

Lomel's Cavern

Chapter 10

A Light through the Cave

By Gordon Saunders

Joshua hadn't meant to get so close to the hole into which the little stream was falling, but he had been very thirsty and had needed to kneel quite close to its edge in order to put his cupped hands under the stream. As he started to slip into the hole, he had called to Marie, and the next thing he knew, he had landed with a little splash and a soft thud at the bottom. The bottom turned out not to be very far from the top. He could see the sky with no difficulty, and he could even see around himself. He was in a small cave that had a mouth farther down the mountain through which still more light was coming in. Joshua decided that it would probably be easier to get out from there. He was walking in the direction of the light when he accidentally found a real hole.

This time he did not strike bottom soon. In fact, he tumbled and rolled, fell straight down, struck rocks and bumped his sides, and then rolled and tumbled some more, until he got onto a great, long, wet slide that went on and on and on. All light vanished, and the only sounds he could hear were those of his body sliding over the rocks and his beating heart.

When he finally stopped, he sat up, groaning, and rubbed himself with his hands. He was sore all over, but there didn't seem to be any missing or broken parts.

"Whew!" he said. "What a ride."

Then the feeling that he and Marie had felt earlier, the feeling that someone was with him, came to him again, very strongly.

Come, said a voice in his mind. *Follow*.

He did not feel compelled, but he wanted to do what the voice said. He didn't know where to go, of course, for it was totally dark and he hadn't any idea where he was. I wonder what I should follow, he thought.

Follow the sound of water, he felt in his mind.

Okay, he thought, but strange. Talking in my mind? Or is it just me?

It is perfectly normal, the thought voice continued, *not strange at all. And the voice of which you are now aware is the voice of one outside yourself who is not you.*

“Can you hear anything I think?” Joshua blurted.

Only if you let me, the thought voice said, slowly and carefully.

Well, I’m not so sure..., thought Joshua. Instantly he felt alone.

“I’m not sure I want to be alone, either,” he said aloud.

Then, as he felt a song like last night’s in his mind, he began also to hear what seemed like water dripping into a pool. He started in its direction.

Since he had no idea how large a place he was in, he raised his hand over his head as he got up. The ceiling was so low that he could not walk upright. So, placing a hand before his face, he crawled on hands and knees toward the sound of the water.

His way was slightly downhill over a smooth, wavy surface, with occasional pebbles or small rocks. He moved steadily onward, stopping now and then to hear the sound of the “plop, plop” he was following. He had been going like that for awhile when his hand bumped a wall of stone. What? he thought. How can that be?

Come, the thought voice repeated.

Joshua moved to the right, feeling the wall as he went, until it seemed that he had turned completely around and the water sound was behind him. Then he sat against the wall, wearily, and dropped his hands into his lap. Dead end. But then where is the water sound coming from? He sat quietly for awhile, thinking in the dark, and began to get drowsy.

He didn’t quite get to sleep, however, when he heard a series of drips and gurgles and drops and plops growing steadily louder. He also felt, in growing volume, the same multitude of voices Marie had described in the large glowing cavern yesterday. They were trying to get his attention. This was important. He had to hurry. He placed his hands before his face and started to get up. Taking a few confused steps, he stumbled over something on the floor. He didn’t fall hard, but one of his hands went right through the floor. Or had it just fallen into another hole?

“Boy,” he said, “they’re right. I am clumsy!”

Even though you do not move quickly for a soft-one, the thought voice said, almost with a chuckle.

“What?” said Joshua. “Oh, it’s you again. Where are you, anyway?”

Come and see, the voice replied.

Joshua tried to see into the hole. He thought he detected the faintest glimmering of light, though he couldn't tell its origin. Maybe my eyes are playing tricks on me like Marie thought, he said to himself.

No, the thought voice said, *you are not deceived*.

The sound of water was also coming from the hole, so Joshua put his feet into it, holding the edge, and tried lowering himself. He couldn't reach the bottom even when he stretched himself as far as possible. But he decided he would take a chance, let himself down, and drop. The strange sense of peace that he had felt the night before was asserting itself once more. It seemed to him that someone had prepared for his coming and that everything would work out. He lowered himself and let go.

It wasn't very far; only a three or four feet drop. He picked himself up and looked for the light. It could be seen dimly in the same direction from which the now louder sound of water was coming. He began cautiously in that direction.

After he had gone quite a distance, he got the impression that the light was reflected off a smooth wall where this passage ended. He could see that it opened into a larger area where the light was to be found. Then, as he moved on, the floor of the passage began to slant steeply up toward the opening. He lay on his stomach and craned his neck to look through the opening past the end of the passage. He realized that he was seeing the ceiling of a huge cavern.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "Talk about color! If Marie could only see this!" Joshua just lay on the floor of the passage, gazing. Before him was a huge stalactite hanging in a cavern far larger than any in Mammoth Cave. At the top of that cavern, gleaming and glittering, was a fantastic array of other stalactites of innumerable shapes, sizes, and textures. There were also clusters of brilliant crystals of deep blue-green, crimson, and amber. In one area, he saw what looked like a field of roses in amber and white, spiked here and there with a glowing icicle. In another area he saw beautifully delicate cones draped on cones, looking like little, upside-down pagodas. He was caught in a rapture, gazing.

Each stalactite and each gem or flower shimmered with continually changing colors which clearly came from a source moving about beneath them. And each one took its little flash of light and passed it on to a neighbor who, in turn, passed it on, and round and round.

By now, the sound of the water which Joshua had been following, was a jubilant chorus of drippings and droppings, gurgles, plops, splishes, splashes, and little watery sighs. Droplets

fell constantly from stalactites; their dripping fall adding to the light show as each drop caught the light, glittering brilliantly as it fell. Joshua was caressed by the soft, rainbow reflections thrown from the cavern's ceilings by ripples in a large lake below. Yet as the scene warmed its way into his heart, his reverie was gently broken by the sound of a voice within him.

Joshua.

This was a totally different voice than the one he had heard before. It conveyed a sense of terrible beauty and power. Joshua blinked, shook his head slightly, and began to climb the rise which separated him from the cavern.

It was not a difficult climb, this little rise, but Joshua could do it only with great effort. His body seemed reluctant to work. As he neared the top, the light did not grow brighter, but he felt it would blind him. The cave did not become warmer, but he felt the heat would scald him. He covered his face with his arm, and still something kept him back. The very air of the cavern pressed against him.

Still...he continued to feel the song he and Marie had felt the night before, along with the soothing call of the voice that had led him through the passage, so he went on. He had felt a little tingle of dread when he had first seen the cavern ceiling; nothing serious, in fact he had been barely aware of it. But now it swelled to near panic.

The comforting song swelled, too, but it could not put out the dread. Yet slowly, methodically, Joshua plodded up the rise. It ended in a sort of wall. Over this wall, feeling shame and great fear, his arm still in front of his face as if to fend off a blow, he raised his head, miserably, at length.

This is the end of me now, he thought.

He could not see what was below him, but even his arm in front of his eyes could not completely keep out the light thrust toward him. And the light was the least of it. Joshua was shaken to his very core with the swift realization that here was something vastly greater than himself; than anything he had ever known. Here was something before which all else was struck to utter insignificance; something to which he would go no matter what barred the way. Everything in him wanted to go to it. He fairly burst for love of it. But his body would not work at all.

Come down, Joshua, said the beautiful terrible voice. *I have been waiting for you.*