

A Killing in the Market

by Neil Serven

Culpeper wears slip-on loafers to the airport, keeps his keys and loose change in a separate zipper pouch in his carryon. Just the one bag, no toiletries save for a toothbrush and comb. Anything else he can buy on the other side and write off. When they ask, he'll consent to the full-body scanner without complaint. Let them look all they want. The cigars will kill him before the radiation can and a zeroed-out southern infantry will only save him headaches down the road.

Doyle texts him: good luck, chief, don't run over any Mormons. IHG is divvying shares, we're buying up, you want in? Holiday Inn, etc.

put me in for 2, Culpeper texts back. u still owe me 1.

In line in front of him is a girl, a college kid on her way home for the summer. Pajama pants, flip-flops and a hoodie in University of Washington purple. Hair in a scrunchy, smelling like cinnamon. Shoulder tote and a roller bag. Professional student traveller, Culpeper figures, probably had most of her stuff shipped home. She'll know the game and won't hold up the line.

They got their assignments in Seattle, then traded amongst themselves. It turned out nobody wanted Idaho. Fluky rains foretold a down season for potatoes. The Farmers' Association will want to renegotiate for next year to protect its members; whoever went would have to break some hearts.

Fair but stern, Blake, was what Rosalyn told him back at the hotel. Politely remind the SIPGA that folks don't patronize our restaurants for the French fries.

Everyone hoped to be assigned somewhere they could just drop in on their way home for Memorial Day weekend. Someone said, Blake, you're single. You hate your family, don't you?

So Culpeper got the draw to fly to Salt Lake City and drive a rental car north up I-15 to Pocatello, then on to Idaho Falls, to complicate some farm families' lives. Rosalyn promised they'd

reserve him a Mustang if one were available. Ought to be a nice ride this time of year, she said.

At security he watches as TSA makes the girl take off the hoodie. She has spaghetti straps on underneath. Fair assets, broad arms, tan: probably a swimmer.

Doyle again: Keep an eye on Marriott Food Services, they're not happy with Ore-Ida. The college kids are raising a stink about locally grown this and fair trade organic that and if ol' H. J. Heinz comes back to the SIPGA with this info then there goes our leverage.

The thing about Doyle is you can't tell when he's done his homework and when he's full of shit. Claims he made two hundred grand in the market last year and only keeps with the restaurant distribution gig for the travel, to get away from the wife. He thinks Culpeper will relate to this.

So this girl: her arms are out in a T and the agent, a heavy woman like an inkblot in her black TSA uniform, swings her around to the side to give her the patdown. Soon she has her hand curved pretty comfortably around the girl's left breast, like she's tuning a dial, and all the girl can do in defense is roll her eyes in quiet exasperation. Culpeper, seeing this, lets out a chuckle, loud enough to draw the attention of the girl and the agent, neither amused.

That's when another officer, a little guy holding the magnetic wand the way Gene Rayburn used to hold his microphone, puts up his other hand and tells Culpeper, Sir, this will only take a minute. Please wait here.

Culpeper shrinks back, wondering what his other options are.

From his place in line he watches the female officer's hand follow a path that seems to cover every inch of the girl's silhouette, in and out of the most intimate folds: places that would get him slapped. Around the hips, between the legs, up in *there*. The girl's eyes squinch closed. Culpeper's not sure whether to be aroused or disturbed. Hotels charge you through the nose to watch this kind of stuff on TV and it's not the kind of thing you can write off.

And then the girl is gone. Just as expertly as she maneuvered through security she follows the no-nonsense route to wherever she needs to be.

As for Culpeper, they don't make him do a thing. Within two minutes he has his shoes back on and his carryon slung back over his shoulder. He looks around, unsure of where to go next. Part of him wants to go look for the girl to ask her if she still eats Tater Tots.

With time to kill before his flight, and cinnamon still on his brain, he orders a sticky bun and coffee. The airport bookshop has a new history of Lewis and Clark—discounted paperback—that should keep him busy. The terminal is not crowded yet, it is actually calm and pleasant. He finds a seat that affords him a view of the takeoffs and landings and settles in. Email chimes in from Doyle: tornados near St. Louis, his flight is delayed. See ya ladies, I'm going back to the bar.

u wont believe--, Culpeper starts to write back, then cancels. Not everything is worth sharing, cowboy. You work on the road, you look at women in airports. Amidst the glass and the crowds, the announcements and fluorescent lights, it's what you do to remind yourself you're alive. You look for a little flash. Try to make it last, turn it into a story, and it'll be one of those kinds that you're apologizing for by the end of it, saying I guess you had to have been there.

