

Striations

1650 words

ted.gross@comcast.net

I come home, Sue's watching *The Price is Right*, she announces that well she's 3 for 3 today in the getting shot down for jobs department.

I'm thinking the first two, the dentist's office and the steak place, okay, but how do you get rejected at the gas station convenience store?

I ask well didn't they need a cashier? Wasn't that the point? She'd worked as a cashier before at Home Depot when we lived in Pocatello.

She says she was surprised herself. The gas station gal flat-out said they couldn't use her. The other two at least, they gave it the thank you we'll be in touch if we can.

So they might then, I say.

No way, she says.

I ask her did she dress the same for all three? Did she wear make-up?

What I didn't ask was did she have booze on her breath. She can drink when she's nervous.

She dressed fine, she says. But that all 3 interviewers were women, maybe that worked against her.

I say Babe before we go any further, we still got some of the mac cheese from Rudy?

Rudy is her cousin. He's carved out a nice little gig for himself, a food truck in the business park. We get leftovers sometimes, and have to say, one dish is better than the next, he's come a long way.

No I finished it when I got home, she says. She also ate when she was nervous, which I didn't love, her figure starting to slip a bit.

I thought of something obvious. Rudy can't give you a job?

No, she says. Like how could you even ask that. That would *never* work.

A new family has moved in upstairs, nice enough folks but they let the 4-year-old jump off the couch whenever he wants. Kid was doing that now, big thumps in the ceiling. I tell Sue I'm going to Joe's for a while. She's on her device, can't tell if she hears me.

Joe makes a suggestion, though he ticks me off at the same time. He says Sue should try the Indian casino, they're always hiring up there. He says tell her to dress a

little bit provocative, they like that. Sue's got it, he says, she should flaunt it.

He gives me the story, he had an ex worked up there. Not on the main floor, in the cage. He says the ex wasn't cocktail waitress material but yours is, that he might stop up there and say hello if she was working it.

In a perfect world I kinda want to punch the guy in the mouth at this point, but I say don't the degenerate gamblers hang around the cocktail lounge for the free drinks?

You mean the tips are no good? he says. Probably right, compared to your Caesar's Palaces in Vegas. But you told me she's looking for a job.

In the morning I mention it to Sue. She says she considered the casino once but it's too far. Which is true, an hour and fifteen if there's no traffic, plus a curvy two-lane getting out of there at night.

Just relaying what Joe said, I say, not trying to tell you what to do.

I come home from work and Sue informs me she re-framed it, the suggestion, and she's going up there tomorrow, at least fill out an application.

Good idea, I say, doesn't mean you're all-in if they offer you something.

Right, she says. If there are options, you're serious about the cocktail waitress?

Why not, I say, might be some odd hours but it's work.

I think about it and decide to tell her what Joe said about how to dress.

Gee I don't know, she says.

There's a game on after dinner and we polish off some maple nut ice cream and she says let's head into the bedroom. Which I'm good with, relations take a hit whenever she's in limbo.

Later she thanks me for looking out for her, says it makes her feel important, even though she's not.

You are so, I say. I remember saying the same thing to my kid sister once, trying to prop her up after she got stiffed at a school dance. We were close then. Lot of stuff got in the way, now we barely speak.

I walk in the next night and something smells good and Sue's picked up Mexican take-out. She says wouldn't you know, thanks to my encouragement, the Indian casino offered her not one but two jobs.

Jeez, I say. Simultaneously?

You're funny, she says, and starts rubbing my shoulders. I'm a little concerned she's going to herd me

into the other room again, Mexican take-out being my favorite and I'm starved. But she puts out plates and we sit down.

Option 1, she says, I work roulette. Takes the least training, you're not handling cards or dice, and they pay you to learn.

Option 2?

Actually there's 3, she says, if you include working the 24-hour coffee shop--but 2 is the cocktail lounge, like you said.

You're telling me they handed you that? Already?

Pretty much, she says--you have to learn your beverages, plus there's an etiquette they need you to stick to.

How so?

Not real interesting, she says, but the tricky part--not that she necessarily minds because the money's good--the outfits are kinda extreme.

Oh, I say . . . more extreme than, like other places?

Well if you're talking showgirls and such, then no.

But still, I say.

Yes, she says, they do a number on women's bodies.

Jaden explained it to her, she says, they changed them last February, the top brass, made them a brighter

blue and different cut that showed more thigh but the main thing spilled more cleavage.

Jaden?

Yes, he's the floor manager for second shift, she says.

You didn't have to . . . like put one on, I say . . . as an audition or something?

Sue doesn't say anything. I finish eating and tell her I'm going to Joe's.

But I don't do that, I take a walk.

There's a housing project three blocks over. You need to keep your eyes open, doesn't require much for a couple a-holes to be wandering around looking to mess with you.

I try my ex-girlfriend Melody. She doesn't answer but she calls me back before I get home.

I say hey what's up, and explain the situation.

She says Gary you're laughable except I know you well enough that you're not.

I say I'm not reading you.

She says no you wouldn't be, and says good night.

I don't go home, I go to Joe's. He's got a little thing going on, a few people over.

After a while someone asks me what I do. I tell them I'm an engineer. Joe looks at me funny but I can feel him getting into it.

Not like a *train* one? the person says.

No, I tell them, an aerospace one, for Boeing, up in Seattle.

He's visiting, Joe explains.

Must be amazing, the person says.

When I get home Sue is in her pj's with a cup of tea. Some Dierks Bentley is playing.

She says, I'm not going to take the job, I decided. I hope you're not disappointed.

No?

I felt like that guy was coming onto me maybe, she says.

I see, the second shift floor manager . . . the roulette wheel problematic too?

Think so, she says, sliding next to me.

Well you never know then, I say.

She asks do we want to watch the news and then go back, or go back.

I tell her I'm good for the time being if we have some more of that maple nut. She says we don't but she picked up a pint of rocky road.

That's okay, I say . . . did I ever tell you about the setup in the basement?

No, tell me, she says, and puts her head on my shoulder.

So I get into it. The band I started in high school. The drummer having a tough time at home, his step-dad's going to sell the drumset cause it takes up too much room. I tell him he can store it in our basement. We end up building an enclosure down there, me and the guy, and other kids start coming by and it becomes a bit of a hangout. We name it The Box. We rigged it you have to climb a rope to get over the wall and drop in.

Long story short, I'm telling Sue, we play our one big gig and we sound terrible, feels like people are laughing. One kid quits the band that night and another moves to Indiana couple weeks later.

So it's just you and the drummer left? Sue says.

Yeah, and that's it for The Box too, I say.

I get that, she says.

Then one day, I tell her, our class is in the library and I start thumbing through this book, and it's pretty great, and I don't check it out or anything I just take it. It's called *Engineers of the Western Plains*. I go in The Box with the book, stretch out on this old couch we had.

Black and white photos, I tell her, huge locomotives.
Steam? she says.

Oh yeah.

I love those old steam engines, she says. My dad
used to take me, they have a roundhouse in Jamestown.

I didn't know that, I say. What's that, Tuolumne
County?

It is, she says, on the way to Pinecrest Lake.

Can't beat the smell of one fired up, I say.

I know what you mean, she says, even though most
people hate the smell.

Y'ever think about moving to Seattle? I say.

What would we do there? she says.

I don't have a good answer. I'm picturing wet streets
at night, bright lights, some colorful umbrellas, but
maybe that's New Orleans.