

The Secret Cave

or, John Lee's Adventure

by Howard Phillips Lovecraft, 1890-1937

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„Now be good children,“ said Mrs. Lee, „While I am away and don't get into mischief.“ Mr. and Mrs. Lee were going off for the day and to leave the two children John, 10 years old, and Alice 2 years old. „Yes,“ replied John.

As soon as the elder Lees were away the younger Lees went down [into the] cellar and began to rummage among the rubbish. Little Alice leaned against the wall, watching John. As John was making a boat of barrel staves the little girl gave a piercing cry as the bricks behind her crumbled away. He rushed up to her and lifted her out screaming loudly. As soon as her screams subsided she said „the wall went away.“

John went up and saw that there was a passage. He said to the little girl, „lets come and see what this is.“

„Yes,“ she said, [and] they entered the place. They could stand up [in] it. The passage was farther than they could see. John went back upstairs and went to the kitchen drawer and got two candles and some matches and then they went back to the cellar passage. The two once more entered. There was plastering on the walls, ceiling and floor. Nothing was visible but a box. This was for a seat. Nevertheless they examined it and found it to contain nothing. They walked on farther and pretty soon the plastering left off and they were in a cave. Little Alice was frightened at first but at her brothers assurance that it was „all right“ she allayed her fears. soon they came to a small box, which John took up and carried. Within pretty soon they came on a boat. In it were two oars. He dragged it with difficulty along with him. Soon they found the passage came to an abrupt stop. He pulled the obstacle away and to his dismay water rushed in in torrents. John was an expert swimmer and long breather. He had just taken a breath, so he tried to rise, but with the box and his sister he found it quite impossible. Then he caught sight of the boat rising [and] he grasped it...

The next he knew he was on the surface, clinging tightly to the body of his sister and the mysterious box. He could not imagine how the water got in but a new peril menaced them. If the water continued rising it would rise to the top. suddenly a thought presented itself. He could shut off the water. He speedily did this and, lifting the now lifeless body of his sister into the boat, he himself clim[b]ed in and sailed down the passage. It was gruesome and uncanny [and] absolutely dark. His candle being put out by the flood and a dead body lying near, he did not gaze about him but rowed for his life. When he did look up he was floating in his own cellar. He quickly rushed up stairs with the body to find his parents had come home. He told them the story.

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The funeral of Alice occupied so much time that John quite forgot about the box;but when they did open it they found it to be a solid gold chunk worth about \$10,000—enough to pay for anything but the death of his sister.
