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Evolution

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Deciphered from cuneiform, this is the earliest known example of a break-up letter.

Dear Lucy,

What's up? Not much here. You're probably wondering why I'm writing a letter. If I know you—and after sharing your cave for a month, I think I do—you're probably scratching your cute temple like *what the heck? Ock LAUGHS at letter-writers, then says something witty like, "Make yourself useful," before tearing off their arms and carving the wristbones into spearheads.*

Well, that was Old Ock. New Ock has a different perspective. No doubt you've noticed that I've been standing more upright lately. Those few vertical inches have changed my worldview. Literally. Instead of looking at cracked mud and mammoth scat and your breasts, my view soars over treetops, stars, and your breasts.

New sights put New Ock in mind of big and distant things. The horizon. The future. The whole deal between men and women.

Ah, but listen to me go on. If Dr. Ur was looking over my shoulder, he'd say I was "practicing avoidance." Then again, if Dr. Ur was looking over my shoulder, he'd find himself suddenly armless. Ha!

But still, Dr. Ur would have a point, so let me get to mine.

In a minute.

First, Lucy-in-the-sky, I need you to understand how much I have changed. For Old Ock, the day-to-day existence of hunting mammoths and gathering soft leaves to wipe our bottoms was a full life. New Ock picks up his spear in the morning and thinks, *Geez, I need a hobby.*

Mammoths, it turns out, are easy to hunt once you straighten up. They're basically clumsy, overgrown bears with no claws. It takes them about two minutes to sweep their tusks around. "Look UP!" I tell the other guys, but they just keep scuffling around its hooves, stabbing blindly upward. In all the dust and confusion, they mainly succeed in spearing each other, and, occasionally, themselves.

Eventually, I get disgusted and punch a spearhole behind the mammoth's ear. The guys cheer, then sit down to pack boiling mud into their spear wounds, which they blame on the mammoth. "Man, did you see that guy? His tusks were *everywhere.*"

When I tell them that straightening up, just a little, would make the job a lot easier, they scoff. It hurts their spines. The sun gets in their eyes. Besides, if this posture was good enough for their fathers, it's good enough for them. Which makes me think of what my own father said when he first caught me upright. *What, you're too good for me now?*

Old Ock would have popped him in the mouth with the butt end of a spear. New Ock smiled and said, “Come on, Dad . . .”

Evolution has its downside, I guess.

See how much I’ve changed? You probably feel like I’ve done a real “bait and switch,” the trick where my father sets out a scrap of meat, and, when a lizard appears, he whacks it with a switch.

As unfair as that is to the lizard, it would be doubly unfair, sweet Lu, to ask you to stay with me when the deal has changed so much.

I’m big into fairness now. Old Ock thought of might and right as identical twins. I thought that just because I *could* pull off a letter-writer’s arms, it was okay to do so. “It’s not like it’ll hurt the tribe,” my father always said, noting that letter-writers didn’t even gather leeks. “And during a hunt, they always stay behind with the women.” Here he tapped his sloping forehead. “One more reason to tear off their arms.”

Now when I think about yanking limbs, a dark cloud forms behind my eyes. The same cloud is forming now, I assume because I love you so much, and yet, for the sake of fairness, am forced to say: let’s take a step back. Let’s take a look at ourselves and who we are becoming. Respectively.

If you think that sounds like Dr. Ur, well, ha ha, you got me there. When he gave me those lines, he helped me realize what I was already thinking. Helping people realize things is apparently a gift that comes with being “born erect” (a phrase Dr. Ur always says with a leer, for some reason).

Dr. Ur is not so gifted that he can do all my realizing for me, though, so I have to leave the village to spend time by myself in deep thought, which is another one of my ideas that happened to come out of his mouth.

If you want to see other guys, I guess I can’t stop you. Just don’t go out with any of my hunting buddies. Or letter-writers. Or—God, I hope this goes without saying, but in case it can’t—my father. He’ll probably set out a scrap of your favorite meat, so be prepared. I only regret that I won’t see your tears of gratitude spilling onto this letter, because I’ve already left the village.

If your gratitude tears won’t stop, talk to Dr. Ur. He always asks about you. Right after he told me what I was thinking in terms of leaving the village, he said he’d be happy to help you “rebound” at a big discount.

Lefty-Lucy, wish me luck in my hunt for understanding—between Ock and self, between Ock and women—though I doubt I’ll need it. My father thinks there are no answers, and Dr. Ur says I may have to spend years in the wilderness before I figure anything out,

but, really, what do they know? Has my father ever willed himself into an evolution? Has Dr. Ur?

No. Only Ock.

The answers will come soon, I trust. Looking at the stars written in the sky, I feel so close already. Understanding can't be more than another evolution away.

Your friend always,

Ock