

The adventure begins

The light from Jim's torch didn't reach far along the dark tunnel. Jim was afraid but he knew he must hurry. He hoped he was in the right tunnel. He had to get out of the cave and find someone – anyone – to help.

For just a moment, he thought, *Am I really in a cave in the middle of Guatemala?* He almost laughed but it was the laughter of fear, not happiness.

Jim hurried along the tunnel for a few more minutes, and then he stopped. What was that sound?

Footsteps!

Jim turned off his torch and hid behind a large rock. They were footsteps of men wearing heavy shoes or boots.

Oh no – the thieves must be coming back!

The footsteps got closer. Then Jim heard a man speaking English. The man was angry. Jim didn't move. Light from two torches shone on the roof and walls of the tunnel. Jim hoped the rock was large enough. The men came closer and closer. Jim was more afraid than he'd ever been in his life. He thought of how he came to be here ...

'Be careful, Jimmy,' his mother Julie said. 'And remember, you can call me any time, day or night.' Jim's mother and his girlfriend Katie were at the airport to say goodbye.

'I'll be okay, Ma,' Jim said. He smiled at her. 'Don't worry.'

'I know you'll be okay, but I'm your mother. Of course I'll worry.'

Jim smiled. 'But I'll be with Uncle Simon, Ma.'

'That's another thing to worry about. We don't really know him, do we? He's a mystery. He moves from country to country all the time. What does he do in all those jungles and mountains



and islands? He never comes back to Canada. He's always in some strange, new place –'

'Ma, we've talked about this,' said Jim. 'Simon is Dad's brother. I want to get to know him. I want to hear stories of when he and Dad were boys.'

'Well, Simon never comes to Vancouver to tell you stories, does he? He was always too busy when your father was alive. And in the last five years ... Well, Simon hasn't been a very good uncle. I don't like him and I don't trust him. He never sent you birthday presents, and he never came for Christmas with us, his family.'

Jim said, 'But Ma, Simon did send me the money for this trip. And you agreed that it's a great chance for me to have a real adventure.'

Nobody spoke for a moment. Then Katie said, 'Mrs Franklin, Jim will be careful, and it's only for three months.'

Jim hugged his mother and said, 'I'll send emails and I'll ring you when I can. I'll be safe.'

Julie began to cry. 'My son is going to the jungles of Central America for three months to be with a mystery man who I don't trust.'

'Ma, I love you but I'm going now.' Jim hugged her, and then he hugged Katie. Then he picked up his backpack and walked away from them both. He turned for a last look at them. They were both crying but they both smiled and waved goodbye.

Nine hours and several thousand kilometres later, Jim looked out of the window of the plane. Below, he saw Guatemala City. It looked very different from Vancouver. The city was in a valley between tall mountains. All the colours were very bright – the green jungle, the low white buildings, the blue sky. Until then, the trip hadn't felt real to Jim. Now he felt he really was on an adventure.

At the airport, Jim looked for Simon. He didn't see his uncle

in the crowd. He looked everywhere. It didn't take long – it wasn't a large airport. Simon wasn't there.

Then Jim heard his own name. A woman from the airline was walking through the crowd, and calling, 'Jim Franklin? Jim Franklin?'

Jim stopped her. 'I'm Jim Franklin.'

'I have a message for you.' She gave Jim a piece of paper.

'Thank you,' he said. It was a message from his uncle:

Hi Jimmy

Welcome to Guatemala! I'm sorry I can't be there to meet your plane. Please get a taxi to the bus station and catch the next bus to Rio Dulce. I'll see you there.

Simon

Jim had been on the plane for hours. He was tired and he wanted to have a shower. But he smiled and said to the woman, 'Can you please help me? I need to change some money and get a taxi.' The adventure was beginning.

It was a long bus trip. For the first hour, Jim was excited. There was so much to see as they drove east from Guatemala City through valleys and over mountains. He took lots of photos of the views, the people, and the tropical plants of the jungle. Everything was new and interesting. It was hot – much hotter than Canada. It was humid too. The tropical air felt heavy and wet.

The bus was old and slow. Jim had read about these local buses. They were old school buses from America, painted in bright colours. The bus was full of people and their bags, bananas and other fruit. One woman held a chicken. When Jim saw it, he smiled. These buses were called 'chicken buses' and now he knew why. It was noisy – everyone was talking and the driver played local music very loudly. It was fun, but Jim also felt like a stranger in a strange land.

He now had some Guatemalan money – *quetzal*. He'd changed some Canadian dollars for quetzals at the airport but

he was worried about spending too much. When the bus stopped at a café, Jim only bought some fruit and a bottle of water. He wanted to sleep on the bus but he couldn't, with all the noise, the heat, and the hard, uncomfortable seat.

A few hours later the bus reached Rio Dulce, a small town beside a big bridge across a wide river. The driver climbed up on the roof to get Jim's bag. It was an old duffel bag of his father's. Jim reached up and took it. Jim was very tired and hungry. There weren't many people in town. And there was no Simon waiting to meet Jim.

Jim began to worry. *What if Simon doesn't come? I don't know anyone here in Guatemala. What if Ma was right? What if Simon can't be trusted? Or what if something has happened to him?*

He thought about ringing Katie – he really wanted to hear her voice – but he didn't want to worry her. He wanted to go home. Then he said to himself, *Come on, you wanted an adventure, didn't you? Find something to eat, and then try to find Simon.*

He was walking towards a small shop when he saw his uncle. Simon was across the street, talking to another man, and Simon was angry.

This is the German version of **The Cave of the Jaguar**

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