

# **Mark's Way Out**

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# Introduction

A fun adventure story for the curious reader who does not always like the decision a protagonist makes.

Multiple stories and multiple endings, but be wary; death awaits within.

Mark strays from the group as they take a tour of the underground mines below the ruins of an old castle. Wanting adventure, he journeys deeper into the maze of caverns and strange rooms. Soon he hears a booming voice, and it isn't friendly.  
"Get Out!"

## How to use this book

Click on the decision you want Mark to make, this will take you to the correct page to continue the story.

Click on the title Mark's Way Out when you need to go back to the start of the story.

Click on THE END or GO BACK to take you back to your last decision.

Please don't be tempted to navigate this book by trying to use chapters or table of contents or even clicking on an arrow to take you to the physical next page using your device. If you do, you'll get terribly lost.

If the words NEXT PAGE are within the text of your story (the same as the words THE END or GO BACK - provided by the author) then clicking on this is correct. It is a hyperlink that will take you to the next page within the story you have created, rather than the next page in your device.

Links to Mat Clarke and other books

## Mark's Way Out

The flashlight spun and clattered about in a demented circle on the dust covered blue stone, shooting beams of light across all four walls and the many grey cobwebs hanging low with dust from ages past in each corner.

Mark groaned and rubbed his sore knee. His hand came back wet and sticky. Blood, he thought, but it didn't hurt like a graze. He retrieved his dropped flashlight and shone it at the ground where his knee had impacted. Stretching up from a crack in the large dark stones a tree root grew across the floor to climb the nearest wall. Clear liquid poured out of the broken root in a bubbling trickle.

Maybe straying from the group hadn't been such a great idea after all. But the tour guide had bored him into a coma right from the beginning, leading them around showing off little more than dirt and rocks.

Mark had initially been excited at the idea of exploring a ruined castle, and climbing through the ruins underneath. An abandoned mine with tunnels that ran for ages; he and Benny should have been happy for hours.

However, even before he had decided to leave the group and go exploring, he had caught his dad rolling his eyes and yawning as they listened to the guide explain about who had lived and worked here, their history, and then more boring stuff about how much rock and dirt had been excavated. Mark decided he would see nothing on this tour except big open caverns if he didn't go his own way.

Benny hadn't been much fun today either. He didn't even care that everyone would probably die from being so bored if they didn't get to see something interesting soon. No gold, no exploring. Nothing. At least if there was a chance of finding the smallest amount of gold, that may have been something.

In the end he had made his own adventure. A tunnel led off a different way to the group and looked too interesting to resist. One peek inside and he saw that it went to some rooms with archways leading off to even more dark rooms. Mark had called out to Benny to come along, but his older cousin had just said to stop lagging back.

Mark almost did come running when called, like always, then changed his mind deciding his cousin wouldn't make up his mind for him this time. Today he was going to lead, then later he could tell Benny what a great time he had had. And if he didn't find anything fun to do along the way, then he could always just make something up.

Mark flashed the light out across all the walls then trekked back the way he had come. He felt his way around the solid stone, from floor to roof but found no doorway. The way out should have been back this way from where he had come into the room. He again traced his hand across the first cobbled wall's surface, then past a corner and onto the next until he stood back where he started. No way out, no way in. He thought about what the guide had told everyone when they walked into the first bunch of rooms:

*Each room in the mines was built for a specific purpose, one where the workers could eat, another to plan and have meetings, one for resting or sleeping, and then others...* he hadn't listened much after that. This one must have been created just to confuse people, he thought, then smirked.

He shone the flashlight out along the broken tree root in the other direction away from the wall. It disappeared down into the ground but not through a crack like he had first thought. He walked while following it further and soon found he wasn't level with the ground any longer.

So, that's how he had got in here without realising it; the stone floor in the middle of the

room sloped down on a low angle to another room below. He wouldn't have even noticed when going up the slope, especially the way all the walls and stone looked the same, camouflaged and in darkness.

He continued along and smelled a strong damp stale odour. He stood in the middle of the room and shone his flashlight around again, exposing the walls and two ramps, one up and one down. Water dripped from above into small dark pools in the ground's stonework with a constant, *plop plop*, sound. But, again no doorways, although in the corner of this room a set of steps dropped away into the floor and around, disappearing into more blackness.

