

## **Cold Cuts**

**750 words**

**ted.gross@comcast.net**

Kirby came home from work, poured a Dos Equis and checked the updated betting line for the Detroit-Tampa playoff game Sunday before he noticed the note pinned on the fridge.

She was staying at Margo and Jim's. She'd be in touch about picking up the rest of her stuff. Don't forget about the tree guy. Signed K.

Kirby phoned her, it went to voicemail. He left a message, *Cmon what are you doing.*

He sat back down. Now what. It wasn't like he didn't see it coming.

Kirby went to his club and took a steam. There was a guy in there he talked to sometimes, the guy seemed reasonable. Kirby said, "Long story short, I shouldn't have sold the business. She liked it."

The guy said. "My wife left me once. I got home 24 hours late from salmon fishing, opening day."

"You didn't call, or what?"

"Didn't want to hear her voice."

“But she came back.”

“Sure. I told her I bought some wrestling tickets, they were in town. It’s all fake but it’s fun.”

That wrapped it up pretty good and Kirby got out of there and took a shower and tried his bartender Ginger at the Dew Drop Inn. “No offense,” she said, holding up her hand in the middle of his little speech, “but you males are all victims.”

No particular comeback to that one, and Kirby went home but he knew he wouldn’t be able to sleep so he started digging around the internet.

The last time he spoke to Olive if he was remembering right was 1997. There was an equipment problem with his flight and the replacement one made a stop in San Diego. Olive was listed then so he called her and it was friendly, and she said she had someone, and Kirby was happy for her.

This time they made you jump through hoops, plus the name change, but he found her teaching beginning field hockey at a community college and there was an office extension so in the morning he called it.

“I was pretty certain I’d hear from you some day,” Olive said.

“Me too,” Kirby said. “We had fun.”

“Yes we did. You told me I was the female you. I have grown kids and I’m divorced.”

“Oh.”

“I’m not going to ask.”

“No?”

“Have a nice life,” she said, and clicked off.

Kirby was thinking, *did* he call Olive the female me? Was she?

Let’s see . . . who else.

There was this Roberta person he met by the pool at Carmel Valley. She said she owned a hat store in Salinas, so maybe you have a shot.

There were more of those than you expect and no *Roberta’s* but there was *Bertha’s* so he tried that and nope, but Bertha knew Roberta and redirected him.

“Hey there,” Kirby said, “we played pinochle under that overhang at Blue Sky Lodge? You were planning a trip to Minnesota to find yourself?”

“South Dakota,” Roberta said. “I remember you. I hate hey-there though.”

“I do too. Listen, you ever get up to the Bay Area?”

“You had a wife,” she said.

“Right. I don’t have one.”

“Blue Sky Lodge closed. Did you know that?”

“No way . . . That is sad to hear. We’d been going there since I was a kid. Jeez . . . Did you work it out? In South Dakota?”

“Partially,” she said. “I feel this is weird.”

She let him go a little longer and said goodbye.

Kirby was on the back deck smoking a cigar reading the Sunday paper when Kayleen came by to get her stuff. She had a guy with her. Kirby wasn’t expecting them but he had picked up pastries from the French place so he put those out and they gobbled them up but didn’t sit down.

Kayleen said, “You *were* always polite.”

Kirby said, “I like to be. By the way I got some tough news, Blue Sky Lodge closed.”

“Really. Wow. That was one of those places . . . you expected them to always be there.”

“Yeah you just did. You wanna like, stick around and watch the game?”

Kayleen’s friend Malone was nodding, that’d be fine, and Kayleen said well, she could run down to Raley’s and get some combo subs for halftime.

Kirby said extra pepperoncini for me please, and heavy on the mayo, if they can. Kayleen said she knew the drill and she’d make sure.

