

THE TEMPLE OF SÄHR

WILLIAM PENGREEP

THREE FINE ROMANCES BY  
AUSTRALIAN AUTHORS

VISION

By ANNE PRAIZE

THE CRIMSON FALCON

By NITA O. THOMPSON

OLD BLASTUS OF BANDICOOT

By MILES FRANKLIN

# THE TEMPLE OF SÄHR

*By*

WILLIAM PENGREEP

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TO  
JEAN

✓  
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*Alto.*



## FOREWORD

WHEN my friend Mr William Pengreep first sought my consent to his writing the story of the adventures which befell us in the Land of the Sährs I was reluctant, principally because our experiences were so amazing as to excite possible incredulity. However, I finally agreed to his persuasions on condition that the manuscript should be submitted to me upon completion. I have read Mr Pengreep's realistic account of our adventures, and I can offer no further objection to its publication. The story has been written just as I would have desired it; every detail of that amazing journey to Treasure Lake and the events which so swiftly followed have been described with a fidelity and realism that, despite the lapse of time, bring them all back to my mind with vivid clarity. Only in one direction has Mr Pengreep, at my request, veered from strict accuracy, and that is in the bearings of the Lake. We who experienced the adventures chronicled herein feel that the exact location of the Lake should not be divulged; the discerning reader will perceive our reason towards the close of the story.

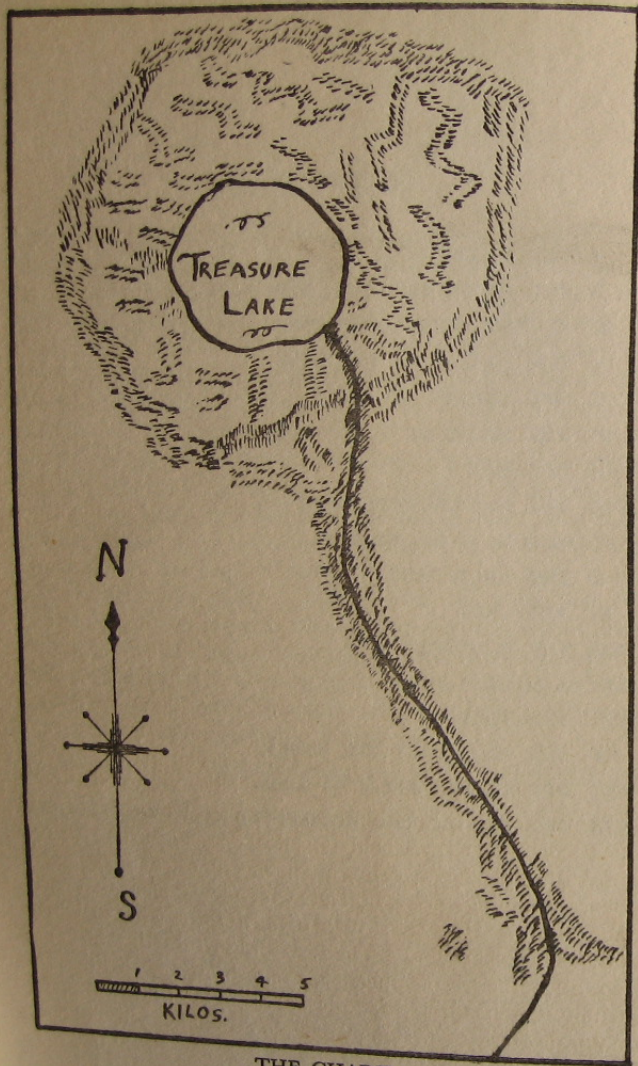
PETER TRELOARE, M.B., M.R.C.P.Lond.

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THE CHART

## CHAPTER I

### THE CHART

"WELL, gentlemen, what do you think of it? How do you like my little surprise?"

Dr Peter Treloare, M.B., M.R.C.P.Lond., crossed his legs, leaned back in his comfortable armchair, and glanced keenly at the two men seated on the opposite side of the small round baize-covered card-table. The brilliant electric light cast a glaring illumination over the room, which, as might have been guessed from the well-filled bookshelves, with their array of leather-bound volumes, and the polished roll-top writing-desk, was indeed the Doctor's study. There was, however, nothing of a professional nature in the matter which engrossed the attention of the other two occupants of the room. It was, in fact, something of far greater interest to all of them than the mere unfolding of a tale of sickness and misery; and the undoubted interest which they evinced in the curious thing spread out in front of them was such as certainly would have been aroused in ninety-nine men out of every hundred—and probably more than that.

Dr Treloare, as his name might have suggested, was a Cornishman by birth—bluff, good-tempered, and as generous-hearted a man as ever held a medical degree. He had arrived in Australia when a young man, shortly after obtaining his degree, gaining with it honours which few men at that early age attain. He was a man of medium height, to whom advancing years had brought a certain rotundity of figure not altogether displeasing. The high brow and slightly protruding forehead bespoke unusual strength of intellect. The natural severity of his long Roman nose and high cheek-bones



was softened by the round chin, beneath which another was beginning to make its suspicious appearance. His age was nearer sixty than fifty, though his appearance and manner belied the fact; for the Doctor was a man who held his physical health in the highest esteem, and having guarded it carefully during his younger days now rejoiced in the exuberant spirits and good-humour which only perfect health can give to advancing years.

Opposite him was seated Major Arthur Wilding, explorer and adventurer, famous for his daring expeditions through the length and breadth of the Empire. More than six feet in height, proportionately broad and immensely powerful, Wilding was indeed a veritable giant of a man. His face, surmounted by closely cropped jet-black hair, was granite-like in its rugged austerity, and tanned to brownness by long exposure to the elements; yet despite his swarthy features he was withal a man of attractive appearance, and his square, thick-set jaw and piercing steel-blue eyes gave one the impression of tremendous strength of will-power and force of character which was not belied by his amazing record. On more than one occasion had his dogged perseverance and grim tenacity of purpose carried him safely, almost miraculously, through dangers well-nigh insurmountable. Formerly an English army officer, Arthur Wilding had, in his forty years' existence, explored most countries on this earth, and, thirsting for new sights and new sensations, was now on a visit to Australia. He had first met Doctor Treloare in the Adelaide Club, and, being a man who made few friends, had been glad enough to avail himself of the frequent invitations of the Doctor to visit his home in the quiet Adelaide suburb whenever he felt inclined. At first he had accepted the invitations largely because of his loneliness; later he had found another and more impelling reason.

The third member of the party gathered round the Doctor's study table on that warm October evening was a

young man of some twenty-eight years of age. Although his physical stature could not compare with that of the travel-hardened explorer, Brian Dale was nevertheless a magnificent type of athletic young Australian manhood. What he lacked in weight was more than counterbalanced by supple strength, well-trained and hardened on the football field and behind the oar. His frank, cheery countenance, if not handsome, was at least pleasing and confidence-inspiring in its fine openness. An electrical engineer by profession, young Dale had, by sheer merit, already risen well up the ladder of success. He was an orphan, living with a maiden aunt in the house adjoining the Doctor's residence, and since the latter's only child—a girl, left motherless in her first year's existence—was but a year younger than Dale himself, the two had been playmates all their lives; and the young fellow, whose manly qualities the Doctor greatly admired, was a frequent visitor to his home. Secretly, Dr Treloare cherished the hope that Brian Dale might some day become his son-in-law; but, being wise in the ways of the younger generation, he said nothing to his rather high-spirited, pretty daughter, and merely contented himself with giving, as he termed it in his expressive diction, "a push in the right direction" when opportunity offered, and with watching the results of his quite ineffective efforts.

On the table at which the three men were seated lay the object which seemed to have such an absorbing interest for both Wilding and Dale, and if the Doctor evinced no outward interest it must be admitted that this was only because he had, that afternoon, devoted no less than three hours of time to its solution. It was, he reflected, not often that anyone would have such tempting fare to place before a man so famous as Arthur Wilding, and his eyes twinkled as he observed the expression on the explorer's rugged features.

The object responsible for this interesting state of affairs was a sheet of heavy parchment paper, which originally had been of the size known as foolscap, but had been reduced in



size through several inches having been roughly torn from the bottom of the sheet. It was plainly some years old, for the colour had faded from the original azure tint to a mottled yellow-grey. It had been folded first in half, and then into three smaller sections, the creases having almost cut through the heavy paper; and from its generally dilapidated appearance it had obviously been carried in a rough wrapping in a none-too-clean pocket. In a space occupying about one-half of the top portion of the sheet had been sketched the rough plan which appears on page 10; the lower part of the sheet was completely filled with small, cramped writing, which must at some time have been continued farther down, as the sheet had been torn right across the writing. Age and the general rough handling to which this curious document had plainly been subjected had combined to make the writing almost indecipherable; yet had it been quite clear it would still have been an enigma to both Wilding and Dale, since the words were in French, a language with which neither was familiar. Carefully affixed by drawing-pins to a sheet of stout strawboard, this was the amazing document which, not without justification it must be admitted, had caught and held the interest of the two men who closely studied it.

Wilding at length leaned back in his chair and lit a cigar. His keen eyes bore an expression of mingled amusement and curiosity as they rested upon the face of his host.

"Well, Doctor, you've certainly struck a corker this time," he declared. "It is evidently a plan of some sort, judging, by the look of it, in mountainous country; but why, where, or what is more than I can tell—and I'll wager Dale here is in the same position. The sketch itself signifies very little; the French jumble at the bottom must be almost unreadable. Where in the name of the saints did you pick it up?"

Dr Treloare chuckled at the surprise his little mystery had aroused. "Got you guessing, has it? Well, I'm not sur-

prised, either! I was in the same boat when I first saw it. By George, it's a real trimmer! I've been practising medicine for the best part of thirty years, and I've come across some queer things in that time, but I've never struck anything to equal this before. Perhaps I had better begin at the beginning and tell you the whole yarn."

He selected a fine Havana, pierced the end, and settled down more comfortably in his chair, puffing contentedly. The sound of his pleasant voice was all that broke the stillness of the quiet evening, and his two listeners heard with growing astonishment the tale which fell from his lips.

"Shortly after one this afternoon, just as I was finishing lunch, there came a ring on the telephone. It was from Garland, who, as you probably know, is resident surgeon at the Queen Alberta Hospital in Adelaide. 'Treloare,' said he, 'can you come along to the hospital at once? A sailor—a Frenchman named Sevinge—has just been brought in. He fell down the hold of his vessel, the *Cygnets*, and is very badly injured internally, and has a broken back. There is absolutely no hope for him, and he is sinking fast. He is semi-conscious, and in his ramblings has called for you several times. It must be you—you're the only Dr Peter Treloare in Adelaide. Will you come at once? He may go at any minute.'

"Of course, I told him I would leave immediately, and before I could ask him any questions he rang off in my ear. I'll admit I was very much surprised at the summons; in fact, I was utterly at a loss to understand it at all, for I could not remember ever having had anything to do with a French sailor named Sevinge, or any other name. However, there was no time then for speculation, so I got out the Vauxhall and hurried to the hospital. The poor chap was terribly injured, and was in a half-conscious condition. I could see at a glance that nothing could be done for him, and that death would be a happy release from his agony. He did not know me when I first spoke to him, but later consciousness



returned in some degree, and his face lit up with a smile when he recognized me.

“ ‘Doctor,’ he murmured in broken English, and I had to bend over him to catch the words. ‘Doctor, you may not remember me, but I have not forgotten you. Five years ago you helped me when I hurt my arm. You asked for no payment, but I could have given you none then.’ A fierce fit of coughing racked him, and for a while he could not utter a word. When he resumed I could scarcely hear him. He stretched an arm under his pillow and drew forth an old blue envelope, greasy and dirty.

“ ‘Take this, Doctor,’ he gasped, ‘it is the last gift of a dying man. Do what you will with it. Use it well and it will make you rich, for the treasure is still there. But beware—’ Again that coughing racked him, almost convulsing him with its intensity; when it had subsided he was too weak to speak and had drifted into semi-consciousness again. Three minutes later he died, carrying with him the warning he intended giving me.”

Dr Treloare leaned forward to flick the ash from his cigar. Wilding and Dale, who had listened to his strange narrative with the keenest interest, waited expectantly for him to resume.

“When I arrived home, considerably surprised by what had happened, I first spent half-an-hour looking through my patients’ book some five years ago. Sure enough, I discovered that I had treated a man who gave his name as Pierre Sevinge for a nasty gash in his left forearm which had been received, according to his tale, in a fracas in the street. Thus far, at any rate, the man’s statement was true enough, though I cannot say I had any real doubt about it at all, for something seemed to tell me that he was speaking the truth. However, there’s no harm in verification, which has many times helped me in my professional work.

“With those strange words, ‘the treasure is still there,’ ringing in my ears, my next step was to examine the package.

The envelope, as I have said, was greasy and dirty, having apparently been carried in the man’s pocket for some time. On opening it I found this paper”—indicating the sheet of torn foolscap—“wrapped carefully in several thicknesses of waxed paper. I could see, of course, that it was a plan of some locality, but at first glance I had no more idea than you two of where it was, or what it was meant to represent. However, the ‘French jumble,’ as you termed it, Wilding, gave me the key to the whole thing. In my younger days I took a course of French, and although it is many years since I have done much of it, I was able, by the aid of a dictionary, to decipher most of the writing.”

“Well done!” interjected Wilding approvingly. “Another advantage of learning other people’s languages!”

The Doctor smiled broadly.

“I flatter myself,” he remarked, “that I made a pretty good job of the translation. To tell you the truth, I wouldn’t take on anything like it again if you paid me, for what with the small, cramped writing, the folds in the paper, the fading of the ink, and, to cap everything, some very bad grammar, I had the very devil of a time with it. I struggled with it for a long while, until my eyes began to ache under the strain. Then I thought of using my magnifying-glass, and found it a great help. At last, after nearly three hours of hard work, with constant reference to the dictionary, I had the satisfaction of having obtained a fairly accurate translation of the French writing, and I’m willing to wager anything you like that if my translation, together with that chart, were published in any of our daily newspapers it would create one of the greatest sensations Australia has had for years!”

He paused dramatically, and Wilding and Dale moved impatiently. “Well, what is it, Doctor?” exclaimed the younger man impetuously. “What does the French jargon say?”

The Doctor’s voice was quite calm as he proceeded,



though he could not quite conceal the ring of triumph as he flung his bombshell.

"It says, first, that the chart actually represents a certain locality, hitherto unexplored, in Central Australia; second, that in that locality reposes a treasure of vast wealth; third, that the only entrance to Treasure Lake is by way of a river which flows for ten miles in a subterranean tunnel through a range of mountains!"

There was absolute stillness in the room following Dr Treloare's astonishing statement. So interested had his two hearers become in his extraordinary narrative that they had had little time for conjecture about its climax, and the entirely unexpected ending was for the moment almost incomprehensible. It had, in fact, thrown them off their balance completely; and even Wilding, who in his exploring experiences had learned to take most things calmly, was powerless to conceal his surprise. As for Brian Dale, he was utterly nonplussed, and sat staring at the Doctor as though hypnotized.

Wilding was the first to recover from the mild shock. "Well, I'll be damned!" he ejaculated, half-ashamed, if the truth be told, of having been thus caught unawares. "Where in blazes did you get hold of that yarn? I believe you're pulling our legs!" He glanced sharply at his host.

The smile swiftly left the Doctor's face.

"Not at all, my dear Wilding, not at all!" said he earnestly. "I can assure you that what I have told you is absolutely the gist of the translation, so far as it goes. More than that I can't tell you, because it isn't there. You see the sheet has been torn some inches from the bottom, and unfortunately for us the missing part is even more interesting than that which we have here. Listen, and I'll read you my translation." He plunged his hand into an inside pocket of his coat and drew forth a folded sheet of notepaper, covered with his own sprawling hieroglyphics. And from this he read:

"Treasure Lake lies approximately 131 deg. 25 min.

East long. and 25 deg. 30 min. South lat. Start from the river at 130 deg. East long. and 31 deg. South lat. Thence travel along the broad stream which flows generally north-north-east until it meets the mountains bearing north-west. The tunnel through the range is wide and high, yet dark as the blackest pit on earth. It will measure at least fifteen kilometres in length. The current is of moderate strength, neither swift nor slow. Treasure Lake, surrounded by hills and rocks, measures three kilometres at its widest part. There is no other entrance, and no other exit, than the tunnel through the range. Here lies the Golden Rope—a mighty chain of nuggets of gold, of a wealth such as no man may calculate at sight, of a brilliance that gleams like a thousand suns. It lies in the cave near the waterfall, reached by following the——"

"That's as far as I can go," said the Doctor ruefully. "The next word is torn clean in half, and there is no more on the sheet. I'd give something to have the other part! But you can see from this that I've told you no more than the truth, and from what Sevinge said we have every reason to believe that this treasure—this Golden Rope—is still in the cave by the waterfall. Where he got this chart from I don't know, of course; he may have got it in a fight with someone, for all we know, for he was a pretty tough customer. But he must have known more than we do, for you remember his last words—to beware of something."

"I should think there would be a good many things to beware of in such a trip," remarked Wilding dryly. "The man who sketched that plan and wrote the words under it must have had a remarkable adventure."

"Not a doubt of it," assented the Doctor. "And," he added with great deliberation, "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't do likewise!"

"What!" The exclamation came simultaneously from his two companions, who stared at their host in astonishment. For a moment they had thought he was joking, but one



glance at the earnest expression upon his features convinced them of the Doctor's genuine seriousness.

"Do you really mean," said Wilding slowly, "to suggest that we should follow up this vague chart, go down the river, through the tunnel, and—and——"

"Certainly," averred the Doctor stoutly. "And pick up the treasure too, if there is any. Why not?" He leaned forward in his chair, facing them earnestly. "I've been thinking this matter over all the afternoon, and I can't see anything to stop us from making the trip. Here I am, getting near the end of my tether without having had one decent adventure in my life, despite the fact that I've been practising a profession which is popularly supposed to be one thrill after another. I want some excitement! I admit it openly. Who doesn't want it? We may not find any, of course, but it's worth going in search of, anyway, with a bait like this luring us on." His eyes sparkled with anticipation. "Hidden treasure—and in such surroundings! Hell's bells, ever since I first read *Treasure Island* thirty years ago I've been itching to hunt for hidden treasure! And now here's the very thing flung right into my hands! What about you, Brian?" He eyed his young friend quizzically. "What do you say about it? Are you game to go roving for hidden treasure, young fellow?"

His enthusiasm caught Brian Dale at once. The young man's eyes were alight with the fire of adventure. "Rather!" he cried, with emphasis. "I'm with you, Doc! I couldn't resist that!"

Doctor Treloare grinned like a delighted schoolboy.

"I knew you couldn't," he said with a chuckle. "Of course you'll come! Now, what about you, Wilding? Here's a chance for you to add to your laurels. You've explored most inaccessible parts of the world. Surely you're not going to travel home twelve thousand miles without following this up to its end? Why, man, you'd regret it for the rest of your days!"

The explorer smiled slightly at his friend's infectious enthusiasm.

"Maybe," he said, in his slow, deliberate way. "Of course I'll come with you, Doctor, if you're set upon going. Perhaps we're foolish, taking on a trip like this without a little more knowledge of what it's all about. It might be the death of us all. However, I'm not worrying much about that! I've taken so many risks in the past that one more is neither here nor there! But I wouldn't be fair to you if I did not warn you that this may not be the pleasure jaunt you think it. There may be dangers of all sorts, and——"

"Pshaw!" the Doctor exploded impatiently. "God bless me, Arthur Wilding, we're not children! Don't start throwing cold water on my scheme to give you all something to think about for years! And as for dangers, why, it won't be half as dangerous as some of your own reckless trips. I've got it all worked out—ways and means of getting there, and everything else. The main thing is: Do we go?"

There was no doubt about the emphatic affirmative to his query. Wilding's "Sure!" and Dale's "Too right!" came in a simultaneous volley of sound.

"Good!" There was a note of deep satisfaction in the Doctor's voice as he relaxed into his chair. "That's settled, then. We go!"

"Oh!" came a silvery voice from the doorway. "Do we?"

With one accord the men sprang to their feet. For an instant the slender figure of a girl was framed like a picture in the open doorway, then she stepped into the room, softly closed the door, and faced them with an air of amused curiosity upon her delicate features, and a hint of mischief in her laughing brown eyes. Her unexpected entry had startled the men, but it was not only that which now held them rooted to the floor.

For Dorothy Treloare presented a picture that most men



would have stood long to admire. Tall, slim and graceful, from the top of her shingled golden-brown hair to the tips of her neat brown shoes she was indeed a fine type of winsome girlhood. Her features, flushed with the glow of radiant health, were regular and even, with a firm set of the chin which indicated a resolute will. Her brown eyes were almost invariably laughing, and when she smiled the flash of perfect white teeth was dazzling against the darker tint of her soft face, to which an open-air life had imparted a light colour despite the efforts of all the modern aids to beauty which favour young women of this twentieth century. Not that Dorothy Treloare had ever found it necessary to descend to the depths of crudity represented in the lipstick; Nature had endowed her liberally with ample colour, and needed but little assistance to enable this charming example of her handiwork to maintain her beauty and fascination.

The Doctor was proud of his pretty daughter, and with justification; proud not only of her physical charms, but also of her mental prowess, for Dorothy had just recently completed her course of training as a nurse at one of Adelaide's largest public hospitals, and had flung her father into an ecstasy of triumphant happiness by passing every examination with the highest honours. To the natural physical beauty with which Nature had endowed her she thus added a brightness of intellect which made her a universal favourite everywhere. As she walked lightly across the study towards the little group of men her father's eyes shone with pride and affection; the eyes of Dale and Wilding also were shining, the former with open adoration, the latter with admiration ill-concealed beneath the half-closed lids.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" Dorothy cried merrily. "So we go, do we? Where do we go, and when, and how? I'm ready whenever you are!"

"Dorothy," said her father, endeavouring to look sternly at his bewitching daughter—an effort, incidentally, which failed dismally—"you should not come in here without

knocking. It's bad form, you know! If you do it again I shall have to spank you!"

"Oh, will you?" Dorothy's laughter pealed out merrily, and she flung an arm round her father's shoulder. "I'd advise you not to try it, Dr Treloare! Fancy a little old fat man trying to spank me! And here he is, actually engaged in a secret council, too! Daddy, I'm really surprised at you." She wagged a finger at him reprovingly. "Why, at your age you should be in a big armchair, with a cap on your head, and slippers on your feet!"

"What! What! 'Little old fat man'! Dammit, girl, I'm not old!" exploded the Doctor, squirming indignantly, while Dale and Wilding chuckled at his discomfiture. "Blister me, anyone would think I was as old as Methuselah to hear you talk, you little minx! By gad, I won't have it, I tell you! I won't!"

"No, no, of course not," said his daughter soothingly, with a wink at Dale that sent that young man into a spasm of mirth. "You're only a chicken, aren't you, my little man? Though to hear *you* talk, anyone might think, without any blistering, that you were a wild old Cornishman! Your language, Dr Treloare, is really dreadful for a medical man—it's a disgrace to the profession! I shall have to take you in hand. Maybe I'll spank *you* if your language doesn't improve!"

She dropped a kiss lightly upon her father's flustered brow and slipped gracefully into a chair near the table. "Now where *do* we go?" she inquired again, her keen glance sweeping each in turn as the men resumed their seats round the table.

The Doctor fidgeted uneasily and said "Ahem!" in an apologetic tone. Wilding and Dale moved uncomfortably, waiting for a lead from their host. Dorothy looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Why, there must be some mystery afoot," she cried. "There's devilry in the air! I can smell it! Ha! What's



this?" Her eyes suddenly fell upon the parchment on the table, and before the Doctor could prevent her she had picked it up. Her brown eyes opened wide in wonderment. "Why, this is a chart," she exclaimed. "Daddy, where did you get it?"

The Doctor groaned. "Er—it was given to me," he responded weakly.

"Oh, isn't it perfectly gorgeous! 'Treasure Lake'! And surrounded by mountains. And what's that? A river running through another mountain! And all written in French! Why, this is wonderful! Oh, what an adventure!" Her eyes sparkled with excitement. "So this is what the conspiracy was all about, eh?" she said accusingly. "You're planning to go up this river to Treasure Lake! And you were actually going to leave me at home! I don't call that a fair deal, now!"

The Doctor flung out his hands appealingly. "But, my dear girl, you can't come with us," he remonstrated. "It's—it's no trip for a girl. It's too risky, and dangerous, and we don't know what we may meet, and——"

Both Dale and Wilding grinned as the Doctor, red in the face, rattled off all the objections which he had but a few moments earlier brushed so lightly aside.

Dorothy's mouth set in a determined little straight line. She slipped round the table, placed both hands upon her father's shoulders, and looked him straight in the face. "Dr Peter Treloare," she exclaimed severely, "would you dare to go off on a treasure hunt and leave your only daughter out of it? Now, listen to me"—as her father began to raise further objections—"I am going with you! I've made up my mind, and it won't make any difference whether you sit there and argue all night! I—am—going! If you think I intend to be left out of this, sir, then you're very much mistaken, and I'll change my medical adviser, so I will! Blister me, anyone would think I was as old as Methuselah to hear you talk!"

There was a burst of laughter from Dale and Wilding at this shrewd sally at the Doctor's expense. The latter collapsed weakly and stared helplessly across the table at his fellow-conspirators. He knew it would be quite useless to argue if Dorothy had made up her mind.

"What do you think about it?" he asked the others.

Dorothy flashed a devastating smile upon the reluctant Wilding and the hesitant Dale. Neither had any qualms about sharing the risks of an adventure like this amongst themselves, but for Dorothy to share them was quite another matter. Wilding had opened his mouth to utter an objection, but alas! that smile shattered everything. How could a man say "No" to a girl with such a smile? "I may come, Major Wilding, mayn't I—please?"

Wilding's stern features relaxed at the naïve appeal. "Well, of course, if your father is agreeable—er, I suppose it could be arranged, but——"

"Oh, there you go with your 'buts' again! Major, you're as bad as Daddy! . . . Well, that's two, anyway. Now, Brian Dale, I'm not going to *ask* for your approval; I'm going to *demand* it! If you say 'No' I'll never play tennis, nor dance, nor swim with you again!"

The Doctor chuckled at the expression upon his young friend's face. "By gad, she doesn't leave you much choice, eh, Brian?"

The vision of that fair, laughing face, the dancing eyes, had gone deep into young Dale's heart, setting it jumping at a pace that broke all acceleration records. With an effort he pulled himself together.

"No, she does not," he answered, with a cheerful grin. "Under the circumstances, I suppose I shall have to fall in with the majority, but——"

"Hurrah! Cheers for me! Didn't I manage that nicely, now? I *knew* you wouldn't leave me out of such a glorious adventure, for all your 'buts'! Well, that's settled, anyway. As my respected father remarked when I happened to open



the door a few minutes earlier, we go. And now, when do we start? Come, Daddy, let me into the secret."

"Sit down, young woman, and calm yourself a little," admonished her father; and, Dale having placed an extra chair for the new member, the council resumed its interrupted deliberations.

"Before we go any further, just study this for a moment." The Doctor took an atlas from one of the shelves and, opening it, displayed a large-scale map of Australia upon the table.

"On checking up the position given in the chart I found that the start of this strange river, which is not marked on this map, is here." He placed a pin-point upon the Avon river, at a spot near the West Australian border. "The position of Treasure Lake is given as 131 deg. 25 min. East longitude, and 25 deg. 30 min. South latitude. In other words, it lies at least five hundred miles north-east of the starting-point. Now, as we all know, the Avon is an important river, some seventeen hundred miles in length, but the bulk of the travelling by the river-boats is along the western stretch in West Australia, and I doubt whether any of them ever come farther east than the border. Also, the Avon has so many tributaries branching from it that one more or less would hardly be noticed, and if the junction of this northern stream with the Avon has ever been noticed—which I doubt—it has probably never been considered worth following up. The country hereabouts, and farther north to the lake, is not settled, and is, in fact, generally regarded as a vast stretch of useless, desert country. My own opinion is that this northern river is just a small stream where it enters the Avon, and it must widen considerably as it goes northwards, for the chart describes it as 'a broad stream'; hence I should think that if we can locate its junction with the Avon we should have no difficulty in following it north to the lake."

"Yes, that's probably correct," said Wilding, nodding his head in approval. "I remember a small river in Central

Africa something like that. It is not more than thirty yards wide at the junction with the main stream, but fifteen miles up through the jungle it is more than half-a-mile in width. The Australian river system is most peculiar, and a similar state of affairs might easily obtain on this stream."

"But, Daddy, how are we to get along this river?" queried Dorothy, with a little puzzled frown. "Are you going to buy a boat?"

Her father smiled. "Not quite!" said he. "I've got a better plan than that. Don't you remember our old friend—"

"Captain Dixon!" Dorothy's voice was vibrant with excitement. "Of course! Why, he would be just the man!"

"Not a doubt about it," assented her father. "Dixon," he explained to Dale and Wilding, "is an old friend of mine, whom I haven't seen for two or three years. He runs a river-boat for cargo and passengers on the Avon, and I am certain he will jump at this scheme, not so much because of the treasure at the end of it, but because he is always keen on penetrating into the back country. His boat would be just a nice size for us; it's not too big, nor too small. We can finance the outfit comfortably ourselves, and even if we don't find any treasure, nor even the tunnel through the range, well, we shall all have had a pleasant holiday trip, which won't do any of us any harm. Now what do you think of my plan?"

"Splendid!" cried Dorothy and Dale together. Wilding hesitated a moment before replying. "Yes, I think it is sound," said he at length. "The scheme is feasible—as far as the rivers go, I mean. Whether the whole thing is a hoax remains to be seen, but even if it is no harm will be done in following it up. There is only one thing: we must keep this business strictly to ourselves, otherwise we may have competition that will cause no end of trouble. Can you rely on Captain Dixon to keep quiet?"

"Absolutely," averred the Doctor. "I'll write him



to-night, and as soon as we hear from him we can get our preparations under way. I know Dixon has an electric-lighting plant on his launch, and I propose installing a headlamp, or a searchlight, so that we will not be travelling blindly through the tunnel. We will also be armed, just to be on the safe side—though I really don't anticipate any danger in this deserted region. But you're right about keeping this thing to ourselves, Wilding. If it gets about that we are going on a treasure-hunt we will have half the countryside on our trail. We must keep absolutely quiet about it. You hear that, young lady?"

Dorothy solemnly closed one eye.

"My lord," she said, "your wishes shall be observed."

## CHAPTER II

### THE RIVER THROUGH THE RANGE

DOCTOR TRELOARE had not exaggerated when he observed that Captain Dixon would be agreeable to joining in the journey up the strange unknown river to the mysterious Treasure Lake. Indeed, the skipper had accepted the suggestion to use his boat with an alacrity that left no doubt in the minds of the others as to the sincerity of his offer to join them. And, as the Doctor had said, his boat proved ideal for the venture. In vivid contrast to the majority of unkempt river-boats, the *Jessica* was a smart, clean launch, compact, yet large enough to carry its full complement of passengers comfortably.

Just why he had chosen that name for his boat was a question to which no one had ever obtained a satisfactory answer. James Dixon was a bachelor, a mere three years younger than his old friend Dr Treloare, and so far as was known he had never been heard to mention a woman's name at any time. The curious loungers upon the river wharves, with the ready explanation of their kind, averred that he had been jilted in his younger days by a woman for whom he still retained his former affection; but, since the skipper himself never enlightened anyone upon the matter, the origin of the name which he had chosen for his boat remained a mystery to all but himself.

Dixon was a man well provided with his share of this world's goods, and he ran his launch on the Avon principally because he liked the free-and-easy open life. Hence he had spared no expense in equipping the *Jessica*, which was more like a pleasure launch than a commercial craft.



## THE TEMPLE OF SÄHR

Powered with a new type of oil-burning engine, and equipped with electricity for light and power, the trim-lined boat was ideal for the purpose to which it was now proposed to place it, and although it was not built for speed it was nevertheless able to maintain a steady rate of progress which quite satisfied its passengers.

After some consideration it had been decided that only two outsiders should accompany the party on its venture, and both of these were chosen because they had been in the service of Captain Dixon for several years. They were Sandy MacTavish, a dour Scots engineer, ready to run the launch wherever the skipper ordered with typical national phlegmatic calm, and Pat Murphy, a small, active Irish-Australian, who was an excellent cook-steward, and who could, in the words of the skipper, "dish up a meal out of next door to nothing."

The full complement therefore comprised seven in all: the Doctor and his daughter Dorothy, Major Wilding, Brian Dale, Captain Dixon, and MacTavish and Murphy. The actual handling of the launch devolved, of course, upon Captain Dixon, but the whole of the outfitting and provisioning had been superintended by Wilding, whose knowledge in this direction, gained from his own vast experience in journeys much more arduous than this, had proved invaluable, and a veritable eye-opener to the Doctor.

The explorer had left nothing to chance. In every possible requirement the *Jessica* was fitted out for at least a two months' trip, and although Wilding did not expect more than half of that time to be devoted to the journey, he had seen in the past such disastrous results through lack of foresight in this direction that he deemed it wiser to err on the safe side—a course in which, needless to state, he was supported by every other member of the party.

Beyond the addition of a small but powerful searchlight, mounted on a swivel in the bows, it had been found un-

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necessary to make any extensive alterations to the *Jessica* in order to render the launch suitable for its unusual journey. Dale and Sandy MacTavish had, during the first few days of the voyage, wired up a number of electric-light globes round the spacious deck, so that at night-time, when all the lights were switched on, the launch became a blaze of sparkling light. Beyond these, nothing else called for alteration. Behind the *Jessica*, attached by a short length of wire rope, trailed a handy motor-boat—an ordinary large-sized rowing-boat to which had been fitted a single-cylinder outboard motor—for use if the necessity arose.

Little difficulty had been experienced in locating the exact junction of the unknown river with the Avon, and it was with considerable curiosity and keen expectancy that the *Jessica* was swung out of the wide open stretches of the Avon and into the narrow stream which led to the north. Before they had completed the first fifteen miles up the river the Doctor's hope that it would widen had been fulfilled, and at the end of the first day's run of some twenty-five miles the *Jessica* floated gently in the warm summer night upon a broad sheet of water some five hundred yards in width, and overhung by steeply sloping banks which towered, alternate patches of bare, brown earth and stunted, leafy shrubs and trees, to a height of about a hundred and fifty feet above the water. On top of the banks tall trees were growing in scattered scarcity, but until Captain Dixon, moved by a sudden impulse, took a sounding there was nothing in the appearance of the stream to indicate that it differed in any respect from the hundreds of other rivers flowing throughout Australia.

To the astonishment of the skipper, however, and also much to Wilding's surprise, the depth of the river proved to be nearly three hundred feet. So amazed was the skipper at this discovery that he immediately tried again, thinking that he had made a mistake, but the second sounding gave a reading exactly similar to the first.



Captain Dixon rubbed his nose in puzzled surprise, and glanced at Wilding, who stood beside him.

"This beats everything, Major!" he exclaimed. "Why, I never expected the river to be a fifth of that depth. What do you make of it?"

Wilding shrugged his broad shoulders with a characteristic, almost imperceptible, movement. "Can't say," said he dryly. "I've got so used to supposedly impossible things turning out to be possible that I've given up looking for explanations. There are some curious things in this world, Skipper. You may find that by this time to-morrow the depth will have doubled!"

"By gad, I hope not!" exclaimed the startled skipper. "I'm half sorry now that I took that sounding. I'll be wondering what next we're going to discover."

"I shouldn't worry about that," said Wilding, with a laugh. "We are bound to meet with some surprises before this trip's over, and if they are no worse than this one I'll be much surprised. But it's of no use meeting trouble halfway; we shall deal with it if, and when, it arrives."

The days drifted past in leisurely, languorous fashion, and the launch slowly made its way north-east along the unknown river. At times the stream exceeded a quarter of a mile in width, at others it narrowed considerably until it was less than two hundred yards from bank to bank. And always the banks on either side rose high above the water; indeed in its narrowest sections they seemed highest, rising sheer out of the water for more than two hundred feet, so that the *Jessica* seemed to be travelling in a mighty chasm. The awe-inspiring grandeur of those rugged banks, which as they progressed farther inland seemed to be composed of more rock than earth, impressed itself forcibly upon the travellers, who had never anticipated anything like this; and as day succeeded day, and the stream became narrower and deeper, with the massive banks rising almost like huge cliffs overhead, the travellers began to sense something of

the tenseness and excitement which are invariably aroused with the gradual approach to an unknown goal.

There was no lack of entertainment for the adventurers on the *Jessica*. Very early in the journey they had exchanged the softer garb of civilization for clothing more suited to the undertaking, and heavy khaki shirts, riding-breeches and leggings were donned by them all, including Dorothy, whom not even the severe lines of the neat sports outfit she wore could rob of her natural girlish charm and fascination.

The constantly changing surroundings, with their unfamiliar novelty, in themselves provided a kaleidoscopic panorama of which the travellers never tired. During the lazy summer days they lounged about upon the spacious deck listening to the varied broadcast programmes which came from all over the Commonwealth with amazingly clear reception. Fishing, first tried by Dale, became a popular recreation, and, although no great success was achieved in this direction, several good catches of five- and six-pound specimens were obtained every day, which Pat Murphy, with the wizardry known only to the champion cook, managed to serve up in the form of tempting and appetizing dishes which formed a welcome addition to the menu. The wonderful bird-life which enveloped the strange river and its equally strange surroundings was a never-ending source of instructive entertainment. This quiet region, unmarked by the hand of man, seemed to be a veritable Mecca for every conceivable kind of Australian bird, large and small. In a galaxy of gorgeous colourings they thronged the banks and flitted unafraid just over the *Jessica* as the launch made its steady passage through the limpid water. At night, and in the early morning, the air was filled with a vast melody of sound such as none of the adventurers had ever heard before.

Dorothy and Brian Dale also found an interest in revolver practice, and under the expert tuition of Wilding, who was



a crack shot with both rifle and revolver, they made rapid progress in marksmanship.

At night, under the brilliant electric light on the deck, where the air was cooler than in the small saloon, the travellers played bridge, the Doctor and Wilding endeavouring, not without some measure of success, it must be said, to prove their superiority over Dorothy and Dale. When they tired of cards Dorothy danced upon the smooth deck alternately with Dale and Wilding to the broadcast music, while the Doctor and Captain Dixon pored over the chessboard, at which game both were enthusiasts. Dorothy was surprised to discover that the burly explorer was an excellent dancer. He moved on his feet as lightly as the girl herself, and was an even better partner than Brian Dale, whom Dorothy had always regarded as an ideal exponent of the art.

And so the days went by in calm succession, and the launch made its unhurried way towards the north. Maintaining a steady average, and travelling just as they felt inclined, they covered generally about fifty miles each day along the unknown river, and at the end of the tenth day Captain Dixon estimated that a little more than five hundred miles had been travelled. In the last two days the contour of the river had changed wonderfully. The stream had narrowed until at times it was not more than one hundred yards wide, yet the current had not increased its rate of flow in the slightest degree. The depth, too, had remained fairly constant.

On the tenth day's run the river underwent a startling change. Veering now sharply to the north-west, it had developed into a ravine, the barren rocky banks towering more than two hundred feet high, with an almost precipitous drop from the top. There was less than fifty yards of water at the widest portion of the river, and the tall gaunt banks, surmounted by a thick growth of leafy trees, presented a weird spectacle. Towards the close of the day a mountain

range appeared in the distance, its hazy outline blurred against the blue sky, and night fell with the launch but a few miles distant from the strange passageway through the range.

On the *Jessica* that night the adventurers felt a queer sense of tension, which affected even the stoical Wilding. The only sounds that broke the extreme stillness of the summer night were the eerie calls of far-off mopokes and curlews, and the occasional screech of a nearer cockatoo or parrot jarring sharply on tingling nerves. The velvet softness of the night settled down almost imperceptibly upon the strange countryside, and high overhead the stars came gradually out in a thousand brilliant points of light. It was not cold; there was a gentle warmth in the atmosphere peculiar to the Australian bush, and a light breeze, laden with the fragrance of the tall gums perched like sentinels of the night high up on the banks overhead, came wafting down upon the water far below.

The adventurers found it difficult to settle down prosaically under the strangely stimulating surroundings and the knowledge of the nearness of their goal, and when the Doctor rose to his feet at supper-time there was a tremor of excitement in his eyes and in the hand which waved a cigar before his portly figure.

"Well, my friends, here we are almost at the end of our journey! We have been travelling now for ten days, and according to Captain Dixon's reckoning we have covered over five hundred miles along an unknown river which has probably not been traversed by a white man for many years. To-day we have come in sight of the mountain range which, I am certain, will be the end of our journey, and through which to-morrow we shall go to Treasure Lake. So far, you see, the old chart has proved its accuracy, and I haven't the slightest doubt but that to-morrow night, if all goes well, we shall sleep on the broad waters of Treasure Lake! And now, a toast to our project—A safe run to-morrow, and success to our hunt for the Golden Rope!"



The toast was drunk with great heartiness, and shortly afterwards the travellers retired for the night. Sleep came quickly to them all with the exception of one. For the first time since they had swung up this strange river Dorothy found herself lying wakeful in her berth, while in the stillness of the night the hurrying tick-tick of her small wristlet-watch sounded noisily in her strained ears. She counted sheep, went through multiplication tables, changed position, and tried all known devices calculated to bring sleep in their train. And when at last she drifted into slumber it was to dream of oddly unfamiliar things—of winding, never-ending, inky-black passageways, of chilly air and fast-running swirling waters through which the *Jessica* seemed to battle for hours without making any progress towards the light.

The sun had not long scattered his beams over the silent countryside next morning when the launch again began to thread its way along the narrowing stream towards the mountain range ahead. The river now developed a tortuous course, with many sharp bends which needed careful handling of the wheel on the part of Captain Dixon. Because of this, and because also none knew what lay round the next bend, progress was necessarily slow; and, maintaining a position as near as possible in the centre of the narrow stream, the *Jessica* forged slowly along, far down in a ravine over which the sky towered like a huge dome of cobalt-blue.

After four hours' careful travelling round innumerable bends in the winding stream the travellers discovered to their surprise that the range of mountains was no longer visible. The river seemed to be now enclosed by two towering banks, beyond which nothing could be seen.

"Well, that's queer," observed the Doctor in perplexity. "Now where can that range have gone?"

"I'm blessed if I can understand it," responded Captain Dixon, to whom the Doctor and Wilding had been talking in the wheelhouse. "It's a mystery altogether. We have

taken the best part of a hundred bends, but the compass shows we're still heading north-west. We can't be bearing away from the range. What do you think, Major?"

The momentarily puzzled expression upon the explorer's rugged countenance showed that he too was perplexed at this inexplicable turn of events. As his keen eyes swept the banks, however, his face cleared.

"Ah, yes, of course!" he said suddenly. "It's a wonder I never thought of it before! You see how the banks of the river have changed? There's scarcely anything but rock in them now, and look at the height—particularly that on our right. Three hundred feet if it's an inch! It's my opinion that we're now running, not between two ordinary river-banks, but actually through the divided end of the range itself, the main part of which is on our right, accounting for the high bank, and the left-hand bank is probably a smaller hill forming part of the whole range."

The soundness of his reasoning was obvious to both the Doctor and Captain Dixon.

"You're right, Major," said the skipper, swinging the wheel sharply to negotiate an acute right-angle twist in the stream. "Curse these bends! I've never seen anything like it in my life! . . . You must have hit the solution of the mystery all right. No river-bank would ever follow such a winding course as this. There isn't a doubt about it. We're making right for the heart of the range."

He slowed the *Jessica* until the launch was just crawling through the still water, which sparkled crystal-clear against the browns and greys of the towering rocky banks. The stream had drawn in until now its widest portion never measured more than fifty yards, and at times the width fell to less than thirty. Indeed, the narrowness of the river, and the frequent bends, from the corners of which jutted out sharp, jagged masses of rock, would have caused Captain Dixon no little concern but for the depth of the water. Frequent soundings taken by Pat Murphy revealed the fact



that even in its narrowest stretches there was never less than one hundred feet of water, and frequently half as much again—a fact which further bore out Wilding's shrewd guess that the river was now flowing through the range itself.

From the deck of the launch the view was one of awe-inspiring grandeur as it slowly made its way between the precipitous cliffs. Towering to a height often exceeding three hundred feet, and utterly bereft of natural growth of any description, the gaunt bareness of these huge masses of granite filled the adventurers with wonder. Even Wilding, who had travelled most parts of the world, was forced to admit that he had seen nothing to surpass this amazing spectacle of Nature's rugged grandeur.

A hundred feet and more above the water-level the cliffs seemed to converge slightly, enormous pieces of rock overhanging the rest of the cliff at an alarming angle, which brought a shudder to Dorothy as she speculated upon what might happen were one of those huge slabs of granite, weighing perhaps thousands of tons, to come crashing down into the water far below. Not a sound disturbed the calm, almost weird, stillness of the atmosphere; even the birds seemed to have deserted it. The solitude which overhung the gaunt splendour of this strange region brought with it a sense of eerie quietude which thrilled them all. At times the sun bathed cliffs and water in its brilliant radiance, and then a turn in the river would carry them into the queer gloom, where the water shone darkly, and high overhead the sun-splashed tops of the mighty cliffs sparkled against the blue sky beyond.

Quite unexpectedly they came to the entrance to the tunnel. A little after midday a sharp right-angle bend round an enormous mass of projecting slate-coloured rock brought them into what at first glance appeared to be a small lagoon, walled in on three sides by the cliffs which rose precipitously out of the water. In the shadow the wall opposite the entrance to the lagoon appeared solid from the distance,

but as they approached it a little cheer went up from the travellers on the *Jessica*.

Roughly semicircular in shape, black and uninviting, the tunnel mouth gloomed at them from the mass of rock ahead. It must have been a hundred feet in width and at least eighty feet in height, yet those dimensions were insignificant in contrast with the immense height of the rock which towered straight above it. The mountain-side rose sheer from the water's edge to a height that could not have been less than six hundred feet—more than twice as high as the other two sides of the wall through which the river had wound upon its strange course.

Like a grim sentinel guarding its secret, the towering sun-splashed rock, weather-worn and as old as the world itself, held the adventurers in fascinated dread as the launch carried them towards its gloomy depths.

Straight for the centre of the tunnel Captain Dixon steered his boat, and, with all lights blazing and the searchlight stabbing the darkness, they passed beneath the mighty entrance to the cavern, and in a moment had exchanged the light of day for the inky blackness of the tunnel through the range.

The myriad lights on the *Jessica* reflected strangely in the still, dark waters, casting a dim, phosphorescent radiance round the launch. Behind them the semicircle of daylight grew smaller and smaller, until at last it became enveloped in the profound gloom of the tunnel. But ahead of them the powerful beam of the searchlight spread widely as Brian Dale slowly swung it round upon its swivel, illuminating not only the dark water for a great distance on, but also splashing a blaze of whiteness over the roof and sides of the weird passageway. Beneath its intense brilliance the interior of the tunnel stood out in bold relief; every detail was as plain and as easily discernible as though the roof had been transparent, pouring a flood of daylight into its dreadful gloom.



The river still seemed to maintain its width and depth. The tunnel did not vary by more than a yard or two anywhere, and the depth of water began to increase as they travelled slowly forward. Under the bright, piercing beam of the searchlight it could be seen that the passageway was composed almost entirely of immense pieces of rock, the sharp, jagged ends of which jutted out abruptly, glinting strangely as they caught the light. The stillness which had been so noticeable outside seemed to have become intensified within the tunnel; there was a cold, unnatural calm, and an entire absence of even the faintest breeze, which gave to the travellers a feeling that they had suddenly been transported into another world. The only sound which broke the eerie quietude was that made by the *Jessica* itself as the launch slowly pushed its way through the dark water, maintaining a course as near the centre of the stream as possible, and following the contour of the rocky passage without variation.

"By gad, I wouldn't have missed this for anything!" ejaculated the Doctor suddenly to his companions, who had clustered in a little group near the searchlight in the bows. His voice sounded strangely loud in the confined space, echoing hollowly against the vaulted walls. "Now this is what I call something like an adventure! We'll have something to talk about for years, even if we don't find any treasure. I'll wager you've never seen anything to equal this, Wilding!"

"No, I haven't," admitted the explorer. "I've been through some queer country in my time, and I've seen some unusual sights, but never anything like this. I didn't imagine such a thing existed. It's one of the wonders of the world, and, like you, I wouldn't have cared to miss it. How are you enjoying it, Miss Dorothy?"

"Oh, it's glorious!" cried the girl delightedly. "I'd never have forgiven any of you if I had been kept away from this! It's—it's perfectly wonderful! But I wouldn't like to

come through here without plenty of light, though. Isn't it weird?"

"It certainly is," agreed the explorer, "and it would not be nearly so pleasant in the darkness. In fact, it would be dangerous. Look at that!"

He pointed towards a mass of rock just ahead, jutting out a little above the level of the water. "That sharp edge would rip the side out of the *Jessica* if we hit it," he remarked, as Captain Dixon, whose keen eyes missed nothing in the waterway, swung the launch a little to one side in order to give the menacing projection a wide berth. Dorothy shuddered and relapsed into silence.

Slowly, surely, the *Jessica* continued her steady progress along the eerie passageway beneath the range. Between the fissures of the huge rocks that lined the tunnel long, straggling strands of a strange bright green plant grew in profusion, stretching out in the calm air like the tentacles of an octopus; but apart from this fungoid growth there was nothing to break the monotony of the stark, barren rocks. Mile after mile slipped slowly by as the *Jessica* made her silent way through the heart of the range, and no untoward incident occurred to mar the pleasure of the unusual journey. As the Doctor had foretold, it seemed to be an ordinary, straightforward stream flowing slowly through an ordinary, straightforward passage through the rocks, and there being no sense of danger, the travellers relaxed into complete enjoyment of the journey.

The old stone walls looked down upon a strange sight indeed that day—the brightly lit launch, weirdly reflected in the dark waters, with its huge searchlight ray glaring into the murky distance ahead, and, in fitting consummation, the sound of music broadcast from a city hundreds of miles to the south. More out of curiosity than anything else, Dorothy had switched on the radio, wondering whether reception would be possible under such strange surroundings, and to her delight she found it even clearer than upon



the broad sheet of water outside. The volume of music filled the confined space, echoing and re-echoing from the vaulted walls, and even the stoical Wilding and phlegmatic MacTavish could not resist joining in the general laugh at the oddity of it all.

"Egad, I'll bet these old rocks have never heard anything like that before!" said the Doctor, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. "Ye gods! Wireless in a place like this! A mixture of civilization and antiquity, with a vengeance! What a difference to the trip made by the man—or men, I suppose—who first came through this old tunnel. If they could see us now they'd rub their eyes in astonishment!"

With a little more than nine miles of tunnel traversed the adventurers began to anticipate the welcome approach of daylight again. "We should be getting pretty near it now," observed the Doctor. "Fifteen kilometres is the distance given in the chart; that's a bit under ten miles. We can't be far off now."

"I don't think we can place too much reliance on the chart for that distance," remarked Wilding. "Presumably those travellers had to come through here either with torches or some such means of illumination, if they had any at all; and they might easily have been astray in their calculations. If I remember right, the chart said *at least* fifteen kilometres. Probably it's farther than that."

"Quite likely, Wilding, quite likely," said the Doctor. "I hadn't thought of that. Anyway, I dare say we'll know when we're getting near daylight again."

But the knowledge was to come in an unexpected manner.

The *Jessica* had not proceeded very much farther when the weird quietness was broken suddenly by a heavy swish of air, and a moment later there came a dreadful crash and a shattering of glass. The intense glare of the searchlight was extinguished with startling suddenness. Deprived of its piercing rays, Captain Dixon experienced a moment of

helpless bewilderment, but he quickly recovered himself and the engine-room telegraph jangled shrilly.

In a queer halo of light from the innumerable electric globes suspended from stem to stern the *Jessica* lay motionless upon the still, dark water. There was a rush to the searchlight.

"It's all right," came Dale's voice reassuringly. "Only a huge bat crashed into the light. Jolly lucky we've got some spare globes and glasses, though. I'll have them fitted in a jiffy."

He hurried into the saloon in search of the necessary parts. "Not hurt, Brian, are you?" called the Doctor anxiously, observing a smear of blood on the young man's face as he passed.

"No, I'm all right, Doc. It's only a scratch on the cheek—piece of flying glass hit me."

"By Jove, you were lucky to escape so lightly," said the Doctor, as the young man rejoined the group round the searchlight. "Look at this."

The thick front glass of the searchlight, measuring some twelve inches across, had been smashed into fragments by the force of the violent impact, and pieces of glass were lying all around the bows of the *Jessica*.

"These jagged edges could cause a nasty gash," observed the Doctor. "It's a wonder you got off so well, Brian. I suppose you couldn't see the thing coming?"

"Not until it was too late to swing the lamp away," answered Dale, busily fitting a new globe and front lens. "I wasn't expecting it. The light must have attracted it, and the thing was coming at such a rate that I had no time to do anything."

The enormous bat, measuring some three feet across the wings, lay in a hideous, squashed heap upon the boards below the light.

"It must have struck that lamp with terrific force," said Wilding. "The thing's just a mass of squashed pulp."



The sight of that mass of quivering flesh sent a swift feeling of nausea through Dorothy. She turned away as the explorer, seizing a length of iron piping standing near by, jerked it into the river, where it fell with a dull splash.

"It seems to me," remarked Wilding thoughtfully, as the searchlight's beam once again cut through the gloom, and the *Jessica* resumed her interrupted journey forward, "that we must be getting somewhere near the end of this tunnel. We never saw a sign of these flying creatures farther back. I wouldn't be surprised if we run into more shortly—or perhaps I should say, they will run into us."

"Yes, I believe you're right, Wilding," said the Doctor. "It's probable that these things inhabit the mouth of the tunnel, but don't go very far in. This one must have been drawn in by our light. We shall have to be on our guard against them."

Wilding's surmise that they might meet more of these pests proved to be correct. Every turn in the winding tunnel seemed now to increase the number of flying creatures. Bats and similar winged creatures larger than any Wilding had ever seen in his travels in South America (where they attain prodigious dimensions) swished noisily overhead, while some, flying low and becoming dazzled by the brilliant glare of the searchlight, crashed with a horrible squelch against the wood and iron stanchions of the launch, to be tossed overboard by the Doctor and Wilding as they fell in a crumpled heap to the deck.

Dale had to be constantly on his guard against these creatures, which flew heavily past at great speed. He began to wish that he had fitted a wire guard over the face of the lamp, for only by constant and immediate swivelling was he able to protect the glass from the repeated onslaughts.

Nor were bats the only inhabitants of this portion of the tunnel. Birds of many sizes and hues, the majority of them unknown to Wilding, flitted to and fro, plainly visible in the broad beam of the searchlight. Now and again a

weird, wailing cry reverberated with insistent resonance through the tunnel as some huge unknown winged reptile swung heavily past the launch. From a passageway of ghostly silence the tunnel seemed to have now become a veritable inferno of ghostly sounds, and plaintive cries of appalling weirdness shattered the stillness which up till now had not been broken.

"By George, I hope we haven't much more of this to put up with!" exclaimed the Doctor, with an expression of disgust upon his normally cheerful face as he pushed overboard a squirming pulpy mass which had crashed heavily against an iron stanchion over the rail. "These birds and things are getting unbearable!"

"They are a confounded nuisance," agreed Wilding. "But they're very interesting, all the same! There are creatures like bats which I don't remember ever having seen before. And as for the birds, well, I'm afraid I cannot place more than a dozen out of all we've seen. Most of them are strange to me."

"Well, they seem keen enough to make our acquaintance, damn 'em!" growled the Doctor. "Hell's bells!" he roared suddenly, as one screaming bunch skimmed overhead, shattering four of the electric-light globes suspended round the deck. "We'll have all our lights broken if this goes on much longer! Where the deuce are they all coming from?"

Before anyone could answer him there came another shrill rush overhead, but this time, fortunately, without further damage to the now sadly depleted globes. Simultaneously they rounded a sharp bend in the tunnel and, to avoid the onslaught of some huge bird making straight for the light, Dale swung the lamp quickly to one side. Momentarily it played upon the opposite wall, leaving the tunnel ahead in darkness. Instantly there came a sharp cry from Dorothy.

"Look, there it is!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Daylight ahead!"

"What! What! Stop a moment, Dixon!" shouted the



Doctor, excitement in his voice. "Now then, Brian, switch off that lamp."

The penetrating beam died away, and their hearts leaped at the sight before them. "There it is," cried Dorothy again. "I saw it when Brian had to swing the light away."

Dorothy had not been mistaken. Far, far ahead through the murky gloom of the tunnel a faint point of white light shone steadily. There was no doubt that it was daylight. The end of the passageway was at last in sight!

