

ARIZONA SHERIFF IN LOVE

A Short Story

By Guillermo Reyes

The hotel faces the I-10 on the edge of Casa Grande, Arizona. The Sheriff brings his boys here—still does even after the recent brouhaha. Go figure. I don't talk about it, but sometimes I like to dish, like I'm doing right now, but we'll keep it *entrée noose*—that's how you spell it, right? I mean, I keep the confidence of all my clients, but in this case, it's the effing sheriff, y'know? People, y'all are gonna have to chill. And enough with the emails and the Facebook hate-that-beatch type of messages. I'll have none of that no more. The sheriff's entitled to get off and y'all voted for him, so I don't take responsibility for his actions. I just happen to have reported them.

I spoke up only because I didn't know how to handle the press. I never been part of a political scandal before, and if Bald-Headed Eagle (it's what I still call the sheriff) had kept his mouth shut about his true feelings, one of his boys wouldn't have gone and called the *Phoenix Weekly*. God made him the politician, not me. Didn't we learn from the 90s that some politicians need to keep it in their pants or face the music? The sheriff, or Bald-Headed Eagle, needed to face the voters, too, us, we the sorry-ass people who call us-selves the voters.

I'm not asking for much, just that my pictures in your papers or websites won't make me look fat like the rest of the media has. I've got something of a weight problem. Some folks 'round here just call me "whirly." I step into a room apparently and stir up a whirl. I sit around all day checking people in and out of our one-star hotel, and I grab pieces of candy some of them bring me as bribes. "A bribe for the tribe," one smart alecky told me, like I represent a tribe. Me? I don't live anywhere near the rez and the hotel belongs to a Hong Kong investor, and I'm not even the manager, just the assistant to him, Pepe the Pipsqueak. He's a former teenage stoner. I went to school with him, and trust me, girls wanted nothin' to do with him. I'm surprised one of them went and married him which made me wonder about the girl's sanity. She was a cheerleader, and who knows what went wrong in her life---pity her, but send some sympathy my way, too. It's him I gotta respond to, and he's my burden to bear. I get talked to when one of our regulars—a trucker named Pruny 'cause his wrinkled face demands a nickname—tries to get a better room away from the freeway by offering a Snickers bar. Like I'd sell that cheap. Truckers just wanna get to sleep after a long day of coursing through the freeways of America. They often make a special stop to ogle at me, the grumpy whirly Cindy Littlefeather. My middle name: Littlefeather. My parents named me after Sacheen, the woman Brando sent to the Oscars. Daddy was half Apache, but my Mexican-American mother was one of them 60s hippies, mostly Spanish and white as snow but called herself a radical Chicana at one point, and she went all like, "Oh, let's get in touch with our indigenous roots." Her roots ran all the way back to Spain actually and her folks are whiter than Dawn, the soap not the time of day, but she wouldn't hear none of that back when her teeth still held on to their gums. She went whole hog ethnic before she got Jesus in her blood but then transitioned to full piety and Tea Party---don't blame me, people. It's the Spanish fascist General

Francisco Franco side of her talking now. Dad abandoned her well back in the 90s even if the pot was cheaper 'round here than in the Iowa town where Dad settled with younger white girl in love with honcho man, his third wife at that point, and where do men like my dad get these women? Daddy-o uprooted himself from the rez long ago and never looked back (though officially still belongs), but it was ma, in her white Mexican-American girl phase, that demanded he bring her to visit the family in Arizona and she mostly searched my Apache grandma's cabinets for peyote and never found any, but ma zeroed in on peyote like she had hawk-eyed laser precision vision and found it somewhere in a neighborhood in Phoenix and became hooked. Years later she had to do a stint in rehab and Betty Ford was her bunk mate, or maybe it was Liz Taylor. Her story keeps changing. Suffice to say that's how today her brain functions like fried tomatoes and, one day, woke up a sixty-nine year old woman in panic mode about them immigrants. Deport them all, she says. This is a woman who won't greet me "good morning." Instead, she shouts, "Benghazi!" That's what I gotta live with, people, so cut me some slack when I dish. Ma follows her Fox News and won't let up about the foreign-born president and them unwashed hordes "invading" the country, and I shout at her, your people invaded the Americas in 1492, and she says, blame the Italian guy, and we all know Columbus was Genovese, not Italian, a country that didn't even exist then. I may not be as hoity-toity as some of these PhD college kid customers I get all the time from Germany and Britain who study tribal rituals in the desert, but I got the internet. I know how to click and google my History of the Americas 'cause I got some interests that go beyond small town trivia, trust me. I gotta go home to mother, people, so don't mind me if I take an extra piece of mint from the reception desk. It helps to get sugar in your blood, in my spirit, instead of getting spirits into my blood 'cause that's a problem out here as well: too many spirits of the brewed kind. This job is mostly the type of graveyard thing that makes you sleepless and inspires a kitchen raid for fat, booze and sweets, sometimes in the same gulp. I'll take Tiger Milk protein bars instead: and that's a note for you future bribers. A bribe for the tribe, so there you go!

