

Mountain man on celestine (working title)
a Celestine Chronicals Fan-Fic

From: ~Cebelius To: ~straycat_74
8:34pm 05/26/2001

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- 1) that you link to my work in the description for each part as it's posted.
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- 2) that you not seek to profit by this or any other fan fic set in my worlds in future.
- 3) have fun. :)

The Second Day

Jeb awoke all at once, eyes wide, arms crossed, knees bent to keep him from rolling around on his side in his sleep. He looked around frantically trying to figure out what the fuck and where the fuck he was.

He still didn't know and it was going to start pissing him off soon. He sat up, turning his head to look around. Still nothing worth noting. Grabbing his walking stick he moved to his 'bathroom' to relieve himself. So far he'd taken a couple leaks, but hadn't needed to squat yet, he wasn't looking forward to that as he hadn't found any leaves he recognized for bathroom tissue yet. On the way back to camp he found another branch that had potential, it was a bit larger around than his wrist, and longer than his forearm from elbow to finger tip. He nodded to himself as he got back to camp with it. He used a couple of finger sized sticks as improvised chopsticks to pick up some coals placing them on the larger end of the new tool. Then he blew on them so they would smolder and burn a hole in the stick. He did this over and over again, occasionally feeding the fire to keep it going as he worked. Once the hole was close to big enough and at least most of the way through he tried to fit his stone ax into it, then adjusted where the coals were going to burn down into it so the rock fit snugly, then he had to smother the coals inside the stick, but decided to drown them in the stream instead. Back in camp the rock fit in nice and snug, he wacked it with another stick to help get it set. He'd need a binder to keep it in there, like reeds or sinew. Till then he jammed a couple small twigs in on either side of the rock to wedge it in and keep it there. Tucking that into his belt, he pulled the smaller half of split rock from his smaller belt pouch, then using it to sharpen the narrow end of his walking stick, he worked that over till he was satisfied. Then stuck the point into the fire till it started to catch, the stabbed it into the dirt, and then rubbed it on the roots to get the dirt off. Fire hardened end of the stick now ready to stab with if he needed to, he gathered up the tinder, fines, and small twigs filling his larger belt pouch again. He took the hearth base plate he'd used, and tucked that in there as well.

Last thing he did at his overnight camp was to fill in the fire hole as best he could, stomping the dirt back into place. Leave No Trace isn't just a hikers slogan. Then he went to the stream and drank his fill, stood, and started up hill again looking to see the mountains in the far distance.

Weaving in and out of the trees, trying to keep more or less parallel to the stream, he walked. Pausing intermittently to look around him and listen, he didn't see much, and only heard bird song in the trees and the stream babbling to his left. A couple hours of walking later he stopped just behind a tree to look around again and saw the tail of a rabbit not 5 yards beyond the tree. He took up his walking stick like a spear and slowly leaned out to eye the rabbit, it hopped a bit, turning it's back towards him as it munched some grass. He took careful aim and let fly.

"Dinner." he said with a smile as he walked over to the spear-walking stick with

the rabbit impaled on it. While he field dressed the rabbit with the smaller half of the sharp rock, he should just start thinking of it as his knife, he also looked around for another stick he could use as a Rabbit Stick, sort of like a boomerang, but doesn't return to you and is much smaller. He's had one back at his base camp outside of Blue Lodge, Montana, but he had no idea where that might be in relation to where he was anymore...

and with his nightmares last night, he wasn't sure what to think of this place. He was still pissed about his gear, the pizza, and the beers he 'lost'.

20 minutes later he used the newly crafted rabbit stick on a hare about 60 feet from where he found the first one.

Heads tucked under his belt since he no longer had a backpack, the rabbits swung back and forth as he walked. When the sun reached it's noon height he went to the stream to drink again, before retreating to the cover of the forest to continue his walk upstream. Just as he reached the shade of the trees he heard something, and dropped into a crouch and swiveled his head around trying to locate the source of the noise. He leaned around the back side of the tree to look past it's blind spot and he saw a deer's head sticking up above the grass next to the stream further up hill. He held completely still eyes locked on the deer. The wind was coming down the hill toward him, that's probably why he heard whatever noise it was. The deer looked around, ears up, scanning. After a minute the deer flicked it's ears and lowered it's head below the level of the waist high grass.

Moving slowly, he started to crawl in that direction, occasionally raising his head just enough he could see above the grass in that direction. He'd occasionally see the flick of an ear, but that was it. Staying down wind, staying low, moving slowly, stopping every time the wind stopped, only moving while the wind blew, he got closer. Spear-walking stick in hand, he crept closer and closer till he could see the deer's brown hide through the grass. He readied himself the throw the spear.

