

Graham's Surprise Adventure

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Graham had never worn gloves before.

"You'll need them," said his mum, as they set out from the carpark. "You never know what you'll meet in the cave."

They took the track from the carpark that led up the hill. Bats in the trees overhead screeched and some started to fly off on their evening adventures. It was beginning to get dark.

The steps down to the cave were very, very old and partly broken. Graham was keen to explore and so went ahead, but creak and then crash. He fell. His arm scraped against the rocks at the entry and then he found himself rolling down into the dark. He rolled on and on, deep into the cave until he landed on a big pile of sand on the floor of the cave. Bruised and shocked he lay there for a moment. He could hear his mum screaming, but it seemed a long way away. How far had he fallen? He had no idea. He was stunned.

No bones broken, just feeling very bruised, he pulled off one of his gloves and reached into his pocket. The torch! Yes he still had the torch. When he turned it on he could see that his glove was badly ripped. Just as well, he thought. My hand could have been ripped off.

He shone the torch around. He was in a deep cavern. He had fallen through a hole in its roof. There was no way back. He tried calling out to his mum, but there was no answer. "Where was she?" he thought. "Perhaps she's gone to get help."

At one end of the cavern there was an opening and Graham could hear water. He slowly rose to his feet. No problem with head room. The cavern must have been at least four or five times his height. So he moved towards the opening, watching carefully that he did not stumble or slip. When he managed to squeeze through the opening, he found himself in another cavern, bigger still.

He shone the torch around. Suddenly he noticed two shiny eyes looking at him from a ledge. An animal! Should he be scared? He walked slowly towards it, but just as he was getting closer, it ran off through another opening. Too big for a rat. A cat? Something else? But it must have come from somewhere outside, thought Graham. So he decided to follow – very, very carefully. Soon he found himself in another cavern and there was a stream running along the floor of the cavern.

As he stepped over some smooth rocks which the water had worn down over hundreds of years, he felt a damp feeling on his neck and then something scratching at his skin. He ripped it off. It was a large grasshopper, all black. "I hope there are no more," he said to himself. On he went until he saw something move. He turned his torch on it. It was a large sack hanging from a pointed rock, moving slightly in the wind which sometimes wafted into the cavern.

Graham repositioned some stones so he could climb up to see inside. There inside was a box all covered in gold and a sword. He carefully removed the box and set it on a rock in front of him and tried to open it. That was difficult. Was it locked? Or had it been there so long that it had become stuck. He found a sharp stone and prised it open. Inside was a golden chain and hanging on it was a very large red stone that looked like it was made of glass.

When Graham touched it, it felt warm. As he squeezed it, the cavern became lighter. He looked up and there on the ceiling he saw the figure of a woman. It moved as though he was watching a film. Graham was so shocked, he dropped the stone and suddenly it was all gone. He was alone with his torch. This time he picked up the golden chain and hung it around his neck and held on tight to the stone and sure enough, again the woman appeared.

As Graham held the warm stone in his hand, the woman turned her head and began to look at him. Graham was astonished. "I am peace," she said in a very quiet and soothing tone. "You don't need to be afraid." Graham wasn't sure: should he be afraid?

"There is blood," she said. "There is blood in the village. There is war. There is fighting. And now they want to kill each other and destroy the land. The trees are weeping. The crops fail. The ground is crying out. When will it end?"

Graham listened. This was a very sad story. "My children," she said. "My children!" And then she looked very intently at Graham. "You are the chosen one," she said. "You have found the treasure. Deep in the box you will find a key. You must go into the village and unlock the gate in the house of hope and summon people to a feast."

Graham was flabbergasted. "Me, me? What can I do? I'm lost. I fell into this cave," he said.

"Yes, you," she said. "I have chosen you. Go to the village." She then pointed to the animal he had seen only fleetingly. Yes, Graham was right, it was a cat. "You must follow Felix. Do not be distracted. Do not let anyone stop you or turn aside. You must go swiftly. It is night. There is moonlight. Use your torch only if you really must. But go now quickly!"

Graham clutched the red stone, reached into the bag, found the key, and also an ancient scroll which it was too dark to read, even by torchlight. He set out along the floor of the cave, following Felix, the cat. The cave seemed to go on forever, but then with a meow Felix led Graham to an opening and as he looked up the darkness was different. There was, indeed, the moon, and stars. He turned off his torch.

