

## **A Coyote's Tail** **by Fritz Heinmillerstien**

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Jelli broke the silence cursing, “Bastard!” It had all been many long years ago, but the bitterness broke unwelcome into her thoughts even now.

Julie Bernstien had been born fat, had grown up fat, and until a few years ago had expected to die fat. She had gotten the nickname Jelli at an early age and it had stuck with her all through school. She had hated the name. She knew it had simply been a way the other kids got around calling her fat whenever a parent or a teacher was around. Everyday of her childhood, every time someone had called her name she hadn't heard Jelli, she had heard, “Fatso.”

Jelli was now 43. She had been recalling a time in second grade. Couldn't she just let the past go? But the answer to that was obviously no. It kept on invading her present. No matter that she was no longer fat and the incident in question has occurred in second grade. She had been thinking of Tommy, the aforementioned bastard. He hadn't wanted to be her boyfriend, because she was too fat. Tommy who picked his nose and ate the boogers didn't want to be her boyfriend, because the other kids would make fun of him. “F--- Tommy!” she cursed aloud before remembering where she was.

Jelli waived her hands in the air and tried to giggle it off, “F--- them all.”

She was in a convertible riding across The Desert. It rained a lot in this desert. There were forests, rivers, and lakes in this desert. Right now they were driving through an endless field of corn. The Desert was just a name--for an inhospitable patch of ground.

The air was warm, hot even, yet Jelli had on an expensive fur coat, leather gloves, and a scarf. Tools of the trade she thought as she shivered in the warm breeze. The car heater was on full. She was always cold and tired. She leaned back and looked at the full moon, and then let her head swing towards her driver.

The man behind the wheel was smart and took the cue. He returned the favor and stared back longingly at Jelli as they barreled down the highway. “F--- them all,” he said solicitously.

Unlike Jelli, he was hot in the tight jeans and tank top, which he wore. He was sweating profusely, but if you care to know, he looked exceedingly handsome, unnaturally handsome, and he enjoyed the opportunity that his present outfit gave him in showing off his expertly chiseled features, but his main talent was his charm. That is to say, he was a charmer with a voice... Let's just say, it was like listening to the angels sing. He would appreciate the deceptive irony of it all, and he liked a good laugh, but that is neither here nor there. I believe we were talking about business. The man was a contract job. His people had wanted him brought over. They thought he could make it big as a musician over here, and if he was half as charming on stage as he was three feet away, Jelli knew he'd be a sensation.

A sensation--Jelli let her mind slip sideways as she repeated the phrase in her head... a sensation. That's what it was all about. Sure being a border runner was great money. Jelli would make as much money in the next three days as she used to make in three years as a secretary. It was dangerous work. At her age, if she got caught, she'd be lucky to ever see the outside of a prison wall ever again. The authorities took a dim view of coyotes and considered them traitors to their kind, but Jelli chose to see it through a romantic light. She was merely a guide, a border runner, safe haven, guiding light, and oasis through an otherwise inhospitable and desolate land.

Jelli shook the last thought off with a shudder she tried to disguise as a laugh. “Keep your eyes on the road honey. Not yet,” and in response the man, the vampire, the would be pop sensation

wrestled his gaze away from her neck and back to the road. Those eyes, that desire, that insatiable need: that was the reason Jelli did this, not the money, or as she always said, F--- the money!

Being a coyote had turned Jelli's life a round. The stress, the long hours, the obvious hazards...

Jelli was bone thin. Her! Jelli!

Whenever she walked into a truck stop all the men stared. She had taken to wearing tight t-shirts, which revealed her small breasts and even tighter jeans, which hung low over her bony hips. She relished the attention, the desire.

She hadn't ever made the conscious decision to be a coyote. It had just happened. She had been traveling cross-country returning from a failed Internet date. She'd gone 2,700 F---ing miles! almost all the way across the country for a date, for the chance of romance, and it had lasted fifteen minutes.

She had been heartbroken and alone. Before she had gotten halfway home, her car had broken down. Even it didn't want to be with her. She had cried for a long time in the truck stop. No gallant trucker had stepped forward to help her. Once again she was alone. Always had been. Always would be. How could it get any worse?

