

Mounds of Flesh

by Michael Seidel

The rock village sprung up from lethargy. At the start, the men simply rested down on the jagged ground for a few minutes between hunts. They'd see the women coming, quickly uncross their legs, and pretend to busy themselves with mending dull weapons.

Of course the women always knew better. They had kettles on their heads and would play like they were bowing to the men, such great respect. Hot cooking water would land on the men's sandals. They'd cuss. The women would turn away and smirks would run like faults across their faces.

Generations passed and time spent on the ground increased. Eventually, the men stopped attempting to cover up that they were just relaxing. They tried to convince the women to rest with them, saying "Let's cuddle! We never have enough time together anymore." The water in the kettles above the women's heads would start to cool as they resisted. Eventually they gave in and crossed their legs as they sat down next to their men.

The rains. Oh, the rains. They came and fell on the villagers, the mud and muck causing ruts to form under them. And then the rain kept coming. Months, then years, then at least a decade. When it stopped, the villagers were soggy to their hearts. But then there was a great sun and the tops of their heads began to reach toward it.

They ran out of things to say to each other.

"I'm meditating," one would say if his silence was interrupted. And the interrupter would respond, "Well, I am too, you know."

Generations passed. Generations of silence and too much rain and blistering sun. The rock villagers continued to heighten.

People from the neighboring sand villages would gaze into the distance and admire the structures that were rising ever taller. They'd sit at sunup in their orthodox robes on muleback or giraffeback or they'd risk the roofs of their runny adobes or take turns going thighs-on-shoulders-thighs-on-shoulders until they were seven high and wobbly. Whatever they thought would get them the

absolute best view, they tried. For hours each day, they'd stare out and feel jealous of the villagers who lived in the majestic distance. "Such accomplishment, such beauty!" the village leaders would shout, brimming with ebullience. The others would nod, while under their breath they muttered, "Showy pricks."

Temperature drops as altitude climbs. Generations of silence were broken when the first rock villager's head went up into the clouds and she came down with the flu. "Friends, family," she said. Her sick eyes had begun to look like archways. "Enough is enough! We've all experienced nosebleeds. We've all had thoughts so long unexpressed. Our longings have made us repressed and resentful. Our robes have long since stopped fitting."

"Amen!" shouted the man next to her, a man who had been once her husband and once her nephew, but now was now just a windowless tower covered with a fine dusting of hail and a beard that hung down like drapes. Then he said, "We must all stand up!" And he began chanting the woman's proclamation: "Enough is enough. Enough is enough. Enough is enough."

Everyone joined in.

But who should be the first to stand up? The first who sat down? Or the last? Should the youngest generation aid the oldest generation, help them to their feet? Should they pull straws? Should it be someone fair and pure, barely visible on the landscape, or one who is old, whose structure is filled with crags and warps and voluminous kinks?

Querulous generations passed. Rains came again and wore away at their flesh, revealing bone as white and sharp as sharks' teeth. The neighboring villagers heard the din of perpetual disagreement and took it as a cry from the saviors to ready their weapons. But first they had to build weapons, which they'd never had before. Once the weapons were built, the sand villagers had to learn how to use them. Generations passed fumblingly. Then they were ready to move.

As the rock villagers began to hear the ripple of giraffe and mule hooves move closer, they took it as a cry from the saviors to end their argument once and for all. "None of us can do this alone!" a

boy name Salzmänn said in his drawl. To his surprise, every other villager responded in unison, "You know, you're absolutely right. On 3!"

A few seconds passed. Salzmänn lead the count. 1 — The women readied the kettles on their heads. 2 — The men reached for their weapons. 3 — They all put their feet to the ground and lifted up.

Hooves continued to sound in the distance.

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Archaeologists spent the better part of the 1960s and '70s excavating the Mounds of Flesh. Lazarus Oman, a doctoral student from the University of Ohio at Youngstown, had a theory, based on little evidence, that the Mounds of Flesh were once the site of a massive saltwater lake. This was in the time of lake mermaids and cargo ships. The sailors of these vessels would seduce mermaids using waterweed rum blotted with seagull blood bitters. They'd throw out their nets and bring the mermaids on board. They'd speak to them in any number of romance languages. When the mermaids were finally drunk, the sailors would carry them into their chambers to begin the seduction. Inevitably, the sailors would be unable to figure out the mermaids' anatomies. Frustrated, they'd hastily toss the mermaids back overboard.

Lazarus postulates that a boat of Romanian sailors was hauling a great deal of powdered cement from one coast of lake to the other, an overnight journey. Coincidentally, this was on the very evening that the General Counsel of Mermaids unanimously agreed that they'd finally had enough of not being adequately seduced. They banded everyone together and launched a revolt.

When they saw the concrete ship's light appearing in the stormy distance, they formed a tight circle around the roped goose they'd kept as a pet and raised to be furious by feeding it a diet of thumbnail clippings, hot pepper, and silt. The ship would see them coming and slow, ready to seduce them, they figured. At the very second it stopped, they'd undo the goose's rope and it would fly into the ship to peck out the sailors' Adams apples, like they'd trained it to do.

But just then the rains came heavy and so too the waves. The ship never slowed. The captain failed to even notice the mermaids. His thoughts were on his daughter Irene, the crown of whose head was just then first showing itself outside her mother's womb. The captain slammed right into the mighty hoard of mermaids. There were so many of them that hull of the ship disintegrated on impact and the whole thing began to sink. All the cement mixed with the water. Immediately the high waves began to harden around the bodies of the mermaids and the sailors, and even around the roped goose.

This, Lazarus has stated in numerous papers, is what explains the distinct anatomy visible within all layers of the Mounds of Flesh.

What about the presence of be-saddled giraffes and mules on the east peak? It continues to be a mystery. And the furious goose, code named 'Crosby' in all documentation, has not yet been accounted for.

But to this day, Lazarus Oman's claims have nonetheless remained undisputed.

