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Back in the 80's, I lived for awhile in San Angelo. I gave it a good test. On one stint, spent five nights in a row over at a house in the University area. It wasn't altogether an alien place. College Hills was once part of Sarge Nasworthy's ranch. Big white caterpillars still crawled in the carpet grass under the lawn chairs in the back yard. Fox squirrels looted the pecan crops. Now and then, a mockingbird swooped down to land on the clothesline. And out in the alleys, raccoons raided the garbage.

Sure, I missed living in the country, yet sitting in the back yard, a lot of connections brought back the Nasworthy name. The grandfather, Sarge Nasworthy, owned a saloon adjacent to the bank on Concho Street back in the early days. About the time I was adjusting to city life, Sarge's old building and the bank's became a fancy restaurant. The tourist bureau began promoting the street as a historic district, encouraging dress shops and gift stores to take space. The main attraction, besides all the handsome old buildings, was the discovery of an upstairs bordello furnished like the day the Texas Rangers raided it.

All that was left of the spots the cowboys congregated around after World War II was the saddle shop. Today's boutique keepers and tearoom operators would had to have hidden their eyes and covered their ears from the roar of the payday crowd bellowing and bucking from one watering spot to a blind tiger of a melee down the street.

The pattern was the same for every waddie: get a haircut, buy new clothes, and lay in enough tobacco and soap to last a month. Serious businessmen invested in a pair of bridle reins or a new rope. (Needless to say, ropes in the hands of indisposed cowboys made dangerous distractions around saloons.) Really astute investors, (I speak of the ones inclined to be Rockefellers or Mellons) might buy a pocket watch and a tin suitcase. But the main transaction was five cent nickelodeons and ten cent a schooner beer.

Several times on a Saturday night, the music boxes had to be emptied from the overflow of coins. Bar tops and shirt sleeves grew soggy from spilled beer. Girls on Concho Street lived in the midst of all this debauchery. I never knew for sure, but suspect most were shills for the saloon keepers, receiving a chit for every drink they mooched. I do know they had to be quick on their feet if a cowboy swung them around close to the spurs on the wild men's boots.

I was there the night a gal I'll call Phantom Face Rose to protect the guilty, kicked Rowdy Bill so hard that the rim of the glass he held to his lips broke out two of his teeth. The story doesn't have to be blabbed around your Aunt Tillie's sewing circle, or recorded in the minutes of next month's PTA meeting. I only joined the cowboys because I worked on the ranch. The extent of my participation was out of loyalty to the trade and to be known as a regular fellow.

But my return was a much different matter. Time tames a lot of hombres. I knew no one was around to recognize me. So

opening week of the restaurant in Sarge's old saloon, I lunched with a group of my sister's friends. I dressed like San Angelo lawyers on a court day. Stopped at the stand by the parking lot for a quick shine and took a seat, keeping the mirrored wall to my back so I had only one image to hide. The conversation opened and stayed on the discovery of Miss Hattie's, the fore-mentioned bordello.

Each time a pause occurred, I nodded and said, "Indeed, how quaint." And at a much longer pause, "What a smashing idea to commemorate a sporting house. So novel to revive such a vigorous period in history. Such style in a city to remember every aspect of the frontier culture."

After we broke from lunch, I found a wrought iron bench gracing the old Contact Club to finish a cup of coffee. Names rolled past: "Kenos, Pecos, Salty, and Pea Picker Dan; Bill and Riley; Smoky, Banty and Doc." Boot heels tapped down the sidewalk, meaning Shorty was in a hurry to leave town. A moan came from the alley announcing Stony was coming alive from the night before.

I opened in a phrase far removed from these hombres' comprehension: "Better be careful where you sleep. (Telling the genuine article to be careful is as alien as ordering a polar bear to wipe his feet before he breaks into a log cabin.) Going to be tour groups giggling and looking in the upstairs cribs. I always figured you'd all end up being bigger tourist attractions than you were bronc riders."