Neeya stumbled on a stone, knocking it clattering down the rocks next to the stream. She dropped to the ground, pulling Hope down with her. He paused for a long moment, before raising her head to look around, ears upright, smelling the air as she scanned. There was a small grove a few hundred paces further downhill, that might be a good place to rest after she and her daughter drank from the river, there was also a rise where the river went around a small promenade of rocks between her and the grove. Nothing moved and she could not smell any predators out there. She lowered herself back down to whisper in Hope's ear.

"It is ok my dear, I think it is clear."

"No bad men?" her fawn asked, and she smiled

"Not today beloved. No bad men today." she answered before kissing her child on the forehead. They held each other for a few minutes before getting closer to the stream so they could drink. One would drink while the other watched, taking turns. The only thing Neeya could see moving was the grass when the wind blew, the clouds, and the birds.

"Mommy? My feet hurt." Hope complained, they had been walking a very long time

"I know, baby. I know. My feet hurt as well." and they did, mostly following the rocks trying to leave no tracks. She wasn't sure how far behind them the hunters were, but...

her thought was interrupted by a deep voice that almost growled out of the grass directly behind her.

"Damn it. You're sentient." the voice complained. Hope dove into her mothers arms, shivering in fright, as Neeya turned her head towards the voice, paralyzed in fear. A Huge figured raised it's self from the grass only a few paces away, Black fur, rounded ears, glass black eyes, sharp teeth that were bared... no, no the thing wore a bears pelt like... clothing? It spoke to her.

"I mean you no harm. May I approach closer?" Neeya, eyes wide, ears erect, looking directly at him, she couldn't answer. After a few breaths the creature came closer, but kept it's weapon lowered, and stayed 3 paces away, moving uphill, and up wind. She could smell him now, he was different. Sweaty, dirty, something dead on him,

but then she noticed the rabbits hanging from his belt. There was a smudge of old fire on him, but the maleness of him was unmistakable. Hope Looked at the beast-man from her mothers arms, crying slightly. He crouched down, setting his spear on the ground and raising his empty hands.

"I heard you talking." the being said. "You Do talk, right?" Neeya nodded her head, unable to talk. "You may call me Jeb." he waited a few moments. "What's your names?"

"Neeya." Neeya finally answered. Rubbing a hand on Hopes head, between her ears in a soothing fashion she continued. "And this is Hope, my daughter." the man-thing nodded to each upon hearing their names.

"May I ask where you are going out here alone?"

"We were going to visit family in Butterpond, but we were waylaid on the road. We ran, but there are hunters after us... I think we lost them, but I can't be sure." her voice was quivering in fear. The man-beast could still kill them both. He reached down and grasped the spear and in a confident baritone said

"Not while I'm around they won't. You'll be safe with..." And a huge wolf hit him from behind.

Jeb heard the small one ask the larger a question, it sounded like a little kid... sounded like his kids complaining when they had to do chores. Even after all these years their memory tore at his heart in nearly physical pain. He lowered the spear and spoke out loud without thinking. "Damn it. You're sentient." he couldn't just kill sentient creatures... People.

He stood up from the grass where he'd been hiding, about to throw his spear into the back of... well, he wasn't sure.

They were deer, but just as obviously not deer, almost human. Human-deer. Deer people?

"I mean you no harm. May I approach closer?" he asked gesturing off to the side where she could see him better. When she didn't answer he moved slowly, deliberately, keeping the spear pointed away from them, and lowered so as to not be as threatening. He crouched down about 3 yards uphill from her, setting his spear on the ground, he raised his empty hands.

"I heard you talking." Jeb said. "You Do talk, right?" the, for the lack of a better term, the girl nodded her head, unable to talk. "You may call me Jeb." he waited a few moments. "What's your names?"

"Neeya." she finally answered, pronouncing it Knee-Ya. Rubbing a hand on the little one's head between her ears. "And this is Hope, my daughter." Jeb nodded to each upon hearing their names as he would do upon meeting anyone for the first time. His mind was running 100 miles an hour, dancing through his memories of where he'd seen someone or more like something... well, ok people, that were sitting before him right now.

"May I ask where you are going out here alone?" he asked, genuinely curious. Then it hit him. Anthropomorphic Art. He'd stumbled across it while working tech support at JCN, back when he was still happily married with children... he stepped on that thought to listen to her answer.