"Yes, that's daylight, without a doubt," averred Wilding. "We're nearly through now."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said the Doctor, with a sigh of satisfaction, as the searchlight's beam stabbed the darkness and the *Jessica* began to move forward again. "These last fifteen minutes have been dreadful! Lord knows how many electric-light globes have gone west! Just as well we've got a few spares on hand."

"Well, we can dispense with them pretty soon," observed Wilding. "Look, the light is getting stronger every minute! We can't be more than a quarter of a mile from it now."

Every yard carried them closer towards the growing spot of daylight, which could now be seen quite plainly through the glaring light of the lamp. Very soon the latter began to be practically unnecessary, for the daylight, streaming in through the entrance to the tunnel, cast a weird streak of pale light upon the water. Rapidly the opening grew clearer, larger, and more defined. Beyond it the sun sparkled brilliantly upon the water. Ten minutes later, to the accompaniment of loud cheers from its passengers, the *Jessica* sailed with majestic stateliness through the massive opening in the rock and came to rest upon the calm sun-bathed waters of an immense lake. The first step in the great adventure was successfully achieved!

The glorious afternoon sunlight streamed down upon the countryside, and for a few moments everything seemed blurred and indistinct to eyes which for so many hours had

been strained in the semi-darkness of the passageway through the range. But rapidly they became accustomed to the bright sunlight, and there was not one of the travellers who did not breathe a sigh of relief to have the narrow confines of the gloomy tunnel exchanged for the boundless blue sky overhead, and to feel once more the warm sunlight enveloping them. For a while they were content to bask in its pleasant warmth while their eyes grew accustomed to the stronger light.

And then, with a sweep of his arm, and a note of triumph in his voice, the Doctor faced his companions.

"My friends," he exclaimed vibrantly, "behold Treasure Lake!"



## CHAPTER III

### AN UNSUCCESSFUL QUEST

MOTIONLESS and silent the *Jessica* lay at rest upon the huge sheet of water which comprised the lake, while her passengers gazed in wonder at the fascinating spectacle before them. The lake itself was almost a perfect circle, and must have been at least two miles in diameter. It was completely surrounded by a range of alternate hills and rocks, the broken, jagged peaks of which rose straightly to a height of several hundred feet above the surface of the water.

Thickly covered with trees and shrubs, the steep slopes of the hills reached almost to the water's edge, while here and there huge masses of rocky cliffs rose in a perpendicular line from the lake, towering to an immense height above the level of the placid water. To climb those cliffs would have been a physical impossibility; hundreds of feet up they overhung the water, casting fantastic shadows in the sunlight over the lake. What lay beyond them none could conjecture. Those huge gaunt rocks were utterly bereft of growth of any kind; like grim sentinels they rose skyward, austere and majestic in their rigid grandeur.

It was through one of these huge masses of granite at the south-eastern end of the lake that the final stages of the tunnel had, by some strange freak of Nature, been constructed. The width of the hollowed subterranean passageway the travellers had marvelled at many times on the journey through, but as they now gazed in silent wonder at the yawning black chasm which indicated the mouth of the tunnel the insignificant nature of the passageway itself came forcibly upon them.

The mouth of the tunnel through the rocks was perhaps a hundred feet wide where it entered the lake, and not much less than that in height, but the rocky face of the cliff towered five hundred feet above the water, rising in a series of peculiar ladder-like steps, each jutting out a little farther than the one immediately below it, so that the top of the rock overhung the mouth of the tunnel like the huge peak of a cap, casting weird shadows in the afternoon sunlight which bathed it in a flood of brilliant light. Viewed from the other side of the lake the tunnel mouth, hidden in the shadows, would probably have been invisible; indeed, for all that the adventurers could tell, there might just as easily have been several other similar passageways scattered through the rocks which partially surrounded the water.

There was not a yard of level ground round the whole circumference of the lake. Where the rocky slopes vanished abruptly, thickly wooded hills ran down almost to the water's edge, and rose in gradual undulations to a height even exceeding that of the granite formations. The lake was, in fact, completely surrounded by an inaccessible barrier of hills and rocks, and, so far as the travellers could see, the only entrance was by the way they had come—through the tunnel in the range.

The scene was one of awe-inspiring grandeur, so utterly unlike anything they had ever seen before that for a while the adventurers were content to stand and view the strange panorama spread out before them.

Scarcely a ripple marked the placid surface of the lake, save where the water, under a faint southerly breeze, lapped against the rocky cliffs towards the north in small wavelets. The vivid green of the timbered hills contrasted sharply with the gaunt greyness of the bare rocks. An atmosphere of peaceful calm overhung the lake; the silence of the late afternoon was broken only by the faint murmur of the breeze in the leafy trees and the soft *lap-lap* of the waters against the rocks, which dropped with sheer straightness down into the lake.



There was a fascination about the place that held them all within its spell—an indefinable atmosphere of unreality which affected even Wilding, whose ramblings in strange lands had brought him in direct contact with many queer sights of Nature.

Dorothy was the first to break the silence which in some inexplicable manner had settled upon the little party following the Doctor's triumphant exclamation.

"Isn't it wonderful," she murmured, her voice low and soft, as though afraid to break the spell. "It all seems so unreal and so different! Why, I feel as though I might wake up in a moment and find it all a dream!"

"It's a remarkable sight," agreed Wilding, his eyes roving over the entrancing spectacle. "I have travelled a lot through strange country, but I have never seen anything like this before. A lake surrounded by mountains—and such mountains as they are! Half rock and half earth. I don't claim to be an expert in geology, but I'll swear those granite rocks are thousands of years old, and if there's no gold in them I'll eat my hat."

Doctor Treloare lit a cigar, puffing with satisfaction. "If you ask me," he declared, "I think the darned place is uncanny! It isn't natural. And so quiet! Why, there doesn't seem to be even a bird anywhere."

Wilding laughed. "This is the wrong time of day to expect hearing birds, Doctor," he said. "I'll wager you will hear enough of them about five to-morrow morning. Those thickly wooded hills are probably teeming with all sorts of birds."

The Doctor grunted. "You may be right," said he. "I don't profess to know much about them. Anyway, the main point is that we're here now, and we had better lose no time in looking for this cave near the waterfall. We need not worry about whether there's gold in the rocks or not. So long as this Golden Rope is still in the cave we shall leave all the rest in its natural state with the greatest of pleasure.

I think we had better set about locating it as soon as possible." He blew a cloud of fragrant smoke, and waved his cigar in the direction of the tunnel. "Look at that rock, how it overhangs the water. The darned thing might fall at any time, blocking up the entrance altogether, and what the deuce would we do then?"

The general laugh that followed broke the tension created by the novel surroundings.

"I don't think we need worry about that," remarked Wilding. "That rock has probably been in its present condition for a good many thousand years already, and it will most likely remain as it is for some thousands more. However, as you say, here we are; and as the afternoon is getting late we had better decide where we are going to spend the night."

The Doctor glanced at his watch. "It's getting near five o'clock now," said he. "It is far too late to begin searching for a waterfall that might be anywhere within a two-mile radius. I think we had better remain where we are, and discuss ways and means during the evening. Perhaps, now that we have things in front of us, as it were, we may discover something more definite from a careful study of the chart and notes. It seems to me that we are the only inhabitants of this part of the world at present, and we should be quite safe here on the lake. What do you say, Dixon?"

"I agree with you there, Doctor. In fact, I think we'll be safer here than anywhere else. I will pull into the centre, and, to be doubly sure, it will do no harm to take turns through the night in guarding the launch."

Doctor Treloare was half inclined to deride this idea, but Wilding nodded his approval. "I think you're wise, Captain," said he, lighting a cigarette. "The spot certainly seems to be more or less deserted, but I've seen strange things happen in places that appeared even more deserted than this. If we are out in the centre of this sheet of water we should be pretty safe, and it will not hurt any of us to give up an hour's sleep each to mount guard."



The Doctor was still but half convinced. "Oh, well, have it your own way," he said, and moved away to pore again over the much-thumbed chart locked in the safe in the saloon.

Dale and Dorothy were standing together in the bow of the *Jessica* gazing at the strange sight spread out before them. Wilding was alone for the moment, and as the launch slowly swung out into the centre of the lake his eagle eyes swept the shore on every side. There was a puzzled frown upon his countenance, and at last, after momentary hesitation, he drew his powerful field-glasses from the leather case which hung over his shoulder and focussed them upon the north-western corner of the lake, where the jagged edge of a huge mass of rock seemed to merge into a background of green-timbered hills. Even with the glasses visibility was poor, for the setting sun flung a shadow over that portion of the lake. He could see, however, that the towering mass of rock was actually in front of the hill, but the haze almost obliterated its outline against the heavy timber.

Intent upon his examination, Wilding failed to hear the footsteps behind him as Dorothy and Brian Dale sauntered past.

"Hallo, Mr Explorer," hailed the girl cheerily. "Anything worth seeing?"

Wilding spun round in some confusion, but quickly recovered his composure. He smiled as he replaced the glasses in their case.

"No, unfortunately," he said, "nothing out of the ordinary. I thought I could see a reflection of light in the distance, but the haze is so strong that one can't be sure of anything. It may have been the glint of the sun against the cliff face."

"I hope it wasn't," said Dorothy, with calm deliberation.

"I hope it was the sun shining on a native's shield! Do you think there are any natives around here? I'd love some excitement!"

Both Wilding and Dale stared at their fair companion in some surprise.

"Oh, would you?" There was an amused smile upon the explorer's face. "I should have thought, young lady, that you had had quite enough excitement coming through that tunnel. This is to be a pleasure trip, I hope; certainly not a fight against a horde of savages, which, however, is most improbable, as there are no natives in this part of Australia."

Dorothy was obviously disappointed. "Oh, well, I suppose we shall get some excitement in other ways," she said, with comical resignation. "Come on, Brian. I'll beat you at deck quoits to work up an appetite."

Wilding watched them go with a curious little sense of disappointment. Presently he was joined by the Doctor, and together they watched the shadows fast lengthening over the lake as the sun dropped, a huge blood-red ball, towards the western hills. For a fleeting moment the jovial Doctor felt a touch of the apprehension which is so often associated with the unfamiliar. Then he laughed at his fears.

"Do you know, Wilding," he confessed, "this place gets on my nerves. The weird silence seems unnatural. Yet I'm quite sure we've got nothing to fear. I doubt if there is another human being within two hundred miles of us. . . . Come and have an appetizer."

Wilding smiled slightly, but did not reply as he followed his friend inside. Away in the north-western corner of the lake the thick bushes waved and shook with an intensity that could not have been caused by the faint breeze. Here and there strange figures darted about in the gathering twilight, and from far behind the huge mass of rock came the almost inaudible hum of an electric dynamo.

Perhaps, could the Doctor have seen what lay beyond the rock that towered high above the water he would not have so easily banished his fears. Already the web of mystery and adventure which was so soon to envelop the travellers



had begun to spread its meshes over the still waters of Treasure Lake.

The evening meal on board the *Jessica* that night was a most happy and enthusiastic affair. The novelty of their strange surroundings, and the knowledge that they had successfully passed through the mysterious tunnel and were now actually upon the lake, ready to search for the Golden Rope, lent an atmosphere of half-concealed excitement in which everyone shared.

At the head of the table, Doctor Treloare, proud that his plans had so far gone strictly to schedule, beamed jovially upon his companions. Captain Dixon, by no means regretful that he had negotiated the rocky passageway without mishap, was prepared to enjoy himself to the limit. Brian Dale and Dorothy, the two youngest members of the party, were as lighthearted as children; even the sombre Wilding responded to the effect of the girl's fascinating vivacity, and, as the old saying goes, "all went merry as a marriage bell."

At the end of the meal the Doctor rose to his feet, a broad smile upon his jovial countenance.

"My friends," said he, and there was a note of triumph in his voice, "here we are having our first meal upon the great Treasure Lake. We have come along a river and through a tunnel which has been travelled by few others. In the whole of Australia there probably isn't a living soul apart from ourselves who knows of the existence of this lake; we are in a part of the Commonwealth that has never been explored—a region unknown to anyone. To-morrow we will begin our search for the waterfall near which this cave with its Golden Rope is supposed to be located. Whether we shall find it or not I don't know. If we do, so much the better; but even if we don't, I think you will agree with me that it has been a pleasant and wonderful trip. And now I give you a toast—Success to our searching, and a safe journey homeward!"

The toast was drunk amid cheers and laughter, and the party broke up to spend the evening according to individual tastes. Dorothy retired early on the advice of her father, who was afraid that, despite her vigorous constitution, the excitement might have been too much for her. The young lady herself, with all the sang-froid of modern youth, indignantly refuted the suggestion, but nevertheless she was glad enough to accept the excuse, and, after indulging in a little dancing with Dale and Wilding to the broadcast music, which was received with exceptional strength and purity, she bade the men "Good-night" and left them to a discussion of plans for the morrow.

Unlocking a small safe which stood in a corner of the saloon, Dr Treloare drew from it the original faded chart and manuscript of the unfortunate Sevinge. This he laid upon the table, round which Wilding, Dale and Captain Dixon were already seated.

"I don't know what you others think of this business," observed the Doctor, with a somewhat rueful smile, "but it seems to me that we are going to have a rather difficult task in locating this cave. I've been all over this parchment, back and front, with a magnifying-glass, and I can't see any marks at all, or anything to indicate even its approximate whereabouts. It's obvious that the piece torn from the bottom contains the information we want; but that's gone for ever, so we shall have to use our own ingenuity to find the place. What's the general opinion?"

He pushed the worn chart across the table, and Wilding, having previously studied it at some length, passed it on to Captain Dixon, who had seen it only once before and examined the curious relic with reawakened interest. Brian Dale rose from his chair and peered over the skipper's shoulder.

Wilding lit a cigarette and smoked for a minute in silence, his brows knit in a heavy frown.

"This chart," he said suddenly, waving his hand towards



the sheet of parchment, "is a very rough sketch, and it seems to me that it was only meant to give an idea of the general outline of the lake and its surroundings. It does that fairly well, but as a means of locating anything such as a waterfall it is pretty near useless. The man who sketched that plan did so just to keep the general nature of the country in mind, and I have no doubt at all that it was never meant for anything else, or for anyone else to see. If Sevinge had not been so badly injured he might have given you a few more details; of course, it's possible he may have thought the thing was complete. Anyway, Fate decreed otherwise, so, as you concisely remarked, Doctor, we shall have to rely upon ourselves."

Dr Treloare rubbed his nose lugubriously; plainly he was not elated over the prospect.

"Major Wilding is right," remarked Captain Dixon, passing the chart back to the Doctor. "There is nothing on that to indicate where a waterfall is even likely to be found."

"Or to say that there are not two, three, or half-a-dozen falls," interjected Dale. "By the look of the country round the lake I should think there might be several waterfalls, and it is certainly going to be some job finding the right one."

"Blazes!" ejaculated the Doctor impulsively, as the truth of this observation forced itself upon him. "I hadn't looked at it in that way. Why, it might take us weeks!"

Wilding shook his head, and blew a cloud of blue smoke towards the ceiling.

"Not quite so long as you think," he declared. "From the slight examination through my glasses of the surrounding countryside I should think it can be divided into two even sections—timber-covered earth hills and bare rocks. To look for waterfalls among those hills would be more or less a waste of time. I think we are more likely to find them in the rock formations—and I really don't think there will be as many falls as Dale has suggested. Of course, I can't say

anything definite, but I'm going on past experience. At any rate, it is worth examining the rocks first of all."

"Now that's a good idea," agreed the Doctor, eager to seize upon any reasonable suggestion. "But what do you think would be the best way of setting about making an examination of them?"

"That depends on our skipper," answered Wilding. He turned to Captain Dixon. "How close to the shore do you think we will be able to get with safety?"

Captain Dixon was doubtful. "Can't say exactly," he declared. "This lake seems to be very deep in the centre, and judging on the depth of the tunnel I think we should be able to get fairly close to the rocks that run down into the water. But I would not care to go too close to either them or the land shore; it may be treacherous."

"Well, you can probably get to within a couple of hundred yards, I suppose," said Wilding. "My idea is this: that we should cruise slowly round the lake, keeping as near the shore as possible, and keep a sharp look-out for any small stream or inlet which may flow into the lake itself. We can follow this up in the motor-boat, leaving the launch in deep water farther out on the lake. If there is a waterfall anywhere, it stands to reason that the water must be flowing into the lake; and if we can find that inlet, we stand a good chance of finding the fall and the cave by following it up."

There was a murmur of approval at this suggestion.

"It's a good idea, Wilding," declared the Doctor enthusiastically. "If we make an early start we can take our time and explore the shore pretty thoroughly. The more I think over the plan the better I like it. It's ten to one that the water from the fall is coming into the lake through an inlet."

"Unless it enters through a subterranean stream," Wilding pointed out. "We must consider that. Still, I think the plan's worth trying—unless anyone can suggest something better?"

But no alternative was proposed, and so it was decided



that Wilding's suggested plan of action should be followed. "We shall have to go carefully," Captain Dixon warned them. "The farther out we can keep the better I shall like it. For all we know these rocks may run just a few feet under the water, and if we strike one of them—well, we'll need a balloon to get out. However, I will do my best for you."

"I know you will, Dixon," said the Doctor heartily. "I'm no keener on running risks than you are. . . . Well, I think we might as well leave it at that now and get some sleep. You've arranged for the watch, have you, Dixon?"

"Yes. There are six of us men, and if we take an hour apiece that will carry us right up to daylight. You can take the first, Doctor, then Major Wilding, Mr Dale, myself, Sandy MacTavish, and Pat Murphy last. Each will be wakened when his turn comes, and at sight of anything unusual or alarming three shots to be fired from the revolver carried. Is that satisfactory?"

Dr Treloare laughed and clapped the skipper on the shoulder as he rose to his feet. "It's more than satisfactory," he declared. "I think it's unnecessary, Dixon, but still, it won't do us any harm."

"Well, this is our first night here, and we had better be sure than sorry," said the skipper. "If nothing happens to-night we can perhaps dispense with the guard in future."

"Nothing will happen," declared the Doctor confidently, making for the door. "You others had better get to sleep. To-morrow we shall start on our search, and hope for the best."

As it happened, however, the well-laid plan was doomed to an unexpected and abrupt failure. Making an early start next morning, after an uneventful night, the *Jessica*, under Captain Dixon's skilful handling, began its voyage round the shore of the lake.

The first surprise came when the skipper took a sounding to ascertain the depth of water. In the centre of the lake he was amazed to discover that there was no less than eight

hundred feet of water—an enormous depth, which so astonished him that he repeated the sounding in three distinct places to ensure accuracy. Each, however, gave an almost identical measurement.

"Eight hundred feet!" he exclaimed. "Ye gods! Why, I didn't think there was a lake in the country of that depth."

The Doctor chuckled. "I don't suppose there is another one, either," said he. "This Treasure Lake is one out of the box altogether. I wouldn't have been much surprised if you had not been able to touch bottom at all."

"Well, I'm not taking any chances," declared the skipper. "It may be eight hundred feet deep here, and only eight feet near the rocks. I'll go easy until we find out definitely."

Captain Dixon's caution was justified. Starting from the mouth of the tunnel, at the south-eastern side of the lake, and where the depth was about two hundred feet, they began to move round towards the east, and had not proceeded very far along the side of the precipitous rock when the depth suddenly decreased to fifty feet, and then to eighteen feet, and a little farther on to ten feet. Instantly, the *Jessica* was swung out of the danger zone to the centre of the lake, until the sounding gave the depth as thirty feet. The launch was then about a hundred yards from the rock, which towered sheer above them to a height of some four hundred feet. Here the depth appeared to be fairly constant, and they slowly cruised along while a keen look-out was kept for any inlet up which it might be possible to run the motor-boat, which trailed along behind the launch.

For perhaps five hundred yards they slowly skirted the huge mass of rock; it came suddenly to an abrupt end, and as the *Jessica* slid silently past there was a chorus of excited exclamations as a narrow inlet, not twenty yards wide, came into view. On one side it was bounded by the rock which they had just passed; on the other, by a gently sloping rise, thickly covered with tall trees and shrubs which grew in great profusion. A hundred yards upstream the inlet seemed



to wind round a bend and was lost to view. The *Jessica* was immediately hove to, and the motor-boat drawn alongside.

"You and Dale had better go with MacTavish," said Captain Dixon to Wilding. "Three will be enough, and as Mac understands the engine he should go in any case. There is a siren on the engine's exhaust-pipe. If you get into difficulties set it blowing. It will carry for miles in this atmosphere."

"Daddy, do let me go, please," begged Dorothy, her brown eyes luminous with excitement as the three men climbed into the motor-boat.

Her father shook his head. "Not this time, my dear." He leaned over the rail and called to Wilding: "Don't go too far up, and get back as soon as you can."

Wilding waved his hand in reply, and a few seconds later they were off, the *chug-chug* of the little engine echoing and re-echoing against the solid rocks. The small boat possessed a fair turn of speed, and in a few minutes it had disappeared round the bend and was lost to view, the sound of the engine growing fainter and fainter until it faded away completely.

Left to themselves, the travellers on the *Jessica* gazed with some interest at the shore-line just ahead of them, and which they now had a fine opportunity of observing at close range. The beach, if such it could be termed, was little more than a narrow strip of land not a quarter of a mile in length between the inlet and the next massive rock. Ten yards from the water's edge the thickly timbered land began to rise gradually, extending back into the range of hills which in the background encircled the lake.

The Doctor swept it with his glasses, and was surprised to observe that it, too, was thickly covered with trees and shrubs, which gave it the appearance of a mass of green foliage. There was not a sign of life anywhere save for a few large birds which soared lazily over the thick woods in the calm, sunlit morning air.

Twenty minutes passed without any sign of the motor-boat returning. Captain Dixon moved uneasily, and kept an impatient eye upon the inlet. "It's a good thing we're not using steam, Doctor," he remarked. "We'd be wasting more than we were using this trip. We should be hearing something from them pretty soon now."

"Yes, it's time they got back," agreed the Doctor. "However, Wilding will take no risks. He is an old hand at this game. Still—what's that? Ah! here they come!"

Faintly at first, and then growing louder as it approached, the sound of the motor-boat's engine came to their ears, and a few minutes later the boat appeared rounding the bend. Its occupants were greeted with eager inquiries, but Wilding shook his head as he climbed on board.

"No luck at all," he announced briefly. "And by the look of this inlet our plan is not going to be such a time-saver after all. We followed it right up as far as we could go, and then found that it branched out into several smaller streams winding amongst the hills. We tried two of these, but they seemed to double back on themselves, and we found ourselves on a fairly big sheet of water which might have been the main inlet again, for all that we could tell. The hills seemed to be riddled with streams, and no sign of a waterfall or a cave did we see anywhere. It's a wash-out."

"H'm." The news was plainly not to the Doctor's liking. He frowned, and drummed against the rail-top with his fingers. "Oh, well, it's no use getting downhearted over one set-back," he declared finally. "We'll probably get several more before we finish. Let's go on and see what the next one offers."

But the next inlet, a little farther on, proved equally disappointing, although several hours this time were spent in diligently following up each tributary of the main stream. By five o'clock that afternoon less than a quarter of the shore had been explored, and even that which had been



covered had not received the close scrutiny which Wilding would have preferred to devote to it.

It was evident that a thorough examination of the surrounding country on the lines as originally suggested by the explorer would be a very lengthy process, in which weeks might easily be spent in fruitless searching. A network of channels and small streams seemed to run through the peculiar countryside, and to find a cave near a waterfall amongst this maze of waterways was, as Wilding himself admitted, like searching for a needle in a haystack.

Another round-table conference was held on board the *Jessica* that night to consider the problem, and to formulate, if possible, some better plan which would save time in the location of the fall.

"It's useless going on for day after day as we have done to-day," said Wilding, tearing down his own suggestion with the inexorable candour that was so characteristic of the man. "We may waste a week or more, to say nothing of a lot of petrol in the motor-boat, and even then miss the one inlet we want. Besides, after thinking over the matter, I am not so sure now that we can find the fall in this way. This lake and its surroundings are such peculiar freaks of Nature that the possibility of an underground stream flowing into it from the waterfall seems more likely than ever. Those inlets that we have examined to-day are hemmed in on all sides by high banks, and the hills are covered with tropical jungle so thick that if a man once got into it he might never get out. I am afraid we shall have to drop my plan and try something else."

"Well, what else are we to do?" objected the Doctor. "It seems to me that we shall have to adopt a plan of trial and error, so to speak."

Wilding shrugged his shoulders. "What we really want is a balloon, so that we could get high in the air and thus obtain a good view of the whole countryside. The only thing I can suggest is that we climb one of the hills, and that might

be dangerous, as we don't know what we are likely to meet. Even if we got to the top I doubt very much whether we should see anything that would assist us, the forests are so thick."

"I don't favour that at all," said the Doctor emphatically. "It would not be wise to split the party, and, anyway, it might take a day or more to climb one of those hills, with the probability of seeing nothing useful. No. I think the best we can do is to put in a week exploring the inlets, and if we have no luck—devil take it, Brian, what the deuce is the matter with you?" he exploded sharply, for Dale had suddenly smashed his clenched fist down upon the table with a crash that made the glasses jump in the air. His eyes were shining with the light of a sudden inspiration.

"By Jove, we can do it!" he exclaimed in jubilation. "Snakes, it's a wonder I never thought of it before! Why, it's the easiest thing in the world!"

His companions stared at the young man in astonishment. Dorothy handed him a glass of water. "Here, drink this, poor boy; the excitement's been too much for our little pet," she said soothingly.

Dale grinned good-humouredly, and turned to Captain Dixon. "How much strong fine rope have you got on board?" he demanded.

The skipper stared at him in surprise. "Eh? Oh, I don't know, offhand. Several hundred yards, I suppose. I always carry a good length of it. What do you want it for?"

"Good!" There was a note of satisfaction in Dale's voice. He turned to the others with a smile. "I'm not off my head," he said cheerfully. "My idea is this: as Major Wilding has said, if we can get some distance above the lake we have a good chance of spotting that fall. Well, why not use a kite?"

For a full minute there was silence after this amazing suggestion—a silence born more of astonishment than



anything else. His companions stared at the young engineer in dumb surprise.

"A—a kite?" echoed the Doctor slowly, as though he were not quite sure what was meant. "Good Lord, do you mean to suggest that someone should be hauled aloft over the lake by a kite? Why, man, it's ridiculous! It's impossible, anyway. It can't be done."

"Can't it? That's just where you're wrong," averred Dale stoutly. "It can be done, and it is quite safe over a sheet of water like this. Provided the kite has sufficient lift—and that is only a matter of making one big enough—it would be an easy matter to go up several hundred feet. We can find out more in an hour that way than in weeks of searching."

"What an ingenious idea, Brian!" said Dorothy, in admiration. "Why, it will save an enormous lot of time."

But the Doctor was openly sceptical. "It's a fantastic scheme that won't work," he declared. "You would never be able to build a kite big enough to lift a man. What do you think about it, Wilding?"

Thus appealed to, the explorer hesitated before replying. Then: "The scheme should be practicable," he said. "It is risky, to a certain extent, although, as Dale points out, there is really not much danger over a large sheet of water. On the whole, I think it would be worth trying. If it proves successful it will save a great deal of time, and if sufficient height can be attained we should get all our information in one flight."

"Well, I don't know; it seems to me to be a da—darned dangerous thing to do," said the Doctor bluntly. "However, if the majority is in favour I suppose we might as well give it a trial. What's your opinion of this scheme, Dixon?"

Captain Dixon smiled. "I am afraid I don't know much about this sort of thing," he remarked. "It's a bit above me. But on the progress we have made to-day I think we

would be justified in giving the suggestion a trial. We may spend weeks of monotonous searching otherwise. If you decide to try the kite I will overhaul the rope thoroughly to make sure that it will stand up to any normal strain. We can let it out through the little windlass and haul it down in the same way. What strain do you think will be placed on the rope, Mr Dale?"

"Very little," declared Dale. "The upward pull of the wind will counteract the weight to be lifted, and there should be next to no actual strain on the rope."

"I think it's a wonderful scheme, Daddy," urged Dorothy. "What about letting me go up with the kite?"

"If I have much more of your nonsense, young lady, I'll lock you in your room all day," said the Doctor severely. "I never met a girl so keen on excitement. You'll be driving me grey before you're through, you minx." He paused to wag an admonishing forefinger at his daughter, and then turned to Dale: "Well, Brian, if the majority favours your scheme, go ahead, my lad, but don't blame me if anything happens. I don't approve of the idea at all. What type of kite do you propose to use?"

"I think a box-kite will suit us best," answered the young man. "A good-sized box-kite will lift a big weight, and it has the advantage of being able to fly in a light breeze. Also, it is very stable in the air. We can get plenty of light timber on the shore, and the cloth covering can be cut from an old tarpaulin."

"Well, you seem to know more about it than anyone else, so you had better start early to-morrow on the job. We can test it first by using a weight of some sort when you get it finished. But the main question is: Who is going aloft with it?"

"I am," said Dale firmly. "It's my idea, and I should take any risk attached to it. Besides, I am about the lightest in weight of the lot of us, and we don't want to have to lift a bigger weight than is really necessary."



"If you are going on weight, I am the one who should go," interjected Dorothy. "I am only——"

The remainder of her argument was drowned in a chorus of united opposition. "Are you!" said her father grimly. "Well, you're not, young lady, so don't let me hear any more from you! We are not going to have you flying about at the end of a length of rope, so you can get that bright idea right out of your head altogether."

With that the conference broke up, and Brian Dale and Dorothy went out for a stroll along the deck in the cool of the night. The moon, just at the full, had risen a few hours since, and its glorious brilliance seemed to dwarf the stars which twinkled like myriad points of light high up in the heavens. The softness of the night enveloped the launch as in a cloak of velvet. Now and again the faint breeze wafted across the lake, carrying with it the fragrance of the trees on the timbered hills. The only sound which came to their ears was that of the water lapping softly against the side of the launch. The outline of the nearer hills had softened into a hazy blur against the star-studded sky.

The two young people sauntered slowly for a while along the deck of the motionless *Jessica*. The spirit of the night gripped them in its fascinating charm. Instinctively the girl drew nearer her companion. His arm stole round her slim waist, and with a little sigh Dorothy laid her head upon the young man's broad shoulder. For a while neither attempted to break the fragrant silence.

"Happy, Dorothy?" asked Brian softly, at length.

The girl moved slightly. "Who wouldn't be on such a night," she murmured. "Isn't it glorious; so calm, so peaceful. It's hard to believe that a few hundred miles south people will soon be pouring out of the theatres, dodging trams and cars, and dashing for the last train! Here it seems like heaven."

"Just at the moment it is," affirmed the young man fervently.

Dorothy laughed softly. "I am afraid the night has affected you, Brian," she admonished.

"The night—and something, or someone, else," agreed the young man. "You know, all sorts of things might happen on a night like this. We might even see the fairies in this enchanted spot. I might even scrape up enough courage to——"

"To what?" she asked ingenuously.

"Kiss you," he was going to add, when, with a sudden movement, the girl slipped away from him and held out her hand.

"Good-night, Brian. Sleep well, and don't dream that you are falling out of a kite into the water."

A second later she was gone, and the young man was left alone. For a time he stood musing in the velvet stillness, while the mounting moon bathed the lake and its strange surroundings in a flood of pale brilliance, and then he, too, went towards his room.

In the silence there was one other who had watched the little play from the shadow of the wheelhouse. For a long while after the young man had gone Arthur Wilding leaned against the rail, staring down into the curiously clear water which lapped incessantly against the side of the launch. Its gentle rhythm rose and fell in sylph-like cadences. Away in the distance over the hills came the queer call of a mopoke and the clear hoot of an owl. Save for that there was silence—a depth of soundless intensity which settled foglike over the lake, and upon the hills and rocks beyond. For long he remained there, immersed in his thoughts, until at length, rousing himself from his reverie, he moved slowly inside.

And over all the silence of the night held sway.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE DRAMA OF THE KITE

VERY early next morning Dale and Pat Murphy went ashore in the motor-boat and selected the light timber for the framework of the kite. There was no lack of suitable material; the woods were thick, with many varieties of trees, and no difficulty was experienced in obtaining a light, strong timber for the wooden framework.

After a little calculation Dale decided to make the kite twelve feet long and six feet square at the ends, which he estimated would give sufficient lifting power to raise his weight as high as he wished to go. In a very short time the kite was completed, the canvas covering being firmly sewn and glued round the wooden framework. When finished, and stood up on end to dry, the dimensions of the kite gave it a remarkable appearance, and even the Doctor began to admit that there might be something in the scheme after all.

Shortly after midday the breeze strengthened into a stiff north-easterly wind, and as the kite had dried quickly in the warmth of the sun Dale decided to give it a trial. The scales on the boat gave his weight as a hundred and fifty pounds, but the Doctor insisted that the trial weight should be a hundred and eighty, which would give a safety margin. An empty oil-drum was therefore loaded to the required weight with odds and ends of the material which accumulates on a river-boat even when it is as well kept as was the *Jessica*; and in the meantime Captain Dixon and Sandy MacTavish overhauled the rope and wound it upon the small windlass in the bows, just in front of the wheelhouse.

"There's just over four hundred yards of rope here,"

### THE DRAMA OF THE KITE

announced the skipper, as the last yard was measured off, "and every foot of it is good, sound rope."

"Twelve hundred feet," commented Dale. "That should be sufficient, even allowing for the drift in the wind. I should be able to get at least eight hundred feet, and perhaps a bit more, directly over the lake."

"What puzzles me," said the Doctor, staring at the huge kite in some perplexity, "is how you are going to get the thing started. When I flew kites, forty-odd years ago, we had to run like hares into the wind before they would lift. You can't do that here."

Brian Dale laughed. "A box-kite does not need any running at all," he explained. "In this wind we should not have any trouble to get it launched. Before putting the load on it, however, we'll give it a short trial just as it is. Give me a hand here, Pat."

Together he and the Irishman carried the huge kite into the bows, where one end of the rope was fixed firmly to the kite about two feet from the top. A hundred feet of rope were run out from the windlass, and coiled loosely on the deck.

"Stand by the windlass, Mac," called Dale to the engineer, "and let out the rope as fast as she needs it. Now then, Pat."

Sandy MacTavish took up his stand near the windlass, while Dr Treloare, Wilding, Captain Dixon and Dorothy watched the proceedings with keen interest. The wind had increased a little in strength, and now was blowing with some force from the north-east, lashing the water into foam against the rocks at the south-western end of the lake.

Brian Dale and Pat Murphy climbed to the roof of the wheelhouse, and hauled the kite up after them. Here they were exposed to the full force of the wind, and they were compelled to maintain a firm grip on the kite, which, despite its huge bulk, was surprisingly light.

"Lorlumme!" gasped the Irishman, as the wind swept



through the canvas covering. "She pulls like a big fish, Mr Dale! I'm thinkin' we shan't have much trouble to launch her."

"You're right," agreed Dale, keeping his balance with some difficulty. "Now, get the other end, Pat; lift her up—so—and when I count three sling her right into the wind. Ready? One—two—three!"

With a mighty heave the huge kite was flung high into the air. Just for a fraction of a second it hesitated, and then, caught by the wind, it swept with terrific speed over the lake, mounting swiftly into the sky.

"Hurrah!" cried Dorothy enthusiastically, clapping her hands in the excitement of the moment.

"Let out that rope, Mac!" yelled Dale, in swift apprehension. "Don't attempt to hold her! She'll break the rope if you do."

The loosely coiled cord on the deck whipped through the air at lightning pace, and the handle of the windlass spun round madly as the kite, in the teeth of the wind, pulled hard on the rope. More than half of the total length had run out before Dale dared to apply the brake on the revolving windlass-drum, but at last he was able to slip the ratchet into place, and the huge kite floated serenely four hundred feet over the lake, steady as a rock in the stiff breeze.

"Well done, Brian!" exclaimed the Doctor, in admiration. "She went up splendidly. You will have rather a quick ride through space, my lad!" he chuckled.

Dale shook his head. He was delighted at the success of the kite's trial flight.

"I don't think so. You must remember that this is an immense kite, with great lifting power, and just now it had nothing at all to lift. With the weight attached the rate of travel will be much less. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if I get a ducking in the lake before the kite gets high enough to feel the full benefit of its lifting powers. But it's just as well this windlass is well bolted down, or we might be minus

kite, rope and windlass now. . . . Well, we'd better haul it in, and see how it deals with the weight."

Yard by yard the rope was wound upon the windlass, and slowly the great kite began to come nearer the launch. So great was its lifting power, however, that even in the last few yards it showed no sign of falling. Like a huge balloon it came in, pulling hard all the time, and Dale's inward fear that it might drop suddenly into the lake proved groundless. Eager hands reached out to seize it and haul it aboard as it came within reach, and a close examination showed that it was quite unaffected by the heavy strain in the wind.

"We had better allow fifty yards of slack rope between the kite and the weight, so that it will have a chance of getting well into the wind before the weight comes on it," said Dale. He turned towards Wilding. "Pat and I will launch it from the roof again, and if you and Captain Dixon stand by you could push the weight off the deck as soon as she pulls on it."

Again they climbed to the roof of the wheelhouse. The wind had strengthened so much that they found it difficult to maintain their balance.

"All clear there?" called Dale.

"Let her go!" replied Wilding.

Again the kite was flung into the wind, and this time it started its upward flight at an even faster speed than before. Like a stone out of a catapult it shot up over the lake. In a few seconds the slack rope had run out, and just at the right moment the thirteen-stone weight was swung through an open space in the rail.

For an instant the kite seemed to hesitate and drop under the sudden load as the weighted drum skimmed over the surface of the water. The next, it had recovered its equilibrium and, soaring bravely into the wind, drew the laden drum up over the lake as though its weight were negligible. But the rate of progress, as Dale had foretold, was appreciably slower, and they were able to control the outgoing rope much more easily. Little by little the rope was let out until



just over a thousand feet had gone. The kite and its weight hung almost motionless at a height which, even allowing for the drift in the wind, could not have been less than seven hundred feet directly over the lake.

"By gad, Brian, I really believe it's going to do the trick!" exclaimed the Doctor, unable now to conceal his satisfaction at the successful trial. His eyes were focussed upon the gently swaying drum, which seemed diminutive so high above the water. "It handled that load easily. It should pull you up better still."

"Not a doubt about it," declared the young man. He glanced at his watch. "Look here, it's only half-past two now. I think we had better haul it down and I'll have a go at it at once. Conditions are ideal to-day. The wind is strong and visibility is good. We might not be lucky enough to strike another day like this for some time."

"Well, yes, I suppose you're right there," admitted the Doctor, albeit a little dubiously. "You might just as well go to-day as to-morrow. Eh, Wilding?"

The explorer shrugged his shoulders. "It's Dale's own suggestion, so I suppose he can please himself," he remarked. "At the worst he can always swim for it."

"Hope I won't have to do that," said Dale, with a grin. "Anyhow, there's no sense in wasting time. Haul it in, Mac, while I get things ready."

Strangely enough, now that the great adventure was about to begin, a sudden silence came over the little party. Dale went about his preparations in a quiet, confident manner. He removed his heavy boots and donned a pair of light shoes. Over his shoulder he slipped a leather case containing a pair of powerful Zeiss field-glasses.

Yard by yard the great kite was hauled down, until at length it rested upon the deck. The Doctor, realizing that some responsibility for the young man's safety rested upon him, wore a rather anxious expression upon his face. Dorothy surveyed the preparations with outward calm and inward

trepidation. Wilding evinced no perturbation at all; he appeared quite unconcerned about the whole business.

At last all was ready. The weight had been removed from the rope, and in its place Dale fastened a small wooden seat, with ropes hanging in loops in which he could firmly fix his feet, but so that he could instantly free himself if the necessity arose. Wilding and Pat Murphy ascended to the roof of the wheelhouse to launch the kite, and Dale turned to Sandy MacTavish at the windlass.

"Let her right out as far as the rope will go, Mac," he directed. "And you had better leave me up as long as possible. I will wave my handkerchief when I'm ready to come down. Doctor Treloare will be watching me through his glasses. Quite clear?"

"Aye, Meester Dale."

"Good. Now I think we're all ready. I'll be off."

Captain Dixon eyed the north-eastern sky with some apprehension as the young man began to lay out the rope in a neat coil on the deck.

"I wouldn't stay up longer than you can help, Mr Dale," he advised. "I don't like the look of the weather much. In fact, I'll go further. I think you had better wait until to-morrow. I don't like the wind, and I don't like the hazy sky, and that's flat."

But Dale was not to be thus dissuaded from his enterprise after having gone so far with it. He laughed lightly. "For the Lord's sake don't tell that to the others, or you'll be scaring the wits out of them," he said. "I will be all right, Skipper. And as far as the weather goes, the wind couldn't be better. The haze is probably just the reflection caused by the water against the surrounding rocks."

Captain Dixon appeared dubious, but made no further comment as he rejoined the Doctor and Dorothy a few yards away.

Dale fixed himself firmly in the seat in the rope, with his feet in the loops, and climbed on to the rail of the *Jessica*,



which was rocking slightly on the waves. There came a sudden sharp gust of wind, and, taking advantage of it, Wilding and Pat Murphy launched the kite into the air. Dale's eyes never left it. Just as the slack of the rope drew taut and he felt the pull of the kite he released his grip of the stanchion to which he had clung, and sprang forward. For a second or two he dropped a little as the kite gave momentarily under the load. For perhaps fifty yards he skimmed the surface of the lake so closely that the waves were only a few inches below his feet. Then he felt himself being lifted as by some huge invisible hand.

The kite, billowing in the wind, rose almost directly into the sky. The lake, the hills, the launch, seemed to fall rapidly away beneath him. Higher and higher still he rose, until there came a slight jerk on the rope, and he guessed, rather than knew, that he was stationary.

At that height the wind was considerably stronger than in the shelter of the launch. It whistled and screamed round him with gale-like intensity. But the enormous pull of the kite was sufficient to counteract any tendency to violent swaying. His elevated perch swung gently a thousand feet above the level of Treasure Lake, and a striking panorama of remarkable country spread itself before his eyes.

Taking careful note of his position from the *Jessica*, Dale drew the field-glasses from his case and began a steady scrutiny of the wild country surrounding the lake.

With startling suddenness the gathering squall broke.

For more than half-an-hour the kite with its human freight had been straining at the rope, and during that period the wind had increased in velocity until it swept across the lake with the force of a gale. Several times Captain Dixon cast an anxious look round the unsettled heavens, and at length he went to consult the barometer in the wheelhouse. His face was grave as he hurried back and approached Dr Treloare, who was intent upon watching the kite through his glasses.

From a sheet of calm, placid water the lake had developed into a mass of heavy waves, upon which the motor-boat moored to the stern of the launch tossed and rocked in alarming manner; even the *Jessica* herself was rolling under the heavy swell, and the waves dashed like breakers against the rocks at the south-western end of the lake.

"Doctor, I think we had better pull that kite down," exclaimed Captain Dixon, who now made no attempt to conceal his alarm at the growing menace in the elements. "That rope is pretty strong, but I don't know how much of this it will stand. And it isn't all over yet; the barometer has dropped from 29.8 to 29.2 in the last three hours. We are in for some dirty weather! The glass never drops like that without good reason. And look at those clouds coming up over the hills! Did you ever see clouds like them—it's more like a black mist than clouds."

Dr Treloare was considerably startled, as much by the skipper's manner as by his words. He dropped the glasses into their case and cast a look at the north-eastern horizon.

"By George, Dixon, you're right! I hadn't noticed the way the weather has developed. My God, with the barometer as low as that we might be in for a cyclone!"

He hurried to Wilding. "Pull it down as fast as you can, Wilding! Dixon seems to think we're in for some nasty weather. Better haul in at once!"

"What's the matter, Daddy?" asked Dorothy, her face suddenly white. "Is anything wrong?"

"No, it's all right, my dear," her father reassured her. "We are just pulling in to be on the safe side. No need to worry."

He raised the glasses to his eyes again and anxiously scanned the kite, which was now tossing a little as the wind changed from a steady blow to sharp, savage gusts. "My God, I'll never forgive myself if anything happens to the lad," he muttered to himself. "The damned young fool! I should not have let him go. He doesn't seem to be worrying about it, anyhow."



Although he could not clearly see the young man's features, Dale's whole attitude was one of complete confidence. Apparently he was unaware that his friends had commenced to haul down the kite. Indeed, there was now so much slack rope that a good deal would have to be wound in before it would affect the height of the kite at all.

Yard by yard the rope was wound upon the windlass. But less than two hundred feet had been hauled in when Wilding suddenly stood rigid, his gaze transfixed over the rugged outline of the north-eastern horizon.

"Good God, look there!" he exclaimed sharply.

Startled at the vehemence of his tone, the others turned in surprise. Over the top of the huge rock had appeared what seemed to be a huge black cloud, intensely dark in the centre and fading to a curious light grey at the outer edges. Every second it grew larger and larger as it advanced upon the lake.

The Doctor stared at it in stupefied surprise. "What the deuce——" he began, and broke off as he caught sight of the expression on Dixon's face, which had gone swiftly ashen.

"My God, it's a typhoon!" His voice rang with strident fear. "Quick! We can do nothing for him! Leave everything and under cover for your lives! If it hits us we're done! Engine, Mac!"

He dashed for the wheelhouse, and MacTavish, with Pat Murphy close behind, clattered below to the engine. Dr Treloare hurried Dorothy into the saloon, hastily followed by Wilding.

They had barely gained shelter when the squall burst upon the lake. With a roar like a thousand cannons it crashed over the water at frightful speed. The *Jessica* spun round in the grip of a whirlwind which lashed the waters of the lake into mountainous, foaming waves. A blinding, choking cloud of dust enveloped the launch, making it almost impossible to breathe. Dorothy reeled as the boat spun broadside to the gale, and would have fallen had not

Wilding swiftly flung an arm round her. The Doctor hung grimly to the half-open door and strained his eyes in a frantic endeavour to catch a glimpse of the ill-fated kite through the immense haze of blinding dust.

The launch rocked and shivered under the terrific strain, while above the roaring shriek of the wind came the thud of huge branches of trees as they fell heavily against the iron stanchions of the *Jessica*, or crashed with a mighty splash into the lake. For a minute or two it seemed as though the launch could not maintain an upright keel in that raging inferno; indeed, had it not been for the superb handling of the wheel by Captain Dixon the *Jessica* would in all probability have been completely overturned in the gale.

But the squall passed as quickly as it had come. With surprising suddenness the wind fell to little more than a soft breeze, the choking dust gradually cleared away, the waves subsided, and the bewildered adventurers found themselves in an atmosphere of peace and calm again.

Hastily they streamed out on to the deck. Save for a faint smell of dust in the air, and an occasional tree-branch floating in the lake, there was nothing to indicate that anything unusual had occurred. The sun shone brightly in a cloudless, clear blue sky; the *Jessica* floated quietly upon the smooth waters. But where was the kite and its human burden? In an agony of apprehension they searched the sky for some sign of the ill-fated kite and its passenger. There was not a trace of either; there was not even a stick of the huge framework floating upon the lake. All that was left of the ill-fated venture was a long length of rope drifting idly in the water.

Dr Treloare groaned aloud, and his hands trembled as he lowered the glasses from his eyes. "Gone!" he muttered brokenly. "Poor Dale! God, what a fool I was to let him go! Lord knows where he's been blown to."

In silence they surveyed the vast expanse of water, and the hills and rocks beyond. Dorothy bit her lip to restrain



the tears which welled to her eyes. Dale had utterly disappeared; though they dared not put their thoughts into words, there was not one of them on the launch but knew that nothing in the air could have withstood the fury of that cyclonic whirlwind.

Captain Dixon came towards the silent little group, wiping beads of perspiration from his brow. His face was grave and troubled.

"I saw him go," he said, in answer to their unspoken query. "I was watching him through the window of the wheelhouse. The gale carried him and the kite straight towards that 'horned' hill in the south-west." He pointed to the hill which they had previously commented on for its strange appearance, its shape somewhat resembling the outline of two horns reaching into the sky. "I couldn't see much through the dust, but the last thing I saw he was dropping down behind the hill. Then the dust came over thicker than ever and wiped out everything."

A strained silence fell upon the little party—a silence of grief where less than an hour before carefree lightheartedness had prevailed. Dr Treloare and Captain Dixon were visibly affected by the sudden disaster. Dorothy was staring over the placid waters of the lake with tear-dimmed, unseeing eyes. Pat Murphy and MacTavish stood a little distance apart, embarrassed and shaken. Wilding alone remained seemingly unaffected; his face was as a mask; none could tell what emotion lay behind those inscrutable features. In his time the explorer had seen many a good man go to his death. Dale was a rival for Dorothy's hand and heart. With him removed the goal would be so much easier of attainment. Was it likely that he would regret the disappearance of a man who stood in his way? There were other things to think about. With an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders he began to dismiss the matter from his mind.

The Doctor broke the silence that hung like a pall over

them. His jovial face had suddenly become lined and aged. He stood irresolute for an instant, and then squared his shoulders in swift determination.

"Look here, we must do something to find him! We cannot leave him out there and not make some effort to trace him. He may be injured. It is our duty to at least search for him."

"That's a fact," said Captain Dixon. "That hill is heavily wooded, and the trees and shrubs would break his fall. Besides, it is more than likely that the kite would act very much like a parachute, and let him down gently. I certainly think we should make some effort to locate him, Doctor, especially as we know what direction to take."

Dr Treloare snapped the lid of his field-glass case. "We'll go at once," he declared. "It's still early in the afternoon. By gad, we'll search every inch of ground to find him! Run over as far as you can, Dixon, and we will go ashore in the motor-boat. You'll come with us, of course, Wilding?"

It was more than a request; it was a command. Perhaps the Doctor had half guessed, in his shrewd manner, at the thoughts that lay behind the explorer's inscrutable countenance.

"Oh, of course I will come," Wilding replied immediately. "There is a sporting chance of finding him, though from what I know of this kind of country the task will not be an easy one. I am afraid we will find the hills very thickly timbered."

Dorothy stamped her foot impatiently upon the deck. Her brown eyes blazed ominously. "Of course you will find him," she said, with an icy stare at the explorer. "That is, if you want to," she added pointedly.

"My dear girl, of course we want to," said Wilding smoothly. "But I have travelled through hundreds of miles of country like this, and I do not want to arouse any false hopes, that's all. You can be sure we will use every effort to trace the unfortunate young fellow."



Dorothy relapsed into silence and gazed anxiously at the heavily timbered hill, with its two peculiar eminences that so closely resembled a cow's horns. While the launch skimmed through the water, Dr Treloare and Wilding wound upon the windlass what was left of the rope, measuring it as it came in.

"Why, it's nearly all here!" ejaculated the Doctor in surprise, as the end came over the rail. "Look, there's one of the loops Dale tied to place his feet in."

"That's not surprising," observed Wilding. "You see, when the strain came, the rope would naturally break where it carried the greatest load. All that is missing is the length between Dale and the kite itself. It is fortunate, in a way. We may be glad of this rope later on."

The Doctor looked at him in surprise, and was about to speak when Captain Dixon came up. "I don't think it's safe to go much closer in, Doctor," he stated. "We are in eight feet of water now, and about two hundred yards out."

"That will do," said the Doctor. "Don't take any risks. We don't want to run aground."

He looked anxiously at his daughter as MacTavish hauled the motor-boat alongside and, climbing in, began to start up the engine. "Do you think you will be afraid to stay on board by yourself, Dorothy?" he asked. "I can leave Pat Murphy if you like, but I would rather take him with us. The more we have searching the better are our chances of finding poor Brian."

"Of course I'm not afraid, Daddy," answered his daughter. "By all means take everyone with you. In fact, I would like to come myself."

Wilding, standing near by, shook his head. "Not wise," he said firmly, and the Doctor nodded agreement. "We have some heavy climbing ahead of us, and we five should be sufficient."

He hesitated a moment before going over the rail into the motor-boat, the engine of which was spluttering noisily.

"Got your revolver, Miss Dorothy? That's all right," as the girl nodded briefly in reply. "Don't hesitate to use it if you have to. This place is, I think, deserted, but still—one never knows."

Before the girl could reply he was in the boat, and with a rising crescendo of exhaust, which echoed and re-echoed strangely in the calm atmosphere, the small craft moved rapidly towards the narrow strip of shore.

"I don't like him," thought Dorothy to herself, as she watched the receding boat. "I don't believe he would have gone to look for Brian if Daddy hadn't suggested it. He isn't sincere; I know he isn't."

But, for all her vague distrust and misgiving, Dorothy was forced to admit that Wilding had not exaggerated in his estimate of the difficult nature of the task.

The peculiar-shaped hill was one of the most densely wooded of all in that strange region. From the centre of the lake it had seemed very little different in this respect from any of the others, but viewed from the closer range of some two hundred yards it was obvious that the search, to be effectual, would have to be a lengthy one, and even then might not be successful.

As the motor-boat grounded and was drawn ashore the Doctor, surveying the immense, steeply sloping hill and its thick covering of timber and luxuriant undergrowth, felt his heart sink at the realization of the magnitude of the task before them. It seemed hopeless to look for a man in that maze of jungle, especially a man who might be lying unconscious somewhere and therefore unable to respond to their calls. Wilding joined him as Dixon and the other two drew the boat clear of the water.

"It's going to be some job, Doctor," observed the explorer.

The Doctor nodded, his eyes sweeping the tree-lined ridges. Then his jaw set resolutely. "We will do the best we can, anyway," he declared. "We've got three hours of



daylight left, at least, and a lot can be done in three hours. Now, Wilding, you have had some experience in this sort of thing. What would you advise to be the best way of setting about it?"

The explorer's heavy eyebrows came together as he surveyed the huge expanse of jungle-covered hill. "The first thing we shall have to guard against," he said, "is not to get lost ourselves. If we are not careful it will be the easiest thing in the world to get lost in this maze. That cuts out any individual searching. Although we are armed we do not know what we may meet. We had better move off in a line, with about thirty yards between each of us, and if we cannot see each other we can keep in touch by calling. We can comb the woods pretty effectively that way, right up to the top of the hill, and if we have no luck we can start off again farther down towards the south. If any one of us should get out of touch with the others, or if any danger threatens, he must fire two shots in the air."

The Doctor considered the plan in silence for a few moments. Then he nodded. "Yes, I believe that would be best," he said. "At all costs we must keep in touch with each other. To separate may prove fatal. . . . Well, let us make a start."

So the search began, and so it ended. For nearly four hours they scoured the hillside; through the tall trees, which grew taller and yet taller the higher up they went; tramping through bracken and a network of tangled undergrowth; round huge boulders and through occasional patches of clearing that contrasted strangely with the mass of thick timber surrounding; arousing birds in their thousands by the constant calling and shouting. The woods rang with voices as they had probably never rang before; in the peaceful quiet of the late afternoon the sound of their shouting travelled far and wide, until it seemed that every living thing on the hillside had been startled into activity.

The daylight faded gradually into twilight, and the twilight

more swiftly into dusk, and as the shadows of evening stole over the lake the weary searchers gathered once more upon the narrow shore, tired and exhausted after the constant tramping up and down hill, and sick at heart that their efforts had proved fruitless. Not even a trace of the kite itself or any of its framework had been seen in the trees.

"It's no use," said the Doctor in despair. "It is too late for any more searching, and somehow I don't think it would be of any use. If Dale is alive, and on this hill, he must surely have heard us. Either he is not here, or else he is—unconscious or dead. . . . Start up, Mac. Let's get back to the launch. I can't understand why Dorothy has not switched some lights on."

In silence broken only by the *chug-chug* of the engine they slipped through the dusk to where the *Jessica* lay, a ghostly outline upon the still waters of the lake. The rope-ladder hung over the side, its weighted end trailing limply in the water.

Dr Treloare climbed wearily aboard, followed by Wilding and Captain Dixon. The Doctor stared round him with a frown of irritation upon his normally cheerful countenance. He was utterly tired out, for there is nothing more exhausting to a stout man of middle age than continued tramping up and down hills.

"Dash it, where's Dorothy?" he demanded querulously. "Why can't she put some lights up? She must have fallen asleep somewhere. Dorothy! Dorothy!" His voice boomed strangely loud in the almost uncanny stillness.

There was no answer to his stentorian shouts. Wilding's grim face grew swiftly grave.

"Do you think she is in her room?" he asked.

"She must be." The Doctor's care-lined face softened a little. "Poor girl! She's had a devil of a shock over this business! She thought a lot of young Dale. Perhaps she's cried herself to sleep."



"Dorothy's hardly that type of girl," commented Wilding dryly.

"Well, I'll see if I can find her. Put some lights up, Wilding. This darkness gives one the shivers."

Dr Treloare went below and stepped softly along the narrow corridor. He paused in front of Dorothy's room and tapped against the closed door.

"Dorothy! Are you there, dear?" he called softly. There was no answer.

"Dorothy!" His voice sounded a little more loudly, and with growing anxiety. Again no answer; only the stillness and a silence that sent an inexplicable foreboding through him. He turned the handle; the door yielded to his touch. He pressed the electric-light switch, and the room became flooded with the soft light from the frosted bulb which Dorothy herself had chosen.

