

The Waterslide - By Gavin Burgess

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Parental Note:

This story is intended for young teens. It contains content which some parents may deem unsuitable for less mature children. It is suggested that parents review the contents of this publication prior to making it available to their children.

The Waterslide

We stood way back at the end of the line, a great snake of writhing shoving kids, all eager to take our turn, to be the one who got there before their mates, to be the one who could brag of the bravest feat, or the craziest gamble, or to just be able to boast about the wonder of it all to the few poor unfortunates who'd not made it to the grand opening, who would have to content themselves with being the also-rans on this great day in town history. We were hot, packed tightly between sweating bodies under the fierce February sun, and covered in sticky patches from half melted ice-creams and chuppa-chupp dribble, and we were shouting to be heard over the other kids who were all also shouting to be heard, the way it so often happens in crowds where one person talks too loud and everyone else talks louder in turn until soon everyone is shouting and no-one seems to be making much sense at all.

The parents had been talking about this place for a while, but only because they wanted to know what was going on. About four months ago a big wall had gone up, corrugated iron, painted green, and big signs saying 'Danger, Construction Site' 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted', 'Hard Hat Area' and other such things. We hadn't really cared or worried much. Billy had half-heartedly tried to jump up to the top of the wall to have a look but it was too high to get a real grip on the top and all he did was tear the skin off his finger which bled quite a lot and stopped him from playing in the school band, which meant he was probably going to miss the big concert. This was too much of a risk for the rest of us, just because of the concert, you understand, which would entail

two days off school and a trip to the city the following week for a repeat performance at the Catholic girls school. None of us wanted to miss that, what with the girls thinking that the city girls were so terribly sophisticated and us guys having heard some stories in the locker rooms from the guys who went on last year's trip. Stories of squeezing unsupervised into rooms full of girls. Stories of lights being turned out. Stories of girls who liked to be touched down there. So, risk cutting your hand like Billie, risk being omitted from the school band? Yeah right!

Anyway, the parents wanted to know what was going on. No-one knew who owned the land or what was being built behind the fence. What was even stranger, they said, was that no-one ever saw anyone go in or leave the site. No materials were seen to arrive, no deliveries were made, and according to my Dad no-one was trying to sell any new units or shops in the town either. Dad was real concerned about this and would go on about it every time we passed the site, which was on the way to school and on the way home so he went on about it a lot. By the way, don't get me wrong here, I didn't have to ride to school with my Dad you know, don't think I'm a sissy boy or something. It's just that he was going that way anyway, what with dropping my little sister off at primary school, which was almost at the secondary, and the secondary being almost on the way to his office. I hit Billie real hard for saying something about this last year and I think you better say you believe me or I might have to give you the bash as well. The point of telling you all this anyway was just to let you know what my Dad said all the grown-ups were saying about the building site, you know, the one where Billie cut his finger. Not that I really

cared much anyway, but it's all part of why we're standing in line all sweaty and sticky, pushing and shoving in the sun.

Yesterday, in the morning, which when you think about it is a bit strange in itself, the corrugated walls and the signs are gone. The place is immaculate, with lawns that look like they've been there forever and a wide sweeping white concrete path which leads up to the peak of a hill. This is a bit strange too because there never used to be a hill here and yet the grass on it's sides looks just as established as the grass on the lawns. At the top of the hill is what looks like the entrance to a cave with two large waterfalls, one on each side streaming into its base. A banner suspended across the path, which must be hung on invisible string or maybe fishing line because I can't see any ropes, is fluttering gently in the breeze and boldly proclaims 'Giant Mystery Waterslide - Grand Opening Tomorrow'. Under this is added in brackets 'For children 8 to 16. Free for one day only!' Well yesterday was Friday which means that yesterday's tomorrow was Saturday which is today and most of the kids in town between the ages of eight and sixteen and quite a few of those who are not quite eight and even more of those who are older than sixteen are all standing here, bedecked in old T Shirts and rumpled togs, boys and girls squeezed excitingly close together, in this sweaty sticky line, all waiting their turn, and the line has been slowly moving for the last twenty minutes.

