

Mister – a short story

Not far from the road going up Mount Lemon stands an isolated Spanish Colonial Revival mansion on a ridge overlooking Tucson. It's all tan stucco, red tile roofs, porches and balconies, and canvas awnings, with stately Saguaro cacti and palm trees and a fortress-like command over the surrounding desert. It looks as if it may have been designed by Mary Coulter a hundred years ago.

Under an arch leading into a courtyard, past a bubbling fountain, and through heavy, carved double doors, the living area is tastefully appointed with leather furniture, Western art, a gun cabinet, and a collection of every *Desert Magazine* ever published.

Brad Balthurst is sitting in the living area, leaning forward with his forearms on his knees, and a pizza on the table in front of him. He takes a slice and looks up at a large flat screen television where a man, Larry, and a woman, Mattie, stand in front of a green screen with a map of Arizona on it. Larry and Mattie are middle-aged, well-groomed, and attractive.

Larry says, "Coming up next on KOFE-TV we're going downtown where our very own Estrella Serra is joining in the Cinco de Mayo celebration at the historic Congress Hotel."

Brad steps over to a DVD recorder and starts recording the program.

Mattie, "Estrella, what's the atmosphere like down there?"

Estrella is holding a microphone in one hand and a red solo cup in the other. She is leaning back against an antique, mahogany bar, and is surrounded by a rowdy crowd of mostly young men. She is stunningly beautiful with long, curly, shiny black hair, big blue eyes, white skin, large dark red lips, and perfect teeth. She is wearing a dark blue Western silk blouse tucked into jeans, a black leather belt with silver Conchos, and tall Western boots. The jeans are tucked into the boots, and the boots are black leather with silver skulls embossed on them, and two-inch heels which make her about 5 feet 9 inches tall. The blouse is a little wrinkled, her hair a little mussed, and she looks, as usual, a little disheveled.

She has to speak up over the noise and music of the bar. Earlier when she first arrived, there was a chorus of "Estrella" as she wove her way through the crowd from the parking lot, across the patio, in the back door, past the

lobby and into the bar, calling out to patrons, and slipping back and forth between English and Spanish. She was followed by a camera man and another crew member.

“Hey Tommy, does your wife know you’re here?”

“Sam the Man, when did you get out?”

“Is that a City Councilman I see hiding in that booth back there?”

“Betty, it’s good to see you indoors instead of out on a street corner.”

A wave of laughter followed her through the hotel.

Estrella smiles at the camera, “Well Mattie, I’ll tell ‘ya, I’m down here with” she points with the hand that is holding the solo cup to some of the men squeezed in around her, “Jose, Mike, Eduardo, Tommy and Jesus...” A tipsy little guy leans toward the microphone looks at the camera, and says, “None of those names are right”. They all laugh, Larry and Mattie laugh, Brad laughs, and half of Tucson laughs.

She continues, “They cancelled the dart competition after one of the waitresses got hit by a dart in the rear end.”

Two of the guys beside her shake their heads and exchange incredulous looks of disbelief.

In the studio, Mattie and Larry are watching Estrella on a monitor as she continues to describe the scene, Mattie says, “Estrella’s amazing. Look at her, everybody loves her.”

Larry nods in agreement, “I know, she’s the only person I ever loved like a daughter.”

Estrella finishes her drink, throws the cup over her shoulder, runs her fingers through her hair, realizes that her hat is gone, and says, “I had a Stetson on when I came in here, but somebody must a took it”.

One of the cowboys beside her puts his hat on her; it is way too large, comes down to her eyebrows, she tilts her head back and looks from under the brim, becoming even cuter.

“Dude, what size is this? Your head must be huge. Did they call you Mellon-head in school? Are you a rodeo clown?”

She reaches over and pats his blushing cheek, “I’m just playing with you, Darlin’.”