The room was empty. Neat and tidy, everything was in its place, and the bed gave no indication that Dorothy had been resting upon it.

The Doctor stood silent for a moment, a puzzled expression on his face. A sudden fear shot through him like the stab of a knife. He turned and stumbled from the room.

"My God, Wilding, she's gone!" he said thickly, bursting into the saloon, where the tired explorer was pouring himself a stiff whisky-and-soda.

Wilding spun round in astonishment. The stem of the thin glass crumpled in his suddenly clenched hand as though it were paper. A nameless fear gripped at his heart with an icy clasp.

"Gone!" he repeated mechanically. "Gone where?"

The Doctor staggered to the table, flung himself into a near-by chair, and sank his face in his hands.

"Gone!" he muttered hysterically. "Gone! First Dale, now Dorothy! They are both gone! Who will be next?"

With an effort Wilding recovered himself, poured an almost neat whisky with hands that shook in spite of his

amazing self-control, and touched the Doctor gently upon the shoulder. "Drink this, Doctor," he commanded. "It will brace you up. Quick! Get it down!"

With a little shudder Dr Treloare dropped his hands from his head. Wilding was shocked at his altered expression; his face was deathly white, his features lined and haggard. The fiery liquid sent the colour tingling into his cheeks, and with an effort he endeavoured to regain his self-composure.

"Now, then, what's happened?" Wilding's steady voice helped to calm his trembling companion. "You say Dorothy has gone. Where has she gone?"

The Doctor groaned aloud. "God knows!" he muttered, his lips quivering. "She is not in her room. I can't find her anywhere. She has disappeared!"

Wilding's brows were black as thunder. The knuckles of his clenched hands stood out white against the sun-browned skin. In an instant he was the man of action known far and wide for his clear brain and immediate decisions in an emergency.

"We will search the boat thoroughly." He rapped the words with biting decisiveness. "She can't have disappeared altogether. She may have fallen down somewhere, unconscious, perhaps. Dixon!"

His shouts brought Captain Dixon and the others running to the saloon. They stared in amazement at the bowed figure of the Doctor and the grim, determined expression upon Wilding's granite-like features. The latter wasted no time in useless talk.

"Miss Dorothy seems to have disappeared," he said sharply. His words came to them like a thunderbolt. Dixon opened his mouth to speak, but Wilding waved him into silence with an imperious gesture. "Search the boat thoroughly, and at once! She is not in her room. She may have fallen down and injured herself. Switch on all lights, carry extension lamps, and don't leave a square foot of space unsearched. Now, then, to work!"



His inflexible voice and manner impelled immediate action. Tired though they were, the men sprang into activity at once, and with anxious faces went about their task. Miss Dorothy missing—Dorothy, with her happy manner, her cheery smile and kindly words! It seemed incredible, but they wasted no time in idle questioning. Had they been twice as tired they would have searched the biggest liner afloat for the girl, who had endeared herself to them all.

In a matter of seconds the launch was a blaze of light. They searched it all from stem to stern, calling her name until its echoes must have carried far into the silent hills. Under Wilding's direction they worked methodically through the whole length of the launch, while the Doctor followed first one and then another, every moment expecting to find the still form of his daughter lying inert, unconscious, perhaps bleeding, in some out-of-the-way spot.

But as minute succeeded minute, with still no trace of the girl, the hearts of the seekers grew heavy within them, and at last the fact could no longer be ignored—the search for Dorothy had been as unavailing as that for Brian Dale. The girl was nowhere on the boat.

Wearily in body and mind, inexpressibly shocked by the two tragic events following so closely one upon the other, the men gathered together once more in the saloon. To search any longer was obviously useless; not even one of the girl's shoes could have been missed by those keen eyes that had gazed into every nook and cranny on the launch. Dale's disappearance was serious enough, but there had been admittedly a risk in his undertaking, and he had willingly shouldered that risk. Under the circumstances, his disappearance was at least reasonable, and there was little mystery about it. But what had become of Dorothy? What had happened to the girl in the few hours during which they had been searching for Dale? Her disappearance was utterly inexplicable, for which no reason could be advanced.

As they entered the saloon MacTavish, in the rear, suddenly remembered the motor-boat, and slipped away to moor it securely behind the launch.

The Doctor sank into a chair with a weary sigh. Captain Dixon, his honest, rugged face much troubled, followed his friend's example. Wilding stood facing the door, motionless, his eyes fixed with unseeing stare upon the table, his heavy, frowning face as black as thunder. Yet only his huge hands gave any outward sign of the deep emotion within him; they clenched and unclenched spasmodically as he leaned against the wall. Plainly the disappearance of Dorothy worried him far more than had that of Dale. There was an expression in his steely eyes which boded ill for anyone upon whom the explorer might vent his wrath.

Dr Treloare flung his arms wearily upon the table in front of him.

"In God's name, where can she be?" he muttered brokenly. "My little Dorothy! My poor little girl! . . . What can have happened to her?" His voice trailed into a whisper. Captain Dixon, his sympathetic nature sensing some of the Doctor's tragic despair, moved uncomfortably in his chair.

"Let us face this as calmly as we can," said Wilding steadily. "It's a hell of a knock, but we won't help Dorothy any by giving way to it."

"There's sense in that, Major," observed Captain Dixon. "Bear up, Doctor! I can guess how you feel!" He rested his hand sympathetically for a moment on his friend's arm. "You can bet your last shilling that we'll work ourselves to a standstill to ferret this thing out! I know I am speaking for all in that!"

Dr Treloare swallowed hard, and braced himself in his chair. "Yes, yes, I know you're right," he said apologetically. "You must forgive my weakness. This has been a dreadful blow to me. First Dale, and now Dorothy, gone—and somehow I feel as though I was to blame for each."

"Nonsense!" Wilding spoke sharply. "No one of us



was to blame. Now, to get down to facts. This is what we know. We left Dorothy quite safe here when we went ashore. She was in good health, and we had seen no sign of anyone but ourselves in this place. Four hours later when we returned she had disappeared. Do you think she could have fallen overboard?"

The Doctor shook his head. "Dorothy was a fine swimmer," he declared. "Even if she did fall overboard, there was a rope-ladder and two other ropes trailing in the water. She could easily have got on board again. That is," he added, "unless she struck her head and became unconscious."

"That isn't very likely," said Wilding. "Dorothy was not the type of girl to suddenly faint, and there is nothing on which she could strike her head if she did fall over the rail. No. I think we can rule out any possibility of her having fallen into the lake."

"Then where can she have gone?" demanded the Doctor. "Her revolver is still lying on her table. Her field-glasses are hanging over a deck-chair. She would never have swam ashore by herself. The whole thing's a mystery."

Wilding had opened his mouth to reply when his attention was sharply drawn to the door, which he was facing, and to which the Doctor had his back. In the open doorway MacTavish had suddenly appeared, a peculiar expression upon his long thin face. He beckoned frantically to the explorer.

With a muttered excuse, which passed unnoticed, Wilding, without change of expression, casually left the saloon and followed the excited engineer on to the deck.

"Now, Mac, what's the matter?"

There was a single electric light burning in the stern of the *Jessica*, casting a strange glow in the thick darkness of the night. The Scotsman looked round him curiously. Wilding stared at him in swiftly growing exasperation.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he snapped. "This is no time for fooling."

"I ken it, Meester Wilding," said MacTavish, in a tone of reproach. "I cam' oot a few minutes ago to tie up yon motor-boat safely. When I got to the stern and switched on the light look what I saw."

He led the surprised explorer to the rear of the launch, paused beneath the bright light, and pointed to the deck. Wilding started violently at the sight. Accustomed though he was to shocks, the sight seemed momentarily to freeze the blood in his veins. For there, near the rail, and standing out boldly against the spotless boards of the deck, were two muddy imprints of a naked human foot—a squat, broad foot with short, thick toes. In fascinated horror the explorer gazed at these grim tokens with their dread message. A hundred thoughts flashed suddenly through his brain—thoughts that sent the blood pounding madly through his veins, and caused him to groan inwardly. MacTavish's broad voice broke in upon his reverie.

"Ye ken how they cam' ?—up the rope hangin' over the side there. One of 'em—most likely the one that pushed off their boat from the shore—must have got his feet muddy, and didn't notice the marks he left." He paused a moment. "I thought I had better tell you first, Meester Wilding. Should we let the Doctor see these? He seems main cut up about poor Miss Dorothy."

Wilding considered for a moment. "I think we had better tell him," he said slowly. "It will do no good to keep it from him. And at least it gives us something definite to work on. It will be a shock to him at first, but even that is better than the present uncertainty that worries him."

He strode back to the saloon, and paused in the doorway. "Mac's made a discovery," he said briefly. "No, it's not Dorothy," he added quickly, as the Doctor's face suddenly paled. "But it's a clue, at any rate. Come and see."

In silence he led the way to the stern, a curiously expectant little group behind him. Still silent, Wilding pointed to the tell-tale marks upon the deck. At sight of the footprints



Dr Treloare gave a violent start, and gripped the rail for support. Captain Dixon and Pat Murphy stared at them in horror. For a full minute the men stood in silent contemplation of the grim scene. And then the Doctor raised his weary eyes. He looked from one to the other in bewildered horror.

"In God's name, what does it all mean?" he gasped. "Wilding, what does it mean?"

There was not one who could answer him. For that was the question which staggered all of them as they stared at the mute, hard-caked muddy marks upon the white boards. What did it mean? A hundred thoughts flashed at lightning speed through the minds of the men gathered in a silent group beneath that glaring light, and in their hearts began to dawn a gnawing fear to which none dared give expression.

## CHAPTER V

## THE TEMPLE OF SÄHR

WHEN a woman is interested, if even slightly, in a man who has disappeared under the strange circumstances which surrounded Brian Dale's disappearance it is only natural that she will be concerned for his welfare. In common with most other modern young women, Dorothy Treloare, had she been asked the question straight out, would probably have strenuously denied that she was "interested" in any man; indeed, such are the ways of women that it is not improbable that she would have laughed at any implied suggestion that the young man was anything to her but a friend. They had danced together, played tennis and golf, swam together, and occasionally, after the fashion of modern youth, indulged in a mild flirtation. Content to accept his friendship just as it was offered, she had as yet never fully analysed her feelings for Brian Dale.

But now, face to face with the stern fact that he had gone, and that she might indeed never see him again, the girl was suddenly awakened to a sharp realization of her real regard for the young engineer; and deep down in her heart Dorothy knew that Brian Dale meant more to her than a mere platonic friend. Two hours ago, she reflected, he had been laughing and joking with them on the launch, full of enthusiasm for his scheme to help them to find the mysterious waterfall and the cave which concealed the Golden Rope.

And now—where was he now? Usually self-possessed and calm, Dorothy felt herself trembling with half-concealed emotion; and wistful tears dimmed her big brown eyes as in imagination she pictured the unfortunate young man



lying, perhaps unconscious, and seriously hurt, away over those rugged hills. With incredible swiftness tragedy had come for the first time within her remembrance into her happy young life, and, like most other people who have never previously known deep sorrow, Dorothy felt its numbing effects with exceptional severity.

She watched the motor-boat as it sped towards the shore, saw the searchers first in consultation, and then, under Wilding's guidance, disappear into the thick timber.

For a while she leaned against the rail, her eyes on the calm water below, but her mind away in the hills. A sudden thought striking her, she sauntered to her room in search of her field-glasses. They stood upon a small table, on which also lay the miniature revolver which her father had given her at the start of the journey north. Dorothy picked up the glasses, slung the case over her shoulder, and, remembering Wilding's last words, smiled as she fingered the small weapon.

For an instant she half thought of strapping it on. But Fate was taking a hand in Dorothy Treloare's life that afternoon. For a few moments the girl hesitated, the little weapon shining dully as she turned it over in her hand. Again those words of Wilding's flashed through her mind. And then she laid it back upon the table. "What's the use of carrying this about with me?" she said to herself. "It is here if I want it. No. I'll leave it here."

She replaced the weapon in its case, left it upon the table, and made her way back to the deck. Carefully focussing the glasses on the thickly wooded hill, the girl was amazed at the wonderful wealth of detail which the powerful lenses revealed. The greys and browns of the trees and shrubs stood out in bold relief; even the luxuriant foliage, with here and there a brightly plumaged bird hovering overhead, was plainly discernible. For a while Dorothy swept the hill with the glasses, hoping against hope that she might perhaps find some trace of the unfortunate young man. But not

even the excellent lenses could help her in this; and at last, with a deep sigh, Dorothy slung the case over a deck-chair and relaxed into another near by.

Only then did she realize how tired she was—wary not so much in body as in mind. In the excitement of the moment the girl had scarcely felt its effect; but now, left to herself in the calm solitude, the strain of the severe mental agitation began to make itself felt. The drowsy afternoon, the warm sun and the gentle breeze following so quickly upon the fierce rush of the tempest, the steady *lap-lap* of the water against the side of the launch, together with her own distress of mind, combined to induce a feeling of intense physical languor, and almost before she had realized it Dorothy had fallen into that pleasant state of semi-consciousness termed dozing.

How long she remained in that condition she did not know; but suddenly she awoke with an uneasy premonition of impending danger. Behind her there came the sound of a soft thud and the splashing of water. Wide awake in an instant, Dorothy sprang to her feet and swung round. For a moment she thought she was still dreaming; the next, she could have screamed in horror.

Not twenty feet away was a brown-skinned native, creeping silently towards her. Behind him came another, and still another, while the face of a fourth peered at her through the railing in the stern of the launch. Stark-naked save for a strip of loin-cloth, their brown-skinned bodies, strangely different in colour from that of the usual Australian aborigine, glistened dully in the sunlight. In height no taller than the girl herself, their lithe bodies were splendidly proportioned, and even in the split second in which she stared at them Dorothy was conscious of their magnificent physique—the sturdy limbs; the deep, broad chests; the wide, deep-set eyes and sharp, thin-lipped, intellectual features, all so strikingly different from the usual native types. None of them carried a weapon of any kind; they came towards her



with silent, soft, catlike tread, their muscles rippling under the light brown skin.

For an instant Dorothy stared at them in bewildered wonderment and fascination. Her powers of voice and action seemed to have gone. A hand of ice gripped at her madly beating heart—gripped and held until she found herself powerless to move. Then in a flash she recovered from the stupefying inaction occasioned by the unexpected discovery. Her hand dropped to her side, where she usually carried the small revolver, and with a gasp of dismay she remembered that it lay upon the table in her room, out of reach and useless.

Unarmed, her eyes dilated in horror and apprehension, she stood for a moment in helpless confusion. The next, before she could make a move in any direction, they were upon her.

She heard a few strange words spoken, and then she was swept from her feet. Sturdy arms gripped her legs as in a vice, went round her shoulders and her waist, pinning her arms firmly to her side, and she was borne swiftly along the deck.

In a flash came the realization to Dorothy that they were abducting her. Memories of tales of dreadful treatment of women by the natives crowded in upon her. In a frenzy of fear, sick with dread, she began to scream shrilly, and endeavoured to free herself by violent kicking. Instantly the grip on her legs tightened until she was powerless to move. Her screams faded into a gurgle as a heavy, oily hand was hastily pressed over her mouth. Not a word was spoken by the natives as they carried her along the deck. She was amazed at the remarkable strength of these small men; they handled her as though she were a child.

Head first, yet not ungently, she was hoisted over the rail into the most surprising craft she had ever seen in her life—a long, sleek canoe, shaped from a tree-trunk, with high sides running to sharply pointed ends. There was no hope

of resistance. Flat on her back the girl was placed, her legs held in a firm but not painful grip, her two hands clasped in one big brown one and pressed close against her breast. Her head only remained free; but Dorothy knew that the first sound she made would bring that evil-smelling hand over her mouth again, and since nothing could be gained, shouting was futile. Two rowers knelt, one at each end of the canoe, and with short, sharp strokes on the broad-bladed paddles sent the craft skimming over the water at racing speed.

Dorothy was conscious that they were travelling almost due west, for the sun was shining directly into her eyes. Despite her fears she still retained her presence of mind, and she began to wonder what lay behind her abduction. How did these people know that she was alone on the launch? And why had they taken so much risk in not first rendering her unconscious? She was puzzled by their unusually strange manner. They had handled her carefully and with little roughness; the grips that held her powerless were firm, but caused no pain. Even the bottom of the strange craft was thickly lined with soft rushes, upon which she lay in complete bodily comfort.

What did it all mean, she asked herself, in growing bewilderment. Could it be—and a momentary dread seized her at the thought—that these peculiar people were taking her to be their goddess, or a priestess, and for that reason had not caused her any injury? As she lay upon the soft rushes Dorothy could easily have believed that the whole thing was a nightmare from which she had suddenly awakened. But the sight of those light brown naked bodies gleaming in the sunlight and the never-varying pressure upon her hands and legs were concrete proof of the stark realism of it all.

Skirting the western end of the hill, which the invisible searchers were busily scouring, the native craft swung into a narrow inlet and made straight towards the face of a huge rock which rose, like most of those surrounding Treasure



Lake, sheer out of the water. In the distance Dorothy perceived what appeared to be a large black shadow on the face of the rock just above water-level, but as they drew nearer she saw that it was the entrance to a narrow passageway through the rock.

Without hesitation or slackening of speed the canoe was swung into the tunnel, and became engulfed in utter darkness. Dorothy could not see an inch in front of her, and every moment she expected to hear the small craft crash against the side of the rock. But unerringly the rowers picked their way through the dark tunnel; and at last, after what seemed to the girl an interminable time, though it was actually only a few minutes, the darkness began to give place to a subdued grey light, and very soon they slipped out into another inlet, bounded by the towering rock on one side and a gently sloping, tree-covered hill on the other.

The sudden transition from darkness to broad sunlight was so painful that for a time Dorothy closed her eyes against the glare. When she opened them again a little cry of astonishment escaped her lips.

They had rounded a sharp turn in the stream, and a few hundred yards farther on the water ran up against a massive rock, the sides of which rose sheer into the sky. The rock was perhaps a hundred yards across, for the inlet broadened at its end. But it was not the rugged granite formation which caused Dorothy to exclaim in amazement; she had seen far too many of them in this peculiar region to express wonder at one more. For two hundred feet it rose straight out of the water, and on top of it, towering another two hundred feet into the blue sky, stood a huge stone building, the front of which, facing her, resembled an immense semicircle in shape. Surmounting it was a dome-covered watch-tower, through the top of which a long pipelike contrivance projected higher still.

The sight was one which would have brought an exclamation of astonishment to the lips of a traveller more blasé than

Dorothy Treloare. A building such as this was the last thing she might have expected to see in this deserted region. Constructed of grey-white stone, it shone with an almost unearthly brilliance in the sunlight, its vivid whiteness contrasting sharply against the mellow brown of the rock upon which it had been built. Although the rear of the building was hidden from view, Dorothy could see that it was one of great size, extending back over the rock for some distance. High up along the curved wall overlooking the stream were gaps which were obviously intended to serve as windows. The dome-covered watch-tower on top gave to the building a most bizarre appearance, and from that lofty viewpoint Dorothy guessed that it would be possible to command an exceptional view of a great deal of the surrounding country.

To Dorothy there was but one explanation of that peculiar building. Instinctively she knew it must be a native temple, and the sight of it aroused in her mind renewed fears for her ultimate fate. Imprisoned and unarmed, her heart sank within her as she reflected how utterly helpless she was in the hands of her captors.

But there was little time for idle speculation. As the canoe neared the end of the inlet another small passageway through the rock on the left-hand side came into view, and through this they travelled. A pin-point of light in the distance gradually loomed larger and larger, and in a few minutes the canoe came out upon a small clear stream. They passed what appeared to be a landing-stage, cut in the rock level with the water, and went on until a sharp turn to the right brought them to the rear of the temple.

Dorothy was amazed at the remarkable change in the appearance of the countryside on this side of the temple. She now perceived that the rock upon which the building had been constructed sloped back sharply, giving place to brown earth, which at the water's edge was almost flat. The rear of the temple itself was some distance back from the landing-stage, and the approach to it lay through a natural passage-



way of leafy trees, the overhanging branches of which were intertwined with a peculiar creeper of broad green leaf, that formed a natural canopy overhead. Trees and shrubs in great profusion were growing everywhere; indeed, viewed from this aspect, the temple seemed to be set in a luxuriant forest surrounded by water.

The canoe was steered up to the smooth bank and dragged clear of the water. Dorothy was immediately lifted out by the two men who had kept her imprisoned, and carefully set upon her feet, where she stood for a moment gazing in astonishment at her strange surroundings.

Almost immediately there was the sound of pattering footsteps, and a girl came running lightly along the covered passageway leading to the temple. Like the men she wore little clothing—only a short skirt fastened at the slim waist and hanging loosely to her knees. Her skin was coloured a light tan rather than brown, and as she ran lightly towards them Dorothy could not but admire her lithe, supple figure and the easy swinging gait as she moved. Her age could not have been more than twenty. The broad shoulders, the wide chest, the small breasts, round and firm, the slender waist and sturdy limbs—in every way this native girl might well have passed for a sun-tanned young white woman. Her hair, black as her sparkling eyes, was coiled over her forehead in quaint fashion, and little wisps, straying from the coils, floated gently in the soft breeze. Her features were as regular as Dorothy's own, and pearly white teeth flashed in the smile of welcome which she gave the white girl.

There was nothing but kindness and friendship in the wide black eyes which critically regarded Dorothy for a moment or two, and the latter was sorely puzzled by this obvious manifestation of welcome. Surely, she thought, no harm could come to her in a place which sheltered this happy-natured, smiling native girl! And who, she wondered, had sent such a cheerful guide, whose mission obviously was to gain her confidence and to remove any misgivings from her

mind. That there was a definite purpose behind her abduction from the launch the girl now felt certain; but who had organized it, and why? What mystery lay behind the stone walls of this old temple, and what part was she to play in its unravelling? These and other questions crowded in upon her while the native girl spoke in a low, musical voice to the man who appeared to be the leader of the party; but the more she thought about it the more bewildered she became.

With a wave of her small brown hand the native girl dismissed the men and turned towards Dorothy. Her happy nature was infectious, and Dorothy could not but smile in return—a little tremulously, perhaps, but still a smile that set the brown-skinned girl's eyes dancing.

For a second or two the girls surveyed each other in silence. Dorothy was wondering whether she would look as well as her companion if she were attired in such a scanty costume. The latter, with true womanly curiosity, regarded the white girl's clothes with interest: her khaki shirt, her neat cord riding-breeches, her leggings and stout boots. She fingered them all gently, as though she were not sure that they would withstand much handling. Plainly, she had never seen a woman dressed in such a manner before.

But at last her curiosity was satisfied; she suddenly placed one hand upon her bare bosom and in her low, soft voice pronounced the word "Lula" very distinctly.

Dorothy immediately grasped her meaning. Realizing that this was her companion's name, she repeated the word several times with the correct degree of inflection, to the huge delight of its owner. Then, pointing to herself, Dorothy pronounced her own name very distinctly twice. Lula listened intently and then repeated it: "Dorothy. Dorothy." She said the name several times, with a curious little accent, until she had it right. Dorothy nodded and smiled, and Lula, delighted at her success, broke into a low ripple of laughter, her voice surprisingly rich and soft.

With an impulsive movement, characteristic of the girl,



Lula's left hand closed in a warm, friendly grip upon Dorothy's right, and she began to lead the way up the covered pathway. She chattered incessantly as they climbed the gentle slope, and although Dorothy could not, of course, understand one word of what was said, nevertheless she liked to hear the girl's pleasantly musical voice.

At the end of the passageway they entered a spacious hall, with a stone floor and stone walls bare of any ornamentation. Crossing this they came to a broad stone stairway, up which Lula pointed. Round and round in an easy spiral it wound as it rose, and at the top it terminated in two massive stone pillars which gave on to a narrow passageway, imperfectly lit by small windows cut through the stone high up in the side on one wall.

As they went along the passage Dorothy was surprised to feel a soft surface beneath her feet, and glancing down she saw that the stone floor of the passage was covered with a soft carpet made from rushes skilfully interwoven. In silence Lula led the way along this passage until they came into a brightly lit open ante-room, from which other doorways led, screened by heavy curtains. The floor of this room, like the passage, was covered with the curious native carpet-like material. Through the windows in one wall the afternoon sunshine streamed freely, and Dorothy could see the blue sky and the tree-tops in the distance. The ceiling of the room was as bare as the walls, the rough-hewn slabs of stone creating their own weird panelling.

Across this bare, unprepossessing chamber Lula led the way, and paused at length before a heavy curtain of dark-coloured velvet-textured material which concealed the entrance to another room. There seemed to be no doors anywhere in the building; only thick drapings, which completely screened the entrances.

The laughter had gone from the native girl's bright face, and her voice was steadily calm as she called one word. Dorothy waited in inward trepidation, her heart beating

wildly. Unconsciously her grasp of Lula's hand tightened a little, and Lula gave her an answering squeeze.

After a slight pause there came the sound of a gong from inside the room—a low, booming, resonant sound which carried clearly through the heavy curtain in the still atmosphere. Its unexpectedness startled Dorothy, whose nerves were all on edge. To Lula it was the signal for which she had been waiting.

She stepped towards the curtain, drew it slightly aside and ushered Dorothy into the room. As they crossed the threshold the heavy draping swung silently back into place again. Dorothy Treloare found herself at last face to face with the moment which she had so long been dreading.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE SCIENTIST

THE room was empty. There was not a sign of any living person.

For a moment Dorothy was considerably startled, until she observed that Lula regarded the empty room with evident unconcern, and then she noticed, at the far end, another curtained doorway similar to the one through which they had just passed. Apparently, thought the girl, the occupant of the room was not ready to receive her; or, as was more probable, she was being subjected to a keen scrutiny by unseen eyes.

Despite her wildly beating heart, Dorothy endeavoured to assume an air of composure, and gazed with interest round the room. It was not large—not more than twenty feet square, she thought—but it was furnished in marked contrast to the bare ante-room just behind the curtain. The floor was covered with the thick, soft material which made an excellent substitute for carpet; the walls were hung with quaint tapestries, but were entirely devoid of pictures. At one side there was a large open window, with strangely carved wooden shutters which could be closed in inclement weather. Along one wall were two broad shelves filled with leather-bound books; there were two armchairs in the room, and a small table, upon which stood the gong that had summoned them, and beside which, to her intense astonishment, lay a large box of Turkish cigarettes.

At all these evidences of civilization Dorothy stared in growing amazement, wondering who could be responsible for them in such surroundings. They simply added to the

mystery which already enveloped this strange place, and in her dazed state of mind she was content to accept things just as she found them until someone chose to supply an explanation.

The curtain at the far end of the room quivered slightly and was quietly drawn aside, and a man stepped into the elaborately furnished chamber. Dorothy felt, rather than saw, the slight, almost imperceptible, movement of the native girl at her side. She regarded the newcomer curiously, and not without interest, for he was indeed a man who would have attracted attention anywhere. He was tall, and commanding in appearance; his thin, ascetic face betrayed a trace of foreign blood. His age would have been difficult to estimate; Dorothy decided that he could not be more than forty, and in many respects he seemed less than that. His thin, spare figure was clothed in a faultlessly tailored suit of grey material, and his whole air was that of an exceedingly well-groomed man garbed in the best of good taste. His face, surmounted by closely cropped dark hair, displayed keen, sharp features, and the high, bulging forehead denoted a powerful brain. Firmness of will was indicated in every line of his prominent chin and tight, thin lips.

But his eyes, deep-set, with a fierce, blazing light, and blacker than she had ever seen in a human being before, were outstanding. Dorothy experienced a little shiver of apprehension as she encountered that hard, inflexible gaze. It seemed to stab through to her very soul; once met, it held one fascinated. Personality and hypnotic power were stamped all over the man. He gave the impression of sternness rather than kindness, of ruthless disregard for anyone or anything that came between him and his purpose.

Seemingly unaware of Dorothy's close scrutiny, he scarcely glanced at her and addressed Lula in a low, deep voice. Only a few words were spoken; to Dorothy they were unintelligible, but Lula listened with close attention. When he had finished the native girl bowed her head in silent



acquiescence. She released her clasp of Dorothy's hand and slowly backed from the room.

The curtain had scarcely swung into place behind her when the man turned to Dorothy with a smile upon his austere face.

"Welcome to the Temple of Sähr, Miss Treloare," he said, in excellent English, but with the faintest trace of a foreign accent. "I am indeed pleased to meet you! I trust that my deputies caused you as little inconvenience as possible during your journey here?"

The question was almost a command. Mechanically Dorothy answered, her mind in a whirl at his words. How did this man know her name, she wondered.

"They—they treated me carefully," she stammered, colouring slightly, and at a loss to know just what to say. "But—"

"Ah! I am glad of that," he interrupted. "The route which you followed here is not the shortest, but I regret that it was the only one I could safely use to-day. I gave special instructions that no violence was to be used, and so far as I could see my wishes were observed."

Dorothy stared at the man in astonishment. How could he possibly have seen what happened on the lake? Disregarding her obvious surprise he went on in the same smooth, unhurried tones: "I am glad that you displayed sufficient common sense to refrain from wild and useless screaming. My opinion of your courage was fully justified. I trust also that Lula was waiting to greet you when you arrived?"

Again the question that was more of a command. His piercing eyes never left her face, and Dorothy found herself answering as mechanically as before.

"Yes; she was very kind," she murmured. And then suddenly the futile nature of the conversation dawned upon her. Why should she waste time discussing her personal welfare with this man? A wave of anger swept over her.

Who was he that had dared to take her prisoner in this manner? She opened her mouth to speak, but again he interrupted.

"That, also, is good. Lula is an excellent companion, and I gave her very definite instructions that she was to make you welcome. I am sorry that she was not attired more in keeping with your conventional ideas of dress, but she has, of course, never been accustomed to wearing anything more. However, I trust you will understand that I had no intention of causing you embarrassment."

Dorothy listened to his easy flow of perfect diction in utter amazement. Not one word had he uttered in explanation of his action in bringing her to the temple. Her eyes flamed angrily, and the colour mounted to her pale cheeks.

With a courtly wave of his arm her captor indicated a chair. "Please be seated, Miss Dorothy," he urged. "Our conversation may require some time, and really there is no need for you to remain standing."

Dorothy's brown eyes blazed at him. For an instant, while waiting for his appearance, she had felt an overpowering horror that her captor might have been a native priest, and now that she knew she had a white man to deal with some of her natural courage began to return.

"I would like to know, sir, just what you mean by this—this outrageous conduct!" she burst out swiftly. "What right have you to send men to take me prisoner and bring me here? I have never seen you before. I don't know how you know my name. I demand that you release me at once and let me return to my father!"

Her companion raised his eyebrows at the girl's passionate outburst. "My dear young lady, pray be calm," he urged. "Nothing is gained by fiery words—and it is so distressing to the nervous system, as you, a trained nurse, should know." He placed an armchair in position for her. "Please be seated," he said again, his voice strangely calm. Those piercing black eyes bored through Dorothy like a gimlet.



For a second or two she attempted to meet his burning gaze, and found herself fast drawn under the spell of his powerful hypnotic personality. With a little gesture of despair she relaxed into the chair he had brought forward.

"That is better," he said, himself taking the other next to her. "As I remarked, we may have a somewhat lengthy conversation, and it is tiring to stand and talk. Do you smoke?"

He placed the box of cigarettes before her. Dorothy, thinking that perhaps it would be better to humour him, accepted one, and he lit it for her, afterwards lighting one for himself. He leaned back in his chair, inhaling the fragrant smoke deeply. For a little while his keen eyes rested upon the slight girlish figure, taking in every detail, from the top of her shingled head to the toes of her neat brown boots. It was obvious that he had no intention of allowing her to go.

Dorothy felt the silence becoming unbearable. The girl experienced all the helplessness of one who, while seemingly free, is yet powerless to break the fetters which bind. And for the life of her she could not meet those piercing black eyes which smouldered with a light scarcely human. A hundred questions rushed unanswered through her mind while she waited for him to speak, but always, with wearying repetition, she found herself wondering who this man could be, why he had buried himself in such a strange region, and why he had brought her to the temple. The last aroused mingled feelings of dismay and apprehension as she cast a quick, covert glance at the stern features and determined chin.

With a little gesture of his smooth white hand her captor leaned towards her. His keen eyes never left her face.

"You say that you have never seen me before," he observed, in calm, even tones. "That is quite probable. But I am happy to state that, on the other hand, without your knowledge I have studied you closely during the past few

days, and the result of my scrutiny is one of the reasons why you are here now."

He paused, and Dorothy, moving uneasily in her chair, looked at him in surprise. "Naturally, you wish to know why I have brought you here, who I am, and what I am doing in this ancient temple. We shall leave in abeyance for the moment the first question; you will know the answer to that in good time. As to myself, allow me to present my own introduction, since we have no mutual friend here." His white teeth flashed in a brief smile which transformed his usually austere countenance.

"My name is Gregory Lemiere. My mother was English, my father French, hence the odd mixture of names. As to what I am, if I tell you that I hold high degrees in medicine and surgery, that I am a scientist, an inventor, you must for the time be content. And why have I come to this remote region? Ah! You, of course, are thinking that I am a madman—insane, eh?" He laughed softly as Dorothy started violently at this accurate reading of her mind. Almost from his first words the girl had wondered whether she had a madman to deal with. His speech and action were normal, but those eyes! Their fierce intensity sent little shivers down her spine, frightening her into horrified fear.

"I can assure you, my dear Miss Dorothy, that I am certainly not mad," resumed Lemiere, in his even voice. "Call me abnormal if you will, but my abnormality is only that which characterizes the true genius. I will tell you why I am here, making my home for the time in all that is left of this ancient Temple of Sähr. The building itself, by the way, is some thousands of years old, and the people of Sähr, now few in number, will in a short time, I fear, become extinct." He paused again, and an almost inhuman light flamed in his lambent eyes.

"Years ago I studied medicine and surgery, as I have just mentioned; but although I qualified in a famous British University, and later studied extensively in Germany, I have



never entered private practice. Instead, I have devoted myself to a study of the human body and the effect which electricity, correctly applied, has upon it. There is no need for me to dwell at length upon these experiments, interesting though they were. I was successful in my research. I have almost succeeded now in discovering and applying an invisible electric ray which will revolutionize modern surgery. It will take the place of the things that are termed anæsthetics—crude poisons which, I admit, possess some utility, but which are more dangerous even than a surgeon's knife in unskilled hands."

His voice rang with contempt and, despite herself, Dorothy began to grow interested. Her hospital training had brought her into intimate touch with the disadvantages, as well as the advantages, of anæsthetics in general, and she wondered what strange discovery this peculiar man had stumbled upon.

"By means of this ray," resumed Lemiere, "it is possible to make the human body, its nerves and tissues, quite insensible to pain of any intensity. It is far more effective than the best of the drugs now known to medical science. And its supreme advantage is that it leaves no after-effects upon the patient. In fact, in direct contrast to the poisonous drugs now used, the action of my ray actually has a beneficial effect upon a human being, particularly when, as so often happens, the vitality of the patient is very low. In such a case the drugs now used may cause death, due to their effect upon the heart, as you know; my ray not only produces complete insensibility, but actually invigorates and rejuvenates the system, thus giving the patient a far better chance of recovery. And when I tell you that I believe the necessary apparatus can be so constructed that it will fit into a light, portable cabinet, and therefore may be carried by a medical man anywhere, I am sure you will agree that I am not exaggerating when I say that the Lemiere Ray will revolutionize modern surgery!"

His deep voice was vibrant with the triumph of achieve-

ment, and Dorothy, who had listened to him in growing amazement, felt herself fast falling beneath the spell of his dynamic personality. The hundred and one questions that had flashed through her mind, and which puzzled her sorely, sank into insignificance beside the realization of the far-reaching importance of such a remarkable discovery—supposing that it were correct.

It is said that a true journalist is never off duty; that even when on holiday his first thought is for his own particular journal if anything unusual should happen. But the medical profession exercises an equally strong fascination over its devotees.

In the excitement of the knowledge of such a stupendous contribution to medical science Dorothy Treloare forgot that she was virtually a prisoner in strange surroundings, forgot that she had been abducted for some unexplained purpose, and that even now her friends might have returned to the launch, wondering what had become of her. The past and the future represented no more than a meaningless jumble in her shaking mind. She was wrapped in the present; such was the man's powerful personality that she could have easily closed her eyes and believed that she was back again in the hospital lecture-room listening to an absorbing discourse by the medical officer. The startling nature of Lemiere's discovery, together with the man's own hypnotic will-power, combined to make her forget everything but the one fact that here was something which would indeed amaze the civilized world.

Lemiere was watching her intently, his slim fingers drumming nervously upon the table-top at his side. Dorothy leaned suddenly towards him, meeting his piercing eyes for a brief instant.

"But—but, if you have made such a wonderful discovery, why do you remain here in this place?" she asked, in bewilderment. "You have the world at your feet. You can be famous and rich in a day."



Lemiere laughed—a short, harsh, mirthless sound. His nervous manner seemed to have passed; once more he had assumed the cold, impartial air of the man of science. “My dear young lady, we do not all desire fame, and as for wealth—I have more now than I am ever likely to need.”

He rose suddenly to his feet and crossed to the window, summoning Dorothy to follow him. Devoured by curiosity, the girl obeyed him, and a half-stifled exclamation of surprise rose to her lips at the strange sight. The window faced the north, thus dashing a brief hope that she might have obtained a glimpse of the lake, which she knew lay on the eastern side of the temple.

She was looking over a vast forest of thick, tall timber, which completely concealed the ground save for a large open clearing two hundred yards from the foot of the temple. Away in the distance, perhaps two miles away, towered a mighty mountain range which from her restricted view seemed to take the form of a semicircle. Instinctively Dorothy guessed that this range must completely encircle the lake and its immediate surrounding hills.

But it was the object in the centre of the clearing which had evoked the exclamation of surprise; like a huge white bird with the afternoon sun glinting upon its wings stood an aeroplane—a fleet-lined monoplane; while another machine, somewhat larger, rested under the shelter of the trees at the western end of the clearing.

Lemiere smiled at her astonishment.

“You did not expect to see aeroplanes here, did you, Dorothy? As you see, I have two of them—a single-seater and a larger plane capable of seating four people or carrying a quantity of material. Using whichever suits my purpose at the moment, I visit Adelaide and Melbourne at frequent intervals; so you see I am not entirely out of touch with civilization. . . . But there is something else for you to see from here—something for which you and your friends have

spent quite a lot of time in searching since you arrived in Treasure Lake. Do you see it?”

His long arm stretched out towards the north-west, and Dorothy followed the direction of his pointing finger with some surprise. It indicated a break in the forest perhaps half-a-mile away. In a swift, careless survey it might have passed unnoticed; but now she could not fail to perceive it. The sunlight scintillating on the tumbling water, the small dark patch against the lighter grey of the rock told its own tale.

“The waterfall!” she gasped involuntarily. “The waterfall and the cave!” And then she could have cried with mortification as she realized that in her excited outburst she had given to this strange man a clue which he could not mistake.

Lemiere regarded her in some amusement. “Precisely!” he said. “The waterfall and the cave! I wonder what is in that cave, now?” he murmured reflectively.

Dorothy caught her breath sharply. Without further comment her companion moved away from the window and motioned the girl back to her chair. “Those two machines cost nearly three thousand pounds,” he said with careless indifference, and as though he had entirely forgotten the existence of the waterfall. “I have also spent a great deal of money in making this old temple suitable for my experimenting. Altogether, it has cost me something like ten thousand pounds. You will see, therefore, that money is of no account to me. And as for fame, I have no use for it, unless—”

He paused abruptly and fixed his piercing black eyes intently upon his fair companion’s face. Again Dorothy felt that inexplicable wave of apprehension sweep over her. But the mystery that surrounded this strange man still held her in its fascination. She felt as though Lemiere had begun his story in the middle, and she was filled with desire to know its commencement.



"But—but—why was it necessary to come here to conduct your experiments?" she asked, in mystification. "You could have done so somewhere else. And how did you come to know of this place?"

Lemiere smiled again—that rare smile which spread over his sharp, sombre features, illuminating them like a ray of light. "Ah! You are surprised at that! Well, it is easily explained. You are aware that *two* men, and not one, knew of that curious old chart with its message in French; but one knew more than the other."

He looked at her meaningly, and Dorothy gave a slight start.

"Sevinge and another man named Ronsierre played poker one night some years ago," said Lemiere inconsequentially. "Ronsierre lost every penny he possessed, and finally, in a moment of weakness, he staked the chart against his former losses. How he had got the chart does not matter much now. He lost again. He attacked Sevinge, whom he suspected of card-sharping, and in the fight which followed the chart was torn. Sevinge almost killed Ronsierre, and then, himself injured I believe, staggered away with what in his drunken stupor he imagined was the whole of the chart. Ronsierre never saw him again. In Melbourne some time later I met Ronsierre, whom I had known years before. He, of course, had read the writing on the chart before he lost it, and, unfortunately for you folk, the latter portion happened to be the most important, since it gave an outline of the temple and the natives, as well as the location of the waterfall. Ronsierre told me of this strange region, and of the old temple. I was just about ready to begin the last stage of my experiments after a trip abroad. I at once realized the value of this place for my purpose, and we came up by plane. We had some difficulty in locating it, as Ronsierre had not kept a copy of the chart, and his recollection of the exact position of the lake was rather hazy. Eventually we landed here, frightening the natives into

instant submission. I found the temple—and the people—just what I needed, and"—he spread out his hands with an easy gesture—"here I am. I soon gained the respect of these simple folk, and had no difficulty in mastering their language, which is almost purely phonetic. Ronsierre was unfortunate. He was killed in a motor accident in Melbourne shortly afterwards."

He paused a moment, and looked at her intently. "As to *why* I came here, you must be aware, Miss Dorothy, that one cannot experiment in researches such as mine without a number of human subjects. And you must also be aware that I would have experienced great difficulty in obtaining my subjects in the cities, or for that matter anywhere in the country. Here I had them in plenty—or at least more than sufficient for my purpose."

His words conveyed a challenge to the girl. Dorothy gazed at him in puzzled surprise, and then the significance of his meaning flashed upon her. Her face was ashen; her lips trembled as she spoke.

"You—you don't mean that you—*tortured*—these poor people—"

Her voice trailed into a whisper. A growing horror dawned in her eyes.

Lemiere frowned slightly. "Torture is a hard word, Dorothy," he said coldly. "It does not suit this case. They were subjects in the cause of science. I was fortunate in discovering the essential properties of the ray almost immediately, but I experienced some difficulty at first in prolonging its effect for more than a few minutes. And at that time the ray could be used effectively only upon persons in full possession of consciousness."

Dorothy heard him as one in a dream. That cold, calm voice seemed to come from a machine rather than from a man of flesh and blood. Her eyes dilated in horror.

"Those were things which I had to overcome by experimenting," resumed Lemiere unconcernedly. "Some most irritating and annoying experiences occurred during the



early stages of my investigations. On two occasions I was compelled to—er—do away with excellent subjects," he added, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"What!" The word tore from Dorothy's ashen lips in a half scream. "You actually—*killed*—them!" Lemiere shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"In the cause of science I regret that it became necessary," he stated calmly, as though he were discussing pieces of machinery. "I regretted it exceedingly, I assure you, because they were both extraordinarily good subjects. But, unfortunately, the influence of the ray subsided suddenly in the midst of an unnecessary operation, and——"

"Oh, stop! Stop!" Dorothy sprang from her chair and turned away from him, covering her face with her hands. A feeling of nausea swept over her. The man's calm admission of guilt, his terrible extenuation of his dreadful deeds "in the cause of science," filled her with dread and a great loathing towards him. For a moment she felt violently ill; her legs trembled strangely beneath her, and in her weakness she grasped the back of the chair for support. With a great effort she at length composed herself a little, and faced him, her eyes blazing with contempt and hatred.

"You inhuman beast!" she flashed fiercely. "How could you do it—you, a doctor! Have you no regard for human feelings? Oh, I loathe you—I—I——" The words choked in her throat. Then: "Let me go immediately!" she cried, with sudden passion. "Why do you keep me here? Let me go away at once!"

Her bosom rose and fell swiftly under the stress of her emotion. Her face was pale as death. She faced him with all the defiance she could muster, yet still dared not meet those dreadful eyes.

Lemiere, who had remained unmoved by her violent outburst, raised his arm as though to calm the trembling girl.

"Patience, my dear young lady," he said smoothly. "I have much still to tell, and to show, you. Please be seated.

It is fatiguing, and foolish under the circumstances, to remain standing. And as to letting you depart, why, I could not think of it! I am just beginning to enjoy your company. Again I entreat—nay, urge—you, Dorothy, to make use of that most comfortable chair."

The tone of his voice, his words, the strange familiarity with which he used her name, struck sheer terror into her soul. For an instant the girl hesitated, and then, realizing the uselessness of resistance, sank again into the chair, with a little sigh of weary resignation. She felt a greater loathing for this man than she had ever known in her life; yet his amazing personality was such that even now, after his startling disclosures, she could remain quietly seated and listen to that smooth-flowing voice.

"I beg that you will think none the worse of me for anything that has had to be done," Lemiere said earnestly. "It is all for the good of mankind in the end. Science and sentiment cannot go hand in hand; that is where so many men fail who otherwise would have won fame. Science knows no law save that of cold, calm logic. . . . But let us speak no more of that. I have something of interest to show you—something in which I know that you, as a trained nurse, will be interested, in spite of the antipathy which you now feel towards me; for we of the Profession always place it first, do we not? We cannot help ourselves." He paused, and again that rare, brilliant smile lit up his lean, ascetic, sombre features.

"As I progressed in my researches I became more and more successful, and now I have advanced so far that complete success is almost within my grasp. I have already improved my ray to such an extent that its influence upon a patient may be exerted just as long as I desire. In fact, in every theoretical respect my ray is now a practical reality, and not a mere probability; it could be used with confidence and success in the largest hospital in the world. But I am not yet satisfied. My aim is to so design the necessary apparatus



that it may all be contained within one small cabinet, thus placing it in the hands of every medical man in the country. I have not yet attained complete success in this, for there are many difficulties to be overcome, but I am confident that before long I shall have achieved my object. And when that is done I shall place my discovery before the world. Think of it, my dear Dorothy! Just consider the sensation which the Lemiere Ray will cause!"

Again Dorothy felt his amazing personality dominating her, holding her even against her will. Lemiere's eyes burned like twin pools of fire as he contemplated the result of the announcement of his discovery to the world. Then, with a swift change of countenance that was almost uncanny, he was once again the calm, cold man of science. He rose to his feet and stood in front of the girl, a tall, lean mass of nervous energy.

"I have told you my ray has been so perfected that failure is impossible. Would you care to see it in operation?"

Dorothy's loathing of the man and his deeds was overcome by her professional curiosity regarding his invention. Hitherto she had not known whether to believe him or not. But his manner now was one of quiet confidence rather than arrogant bombast. In spite of her feelings she was forced to admit that she was intensely curious to see this strange ray in action, yet she could not bring herself to tell him so.

Lemiere eyed her keenly. "Of course you would like to see it." He answered his own question. "I will give you a little demonstration, just to convince you that I have not indulged in idle boasting—as you seem to think." Dorothy's pale cheeks flamed red at the implication; the man seemed to read her thoughts like an open book.

Stepping to the table, Lemiere touched the gong, and almost before its sonorous sound had died away the heavy curtain concealing the doorway was swung aside and Lula stepped lightly into the room. She flashed her kindly smile upon Dorothy, and then stood erect just inside the curtain, her

dark eyes fixed steadily upon Lemiere. Her natural good-humour still shone in her countenance; but it was evident to Dorothy, watching the girl closely, that she regarded Lemiere with veneration, and some awe.

The latter spoke a few words, and Lula answered in a subdued tone. Dorothy thought that she appeared to hesitate, but if so it was only momentarily, for she answered the scientist almost at once.

Lemiere turned to Dorothy. "Lula is going to let you see the effect of the ray upon her," he explained. "I can assure you," he added quickly, observing the dubious expression on Dorothy's face, "that she will suffer no harm at all. Come!" He moved towards the curtain at the far end of the room, drew it aside, and motioned for them to enter. Dorothy stepped forward, closely followed by the native girl, and Lemiere dropped the curtain into place.

Dorothy looked round her in some astonishment. The room seemed to her to be a quaint combination of operating-theatre and laboratory. Although no larger than that which they had just left, it was more faintly illuminated, the central window being much smaller and set higher in the wall; but under the brilliant and carefully placed electric floodlights, which Lemiere switched on, the light was far superior to daylight, both in intensity and evenness.

Along one side of the room stood a modern operating-table, with all the usual appliances, and a complete sterilizing outfit near by. The stone walls of the room were lined with closed cabinets and shelves littered with a multiplicity of articles the object of which remained a mystery to Dorothy. There was no covering upon the floor; the stones had been chipped so smooth and even that in appearance they closely resembled large grey tiles.

Near the operating-table stood another table, canvas-topped, and so hinged that it could be swung into various positions between the horizontal and the vertical. Lemiere motioned Lula forward, and the native girl took her place



upon it, lying full length and face upward. Outwardly she wore an assumed air of calmness and indifference; only the tightly clenched small hands and the more frequent rise and fall of her bare bosom betrayed the nervous apprehension which she strove to conceal.

Standing at the foot of the table Dorothy watched with keen interest as Lemiere's long slim fingers rested for a while upon the native girl's pulse. He frowned slightly, and then, after a moment's hesitation, passed his hands gently over her forehead. Dorothy was amazed at the sudden effect of his magnetic personality upon the girl. Her hurried breathing almost immediately became normal, her whole body relaxed from its rigid tenseness into a posture of ease and comfort.

Lemiere turned from her and opened the door of a handsomely inlaid ebony cabinet which stood near the wall. Dorothy scarcely knew what she had expected to see, but a little thrill of disappointment ran through her, for she could see nothing but a large black panel, upon which were a number of switches, knobs and dials, giving it the appearance of a somewhat intricate radio receiving-set. From the bottom of the cabinet Lemiere drew forth a small cone-shaped device about twelve inches in length and some four inches across its mouth. To the other end, corresponding to the apex of the cone, was attached a length of flexible insulated wire, which he plugged into a socket in the centre of the panel. He then suspended the cone by means of a clip to an arm hinged to the wall, so that it hung with the mouth a few inches above Lula's head. Lemiere spoke briefly as his slim fingers connected up the apparatus.

"You will observe that the ray operates directly upon the brain." He spoke with the curt precision of a man lecturing to a class of students. "In some cases—Lula is one—it would be equally effective over the heart, but its action upon the brain is never-failing and almost immediate. There it not only paralyzes the main nerve centres, but, in some manner which I have not yet had an opportunity of investigating, it

also has a wonderfully invigorating effect upon practically every organ in the body. In that respect it is unique, for, as you are aware, the average anæsthetic has a particularly depressing effect. Now we are ready."

He pressed a switch and Dorothy saw the small pointers in the dials on the panel swing into motion. Lemiere adjusted the control knobs until each pointer swung level with a red mark above each dial; and then, his eyes upon the reclining figure of the native girl, his finger closed upon another larger switch in the lower right-hand corner of the panel.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE MAN

THE effect upon the girl was instantaneous. It was as though the Gods of Hope had suddenly waved a magic wand over her. Her limbs and body, which had assumed a rigid state again during Lemiere's final preparations, swiftly relaxed into unconscious repose. Her head, resting upon the soft support, inclined a little to one side, her breathing became normal and steady, and her whole attitude was one of calm slumber rather than unconsciousness.

Dorothy, accustomed to the ill-effects of the average drug anæsthetic, found it difficult to believe that the native girl was actually insensible. Beneath the light brown colour of her skin a healthy flush suffused her face; the scantily covered body seemed full of vitality. Dorothy felt sure that the touch of a finger, much less that of a surgeon's knife, would have been sufficient to arouse the girl to wakefulness. Her doubt must have been openly displayed upon her countenance. Lemiere, watching her keenly, smiled slightly.

"You think that I have merely hypnotized Lula," he remarked softly. "That is quite wrong. She is now as completely insensible to pain as though she were under the influence of chloroform, ether, or some other drug. If it were necessary I could perform any operation I desired. But, as you see, she exhibits no signs of the ill-effects which accompany the administration of most drugs, and in her case, as she is peculiarly susceptible to the influence of the ray, her body is at present under the action of a powerful stimulant. I could keep her thus almost as long as I wished. When she wakes she will be none the worse for the experience."

## THE MAN

He raised her left arm a few inches and then released his clasp. The inert limb fell heavily upon the canvas top. "So long as the ray exerts its influence upon her, she would feel nothing, she would know nothing. If you desire, I can make an incision. No? Well"—his long fingers moved deftly over the still body—"you can see that she has no sense of feeling. Even a severe pinch on the arm has no effect." His right thumb and forefinger closed tightly upon the firm flesh, the impress showing vividly against the brown skin. Lula lay as one dead; neither by motion nor voice did she display the slightest indication of having felt the severe grip.

Dorothy stared at her in wondering silence. Indeed, the conclusive proof that Lemiere had not exaggerated in his claims for his amazing discovery came to her with such dramatic suddenness that for a time it deprived her of speech. She had at first merely regarded his assertions as the wanderings of a clever man whose brain had been affected by over-indulgence in research, but now he had proved to her that his discovery was genuine. She had not the slightest doubt that at a word from her, if even now she were not fully convinced, Lemiere would plunge a surgeon's knife into that motionless form; but there was no need for that. No human being could have silently withstood his cruel pinch unless they were completely insensible to all feeling.

Dorothy suddenly became aware that Lemiere was watching her keenly through half-closed eyes. She flushed under his intent gaze.

"But—but this is wonderful!" she stammered, in confusion. "It is a wonderful discovery. I—I have never seen anything like this before." Although she could not repress the feeling of repulsion which enveloped her in contemplation of Lemiere himself, Dorothy was constrained to admit a measure of admiration for the genius of the man which had made possible such a discovery.

Lemiere's eyes blazed in sudden triumph. "Ah! I have



been longing to hear you say that. I would prefer such praise from you than from anyone else in the world!"

Dorothy started a little, and gazed at him in mingled astonishment and apprehension. With an odd little gesture of his hands Lemiere went on hurriedly: "You can see for yourself that the ray is effective in producing unconsciousness superior to that occasioned by the use of any drug," said he. "If you would permit me I would be pleased to give you an even more effective demonstration. Perhaps some day while you are here as my guest the need may arise for an operation; then you will be even more convinced. My ray is quite fool-proof, and it is so powerful that if I place my hand—or, indeed, anything at all—between the cone and the patient, thus, it merely passes right through the obstruction. Yet it does not affect me at all, though it is penetrating through my hand. It can, in fact, affect only the heart and the brain, and no other part of the body. Come, now, my dear Miss Dorothy! You were sceptical, were you not? But you must admit that I have made a discovery which will shake the world!"

The blood rushed to Dorothy's face at his words. His tone was one of light banter, overshadowed by the triumph which he could not conceal; yet something told her there was more than that behind his meaning.

Lemiere did not give her an opportunity to reply. His thin lips parted in a mirthless smile, and, turning to the cabinet, he pressed the main switch which opened the circuit and discontinued the influence of the ray, at the same time swinging the cone aside.

Lula moved slightly, her fingers twitching convulsively for a moment. Her breath came in a long, deep, indrawn sigh. Almost immediately her eyelids flickered and opened. Her black eyes fell upon Dorothy, and for an instant bewilderment showed in them. Then remembrance came back, and with a soft laugh she sat up and stepped lightly from the canvas-covered stretcher. It was very evident that

Lula had not suffered adversely from her brief spell of induced unconsciousness. Indeed, as Lemiere had stated, she seemed even brighter and more vivacious than before. Dorothy, with vivid memories in her mind of patients recovering from the effects of chloroform, was even more amazed by the native girl's quick return to consciousness than by the unusual nature of her insensibility.

While she stood in silent wonderment Lemiere spoke a few words to Lula, and the latter, with another glance at Dorothy, turned slowly and left the room. Lemiere's brows contracted into a frown.

"Lula seems to have taken a decided liking to you," he informed Dorothy. "She does not care to leave you. However, I am glad of that." His brow cleared suddenly. "It may simplify matters somewhat." He waved his arm towards the curtain through which Lula had just passed. "Our little demonstration is complete," he said. "Will you please return to my study? It is more comfortable there."

Dorothy hesitated a moment and then, a sudden resolve gripping her, she bowed slightly and obeyed his request. Lemiere followed her into the room. He indicated a chair, but Dorothy remained standing. Despite her firm resolve to insist upon a solution of the mystery surrounding her abduction from the launch, the girl felt herself weakening as she met those piercing eyes. Dorothy Treloare was by no means weak-minded, but the influence of his magnetic personality upon her was amazing. She shuddered at the mere thought of his power. Although inwardly she trembled in trepidation, Dorothy's outward demeanour was one of calmness and self-composure, and her voice, when she spoke, was clear and firm.

