

**THE STICK**

By Paul Lambrecht

Meliza had very large round wooden eyes, big as wagon wheels, and just as brown.

They were deep muddy pools which glinted in the middle like an oil slick, with all the prismatic variance of a rainbow.

She was thick at the waist and cankles. She had a sweet smile and a juicy plum eager face.

When she wasn't pleasant, she was bitter and hostile, and she could never control which way she was going to be, and she seemed to prefer both ways equally.

Her heart was open and fatuous. Her life proved that if you weren't particularly industrious or ambitious, interesting things would happen to you.

Her lips shuddered like quaking drumskins when she whispered the name, Moses. Her mouth formed like a cave, spewing smoke from her esophagus, rising from the fire in her heart.

Meliza knew that Moses only slept rarely, that most nights he stared at the moon gleaming off a silver tree stump, dreaming in its luminous crevices that his sheep had transformed into beautiful women, and that he didn't stutter bravely in front of the others.

Meliza looked at the moon knowingly, too. In the quiet way she wanted things, she wanted Moses to know good things and to be happy, for once.

Moses was afraid. He was afraid his mother would slap him. He was afraid of the dark. He was afraid he'd be dead one day, gone, that this had all been a dream and he'd woken up, in the darkness.

He was frightened by every single one of his thoughts and the chubby girl who stared at him all the time.

One day they went on a walk together.

They walked along a stony path through the heather of the nearby ridge and over to the waterfall and bathing pool. Meliza's face was smooth and simpering. Moses chucked stones into the black water.

Her face was so trusting and innocent and simple, he thought digustedly.

Meliza tried to touch his hand and he slapped it away, just like his mother slapped him.

She reacted harshly, as if wounded, and suddenly diffuse. She hadn't expected this to happen. She felt briefly as if she wanted to die. Moses riddled her up and down with his gaze contemptuously.

The hair on her arms stood straight up and she looked searchingly around her for another person to come up the path. But there was no one to save her, no place for her to hide. So she was rooted in place, frozen with fear.

Moses picked up a stick and started swatting it through the air. Meliza finally broke free from her trance, and took off running back towards the village, fresh milk clouding her eyes.

Moses took off running after her, swatting his stick, and catching her on the rump with a wispy extended tendrill. She shrieked and gathered more momentum to her fleeting

haunches. This sent waves of delight upsurging through Moses, watching his dream of a sheep turning into a human woman come to life, charging away from him in terror.

At last he chased her exhausted collapsing into the hillside. He glowered over her murderously.

His eyes were a storm-tossed blue, his face bird-like and sharp. His complexion was shiny and burnished and his pupils swollen.

Her eyes were still dull and wooden, her breast heaving, choking, spewing from her lungs.

He cracked her with his stick. She shuddered and whimpered.

Then he helped her to her feet submissively as she cried limply and uncontrollably. He had satisfied himself that she was just a helpless animal, not worthy of his effort.

When they got back to the village, Moses's mother slapped him and he hit her with his stick.

Moses's mother cried. Sticks hurt.

**END.**