She gives him back his hat, then speaks to the camera again, “So as you can see, and hear, there’s a party going on down here and everybody’s welcome to join us. You won’t be able to get in because it’s so crowded but... yeah, maybe you’d be better off celebrating wherever you are. I’m gonna go check out some of the brewpubs downtown so... Happy Cinco de Mayo everybody, WooHoo!”

Back in the studio Mattie speaks to the camera, “There are celebrations going on all over the Old Pueblo tonight so everyone take care, don’t drink and drive...”

Brad stops the recording and goes back to the pizza. He doesn’t worry about what he eats, he’s in his mid-twenties, almost six feet tall, with a low BMI. He has dark reddish hair, a fair complexion, and he blushes easily.

The next morning, after getting the laundry started, Brad’s housekeeper, Abella, comes in the living area where Brad is watching a video of Estrella.

Abella starts dusting, looks at the video, and smiles, “Oh look, Estrella.”

“You said that like you know her.”

“I do. My oldest daughter, Leticia, has classes with her at U of A.; they’re friends. She gives Leticia a ride home sometimes.”

Brad pauses the video and looks at Abella with interest, “Really? What’s Estrella like?”

“Well she’s nothing like the girl you see on TV, she’s quiet, reserved. When she’s on TV, it’s all an act. My daughter told me that at school most people don’t realize it’s her. She dresses down, often hides under a baseball cap, and doesn’t wear much makeup, and doesn’t, you know... interact.”

“Who does she live with?”

“It’s just her and her mother now; her father passed away a few years ago. She has several older brothers and sisters, but they’ve all married and moved out. The Serras are a very old Arizona family who used to be land owners, but as time went by they lost everything.”

“Interesting. How old is she?”

“Twenty-two, the same as Leticia. If you don’t mind me asking, I’ve been coming here twice a week for several months and I don’t know how old you are.”

“I’m 25.”

“And it’s none of my business, but how did you get so well off at such a young age?”

“I just made some lucky investments. I had a friend in college who was a finance major and he told me which stocks to buy and... What’s Estrella majoring in?”

“I’m not sure. My daughter has a film class with her. Estrella’s job at the TV station is just part-time and it doesn’t pay much. I asked her if it was a good place to work and she said no, that young people come in there every week offering to work for free just to get some experience. I was asking because her and my daughter will be graduating before long and I thought she might be planning on going to work at the TV station full time, but I don’t guess so. Okay last question I promise. Have you ever been married?”

“No, not yet. When does Leticia have that class with her?”

“It’s Tuesday and Thursday nights from 7 to 9.”

She smiles at him, “Why?”

“Just wondered.”

Tuesday night, Brad hangs around the auditorium where the film class is taught until he sees Estrella and the rest of the students leave then he goes in and talks to the professor about auditing the class.

Thursday night, Brad slips quietly into the auditorium and sits in the back by himself. He watches Estrella then leaves just before the class ends. He

sits in his Jeep in the parking lot and waits until he sees Estrella come out and get in an old raggedy, pickup truck and drive away.

Brad's Jeep is a new Wrangler Unlimited with a Starwood Industries decal on the windshield. Starwood buys new Wranglers and customizes them into the quarter-million-dollar range. On the drive home, he calls his agent, Phillip Collins, in Los Angeles.

"Hey Phillip, just thought I'd let you know that tomorrow I'm gonna send you the screenplay for the last book, and the final draft for the next book."

"I can't wait to read them. The screenplay is a done deal the studio is waiting for it, the last one was amazing. And the new book will be, what, the fourth in the series? You should start thinking about buying your own island. I know a realtor who..."

"I don't want an island; I like it where I am, and I'm in love."

"Details Dude, tell me all about it."

"Maybe next time, I haven't actually been out with her."

"How could anyone as brilliant and talented as you be so shy? Why don't you let me fix you up with this young actress I just signed? She'll..."

"That's okay, thanks just the same. I'm pulling into my garage now so keep me in the loop. Talk with you later."

