

NEANDERTHAL EINSTEINS

by

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CHAPTER 1

For Grim and Dral it was another day in the forest, foraging for what the band of other humans in their extended family who had to leave the caves two winters ago needed while living under the sun and stars. And obtaining hides they learned to put over their heads when there wasn't enough natural brush to keep out the drenching rain and wet snow. The bats and sabre-toothed tigers had reclaimed the inside of the caves, then the mountain that decided to close up the entrance with an unexpected avalanche. Perhaps such was caused by the imagined creatures who lived above the clouds who, at their whim, provided protection or pain for those below them. But, each species and each mountain had to look after itself. And a species of evolving primates that isn't challenged did, after all, not get any stronger or smarter.

As for getting stronger and smarter, Grim and Dral, twin brothers who had just two winters ago sprouted enough pubic hair on their testicles and contents within them to impregnate the women or girls of the band, were less than mediocre at best. At least relative to the other members of their band of now thirty who spoke the same language and believed in the same creatures above the clouds, sort of in the same way. Most everyone in the band learned very quickly and/or painfully, that the easiest way to make enemies of family and friends was to reveal your own real opinion about who those gods really were, and who should be their representative chief on earth.

But Grim and Dral weren't able to learn very much else, particularly when it came to being better at anything than anyone else. Rightly or wrongly they accepted each other's failings at being under-average at hunting game that roamed on the ground, pulling out what lived underwater, skinning or scaling what came in to the 'village' (as it was now called), finding stationary eatable wild berries, making implements to cut down wood and pierce living animal flesh, fighting anyone other than their own villagers who came to their cave or camp uninvited, and, of course, finding women to have pleasure with now and who spawned

their babies nearly a year later. So much so that Grim and Dral felt like they were members of their own tribe within a tribe, who were kept around, for now anyway, only because they were pitied by their father, Prim, the current chief in most matters.

Prim was a still strong and, most importantly, clever man who had, been born 34 winters ago (60 winters, according to him, when he had eaten too many rotten berries) . He blamed Grim and Dral's mother for giving him such defective sons. The other five women who he had pleased produced strong, strapping and superior thinking sons and daughters.

But there were two things that Grim and Dral were good at, other than losing their way in the woods and wandering farther away from home than anyone else had. Or being unable to easily find the camp they were sent away from on a 'special mission' to get food. In such instances the camp moved its location without its cool and strong hunting boss, Thel, telling Grim and Dral about the relocation, as instructed to do so by the "loser lads'" father, Prim.

"I think I can hear these berries talking to us," Grim said one sort of fine day to his brother as he reached for a group of three large red balls on a branch hidden by leaves and protected by thorns, feeling very lightheaded and different headed after he sampled one of them.

"Something different than what these roots are saying?" Dral enquired, spotting wild onions that he stumbled upon with his awkward, mismatched feet, that on a good day, decided to work together rather than separately. "But they are saying that...hmmm,"

Dral looked at and, as he perceived it anyway, into a cluster of trees down the valley, in the direction where the sun was about to set soon. "These roots are saying..."

"...That if we get bigger berries than everyone else at home, while they get more berries where they went to find them, they will give us more

meat to eat?” Grim proposed. “Or not take our hides off us when we’re sleeping? Or laugh at us when we take a piss in the woods because they have bigger sticks between their legs than we do? And more hair on their faces and balls?”

“Maybe,” Dral countered. “But if we offer these bigger berries to the women, Lolila and Riha. And the others who I don’t think are our sisters, because they don’t look like I remember our mother did. Then maybe they will invite us to share their hides and themselves. We tricked wild dogs to be our friends by offering them food. Why not train women to do the same?”

“That will take more than big berries,” Grim related, recalling his own experience with the two women. “Or different kinds of wild onions. But...” Grim was distracted from his next thought by a strange sound in the depths of the valley. It was the song of a bird, perhaps. But it felt like something else. And someone else.