Soon they reached the edge of the village. A crowd was approaching with swords and shouting, "We hate them. Let's kill them and set fire to their houses." Felix jumped up the nearest tree and Graham hid behind it until the crowd passed by. He could smell the smell of hate, like burning blood. "Blood, blood". Yes, that's what she said, he remembered.

They started off again and soon came to a house where someone had climbed onto the roof and another had climbed up to some windows. They were wanting to break in and steal what was inside.

They moved by swiftly. Next they came to the village park and there under some trees were some people looking wretched. Some could not walk. Some were very old. Some looked very sick. And some people were shouting to them: "Go away we don't want you here!"

That made Graham feel very uncomfortable. In the centre of the village was a big old house overgrown with creepers, like no one had been there for years. There was a sign, badly weathered and hanging from the gate. It was broken. Graham could decipher the letters OPE. "Open," he thought. But it didn't open. He felt in his pocket and there he found the key. With the key he opened the gate. It shook, as though it was opening a hole in the earth itself. The shaking was so great that Graham fell head first through the gate into the deep garden behind the wall. The shaking seemed never to stop and Graham found himself, it seemed, wrapped in large leaves and flowers which swallowed him up and soon he was fast asleep.

He lay there all through the night. He didn't hear the fighting, the crying, the shouting. He woke to the simple sound of Felix purring near his head and pawing him gently on the face. Graham rubbed his eyes. The sun was up. He looked around. There was his torch and the key and the scroll. What was in the scroll?

He unrolled it and it read: "The finder of this scroll must open the gate of hope, find the trumpet under the door and use it to call all the people of the village together." Graham look beneath the door and there was a trumpet. "No way I can blow that trumpet," he thought. "Spider webs in it." He picked it up and wiped it on his shirt. He found a stick to clear the spider webs. Some very annoyed spiders came running out. "But I've never blown a trumpet," he thought. His hand touched the red stone, still hanging around his neck. Again it turned warm and he heard that woman's voice: "You must not fail us now!"

So Graham blew air through the trumpet. "That can't be right," he thought. "How do you blow a trumpet?" He tried and he tried and finally, pressing his lips close together, he blew again and there was the trumpet sound. It echoed not once but twice, three times and kept ringing out across the village.

Soon he saw them coming. They came from all directions. There were the people he had seen with their swords. The very poor and sick whom he had seen in the park came hobbling, some being carried. The burglars he saw on the roof and at the window were there. They were all gathered at the gate. There must have been 5000 of them.

"What am I to do?" wondered Graham. "Why are they coming here – to me? To me? What am I to do?"

As he climbed up onto the wall to be able to see them all, he clutched his red stone tightly. "Listen to them," said the woman.

One by one they came forward. "You have opened the gate of hope" said one. "You have opened the gate of peace" said another. "You have opened the gate of love" said another. As Graham looked on, he saw the fighters drop their swords and move over to shake hands and embrace the people

they had been fighting. He saw the people who had been shouting at the poor people of the park go over to help them sit comfortably. He saw the burglars bringing back to a family the things they had stolen. Then he saw saw people open the bags. A feast for breakfast. They all shared.

Graham was puzzled. Why did these people change? He thought about Jesus changing mean people into kind people. He thought about stories of finding lost lambs, of welcoming home lost sons, of little mean men like Zak become big generous people.

Again he clutched the stone tightly and again he heard the woman's voice. "You have seen a miracle," she said. "When people open the gate of hope and peace and love, they change. They stop hating and killing and stealing."

Graham looked around. Where was she? Where was he?

Then suddenly he felt someone pulling at his arm and shaking him. "He's alright," a voice said. Graham wasn't in a village at all. He was lying in some sand at the bottom of a cave, stunned. A St John's ambulance man was bent over him. "Are you alright, son? You've had a very dangerous fall. You're lucky to be alive."

He had to be carried, hauled up on a winch, to where his mother was waiting. She had tears of joy. "We thought we had lost you," she said. "We wondered where you were." Graham wept too for joy, looked into his mother's face. It seemed familiar in a new way. "That was an adventure I'll never forget," he said. Even his cat seemed overjoyed to see him. Graham smiled as he followed her down the hill.