The first time the sheriff arrived with one of his Mexican boys, I didn't even recognize him. He wasn't wearing his uniform or advertising his presence. I knew it by looking at the scene that it was a same-sex *randy vouz*. I recognize those from a distance. Ain't no reason for some white man in his 40s to show up with a dark, queeny boy and a barely legal one at that if it's just about giving the boy a lift to the boonies or something, a goodwill measure, just to find the boy a job in picking tomatoes or dates or cotton, or something. I knew what it was. And it was none of my business, of course. I get a thrill, I admit, in sizing people up.

So, about the first time...nothing much to say, not even about the second and third. The sheriff likes 'em young and FOB--fresh off the border. Three different boys for different seasons. They stayed overnight a coupla times and nobody complained about noise, so they were discreet, I gather, and they never come down for our free breakfast. Gay guys wanna keep their figure, I reckon. We serve mostly cereals with lots of processed sugar and cheap swirly treats and the type of orange juice that comes in thick concentrate from a store. I doubt it's real orange. I don't know why the gays gotta be so snobby about it. But the truckers seem satisfied with it all and leave me tips and an occasional marriage offer (ain't kidding. I've turned down a good share, though I figured marriage was just the excuse for what men really want 'round here, but I ain't giving them none of that, except when I'm feeling really, really lonely, but that's neither here nor there.)

I realized it was the sheriff after all when I seen the TV commercials. It was John McCain running for his umpteenth time for the senate and he's standing on the border with the sheriff and

says, "Let's build that dang fence," and everyone thinks McCain sounds so country that we gotta re-elect him and once we did, he don't build no fence, of course, nobody really expected him to. But the Bald-Headed Eagle standing next to him smiling like a dolt was our sheriff wearing his uniform, and I recognize him and I get a big kick out of it. He's the one who brings his boys over to my hotel in the desert, I tell myself. Shoot, a celebrity, too. Never had put two and two together till then.

I had the graveyard shift that spring night and the desert blew some mild breezes of dust through the land, and trucks whizzed by and business seemed slow when even coyotes felt confident enough to stroll through the streets. So I'm surprised to find one of these young men in the lobby sitting on the couch with the busted springs, sipping our complimentary coffee with his pinky pointing up to the heavens. I recognized him when he had checked in with our sheriff earlier in the evening. He's a little older than most boys, and by that, I mean probably 25-28, wasn't quite sure, but not as boyish as the rest. Ain't nothing wrong with sitting there drinking the coffee 'cause he's entitled like any other customer but he's got one of them faces that calls out "drama queen" from a distance, or just plain queen. He's avoiding my gaze, and I'm just standing there behind the reception desk trying not to look like the somber Indian of some John Ford movie, but I am a large woman and it's hard to 'void me, so he finally just break his silence, looking impatient,

"Yeah, well," he says, "Don't you judge me, missie!"

He says this in perfect English and I was surprised 'cause to me the sheriff's boys were usually these skinny young things who never said much 'cause their English wasn't as American as ours. Or they didn't speak it at all. But this one seemed eager to talk. I checked the clock and it was two a.m. on the dot like that's the time when he perked up like clockwork and opened up to the truth with a perfect stranger.

"Why ain't you in your room?" I asked. I knew it wasn't none of my business, but since he broke the ice, I figured I'd best get to the point. "Sheriff kick you out?"

