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TERRY DEARY



TERRIBLE TRUE TALES

THE STONE AGE

Inside illustrations by Tambe

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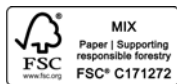
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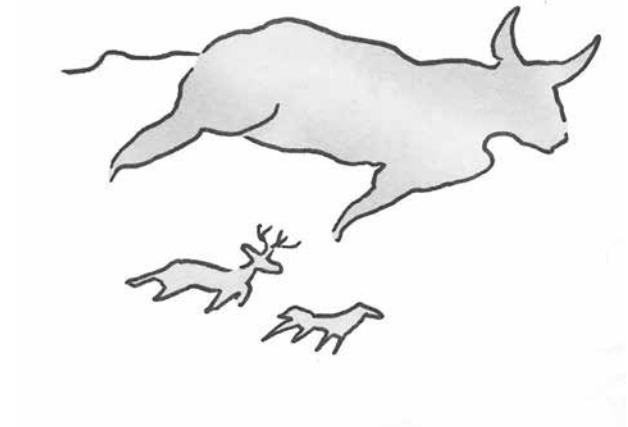


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The Great Cave



1

Willow

17,300 years ago; Lascaux in France

They called the weak boy Willow. The strong boys were given strong names: Oak and Rock, Bull and Bone. But willow trees bent in the wind and drooped by the river. Willow limped after the hunters with his twisted leg but was never fast enough to be there at the kill.



The chief of the tribe was Flint, when Willow was young. Flint's hair was grey as the stone in the caves where they made their home. 'They say he's thirty-five winters old,' Willow's mother whispered to him one morning. 'They say he'll soon be dead.'

Willow nodded. 'Who'll be chief then?' he asked.

The woman shook her ragged head of hair as she fastened a cloak of rabbit skins round Willow's neck. 'The best hunter, I suppose.'

A fire flickered on the floor of the cave. Bones from last night's meal lay near it. Suddenly, two great hounds bounded into their hut and snapped at the leg-bone of a deer.

A man hurried in after them. 'Don't let the dogs eat, Rainbow,' he grumbled at Willow's mother. 'I want them hungry for the hunt.'



The man snatched at the bone but the dog, swift and grey as a rain-cloud, fled through the door and into the daylight outside.

'Sorry, Flint,' Rainbow moaned. 'I should have buried them.'

The man's anger slipped away and he sighed. 'Never mind,' he said with a small smile. 'Perhaps we'll make another kill today and we'll all eat well come darkness. Dogs and men.'

Willow picked up a wooden spear with a stone tip that he'd rubbed as sharp as one of Rainbow's bone-needles. 'I'm ready,' he said, eager and bright-eyed.

Flint lowered himself onto the warm deer skins on the floor. He was slow and stiff and Willow thought he heard the old man's bones creak.

'You could stay at home with the women,' he said. 'There are skins in the main cave. They need to be sewn together to make warm clothes for winter. You could help.'

Willow's mouth fell open. He swallowed tears. 'I'm a man... nearly,' he said. 'I want to hunt. Don't make me stay with the women.'

Flint nodded at Willow's twisted leg. 'You can't keep up, boy. You've tried. You know you can't.'

Willow's face burned red. 'I can carry the meat back to the caves,' he argued. 'Don't make me stay behind.'

Flint shrugged. 'I'm not much faster myself,' he sighed. 'There was a time when I could run alongside a horse and bring it down. No one else in the tribe could do that.'

'I wish I'd seen that,' Rainbow said with a sigh. 'But now you make plans. You are wise. You find the tracks and tell the hunters where to hide. Now you let the others do the running, Flint.'



The old man nodded and struggled to his feet. Willow stretched out a hand to help him. 'Come along, boy,' Flint said. 'We'll limp along at the back together, eh?'

Willow grinned. 'A deer or a horse or a bull will die today,' he said.

The old man and the boy shuffled up the slope towards the mouth of the cave. One of them would not walk back.



2

Bull

The women were scraping the flesh off skins and sewing them into clothes with sharp, bone needles. The young hunters were excited; pushing and wrestling and having mock fights to keep warm.

The boy called Bull was just one winter older than Willow, but had grown much larger. He was shouting to the other young men to keep quiet and sit on the ground.

