

## ... AND HE WAS WITH THE WILD BEASTS (MARK 1:13)

- I. He went into the wilderness to fast and pray.  
After forty days and nights they came  
as He knew they would, as He had hoped they would not:  
the fears and doubts, desires, despair.  
His humanness raged within Him.  
He cried for humanity and for Himself.  
He fought a human's battle with only human weapons.

- II. Ragged and weary  
in unproud triumph  
He lies in sand  
awash in wind  
and sun, asleep.  
They come,  
one by one,  
and form a gathering,  
silent as Quakers  
and just as full:  
the beasts.

No angel,  
Jew, or Gentile,  
but the lion stands  
in ageing majesty,  
against the sun  
creating with himself  
a cool shadow  
for His rest.  
Pariah dogs,  
lupine, devoted,  
he on one side,  
she on the other,  
lick His face clean  
of tears and sweat,  
awakening Him  
to tickly tongues  
and wolfy grins.  
The lizard, kaleidoscoping  
green and brown  
and rose scuttles  
into the shelter  
of His sleeve,  
while the locust,  
God's soldier, flutters  
to His knee to rest,

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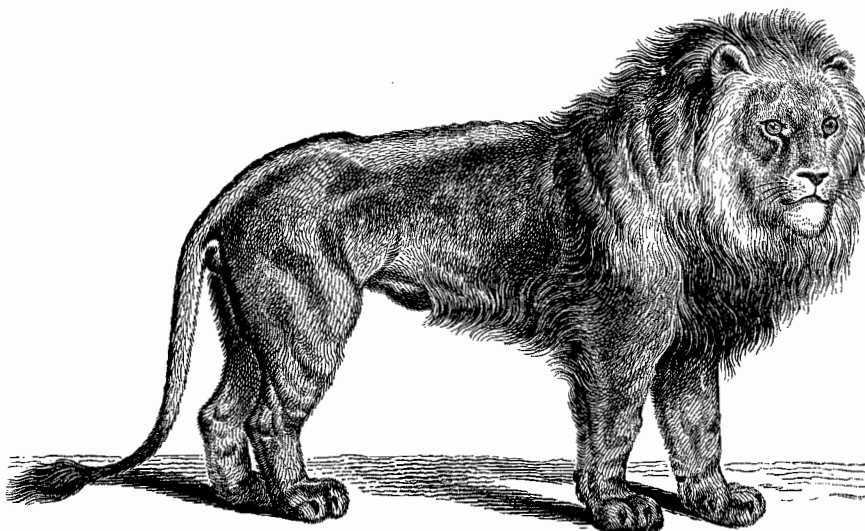
all pink and glowing  
in the sunset. The vulture  
with feathers tucked modestly  
beneath her like a taffeta  
skirt, sits, a gleaming black  
matron, beside  
the school-girl dove  
who has followed Him  
and watched over Him  
since His cousin's watery  
blessing. The snake  
pretty and sleek,  
coils humbly, contentedly,  
at His feet,  
shining like  
a jewel in the light  
of the rising moon.  
The ram, escaped  
from the safety and bloody  
end of the flock --  
gone wild,  
gone free --  
stands serene,  
blinking in the twilight.  
A desert rat,  
soft and brown,  
climbs into His lap,  
puts tiny feet  
up on His chest  
to examine Him, close,  
with earnest dark eyes  
and snuffling nostrils.  
Satisfied all  
is well with Him now,  
he scurries away  
on a private mission.  
The jackal, shying  
among the shadows,  
He calls  
into the circle.

Who knows the mind of a beast or the mind of God?  
Who can tell what flows between?

The lion weeps  
As He strokes his shagged  
and scarry face.  
Gripping the grizzled mane  
He rises

and they lead Him to water.  
The rat erupts  
from a tiny dune  
with figs for His nourishment  
from a personal trove.  
Refreshed, He plays  
with them. The dogs,  
wiggling, eager  
for games, play tag  
with Him. The ram  
joins in. The vulture  
and the dove, silhouetted  
against the moon  
dance and dive  
to His applause  
as the lizard somersaults  
in miraculous circles  
between earth and sky.  
The locust clings  
to His shoulder, informally  
keeping score.  
And the snake rising  
in her delicate spiral  
sways in soundless harmony  
to the rhythm of their play.  
The jackal chuckles,  
sprawled like a pup  
on the sand, belly up,  
feet akimbo, giving in  
to the joys of the romp.  
Even the lion  
remembers some kittenish  
glee in a mock wrestle  
with this gentle man.

- III. I thought I heard an echo of something said  
at a place in the desert a long time ago  
where a man went to find Himself and finally  
breaking His solitude before His fast sought the company  
of animals. Why he did this is not so hard to fathom.  
Why does anyone seek the company of animals? For refreshment  
and companionship,  
and a communion unattainable with most of our own kind.  
Perhaps this man had deeper reasons.  
And He, unlike most, might have known how to speak to them  
in a language  
they could understand. The echo I hear is this:



**"No more scapegoats, my friends.  
No more sacrifices.  
No more blood of the lamb  
on the alter stone.  
No more dead pigeons.  
No more an eye for an eye,  
a tooth for a tooth.  
I AM the eye.  
I AM the tooth.  
Humans are a blood loving race.  
(The earth has never cried for blood,  
nor the heavens either.)  
Their hunger and thirst  
for flesh and blood shall be sated.  
I AM become you.  
And this is the beginning of the end."**

**And so the lion wept.**

**IV. They came, across miles, some of them,  
and formed a gathering:  
the lion, the ram,  
the jackel, and the locust,  
the lizard, pariah dogs,  
the snake, the vulture,  
the dove (she had never  
really left Him),  
and the small brown rat .....  
they were there, on the misty heels  
of the angel who rolled away the stone,  
before the Mary's, to greet Him  
in quiet, doubt - less, welcome,  
when He walked out of the tomb.**