In the studio at KOFE, Larry and Mattie sit side by side behind a desk looking at a camera, Larry says, "Welcome back. Last week we talked everybody's favorite reporter Estrella Serra, into letting our makeup and hair people use her as a subject in a video like ones we've seen on YouTube."

Mattie joins in, "The YouTube videos show what was considered beautiful for women of different nationalities over the past one hundred years. Estrella is representing what was considered beautiful for Tucson women over the past hundred years. Our editors did a great job of cutting several hours of video down to a minute and a half. They start with 1910 and go on to, well you'll see.

The video starts with a shot of a freshly scrubbed Estrella filling the screen from her bare shoulders up. With no makeup and her hair pulled back, she looks pale and washed out. She grimaces, turns her head, and

puts her hands in front of her face as if to hide. Then there are fast video clips with two pairs of hands working on her makeup and hair. After a few seconds, which were in real time about half an hour, the video stops with “1910” written across the bottom of the screen, and Estrella looking like a cute peasant girl with a bandana on her head and dark skin, holding what could be the wooden handle of a hoe. She slowly turns her head and smiles at the camera.

Then the speeded-up video starts again as she is deconstructed and reconstructed as a 1920’s Flapper with a little hat and Betty Boop makeup, and a wide-eyed, pursed-lip expression. She puts her open palms up, circles them and rolls her shoulders as if she is dancing, then laughs.

In the 1930’s, she’s a gun moll with a beauty mark, dangly earrings, a long cigarette holder, and slanted, steely eyes... for a few seconds then she laughs, and looks at the cigarette holder as if she doesn’t know what it is.

For the 1940’s, she has on a military hat, she salutes, and then winks and sticks her tongue out of the corner of her mouth.

The 1950’s find her wearing glasses, and holding a pen and pad as if taking dictation. She tries to look serious but then laughs and puts the pen between her nose and upper lip.

The 1960’s version has her in a cowgirl hat and turquoise jewelry. In the 70’s, she’s a hippy, and...

Through the decades she displays different hairstyles, makeup, and looks. She hams it up, moues, flirts, pouts, rolls her eyes, smiles and charms her way through the years. Men who see it want her; women who see it want to be her.

She gets progressively better looking and by 2010 is sensual and movie-star gorgeous.

Abella comes in the living area and finds Brad editing an Estrella video.

Abella tidies up while saying, “I could introduce you to her, you know. I could call you when she’s at my house and you...”

Brad blushes and interrupts, “No, no thank you. Nice of you to offer but... I don’t think so.”

“Hey, I know both of you and I think you’d make a nice couple, you should let me introduce you.”

He doesn’t answer.

“Well, if you change your mind let me know.”

Estrella is walking toward her truck in the university parking lot one night when a guy who looks like a linebacker suddenly appears, grabs her by her shoulders, and presses her against a car, then he leans against her. Brad runs up, grabs the guys shoulder and spins him around. The guy slugs Brad and sends him staggering back, then the attacker turns back to Estrella, just as she pulls a whistle from her purse and blows it right in his face. The guy looks around then hurries away. Brad starts to walk away, she calls to him, “Are you okay?”

He glances back over his shoulder, “Yeah, I’m okay.”

Then he walks off into the night. She looks around dumbfounded and in shock over what just happened.

A few nights later, Brad leaves the auditorium a few minutes before the end of class, but the class ends early, and she catches up to him as he walks down a hall.

“Hey wait, was that you coming to my aid in the parking lot the other night?”

“No, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

As he turns away she notices a big bruise under his eye.

She says, “Hey” but he keeps walking.

Brad is in a Scottsdale car dealership, “If I’m gonna pay cash I think I should get a better price than that.”

The salesman says, “Let me go confer with the sales manager and see what we can do for you.”

The day after the University of Arizona graduation ceremony Estrella and other employees of KOFE TV are crowded around windows that overlook the parking lot. It is mid-afternoon and the studio is quiet. A flat-bed car hauler truck has pulled into the lot, and the driver is unloading a car. The bed of the truck tilts up and a cable attached to the car lets the car very slowly roll off the back of the truck. He pushes the car back a few feet into a parking space near Estrella's pickup truck.

