

Desert Rapture

Not far from Scottsdale is the Desert Rapture Resort a world class golf and vacation destination. It's where politicians, celebrities, and people of means from around the world stay when visiting central Arizona. Besides the golf course, other tangible amenities, include elegant guest rooms, swimming pools, health clubs, bike paths, hiking trails, horse trails, meeting rooms, ballrooms, restaurants and lounges.

The Tourmaline Lounge is large and has live music nightly; whereas, The Rendezvous Bar is smaller and more private with intimate lighting and high-back booths. It is known as a place where one can find some of the most beautiful, and expensive, free-agent prostitutes in the entire Southwest.

Tonight, the manager of The Rendezvous, Maria, has invited her friend Clarice to come by for a visit. Maria is behind the bar washing glasses, stocking the coolers, and getting things set up for the night. She is 26 years old, tallish, attractive, dark-haired, quick and energetic.

Clarice is sitting at the bar holding a drink and watching Maria . She is 5'3", blonde, 26 years old, small, delicate, green-eyed, and pretty.

Maria stops in front of Clarice, and says, "There's a guy who comes in here that I want to introduce you to. He's probably a couple of years older than us and nice looking, but get this -- he only goes out with prostitutes."

Clarice looks surprised, and says, "Oh, and you want to introduce him to me? Are you trying to tell me something? Are you implying...?"

Maria laughs and interrupts, "No, no, no, it's just that I think you'd find him interesting, he's really cool, and hot. I'll introduce him as, one of our regulars."

Clarice, "He's probably married."

There are a few married couples in the bar who are vacationing at the Resort and a few locals out on date night at the D R; that's how locals refer to the Desert Rapture, the D R. And there are two suspiciously elegant young ladies sitting at a table in the back by themselves.

Later, a young man steps up to the bar near Clarice and orders a beer. He is dressed business casual; tan Dockers, dark green golf shirt, brown loafers and belt. However, every female in the bar notices that he looks very fit, and that he carries himself with confidence. He's tan, has blue eyes, and short, light brown hair.

When Maria places the bottle on the coaster in front of him, she smiles, and says, "Phaedren, this is my best friend since high school Clarice. Clarice, this is Phaedren one of our regular customers."

Maria steps away.

Phaedren smiles at Clarice, and says, "Hi, nice to meet you. You guys have been friends since high school, what was that last year, year before?"

Clarice smiles, "Oh thank you, what a nice thing to say. And, Phaedren, what an interesting name, were your parents hippies?"

Phaedren leans closer and lowers his voice, "No, I got that name when they put me in the Witness Protect Plan. I was in the CIA for a few years and there are Russian agents still looking for me because... well I guess I shouldn't say. But I like it, just don't call me Phae. Do you like it? Actually, you can call me anything you want to. Can I call you Clare?"

Clarice is laughing softly, "Actually, I prefer Clarice."

"What kind of work do you do *Clarice*?"

"I'm a paralegal."

"Is that something you had to go to school for?"

She looks away while saying, "Oh my God."

Phaedren, "Well I don't know, what is it, a two-year course?"

"You can get an Associate's degree in two years, but I have a Master's Degree. What about you? What do you do?"

Phaedren says, "You know how sometimes you go outside in the morning and everything's wet and you think it rained during the night?"

"Yeah."

“Well, I work for the City of Phoenix and I drive a tank truck around early in the morning and spray water on streets, sidewalks, front yards and cars, so people will think that it rained during the night. When in fact, it hasn’t rained within the city limits of Phoenix since 1987.”

Clarice laughs, “You had me going until the 1987 part.”

Clarice has this nice, soft, throaty, kind of half laugh, more rolling than a chuckle, like she just thought of something funny and is laughing to herself, and Phaedren is already bringing it out.

Two stunningly beautiful young ladies come in, look around, then sit at a table. Each of them is younger and more turned out than Clarice.

Phaedren looks their way, Clarice follows his eyes, and when he looks back at her she says, “Are you married?”

“Not so’s you’d notice. Just kidding that’s a quote from a Jack Nicholson movie.”

Clarice, “*The Last Detail?*”

“Yes, very good. Are you a fan?”

“A fan of Jack Nicholson? Not really, I like some of his earlier movies, but not so much lately, are you?”

They talk about Jack Nicholson movies for the next few minutes, which leads them to Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, and others from that older generation. Neither of them dominates the conversation, there is an easy flow back and forth between them.

After a quiet pause Clarice says, “You never really answered me, are you married?”