Crying, lost in despair, she hadn't noticed him--him, he deserves a pause--until he had spoken to her through the open car window. "Is it that bad?"

Startled she had looked up. With a sudden revelation and horror she had pleaded desperately, "Please don't kill me."

He had ignored her plea... and caressed the side of her face.

"You're not going to rape me are you?"

He had only laughed. How could she sink any lower? She was so ugly she wasn't even rape material.

He had pinched her cheek then, and commander her to, "Look at me."

It had been beyond Jelli's will to disobey. She had looked into his eyes, saw his desire, and his hunger. No one had ever looked at her like that before. No one. Not ever.

"I want to hire you. I need help getting through The Desert," the man, need I say the vampire, had explained.

Being new to the game, Jelli had thought he meant The Salt Flats... and with those wild eyes, the undisguised need, what would he do to her out there, all alone?

"My car doesn't work," she had said looking for an excuse any excuse.

"I have one. Three days, three nights and it shall be yours."

Jelli had considered it slowly. She had not known what the man was, who he was. Her fears had been more mundane, fueled as they were by true crime novels and the like.

"I shall even throw in a thousand dollars cash," the man had continued.

Jelli hadn't really believed that she would make it through the Salt Flats alive, so she asked for a wild amount of money, a year's wages.

Without a thought, without a pause, in an instant he had agreed.

"In advance."

He had patted her cheeks again, reached into his coat, and handed an envelope filled with a thick wad of bills. "It's more than you asked for," he had assured her. "A pretty girl like you will be worth every penny."

Jelli had wiped the tears from her face then. No one had ever called her pretty. Maybe he would kill her. Maybe he would rape her. Maybe it would slow, brutal, and painful, but if he said she was pretty again while his eyes bored deep into her soul like that, well then, she would let him do whatever he wanted.

Three days later they were across The Desert. Jelli was weak, tired, and exhausted--in a word anemic. He had put her up in an expensive hotel for a week, while he stayed with her, sat by

her side, and nursed her back to health. The crossing had been hard on her. She had lost some weight. She had thought to herself that it was like the that miracle diet she had always been searching for.

When the week was over, he had come to her one last time, sat on the edge of her bed, held her hand, and he asked, "Would you like to make another crossing?"

"I'd go anywhere with you."

"Our time is over," it was not negotiable, but, "A lady...an acquaintance needs an escort across The Desert." By know--as do you--she had known exactly what he had meant. She had been hesitant. It would not be with him.

"She is willing to offer twice what I paid."

Two years salary for a weeks... work, but more importantly, much more importantly, for the first time in her life she had been losing weight. Not to mention the desire... No one had ever looked at her--completely and totally--full of desire as he had.

Vaguely she had wondered what it would be like to be looked on with hunger and desire by another woman.

It had only taken her a moment more to accept.

One job had led to another. The money had been fantastic. Before she had known it, Jelli had become a professional coyote, a guide through The Desert, and due to her... genetic advantages, she was in high demand. She didn't care what the vampires did once they got through, or what havoc they wreaked.

"F--- them. F--- them all," she shouted gaily again into the night air.

The singer looked over at Jelli. She was rail thin. She had been doing this too long. Maybe this would be her last trip. Yes, that had a pleasant sound to it. Maybe this would be her last trip, the vampire thought eagerly, as he licked his lips and bared his fangs. Unlike others in his clan, he had no sympathy for his prey, and considered sentimentality a weakness.

Jelli saw him staring hungrily and quivered. She loved the attention. She loved the desire. His hunger resonated off of something deep inside of her. She knew she should feed him soon, but not yet.

“Just a little while more honey,” she teased him. “Keep your eyes on the road.”

Struggling, the vampire pulled his attention back to the highway, and then adjusted the rear view mirror as looked at the empty back seats. He considered this for a moment before coming to a silent conclusion. If he ever had to cross this desert again, or any desert, he was going to bring more canteens... you know, just incase there was an accident or something. After all, you can never be too careful.

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Brett@Paufler.net  
www.Paufler.net

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