When the driver pulls the cover off the car there are, Wows, Oohs, and Aahhs, emitted from the watchers at the windows.

Larry says, "Did you guys chip in and get me a new Porsche 911 Targa?"

Mattie, "That's the most beautiful car I've ever seen."

Larry, "I think that's called Agate Gray."

Mattie, "And the sexiest car I've ever seen."

One of the young crew members looks down at his phone and says, "You can have one for about \$90,000."

Estrella says, "I like the way he parked it near my truck just to add insult to injury. That's why I worked so hard to graduate from college, you know, so I could work part-time at a place called KOFE (she pronounces it "coffee"), and drive a truck so old they don't even make parts for it anymore. The gorgeous sports car... this is your brain. My old truck... this is your brain on drugs."

The driver gets a clean, white hand towel from the cab of his truck and gives the Porsche a quick dust off. He puts the towel back in his truck, grabs a large beige envelope, and starts toward the entrance to the TV station.

Everyone heads toward the reception area. The driver comes in, sees everyone looking at him, smiles, looks at the front of the envelope, and says, "Is there an Estrella Serra here?"

Estrella takes a small step toward him and into what feels like an out of body experience, "I'm Estrella Serra."

"Well congratulations Miss Serra I heard you just graduated from U of A."

Estrella, cautiously, "Yeah."

“I have the pleasure of letting you know that you have an admirer, who wishes to remain anonymous, who bought that new Porsche 911 out there as a graduation gift for you. It’s paid for and in your name.”

Estrella puts her hand to her mouth and takes a couple of small steps back. Larry steps up beside her, puts his arm around her shoulders, looks down at her, and gives her a little supportive squeeze.

Mattie and a couple of other people smile, and spontaneously clap for joy.

The driver reaches into the envelope, pulls out a key, and says, “C’mon and I’ll go over some of the features of your new car with you.”

Estrella and Larry follow the driver across the parking lot. It is about 105 degrees and after coming out of the airconditioned building... Estrella takes Larry’s arm and looks up at him, “Is this really happening?” She is about to cry.

“Yes, it is Sweetie, and it may turn out to be one of the best days of your life so focus, soak it up, remember every detail of it. You deserve this. Someone you probably don’t even know loves you, and loves you enough to give you a new Porsche, oh my God.”

The driver stops in the middle of the parking lot and waits a second for them to catch up with him, then he holds the key up for Estrella to see what he is doing as he pushes one of the pads on the key. When he touches the pad, the trunk opens and the roof folds back into the trunk like a Transformer.

Estrella watches open-mouthed, with tears in her eyes.

A few days later in the studio, another occasional employee stands before a long table filled with emergency supplies. He is small, middle-aged, and serious, with thinning hair; he looks meek. He looks at the camera and begins an obviously prepared and memorized lecturer about emergency preparedness.

“Monsoon season will be here before long and we all need to be prepared for the storms and flash floods that come with it.”

Estrella walks up beside him wearing a long yellow slicker raincoat with the hood up over her head.

He continues, “It’s a good idea to have a raincoat for everyone in the home.”

Estrella looks down, sighs, and shakes her head as if to say, “I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

But what she says is, “It’s hot in here, I’m not wearing this thing, and it’s ugly as sin.”

She pulls the slicker off, throws it on the floor behind her, then turns and starts examining the stuff on the table. She’s wearing jeans, sneakers, and a red tee shirt with a big A on the front that looks as if she might have slept in it.

He resumes, “Having extra candles and batteries on hand is very important during emergencies.”

Estrella sounds like him when she says, “Very important.”

She picks up a headlamp, puts the strap around her head, adjusts the lens so it is crooked and tilting, part way around the side of her head, turns the light on and swivels her head around causing the light to sweep around the room.