When they had settled he spoke in a voice as deep as any man's. 'Today we hunt in the valley of the lilies. There are bison grazing there.'

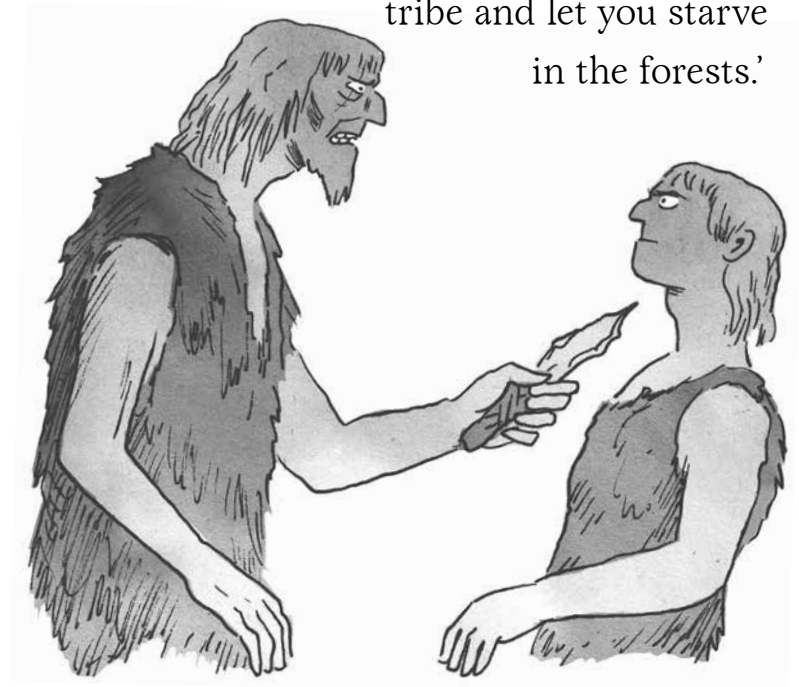


‘They will run away as soon as they see us,’ old Flint said. ‘We can’t run fast as a bison.’

Bull threw back his head and laughed. ‘You can’t run as fast as a worm, old man,’ he said with a sneer. ‘But we aren’t all as slow as you.’

Flint pulled a stone knife from his belt and pointed it at the boy. ‘I am your chief.

I will send you away from the tribe and let you starve in the forests.’



Bull's heavy face turned red with anger. He half-raised the hunting spear he was carrying. Everyone in the tribe fell silent. They waited.

'Maybe you won't be chief much longer. Maybe the spirit in the sky will take you soon,' Bull said.

The chief spoke quietly. 'Maybe she will. But, until that day, you *will* obey me.' He looked around the hunters. 'Now who is going to tell me the plan for today?'

'We were going to run down the valley and kill a bison,' a young man called River said. 'Maybe one of the old bison will be too stiff to run so fast.'

'If it's as old as me then it will be too tough to eat,' the chief said and gave a harsh laugh. The hunters smiled. All except Bull.

Willow stepped forward. 'The valley of the lilies is narrow with steep sides,'

he said. 'If some of us make a noise with sticks and drums the bison will run. If the rest of us are at the far end of the valley then the bison will run straight onto our spears.'

'It might work,' Owl said.

Bull stepped forward. 'I will lead the hunters at the far end of the valley. I will make the kill,' he said in his booming voice. He pointed to ten hunters to go with him.

'We'll go to the far end of the valley now. When we are ready then River will give the howl of a wolf. That will be the signal for you to start your beating and driving the herd.'

Bull led ten others off at a run. They would circle around the hill and lay the trap.

Willow looked across to his mother, Rainbow. She nodded at him. 'You are clever, lad. Just like your mother.'



Flint placed an arm round the boy's shoulder. 'One day he will make a fine chief of the tribe... when I have gone to the spirit in the sky.' He looked at the women and girls who remained in the camp. 'Remember that. When I am gone, then Willow should be your chief.'

No one argued. Flint shuffled down the dusty track and Willow went to pick up one of the drums. Some of the tribe would not want him as chief, he knew. There would be one who would fight him for it. And he knew he would lose.

Willow sighed and limped off after Flint.