

The eye looking down would also have seen the water of a rapidly rising creek lapping on the coals of the most northerly fire, and sizzling as it extinguished them. Still Pete Armstrong slept profoundly. He had not reckoned that the rain now pouring down outside would raise the water in the cave.

Inch by inch its level ascended. Soon the brands of the extinguished fire were afloat and drifting toward the whirlpool. Even when the water had encroached upon the two fires further in, the boy still slept. His cowhide boots were lapped by the rising flood, and yet he lay quiet as a log.

Down from the cascade poured a large volume. Driftwood came tumbling with it. The Lost Creek was in half flood with the steady and great rain. No longer could the cloop-cloop have been heard by any one in the cave; for the funnel was gorged too full.

By morning neither flame nor coal of Pete's fires could have been seen from above. Nor was there any sign of Peter Armstrong near the dispersed ashes of those inner fires that had not been overflowed by the rising stream. The cave's floor was newly covered by a tumult of whirling water.

## CHAPTER VI.

### VINCENT DOWN THE CHUTE.

At noon on the third day, long before Mrs. Armstrong had received Vincent Bracy's letter, he stood, with one man, at the place where Pete had disappeared. Both carried camp lanterns with reflectors.

"Grosbois," said Vincent, "the creek has risen a good deal here since yesterday."

"Yeesch! Bapteme—it's de rain."

"Do you hear that pouring sound?"

"Yeesch—dass a fall down dere, way far. Can't be ver' high—no, sir, not ver' big fall."

"No. I dare say the chute runs into deep water. That would account for the sound, eh?"

"Mebby. I don' know, sir, for sure."

"How would you like to go down?"

"Sapree! Not for all de money in de Banque du Peuple."

Vincent had brought ten men with him from camp. Eight were now at the Brazeau end of the cave looking for the longest tree they could hope to carry into the curved ravine.

Early in the morning they had found the channel by which Lost Creek discharged from the cave to the Brazeau. Looking into an irregularly-walled, tunnel-like passage about twenty feet high, they saw how the water came whirling down straight from the clooping funnel that Pete had seen from inside the cave.

After dropping into a deep, narrow basin it spread wide and shallow over the level rock on which the search party stood, gathered again into a narrow brook, and prattled on gently to the Big Brazeau River, a quarter of a mile distant.

It was clear that Pete's body, if he had been carried dead down the funnel, would have been found on the shallows, where sticks that had descended were widely strown. Between and under these sticks the water ran. Vincent's inference that Pete was alive within the cave looked reasonable.

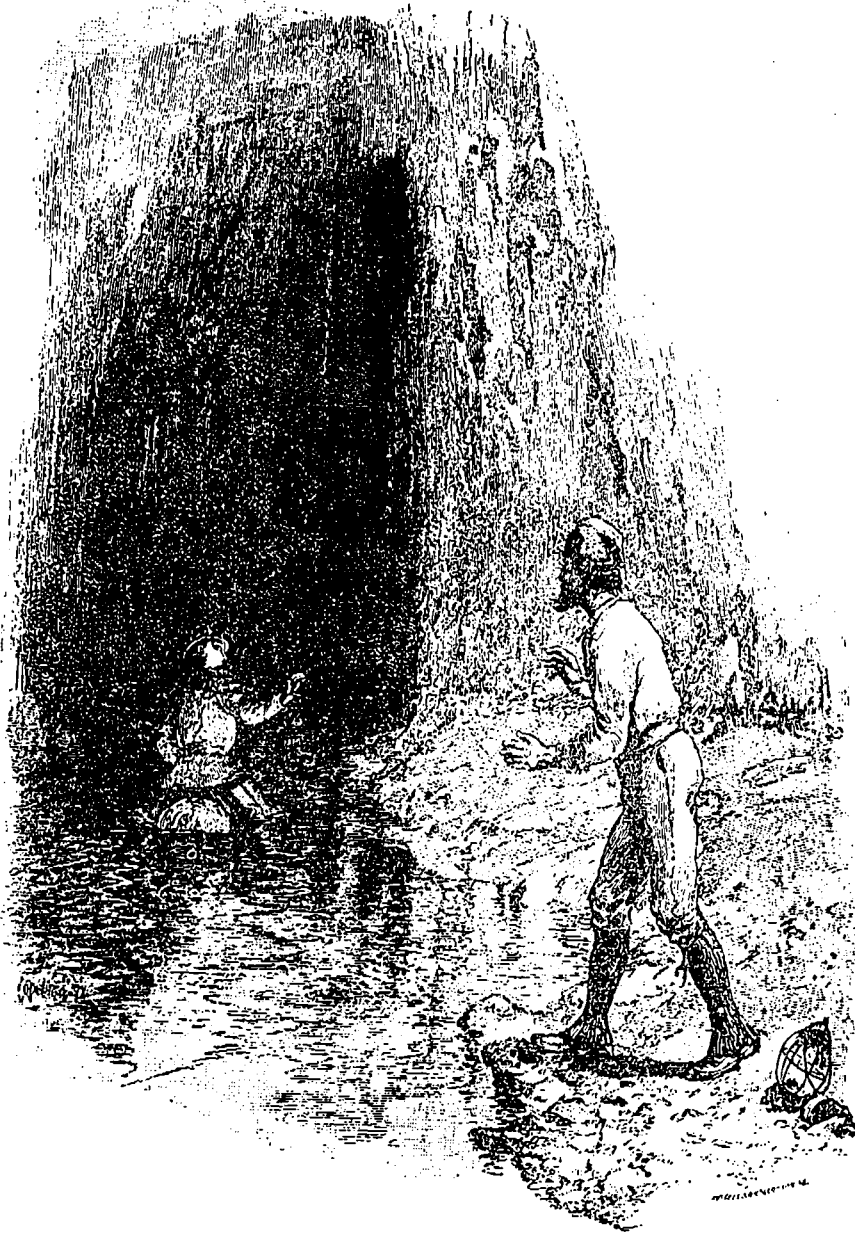
He took his men into the passage whence he had escaped, and soon found the south side of the enormous barrier of fallen rocks whose

