

The Cave

by Shadow

Deep underground, Ron Weasley discovers something that utterly terrifies him.

One Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Excerpt from the diary of Ronald Weasley, dated 30 October:

I am writing this down to the best of my recollections.

My hands are shaking so badly I can hardly read what I am writing, but I must get this sorted out, even if it is only in my head.

It all started on a beautiful day about two weeks ago. I was taking my vacation up in the Scottish highlands. I was exploring up on the moors, when I came across a small dark opening in a little hill. As I am a naturally curious person, I decided to investigate the crevice and see if I could fit through. It was a tight squeeze, but I got in.

Despite the bright sunlight behind me, the cave was extremely dark. Even casting Lumos didn't help much. The darkness seemed to absorb the light from my wand tip.

From what I could make out, I was standing in a vestibule of sorts. Beautiful columns of stalagmites surrounded me, the crystal-like growths catching the dim light and twinkling like stars. At the far end was a passageway, more like a crack in the rock than a hole. There was a strange, rustling sound coming from that direction.

Intrigued, I approached it. If I turned my head to the side and took tiny, sideways steps, I could just squeeze through. After about five minutes of this shuffling movement, the passage widened, and the ceiling dropped, forcing me to crawl on my hands and knees. There was no place to turn around; it was either carry on or go backwards through the crack. I looked at my watch. I had an hour before I was expected back at the hotel for dinner. I grasped my wand in my mouth and crawled forward.

After what felt like ages, the passage ended abruptly, opening up into what could only be a huge room. Here, my wand light did not reach further than a foot in front of me. I decided to explore around the walls for five minutes before Apparating back to the hotel for my dinner. I could always come back and explore another day.

Just inside the doorway was a huge, smooth boulder. It seemed a bit strange that it would be there. Most of the rock walls and ceilings were rough and craggy. Just past the boulder, the walls glittered with a strange, iridescent light. When I reached out to touch them, they were warm, almost hot, and not cold like I had expected them to be.

Suddenly I felt a cold, creeping chill race down my back. I felt like someone was watching me. I decided that was enough exploring for one day, closed my eyes, turned on the spot and prepared for the discomfort of Apparating.

Nothing happened. I tried it two more times before I realised I would have to go back the long way. The strange feeling of being watched stayed with me the whole way back to the entrance. That's when I realised with a shock the rustling sound had stopped.

xXx

For the next week, I was kept busy with activities and sightseeing tours I had already booked and paid for, but I could not get the cave out of my head. I wanted to see what was in that huge room and find the source of the mysterious rustling.

On the last day of my vacation, I went to the local Muggle hardware store and bought a few supplies a big battery-operated torch, a long length of sturdy rope and a disposable camera. At the hotel, I put on my sturdy walking shoes and put the pocketknife my dad had given me for my birthday in my pocket just in case.

When I got to the Entrance Hall of the cave, I took a minute to fasten one end of the rope to a thick stalagmite and the other end around my waist. I wasn't sure what was in the big room, but if I fell down a crevice or something, I was going to make sure I could get back out. I took out the camera and took a few pictures of the rock formations. I wanted to show them to Hermione when I got back home.

The torch was slightly better than my wand light. I could see a bit further this time. I cautiously approached the crack. The rustling was back today. I took a deep breath, levitated the torch to float just ahead of me and was about to slip through when I heard a strange noise. It was a weird grating sound, like rock moving on rock. It happened so quickly, I just shook my head, told myself I was imagining things and carried on through.

When I reached the room, everything was quiet. Even the rustling had stopped again. Every step I took echoed hollowly back at me. Again, I took out my camera. I took some pictures of the boulder, the walls and even shot a few of the darkness beyond, hoping something interesting would get caught on film.

I followed the same path I had taken the last time, sticking to the strangely warm walls. The torch light still would not let me see very far into the room.

When I was about ten meters into the room, I got that strange sense of someone watching me again. I shook it off. It was a cave, down in the middle of the earth. Who would be here, after all? I can only think back and wonder at my naivety. I wish I had listened to the little voice that told me to go back.

I must have stood there for another ten minutes, listening, when with a sickening crash of breaking glass and plastic, my torch fell out of the air and smashed to a thousand pieces. I think at that point I was too numb to do anything. I just stood there in the boiling darkness, my head moving from side to side in an effort to see something, anything.

