

Lost in the Cave

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intermediate



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CHAPTER 1

Ellise Darby pulled the sitting room curtains aside and looked out the window. "Where are they?" she wondered impatiently. "What's taking them so long?"

"Who are you waiting for?" asked Mrs Darby.

"Agnes and Fran," explained Ellise. "We're going to a meeting of the Derbyshire Potholers' Club. It starts at eight o'clock and if Agnes doesn't come soon, we'll be late."

"I didn't know you were interested in potholing," said Mr Darby. "Remember when I took you to Kitley Caves? You hated being underground. You cried and..."

"Oh, Dad!" interrupted Ellise. "That was ten years ago. I was only eight and I was frightened by that sabre-toothed tiger fossil."

"I think it would be fun to explore caves," said Ellise's twelve-year-old brother Neville. "I'm going to join the potholers' club when I'm old enough."

"You have to be at least eighteen," Ellise told him.

"Why did you join the club?" asked Mrs Darby.

"It was Agnes' idea," explained Ellise. "She did an A-level in geology last year, and she thinks that she will find some interesting rock samples in caves. I don't care about rocks, but I think exploring caves will be good exercise. Besides, I hope I'll meet some interesting people."

"You mean boys," said Neville. "That's all you think about these days. Boys, boys, boys."

"Shut up!" said Ellise.

"Stop teasing your sister, Neville," said Mrs Darby.

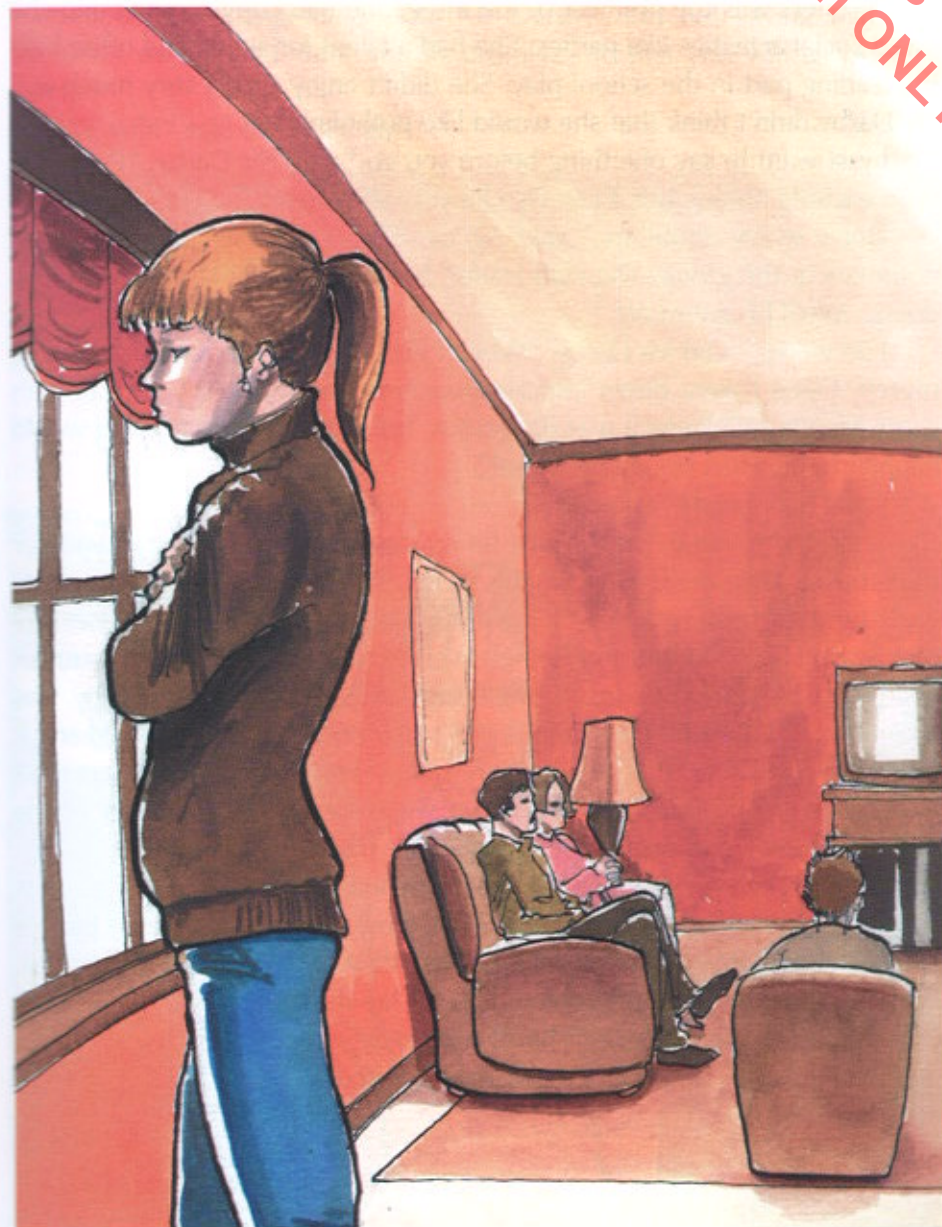
Just then, the doorbell rang. Ellise ran to open the door. Agnes and Fran were standing outside.