"We were going to visit family in Butterpond," she said "but we were waylaid on the road. We ran, but there are hunters after us... I, I think we lost them, but I can't be sure." he could hear the fear in her voice, see it in the tension of her body, the way she held her child.

It took him barely a second to make up his mind. He reached down and grasped his spear and in a confident baritone said

"Not while I'm around they won't. You'll be safe with..." And something huge hit him from behind, knocking the spear from his hand and sent him sprawling on the rocks next to the river.

He rolled over, throwing an elbow into whatever was on his back when he felt the thing wrenching at his coat. The Bear Spine still attached to the skull in his hood, trying to shake him like his big stupid fluffy dog, Moron, would shake a sock he'd found to chew on. They fell into the stream as he got an arm around the middle of the beast, forcing it under the water as he took a deep breath, face getting

splashed as it thrashed below him, trying to twist out of his grip. He wrapped a leg around it, preventing it from getting it's hind legs under it to get out of the water. She saw it was some kid of dog, probably a wolf, he wrapped an arm around it's throat, the wolfs left fore-paw with his right hand, driving it back under the water trying to drown it. Riding it like a bucking horse, he tried to keep his face above the water and taking the occasional breath when he needed to dunk, the damned wolf seemed to take forever to drown. When it stopped thrashing, he waited another long moment, before pulling it from the water, and dragging it up on the rocks only to be greeted by Neeya, hands over her eyes crying like a child, Hope standing at her side trying to sooth her mother, and another wolf laying on it's side with his spear-walking stick jammed through it's ribs and out it's back, blood frothing out of it's nose.

"What... Happened?" he gasped for breath. Surprisingly the little deer-girl, Hope, answered.

"your stick almost hit mommy, she picked it up and turned around just as the other bad hunter knocked her down and ended up like that..." Jeb Closed his eyes for a moment as pain lanced through his heart. From her speech patterns he figured the little girl was maybe 6 or 7 years old. About the same age as his daughter when... he stopped thinking about that. That was a long time ago and he didn't know how far away from here. At least a decade of living as a mountain man ago. He blinked.

"Just the two?" He asked and Hope nodded.

"I... I think so. We only saw them from very far away when they crested a ridge behind us."

Jeb looked down at the other wolf, the one Neeya had killed, it whimpered and tried to paw at the ground. Then laid still as death took it, last breath leaving it frothing blood bubbles from it's nose.

"I think we need to... move." he thought for a second "Back to the trees I left." Gesturing toward the trees not far from the stream. He pulled his walking spear-stick out of the now dead wolf, took it to the stream and rinsed it off best he could. While doing that he thought of the pot he used to make soap from wood ash lye and animal fat. It was crude, but it worked. He wished he's had his minimal kit with him at least, it was at the bottom of his backpack, but those were gone. He looked around, one of the rabbits had fallen out of his belt, and his stone axe as well. Looking around he found them, returned them to his belt, and grabbing one paw from each wolf in either hand, he stood and said

"Shale we? I'll lead." and he started towards the treeline, dragging the dead wolves behind him on either side. Once in the tree line he made no attempt to be quite, deliberately stepping on sticks and twigs, he lead the way in a couple ranks of trees, then finding a good spot for a camp he dropped the wolves, then the rabbits on top of them.

"I need to make a fire. Be right back" Jeb said as he leaded his walking-spear against the tree. "Use that if you need to."

"I'm not a fighter, I don't know how." Neeya said, a slight quaver to her voice still. Jeb smiled.

"You seemed to do alright back there." Neeya seemed to blush and turn away a bit.

"All I did was pick it up, and as I turned around the other hunter missed my throat and landed on me. The weapon was... jammed into the ground and... the weight..." she was obviously still having trouble with the situation.

"All you have to do is poke them with the pointy end. If they keep coming, keep poking them. I won't be long, and if you scream I'll come running to save you." and he meant it. She seemed to calm at that.

"O... Ok." she said and nodded, sitting next to the tree as Hope climbed into her lap again.

Jeb turned away. It almost hurt to see mother and daughter sit like that. He wandered off, staying within a few dozen yards of the new 'camp' picking up branches and sticks up off the ground. He found a nice Y-branch that would work for cooking the rabbits. He figured it'd take an hour to skin the hides off each of the wolves, he could cook the rabbits while he did that, turning them occasionally so they didn't burn.