"Mr Lemiere, or Doctor, I suppose I should say, I must ask you again for an explanation of your conduct in bringing me to this place. I cannot believe that you went to the trouble of getting me here just to show me the effect of your



ray upon Lula. If that was your object, why could you not have visited us openly and allowed us *all* to witness what I have just seen? My father, a doctor like yourself, would have been even more interested than I. Why was I brought here?" Her eyes flashed angrily. Her bosom rose and fell with swift emotion.

Lemiere, who had calmly lit a cigarette during her impassioned outburst, folded his arms and seated himself upon a corner of the table. He did not answer her at once, but smoked in silence, while his gleaming black eyes held her own. Dorothy could read nothing from them; what lay behind those blazing orbs she could not guess, but there was something in the fixed intensity of his gaze that stirred her strangely—a smouldering warmth, half-repellent, half-fascinating in its fervour.

"Why were you brought here?" He repeated her question softly, sending a cloud of blue tobacco smoke towards the ceiling. "My dear girl, I simply couldn't resist the temptation! For the last couple of days I have watched you and your friends fruitlessly searching for the waterfall and the cave which you saw from my window there. I watched young Dale go aloft in the kite this afternoon—in fact, I was rather worried about that for a while, because I knew he must have seen the old temple, which you would never have found in a month of searching. However, the storm disposed of him, and when your friends commenced to search for him, why, I could not resist the temptation! You were alone on the launch. I had only to send some of my men, and I felt sure they would be able to persuade you to pay me a visit. The idea was irresistible. I gave them instructions, saw them carried out from my tower—and here you are." He spread out his hands with a gesture of nonchalance which irritated Dorothy beyond forbearance. She stared at him in amazement. A wave of blind anger surged over her.

"You—you brought me here just to gratify a whim!"

she cried indignantly. "How dare you! Are you crazy? I demand that you send me back to my friends immediately!" Her voice trembled strangely beneath the fire of her wrath.

Lemiere's features remained expressionless, but his eyes hardened slightly. "You demand, do you? You demand! Well, well! My dear young lady, it is not always wise to demand things. Sometimes it is preferable to beg them. If you persist in your attitude of demanding you may find that other people also will—demand." He paused abruptly.

A sharp spasm of frightened apprehension shot through Dorothy at his words. Mingled fear and anger struggled in her breast.

Lemiere carefully laid the end of his cigarette in the brass ash-tray on the table, and turned towards her. "My dear Dorothy"—his calm, steady voice struck fresh terror into the girl—"My dear Dorothy, you surely do not for one moment suppose that I went to the bother of bringing you here unscathed and uninjured just to gratify a passing whim! I am pained to think that your opinion of my intelligence is so slight, particularly after what you have witnessed this afternoon. I most certainly did not have you brought here merely for a few hours' conversation, pleasant though that would be. No. I had another purpose in mind, but the storm, the disappearance of young Dale, and the absence from the launch of all your friends simplified my plans considerably, and provided me with an opportunity which I would have been foolish to have disdained."

Dorothy heard him in fast-growing terror. The feeling of dreadful revulsion that had swept over her brought with it a numbing faintness which made her head swim. "What—what do you mean?" she faltered at length, her brown eyes dilated in nameless fear. "You—you had meant to—abduct me—all the time?"

"Abduct!" Lemiere frowned slightly. "Do not use that word, I beg you," he said testily. "It has so many vague meanings. There is nothing vague about my intention



at all, I can assure you. Long before you had even seen the lake I had mapped out a plan of action to bring you here which, fortunately for all concerned, the storm rendered unnecessary."

Dorothy stared at him in astonishment. "But—but how did you know we were coming?" she gasped faintly. The man seemed in some uncanny way to know as much as she herself of their expedition.

Lemiere smiled grimly. "There is an old saying, and a very true one, Dorothy. It is 'Money talks.' Nothing is secret to him who will pay for information. . . . It was well known in Adelaide that the celebrated Major Wilding intended taking a holiday trip along the Avon, and my agents experienced no difficulty in obtaining for me all the information regarding this unusual journey which I required. They found that Captain Dixon's launch had been commissioned for the journey, and they succeeded in tracing the connection between the man Sevinge, Dr Treloare, and the expedition. Sevinge, I might state, had been under our observation for some time, as I knew he had the chart, and naturally I wished to know whether he intended making use of it. . . . So you see, I was expecting your arrival in the land of the Sährs, and during the period of your journey through the mountainous passageway I formulated a scheme to bring you here."

"But—but why?" The words came almost in a whisper. Dorothy was shocked by the strange faintness of her voice. The fear which gripped her seemed to stifle the power of sound.

Lemiere suddenly stood in front of her, his tall, spare figure towering over her. His eyes were blazing with a fierce exultation that cowed her into frozen silence.

"Why?" he repeated, his voice vibrant with half-suppressed emotion. "Why? Ask yourself why, Dorothy. You are a woman—an intelligent woman, perhaps, but a woman for all that, with a woman's instincts, and a woman's feelings. And I—I am a man—a scientist, a genius, but still a man,

with—God help me!—man's passions and desires implanted deep within me. I have brought you here because I love you! Dorothy, I love you better than life itself! I want you for my wife!"

With a swift, sharp movement his arms went round her slim figure, crushing her to him in a fierce embrace that almost swung her off her feet. Half dazed, she lay against him, her head upon his shoulder, his arms encircling her slight, unresisting form. Upon her upturned face he rained passionate, burning caresses; the fierce ardour of his embrace beat upon her like a fiery flame, holding her spellbound, powerless, in its unaccustomed glamorous splendour.

Lemiere's dynamic personality dominated her completely; his passionate declaration swept everything else from her mind. Dorothy felt herself slipping away, as though borne upon some swift-moving tide. The man himself was half forgotten; the woman in her longed to respond madly to this, the first clear-cut call upon her feelings.

But realization suddenly came to her. Her eyes opened and gazed straight into his. The sensuous spell was broken. Loathing—nauseating loathing—came surging over her, brushing aside, in its mad, headlong rush, the glamour of those few brief moments. Sick with inward shame at her mental and physical weakness in thus surrendering to his passion, Dorothy, straining fiercely, suddenly broke from his encircling arms and stumbled across the room.

For the space of a few seconds they stood facing each other in tense silence. Dorothy's face was ashen; her slight figure quivered and shook beneath the stress of the unwonted emotion. Her trembling limbs refused to support her; panting, frightened, bewildered, she leaned heavily against the stone wall, struggling to regain some of her former composure. There was stark terror in the depths of her staring brown eyes.

Lemiere himself was strangely affected by the swift, overwhelming rush of his passion. In silence he stood before the



girl, his head sunk upon his breast, his long arms hanging limply by his side. For an instant he seemed almost ashamed of his sudden outburst; in one short moment the man of science, calm and calculating, had given place to an ordinary flesh-and-blood human being, a man of men, forgetful of all save the woman in his arms. With wonderful self-control he mastered himself and endeavoured to relieve the tension between them. He suddenly straightened himself, and cast defiant eyes towards the frightened girl. Instinctively she shrank with an almost imperceptible movement from him.

Lemiere laughed, a strange, nervous sound, forced and harsh.

"You see, my dear Dorothy, how strongly you attract me," he said lightly, his voice as calm and steady as ever. "You have torn the mask away from me. No longer am I just the cold man of science to you. You have seen that I am, as I have said, only a man at heart. Dorothy, my dear, I love you madly! You must, you shall, be my wife!" His voice was gravely earnest, his eyes compelling and appealing. Dorothy stared wildly at him in stupefied fascination. He made a sudden movement towards her, his hands outstretched. With a little cry the girl slipped swiftly from him.

"Oh, I hate you!" she burst out fiercely, incoherently. "I hate you—I loathe you! You—you cowardly beast! How dare you treat me like that!" Anger struggled against the fear which oppressed her. Her small hands clenched tightly, her bosom rose and fell under stress of her agitation. "Marry you! Never! I will kill myself first!" Defiantly she faced him; her flashing brown eyes met his levelly.

Lemiere controlled himself with an effort. When he spoke the light, bantering tone had gone from his voice.

"Don't be melodramatic, Dorothy," he said evenly. "It really does not suit you. And as to you marrying me, I never suggested it." He paused a moment, and his next words, clear and deliberate, rang with significance: "I said that you should be my wife. There is a difference."

Dorothy felt her face swiftly flaming at his measured words. There was no mistaking his meaning, and the colour ran from her cheeks as quickly as it had come as she realized that she was alone, and entirely in his power. With a feeling of sick helplessness she knew she could do nothing against him. She was utterly and completely at his mercy.

"Of course, if you prefer the formal marriage ceremony, I shall be happy to oblige you," said Lemiere calmly. "Personally, I can see no use for it. What is it but a few words mumbled by a profligate parson who may be the biggest hypocrite unhung. . . . However, if you wish it, we can go to Adelaide or Melbourne by air, and return immediately it is over."

Caught in a trap from which she could see not a loophole of escape, Dorothy's brain began to work at lightning speed while he talked. She realized that her one hope was to play for time; she must keep him off, if only for a little while. Her father and his friends, she knew, would begin to look for her when they found that she had disappeared. There was a possibility that, working on Lula's evident affection for her, she might be able even to make her escape later from this dreadful man. Her one chance now was to gain time.

The realization of her plight was the best tonic the girl could have received. It acted upon her dazed, bewildered mind like a sudden douche of cold water upon a sleeping man. By degrees her self-composure began to return, and though inwardly she was still in a state of great mental perturbation, to all outward appearance she seemed as calm as the scientist himself.

She was silent for a moment when Lemiere finished speaking, as though pondering his words.

"Certainly I would prefer a legal marriage," she told him indignantly. Her vigour in the part she was playing amazed even herself. "But—but supposing I refuse to marry you?" The question came half hesitantly, half diffidently.

Lemiere laughed mirthlessly. "It hardly matters whether



you refuse or not—to me,” said he. “I have already told you that you will be my wife—and I always keep my word!”

Despite the command which she endeavoured to maintain over herself, Dorothy blanched at his words. The cold, calm voice went steadily on. “Don’t forget, my dear girl, that here you are entirely in my hands. You cannot escape, and your friends will never find you.” His voice blazed with sudden triumph. “You shall be my wife—the wife of the famous Professor Gregory Lemiere, inventor of the celebrated Lemiere Ray! Think, my dear Dorothy, of the honour I am conferring upon you! In a few short months—weeks, perhaps—I shall announce my discovery to the world. You will share in my triumph. And I am asking you, of all women, because—I love you!”

He took a swift step towards her. Before Dorothy could move his long fingers had closed upon her slim shoulders in a strong grip. Escape was impossible. His nearness sickened her; those blazing, piercing eyes burned fiercely upon her, weaving a strange hypnotic spell, into which she found herself sinking. Dorothy half inclined her head; not for worlds would she have met those glittering eyes.

Slowly his face came nearer hers. She could feel his breath upon her cheek. Blind terror seized her. In a few moments she would again be in those arms, feeling once more the hot caresses of his blazing passion.

With a supreme effort Dorothy fought madly against the paralysing inaction that held her motionless. A sudden twist of her lithe body, a wrench that seemed to pull her shoulder from its socket, and she was free. Slipping a few yards away from him, Dorothy turned and faced the man. A ripple of laughter forced itself to her lips—how, she never afterwards knew. Dazzlingly provocative, summoning all the courage at her command, she met his glittering eyes with open boldness. She felt the colour mounting to her cheeks and neck, staining them crimson in its hurried rush. The whiteness of

her shoulder, where her tunic had been wrenched open in the struggle for freedom, gleamed strangely in the half-light.

Lemiere caught his breath sharply. “You—you wild, elfin thing!” he muttered thickly. “You would tempt a saint in heaven! God, how can a man resist you! I—I——”

He made a swift move towards her, his face flushed with passion, but Dorothy stopped him with upraised hand. The laughter had suddenly gone from her eyes. In its place the man saw an appealing look, and a wistfulness that struck a hidden responsive chord within him.

“Please, will you give me a little time to think it all over?” There was a plaintive pleading in her voice, and her brown eyes were misty with unshed tears. A strange weakness began to steal over her, a weakness that alarmed her, because she knew it was not part of the acting. She fought against it with all her strength of will, fearful lest she might suddenly collapse at his feet.

“Please! Please! You surely cannot expect me to give you an answer now. Let me have a little time to myself. Please!”

The pleading softness of the voice, the wistful, childlike face, so trustingly turned towards his own, would have touched a heart much harder even than that of Gregory Lemiere. Her changing moods enthralled him as his personality had fascinated her. But her pleading was irresistible. The spark of passion died as quickly as it had risen. Once again he was the scientist, the doctor, steady and calm in his contemplation of life. His features were expressionless, but there was the faintest suspicion of concern in his voice when he spoke.

“Certainly, my dear Dorothy, you may have time for consideration. I trust our little interlude has not distressed you. I had not intended to speak of this to you so soon; but, my dear girl, you do not seem to be aware of the fascination and charm which you exert. Perhaps, however, it is better that I have spoken, for now we know just where we stand. You shall have the night to consider the matter. I shall ask



for your answer to-morrow. The hour is late—nearly seven o'clock. I have had a room specially prepared for you, and Lula will act as your companion and maid. I regret that I shall not be able to join you at dinner; I have work that must be attended to this evening. I will not, therefore, see you again before morning."

His eyes, piercing as ever, were cold and passionless. "One word of warning: do not attempt to escape. This temple is full of pitfalls for the unwary—and I should not like anything to happen to you while you are my guest. To-morrow, I hope, I shall be free to personally conduct you over this wonderful old building, in which I am sure you will find much of interest. As it will probably be your home for some time you should know something of it."

He struck the gong, and Lula came into the room. In quiet, level tones Lemiere spoke to the native girl for more than a minute. She listened intently, and when he had finished bowed her head in acquiescence.

Dorothy, who had been thinking quickly while Lemiere was addressing the native girl, turned suddenly to him.

"Would it be possible to send a message to my father?" she asked, her big brown eyes wistful and appealing. "He will be worried so much when he finds me missing. He may think I am lying dead or injured somewhere, or perhaps that I have fallen into the lake. Please, you could send a message to him, couldn't you? Just to let him know that I am—alive and well. You cannot refuse me that?"

Lemiere frowned a little at her words.

"I cannot see what advantage it will be to anyone," he said coldly. "None of your friends know where you are. Why enlighten them if they believe you have disappeared? They could not find you if they were to search for a month—and it would not matter if they did. . . . However, if you desire it, I will grant your request. If you care to write a short note I will have it placed on the launch during the night."

"Oh, thank you so much!" Dorothy's voice was full of genuine gratitude. "I knew you would not refuse."

In silence Lemiere placed a chair for her at the table, and indicated paper and ink. He walked to the window while she wrote, and stared at the lengthening shadows. Lula remained motionless, her large sympathetic eyes fixed steadily upon Dorothy's face.

Dorothy knew quite well that Lemiere would read her message, and that she must exercise care if her note was to be delivered. She knew that he would allow her to give no clue to her whereabouts; but above all else Dorothy, knowing how her father would worry over her strange absence, desired to let him know that she was still alive. She could do no more than that; what happened afterwards must rest largely in the hands of Fate.

After a little thought she wrote:

"DEAREST DADDY,—I am writing this note just to let you know that I am alive and well, as I know you will be wondering what has happened to me. Do not worry about me. I cannot say more now, but if I may I will write you again. Your ever loving  
DOROTHY."

She read the note through with tear-dimmed eyes. Its pitiful brevity appalled her, but she knew that Lemiere would allow her to say no more.

She rose to her feet, and in silence handed the sheet of blue-tinted notepaper to him as he turned from the window. He glanced over it, and inclined his head. "That is quite satisfactory. I assure you that it will be placed in such a position that your father will see it in the morning. And now, if you please, we will say good-night."

Dorothy wondered whether the presence of Lula in the room was responsible for Lemiere's formal manner, his calm, even voice, his expressionless features. It seemed incredible to her that a man who had recently been so devoured by passion could have calmed himself into this automaton



who now regarded her with, ostensibly, no more affection than he displayed towards Lula. Dorothy marvelled at his self-control, but she was glad of the respite which she had obtained. Her mind seemed to have run the whole gamut of human emotions within the last few hours; now she felt strangely weary, conscious of an overwhelming desire to get away from this man who had woven such a merciless spell round her.

Lemiere's eyes met hers for a brief instant—met and held them as a magnet holds steel. Not even his studied imperturbability could conceal entirely the flame that lay behind those blazing orbs. With an old-fashioned courtliness which seemed peculiarly to suit him he lifted Dorothy's left hand, bent his head, and lightly brushed his lips against it. The action was not so much a caress as a gesture of farewell.

A moment later he turned upon his heel and, with an abruptness that astonished her, strode through the curtained doorway into the adjoining laboratory.

While she stood in surprise at his sudden departure there came a slight rustling and Lula, her dark eyes shining with warm friendliness, stood beside her. Dorothy turned to the native girl in swift relief, thankful that here, at least, she would find someone with ready sympathy and comradeship.

Dorothy felt strangely drawn to her new-found friend; Lula, for her part, made no endeavour to conceal the fact that she had conceived a great liking for the white visitor. Her big black eyes shone warmly, her hand closed on Dorothy's in a strong, firm clasp that sent a little thrill of gratitude through her. Moved by a sudden impulse Dorothy bent her head and kissed Lula upon the brow. Her arm went round the native girl's bare shoulder, and for a few moments the two girls stood in close embrace. To a casual visitor the scene would have been one to arouse the utmost surprise—the white girl, clad in khaki shirt and riding-breeches, with her arm round her brown-skinned companion, dressed only in a many-hued short skirt.

But Dorothy Treloare felt no strangeness; to her came only the comforting knowledge that in this time of stress and trouble she had found a friend whose genuine sympathy enveloped her in an atmosphere of soothing calm.

Midnight.

The peaceful stillness of a glorious Australian summer night.

The brilliance of the moon dwarfed into insignificance the stars that studded the limitless dome above, bathing in a flood of silver radiance the quiet waters of Treasure Lake, and spreading gently over the hills and rocks beyond, where the broken outline of the range merged invisibly into the dim horizon. Dorothy, leaning wearily upon the ledge of one of the three narrow openings which served as windows in her room, breathed a fervent prayer that the calmness of the night might in part pervade her troubled soul, granting the sleep which she so sorely needed, but which refused to come.

Her small wristlet-watch sounded strangely loud in the silence of the night. Far below her the girl could see the still waters sparkling in the moonlight; in front, not fifty yards away, a huge mass of rock towered higher even than the temple, white and ghostly in the pale light. To the left, in the distance, was the outline of a thickly wooded slope, the trees and shrubs merging together in a strangely jumbled mass of undefined form. Only on her right was there an open space, and Dorothy guessed that the room which she occupied overlooked one of the innumerable inlets with which the peculiar region abounded. One glance had shown her the hopelessness of any possibility of escape. Even had she been able to scramble through the narrow window she realized it would have been suicidal to attempt to dive from that lofty perch, hundreds of feet above the water. Dorothy had as yet no intention of throwing away her young life. There would be time for that, later—if necessary.



The swift march of events had exerted a strangely numbing effect upon her mind; her brain swam with a mad jumble of nightmare scenes that banished all hope of concerted thought. Twelve hours ago—twelve hours!—it seemed like days, even weeks, rather than hours, she thought—she had been watching Brian Dale setting out on his ill-fated flight over the lake; now she was a prisoner, and in the hands of a man who was assuredly mad. Her mind ran backwards, as it had done a hundred times in the last few hours, while sleep refused to come, and every detail of that memorable afternoon stood out in bold relief. She saw again those native figures creeping stealthily towards her, the journey through the maze of tunnels and inlets, and into the presence of the man who had so swiftly changed the tenor of her life. The strange experiment she had witnessed, Lemiere's passionate declaration, his powerful influence over her and, later, the lonely meal at the dainty table set for two—there was not a minute of those hours for which she could not account. They crowded in upon her like so many realistic dreams, and strangest of all was the room which had been prepared for her.

Dorothy had wondered where she would be confined, but not in the wildest stretch of imagination had she conceived the bizarre splendour of the room which she now occupied. In size it was small—smaller than that which Lemiere had termed his study; yet its very smallness seemed to lend a more comfortable aspect to the elaborate furnishings. A heavy native carpet covered the stone floor—a carpet so luxuriously soft that her feet sank deeply into the velvet pile. The walls were draped with dark, closely woven material, which hung in soft folds almost to the floor. A handsome indirect-lighting bowl suspended from the ceiling broke the fierce brightness of the harsh electric light, and a reading-lamp had been provided just over the head of the comfortable bed which stood in the centre of the room. There were two full-length mirrors, a handsome dressing-table, a com-

fortable armchair, and even water laid on in a wash-basin in one corner of the room. More elaborate accommodation could not have been found in any modern hotel; the completeness of its detail surprised Dorothy no less than the unnecessary luxury of its surroundings. It was obvious that Lemiere had spared no expense in furnishing the room for his guest.

Of Lula, Dorothy had seen nothing since, a few hours before, the native girl had bowed before her and withdrawn. Dorothy guessed that she would be somewhere near at hand, in the next room probably. Despite his confident assertion, it was unlikely, she thought, that Lemiere would allow her to remain in complete isolation. There was no door to the room; the arched doorway was simply covered by a heavy curtain, similar to that which served in every other room she had seen in the ancient temple.

Despite her physical weariness, Dorothy found that the intense mental excitement to which she had been subjected had driven away all thoughts of sleep. She had not even attempted to disrobe. When she had satisfied the natural curiosity aroused by her novel surroundings she switched off the electric light and, leaning upon the broad stone ledge of the narrow central window, bathed herself in the calm beauty of the night. Her brain was in a whirl; so much had happened in the space of a day that the swift sequence of events left her breathless. Every detail of those few hours stood sharply in her mind, and clearer still, dominating them all, was the sinister figure of Gregory Lemiere.

Dorothy had never met such a man before. The power of his dynamic personality held her spellbound; even now that power still retained sufficient force to fascinate her with the memory of its elusive, indefinable strength. Dorothy had danced, and played, and flirted with men of all types in the past, but Lemiere was of a race apart. He of all men had made her run the gauntlet of nearly every human emotion, even to physical pain; her shoulders still ached



where his fierce grip had closed upon the yielding flesh. At first she had loathed him with an abhorrence that no man had ever aroused in her before; then had come in its place a feeling of respect and reluctant admiration as she witnessed the demonstration of the ray upon Lula.

And then, sweeping all before it, had surged the violent declaration of his passion. The swiftness of his wooing had startled her; his impetuous advances had swept her from her feet. She thought for a moment that she had floated in the clouds of delicious desire, where no man had taken her before. Nothing could alter that. His personality had utterly dominated her, and Dorothy felt the colour rush to her cheeks as she realized that, under the spell of his burning passion, she had responded momentarily to his advances. For an instant she had lain in his arms while he rained caresses upon her. As the recollection of that supreme moment came back to her, Dorothy's eyes dilated with horror in the moonlight—and not merely horror, but repugnance and a sense of shame that she had so easily surrendered to him.

Why had she done that? Why? Why? She knew the answer while the question was still drumming in her brain—knew it, but was unwillingly afraid to admit it. Lemiere had won her, if only for a brief period, because he of all men had aroused for the first time within her the passion of womanhood; and in its glamorous warmth had melted the loathing which she had known. . . . But now it was over, and mingled anger and humiliation struggled within her breast, tinged with a gnawing fear of what might lie ahead. In the space of a few short moments the girl within her had died and the woman had been born. Dorothy realized it, and emotion ran riot at the thought as she stared with tear-dimmed, unseeing eyes at the ghostly mass of rock which loomed silver-splashed in the distance.

What was to be her fate? The troubles of the morrow might be even worse than those of to-day, and it would be

Dorothy the woman, not Dorothy the light-hearted girl, who would have to face them. To-morrow Lemiere would demand his answer from her. His answer! Dorothy smiled wanly as she realized how little it mattered what she said. . . . There was no mistaking his meaning. . . . And not for an instant did she relish the prospect of becoming the mistress of such a man, however clever, however wealthy he might be. Yet she could see no escape—excepting death. Her only chance was to gain more time, in the hope that her father and his friends might perhaps be fortunate enough to find her in the keen searching which she knew would begin early in the morning. But her heart was heavy as she realized that the chances of them discovering the old temple were remote indeed; and even then they might find it impregnable to attack.

To the sorely stricken girl the future was dark and hopeless. It seemed as though the search for the Golden Rope, which had led them to this strange place, was to end in disaster. Dorothy sank her face in her hands; the tears flowed freely from her overwrought heart. Not even her splendid courage and self-control were inviolable; the reaction had come, and with it the storm of swift-released pent-up emotion so long repressed.

Dorothy lost all count of time while she sobbed out her heart against the cold stone in the stillness of the night; the seconds might have been minutes, the minutes hours, for all that she knew or cared. But Nature at length intervened in her infinite wisdom. Utter weariness, physical and mental, fell upon the girl like a soothing cloak. With a gesture of resigned despair she rose from the window and flung herself, fully clothed, upon the soft bed. Almost before her weary head rested upon the pillow she had slipped into the dreamless, untroubled sleep that is the heritage of exhausted youth.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

THE sun had long since risen over the hills on the eastern side of Treasure Lake when Dorothy Treloare awoke, considerably refreshed by her long, dreamless sleep. For a few moments her eyes wandered in bewildered astonishment round the unfamiliar room; then remembrance came speedily to her. She moved uneasily upon the luxurious bed, and was suddenly conscious that Lula was standing near by. The native girl smiled at her in friendly manner, and Dorothy could not but return her greeting. She became aware that her heavy boots had been removed, and that her tight-fitting outer garments had been loosened a little to provide a greater degree of comfort. Instinctively she knew that Lula must have crept into the room after she had fallen asleep, and she felt grateful for the kind thoughtfulness of the native girl.

Lula's white teeth flashed in a swift smile. She spoke a few unintelligible words in an inquiring tone, at the same time moving her arms in a gesture of swimming. Dorothy instantly guessed at her meaning, and felt a violent desire for her morning dip. She nodded to Lula, and the latter, extending an arm, helped her to rise from the soft bed. She led the way through the curtained doorway, and Dorothy, pausing only to draw on her boots, followed closely.

Through a maze of short, downward-sloping corridors they went, turning first to left and then to right, until Dorothy lost her sense of direction altogether. She had no idea where they were; she had never been in such a maze in her life. Of one thing only she could be certain, and that

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was the undoubted fact that they were descending continually. Dorothy half guessed that they were simply going down by a roundabout way instead of using the stone staircase up which she had come yesterday. The place was silent and gloomy; there was no one but themselves in the passages. The only sound she heard was the light pat-pat of her boots upon the stone floor; Lula moved as silently as a ghost, her bare feet gliding noiselessly over the floor.

A sharp turn brought them to the end of the passageway, and Dorothy found herself standing upon the brink of a magnificent bathing-pool, where man's ingenuity had combined with Nature to provide unexcelled swimming facilities. Completely enclosing the water, the stone walls rose to a height of some thirty feet, but the top had been left open to the blue sky, giving an air of brightness that could not otherwise have been obtained. A broad platform of stone, thickly covered with sand, extended round the pool, which Dorothy guessed must be at least a hundred and fifty yards long and sixty yards wide; and from this platform several sloping ramps led down into the water, giving easy access to and egress from the pool. The water was crystal-clear and fresh; indeed, had Dorothy but known it, the pool itself had been constructed by building the walls over a portion of one of the small inlets near the temple, so that a stream of fresh water was constantly circulating through it.

For a second or two the novelty of the thing caused Dorothy some astonishment; but she was fast becoming inured to surprises in this strange place, and the feeling of wonder soon vanished. For an instant she stood hesitant, wondering what degree of privacy might be expected in such a place, for neither she nor her companion was provided with a bathing costume. But Lula did not appear to be greatly worried. With a quick movement she had divested herself of her scanty apparel, and an instant later her slim brown body was flashing through the air in a graceful dive. Dorothy hesitated no longer. With a resigned shrug of her shoulders



she began to disrobe, and in a very few minutes had joined Lula in the sparkling water.

Dorothy enjoyed that morning dip immensely; it acted upon her as an invigorating tonic. And when, a little later, she was conducted by Lula into the room where she had dined the previous night she was conscious of a sense of physical and mental alertness, upon which she felt that so much would depend.

She had scarcely taken her seat at the table, neatly set for two, when Lemiere appeared through a covered doorway and advanced towards her. He was dressed much the same as on the previous day; he walked with a slow, precise step that gave a certain dignity to his tallness.

He greeted Dorothy with calm conventionality as he took the seat opposite her, his impassive countenance betraying no sign of any inward emotion. Dorothy was surprised at the aloofness, almost coldness, of his manner; it seemed difficult to believe that this austere person was the man whom she had seen in the grip of a strong passion less than twenty-four hours before. But although his calm features revealed nothing of his thoughts, Lemiere's keen black eyes were full of open admiration.

"The night's rest seems to have refreshed you, Dorothy," he remarked, much as though he were a doctor addressing a patient in whom he took more than usual interest. "In our professional capacities we both know the value of sleep, of course. But perhaps it is the exhilarating effect of your swim this morning in the Sacred Pool of Sähr which brings that radiant flush of health to your cheek. No, you needn't be alarmed," he said, with one of his rare smiles, for Dorothy had lifted startled eyes to his, and the colour mounted swiftly to her face. "I was not a spectator, as you seem to think. I instructed Lula to take you there, and she informed me just recently that you seemed to enjoy the swim. I am glad of that, and I hope you will enjoy many more. But please forgive me, Dorothy. We can speak of these things later. I

am sure that you must have developed an appetite after the vigorous exercise, and I, too, being only human, am hungry this morning. I have always believed that breakfast is one of the most important meals of the day, and I have ordered something special this morning."

Despite her growing uneasiness, which even his studied politeness could not dispel, Dorothy was fain to admit that she had, as Lemiere suggested, "developed an appetite"; and because she was also a sensible young woman, and well aware that a sulky refusal to eat would have served no useful purpose, she did full justice to the splendid repast.

The wonderful variety of food, so temptingly cooked and displayed, amazed her. Dorothy had been surprised at the nature of the meal set before her on the previous evening; she marvelled still more at the elaborate breakfast now provided. The table appointments, too, were faultless—there was even a large bowl of fragrant blue flowers in the centre—and but for the strangeness of her surroundings the girl could easily have believed that she was sitting at a well-equipped table in a city hotel.

This strange combination of ancient simplicity and modern up-to-dateness intrigued her by its very quaintness; and the final bizarre touch was supplied in the slim brown figure of Lula, who waited upon them with a silent precision that would have done credit to any well-trained white girl.

Much of what was set before her was unfamiliar to Dorothy, who, however, was far too hungry to question any of the tempting viands. There was no bread, but in its place were small hard cakes of delicious flavour; and an equally pleasant substitute was provided for butter. There were meats and fruits in profusion; and for drinking, various beverages, hot and cold, of piquant aroma and flavour. Dorothy was filled with wonder, not only at the great variety of food, but also at the remarkably high standard of cookery.

Lemiere, watching her keenly, made a shrewd guess at her thoughts.



"You are surprised at the efforts of my servants?"

"Yes, I am," said Dorothy frankly; and then, thinking that a little judicious flattery would do no harm: "I had no idea that you maintained such a high standard. How do you do it—one white man among so many natives?"

"Ah! But they are not the usual type of Australian native," Lemiere assured her. "Believe me, my dear Dorothy, these strange people, whose existence dates back many thousands of years, are highly intelligent, and at one time enjoyed a remarkably high standard of civilization. You yourself, with your observant nature, must surely have noticed that Lula is a girl of more than average intelligence; indeed, she possesses far more than many white girls, the majority of whom, I regret to perceive, nowadays think more of powdering their noses and aping their men friends than is good for them. There are less than two hundred of these strange folk left here now—relics of the once famous tribes of Sähr—and their existence is quite unknown to the most learned of professors. Here they live in a world apart. They have never left this fertile region, which has been their home for many thousands of years. The high mountain range which completely encircles their land prevents their deterioration through social intercourse with the scattered nomads who roam the desert in the centre of this vast continent. I had no difficulty in training them to do just whatever I desired. They are naturally more cultured than the Australian aborigine, and as this region is abundantly supplied with food of all descriptions, which they themselves know well how to use to the best advantage, why, there is really no cause for wonder at the nature of our repast."

"But—these table appointments—the glassware, the knives and forks, even the flowers on the table—surely they knew nothing of them?" asked Dorothy, in astonishment.

"Ah! I wondered whether you would ask that," said Lemiere, with a slight smile. "No, of course they knew little of them, although they did have rather crudely fashioned

substitutes which they still use themselves. But I am a man of refinement—in my college days I was even termed fastidious—and I was responsible for these modern adjuncts to civilization. The flowers were for your especial benefit; I hope you like them. You will see nothing to surpass them in the botanical gardens of any Australian city. Later I will show you a flower-garden that will surprise you with its exotic splendour. You have no idea, my dear Dorothy, of the wealth of beauty and utility which Nature has lavished upon this strange, remote region—apart altogether from its famous Golden Rope," he added, with a smile.

It was obvious that Lemiere was in a particularly cheerful mood this morning. He practically monopolized the conversation, and Dorothy, despite her reluctance, could not entirely repress the interest which grew in all that he told her. Not by word nor sign did he so much as refer to the events of the previous afternoon, and the embarrassment with which Dorothy had anticipated their meeting quickly subsided.

Lemiere's voice alone compelled attention. He possessed the happy faculty of modulating his tone to suit the topic upon which he spoke, and the skilful intonations helped to sustain interest in his remarks. His whole manner was beyond reproach, his bearing gentlemanly and courteous, and above everything was that indefinable personality which the girl had felt when she first met him—a dynamic, compelling quality, arresting in its powerful influence and attraction.

He told her about the lives and curious customs of these strange people—information which he had obtained by a study of the ancient records so marvellously preserved in the Sacred Room of Sähr, where the effigy of the god himself maintained constant watch. He spoke of their quaint medical and surgical knowledge and beliefs, some of which he had found upon investigation to produce startling results. He told her of their superstitions, and of the reputed power of their great god Sähr; for, despite the centuries of learning



behind them, they were as credulous as children in many ways.

He spoke of their fearlessness and courage, not only of the men, but of the women also, and described how their intrepid natures quailed only before the unfamiliar firearms which Lemiere had brought with him into their quiet surroundings. Their own weapons, he said, were spears and knives. With both of these they were remarkably skilful, particularly with knives, which, long and slender, with a short, flexible blade, they could throw with amazing accuracy for more than fifty yards.

"But, my dear Dorothy, I must crave your pardon," he said, with sudden contrition. "I myself am so interested in these simple folk that I may unintentionally weary you with so much talk of them. Later you will see and hear for yourself much that will interest you. I have other things to show you this morning."

He rose from the table and made an old-fashioned, courtly bow which in any other man would have seemed incongruous, but which appeared to suit him naturally. "When you have completed your meal Lula will conduct you to your room, where I will join you in perhaps half-an-hour. Until then, au revoir."

He turned swiftly upon his heel and strode out of the room, leaving Dorothy to finish her meal in solitude. The girl had plenty to occupy her thoughts. She found herself wondering at his impersonal conversation, and unable to account for the captivating manner which he had displayed. The man was an enigma to her; and she was still puzzling over his changing moods when later he appeared at the entrance to her room, where she stood near the windows, wondering what would be the outcome of the day's events.

Lemiere inquired if she were ready, and receiving an affirmative answer courteously held aside the heavy draping while she passed through the doorway.

"I am going to show you something which you would

never dream of seeing in this ancient building," he remarked, as he led the way down the stone passageway. "On your way here yesterday you no doubt observed the tower on the top of the temple. Well, we shall visit that first. We are not so very far beneath it now."

The winding passage terminated in a narrow stone spiral stairway, up which they climbed for several minutes in silence. The stairs were faintly lit, for there were no windows in the walls, and the only illumination was that of the subdued daylight which streamed from above.

The stairs led directly into one end of the tower, which was a fair-sized structure thirty feet in diameter. A stone wall some four or five feet high completely encircled the tower floor, but from there upwards all was open, so that a clear view could be obtained in every direction. The domed roof was supported on four massive pillars some fifteen feet in height.

From this lofty viewpoint Dorothy gazed with interest at the surrounding country, spread out before her like a mighty panorama, and was astonished that no trace of the lake could be seen. How was it possible, she wondered, to be so high up and yet not have a clear view of that big sheet of water. Lemiere, who had been watching her keenly, supplied the answer.

"You are wondering where the lake is, I see," he said, with a smile. "It does seem strange, but the explanation is simple. We are several hundred feet above the ground here, but we are still not high enough to see over that huge wall of rock just in front of us there, although we can see the top of it plainly. As a matter of fact, the lake lies just on the other side of that rock. With this we can see it easily."

He indicated a peculiar instrument which stood in the centre of the tower upon a raised platform three feet above the floor. The lower part, covered with a large black cloth, was invisible; from the centre of it a cylindrical pipe some thirty inches in diameter extended upwards through the



domed roof of the tower. Dorothy was puzzled by his words.

"This is a remarkable combination of periscope and magnifying-glass," explained Lemiere; "and when I tell you that it was here when I came, and had been built by the natives centuries ago, you will agree that I did not exaggerate when I spoke of their extraordinary intelligence. With this it is possible to see the whole of the lake as clearly as though you were looking down upon it from the clouds, with the added advantage that the watcher remains quite unseen."

He drew aside the covering cloth, and Dorothy leaned eagerly forward. She could scarcely repress the cry of astonishment which sprang to her lips. The lower portion of the long cylinder was cut away to give free access to the shining substance which served as a mirror, lying flat at the bottom of the instrument.

There, to her amazement, was an exact reproduction of Treasure Lake, clear and calm in the morning sunlight, and upon its placid surface floated the *Jessica*, its whiteness contrasting vividly against the darker tint of the water. Dorothy experienced a feeling of faintness as she gazed at the familiar outline of the launch. It seemed to her ages since she had last seen the boat, and ages more since she had walked upon the firm, white deck. A lump rose in her throat, and for a moment the tears dimmed her eyes.

Lemiere's quiet voice broke in upon her thoughts.

"You see now a general view of the lake," he observed. "Useful though that undoubtedly is, this instrument can give something even better." His long, sensitive fingers closed upon a milled knob which projected through the cylinder two feet above the mirror. "By turning this control the position of the lenses inside can be altered to give a greatly enlarged view, just as a photographer enlarges a bigger picture from a small negative. Watch."

He moved the control, and to Dorothy's astonishment the

image of the launch began to grow larger and larger, while the edges of the lake disappeared from view, until at last the *Jessica* occupied nearly the whole of the thirty-inch surface of the mirror. The wonder of it gripped the girl sharply. Every detail of the launch stood out more clearly than the best of field-glasses could ever have shown it: there was her own case hanging over the chair on the deck where she had slung it yesterday; in the bows she could even see the pieces of rope which had been used in experimenting with the ill-fated kite.

The amazing clearness of it all staggered her; Dorothy felt as though she could have stretched out her hand and touched the iron rail.

The launch itself appeared deserted; there was not the slightest sign of movement anywhere.

"It is an ingenious device, is it not, Dorothy? Yet the principle underlying its construction is quite simple, and I often wonder why such a thing has never been developed by any of our clever inventors in this twentieth century. Even that enlargement you see there is not the full extent of the instrument. In fact, there is practically no limit to the degree of enlargement which can be obtained. If there was anyone standing upon the deck of the launch you could enlarge the image until only the head, or even the face, filled the whole of this big mirror! Yesterday, when you were alone on the launch, your head filled this mirror on several occasions," he added softly. Dorothy started, flushing swiftly at the realization that she had been subjected to such a close scrutiny.

"I watched every detail of the way in which my men carried out my instructions," continued Lemiere. "This instrument can be moved in any direction." He turned a small hand-wheel just below the mirror, and the whole instrument began to revolve upon its axis. Dorothy followed it with fascinated eyes. The *Jessica* disappeared from view, and presently she saw the entrance to the tunnel, every



detail of which stood out sharply and clearly. And as it continued to revolve, in the large mirror appeared a wonderful panorama of the surrounding country from every point of the compass.

"You see the advantage this instrument gave its owners in days of old?" remarked Lemiere. "No one could enter the tunnel without being seen. Even a swimmer could not pass unnoticed. And so great is the degree of enlargement obtainable that an animal no larger than a dog could be seen among the trees on the amphitheatre of hills round the lake."

He turned the wheel rapidly as he spoke until the instrument pointed directly towards the far eastern shore of the lake. A touch upon the magnifying control and the image was so much enlarged that two of the large trees completely filled the mirrored surface.

"To the man controlling this instrument there are no secrets on or around the lake," said Lemiere. "I myself have found it invaluable for watching my men when I have dispatched them upon a special errand; for although they know that this thing is here—they have given to it an appropriate name which means 'The Eye of Sähr'—they regard it with an amazing degree of awe, and none of them would now dare touch it. Indeed, they will not come near it for fear of what the great god Sähr may do to them. As I told you before, they are most superstitious."

He refocussed the lens until the *Jessica* came again into view and filled the polished surface of the mirror. A ray of hope had suddenly darted through Dorothy's mind at his words.

"If you were watching us yesterday," she said, with an assumed indifference which she was far from feeling, "perhaps you saw what happened to Brian Dale when the storm carried away his kite?"

To her intense disappointment Lemiere shook his head.

"No," he said frankly. "This tube"—he tapped the long cylinder with his slim fingers—"is made in two sections, and

the top portion, which projects considerably above the dome, can be lowered when not in use. I certainly watched your efforts with the kite with great interest and, I admit, a certain amount of concern. I saw the young man directing his glasses upon the temple, and from the expression upon his face I knew that he had seen the building and was somewhat surprised. But I also saw the squall approaching—they are not uncommon here, by the way—and I lost no time in lowering the top portion, which might well have been carried away by the force of the wind, although the centre of these tornadoes always passes over the lake. Immediately the disturbance had passed I lifted the top again, and was not surprised to find that the intrepid, but very foolish, young man had disappeared. It was one of the most severe squalls I have yet experienced here. Your friend might have been blown ten miles away," he added calmly.

Dorothy was deeply disappointed, and her heart sank within her at his words. She had cherished a faint hope that Lemiere might have seen Brian land somewhere, and might know whether he was still alive. The man's callous indifference aroused resentment within her. Despite the nature of his researches, by which he hoped to free humanity from much pain and suffering, he seemed to place no value upon human life. Somehow the girl could not believe that Dale was dead. Although the odds were so heavily against him she could not bring herself to admit that he had gone out of her life for ever.

"I wonder what our friends are doing?" remarked Lemiere reflectively, gazing into the polished mirror. "There seems to be no sign of life— Ah, there they are!"

Almost as he spoke the door of the saloon opened, and Dorothy's heart missed a beat as she saw her father step on to the deck, closely followed by Captain Dixon, Wilding and Pat Murphy. Lemiere manipulated the enlarging control, and the figures grew larger and larger until Dorothy could even perceive the lines upon her father's careworn face.



They stood together on the deck, entirely unconscious of the fact that a mile away their every action was being closely followed by the girl who obviously filled their thoughts.

To Dorothy it was like watching a silent motion-picture; the movement of their lips was easily seen in the brilliant surface of the mirror. How she longed to cry out and attract their attention! The temptation was irresistible; it was maddening to have them in sight, yet herself be hidden, unable to give them the slightest hint of her whereabouts. Dorothy clenched her small hands until the knuckles stood out white against the sun-tanned skin. She bit her trembling lip fiercely in an effort to keep back the tears of utter helplessness which threatened to break forth into a torrent of sobbing. Not for worlds would she have given way to her pent-up emotion before Lemiere; yet not even her admirable self-control could quieten the mad thumping of her heart, the almost involuntary movement of her slight shoulders, which told of the storm within.

In marked contrast to her father's care-lined face—to Dorothy he seemed to have aged ten years since yesterday—Wilding's rugged features were stern and granite-like in their rigidity, indicating quite plainly that he was baffled, as well as worried, by the unexpected turn of events. Dorothy now saw a phase of his character which she had never before witnessed. It was Wilding the explorer, not Wilding the man, whose flashing eyes stared at her through the mirror. Determination was stamped on every line of his rugged countenance. Dorothy knew that he would exert every effort to find her, not only because she was Dorothy Treloare, but also because he was Arthur Wilding, the famous explorer—a man to whom failure was a word unknown, and who had never yet admitted defeat in any undertaking.

Dorothy experienced a little thrill of hope as she gazed at that grim-set countenance. That he would use every endeavour to find her she had no doubt; he might even be successful in his search, but—would he be too late?

“Major Wilding seems to be a most determined individual.” Lemiere's calm voice broke in upon her thoughts. “He will find that others also can be equally determined.” He lit a cigarette and surveyed the scene in the mirror with languid amusement.

Dorothy suddenly faced him fiercely.

“He is at least—a man!” she flashed at him passionately. “He would not imprison a woman against her will!” Her eyes blazed into his.

The cold contempt stung Lemiere like a whip. For an instant his eyes glittered with fury beneath the half-closed lids at her violent outburst. His body grew tense and rigid. Then with an effort he regained his calm composure. Through a cloud of fragrant tobacco smoke he surveyed his fair companion in silence for a moment.

“Do you think so?” he murmured softly. “I think you are mistaken. Major Arthur Wilding is only a man, like all other men. I think he would go to greater limits than I have done in order to gain his objective.”

Dorothy turned again towards the mirror. She regretted that swift, irresponsible outburst; she wished now that she had not spoken so hastily, for she realized that it could do her no good. But she had little time for such thoughts. While she watched, the Doctor suddenly plunged his hand into an inside pocket of his coat and brought forth a much-crumpled sheet of blue-tinted notepaper. Dorothy recognized it with strangely mingled feelings. It was the note which she had written in Lemiere's presence on the previous afternoon.

“You see that I am a man of my word,” came his quiet, sibilant voice behind her. “That is the note I promised to deliver. I was hoping they would produce it, if only to prove to you that I always carry out my intentions—whatever they may be!”

With sinking heart Dorothy watched the little group reading and discussing her short message. How little it conveyed, she thought. She had meant it only as a token to show that



she was still alive; obviously they were looking to it now for some clue to her whereabouts. And with a sigh Dorothy told herself that there was nothing in the note which would give them any indication of what had happened to her. There was, she thought, not even a hint which the astute Wilding could follow up. But there, as it happened, she was wrong. Had she only known it, the message, pitifully brief though it was, had already furnished Wilding with the basis of a theory which even now he was preparing to put into execution. . . .

She saw her father replace the note carefully in his pocket, and a few seconds later the little group dispersed. Wilding and Pat Murphy climbed overboard into the motor-boat and set off for the north-eastern shore; the Doctor and Captain Dixon disappeared into the saloon. Lemiere moved the periscope, keeping the boat in view as it sped over the calm waters of Treasure Lake until it eventually turned up one of the narrow inlets and, rounding a bend, disappeared from view.

Dorothy, watching him covertly, glimpsed a puzzled frown upon his countenance. For a second or two he stood, deep in thought. Then he smiled at her, swung the strange instrument back into its normal position, and carefully drew the cloth covering over the mirror.

"Our friends seem to have gone on a little expedition," he remarked lightly. "I am afraid they will not meet with much success. However, we will leave them for a while. Later we may return and see what new developments have occurred. . . . Is there anything else you would desire to see from here?"

Dorothy shook her head in silence, and together they descended the stone stairway. Lemiere led the way through a labyrinth of narrow, winding passages. He was strangely silent after his recent loquacity; and Dorothy, surprised at this sudden taciturnity in a man who obviously liked to hear himself talk, stole a glance at him as they traversed the sloping floor. But his calm, impassive countenance told

her nothing. Whatever may have been stored within him, Lemiere was a past master at concealing his thoughts. Dorothy wondered whether he was annoyed by her unexpected outburst in the tower. She felt a growing sense of irritation mingled with dismay at her childish display of temper, and more than ever she wished that she had controlled herself more carefully.

Picking his way with almost uncanny accuracy through the maze of winding passages, Lemiere led the way down a short flight of steps, across a square landing brilliantly lit by the sunlight which streamed in through many windows, and down another and longer stairway which gave on to an open hall. Its appearance was vaguely familiar to Dorothy; the realization came suddenly to her that this was the entrance to the temple—the hall which she and Lula had first entered yesterday. Why had he brought her here, she asked herself in perplexed wonderment.

Half way across the hall Lemiere stopped and faced the girl. His features were calm and inscrutable as ever, but his keen eyes were blazing with a fierce intensity as they met, and held, hers for a fleeting moment. Dorothy found herself flushing beneath his steady, penetrating gaze.

Lemiere smiled slightly.

"I have shown you something which you never thought to see," he remarked, in level, unhurried tones. "Now I am going to show you something else which will surprise you still more—something which will recall to mind those words of Gray's—you remember:

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air,""

he murmured, to Dorothy's intense astonishment. The idea of this man, this cold scientist, quoting poetry had never occurred to her; it came as an immense surprise. Ignoring her amazed expression, he turned swiftly upon his heel. "Come this way, please."



Dorothy followed him across the hall, with its vista of tree-lined avenue in the distance leading to freedom, towards a curtain-covered doorway at one corner of the hall. With one hand upon the heavy draping Lemiere turned to his companion, a smile upon his sombre features.

"If you would like a pleasant surprise," he said, "just close your eyes and step forward. You have my assurance that no harm will befall you," he added.

Somewhat startled at the request Dorothy hesitated for a moment and then, deeming it advisable to humour her queer host, she obeyed. The curtain brushed lightly against her as she advanced through the doorway, and her feet stepped from the hard stone floor on to a yielding substance which she knew instinctively to be sand. When she opened her eyes she could not repress the cry of astonishment which rose to her lips.

The place was a veritable fairyland such as she had never imagined could have existed.

The drab stone walls of the temple had gone; she was standing in a large bower completely enclosed by flowering bushes and short, leafy trees through which were intertwined great masses of green creeper somewhat resembling ivy, and forming not only the sides but also the roof, through which the warm sunlight filtered in scattered, searching streams. The ground was covered with plants and shrubs bearing gorgeously coloured flowers to which no name could be given.

The blaze of colour was dazzling in its spectacular profusion, arresting in its sharp, vivid contrasts. There was no trace of the grey stone wall of the temple; the ivy-like creeper had long since overgrown it, and time and Nature had given the plant such a strong hold that the only break in the mass of greenness which enveloped the bower was the dark-coloured curtain covering the doorway through which they had just passed. The earth was soft and sandy. Through the centre of the bower flowed a narrow stream of crystal-

clear water, the banks of which were thickly lined with vivid green moss and grasses, contrasting sharply with the deeper, softer green of the overhanging creeper. Overhead, brightly coloured birds were flitting to and fro, their gorgeous plumage standing out with vivid clearness against the mass of green foliage.

For some moments Dorothy stood entranced at the scene. Its natural beauty fascinated her; she felt as though she might have been in an old-world garden redolent with the fragrance of centuries of growth. Over it all rested an air of calm quietude, giving to it a charm that was indefinable, yet very real.

Lemiere watched with a growing sense of satisfaction the evident pleasure upon the delicate features of his fair companion. With the shrewdness of the true psychologist he remained silent for a while, content to allow the mellowing influence of the place to weave its spell. When at length he spoke his voice was low and soft, yet vibrant with feeling.

"Is it not wonderful, Dorothy? Here we are standing in a temple garden that is older than civilization itself—yet there is nothing in civilization to surpass it. You will never see a native here unless for some special reason; my people regard it as sacred to Sähr, for their legends tell them that in this garden the priests of the temple used to wander, to seek relaxation of mind and body from their labours in the temple. The natives believe that the place is haunted by the spirits of long-departed priests, who return here to rest at regular intervals."

He laughed softly and, taking Dorothy's arm in a firm yet gentle grip, led her to a strangely fashioned seat of rushes near the little stream.

Instinctively the girl guessed what was coming. Her heart sank within her. She felt the blood mounting to her cheeks. With an effort of will she strove to calm herself, well knowing that she must rely wholly upon her own wit for



assistance. There was no one to extricate her from her prison; she would have to fight for herself.

Lemiere sat down beside her, and his hand rested lightly upon her arm. Again Dorothy felt that queer tingling of the senses that came with his nearness. The very touch of the man seemed to convey all the vitality, the personality, the amazing nervous energy vibrating within his spare frame. Dorothy dared not look at him; to meet those blazing, piercing eyes would have been fatal.

Lemiere lost no more time in stilted conversation.

"Dorothy, I want my answer," he said abruptly. His voice was calm and steady, yet behind it the girl sensed the latent passion which only his remarkable self-control kept from breaking through. "I told you that I would defer this matter until to-day. The time is fast expiring."

The grip upon her arm tightened as he paused. Dorothy felt, rather than saw, his penetrating eyes bent upon her face. With all her courage, she knew that she could not hope to fight him off. Her heart began to pound madly, her bosom rising and falling quickly under the stress of her emotion.

Eagerly insistent, the steady voice rang again in her ears:

"Dorothy, what have you decided? Will you be my wife, or——"

The significance of his uncompleted question aroused her to action. With a swift effort she half rose from the seat. That movement proved fatal.

Instantly Lemiere's grip upon her arm tightened. Vainly she strove to free herself. With a swift movement his arms went round her, crushing her to him. She heard the quick intake of his breathing, and then the fierce ardour of his love launched itself in an ecstasy of feeling. Madly he held her to him in an embrace that left her powerless, dazed, helpless. Passionate kisses rained upon her upturned face, her throat, her hair. Like a mighty flood his passion poured itself out upon her, the culmination of long-restrained feeling, until she felt herself reeling and her senses swimming. In his

arms Dorothy lay helpless. She scarcely heard the words of endearment that mingled with his caresses; the intensity of his ardour seemed to have drawn the vitality from her.

How long she lay in his arms Dorothy did not know; an eternity of time seemed to pass before his fierce grip round her relaxed a little, and his clasp became more gentle and considerate. Faint and spent under the wealth of his emotion, Dorothy opened her frightened eyes, to find his own gleaming black orbs staring into hers. She trembled before the intensity that lay beneath the light of triumph. Instantly his arms closed round her again, but now as though to calm and reassure her.

"Dorothy, forgive me, my dear," he whispered, his face close to hers. "I—my feelings carried me away. I would not hurt you for the world! But, God, how I love you! Dorothy, you *will* marry me! I will teach you to love me! I will show you what love really is. You shall be my wife—you shall have everything on earth you desire! Dorothy! Dorothy! Say you love me! That you will be my wife!"

There was no mistaking the sincerity of his vibrant voice, the pleading earnestness of his manner. Dorothy's womanly intuition told her that Lemiere was speaking no more than the truth. She knew that he loved her, but the knowledge brought to her nothing but despair. Love him! No, she could never love him! She longed to cry out, "I loathe you! I loathe you!" but common sense and fear of what might follow held back the words. His caresses sickened her; his lips seemed to burn her at every touch.

Again she strove to free herself, but Lemiere was adamant. His arms held her in a clinging, firm clasp from which she could not escape.

"Dorothy, give me my answer!" His voice was hoarse with emotion, his lips came close to hers. "I have waited long for you. Will you give yourself to me—or must I take—what you will not give?"

The vibrant voice struck utter horror into her soul. . . . If



only she could get a little more time! That thought scared through her dazed, bewildered brain like a white-hot knife. To gain time! . . . A day—even a few hours! . . . She must conceal her feelings. . . . She must let him think that she—cared. The realization of that stabbed her with repugnance, yet resolutely she set herself to carry it out. Just for an instant she allowed her eyes to be drawn to his. With an effort she forced a wan smile to her face. Her lips began to move when there suddenly came a cry that froze her into rigid amazement. The forced smile fell from her lips. The colour dashed from her face in an instant, leaving it pale as death.

“My God! Dorothy! Dorothy!” The words ended almost in a shriek.

With a muttered imprecation Lemiere swiftly released his hold of the girl and sprang to his feet. Dorothy fell half fainting against the back of the seat. The swift spasm of joy that ran through her made her brain reel.

In the entrance to the bower, his clothing torn and tattered, a rough bloody bandage round his forehead, his face begrimed and haggard, stood Brian Dale, staring at Lemiere and Dorothy in mingled horror and astonishment.

“Dorothy, what are you doing here? And—and—who the devil are you?”

The two questions rapped out in rapid succession. The intense amazement which Dale had first felt at sight of Dorothy had swiftly merged into blind rage. He glared from Lemiere to Dorothy, incredulous anger upon his blood-stained face. Had he not just seen the girl lying in the fellow’s arms—and smiling, actually smiling! The young man’s hands clenched tightly together, and for an instant it seemed as though he would spring at Lemiere. But reason prevailed, and instead he stood waiting for an explanation of what seemed to him an unfathomable mystery. What was Dorothy doing here? And why in the arms of this stranger?