"Are you ready to go?" asked Agnes.

"Come inside," Mr Darby called from the sitting room. "I'd like to talk to you before you leave for this meeting."

The three girls went to see what he wanted. They stood in a row in front of the fireplace, impatient to leave but too polite to say so.

Mr and Mrs Darby said hello to the girls. Ellise, Agnes and Fran had been friends since they were little, and they still spent a lot of time together. Sometimes this surprised the Darbys, because the three girls were very different from each other.



Ellise was tall and blonde, like her mother. She liked sports, but she was also a good student. She had just finished A-levels in history and sociology, and she planned to go to university in September. Agnes Snow was short and dark. She was serious, rather shy and not as outgoing as her friends. Fran Winters was the prettiest of the three. She had curly red hair and she loved social activities like parties. She had a talent for acting and often held the leading part in the school play. She didn't enjoy sports very much and Mr Darby didn't think that she would like potholing.

"I just want to say one thing before you go," said Mr Darby. "Potholing is an exciting hobby, but it can also be very dangerous."

"Don't worry about us," said Agnes. "There are lots of experienced potholers in the group. The club leader, Mr Brady, really knows what he's doing. We'll be quite safe."

"I do worry," said Mr Darby. "When I was young, I used to go potholing myself. Once I went down into an abandoned tin mine in Cornwall with some friends. We knew it was dangerous, but we were sure nothing would happen to us. How wrong we were!"

"What happened?" asked Fran.

Mr Darby frowned. "In the past tin miners used to go a long way under the ground. They made long tunnels to get the tin. Sometimes the tunnels went through solid rock, so they were quite safe, but in other places the rock wasn't so solid and the tunnels were weak. Then they used wooden boards to support the tunnel walls and ceilings," said Mr Darby and continued, "Unfortunately, wood doesn't last forever. It becomes old and it rots. The tin mine that we explored was very old. The miners had abandoned it fifty years before. When we were inside, a section of the tunnel fell down and two of my friends were trapped behind it."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Ellise. "What happened to them?"

"We went out to get help," said Mr Darby. "It took the rescue party a whole day to clear the fallen rock so that they could get my friends out. Paul, my best friend, had a broken leg. He lay there for twenty-four hours with a big rock on his leg, and he almost died."

"What happened to your other friend?" asked Fran.

