

a grassy spot in which to tether him. A few steps in advance of where I stood was a little hillock, rising not more than ten or twelve feet above the surrounding surface, oval and smooth in outline, and crowned at the summit with a pile of loose stones. Dropping the lariat, I mounted this elevation and sprang upon the stones, with the design of getting a more extended view of the vicinity that I might select the best possible grazing spot for Pedro.

"Scarcely, however, had I gained a footing upon the stones when I felt them begin to sink beneath my weight, and ere I could leap clear of them the hillock seemed to open and swallow them. Throwing my arms out wildly on either side to save myself, I grasped the crumbling edges of the aperture through which the stones had disappeared, and there I hung by tension of muscle and sinew, suspended over—what?

"I knew not. Nor could I form the faintest conception of the nature or extent of the underground opening beneath me. It might be an infernal pit leading into the bowels of the earth! Or an old mining shaft, deep, deep down, with slimy water and poisonous gasses awaiting me at the bottom! A cold perspiration came out upon me at every pore, and my very ribs seemed to contract and crush my heart in a spasm of terror, as, bit by bit, the gravelly formation to which I clung crumbled beneath my hold and fell into the abyss below.

"My lower limbs were hanging in space, and, feel around as I might with my feet, I could touch nothing. Moreover, every motion of my body, however slight, only served to dislodge more of the ragged edge to which I clung, and the opening was widening with fearful rapidity. I tried to listen as the fragments fell, hoping to hear them strike bottom; but a sudden wind, forerunner of the storm, came moaning down the gorge and joined its voice to that of the noisy waters to baffle me.

"My arms and shoulders ached and grew numb with the unwonted strain to which they were subjected, and I knew that in a few minutes more, at most, my hold must relax. Soon everything grew seemingly dark around me, and the roaring of the winds and waters softened and receded, and, strangely enough, took the sound of Helen Poindexter's well remembered voice calling to me in accents of hope and reassurance. I was struggling to cry out in response when suddenly the whole top of the hillock apparently gave way at once, and I went down with it.

"How far did I fall? Well, as nearly as I can tell, about fifteen feet. Quite far enough, in my exhausted condition, to stun me, though I imagine the gravel that went with me and almost buried me alive, had a good deal to do with producing the unconsciousness that overcame me for a time. But my head was

uncovered, and it was the steady drip of rain in my face that finally revived me. I opened my eyes, recalled my extraordinary situation, and, looking upward, saw, far above me, an opening apparently four or five feet in diameter through which a patch of stormy sky was visible, and raindrops were pattering down upon me.

"Slowly, and rather painfully, I drew myself out of the gravel and debris of decayed sticks of wood in which I was partially buried. Then I peered about, endeavoring, with the aid of the light from the opening above, to determine the character and extent of the trap that had so effectually caught me. I soon ascertained that I was in an apartment at least twenty feet square—a cavern, I thought at first, but a few moments' inspection of the place put that theory to flight. The walls were lined with rough slabs of wood and the place bore every indication of having been constructed by the hands of men. I was not long in arriving at the conclusion that I was in an old, deserted dug-out, a species of habitation often resorted to by miners in early days in localities where Indians were troublesome, because they combined cheapness with greater security than was afforded by an ordinary frontier cabin of logs.

"'If it be a dug-out,' I reflected, 'there will be an opening somewhere by which I may once more reach the outer air, for it is not probable that its original occupants adopted my mode of gaining ingress.'

"With this thought I began an examination of the place, and in a short time had made two rather startling discoveries. One was that the entrance, which was on the side next the stream, was closed by a huge slab of sandstone which looked as if it might tax my strength to the utmost to displace, and before making the attempt I would have an hour's work in removing the pile of stones, gravel and rubbish that I had brought down with me, the bulk of which lay banked against the stone.

"Discovery number two was of a ghastly nature, being nothing less than a human skeleton reclining with head and shoulders against the wall in a dark corner.

"Such a find, even above ground in the broad glare of day, has a tendency to unsettle the steadiest nerves. What, then, were my sensations in that vault-like place, with the storm raging above, the rain pouring in through the broken roof, and the darkness of coming night settling down upon me so rapidly that I knew it would be useless to attempt the work of liberating myself before the morning!

"Having matches in my pocket, I gathered some of the litter that strewed the earth floor and essayed to light a fire; but it proved a feeble, flickering blaze, and depressed rather than cheered me, by filling the