Lemiere was the first to regain his composure. His self-

control was remarkable. The momentary expressions of annoyance and amazement that had crossed his face at Dale’s dramatic entry were gone. With his hands in his pockets he surveyed the young man calmly, and with frigid coldness.

“Perhaps it would not be out of place to ask who you are, and what you are doing here in this disreputable condition,” he said coolly. “However, there is no need to do so. Having scrutinized you for some time yesterday, I have no difficulty in recognizing you. Mr Brian Dale, welcome to my humble abode!”

He bowed ironically. His peculiar manner, his apparent unconcern, and his confident self-composure began to confuse the younger man, who could understand nothing but the fact that he had seen Dorothy—Dorothy, of all persons!—smiling in this fellow’s arms.

“I must congratulate you upon your very fortunate escape, Mr Dale,” went on Lemiere calmly, while Dorothy gazed at Dale as though he were a ghost. “Later I will be pleased to hear the story of your adventure in the storm. In the meantime, please consider yourself my prisoner—or guest, if you prefer that designation. I perceive that you have not escaped entirely unhurt. I am a medical man, and if you desire professional attention to your injuries I beg that you will command me—though I must admit that your presence here is most inconvenient.”

The blank astonishment which had been registered upon Dale’s begrimed countenance gave place to a swift expression of anger. His eyes blazed dangerously.

“Never mind about me,” he rapped out sharply. “What I want to know is this. What is Miss Treloare doing here, and who the devil are you, anyway? You talk like a damned parrot. I am no prisoner of yours! I walked in here of my own free will, and I’ll walk out again—if I want to. Where are Doctor Treloare and the rest of our friends?”

Lemiere raised his eyebrows, and a sarcastic smile flitted over his thin lips.



"You are very free with your tongue, young man. I would advise you to moderate your language somewhat. Since you seem interested, I will introduce myself, although I see no reason why I should do so. I am Professor Gregory Lemiere. You will learn more about me later, I think. As to Miss Treloare, in whom you appear to take such a proprietorial interest, I may tell you that she is shortly to become my wife."

"What!"

Dale's incredulous ejaculation almost drowned the half-smothered "Oh!" from Dorothy. The young man turned suspiciously towards the faltering girl. "So that's the reason why you seemed so happy in his arms," he said scornfully. The contempt of his measured tones stung Dorothy to the quick. The colour flashed to her pale cheeks. "Oh, you needn't bother to deny it! I saw you with my own eyes! I don't profess to know much about this business, and I don't know how you got here, but apparently you've been playing a trick on all of us. Well, you're welcome to your fine lover!"

"Brian!" The cry was half-moan, half-scream. Dorothy rose to her feet and faced him. Her face was ashen; the tears sprang to her eyes. "Brian! It's not true! I was captured and brought here! I——"

Lemiere swung round upon her fiercely. "Be silent, girl!" he rapped savagely. "I told you that you would be my wife, and by God you will!"

For an instant Dale stood petrified. Then realization came swiftly to him.

"Oh, so that's your game, is it!" he roared, blind with anger. He stepped towards Lemiere. "You dirty, low-down scum! I—I—for two pins I'd smash you to a jelly, you miserable hound!"

There was murder in his blazing eyes as he advanced upon Lemiere. His grim-set features, covered with mingled blood and grime, surmounted by the blood-stained bandage, gave him a ferocious appearance. Lemiere backed away in alarm.

"Keep off, you young fool! Keep back, or it will be the worse for you!"

Dale laughed harshly. "It'll be worse for *you* if I get my hands on you, you muck-rat!"

Lemiere's right hand flashed into his coat-pocket. Dorothy, expecting him to be armed, screamed in sudden terror. But the hand that came from his pocket brought no revolver with it. He whipped out a small cone-shaped instrument and, placing it to his lips, blew strongly through it.

Immediately the peaceful air was broken by the most weird, blood-curdling sound that Dorothy had ever heard. It rose from a deep wail into a dreadful high-pitched shriek, echoing and re-echoing in the silent atmosphere. Again and again it sounded, striking terror into the heart of the girl, and causing Dale to stay his headlong rush.

Almost before the horrible sound had died away there came the pattering of many naked feet upon the bare stone floor beyond, and a second later the doorway was filled with excited, gesticulating, half-clad natives, pushing and clamouring from behind until more than a dozen were forced into the Garden of Sähr.

A look of alarm crossed Dale's face as, cursing himself for a misguided fool, he swung round and surveyed the menacing throng. Dorothy, whose hopes of escaping from Lemiere's clutches had risen with Dale's arrival, felt her heart sink at the knowledge that he, too, was now helpless.

Lemiere spoke a few words to the gibbering natives. His voice was calm and inflexible, as though nothing untoward had happened. When he had finished he pointed to Dale.

With a swift rush the natives surrounded him, and, despite his fierce struggles, he was hoisted up like a child and hurried through the doorway. The curtain swung over the opening as the last of the natives went through, and Dorothy, sick with helpless despair, was again alone with Lemiere.

The scientist seemed to have been peculiarly affected by the unexpected interruption. The eager, almost boyish,



expression which Dorothy had seen upon his countenance had gone, and in its place had come a look of austereness and severity. The lines of his thin features had set into a mask of imperturbability. For a little time he stood deep in thought, while Dorothy wondered what would happen next.

Quite suddenly he looked up, and there was an expression almost of surprise in his face as his eyes fell upon her. He raised a hand to his forehead. The girl shrank imperceptibly from him, but he scarcely seemed to notice the slight movement. His voice, when he spoke, was as steadily impersonal as though he were addressing one of his native followers. Dorothy was amazed, and not a little relieved, at the sudden change in his mood. He regarded her reflectively before he spoke, in his keen black eyes a peculiar far-away expression that puzzled her exceedingly.

"You will please return to your room, Dorothy," he remarked at length. "Er—we will discuss the matter some other time."

He pressed his hand against his forehead for an instant, while the girl stared at him in astonishment. More and more she wondered how this cold, austere scientist could ever have displayed such fierce passion as she had witnessed. Of his madness she was now thoroughly convinced; no one but a madman could have been affected by an interruption to such an extent that he had completely forgotten their former conversation.

Lemiere led the way through the curtained doorway, and Dorothy followed him as in a dream. Of only one thing now she was sure, and the knowledge filled her with a great relief. For a while, at least, she would have some respite from the man's fierce love-making, and for that she was deeply grateful.

In the open hall Lemiere summoned Lula, directed her to conduct Dorothy to her room, and then, without a word of farewell, but with an air of deep preoccupation, he turned suddenly away from them and, mounting the stairs, was soon lost to sight.

## CHAPTER IX

### ESCAPE IS PLANNED

SEVERAL hours later Dorothy Treloare sat in an armchair near the windows of her room, considering the amazing events of the morning.

She had half expected Lemiere's amorous advances, but there were some things which she had certainly not anticipated. The view of the lake through the remarkable periscope, for one thing, had come as a great surprise to her. Now, of course, it was easy to see how Lemiere had been able to know just what was going on aboard the launch, and how he had been able to time her abduction so carefully. With such an instrument nothing that happened upon the lake could be kept secret from the watcher in the tower. . . . She wondered what her father and his friends were doing, and what they had thought and said when they read her brief note. The remembrance of that worried look upon her father's drawn face brought tears to her eyes again. How she wished she could get a long letter to him, telling him just where she was!

Then there was Brian Dale's dramatic appearance. Like one from the dead he had suddenly come into her life again. She wondered how he had managed to escape in the storm, and whether he was much hurt. Poor Brian, impetuous as ever! She sighed wearily as she reflected that had he not been so headstrong he might have been able to get both of them out of the temple. But now he was a prisoner, perhaps closely guarded and in pain through his injuries. And all because of her! Dorothy was a very human girl, and she thrilled again at the remembrance of Dale's impetuous



outburst when he realized just what had happened. If only he had sprung upon Lemiere before that horrible thing had been blown! They might now both be safe on board the launch again. . . . If—if—— "Oh, those ifs!" thought poor Dorothy. "If it had not been for the squall all this trouble would not have occurred."

With a long sigh of despair Dorothy rose from her chair and, cupping her chin in her hands, leaned upon the broad window-sill, gazing abstractedly at the mass of rock beyond and the clear water far below. The temple was strangely quiet in the warm atmosphere of the early afternoon. There was scarcely a sound to break the stillness. Deep in thought, Dorothy did not hear the first faint creak which, half-muffled by the cloth that draped the walls of her room, broke the calm stillness. It came again, this time rather louder and more pronounced, and with a little gasp of fear she swung round. The sound now was quite plain. It was coming from the other side of the stone wall at one end of her room!

For an instant Dorothy stood in hesitant fear, wondering whether or not she should call Lula, or make a dash for the door. What lay behind those heavy drapings? Her eyes were riveted upon the spot from which the cautious sound proceeded. She was still hesitating when, to her unspeakable astonishment and alarm, the lower portion of the heavy cloth began to move.

Slowly, inch by inch, it bulged into the room, just as though someone were pushing behind it, until at length it projected some three feet away from the wall. There it remained still and motionless. For a few seconds nothing happened; Dorothy's heart was racing madly as she stared with horror-stricken eyes at the bulging cloth. There came the sound of scraping, and then the heavy covering was agitated gently. Someone was creeping behind the curtain!

Dorothy watched the rippling cloth in fascinated fear. She was just preparing to spring towards the door when, through a join where two sections overlapped, a man's face appeared,

peering cautiously into the brightly lit room. It was Brian Dale!

Dorothy could have screamed with relief at sight of his anxious countenance. But her surprise was small in comparison with that which appeared on the young man's face as he recognized her. With an expression of utter amazement upon his features he stepped through the opening in the cloth and stood upright in the room.

"Good Lord, Dorothy, is this your room?" he exclaimed; and then: "By George, this is a stroke of luck! I never expected anything like this!"

Eagerly he came towards Dorothy and took her hands in his. The girl suddenly felt a great wave of relief sweep over her. She clung to him happily.

"Oh, Brian, I'm glad you have come," she whispered shakily. "I wondered what had happened to you." Her lips trembled, but she forced a little smile. "How did you get here?"

Dale grinned as he turned and pointed towards the bulging drapery. "There's a secret passage in the wall," he explained. "Look!"

He drew her towards the wall, swung the heavy draping aside, and revealed a hinged stone doorway, some three feet square, in the wall. The huge slab of stone, nearly twelve inches thick, which formed the door opened into the room, and as it swung forward upon its hinges it had forced the draping cloth back.

"I couldn't make out what had happened when the door opened and I found myself confronted with blackness," said Dale, with a wry smile. "I thought for a second that I must be heading for a dungeon! Then I could see that it was cloth, and I crept along between it and the wall, wondering where on earth I was. I never dreamed it was your room, Dorothy!" He placed his hand upon a spot a few inches above the opening, and pressed against the stone. Noiselessly the massive trap-door swung closed, fitting neatly



into position in the wall. He allowed the covering to fall into place, and cast a look of surprise round the room, with its elaborate furnishings.

"But—but, Brian, how did you find that strange passage-way, and how did you escape in that squall yesterday? I—I thought you might be——"

"Dead?" Dale turned towards her with a bright smile and clasped her hands in his. Side by side they sat down upon the bed. "No. I'm afraid I wasn't meant to be killed that way, Dorothy; but it was a near thing, all the same. My story isn't a long one. When I was up with the kite I saw this place, and also spotted the waterfall. It's just near here. Oh, you know, do you?" as Dorothy nodded her head. "Well, I thought this old building must be empty, as I couldn't see anyone about through the glasses. When the squall came I was blown almost directly over it, and I landed in the water in an inlet about half-a-mile to the south. Heavens, I never knew that wind could blow so hard! But I was fortunate in falling into the water. The only damage done was a scratch or two on my forehead where I was struck by a piece of flying timber. No, it's nothing serious, Dorothy," he hastened to reassure her, observing her look of concern. "It bled pretty freely, though, so I just tied my handkerchief round it, and then set about drying my clothes. I was surprised to find them almost in rags. It must have been the wind. In fact, I am rather a disgrace—'disreputable,' as our strange friend observed this morning."

He laughed lightly, surveying his tattered garments with rueful gaze. "However, I took them off, dried them as well as I could, put 'em on again, and ran round to thoroughly dry out. I must have lost my sense of direction altogether, for although I could tell from the sun which was north and south, I had no idea where I was at all. Night came on as I was roaming around, and I slept under the shelter of a big tree, and then this morning started off to find the lake. After wandering around in the jungle for a long while,

getting nowhere, I began to grow alarmed, for I was as hungry as a hunter, and I did not know where I was. At last I came upon the rear of this old building, which I guessed to be a native temple, and the first thing I saw was a canoe drawn up out of the water, and well filled with what looked like melons. Taking a chance, I tried one, found it excellent, and ate four of them, which appeased my hunger a good deal.

"Then I began to wonder who might be in the temple, for although I had seen no one I knew from the canoe that there must be somebody inside. I came in very carefully, and while I was standing in the hall, just outside the garden, I heard the voice of this fellow who calls himself Professor Lemiere. I knew the words were English, though I couldn't make them out clearly, and I wondered who on earth could be talking English in such a place. Out of curiosity more than anything else I pushed aside the curtain over the doorway and—came on you and him in the garden."

His voice grew suddenly serious at the recollection. "Dorothy, I never had such a shock in my life! I must have stood there for several minutes before I had sense enough to speak. It was the last thing I had ever expected to see—you in the arms of that fellow, and smiling!" His big hands closed tightly over hers, and Dorothy shuddered at the hideous recollection.

"I—it was not my fault, Brian," she whispered, her face swiftly stained crimson. "I could not stop him! I was helpless. And I was only smiling to put him off—to gain a little time. He—he had said such dreadful things. . . . You came just in time, Brian." Her voice trailed away in a choking sob.

"Poor little girl!" Dale's voice was full of genuine sympathy. "What a dreadful time you must have had! By heavens, if I could have got my hands on the fellow before he blew that confounded trumpet I'd have made him sing a different tune! I'd choke the life out of him! Who is he, Dorothy?"



"I'll tell you later, Brian. Please go on with your story. What happened after——?"

There was a frown on Dale's handsome features. "Perhaps if I hadn't been such a blithering, hot-headed fool I might never have got caught like that. However, the damage was done, and when the niggers got hold of me I thought it was all over with me—and you too. But they carried me to a sort of underground cell with only a very small window in it. There was no door, and I was dropped down through a hole in the roof. Some food was thrown down after me, the stone trap-door was dropped into place, and I was left alone. I could just see what I was doing in the dim light. I was mad as a hatter with myself at first for being such a fool, but I realized it was no good fuming over what had happened, so I ate some of the food and set about wondering how I could get out.

"To reach the top was impossible, as the walls were twelve feet high. After wandering round the cell for a while, by a stroke of luck I happened to lean against the wall on one side, and nearly fell through the opening as part of the wall fell away. I guessed that I must have touched a secret spring, and after a couple of minutes' searching I found it—a few inches above the centre of the hinged door. There was no sense in remaining in the cell, so I crawled into the passageway and closed the door behind me, after making sure that I could open it again from the inside." He paused a moment, and his eyes smiled into hers.

"But—but does this passageway lead straight to my room here?" asked Dorothy, who had listened to his strange tale with keen interest.

The young man shook his head. "Not directly," he replied. "As I crawled through the darkness I came to a sort of Y-branch. I followed one side, and finally found myself in a small space with what looked like an air-ventilator at the top. By standing on tiptoe I could see through this, and to my surprise found myself looking into Lemiere's

study, or laboratory, or whatever he calls it. I've never seen such a room in my life—operating-tables and all sorts of other things in it. He was there himself, bending over a mass of electric wiring, muttering to himself like a school-kid. I came back along the passage, turned at the branch, and followed the other side of the Y until I came up against a wall. Remembering the position of the spring, I touched the stone in several places until at last I hit it. The door swung open and, as I told you before, I was surprised at the blackness until I guessed that there was a curtain over it. I crawled through, until I came to a gap in the cloth, and—here I am!"

Dorothy was silent for a moment when he had finished his absorbing narrative. Then she turned to Dale and looked at him squarely.

"Brian, do you think there would be an opening from Lemiere's room into this passage?"

"I should think there would be, naturally."

"Then it would be possible for him to reach this room without coming through the main corridors of the building at all?"

Dale's face was grave. He had guessed her meaning. "I am afraid that's so—unless, of course, he does not know of the existence of this passage, which is possible."

Dorothy moved her hand with a gesture which showed she had no doubt about that, and for a while neither spoke. The same thought was present in the minds of both.

Dale was the first to break the silence:

"Tell me as briefly as you can what's happened to you, Dorothy," he said. "We are not likely to be disturbed for a while. Lemiere was deep in his experiments when I saw him. Anyway, if he comes, he won't expect to see me here—and this time I'll deal with him before he can summon his niggers again."

Needless to state, Dorothy was just as eager to give her companion an outline of her adventures as he was to hear



them. He listened with deep interest and in silence as she described the abduction from the launch, her interview with Lemiere afterwards, the demonstration of his ray, the strange periscope and what she had seen through it, and finally the scene in the garden which Dale himself had interrupted at the crucial moment.

"He must be a clever man, Brian," she added; "that ray is a wonderful thing, and would make him famous all over the world. But I'm sure he is mad—or partly so. His eyes—! Oh, I shall never forget them!"

She shivered a little, and leaned closer towards the stalwart figure of her companion. His big hands tightened protectively round hers.

"Don't think about him, Dorothy. Clever he may be, but mad he certainly is. He's an unscrupulous, cold-blooded scoundrel, yet he seems to have a strong hold over these niggers. Anyway, we must try to get away from here as soon as possible. We must get back to the launch and clear out of this cursed place before he knows we have gone. It's no use wasting time looking for this Golden Rope with a maniac at our heels. What good will all the gold in the world be to us if we lose our priceless pearl?"

It was quite a gallant speech for Brian Dale, and Dorothy smiled her appreciation. "But how are we to escape, Brian? This place may be guarded day and night. Neither of us knows our way about, and we cannot jump out of a window." All the old doubts and fears began to re-assail her. How *could* they escape from this dreadful place?

Dale's jaw set in a determined line. "We shall have to find a way out," said he grimly. "And the sooner the better. This fellow seems to have forgotten our existence completely now, but he may swing the other way any moment. If we can manage to reach the back of the temple there are several boats tied up, and we could soon find our way back to the lake. In any case, we shall have to chance it. Anything is preferable to staying here."

He remained deep in thought for a minute or two, his naturally quick and active brain pondering the situation. Dorothy watched him anxiously. She realized keenly that her future safety rested largely upon any plan which he might propose.

"We can't very well fight our way out," said Dale reflectively, "so it will have to be a battle of wits. I think we had better wait until night before making a dash for it."

He lifted her arm and glanced at the small wristlet-watch which ticked away the minutes as unconcernedly as though nothing unusual had happened. "Half-past three," he murmured. "Good! That gives us several hours, and from what I saw of Lemiere I don't think we shall be disturbed. Now, this is my plan, Dorothy. First, I am going to try to find my way to the tower, and have a look through the periscope. I want to know two things: where the launch is, and what our friends are doing. Oh, there won't be much danger in that"—observing Dorothy's expression of alarm. "By your account it lies in a part of the temple generally deserted, and I don't anticipate any difficulty in finding the place. I won't take any risks, and I will get back as soon as I can.

"In the meantime, there is something you can do, Dorothy. It is more than likely that there is another secret passageway from this room, and I should think it would be in the wall opposite to the one which I came through. Before I go I will show you the position of the spring, and you must go right round the other walls in the hope of finding another opening. The springs controlling the two doors I have come through have been almost exactly the same height from the floor, so you may have no trouble in locating another passage which might take us directly out of the temple. It is worth trying, anyhow. While I'm out I will keep a keen look-out for a quick way to the boats at the rear. When I get back it will probably be pretty late, and I shall have to return to my cell until it gets dark."



Dorothy started violently. "Go back there?" she echoed, in dismay. "But why, Brian? Why go back now that you are out of it?"

Dale patted her hand reassuringly. "I must, Dorothy. You see," he explained, "it is almost certain that some food and water will be brought there towards night, and if I am missing the alarm will be raised immediately, knocking all our plans on the head. If I am there, everything will seem in order; and as soon as possible afterwards I will come here to you. If I don't go back we may spoil everything."

Dorothy was forced to admit the logic of his reasoning, though the thought of remaining alone in the room, with the knowledge of that passage leading directly from Lemiere's study to her, sent a little shiver of apprehension through her. Dale, guessing her thoughts, endeavoured to reassure her.

"Don't worry, Dorothy. I will return as soon as I can, and honestly I don't think there is any danger as yet from the fellow. But we are playing a lone hand, almost in the dark, and we shall have to take a risk or two." He rose to his feet. "I had better be getting along now. We cannot afford to waste too much time."

"Wait!" Dorothy jumped up beside him, and commenced to remove the grimy, blood-stained bandage which he had tied roughly round his forehead. "You must let me cleanse this wound, Brian. You will have to be careful. It is so easy for these things to become poisoned."

Dale grinned cheerfully, and sat down on the bedside again.

"You nurses are very particular, aren't you? Professional curiosity, I suppose! It's really nothing serious, Dorothy. I will be all right."

Nevertheless he was glad enough for her kind treatment. Very gently the girl unwrapped the rough bandage, and was relieved to find that the young man had suffered nothing more serious than several small cuts and scratches along his

forehead. Two were deeper than the others, and it was from these that most of the blood had soaked through the bandage.

With a sponge and cold water Dorothy gently bathed and cleansed the broken skin, and to Dale the touch of her soft, cool hands was like a healing salve. When she had finished, Dorothy tore a narrow strip from one of the sheets, and made a neat bandage round his forehead—"just to keep it clean," she said, in answer to his protestations that it was not necessary.

The young man grinned as he surveyed his unshaven face in the mirror of the dressing-table.

"Don't I look swish!" he remarked cheerfully. "It's certainly a big improvement on my efforts. Thanks very much, Dorothy. I'll admit it feels a lot better. . . . Before I go, now, I will show you how this spring-door works."

Drawing aside the heavy draping which covered the wall, Dale quickly located the spot on the stone, about four feet from the floor, and, having opened and closed the trap-door, he bade Dorothy do so.

"You see, there are two springs," he explained. "That on the left opens the door, and that on the right closes it. They are not more than twelve inches apart, and no great pressure is needed. These things are real works of genius, and I'm not surprised that the same folk have built this strange periscope you describe."

Dorothy opened and closed the door several times to Dale's satisfaction. "Well, that's all right," he observed. "If there are any more secret panels in this room you should have no difficulty in working them. Now I must be off."

"Brian, promise me you will be careful." There was a world of entreaty in Dorothy's voice, and her brown eyes gazed seriously into his. "If anything happens to you I will be alone and helpless here. Please be careful, for both our sakes."



He clasped her hands in his for a moment, and then he was gone, his rubber-soled shoes carrying him noiselessly over the rush-covered floor. The curtain swung into place behind him as he slipped through the door, and Dorothy was left to herself again.

She wasted no time in idle speculation. At any moment Lula might return, and though Dorothy did not doubt the genuineness of the affection which the native girl displayed, nevertheless she did not want to arouse her curiosity.

Both by nature and training Dorothy Treloare was a methodical young woman, and she set about her task in a most systematic manner.

The outside wall with the windows she did not consider for the moment; it was most unlikely that it was thick enough to conceal a secret passage. For the same reason she thought the opposite wall, with its curtain-covered doorway, might yield no results. It was possible that there was still another passage in the wall through which Dale had come and, drawing aside the heavy draping, Dorothy began to work along the cold stone at a uniform height from the floor, her sensitive fingers exerting continual pressure against the stone in the hope of striking a yielding section. Not an inch of stone was missed in her careful scrutiny; and she was convinced when she had completed the examination that there was no second secret passage to be found there.

She was not greatly disappointed, however, for she had scarcely hoped to find two passageways in the one wall; and she therefore turned her attention immediately to the opposite wall, which, like the others, was covered with the dark-coloured draping material.

Very slowly, inch by inch, Dorothy began to feel her way across the stone wall, working from the left-hand corner across to the windows. She felt sure that Dale was right in his guess that there would be another secret exit from the room, and she knew that, if anywhere, it must surely be in this wall.

As she progressed slowly across the cold stone her heart began to beat faster in the excitement of the quest. As Dale had said, it was a battle of wits between them. Dorothy found herself intently examining every block of stone at or near the four-feet level, and she drew aside the hanging drapery to obtain more light on the stones. Some were small, not more than six inches across; others were huge masses of granite measuring eighteen inches square. Rough-hewn and many-shaped, they had obviously just been chosen to fit wherever they would; and between each was a thin layer of grey-coloured joining material of extreme hardness, into which not even the sharp edges of the nail-scissors which she had found on the dressing-table could penetrate. Every small projection, and every piece of stone, came under the pressure of her hands and fingers; but not once in the whole expanse of the wall did she find a spot which would yield to her touch.

Dorothy was deeply disappointed when she reached the corner of the room and had to admit that her examination had been fruitless. Immediately on her right was the outer wall through which the windows had been cut; it did not seem as though anything could be found there. The only other wall was that at the opposite side, through which the doorway led into the corridor beyond.

Dorothy, on her knees in the corner, surveyed it dubiously from across the room, and wondered whether it would be worth while going over it. "It doesn't look very promising, but I suppose I might as well," she told herself, and put her right hand against the outside wall to steady herself as she rose to her feet. As she unconsciously pressed against the stone, to her intense astonishment and delight it moved inward a fraction of an inch.

She sprang to her feet and stepped back just in time to avoid being struck by the heavy mass of stone that swung slowly out into the room from the extreme end of the wall which she had just completed searching. Instantly Dorothy



guessed what had happened. The secret doorway fitted neatly into the corner when closed, and the old-time builders, perhaps to baffle pursuit, had concealed the mechanism in the adjoining wall. Considerably elated by the discovery, the girl sought for, and quickly found, the control which operated the closing mechanism; and after a curious glance into the dark, musty passageway she closed the secret door, and allowed the draping cloth to fall into place over the wall.

Her hand was still upon the heavy material when there came a sound that dashed the colour from her cheeks, and sent her rigid against the wall, her eyes dilating in swift terror.

Again she heard it; faintly at first, and then louder, as it echoed and re-echoed hollowly through the ancient stone building in the still calm of the late afternoon—a groan, almost a wailing cry, of inexpressible pain and fear, rising into a high-pitched scream that froze the girl into statuesque rigidity.

Again and again it came, not quite so loud now, but with all the intensity of acute physical agony. Dorothy had heard too many similar cries to be deceived; it was the involuntary, semi-conscious shriek of someone in mortal suffering.

And to her there was only one explanation. Brian Dale! Lemiere must have caught him and was killing him—perhaps torturing him in one of his frightful experiments with the ray!

Sick and faint with the horror of it, Dorothy stumbled across the room and dropped weakly into the armchair, covering her ashen face with shaking hands. The memory of that hideous scream rang in her ears with unforgettable intensity. It crushed all else from her mind; she could think of nothing but the fact that Dale must have been killed.

How long she remained thus she did not know. Normally well balanced and unaffected by unexpected happenings,

Dorothy had suffered so many violent shocks in the last twenty-four hours that each now seemed to strike fresh terror into her soul. For what seemed an eternity of time she sat there, dazed and bewildered, until the curtain covering the doorway twitched slightly, and an instant later Dale appeared in the room.

The wave of intense relief which swept the girl almost overwhelmed her. Then she sprang to her feet with a quick sobbing cry, and hastened towards him, with outstretched hands:

“Brian—Brian!”

The young man was shocked at the strange expression upon her face.

“Why, what’s the matter, Dorothy? Not ill, are you?”

The anxiety in his voice steadied her a little, and she laughed shakily, the colour slowly coming back to her pale cheeks. “No, I’m all right, Brian. It’s just nerves. Oh, did you hear that dreadful cry? I thought it was——”

“Me? Poor kid!” Dale’s voice and eyes were full of compassion. “You’ve had a rotten time, Dorothy! The sooner we get away from this place the better. It’s getting on your nerves, and no wonder. . . . Yes, I heard it, Dorothy. God knows what devilry the man is up to now. Probably one of his unfortunate ‘patients’ being experimented on. I never saw a soul the whole time. I found the tower all right, and had a look through the periscope. The *Jessica* is still where you saw her this morning; I am glad of that, as we’ll know just where to find her. And, Dorothy, what do you think? They have built another kite!”

“Another one?” There was incredulous astonishment in the girl’s voice. “Whatever are they going to do with it? Surely they won’t risk——”

“They will risk anything to find you, Dorothy,” Dale told her gravely. “And the idea is a good one. If there is enough rope left to get up any distance they will soon spot this place, and will guess from your note that you are here. Jove, that’s a knock to our mad Professor! I’ll wager he



never thought they would do such a thing! But they can't do anything until to-morrow, and that may be too late. We must make an effort to get away to-night, and if we are lucky there will be no need to use the kite. But tell me, Dorothy, how did your search go? Any success?"

"More by good luck than anything else, I'm afraid, Brian," said Dorothy, with a smile. "But I found it, all the same. It's here."

Dale was delighted at her success. "This may be an important find for us, Dorothy," he said. "I must know where it leads. What's the time?"

Dorothy glanced at her wristlet-watch: "A little after five."

Dale hesitated for a moment, thinking quickly. "Yes, I believe I'll chance it," he declared at length. "I will have to trust to luck that no one visits my cell before I get back. I must know where this leads."

"You're going through it, Brian?" There was half-concealed fear and trepidation in Dorothy's voice. "Is it necessary?"

"Well, I think it is," he returned. "It is just as well to know where this leads, as it may give us a quick way out to-night. I won't be long, Dorothy."

It needed a good deal of courage to enter the dark, musty-smelling passageway, but Brian Dale was not lacking in that. Without further hesitation he crawled through the opening and, having located the controlling springs inside the wall, closed the door. A second later it opened again. "Works all right, Dorothy, so there's no fear of my getting trapped. I will close it now and go on. Don't be alarmed."

In the stillness that followed the only sound that came to the ears of the anxious girl was the steady, unhurried tick-tick of the little watch upon her wrist. Dorothy dropped into the armchair, weary with the excitement of the day. Yet she knew that what was to come that night might be even more strenuous. If they could gain the rear of the temple and steal away in one of the native canoes all would be well.

But would the luck hold for them? Neither knew their way about the old building; to Dorothy it was little more than a maze of passages, yet she felt that she would take any risk rather than remain another night in this room into which there were so many strange entrances.

Minute after minute dragged by with a silence that became more tense and more oppressive to the pent-up feelings of the girl. Strange it is, but true, that the time which flies so swiftly by when one is happy, goes so slowly when one is in suspense. To Dorothy the minutes seemed interminable. She felt that her companion had taken a great risk in exploring the secret passageway, yet she was forced to admit that it was desirable to know just where it might lead.

She had glanced at her watch for the hundredth time, wondering what might have happened to the young man, when the heavy cloth covering the wall began to move, and a few seconds later Dale appeared. Carefully he closed the secret trap-door and came towards her.

Dorothy noticed that his face was grim, and his eyes unnaturally bright. Observing her intent gaze he forced a mirthless laugh to his lips.

"All serene, Dorothy! It is not a long passage, and leads to a room that Lemiere seems to use as a sort of dispensary. At least, it was well stocked with all sorts of drugs. I found something which might be very useful—if the necessity arises. Took it from one of the shelves."

He produced a small amber-coloured bottle from his pocket. Dorothy saw that it was filled with small tablets. "Tincture of Opium—Concentrated." She read the label in surprise. "That's laudanum, Brian. What is that for?"

Dale's face was very grim as he placed the bottle carefully in an inside pocket of his tattered tunic.

"Laudanum is a handy drug to use—if you have to," he said laconically. "These tablets may be very useful to us. If we want them they will be needed very badly. It does no harm to have them ready for use. . . . Now, I must be



getting back, Dorothy. I hope they haven't discovered my absence."

He moved across the room, drew the covering from the wall, and opened the door of the passageway which led to the cell in which he had been confined.

"Au revoir, Dorothy!" He smiled at his fair companion and patted her hand reassuringly. "Keep up your courage, my dear—you may need it all to-night! You can expect me back as soon as possible. But don't be alarmed if I do not turn up until dark."

Dorothy smiled tremulously at him. How she longed for his confidence and his courage! "Come back as soon as you can, Brian. I dread being alone in this room. Oh, I hope everything goes all right to-night!"

"So do I," rejoined the young man fervently, "and I'm sure it will."

But as he groped his way carefully through the dark stone passageway the air of cheerfulness which he had assumed fell from his face like a mask swiftly discarded. The recollection of what he had witnessed in that "dispensary" crowded upon him like some horrible nightmare. He wondered whether he had been able to conceal from Dorothy the horror which had stamped itself upon him, and which she must have glimpsed when he first came back into her room. He wondered what she would have done had it been she who had been suddenly confronted with that sickening sight, the memory of which he could not forget.

He knew now the real meaning of those blood-curdling screams which had terrified them both. In the darkness of the secret passageway he could see it again—the still, naked figure of a well-built native man, stretched out upon the stone floor in a pool of blood, a great gash in his right side, a short-handled dagger plunged to the hilt in his heart, and on his pain-distorted features an expression of such mingled horror and agonized fear as Dale had never imagined possible upon a human face.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ARCHWAY

A FEW minutes before six o'clock that same evening Lula brought to Dorothy a short note from Lemiere. The girl tore open the envelope and unfolded the blue-tinted paper with inward trepidation. The message was short and concise.

"MY DEAR DOROTHY,—I am expecting you to dine with me to-night. Seven o'clock is my usual hour; I trust that it will suit you. Lula will conduct you to the dining-room when you are ready.

GREGORY LEMIERE."

Dorothy bit her lip in perplexity as she read the few lines written in his perfect calligraphy. She had hoped that Lemiere was so deeply engrossed in his work that he would have forgotten her. But now he had sent for her, and to evade the summons was, she realized, quite impossible.

Just for an instant a wild idea entered her head that she might escape him by hiding in one of the secret passageways. But she reflected that Lemiere probably knew more about them than either she or Dale; and if he believed that they had any knowledge of these secret places he would soon remove both of them to some other part of the building. Dorothy's heart sank at the realization that there was no chance of escape from him. She would have to obey the summons, and use every effort to return to her room in time to prevent Dale from coming in quest of her—which she knew he certainly would do if he found her missing.

Vague fears troubled her as, at the appointed hour, she followed Lula along the gloomy corridors to the room which had apparently been set aside by Lemiere for use as a dining-



room. She wondered whether her queer host had been as quiet during the afternoon as Dale had supposed. And she wondered also what lay behind that dreadful scream which had so shaken her. But more than anything else Dorothy was afraid that Lemiere might take advantage of the *tête-à-tête* and indulge in another outburst of his passionate love-making.

She need not have worried upon that score, however.

The scientist's manner, when they met, resembled nothing so much as that of a man greeting an esteemed lady friend whom he has not seen for some time. Dorothy was amazed at the changing moods of the man, but she was relieved to find him thus. During the whole of the meal he treated her with civility and polite respect, but nothing more. In every way he was a polished gentleman, in speech, in manner, in actions. Not by one word did he mention what had happened in the garden that morning. Nor did he refer to Brian Dale, or to the scream which had puzzled her so much.

He chatted brightly upon a multitude of subjects, merging from one to another with the easy sang-froid of a man who finds conversation pleasant and exhilarating. Dorothy did nothing more than listen, and make a polite rejoinder now and again. Without a doubt he was, when he chose, a brilliant conversationalist; and Dorothy was obliged to admit that, had she not already had proof of his harsh, unyielding, callous nature, she would under ordinary circumstances have regarded him as a most congenial and interesting companion.

The only thing about him which had not changed was the penetrating gaze that he bent upon her. His keen, piercing black eyes, compelling and forceful, shining with unnatural brilliance, dominated her by the strength of their hypnotic influence. To meet his gaze for any length of time was impossible; those glittering eyes flashed and sparkled with an intensity that was almost preternatural.

The meal was nearly over when he sprang upon his companion the surprise which he had apparently kept in

restraint. His eyes flashed sharply towards her, scrutinizing every detail of her finely moulded features, which not even the stress of unwonted emotion could rob of their beauty and charm.

"Do you know, Dorothy," he remarked casually, "I have been indulging in a little deduction this afternoon during the course of my experiments. I find that nothing refreshes the brain so quickly and so surely as a brief period devoted to an entirely new trend of thought. Have you ever tried it? No? Well, I can recommend it. . . . This afternoon I have been working closely upon the further perfection of my ray, and I found the task imposing a great strain upon my mind, so for the space of a few minutes I cleared my thoughts by concentrating upon something else. I placed myself in the position of our friends upon the *Jessica*, and I wondered what I should do were I in their place."

He paused for a moment, and Dorothy shot a startled glance at him from lowered eyes. Lemiere was not watching her; his blazing eyes were fixed upon the opposite side of the room, with a vacant expression that denoted a far-away mind.

"'What should be done?' I asked myself. Obviously there was only one thing which could be done—only one quick, sure way of finding what had happened to Dorothy. And what was that? Why, by going high into the air again, for in no other way was it possible to obtain such a view of the countryside. When one is several hundred feet in the air, well, one may see many things." He laughed softly, and Dorothy, wondering what was coming next, stared at him in growing fear and astonishment.

Lemiere, apparently highly pleased with the sensation which he assumed his words had caused, continued: "Now how can one get into the air? Ah, that is indeed the problem! We have no balloons, no aeroplanes. But there is something which we can make, and which would serve as well as any balloon. There is plenty of material. Let us make another



kite, and with it go soaring high into the air, looking for—anything we might find! Safe? Of course it would be safe! It is hardly likely that there would be another squall following so quickly upon the last!”

Again he laughed that soft, smooth, self-satisfied chuckle. His keen eyes suddenly sought those of his companion.

“Yes, my dear Dorothy, I feel sure that to-morrow we shall see another kite hovering over the calm waters of Treasure Lake. As to who will fly with it, that I do not know, but I can guess. It will without doubt be the determined Major Wilding. He will soar high into the air, and he will see—what? Why, this remarkable old temple! At once he will appreciate the situation. Instinct will tell him that you are here. He will descend in haste. An expedition will set out at once. Success will seem assured. But alas! How unfortunate for the energetic Major that I should have foreseen what will occur! I will be ready for them. They cannot come through the rocks as you came. There is only one other approach.”

His eyes narrowed down to mere slits, and he spoke with great deliberation. “By this time to-morrow night some, at least, of your former companions will be my guests. I wonder how many.”

He paused, and suddenly broke into a loud, hoarse laugh—a violent outburst of mirthless sound that jarred sharply against the still atmosphere of the room. His piercing gaze fixed itself relentlessly upon his fair companion.

“Tell me, am I not right?” he demanded loudly. “What do you think of my deduction, Dorothy?” He leaned back in his chair and surveyed her in triumph.

His words filled the girl with a great sense of fear. In view of what Dale had seen through the periscope in the watch-tower, Lemiere’s outline of forthcoming events was, she knew, likely to be fulfilled—unless in the meantime she and Dale could escape and reach the launch. Her father and his friends would be almost sure to start in search of her

immediately they knew of the existence of the temple. But how had Lemiere guessed so accurately at their movements?

Could it be that Brian was wrong, that he had not been so deeply engrossed in his work as the young man had suspected? And if he had found time to climb to the tower, might he also not have made his way to her room by means of another secret passageway and overheard their conversation and their plans? The thought almost paralysed her with fear.

How much did the man know—and how much was mere guesswork? Dorothy would have given a great deal to know the answer to that question. Was it possible that he had requested her to dine with him just to torment her, and to show he knew all that was being planned? That thought drove real terror right into her heart. At all costs, she realized, she must endeavour to humour him—to find out just how he had arrived at his knowledge of the movements of those on the launch.

With lightning rapidity these thoughts ran through Dorothy’s brain as she wondered how she could best attain that objective. A swift inspiration seized her.

Forcing an expression of surprise to her countenance, she half raised her eyes to his.

“Why—I hadn’t thought about them doing anything like that,” she murmured, with a well-simulated mingling of astonishment and embarrassment. “What made you think they would do so? Did you see them?” She threw out the feeler in a curious, half-hesitant manner.

Lemiere smiled with satisfaction at the result occasioned by the announcement of his theory.

“No, I did not see them,” he declared, “I merely used my brains. The trouble with ninety per cent. of the inhabitants of this world, my dear Dorothy,” he stated dogmatically, “is that they do not use the brains which Providence has seen fit to give them—and if the remaining ten per cent. take full advantage of that fact can anyone blame them? I



simply placed myself on the launch for a brief period, and looked at the position from our friends' viewpoint. There is not the slightest doubt that my conclusions are correct."

His amazing self-conceit, his appraisalment of his own value, aroused a sense of irritation in his companion, but Dorothy managed to hide her scorn beneath a look of concern.

"Do you—do you intend to use force to drive them off?" she asked, with real anxiety.

Lemiere laughed outright.

"Drive them off? Why, my dear young lady, that is just what I do not want to do! I want them here, for a while anyway. I have an idea that we can arrange matters splendidly between ourselves when the whole company is present. Besides, I am particularly anxious to meet your father, and to give him a demonstration of my ray. As a medical man of the old school he will assuredly be astonished at my discovery. Then, too, I am anxious to meet the determined Major Wilding, of whom I have heard so much. Drive them off?"

He laughed again. "No. I hope to induce them to visit me for a while. You are wondering whether my people would attack them? Please set your mind at rest. My methods, Dorothy, are somewhat above the crude knife-throwing of the natives. I hope to arrange matters so that no one will be hurt."

He rose abruptly from the table with that swift, nervous action so characteristic of the man.

"And now, Dorothy, I regret that I must leave you. I thank you for your company to-night. You are a perfect listener, if I may venture to say so."

He bowed as the girl rose from her chair. "If you prefer to remain in this room, entertainment from every capital city in Australasia is at your finger-tips"—he indicated the handsome radio receiving-set which stood in one corner of the softly illumined room.

"Thank you, but I think I would prefer to go to my

room," said Dorothy, with a well-feigned air of weariness. "I am rather tired, and will retire early," she added casually.

Lemiere bowed in acquiescence.

"Perhaps you are wise," he observed, with a keen glance at her. "Sleep is Nature's great restorative. It works more miracles than all the medicine in the world. For myself, I have work which must be completed to-night. Please command Lula for anything you may require."

Dorothy murmured conventional thanks, and then, his words arousing in her a swift suspicion, she faced him squarely.

"By the way, Doctor, I thought I heard an unusual sound this afternoon—a scream, as though someone were in pain. Did you hear it?" She asked the question with an air of polite indifference, as though she might have been mistaken.

Lemiere flashed upon her a quick, penetrating stare.

"I think you must have been mistaken," he said levelly. "I certainly heard nothing unusual this afternoon. A scream, you said?" He shook his head and smiled as her. "Perhaps it was a dream—the banal influence of an over-excited mind. You need a night's rest, my dear girl."

"Yes," answered Dorothy mechanically. "No doubt it was a dream."

He paused before her, raised her hand to his lips, and bent over it with an old-world courtliness that became him admirably.

"Good-night, Dorothy," he murmured gently.

For a brief instant his piercing eyes flashed into hers. Then he turned and strode leisurely through the curtain-covered doorway.

It was with mingled feelings that Dorothy hastened to her room and, having ascertained that there was no immediate fear of intrusion, cautiously opened the secret door to the passageway along which Brian Dale would have to



come. The dark, gloomy passage, with its strange old, musty smell, filled her with a sense of fear and loathing; she wondered how Dale could grope his way through the uncanny place, the very thought of which sent little shivers of dread through her.

There was no sign of the young man; not a sound broke the stillness of the summer night. Dorothy glanced at her watch. It was just a little after eight o'clock, and, having carefully closed the secret door, she threw herself into the chair and awaited his arrival with all the patience she could muster.

The night had not yet draped its mantle of darkness over the countryside, but with every passing minute the light grew fainter and fainter, and Dorothy knew that, if all was going according to plan, it would not be very long before Brian Dale would make his appearance. She remembered him mentioning that his cell was lit by a small window, and it was unlikely, she thought, that he would leave until it became quite dark. It might, therefore, be half-an-hour or more before she could expect him—providing that he had not been removed to another place of confinement.

The thought of such a contretemps caused a mild panic within her, and her uneasiness grew more intense as the minutes went slowly by, while the darkness came down and enveloped the old temple in the impenetrable velvet shroud of an inland night. In the distance the wind moaned weirdly through the trees on the hillsides; now and again the silence of the night was sharply broken by the unfamiliar calls of birds winging their way over the lake.

To Dorothy's highly strung imagination there seemed to be everywhere an air of brooding mystery, of taut suspense, that kept her overwrought nerves tingling painfully. She longed for the time to come when they should start the great adventure; whatever its dangers, she felt that action of any kind would be preferable to this dreadful, nerve-racking period of waiting.

How much did Lemiere actually know of their plans? That was the question which constantly arose in her mind. The attitude of the man was puzzling in the extreme. Was it possible, she wondered, that he had been playing a game of bluff; that he had merely endeavoured to delude her into a belief that he anticipated no further developments until the morrow.

Dorothy was still pondering over this aspect of the matter when the secret panel in the wall began to swing open, and a few seconds later Dale was in the room. The girl greeted him with undisguised delight and relief. His appearance lifted a great weight from her mind.

"Brian, I wondered whether anything had happened to you," she breathed as, having closed the stone door, he stood beside her in the gloom. "I thought perhaps you might have been moved away, and couldn't get here."

Dale grinned in the darkness, and patted her hand reassuringly.

"Something very nearly did happen to me," he said calmly. "I hadn't been three minutes in my cell when a couple of niggers appeared on the scene. Jove, it was a close shave! If I'd waited five minutes longer the game would have been up! As it is, all's well that ends well. And I will say this for our mad Professor, he certainly sent me an excellent meal. Apparently he doesn't want me to die of starvation! I don't know what it all was, but there was plenty of it. What have you been doing, Dorothy? Dined like a princess in solitary splendour, I suppose?"

His cheery manner was infectious, and Dorothy found her spirits rising. She smiled at him through the gathering gloom, as they sat together on the edge of the bed, waiting for complete darkness.

"Brian, I have had a most amazing time! I have been dining with the Professor—by request!"

The young man stared at her in surprise, his lips pursed in a whistle which he just checked in time.



"By request? Tell me what happened, Dorothy. Tell me everything. It's too early to start out yet. What did he say? What did he do?"

"Oh, he was quite nice and polite, Brian," answered the girl hurriedly. "He did not refer to you, or to—to—what happened this morning in the garden. But he said things that have made me feel very uneasy ever since."

For safety's sake the electric light had not been switched on. Through the open windows came the faint iridescence of the summer night, its star-bespangled cloudless dome as yet unspashed by the pale whiteness of the moon. Sitting close beside her stalwart companion in the dim light, his big, firm hands encircling hers protectively, Dorothy gave him every detail of the events that had transpired at the evening meal. Dale listened with keen attention, not once interrupting the low, soft voice which fell like sweet music upon his ears; and when she had finished her tale he remained deep in thought for a time.

"You see, Brian, he may know a lot, or he may know nothing. He may have no idea at all of our plans for to-night. He never mentioned you once. But somehow he gave me the impression that he was trying to make me believe he expected nothing to happen until to-morrow. He is so strange that I don't know what to make of him."

There was a frown upon Dale's set features as he pondered this unexpected news.

"It's hard to know what to believe," he said at length. "The man has such hypnotic influence that he might have frightened you unduly. I saw him twice this afternoon, and on each occasion he was deep in some experimenting. It doesn't seem probable, though I admit it may be possible, that he spied on us from another secret hiding-place and overheard our plans. I don't see how he could have done it. . . . Then there's another thing. You remember that scream?" Dorothy shuddered at the recollection. "Lemiere was responsible for that, I am sure." He did not tell her on

what grounds he based his assertion—of the dreadful sight he had witnessed at the end of that last passage, the memory of which, even now, hours afterwards, aroused in him a feeling of nausea.

"You see, Dorothy, it does not seem at all likely that he would leave one of his ghastly experiments just on the chance of finding us together. He could not know I had discovered that secret passageway. He had probably forgotten me altogether, and you too. As to his reference to the kite, more than likely he went to the tower just before dark and saw it through the periscope—it was standing in the open on the launch, and could easily be seen. Don't you think I am right?"

Dorothy was forced to admit that her companion's chain of reasoning might be correct.

"Anyway, even if he does know something, we shall just have to take our chance. We are in an awkward position, and must trust to luck. What do you say, Dorothy? Myself, I think we would be wise to go ahead. Are you prepared to take a risk, or will you stay here?"

But the mere thought of such an alternative was hateful to the girl.

"No, no," she murmured, in a choking whisper. "Brian, I don't want to stay here a moment longer than I can help. Let us go, and chance everything."

A vision of Lemiere's blazing, passion-filled eyes rose before her in the darkness; she felt again that fierce, sensuous grip of his arms. "Brian, I don't care whether he knows what we are doing! I don't care if he is waiting outside now! Let us go as soon as we can. If we stay here much longer I will kill him—or myself!"

Her deadly vehemence staggered the young man. Hitherto he had always regarded Dorothy as a warm-hearted, impulsive, generous girl. Her swift transition into blazing womanhood was something which, being a man, he could not fully understand. Yet he was able to sympathize with her, for the



little he had seen of Lemiere had aroused in him a violent distrust of the man. His clasp tightened over her hands.

"If there's any killing to be done, I hope I will have a hand in it," he said savagely. "I'd give a lot to get my hands round his neck! He'd want more than an invisible ray to save him then! . . . However, let's hope we see no more of him, and that before long we will be out of this place for ever."

"What time shall we start, Brian?"

"Not until ten o'clock at the earliest. The moon will be up by then, and if we can manage to reach the back of the temple and get one of the canoes we should have a good chance of gaining the lake unseen. And then I don't think it will take much to persuade your father to slip through the tunnel before Lemiere knows we're gone. Whether there is gold here or not I don't know, but one thing I am certain of is that there will be bloodshed if we stay and fight this madman. We could mow these niggers down easily with our rifles. But what's the good of slaughtering them? I could put a bullet into Lemiere with the greatest pleasure, but I'm dashed if I can see any sense in killing these poor beggars."

"You are right, Brian. It would be murder. If we can reach the launch, Daddy won't need any persuading to leave for home—not after what's happened to you and me."

In silence they waited, hand in hand, while the minutes ticked slowly past. The full moon rose, a huge ball of fire at first, but quickly subsiding into an orb of silver floating with queenly stateliness in the cloudless sky, and splashing the hills, the rocks, the trees, with its pale mellow light.

Dorothy felt her heart beating wildly as the time to leave drew nearer and nearer. The excitement lent her a courage which was not altogether genuine; but Dale's presence, and his firm clasp upon her hands, brought confidence to her in large measure.

A weird, uncanny stillness overhung the ancient temple;

not the faintest sound came to their straining ears. From all outward appearances they might well have been the only inhabitants of that ghostly building, reminiscent of centuries of intrigue and mysticism. In the semi-darkness the watchers felt its influence keenly. It kept them on the alert, their nerves a-tingle, their faculties wrought to concert-pitch.

At half-past ten Dale slipped noiselessly across the room.

He took no chances. Standing well inside he gripped the curtain covering the door and with a quick movement jerked it aside. The sudden swish of the heavy curtain broke the silence—and all was still again.

For perhaps half-a-minute he remained motionless as a shadow, and then, moving stealthily forward, peered cautiously into the passage. So far as he could see in the dim light it was quite deserted. Here and there along its length the fitful light of the moon streamed in through narrow windows, throwing a ghostly radiance upon the grey stone walls. Dale watched for upwards of a minute, and then returned to Dorothy.

"Everything seems clear," he murmured. "Ready?"

Dorothy's heart was beating madly, and she strove to master her emotion. "I'm ready, Brian."

The young man hesitated a moment, and then, plunging his hand into his tunic, he drew forth the bottle of laudanum tablets which he had taken from Lemiere's dispensary that afternoon.

"We are starting out on something that may lead us anywhere, Dorothy," he murmured slowly. "We don't know what we are up against, and I think we had better take no greater risks than are necessary. Before we go, you must take half of these tablets. If anything should happen you may find them invaluable. I hope they won't have to be used, but—well, you never can tell."

Dorothy understood his meaning perfectly. Her face went a shade whiter, but she made no comment as he shook out some of the small tablets, which he rolled in a strip of the



torn sheet that Dorothy had used to bandage his head a few hours previously. The girl slipped the package into the breast-pocket of her khaki shirt, and Dale returned the bottle to its place of concealment on his own person.

He turned towards her with a smile, and his eyes met hers in a glance of mutual understanding. Their hands met in a firm clasp. Together they crossed the rush-covered floor and passed beyond the curtained doorway. Some queer trick of memory brought to Dale's mind an old Latin proverb which he had learned long ago at college. "Jacta est alea," he murmured as the heavy curtain swung back into place behind them.

Brian Dale was right. The die had indeed been cast! Come what might now, there must be no turning back.

The entrance to Dorothy's room stood almost in the centre of the long corridor. Lemiere's rooms lay to their right; to the left Dorothy remembered was the way which she had gone with Lula that morning towards the swimming-pool, and, thinking that freedom might well lie somewhere there, they commenced to make their way in that direction.

Silently as ghosts they crept along the dimly lit passage. Dale blessed the inspiration which had made him don rubber-soled shoes before his adventure with the kite; Dorothy had exchanged her heavy boots for the neat-fitting slippers which Lemiere had placed for her in her room; and they moved down the stone corridor without a sound.

At its far end the passage branched in two directions, the pale light of the moon, filtering through a long narrow window, striking the centre of the Y in which they stood. That on the left was the one which led to the swimming-pool. After a momentary hesitation and a whispered consultation they decided to follow the right-hand path, and in a very few minutes found themselves in the midst of a maze of passages that branched to right and left in hopeless confusion.

Neither the young man nor his companion had the faintest

idea where they were. The main passage, which they had been following, was poorly lit—indeed for the most part it was in a state of semi-gloom, broken only by the ghostly radiance of the moonlight which streamed in through occasional small windows set high up in the stone wall. It twisted and wound round in tortuous fashion, and after half-an-hour's wandering neither of the fugitives could have told with any certainty whether they were in the main passageway in which they had started out, or whether they had strayed into one of the many narrow corridors that branched off in every direction.

Of one thing only they could be sure, and that was the unmistakable fact that the passage which they were following sloped continually downwards. At times the stone floor beneath their feet dropped at an alarming incline in the darkness, sloping steeply for perhaps twenty or thirty yards before it again reached a normal level. Never once did they find themselves upon an upward grade, and they therefore realized that the passage must eventually bring them to the lower part of the old temple.

With infinite caution, hand in hand they slowly crept along the deserted stone corridors. Extreme care was essential, for in the dead silence the slightest sound might have been caught up and re-echoed from wall to wall. Like wraiths they went noiselessly forward, and ever downward, until they seemed to have travelled miles along the winding passages.

Dorothy never forgot the memory of that weird journey in the dead of night through the heart of the old temple. At times they were for several minutes in utter darkness, groping their way with arms outstretched to the cold stone of the walls, but eventually a turn in the passage would bring them into a section dimly illuminated, where here and there the soft moonlight streamed fitfully across the bare floor, or played in mystic fashion upon the opposite wall.

Dorothy Treloare was possessed of more courage than is



part of the make-up of the average modern girl, but not for worlds would she have ventured alone through those weirdly lit passages, at every turn of which her highly strung imagination conjured up a vision of some gruesome spectre close at hand. The deathly stillness, the heavy calm, that enveloped the ancient temple and all within it, beat upon her with fierce intensity. Oppressive as the noontide heat of a broiling summer day, yet cold with the clamminess of unknown dread, the silence crushed her, breathless and choking, beneath its pall-like weight.

Twice she stumbled and nearly fell full-length upon the stone floor; each time only the firm hold of Dale's strong arm saved her.

Sensing something of the nervous agitation which consumed his overwrought companion the young man halted for a moment, and passed an arm protectively round her shoulders. His sympathetic understanding was like a soothing balm to Dorothy's jangled nerves. His firm, reassuring touch quickly restored the confidence which had been so sorely shaken by the unearthly atmosphere, and after a little time they continued the downward journey.

The brief halt in that eerie stillness acted like a tonic upon both the man and the girl. Yet to Dorothy, she thought, Brian Dale had always been like that, though she had never realized it quite so fully before. Never pushing himself forward, he somehow always seemed to be in the background ready to help or to comfort her without causing her embarrassment. Dorothy felt sure that in her overwrought state of mind she would have screamed had he attempted to kiss her just then when she clung to him for protection; some men—a good many, in fact—might well have taken advantage of the opportunity. But what he had done was just like Dale, she thought—that gentle pressure of his arm round her shoulders, helping her, yet seeking no reward for his assistance.

