

Rob Chilson

The Call of Nature

Sylvia sat encircled by her lover's arms and legs, serenaded by wood thrushes. She felt the warm strength of His arms around her, the warmth of His curved hairy legs lightly gripping her own bent legs. His breath was milky on her shoulder and though He was asleep, He lightly squeezed her left breast with His right hand. Sylvia was lapped in love.

Her left buttock was one dull ache.

For hours, during the chill darkness of night, they had sat thus, sleeping and dozing. During all those hours some small pebble had bitten deep and deeper into her flesh. At first the pain had been mild, but it had soon become excruciating; it was all Sylvia could do to sit still. Then a painful numbness had come.

Now the palest gray light of dawn heralded relief, and the thrush was serenading.

Sylvia hadn't wanted to awaken Him – more important, she hadn't wanted Him to know she wasn't enjoying every single aspect of the Natural life. Much less that she couldn't take it.

His breathing caught, He sighed, and though He hadn't moved, Sylvia knew that He was awake. He gripped her breasts inquiringly, and Sylvia forgot her aches and pains. She felt His arousal warm at her back.

"Ye-ess," she said with a happy sigh, leaning back.

Gently, without speaking, He stretched her on the ground. His eyes crinkled with the smile half hidden in His beard. Sylvia arched her back and half closed her eyes. He gazed tenderly on her as they made love, and

she looked lovingly back into His brown eyes.

"This is the best part of all," she murmured, but He put His finger to her lips.

He rarely spoke; much talk is not Natural. She peered lovingly into His eyes, meeting the motions of His body. His eyes were the least human part of Him, less human than his goat-like legs or even the horns or tail. They had a bovine look; the black pupils at times even seemed horizontal.

The calm, accepting eyes of a being that was a true part of Nature.

Sylvia added her cry to the joyful sounds of dawn, and He did not shush her.

Afterward Sylvia still ached, and rubbed at her buttock. To her surprise there was no bruise. He immediately understood her pain, laid her down, and massaged her buttocks carefully.

"Thank you," she murmured, and He nodded.

Sylvia stood and took a deep breath of the cool piney dawn air. Her feet were still tender, but not so tender as they had been a week ago, when she had first run away from home to be with Him. Her body was covered with fine scratches, but nothing very painful. She was adapting well, she thought – not forgetting last night's pebble.

She swept her hair back, combing it with her fingers. The Natural look, she thought, and smiled. A week ago she would have giggled aloud. It was becoming a mane, but she didn't care how it looked – He certainly didn't – and it was such a convenience, not to have to care for it.

And all the other inconveniences of human life – no clothes to worry about, no bed to make, nothing to wash. No makeup. They would bathe in the evening, when the sun had heated the water.

Sylvia had always known that Life could be simple. Always she had rebelled against the artificialities and absurdities of human life. So that when the Call came, she heard it, she knew it. She knew Him.

He smiled at her, she at Him.

"Food," He said. His voice was a deep, thrilling baritone.

Sylvia smiled, but followed Him a little anxiously, till she saw that He was heading for the stream.

She didn't know which was worse – bugs and grubs from under logs, or ripping the skin off some poor defenseless squirrel or rabbit, and eating it raw with the blood dripping down. Though He occasionally dug up some kinds of roots, it was too early for nuts and berries.

The stream made a pool here, above which mosquitoes whined.

"Fish," He said.

He fished with His hands, and was astonishingly quick and deft at it. Sylvia guessed. To be astonishingly quick and deft at fishing with your hands is nowhere near as fast as picking up a package of frozen fish from the freezer.

The water was cold. Sylvia patiently watched Him, followed His movements. They waded in gently, gently, feeling under the water for the fish, then waited patiently, patiently, for the fish to overcome their fear and come investigate. Meantime, the mosquitoes found them.

A swift deft movement of His hand, and a small fish flopped on the bank.

Sylvia sighed. It was such a small fish.

He pitched out four, and she managed to catch one. They sat crouched on the bank and ate. Eating food raw is even faster than microwaving. Unfortunately, fresh-caught fish have blood and guts. However, Sylvia was getting used to it, and she was so hungry she wouldn't have minded anyway.