He found a nice strait sapling about as big around as his thumb. He used his stone-knife to cut it near the root, and again about a foot and a half above the first cut. It was strait and round, and perfect for a hand drill. He tucked that into his belt and picked up all the wood he'd gathered and brought back to where Neeya and Hope sat quietly. Since it was still day time he didn't bother with the Dakota Fire Hole, and just built a regular fire. Two bundles of twigs in a V-shape with the open end towards him, a third bundle on top of those for after he got the birds nest going. He made sure to shave some of the fatwood from the pouch into the birds nest he made of dried grasses. Then kneeling on the end of the hearth block, began working the hand drill back and forth while pressing down. After a few minutes he had an ember, and pulled the hearth block away so it could breathe. Once he was sure it was good he transferred that into the birds nest onto the fatwood shavings, and started to blow into it.

He'd done this part hundreds of times, and less than a minute later the birds nest was engulfed in fire, he turned it over and stuck it into the middle of his fire, pulling the top bundle of twigs and sticks over top of it.

"How did you do that?" Hope asked. Jeb smiled at her from under his bearskin hood. "Lots of practice. If your mommy says it's ok, maybe I'll teach you how one day."

he said picking up one of the rabbits and skewering it on the y-branch. The two girls stayed up while he worked. Neeya watching him intently while occasionally looking around. Hope seemed to have fallen asleep in her mother's lap as Jeb worked, back mostly turned on the two sharing his fire.

After a bit he was getting warm and decided to take the coat off. He reached up and pulled the bear skull off his head and let it fall towards his back. Then reached for the wooden buttons that held it closed over his chest, shrugging out of it, he tossed it towards the tree. Both girls were looking right at him as the coat left his hand, four big brown eyes looking right into his face. Neeya blinked and spoke.

"Template... you are a Template!" she said excitedly, Jeb paused then asked

"What's a template?"

"You are. You are a template. Extremely rare, highly sought after! Especially by The Powers!"

"Why?" Jeb asked annoyed as he worked on getting the pelt off the second wolf.

"I... I have been told that they grant magic powers to the ones who mate with them." Jeb stopped and turned to look at her. He had an annoyed look on his face.

"Magic? I don't believe in magic." he turned away dismissively.

"It does not matter if you believe or not. Others will seek you because of what they believe."

"Why are... what did you call me? A Template? Why are templates so rare?" he tugged on the pelt harder trying to get the forepaw to release.

"I have never met one... before today that is. But I have been told that only one per year comes to Celestine."

"Celestine? Where's that?" he asked

"This is." Neeya gestured around "All around you. This world is called Celestine."

"Why only one per year?" he asked to keep the conversation going while he worked.

"The Powers only know. Legend has it that a template is chosen, how and by whom I do not know. And most do not last a week's time."

"Why not?" he asked with a little more heat in his voice than he really cared for. Neeya winced. This man, this template, was a predator. He killed a hunting beast with his bare hands, drowning it as if it were a pup. She didn't want to draw his ire.

"They are sought, as I said. If many know of one, there is usually a war for possession of him. If the side that owns him loses they might kill him rather than lose him." Jeb stopped. Looking away and breathing hard, he took a moment before he could ask the next question without yelling and scaring them further.

"Possess. Owns. Like a Slave?" he turned his head, meeting Neeya's gaze, she nodded.

Jeb stood. He didn't have any salt, so the pelts would only last a couple weeks, and would start to smell after a couple of days. Still, he didn't have money, and pelts is how he got money. He could salt the hides for a couple of weeks, he could then use their brains to tan them. They'd last quite a long time after that.

Of course the hardware store in town would have a professional tannery work them over after he sold them, but that wasn't his worry. He took the first rabbit off the spit, layed it on the root, then spitteed the other rabbit to cook.

"These need to be disposed of. I'll be back in a bit." he said, grabbing the wolf carcasses by a leg each, and dragging them down hill and further into the woods. He was gone for quite a while, fuming and angry, but not wanting to take it out on the girls. And what was that she said about... Mating? Like sex? How was that even supposed to work. Which is when his memory supplied him with hand drawn imagery of 'furries' idea of sex between anthropomorphic women and humans. He had liked the art, but never really got into it. The plumbing seemed to work like normal, but why would...

Template. A pattern used to create... create new kinds of people? He stopped. Looked around. Then started walking back to the women. He shouldn't leave them alone for long. Who knows what weird shit was haunting this place.

"I mean, Deer girls... really? What the fuck." he muttered half to himself out loud. He'd done that so often he hardly noticed it any more as long as he wasn't trying to hide or hunt.

He shook his head and walked back to camp.

