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Ben Lawden wants three million acres
By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—I often get phone calls from individuals looking for land-buying advice. One came in this week from Ben Lawden that left me puzzled. Here's how I recall the conversation.

Ben: I'm looking for Seltzer, Curtis.

Me: [With an opening like that, I figured I should be cautious.] Me too.

Ben: Ha. Ha. You wary like me. Fox always live longer than rabbit.

Me: Who is this? [He spoke English with an accent that I couldn't place. It was not North Carolina or Pittsburgh, the two I understand.]

Ben: My name, Ben Lawden. I want buy big land...in America.

Me: Are you calling from offshore?

Ben: Yes. I need land for bizniss.

Me: What kind of land?

Ben: I spend lot of time in mountains and deserts.

Me: Do you want to raise crops?

Ben: I have much experience with red flours. I send you semple.

Me: Niche products can do well.

Ben: I no nitch. Red poppies is big bizness. But I need to di-verse, just like Goldmansex. I watch old tv shows like "BANANA" when I was small goat.

Ben Lawden same as Ben Cartwright. I want kettles. I want to poke cows.

Me: ...um...do you mean, punch cows? You want to be a cowboy?

Ben: Right, pardner.

Me: Well...it's probably better to say that you're punching cows rather than poking them.

Ben: I want be cowpoke. Whoever heard of being cowpunch? I know America like back of my elbow.

Me: Well, that's a start.

Ben: I want 10-gallon boots instead of stupid old sandals. I want blue jeans, no more bathrobes all day long. I want palomino stallion like Trigger; no more dunkies. 'Hi, Ho. Trigger! Avast!'

Me: Close enough.

Ben: I be star in Hollywood like Roy Rogers. Put hands, feet in sidewalk cement. Have done this with others already.

Me: You may have to work a bit to be accepted by the locals.

Ben: You watch. I swegger into local water hole. I'm against alcohol, music, chilled water and dense-hall floozies. Anybody say anything, I pull out Stinger missile and blow up saloon. Just like old times with Soviet helicopters, except different.

Me: You're a little short on people skills, but a lot of actors are. I can help you with a ranch, but my best contact in the movie business is a guy who runs a Jewish cemetery in Los Angeles.

Ben: Would he pitch my screenplay?

Me: He comes to bury writers, not to praise them.

Ben: Sounds like one stale pastry.

Me: Oh, right. One tough cookie. Let me focus on the land. What else do you want with your cattle ranch?

Ben: Need space to build new bum factory.

Me: You think there's a market for new bums?

Ben: You bet. Get big Pentagon contract to make low-tech bums. Any schnook can blow up. Sell some to U.S. Army, but most go abroad where I have connections.

Me: You're a defense contractor?

Ben: Sure. Conglomerate. Reality media. Red flours. Bums. Now need big wrench to poke cows.

Me: How big?

Ben: Like Lebanon. How about I buy Connecticut?

Me: You'll do better in Montana or Wyoming.

Ben: Ted Turner owns two million acres. So I buy three. After all, I make the news; he only reports it. Also, big requirement: no snoopy neighbors.

Me: No one in Montana ever said anything about the Unabomber.

Ben: Works for me.

Me: Do you want a house like the kind you live in now?

Ben: No! No! House now—no windows and many bugs.

Me: What style is it?

Ben: Pakistani primitive. Made from dirt and stone, all native materials.

Me: An earth-shelter design! Is it all below ground?

Ben: How you know that?

Me: How very green!

Ben: As Americans say, 'We live in sticks.' Except...we have no sticks where I live.

Me: Are you off the grid?

Ben: Sure. No electric lines in no-sticks. Just batteries.

Me: So, are you looking for another earth house?

Ben: No! Tired of living in cave with four wives and 20 children. Just between us guys—make me crazy. 'Ben do this. Ben do that.' Leave them here, where they have rich, full life. I move to America and live in White House.

Me: Well, I suppose you could build a replica.

Ben: Want big white columns. Hollow. Good for hiding missiles.

Me: I hadn't thought of that. Any other special features?

Ben: I need video-recording studio. And state-of-the-art hazmat lab. Also want big bum shelter.

Me: For the homeless. Aren't you thoughtful? You do have an odd mix of needs. What about amenities?

Ben: Want home on range. Big Sky. Buffalo must roam where deer and cantaloupe play.

Me: How much do you have to spend?

Ben: For right place, money will flow like Gulf oil well. Actually, from Gulf oil well. I make joke from inside. Ha. Ha. Maybe I go into stand up.

Me: I'll call around. What's your email?

Ben: Don't use any more. Too much spam and scam.

Me: Cell phone?

Ben: They cause brain cancer...and drone attacks.

Me: So how do I communicate with you?

Ben: I phone you in three weeks. You must keep confidential. If you blab-blabb—I pile stones on your head until squish, like greppe. I send you \$500,000 to get started. Is that enough?

Ben Lawden smelled a little fishy to me. I'm sure his check will be good. I just can't put my finger on it.

Maybe it will come to me if I connect one or two dots.

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