflection - can I actually see my jugulars pulsating?

Oh God.

I'M HAVING A HEART ATTACK!

I try to calm down, telling myself that I'm overreacting, that my pulse is not really *that* fast. But then I check it again - *and it fucking is!* I have to get to the hospital - well, to the 'dispensary', as it's called here - as fast as I can.

I immediately call Seb to ask him to come and get me in his car but there's no answer. Riding my bike is out of the question, as I'm too afraid I might pass out driving and ironically die in a crash instead. I have no other choice but to wake up Daphnée.

"Jay," she stares at me, groggy from sleep, "what's going on?"

"You've got to take me to the hospital," I moan. "I'm having a fucking heart attack!"

She sits up, her eyes opening wider. "*WHAT?*"

"I - I - I think I did too much coke... Baby, I feel like my heart is about to burst!"

"Oh my God!" she whispers, searching for my pulse; then she finds it. "*Holy shit!* Come on, let's go!"

She puts on a skirt and a t-shirt then takes me by the hand and I stumble outside after her, squinting in the hot bright day. We walk to where her car is parked.

"If you start feeling dizzy or anything, you tell me right away, okay?"

I nod feebly as she starts the engine and we're on our way.

As the car struggles up the uneven street and the dispensary comes into view, I finally feel some relief. But I'm careful not to rejoice quite yet. I can still die. Especially since this dingy little place is a far cry from the E.R.

Daphnée gestures at the girl behind the glass when we enter. She gapes at us dumbly and slowly reaches for the phone. I see her tight, almost non-existent lips move before she hangs up. Then she goes back to the magazine she was reading before our rude interruption.

A guy in his mid-thirties dressed in white eventually appears. He wears small round glasses and runs his hands through his hair as he calmly walks toward us. I notice that his fly is open and don't find that particularly reassuring.

"What's going on here?" he asks sternly.

"Well-" Daphnée begins.

"I'm having a heart-attack."

The doctor, though I'm not sure he actually is one - he doesn't even have a stethoscope around his neck and could be the goddamn janitor for all I know - takes a long look at me.

Everything is moving *way* too slow for my condition.

"All right," he says, "come with me." Then, facing Daphnée: "You wait here."

I follow him into a small room equipped with a sink, an examination table and a few empty shelves. It smells funky and the paint is peeling off the walls.

"Sit down and take off your shirt," he says peremptorily with his back to me. A stethoscope is hooked to his ears when he turns around. I feel mild relief. He listens to my heartbeat in the usual places for several seconds, frowning. Then he takes my blood pressure.

"Do you do drugs?" he asks abruptly once he's done, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

He looks me straight in the eyes.

"Uh..." I hesitate. "Sometimes."

"Let me rephrase that. Have you *been doing* drugs?"

I feel like I'm back in the principal's office. I stare at his stethoscope in silence.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Drugs?"

More staring.

"Yes, yes... drugs," I finally confess, sighing.

"What kind?"

"A little cocaine."

"Just a little, huh?" he says sarcastically.

As I nod shamefully, it occurs to me that this asshole might just be waiting for me to die in order to teach me a lesson about the dangers of drug use. I begin to sweat heavily. He lets me marinate in my juices for a few moments, icily observing me behind round glasses.

Probably Mengele's grandson, I tell myself.

"You're not having a heart attack," he finally says, turning his back to me again.

But I know he's lying.

"You're experiencing acute tachycardia, most likely brought on by an excessive intake of cocaine."

Suddenly he faces me again, a hypodermic syringe in his right hand.

"Whoa! *What the hell is that?*"

"Something similar to Valium," he sort of smiles before indicating its dosage. "It will relax you and put you to sleep..."

I'm half expecting him to add 'for good', or maybe sinisterly ask 'is it safe?' like Laurence Olivier in *Marathon Man*. He takes my arm and fastens a tourniquet around my biceps. I positively *hate* needles but I'm too weak to resist. He disinfects my skin and shoves the spike into my vein as I grimace.

"There," he says with visible satisfaction before disposing of the empty syringe.

"I'll come and check on you in a little while".

When he comes back, about fifteen minutes later, I'm still sitting on the edge of the examination table, tapping my foot on its metal step. I do feel calmer but I'm sure as shit not sleepy. Mengele seems a bit put off when he opens the door.

"Damn!" he mutters.

He grabs his stethoscope and listens once more.

"This is most unusual. I guess I'll give you another injection," he adds with discomfort.

This time I feel a warm wave rushing through my entire body. Mengele remains by my side as I feel my eyelids slowly closing.

"About fucking time!" I think I hear him say.

*Bored with his native France, Rodolphe Cuzon has spent the past fifteen years bouncing between the West Coast, the Caribbean, and New York. He has finally settled down in New Orleans where he is putting the finishing touch on "Seasons in the Sun", the novel from which this story is excerpted. A new novel, on the Big Easy is also in the work." [rodcazon@hotmail.com](mailto:rodcazon@hotmail.com)*