It was a two legged creature sitting on a moving four legged large dog with rabbit-like ears, singing like a bird. ‘It’ worked its way up the mountain, showing itself to be a bird that walked, with a man’s head. It carried things on its back in a sac that didn’t look like it was animal hides, but something that reflected the sunlight. Like a smooth lake with no wind blowing on it.

Grim and Dral both picked up their sticks, hoping the sharp stones they put on the tips would not break off this time. The smaller two legged creature atop the larger four legged beast approached, revealing a face that was a man’s but lacking any hair on it. He had long, yellow hair, bearing a texture and symmetrical arrangement that neither Grim nor Dral had never seen. His skin was whiter than any they had ever seen on a human being. There were skins on his body which were not made of animal hide. They were white and bright red, two colors that were only seen in nature when it snowed, or when someone or something bled. A strange sounding ‘song’, which now was being made by some birds and

some other creatures Grim and Dral had never heard, came out of the large sac on his back, got louder as he approached. The man added his own voice to it with words that changed loudness in a rhythmic manner, each chain of words having some that sounded like they came from a young boy's throat and some from a big old man's. It seemed to bring pleasure to the brother's ears and troubled minds, even though they didn't understand the words to the song.

"Are you scared?" Grim asked Dral, clenching desperately to his hunting stick with its naked and perhaps still sharp enough end poised to pierce into the chest of the big dog, its rider, or the sac behind him.

"Yes, but we're not supposed to be, according to our father, and leader, Prim, who says he's never scared," Dral replied, picking up his spear with the miraculously still attached to a sharpened rock at its end to it. It wobbled as much as the shaking hand he tried to hide from the singing bird-man.. "Our father isn't afraid of anything, right?"

"Except growing older, weaker and being told to leave the tribe because he is useless," Grim said. "Something I heard him say when he was half asleep, talking to people who weren't there."

"Dreaming, you mean," Dral said, taking on the top position in their tribe of two, though not abusing the member on the bottom.

"No, it's us who do the dreaming, and during the day," Grim said, repeating the words that had been tossed at and into him as well as his brother so many times by those who could do anything better than the twins could, which was everyone. "Dreaming of a better tribe. A better world. A better father. A better...everything for everyone. Something that.." Grim continued, looking up at the blue sky that was about to turn black soon.

"Dreaming during the day...Something we're not supposed to do, because we're lazy and stupid," Dral said through a self-defeating sigh.

“And weak,” he noted, reluctantly coming back to the world he could see rather than feel.

“And about to be told to leave the tribe if our father gets weaker,” Grim pointed out. “Which he is. He shits more than he eats. Though he covers his face with mud, his cheeks are getting paler by the day. And when it comes to lifting anything, he’s better at making others do the work than doing it himself. And the shakes he has, which he says is because the creatures above the clouds are talking to him, and only him...”

“Yes, I know...Our father is a dishonest man who told us to never lie, Grim,” Dral related.

“Who never taught us how to lie, Dral.”

“Something I never wanted to learn, Grim!” Dral asserted.

“Because you were bad at it?” Grim inquired, inviting his brother to come up with an honest answer.

“As bad as you are now,” Dral replied, pulling his beloved and fellow accursed sibling in towards the reflective surface of the lake.

“Particularly when you say that you aren’t scared of that man bird approaching us.

“Who is...” Dral said, noting the bird-man-god stopping. He got off the big dog, leaving it to eat grass which the large but somehow gentle beast seemed to enjoy. He then walked to a pile of wood on the ground, and motioned with a kind smile for the brothers to follow him. “Who is..” Dral repeated lowering his spear, which lost its sharp tip, yet again.

“Inviting us to spend the night with him?” Grim speculated.

The man-bird who seemed more feminine than most men somehow, but in a strong way, placed three piles of food around him. He/she stopped singing, then pulled out what was in the sac that held the strange sounding birds. Those captured animals were still singing. The melodic sounds of that 'song' came not from winged creatures but a small strange blue stone with sharp sides on it. He placed it on the center of a slab of wood and something shiny that was elevated from the ground by sticks on all four sides. He then walked to the pile of wood on the ground and set it ablaze with a flick of something in his magic fingers. Then, he set out three piles of food at opposite ends of the elevated platform, placing straight cut logs in front of them.

