

feared he was going to fall. In a moment, however, he controlled himself and laughed.

“Don’t be scared,” he said. “I never felt like that before since the racket I had in this same spot, a couple years back. I s’pose that splash made me think of it.”

“How was it?” I asked.

“Well, ’twas one day in spring ’fore any visitors had came here and I thought I’d jest come in an’ look round a bit; so I took the boat an’ started. The bats was thicker’n bees an’ they all set up that squeakin’ soon’s the light come near ’em. When I got near that big rock I thought I heard a rattlin’ like a stone rollin’ down the side but I didn’t think nothin’ more of it till I got through the narrer place, round here where I could see into the dry cave. Then, all to once, I seen two bright spots close together that seemed to snap and sparkle like coals in the dark, an’ then I see ’twas a wild cat a-crouchin’ on that there rock close to the water, over there. He wa’n’t more’n ten foot away, an’ ’fore I could fairly make out what ’twas, the varmint give an awful snarl an’ jumped straight for my head. I threw up my paddle an’ dodged, but the critter come against my arm like a cannon ball, knocked the paddle out of my hand, an’ give a rip with his claws that tore my sleeve inter strings an’ come near fixin’ my arm the same way. I lost my balance when the old feller hit me, the boat tipped, an’ over we went, boat, cat, an’ all together. Of course the light was out the first thing; an’ I never shall forget that splash as I tumbled into the cold water in the terrible blackness, with the hiss of the torch as it went out, an’ the snarls of the cat, an’ the squeakin’ of the bats, all mixed up in my ears. I can’t swim much an’ I thought I should never come up. The water in here feels different from that outside. Ye can’t help thinkin’ of chills an’ cramps when ye touch the cold, black stuff. I swallowed a good bit of water but I clawed like sin an’ by’n’by I come up to the top an’ heard the wild cat tryin’ to crawl on to the boat. I didn’t want to get any nearer to him so I paddled for all I was worth in the other direction. My, how cold it was! An’ how tired I was ’fore I touched the shore! I didn’t know where I was goin’ nor how far ’twas, an’ I didn’t care so it was away from the cat. But, as I said, I can’t swim much an’ it seemed more’n an hour ’fore I touched the rocks. Once I felt myself sinkin’, an’ the water come up round