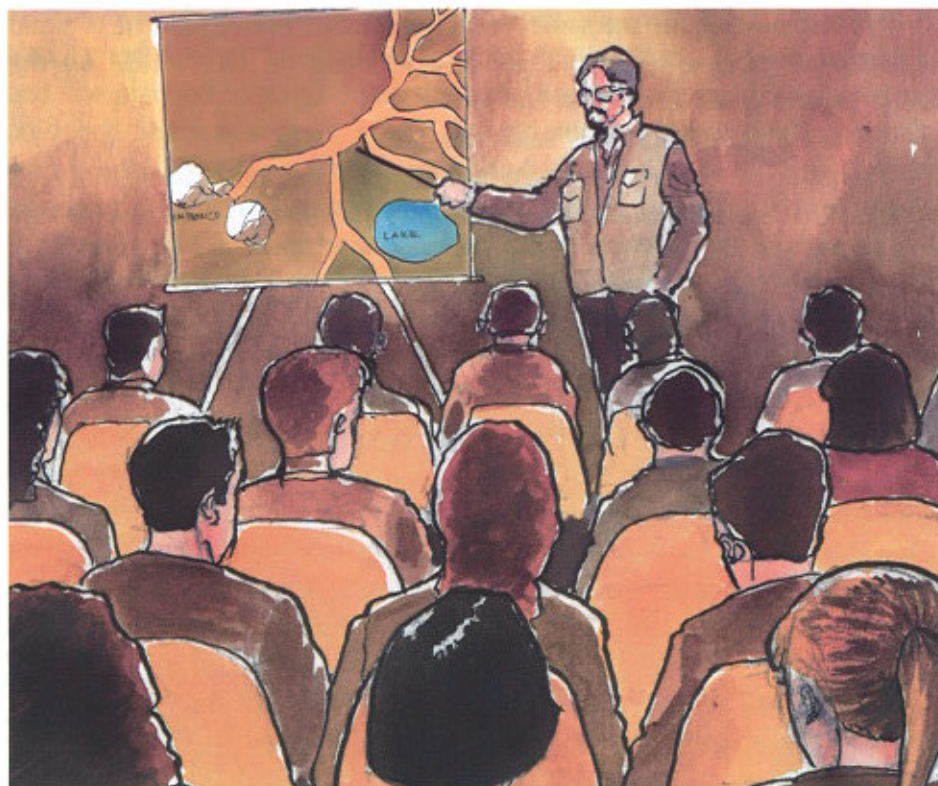
"He was never quite the same," said Mr Darby. "Even today, he is afraid of enclosed places. He won't go in a lift, and he won't ride on the Underground when he goes to London."

"What a frightening story!" said Fran.

"Potholing is dangerous," said Mr Darby. "I'm not saying that you shouldn't do it, but I want you to promise me that you will all be very careful."

"We will!" said the three girls.





CHAPTER 2

Agnes drove the other girls to the Derbyshire Potholers' Club, which was located in a Victorian building in central Derby. The meeting had already begun by the time the girls arrived, so they sat in the last row of chairs.

Mr Brady, the club leader, stopped what he was saying to welcome the girls. "We are planning a trip next weekend," he told them. "We're going to explore a cave in the Peak District National Park. We'll leave here early on Saturday morning and go directly to the park. Then we'll spend the night in Buxton, a small town nearby. Who is interested in coming with us?"

About fifteen people raised their hands. Mr Brady passed a piece of paper around so that they could write down their names. He needed this information so that he could reserve hotel rooms for everyone.

"The cave we are going to explore is very interesting," said Mr Brady. "I have been inside it once before, and it has a lot of beautiful stalactites and stalagmites. There are also many fossils of ancient leaves and insects."

"That's wonderful!" whispered Agnes to her friends. "I can't wait to see them!"

"The cave was discovered in 1979," continued Mr Brady, "but it hasn't been completely explored yet. There are over fifteen miles of underground passages, and there is at least one underground lake. We're going to explore a new passage, so it should be quite exciting. Who knows what we'll find?"

Mr Brady showed the club members a map of the cave. "This map isn't complete," he explained. "It only shows the parts that other people have explored. After our trip, we will be able to add our own information to it." He showed the group where they would begin their trip, in a large cave not far from the entrance. The map showed the beginning of a passage, but it didn't show where it went.