“Clarice, we just met, please girl, slow down.”

She laughs that laugh, “Oh my God, you aren’t very forthcoming, are you? I don’t know if that’s your real name, what you do for a living, if you’re married or not, and the more you talk the less I believe you.”

Phaedren laughs, “Okay, I’m not married, I’m divorced, no kids. How ‘bout you?”

“Same, divorced, no kids.”

Later, another beautiful young lady enters the room and sits at the end of the bar. Phaedren nods at her as if he knows her, then says, "I have to go say hello to someone I'll be back later."

When he walks away Maria returns, "Well? What'd I tell 'ya? Pretty nice, huh? You like him?"

"Yes, he is nice, smart, funny, but do I like him? Yes and no. He just left me sitting here to go talk to some... floozie, and I don't feel like I know anything about him. When he leaves will he pay with a credit card?"

"Yeah."

"Get me his name, be discreet, but get his real name, and call me tomorrow. I'm gonna head out."

Maria looks excited, "Cool, I'll do it, and we'll talk tomorrow."

Clarice glances back at Phaedren then leaves.

A few nights later at the D.R., Clarice tells Maria what she has learned. "His name really is Phaedren, Spencer Phaedren Chambers, he usually goes by Spencer Chambers. He's the principle shareholder and CEO of a mining company that he started seven years ago called Exploration and Extraction Corporation of Arizona, with an office in the Renaissance Building downtown Phoenix. And through his corporation, he holds controlling interest in several mines around the state that extract lead, silver, copper and... wait for it... gold."

Maria is wide-eyed, "Holy crap! And I found out from one of the bellmen that he keeps a suite on the top floor of the hotel here and that's where he takes his lady friends."

Clarice, "I know, it's listed as an expense of the corporation that he runs, it's supposedly where potential investors and stockholders stay when they're here on business."

Maria laughs, "I'll bet there have been a lot more hookers than investors who have seen the view from that suite."

Clarice says, "Really. And he owns a house on Stage Coach Pass near Carefree, that he paid 1.8 million dollars for two years ago."

"Wow! How long did it take you to find out all that?"

"About an hour."

Maria looks down and wipes the bar, "Shh, here he comes."

"Well, if it isn't my favorite drinking buddy. What's up Clare Clare? How long have you been here? Have you been here all day? Are you loaded? Am I gonna get lucky with you tonight?"

Clarice waits for him to stop, then looks at him and smiles, "Hi there, Spencer Phaedren Chambers, how are you tonight?"

"Aww, man, how'd you find out?"

"I told you I'm a paralegal we know how to get to the truth of the matter."

"What else did you find out about me?"

"I found out that you formed your own corporation when you were 21 years old, and that it's been very successful. Don't get me wrong, I'm not impressed with wealth, I work with attorneys who are stupid rich and they're still miserable, but I am impressed that you did it on your own, and at such a young age. How did you do it?"

"When my buds in college were going out partying on weekends I was lugging a core drilling kit up some mountain taking samples and then assaying them. I put in years of hard work outside and underground so by the time I got my Master's in Geology I had filed claims on over a dozen promising locations.

"But I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, I guess it's in my genes, my Dad worked in mines all his life, and started taking me prospecting with him when I was 12 years old. Which was about the same time my mother ran off with my Dad's best friend. So, I grew up learning from my Dad about mines, he knows more about mining and geology than any professor I ever had."

"Where is he now?"

“He’s retired and has a cabin on Mount Lemmon.”

“Did he ever remarry?”

“No, but he likes to go to casinos, play video poker, and hit on the older ladies.”

“Well, at least he’s not paying for it.”

“Oh, okay. I’m gonna go out on a limb here and assume that Maria has told you certain things about me that you didn’t find out online, right?”

“Maybe.”

Hoping to change the subject he says, “What else did you find out?”

“I found out that your corporation keeps a suite upstairs here.”

“Yes, it does and it’s beautiful. Would you like to go up and see it?”

She laughs, “If I was going to go someplace with you it wouldn’t be where you take your whores.”

Phaedren looks at some imaginary point near the ceiling while trying to think of a comeback.

He doesn’t, and Clarice says, “So what’s the deal with the hookers?”

Phaedren hesitates, then, “Well, with them there’s no bullshit, no games, no - I love you do you love me. I don’t have time for all that. And I don’t have to try and win them over, I can pick and choose among the most beautiful women out there.”

Clarice, “How much do you have to pay them?”