He shrugged, may as well explore, he thought. As he descended he expected the air to become even more damp, but instead the air dried out and got warmer. His throat went dry as well and now he wished he had brought a cola with him. Upon reaching the bottom he looked back up to the top of the steps and wondered if he had gone far enough for this adventure. Although, it had been only ten minutes since leaving the group. They probably wouldn't even have realised he had gone yet. He would probably catch them up soon enough, anyway.

"A thief," a voice said from behind.

Mark turned on the ball of his foot, swivelling around, and shone his light but saw no one there. He then shone the light to the surrounding walls floor and roof, but still couldn't find the owner of the voice.

"Get out," the person said, sounding closer this time.

Mark backed away from the stairs, then ran to the next set of winding steps in the stone floor and began down deeper into the warm caverns. His feet hit heavily on the stonework steps like thunderclaps and his breath came like a steam train. The voice didn't follow. Maybe he shouldn't have run, he wondered. He felt a little silly now, but something in that voice had scared the bejeezus out of him.

The steps wound deeper down, much further than the last two combined. It took a few minutes before he came close to the next floor beneath, and finally a dark base came into view. He slowed before reaching it, then stopped. He wiped sweat from his forehead, while leaning against the wall, then finally sat because his legs wouldn't stop wobbling.

His clothes stuck to him in sweaty patches. Being back with the group felt like a good idea about now, the adventure had been *fun* enough already. He listened for the person who had called out and wondered if maybe he had actually imagined it somehow. In a strange way he wished the person would call out again just so he knew someone was around. Next time the voice did come, if it did, he should probably go ask for help to get back to the group, or at least to get to ground level of the national park. He shone the light up the stairs but it didn't reach the top.

The voice came again. "Nooooooooo!"

Mark stood and wavered in thought as he decided to go up or down. He still didn't like the voice. It reminded him of when Benny had tried to scare him when they went camping, calling out in the night like a zombie. Mark opened his mouth to call back, but then stopped, not knowing what to say. He turned and ran down the steps again, the dripping sweat cooling against his skin in the stale warm air. He decided that talking to whoever was chasing him was now a bad idea. He would find his own way back.

He reached the bottom, this time entering a long corridor. No other doors lead off from the side and no light shone from up ahead. He ran again, but soon slowed so he could walk more quietly and hear if anyone had followed him. He turned and tip-toed backwards while shining his light toward the stairs—not an easy task, he found.

He reached into his pocket for his phone, maybe it was time he got out of here, even if he

had to explain to his parents that he had wandered off. Adventure or not, he didn't have a clue how far he had gone or how to get back, and he really didn't want to go back the way he had come. At age fifteen he thought he wouldn't be scared of anything ever again, especially not some guy calling out in a dark tunnel... Okay, maybe he did have a right to be scared.

He studied his phone and saw a strong signal of five bars. He dialled the number for Benny. The call beeped as it connected. Then nothing.

"Damn it!" he kicked at the blue-stone wall, and stubbed his toe. "Double damn it."

He typed a text but it came back with message failed.

"This is stupid." He clicked on Facebook and the familiar screen of the wall activity shone back. He typed the words:

*If anyone can see this, I'm on a tour at the old castle and mine in Ravenbrook. Tried to call Benny. He's with main group and my parents and auntie, but can't get through. Don't want to call parents and get in trouble. But I guess call them if you have to. Probably five or six stories below everyone else.*

He hit send and the message went through. He sighed, then heard the hurried pounding of steps from the stairwell.

"You're still here, get out!"

Mark jumped and let go of his phone. It cracked against the stone floor then bounced and clattered across the corridor. He went to his knees and searched, expecting to find a mess of broken bits and pieces. He spread his hands out and felt everywhere, his torch in his mouth, but couldn't even find one bit of broken glass. He turned off the torch thinking he might see the screen light and hoped it hadn't already switched off. But saw nothing.

The clunking footsteps got louder, closer. Whoever followed him would be at the bottom of the steps soon and may as well have been right behind him considering how loud the footsteps echoed. He then wished he hadn't thought of that. His spine tingled as he imagined someone reaching out to grab him. He switched the flashlight back on and turned to an empty hallway. Then let out a deep breath when he saw no one there.

"See, don't be such a baby," Mark said into the darkness.

He realised it's probably just what Benny would have said too.

He stood and again scanned the corridor floor with his flashlight. If he just had a few more minutes he could probably find it, but that crazy guy following him might be here in seconds.

