

[Only Suckers Work]

ONLY SUCKERS WORK “Work?” Callano said with a laugh. “Me work? Only suckers work.” His rugged, scarred face bore the marks of dissipation but there was dynamic energy in his short and sturdy body. His hands were very large for a man his size, formidable looking hands as he gestured freely while talking. The wavy brown hair was thinning at his temples.

“I know because I tried it. I worked in the stonesheds. My brother Dante is still in there. I tell him he's a fish but he don't listen. The poor bastard can't help it. [He's?] married and got a family. [He?] figures he's got to stay in the sheds, see? [He?] shoulda known more than get married in the first place. Only suckers get married.

“Yeah, I was a lumper for awhile. You have to chain the blocks so they can be moved. You got to be goddamn careful with then chains or somebody gets hurt. If them chains slip it's too bad. I seen a guy lose a leg one day. A pal of mine, Sierra, was killed the summer after he got out of high school, working in his old man's shed. [He?] was a swell ball player, a swell guy. He was going to college that fall if that stone hadn't clipped him. They was loading a truck when it fell. It crushed all the lower part of him from the waist down. The hell of it was it didn't put him out right away, he was conscious while they was getting that block off him. I'm glad I wasn't the guy that chained that stone. 2 “I worked an a boxer too. You take the finished pieces and box 'em up for shipping. You got to make damn sure you crate 'em so they don't get hurt on the road. But it was better than lumping.

“I didn't like it though. I wasn't cut out to work steady. What the hell is seven-eight bucks a day? Chickenfeed. I could make more chips shooting craps and playing poker. I quit one day. The night before I made about ninety bucks shooting craps. I was up all night and I didn't feel much like working that day. The boss started riding me in the yard. I don't take that stuff from anybody. Especially not when I got ninety bucks in my pocket. I just looked

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at him. A guy had a match out lighting a cigarette I took a dollar bill outa my pocket, lit it from the match, lit my cigarette with it. The boss went crazy. I took a long time doing it, see? The boss said, 'You're fired, Callano. Got your time and get out.' I laughed at him. I told him: 'You can't fire me, you prick! I quit already.' So I walked out and I never went back.

“That was during Prohibition and all the boys was running booze. My brothers, the older ones, had a gang bootlegging. They had a bunch of big old Packards and Caddies. I went in with 'em and we made plenty dough. There was dough in that racket all right, and it was fun to bring it in. Times was good then, everybody had money, everybody was spending it. This always was a good spending town. You know how stonscutters are, they're all spenders and they all drink. Granite was going good then.

“We ran mostly ale. We got it in Canada for five bucks 3 a case and sold it here for fifteen or twenty. You could load a lot of ale into those big crates we had. We kept five or six cars on the road all the time. We sold everybody in Barre and Montpelier from the poolroom crowd to the town bigshots. We was sitting pretty them days. A gang from Burlington tried to chisel in but they didn't last long. We high-jacked three of their cars one night and they was loaded, what I mean, loaded. We gave them a damn good beating, we put a couple of 'em in the hospital. They kept away from Barre after that, they didn't bother us no more. We had a tough crew to fool round with, see? We liked to fight too. Nobody messed round much with us. Our gang was bad news. We could drive like hell and fight like hell. We ran a lot of stuff cross that Line, I'm telling you.

“We know the officers and they know us. You know, the same an you know football players on another team, something like that. There was one French sonofabitch gave us plenty of trouble. We lost a few loads but we never lost a man.

“For awhile we had Boston Billy's protection. He was a bigshot. He was too big for them forty-buck-a-week customs punks to fool with, see? His outfit was big-time stuff. We was

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just kids but Boston liked us. So he let us cross with his outfit under his protection, until the officers told him he'd got to drop us. We went through just the same, don't worry. We gave them Customs monkeys some wild chases.

"I used to drive the pilot car a lot. I'd hang behind the loaded cars. When the patrol started chasing us I'd hold 'em up, block the road on 'em, to let the boys with the loads get away. We had a smoke-screen on the pilot car. We'd come hell-roaring 4 down over that Line and hit back roads all the way home. We had hideouts in barns and garages along the way. Some of the people we had to pay, some we just had to leave a case of beer.

"There was one Customs officer that went to high school with us. I guess in school we'd all licked the poor punk. One day Tony and I saw him parked beside the road up there. Tony got out and knocked his cap off, cuffed him, throw him down, took his badge off, and laughed at him. Tony said, "You sure look nice in that uniform." The poor bastard was begging and crying, said he'd lose his job and everything. Tony gave him back his badge when we left.

"We had all kinds of money and women, we lived high, the good old days. I ain't had so much fun since. One night Timmy got drunk up there and started down with a load. He didn't make a turn in North Troy. He crushed right through a plateglass window into a store. He was singing in there when the cops got him. Timmy did time for that one, on top of losing the car and the load. But he never paid for the window. He still gets bills from that storekeeper. He just laughs at 'em.

"Now things ain't so hot here. After Repeal we tried running alcohol into Canada but it wasn't so good, and if you get caught up there you never got out of the can. One winter we went to Florida and we had a sweet spot there. We cleaned up big. I come back with a roll that was a roll. I spent it all on the gang around here. Used to take them to Montreal, New York, Boston, Albany, pay all the bills. It went pretty fast. Then I had some slot machines

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out but they got knocked off. 5 I lost 'em all, and don't think for a minute them slots don't cost.

“Right now all I do is run a poker game and sell a little beer. No money in beer but the game pays me pretty good. I got a drag on every pot, sure and I win plenty of pots myself. I played poker long enough. I got a nice place here, and a blonde to keep house for me. I've settled down some but I ain't married. Only suckers got married.

“Most of the gang's settled down now. Some different than the old days. Frank's got a farm; Mario runs a restaurant; Tony's got a poolroom; Timmy is just loafing and doing odd jobs. I don't know where Red is. He went in the ring for awhile. I heard he got killed in a shooting jam in Chicago, but I don't know. I know this town has gone to hell.

“I'm doing all right though. I got a new Ford sedan and it's paid for. If I want to take a run to Montreal or New York I can do it. I make enough to get by on, but it don't come so easy no more.

“The only time I got [jugged?] was over a girl. I been in plenty of jams but I never did time before. I was playing her, I admit, but so was plenty other guys. Half of Norwich, I guess. She got knocked up and tried to hook me. If she'd been decent I'd probably married her, but I knew what she was so I wouldn't even give her five hundred bucks. I went to jail. Hell of a thing to go to jail for, after all the things I done that shoulda put me In the can. But I'd go again before I'd let a slut like that get the hooks in me.

“My old man's been dead a long time. He was a stonecutter, 6 a good carver. He came over here from the Old Country. My mother died three-four years ago. She was sick of living anyway, I think. We owned a house but it burned after she died. They tried to claim we burned it to collect the insurance. Just because we got tough reputations they tried to pull a fast one.

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“We got a bad name in this town but it don't make no difference. We're getting by all right. We don't ask help from nobody. We never did. I been flat, I been down-and-out, but I always came back. Nobody helped me neither, I came back myself. And I'll always come back like that.

“I got a nice place to live here, good clothes, a new car, money in my pockets, a good girl... I still say only suckers work for a living.”