"No, I'm just trying to avoid the usual post-coital depression," he said. "His, not mine! He goes off on rants, you know, like blaming God for being the conflicted creature he is. I tell him to chill 'cause God's not about to have a say in our private time, and to buy me a condo in Phoenix, you know. My sister-in-law in Mexico knows all about how to get treats out of men--- she advised me to ask for a condo like in that opera, *La Traviata*, or whatever her name was, close enough. She was set up in her own expensive chambers, as played by Greta Garbo, and then she dies coughing in his arms, and sings a big-ass song while dying. You seen that movie?"

"Hmm, no," I said, "But I could Netflix it."

"You do that."

"You becomin' a regular," I said. Again, none of my business but I grown curioser and curioser.

"How many boys has he brought here before me?" He asked.

"Oh, lost count."

“That bad, huh? Well, this is our third date,” he said, “and I just wanted him to make a commitment, you know.”

“I know how men are,” I said, not that I know that much about men, but what the heck. I know Pa ran out on my crazy Spanish chick of a mom, but came back years later to leave her pregnant with my brother, Duty, and he grew up with a bright mind, a whiz kid who went off to community college down in Tucson, but he died in one of those shootouts. They have them often now like it was the old wild wild west, but that’s what American voters like and they want us all armed and ready for the next one. I don’t own a gun and maybe one day, alone at midnight in this desert hotel, I’ll regret it, but I’ve survived without one. My brother, the geek, didn’t know about guns either, so he wasn’t prepared for a random shooting. “They only want one thing, these men,” I said.

“You said it, sister,” he said. He got up and walked towards me. He was beginning to trust me though I ain’t nobody’s sister no more. “I’m Rubio de la Esperanza.”

“Pretty name.”

“I think so, too,” he said. “Not that Ariel knows how to pronounce it.” He referred to the sheriff by his first name. “I mean I may be foreign, but I’m not, like, an illegal,” he said. “I came as a child and got my papers the regular way, by marrying an American woman and then divorcing her when the papers got mailed. I’ve gone to night courses for a couple of semesters and I once took British literature of the 20th century, like Virginia Woolf, you know, and Forester, whatever his name was, the one who wrote *Passages to India*. The movie was good, though they had no real hunks in it, but Judy Davis was fab. Anyway, I’ve got some education. I’ve got more class than the immigrant trash the sheriff usually deflowers, and I’ll be applying to the university to finish my degree in the humanities. I had to drop out for a while to work and save some money. A class here and there, and some really good teachers at Pima got me going and I know one day I’ll finish and earn my degree. Also, Pima’s where the famous Tucson shooter went, you know, the one in the Gabby Giffords shooting and I met him once, too, he nearly shot me when I called him a white boy with privileges. He got all his micro aggressions out on me, Dios Mio! I get the feeling white boys with privileges don’t like to be told the truth. He just went on and on about the conspiracy this, and the conspiracy that, and that Pima College was the center of the genocide.”

“Pima’s where my brother went,” I said.

“Your brother? Did I meet him?” He asked.

“He got shot early on.”

“Oh, no, he wasn’t one of the people killed at the Gabby Giffords shooting, was he?”

“No, this one was a fraternity shooting, mostly neglected. Only he got killed, others injured. It was in the local news for ten seconds.”

“Oh, one of the minor shootings, but of course it wasn’t minor to you, poor thing. What a world! That’s why love is so important, Littlefeather.”

“Love?”

“You can’t hurry love, they say, but I do! I feel that an educated boy with discerning tastes like me should demand to have a husband with connections like Ariel now, in a rush, today, and all I want from him is a commitment, you know. I can see us adopting children, paying for British nannies to raise them, and then going out to a classy dinner at least once a week in the center of town, not drive out here to the boonies where no one can see us. It’s possible for us to marry nowadays, and then he won’t have to sneak around and be afraid of being seen with me. Our relationship is legit, in my opinion, and I’d make a good husband if only he could acknowledge that. *Ay, Dios Mio, pero qué cruel es esta vida, ¿sabes, chica?*”

“Maybe the sheriff likes to play around,” I offered. It was my knowing hint. “Maybe romance isn’t quite for him. Or marriage is too soon after three dates.”

