

Centuries Ago and Very Fast

by

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## The Sister Who Started It All [Thomas's Story, Vel's Tale]

When I first met him running on the moors, I thought he was gypsy or part Paki with his otter body and the broad head that ended in an almost pointed chin, but he said he was European, old stock, some French in the bloodlines. His left little finger ended just below where the nail would have been.

We'd been lovers for almost a year—at my flat, in the moors when he could tease me into open-air sex, in cars, but never at his house before he decided to trust me and brought me to the kitchen of his old farmhouse where his kinswoman Carolyn, a doctor, was waiting for us. I wondered if what had been making my cop brain itch would be a crime I'd be obliged to turn him in for. What he turned out to be was *Le Bel Homo*, but not *sans merci*. Vel said, "Here's one secret." He disappeared and flickered back with two fistfuls of coarse chestnut fur, as long as horse mane hair, but different, with clumps of finer hair mixed in. "The other is that I killed that mammoth's calf when I was a boy. I've lived for a long time, maybe 15,000 years. I don't remember it all."

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Full of the warm ancient fur, Vel's hands trembled as he extended them to me.

After I touched the coarse long hairs and the soft undercoat, the longevity seemed completely believable. Carolyn, who had kept his secrets as hundreds or thousands of kin before her had, watched us both. She hated having to trust me.

I'd never seen him scared before. I was touched. I said, "We could enter a civil union; then I couldn't be forced to say anything about you."

Carolyn said, "We'll sell the mammoth fur on eBay. People pay \$15 for about five strands." She put down the stone knife she'd been holding. I realized that if I'd said the wrong thing, she'd have killed me. *Love you, too, Carolyn.* That's what Vel had been afraid of.

What would I turn him in for, being born 14,000 or 15,000 years ago in a land that had been covered by water?

I walked up the stairs that night with Vel and took a shower in his ensuite bathroom with the most modernistic fucking plumbing I'd ever seen. I think he invented some of it—Paleolithic boy gone silicone happy with hot and cold running water. He had plumbed in a line for enemas. Beside the tub was a basket of hose tips all wrapped in plastic. Vel must have always been an optimist.

I turned on the spigot for the enema hose. "I've never seen one of these before."

"You can adjust the tap for warmer or colder water, but it's not going to get too hot because that's dangerous. I found it online and installed it myself."

I looked around the room. The toilet was behind a door and from what I could see of it, had a basket of goodies within arm's reach—lubes and goops and body oils. "Why not in the toilet?"

“What?”

“That enema thing? Wouldn’t it be better to have it as part of the toilet and not part of the bath?”

Vel said, “Sure, but I think I’d need a sink and pipes in the toilet first, and drilling through three foot stone walls is hard.”

“That’s okay. I’ve never seen most of what you have here. I’ve always just used whatever the shop that sold the condoms had for lubricant.” Was I to be murdered in my sleep now that Vel had told me his secret?

Vel handed me a huge towel and warmed robe. He was still wearing his little time travel rig of loincloth and leggings, but took them off and went into shower after I did. I sat down on the bed not feeling terribly sexual.

I could smell the soap on his body. If he did live on without aging, there’d come a time when he’d have to leave me.

Curled around my dick, I sat at the edge of the bed while he dried himself off. He put on a robe and asked, “Do you really want to stay the night?”

“I have to work in the morning.”

“I’ll get you up in time.”

“I’m not particularly sleepy, though.”

Vel gripped my shoulder, a bit rough, not sexual in intent. I didn’t want to look him in the eyes. He said, “I raised one of my sisters who turned into the mother of all my sisters. Carolyn is one of my nieces. Let me tell you the story.”

I sat on the edge of the bed while he leaned back against the headboard, wrapped in his robe, eyes dark under brows that were not contemporary.