We expect to see the kids who've already taken the ride emerging by now but as yet no-one has come. There are no drippy trails leading to the back of the

line, no children shivering in the breeze from the water when the sun goes behind a cloud, no girls shrieking when boys who secretly like them splash out with water from their hair. It must be an awfully long ride! The line moves slowly forward again.

Now we're closer to the mouth of the slide and it's really weird cos we still haven't seen any of the kids come out for a second turn, but now from the mouth of the cave we can hear the shouts of the kids who've already gone in and we figure there must be some sort of pool or something in there, which must be why they haven't come out yet, although I've also been thinking about it a bit and I can't actually see any door for them to come back out of. Of course this could be on the other side of the hill for all I know and maybe the kids are being told they can have only one ride, which seems a bit daft but who knows, and we haven't seen any grown-ups at all outside the slide or anyone telling us rules or anything like this so maybe they're on the other side too and are sending the kids home. Anyway it sounds like there's an awful lot of kids still having a great time in there and I start to feel a bit nervous because we're right up close now and I'm not sure if I'm nervous from excitement or if I really am worried about where all the kids are going. But now it's Billy's turn and next up it's me and Billy turns and grins and leaps, a great bomb, into the water and vanishes into the mouth of the slide. I wait for a bit and think I hear a shriek but then Billy's voice comes loud and clear, 'Come on guys, it's great in here', and the girl behind me is pushing against me and I don't mind this at all except she's starting to mouth of at me the way

girls always do to try to make you feel small, so suddenly I'm in the water and on my way.

The first part of the ride is a great rushing around a few bends and I get thrown around quite a lot but it's not so bad, although I don't think the girls will like it. I seem to be going down very fast, faster than I think is safe, but then I come up hard and winded against a grating. The water is pouring through it but I'm stuck fast which strikes me as very strange, but I only have a moment for this thought before the chamber fills and I am gagging for breath and I get a great mouthful of water instead and a great stomach-full of fear and the water tastes like soap but also very sour and burning like acid which is crazy but I swear it's true, and then there's a great swirling like being inside a giant washing machine and my clothes seem to be dissolving and then the chamber empties again and I smell the soap as well and my skin is burning for a moment until there are jets of cold icy clear water from the sides of the chamber and the soap is washed away and my clothes are gone and my hair is gone, not just from my head but also the new hairs that've been growing on my balls, and I'm naked and cold and confused and I realise I'm pissing like I've pissed my pants, only my pants are gone and I'm pissing on my feet, and then I hear my own voice but I've not said a word, and the voice that sounds like mine and echoes up the tunnel is saying 'Come on guys, It's great in here.' and the grating drops open under my feet and I'm falling down.

I must faint round about then and not even God, if he's stuck away in this dark solitary place, would know what the hell time of day or night it is now. I have a

piece of metal, or something like metal or maybe wood or bone (Oh God please not bone!), which I've found in the dark, and the walls of this cave seem soft enough to scratch on, in fact they seem to give a little when you push. My skin is burning again but I find if I concentrate on this scratching of my story on the wall it's not so bad to take, although the burning is getting worse and now that the story is almost over I'm not sure how I'm going to go. I've felt all around but there seems no way from this place, although here and there small holes in the walls and floor seem to breathe a soft rancid air. I guess I just have to hang on and wait for the next part of the ride, or whatever it is, this terrible thing that I'm in. I think to myself that this thing is a bit like a stomach and if that is so, it obviously takes great care over washing it's...

In 2003 these words were found scratched on the walls of a cave below a small, isolated country town where the few remaining residents, when summoned by our investigator's knock, shambled to their peeling front doors and muttered strange stories about the day the children disappeared. The potholers who discovered the cave said it was strangely like a being inside a giant stomach. The bonelike fragments found on the floor of the cave were never identified as the local police dismissed the caver's story as a hoax.