



Lost in the Cave — Found But Not Saved

TOM AND BECKY HAD STARTED THROUGH THE BRANCHING CAVE WITH the other children. Then they had had enough of the games with the others. They had walked farther, talking, and reading the writing on the walls. People had put their names there. Tom and Becky also put their names on the wall.

They came to a place where a small stream of water fell over the rocks. Tom went behind the waterfall, to let his light shine through for Becky's pleasure.

Behind this waterfall Tom found an opening leading down, and he wanted to discover where this branch of the cave went. He made a mark on the wall to guide their return, and started down with Becky following.

They continued farther and farther, making marks where they turned into a new branch, and discovering many wonderful new parts of the cave. One great room was full of hundreds of **bats**, which were hanging, asleep, on the walls. When the children entered, the bats came flying at the lights, and the children ran.

They came to a dark lake, and sat down at the edge. Now, for the first time, they felt the deep quiet of the place.

Becky said, "It is a very long time since I heard the others."

"Becky, we are far below them, and far north, or south, or east, or west. We can't hear them here."

Becky was afraid. "We should return. Can you find the way, Tom?"

"I think that I can. But there are those bats. A different way would be better."

"We must not get lost. It would be fearful!"

They started. But every turn now seemed strange. Becky's tears began to fall.

They stopped. Tom shouted. The answer was a deep quiet. It increased Becky's fear, and Tom began now to feel afraid. Becky said, "We must return to the lake and then go through the room full of bats. It would be better than being lost."

But Tom said, "Becky, I have been a fool!" He had not remembered to make any marks. He had not expected to return to the lake.

"Tom, Tom, we are lost! We are lost! We never can get out of this fearful place! Oh, why did we leave the others?"

She dropped to the ground and wept so loudly that Tom feared that she might die. He sat down beside her and put his arms around her. He said that he was sorry, that he should never have brought her so far into the cave. Then she said that she also had been wrong; they had both been wrong to come so far.

They started to walk again. Each had a light. Now they decided to use only one light, and to save the other. They walked until they could go no farther without resting. They talked of home, and their friends, and their beds, and they talked of sunlight. Becky's tears started again. And then she was asleep.

Tom watched her. Slowly her face grew peaceful, and then he felt some peace.

She opened her eyes, laughing—but suddenly the laugh ended. "Oh, I wish that I had never, never opened my eyes again! Oh, Tom! Do not look at me like that! I shall not say that again."

“We are going to find the way,” Tom said. “We are going to try.”

They rose and started to walk, hand in hand and without hope. Tom said that they must go quietly, and listen for falling water. They found it, and sat down to rest again. Becky said:

“Tom, I am very hungry!”

Tom had saved a piece of the picnic cake. He took it from his pocket and divided it. They had cold water to drink. After eating and drinking, Becky was ready to move again.

But Tom said, “Becky, I must tell you. Our light is almost finished. We must stay here, where there is water.”

Again Becky wept. Then a new thought came to her. “Tom, they will hunt for us! Perhaps they are hunting for us now. When would they discover that we were not with the others? On the boat?”

“It will be dark on the boat. But your mother will know that you have not come home.”

Now Tom learned that Mrs. Thatcher did not expect Becky to return home that night.

Then their last light failed, and darkness was complete.

Becky wept a long time in Tom’s arms. Neither knew how long she wept. Then both opened their eyes in the darkness and knew that they had been sleeping. Again they did not know how much time had passed.

Tom said that it might be Sunday. It might be a day later. But Becky would not talk. Her hopes were gone.

The hours passed. They were hungry again. Tom had saved most of his share of the cake. He divided it.

Then they heard a sound like a distant shout. Tom answered. It came again. They started moving carefully toward it. But they arrived at an edge of rock, where the floor fell away. They could go no farther. They listened. The distant shout was now more distant. And then they did not hear it, again.

They returned to the place where they had water to drink. Time passed. After sleeping again, when they opened their eyes, they thought that another day must have passed. They were very hungry.

Now Tom had a new idea. The cave had many small branches near them. Tom decided to learn about them. That would be better than sitting and doing nothing. He had some string in his pocket. He tied an end of this to a rock near the little waterfall. Then he and Becky started to walk carefully away. They let the string fall behind them. It would be a guide for their return.

After twenty steps, they came to a hole in the rock floor. Tom went down on his knees and felt below. Then he put his hands and his head as far as possible around the corner to look.

At that moment a human hand, holding a light, appeared from behind a rock not far away!

Tom shouted.

At once a body followed the hand. It was Indian Joe!

Tom could not move because of fear. He was deeply thankful to see Indian Joe run away.

He did not tell Becky what he had seen or why he had shouted.

They returned to the waterfall. But after another long wait and another sleep, Tom decided to try moving again. They were very hungry now. He thought that perhaps a week had passed.

Becky was not strong enough to go with him. She asked him to return often. She also asked him to return when all hope was gone, and to hold her hand until she died. Tom promised.

He kissed her. Then, with the string in his hand, he started on his hands and knees through one of the openings in the rock. He was sick with fear and he had no hope.