

had turned to retrace my steps, when suddenly, without the slightest warning, the bough on which I stood snapped short off a few feet from the trunk.

For one harrowing instant I clung to the slender branch above, and then, it slipping swiftly through my fingers, with a wild shriek of terror I plunged feet foremost into the awful abyss beneath.

Just grazing the rim of the tree's open mouth, I fell sheer to the bottom, bringing up with such a shock that the fright and fall combined rendered me insensible.

How long I lay there I cannot say. When I did come to myself, my first impulse was to stand up. And words cannot express my relief when I found that, although much-shaken up, no bones were broken, thanks to the accumulation of rotten wood at the bottom of this strange well.

But oh, what a fearful situation was mine, and how bitterly I reproached myself for my folly! Shut up in the heart of that hollow tree; four long miles from home and help; utterly unable to extricate myself, for the soft decayed sides of my prison forbade all attempts at ascent; only a few biscuits in my pocket; not a drop of water, and already I was suffering with thirst; and, to crown all, the possibility, ay, the certainty, of the bear returning in a few hours, while I had no other weapon of defence than the hunter's knife which hung at my belt.

Although it was mid-day now, intense darkness filled my prison cell, and the air was close and foul, for Bruin had evidently been tenant of the place all winter.

For some time I could do nothing but gaze at the little