

## The Idiot Savant

Nineteen years of eating bats and salamanders. Nineteen years of painting walls. Nineteen years of humping the stalagmites. Nineteen years of shitting in the corner by the rocks.

The idiot savant is getting old. His head is bald, his feet have splayed. At night he cackles. Wouldst thou see him there in the dark he would not seem a man. A creature of the cave he hath becometh, and with that, he grunts, he has finally done it.

Today is the day the idiot savant enters the prime of his artistry.

He wakes and strikes his torch aflame and mashes the berries between the rocks. Then, taking the paste he's made, he smears it across his hands and, feeling up an empty wall, he starts to paint.

His subject? A horse which came to him in a dream, prancing across a prairie he himself had never been.

"Grhm." *Grotto*, he thinks. The horse is goblinlike. It looks as if it shouldn't prance. Rather it should romp.

"Grhm." Come to think of it, he doesn't know what a horse looks like.

"Grhm." He can't even tell what the painting is.

So he stops, standing back with his hands to his hips.

Am I a brainless lizard? he thinks. A dilettante thug? Do I have any talent at all?

"Grhm," he grunts once more, meaning no.

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They found him there in the cave fifteen thousand years later, then just a shriveled mummy in the corner by a mound of fossilized shit. According to the lab where they had tested him, he had died of malnutrition. Though, it was also suspected that, due to the phrenologically distorted crown of his skull, the idiot savant had been lobotomized.

What was more a miracle than the mummy, however, was that as for his work it was all still there. Archeologists documented over two-thousand individual paintings, many of which on canvases that seemed repeatedly scored.

"An expansion in consciousness," read an article, the author, a part-time curator for the Uffizi and the Vatican.

"A primeval delight," read another, a Vorticist and leader of the Avant-Garde.

One author wrote that the paintings were so vivid, so clear, that for weeks on end cave bears and lions lurked in their dreams. They took special note of a horse in a field they said they but dimly recalled as though it was their earliest memory.

So by the end the hearsay had confounded to such an extent the cave was becoming an attraction. It was to be opened for tours to the public.

COME. SEE THE SAVANT. FORGOTTEN DREAMS LIE WHERE HE RESTS.

Outside a line ran for three miles. There were pop-up vendors selling trinkets and troglodytes in costume. Among the celebrities that day: Ernest Hemingway, Winston Churchill, Amelia Earhart, the Dalai Lama. Picasso came too. And when he emerged from the cave's jaws, as if from a woman's womb, grabbing ahold of his wet tan gamboa and wet tan suit, he turned to his wife and said, "Fifteen thousand years of mankind and art."

Yes? said his wife. "What is it, dear?"

He wrung the sweat from his handkerchief. "We have learned nothing."