

Leonard Cassamas

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"Dreg of the Wildebeast"
by
Len Cassamas

Dreg crushed the remaining laziness of sleep from his flat black eyes, stretched, and surveyed the cave before him. "Another day, another caribou," he said and started looking around for breakfast. Poona, his wife, was standing by the fire. She had a squirrel in one hand and a chipmunk in the other. She noticed Dreg's rustling and turned to him. She was short and shapeless and truly the essence of what her mother would call, "a lively dancer." She said, "Honey, would you mind having rodent this morning? It's the only thing we've got left in the cave."

"Rodent's fine," he answered. "I'm in the mood for something light, anyway."

"I think we've got some beetles and grubs leftover from Caftan's deflowering feast in case you get hungry later," she

said.

"Fine, fine." "Whatever happened to eating roots and berries," he thought. "Nobody eats real food anymore."

As Poona started preparing breakfast, Dreg staggered to the mouth of the cave and scanned the lush green landscape that lay sprawled before him. Some movement in the trees caught his attention. The lower primates were moving in. He and Poona would have to find a new cave soon.

"It's almost the Ice Age, already," he thought as he looked at the trees, "and I can't get my hands on an extra pelt for love or agriculture. What's the world coming to, for Noob's sake? Nothing's simple, the way it used to be. And I keep getting the distinct feeling that damn glacier's moving."

Soon, he and Poona would have their usual breakfast, ~~and~~ She would talk about maybe doing some new drawings for the cave wall and couldn't he possibly get her a bear skin because Flak, the woman two caves down had one and she didn't see why she shouldn't too and on and on with the same things from yesterday and the day before and time is passing by and I was looking in a pool of stagnant water the other day and I thought I saw some grey hair and I don't mean a distinguished grey around the temples, but a general dirty grey and I'm getting older and I don't understand it and why must I die and what will the children think? Sometimes ~~even a caveman~~ ^{Neanderthal could just} feels like crying.

He spent his morning engrossed in several authentic Neanderthal activities such as hunting, fishing, and staring at some bark. "I need something new," he thought. "Something to

refresh me. Something to perk me up." A friend of his, Zim of the Royal Mounted, had recently invented organized religion and seemed to be doing pretty well with it. "Why couldn't I have thought of sin and guilt ^{?" Dreg thought. "why didn't I think up a} and a place called hell where you rot ^{members only} for eternity for no particular reason? Why him and not me?"

There was only a moon between Zim's and Dreg's ages. What was the difference? Why was one catapulted to the heights while the other was assigned the life of a drone? What was the secret? Where was the meaning?

Dreg had inadvertently stepped on some burning embers and was hopping about on one foot. In an effort to ease his pain, he leapt into a nearby stream. ^{This} a simple act ~~that~~ changed his life irrevocably when he splashed a young Cro Magnon woman who ^{was} ~~happened to be~~ wading in the stream trying to brain some fish with a rock. She caught Dreg's attention by screaming ^{and preparing} ~~in a key~~ ^{to lean him with the stone} ~~that he never knew existed before.~~ ^{DREG} He was speechless, she was so beautiful. She was tall, lean and fair. Her blond hair gently surrounded her face like a mist covers a valley. Well, maybe not exactly like that, but somewhat like it. Dreg was astonished. Up until now, all the women he had ever known resembled large mushrooms with feet. And he spoke to her. "I'm Dreg," he said, shifting his weight and shuffling his feet. "What's your name?"

"I'm known as Margo," she said.

Suddenly Dreg felt dizzy and giddy, like he had so many moons before when Blintz, a girl he knew from the old tribe, let him look up her bearskin. But that had been so long ago. He had been nothing more than a junior spearholder then, a neophyte who

only knew from the gifts of love what he heard the older boys chuckling about on the hunts. And then there was Blintz, who was soft and warm and not too bad looking if you squinted real hard. And next thing he knew, he was what they loosely referred to as a man.

Margo ~~had her~~ ^{well} hands on her hips. The stream cascaded between her spread feet. Water dripped with hypnotic regularity from the slightly moldy rock ~~she~~ cradled in her right hand. She was quite a sight.