When they were finished, Sylvia was still hungry. In the seven days she'd lived the Natural life with Him, she'd lost at least five pounds. Maybe seven, she thought.

After eating, He sat in the sun and plucked ticks from amid His hair. Sylvia searched her own body, and was disgusted to find that one had sunk its proboscis into her scalp. As she had much less hair than He, her search took less time. She hardly noticed the mosquitoes by now.

Sylvia sat in the sun.

She was still hungry, but she was used to that. She was always hungry now. No doubt she had always eaten more than she needed to. Unnatural to eat so much.

Nevertheless, she found herself yearning for ham and eggs and bacon,

waffles and maple syrup.

Concentrate on the Now, she told herself. Look at Him. He is content just to be here. The sun is warm. The woods are lovely. We have eaten.

The woods were lovely, bright and deep, green shot with gold, the air resounding with birdsong. All those sweet sounds said Get the hell off my property or I'll sic my dog on you. No, no. The woods were lovely, the birdsong was lovely whatever it meant, the sun was warm.

Her butt hurt.

Sylvia sighed and shifted about, swatted a mosquito. Look at Him; He never wiggles around like this. Maybe I'll get used to it in time.

Her butt still hurt.

Presently He stood and smiled at her, His mild eyes crinkling as if at a joke. Sylvia scrambled eagerly to her feet, as she had learned to do. He drew her to Him, nuzzled her. His breath and beard still smelled of raw fish, though He'd rubbed his face with fine sand and washed it off.

Sylvia followed Him off through the woods, to a log he knew. Sylvia sighed and helped him roll it. Things ran out.

Food, she thought. She hoped she didn't get any of the little green-filled kind.

Toward noon it was hot and Sylvia was tired. She had not slept well for a week. But He always laid up during the heat of the day. Now He led her to a deep shady place that was almost cool and made a nest in last year's dry leaves.

Sylvia hoped no bugs would run out; she was better fed but nauseated. Now she observed the signs of His interest in her with slight dismay.

She was tired and footsore and not really feeling well – now that she thought of it, her head hurt. She just wasn't in the mood, especially since it was hot.

But how do you say No to something so Natural as spontaneous sex? And she didn't want to hurt His feelings – she had come to Him, after all. Wasn't this what she'd wanted, sweltering in the city in a tintinnabulation of telephones and alarm clocks and car horns, and relationships complicated by too many words?

Sylvia sighed, and submitted to pleasure.

It was a pleasure, but not the pleasure it had been at first. Now it was a favor to Him. Sylvia felt a trickle of dismay. They came together as usual, and it was wonderful, more wonderful than any sex she'd had in her past life, even the best.

But it wasn't really spontaneous. She had catered to Him, as she had always catered to her lovers. Yes, she had had loving relationships and had had men who were kind and giving. This very morning, He had massaged her butt, and had always been loving and kind.

But when it comes to sex, she thought, we always cater to them.

Happy, He rolled off with a sigh, stretched out in the leaves. He reached out to stroke her once or twice, and closed His eyes.

She hadn't thought it would be this way. When she had run away to enjoy the Natural life, she had assumed that He would cater to her, if she thought of it at all.

Should've got a signed contract, she thought.

He fell asleep beside her, not cradling her as it was too warm. She looked at Him. His face was flushed, ruddy in the shadows, and sweat beaded the roots of His beard and hair. A strong musky odor of man and animal arose from Him, with a lingering hint of fish.

He is a stranger, she thought. I don't know anything about Him. He doesn't even have a name.

In the end, they were always strangers.

Sylvia was as sweaty as He, and her skin itched and prickled. He was sound asleep. Cautiously she stood and inched out of the leaf nest, in the quiet way He had taught her. She had formed the habit of slipping out for a midday bath, and He had never seemed to notice.

Her period would begin in a week or ten days. She knew He'd be understanding of anything so Natural, but it would still be a mess.

The coldness of the water was a relief. Sylvia scrubbed herself with sand, yearning for soap. Her feet hurt. So did her butt, when she sat to rub her feet. Though fresh out of the stream and still wet, she already felt hot, and she would have to try to nap in this heat. It would probably give her a headache.