“Now Estrella, don’t be playing with this stuff, this is serious.”

She takes the headlight off, “This is serious.”

He continues by pointing to a case of bottled water, “Everyone should have bottled water stockpiled in the home.”

Estrella opens a bottle of water and takes a drink. Then she spots some glowsticks on the table and looks thrilled. She picks one up, bends it till it lights, and then starts swaying back and forth while waving the glowstick around over her head.

The little man is getting flustered, “Estrella is demonstrating how a glow stick works and how they can provide long-lasting light during an emergency.”

Crew members who are off camera can be heard laughing in the background.

Estrella laughs and throws the glow stick down on the table. She picks up a black box and asks what it is.

“That’s a surge protector.”

“I need one of these for my car.”

“No, that’s for in the home, it plugs into the outlets in the home to protect electronics from a power surge.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna get one for my car. Have you seen my new car? It’s amazing, and it needs to be protected from power surges, whatever that is.”

He shakes his head, points to some boxes, and continues, “It might also be a good idea to have a supply of non-perishable food on hand.”

Estrella tears open one of the boxes, dumps out the contents, and picks up a protein bar.

“I love these things, I didn’t know they were survivalist food.” She rips open the bar, takes a bite, then throws the rest of the bar on the table. She looks off camera and says, “Are you guys hungry? Here.” She throws food packages to the other employees who are standing around watching, and laughing.

Then she pulls her phone from her back pocket, looks at it, pats the little guy on the shoulder, and says, “This is fun but I have to take this” and walks off.

Brad is walking through the house while talking on the phone, “That all sounds good, Phillip, but I have a mission for you. I’m sending you a DVD of a local Tucson news girl that I want you to represent. I want you to take copies of this DVD to local LA news channels, and see if you can get her placed with one of them.”

Brad pauses, listens, then says, “Yeah, I know you don’t usually represent people like this but after you look at the DVD that I’ve compiled I think you’ll be onboard with this. Watch it and let me know what you think.”

Brad pauses again, then, “How much money have you made since you’ve been representing me?”

A slight pause, then, “Good, I look forward to hearing from you soon.”

In LA, Estrella goes into the office of the General Manager of a popular LA television station. She's dressed business casual but her white blouse is wrinkled, and her hair is a little mussed.

The General Manager comes around his desk and shakes Estrella's hand, "Hi Ms. Serra, nice to meet you. Have a seat. I watched the DVD that your agent Mr. Collins gave me, and I must say I'm impressed."

He holds up the DVD that someone has drawn a star on with a black marker. He looks from the DVD to her and says, "I guess that star means you're going to be a star, eh?"

She looks him in the eye and smiles for the first time, making his heart skip a beat.

She replies, "Or it could be because that in Spanish, Estrella means star."

"Oh, I didn't know. Spanish eh, do you speak Spanish?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Did your family come from Mexico?"

"Yes, over 200 years ago."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. Since before Arizona was Arizona."

"Oh wow. Did you make the DVD?"

"No, I don't even know where it came from, or why Phillip Collins offered to represent me. Lately, things have been happening in my life that I have no control over. Good things, but... I don't know. I'm just going with the flow at this point."

He laughs, "Well good. I'd like for you to come on board with us for a few weeks and see how it goes. I'll put you with a team, a driver, cameraman, soundman, and let you go out and record your first impressions of LA. We'll give you some things to cover, and also see what you come up with on your own. Go out and have fun, bring us some upbeat footage. Show us some of that charm and humor that I've seen on your DVD. If it's good we'll use it and offer you a contract. If not, well... nothing ventured, nothing gained. Sound good to you?"

"Sure, let's give it a shot."

A few weeks later, a stream of celebrities alight from limos and swan down the red carpet on their way into the Academy Awards ceremony.

Estrella's cameraman looks her over and says, "Your blouse is buttoned crooked."

She looks down and says, "Yeah, I don't care."

He laughs and shakes his head.