He stopped when he saw that Neeya was turning his second rabbit over the fire. She was still upwind of it, and did not look happy with the meat, but she was doing it. She'd even added wood to the fire at some point. She looked up as she noticed his movement.

"I'll take that." he said a lot more kindly than he felt. She didn't cause him to be here, so no need to blame her. He took the overcooked and slightly burnt rabbit off the y-branch, and sat with his back to a root, and tried to eat the rabbit he had forgotten on the dam fire. His fault, and it wouldn't be the first time he ate burnt rabbit, and probably wouldn't be the last time. At least he had the first one that wasn't burnt. He preferred to eat those after the burned ones to help get the taste of his mistake out of his mouth. As he ate he looked over the two females sharing his camp. Not Human was the first thing he thought, but as he looked he noticed for the first time they were wearing clothing. It was dirty, stained with dirt and mud, and fairly matched their... fur? Skin? The dress Neeya was wearing matched her coloration, and the dress Hope had on covered her spots that he could see poking out of the sleeveless bag she seemed to be wearing. Neeya's was a homespun and rather rough looking dress, simple in lines and barely down to her mid thigh. If he leaned just a little bit forward he'd be looking right up her... He stopped himself. These were strangers, Inhuman strangers. Ok they were people just the same as he was. His wife had been African-American, their kids were 'mixed' as some bigots said. He wasn't judgmental, nor did he care what color someone's skin was... he wasn't sure yet how he felt about fur or it's color, theirs seemed to be reddish-brown.

Neeya watched him eat, tearing meat off with his teeth, chewing and going back in for more. Once the burnt rabbit was as done as he intended to, he set it on the other side of the root he was using as a backrest and took up the other.

Tasted like Rabbit without seasonings, plain, unimpressive, but they filled his belly. He tossed the second along the way of the first when he was done, then with a contented belch he reached his hand absentmindedly into his shirt pocket and pulled out his wooden Viking Comb and started combing out his beard. It wasn't until he pulled through the first snag that he stopped and looked at his hand holding the comb.

"Huh." he said getting the attention of the ladies.

"What is it?" Neeya asked.

"My comb." he shook his head. "I lost all my tools, my knives and equipment... but this comb, this stupid." he paused a moment swallowing. "This stupid comb is still in my pocket." he turned it over in his hand. It had a valknut carved into it on one side, the other was blank. He'd made it at a moot where a dozen other mountain men had hooked up for a month or two. Trading stories and skills.

The guy claiming the name Grizzly Addams taught him how to carve that comb. It sucked, was crooked, could have done a much better job with practice... but here it

was. The only thing beyond his clothing, belt, and pouches that made it to this god forsaken place. Celestine, what kind of a name was that? Sounded like some chick with pretensions of upper-middle class-hood.

And was Celestine the planet or the country? Continent? He didn't know.

He did know that deer-people were on it, and wolves, and someone or something dragged him here for a reason.

He didn't mean to, but combing his beard and lost in thought, belly full for the first time in several days at least, he fell asleep.

He jerked awake, sitting bolt upright, hand on the stone ax at his side. He swiveled his head from side to side scanning. That's when Hope made a noise, Jeb looked at her sleeping in her mothers arms as she squirmed. Her mother whispered to Jeb

"Bad Dreams." Jeb nodded, and released the ax, then looked to the root next to him and his bearskin jacket. Picking it up and carefully stepping over the coals of the fire, he covered the little girl and her mother with it as a makeshift blanket.

Neeya smile and mouthed 'thank you' before laying her head back down and seeming to drift off to sleep herself. Jeb looked around, it was late in the afternoon, the breeze was still coming down the hill, but was gentle and warm. He stood over them for a long time before walking as quietly as he could away and to the stream for a drink.

One handful at a time, bringing the water to his face he looked around. Buckskin shirt, boots, and breeches, belt with pouches. Not even a knife or his stone ax.

"Well this is another fine mess you have gotten us into..." he quoted turning to go back to camp.

The next time he woke it was dark, true night. He opened his eyes, but didn't move at first, then slowly reached for his stone ax, carefully pulling it into his hand all the while listenning trying to firgure out what he heard. He slowly turned his head to the left to look over his shoulder to the root he was up against and he could just barely make out a shape, like a snout right above his face. I snuffled the withdrew behind the root. Jeb heard teeth grab the leftover rabbits, then nothing for a moment he slowly sat up to look over the root to see something large disappear into the darkness of the trees behind them.

Propitiation accepted, he added a couple bigger pieces of wood onto the coals, then laid back down, but kept a hold of the ax.