"You're very beautiful," Dreg said, a blush rising to his tawny cheek. "I'll bet she gets that from every Neanderthal she meets," he thought. "I'm too old to be making an idiot out of myself. Get a grip, man, get a grip!"

"Would you like to have sex with me?" she asked, all innocence and light.

Dreg thought for a moment. "Well, now that you mention it..."

The blazing rays of the noon sun fell like raindrops on the fresh green world and somewhere, off in the distance, Poona heard a voice she thought she knew singing history's first rendition of "Babaloo."

I am like a yak on the wing;
Swinging wildly in ever
Concentrating tendrils
Of carnate passion.

Curious dawn bursts forth
On the hapless landscape
To kiss my winnowed head.
I sure hope my old lady
Don't find out about this.

Poona wasn't sure what was the matter with Dreg. He was acting very oddly, indeed. He hardly seemed like the same old Dreg. But this was news? She remembered when they first met. Had time really changed him so? Had he really turned into that ill-begotten, insolent lout who had been banging about the cave recently? What had happened? What had she done?

She remembered when they first met. The combination sun worship and clam bake the Gregegowgow family hosted when she was no more than a sprite. He was so witty, using grammar and syntax. He had developed a slight British accent which was admittedly an affectation, but one that she found charming. She had even heard that he had invented lawn bowling. He was so different then. He was fun. And young. ^{So} ~~Very~~ young. Where did ~~all~~ the youth go?

She ~~finally decided that the only thing left to do was to~~ ^{suddenly realized all she could} hang on. She knew that she must hold fast to what she had and cherish it in spite of its seeming paltriness, and hope the little happiness she did have was not crushed by the cruelties of barren fate. "What the heck," she figured, "I got through puberty, I can get through this."

~~She sighed with the weight of the ages.~~

Dreg was leaning against the big tree at the bend of the river that was known as the big tree at the bend of the river. This was his new routine. Instead of making surprisingly complex tools from flint and stone, instead of going out on the big rat hunt with the guys, instead of just hanging out, Dreg spent his days leaning against this tree waiting for Margo to show up. And waiting. And waiting. And then she'd show up and they'd find someplace to go for the big event. Usually, he'd still have plenty of time left to be wracked with guilt and remorse. *before sunset*

"What am I doing here?" Dreg thought. "Why am I waiting? I could be out killing dinner now. Who needs her? I do. Why? I don't know. Maybe I'm an idiot. ~~But~~ she's so beautiful. *But then there's the age problem.* ~~and~~ *am I* Not only *am I* older than she is, but I'm from an entirely different evolutionary step. *and* That's more than a generation gap, let me tell you. If there was only some sign, some message from the great sky god of pain and whining, something to go on, something to think, feel, and say. I need help. I need direction. I need my mommy."

The answer to Dreg's moral dilemma soon came when he spotted Margo frolicking on the other side of the river with a handsome young Cro Magnon. "What pecs!" Dreg thought as he felt his insides knitting themselves into a kind of cat's cradle. He started to raise his hand, started to speak to them, but was suddenly overcome by a wave of hysteria, panic, anguish and stupidity that didn't allow him to hail them. It only allowed him to run. Which he did.

Dreg found himself at the edge of a cliff. The river below

looked like one of the lazier species of earthworm, twisting languorously in the cool mud. It was farther beneath him than Dreg had ever looked before.

"It's easy," Dreg thought. "I'll jump. I don't even have to jump, I could just roll over and there I'd be, on my way. Just the slightest slip and I'd be falling. My body writhing, contorting, my hands grasping for the hold they cannot find; screaming and falling, ever falling. Until..."

Just then, Dreg thought of Poona and how devastated she would be. She was a good, albeit frumpy, woman who had stayed with him and cared for him. He remembered the times when he would come home from that day's hunt, his hands as empty as his expression. He remembered how she would hold him and caress his receding hairline and say, "Poor Dreggie-poo." He remembered Caftan, their daughter, who had inherited her mother's kind nature and his finely chiseled good looks. And their boy, Bonk, who was showing signs of eventually evolving into something very special.

Dreg looked down at the worm-like river. It was tiny and far away. He stepped back, his toes grabbing the earth. He looked toward the horizon and wanted to go home. After all, that's where the food was.

He left the cliff, walked away from the ledge and never returned.

The End