A sudden turn in the passage brought them into the

moonlight again, and they were quick to observe that the passageway had now widened until it was some twelve feet across. The stone floor felt almost level beneath their feet.

With rising hopes and fast-beating hearts the two adventurers pressed forward more rapidly; the way was clear, and the widened passageway well lit by the moonlight which poured in through the larger and more regular openings that served as windows in the left-hand wall. A little farther on the passage turned sharply to the right. They followed it round, and suddenly stood transfixed with surprise and delight.

Ahead of them was a dark, wide hall, perhaps fifty yards long. It ended in a lofty archway, silhouetted sharply against the brilliant moonlight, and beyond it the calm waters of an inlet gleamed dully in the silver light.

Dorothy could scarcely conceal her joy. Her eyes shone with excitement and relief.

"Brian! Look! Oh, we're free! We have reached the water! At last we can get away!"

Dale's grip on her arm tightened. "Ssh! Steady, Dorothy!" he whispered. "Don't make so much noise. We're not quite out of it yet. Quietly, dear!"

Dorothy scarcely heard him. Almost beside herself with joy at sight of freedom at last before her, she slipped from his restraining clasp and ran, rather than walked, over the stone floor and through the massive archway. Dale followed her closely, more calmly, yet equally elated and somewhat curious as to where they were.

This entrance to the temple was plainly not the one which they had hoped to locate. From the position of the moon Dale guessed that it was facing the north, whereas he knew that the main rear entrance was at the western end of the building. To make for that, however, was impossible, for the water lapped up against the stone wall, and the only way to reach the canoes was by swimming—a hazardous,



and even dangerous, undertaking, since they did not know how far they would have to go.

The stream of water in front of them was not more than fifty yards wide; on the opposite side the bank sloped gently backwards to a height of perhaps two hundred feet, and in the brilliant moonlight they could see that it was thickly covered with the shrubs and short, leafy trees which grew so plentifully in this strange region.

"We shall have to swim for it, Brian," said Dorothy calmly.

The young man remained silent for a moment, endeavouring to reconstruct the general position of the temple as he had seen it from the air.

"We are facing roughly north-east, Dorothy," he said at last. "If we can cross this stream, and then strike out south, we should reach the lake. We cannot be more than a mile or so from it, at the most. Yes, we shall have to swim for it, Dorothy. I'm afraid there's nothing else for it. Do you mind?"

Dorothy laughed in the exuberance of her spirits. "Of course not! I don't expect you to carry a boat around with you, Brian. It's a warm night, and we can——" She broke off very suddenly; her face went deathly white. Her fingers closed on Dale's arm in a sharp, nervous grip.

"Brian! Look! What's that?"

The young man followed her pointing finger, and his body grew suddenly rigid. A man was rowing slowly in a small native canoe towards the archway. His back was towards them, but in that brilliant flood of light there was no need to guess twice at his identity.

It was Gregory Lemiere.

The amazing suddenness of the man's unexpected appearance took the fugitives completely by surprise; for a second or two it cast a paralysing numbness over the two who had but a moment before seen freedom within their grasp.

Dale was the first to recover from the shock. The sight of that steadily approaching dreaded figure galvanized him into instant activity. With a quick movement he swung Dorothy back into the shadow of the archway.

"Quick! Back out of the light!" His whispered voice was tense and strained. "Keep close against the wall. He will probably walk through and not see us in the darkness. If we can get that boat our luck will be in!"

The swiftly unexpected development dazed his companion. Dorothy's heart was beating so fiercely that she felt sure Lemiere must hear it in the stillness of the night. Dale's big hands closed upon her arm with a grip that under ordinary circumstances would have made her wince with pain, yet she scarcely felt the pressure. Together they crouched close against the rough stone wall far back from the entrance.

The canoe came nearer and nearer; they could hear the faint *plash-plash* of the paddle in the stilly air. At last it bumped lightly against the stone landing. Lemiere got out leisurely and tied up the boat by a short length of rope to an iron peg let into the wall. He seemed to be in no hurry, though the hour was after midnight; to the anxious, straining watchers his unhurried movements were maddening.

Beneath the archway at the entrance to the hall Lemiere paused for a while, and stretched his tall frame as though to relieve the muscles cramped by long sitting in the small canoe. Not twenty yards behind him, in an agony of suspense, his erstwhile guests watched with a feeling of growing apprehension as he drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, selected a weed, and rattled a match-box with the curious habit which many men have before lighting up. The match scraped loudly in the silence; the darkness was stabbed by the sudden flare of the flame. The fugitives instinctively shrank closer against the unyielding wall, but Lemiere, facing the still water, saw nothing behind him. He leaned against the stone archway and smoked leisurely, and the



scent of the fragrant tobacco came floating in on the soft night breeze.

For several minutes Lemiere remained motionless, apparently deep in thought. His tall, spare figure, in sharp silhouette against the moonlit exterior, might have been that of a statue. Then quite suddenly he moved, flung his half-finished cigarette into the water, and turned to enter the temple. To the watchers his slow, deliberate movements were like torture.

He had barely taken a dozen steps forward when he stopped abruptly. Perhaps it was a strange, half-indefinite sense that all was not as it should be in the old hall-way that made him hesitate; it may have been just the natural desire for more light of one who enters a dark room. Whatever the reason, his next action took the fugitives both by surprise. There came the sudden click of a switch, and the hall-way was bathed in a flood of brilliant yellow light from a powerful electric globe suspended high up in the ceiling.

The swift transition from semi-darkness to glaring light was almost blinding to the crouching fugitives, whose eyes had for so many hours been accustomed to the dim illumination of the moonlight in the old building. The brilliant light revealed every nook and cranny of the ancient hall-way. Beneath its penetrating glare they cowered helplessly against the lofty stone wall, dismayed and startled by this unexpected turn of events. To flee was futile; for all they knew Lemiere might be armed, and in any case their very unfamiliarity with the temple would have made escape difficult, if not actually impossible.

There was nothing for it but to remain where they were, humiliated and cornered; and with the realization of their position came once more to the minds of both that dread feeling that again they were in the grip of their powerful captor, who seemed to thwart every avenue of escape. Dorothy fought bravely to choke down the tears of disappointment that welled in her eyes; to Dale the realization

of their helpless position brought a sense of savage recklessness that knew no bounds. Five minutes more and they would have been free; now that sinister figure barred the way. There was blind rage in the young man's heart as he and his companion faced Lemiere, yet he strove to calm himself, knowing full well that if disaster was to be averted he would need all his faculties on the alert.

For perhaps ten seconds after the light had flooded the hall-way Lemiere stood motionless, his hand upon the switch. His peculiar eyes adapted themselves to the intense glare almost immediately; as they did so, utter amazement stamped itself upon his lean countenance.

For the first time in many years Gregory Lemiere's remarkable self-composure when confronted with an unexpected emergency had been rudely shattered; he was forced to admit that he had been temporarily thrown off his balance. Dorothy and Dale had been surprised to see him come paddling down the stream at midnight, but their astonishment was negligible compared with that which swept him at sight of his two captives crouching against the side of the old hall-way, blinking dazedly at him through the harsh, bright light. Amazement was writ large upon the face which normally was sphinxlike in its immobility; they were the last people in the temple whom he had expected to see there that night.

The surprise which struck him into momentary inactivity did not, however, long retain its influence. The self-control which seemed so natural in him quickly reasserted itself. Before either of the two fugitives had become accustomed to the intense illumination he had completely recovered his composure, and the face which they saw through the glaring light was utterly devoid of expression.

He stood a little away from the wall, and surveyed them curiously.

"Good-evening, Dorothy! Good-evening, Mr Dale!" His voice was toneless and conventional. "This is indeed



a pleasant surprise. I had thought that both of you would have been asleep long ago. I am surprised at you, Mr Dale, keeping Dorothy out until this late—or perhaps I should say early—hour. What do you mean by such conduct?”

His bantering words took the young man very much by surprise. Watching him warily, Dale hardly knew what to do; he experienced an uncomfortable feeling as of a cat playing with a mouse—and himself the mouse. Had Lemiere made a sudden attack upon him he would have acted with promptness and precision; before this badinage of words he felt confused and uncertain.

Lemiere did not wait for an answer to his question. He went on smoothly and calmly, his penetrating gaze taking them both within its sweep, and then lingering upon Dale:

“I suppose you found your way to Dorothy’s room *via* the old ‘priests’ channel’ through the walls. Ah! I thought you might perhaps discover it, but to be candid, my dear Dale, I did not think you were clever enough to do so. You have advanced considerably in my estimation.” He paused momentarily, his piercing eyes boring through them. “I sincerely hope that you did not intend to depart without a word, of farewell, yet I find that this conclusion forces itself upon me. How very fortunate that I should happen to return at the psychological moment! In another five minutes you would, I suppose, have been immersed in the cold water. Well, you must thank me for saving you a wetting and—I can assure you—a quite fruitless crossing. For your own sakes everything has resulted for the best. Across the stream are dangers which you could not conceive, since you know nothing of them.”

His tone changed suddenly; his voice became cold and menacing: “Come! You will return with me. I myself will conduct you to your respective apartments—by paths much shorter than those which you have probably just traversed.”

He advanced nonchalantly towards them. Dorothy shrank

against the wall, consumed by mingled terror and despair. Beside her, Dale’s body became swiftly taut and rigid. His eyes never left those of the man strolling leisurely towards him. Dorothy felt the quick movement of his muscles. Instinctively she guessed his purpose, and with a sharp feeling of dread at what might follow she opened her mouth to utter a warning. Lemiere was just a few yards away. Before her trembling lips could frame the words Dale sprang. The next few seconds were so filled with action that Dorothy could scarcely follow what happened.

With an almost casual movement Lemiere slipped aside just as Dale sprang at him. Before the young man could recover his balance Lemiere’s right arm shot out, gripped Dale by the shoulder, and with a peculiar twisting motion became suddenly rigid.

The effect upon the young man was extraordinary. Impelled by the skill, rather than the force, of the ju-jutsu movement he shot helplessly forward, crashing heavily upon the stone floor. Dorothy’s eyes dilated with the sudden fear of broken limbs, or worse, as he thudded against the stone.

Lemiere, standing between her and Dale, surveyed his fallen opponent with neither triumph nor concern. His features were impassive, his attitude one of complete indifference. Neither by laboured breath nor in any other way did he give the slightest sign of exertion behind that forceful movement.

Fortunately for the young man his relaxed body sustained nothing more serious than bruises from his unexpected impact against the stone floor. But the rage which he had known before now became a fierce, blazing passion. The humiliation of what had happened made him utterly reckless, yet at the same time aroused in his subconscious mind the knowledge that here was an opponent who must be treated with respect. His eyes were gleaming with hate as he warily got to his feet.

Dorothy watched him in growing terror. She knew full



well that in his present mood the young man would fight against overwhelming odds until he could fight no more—and she shuddered at his fate.

“Brian!” she called sharply.

Lemiere’s swiftly upraised hand commanded silence.

“Let us have no more of this unseemly brawling.” His steely voice was cold as ice. His eyes swept over Dale with fierce intensity. “You may be a fighter, young man, but it is foolish and futile to fight a losing battle. I warn you that I am a man who will not be trifled with! You are—— Get back, you fool! Get back!”

His voice rose into a stern command. Dale, mad with fury, rushed at him blindly. Lemiere suddenly slipped across the hall, his right hand plunged into his coat-pocket. Dale, with a cry of triumph, and confident now that the man was bluffing, dashed after him.

Lemiere’s hand flashed from his pocket as Dale sprang towards him. The scream that rose to Dorothy’s drawn lips choked to a low gurgle of surprised horror. Instead of the pistol or the native trumpet which she had expected to see Lemiere’s hand held a small glass globe, about the size of a walnut.

“You’ve asked for it, my friend, so you shall have it,” he hissed between his clenched teeth.

The glass ball, flung with unerring aim at that short distance, struck the young man upon the bandage which encircled his forehead. It burst with a crack that sounded strangely loud in the silence of the night, and to Dorothy’s utter horror a little cloud of pale blue gas suddenly enveloped his head.

For an instant Dale swayed upon his feet like a drunken man; the next he collapsed in an inert heap upon the stone floor. The gas drifted slowly up to the vaulted roof; in less than ten seconds it had disappeared completely, and the only indication that anything unusual had occurred was the huddled form of the young man upon the floor.

With such amazing rapidity had everything happened that for a while Dorothy was paralysed into inaction. Fear and astonishment rooted her to the spot—fear that Dale had met his death, astonishment at the ease with which he had been overpowered.

But the sight of that mute figure quickly roused her into activity. With a sharp, choking cry she started to rush towards him, when Lemiere intervened. Swiftly crossing the hall, he seized her firmly by the arms.

Dorothy struggled furiously to free herself.

“Let me go, you monster!” she cried fiercely. “Let me go! Oh, you have killed him! You inhuman brute! Oh, I hate you!”

Lemiere held her as he would a screaming child.

“Calm yourself, Dorothy,” said he coolly. “He is not dead, by any means. And if he were, your cries could not bring him back to life.”

Dorothy stared at him dazedly.

“Not dead?” she repeated dully, and finding resistance useless wisely ceased her frantic struggling. “Not dead? Then what has happened to him? Why is he so still?”

“Because he has been drugged,” answered Lemiere calmly.

Dorothy gazed at him in astonishment, and with a growing feeling of revulsion. “Drugged?”

“Yes. You need not worry about him. He will recover later and be none the worse for it. That pale blue gas which you saw surrounding him was one of my first experimental discoveries. Science would give a great deal to know the formula of that gas, Dorothy. It is prepared in the form of a liquid, contained in a light glass-bulb, and of such remarkable volatility that it vaporizes into a gas as soon as it meets the oxygen in the air. I have found it wonderfully useful, I can assure you, Dorothy. It is far more effective than a pistol, which is one of the crudest things on earth. The gas is almost odourless, and, like my ray, has no unpleasant



after-effects. When our young friend here awakes in the morning he will feel none the worse for his experience. Indeed, he will enjoy several hours of pleasant, dreamless sleep, which he might otherwise not have obtained."

He paused, and laughed softly, his face close to hers. "You surely did not think, Dorothy, that I would go about this place entirely unprotected? Ah, no! Please credit me with a little more intelligence than that! . . . And some day all my secrets will be yours! The world will honour us as it has honoured none before—not even kings and princes! We have it almost within our grasp—you and I together; we shall rule the world!"

His words, his maniacal laugh, his blazing eyes filled with an inhuman brilliance, seemed to come to Dorothy from a vast distance, as in some dreadful dream. The glaring light was swimming before her eyes; the old stone walls seemed to be swaying at an alarming angle. Everything was going round in circles. Her overwrought brain could stand no more. . . .

Lemiere saw her going, and swiftly flung his arms round her. As she drifted into unconsciousness Dorothy had a vision of a still form lying hunched upon the stone floor, and two blazing eyes that seemed to sear deep into her very soul. Then everything went swiftly black, and with a choking gasp she collapsed heavily into his arms.

## CHAPTER XI

### AMBUSHED

HALF-AN-HOUR after the time when Dorothy Treloare and Brian Dale began the journey through the temple, which led to the events described in the preceding pages, a scene of unusual activity might have been observed upon the *Jessica*, which floated peacefully on the calm, moonlit waters of Treasure Lake.

In the brilliant moonlight it was possible to see around the launch almost as easily as in daylight, and therefore the electric lights were not used. That, of course, was not the only reason why it had been decided to dispense with the unnecessarily brilliant illumination. The principal reason lay in the fact that it was desired to carry out the night's activities with the greatest possible caution, and the interest which might have been aroused by a display of many electric-light globes burning brightly was hardly conducive to secrecy.

There was ample light for the purpose, for the moon was almost at the full; yet it bore this peculiar advantage, that it was not sufficiently strong to allow anyone from a distance to observe just what was being undertaken. The star-studded sky was cloudless; the only sound that broke the stillness of the night was the rustle of the east wind through the trees which grew so thickly on the amphitheatre of hills round the lake.

In a clear space of the bows of the *Jessica* a large box-kite stood on end; Major Wilding was busily attaching a strong rope to one end, while Sandy MacTavish, an oil-can in his hand, endeavoured to locate an elusive squeak which had



developed in the windlass, upon which was wound a little more than a thousand feet of stout rope. A squeak in any machinery was anathema to MacTavish's mechanically minded soul, but on this occasion he had another reason for locating it. At the speed at which the rope was expected to run from the windlass that squeak might easily develop into a pronounced shriek, which would carry a great distance in the calm atmosphere.

Captain Dixon and Dr Treloare stood near the kite, and conversed in low tones with Wilding as he completed his final preparations.

The Doctor had changed marvellously in the last twenty-four hours. The mishap to Dale, followed almost immediately by the inexplicable disappearance of Dorothy, had worried him so much that he had obtained little sleep the previous night. Indeed, had it not been for the brief message from the girl which they had found to their astonishment upon the saloon table that morning, the mental strain induced by the worry might have proved disastrous to him.

Brief and mystifying though it undoubtedly was, that short note had revived the hopes of them all, for it proved at least that the girl was alive and in no immediate danger of her life. Whence it had come was an absolute mystery. Where could she be, how had she got there, and who had taken her? These were but a few of the questions that ran freely back and forth over the breakfast-table that morning, but not one reasonable explanation could be put forward to solve the mystery—until a sudden inspiration came to the grim-faced explorer.

"I can't for the life of me think what has happened to her," groaned the Doctor for the hundredth time, running his shaking fingers through his greying hair. "We have seen no sign of any other human beings here; as far as we can tell, the place is deserted except for ourselves. Yet those muddy footprints! . . . Who made them? . . . Curse that

chart! I wish I'd never seen the damned thing! First Dale gone, blown away in a storm, and now Dorothy. In God's name, where can she be?"

Wilding, who had been strangely silent during the meal, spoke suddenly. There was a frown upon his heavy face, and his words were calm and considered.

"How do we know that this place is deserted?" he demanded. "Beyond the fact that we've seen no one, we know nothing at all. We may not have seen them because they did not want to be seen. There is somebody here who speaks English, who is well provided with the comforts of civilization, and who has servants who will carry out his instructions with more obedience than the average white servant. And he has an uncanny knowledge of our movements."

The Doctor and Captain Dixon looked at him blankly.

"How do you know all that?" exploded the Doctor. "You're guessing, Wilding; it's pure guesswork."

"Not entirely, Doctor," rejoined the explorer. "I have been accustomed to saving my life by the quick use of my brains, and it tends to make a man observant."

He picked up the sheet of notepaper upon which Dorothy's message had been written. "Look at this paper. Feel its quality. Has Dorothy anything like that on the boat? And if she had, would she be likely to carry it around with her in the pocket of her sports tunic, or her riding-breeches? It would have been impossible for her to do that, because it is a fair-sized sheet of writing-paper, and she would have had to roll or fold it to carry it with her. Yet this sheet has plainly been folded only twice—after it was written on too. Then take the envelope. It matches the paper exactly, both as to quality, size and colour. Is it likely that Dorothy would have in her pocket paper and envelopes like this? No. So that proves she must be with someone, presumably an educated person with somewhat fancy tastes, who has supplied her not only with this paper, but also with pen and ink to write. And that person must be able to speak English,



as otherwise how would Dorothy know that she was in no immediate danger?"

The argument was unanswerable.

The Doctor brought his clenched fist down upon the table. "By God! you're right, Wilding," he exclaimed. "I never thought of it in that way."

"With regard to the servants," pursued Wilding calmly, "look at it from this viewpoint. Dorothy has been taken away from the launch by one or more people, as we can well assume from the muddy footprints on the deck. Yet she has been unharmed, and in fact carefully treated, according to her letter—which, by the way, I think we can accept as genuine, since the writing fully corresponds to other examples we have here. That is important, because it proves that whoever took her away not only received strict instructions upon the manner in which she was to be treated, but also that they were very careful to carry out those instructions to the letter. And now, here is this note, which must have been brought here some time during the night and placed on this table—another example of strict instructions carefully carried out. As to his knowledge of our movements, the accurate timing of the abduction proves that to the hilt. This person must have a marvellous knowledge of our actions, how otherwise could anyone know that Dorothy was alone on the launch?"

Wilding's quiet voice carried conviction. He paused for a moment, and the others regarded him curiously.

"Well, what do you make of it all?" asked the Doctor, with intense interest.

"It seems to me," said Wilding slowly, "that somewhere in this region is a white man with remarkable control over a tribe of natives."

"Good God!" ejaculated the Doctor, going suddenly pale.

Captain Dixon pursed his lips thoughtfully. "It looks very much as though you're right, Major," he said, meeting

Wilding's inquiring eyes. "Though how he knows so much about us beats me altogether."

Dr Treloare was obviously impressed by his friend's earnestness, and by the logic of his conclusions. Yet a doubt still lingered in his mind.

"But why in heaven's name should a white man shut himself up in this strange place to rule a lot of savages?" he demanded. "And why should he abduct Dorothy?"

Wilding shrugged his shoulders. He did not care to speak the thought which rang with cold insistence in his mind—that Dorothy was in the clutches of a man who was probably a maniac. "That, of course, I cannot tell," he said. "But we may be able to find out, though."

"Ah!" The Doctor's eyes brightened swiftly. "You have an idea?"

"Yes." Wilding smiled slightly. "Not an original one, but I think it might work. The point is this. If my surmise is correct, this man must have some sort of home that is fairly well fitted up—as witness the high-quality writing-paper. How can we find out where he lives? Obviously there is only one way—by getting up into the air, as Dale suggested to find the waterfall. I think we should make another kite and use it for that purpose."

Captain Dixon nodded his head approvingly. "The idea is right, Major," he remarked. "Twenty minutes or less in the air will give you more information than days or weeks of useless searching by land and water."

"The only thing I don't like about this kite-flying business," interjected the Doctor, "is that we don't know when one of these infernal cyclones will sweep over the lake. The scheme is practicable enough—we proved that yesterday, but it seems to me too dangerous."

"I don't think so," said Wilding. "In any case, for Dorothy's sake we must be prepared to take a risk. What do you think about the weather, Skipper?"

Captain Dixon rose from his seat and consulted the



barometer which hung on the saloon wall. Then he gazed critically at the expanse of blue sky outside.

"I should think this weather will remain unchanged all day," he said at length. "The glass is very high and steady. When young Dale went up yesterday it had fallen considerably. In fact, if I had known how quickly the glass had dropped, I would have stopped him. Of course, one can never tell what is likely to happen in these inland parts, but on present indications this weather should last for at least another twenty-four hours."

"In which case there will be no danger at all," declared Wilding. "But my idea is not to go up in daylight. If we can get the kite completed and dried in time I will go up to-night. This fellow may have spies everywhere. We do not want him to see any of us floating over the lake in broad daylight. In the light of the full moon, by using night-glasses, I should be able to see over an enormous stretch of country. If, however, I have no success, then we must take a risk and go up again early in the morning. But we will save a lot of time by making a night ascent, because if we get our information we can start out very early in the morning and make a surprise attack."

"By gad! that certainly is a good scheme, Wilding." The Doctor's weary eyes were shining with renewed hope as the possibilities of the plan came suddenly to him. "Anyway, whether you're right or wrong, there's nothing else we can do. When will you start to make the kite?"

Wilding rose from the table. "We will get on with it at once," he said. "The sooner we get it completed the more time it will have to dry thoroughly. We have plenty of material on hand, and fortunately more than a thousand feet of rope were saved. Pat and I will go ashore in the motor-boat and get the timber we need."

The night proved ideal for the venture. Not a cloud could be seen in the sky, and the full moon shone like a huge silver

ball, flooding the lake and its surroundings with a clear white light. The east wind was of ample strength to lift the kite and its human burden. It seemed as though Fate at last was deigning to smile upon the little band of adventurers.

A little after twelve o'clock everything was in readiness for the attempt.

There was no question as to who should go up with the kite; Wilding was adamant upon that point. Both Sandy MacTavish and Pat Murphy had begged to be allowed up, because of their lighter weight, but the explorer was determined that, having suggested the idea, he should accept any risk that might be attached to it. So calm was the night, however, and so favourable the conditions, that even Dr Treloare was forced to admit that there seemed no danger this time. A trial flight had already been made of the kite, which flew perfectly, and had remained rock-steady high above the lake.

Remembering that his weight was somewhat greater than Dale's, Wilding had made the new kite nearly half as big again as the ill-fated one used on the previous day, and he also allowed a little more rope to enable the kite to obtain a hold in the wind before his weight was placed upon it. Captain Dixon controlled the windlass; MacTavish and Murphy climbed to the top of the wheelhouse with the kite, and Wilding, having securely fastened the rope round himself, gave the signal.

The kite, launched into the breeze, rose perfectly. Wilding skimmed over the lake for a few seconds, and then, as the kite got fairly into the wind, felt himself hauled rapidly, yet gently, skyward. The lake fell away beneath him; up and up he went until the *Jessica* was little more than a blurred outline upon the water far below. Eight hundred feet above the lake the kite remained motionless, straining strongly in the breeze; a hundred feet below it Wilding looked with keen interest upon a scene which no man before him had witnessed in such strange circumstances.



As far as he could see, the rugged countryside in every direction was bathed in the silver light. The myriad inlets reflected the moonlight like so many mirrors. There seemed to be no end to their number; the hills and rocks immediately surrounding the lake on every side were freely intersected by these streams, which contrasted sharply in the moonlight with the dull greys and browns of the surrounding country.

But it was not the sight of these inlets gleaming in the pale light which caused Wilding to stiffen suddenly and reach for his night-glasses. To the north-west, a little beyond the rocks which bordered that portion of the lake, he saw something which brought an exclamation to his lips.

In the brilliant moonlight the greyish whiteness of the old temple stood out prominently; the ancient building rose phantom-like from the water which seemed to almost completely surround it. But what surprised him most was the fact that the dome on the top was encircled by a number of brightly flashing lights, and it was these which had first attracted his attention in that direction.

Long and earnestly through his night-glasses Wilding studied the strange building and its curious ring of sparkling lights. The latter puzzled him considerably. Why should anyone waste time and attract attention by illuminating the top of the dome in such an unnecessary manner? The light intrigued him; it was of a steady, even nature, rather too white for electricity, he thought, yet what else could be responsible for it?

Wilding gave up the problem without wasting further time upon it. He concentrated upon the temple itself, and the approach to it. With the aid of his powerful lenses he soon discovered the inlet which led from the lake, following a winding course before it finally reached the water round the temple itself. The easiest and quickest approach, when one knew the correct inlet to follow, was by water; there was no doubt about that. Yet he thought it would be possible

to reach the strange building—which instinctively he knew to be a native temple, though its location there puzzled him very much—by striking across the hills first due west, and then turning north, and following the bank of the inlet which ran in that direction.

As far as he could see the old building seemed to be surrounded by water, but he could not observe the rear portion clearly, and he guessed that here the rock upon which it had been built might be joined to the mainland by a narrow strip of land.

Taking careful note of its position, Wilding again verified his knowledge of the only inlet which would be of any use to them, and then, having swept the rest of the surrounding country through his glasses, but without success, he gave the signal to haul the kite down—three short flashes of his pocket electric-torch. He had been aloft for nearly half-an-hour, and the knowledge of his success sent a little thrill of satisfaction through his usually complacent mind.

Gradually the windlass began to wind in the rope; the kite came down very slowly, very gradually, and before he dropped below the level of the hills Wilding took one last look at that ring of extraordinary light which so puzzled him. He could not understand the meaning of it at all.

Yet his surprise would have been no less than that which Gregory Lemiere would have experienced had he been in Wilding's lofty position. For the ring of light surmounting the dome of the temple was not by any means a product of modern ingenuity. The lights were simply circles of strange luminous stone, skilfully inlaid centuries ago by the ancient builders round the edge of the grey stone which comprised the roof of the dome.

And Gregory Lemiere did not know that his home bore such a striking appearance because he did not fly by aeroplane at night, and so had never seen the gleaming ring which burned like fire above him.



Long before the sun had risen over the eastern hills next morning the little party on the *Jessica* were busy making preparations for the surprise attack upon the old grey-white building and its inhabitants.

Wilding's amazing report on his observations from the kite had not only astonished his companions, but had also aroused in them a feeling of intense curiosity concerning the identity of the inhabitants of such an unusual place. The whole affair seemed to be more deeply wrapped in mystery than ever, and it was with keen interest that they looked forward to the expedition.

After much discussion it was eventually decided that Wilding, the Doctor, Captain Dixon and Pat Murphy should make the journey. That the launch should not be left unguarded was obvious; the only question was who should remain on board.

MacTavish and the Irishman settled the matter after some argument by tossing a coin; the Scotsman called "heads," and to his intense chagrin the coin, after spinning briskly on its edge, ran into a small crack between the deck planks and fell "tail up." The Irishman was as overjoyed as MacTavish was disappointed.

The Scotsman eyed his fellow-servant dourly as the latter took the revolver from its holster round his waist and fingered it lovingly.

"Don't shoot yersel' wi' it, mon! I suppose ye ken which end the bullets come frac?"

The Irishman glared at him. "Bejabbers, any galoot that gets near me will, anyhow!" said he.

MacTavish turned away despondently. "Ah, weel, if ye get a chance plug an extra one into him for me."

He picked up the rifle which was his favourite weapon, and gloomed savagely towards the tree-lined shore. "If any o' they heathen niggers comes here to-day," he said, with cold deliberation, "I'll fill 'em as full o' holes as a colander. I'll larn 'em to play heathenish tricks on Christian folk."

He watched in silence as the motor-boat sped across the calm water under the vigorous strokes of Wilding and Pat Murphy. Because of its noisy exhaust the motor had been dispensed with, but speed was not, in any case, one of its attributes, and progress was almost as rapid with the oars. With scarcely a sound the small boat slipped through the still water in the direction of the inlet which Wilding had observed from the kite, and ten minutes later it turned into a stream the entrance to which was almost completely hidden by overhanging leafy branches.

Winding in and out among the trees, between steeply sloping banks on either side, the inlet along which the little party travelled seemed to be a never-ending succession of bends. A straight stretch of fifty yards was a rarity; at times the bends were so sharp, and the stream so narrow at these points, that difficulty was experienced in keeping the boat in midstream. Progress was slow, for although the inlet was fairly wide and open in its straight stretches the multitude of bends had to be taken very carefully. None of the party had travelled the inlet previously, and it was deemed advisable to proceed with caution. As Wilding pointed out, they knew now that this part of the country was inhabited, and it would have been most foolish to have taken any risks.

Despite their caution, however, the unexpected happened with amazing rapidity.

The inlet suddenly narrowed down to a small channel less than fifteen feet wide, where the overhanging trees on either side formed a leafy archway beneath which the boat was slowly paddled. The eerie stillness of the morning was broken with dramatic suddenness.

Before the adventurers had realized what was happening they were overwhelmed by a horde of half-naked, brown-skinned figures, who swarmed into the shallow water like bees. They came from behind the trees on the banks, even dropping from the branches overhanging the water, and in far less time than it takes to tell each of the four men



in the boat found himself helpless in the clutches of an unexpected enemy.

For a moment or two confusion reigned supreme; the boat rocked dangerously under the sudden extra weight of many natives. Dr Treloare and his surprised companions struggled furiously to free themselves, but their efforts were in vain. The surprise attack had taken them so unawares that there had been no time even to draw a revolver.

In triumph the natives pushed the boat towards an open space on the bank a little distance ahead, and here its occupants were unceremoniously bundled out and lined up like delinquent schoolboys. Dr Treloare and Captain Dixon were still too much bewildered and confused by the suddenness of the attack to offer any resistance; Wilding, cursing himself for a blind fool for not anticipating such a contingency, realized that any resistance at all under the circumstances would have been useless and even foolish; but Pat Murphy, blazing with the hot-headed impetuosity of an infuriated Irishman deprived of a fight, struggled and kicked in a perfect frenzy of rage, until Wilding spoke sharply to him.

"Give up, Pat. It's no use fighting against these odds. Wait a bit. We may get a better chance later on."

Borne down by sheer weight of numbers, the Irishman at last subsided into a state of hostile truce, glaring belligerently at his solemn-faced silent captors.

Wilding surveyed them with keen interest. From the wealth of his experience he knew that these men were of a race unknown. In all his travels through the wilds of the world he had never encountered such a native race; their high foreheads, keen, intelligent features and splendidly proportioned figures, somewhat below medium height, proclaimed them as a type apart. They were clad only in short loin-cloths, and seemed quite unperturbed by their recent immersion in the water.

For a brief moment at the start of the attack Wilding had thought that he and his companions had fallen in with

a wandering band of marauding natives, but he quickly perceived that this was by no means the case. The natives, of whom there must have been at least fifty, were all armed with a knife, some fifteen inches long, which hung in a rough sheath from their waists. Not one of them, however, had made the slightest attempt to draw his weapon. They had relied entirely upon the suddenness of the attack and the overwhelming weight of numbers, and although they had lost no time on overpowering the four white men none of the latter had been roughly handled, or ill-treated, in the slightest degree. The attack had plainly been premeditated, and it was equally obvious that it had been ordered by someone who wished to secure them unharmed.

Who was behind it all, and what was his object? These questions puzzled Wilding exceedingly, yet there was still another which aroused in him intense amazement and curiosity. How had their plan to attack the temple been discovered so quickly? They had started out less than six hours after he had ascended with the kite. Yet the surprise attack by the natives indicated clearly that in some way their scheme had become known.

The explorer was still puzzling over this strange state of affairs when the leader of the natives, a finely built man who carried himself with surprising dignity, strode forward and faced the prisoners. Wilding guessed that he must have superintended operations from the bank of the stream, for his short skirt was quite dry, in marked contrast to the soaked coverings of most of his companions. Suspended by a length of thin, cord-like material round his neck, a small square-shaped wooden case rested lightly upon his broad chest.

He spoke a few words in a tone of command, and in a very few seconds the white men had been relieved of their weapons. The revolver belts and rifles were slung round the shoulders of one of the natives in a careless manner, which proved that they had not the slightest intention of using them. The leader then stepped in front of Wilding,



paused before him, and stared keenly at the explorer for several moments. His deep-set eyes travelled to Dr Treloare, and on to Captain Dixon. Pat Murphy he ignored entirely. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, the native chief carefully opened the wooden case which hung round his neck, and from it extracted a blue-coloured envelope, which he handed with a flourish to Wilding, whose arms were immediately released so that he could take the missive.

The explorer could not repress the start of surprise which came involuntarily at sight of that envelope, with its familiar bluish tint. Three pairs of eyes watched him in breathless excitement as he accepted the envelope, tore it open, and extracted from it two sheets of notepaper precisely similar to that on which Dorothy had written the message which had been discovered on the saloon table the previous morning.

As he read the message an expression of intense astonishment appeared upon the explorer's rugged countenance. Devoured with curiosity, his three companions, helpless and unable to move, watched him with growing impatience.

"Well! What's it all about?" ejaculated the Doctor suddenly. "Read it out, man—read it out! I don't suppose it's private and confidential!"

Wilding smiled grimly. "No; it's meant for all of us," said he. "Listen to this.

"MY DEAR MAJOR WILDING,—If my chosen servants have succeeded in carrying out my orders, you and your three companions will now be standing, disarmed and doubtless somewhat surprised, by the water's edge about a mile from my home. You will observe that I know more about your plans than you suspect. I regret that any action of mine should have given you cause for annoyance with me; and in order to settle this matter amicably between ourselves I have instructed my servants that you and Dr Treloare are to be escorted safely to me, while Captain Dixon and Mr

Murphy return to the *Jessica*. They will be taken back in the boat in which you have come, to a secluded spot not far from the entrance to the lake. Your Scotch engineer, who is leaning upon the rail with a most ferocious expression upon his features, is, I understand, an excellent shot with the rifle, and I do not wish to have my servants slaughtered. When they are left alone I would advise Captain Dixon and Mr Murphy to make straight for the *Jessica* and remain on board. If they endeavour to retrace their steps along the inlet I will not be responsible for anything that may happen. To both yourself and the Doctor I guarantee a safe journey and, I hope, a safe return. I would advise you to offer no resistance. My men are expert knife-throwers, and you are both unarmed. If you are agreeable to comply with my wishes you will, in acquiescence, place your left hand upon the top of your head, and your right hand over your heart. My servants will then know that you are ready to accompany them peacefully. If, however, within a reasonable time after reading this you make no such sign, my servants will proceed to carry out certain orders which they have received from me. I sincerely hope it will not be necessary for them to do so.

(Signed) GREGORY LEMIERE."

For perhaps half-a-minute there was utter silence as Wilding finished the reading of this amazing epistle—a silence born of astonishment not only at the startling nature of its contents, but also at the uncanny knowledge of their affairs displayed by the writer. Dr Treloare stared at the explorer open-mouthed.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he exploded with vigorous emphasis. "Who in blazes is Gregory Lemiere, and how does he know so much about us?"

"It's a mystery," declared Captain Dixon, frowning. "The man must be a wizard."

"Well, there's no mystery about his instructions, anyway," said Wilding. "It's no use wasting time in idle speculation.



We have the option of obeying his orders or taking the consequences. Lord knows what these niggers will be up to if I don't hurry up and make that sign. The question is, What are we going to do? Shall we do as he orders—or not?"

"There's no question about it," declared the Doctor savagely. "Curse it, Wilding, what can four unarmed men do against half-a-hundred armed niggers? If we try any tricks we may get a knife stuck into us, and what's the sense of that? If we are going to be of any assistance to Dorothy we cannot run senseless risks. You'd better pat your head and go through the rest of that heathenish foolery before it's too late."

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Wilding could not repress a smile at the deep disgust in his friend's voice.

"I think you're right," said he. "What say, Captain?"

"Well, I'm not keen on turning back now that we've come this far, but I'm afraid we can't do anything else," said Captain Dixon ruefully. "The odds are too heavy against us. If we get out of this mess safely we may find some other way to assist later on. What do you say, Pat?"

The expression of lugubrious disappointment upon the face of the Irishman was almost comic.

"Sure, Captain," said he dolefully, "I'm as ready for a fight as any man, but I can't fight knives with me fists." He glared malevolently at the solemn-faced native chief, who was watching them curiously. "Bejabbers, I'd like to get me hands on this Gregory Lemiere for a couple o' minutes. I'd give him something to regret about, sure I would."

"Well, since we're all agreed, I suppose we had better submit," said Wilding. He made the necessary sign, carrying out the instructions given by Lemiere.

A smile spread over the fine features of the native leader. He spoke a few words to his followers, and immediately the tension was relaxed. Without further loss of time, Captain

Dixon and Pat Murphy were hurried to the boat, into which they climbed, accompanied by four stalwart natives, two of whom seized the oars and with a few swift strokes sent the little boat into midstream.

A sudden thought struck Wilding. "Don't attempt anything rash, Dixon," he called. "You had better remain on the launch till we return."

Captain Dixon waved his arm in reply, and a few seconds later the boat shot through the leafy avenue where they had been ambushed, swept round the bend, and was lost to view.

Wilding felt a touch upon his arm, and turned to find the native leader at his side. He was surprised to observe that the majority of the natives had disappeared; there were only six to be seen, but even that number, he reflected, was more than sufficient to guard two unarmed men. Each of the natives carried a knife, and one was laden also with the weapons commandeered from the white men.

In single file they struck off through the thick timber in a south-westerly direction; the chief led the way, followed by another native, and then came Dr Treloare, two more natives, Wilding, and still another at the rear. Last of all walked the gun-bearer, who did not seem to notice his extra load at all.

Neither the explorer nor Dr Treloare could observe the slightest sign of a track through the jungle, but the natives never once hesitated. Ahead of them rose a low, steeply sloping hill; this they skirted, taking a track along its lower slopes. The going was not difficult, for the ground, although thickly covered with grass, was firm and hard, and singularly free of twisted undergrowth. There was little or no climbing, and the pace maintained by the leader was such that even the Doctor, who was, as he admitted himself, sadly out of condition, experienced no difficulty in keeping up with the march.

The little party travelled in complete silence as they made



their way across country in the still, sunlit morning air. None of the natives spoke, and Wilding and the Doctor were both too deeply interested in their surroundings, and too anxious as to the outcome of the day's events, to make conversation.

The sun had by this time risen well overhead, and the warmth of its rays beat down heavily over the silent countryside. So thick were the trees, however, and so luxuriant the foliage, that for two hundred yards at a time not a trace of blue sky could be seen, while here and there little rays of sunlight forced their way through the leaves, splashing with quaint touches of gold the sombre greyness of the gaunt tree-trunks. Gaily-coloured birds darted swiftly through the leafy foliage, their brilliant plumage contrasting sharply with the vivid greenness of their surroundings. The atmosphere of peaceful calm which was so predominant over the whole of the strange region surrounding the lake seemed to be even more pronounced in this idyllic spot, and both Wilding and the Doctor found it difficult to believe that treachery and intrigue could exist in such a place.

Half-an-hour's walking brought the little party to a narrow, fast-rushing torrent of crystal-clear water, which they crossed on a peculiar native bridge made of closely interwoven rushes and similar tough-fibred material. It sagged a little in the centre beneath their weight, but the crossing was made in safety. On the other side the track led sharply uphill, and the going became somewhat more difficult, boulders and large stones having to be avoided. Near the top the trees began to diminish, and the summit of the hill was bare as a plain. But it was not that which brought from Dr Treloare the sudden exclamation of astonishment which broke from his lips as he panted to the top. Wilding, too, had seen it.

"Look, there it is!" he exclaimed. "The old temple I saw last night!"

Down in the valley beneath them the trees were as thick

as ever. But on top of the next hill—a huge mass of stone half-a-mile away—stood the strange semicircular building, with its massive dome, gaunt, grey-white and awesome in the midst of its surroundings.

Dr Treloare mopped his brow and stared at it in amazement. "Good God! Wilding, what sort of man lives there?" he demanded in wonderment. "Who is this Gregory Lemiere?"

Wilding's eyes were gleaming with the light of discovery close at hand. "We shall soon know," said he grimly. "Our friends here are getting impatient. Come! Let us go on."

Down the steeply sloping hillside into the valley beneath they plunged, and the tall trees once more hid from them the view of that imposing domed building. And as they pressed forward Wilding found himself repeating with ever-growing curiosity that last question of Dr Treloare's: "Who is this Gregory Lemiere?"



## CHAPTER XII

### THE CONFERENCE

At eight o'clock that same morning Dorothy Treloare awoke suddenly from a refreshing sleep to find the sunlight slanting oddly through the windows of her room. For a few seconds her eyes roamed in frightened surprise round the vaguely unfamiliar surroundings; then, with a quick rush of memory, the events of the past night came back to her.

With startling clearness everything that had happened since she and Brian Dale had left her room less than twelve hours before flashed through her mind. She remembered that lonely, awesome groping along the semi-darkness of the gloomy passageway, the sense of vast relief which had surged through her at sight of the freedom then within their grasp, the sudden and unexpected appearance of Gregory Lemiere, the attack upon him by Dale, the sight of the young man huddled on the stone floor and a bluish-tinted gas slowly drifting upwards, and then—what had happened then?

Dorothy sat up on the edge of the softly sprung bed and sank her head in her hands. She remembered with a feeling of revulsion that Lemiere had placed his arms round her, while his voice, booming with triumph, came as from a vast distance; and then she must have fainted, for she remembered nothing more until she awoke and found herself lying, fully dressed excepting for her slippers, upon the bed in the room which she had hoped never to see again.

The thought of what had happened in the silent hours of the night sent a little shiver of real fear through her. She seemed to be hopelessly in the grip of this strange scientist;

his power seemed unlimited. With a feeling of despair, which she could not repress, Dorothy realized that now, with Dale probably dead, she was even more helpless than before. Escape from this terrible man who held her in such a relentless grip seemed an impossibility.

The entrance of Lemiere himself into the room broke her reverie.

Calm and sedate, his inscrutable features rigid as ever, the man displayed no evidence of the fact that he had obtained only three hours' sleep during the night. He was, as usual, faultlessly attired; his bearing as he walked into the room was dignified and erect.

Despite her intense loathing of the man Dorothy was impressed by his courtly grace, his politeness, and the almost regal austerity of his suave carriage. She would not have been human had she not felt the power of his presence; for Gregory Lemiere possessed an amazing personality that would have commanded attention in any company.

For a second or two Dorothy's startled eyes met, and held, his piercing hypnotic gaze as he stood regarding her in silence. The colour mounted swiftly to her pale cheeks at the intensity of his stare; she made as though to rise from the bed, but Lemiere stayed her with outstretched hand.

"Please remain seated, Dorothy." His calm, even voice carried a command as much as a request. "After the excitement of last night you must help Nature by resting as much as possible. I am glad to observe that you are considerably refreshed by the few hours' sleep."

He paused, and regarded her with the professional eye of a medical man. "In view of the fact that you were very much overwrought last night—or perhaps I should say early this morning—I took the liberty of giving you a slight sedative before leaving you to Lula's care. It is a small preparation of my own, administered in the form of a subcutaneous injection, and is, though I say it myself, vastly



superior to the odious drugs which medical science still forces its patients to swallow. You will find an almost invisible puncture upon your left wrist. I am pleased to see that it has been of use to you. It is a quite harmless preparation, which I may place before the world some day," he added carelessly.

Mechanically Dorothy raised her left arm while he was speaking and glanced curiously at the small dot upon her wrist. There was the mark of the hypodermic needle, plain enough when one looked for it, but so insignificant that it might easily have passed unnoticed. The spot was quite painless. . . .

This, then, she thought, was the explanation of that peculiar sense of exhilaration and freshness which she had experienced since awakening. No headache, no weariness, nothing to indicate the enormous mental and physical strain to which she had been subjected in the eerie stillness of the night. Under ordinary circumstances Dorothy would have been amazed at the beneficial results of such a discovery, but the girl had seen so many remarkable things during the past two days that she had now reached a stage when she would not have been very much surprised had Lemiere announced that he was able to restore a dead person to life.

Disregarding the subject entirely, she suddenly faced him squarely.

"Perhaps you will tell me if Brian—Mr Dale—has recovered from the effects of the gas you used on him."

Lemiere smiled at her a little sadly.

"I am afraid, my dear Dorothy," he said, "that, despite all you have witnessed, you still underestimate my abilities. I informed you last night that the young man would suffer no ill-effects. I have seen him this morning, and I can assure you that he is as well as ever. You shall see him yourself presently. I am not a bungler, Dorothy. I am distressed that you should think me such. In those glass balls is just sufficient liquid to serve the purpose—that is, to induce

unconsciousness. A very little more would cause instantaneous death through seizure of the heart—as I have learned from experiments."

He paused and glanced at his wrist-watch.

"It was, however, not to discuss the matter of my intentions that I have come to visit you so early in the morning," he resumed. "I have come to inform you that very shortly your father and Major Wilding will arrive as my guests, and if you would like to meet them you have just time for a swim—which I earnestly recommend—and a light breakfast."

Dorothy sprang to her feet at his words. Her heart began to beat madly, as she remembered that Dale, after his stolen view through the strange periscope in the watch-tower, had told her that the occupants of the launch were making another kite. She had expected some development, but hardly so soon as this.

"My—my father?" she faltered. "How do you know? Have you seen him?"

Lemiere smiled. "Ah! You are surprised! Well, I will admit that I, too, was somewhat surprised at first. As I told you yesterday, I guessed that your friends would construct another kite, but I did not think they would act quite so quickly. Their ingenuity—and their energy—call forth my admiration! Quite early this morning I chanced to take a casual glance through my periscope. To my surprise, there were your father, Major Wilding, Captain Dixon and his Irish servant just setting out in the little motor-boat—and using oars, instead of the engine! Captain Dixon carried a rifle, so, also, did the determined Major. All four wore revolvers. Obviously this was no pleasure trip. I looked over the launch, and there, in the bows, stood the kite I had expected. Instantly I saw it all. They had made the kite yesterday, flown it last night in the brilliant moonlight, and intended making use of the information they had gained by means of a surprise attack! Ah! The move was shrewd,



Dorothy! Really, the energy of our determined Major is most admirable! It is a pleasure to cross swords with such a worthy opponent."

His blazing eyes gloomed suddenly with a strange light, and Dorothy stared at him in fascinated horror.

"But alas! Fate is always on my side! You observed that last night, when I so unexpectedly interrupted your little—er—expedition. . . . Here were our friends playing straight into my hands! In a very few moments I had made my plans. I will not weary you with the details. But this much I can tell you: I have just come from my periscope, where I have witnessed the humorous spectacle of a very puzzled Scots engineer welcoming back an equally puzzled Captain and his Irish servant, while your father and Major Wilding, who no doubt are also greatly puzzled, are at this moment being escorted here to visit us. You have at least three-quarters of an hour. Here is Lula, and when you have breakfasted she will conduct you to the room in which I shall receive my guests—the Sacred Room of Sähr."

Lula entered the room as he finished speaking, and Lemiere moved towards the curtained doorway. He was gone before Dorothy had sufficiently recovered from her astonishment to ask even one of the many questions which raced through her mind in bewildering confusion, and she hurried through her toilet, consumed with curiosity, and filled with excitement at the prospect of at last meeting her father again.

Long afterwards the memory of that morning—as, indeed, of the whole day—stood out as one of the unforgettable incidents in Dorothy Treloare's life. It stamped upon her mind an indelible impression which time could never efface, though its soothing influence might perhaps soften the sharpness of the tragedy that was to follow.

The room in which Lemiere was waiting to receive her was one which Dorothy had not previously entered. "The Sacred Room of Sähr," the scientist had termed it, and as

Lula ushered her through the heavy curtain which covered the doorway her eyes roamed quickly round it in curious interest.

It was a room which well repaid a second glance. Rectangular in shape, some forty feet long and thirty feet wide, it was lightly furnished with a few chairs and a table at one side immediately opposite the door, and at which Lemiere was seated when she entered.

But the plainness of the furnishings passed almost unnoticed in the midst of the number and remarkable variety of native ornaments which hung from every wall, excepting one, in lavish profusion. The single exception was the wall on her right hand as she entered, through the centre of which had been cut a huge archway which opened out on to a narrow balcony. The heavy curtain which, like the doorway, normally covered the entrance to this balcony had been drawn aside, and the bright morning light streamed into the room, giving to it a cheerful appearance which contrasted sharply with the grim relics hanging upon its walls.

To an enthusiastic collector the room would have been a veritable Mecca, with its amazing wealth of ancient material. There were strange weapons of unusual design and construction; crudely shaped spears and cunningly fashioned knives, the handles of which were carved in grotesque designs. To Dorothy much of the mass of ornamentation was an unintelligible jumble: there were tools, weapons, headdresses, and many queer tokens the use of which was a mystery to the girl. But the most important, and most awesome, of all the barbaric ornamentation was that which plainly had given the room its name.

Fixed to the wall opposite the door, and just above the table at which Lemiere was seated, was a huge bronze figure of a massive grinning head set upon broad shoulders—the God Sähr. The figure comprised only the head and shoulders and part of the chest; yet it stood six feet in height,



and every detail in the hideous expression of the face had been registered on the metal with such amazing accuracy that, had a wanderer come upon this startling apparition at night, in the dimly illuminated room, its striking realism would have aroused stark terror in the heart of the bravest. Even in the broad daylight Dorothy shuddered as she stared, fascinated, at the hideous thing, and she wondered how anyone could sit beneath it with the unconcern which Lemiere exhibited upon his impassive countenance.

The scientist rose from his seat at the table as Dorothy entered the room. His austere features relaxed into a smile of approval as his keen eyes swept rapidly over the girl.

"Ah! You are early, Dorothy," he declared, striding towards her over the rush-covered stone floor. "Our guests have not yet arrived, but I expect them at any moment. I have also ordered that our young friend Dale should be conducted here. We must have a full attendance at our conference. . . . In the meantime, come and enjoy the view from the balcony yonder. It does not command the panorama which one sees from the tower, but it is not so very much lower than the latter, and the view is worth seeing."

He led the way through the massive stone archway, and Dorothy followed him, curious to know what might be seen from this unexplored part of the old temple.

The stone balcony—it was little more than a ledge—was but four feet across and not much wider than the width of the archway. Round its edge ran a narrow kerb, three feet high. Far, far below—hundreds of feet, it seemed to the girl as she peered cautiously over the ledge—the still waters of the inlet which surrounded the greater part of the temple flashed and sparkled in the sun.

The sheer drop aroused in the girl a feeling of nausea, and she shivered and turned hastily away. Lemiere's fingers closed upon her arm in a protective grip.

"This is the north-eastern wing of the temple," he remarked easily. "Away in the distance for miles the country

is, as you can see, a succession of tree-covered hills and valleys, until it finally reaches the mountain range which completely encircles this region, and to which, somewhat like a tail, is attached the range through which flows the river that carried you here. Strangely enough, in my aeroplane trips I have observed that there are no rivers or streams of any kind beyond the mountains. Yet here, within a ten-mile radius, are concentrated hundreds of these inlets, flowing into the lake. It is interesting country, of an unusual nature. Some day, Dorothy, you shall view it from one of my aeroplanes."

He paused abruptly and turned to meet a native servant whose noiseless approach through the room had passed unnoticed. The man bowed slightly before Lemiere, and spoke a few words in a low voice.

"Ah! Our friends have arrived!" Lemiere turned to his companion. "We shall go inside and meet them in formal manner."

He uttered a few words of command to the native servant, who bowed again and slipped away as noiselessly as he had come. Lemiere glanced keenly at the northern sky before he led the way into the room. "Our friends have had a fine morning for their journey here," he remarked, "but I am afraid they may get wet going back. That haze tells me there is rain approaching. We may experience a storm."

He paused, and a frown appeared for a moment upon his high brow. "Come!" he said abruptly. "Let us go inside."

Lemiere took up his position in the chair behind the table, just beneath the grinning face of Sähr. Dorothy, at his request, seated herself near by. Her heart was beating fiercely; she felt a queer tightening sensation round her throat. Her eyes were fixed expectantly upon the heavy curtain which concealed the doorway. It quivered slightly, was suddenly drawn aside, and Brian Dale walked into the room, the bandage still round his forehead, and upon his features a puzzled expression, which deepened as his eyes roved



round the strange room, alighting finally upon Lemiere and his fair companion.

Striving to conceal her disappointment, Dorothy flashed a bright smile towards the perplexed young man.

"Hullo, Brian! This is a pleasant surprise! I didn't expect to see you here! How's your forehead?"

"Oh, it's pretty right now, thanks, Dorothy," returned the young man, halting in the middle of the room. "I didn't expect to see you here, either. I understood I was to meet——" He broke off abruptly and stared inquiringly at Lemiere.

"Dr Treloare and Major Wilding," added the latter, with a strange smile. "Quite so. They are on their way, and will be here very soon. When we are all together we shall discuss a matter which, I hope, will be settled satisfactorily and without undue delay. But I wanted you here a few moments in advance just to utter some words of warning."

His keen black eyes blazed penetratingly upon the stalwart figure before him; the torn and tattered garments seemed to intensify the supple strength of the young man.

"Please take that chair, Mr Dale. Thank you. . . . You are a somewhat impulsive young man, Mr Dale," went on Lemiere steadily, "and I want to inform you that it will be to your own advantage to create no unseemly disturbance in our deliberations this morning. You have already had some slight experience of my powers. I may not possess your physical strength, but I can assure you that in all other respects I am your superior—and physical strength is not everything. I have no desire to cause you any harm, and if I am forced to do so the responsibility will be yours. Do you understand?"

"Yes," answered Dale mechanically, wondering what sinister motive lay behind the warning words.

"That is all right then," said Lemiere. "I want you to be quite clear upon that point. Remember, you are

completely in my power for the present. . . . Now we are ready."

He raised his hand and pressed the top of the gong which stood on the table in front of him. Its strident booming reverberated against the stone walls with startling loudness.

Instantly the curtain was again drawn aside, and this time into the room walked Dr Treloare and Major Wilding, the former somewhat aggressive, the latter calm and unhurried.

Lemiere could not have suggested a more dramatic meeting between the scattered members of the party. Astonishment and emotion flashed across the face of the Doctor as his eyes fell first upon Dorothy, and then upon Dale. Even the imperturbable Wilding was for a moment startled out of his usual calm. Dorothy and the young man sprang to their feet immediately; a queer, choking cry rose to the girl's throat as she ran towards her father. Lemiere let her go in silence, his keen features devoid of expression.

"Daddy!" she cried, flinging herself into his arms. "Oh, Daddy! How glad I am to see you!"

"Dorothy! My dear little girl!" The Doctor's voice was husky with emotion as he clasped his daughter tightly in his arms. "Dorothy! I wondered whether I should ever see you again! And here you are, alive and well, thank God! They haven't harmed you, have they, my dear?"

A shadow of anxiety tinged his voice, and his arms held her in a tight embrace. Dorothy lifted shining, tear-dimmed eyes to his.

"No, Daddy, I am quite well," she answered, smiling tremulously at the emphasis he had placed upon the "they."

