

The Dilemma in the Cave

It had seemed like hours, but only two minutes had passed since they heard the dull thud of Steven's body hitting the mud at the bottom of the pit in the cave. Exploring the old stalactite cave had seemed like such a good idea to the three young adventurers. Being in places where, perhaps, no one had ever been was, by far, the greatest excitement they could imagine on this summer day.

"All we really need is a flashlight," Mark had said, "and maybe something for lunch. We'll be in there only for a few hours." And so, travelling lightly, they had gone deep into the earth to find whatever awaited them. All of a sudden, it didn't seem to have been such a good idea after all.

Steven lay, unconscious, at the bottom of the pit. At least, they thought he was unconscious, but there was really no way to be sure. He could have hit his head on a rock, and . . . Well, they couldn't really think beyond that. He *must* be unconscious, and he would be all right, if only they could get him out. But with no ropes, how could they get an unconscious body out of a deep pit?

Mark broke the heavy silence that hung in the air. Clearing his throat, he said what they both already knew. "One of us will have to go back for help, and one of us will have to stay here. We can't get him out ourselves, and we can't leave him alone."

James pointed out that they had only one flashlight; therefore, they both would have to

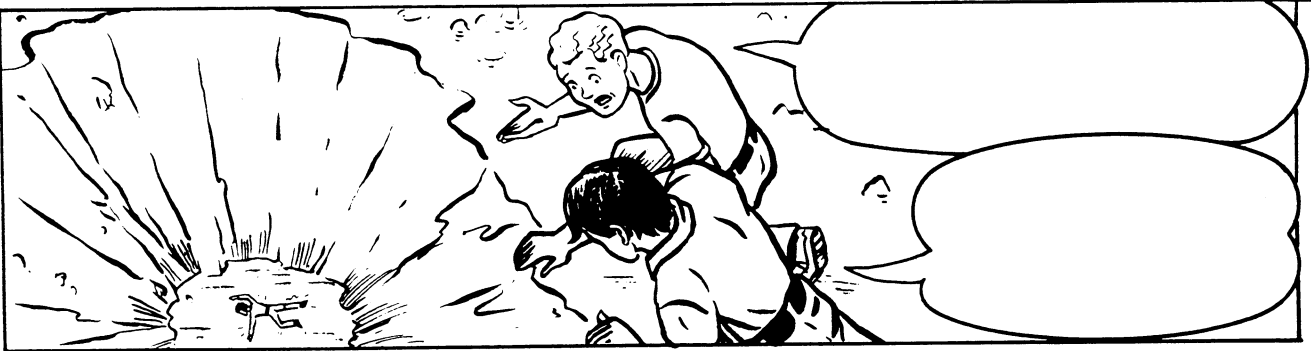
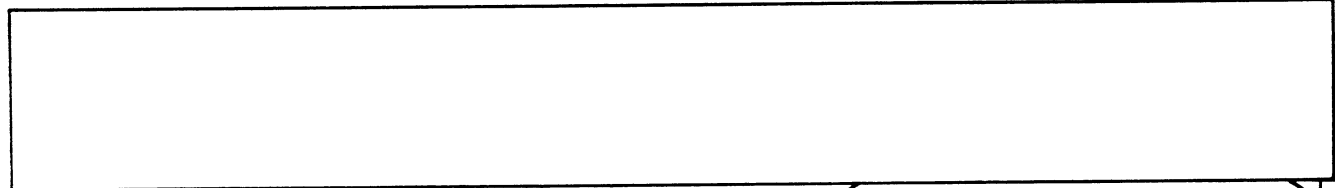
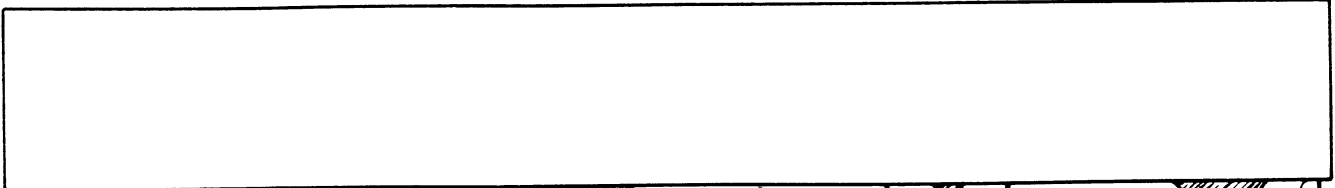
go for help. It was unfortunate, but it was necessary to leave Steven alone. No one could be expected to sit there in the dark, next to the pit where Steven lay, waiting for help to return.

Again, Mark was the one to point out the obvious. "We can't just leave him here. We both know that someone will have to stay. It would only be for about four or five hours—two hours to get back to the entrance, about one hour to get help, and two hours to get back here."

James was afraid to go back to the entrance alone, even with the flashlight; but he was even more afraid to remain in the dark alone. He had read about people's hair turning white from fear of being alone in the darkness, wondering if they would be rescued. He had also read about people having visions of things, even in pitch darkness, that weren't really there. No, staying in the dark alone was out of the question.

But the thought of travelling alone for two hours to get to the entrance of the cave wasn't too appealing, either. What if he, too, tripped and fell into a pit? Then all three of them would be stranded in the cave. James felt that Mark should definitely go with him for help.

Mark finally made the decision. "There are no two ways about it, James," he said. "Steven is our friend, he's hurt, and this is what we'll have to do . . ."





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I. WORDS

The boys were exploring in a stalactite cave. Stalactites look like something else in nature. To find out what they look like, fill in the blanks in the following sentences based on the story.

- They carried their lunches and one _____ Q _____ .
 Steven fell into a pit in the Q _____ .
 Steven was not in pain because he was _____ Q _____ .
 It would take two hours to get back to the _____ Q _____ of the cave.
 James was afraid of being _____ Q _____ in the darkness.
 James had read about people's hair turning _____ Q _____ because of fear.
 If James tripped and fell, all three boys would be Q _____ in the cave.

Now, read the circled letters, and write them in the space below.

Stalactites look something like _____ .

II. IDEAS

Use the back of this paper or another sheet of paper to write the following.

- A. Write your own ending to this story. Tell what you think Mark's decision was, how Mark and James carried it out, and what happened to Steven.
- B. In the story, Mark and James face what is called a "moral dilemma". This means that they had to decide what to do, when the right choice was not clear; they could have done several things, any one of which could be considered "right". Have you ever had to make a decision like that? Tell about it.
- C. What do you think Steven would have wanted his friends to do?

III. COMPREHENSION QUIZ

A. Number the events in the order in which they happened.

- 1 The three boys decided to explore the stalactite cave.
- 4 Mark made the final decision.
- 3 James said they'd have to go together for help.
- 2 Steven fell into a pit.

B. Circle T if the sentence is true. Circle F if the sentence is false.

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| 1. Mark had fallen into a pit. | T | F |
| 2. They had only one flashlight. | T | F |
| 3. James wanted to go for help alone. | T | F |
| 4. Steven said he was not hurt. | T | F |
| 5. Mark said that someone had to stay with Steven. | T | F |

C. Underline the correct answer.

1. You can tell from the story that:
 - a. James was afraid of the dark.
 - b. Mark came from a large family.
 - c. Steven's leg was broken.
2. In this story *lightly* means:
 - a. brightly
 - b. with little weight
 - c. happily