

The Caves

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I. South of the Pyrenees, 22,000

N was proud of his discovery. The tall, shallow cave in which he had taken shelter proved to be merely the entrance to a series of caverns extending back into the hill. Gradually, working with bone and rock, he had widened entrances, knocked down stalagmites and created several spaces in which food could be stored over winter, and women and children could be sheltered.

Of course, one cannot spend one's life in a cave. One must always need venture outward in search of food and entertainment. But on rainy and particularly cold days, the cave provided warmth and hospitality, and, day in and day out, a refuge from predators.

The mouth of the cave was located several feet above the ground. Hidden by berry-festooned shrubs, N had discovered it only by accident. While the outer entrance to the cave was not defensible—the opening was far too wide, the majority of the inner caverns were. Fire and weapons could be cached inside them and their narrow entrances easily defended.

Standing just under 5' 5", muscular and solidly built, N was ready now to acquire a string of females. Handsome by Neanderthal standards, with

a broad nose, and long earlobes, he anticipated little difficulty in rounding the women up, nor in keeping them once they saw his magnificent home.

But when he ventured outside his cave again, the only females he saw were small-nosed and ugly, thin, almost hairless creatures, barely recognizable as people. But a man in lust is seldom choosy and as the women were captivated as well as frightened by his size, soon, catching one well away from the others, he mated with her and brought her to his cave.

He caught several of the near-hairless females in this fashion and killed several of their males in a raid upon a cultivated field. The females became pregnant, but as N was a great hunter and the forest and meadows nearby filled with berries and edible fruit, all survived the winter to litter successfully in the spring.

A year passed. Though N extended the range of his hunting trips, not once did he encounter any of his kind. The weather was warmer now, much warmer than when N had been a boy. After experiencing several months of discomfort that summer, the surrounding hills brown and withered, the insects stinging and inedible, he recalled there had been talk amongst his tribesman of going north into the mountains to live. Perhaps they had all gone north while N, caught up in the wonder of his newly-discovered cave, had been left behind.

Still, an intimacy gradually arose between N and his mates. He and they would rub noses even when sex was not in the offing. When he

would return to the cave, his pelt littered with ticks that had caught hold as he plowed his way through the tall grasses, his mates would carefully pluck them free till he was whole again. And in the winter, short as it was, all slept together their legs and arms intertwined in a warm, intimate pile.

The spring brought unexpected disappointment. Though the females again were pregnant, none of the offspring survived. A modern scientist would have talked knowingly of the rh factor, but such knowledge and the discovery of a preventive vaccine belonged to a far off future.

N had no choice but to go out again in search of women, encountering and needing to avoid more and more of the hairless people. Though they were easily killed in one-on-one combat, in large numbers they need be avoided. In fact, on his third such trip, with two more females already added to his string, he failed to achieve his objective. He had no choice but to leave behind an injured female while a band of hairless men chased him back across the thickly-forested hills.

They were faster than he, but, fortunately, a wild boar delayed them and he was able to reach his cave in safety. Once inside he fought fiercely—he was right in thinking the inner caverns might be readily defended—succumbing only when U, one of the women in the first batch he'd collected, once loving but now distraught at being neglected for his new acquisitions, clubbed him from behind.

The hairless ones liberated the women and their hybrid offspring. The caverns were abandoned and the legend of the hairy giant who had once lived there kept the people well clear of them until the caverns were long forgotten.