

## The White Giraffe

It was a tunnel, one that smelled strongly of wet rock and animals that dwell in dank, dark places – spiders, baboons and the like. Leopards enjoy those places as well, but Martine consoled herself with the thought that Jemmy would hardly have lived as long as he had if a carnivore resided close by. After one last attempt to talk herself into staying in the lovely valley, she stepped inside.

The tunnel was not much taller than she was and even a small adult would have had to crouch, but gradually it widened and became less claustrophobic. After a while, it turned back on itself. She was beneath the mountain now. From there, the ground rose sharply in a series of steep steps, slick with froggy algae. Martine put the torch between her teeth and scrambled up in an undignified fashion. She made a mental note to smuggle her giraffe-fur, grass and slime-covered jeans into the washing machine before her grandmother noticed them. The vegetable garden excuse was not going to work a second time.

She was halfway up the last step when a hideous screech echoed from the chamber above her. Martine nearly flew over backwards. Her torch flashed around madly as she grabbed a ledge to save herself. Within seconds, the air was filled with a blizzard of flapping wings and high-pitched squeaks. She had unleashed a colony of bats!

*by Lauren St John*