Too bad I didn't bring aspirin, she thought idly, standing up.

She tripped on the uneven streambed and slammed her foot savagely into a jagged rock. The second and third toes cracked like breaking twigs. Sylvia staggered back, blind with pain, and sat down hard, gripping her toes while tears stood in her eyes. At first she thought, gasping, that they must be broken, but they were merely stubbed and scraped.

The tears would not stop coming.

He would feel her pain, she knew, He would understand. Yet, how could he understand – he had no toes, just hooves. Why couldn't I have kept my shoes? she thought, weeping silently, rocking back and forth.

It was not alone pain that brought her tears, she finally realized. It was loneliness.

Suddenly Sylvia was electrified by the thought of chocolate ice cream. She could almost taste it, cold and rich and dark on her tongue.

She always ate it when she was hurt or lonely. Chocolate! she thought. That's one thing He will never dig out of this forest.

Come to think of it, He wouldn't be able to find anything she liked in these woods.

Soap, she thought. Soup. Cooked food. A bathroom with a john, and paper. Real music, not just birds shrieking curses at each other.

And – the tears flowed faster – someone to talk to!

He never talked to her – and never listened to her.

This stream ran down between the hills to the end of the old woods road where she had parked her car.

Sylvia stood beside her green-gleaming car, panting lightly. It was late afternoon, and He would soon be waking, though the heat had not relented. She looked all around, conscious of her nakedness as she had not been while with Him.

Here stood her car. Though deep in the forest, it was a harbinger or outpost of human society. Where there were cars, there might be men.

Quickly she donned her shorts and bra. Uncomfortable, unnatural, hot. But the car was air-conditioned, she would soon be cool. Then pants and

shirt. She wiggled her feet into tennis shoes that seemed too narrow, her stubbed toes protesting. Quickly she brushed her hair into something like shape. No man would notice the difference, she thought.

It was like an oven inside the car, but at least there were no mosquitoes or biting flies.

Surely the cranking of the engine would bring Him on the run. Surely He would appear before her on the woods road on the way out.

But He didn't.

Presently she was on the gravel road, then on the blacktopped county road, then the state road. Sylvia drove numbly, seeing each sign of her approach to humankind without emotion. She smoothed her hair back and inhaled the conditioned air gratefully.

"I'm sorry," she said aloud. There was a feeling of regret, for His loneliness, for His disappointment.

Then she turned on the radio and tried not to think about it.

In the end, Sylvia was amazed at how easily she negotiated her return to civilization. She drove with casual competence, swiftly and deftly through traffic and obscure streets, to her apartment house.

"And only one week of my two-week vacation gone," she said aloud, for the sheer joy of speaking aloud.

She'd spend the second week holed up in her apartment, putting back on the weight she'd lost. She looked up at the cliff wall of her expensive apartment house.

"One of the nice things about civilization is that even modestly talented women can earn enough to live in luxury," she said, as if carrying on an argument with someone not here.

"Or have I always been arguing with myself?"

The parking attendant moved languidly toward her, so ordinary a teen-aged lout that she could have kissed him. She got out, hoping she looked ordinary herself, and turned to hand him the keys.

It was Him.

She stared in shock. He was looking at her with those brown, beast-like eyes, mild and patient as ever.

"I'm s-sorry," she heard herself say. "I-I don't – I-I c-couldn't –"

"Why not?" He asked.

She had had a long time to think, in the woods – there hadn't been much else to do. She looked down, swallowed.

"I guess I never really wanted to escape from being human," she said at last, in a small voice. "I just wanted to get away from the small pains and problems of being human."

"It is always so," He said, and from a distance she heard understanding in His tone. "None of you can ever cease to be human."

"Well, magic has its limits, after all. It can't work miracles," she said wanly.

"Well, gimme the keys," the attendant said impatiently, and she quickly put them in his hand.

With a sullen look at her, he slouched into the car, banged the door shut, and drove it into the lot. Sylvia turned her face the other way.

The End

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