

Spirit of America

935 words

ted.gross@comcast.net

It didn't really happen but Henry told this new person Margie he killed a guy once. See how she'd react.

They were at Tahoe, an Airbnb at Heavenly Valley, having a little breakfast getting ready to ski.

Margie put down her sticky bun. She said, "If you want me to sleep with you there's better ways."

"There's that part too," Henry said. "What ways is that though?"

"Let's clear it up," she said. "Silly, right?"

Henry said not entirely, something he's wrestled with.

"Fine," she said, "we all have our little lists."

There was no bedroom but there was a ladder next to the wood stove that took you to the loft. After a few minutes Margie whispered how would you do it and Henry said beats me.

On the chairlift she said, "No it doesn't beat you, and you're scaring me. Is that the idea?"

Henry said, "Who's on your little list?"

"You're going to shake your head. A landlord in

Oxnard who never fixed anything.”

“Hmm, seems a little extreme then.”

“And laughed about it,” she said. “Looking you right in the eye when he collected the rent.”

“Okay that I can sort of see.”

“So yes, those type of people.”

“No home run ball though?” he said.

“That would be the person who stalked my niece.”

“Ah.”

“There was the restraining order and such, and it’s been a while. But--”

“But those things never work. Ultimately.”

“So see?”

Henry was thinking of the one the gal in Anderson laid on him, up near Oregon, after he showed up 2 in the morning with his old key and confronted the new boyfriend. But was that stalking? Technically?

He said, “How would you get away with it? Could you live in motels?”

“You mean bounce around? Small towns? Maybe I could, what’s it to you.”

“All’s I’d be considering--two categories. No surveillance, and don’t leave DNA, that’s the big one.”

She said, “I’m thinking you were the bad boy in

school. Where'd you *go* to school anyway? What was your dad like? What did your parents do at night?"

"You're nose-y," he said, "but I'm for sure taking you back up that loft when we wrap this up. Where'd *you* go to school at?"

"Salinas. My dad managed a resort in Carmel Valley."

"So same then. My dad ran a summer camp in Colorado. He ended up getting arrested."

"Gosh. You're not saying . . ."

"No, no, it was finances. Men showed up the house sometimes asking for money. He eventually got wasted after a poker game."

"Oh you're kidding. You mean--"

"Wasted means something different? To you?"

"Well in that case . . . is who wasted your dad on *your* list?"

"Told you back in the beginning--you don't listen?"

They exited the chair and skied down. Small mountain, not a real challenging run. They both decided that was enough and get something warm in the lodge.

"Senior grad night?" Margie said. "We all listened to the radio. We made the rounds to the various parties. People opened up. Their highs and lows, their dreams going forward. God that was a good night."

“So what were yours?”

“Not too long ago someone forwards a YouTube, the same radio station, the same music . . . the *same date*. I cried listening to it. It ran over an hour, the segment they found.”

“Mine worked out different. Kid I didn’t know, we get in a shoving thing by the water fountain. It escalates, we both get suspended. I spend grad night at his place if you can believe it, turns out to be a pretty nice guy.”

“Mine was move to Canada and work in the movies,” she said.

“Mine was be a gardener or over the road trucker.”

“You didn’t crash any parties though? You and your new friend?”

“No, we played mini golf. This kid, his dream was be a stunt man. In the movies like you.”

“He did it?”

“Oh yeah, started off. Ended up working for NASA.”

She looked out the big glass wall where you could see the skiers coming down. “You are so full of shit.”

“Anyone take a wrong turn? From *God what a night?*”

“Plenty of us. I wish I could go back.”

“Taking it over. Like in dodge ball, they’re not sure

the person got nicked. Why'd you want to know what my parents did at night?"

"Has to be a reason?"

"They played Parcheesi and watched TV. Situation comedies."

"Day before," she said, "we had our senior picnic. This cheerleader girl up on the shoulders of a basketball player, in the pool. Everything ahead of them."

"A wild guess, you ran into her years later."

"At a restaurant in Monterey. Nice seafood one, but she looked worn out."

"She remember you?"

"Not a chance. But me bringing it up made her day, she said."

"Her year. What about the basketball guy?"

"He coached somewhere. But then dropped from sight. Our class correspondent tried hard but couldn't find him."

Henry said, "Not the worst thing, drop from sight. I'm not talking your deal, your sister."

"Niece."

"How bout can she move? Change her name?"

"She has."

"Oh good then, so don't worry about it. Probably."

“The cheerleader girl, she hasn’t turned up at any reunions.”

“Why would she,” Henry said.

“You know something? You and I just aren’t getting here.”

“We’re really not.”

“I mean I’m not sure I’ve met anyone this irregular.”

“Uh. So no more monkey business.”

“I didn’t say that. But NASA? The best you can do? What a trip.”