

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

by McKenna Sharrer

It had been two years since this cave fell upon me. Two years of me trying to find a way out. Two years of failure. The walls were jagged, the floor cold, and the darkness overwhelming. *Why am I in this cave*, I thought. I had never asked for it, but maybe I did something to deserve it. Either way, there I was in a seemingly endless cave, alone. I sometimes heard the voices of other people in the cave but I never saw them. It was reassuring to know I wasn't alone in the cave. *Will they ever get out*, I thought.

I had such a little amount of food, I mainly survived on the insects that crawled around me. There were puddles and little pockets of water here and there, but not much else--just darkness. It wasn't a calming or relaxing darkness, either. It was the kind of darkness that makes you feel as though it is cradling you in its arms and each day the grip gets tighter and tighter.

I packed up my bag and headed down a tunnel that curved left. I was so greatly hoping it would lead to light. I could feel each ridged rock under my feet from where my shoes had worn down. The cave split again and this time I followed the right path. It didn't look any different from the left until I got a couple of yards in. It opened up a bit and I could see a small stream flowing down. My eyes lit up and I followed the beautiful little water stream that seemed to go on for miles. Each turn the water took gave me more and more hope it would lead out. I followed the stream for days until it got to a point where I had to kneel down to make my way under a low ceiling and that's when I felt my heart almost give out. *It ended.*

I took off my pack and just cried. "Is this fun for you. Is it? All of this teasing and torturing," I yelled to nobody. It seemed like the stream of water that had become my stream of hope was placed there just to tease me. That night was the first night I felt like giving up.

And that's how it was for months on end. I would keep walking and walking through the monotonous cave. I would sometimes see something that would get my hope up, but it never lasted--until I got to another split. I almost fell to the ground when I saw what it was. Light. It was so dim, so far away, but I saw it, nonetheless. The first real glimmer of hope in two years. If you were to see my face, you wouldn't think I was excited at all, or even happy. It's just that the years spent in this cave have taken a toll on me. I knew I shouldn't get my hopes up, but how can light fool me? My legs were unbelievably weak and my eyes so heavy, but I ran.

I ran and ran and ran and kept running towards the light. The light must have run away from me just as fast because it looked to be no closer. My running slowed, my mind still hopeful, and I continued towards the light. *It was there; I saw it.* And so I continued, even though the light never seemed to get any closer, it was all I had to hold on to.

I kept track of how long I followed the light. I had no way of knowing when night fell or when the next day started, but I knew I had been following that light for months. That little glimmer of hope was the only thing that kept me going.

Even though the light's there, and it seems so close, I can no longer continue. And that's why, now, I am writing this so when people find me, they know I tried. And I know they'll say, "But it's right there. The light's right there. Why would you not continue?"

The thing, that they don't understand, is I have tried to continue through this treacherous cave for so long. It has beaten me, belittled me, and tore my soul away from me. That is why I cannot reach the light out of this cave. Maybe there'll still be a chance for someone to rescue me, but for now, I cannot do this on my own.

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