"He's maybe inviting us to dinner?" Grim speculated.

"Or as dinner?" Dral suggested, recalling what happened to the animals and patches of the forest when the bright light that emitted smoke that got warm when you got close to it and painfully hot when you tried to touch it. He pointed to sharp, flat blades that reflected the setting sun which the now on foot bird man used to cut open two blankets. He laid them on the ground in the manner women did for men back 'home' when they wanted to go to 'sleep' with them. "That man-bird has intense eyes," Dral noted.

"And the big dog with the long tail of hair with the blanket over its back that he's sitting on seems to have kind eyes," Grim noted as birdman patting it as a friend rather than something to be killed or skinned. "I say we talk to him."

"Or her?" Dral advanced. "We don't know if this grown man who has even less hair on his face than most of the women in our tribe with the long yellow hair is hiding breasts or balls behind those skins. Or...he/she is maybe both a man and a woman?"

The man-bird got on top of the big dog, kicked him gently with his legs, and proceeded to ride up to Dral and Grim. The brothers each put up

their spears, trying to act like the men they were supposed to be. Prepared to kill what and who they didn't understand, like real men. But they couldn't, somehow. The man-bird on the big dog stopped, smiled at them, then uninvited them to his camp down the valley with a wave of his hand, a smile on his lips, and utterance of the word 'welcome' in Grim and Dral's language.

"We ...can't...." Dral said. "And shouldn't!"

"We have to get...home," Grim added. "To our people. And you have to get back to your home and your eh..."

"People, yes, I know," the man-bird said, again in Grim and Dral's language. "But, destiny calls you both. IF you are man enough to answer it. Besides, it is getting late," he said, looking up at the sky. "You can go back to your people when the sun rises a few more times with a lot more than berries and onions. Or if you want things to continue as they are, you can go 'home' now..."

Dral and Grim, for reasons they did not understand but had to in the intensity of the moment accept, were not so concerned with why this stranger who looked like no other member of their upright, two legged species could speak their language. Of more concern was what was waiting for them at home. A steady decline in the quality of their lives which would plummet them into a dark hole. Or the place where those who stop breathing go, which would happen soon enough. Particularly if their father Prim's coughing, shitting, and shaking got any worse.

Grim found himself looked at by the bird man's big dog. He was normally afraid of dogs, but this one seemed to like him. The dog with the long tail and big rabbit like ears walked up to Grim, seeking seeking a bite of the berries he had collected. After consenting to give the largest berry to the beast, Grim imagined in yet another day dream, that it, be it he or a she, was inviting him to jump onto his back. He picked up the long, straight and smooth leather twine that was connected to more

twine wrapped around the big dog's head, which was connected to circular rings outside of either side of its mouth.

Meanwhile, Dral's eyes were fixed upon the small ground-connected sun which emitted more light than smoke yet remained in a small place. Grim then found himself hypnotized by the smell of something in his nostrils coming from the food set upon pots over the warm from a distance, hot when you touched it, sun that didn't move.

"It's called fire," the bird man said by way of explanation. "Good for cooking food, scaring away unfriendly animals, and other purposes which one or both of you will discover, or spread, very soon. According to this dream I was assigned to by Life, and others, to finish, so it could become reality," he said. He then looked up to one part of the sky with fear, and another with defiance. A crow landed next to him, cawing at his belly. "I will finish what has to be started no matter what you say you want to eat, or were instructed to do!" the thus far calm and collected bird man grunted with more rage and determination than Grim and Dral had ever seen in one of their own people to the crow with a shaking second finger that merged into a clenched fist.

But the crow who still seemed to hunger for something in the bird man's belly held its ground. The bird man then yelled the crow away in a language Grim and Dral didn't understand, but felt was very, very intense. It sent the bird away up to a branch above him. The bird man then let out a fiercer yell, and the crow flew back up to an behind a cloud.

"So," the bird man continued, after finally calming down. A warm glow overtook his eyes once again. "Where were we, gentlemen?"