One of Hollywood's best-looking, and most eligible young bachelors, ignores the reporters who are calling out to him until he sees Estrella.

"Hey, I know you, you're Estrella, that hot girl on the local news."

She holds the microphone up between them, "Thank you, Roy. You've been nominated tonight do you think you'll take home an Oscar?"

"I don't know, what do you think?"

She smiles and says, "I don't think you've got a chance, but you're already here you might as well go in. You get free drinks or something don't you?"

Roy laughs, "Well thanks for that vote of confidence Estrella. Why don't you come in with me, they said I could bring a guest?"

"Thanks, but I've gotta stand out here and chat it up with some of the people who might actually win something tonight."

"Damn girl, you're cold as ice. I like that. Can I call you later?"

"You can call me in your dreams."

He laughs, kisses her cheek, stops and says, "You even smell good" then he turns and walks away.

Several small satellite antennas pointing in different directions are lined up on the backside of Brad's house where they can't be seen. He sits in the living room alone watching Estrella on the LA television station.

Estrella's face is reflected on the blank gray screen of an old television sitting on the counter in Abella's kitchen. Leticia and Estrella are sitting at

the kitchen table with cans of Coke on the plastic table cloth before them. Through the screen door Estrella can see a chile ristras hanging on the back porch.

Leticia asks, "So how do you like LA?"

"Well, I don't want to sound ungrateful, I'm really lucky to have been given the opportunities that I have, but... After living in Tucson all my life LA is like - hard. The weather's nice, it's beautiful, but the traffic, and the crowds, and the pace, and the pollution... I miss Tucson."

Leticia answers, "Tucson misses you. They were talking about missing you on the talk radio station last week. One of the DJ's said he was going to move to LA and look for you."

They laugh, then Leticia asks, "Have you been out with anyone?"

"No."

"Girl..." Leticia doesn't have to finish, they've had this conversation before.

"How long did it take you to drive here from LA?"

"If you Google it, it says seven hours, I made it in six. People tell me that car will go two hundred miles an hour, I'm not gonna go that fast, but I did make it here in six hours."

Leticia looks at her phone, "I have to go pick up Mom why don't you come with me. We'll take the truck, you probably miss your old truck."

"Not really."

"It was the best present I ever got, but if you ever want to trade..."

Estrella laughs.

At Brad's front door, Abella gives Estrella a hug, and they go in.

Estrella looks around the living area, "Wow, pretty nice digs. This must be what they call an estate. Who lives here?"

Abella smiles, "A fan of yours, his name's Brad Balthurst, and he watches videos of you all the time. Here's one of them."

Abella holds up a DVD with a star drawn on it just like the DVD the General Manager of the TV station had.

Estrella is still frowning at the DVD with the star on it when Abella takes her by the arm, “Come look at this.”

She takes her down a hall, then into a room, “The master bedroom.”

Estrella looks around, impressed by the size of the bed, and the floor to ceiling windows, and the view, and... Then she sees why Abella brought her here. On one wall, there is a poster-size picture of Estrella. It’s from the beauty standards video 2010, and it has been matted and framed, and hung as a focal point in the middle of a wall.

Estrella inhales a little gasp, and puts her hand to her mouth, “Oh my God. This guy really is a fan, isn’t he?”

Leticia has walked up beside her, “Wow, I wonder if there are pictures of you in bedrooms all over Tucson?”

They laugh.

Abella says, “You guys go ahead and look around, Brad’s not here. I’ve got to finish up a couple of things before we go.”

They wander around the house. Leticia picks up a brochure and says, “Hey look, your car.” The brochure is for a Targa like Estrella’s.

Estrella comes to an office, the door is open, she goes in and notices Brad’s framed diploma’s, one in English Literature and one in Current Affairs. She stops at a bookcase and looks at the titles. On one of the shelves, there are several books by Maxx Hess. She has heard of Maxx Hess and his espionage thrillers, two of which have been made into movies. She opens one of the books and notices the dedication: ‘A heartfelt thank you to my old friend, my agent, Phillip Collins’. She doesn’t know what to think; what are the odds? She takes down and looks at other books by Maxx Hess and notices that it looks as if they’ve never been opened. There are two manuscripts on the same shelf that are held together with large clamp-type clips. On the cover page are the screenplay titles and the author’s name, Maxx Hess.