What should Mark do? (a)

**Keep looking for the phone?**

**Run away?**

**Wait for the man and ask him to help look for the phone?**

### **Keep looking for the phone?**

Mark got down onto his hands and knees, the torch in his mouth again, and scurried around in circles like a confused mouse from one wall to the next. He searched every corner, every crack in the floor and behind every raised block of stone, but still found nothing.

He turned back and repeated his search checking every nasty dark dirty corner of the floor and hallway once more.

Feet pounded down the hall and a voice grumbled in between ragged breaths. He should go. Leave before he had to face whoever chased him. He stood and turned to run, but just as he took his first step he saw a basketball sized tunnel, where light blinked from inside.

He lay down on his belly and closed one eye. The light came from a fair way inside, but he could see a definite shape of a phone. The words, answer or decline flashed in red and green. He reached in, both arms ahead of him and squirmed inside. The phone stayed out of reach, too dark for him to work out just how far away it was. He clawed further in and pushed with his feet, getting close enough to see the name of the person trying to call. Just as he came within reach and the light shone over his fingers, someone grabbed hold of the top of his shorts and pulled.

Mark's breath caught and his eyes opened wide. He squirmed and rolled to get loose of the grip from behind. The large hands loosened a little, then re-gripped onto the pocket of his shorts, which then tore away. Now the hands fumbled for his foot—two hands this time—and grabbed hold of his ankles.

“Let go,” Mark yelled, and kicked, hitting something soft.

The hands let go. Mark shuffled forward again, pulling his legs in as far as they would go and kept moving. The light from his phone reflected off his hand as he reached out. But then it moved further along the tunnel. And kept moving away from his outstretched hand.

He shone his flashlight forwards and reached in with his other hand and brushed up against a clump of something damp and furry. He turned the light toward it and saw it to be a large rat with a foot long tale. He pulled his hand back, his breathing shallow for a moment and thought about what to do. The head turned toward him, as if only now deciding Mark was worth the attention, two eyes reflected back.

Mark searched for a rock to throw, and found a pebble. Which would be enough to scare it off. He threw it and hit the rat on its head. It screamed and ran away along the narrow hole.

Mark smiled and breathed a sigh, then shuffled further in and grabbed his phone. It had been ringing the whole time, so must have clicked to silent when he dropped it. He answered the call but it disconnected just as he said, *hello*. He checked who had called, but then saw the two rat eyes return.

Back for another round, Mark thought. He looked for more rocks and found a pile of big ones. More eyes appeared next to the first. And still more after that. He put the phone in his pocket and inched back. As soon as he moved, the rats leapt at him. Mark threw the first rock and the rat screamed as it got crushed beneath. But the rest continued to charge.

They climbed over the top of his arms and shoulders and down his back, then began to bite and claw. Every rat found a place on his body to attach itself to. The biggest rat he had ever seen went for his face and tried to claw and bite his eyes. Mark screamed and swatted it away, then grabbed the one on his neck and threw it away as well. He rolled around crushing the ones on his back and screamed at them to get away.

Then more came. Running, jumping and climbing over the top of each other straight for his face. He put his arms up over his eyes. They ate through his hands then through his eyelids and bit through his cheek.

He cried out for the man who had grabbed him earlier to save him—anything would be better than being eaten alive, but no reply came. Blood flowed from his body and he felt his mind drift. He couldn't hold on. His heart stopped.

THE END  
-Mark's Way Out-

### **Wait for the man and ask him to help look for your phone?**

Mark shone the flashlight back up the corridor and waited. The footsteps came faster and louder. At least he would now discover who had been chasing him this whole time. And really, this is supposed to be a tourist place not a house of horrors. It had to be a worker who saw Mark come down and didn't want him to get lost or fall down a mine shaft.

The footsteps clunked closer on the stone floor. It wouldn't be long. He gripped the flashlight in both hands, white knuckles stuck out like ice caps on his skin. The first grey outline of the man came into view. His head hung down to his chest and a few inches from the roof. Even taller than Mark's dad. His face stayed cast in shadows. His shoulders appeared to be almost as wide as the corridor.

As he ran he pointed at Mark. His voice came like a sonic boom.

"I told you, out!"

Mark tried to explain but his throat dried out and he could only cough. He swallowed but no saliva came.

Finally a whisper grated against his throat.

"Sorry, but... I lost my phone."

The man didn't slow.

