

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE – ARON RALSTON

'Between a Rock and a Hard Place' is a 2004 autobiographical book by American mountain climber Aron Ralston. It details an incident that occurred in 2003 when Ralston was canyoneering in Blue John Canyon in the Utah desert, where he became trapped for five days. The book predominantly recounts Ralston's experience being trapped in the canyon and how he was forced to amputate his right arm with a blunt pocket knife to free himself after the arm became trapped by a boulder. It also describes Ralston's childhood, how he took up outdoor activities after moving to Colorado from Indiana, how he came to be an obsessive outdoorsman and how he left his engineering career at Intel in Arizona to take up outdoor activities as much as possible.

The title '**Between a Rock and a Hard Place**' is an idiom and a well-known saying. The phrase implies a situation in which a person doesn't have any choice instead there are only two options both are unsatisfactory and unwelcome. It is usually used metaphorically. Here, it foreshadows that the writer will find himself in a predicament where any decision he makes will be a difficult one.

The extract opens with minute details about how the writer (narrator) is inching his way across the massive canyon. The first paragraph, which opens up with a short and simple sentence "**I come to another drop-off**" introduces the use of first-person, showing that we are in a person's narrative, and as usual for an intimate, autobiographical piece. It is written in the present tense, which means that the events are unfolding in front of us. The narrative voice is unaware of what will happen in the future. This makes it immediate, dramatic and tense. A '**drop-off**' is a sudden drop in floor level in the canyon that he is exploring. The technical diction of climbing shows the reader that the writer is an expert at this, making what happens next even more awful. The word '**another**' implies that he has already been exposed to a similar situation and the idea of how experienced he is, reinforces his confidence.

The expertise of Ralston is shown through the long sentence "**Instead of the walls widening after the drop-off, or opening into a bowl at the bottom of the canyon, here the slot narrows to a consistent three feet across at the lip of the drop-off and continues at that width for fifty feet down the canyon**". The use of long sentence structure reflects how scrupulously and detailed the structure of climbing was scrutinized, which conveys the information that he was able to assess his surroundings accurately and analytically. The demonstrative pronoun "**This**" is used to engage the readers who are able to see what the narrator is pointing to. He also used mathematical language such as "**maybe eleven or twelve feet**", "**consistent three feet**" to display he was adept at gauging distance – a standard skill for excellent climbers, apart from informing the readers about the expanse he was climbing. The use of the word '**may be**' suggests uncertainty and a colloquial informality alerting us to the fact that Ralston is in an unfamiliar location, and therefore potentially at far great risk. The use of the word '**geometry**' reinforces the idea of how angular the rock face was. This account is peppered with technical lexis relating to the rocks and his movements which convince the reader that the writer has a reasonable degree of experience in free climbing.

The writer then goes into a description of the rock he is going to descend distinguishing it from the one he climbed '**ten minutes ago**', and this creates an immediate sense that he is adventurous and has an intricate knowledge of what he was doing. He, then highlights –**refrigerator chock stone, ledge and drop-off** and these are examples for the semantic field of mountaineering. A chock stone is a rock

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