“But life is short!”

“Yeah, well, some men get bored easy, princess.”

“Not me!” He insisted. “I’m not boring! I buy all sorts of gadgets to keep our relationship, you know, creative in bed.”

“TMI!”

“Yeah, I know, but I had to make a point, Littlefeather. I’m not boring ever and certainly not that way! If that’s TMI, it’s TMI you need to hear from my very own lips.”

“Then give him time to adjust. The sheriff’s a politician. He’s still gotta get re-elected.”

“He does? Really?”

The kid had never even realized this. In our state, sheriffs get elected not appointed. Something mighty suspicious went off in that face. He was getting his ideas there and then, and I had opened my big mouth.

“It’s good to know that,” he said.

“Now don’t you go gettin’ any ideas, mister,” I said. “I’ve seen what happens to uppity mistresses, it was a movie I Netflixed with Liz Taylor, I think, and Montgomery Clift, and you know, the pregnant girl played by Shelley Winters ends up murdered.”

“Don’t be silly, that just happens in movies.”

“You never know with these politicians. You threaten them, and they get their people to take you out into the desert. Who knows what could happen to your sorry ass out there, you know?”

“Oh, please! I know what I could do with my ass in the desert, honey, but that’s TMI.”

“You don’t believe me? They find bodies in the desert all the time.”

“Don’t be morbid!”

“It’s true, princess.”

“Look, I better go up now and beg,” I said. “Maybe I’ll apologize first and that’ll break the stand-off. I’ll live to see another day and then I can plan my big fat gay wedding.”

“Your wedding?”

“Yeah, I’m gonna get myself a husband with panache. I know words like that, ‘panache.’ No other immigrant knows such words, you know. Pa-natch!”

“Yeah, well, good for you, lover man.”

“Nice talking to you. You’ve been a real help. Keep up the good work, Miss Littlefeather.”

Just like that Rubio de la Esperanza went up to his room and I didn’t realize that I had unleashed a border creature upon the land. The next morning, I saw no evidence of any beef between those two lover boys. In fact, next thing I notice on that morning is Rubio out in the pool lying on a big, fat swan. I bought the inflatable pool thingies myself after Pepe the Pipsqueak manager couldn’t make up his mind on what to buy. He drove me to the big mall in the desert and I chose the inflatable pool chairs with the American flag which I figured would delight some of my patriotic truckers, but the big white swan was meant for little girls, and yet there’s Rubio with his arms all up hugging the swan’s neck soaking in the sun looking like he own the place, and I also notice that he got no armpit hair. That girly boy shaves, and I don’t want to know what he does with the hair down there, I tell you, but I can only imagine. TMI! The sheriff sat on one of the cheap pool chairs I also bought on foreclosure sale and he was reading the *Arizona Daily Star* on actual paper. None of that reading it on your I-Pad for him. He touched real paper like a man. He was in his 40s by then and I don’t think he was gonna change the habit of reading the paper, all processed bark of tree turned into mulch. Good for him. And both of them looked quite satisfied. Judging by the two empty Styrofoam plates, it looked like they’d helped themselves to our award-winning sugary breakfast. The lovers had kissed and made up and I thought maybe Rubio had convinced him to make him an official boyfriend, even a husband. More power to immigrant lover boy, I figured.

Appearances deceive. Next thing I know, a few days later, I got the *Phoenix Weekly* calling me asking questions and the reporter said they be running an article about the sheriff and whether I might be so kind as to confirm his visits to my hotel. At first, I said, “no comment” ‘cause that’s what important people say, but hell, I’m not that important, and I figured, why not, just let it out as long as they keep my name out of it. So I followed my “no comment” with lots of comments. It was good publicity for us really ‘cause a bunch of reporters came up to see the hotel for themselves, and they even stayed and demanded lattes. I had to tell them, of course, we don’t own an espresso machine and they looked so disappointed, I feared they’d check into one of those two-star motels down the block that actually doles out cappuccinos.