“Why? You want to make some extra money? You thinking about a side job?”

She laughs, “No, Lord no, I just wondered.”

“Well that’s a shame you’re kinda cute. I don’t go with anyone who asks for less than a hundred dollars.”

Clarice exclaims, “Really!”

He says, “See, you sound interested, I think you might be open to the idea. I’ll tell you what, I’ll give you five hundred dollars for the rest of the night.”

“No! And I’m insulted that you would think I’d do something like that.”

“Okay, sorry, didn’t mean to offend you. Here’s something you might find interesting... many of them are married, and... their husbands know and approve.”

She is truly shocked, “Oh my God, what’s this world coming to?”

His wide-eyed, fake response, “I know, it’s terrible” makes her laugh.

An hour later, a beautiful young lady comes in and sits at a table by herself. She’s wearing five-inch spike heels, a tight dress split up the thigh, and her jewelry, makeup and hair are all perfect. Phaedren looks at her, then tells Clarice, “I just saw someone I know, I’ll get back with you later.”

When he sits at the table the beautiful young lady says, “Who’s the pretty girl at the bar?”

“That’s Clarice, she’s just a friend.”

“A friend, huh? When you were walking over here she gave you a look, a serious heartfelt look. Don’t you be throwing away the real thing just for a night of fun.”

He looks back at Clarice, she is turning away from him and getting up to leave. He turns back and asks the young lady, “Well, how did your week go?”

“As well as can be expected herding a bunch of fifth graders every day.”

A week later, he gets to the D.R. before Clarice, and is waiting when she comes in. They sit at the bar and make small talk, and eventually he asks, “How come your marriage didn’t work out?”

“I caught him messing around with another women.”

“How’d you find out?”

“I told you, I’m a paralegal, it’s not a good idea to bullshit a paralegal.”

He laughs, “I’ll keep that in mind.”

She asks, “What happened with your marriage?”

“We were young, still in college, I was working a lot, and I was gone a lot looking at properties. I came home one night, and she was gone. I found out later that she had been seeing someone. But that was years ago, let’s talk about something else. Let’s talk about how tiny your hands and feet are, it’s like you’re small but your hands and feet are tiny. What size are those pretty, little sandals you’re wearing? Four, five? And how do you feel about having your toes sucked? Is that something you look for in a guy, that he’ll want to suck your toes? Because I’ll do it. I never have, and it’s not something I would get off on but if it makes you happy, I’ll suck those pretty, little nubbins until your eyes cross.”

She laughs, and they spend the next few hours drinking, talking and laughing.

In the wee hours, they make out in the back of an Uber on the way to her house.

In the morning, she wakes up to the sound of him in the bathroom. She gets up, sees that his clothes are not there, and realizes that he must be dressed and getting ready to leave. She starts toward the other bathroom then notices a hundred-dollar bill on her dresser. She grits her teeth, curses under her breath, grabs the bill, and goes in the other bathroom.

When she comes out, he is standing by the front door looking at his phone. She goes over, gives him a hug and slips the bill in his pocket without him noticing.

He says, “I had a great time last night; I really like being with you. I’m going to be out of town for a few days, but let’s rendezvous at The Rendezvous Saturday night.”

She says okay and just then the Uber arrives.

He doesn’t find the hundred-dollar bill until he gets home and is emptying his pockets; it makes him smile.

Saturday, as soon as they meet at the bar, he asks if she wants to get something to eat, and she says, yes. They walk to a small, dimly lit restaurant at the resort and spend the evening sharing dinner, a bottle of wine, and their life stories.

At one point he jokingly says, “Seems like you’re a lot nicer to me now that you’ve discovered my net worth.”

She laughs, "I've made it clear that I'm not a prostitute now I guess I have to tell you straight up that I'm not a gold digger either. If I wanted to practice hypergamy..."

He frowns and tilts his head.

She continues, "Hypergamy, marrying up, if I wanted to marry someone with money I could have done it years ago. So, don't worry I'd like you even if you didn't have money, besides I'm not poor, I don't need your money."

He feigns surprise, "You said 'marry', Clarice, please, slow down girl."

She laughs, "You know what I meant."

"Yes, and since it's come up, I want you to know that I don't use the L word very often, but you should know that I really... Like you."

"Aww, how sweet, I have an L word for you too darling, Leave, get away from me, Leave me alone."

He laughs, "I would, but I know you'd regret it later so come here."

