

COYOTE BAIT, by Tom Lombardi

The coyotes took my wife. Frankly, if she hadn't been wearing that nightgown with the factory-stitched hole in front that serves no other purpose than to display her pubic hair, I'm pretty sure this whole situation could have been avoided.

A while ago, when I first caught my wife rolling the recycling bin down the driveway I asked if she was by any chance in the mood to get tackled by some psycho with a boner?

She said she was not. That I should shut up. That her mother had bought the nightgown for her. So *back* off!

I ask you, what kind of mother buys a slutty nighty for her daughter? This same woman, last Christmas, had purchased my wife a pair of green, thong panties, equipped, I shit you now, with a red bow atop the triangle part that barely covered her ass crack to begin with.

Imagine the look on some dude's face when he sees bow on a thong; some douche from the New Business Department pouring himself coffee in the kitchen while my wife's all bent over to retrieve the sugar packaged she'd just dropped -- I told her to stay off the sugar! -- and the guy just so happens to spot, as her jeans slide down her lower back: a bow affixed to the top of her ass. You know what's going through this dude's head like one of those arrows with the explosive tips Rambo used to blow-up Filipino extras? A pretty ass with a bow on top! And I'll tell you what else is going through his mind: she's not only potentially slutty but she's neat and tidy . . . hence the bow. Look, I didn't know some guy in New Business. I just knew that the coyotes had taken my wife. And I'd spent hours combing Griffith Park with a flashlight -- which happens to be one of the biggest natural parks in the world, so you can do

the math -- and returning with enough fear and guilt to start my own religion.

So when I got back, I did what coke we had left in the house and did what any red-blooded American would do when his wife is missing. I called my mother-in-law.

"Stop buying her rape gear," I told her.

"Ju are just jealous," she said.

For once, I had a retort big enough to fill a bazooka: "They took her," I said proudly. "Now you think I'm jealous?"

"Who took hair?"

"Her."

"I g-know what ju said. What ju think -- I'm some ass hoil?"

This woman puts a "g" in front of W's for reasons only God can decipher. Meanwhile, I'm pacing around the house like a murderer covered in blood.

"Who are ju talking about. Who took *hair*?"

"The coyotes took her last night. There must have been, like, ten of them -- all yappin' -- you know that sound, it's like they're laughing. Eye-eye-eye-eye . . . I'm telling you it's because of that goddamn nightly you bought her, it's . . . I told you it was rape gear and that some day we'd be paying the price and yeah, well . . . now the coyotes got her and

God knows what they're doing to her and look I don't know what to do about this, I mean, what the fuck do we do, you know what I'm saying? You have any ideas? Jesus. I mean, holy fuck. *Coyotes!* "

"Okay," she said, "fairst off, ju need to calm down, okay?"

"My hands are shaking! "

"Call da police."

"They told me to call the animal control! "

"Ass hoils."

"Totally! "

"My daughtair is not some any mall."

"*That's* what I fucking said! "

"Ju need to calm down."

"Guess what else they asked," I said, hearing her sigh all hard, "they asked what she was wearing."

Her silence was like a gigantic, blinking, buzzing neon sign in the room that said: G-WHY ARE JU SO FUCKIN' JEALOUS?

"I'm not being jealous," I said, nipping it in the bud, "they asked what she was wearing. And when they find out I lied -- I told them she was wearing big grandma bathrobe -- they'll probably just say we're responsible for any woman

who's taking the garbage out in a silk nighty with a hole over her you know what!"

She took a few breaths on the phone and sad, "Dey have to ask that for da records."

"Look, why don't you just come over and we figure out a plan?"

"I'm in da driveway."

Instead of glancing out the window to see if sure enough her red Ford Focus was pulling into the driveway, I scoured the house for any incriminating evidence; and ended up finding a little baggie of coke on the floor under the bed. I was licking it like some freak on one of those ABC After-School Specials where everyone's a pedophile driving a green sedan or a drug dealer driving a green sedan, when the doorbell rang. Of course, she has a key, so she'd already barreled inside and had begun dismantling the coffee maker by the time I made it into the kitchen, my teeth so numb from the coke I had to tongue to my teeth to ensure they were still there.

"I'll making coffee," she said. "Ju don't make it strong when ju make it."

"I'm a terrible human being."

"Okay," she said, her shoulders falling, "we don't half no time for jour passive aggressive bull sheet, okay?"