Not an employee. Too scary to be working here.

Mark turned and stepped on something soft and it squealed. A huge rat. And it had his phone! He picked up his phone and ran for his life. The LCD screen shone Benny's name and blinked on and off. Mark answered it.

"Benny! I'm being chased. You have to get someone down here. He's close behind me."

Benny's voice came back clear with no static. "Chased by who? Oh right, your adventure. I told you I'm not coming. My mum and I didn't know where you got to, so I told her what you said and she told your parents. They're mad as anything, I hope you're close—"

"You moron, Benny, I'm really being chased. I don't care if you tell my parents. I—ah, forget it."

Mark hung up and called his dad.

"Mark, where have you got to? The guide's called the ranger. They're thinking about sending people down.

"Dad—"

A hand grabbed Mark's collar, then slipped off. Mark stumbled towards more steps leading down into the dark. His right foot shot down the hole and he fell head over, tumbling through the blackness. His flashlight and phone spun over and over in a scary lightening show reflecting off every wall.

For a strange moment time moved slowly like in the movies; Die Hard, when the bad guy fell away from Bruce Willis down the side of the building.

Mark fell past a set of stairs with no guardrails and nothing to save him, and flew out further into the dark, his flashlight continued to tumble away from his hands and out of reach. He clenched his phone even tighter while his dad called out and asked what was wrong.

Mark then heard a clatter and smashing of glass as the flashlight hit the solid ground. A split second later the Stone floor came up to meet him.

THE END  
-Mark's Way Out-



## **Run away?**

Nah, not worth it, he decided. He flashed the light across the hallway one last time, then ran from the pounding feet and just hoped the corridor didn't lead to a dead end.

"What's this?" he heard from behind. "No! Who have you been speaking to? What did you tell them? I'll chain you up at the bottom of the mine and leave you to the rats, for this!"

He roared, then yelled something in another language.

Mark heard stomping and plastic breaking. He groaned while continuing to run. Stairs shone into view at the end of the large corridor, this time going up. He climbed two, three at a time. The stomping of his pursuer's feet died away until he heard them no more. Only his own sneakers hitting the stone floor and heavy breathing.

He reached the top of the stairwell and rounded a corner to a second long corridor and continued to run. His breathing burned his throat and lungs. His heart beat so hard he felt it against the walls of his ribs. Whoever had been chasing him would have no chance of catching him now. He may not have been the fastest at school, but he came close, and he had just run faster than he ever had before, even with shaky legs.

He turned another corner, then the next. Ahead, he thought he could hear music. No, a ringtone—his ring tone. He slowed to a walk. The glow from the LCD screen reflected off each of the walls, the ringtone running its recorded message. He turned off his torch and crept close along the wall, then ever so slowly, he peeked around into the room.

On the stone steps the phone flashed, vibrated and sung. These stairs led up from over the other side of the room. He tiptoed forwards. The light giving the impression he moved in still framed flashes. Then he stood over his phone.

The cracked screen blinked and vibrated against the rock floor. The words *Unknown Caller* appeared then disappeared and appeared again. He leaned down and picked up his phone with its cracked plastic. At least it still worked, but how did the crazy guy get here before him to leave the phone in his path? He turned full about watching the shadows for any sign of movement, then hit the answer button and listened.

"There you are. I see you now you. This is my place, my home. Get out!"

Mark fumbled with the phone, his fingers shaking so much they had gone numb. He finally got a proper grip and clenched hard, then put the phone to his ear and said, "Who are you, what do you want? I only want to leave."

Static filled the earpiece. He pressed the phone closer against his cheek.

"What? the person said. His tone curious, although still rough and deep. He spoke further, but mumbled. Mark made out a few words, but nothing that made sense.

"Do I know you?" the man then said, but didn't wait for an answer. "Maybe not. I could give you a choice if you're not after what's mine? Hmm, yes, listen carefully. The stairs, they take you to a top level of the mines, then I won't see you anymore and you won't see me—ever. Or you may turn around and go meet with your people, to do this you have to go the way you came. But I don't advise it. I don't want you spying down here. I propose you go up the stairs now. Forget everyone you came with. I don't know who will live through the next collapse."

What should Mark do? (b)

**Leave and go straight up?**

**Ask about what is so important down here that no one is allowed to see it?**

**Say he will go, like he has been told, but then instead try and find the group and warn them about the possible cave in?**

GO BACK