Later that night, she goes in her kitchen wearing lingerie and a slight sheen of perspiration and finds him in boxer briefs standing in front of the open refrigerator, dripping sweat and reaching in for a small bottle of water.

She says, "Yes, please, give me one of those."

He twists the top off the bottle and gives it to her.

She takes a drink and then says, "I don't know why you feel like you have to pay women to have sex with you. I thought you did just fine, very nice."

"Just fine? Very nice? Oh my God, you're killing me. If I didn't know you were kidding, I'd be pissed."

She's all innocence, "Kidding? Oh, right, okay."

He lets out a little roar of exasperation, sweeps her up in his arms, carries her to the bedroom, and throws her on the bed. And then... and then it wasn't 'very nice'.

The next morning, she wakes up to find that he has already left. She gets up, looks at the dresser and doesn't find any money. She dances her way down the hall to the bathroom, comes back, and starts to make her bed. When she picks up her pillow she finds a hundred-dollar bill under it. She crumples it up and throws it against the wall.

That night at the bar he comes in, sits beside Clarice, and orders a beer. When Maria places the beer in front of him, Clarice says, "Here let me get that", then she slides the crumpled hundred-dollar bill across the bar, and says, "Keep the change."

He laughs, and Clarice says, "Enjoy it while you can."

He's still laughing, "What do you mean?"

"I found out today that I have to go to Tampa for a few weeks with a team from the office for a toxic tort case."

"When, and what do mean, a few weeks?"

"I don't know in advance how long it will last, could be up to six weeks."

"Six weeks?"

"Yeah, it's a big case, two attorneys, me and another paralegal, a clerk, a secretary, maybe more. We leave tomorrow."

He drinks, stares into space for a few seconds, then says, "Well I know you're gonna miss me; maybe you should take a selfie of us together before you go."

She laughs, "That's okay, I'll probably forget all about you after a few days."

"Yeah, me too."

And then he takes it a little too far by leaning back and looking around the room, checking out the action. Maria looks from him to Clarice who saw what he did and is now staring at her drink and clenching her teeth. He looks at Maria who looks like she might hit him with something, then he looks at Clarice and realizes his mistake.

He puts his hand on Clarice's shoulder, and says, "Come on let me take you out to dinner."

She says, "No, I need to take care of some loose ends from work tonight, but you can take me to the airport tomorrow."

The next day he drives her to Sky Harbor Airport, and while he gets her bags out of the trunk she steps up on the curb, which makes her almost as tall as him. They kiss, and he says, "I'm going to miss you."

She says, "I hope so."

He smiles, "Call me as soon as you get settled in your room."

"Okay, but I'll warn you I'm going to be working around the clock. There's not going to be much time for chatting on the phone. I'll call you tonight though."

A week later, Maria calls Clarice, and after a few minutes Maria says, "I really called to tell you this... Phaedren came in the bar last night, sat there, and talked to me for an hour, then left by himself. Yeah, Ladies of the Night all over the place and he left alone. There may be hope for that boy yet, eh?"

Clarice says, "Well, we'll see. That's why I volunteered to go with this team to Tampa, so he'd either commit or move on and leave me alone. He calls every night and says he misses me, but I don't know. I usually cut the calls short because I do have a ton of work here, and, well, talk is cheap. We know he's liable to say anything, silver-tongued devil that he is, but... Oh well, thanks for keeping me in the loop, and I'll call you tomorrow night."

At the end of the third week, at 8 PM there is a knock at Clarice's door. She's wearing shorts and a tee shirt when she opens the door and then steps aside as the bellman rolls a cart into the room.

"Wait, what's this? I didn't order anything, you must have the wrong room."

The bellman smiles and with a flourish removes the white cloth covering the cart and reveals an ice bucket with a bottle of champagne in it, two stem glasses, and a plate of chocolate-covered strawberries, all of it covered with a sprinkling of flower petals.

Just then, Phaedren steps into the room holding a single, long-stemmed, red rose. Clarice runs and jumps into his arms.

The bellman leaves and quietly closes the door.

The bed is covered with stacks of papers that Clarice had been sorting. She motions for Phaedren to sit in the big overstuffed chair then she curls up in his lap and pulls his arms tight around her. They sit like that for a few minutes without saying anything.

Then she says, "Three weeks? It took three weeks for you to decide to come and see me?"

He laughs, she says, "I'm kidding, I'm glad you're here. Who's watching your office?"

"Well, you know, I have people."

She asks, "When are you going back?"

"When you go back."

end