Maybe it was the coke, but before I knew it we were hugging probably tighter than your average son-in-law/mother-in-law hug -- in fact, I felt the sweat breaking through the fabric on her lower back. But hey, fucker, let me see how much of a man you are when the coyotes take your wife!

The moment we broke from the hug, she began scrubbing the counter with a rather impressive velocity. "No time for pain," she said suddenly with so much insecurity I just assumed it'd been a line of terd one of her ex-husbands had fed to her on a plate of lies in a hotel room years ago.

Meanwhile, I had to sit down, as it felt like Mike Tyson was inside my chest trying to upper-cut his way out. If I was having a heart attack, I decided, I would continue to look for my wife. No time for pain.

"I searched for her already. For hours," I said, out of breath. "It's no use. We need bait."

She looked at me like I had snakes slithering out my nose.

"Ju expect me --"

"No! A younger woman that looks like Sonia. *Obviously.*"

"Oh," she said sadly, holding the Windex in her hand, "ju're right."

"The babysitter," I said, catching an ant scurrying up the yellow wall toward the door.

"Whose babysitter?" she asked.

"Ours."

"Ju half a baby?" She stopped scrubbing the fridge to stare at me, her fake eyelashes flapping as she blinked.

"Since g-when?"

We were sipping coffee and filling the room with cigarette smoke when I said, "Obviously, we don't have a baby. I mean, I think you of all people would know if we had a baby. But we have a babysitter. It's a long story -- forget it."

She ground out her cigarette. "Guh-WHY in God's name do ju half a babysitter when ju no half a kid?"

"She comes over sometimes and we pay her -- you know, to hang out when we go out. Look, every house around here's been robbed except for ours. I'm not going to let some drug addict waltz in here and take things for which we worked really hard, all right?"

"Ju are so paranoid my God it's like ju are the drug addict. Okay."

"G-whatever," I said, suddenly wondering if my nostrils looked like I'd tried eating a jelly donut through my nose.

Christie arrived, as usual, doused in make-up and wearing one of those Juicy Couture knock-off track suits, with the zipper all the way down on the top, barely concealing one of those white trash tank-tops that practically grabbed you by the neck and said, *Do you want to lick my tits again?*

She sat down and instantly retrieved a cell phone from her purse, her fingernails moving manically as she texted away, avoiding eye contact with me; which, given the circumstances, I appreciated. She put the phone back in her purse; lit a cigarette, and said, "What do you need me for again -- you were, like, so coked up on the phone I . . ." She glared at my mother-in-law and laughed. "I'm totally just teasing him, by the way."

My mother-in-law rolled her eyes.

"Coyote bait," I said.

"Okay, like," Christie said, "I don't know what that means."

I explained.

She put out the cigarette, retrieved her phone again, and started texting again. "I'll do it. But I swear to fuckin' God

one of those wolves so much as lays a claw on my ass you'll have my husband to answer to."

"Dey," my mother-in-law said, "are not *wolves*. Dey are coyotes."

"All right," I said, standing up and feeling, for the first time in a while, some motherfucking hope pumping through my tired veins. "Let me get some nightgowns."

My mother-in-law was in the bathroom with Christie, helping her try on my wife's nightgowns. "Ju have such a great *butt*," my mother-in-law told her.

"You think?" Christie said, "I mean, you're not just saying that? My husband thinks I'm fat."

"What's he want --- two tennis balls for his wife's ass? I mean, come on."

"*Right?*" Christie said, turning her head over her shoulders to check out her ass in the mirror.

I was watching all this from the doorway when I felt a stirring in my jeans. So I walked into the bedroom and tried to convince myself that it was the familiarity of the nightgown that aroused me, and not that the memory of Christie, our babysitter's thighs clamping my head in an

infidelitous vice a drunken night a few weeks ago. We hadn't fornicated. But we came close. And the guilt was pumping so fast now I practically lifted up the bed in search of a stray baggie.

As I got down on all fours and found nothing, I decided, for the first time in possibly a decade, to pray: "God. It's me . . . pause for your laughter. The coyotes, as you know, took Sonia. Now if this is some payback for me and Christie and all the shit I've done, come on, man, why not take me instead? Of course, I realize the guilt over something happening to her is punishment, but if she dies from a coyote kidnapping I'll have no choice but to not believe in you. And I'm sure you don't want that on your conscious. So please protect her. I love . . ." I began to tear up a little. "Fuck, it," I said, getting up. It was time to move. Like that heroic dude on one of the 911 flights, I called out: "Let's roll!"

