Benny and Sylvia

by Larry Strattner

Benny and Sylvia rolled apart, still laughing, caught up in the magic. They always laughed afterward her cheeks always dark red, apples ripe for picking. *A little backwards* he thought *since her apples had already been picked. Even better, he had picked them and it didn't seem this time he would have to re-live the pain of loving, losing and having a lover go off, giving herself to someone else. When the real difference between love and lust is felt there is no question. Love was cruel, true; it wasn't just some rhyming words a songwriter set to music to make a few bucks off suckers who made the mistake described over and over. Though it seemed none of the songwriters were starving. This suggested a strong supply of suckers, lost loves and people shelling out the price of loneliness and despair. What he felt with Sylvia was real. Overcome, he thought, I should do all I can to stay with her.*

Her involuntary laughs subsided into quiet giggles. She might've been lost in contentment, as was he, but she early-on discovered it took her a lot longer after they finished to muster a coherent thought. *I should stay with him. It isn't only this part either. He listens to me. No one else ever listened to me like he does. I have some things I want to do and see. I want some things to be a certain way. Part of why we do well at this love thing is because he works at finding out things I like and does them for me. Seldom do you meet anyone like Benny. I can tell when he touches me.* Her breasts were firm, not especially large, but firm, from the workout she got in her job as a lineman with the power company, what she told anyone who asked what she did, "I'm a lineman."

They met at one of those after-work slow-pitch league, softball games. She pitched to him and he struck out. His factory team beat her power company by one run and they laughed together while sipping the first beer after the game. They were laughing still.

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She didn't want to hear what anyone had to say who made an overture like, "line girl" or "line chick" or even "line woman", taking a stab at political correctness.

Sometimes, one of a group of men would yell at her when she was working atop a pole, "yo, line bitch, or once, "line girl! Come on down and climb my pole!" To which she rejoined, "Give me a minute while I put on my climbing spikes, Roy," using a name she'd always associated with a sort of foppish, phony, decked-out cowboy who probably played with himself because no woman worth her salt would play with him.

Occasionally her ground-to-air exchanges with some red-necked horn-dog would escalate to aggression. Up in the bucket she always wore a leather tool belt. Several of her tools were wickedly sharp and, being in the shape she was in, she was confident she could make pork sandwiches out of several men simultaneously. Instead she called down, "the Sheriff is on his way over to help you with your problem," and they disappeared. So much for testosterone-fueled bravado.

She figured right about Benny's appreciation for her breasts. He hung onto them like he was on some climbing-wall. In fact, he had given her the notion she might try rock climbing as a pastime. It seemed a nice mix of danger and conditioning to keep her the way Benny liked her, hard and agile. She gave up on this thought after Benny froze on an open stairway three stories up in a Mall. He was adventurous with her body, yes, but not at high elevations. You can't have everything, particularly where a man is involved, she smiled a secret smile. She weighed her love of him searching her body for sources of squeals, gasps and moans against making him climb some rock with more cracks and protrusions than both of them had together, decided to stay with her original inclination.

Benny had a hardscrabble upbringing but he wasn't callous. He had a touch with women but until now, seemingly not a lasting one. In the past when he started to get comfortable with a new woman she soon went back to some no-good guy who hurt her, body and soul. After predictable beat-downs from the guy they couldn't stay

away from, his old flames never regained the attraction he saw early on. *They were flowers cut too soon and left untended. They never kept their startling colors long enough to live again. They withered and dried, dying slowly in a vase with water turned brown, left to stand on their own without the energy to do it. More and more he thought about this when he thought about Sylvia. Lineman,* he smiled, *hanging on tight, she's a climber. He could make the climb worthwhile. She accepted no bullshit and had no use for any of its messengers. It seemed to him a winning combo.*

"Why don't we get married?" He said, one day, afterwards, into her wide open eyes, and hung onto her breasts in case she tried to kick him off at this, new, dizzying height he had attained.