"That's fine!" ejaculated the Doctor fervently. "And Brian here, too!" His kindly eyes beamed with mingled pleasure and surprise as the young man strode forward, after greeting Wilding, his face wreathed in smiles. "My stars! we thought we had lost you, young fellow," cried the Doctor, wringing Dale's hand violently in an effort to work off the



emotion which he was rather ashamed of having shown. "That's splendid! Not hurt much, Brian, my lad, I hope?" The significance of the neat bandage round the young man's forehead aroused in him a professional curiosity, and helped considerably towards allowing him to regain his normal composure; while Dorothy greeted Wilding somewhat shyly.

"Not much, Doc," said Dale reassuringly. "Just a scratch or two, which Dorothy attended to for me. I escaped pretty well."

"Splendid! Splendid!" The unexpected reuniting of the party seemed to have suddenly lifted a great weight from the Doctor's mind. His jovial nature swiftly began to reassert itself, and he beamed with fatherly affection upon the two young people whom he had feared as lost for ever.

"Why, it's wonderful, isn't it, Wilding?" He turned to the explorer, his eyes shining. "Here we are all together again, safe and sound, and ready to depart."

"I beg your pardon."

The cold, calm voice came like a douche of icy water upon the little group. With one accord they turned towards Lemiere, who sat unmoved in his chair behind the table, his piercing gaze fixed sternly upon them. In the exuberance of his spirits Dr Treloare had completely forgotten the presence of someone else in the room. Both he and Wilding stared with considerable curiosity at the strangely calm figure that faced them.

The cheerful expression had gone from the Doctor's face; a swift wave of mingled surprise and anger surged over him.

"And who the devil might you be?" he demanded sharply. A curious foreboding gripped him as he met those blazing eyes. He sensed a nameless yet definite menace in that motionless form.

Gravely, steadily, came the reply:

"I am Gregory Lemiere."

"My God!" The Doctor started violently at the measured

words. Wilding made no outward movement, but his lips came together tightly.

"Gregory Lemiere! You are the man who wrote that letter! . . . And, I presume, you are the cause of all this trouble! What do you mean by it, sir? Who are you, and what the devil do you mean by abducting my daughter and going on in this insane manner? I demand an explanation!"

The Doctor's eyes were flashing with the light of unbridled anger as he glared at the still figure across the table. He made as though to move forward, and Dorothy, fearful for his safety, caught his arm between her hands.

"Daddy! Please be calm!" Her voice was a shaking whisper.

The Doctor stared at her in bewilderment.

"Calm! Calm!" he repeated, in dazed tones. "You—you tell me to be calm, after what has happened! Why, I'll——"

He broke off suddenly as Lemiere rose with leisurely, unhurried motion to his feet, and in silence for a moment surveyed the little group before him. His long thin face was quite expressionless; those piercing eyes blazed with an unabated intensity that seemed scarcely human. The Doctor felt again that inexplicable thrill of dread as he met the man's steady gaze.

"For a medical man, my dear Doctor, both your language and your manner are most unprofessional," observed Lemiere coldly. "Let me advise you here and now to exercise greater restraint. I have had both you and Major Wilding brought to me for a definite purpose, and not merely to gratify your curiosity. It will be better for all of us if you will listen carefully to what I have to say; there will be ample time for discussion afterwards. In the meantime, please be seated. We have already lost some time in the quite unnecessary emotional scene which I have just witnessed. It is essential that we should come to business."

His hand rested lightly upon the gong, and in answer to



his summons a silent-footed native appeared in the room and arranged four chairs immediately in front of his table. Dorothy occupied one on Lemiere's left hand, a little apart from her friends; nearest her in the row was Wilding, with the Doctor next to him, and Dale at the other end.

Dr Treloare was obviously puzzled as he accepted the chair allotted him; everything seemed to be wrapped in mystery which he could not fathom. Wilding and Dale began to have a dim perception of what was to come, but, of the four, Dorothy alone knew exactly what was in Lemiere's mind. None of them realized more fully than she the grave peril in which her father and his friends were placed, but with a supreme effort of will she managed to keep her wonderful self-control and, though her face was ashen, Lemiere saw nothing of fear in the calm, clear eyes which met his own.

Lemiere's expression was one of blank inscrutability as his gaze swept the little group assembled before him. With the cold, calculating mind of the scientist, and his own amazing power of intuition, he quickly summed them up. Dorothy's fine courage aroused in him a feeling of real admiration; he knew that she must be aware of what was to come, yet she faced him unflinchingly. Wilding was curious, but alertly suspicious. Dr Treloare was openly bewildered, and considerably angered. There was venomous hostility in the depths of Brian Dale's smouldering eyes. Wilding, thought Lemiere, must be watched; yes, Wilding, with that peculiar expression in his deep-set eyes, an expression of bored curiosity as much as anything else, must be watched very carefully. The other two men he regarded with a feeling of amused indifference.

"You have asked me who I am," Lemiere said suddenly, in his cold, steely voice. "Well, for the moment just consider me as Gregory Lemiere, a medical man with degrees from London and Paris. You have already received some indication of my powers; Dorothy here has seen more. Later she will probably tell you a good deal more about me.

At present, I will simply content myself with a warning that all of you are utterly and completely in my power; in a fraction of a second I could destroy any or all of you as easily as you would kill a fly. Therefore, again, I would advise you to consider carefully any action you may contemplate. As I informed our young friend Dale here a little while ago, I do not wish to harm any of you, but I am a man who will tolerate no resistance. If our conference reaches an amicable settlement, as I sincerely hope it will, no harm will come to anyone; whatever else may happen, the responsibility will rest upon yourselves. So much for myself."

"Look here, damn you, whoever you are, Mr Gregory Lemiere, you can't threaten us like this!" exploded the Doctor vehemently, his eyes flashing with growing anger. "This isn't the eighteenth century, you bloodthirsty ruffian, and it isn't Russia! If you try any tricks——"

Lemiere raised his hand for silence. Despite his natural courage the Doctor felt a little chill run down his spine as that baleful stare fixed itself upon him. God, what dreadful eyes the man had! They seemed to stab through one like a dagger!

Lemiere disregarded the interruption as though he had not heard it.

"You are wondering why I am here, and also, no doubt, why I have brought Dorothy and the rest of you here. Both questions are easily answered. I am here because in this secluded spot I can work and continue my experiments without interruption. I have already made at least six important discoveries, any one of which would revolutionize the medical world if I chose to announce it. But I am not yet ready. My greatest work, my *magnum opus*, is still to be completed. Yet success is almost within my grasp, and when it comes the world will ring with the name of Gregory Lemiere! Dorothy will tell you that this is no idle boast."

He paused, and his icy stare swept the astonished listeners, as though defying contradiction. Then he proceeded:



"As to why I have brought you here, why, I knew that you intended to visit me, and I thought it advisable to have my people conduct you here in safety. This strange region is full of traps and dangers for the unwary. And I particularly desired that you should meet with no harm. I wanted you here for several reasons to-day, gentlemen, but chiefly to inform you that I intend Dorothy to be my wife."

The effect of this calm, deliberate announcement was startling in the extreme.

The Doctor bounded to his feet with a violence that sent his chair reeling backwards, to crash heavily upon the carpeted floor. Wilding stiffened imperceptibly, but he and Dale had half guessed what was coming, and remained unmoved. Dorothy's face went a shade paler at the steady declaration. Despite the warmth of the atmosphere a little shiver of fear ran through her as her eyes for a moment met Lemiere's burning gaze.

But the Doctor, when he had recovered from the momentary paralyzing astonishment, was boiling over with rage and anger.

"Good God! Are you mad!" he roared, his rotund face purple with fury. "You—you infernal scoundrel! So that's why you abducted her! And I suppose you thought we should sit down and chew our fingers! You blackguard! Dorothy *your* wife!"

He brought his clenched fist down upon the table in front of the scientist with a crash that made everything on it jump and rattle. His eyes blazed fiercely into Lemiere's.

"*Your* wife! If you were the last man on God's earth Dorothy wouldn't marry you! You—you damnable hound! You're not a man, you abductor of women! You haven't got the courage of a rat, you boasting coward!"

"Daddy!"

Dorothy's voice came in an agonized whisper. In an instant she was at her father's side, endeavouring to draw

him back to his chair. Her eyes, tear-dimmed and shining, pleaded into his.

Lemiere's face whitened a little beneath the raging scorn of the Doctor's fierce attack. For a moment Dorothy trembled lest he might be provoked into a disastrous reprisal. But he retained his amazing self-control, and faced the enraged Doctor with a smile that was almost a sneer.

"Come, come, Doctor! Let us have no more of these violent interruptions." There was a faint hint of brusque impatience in his steady voice. "Please return to your chair, which I see Major Wilding has replaced in its normal position. There is nothing to be gained by these unnecessary and disturbing scenes, I assure you."

Dr Treloare glared furiously at the smooth, suave figure behind the table.

"Do you expect me to sit here and listen to such an outrageous suggestion without objecting?" he demanded stormily. "You are an unscrupulous villain, whoever or whatever else you may be! Do you think that Dorothy would marry a man like you?" He slipped an arm affectionately round the girl's shoulders, and glared defiance at the exasperatingly calm features that faced him.

"You are somewhat dense," said Lemiere wearily, "or else you misunderstand me. I said nothing about marrying anybody. That will rest entirely with Dorothy. I simply stated that I intended Dorothy to be my wife. I have already informed her that I will go through the legal formality of marriage with her, if she desires. So far as I am concerned, however, there is no need." He spoke with an indifference that stung like a whiplash.

"What! You foul beast!" The Doctor's anger rose to white heat again. "You—you would force a woman into an alliance like that? Why——"

"There is no question of force," interrupted Lemiere calmly. "I have decided that Dorothy shall be my wife, and that is all there is to it. She will merely comply with my request."



"Oh, will she!" raged the Doctor furiously, his anger whipped to passionate loathing. "By God, I'll see her dead first! I'll——"

"One moment, Doctor." Wilding's voice, calm and steady as that of Lemiere, broke in upon the Doctor's excited shouting. The explorer's big hands were clenched tightly together, his eyes were glittering with unaccustomed brightness, but he held himself in check.

"Might I inquire," he asked Lemiere, "whether Dorothy has been consulted in this matter, and what her decision is?"

Lemiere's icy gaze flashed suddenly over him. "I have discussed it with her, but so far she has given no definite answer. Not that it matters very much. . . . But perhaps she will do so now."

He turned to the girl, who had swiftly gone deathly white: "Dorothy, will you accept my offer of marriage?"

Surely never was proposal of marriage made under such amazing circumstances before. Dorothy found herself the cynosure of four pairs of eyes. Four men were watching her keenly, awaiting her answer. And she could not give it! She longed with all her soul to cry "*No!*" in the face of this man she had come to loathe. "Be his wife? Never!" she told herself fiercely. She would fling herself from that balcony before she would consent to that. But—something must be said.

In a flash she saw the responsibility which Wilding had all unwittingly thrust upon her; it bore her down like a choking blanket of fog. Her brain worked at lightning speed as she stood with downcast eyes before them. If she said "No" her father and his friends would almost certainly attack Lemiere, and Dorothy shuddered at the thought of what might happen to them. She must restrain them from doing anything that might lead to disaster, yet she dared not give Lemiere a lever to use against her. Afraid to say "No," she could never say "Yes" to his direct question. Yet something she must say—and quickly too.

And while she hesitated it was Lemiere himself who came to her aid.

"Perhaps I have embarrassed you by my tactless question, Dorothy," said he, misinterpreting the meaning of her confusion. "Well, there is no necessity for you to reply, my dear girl. Let us waive it for a time. In any case, it is immaterial."

"But it isn't," expostulated the Doctor angrily. "Damn you, Lemiere, you've terrified my little girl with your crazy nonsense! You can't force people to do things like this in the twentieth century. You're an idiot—a—a——"

An icy smile swept for a moment across Lemiere's thin lips. "You underestimate my power," he remarked. "Let me assure you that you are making a grave mistake. Please remember that you are not in civilization now; here I am supreme—and answerable to no one."

His boasting assertion staggered the Doctor, who plainly did not know what to make of this amazing man. It was Wilding who again put a pertinent question:

"Then if that is the case, why take the trouble to get us here just to tell us that you intend adopting cave-man tactics to obtain a wife? Is it so difficult to find someone who will marry you that you must descend to such depths? Or is it that you are proud of the idea, and wanted to share the glory with others?"

Dorothy caught her breath sharply. She saw the drift of Wilding's scornful remarks immediately. He was deliberately irritating Lemiere, no doubt in the hope that the scientist would lose his temper and thus provide an opportunity for them to overpower him. The boldness of the scheme sent a little ray of hope through her. In breathless anxiety she awaited the result.

Lemiere turned his smouldering eyes in Wilding's direction, hesitating while he searched the explorer's grim countenance with his steely gaze.

"Your language, Major Wilding, is most insulting," he said coldly. "If your purpose is to annoy me, you are wasting



your time. I have brought you here because I knew that sooner or later you would have come of your own accord, and also because the sooner we conclude this matter the less time will I be wasting which I should be devoting to my work."

His piercing eyes gloomed over them. "These are my conditions. If you are prepared to leave Dorothy here, to annoy me no further with futile attempts to take her away, and to leave this region at once, I will guarantee the three of you safe-conduct to your launch, and—what may be even more important, since you are all men of the world—I will give you the famous Golden Rope, which is now in my possession. If, on the other hand, you still propose to treat me as an enemy, if you will not agree to my conditions, then, by God, you will find me an opponent who shows no mercy!"

The cold vehemence of his level tones struck horror into his hearers. "Not one of you will leave this temple alive! And you will gain nothing, because I have definitely decided that Dorothy shall be my wife. Nothing that any of you can do or say will alter that! I warn you that I will tolerate no interference!" That cold, passionless voice carried conviction deep into the hearts of those who heard it. The silence that followed seemed to Dorothy to sound her death-knell.

"Ah!" Wilding was speaking again. "Then it simply amounts to this—that you intend to keep Dorothy here in any case; if we offer no resistance and barter her for the Golden Rope, which you seem to know so much about, we can go unharmed; if we do resist, we will probably be killed. Is that so?"

"With slight alteration that is correct," observed Lemiere. "There will be no *probably*; you certainly will be killed. I am a man to whom half-measures have always been distasteful."

"But this is intolerable!" Dr Treloare stared aghast at the man behind the table. "You cannot do things like that and escape unpunished! Why, you bloodthirsty scoundrel,

supposing you did kill us all. Don't forget that there are still three men on the launch who would never rest until they got you! And it wouldn't be long before they did!" There was a blare of triumph in the Doctor's strident voice, and his eyes flashed defiance across the table.

Lemiere shrugged his shoulders. "I have two aeroplanes here," he remarked, "and quite recently I perfected a gas so powerful that one cubic foot would wipe out a regiment of soldiers. . . . The launch makes a very fair target on the lake." He stopped abruptly, and again came that slight movement of the shoulders.

"My God!" Dr Treloare fell back a pace and stared fixedly at Lemiere, an expression of utter horror upon his features. "You—you would kill Dixon and the others—three men who have never done you the slightest harm!" There was incredulous amazement in his voice.

"I think I told you that I never had any time for half-measures," Lemiere said coldly. "If one man stands between me and my objective, that man goes. Six would go the same way. So would fifty or a hundred. I repeat that I will tolerate no interference!"

"Why, you murderer, you——" Words failed the outraged Doctor. He choked and spluttered in a paroxysm of rage and horror, while Dorothy's face went whiter still in the silence that followed.

"Well, gentlemen, what is your answer?" asked Lemiere sharply. "I am a busy man. I cannot afford to waste my time in useless discussions. I have already given you a choice, and that is a concession which I seldom allow. What is your answer?"

Wilding suddenly assumed the rôle of spokesman.

"Will you grant us a little time to discuss this matter amongst ourselves?" he asked quietly. "You can hardly expect us to give you a straight-out answer at once to such a proposal. Let us talk it over together, and we will give you our answer in an hour's time."



Lemiere frowned, and drummed on the table-top with his long fingers while he considered the request.

"I cannot see that there is any need for further discussion," he declared at length. "However, I will make you a concession." He consulted his wristlet-watch. "The time is now half-past eleven. I will give you until two o'clock to come to a decision. At that hour I will send for you all, and I hope that by then you will have adopted a sensible attitude."

In answer to his touch on the gong a native servant appeared in the doorway. Lemiere spoke to him quickly and then turned to the little group in front of him.

"You will be conducted into another room, where you can talk without interrupting me," he informed them. "Before you go, I will tell you two things. The first is this: Do not attempt to escape. The task is beyond you. The second: It will not be worth waiting one moment on the lake in the hope of finding the Golden Rope. As I have told you, it is in my possession now. That is all."

## CHAPTER XIII

### A DARING PLAN

THE small, bare room in which Lemiere had ordered his prisoners to be placed was strikingly different from that which they had just left. The stone walls were bare and unadorned; the floor was uneven and uncovered. It was dimly lit, the only illumination coming from two small windows set high up at the top of one wall.

"More like a cell than a room," observed the Doctor, with a sniff of disgust, as he looked round it. And, indeed, but for the fact that four fairly comfortable chairs had been placed in it for their use, the unprepossessing chamber certainly resembled a prison cell more than anything else. There was an air of foreboding in its very gloominess; the bare stone seemed to radiate a chilly coldness that not even the sultry warmth of the summer day could dispel. The doorway, like all others in this ancient building, was covered by a heavy dark-coloured curtain. Who, or what, was on the other side none of them knew; but of one thing they all felt very certain, and that was that they had not been left unguarded. The only exit from the room was through the door.

Standing on a chair Dale looked through one of the small windows. The view which met his eyes was one which would not inspire confidence in an attempt to escape in that direction. Steep and barren, the stone wall of the old temple dropped sheer below him for nearly four hundred feet, to where the still water of the inlet sparkled in the hazy sunlight.

He shook his head gloomily as he descended from the chair. "Only a fly could climb down that wall," he declared.

"Well, as we can't escape we had better make the best of



it," observed the Doctor wearily. His care-lined face wore a troubled, anxious expression in sharp contrast to the defiant anger with which he had faced Lemiere. He had at first been inclined to regard the man as a maniac, harmless perhaps, but one whom it would be wise to humour; now the realization of the peril which faced them was startlingly clear. Lemiere's cold-blooded callousness cut through him like a knife.

There was a world of tenderness in his eyes and his voice as he turned towards Dorothy, who had flung herself with a little sigh into one of the chairs. The look of despair upon her pretty face went to his heart; bitterly he reproached himself for ever allowing her to accompany them on the ill-fated journey. He wished that he had never seen that cursed chart, and more than ever that he had not regarded it so seriously.

Wilding, closely observing the changing expressions on the Doctor's features, guessed at his thoughts and sought to cheer him up a little.

"It's of no use bewailing what has happened, Doctor," said he quietly. "No one could have foreseen this. We're in it now, and we shall have to get out of it as best we can. It's a case of our brains against this man's abnormal mind, and if we're to beat him we shall have to keep our wits about us. We can't afford to give way to despair."

"Major Wilding's right, Doctor," chimed in Dale earnestly. "Let us talk it all over calmly, and I'm sure we shall find some way out."

The Doctor heaved a sigh. "I know, I know," he said. "You are right. For Dorothy's sake we must think and act clearly. What do you suggest, Wilding?"

Instinctively he turned towards the explorer for advice, well knowing that only Wilding's quickness of thought had extricated him from many tight corners.

The explorer looked at Dorothy steadily, and hesitated for a moment or two.

"I think, before we do anything else, it would be as well to get some things clear," he said, in a rather embarrassed tone.

The girl stared at him in some surprise, and he went on hurriedly: "A little while ago, Miss Dorothy, Lemiere asked you a question which you did not answer—I think I know why. Will you give us that answer now? Do you want to do—as Lemiere suggests?" He asked the blunt question with painful diffidence.

Dr Treloare glared at him, and opened his mouth to speak. Wilding waved him into silence.

Dorothy's brown eyes flashed. "No, I don't!" she cried, with passionate vehemence. "And I won't, either! I hate him—I loathe him; I would sooner die than marry him." She shuddered in terror at the thought, and then, regaining control of herself, continued more calmly: "I did not answer him because I thought that if I said 'No' the three of you might have attacked him, and"—her voice suddenly trembled—"you don't know what dreadful things he can do! Brian does, because he has seen some of them; but you, Daddy, and Major Wilding, have no idea what he is like. He is inhuman! . . . He could have killed you all without leaving that table, and he would have too. I could see it in his eyes! . . . And—and I couldn't say 'Yes' to him, could I? You might have thought I meant it. So—so—" She stopped abruptly, and bit her quivering lip to keep back the tears that seemed so near.

"My poor little girl!" The Doctor's arm went round her in an affectionate embrace, and she sank her head on his shoulder.

"So you said nothing," concluded Wilding softly, "and Lemiere thought it was because you were overcome with emotion. It was a wise move, Dorothy."

It was the first time he had ever addressed the girl by her Christian name without the prefix "Miss," but she seemed not to notice it. "I don't know what might have happened



if you had answered him as you just answered me," continued Wilding, "but I think you're right in one thing. We certainly would have rushed him, irrespective of the consequences. Perhaps it's just as well we didn't. . . . Well, now, we have more than two hours to ourselves, and I would suggest that both Dorothy and Dale give us an outline of what has happened since we were separated. It may help us to formulate a plan."

And so, for the next half-hour, Dr Treloare and Wilding assumed the rôle of listeners to a tale so strange that more than once the former was constrained to pinch himself to make sure that he was not dreaming. Astonishment was writ large upon his expressive features. So swift had been the march of incredible events in the few days that had elapsed since the adventurers reached the lake that he found it difficult to believe so many things had actually happened. He would not have been surprised to find himself sitting up, suddenly awakened from a remarkable dream, in bed at his home in the quiet Adelaide suburb. But there were the four stone walls round him, and there was his daughter in front of him telling him the most amazing things in her low, sweet voice with the utmost composure.

In his long experience as a medical man Dr Treloare had heard and seen many strange things, but never in all his life had he listened to such an astonishing story as that which fell from the lips of the girl in front of him. Dale, of course, had already heard it all before, but he listened to Dorothy with rapt attention—perhaps, be it said, principally because he liked to sit there and watch her sweet face, and listen to her soft voice, and observe the queer little shake of her shingled head as she emphasized some point in the narrative.

Wilding, too, kept his half-closed eyes upon her face, and if his rugged features were set in masklike immobility it was only because he had long ago learned that the face is the mirror of the mind, and he who would keep his thoughts to himself must first learn to control his features.

Step by step he followed the girl's narrative with the keenest interest, seeking to glean from her story some definite point around which he could evolve a plan. It was not through self-conceit or an exalted opinion of his own abilities that he thus considered himself the leader of the unfortunate little party. So long had he been a leader of men who placed implicit reliance in his guidance that Wilding accepted the position now as a matter of course. And as he listened carefully to every word uttered by that low, clear voice his subconscious mind was busy planning—planning—until at length the germ of a concrete scheme took shape and began to grow. . . .

With a detailed conciseness that would have delighted the heart of a sub-editor on a news-pictorial morning daily Dorothy described her adventures from the time when she had been surprised by the natives boarding the *Jessica* until the arrival of her father and Major Wilding at the temple that morning. Bearing in mind Wilding's suggestion, she omitted nothing of interest. Only those painfully passionate scenes with Lemiere did she touch lightly upon; the memory of them aroused within her a sense of dreadful loathing and horror which she endeavoured to drive from her mind. . . .

She told them of the strange underground waterway by which she had been brought to the temple; of the wonderful ray which Lemiere had demonstrated to her, and which brought to Dr Treloare a feeling of irresistible curiosity after she had assured him of its genuine nature; of the amazing periscope-telescope combination which had enabled Lemiere to keep himself so well informed of their movements; of the wonderful garden into which Dale had burst so unceremoniously, and of the secret passages which ran through the old building.

And then Dale took up the narrative, and told them how he had stumbled into the temple after losing his way in the jungle; how he had discovered the secret passageway from his cell, and how Lemiere had so unexpectedly appeared in



front of them on the preceding night when they had almost succeeded in their bold bid for freedom. Only one thing he did not mention—that still, stark figure, stabbed to the heart, which he had seen stretched upon the stone floor at the end of the second passageway; the mere thought of that dreadful scene brought overwhelming horror upon him.

“And now you know as much as we do,” he concluded gravely. “Whether or not the Golden Rope is here I don’t know; at any rate, I haven’t seen a trace of it in any of the rooms I have entered through these passages. Lemiere may have been bluffing.”

Wilding sat as though lost in thought as the young man finished the strange tale which Dorothy had begun. There was a frown upon his grim features, and a far-away expression in the half-closed eyes which stared vacantly at the stone wall opposite. Dorothy watched him with a queer mixture of hope and despair, wondering what lay behind that immobile countenance.

Dr Treloare, whose astonished gaze had strayed alternately from Dorothy to Dale as he listened to the extraordinary narrative, suddenly snapped his fingers with a click that sounded strangely loud in the confined space.

“God bless me!” he ejaculated. “I’ve heard some odd things in my time, but this beats everything. Why, it sounds more like a bad dream than anything else! The man must be a raving maniac! Clever he may be, but mad he surely is. Great heavens, when we left on this trip the thought of such things happening never entered my head. I—it seems incredible!”

“Well, here it is—and here we are,” said Dale grimly. “The question is: How are we going to get out?”

For a few moments no one spoke. The sultry silence was pregnant with feeling.

Wilding had half opened his mouth when Dorothy suddenly rose to her feet. He watched her with keen interest; his eyes flickered imperceptibly. The girl’s face was deathly

pale, but there was determination stamped in every line of her sweet features. Her eyes were bright with the glimmer of unshed tears. Her hand closed tightly upon the back of her chair, until the knuckles stood out whitely against the sun-tinted skin.

“Daddy!” Her voice faltered a little, but with an effort she regained her self-control and went on steadily, her eyes sweeping in turn to each of the three men: “There is only one way out of this. I shall have to do—as Lemiere orders.”

“What!”

The horrified exclamation came simultaneously from both the Doctor and Brian Dale, who sprang to their feet and regarded her in utter astonishment. Wilding, who had swiftly guessed at her intention, made no movement, but his eyes suddenly brightened with fierce admiration.

“Dorothy! You can’t! Why, you said yourself——”

The girl waved aside their expostulations, and went on quickly, as though she were afraid of her resolution giving way: “You must see that there is no other way! I have seen more of this man than any of you, and I tell you his power is almost unlimited!”

There was a vibrant intensity of feeling in her voice that startled the Doctor into quivering silence. “If we don’t agree to whatever he wants he will kill you, and the others on the launch as well. You are unarmed, but even if you each had a revolver you would be powerless against him. You would not have a chance! Why should you sacrifice your lives in a hopeless fight? He wants me, and he will get me—if he has to kill you all. You heard what he said about one man or six men being in his way.” Her head dropped, and her voice fell to little more than a choking whisper. “Let him have me. Leave me, save yourselves, and go away from here before he changes his mind. Go—and forget me. I—will find some way out.”

Overcome by her effort, Dorothy sank wearily into her chair, and covered her face with quivering hands. Her slim



figure trembled with the intensity of the emotion that shook her through and through. She longed to weep, but now the tears refused to come. Weakness and exhaustion seemed to overwhelm her.

For several seconds the three men stared at the girl in stupefied amazement. Her splendid sacrifice, so freely offered, held them spellbound. Dale's eyes were shining brightly; he could not have trusted himself to speak. Her magnificent courage staggered him, just as it had aroused in Wilding a feeling of admiration such as he had never felt for any woman, and for few men, before. And the tears stood unashamed in the Doctor's eyes as he leaned forward and laid his hand gently upon Dorothy's quivering shoulder.

"My brave little girl," he said softly, his voice vibrant with emotion. "You surely don't think we would let you sacrifice yourself like that, do you? Why, any of us here or on the launch would strangle the fellow with our bare hands before we would let him touch you."

"I'd wring his neck if I got near him," said Dale viciously, clenching his fists tightly. "And I," added Wilding quietly.

"There, you see, Dorothy, we are determined to stick to you, my dear. We are not such cowardly curs as to take advantage of your brave offer."

Dorothy raised her head and smiled wanly upon them. "But, Daddy, it isn't a matter of being cowardly! It's just being—sensible. You cannot fight this man, because he is utterly unscrupulous, and he won't give you the chance. Why throw away so many lives when it's only one he wants?"

"He'll be getting a da—darned sight more than he wants if he isn't careful," said the Doctor, breathing hard. "I tell you, Dorothy, we're not going to let you sacrifice yourself in this way! We don't leave this place until you come with us! We'll defy him to do his worst!"

"I think we can do better than that," said Wilding calmly. The others looked at him in surprise. A glimmer of hope sent the colour racing back into Dorothy's pale cheeks.

The Doctor's eyes brightened as they anxiously scanned the explorer's rugged countenance. "Ah! You've got an idea, Wilding? That's the stuff! Let's hear it."

Wilding hesitated momentarily under the keen scrutiny of those anxious faces.

"It's a long chance," he said slowly, "and there is an element of risk in it, but the odds against us are so great that we shall have to chance it. My experience has shown me that in the most desperate situations you have to take the most desperate chances—and, oddly enough, they generally come off. I've been in some nasty scrapes in my time, but I'll admit that I've never been up against anything like this. We are utterly helpless—we haven't as much as a jack-knife between us. And if we're to get out alive, well, we shall just have to risk everything on one fling of the dice."

"I think we're agreed on that," said the Doctor gravely, impressed by the seriousness of Wilding's voice and manner. "We must take a chance—if it's the longest chance anyone ever took. Let's hear your plan, Wilding."

The explorer turned towards Dorothy, who was watching him with pathetic anxiety. The ray of hope she had first experienced hung suspended at his last words.

"If I remember aright, Dorothy, you mentioned just now, while relating your experiences, that you were particularly struck by the strange silence all over the temple yesterday afternoon just after lunch?"

"Yes, I did," answered the girl, in some surprise. "I couldn't help noticing it. Really, it seemed as though the place was quite deserted. It was almost uncanny—so quiet, so still."

Dr Treloare fidgeted impatiently in his chair.

"Look here, Wilding, what's this got to do with your plan? We haven't much time left, you know. I don't see the drift of your question at all."

"It's plain enough," observed the explorer calmly. "I



just wanted to verify the point, because the success of our scheme depends on it a good deal. I am convinced that the reason for this silence is just that during the afternoon the temple actually *is* deserted, excepting for Lemiere himself, and perhaps the girl Lula and a few of the less important servants, who would be in some distant part of the building. If that is the case it amounts to this: that if we can get rid of Lemiere for a little while we should have no difficulty in getting out of this place unnoticed, provided we select our time carefully."

"Well, yes, maybe," agreed the Doctor, still puzzled. "But how are we going to shake off the fellow? And what are we going to say in answer to his ultimatum? That's the problem."

"And it's easily settled," returned Wilding. "This is my plan. When we meet Lemiere at two o'clock we will tell him that we are resigned to our fate, that we accept his conditions, that we will leave Dorothy here, and if he will give us the Golden Rope and take us back to the launch we will leave Treasure Lake at once. In other words, we will surrender to him completely."

He lifted his hand to command silence, for the Doctor, astonished at this apparently abject avowal of defeat, had opened his mouth to voice a vigorous denial. Dorothy and Dale, though openly puzzled, said nothing.

"Needless to say," resumed Wilding, "Lemiere will be delighted at his triumph. In fact, if I am any judge of men he will swell with conceit. We shall ask him to give us a demonstration of his ray, and also to let us inspect the periscope in the tower before we go. In every possible way we will give him to understand that we acknowledge him as master of the situation."

Wilding leaned forward in his chair, his eyes gleaming in his grim-set face. Something of his vigour passed to the three listeners who sat in strained silence, conscious of the thrill of unknown expectation.

"If we can carry out our parts well enough, we will deceive the man completely. I have no doubt that he will meet us armed with some diabolical thing—perhaps one or more of those gas-balls; and if he saw any sign of hostility he would not hesitate to use them. But when he knows that we have climbed down to his wishes he will forget everything in his conceit. To him we shall be but four more victims afraid to oppose his will; as enemies we shall cease to exist. And then our chance will come."

His voice grew tensely earnest. "Lemiere in this state of mind will be a very different man to the Lemiere we saw this morning. He will never imagine that we are bluffing him; such men never do. He won't be able to think about anything but his supposed triumph. And now it will be three men against one man—and an unsuspecting man at that. He may be armed, but if we all get at him together he will be helpless."

Wilding's big hands clenched slowly. "If I get my hands on his windpipe I'll guarantee he won't make one squeak; if I keep them there long enough he'll never make one again. The three of us will be able to manage him easily: there is sure to come a time when we can catch him off his guard. Whether or not we kill him doesn't matter much; we will effectively silence him, anyhow. And then, while everything is quiet, we will go quietly out, make off in one of the boats at the back, and as soon as we reach the *Jessica* go for our lives into the tunnel, where we will be pretty safe. That's the plan. It seems to me to be the only one, but if anyone can suggest anything else, let's hear it."

Dorothy's eyes were shining with excitement and renewed hope.

"It will work, I know it will!" she exclaimed. "You've measured the man perfectly. I've seen him in different moods, and I'm sure the plan will go just as you say! Oh, if only we can do it!"

"Yes, I believe we ought to pull it off," said Dale. "The



idea is sound enough, and with three of us against him we should flatten the fellow in a few seconds."

"By gad, I believe you've hit it, Wilding!" The Doctor could not keep the quivering excitement out of his voice, and his eyes were bright at the sudden transition from despair to hope. "I can't see anything else for it. I am certain that Lemiere will behave as you think, and it's just a matter of whether we can act the part well enough to deceive him. If we can do that, the rest should be easy."

"I think there will be no difficulty about that, because to a certain extent he will be expecting us to surrender," emphasized the explorer. "Whatever our expressions may be, he will put it down to resignation, unwilling perhaps, but genuine all the same. I would have preferred something less violent than attacking him outright, though," he added, "because he will almost certainly have one or more of those infernal gas-balls on him somewhere, and if they get broken in the scrimmage things may be serious for all of us. However, we shall have to—— Why, what's the matter, Dorothy?"

He stared at the girl in surprise, and Dale and the Doctor followed his gaze, to find Dorothy sitting suddenly rigid, a strangely intent expression upon her face, and an abnormal brightness in her staring eyes.

The girl did not answer him immediately. His words aroused in her mind a swift flood of memory. With startling distinctness she remembered a scene in her room on the previous afternoon—a young man with a bandage round his forehead standing before her, in his hand a small bottle of grey-white tablets.

"Laudanum!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Don't you remember, Brian? That bottle, yesterday afternoon." And then, turning to the bewildered explorer, she went on swiftly, the colour racing through her cheeks: "I just remembered! Yesterday afternoon, when Brian was going through those secret passages he got into the dispensary, and found a bottle of laudanum tablets—tincture of opium. We kept half each."

She fumbled in the pocket of her khaki tunic, and produced a small package wrapped in cloth, as Dale, with a sudden exclamation of remembrance, dived his hand into his own tattered garment and produced the bottle. "Look! Here's mine—and Brian has found his!"

"By Jove, this *is* a discovery!" Wilding's eyes were gleaming as the Doctor, taking one of the tablets, sniffed at it and cautiously placed it against the tip of his tongue. "This alters the whole thing! It simplifies matters wonderfully!" His quick brain immediately grasped the value of this new development. "It was lucky you thought of these, Dorothy. How many tablets are there altogether? Sixteen? Good! That's four each. All we have to do now is to distract Lemiere's attention for a moment during the lunch we shall ask him for, so that whoever is nearest him can slip a couple into his cup or glass, whichever he is using. It will be the easiest thing in the world! No fuss, no bother of any sort. Doctor, how long will these things keep him quiet?"

"Hard to say," returned the Doctor, frowning. "Three might kill him; they would some people. Depends on his heart. By the taste of them these tablets are highly concentrated. Two of them in a drink would act mighty quickly, and would quieten him for several hours, anyway."

"Good!" Wilding took four of the small tablets from Dale, and the Doctor, keeping a similar number for himself, returned the rest to Dorothy.

Scarcely had he done so when the curtain covering the doorway quivered, and an instant later a native servant entered the room. He bowed slightly, and held the curtain to one side. There was no mistaking his meaning. It was evident that the truce was at an end.

The prisoners rose slowly to their feet.

"One word before we go." Wilding spoke with swift softness. "Don't forget that our first aim is to deceive Lemiere. What will happen afterwards I can't say. We shall have to rely on our own brains, and take the first opportunity we



see. And if we cannot use these tablets we still have the other alternative."

He turned towards Dorothy as they moved through the doorway. "You are the main actor in the drama," he told her in an urgent murmur. "If you succeed, the rest will be easy. Understand?"

The girl nodded in silence. Her heart was pounding madly as they followed the guide along the stone passage. Could she do it? Could she deceive those sharp eyes that bored into her soul with such fierce intensity? She must, she told herself. She must! Not only her own safety but that of the others also rested upon her.

Dorothy knew that Wilding was right; that it was to her more than to her friends that Lemiere would look for proof of his victory. If *she* could convince him he would take little notice of the others.

And convince him she must! The mere thought of failure roused her to a high pitch of self-reliance. All her innate courage, her old-time confidence, came suddenly upon her; the self-composure which had won for the girl the highest commendation from famous surgeons began to reassert its influence. Her heart ceased its painful hammering, and when she stepped into the room where Lemiere was waiting Dorothy knew that her faculties were more alert than they had ever been since she entered the precincts of the temple.

Whatever Fate might have in store for them, however strenuous the fight, she was at least ready to give of her best to the very last moment!

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE TOAST

DOROTHY recognized the room immediately. It was the dining-chamber in which she had previously dined with Lemiere. It was rather small, but splendidly lit through three large open windows which gave a magnificent panoramic view of the far-distant mountains. There were no elaborate furnishings in the room, but there was sufficient to ensure comfort and convenience.

A neatly laid table, set for five, had been placed at one end of the room, the floor of which was covered with the thick, velvet-textured native material so extensively used throughout the temple, and just behind the table, and a little to one side of the nearest window, stood a small sideboard, containing several bottles of wine and other liqueurs.

In the centre of the floor, his back to the light, Lemiere stood with his hands clasped behind him. He was dressed in the smartly cut well-fitting suit which he had worn when he first met Dorothy in his study. There was a sense of quiet dignity about the man which commanded respect and even admiration; to all outward appearance he seemed a polished gentleman, courteous, yet with the air of one accustomed to obedience.

His four prisoners stood facing him against the brilliant light. With a wave of his hand Lemiere dismissed the native servant, and they were alone.

He seemed in no hurry to learn their decision. For a few moments he stood surveying them calmly, his piercing gaze moving slowly from one to another until it rested at last upon Dorothy, who stood, a little apart from the others, at



the extreme left. Just for a fleeting second she met his keen, penetrating stare; then her eyes fell to the floor, and confusion and embarrassment showed in her features. She moved a little uneasily; a faint flush stole over her pale cheeks. Lemiere's eyelids flickered almost imperceptibly, but his features remained motionless. Not by any other sign did he betray the fact that he had observed her confusion.

"Well, gentlemen, what is your decision?"

The question came clearly, incisively, yet without the slightest trace of impatience. Such was the tone of his voice that he might merely have been asking the time of day. His eyes were fixed upon Wilding, whom he plainly regarded as the leader of the party. The explorer met his searching gaze levelly.

"We have agreed to do as you wish," he said slowly, in the expressionless voice of one resigned to his fate. "What else can we do? There is no sense in fighting against impossibilities. . . . We will leave Dorothy here, and if later, after lunch, you will give us the Golden Rope and conduct us to our boat, we will depart at once. . . . Perhaps before we go you will let us see something of this strange ray you have discovered, and of the other wonders of this place."

The last sentence passed Lemiere almost unnoticed. Into his eyes had come a swift flame of triumph that not even the expressionless features could disguise.

"Ah!" The sibilant exclamation forced itself through his tightly drawn thin lips. "You speak, I suppose, Major, for the others. Is that so, Doctor?"

Dr Treloare spread his hands resignedly in front of him. "What can we do?" he asked helplessly. "We are in your hands. We must accept whatever you offer."

"And you, my young friend?"

The realistic scowl upon Brian Dale's handsome features was just what Lemiere might have expected from one who perceived Love slipping from his grasp. The look which the stalwart young man flashed upon him was one of resigned

malevolence rather than open hostility. "Yes," he muttered, clenching his hands tightly.

Once again Lemiere's keen eyes blazed upon Dorothy. He regarded her thoughtfully for a moment or two, and was about to speak when Wilding interrupted.

"I beg that you will not embarrass Dorothy by asking her needless questions," he said stiffly. "She is doing what we consider best for us all."

Lemiere nodded slowly. "You are right," he acknowledged. "Naturally she is somewhat disturbed by the—er—extraordinary circumstances. Allow me to congratulate you all upon your decision. Believe me, it is a wise one."

His eyes were flashing like brilliant stars, and his usually calm voice rang with a triumph which he made no effort to conceal. The knowledge that he was superior, that they had surrendered so completely to him, aroused his self-conceit until it threatened to overwhelm him, even as Wilding had foretold. His whole attitude seemed suddenly to change; the rigid austerity merged with astonishing swiftness into a boisterous joviality. He laughed sharply—the unctuous chuckle of one who knows his own superiority. Its very mirthlessness dashed against Dorothy's sensitive mind as a douche of ice-cold water against her body.

"Ha, ha! Of course you would do as I wish! Everyone does so! I told you before, didn't I, that here I am supreme! I knew you fellows would think of your own skins first! Or perhaps the Golden Rope had something to do with it, eh?"

The coarse gibe, followed by another sharp cackle of mirthless sound, roused the Doctor to blinding fury. Only a warning glance from Wilding prevented him from hurling himself against the grinning author of that revolting sarcasm. The explorer seemed unconcerned by the gibing outburst. His rugged features were entirely devoid of expression, and Dale, taking his cue from that imperturbable figure, controlled himself as best he could, though the knuckles of his



tightly clenched hands stood out in bold relief against the brown skin.

Lemiere waved his hand airily towards the table.

"You see, I expected that you would behave sensibly," he cried. "I even had the table prepared in readiness for our lunch. Come! You shall be my guests for an hour or two. It is seldom that I honour anyone in such a manner. We shall lunch together, drink a toast together, and then before you depart I will show you wonders that will stagger you! You will see things that exhaust the imagination—sights that will make you remember the Temple of Sähr for the rest of your years! Come!"

With the boisterous energy of a delighted schoolboy Lemiere installed his guests in their places at the table and, with Dorothy at his right hand, took his seat at the head, his back to the windows.

The remembrance of that strange meal lingered long afterwards in Dorothy's memory. She had but to close her eyes to see it all again with startling clearness—Lemiere, intoxicated by his madness and conceit, close by her left arm; on her right, Wilding, calm, serene, almost stolid in his utter indifference to anything but the food in front of him; immediately opposite, the Doctor, openly bewildered by the amazing change in his remarkable host, and next to him Brian Dale, sullen and brooding, playing his part with all the aplomb of an experienced actor; while every now and then a brown-skinned figure moved noiselessly into and out of the room, attending to the table with a precise skill that would have done credit to many a waiter at a city hotel.

The surroundings alone would have been sufficient to impress the scene indelibly upon the girl's memory, but Lemiere himself was, perhaps unconsciously, the pivot upon which everything swung. He talked incessantly in a high-pitched voice which contrasted sharply with his normally cold, clear tones, and which betrayed even more than his nervous manner the intense excitement which gripped him.

He told stories and anecdotes in endless succession, roared with coarse laughter at his own jokes, and clapped the Doctor heavily upon the shoulder with a frequency and a vigour which made the latter wince.

As the meal progressed his table manners became more and more atrocious; Dorothy, remembering the polished gentleman with whom she had previously dined, was confused and surprised at his conduct. His wildly waving arm would send food and liquid sprawling upon the table-top, at which he bellowed uproariously. Each time the servant entered the room he flung some article of food at him, and relaxed into ungovernable paroxysms of laughter as the astonished man dived and dodged in order to avoid being struck.

The Doctor was fast becoming exasperated and annoyed at his host's inexplicable conduct; Dale's simulated sulkiness had given place to an expression of undisguised surprise. Wilding alone retained his air of indifference with an ease that Dorothy could not understand. To the girl the lunch had become a nightmare; she never knew just how she got through it. Lemiere dominated the scene; she loathed his beastliness; his coarse familiarity sickened her. She longed with all the strength of her being to snatch a knife from the table and plunge it deep into that long, unprotected throat—to stab him again and yet again.

But always that steady figure beside her stayed her hand; she knew that Lemiere was now in the state of mind which would play him right into their hands. . . . If only she could divert his attention for a moment. . . . Three of those small, fateful tablets lay concealed in her clenched, moist hand, awaiting the opportunity. . . .

With a quick, nervous movement Lemiere suddenly sprang to his feet, and roared fiercely at the startled, frightened native who edged cautiously away from him. There was no misunderstanding his meaning; that imperious finger pointing to the doorway hardly needed the spoken command.



With an alacrity that aroused in Wilding a feeling of satisfaction the man vanished immediately through the doorway, and the heavy curtain swung quietly into place behind him.

Lemiere, still standing at the head of the table, stared around at his guests in triumph; his eyes were blazing with a light that sent a chilling fear through Dorothy.

"Thank God he's gone!" His voice was thick and unsteady. "Can't stand these cursed niggers! They're only useful to experiment with! I've told him if he comes back before I send for him I'll twist his head off!" He shook with laughter and gripped the table, swaying like a man half-drunk. Then with an effort he recovered himself.

"And now for the toast! Let us drink the health of the bride and bridegroom! I can promise you something special in champagne."

He turned suddenly and from the sideboard produced a long-necked bottle and five wineglasses. With a gesture of impatience he opened the bottle by the simple expedient of crashing the neck heavily against the sharp edge of the table. His hand was shaking as he poured the sparkling liquid into the thin-stemmed glasses. With laboured care he placed a glass before each of his guests, and retained one in front of himself.

His eyes were glittering with fierce intensity as he suddenly straightened his tall form and flung a glance of triumph over the little party. Four pairs of eyes were watching him keenly. The touch of anxiety which they seemed to convey tickled his maddened pride. He laughed shrilly—a wild, mirthless sound that tore a shiver of fear through Dorothy, and sent her pale cheeks more ashen still.

"A toast! Come, I will give you a toast!" he cried harshly. "A toast you will remember for the rest of your lives! The bridegroom"—he laid his left hand upon his breast—"and the—— My God! what's the matter, girl?" The boasting triumph in his voice rolled into startled surprise which echoed itself in his piercing eyes.

On Dorothy's face had suddenly appeared an expression of horror and fear. Her eyes were staring past him, her features set in a line of dread.

"Oh! The window! Look!"

Her outstretched arm faltered towards the window behind Lemiere; the words came in a choking gasp that died into a whisper. Her whole attitude was one of frightened terror, of unashamed fear.

Wilding, facing the window with her, was stricken deep with admiration at Dorothy's magnificent acting. He knew from the moment he had seen the places allocated to them by Lemiere that Dorothy would have to carry the heaviest responsibility in the drama. He had wondered during the meal how she would carry out her part, for he knew by her expression and her restlessness that she realized the importance of her position. But her swift movement took him almost by surprise; he caught his breath at the exquisite realism of her dramatic characterization.

Both the Doctor and Dale had been deceived by her startling exclamation, the latter only for a moment, but the former utterly and completely. With one glance at her horrified face he sprang to his feet and swung round to the windows. Yet his movement, quick though it was, had been surpassed by Lemiere.

With an agility surprising in one so tall he pivoted sharply in the direction of Dorothy's trembling fingers. As he did so the hand behind those fingers suddenly grew rock-steady, flickered for a fraction of a second over his glass, and dropped lightly to the table.

The Doctor and Lemiere turned simultaneously towards the creator of the disturbance. If the Doctor had suddenly guessed its meaning he gave no indication of his feelings; his face still expressed undisguised surprise as he stared at his daughter, and Wilding and Dale were also looking at her in some astonishment.

Lemiere was openly bewildered. There was a frown upon



his cadaverous features as he turned to Dorothy, whose ashen face was still set in that hard line of terror.

"What is the matter, Dorothy?" he asked, in curious concern. "What alarmed you? There is nothing at the window."

The shudder which shook the girl's slight frame was so real that Wilding could scarce conceal his admiration. His eagle eyes had followed that half-closed hand as it paused over the sparkling liquid. Only with the greatest difficulty could he master his elation.

"I—I don't know," murmured Dorothy slowly, in puzzled tones. "I thought I saw something there. I—I must have been mistaken. I am sorry." She hung her head suddenly, as though ashamed of her outburst.

Lemiere regarded her with patient anxiety.

"Too much excitement, my dear girl, is even worse than too little. Your nerves must be in a most disordered condition. You need rest after all this excitement—a period of recuperation. You shall have it very soon, my dear. We shall soon have you back to normal."

He turned to the others with a rather rueful smile upon his face. The unexpected interruption seemed to have calmed him considerably. The glittering triumph still shone in his eyes, but his manner had become less boisterous.

"Come, my friends, let us drink our toast." He lifted his glass high above his head, and his guests were compelled to do likewise.

Surely never had toast been drunk under such amazing circumstances. Two of them knew for certain that something must follow—what it would be they could only guess. Dorothy's glass trembled in her shaking hand so that she feared it would crash to the table. The strain was almost intolerable; the tenseness of the air seemed to hold her in a choking grip.

"To the future happiness of the bride and groom!"

Lemiere's strident voice came to her as from a vast distance. "And a pleasant trip home for yourselves!"

He drained the glass almost at a gulp, filled it, and drained it again. He seemed not to notice that his guests had barely touched their lips with the sparkling liquid. The intense excitement of the situation had plainly affected him; the hand which set his empty glass upon the table trembled as with an ague. For an instant he remained standing, his head slightly bowed. Then, with another mirthless chuckle, and a half-puzzled, half-embarrassed air, he sank into his chair, resting his head for a moment in his cupped hands.

He roused himself with an effort, his eyelids blinking furiously.

"Why, I believe I'm feeling this excitement as much as you, Dorothy," he suddenly exclaimed, frowning a little. "Come, this won't do at all. We must entertain our guests. They will soon be leaving us, you know."

He turned towards the Doctor, who had been watching him covertly, convinced now that Dorothy's ruse had succeeded. "Doctor, did I tell you about the strange case of one of my servants here who attempted to amputate his crushed hand? No? Well, there will be just time to run over it before I demonstrate my ray to you. It possessed some most interesting features. . . . Curse this humid heat! The room's like an oven!"

He passed his hand wearily over his perspiring head, but recovered his swimming senses with a mighty effort, and commenced a highly technical description of a most intricate surgical case. To Wilding and Dale it was utterly inexplicable, and they waited in growing impatience for the denouement. Under ordinary circumstances Dorothy would have been keenly interested, but now the minutes seemed to drag past like hours. She felt the strain of waiting unendurable; it bore down upon her like some crushing, enveloping cloak.

Time and again that monotonous voice, growing thicker and ever more weary, would falter and hesitate, only to be



revived with swift rejuvenation as Lemiere, fighting strenuously against the steady stupor of the drug, sought to arouse himself from its influence. The Doctor was amazed at his vitality and the remarkable strength of will which enabled him, even in his confused state, to yet accurately describe the technical details of a complex case of septicæmia. There seemed no limits to the man's extraordinary powers.

The end came with dramatic suddenness. In the middle of a sentence Lemiere hesitated, the muscles of his face twitching convulsively. Into his blazing eyes came a hard, glassy stare. Without a sound he collapsed and fell back in his chair, his head lolling helplessly upon his breast.

In an instant the little party was on its feet. The swift feeling of relief which surged through Dorothy brought an unaccountable weakness which compelled her to grip the table for support. She felt Wilding's firm hands upon her arm, his low voice, vibrant with triumph, in her ears:

"Bear up, Dorothy. You've done splendidly! For God's sake, keep up now, and we'll be out of this in a very short time. How is he, Doctor?"

Dr Treloare had lost no time in a hasty examination of the huddled figure. "Dead to the world," he announced shortly. "He'll sleep for hours. . . . How many tablets, Dorothy?"

"Three," murmured the girl faintly. "I—I hope I haven't——"

"Killed him? No, you haven't, though you needn't worry if you had. Gad, the fellow's got the vitality of an ox! That dose would have killed most men. . . . Now, Wilding, what's the next move?"

The explorer spoke with decisive crispness:

"We'd better get away at once, and as quietly as possible. I don't think we shall be disturbed. Lemiere had that native frightened out of his wits. It's just a little after three; we should be back on the launch in half-an-hour, or an hour at most, and into the tunnel soon after." His eyes were fixed

upon the open window spaces. "I don't like the look of the weather at all," he muttered, frowning. "Curse this changeable climate! There seems to be a storm brewing."

There was not the slightest doubt about that. The brilliant sunshine of the morning had given place to a peculiar haziness which hung, pall-like, over the immediate surroundings and almost obliterated the outline of the far-distant mountains. With a little thrill of dismay Dorothy remembered Lemiere's words as they stood together on the balcony a few hours before: "We may experience a storm."

None realized more fully than Wilding the fact that a sudden storm might seriously jeopardize their chance of escape. With fine weather he had not the slightest doubt that they would quickly find an inlet which would carry them to the lake, but he knew from bitter experience that in a storm anything might happen. So far, thanks to Dorothy, his plan had gone according to schedule; he was all impatience to get away while everything favoured them.

A hasty search of the prostrate Lemiere revealed no weapons, neither firearms nor knife. As Wilding had suspected, however, there were two small glass globes concealed in an inside pocket. The explorer handled these sinister, yet outwardly harmless, fragile things with deliberate care; their curious blue-green tint, unmistakable in the daylight as they lay upon the table, aroused in Dorothy memories which turned her, shuddering, away.

The Doctor, all his professional instinct and curiosity deeply aroused, would have taken them with him for subsequent analysis, but the danger was too great. None of them knew what devilish gas was contained within those thin glass shells; an unexpected breakage might well have been disastrous.

Dale cautiously drew aside the curtain over the doorway and peered into the passage; it was utterly deserted. The old temple was strangely silent. With nerves keyed up by a sense of excitement they crept out into the long corridor.



In the daylight there was no doubt about the direction they should take. Dorothy breathed an inward prayer of thankfulness that there was to be no groping along gloomy passageways in the dark, as she and Brian had been compelled to endure on the previous night. The well-lit passageway sloped easily, yet definitely, to the right. In single file they made their way along it; Wilding in the lead, Dorothy next, then the Doctor, and Dale in the rear, keeping an ever-cautious eye behind.

Not for an instant did they relax their vigilance as they crept silently down the smooth stone passageway, hugging the corners as closely as possible, hesitating before venturing across the numerous intersections where narrow, gloomy, ill-lit alleyways joined the main corridor. No risks were taken; twenty years of roaming through some of the most dangerous portions of the world had taught Wilding the value of that old Roman proverb, "*Festina lente*"—"Hasten slowly." It had been his motto many a time when danger threatened and rapidity of action had seemed imperative; and now, in leading the little party through this unknown maze of winding passages, he followed it to the letter. He knew well that one false step would be disastrous; that if recaptured there would be no further chance of escape.

In selecting such a time for their drive to freedom the explorer had displayed keen sagacity. Not once during the whole of that tense creeping along the stone passageway were they interrupted; it seemed as though he had been correct in his assumption that during those hours of the afternoon the old temple was uninhabited. The silence was profound; its very deepness was intensified by that inexplicable, but singularly real, atmosphere of hollow desertion which characterizes an empty stone building. The slightest sound echoed and re-echoed in magnified proportions against the stone walls.

Imagination plays strange tricks in such surroundings, and more than once Dorothy found herself stopping dead

in her tracks, her heart in her mouth, for no apparent reason at all. The time seemed to her interminable; she wondered desperately how much longer this nerve-wrecking game of hide-and-seek, avoiding unknown and unseen, even non-existent, dangers would continue. She knew that at some time she must have traversed this broad passageway with Lemiere, but they all seemed alike to her, with their massive walls, their similarity of shape and design, and nothing by which she could recognize her position.

A sharp turn to the right, swift progress along a short, unlit, steeply sloping section, and a swing to the left brought her face to face with a sight that raised a little exclamation of joy to her lips. They had turned into a wider passageway, the stone floor of which was covered with the rushlike carpet, and thirty yards ahead was the familiar landing of the stairway which led to the open hall and freedom below. She recognized the two strangely carved pillars at its head.

A few minutes later they were standing in the airy hall; almost opposite was the tree-lined avenue leading to the waters of the inlet. The welcome sight revived their hopes wonderfully. Freedom at last within their grasp! Noiselessly they crossed the stone floor and hastened down the leafy avenue.

Just for an instant Wilding felt a sharp doubt that they might not, after all, find a boat left at the landing.