“Anti-immigration Sheriff threatens to deport his lover!” was the headline in the *Phoenix Weekly* article a coupla weeks later. I didn’t realize that the sheriff was running for re-election with a strict anti-immigrant type of b.s. similar to what Sheriff Arpaio does up there in Maricopa County. The weekly found all the quotes of the sheriff denouncing all the immigrants crossing the border only now the public realized that he brings immigrant boys to our hotel to ravage them. I confirmed the rumors after all. But now I read that Rubio was claiming that when he confronted

the sheriff about their relationship, the Sheriff didn't offer to marry him, but threatened instead to deport him.

"But I'm a legal immigrant," Rubio shouted back, according to the *Weekly*.

The sheriff countered, "Don't matter! Legal immigrants get deported, too, when they become undesirable aliens."

"Who you callin' undesirable, Sheriff?" Rubio retorted. Damn, I'd wished now I'd been standing by that door to listen in on these two guests. I had to read all about it from the *Weekly*.

I wasn't out of the loop myself. Pepe the Pipsqueak summoned me to his office before my weekend shift and had me sit in front of his desk. The ashtray was full of the remains of cremated cigarettes and the lighting shone a bleak light on my face. The man came into the room looking as short and scrawny as any undernourished toddler in an ad to save the starving children. Can't say he cracked the five feet mark and likely stole clothes from his ten year old son who was threatening to grow taller than he. But he did carry himself like he was some big wig with a little dick.

"Do you have something to tell me, Littlefeather?" He asked with a detective voice like he borrowed his line from one of those reality crime shows on Netflix.

"Bout what, Pepe?" I asked. I always summoned up my darling girly voice to throw these suckers off.

"I got the sheriff's office calling and demanding an apology for violating his privacy. Otherwise, he'll slam down a lawsuit on the entire chain."

"So what's that got to do with me, Pepe?"

"Oh, don't give me that, Littlefeather! You know precisely what I mean."

"I didn't see my name in the papers."

"That's right 'cause they say a 'reliable source' confirmed that the sheriff's been bringin' over his boys. Who else 'round here is gonna be a reliable source 'cept a gossip monger like you? You were doing this in high school, too. Always laying out gossip, then denying it after the damage was done." I forgot we were the same age. He always looked like he was in elementary school even back then when we were seniors together. "You gonna deny this now?"

"I do," I said. "I think you're being unfair and should apologize."

"Oh, really? Apologize? Me to you?" He asked, looking outraged.

"Me and the entire tribe," I said.

"What? You never been tribal, Littlefeather! Only now when it's convenient to you, you go tribal."

"I'll call the elders of the tribe and let them know you practice discrimination."

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“That’s only the start,” I added.

“Say what? You got more?”

I know I don’t look like much, but people like Pips always assume I am an easy target. They don’t know how informed I am thanks to my Netflix subscription. I can turn *All About Eve* with a touch of *American Beauty* any minute and that’s precisely what I did tonight on his sorry ass.

“As I see it, Pepe, you can fire me and risk a sexual harassment lawsuit as well as a racial one.”

“What?” He perked up. “Nobody’s sexually harassing your fat half-breed ass ‘round here and you know it. Men got better taste than that.”

“You let truckers come in here and make remarks unsuitable for any woman and create an environment of fear and intimidation for all your female employees. You trust your female employees to support you in court, Pepe? Really? Especially when I know one of them popped out one of your mutts and you’re not paying your share of support?”

“See what I mean? Gossip monger!”

“Are you denying you fathered a child with the last young woman who tried the night shift and went home pregnant?”

He went silent for a second, and could only utter the words, “This isn’t about me.”

“Really? The truth hurts but I bet it’d hold up in court, and you know it, too, don’t you?” He looked back with quiet intensity and his frame threatened to shrink into the fake leather of his throne. “Imagine what fun my lawyers gonna have with your affairs on the job---and this is where the rez comes in.”

“You’re not on the rez!”

“I may not be living there, but my father’s still an official member and, by blood, I count, and I may avail myself of their legal counselors if I see fit. I could have an entire team of lawyers claim I’ve been harassed for my Indian background. And let’s not even get started on government inspectors, Pepe---”

“Guvment what?”