She went rigid. He imagined he could not even feel her heart. Not moving at all and lying perfectly still took its toll on him, more than on her, until she said, "Really? When?"

"Right now."

"Will we last?"

"Perhaps. It feels as if we might. Who can really know?"

"Your grip on my boobs suggests a lengthy bond."

Have I gone a step too far, a pace too fast? Wait, her responses are positive. She's not saying no. It was right. It felt right. I had not misunderstood. My head wass pounding.

"Let's get to it. See what happens. Go down to City Hall right now. I know the clerk there. We went through school together, all the way to twelfth grade. We can pay a bit more and she'll do it right away. Get started."

"Okay," she looked into his eyes and he didn't blink "if you let go of me I'll try to stand up."

Millicent Benny's clerk friend, was delighted to be included in this outpouring of selfless love said, "No problemo, periquitos," *He didn't know if Millicent spoke Spanish or just pretended she did. He knew her grammar sucked but recognized the word "perquito" as some kissing bird, or like that.* He hauled out his wallet.

Millicent held out her hand to him palm out in a Stop sign. The bypassing of several legal requirements was not going to cost him.

Startled, happy surprise and romantic intrigue was payment enough for Millicent. She looked as if she were going to drool on herself with daytime soap-opera excitement.

The paperwork was complete in twenty minutes, all the required boxes stamped and technically signed, also with stamps.

Then Millicent popped the question, “You gonna want the shot”?

“What shot?” asked Benny.

The county had been in the newspaper almost every recent issue, its elected officials moaning about the marriage situation. Local government was buried under the paperwork for separations, divorces, restraining orders and the cost of chasing down alimony payment scofflaws. Since the county was located a bit off in the hinterlands some Brainiac had come up with the idea to participate in a University field test of new vaccine aimed at improving family bonding and longevity. This was the shot to which Millicent was referring. “It helps with your relationship,” Millicent explained.

Not thinking clearly, as is the case with most people poised on the brink of a lifelong commitment, Benny and Sylvia agreed, “Sure why not? Anything for the cause,” and Boom! A little pinch, a Scooby Doo spot-Band-Aid on the shoulder o cover the miniscule needle-hole and it was done. Their relationship was afforded all the extra protection it may never have needed.

Benny and Sylvia could not have known the marriage-support vaccine had been developed by a redneck researcher at Texas Agricultural College who, on the human evolutionary scale, was at the same level as the worthies who yelled “Line Pussy” up at Sylvia while she worked on a pole.

The researcher's concept was beautiful. He spent a couple of years separating and cloning DNA helixes from dogs until he had isolated their loving, unquestioning, faithful, obedient and protective characteristics. From these he made a serum. He had a bit of a problem with some of the more subtle characteristics of dogdom but figured these would sort themselves out in the process of evolution. If he hadn't used German Shepherds, Australian Shepherds and Golden Labradors as his donors he might have succeeded. If you've

ever seen a pile of happy dogs you know he was on the right track.

“By the power vested in me by the State of your eagerness, I now pronounce you man and wife.” No one was serious. Everyone there infected by joy and abandonment, the Justice of the Peace, Millicent, the Court Stenographer and Janitor coerced into witnessing and several clerks and files specialists drawn by the noise of the festivities.

The clerk handed them a document with a seal at its bottom and Benny pulled on Sylvia's hand, Let's *go We're together! Forever! Run for the door! It's time to celebrate!* Out the front of the courthouse they ran and into a quaint little cluster of stores next door with a restaurant on the second floor.

“We'll get us a bottle of champagne!” Benny, his mind spinning, pulled Sylvia, grinning insanely. Holding hands they started up the stairs.

Over at City Hall Millicent and the other folks trading a play by play of the unorthodox wedding heard screaming, commotion from the stores and restaurant, then screeching tires and more Shouting out in the street. Millicent and company ran out to the sidewalk. “What happened? What happened?” Millicent yelled over the hubbub. “What happened?”

