

CHAPTER THREE, NOT ALONE

He shivered again and shone his torch around to find that little tealight once more. Where was it? Ah, there it was! This time he picked it up and looked at it. It had been completely burned up. He wondered what the cave would be like with just a tiny little light. Or with no light at all?

Did he dare turn off his torch? For a moment he stood there, wondering. But then logic took over. He had his torch in his hand and if he got scared, all he needed to do was turn it back on! Slowly, he put his hand over the button, and pushed it.

Darkness. Pure darkness. It was scary, he had never been in such intense darkness before. He pushed the button on his torch again and light flared up. Now he noticed that really, there was only light within the area that his torch covered. All around that little circle there was that darkness, though it somehow didn't feel as strongly dark as when the light had been off completely. Did he dare turn it off again?

But what if there was a ghost? Although if there was a ghost it could have already hurt him. And anyway, ghosts didn't necessarily hurt people, most stories he had read about ghosts were that of really sad ones, that wanted to get back to their families.

Again, he pressed the button. And once again, there was total darkness all around. He held his hand up in front of his face, but he couldn't see it. He waved it in front of himself, but he couldn't see that either. Not even a faint outline. He dropped his hand back to his side and tried to make out anything else in the cave, anything else at all. But he could see nothing.

He had been so busy exploring that he had forgotten how incredibly silent it was down here. Now that he was unable to see anything, he strained his ears for sounds. All he could hear

was the water dripping down the walls and into the little stream on the passage floor. He could hear the sound of his own breathing, and the beating of his own heart. That was a strange sensation, he had never heard them like this before.

Slowly and carefully, he squatted down. The whole thing felt really strange but it also felt good, somehow, now that he had overcome his fear. His other senses seemed to become stronger. The dripping became louder, and had an echo to it. There were different drips going on at the same time, all with their own echoes. Funny that he hadn't noticed that before. The air felt cold but fresh, and it had a smell that he couldn't name. His feet felt even colder than before, and he was beginning to lose some of the feeling in them. He realised he would have to go home soon, before they became so cold he couldn't move properly. They felt very uncomfortable.

Suddenly there was a rustling sound overhead, and Tristan panicked. He jumped up and turned his torch back on, shining it wildly around. What was that? Was there a ghost after all? Something touched his head and he jumped back. He had forgotten he was on that little ledge, lost his balance and with his arms waving wildly around, fell off it, splash into the icy water on the floor. His torch fell out of his hand and turned itself off. There was darkness once again.

Tristan breathed hard. His side hurt from where he had fallen, and he was soaking wet through. He was now glad that he had practised being in the darkness before, or he knew he would have been much more scared. And though he was afraid that there might be a ghost, he was more afraid of having lost his torch. He needed that to get back out of the cave!

Carefully he got up, crouching. At least he hadn't broken anything. It would have been a real disaster if he had, he wouldn't have been able to get out of this cave. He shuddered at the thought. Maybe all this had not been such a good idea, he had fallen twice now and could have

really hurt himself. But he did like this cave, and so wanted to come back here. Could he? Should he?

First of all though, he needed to find his torch or he wasn't going anywhere. He didn't fancy having to try to find his way out of here without any light, that would be a nightmare. He went down on his knees, so wet and cold that he barely noticed the water underneath him. He felt around blindly with his hands for his torch. Where was it? Where had it gone? The ghostly rustling sounds completely forgotten, he searched around, crawling in the darkness. The rough floor hurt his knees and he cried out in pain as a little stone dug in deep, drawing blood. At the same time his hand touched the wall of the cave. Along that edge it was dry, and there was his torch! He picked it up and pushed the button, holding his breath. Would it work?

Yes! It gave forth a faint beam of light. Not as strong as before, but it was light! Had the torch gotten damaged in the fall or were the batteries simply running out? Standing up, Tristan rubbed his knee. It hurt, he was bruised all over and he was so cold. He had to go home. He didn't feel much like a hero any more.

There were more rustling sounds. He gasped, his heart beating even faster now. He made sure he held tightly on to his torch, he was not going to lose it again! More sounds seemed to come from all over the place, echoing around and around the cave. What was going on? Was it a ghost? Or was there a band of smugglers coming? Something touched his head again, and he put his hands up to his head. Doing that made the torch light shine on something small that was flying away from him. It was a bat! He had been afraid of a bat! But surely the bat couldn't possibly make all the sounds that were around now? It had disappeared down the passageway. Now he noticed that there were more bats, all flying towards the exit. Where had they suddenly come from?

He shone his torch around, but the light was growing fainter and fainter till there was only a weak beam of light. The echoing sounds were becoming stronger, and Tristan became convinced that someone was coming down the passage. Smugglers? Thieves hiding their booty? Ghosts? He didn't know who it would be.

His torch light became weaker still and then went out completely. He stood in pitch darkness, wondering what to do. Should he hide? But there was nowhere to hide. Should he run? He couldn't run in here. And he had no more light, and anyway, he could only go towards whoever was coming. He stepped back up on the ledge, so he was out of the water at least, crouched down and waited.

Slowly the pitch darkness became a little less, till Tristan could see a figure approaching. At least there was only one person, he thought. And he didn't look like a ghost. He certainly made enough noise! Had Tristan himself made that much noise when he had been swishing through the water like that? Holding his breath, he saw the person come closer and closer. Whoever it was was moving very slowly and kept his torch pointed to the floor. He, and Tristan was somehow certain it was a he, didn't seem all that tall. Taller than himself, yes, but not tall enough to be an adult. Who was it? Tristan stayed where he was, crouched on the ledge with his back to the wall, and waited.

Finally the person looked up and saw Tristan. He stopped and stared. Tristan stared back.