

# The Deepest Dark

You've ventured down into the jaws of the earth, between its gnashing teeth and right down the limestone gullet. You descended on foot, then by rope, then by pick, then on hands and knees, and then at last on your stomach, inching your way through the terrible cracks cut through the rock, narrow fissures not designed to be traveled by things that do anything but crawl or ooze or skitter.

The batgirl sirens of the dripstone caves are long behind you. The sweet glowberry maidens of the verdant caverns, the pale belledames with their heart-tipped arrows, the sweet, shy creepermaids with their sibilant hisses and hypnotic pollen, the cooing emerald-skinned bimbos infected by viral whispers—whispers whose time of last echoing cannot be measured by year, but by layer of sediment—all of it is long, long behind you.

Nothing like that has room to exist here. Let alone you.

And still you crawl, for you know that every inch takes you closer.

Closer to the rhythm.

It could be drumbeats. A creature's call. Steam vents, some odd chemical response. All you know is that whenever you call out, whenever you make a sound above a whisper, the rhythm echoes in answer.

A short, bubbling beat.

*Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop.*

Your food reserves are running short. The glowberry jam you made last week is all depleted, and the last of the cured ham is down to scraps at the bottom of the pouch. Perhaps the deprivation is what's helping you squeeze these last few feet. Or perhaps it's just desperation.

You swear you can see light up ahead. More importantly, you hear the sound of something more pressing than food.

Water.

You crawl forward, licking dry lips. It must have been at least a week since you lost your flask to the river. You filled what spare containers you had, but it's all gone now.

And fatigue and thirst has left you stupid.

All you can focus on are the sounds echoing back to you. Those pleasant, bubbling drumbeats.

*Pop-pop-pop.*

And beneath the bubbling, the faint sound of a trickling stream.

The cave is starting to widen out. At long last, you can get on your hands and knees again. The ground feels softer here. And slick. Almost porous, like a bed of slippery moss.

You briefly worry that you're entering some sort of actual mouth—that you are crawling down some horror's slippery throat. More realistically, you worry this less-solid ground will collapse under any serious weight, trapping you in a plush, suffocating tomb.

But it doesn't. And the soft ground is gentler on your weary hands and knees as you near the opening.

You gaze upon a sea of stars. Inky blackness beckons you forward, pale blue lights twinkling softly from within, and you realize this is what you've been crawling on, too. It isn't stars at all. It isn't stone, or moss, either. It doesn't catch the light of your headlamp like wet stone or puff out like plump moss. It's soft, and slippery, and...

... moving.

You stare dumbly. Denial briefly tries to dispel reality, but you can't deny your own eyes.

There is no water.

The ground is trickling with a strange, black oil-like substance.

You lick your lips, whimpering softly. You hear a chorus of pretty *pop-pop-pops* answer from deeper into the dark.

And they are joined by a warm, sultry, echoing voice.

*"Oh. You poor thing!"*

The voice is crackly and strange, like three voices layered over one another, every one as sweet and syrupy as medicine.

You give a start. The stars have started moving faster, and now with a single direction. The oil is gathering to pool directly before you. It first forms a puddle, then begins to rise into a pulsing hemisphere of black, starry oil.

You stare, panting. You try to back up, but the way back suddenly seems to be sloped strangely against you, pushing you forward instead. Like an insect in a pitcher plant.

The slime climbs up higher and higher, and new shapes are beginning to emerge as it splits into three forms. Three very curvy forms.

Your heart is pounding. You need to get out of this place, but you can't, so you need to get into the cavern so you can stand. Your sword sits useless in its sheath.

You try to scramble forward, but the three blobs are fully blocking your path. Your head swims as the ground beneath you wobbles, as your hands and knees sink slightly into the goop. You struggle to pull yourself up. You aren't looking at the blobs. You need to get free, get loose, get your sword—

A chorus of *pops* and giggles meets your ears, and you look up sharply.

And three slime girls—their forms shimmering, twinkling voids of inky black and shining cyan—smile beatifically down at you. Their voluptuous forms jiggle as if in slow-motion as they stoop down to catch your eye.

“Has *someone...*” coos one, reaching down to cup your chin. Her lips *pop*.

“... lost their *way...*” burbles the second, reaching down to take your free hand. Her lips *pop*.

“... in the *deepest dark?*” purrs the third, descending until her massive tits slosh right before your eyes. Her lips *pop*.

As they tip your head up, you stare up at those impossibly breasts, slick and shimmering.

You feel delirious. This can't be real.

But it is. The stories were real. You struggle to focus, to remember what you read, what the glowing, tentacled ichormaid cooed to you before—about how the skulk slimes spread across the ancient cities, about their irresistible corruption consuming all in their path, every lost soul expanding their numbers, their control...

Your eyes cross slightly as you notice a bead of glowing moisture twinkling at the tip of her nipple.

And before you can process what's happening, the inky droplet drips onto your lolling tongue.