

Tales of Marvelous Missouri

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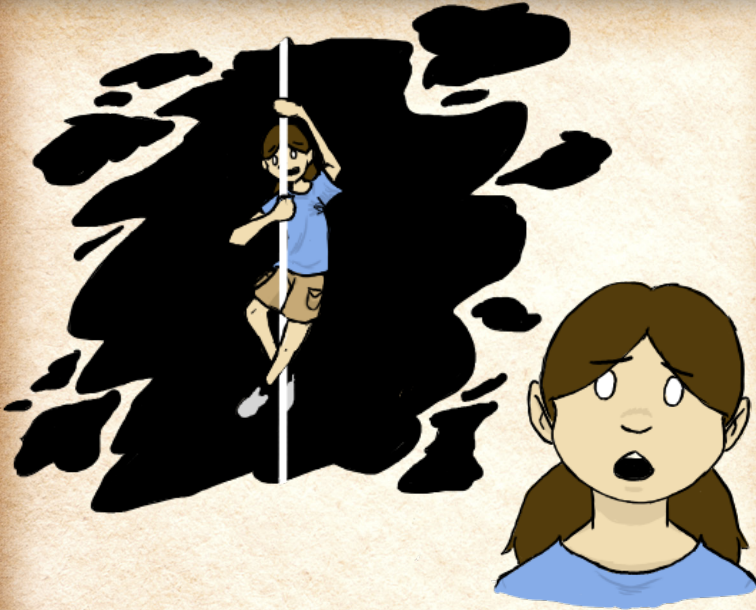
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Chapter 2: A Marvel(ous) Story

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Molly plunked herself down next to Elsie. It did feel nice to sit in the cool shade. The summer day was starting to heat up.

“So, what is this *marvelous cave*?” Molly asked her.

The old lady, happy to have an audience, laughed.

“You’re close,” she said. “But it’s not *Marvelous Cave*, it’s *Marvel Cave*. And it’s famous! It’s Missouri’s deepest cave, and, in fact, this here’s how Silver Dollar City got its start.”

“Oh, really?” Now Molly was curious.

“Course,” Elsie said. “Are you visiting from somewhere?”

“I’m from St. Louis!” Molly answered.

“Well, you’re what we like to call a *tourist*. Lots of tourists come to visit Silver Dollar City. Before they built the theme park, this *cave* was the tourist attraction! But its history goes even, ahem, deeper,” Elsie chuckled.

Elsie told Molly how the original people to live in Missouri’s Ozarks, the Osage, first discovered the cave a long, long time ago. Molly shivered as Elsie described the scary noises these Native Americans heard coming from within its entrance.

“They never went in it,” she said. “They nicknamed it the Devil’s Den.”

“It sounds scary. How did anyone know it was safe to go inside it?”

“Well,” Elsie said. “In the year 1541 Spanish Explorers were looking all over for something called the Fountain of Youth. They thought if they found it, they would live forever!”

“And they thought it was, um, in *this cave*?” Molly asked dumbstruck.

“Well, they didn’t know where it was,” Elsie said. “They looked all over.

Legend has it that they even looked for it right here in *this cave*. Of course, no one found the Fountain of Youth here or anywhere. But eventually the locals learned this cave was no Devil’s Den either.”

Molly listened as Elsie described how hundreds of years later, more explorers entered the cave in search of riches in the form of mineral deposits.

In 1869, an expedition led by a St. Louisan named Henry Blow lowered themselves more than 200 feet into the entrance of the cave, in search of lead. Molly imagined dangling on a rope and descending into pitch darkness. *They must have been really brave explorers*, she thought. The men searched the cave by lantern light, in hopes of discovering lead ore, a valuable mineral. When they surfaced that evening, the fearless spelunkers reported to Henry Blow that they’d found no lead, but they convinced him that the cave must be full of marble!

“Wow,” Molly said, imagining a beautiful glistening white cave filled with beautiful marble.

“That’s when Devil’s Den’s name changed to Marble Cave.”

“Marble?” Molly asked. “I thought you said it was *Marvel*?”

“Well, that name came later,” Elsie said. “It changed because, as it turns out, no one ever did find any marble.”

“What did they find?” Molly asked.

“A cave full of bat guano!”

“Guano? What’s that?”

Elsie laughed and looked at Molly with sparkling eyes.

“Bat guano is, well, poop!”

Newspaper Connections:

Look through your local newspaper for images and stories about caves. Are there caves in your area? Are these open to the public or on private property?