“That crazy-ass couple were going upstairs to the restaurant when all a sudden he shoves his head up the dress of a woman on the stairs in front of him and puts his nose right into the crack of her butt! That's who was screamin' The guy took a couple of good sniffs, then he and his girl ran off to their car and burned rubber out of here!” *Uh Oh,* thought Millicent, *I sure hope this isn't what I think it is.*

“I think the woman who got sniffed fainted.”

“No harm done, ‘cept mayby to her long-gone virginal charade.”

“She'll have a few things to talk about at church come Sunday.” Most of the crowd gathered was laughing.”

“Bet ol' Rafe never gave her a thrill like that. Who was that guy who done it anyway?”

“Benny, works down to the mill. Don't know what in hell got into him. He and his new bride took off like scorched cats.”

“I think the wife might have been laughing.”

Benny did, in fact, get them the hell out of town which took a few minutes. Sylvia was still laughing. “What happened?” he said.

“You happened. I don't think I ever saw anything so funny. That lady must have jumped two feet.” It crossed his mind this was one of the reasons he loved Sylvia. *She wasn't mad or all wound up over what happened, just went with the moment. She was always in the moment, comfortable with excited chaos, ready to play. She leaned over and licked the side of his neck behind his ear.*

He smelled something on her, overpowering. Yanked the steering wheel and pulled into the end of a driveway. In seconds they were going at it. What clothes could come off littered the car's floor. *Never saw the woman with the broom come down the driveway. Scared them out of their socks, or at least him out of his. He didn't remember Sylvia having socks on. Woman beating on the hood of the car with a broom. He could see the lady's face past Sylvia's neck.* “Get out of here!” she was shouting. “Get off my property, you perverts.” Hit the hood with the broom handle.

He scrambled out from under Sylvia and backed out into the road. Made him and Sylvia scarce. *The woman stood watching them get on down the road. All the while he was driving away he smelled Sylvia over on the other side of the seat. Damn she smelled good. It almost drove him out of his mind. Couldn't think straight. Had to get on her again.* His butt was wiggling around crazily. *What the hell was wrong with him!?*

He pulled the car to the roadside again, prepared to go after Sylvia, who was panting. Jerked the car door open to get out and over to her side. Rounded the back end of the car and smelled something. Came up short. Fire hydrant. Loaded with seductive aroma. He smelled it, inhaling deeply. Smelled it some more; a cacophony of messages imploring his attention, or just a quick sketch of the sender; *I was here. Whattya think of that? Come over*

and see me when you get a chance big boy, this scent on the ground, and very alluring.

“I hear a siren,” Sylvia yelled from the car and made a sound like a howl.

Benny tore himself way from the fire hydrant and jumped back behind the steering wheel of the car. “We're out of here!” Tires smoked on the street.

“Were you going?” Sylvia was snuggled against him, licking his right ear and neck beneath it.

“Texas, that's where. “ They were way back on the way back roads and he intended to stay on them until they were well out of state. Sticking his head up the dress on the woman who the News identified as Bonnie Ray Smoot had been picked up as a major story around home and a humor-of-the-day trailer on National Five O'clock news broadcasts. He was a screwed pooch, already envisioning choking the shit out of the Texas Aggie DNA freak who'd ginned up the happy marriage inoculation. Choke him till his eyeballs popped out.

Benny drove like a madman, southwest, into the sun. A rabbit sprinted across the two-lane highway up ahead. Sylvia bounced and scrambled in her seat, “Pull over,' she yelled, “pull over! Did you see the size of that rabbit?” Before the car had even stopped on the gravel shoulder she was out of the car running full-tilt into the roadside field, quartering on the path the rabbit had taken, gaining on him.

Benny sat in the car, his heart pounding, banged his head on the steering wheel, lost in a fog of pheromones, trying to get a grip on his hourly-factory-employee DNA while Sylvia's beautiful rear-end receded into the waving grass.