

# Evolution

By Langdon Smith

When you were a tadpole, and I was a fish in the Paleozoic time,  
And side-by-side on the ebbing tide, we sprawled through the ooze and slime  
Or skittered with many a caudal flip through the depths of the Cambrian fen,  
My heart was rife with the joy of life, for I loved you, even then.

Mindless we lived, and mindless we loved, and mindless at last we died.  
And deep in the rift of the Caradoc Drift, We slumbered side by the side.  
The eons came and the eons fled, and the sleep that held us fast  
Was riven away in a newer day, and the night of death was passed.

We were amphibians! Tailed and scaled, and drab as a dead man's hand,  
We coiled at ease 'neath the dripping trees, or trailed through the mud and sand.  
Croaking and blind, with our three-clawed feet, writing a language dumb,  
With never a spark in the empty dark to hint at our lives to come.

Yet happy we lived, and happy we loved. And happy we died once more.  
Our forms were rolled in the clinging mold of a Neocomian shore.  
The world turned on in the lathe of time, the hot lands heaved amain,  
Till we caught our breath from the womb of death, and crept into light again.

Then light and swift through the jungle trees we swung in our airy flights,  
Or breathed in the balms of the fronded palms in the hush of the moonless nights.  
And oh! What wonderful years were there when our hearts clung each to each,  
When our lives were filled and our senses thrilled by the first faint dawn of speech!

Thus life by life, and death by death, we passed through cycles strange.  
And birth by birth and breath and breath, we followed the chain of change  
Till there comes a time in the law of life, when over the nursing side  
The shadows broke and our souls awoke in a strange dim dream of God.

I was thewed like an Auroch bull and tusked like the great cave-bear.  
And you, my sweet, from head to feet were gowned in your glorious hair.  
And deep in the gloom of a fireless cave when night fell o'er the plain,  
And the moon hung red o'er the riverbed, we jumbled the bones of the slain.

I flaked a flint to a cutting edge, shaped it with brutish craft.  
You broke a shank from a woodland lank, and fitted it, head in haft.  
Then I hid me close to a reedy tarn where the mammoth chose to drink.  
Through brawn and bone I drove the stone, and I slew him upon the brink.

Loud you howled over the moonlit waste. Loud answered our kith and kin.  
From west to east to the crimson feast, the clan came tramping in.  
Over thistle and gristle and padded hoof we fought and clawed and tore,  
And, cheek-in-jowl, with many a growl, we talked the marvel o'er.

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I carved that scene on a reindeer bone with a crude and hairy hand.  
You painted his fall on the cavern wall, so that men might understand.  
For we lived by the law of might as right ere human laws were drawn,  
And the age of sin did not begin until man's brutal tusche was gone.

Ah, but that was a million years ago, in a time that no man knows.  
Yet here tonight in the mellow light, we sit at Delmonico's.  
Your eyes are deep as Devon springs, your hair as dark as jet.  
Your years are few, your life is new, your soul untried. And yet --

Our trail is on the Kimmeridge clay  
And the scarp of the Purbeck flags;  
We have left our bones in the Bagshot stones  
And deep in the Coralline crags;

Our love is old. Our lives are old.  
And death may come amain.  
If it should come today, what man may say,  
"We shall not live again"?

God wrought our souls from the Tremadoc beds,  
And furnished them wings to fly.  
He sowed our spawn in the world's dim dawn,  
And I know that it shall not die  
Though cityscapes rise on ancient plains where the crook-bone men made war,  
And the ox-wain creaks o'er buried caves where the mummied mammoths are.

Then as we linger at luncheon here, o'er many a dainty dish.  
Let's drink anew to the time when you  
Were a tadpole, and I was a fish . . . .

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