On another shelf, she sees a newspaper with the headline, “Who is Maxx Hess?” She whispers to herself, “That’s just what I was wondering.” She picks up the paper and reads the next line, “The pseudonym used by one of America’s most successful authors.”

She scans the article and sees where it says that Maxx Hess is rumored to live in Arizona.

She goes out onto a shaded balcony where there are large potted cacti, over-stuffed lounge chairs, and a concealed tube of humidity misters outlining the walls of the balcony. She leans against the balcony rail, closes her eyes, and turns her face up toward the mist blowing down on her.

She thinks back to Mr. Bickford holding up her DVD with a star on it, then Abella holding up a DVD with the same star on it, and the Porsche brochure, and Phillip's name in the book dedication, and her picture in the bedroom, and the screenplays! He might collect someone's books, but not their screenplays...

Just then Brad walks out onto the balcony, she turns around, and their eyes meet.

"You! You're him. You're the guy who rescued me that night. You... Oh my God, and you're Maxx Hess."

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"And your agent is Phillip Collins."

"How did you figure...?" He catches himself - too late.

She walks up to him, smiling; got-cha.

He looks down, blushes, and says, "I don't know what you're talking about."

He turns to leave and she grabs him, turns him around and kisses him full on the mouth, hard.

He snatches her up and returns the kiss.

She can feel the earth moving under her feet.

They stand there kissing and holding tight to one another, it's the kiss he has dreamed of for months, and it makes him delirious.

A minute later, Leticia and Abella come out on the balcony and find Brad and Estrella still embraced.

Leticia laughs, and says, "What's going on here? We're ready to go Estrella - if you are."

Estrella looks up at Brad, and says, “I’m staying.”

Leticia, “What the…”

Abella puts one hand on her chest, takes Leticia by the arm with the other hand, and says, “Come on Leticia, I’ll explain, something wonderful is happening here.”

After Leticia and Abella leave, Estrella and Brad sit on a couch facing one another.

“Okay mister you got some ‘splainin’ to do.”

“What do you want to know?”

She asks, “Why would anyone do what you did with that expensive car, which by the way I love, and thank you, and the agent, and the job?”

“Well that’s easy, I love you, and I just wanted to make you happy.”

She looks down and takes his hand in hers.

After a long pause, she looks up, and says, “Why do you use a pseudonym?”

“Because I never wanted celebrity. I was one of those guys who never went on a date in high school, or to a party, or to a prom. Some people said I was – lacking in social graces. So I don’t want people that I’ve never seen before coming up to me and wanting me to sign their book, or take a selfie. Sorry, but that’s not my style.”

“Okay, I can understand that. But why didn’t you ever approach me? We may have gotten together months ago.”

“If I had approached you… I know you get hit on and reject guys every day, I would have just been the next guy in line for you to say no to. But as long as I never tried for you my fantasy could continue.”

“Well I guess that makes sense, in a sad sorta way. Look, I want to know everything about you. What were your parents like?”

“My only memory of my father is when I was five years old and somebody picked me up, leaned me over a casket, and said, “That’s your daddy, boy.”

“Wow, kinda sorry I asked.”

Then, hopefully, “What about your Mom?”

“A barfly.”

“Damn.”

He changes the subject, “Also I didn’t approach you because you’re so unbelievably sexy. I don’t have a lot of experience in that area, and, ah...”

He blushes, and looks away.

She looks down, pauses, then stands up, and slowly walks away while taking off her tee shirt and bra. Then she stops, drops the tee shirt and bra, and looks back over her shoulder at him. And that was all it took.

After that day, she never left.

end

