

THE STRAIGHT SHOT

FROM A WOLF TO A RABBIT by Jess Hardin

Given how few divorces there were in the olden days, I figure either folks were making a lot better choices a hundred plus years ago, or else they were a lot more tolerant. Of course, if it was tolerance, it was likely due to them having a lot fewer alternatives as well. Given the scarcity of unattached women in frontier communities such as I live in, it's no wonder a fellow here tended to take that "for better or for worse" stuff so seriously! Then again, even back then I believe I would have rather been dragged behind a horse than be forced to stay any longer with my first wife.

It wasn't that she was a bad person, and in fact we hardly ever argued. Unlike some unnamed gals I'd known, she never threw a frying pan, dumped milk in my lap, or screamed about my bull headed ways. It wasn't aggravation that drove me away, but a decided lack of stimulation... and a dearth of that necessary element of life called love. And similarly, it wasn't her anguish, anger or dissatisfaction that put an end to our government sanctioned experiment in cohabitation, but rather, 'twas indifference

that drove me away. What some may have experienced as a certain peacefulness and equanimity, felt more like detachment and disinterest to me, and even the fact that she never cheated on me seemed due more to a lack of adventurousness and craven passion than loyalty and fidelity per se.

The decision to "split the sheets" followed several nights of my sleeping under extra blankets on the couch. The first such night followed not a disagreement or fight, but a late night of writing during which I wondered if she would check on me and invite me to rest. The second night alone followed a morning in which nothing at all was said about my never having come to bed, coffee poured with the same lack of expression. It wasn't the proverbial "push comes to shove," but rather, how incredibly comfortable she was with our increasing distance that led me to finally jump off the edge.

A crusty Sammy Giron was my rascalion advisor during my first youthful years in Catron County, and he never thought for a minute that it would last. I wish to heck he could have

lived long enough to see how satisfied, well loved and interestingly challenged I am in my current marriage, but he at least got to preside over my period of disenchantment and the fraying that followed. From the time my wife and I arrived here in this backwoods paradise, she complained to the old man about how isolated it was, how slowly people moved around here, and how few "alternative" folks there were for her to relate to. You could see Sammy nodding at every word she said, partly because he was enjoying the proximity and attention of a pretty girl, and partly because in his own way he was just as critical of things around here as was she. The difference was, that instead of thinking there were too few people in our region, he insisted there were "too damn many."

"You should leave that Wolf guy," he grumbled, using my local nickname. "And go to New York and marry a lawyer" he continued grumbling to her in his heavy Spanish accent, never minding that I was sitting close enough to hear. Needless to say, I knew he was messing with us, since he hated lawyers even worse than politicians, and he considered politicians "devils." Maybe he sensed what I hadn't wanted to face: that even at her best, she just didn't belong.

She did indeed leave, but to Canada not the Big Apple. And not being one to take any man's advice, a month after our separation it was a cartoonist she had taken up with instead. This notably undemanding fellow specialized in drawing caricatures of talking vegetables, specifically chiles saying the kinds of clever things that are intended to perplex the tourists in trendy places like Santa Fe. When Sammy met her soon-to-be second husband, the slouch-hatted cowboy was something less than impressed.

"I told her to get a lawyer-man, and what does she do?," he laughed convulsively. "She goes from a Wolf to a rabbit!"

He was calling this well-meaning if somewhat demure artist a prey species, for goodness' sake! And being as insensitive at times as he was forthright, Sammy repeated these very lines to my ex the next time she called him, with the result being that the finally angry cartoonist grabbed the phone from his beloved and screamed obscenities at what was then a 67 year old man.

"He doesn't want me to call him a rabbit anymore," Sammy explained, in a moment of rare understatement. And we could count on him to accommodate. "From now on, I'm going to call him the growling rabbit instead!"



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