The lights of Los Angeles flickered in a way that drove a stake of nostalgia through my heart with such a force I practically fell back. Light was always fucking with you in LA. Especially in the afternoon where it possessed a golden hue that could knock you over if you weren't careful. Its

beauty reminded you of what you lacked. And when you reviled in its beauty you had to eventually return to what you had. Or didn't. Which never felt like much in those days. Or maybe I didn't want it to feel like much. Anyway, just when we reached outside, coyotes had begun stirring in the woods above us:

"Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye!
Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye!"

"Go!" I whispered to Christie.

She turned back with a perplexed face, and said, "If I die, please . . . tell them I was . . . *good*."

"Ju will not die!"

Christie grabbed the recycling bin, and in my wife's nightgown -- a red, silky, slutty thing that revealed the kind of thighs that spawned AC/DC songs -- she began to wheel the blue recycling bin to the end of the driveway. The coyote laughter, meanwhile, increased.

My mother-in-law hid in the bushes sharing a cigarette while we waited. Christie stood at the end of the driveway, lighting a cigarette and looking up the road as if expecting the Coyotes to show up in a cab.

Then we heard the barking. And we the coyotes swoop through and tackled Christie to the ground. "Help!" she said.

As per the plan, they began to drag her up the hill.

The halfass moon hadn't shed much light. I'd been manically crawling my way toward the yelping, trying to cause as little sound as possible when I heard the cock of a gun.

And strange breathing.

I turned around to see a coyote lying on his back as he held me at gunpoint; his eyes so vacant I could only think of Sonia's death. His tongue was hanging out the side of his mouth as he held the gun like it were a bone.

"Please," I said, and I was about to explain how much I loved my wife, but as I was thinking that sort of thing wouldn't register with this fucker I'd managed to knock the gun out of its paws.

We glanced at the gun lying on the leaves now. Without the gun, he must have felt vulnerable, because he bolted. So I grabbed the gun and followed the little shit. But his speed was no match for mine. The darkness thickened, and before I knew it I was running into some sort of void that was terrifyingly familiar.

And then it I heard: "Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye!
Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye! Yiye!
Yiye! Yiye! "

I fired gun until the laughing cased, the thing numbing my hand.

"*Sonia!*" I said.

Everything had gone eerily still.

"Honey?" she said.

"Stay there. I'll find you."

"That's all I can do."

"Right," I said, running into darkness, "then, like . . . just do that."

"I don't want to die, baby."

"No one does," I said stupidly. And then, sure enough there she was: tied like a chicken to the stick portion of a pool skimmer -- probably something they'd stolen from a house down below. Her nightgown was ripped in the front, and on the sides, claw marks on her thighs and ankles, and even on her neck.

I untied her immediately. And kissed her cheek. And grew hard. And felt her feeble, wounded body against me. "Honey," she said, "don't turn"

The little fucker leapt into the air and tackled me to the ground, its claws ripping at my chest as if trying to unearth my heart. "Cock," I said, "sucker," trying with all my might to beat him silly.

"Get the gun," I said to Sonia.

"Where is it!"

"On my waist!"

She managed grabbed the gun.

But it didn't matter, as the coyote and me were caught in a wrestle. Its claws were ripping at my face. And I was so angry I had its head in my hands and I came down with it on a rock and smashed its skull until it crumbled like something made of clay; black liquid leaking onto the leaves . . .

I stood up and hugged her again. Speaking into her ear, I said, "Baby, I have to tell you something."

She remained silent, breathing slightly.

"I fooled around with the babysitter."

Her body went limp in my arms.

"We didn't fuck," I said, "just . . . you know, fooled around."

Sonia pulled back from the hug -- her eyes flickering for a few moments . . . and I was hoping that everything we'd been through would suddenly wipe free all our sins from the past when I heard a gigantic BANG and felt a bullet in my stomach.

While I lay on the ground next to the coyote, my breath said "fuck it" and ran away.

"You've been shot," she said, crying and laughing at the same time. "We have to get you to the hospital."

"I'm not going to die," I said, my breath returning a little, blood filling my hand.

"How do you know?"

"I don't. No, wait . . . I do."

My mother-in-law and Christie returned. I tried to wave hello, but my vision began to go blur. And I found myself falling back onto the dirt, noticing, through the trees, stars flickering in the great empty space above; filled only by Sonia and my mother-in-law's sudden, maniacal Spanish. I could feel the slug indoctrinating itself within my guts; changing my organs in a pain I had no idea existed. *So be it*, I heard a voice in my head say. And as my eyes began to flutter, I thought that made a lot of fucking sense.