north side had blocked Pete's way out the day before. They stood opposite where Pete had stood, and found that end as impracticable as he found the other.

Vincent sent one man to camp with a note to the chief engineer. With himself he kept old Grosbois. He ordered the eight others to ascend the Hump, cut down one of the tallest pines growing there, and wait for the chief to arrive with ropes and the rest of the men, twenty-two in number.

Then he and Grosbois walked away through the cave to the upper entrance with the two camp lanterns.

An hour passed. The great tree lay stripped on the upper plateau. After clearing away the branches the men found they could not stir the trunk. They went below to the cave that they might gain shelter from the incessant rain. There they lighted a fire and waited.



A PERILOUS JOURNEY.

Another hour passed. Grosbois now sat with his comrades by the fire. He had returned to the party without Vincent Bracy. Sometimes the superstitious men turned their heads and peered into the blackness of the cave. They half-expected to see Vincent's ghost coming toward them.

Another hour had nearly passed when the chief engineer and his twenty-two men came into the camp from the Brazeau side.

"Ah, M'sien, Mr. Bracy's gone," said Grosbois, almost crying.

"Gone?"

"Yeesch—gone for sure."

"Gone where?"

"Down de chute."

"What chute?"

"Down where he see dat boy go yesterday—de boy that he's tell us about last night."

"You are out of your senses, Grosbois."

"No, sir, I haint out af no senses—for sure I wish I was. But I'll tol' de trut'. Mr. Bracy he's say to me, 'Mebby Pete is starve before we find it.' He's say, 'Mebby we don't get up in dere all day, mebby not all to-morrow.' He's say, 'Mebby dere haint no way to get to de boy except only one way.'"

"Go on—what did he do?"

"He made me help him for cut off a large clunk off one hollow cedar. He put his hax in de hollow, an he put in a piece of rope, and some pork and biscuit, and he put in his pistol, and his lantern. Den he plug up de two end. An, he say to me, 'Grosbois, you tell 'em to keep climbing back dere. Good-by, Grosbois,' and dat's all."

"But where did he go?"

"M'sieu, in two seconds he's away down the black chute!"

"In the water?"

"Yeesch, in de water—straddle on de log."

"Vincent must have gone crazy."

"He haint look crazy," said Grosbois. "He's look like he's see something bad what haint scare him one bit. He's say, 'Good-by, Grosbois,' an' he's make me a bow same as he's always polite, and he's smile easy, easy. Den he's roll in his log before I b'leeve he's goin' to be so wild, and I don't see him no more."

"Up with you—up for the tree!" cried the chief. "Not you, Grosbois—all the rest, Grosbois, you go down to the outlet and watch for the body."

Little Vincent Bracy! My life and soul—what will his father say!"

The men were climbing the hill by various paths to get the long tree, when one of them stopped, held up his hand, and looked around fearfully at those nearest him.

"I hear Mr. Bracy's ghost," he said.

The startled men stood still, listening. All now heard the faint call. As from the bowels of the earth the cry floated up:

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

"He's alive, wherever he is," cried the chief, arriving. "He's shouting in the hope he'll be heard."

"Hello! Bracy! Vincent! Hello!"

Still Vincent's voice ascended monotonously.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" at intervals of some seconds.

"Yell all together!" cried the chief to the men, who were coming from all directions. They shouted and listened again. And again the far voice cried, "Hello! Hello!" with

the same tones and intervals as before. "It's from over there. And there's smoke coming up," said one.

They approached the edge of the plateau and looked down.

"Why here is smoke. And here's a hole," cried the chief, getting down on his hands and knees. "He must be down here. Yes! Vincent!"

"Hello, yourself, chief!"

"You're alive then?"

"Yes, sir. All alive."

"Hurt!"

"No—as sound as a nut."

"Had a rough passage?"

"Pretty rough, sir. But I'm not hurt."

Down by a bright fire they saw Vincent Bracy standing alone. He looked up at the faces crowding round the hole in which the fissure terminated.