“The ones you bribed to ignore safety violations ‘round here. That smoke detectors haven’t had their batteries changed since Bill Clinton left office, and the a.c. units haven’t had a duct cleaning since the last haboob clogged them up with desert dust! And let’s not even talk about pool maintenance. You really want me to go down the list? I can see it on TV now in one of those shows where they bring out this forensic evidence and stare at the sheets and the bed spreads in ultraviolet light and find they haven’t been washed since the days of Geronimo and got themselves

all sorts of stains including cum, mucus and blood. I'm sure the customers really gonna flock here for that extra bit of sweet-smelling slice of heaven next time!"

"You're one sick puppy, Littlefeather!" He shouted. He whimpered like the helpless pipsqueak he always was. "I'm a family man."

"Yep, it's why you got more than one family," I said.

"Is it too much to expect from you that you keep our customers' love lives confidential?"

"Maybe, but as I see it, I'm way overdue for a raise or a promotion, Pepe."

"Raise? Promotion?" He shouted. "You ain't never gonna get a promotion or a raise long as I'm alive."

"Don't tempt the fates," I said.

"You threatening me?"

"No, you threatened me," I said. That's when I got up. I knew I'd scored at least an extra dollar of pay per hour. In this economy, you take what you can get. As I turned to stare, I noticed the Pips had tears in his eyes. Don't mess with Apache-Spanish-Chicana triple threat, I say, it's a deadly mix.

A coupla nights before the election (or the re-election), I found Rubio de la Esperanza sitting on that same couch by the coffee machine. I didn't even know he'd checked himself into the hotel.

"Just driving through, chickie," he said. Nobody had ever called me "chickie," but Rubio let loose with me. Part of his charm, I guess, and mine. Folks adopt me like I was their best friend even when I ain't. "Thought I'd bring you a little something."

He pulled out a bottle of Scotch. That looked good and pricey, too.

"You were the only one who listened," he said.

But I hadn't listened all that well and I wasn't no sympathetic ear. Never been that. My mother kids herself like that, too, constantly thinking I exist to listen to her sorry ass about Benghazi and Hillary emails and stuff so I got experience with desperadoes like her and Rubio. Grin and bear it and pop another piece of candy in your mouth—that's my motto 'round these people.

"So this is what I get for listening?" I asked, taking the bottle before he changed his mind.

"You were one of a kind," he said. "My parents in Mexico don't even want to talk to me 'cause they want me to marry a woman. How predictable! It's not like our family needs more children to carry on the family name. I got four brothers as it is with wives who have more than twenty kids total. Frankly, they could use a little time out. This vulgar need to breed just leads to overpopulation, don't you think, Littlefeather? I mean, I read *The Maltese Falcon*. No, make that *The Malthusian Factor*, one of those. See what I like about college? You can learn about theories like that. It's what high class people do, theorize all through the night while listening to Bach and

chewing over a piece of organically raised lamb with the right type of wine, preferably made from organic fair-practices grapes. If I'm going to be the host of some classy dinner with my future husband, I need to be able to talk about things like that. I'll be a bitchy married hostess. 'Sorry, couples only,' I'll say. It'll be a sweet life."

"But you and the sheriff split up, I thought."

"Oh, minor details really. At one point, I had him convinced we were going to marry and travel. He was going to take me to Disneyland or something like that for the honeymoon. But I also wanted to, like, travel to foreign lands, too, so that we could visit the house of Jane Austen. I learned about her in class."

"The 'let-them-eat-cake' lady?"

"No, that was Marie Antoinette, silly," he said. "Jane was a writer with bad luck with suitors and I fear she was also really horny, the poor thing."

"Oh, OK, sorry, but she still sounds hoity-toity."

"Not at all. Jane was real class, but modest."

"They got movies about her, I bet. I could look her up in my Netflix."

"You do that!" Rubio shouted. "Anne Hathaway plays her. It's all very classy, and in good taste all around. I enjoy the excellent taste of the people I associate with."

"But how are you going to visit her if you split up with the sheriff?"

"Ay, *mija*, I'll just have to get there on my own then *por favor*. We were going to travel all over Europe until we had the big falling out ---you must have read about it in the papers."

"Oh, yeah."

"You were a great source. I gave the *Weekly* your number. I hope you got some business out of the publicity."

