

The Secret Tunnel



Yavuz DEMİRKIRAN

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Maya clipped her torch to her red backpack strap and checked her map one more time. The school playground was empty after the last bell. Beside her, Leo bounced on his toes, his messy ginger hair sticking up in the wind. Sam adjusted his round glasses and patted his satchel of snacks. "Ready?" Maya asked. Three heads nodded. Today, they would find out where the strange draft under the slide came from.



Leo found the loose paving stone first. He always talked first, and his lopsided grin spread wide. "Listen! Can you hear that whooshing sound?" He lifted the stone, and cool air rushed out. Below was a dark hole just big enough for three curious kids. Maya switched on her torch and shone it down. A narrow tunnel sloped into the earth. "Wow," whispered Sam. "A real secret tunnel!"



Maya went first, drawing a quick map as she crawled. Leo followed, chattering about underground worlds. Sam came last, checking that everyone was okay. The tunnel opened into a wide space, and they all gasped. A tiny railway track ran across the floor, with a little red train waiting. Leo's green eyes went wide. "A miniature railway!" he shouted. "I told you there'd be adventure!"



The little train had a sign: 'Ride to the Glowing Cave.' Leo jumped in first, his orange trainers dangling. Maya wrote 'Train' on her map with a neat arrow. Sam passed out biscuits from his satchel. The train chugged forward, and they rolled through tunnels that sparkled with tiny lights. "This is the best playground secret ever!" Leo laughed. The train stopped at a dark opening, and they stepped out into a cave that glowed.



The cave walls shimmered with stones like trapped stars. Some glowed blue, some green, some soft pink. Maya studied them carefully. "Look," she said, "the bright ones are always next to the dark ones. It's a pattern." She led the way, stepping only on the glowing stones. Leo called out, "Left! Right! Left!" Sam made sure no one slipped. At the far end, a stone door slid open, showing a stairway down.



At the bottom of the stairs, they found a bustling underground market. Stalls sold strange fruits and shiny buttons. Lanterns hung from the ceiling. Sam's hazel eyes sparkled behind his glasses. "It's a whole world down here!" A small stall keeper with a tall hat waved them over. "Lost, are we?" he asked. Maya showed him her map. He nodded. "The way back is through the third passage, but it's tricky."



As they hurried toward the third passage, a low rumble shook the ground. Dust puffed from the walls, and a passage collapsed behind them with a soft thud. When the dust cleared, Maya was on one side, Leo on another, and Sam was somewhere in between. "Everyone okay?" Leo shouted, his voice shaky. "I'm fine!" Maya called. "Me too!" said Sam. But they couldn't see each other. The tunnel had split them apart.



Maya took a deep breath and looked at her map. The tunnel had three branches. She was near the glowing cave. She remembered the pattern of the stones. If she could find the bright ones, they would lead her to the others. She walked carefully, counting each glowing stone. "One, two, three..." Her calm planning had saved them before. Now it would save them again.



Leo was near the miniature railway. The little train sat still on its track. He had to make it go, but the controls were a puzzle. Wires needed connecting, and levers needed pulling in the right order. Leo talked to himself, the way he always did. "Okay, red wire to red hole. Blue to blue. Pull the big lever last." He thought of Maya's lists and Sam's careful checks. He connected the last wire, and the train hummed to life.



Sam found himself in a small cave full of market stalls, but the stall keeper with the tall hat was stuck under a fallen beam. "Help!" the stall keeper cried. Sam's satchel had plasters and snacks, but no tools. He looked around and saw a sturdy pole. He used it as a lever, pushing with all his might. The beam shifted, and the stall keeper scrambled free. "Thank you!" he said. "I know a shortcut to the others. Follow me!"



Maya reached the cave of glowing stones just as Leo arrived on the little train. They hugged tightly. "Where's Sam?" Leo asked. Then they heard a whistle. Leo blew his silver whistle back, three short blasts. Sam's voice echoed from a side tunnel. "I'm here! The stall keeper showed me the way!" They all ran toward the sound and met in a big, bright cavern. The stall keeper waved and disappeared back to his market.



The three friends sat on a rock, catching their breath. Maya unrolled her map. "We need to plan better next time," she said. Leo nodded. "And keep talking. My whistle helped, but I should have stayed closer." Sam smiled. "And I should have checked the ceiling before we ran under it." They all laughed. Then they drew a new map together, marking safe paths and meeting points. "Teamwork," Maya said, "makes every adventure safer."



With their new plan, they found the way back easily. They held hands through the dark parts and called out to each other often. Leo's whistle echoed cheerfully. Sam shared the last of his snacks. Maya's torch lit the way. When they finally crawled out from under the slide, the sun was setting. The playground was empty, but their hearts were full.



The next day at school, they met by the slide. Maya brought a new notebook for maps. Leo wore his whistle, ready to call out. Sam filled his satchel with extra snacks and plasters. "Same time next week?" Leo asked. "Only if we plan first," Maya said. Sam nodded. "And look after each other." They shook hands, a team of three explorers.



They never told anyone about the secret tunnel. It was their special place. But they did share the lesson. When other kids asked why they always played together, Maya said, "Because we make a good team." Leo added, "And it's more fun!" Sam just smiled and handed out biscuits. The playground felt a little more magical, knowing what lay beneath.



And if you ever find a loose paving stone under a slide, listen closely. You might hear a tiny train whistle, or the echo of three friends laughing. But remember: bring a map, a whistle, and a friend who carries plasters. Because the best adventures are the ones we share, and the safest paths are the ones we plan together.