

Outskirts

675 words

ted.gross@comcast.net

Chris had an aunt die and was driving back to Nebraska. He thought he'd get to Utah the first day but came up short, stopped for the night in Winnemucca. You make the most of things.

So he got cleaned up and walked over to the strip of casinos you saw coming off the Interstate. He picked Stan's Lucky Buck and sat down at the lounge bar.

A guy was up front on a little riser, playing guitar and singing Toby Keith with synthesized backup. The place had a homegrown feel.

The cocktail waitresses were jammed into shiny blue and gold outfits. After a couple minutes Chris asked the bartender, friendly young guy wearing a long-sleeved western shirt, "There any of those legal ranches around here, like you hear about?"

"You mean like the old Mustang?"

"Yeah."

"Well we got a few in town, not really ranches anymore."

"Is there one you . . . recommend?"

"That'd be the *semi*-legal one, the Tumbleweed J. There you do have a ranch. Six miles east on Jungo Road, which is State 49. You go out the main door? Up the corner and hang a left at Burger King."

"When you say 'semi-legal', I mean I wouldn't want to be breaking the law or anything."

"Not a concern. They got technicalities with code and shit. Maybe once every 4,5 years they'll haul in a few of the gals and patrons, hold 'em for an hour. It's all for show."

"Anyone in particular there?"

"Well what are you, late 30s, early 40s?"

"Yeah."

"I'd go with Sandra. She's lived a little bit. Very compassionate lady."

Chris thanked him for the tips, finished his beer, and headed out to try to find the place.

It was definitely a ranch, there were barns and corrals and you could smell the animals and feed. The parking area was crowded, and he remembered it was a Saturday night.

There were guys standing around in the entry parlor and two of the working women were sitting on couches, one smoking and staring into space, the other wrapped

up in her cell phone.

An older woman in jeans and a starched white blouse appeared and said she was Daisy and could she help him, and Chris asked if Sandra was available.

"Sandy's here tonight," Daisy said, "but she's booked up through her shift. You've visited her before?"

"No, I got a referral."

"Okay let's see. I'm thinking Jeanette might be a good fit then. She's newer with us but she's one of our more mature girls, like Sandy."

Chris said that'd be fine, he signed something and took care of the credit card and Daisy walked him to Jeanette's room, which had an outside entrance.

A movie with Robert De Niro was on with the sound off.

Jeanette said, "How are you?"

"Hard to say," he said. "I always anticipated this moment, but now that I'm here, it's an odd vibe."

"Do you mean me?"

"No, that part's fine. Just not sure I want to do anything about it."

"Okay, fair enough. There's no need to announce anything, should you change your mind."

"Do you . . . get there . . . ever?"

“You mean when I’m working?”

“Yeah.”

“Not during the act. Occasionally from foreplay. Doesn’t mean I don’t enjoy it all though.” She took off her top, everything bounding forward.

“I see,” Chris said. “Well, maybe I can give it a go at that.”

They were relaxing after, and Jeanette said, “I’m really glad you loosened your guard. It’s just a sense, but I feel you’re hiding from something. Or running.”

“I *am* wrestling with my mid-life direction,” Chris said. “Which makes you perceptive.”

“You learn to size people up,” she said. “If I can distract you for an hour, I’ve spread a tiny bit of goodness out into the world.”

This had its moments, Chris was thinking, maybe check it out again tomorrow when Sandra's not booked up? You’d be late to the aunt thing, but she wasn’t coming back of course.