Then I heard it. Behind me and to my right, the sound of rock scraping against rock. It seemed to be coming from the direction of the passage.

Very slowly, I drew out my wand, waving it uselessly in front of me, before it occurred to my frozen brain to cast Lumos.

I almost wish I hadn't. For a split second, my wand light caught a pair of glowing red eyes. I screamed and bolted for the passage.

It was blocked. The big boulder that was next to it had been moved. There was hardly room for me to get through. I clawed and scabbled at the rock, determined to fit my body through the space. The next thing I knew, I was crawling up the passage towards daylight, towards safety.

Suddenly, the rope around my waist pulled tight. I couldn't go any further. Terror was coursing through my blood; frightened whimpers clawed their way up my throat. I'm not sure how long I fought against the rope before I realised the end that had trailed behind me must have been caught under the boulder. I scrambled for my pocketknife and began to saw at the rough rope.

Slowly, I became aware that I was sliding backwards, back towards the room and the unknown thing inside it. It had the rope and was pulling me back. I screamed. It felt like my vocal cords were ripping my throat. I sawed frantically at my tether, all the while sliding closer to my nightmare.

Finally, the rope fell free. As I scrambled, the rustling began again, louder than ever before. This time it was accompanied by a blast of wind, carrying the stench of death. My eyes watered, and I gagged on the smell, not stopping my crazed scramble. When I got to the crack, I shoved myself through, only vaguely aware of the stinging on the exposed parts of my body.

Then I was out. Through the entrance and out into the daylight. I Apparated to the hotel. How I did not Splinch myself, I have no idea.

I lay where I landed, a quivering heap on the floor. After what felt like a few days, but was only an hour or so, I stood up and packed my things. I had a Portkey to catch. I passed the mirror in the bathroom. I was shocked at what my face looked like. It wasn't the cuts and bruises they were healed up in no time it was the haunted look in my eyes.

xXx

It has been a week since I came back. People keep trying to visit. I don't want to see anyone. I wish they would leave me alone.

I sleep with the lights on all night, when I sleep at all, that is. When I do sleep, I hear the rustling noise again. Only now I can tell what it is: whispering. But when I wake up, I can't remember what they said.

I've developed the pictures from the cave the Muggle way. The ones from the entrance are beautiful. You can see the detail on all the rock formations. The ones from the Room came out pure white, no detail at all. All except one. It is one I shot off into the darkness. That one is pure black, with a pair of evil red eyes glaring back.

I don't like looking at that one. Every time I do, the eyes seem to be a little bit closer. I am terrified of it, but I can't seem to be able to burn it either.

I know now I have to go back. I have to lay this to rest. I can't carry on the rest of my life in this state. I don't want to be alone, but I just can't be with people either.

I've decided to go back tomorrow. I am taking a Portkey, specially set to activate if I say the word "help." Either way, I'm finishing this thing tomorrow.

I'm sure I will be back by tomorrow evening. Then I will write the ending to this terrible chapter here.

xXx

"Harry! What happened? I came as quickly as I could. Your message sounded urgent."

Harry turned to see Hermione running down the hall of the Special Ward at St Mungo's, her eyes huge and frightened.

"I don't know, really. Mrs Weasley asked me to get into Ron's flat because she was really worried about him. He's refused to see anyone since he got back from Scotland last week."

"I know," Hermione replied. "He hasn't been returning all my owls too."

Harry nodded. "Well, when I arrived at his place, at first I thought there was no one there, and then I heard a strange whimpering noise. I found him curled up in a tight ball, staring straight ahead and rocking back and forth. I brought him here."

"What do the Healers say?" Hermione whispered, tears running down her cheeks.

"Something about a catatonic state. They are not sure what caused it."

Hermione turned to look at her other best friend lying in bed, his red hair a shock against his pale face.

"Hermione..." Harry sounded hesitant.

Hermione looked at him expectantly.

"He was clutching this." Harry held out Ron's diary. "I think it might have some answers."

As Hermione opened the diary, a piece of paper fluttered out and fell to the floor.

"Oh my God!" Hermione cried, holding it out to Harry.

Filling the entire photo was a pair of glowing red eyes.

xx

A/N: A huge thanks goes to Southern Witch 69 and Battle of Lissa for beta-ing this for me.