## The Sister of Us All – Vel’s Tale

When a woman bore a baby before an earlier baby could walk she decided which baby to keep and which baby to strangle. My mother was with my father still, who hadn’t been run off yet by one of the younger men, and I was not quite a man yet, but had learned something about how people who were attracted to their own sex could give pleasure to each other from one of the boys who’d been to the painting caves. He’d lived there for a number of years before we brought him back filled with more languages, a better way to make stone lamps, and knowledge of the prostate and cock root.

The boy looked healthy and vigorous, a shame to put him down. I loved my sister and didn’t really want another boy in the family, but Ma had lost two boys earlier, so I knew they weren’t going to kill this boy. We all looked at each other, and then I said, “I’ll take care of her.”

“She’s yours. Take her away for the summer so she knows to turn to you for her needs and doesn’t try to fight my son,” my mother said. “You can get some other kids, your friend perhaps, to go hunting. She’s old enough to suck chewed food out of your mouth.”

So, a gang of us, people who were my friends until they died, went off with me carrying a baby on my hip.



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Ro, who became my lover later, also was carrying a child, but a younger one. His mother had died in childbirth. Ro found someone who'd lost a baby to suckle his brother and had been bringing the wet nurse what meat he could kill or steal until the child could eat chewed meat. The others who went with us were young couples who wanted to practice tending children.

Ma was right. I could kill a male colt and chew it up, and my sister's little baby tongue would winkle it out of my mouth. We spared the one insane male colt who insisted on following us around, the mares, and the male colts who were too little. We also managed to get a mammoth calf separated from its mother and took it down. We built a small-scale hide frame for the girls who found flint and split it for hide-dressing tools and dressed out and brain-tanned the small mammoth hide without splitting it. And we tossed the babies on the hide, and the lighter older girls.

My sister and I spent the summer together. When we rejoined the adults in the fall, we all chased reindeer and went down to the coast for fish, before we made winter camp where the mammoths could be trapped in low country, which is under the North Sea now. My sister learned how to say no. I learned how to chew hides and punch holes for bone needles to pull sinew through, and made her clothes. She remembered her mother, but came to me when she was frightened. Ma still made my clothes, but the new baby took most of her time. We went through a mammoth about every two weeks, along with smaller game. Winter solstice came, and the boys learned how to make fire from the men, and we made fire and passed the lamps around, then took a flame from the fire-plow fire and sent fire following the wicks in these lamps with hol-

low bowls and handles like bird beaks. And dawn of solstice, we all went out and cheered that the sun had decided to show up and would be showing up more and more until summer solstice with the sun in the sky as long as he’d ever be, and then to the cold and dark again.

And at four, my sister was walking and helping the women with gathering fibers, mammoth in shedding time, plant fibers the rest of the time, and was running errands, fetching small things, so the adult women wanted me to carry another baby, which I did, of course, but my sister had been the first child I raised, and we stayed together until I was raising first her children and then her grandchildren.

I was a minor god. I stayed with the family for three thousand years with it being one year after another. I can’t remember much other than we killed off the mammoths. Then things changed. More later.



Vel didn’t know what time to wake me for work, so he woke me up around 5:30. I could have slept a bit later than that, but pulled on the clothes I had. He offered a loin-cloth instead of yesterday’s briefs, but I had a spare pair of briefs and my shaving bag in my car. He went downstairs for them while I brushed and flossed and looked over the collection of electronic and Stone Age and Medieval jet-sam that Vel had collected. The rooms looked like a geek’s room, but now I knew they were the rooms of a Paleolithic boy who’d been following the cutting edges of whatever technology for 14,000 years. The collection of everything from old Sparc Stations to stone lamps to a 1954 Rolleiflex twin lens reflex camera in mint condition to a 23-inch liquid crystal display made sense, given who he was. I was

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fingering a stone knife when he came back with my briefs and razor.

“You could shave with those. Well, not with that one, but many men in those days used flint razors to go clean-shaven.”

I went into the bathroom and lathered up over the sink and shaved with modern steel. He was stubbling up himself, but looked rather tired on top of that. I asked, “You going to shave, too?”

“Um. Carolyn has breakfast for us. Carolyn can be ever so thoughtful when she’s really thinking. She asked if I explained any of the consequences of a very good immune system.”

