

It's one bone in a billion. Those are the odds of fossilisation, for those perfect conditions to occur: burial, pressure, time, and luck.

I was in the waiting room when I found out that we were not the only ones. Someone was ill, and the hospital was an unpleasant yellow. I picked up a National Geographic, and that's when I saw her. We were both seven. Between the pinch of my little fingers, I saw on the two-page spread her black pinky finger frozen in the ice. There were words I couldn't understand; *genus homo, denisovan, mitochondrial DNA...* but it did not matter. She and I were one and the same, 50,000 years in the making. Without a word, without seeing her face or knowing her name my life was changed forever. I closed the magazine and looked about the room quietly. Nobody knew. I felt like I had landed on the moon and the world would never be the same.

I was frightened and enlightened at once. For many years in my childhood I dreamt of people not quite like us... heads sloping, jaws protruding. Some were hairy and some were not. Some were short, and others long-limbed. Their bodies were disproportionate to my own, or I was to theirs. With my heart racing, I would look into their brown eyes in the dark and they would look back into mine. Both of us conscious. Both of us fearful. I couldn't speak or ask a question, nor did I want to hear what they had to say. But I knew that if I had, they would answer.

From then on, no faith or religion could compare to the cold facts of the dirt. How embarrassed I was for the people who called themselves prophets. They thought they could speak on behalf of humanity, but did not know that we were only one apple on the apple tree of life.

With every life lesson I was taught, I performed my secret ritual of digging up the past and asking; Does a man hunt and a woman gather? Or was that an invention to keep me feeling like a lesser human? Are war and violence so integral to our nature that I must be instructed not to harm my fellow man? Or do cuts and bruises show up more readily in the record than the thousands of hugs and kisses lost to time?

I wanted to find evidence of their kindness - the people from my dreams, and let everyone know that we had been wrong all along. Life did not have to be this unfair. We had always been soft and kind, and evil was simply in the hands of a few who wrote our story for their own benefit. We had forgotten who we were at our most basic, and if we tried to change our outlook we could make things better.

Everything became significant. A healed neanderthal jaw (somebody had to feed him), a child's hand painted high on the cave wall (someone had to lift them), a man born with spinal injuries in

the paleolithic (someone had to carry him his whole life). My Saints were all of these invisible someones and my Gospels were written in the stone.

It's one bone in a billion. Those are the odds of fossilisation, for those perfect conditions to occur: burial, pressure, time, and luck. That's eight bones total for everyone alive today. It could be you they find. Your chipped jaw, your femur... if they are really lucky it could be your tooth. They'll see that you ate bananas from a land many miles away. You were sick for a few months in your teens, but recovered stronger than before. They will see your mother, and her mother, her mothers' mother, and a thousand mothers more in your DNA. And you will be put in a magazine.

I wonder what she believed in. The little girl with the pinky finger, frozen in the Siberian ice. What did she know about the people who came before her? What stories did her parents tell her as she went to sleep? Was she alone that cold night in the mountains?