

CHAPTER TWO, INSIDE THE CAVE

Tristan stood right in front of the hole in the ground, the hole that was his cave. All he had to do now was to slide down and go inside. He crouched down and paused for a moment. What did he really know about caves?

His dad had told him stories about caves, and they had all sounded terribly exciting. But he had also told Tristan of dangers. Tristan would have thought wild animals were the worst dangers you could encounter. But his dad had said that that was wrong, that at the most you would meet a bat or two. In this country there weren't any bears or wolves or other dangerous animals to worry about. No, the worst dangers were in cold freezing waters. In sudden holes you could drop down in. Or in getting lost when there were lots of tunnels. And if that happened, search parties often didn't even know that the person had gone inside a cave, so they could never find him. His dad had said people always had to tell someone else exactly which cave they had gone into, and to leave something outside the entrance that would be easily found.

Thinking of all that, Tristan hesitated. Should he go inside? Or would it be better not to? But he wanted to, that was for sure. He had never been inside a cave, and this whole adventure had been so really exciting. Taking his rucksack off, he took his torch out of it and dropped the bag on the floor beside his stick. Looking at it, he thought that the red of his bag was definitely a clear something that could be easily found.

He turned this torch on, and shone its light down into the hole, trying to see as far as he could. But that was not very far. The hole obviously bent, and he would have to crawl to get inside it. He hunkered down to see a bit more, and then went down on his hands and knees.

Slowly he crawled forward and downwards. Underneath his knees were lots of soil and leaves, and a bit of mud too. He didn't notice it. All his attention was bent on what was ahead.

The hole became narrower and narrower, and he found himself lying on his tummy. His legs were sticking up and out, and his head was underneath the earth now, inside the cave. He felt excitement rise up inside him. This was fun!

He squirmed his body further in. He could see that just up ahead, the opening widened and he would be able to crawl again. Wriggling on, he entered fully and pulled himself up on his knees. He stood still, listening. Were any of his enemies inside already? But no, he could hear nothing at all. And he suddenly noticed how really quiet it was down here. There was not a sound of the wind, of the birds, there was no rustling of trees. No sound of airplanes nor of distant cars. Basically, no sound at all, except for his own breathing and some drip drops of water falling somewhere. It was colder too. He shivered a bit and wished he wore more than just a T-shirt. Looking down at himself, he realised that his black shirt was wet and dirty and so were his tracksuit bottoms. His mum was going to be furious! For a moment he panicked and thought to turn back, but then reason took over. He was muddy all over already, he couldn't get any worse, so why go back now? He had come all this way, and there was this whole place still to explore! His mum was going to be angry with him, no matter what else he did now.

It looked more like a tunnel than a cave. Thinking about what his dad had said about getting lost in tunnels, he hoped that this one would be straight, with no side tunnels. Slowly he crawled on. The tunnel was still slanting down, and he had to watch his head. He had nearly hit it a couple of times already, the ceiling was low and jutting out in places.

Finally it widened out and opened up, and Tristan found he could stand up. He stretched his arms and legs. They had been getting a little cramped and his knees hurt a bit. His arms were

scratched too. He grinned. He really felt like one of the kids of those adventure stories. Muddy, scratched and a little hurting, he felt like one of the heroes about to do something really heroic, like fighting some smugglers who had stashed their booty inside a cave near the sea side. Except that he was nowhere near the sea, but that didn't matter. They could just as well have hidden their treasure further inland, in these woods.

Boosted by these thoughts, he shone his torch around. He must have come quite a distance. The tunnel went on, as far as he could see. The walls were no more made of earth though, with the occasional stone jutting out. No, they were completely of stone now, walls and ceiling alike. He thought of secret escape routes from big mansions and castles from the stories, where they had tunnels that had been excavated through the rock so the important people could escape. But those were always full of cobwebs, and he didn't see a single one here. Could this tunnel have been made by people? The idea thrilled him. Who would have made this? And how would they have made this tunnel? And why? Was this going to lead to somewhere special? Was he going to find real treasure, left behind, some time long ago?

As he walked slowly, he could see that these walls were dripping wet in places. He reached out and touched it with his right hand. Quickly, he pulled it back. That felt cold! And wet too. Slowly he did it again, but this time he held his hand there, feeling the stone underneath. There seemed to be some soil on the wall as well. Strange.

He lost his footing and fell down, hard. That hurt! At least he hadn't broken anything, but his right leg and arm were really sore. He took a deep breath and realised he was sitting in a puddle of water. Stiffly he got up, not feeling quite so happy any more. What if he had broken his leg? Would he have been able to get out of here then? Yet again he was wondering if he shouldn't go back, go back home to his mother. But then he thought that this was the kind of

adventure that happened to real heroes, so maybe this made him a hero. He also thought of his friends at school, and how he would be the one to tell them a real story of adventure, of *his* adventure!

He now realised that his trainers were soaking wet through. He had been so busy looking around and exploring the cave that he hadn't even noticed that he had been walking through water. His torch revealed that the tunnel was still sloping down slightly, and that the water at his feet seemed to be getting deeper. But at the end of the torch light, what was that? There were shimmers and sparkles! What could that be? His hurts and fears forgotten, he walked on towards those intriguing lights. He did notice the cold temperature of the water though, and he shivered. Brrr. The water was getting deeper and deeper. Soon it was as high as his ankles, sloshing over his trainers and inside them. He was getting really cold now.

In the beam of his torch light, the tunnel walls and ceiling now seemed to sparkle all around him. A sparkle here, a sparkle there, a larger clump of sparkles. Spellbound, Tristan sloshed on, and looked around, his mouth open slightly.

Bump! Ouch. He had been so busy looking around, that he hadn't noticed the edge he had walked right into. He rubbed his left knee. Another hurt to add to his collection. The tunnel had stopped, right there, and he hadn't even noticed it. It hadn't stopped completely though, there was a ledge of some sort, higher than the water. He stepped up it, glad to have his feet out of the cold water. My, that had been really cold. His feet felt well and truly frozen.

The ledge formed a little platform, there at the end of the tunnel. Tristan stamped his feet, again and again, trying to get a bit of warmth into them. Doing so, his torch bobbed up and down the walls. What was that? Something caught Tristan's attention. He tried to find it again with his torch light. He stood real close to the wall, searching. There it was! The light shone on a tiny

little candle. A tealight, like the ones his mum sometimes used. What was that doing here?

Suddenly he was disappointed, as this meant that he was not the only one who had discovered this place.

But then, that candle could have been there a long time. An awful long time, he thought. Someone could have come here a hundred years ago. Maybe it was a boy, like himself, looking for adventure. Or an adult, hiding something. Maybe there was treasure hidden somewhere, and the boy had gone looking for it. Maybe someone had died here, and their ghost was still around....

Tristan shivered violently. Not from the cold this time, though he was cold. No, it was from the idea of having a ghost around. He realised that his imagination had run away with him and that he was making it all up. But that didn't help. It was still possible, he thought. Anything was possible in here...