I looked at his eyes in the mirror and kept shaving.

He said, “I can get allergic reactions. I can spread things if anything got lodged under my foreskin.”

“Things?”

“Semen. Parasites. I don’t think I’ve ever spread AIDS. I mostly avoid...”

“Okay, we’ll wear condoms,” I said. “Or do you want to promise to be monogamous?”

“And it never happened with the purely oral things, or with hands.”

“And your sister wanted you to tell me this?”

“Remember, she’s my doctor.”

I wondered what 14,000 years of semen up the bum could do, and asked, “Ever have bad allergic reactions?”

“I remember one once, but I’d been with the guy a really long time.”

“Did you sleep any last night?”

“No. I was sitting there, remembering. I’ll go back to sleep after you’ve gone to work.”

“At least you need to sleep.” He could be hurt, had lost the tip of a finger. Someone could kill him — nobody lived long without a head, nor could he survive a burning.

He pulled on sweat pants and a shirt to go down to breakfast with me. We didn’t say much to each other on the stairs, and I said my good mornings to his sister who had cooked up sausages, eggs, and toast, and made coffee. Vel smelled it and poured himself a cup and sat down, sipping it.

Carolyn said, “I don’t think he should have told you, but you’d figure something out if you lived with him for more than a few years. He thinks he needs you.”

I didn’t say anything to her, just poured myself a cup of coffee, drank it down fairly hot, and poured another one, needing the caffeine to get moving. Carolyn put a plate by me. I looked at my watch and figured I had enough time for breakfast if nobody chatted at me. Carolyn appeared to have washed the mammoth fur, which was now drying on newspapers. She wasn’t kidding about selling it on eBay.

Carolyn appeared to look through me, into the future. She focused on me again and smiled.

Vel wasn’t paying attention to anything other than the morning television news about Russia invading Georgia playing on his laptop. Carolyn touched his shoulder, but he just shrugged slightly.

Carolyn said, “I was checking the records after you went to bed. Aren’t your people the Trents who married one of our girls?”

Family. I was distant kin. One of ours had taken a wife from them in something like 1840. I was something like five generations from that. My granny’s grandmother’s mom came from an old family over in Somerset that kept yellow curs and native ponies on land mentioned in the

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Domesday Book. And she'd go back to visit her people a few days before Christmas every other year or so, but we'd stopped going by 1902.

Being with Vel felt like coming home. He'd selectively bred his people to be loyal to him, and he needed them to stay sane.

As I was leaving for work, Vel gave me a big old cock-tingling kiss, tongued me almost to gagging. "I thought you smelled right," he said.

I was lucky that most of Somerset behaved fairly well that day as I did the office work, testified in court, drove the roads, and had my lunch at the usual place with the usual mates talking about the stupid urban people wanting to make foxes sacred beings and keep the hounds from going after the stags as has been custom here since the early days.

The red deer had lived here since Vel was a baby in moss clouts. The hounds that chased them then were nearer to wolves than what the hunts used these days. I wanted to go home and recite W.H. Auden to Vel, his head on my arm, not a half, not one-hundredth as ephemeral as me.

Oh, I had this side that I find embarrassing, see, and Vel was bringing it out. I thought I was too old for all this, but Vel was so very much older. England, that has such beautiful men in it, wasn't even an island when Vel was born, and Vel was born in drowned country between here and there.

When the day was over, I called Vel on his mobile to meet me for dinner away from all the weight of the house. We met in an Indian curry place and grinned at each other over vindaloo and walked in the electrically lit streets, looking in shop windows. I loved the play of metal

## The Sister of Us All — Vel's Tale

vapor light against brows and jaw that were ancient when the world was lit by whale oil.

“Yer mate’s worth looking at,” one of the boys standing around waiting for pizza takeaway said.

We all smiled around, and I took Vel back to my place this time. He called Carolyn to tell her not to expect him home that night. No stories for her. No stories for me, either. No words at all.

The end of the beginning.