"Yeah, we've been booked for weeks straight." That was true. The scandal led people to recognize us by name, and I imagine kids pointing at us from the back seat while the family van passed through the freeway. We were the love hotel, all of a sudden, and that's a prettier thing to be recognized for, I think. The Love Hotel. Sounds kinda catchy, too. It forced the Pipsqueak to finally change sheets. "We might even buy a cappuccino machine," I added, very proud of my modest reforms.

"That's marvelous. It was about time."

"Yeah, well, I don't know how to use one, but I guess I'll learn."

"It's simple really and that's, like, really moving up in the world, Cynthia Littlefeather. Welcome change, you can't fight espresso, and you might finally catch up with the 90s while you're at it."

“Yes, I agree, let there be change,” I said. But I wondered how much I meant that. I was never sold on the virtues of espresso myself. I prefer my coffee instant and watery.

“And you read the coverage in the papers, didn’t you?” He asked with a surprising tone of pride. “It’s my first scandal, you know.”

“Congratulations.”

“They used one of my pictures in my smart phone, the one with the sheriff squeezing one of my firm nipples, the left one. That was hot, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, really hot, precious. What now?”

“Our lawyers have settled our differences. He won’t have me deported as long as I stop talking to the press. The sheriff also is paying my first year’s tuition at the U of A ‘cause he figured he wants to come across as pro-education.”

“Why do voters care about that all of a sudden?”

“He intends to run for higher office in the future. This scandal has really raised his profile as a patriotic gay Republican, and he wants to appeal to college students for their votes.”

“He should hire you as his campaign manager.”

“Nah, I think this is it for us, you know? We had a good run. I loved him and I thought I could build a good marriage with him, but right now he’s more interested in politics, and I’d be a messed-up first lady.”

“Yep.”

“I’m just too emotional. I tend to scare lovers away ‘cause I get serious and I want to settle down way too early and I want to have all those things that other lovers want, one of those prefab compact homes in the desert with water from the Colorado River and maybe enough land to raise some animals.”

“Animals?”

“But nothing vulgar like chickens. If we get birds, it’d have to be ostriches.”

“Whut? Ostriches? Those things could stomp you to death. You’ll never out run one. About twenty of them let loose in a desert farm, and they ran over Mrs. Puddles, old Anglo woman who used to play canasta with mom before she was trampled to death.”

“How tragic,” said Rubio. “My condolences, but it’s not as if I would take care of them. I’d hire immigrants. I’ll let others kill them for me. Their meat is leaner than any other, and easier on your arteries. Imagine your arteries full of white ooze in there, *chica*, ay, *pero qué* yuck! You can get their meat at Whole Foods as a designer meat, or a boutique meat. I might also want to buy up some llamas.”

“Llamas?”

“They’re the latest rage. Their wool is especially desired among the people with class and good breeding, but I think you gotta buy up their cousin, the vicuñas, for even more refined wool. Alpacas, too, and frankly I don’t know the difference among all those three. Same kinda species, but they’re imported and they’re so chic, you know. Life’s too short to waist on icky, pukey chickens and cows and shit. I want to have a marriage that elevates the institution, that’s much more refined than straight people marriage.”

“But the two of you split up so you’ll get no marriage at all.”

“I know, but this new app on my phone, Get-It-While-You-Can, has put me in touch with other gentlemen of class, and now I’m dating new men and I’m testing them out in their good taste and refinement ‘cause my marriage must be special. The scandal elevated my standing among the wealthier set of gays. They seek me out for dates because they just know I’m shopping for someone with panache for a husband, and publicity always brings out the best in people. They really want to get to know you better. I’m dating as much as some people get text messages. They text me, and I’m there, see? Ready to shop around for a wealthy husband. So I have you to thank.”

“Me? Why me?”

“I told you! For listening that night. I needed to assert myself and you were there for me. Your support came at the right time.”

“It’s my job, I guess.”

“You didn’t have to do your job. Most people don’t. You went out of your way, *chica*.” I could see a tear welling up in his eyes, the queen. “You were just grand.”

“Do I get an invitation to your wedding at least?”

“Oh, for sure!” He shouted overjoyed that such a thing were a real possibility now. “Of course, I’d take you over to downtown Tucson for a visit to my hair stylist and my make-up artist. I wouldn’t want you to show up looking like that.”

“Like what?” I asked even if I was afraid to know the answer.

“You know, like a hotel clerk. Nothing personal, but you’d get the *Pretty Woman* makeover and maybe even some liposuction and you’d be just fine for my wedding day. I’d get you some clothes, too, if you don’t mind me doing that.”

“Not if you’re paying for it, precious. Be my guest.”

“What a good sport!”

“My hotel uniform might look kinda drab for your big, fat gay wedding.”

“Yes, I’d burn that uniform personally. You’d be the bridesmaid, too, of course. But one thing at a time: I gotta get someone to marry me first.”

“Yeah, find the husband first before you hold the wedding.”

“Sounds sensible to me,” he said and I realized he sounded proud to know such a word as “sensible.” He threw some of my preferred mints into a pocket in his man purse and left me holding a coffee cup that was almost full. “I really gotta go and return some calls and messages from my many gentleman suitors.”

“Sure thing.”

Rubio de la Esperanza leaned over to give me one of those ghost kisses on my cheeks in which the lips never touch skin. He then pulled apart and made sure he placed the bottle of scotch on the desk for the world to see. He walked out into the night like a desert rat ready and eager to re-conquer the land in the name of the crown. He looked ever so pretty and delicate and his eyes moistened with that aura of hope that sometimes washes over the young when they still think life will bring them good things. The desert picked up dust and I could barely see his petite figure get into an old Sedan and drive away into a hazy night.

The sheriff won re-election ‘cause nobody wanted to listen to some immigrant like Rubio talk smack about our all-American Bald-Headed Eagle of a sheriff. A picture of Lover Boy holding on to the neck of the swan in our pool showed up on the internet and I think that did it. No man who floats on a pool clinging to the neck of an inflatable swan exposing his shaved arm pits was ever gonna get the voters’ sympathy. The Sheriff was declared the victim. I wasn’t going to please mother either by electing his opponent, eighty year old former mayor, Lou, the Dolt, so I voted accordingly. I voted for Bald-Headed Eagle. Them are the choices ‘round here.

I went back home that night after I heard the sheriff won his election and mama was standing by the TV and pointing at the screen. Our roof had been damaged recently by a haboob that unleashed desert winds and red dust tore into the cracks of our 1930s Dust Bowlish home, and delivered dust particles into our bronchial tubes and nose hairs.

“He won big!” She shouted a little nasally. “Even after we found out he was a *perv*.”

“Mother, he made a mistake with one lover. His other boys are a lot less pretentious.”

“And you would know about boys, Miss Whirly!”

“Don’t tire me out now, old lady. Ain’t in the mood for your back talk tonight.”

“At least he’ll still chase after the illegals! Least that he could do.”

“He chases after illegals all right,” I said, “and he’ll only deport them after he’s had his way with them.”

“You’re the one who voted for him.”

“Shut up, old lady, and eat your porridge,” I told her. But, come on, folks, I never even cook porridge. That night, I’d brought home fried chicken with mashed potatoes and coleslaw and two Big Gulps of soda. It was how mother and I spend our nights, talking b.s. like horses kicking up the dust, and getting ready to Netflix something dicey, with Angelina Jolie in it perhaps when she was a little more vixen and less activist, but mother will reach back to Shirley Temple days

and I gotta grin and bear that, too. It's better than having to watch again that Depar-doo-doo movie about Columbus with mother's alter ego, Sigourney Weaver as Queen Isabella. Not again, I'll shout, so I'll settle for some Shirley Temple tap dancing and singing the good ship lollipop. Mother will still complain about living like poor abandoned old ladies scrounging for a living in the desert even though we consume more calories than our bodies know what to do with. Throw in a regular complaint about the Muslim president who is bringing Ebola across the border, and we can go to bed feeling satisfied with our bloated selves. But not before getting a sip of the excellent scotch Rubio de la Esperanza left behind. Just a tiny sip were enough to make us feel that little glow of fine living in our innards. Life just makes more sense that way, people. It's how we party now in the USA.