But Fate still smiled upon them. Two canoes had been dragged up clear of the water; it was the work of an instant to push the larger back. They scrambled in; Dale and Wilding each seized a rough-hewn broad-bladed paddle, and a moment later the small craft was flying down the inlet. They shot round the western corner of the temple and into the short tunnel which led through the huge rock upon which the temple had been built. In a very few minutes they were skimming down the broad inlet along which Dorothy had been brought by her native captors only two days before.



Two days! So much had happened in that short space of time that it seemed more like weeks than days to her. The memory of all that had occurred crowded in upon her mind like some monstrous nightmare; it left her bewildered, dazed, confused. . . . And now at last they were free of that sinister figure; beyond the reach of those soul-searing, blazing eyes; every minute taking them farther away from that grim-walled building so pregnant with evil, reeking with the dread secrets of countless centuries of intrigue.

A wave of vast relief surged swiftly through Dorothy at the thought; relief and thankfulness that came to her with an overwhelming, choking rush, bringing the tears to her eyes. Behind them the old temple towered high above the water; the gaunt, grey-white walls, haggard and austere against the dark background of lowering clouds, seemed to mock them from the distance as they sped through the still, calm water.

Overhead the sky had fast become more menacing; the light-coloured haze had deepened into a blue-black pall which every moment grew more intense. The atmosphere was heavy and electric; not a breath of air, not a whisper of wind, disturbed the leafy foliage on the northern bank. The eerie stillness, the unnatural quiet broken only by the dull *plash-plash* of the rough, broad paddles as they cleaved the water, brought anxiety to every one of the four fugitives in the native canoe.

With redoubled efforts Wilding and Dale exerted all their strength in the race against the elements.

## CHAPTER XV

## THE DRAMA OF THE STORM

WITH devastating suddenness the storm broke in all its fury. It seemed as though the heavens had been rent asunder. There came a blinding flash of lightning, an ear-splitting clap of thunder that roared with frightful reverberations over and through the rocks—and then the wind and rain.

Never in all his wanderings had Wilding experienced such awful evidence of Nature's unleashed anger. In less than a fractional part of a second they were soaked to the skin; the rain descended like a mighty wall of water that beat upon them with dreadful force. The wind, whipped suddenly to gale-like strength, lashed the water into a seething mass of waves which every moment threatened to swamp the frail craft. Like a tornado let loose, it howled down the inlet, carrying in its shrieking course great branches of trees which crashed with sickening jars against the high rocks, or struck the water with a force that sent huge showers of spray high into the air.

Flash after flash of blinding lightning lit the appalling gloom with glaring brilliance; the thunder rolled and roared like a mighty cannonade, echoing and re-echoing from hill to hill, rock to rock; its insistent reverberations striking with painful frequency upon their strained eardrums. The noise was deafening; the bedlam of sound indescribable. The shrieking wind, the squelching rain, the rolling thunder-waves, all combined to produce a weird sound of frightful intensity. Not even a shout could have been heard a yard away in that roaring inferno.

So swiftly had it come upon them that the fugitives were



caught utterly unawares. For a few seconds their frail craft spun uncontrolled in the swirling water; before they could check its mad gyrating the boat was half full of rain and spray. They clung for their lives to the sides of the little canoe, but to Wilding at least it was evident that its usefulness to them was almost gone. No small open boat could have withstood the force of that tempestuous rush of wind and rain for any length of time; even the mighty crashes of thunder seemed to shake it like a leaf.

The darkness was so intense that the temple was no longer visible: only the dim outline of the towering rock a few yards away on the southern bank could be seen. Wilding and Dale fought desperately to save the canoe, while the Doctor and Dorothy baled out water with their cupped hands. But the odds were overwhelming; the bravest fighters in the world would have been powerless against that mighty onslaught of Nature. The water splashed in faster than the two balers could get it out; the united efforts of Dale and Wilding to keep the boat straight in that maelstrom were futile. Gradually the canoe, heavily laden and buffeted by wind and wave, began to settle down in the seething water.

Wilding saw the danger, and his face set in a grim, hard line. Yet it was characteristic of him that even in the moment of certain defeat he still retained all his inherent calmness. The right-hand bank was composed largely of masses of granite; it was death to be flung against that. But on the northern left-hand side a thickly wooded hill sloped gently skyward; before the storm he had observed a narrow strip of shore just a few yards wide. If they could make that in safety he realized there was just a possibility of gaining shelter there until the storm was over.

He rose to his knees suddenly in the tossing canoe, and his outstretched arm pointed to the dim outline of the shore which loomed vaguely through the enveloping mist.

He had just opened his mouth to shout "Swim!" when, with a fierce roar that rose to a mighty crescendo of uncon-

trolled fury, a terrific burst of wind raged down upon them. It lashed the waters of the inlet into waves that towered over them like mountains; it caught the boat and its drenched occupants, lifted it right out of the water, and flung it yards away toward the northern bank. It sank like a stone, but before it had reached the water its occupants had been catapulted in all directions.

Dorothy never saw what happened to her father or to Dale; the last view she had of Wilding was a dreadful vision of the explorer shooting headlong through the gloom into the raging waters. The next moment she herself struck the water with a force that drove almost every ounce of breath from her body. Far below the surface she sank, but still retained her presence of mind, and at last, after what seemed to her like interminable hours of agony, she found herself again above the swirling water, breathless and exhausted, and buffeted helplessly by the chopping waves.

A sudden brilliant flash of lightning stabbed the gloom; it showed her the narrow strip of beach only a few yards away. Summoning all her fast-ebbing strength, Dorothy battled desperately towards that sheltered haven which meant safety from the mountainous waves which surrounded her.

It was a life-and-death fight, with the odds cruelly against the girl. The booming thunder, the flashing lightning, the insistent rain which poured heavily upon her, the wind and waves that swept her away each time success seemed to be within her grasp—no one could battle for long against such overwhelming odds. But Dorothy fought with a spirit lashed by frenzy; all the tenacious fighting blood of her Cornish ancestors carried her onwards; death to her, as to them, was preferable to defeat. . . . And slowly, gradually, virtually inch by inch, she fought her way against the elements towards that narrow shore, until at last her feet touched the sloping sand, and with one supreme effort she flung herself forward.



With infinite weariness she dragged herself ashore, out of the water, away from the waves that pounded her aching body, and for a while lay spent and gasping upon the sodden earth. But not for long. The driving rain beat mercilessly upon her, cutting sharply through the soaked khaki shirt, lashing her shoulders and flinching flesh with whiplike force. Instinct more than reason told her she must find some shelter; her brain, numbed and bewildered, refused to grasp anything save the fact that she no longer had to battle against those cruel waves.

Forcing her weary limbs to action, Dorothy stumbled towards the leafy trees beneath whose foliage some shelter at least was granted from the driving rain. Against the massive trunk of a towering monarch of the forest, where the rain came through only in large, soft drops at infrequent intervals, she suddenly collapsed and slid to the ground in a crumpled heap.

Above her the thunder roared in never-ceasing rolling claps that came with strange weirdness through the heavy foliage; the lightning stabbed the gloom like searchlight rays; the wind shrieked and raged through the upper reaches of the tall trees. The tempest had whipped itself into a veritable frenzy, screaming madly over the rocks and hills. But Dorothy heard none of it; weary in body and mind to the point of utter exhaustion, she lay, huddled and still, wrapped in the sleep of unconsciousness on the rain-spotted fragrant earth.

It is a truism that every storm has its calm.

When Dorothy Treloare returned to consciousness, some hours later, she awoke to find the land of the Sährs bathed in all the peaceful tranquillity of a summer night. The storm had long since blown itself out. Overhead the stars were shining like brilliant gems set in a mighty dome of blue. The full moon was just peeping over the rocks on the eastern horizon, bathing the landscape in a flood of soft white light;

the air was still and warm, with that velvet-like texture so characteristic of the summer nights in Central Australia.

Dorothy awoke to a strange sensation. Strong, yet gentle, arms were round her; a big firm hand was moving up and down her bare arms alternately, first one and then the other, the gentle friction sending the warm blood coursing through her cold, wet body.

Remembrance of the storm and her frightful battle for life came back to her with startling distinctness; she shuddered at the memory, and for a while was content to rest within those protecting arms which held her as easily as though she were a child. . . .

Presently she wondered who her companion might be; she knew she had been moved from where she fell beneath the forest giant, because she could clearly see the stars through her half-opened eyes. Impelled by curiosity and a sudden feeling of prescient uneasiness, she moved slightly and sat up. The man beside her shifted his position; the moonlight fell full upon his face.

She knew, almost before she saw him, that it was Arthur Wilding; yet somehow the knowledge filled her with vague dismay.

She made a movement as though to free herself, and Wilding immediately relaxed his clasp. He placed her gently on the ground, and knelt beside her.

"Feeling better, Dorothy? Thank God you've come round! I thought when I first saw you under that tree that you were dead! Not injured, are you, Dorothy?"

There was a wealth of tenderness in his anxious voice; it roused in Dorothy a sense of reproachment that her first feelings on sensing his presence had been tinged with dismay. He had plainly made her his first care; she was well aware that she probably owed her life to his tender ministrations to her chilled body. . . . And her first move on regaining consciousness had been to repulse him! Yes, she had done that, she told herself bitterly. Involuntary though the action



might have been, still she could not disguise its real meaning from herself; and since she was a fair-minded girl, facing life four-square herself and expecting others to do the same, she felt a sense of deep reproach at her ungenerous thoughts.

Wilding seemed not to notice her momentary agitation. He repeated his question a little more anxiously.

Dorothy shook her head slowly. "No, I'm not hurt anywhere," she murmured. "Just a bit shaken, that's all. I shall soon be all right. . . . Oh, wasn't it a dreadful storm!" She shivered again at the recollection.

"It's the worst storm I have ever experienced anywhere," said the explorer gravely. "In fact, it seems more like a nightmare now than anything else. Heaven only knows what damage it has done. Tell me, Dorothy, what happened to you after the boat capsized?"

"I was flung into the water, like you, and after what seemed an age I managed to scramble ashore and somehow got beneath that big tree. I don't know what happened after that. . . . And you?"

"What a time you must have had! I was more fortunate. I landed in shallow water close to the bank, and swam ashore uninjured excepting for a scratch on my arm when a branch of a tree swept past. No, it's nothing serious, though it ripped my shirt-sleeve away. After that I roamed around in the gloom looking for—the others. I had almost given up hope when I saw you lying in a heap under the tree. My God! I thought for a moment you were dead, you were so still and quiet. Then I found that your heart was beating faintly, so I picked you up and carried you to this spot I had found on the hillside. There is a small cave just behind us here. The storm had gone, and I set to work trying to revive you. You must have had an awful experience, Dorothy; it was hours before you moved."

"And you have been with me all that time—neglecting yourself, too! Why, your shirt is soaked; you haven't spent

any time at all in trying to dry yourself! . . . Oh, how can I thank you for what you have done for me!"

There were tears of mingled thankfulness and reproach in Dorothy's brown eyes as they rested upon Wilding's haggard, lined countenance. He had made light of his own troubles, but she knew from his weary expression and his tattered clothing that his own experience in the storm must have been even worse than hers.

A smile of rare gentleness lit up the explorer's rugged features.

"I have done very little, Dorothy—no more, at least, than any man would have done for you. But if you want to thank me, then follow my advice now. You are still very wet, and although the air is warm you know, as well as I do, the ill effects of allowing wet clothes to dry on oneself. I want you to go into the cave there—it is snug and empty; I've explored it thoroughly—take off every stitch of clothing and wring the water out of it. Then dry your body with your bare hands; in an emergency they make a good towel, and the friction will soon restore the circulation. By the time you are ready to dress your clothes will be nearly dry, and you will suffer no harm from the prolonged soaking. I am going into the bush a little distance away for the same purpose. You will be alone here, but I will keep within call, so you need not be alarmed. Come, now!"

He rose to his feet and lifted Dorothy easily in his strong arms. "Here is the cave. You will do as I ask?"

Dorothy knew that his advice was thoroughly sound. Despite the warmth of the summer night she was shivering with the contact of the damp clothes. The sight of Wilding's tattered garments also brought swift realization of her own unkempt appearance; her khaki shirt was torn so that her bosom was almost bare. The colour flamed to her cheeks as she endeavoured to drape the torn cloth round her.

"Yes," she promised, "I will do as you say."

"That's all right, then. Get yourself thoroughly dry. We



can talk afterwards." His big hand closed with gentle, firm pressure upon her arm for a moment, then he was gone, and she heard the rustling of the foliage as he disappeared in the scrub.

The treatment prescribed by Wilding was drastic, but wonderfully efficient. Under the stimulating friction of hard rubbing, Dorothy's cramped limbs and cold body began to glow with renewed vigour. For a little while the "pins-and-needles" stabbing feeling which always follows quickly restored circulation was painful in the extreme, but this eventually disappeared, and in a very short time her whole body was tingling with life and vigour.

Her sound constitution and natural health now stood her in good stead, and physical rejuvenation brought with it a clearer mental outlook. In a little less than twenty minutes Dorothy was standing at the entrance to the cave, conscious of a sense of fitness and alertness which she knew had not been present when she parted from Wilding. She had managed to make herself presentable by putting on her khaki shirt—or all that was left of it—back to front, which, if it gave her an incongruous appearance, at least satisfied her sense of propriety.

As she stepped into the pale moonlight outside Wilding came to meet her from the depths of the shadowy shrubbery where he had been awaiting her. He glanced with approval at the warm colour in her cheeks.

"Ah, that's better! Now you look like our Dorothy of old!"

He took her arm in his firm clasp and piloted her across the moonlit open space in front of the cave to a huge tree which had been felled, perhaps in some previous storm, and now formed a rough seat.

"Sit down, Dorothy. We must talk, and there is no sense in standing."

In silence Dorothy obeyed him, and Wilding seated himself beside the girl. Her eyes swept his rugged countenance,

noting the grim, determined chin, the deep frown which drew his brows together. With a little catch in her voice she asked the question that had been uppermost in her mind ever since she recovered consciousness and found herself in his arms. The words came slowly, with faltering hesitancy, and her voice trembled as she dreaded his reply:

"Do you think that Daddy and—and Brian could have escaped in the storm?" The words were spoken in almost a whisper; she hung upon his answer with a queer feeling of hope and despair. He had not mentioned either of them; perhaps, she thought, he had seen them . . .

Wilding did not reply immediately. His grey eyes were fixed steadily upon the shadowy trees as though he sought to find the answer there. When at last he spoke his voice was low, but steady:

"It is difficult to say, Dorothy. We two have escaped; why should not the others? In a way, it was fortunate that we were all flung towards the northern bank, because it saved us that much swimming. You did not see what became of either your father or Dale at all?"

Dorothy shook her head sadly. "No. I thought, perhaps, you might have——" Her voice sank in a trembling whisper.

Wilding took the girl's unresisting hands in his and faced her squarely.

"You must try to be brave, Dorothy," he said gently. "There is a possibility that both of them may have escaped, just as we did. The problem we must solve now is whether we should spend any time in searching for them, or whether we should endeavour to find the lake and the launch without further delay. I have thought over this for hours, and it seems to me that the latter course is best. If the others have not been—lost"—he was going to say "killed" but substituted the less harsh word—"it is certain that they will try to find the launch as quickly as possible, and we may search for hours without seeing a trace of them. But if we



strike out across the hills for the lake we have at least a chance of meeting them somewhere. Don't you think so?"

Dorothy pondered his words in silence. She would dearly have wished to search for her father, but she could not deny the logic of Wilding's statement that they might waste hours in fruitless search. And in truth their own position was serious enough. They had no food, no knowledge of their whereabouts beyond a hazy idea gained from the moon in the heavens. They did not know how far they were from the launch, or what dangers might lie ahead of them before they reached it. Obviously the only logical course was to lose no time in striking out for the lake.

"Yes, I think you are right," she murmured slowly, in answer to his question. "I—I would like to have waited and searched for—for Daddy, but while we were doing that he might be on his way towards the lake. We must go on."

"In justice to the others we cannot do anything else," said Wilding. "I am sure both your father and Dale would do the same. But there are two other things we must not overlook. The first is the fact that when Lemiere recovers from that drug he will have every available man searching for us—and what hope would we have against bush-trained natives? We must get as far from him as possible. If he gets us back in his clutches again there will be no second escape."

His face set grimly, and Dorothy shuddered at the cold truth of his words. "But worse than that," continued Wilding steadily, "when the dawn breaks, if he has not found us, Lemiere will be up in his plane, dropping his cursed gas-bombs upon the launch. Dixon and his two men won't have a ghost of a chance; they won't know what's coming until they are enveloped in poison-gas. And then they won't care. . . . Dorothy, if we don't reach the launch before dawn we might as well give up trying. You know Lemiere better than I do; you've seen more of his methods. I ask you, will he hesitate to carry out his threats?"

The grim intensity of his voice, the set lines of his face,

served to emphasize the sudden terror which gripped his fair companion. Her eyes were wide with horror as that dread warning of Lemiere's came sweeping over her.

"No, he will not," she cried chokingly. "He is inhuman! He would wipe them all out and then blow up the launch! I know he would! Oh, God, I never thought of that!"

She buried her face in her cupped hands, her shoulders shaking with inward sobs. Wilding's hand fell lightly upon her arm. The touch suddenly roused her to action. She straightened herself, and sprang to her feet. "Come, let us start at once! We must get there before him. He will murder them if we cannot warn them!"

Wilding was on his feet beside her, his hand upon her shoulder. The ghostly pallor of her face startled him out of his usual calm.

"Steady, steady, Dorothy! Calm yourself, dear girl. You will need all your courage before this night is over. . . . Remember, not even Lemiere, mad as he is, will risk flying at night. He will not start before dawn. We have at least six hours before us—probably more."

His firm touch, his steady voice, quickly restored to Dorothy some of her self-control. For an instant she leaned against him, choking back the flood of emotion which surged through her.

Wilding held her closely; her nearness filled him with a sense of intoxication which he fought madly to control. More than once since he had first found her lying huddled beneath the huge tree in the storm had Arthur Wilding, hardened explorer, blasé man of the world, come within an ace of tearing down the barrier of his own creation—a barrier which was, he knew, no longer capable of withstanding the intensity of his deep love for this girl for whom he had risked so much.

Conceal them though he might, the embers of desire had long since burst into flame; he knew that he loved Dorothy as he had never loved a woman before; that she was the only



girl who had ever meant anything to him. At social gatherings which demanded his presence women had fawned upon him with sickening disgust, not, he would bitterly think, so much because he was Wilding the man, as because he was Wilding the explorer, whose deeds had made him famous in three continents. But Dorothy had treated him with an aloofness which at first amused him, and later fanned the spark of desire into a flame which he could not—would not—quench. He had said nothing to her, content to wait awhile and gently sound her feelings. But he felt he could no longer restrain himself; he longed to pour forth the passionate love which welled within him, to crush her tightly against his heart, to feel his lips on hers. . . .

Yet even as he fought against the overwhelming, irresistible desire, in that calm, velvet atmosphere there came a sound that sent him swiftly rigid. His arm round her tightened like a band of steel. To his sensitive ears had come the sharp *crack* of a broken twig, carrying clearly in the stilly air. Someone was cautiously creeping towards them!

Wilding needed no imagination to guess who that someone might be. Who else could it be but one of Lemiere's natives, following their trail with the insistence of a bloodhound? And where there was one, the chances were there would be more.

With a swift movement he gathered the girl into his arms and swung noiselessly into the deep shadow of heavy foliage just behind them. Dumb with surprise, Dorothy, who had not heard the faint sound, felt a sharp pang of frightened dismay. But before she could move Wilding's lips were close against her ear.

"Don't move! Keep quiet! Someone's on our track!"

The words sent a swift chill of devastating terror through her; it froze her into horror-stricken silence. In an agony of apprehension she stood like a statue, her startled eyes vainly seeking to pierce the shadows which surrounded the moonlit space. The seconds went past like minutes; the

tension of the uncanny silence gripped her with clammy fear. There was not a movement anywhere; only the ghostly shadows in which her imagination conjured up all manner of frightful shapes. The weirdness of it clutched at her heart like an icy hand; she felt as though she could scream with a terror that could not be suppressed.

Quite suddenly there came again that sharply brittle, unmistakable *crack* of a broken twig. It was near at hand, just on the other side of the moonlit square.

In the shadows a dim figure suddenly appeared as though from nowhere, vague and ill-defined, like a wraith rising from the ground. Nearer it came and nearer; at last it stepped into the moonlight and stopped.

The swift feeling of relief which swept over the girl was echoed in Wilding's sibilant indrawn breath. The sharp reversal from stark terror to unexpected joy almost made her swoon. For the man who had come to them so strangely through the shadows was no half-naked, brown-skinned native; it was Brian Dale who stood before them, blinking dazedly in the bright moonlight.

"Brian!"

The exclamation burst unchecked from Dorothy's lips. There was a wealth of feeling in that one word which stabbed Wilding to the heart, closing for ever the lips which but a few minutes ago were ready to utter words of love. As it crashed upon his ears the young man spun round in stupefied astonishment. An instant later Dorothy was in his arms, with Wilding close behind her.

"Dorothy!"

Words cannot describe the combination of amazement and relief in the young man's passionate greeting. Gone was all semblance of disguise; Dorothy clung to him in delirious joy, giving him kiss for kiss with utter abandon, entirely oblivious of Wilding's presence just behind.

"Sweetheart, I thought I should never see you again!" Brian's voice trembled with emotion. "Yet here you



are, safe and sound! And Major Wilding, too. It's wonderful!"

Dorothy became suddenly aware of the explorer's presence. She coloured sharply and turned towards him—a gaunt, haggard spectator of all that had passed.

"Major Wilding was very kind to me, Brian. He found me unconscious and brought me here. I—I don't know what might have happened to me but for him."

Dale faced the explorer in some embarrassment, sensing something of his thoughts. But Wilding quickly eased the tension. "Nonsense!" he said sharply. "I did no more than anyone else would have. . . . Pleased to know you got out of it safely, Dale."

He extended a hand to the younger man. There was no mistaking the sincerity of his manner, which was emphasized by the hearty grip of his hand. Arthur Wilding was a man in every sense of the word. He had long ago learned to take defeat without cringing.

Dale was just as anxious to know how Dorothy and Wilding had escaped from the fury of the storm as they were to learn of his experience. In a few words Dorothy told him what had happened to them since the sinking of the canoe until he had so dramatically appeared before them. The young man listened with keen interest.

"Well, I thought I must have fared worst," he said when she had finished, "but now it seems I came out of it best of all. I was pretty near stunned when I hit the water, but the next wave carried me almost to the shore, and I crawled up without much trouble. Then I wandered round for hours, until I finally got completely lost in the forest. When the moon came up I decided to make for the lake, which I reckoned would lie somewhere in this direction. I saw this open square in the moonlight, and I made towards it, never dreaming that you two were here. I—I thought—"

His voice trailed away into a confused mumble. Something in his manner sent a little thrill through Dorothy; in

his reticent abruptness she sensed a sharp twinge of fear that made her heart sink as she grasped its significance. Yet she faced him very squarely, her face tensely white in the pale radiance of the moon.

"Brian, have you seen anything of Daddy?" The question came with a direct swiftiness that aroused embarrassed hesitancy in the young man. Her voice was low, yet steady; the big brown eyes searched his features with compelling frankness. "You have! I can see it in your face! . . . Brian! Tell me . . . what has happened to him?" The words came almost in a whisper.

Under the intense scrutiny of those unswerving eyes, which held him in irresistible fascination, Dale found it impossible to speak the denial which at first he had intended to utter. He longed to tell her that he had seen nothing; that he knew no more of the Doctor's fate than she did herself. But he realized that she would not believe him, and he could not utter the lie that rose to his lips. The helplessness of his position was galling to the young man; it stung him that he should have to be the one to tell her.

His confused hesitation did not pass unnoticed. Dorothy grew suddenly rigid; that which before had been just a vague, undefined fear had now become grim reality to her. Her eyes never left Dale's face; her soft voice was resonant with vibrant emotion.

"You must tell me, Brian. I would prefer to know—the worst—rather than—nothing at all."

Just for an instant the young man met her steady eyes. Her self-control amazed him.

"You force me to tell you, Dorothy, though I would rather not, because I really do not know anything definite. . . . Just as I crawled on to the shore I saw your father swimming towards me. He had almost reached the bank, and I was turning to help him in, when another huge wave came rolling down. It got him before I could reach him. In half-a-second he was carried away out into the



water, lost in the spray and the mist. . . . I never saw him afterwards."

"Ah!"

The halting words, the bald statement of facts, left no doubt in Dorothy's mind as to the fate of her father. The poignant grief which overwhelmed her threatened for an instant to destroy the self-control she had created over her emotion. The two men looked at her in some alarm. She swayed slightly; the rigid tenseness of her seemed to crumple and collapse. Her arms hung loosely by her sides; she half turned from them, with downcast eyes, and neither saw the quivering lips which she strove desperately to still.

Dale moved swiftly towards her, deep contrition on his open face. His hand touched lightly upon her shoulder.

"Dorothy, I'm sorry, dear," he murmured, scarce knowing what to say, fearful that he should have caused her pain. "I didn't want to tell you. . . . There may be still a chance, sweetheart."

He paused in awkward silence, wishing that he could share the anguish which she strove so bravely to conceal. Wilding, standing a yard or two away, looked on in helpless perplexity. A life-and-death emergency he could handle with promptness and vigorous certainty, but the simple grief of this sorely tried girl was something for which he knew no remedy. All the man in him longed to help her fragile womanliness, but he could find nothing to do, no word to say, that might comfort her or bring a ray of hope into the gloom that had so swiftly enveloped her.

And so both he and Dale remained mute and motionless, while the moonlight streamed gently down upon the hillside, and the velvet softness of the summer night fell like a fragrant cloak that wrapped them in its soothing influence. . . . And at length the trembling shoulders straightened, the limp form regained its normal posture. Dry-eyed, with a steadiness almost unnatural, Dorothy faced her companions. What depths of agony had stirred her gallant heart they never

knew; by no outward sign did she display the slightest indication of the torrent of emotion which raged within her breast. Her face was very white, but calm and unmoved; her voice low, soft and steady. Her wonderful self-control aroused admiration in both of the men; to Wilding, who in the course of his eventful career had seen many men and women dealt crushing blows, her magnificent courage was superb.

"It is not your fault, Brian," she said, in even tones. "It just happened that you should be the one who had to tell me. But I would prefer to know—the worst." Not all her self-discipline could control the slightly twitching lips which spoke so bravely. She paused for a moment, and then turned gravely towards Wilding. The girl seemed to have sprung suddenly to womanhood. "We have delayed long enough, Major Wilding," she said steadily. "Let us start for the lake."

Wilding was quick to seize the opportunity for action. The last five minutes had seemed an hour of torture to him. "By all means. Let us start at once. For all we know there may be groups of natives all over the country looking for us, and the longer we stay here the less chance will we have of getting away."

Dale's face wrinkled into a puzzled frown. "Do you know where we are, Wilding?" he asked. "I'm hanged if I do. I've been roaming around here for hours, and I've got hopelessly bushed. Which direction should we take?"

The explorer glanced at the moon, noting its position in the star-studded sky. "It is hard to say exactly," he said at last, "but the lake is a fair size, and if we strike out in a general direction towards the east we should eventually reach it. We'll make this way."

He extended his arm towards a low-lying hillock which stood out in bold relief against the moonlit sky. "We were going almost due east when the storm struck us, and if we keep in that direction we must get somewhere. We shall have to go across country now, as we have no boat. From



the top of that hill ahead of us we should get a fair view of the country. We could get it by climbing the hill just behind us, but that means going backwards. It would not be wise to do that."

"No." Dorothy shook her head. "We must go forward as quickly as possible. Let us start at once."

And so they commenced one of the strangest journeys which they had ever experienced. They travelled in single file, Wilding leading the way and trusting to his unerring instinct to maintain a straight course; Dorothy followed him, and Dale brought up the rear. At times they were climbing, and sometimes descending, small rises; passing through alternate patches of brilliant moonlight and the deep gloom of the leafy foliage; treading their way through bracken and undergrowth, over fallen trees and narrow streams half hidden in the tropical vegetation. Well aware of the need for haste, they pressed forward as quickly as possible, travelling rapidly over the open spaces splashed in the gleaming creamy light, and more slowly through the heavy timber where the undergrowth was so luxuriantly thick that it was difficult to keep one's feet. Not a sound save of their own making came to mar the stillness of the night; only the occasional brittle snapping of a breaking twig beneath an incautious foot now and then stabbed sharply through the quiet air.

The hill towards which Wilding was making was farther away than he had at first thought, even allowing for the deceptive nature of the moonlight and its peculiar effect upon distances. But at last they reached its foot, and began the steep upward climb through heavy-foliaged trees which cast deep fantastic shadows on every side. The going was difficult, for in addition to the steep ascent there were numerous small boulders which might cause unexpected falls against the trees. The darkness intensified the difficulties; only by keen concentration and straining eyes could the dangers be avoided.

Half way up the hill they paused for a moment, leaning breathless against the trees. Perhaps it was that extra sense which tells experienced travellers of impending danger that brought Wilding suddenly rigid. He could see nothing to account for the swift, certain feeling of imminent peril which gripped him so strongly; instinctively he knew that it was not safe to linger there.

He opened his mouth to urge his companions on again, when the unexpected happened.

From every side there came hordes of natives, silently swarming around them, slinking, half-naked, brown figures which flitted noiselessly from the encircling trees. A sharp scream of horror rose unchecked to Dorothy's lips. The men sprang towards her. Too late! Before they could reach the girl, brown arms and hands, with the strength of steel bands, fastened upon them, firmly yet not viciously, holding them back. They struggled madly, but, weakened by the uphill trek, and overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers, their resistance was utterly unavailing. Not a sound was made by any of the natives; the strange silence of the attack was more weird and terrorizing than the most bloodcurdling of yells could have been.

Seized hand and foot, powerless to move, Dale and Wilding were hoisted unceremoniously upon many broad shoulders; Dorothy found herself swung from the ground in a grip that was gentle, yet from which there was no escape. She felt too sick at heart, too weak, to offer any resistance. Despair gripped her in its icy hand; the certain knowledge of what lay ahead of her filled the girl with stark terror.

In less than three minutes from the start of the attack the scene was deserted. The brown-skinned figures and their human burdens had vanished into the gloom beneath the trees, and the silver moonlight streamed down over the quiet hillside.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SACRED ROOM OF SÄHR

DAWN had broken, and the mounting sun had bathed the Temple of Sähr in a flood of golden radiance, before Gregory Lemiere awoke next morning to find a native servant standing just inside the door of his room. He received the man's obsequious bowing and greeting with indifference, and for a while lay still, while his eyes blazed fixedly upon the opposite wall.

Lemiere was considerably annoyed by the manner in which he had been so shrewdly duped on the previous afternoon, and he was not a little anxious lest the enormous overdose of the drug which he had unsuspectingly swallowed might have left some ill effect upon him. He was relieved to find, however, that it seemed to have left him unharmed; the strong stimulant which he had administered to himself immediately on regaining consciousness must, he thought, have proved effective, for although he had not retired to rest until well after midnight, when his prisoners had been recaptured, the six-hour sleep had restored him completely to his normal health.

He turned his head towards the motionless servant, and addressed the man for some moments in the softly sibilant native language. When he had finished he waved his arm imperiously, and the native, again bowing, backed through the doorway.

As the heavy curtain fell into place the calm expression which Lemiere had maintained in the presence of the servant faded from his face; in its stead appeared a look of intense, vicious hatred, of overwhelming fury, that transformed him

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in an instant into a snarling wild beast. There was murder, and worse, blazing from those jet-black, deep-set eyes. A paroxysm of uncontrollable rage swept through him at the bitter remembrance of the manner in which he had been so completely deceived.

He was well aware that he himself was largely to blame for what had happened; that only his excess of confidence and self-conceit had given his prisoners the opening they needed. The knowledge whipped his anger to white heat. Well, the storm had broken the escape; now he had them again in his power. There would be no mistake this time, he told himself; no loophole through which they might slip again. No! They had won the first trick in the hand; the others would all be his.

He completed his toilet in leisurely, unhurried manner. His unseeing eyes saw nothing of the glory of the morning; of the slanting sunlight that drove the dapple-grey mists from the mountain-tops in the distance, and splashed the tree-covered hills and the limpid water in sparkling brilliance. His maddened mind was set upon one thing only: he would crush them relentlessly, one by one; he would show them the fate of any who dared to rise against Gregory Lemiere!

Meanwhile, in the cell-like chamber where they had been unceremoniously flung in the early hours of the morning, the four luckless fugitives awaited the dreaded summons which they knew must come very soon. Four of them? Yes, there were four; Wilding and his companions had discovered when they were brought back to the temple that the Doctor was already there. He had been carried away into mid-stream on the crest of a huge wave when Dale had last seen him, but the reaction of the swirling water had drawn him, half conscious, to the shore, and he had been flung far up on the narrow strip of land. Losing his sense of direction completely in the storm, he had wandered back towards the temple, and had come unexpectedly upon the first party



of searchers sent out by Lemiere. He, too, had escaped serious injury, although he had been considerably shaken by the terrifying experience.

Dorothy was overjoyed to see her father again, but her delight was tinged with the shadow of uncertainty for the future. What would Lemiere do next? What revenge would he exact for the manner in which he had been duped? The question was one that filled the girl with dread, and although the Doctor endeavoured to comfort her he himself was on the verge of despair. Yet he kept his thoughts to himself, for there was nothing to be gained by further alarming the already overwrought girl.

At last, from sheer mental and physical weariness, Dorothy fell into a heavy sleep upon the thick rush-carpet in one corner of the room. With hands that trembled with emotion the Doctor made her as comfortable as he could, and then he rejoined Wilding and Dale. With a sigh of weariness he flung himself upon a chair and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Well, we're in a mess now," he remarked morosely. "We're worse off than ever. It seems as though we're not to escape from this madman. God knows what he will do to us now. What's your opinion, Wilding?"

"Since you ask it," answered the explorer frankly, "I think we must prepare for the worst. It's no good saying one thing and meaning another. It looks as though the next sunrise will be the last we three are likely to see. As regards Dorothy—I don't know."

He spoke with the peculiar carelessness of a man who has carried his life so often in his hands that the prospect of losing it no longer worries him. His voice was calm and steady; he seemed unconcerned at the grimness of the future.

Brian Dale, to whom life was just beginning to open in all its fullness, moved uneasily; he had no wish to die yet. Dr Treloare, accustomed though he was to death in many

forms, could not repress the shudder which ran through him at Wilding's matter-of-fact statement. The strain of the past few days had told heavily upon him; the brief sense of elation at the nearness of freedom only a few hours ago had been crushed by the failure of the attempt.

Wilding sensed something of the older man's feeling.

"It won't do any good to worry, Doctor," he said kindly, in his slow, steady tones. "Things are black, but I've seen them blacker in my time. It looks as though we are to have the rest of the night to ourselves without interruption, and by morning we may be able to frame something that will help us."

The Doctor groaned and buried his face in his hands.

"It's impossible! It can't be done, Wilding. We shall never get another chance. . . . It isn't what may happen to us that is worrying me. It's Dorothy. God only knows what will become of her. . . . I—I can't see a ray of hope anywhere."

Wilding's big hand rested for a moment upon his shoulder.

"Try to sleep, Doctor," he urged insistently. "You are pretty near worn out—indeed, we all are. Sleep will refresh our minds; we will be able to think more clearly."

"Sleep!" The Doctor laughed strangely. "Sleep! I couldn't sleep now with a dose of morphia. It's out of the question."

But Nature cannot be completely trodden under foot. The weariness which had overwhelmed Dorothy soon attacked her father, beating down the resistance of his despairing will until he could hold out no longer. Almost before he realized it, he had drifted into a heavy sleep, to be quickly followed by Dale, who, despite his tense anxiety for Dorothy, could not keep awake.

Wilding alone remained conscious, deep in thought, racking his brain in search of a solution to the problem which confronted them. Yet one, and one only, could he see. He dismissed it at first as untenable and unsafe, but the more



he thought about it the more convinced he became that it was the only way out.

Had any of his companions chanced to awaken suddenly they would have been astonished to observe Wilding on his feet in the darkness, flexing and unflexing the muscles of his arms and his legs, measuring his reach and testing his strength in many queer ways. What he learned apparently satisfied him. When he had finished he glanced around at his sleeping companions in the gloom. Then, with a strange smile upon his rugged features, he curled himself up on the soft floor-covering, and in a few moments had fallen into a dreamless sleep.

There was little conversation between them in the morning while they waited for Lemiere's summons.

The Doctor and Dale, with nothing to hope for at all, preferred to remain silent. Dorothy, guessing the reason for their anxiety, felt the growing sense of impending peril looming ever greater. Wilding said nothing; his brows were deeply furrowed, and although the Doctor every now and then cast a glance of pitiable appeal towards his friend, he hesitated to ask the direct question because he felt convinced that not even Wilding, with all his remarkable quickness of thought, could devise a plan with the remotest chance of success.

The room in which they had been placed contained only one small window set high up in one wall. Through this they could just see the blueness of the sky and the brilliance of the sunshine, while now and then the notes of a bush-bird came in on the quiet air.

The calm tranquillity brought no peace of mind to the captives. The period of waiting became intolerable; the tenseness seemed to increase with the passing of every minute. Dr Treloare paced the room with quick, nervous strides; Brian Dale fidgeted uneasily, striving for Dorothy's sake to conceal his emotion. The girl herself was calm and quiet;

she seemed to be resigned to her fate. Yet Wilding, watching her closely, observed with some concern the look of determination which had stamped itself upon her ashen countenance. He was sure that Dorothy had made up her mind on something; he wondered what it was.

He was on the point of speaking to her when a native guide appeared through the curtained doorway, and five minutes later they were standing before Gregory Lemiere in the Sacred Room of Sähr.

He eyed them in silence as they stood before him. It was the first time they had seen him since they had left him unconscious the previous afternoon. He sat upright in the chair behind the table, with the great grinning head of Sähr in the wall just above him. His face was utterly devoid of expression as his piercing gaze swept from one to another, noting the despair of the Doctor, the careless indifference of Wilding, the sullenness of Dale, the resigned determination of Dorothy.

Of them all, it was Wilding who intrigued him most. The burly explorer seemed quite unconcerned; his rugged countenance was as expressionless as that of Lemiere himself. In his half-closed eyes there was none of the open animosity which flamed in Dale's glittering orbs. Lemiere was puzzled at his attitude; it seemed as though Wilding was mocking him, holding him even in contempt. The explorer's carelessness annoyed him considerably; he felt his anger rising, and was forced to remove his gaze from that impassive face lest he might lose his self-control completely.

His eyes rested for a moment upon Dorothy, who had turned her head from him and was gazing wistfully through the massive archway, where the morning sunlight splashed colour over the quaint balcony.

"Well, well, so we meet again, my friends." Lemiere's cool voice cut through the embarrassed silence as a rapier slashes through silk. His tone was calm, with just a hint of contemptuous disdain. "You thought that it was easy to



deprive me of your company. Ah, you do not know Gregory Lemiere! I am a man of my word. I informed you that certain things would be done. You apparently thought otherwise, and descended to the depths of crudity in order to achieve your object—or perhaps I should say to *attempt* to achieve it. You thought that by resorting to drugs you could hamper my will. To say the least, I am disappointed and even disgusted. A doctor and a nurse—and you stoop to common drugs!”

“Well, it proved effective, anyway,” retorted the Doctor, stung to retaliation by the biting sarcasm. “It put you out of action for a while, and if it hadn’t been for that cursed storm we’d be out of your devilish clutches now.”

Lemiere’s eyes were glittering, but his voice remained like steel.

“Your language, Doctor, is as crude as your methods. You should know that ‘to render unconscious’ sounds infinitely more graceful than ‘to put out of action.’ . . . I wonder who was responsible for the little scheme? I feel sure it could not have been yourself, nor our surly friend Dale here; to be frank, neither of you possesses sufficient intelligence to be so subtle. . . . I shrink with horror from the thought that Dorothy’s brain evolved the plan. And that brings me once again, by the simple process of successive elimination, to the celebrated Major Wilding, to whom I am indebted for many discourtesies during the past few days.”

He stared with insolent bravado at the explorer, and Wilding returned his steady gaze with unmoved countenance.

“Yes, I am afraid it must have been Major Wilding,” resumed Lemiere, in musing vein. “I regret that I am obliged to add still another black mark against your name, my famous friend. The reckoning between myself and you is mounting up. I confess I am in a quandary to know how to adequately deal with such a brilliant opponent. You merit special treatment, my friend, and so you shall have it. In the meantime——”

“Oh, cut out this useless badinage!” exploded the Doctor angrily. His impatience at this subtle method of mental torment had swollen until it snapped the bonds of self-control. “You’ve got us back into your cursed temple again, and you are well aware we cannot escape. Now what are you going to do with us? For God’s sake, get it over and be done with it!”

Lemiere’s piercing black eyes rested upon the angry Doctor.

“You certainly are in a hurry,” he observed at length. “But there is, of course, no reason why you should not know what is to happen. In fact, you probably know already. As I told you before, I am a man of my word. Yesterday I placed certain conditions before you. I gave you a choice between two courses. You will no doubt remember what they were. You yourselves have chosen, and now you must be prepared to go the way of all who would stand against me. You three men shall die; those who are waiting for you out on the lake will follow. Dorothy will remain here with me.”

There was not the slightest change in his inflexible voice as he calmly uttered the dread sentences. He might have been allotting characters in a stage drama for all the emotion he displayed. His callousness struck his hearers into a horrified silence which swiftly became more tense and electric in the quiet calmness of the morning air.

Dr Treloare fell back a little, his face going suddenly white; Dale moved uneasily, and even Wilding appeared stricken with surprise. Dorothy was staring at the motionless scientist with curiously burning eyes.

Lemiere gazed from one to the other in amused contempt.

“You seem somewhat surprised,” he remarked easily. “Yet there is surely no occasion for astonishment. You were aware of the conditions; you knew what would happen if you chose to thwart me. You must take the consequences.”

“But—but this is incredible!” stammered the Doctor.



His voice was hoarse and trembling as the realization of Lemiere's maniacal earnestness was forced upon him. Hitherto he had thought the man was merely bluffing, now he knew there was no bluff in that grimly suave countenance, those glittering eyes, facing him across the table. "You—you cannot kill people wholesale like that! Why, it's—it's——"

Lemiere frowned in assumed impatience. "I think we had all that yesterday, Doctor," he snapped icily. "And again I must complain of your crude expressions. The word 'kill' is one of the crudest in the English language. Why not say 'remove'? If anyone or anything happens to appear in my way I simply remove the obstacle. I have made no exceptions in the past; I shall make none now."

His voice grew tensely harsh and rigid upon a higher note. "Make no mistake—here I am supreme! We are beyond the bounds of civilization; what happens here concerns no one but myself. At the moment six stupid people stand in my way. I intend to remove them—as I have removed others in the past!"

The gleaming, staring eyes, the harsh, strident voice, carried conviction deep into the minds of his horror-struck hearers. There was not one of them but knew he would do as he said.

Wilding had opened his mouth to speak when Dorothy suddenly stepped forward. In a flash he guessed the real significance of that resolute expression he had observed upon her ashen face earlier in the morning. His eyes gleamed strangely behind half-closed lids, his hands clenched tightly, but he remained motionless, his rugged countenance impassive as ever. Her father and Brian Dale watched the girl in surprise. The Doctor's lips were trembling; in vain he strove to conceal the despair which stamped itself in every line of his careworn features.

Her torn and tattered garments seemed only to throw into bolder relief the graceful carriage and easy poise of her lithe

young body as Dorothy slowly moved towards Lemiere. She paused in front of him and faced him levelly across the table. Perhaps it was the knowledge of her dishevelled appearance which brought the blood swiftly flaming to her pale cheeks as her brown eyes met his. Dorothy knew that now or never she must play her trump card; later would be—too late. She could not save herself, but the lives of her father and his friends hung in the balance.

Summoning all her splendid courage she forced to her lips a smile of witching beauty that transformed her delicately featured countenance; in her wide-open eyes appeared a look that would have set most men's hearts a-beating with strange rapidity. With all the consummate skill at her command, Dorothy flung her womanhood at him. She seemed to have forgotten the men behind her; to be conscious only of Lemiere's presence in the room. The sunspashed silence had grown swiftly tense and strained.

Lemiere had not moved in his massive chair behind the table; his face remained expressionless and inscrutable as ever, but Wilding, watching closely, noted the swift contraction of the eyes and the almost imperceptible clenching of the hand upon the table-top. When Dorothy spoke her voice was low and soft, its gentle cadences falling like sweet music upon the ear.

"Please—please, could you not let them go?" There was a world of entreaty in the voice and eyes which met Lemiere's so bravely; an appealing wistfulness as soft as silk. "What good would it do you to—kill them all? They cannot harm you; you are beyond their reach. . . . Show them that you are generous, as well as clever. Let them go back to the launch, and they will go away and not trouble you any more. I will make them promise to do what I tell them."

Before her earnest pleading Lemiere's eyes fell, and Dorothy felt a swift ray of hope. She placed her hands upon the edge of the table, and leaned a little towards him.



"Please let them go." Her voice was little more than a soft murmur. "After all, you do not want seven lives. I am the only one you want! . . . And I will give myself to you—freely—if you will spare my friends. Let them go, and we shall be left together—just you—and—me!"

No one ever knew just what it cost Dorothy to utter those last few words. She did not hear the half-stifled exclamation which came from her father's twitching lips; she did not see Wilding's hand close firmly upon Dale's wrist as the young man, quivering in every nerve, made to move forward. Her whole being was centred upon the man in front of her; her eyes were wet with unshed tears as she pleaded not for herself, but for her friends. The intensity of her emotion seemed to dominate the room; she held them spellbound with the deep sincerity of her splendid self-sacrifice.

Lemiere slowly raised his eyes towards her. She met his piercing gaze without flinching. It seemed impossible that any man could have withstood the wistful eloquence of that powerful pleading. . . . Yet her heart sank within her, for his impassive features showed no sign of softening, no trace of inward emotion stirring him to acquiescence. In despair, she knew his answer before he spoke.

"I am sorry I cannot do as you wish, my dear." His voice was calm and steady, though the harsh note had gone. "A promise given me yesterday was broken within the hour. How do I know that another would not be treated similarly? No. I will take no further chances. . . . And so far as you are concerned, it is not entirely a matter of giving; what I desire I shall take!"

Dorothy started violently, and her face went swiftly pale as death. Lemiere eyed her narrowly. "Do you not remember the old proverb: 'Stolen fruit is sweetest'?"

The leering, deliberately spoken words aroused within the girl a moment of passionate madness, swamping the despair which came with the knowledge of her failure. Before she realized what she was doing she had raised her

hand and struck him fiercely upon the face with her open palm.

"Oh, you beast! You—you coward! I loathe you! I hate you!"

The unexpected blow, the stinging contempt of her clear-cut, ringing voice, aroused Lemiere to maddened fury. He sprang to his feet, his face black with all-consuming rage, his eyes blazing like twin pools of fire.

The three men grew swiftly tense. Wilding's grip on Dale's arm tightened like a band of steel.

For a moment Dorothy thought Lemiere would fling himself upon her. The man was beside himself with anger, trembling like a wind-blown leaf. His self-composure had vanished with amazing swiftness; his face was livid, his mouth twitched convulsively.

"By God, you shall pay for this!" he choked fiercely, his voice thick with rage. "I will teach you to strike me—Gregory Lemiere! You shall suffer, young woman—by God, you shall suffer! Mental and physical agony you shall feel until you scream to death! And first you shall see these, your friends, torn limb from limb!"

The shrill cry of despair that rose from Dorothy's quivering lips cut like a rapier through the still morning air. She flung out her hands towards him appealingly, stark horror in her eyes.

"Oh, please, not that, not that!" Her voice was a piteous moan. "Oh, anything but that! Please—please—have mercy!"

"Mercy!" Lemiere's exulting voice echoed the word derisively. "I'll show you what mercy is! I'll teach you, young woman!"

His hand went out suddenly, hovered over the gong, and was almost descending when Wilding's calm voice came steadily, unhurried, through the tense atmosphere: "One moment."

Lemiere paused, and glared at the explorer balefully.



"What in hell do you want?" he snarled savagely. "Speak, for it will be your last chance!"

Wilding met the maddened eyes squarely. The others watched the imperturbable explorer in some astonishment.

"I just wanted to tell you something that might interest you," he remarked, in the same level tones. "Something we discovered while you were—er—sleeping yesterday afternoon."

He paused, and Lemiere looked at him with eyes of hate. The explorer's manner intrigued him; his curiosity was aroused. His hand fell from the fateful gong to the table-top.

"Something you discovered yesterday afternoon." He repeated the words slowly, a puzzled frown upon his lowering face. His eyes blazed at Wilding strangely. "And what did you discover yesterday afternoon?"

"We inspected your famous ray apparatus," lied Wilding steadily.

Lemiere started violently, and leaned slightly forward. "Oh, did you? I hope your inspection was enlightening."

Wilding ignored the sarcasm in the other's icy tones. He smiled sardonically.

"It was. Very much so, in fact. As a hypnotist and a bluffing scoundrel, Mr Gregory Lemiere, you may be pretty good; as a scientist and an inventor you're an impostor. We found you out yesterday! You have not invented a new ray at all. Your apparatus is just a mass of useless rubbish! You're a fraud, Gregory Lemiere, and not only a fraud, but a double-dyed schemer and a white-livered cur as well!"

The cold calm of Wilding's deliberate lashing fell like an icy deluge upon the little group in that ancient Room of Sähr. For some seconds the silence was electric. Dorothy, the Doctor and Dale were staggered; they stared at the unperturbed explorer in astonishment. That Wilding was playing some deep-laid plan they guessed instinctively, but what his immediate objective was they could not fathom.

To the Doctor, indeed, it seemed the beginning of the end. To taunt the man in this way was madness! He almost groaned aloud in his despair.

The effect upon Lemiere of Wilding's vituperation was amazing. For a few moments he stood motionless, glaring at the explorer in petrified stupor. And then, with a rush like a roaring torrent breaking down its barriers, the full fury of his ungovernable rage burst loose. Wilding had guessed shrewdly and well in his sudden attack upon the man's invention. Personal insults Lemiere could, and would, regard with disdain, but the slightest reflection upon the cherished child of his brain was like a spark to gunpowder.

All the madness within him welled unchecked to the surface. Leaning upon the table he yelled and shrieked expletives at the imperturbable figure before him, raging and screaming in a very paroxysm of demoniacal fury. Frightful oaths rolled from his frothing lips, his face twitched convulsively, his bloodshot eyes burned like pools of molten metal. All the evil in his soul seemed to be concentrated upon his distorted features. In stark horror at his inhuman appearance Dorothy turned, shuddering, her face in her hands to blot out the dreadful sight. The Doctor was openly shocked at the fiendish expression which met his eyes, and even Dale had gone a shade paler.

Wilding alone appeared unmoved; upon his grim face that slight, sardonic smile still showed his contempt. His eyes were half closed, as though he were utterly indifferent to the raging maniac before him, yet not one movement of that screeching figure escaped his keen perception. His mind was working swiftly. He knew that he alone could carry out the daring plan upon which he had built his hopes. He must judge the time to a fraction of a second; one-tenth too late, and all would be lost. Yet he felt the time was not quite at hand, and so he stood motionless, contemptuous, that maddening smile lurking round his curling lips, while



Lemiere lashed himself into a very passion of tumultuous frenzy.

Wilding's open indifference, his unconcealed contempt, aroused the scientist to frightful heights of rage. Never, it seemed to his dazed hearers, had human being ever before reached such a state of soul-shattering, devastating fury. The table rocked and shook beneath the force of his pounding fists, which hammered upon it until the skin of his hands split beneath the strain, splashing it with bloody drops which he seemed not to notice. The very air seemed to quiver with the bellowing foulness of his screaming.

But the strain had begun to have its effect upon him; his gaunt body trembled fiercely, his voice became thick and hoarse. In his weakened condition his wildly waving arms caused him to overbalance; he swung heavily against the table, which went to the floor with a crash, and the sonorous boom of the gong as it struck the rush-covered floor resounded loudly in the momentary stillness which followed.

In the swift excitement the significance of that resonant sound passed unnoticed. As Lemiere stumbled forward over the fallen table Wilding sprang at him. His huge hands closed upon the half-exhausted body of the maddened scientist in a grip of steel. His powerful muscles cracked beneath the sudden strain as he swung Lemiere high above his head and turned towards the massive archway which led to the balcony outside.

In a flash the explorer's intention burst upon his friends. They knew now what lay behind his apparent folly in arousing Lemiere to frenzy. Taking him unawares, Wilding meant to fling the maddened scientist over the balcony and down into the inlet, hundreds of feet below!

The sudden realization of the plan struck the Doctor and Dale into momentary paralysis. But Wilding waited for no assistance. With grim-set face and gleaming eyes, his deep chest heaving beneath the strain, he rushed towards the open archway. Lemiere, now fully conscious of his danger,

kicked and screamed in mortal terror in that grip of steel.

Forcing himself to action, Dale sprang to Wilding's aid. But before he had moved three yards a shrill scream from Dorothy caused him to spin round in swift apprehension. Answering the strident summons of the gong, two thick-set natives had burst into the room, and were swiftly advancing to their master's assistance. With a groan of dismay Dale flung himself at the foremost, and the Doctor, with a flying tackle reminiscent of his Rugger days, brought the other to the floor with a crash that left them both breathless.

In a moment indescribable confusion reigned in the Sacred Room of Sähr. The natives fought with a vigour that was astonishing, but fortunately neither was armed, and Dale and the Doctor, well aware that they were fighting now not only for their own lives, but also for Dorothy's, exerted every ounce of strength against their smooth-skinned opponents. They heard the girl's half-stifled scream, but dared not relax their efforts for an instant. They did not see that which had suddenly stricken Dorothy into agonized, helpless fear.

At the threshold of the archway Lemiere's wildly thrashing legs crashed heavily against the stone wall. The impact flung Wilding off his balance. He swayed uncertainly, fighting fiercely to preserve his equilibrium, but the weight of the writhing man above his head proved too great a handicap. With a crash that seemed as though it must break every bone in the two bodies, Wilding fell full length through the archway and on to the balcony, Lemiere collapsing on top of him.

Half dazed by the terrific impact, maddened with rage and fear, Lemiere yet retained sufficient sense to realize fully the peril which confronted him. Recovering himself almost immediately, he flung at Wilding with a strength intensified by madness and fear.

The big explorer was ready for him. Wilding had a greater



knowledge of ju-jutsu than his writhing opponent. Although suffering severe pain from a nasty cut in his head, and half blinded by the blood which flowed freely from the gash, he slipped from Lemiere's clutching fingers and obtained a back-breaking grip which brought hideous screams of agony from the scientist's pain-racked lips.

Slowly but surely, his face grim-set and streaked with blood, Wilding forced Lemiere over the low balustrade, until the man hung half over the fearful drop below. A shower of blows from Lemiere's wildly waving arms rained unchecked upon the explorer's unprotected face, yet he seemed oblivious to the fierce battering. The huge muscles of his back and shoulders worked convulsively as he forced Lemiere further, and still further, over the low stone wall.

The scientist fought like a man possessed, to avert the frightful death which loomed nearer with every passing second. But all his efforts were unavailing, and not one trace of mercy stood in the lines of that rugged, bloody countenance but a few inches from his own. There was madness in Wilding's blazing eyes—the madness of triumph that comes to the fighter who knows no defeat. Slow to arouse, swift to abate, Wilding's passionate anger had been lashed to a white heat that gave him superhuman strength. He asked, and gave, no quarter.

Lemiere read the meaning in those blazing, pitiless eyes. It shocked him into momentary sanity, and with the certain knowledge of his fate came a swift change in tactics. He knew he could not free himself from that steel-like grip which forced his pain-benumbed body out over the abyss; at any moment he would go hurtling through space into the swirling water far below. Escape was impossible for him; he would make it impossible for his attacker!

His long arms went out and gripped the explorer tightly. Wilding, swiftly realizing Lemiere's intention, endeavoured to free himself from that maddened clutch and draw back to safety. Too late! His blood-streaked face blanched

suddenly as he saw the danger. Gripping him in a hold that could not be broken, Lemiere began to writhe his body out over the low stone wall, drawing Wilding with him. The explorer fought frantically to free himself. A shrill cackle of maniacal laughter broke from Lemiere as he tightened his grip round Wilding's heaving shoulders; its stark horror froze the blood in the explorer's veins.

Within the room Dorothy, too, had seen and guessed at Lemiere's desperate attempt to drag Wilding to his death. So quickly had everything happened that the girl had been flung into stupefied inertness until she had suddenly roused herself and dashed to her father's assistance. The swift realization of Wilding's peril stabbed her like a knife. Dale had managed to pin his adversary to the rush-covered floor, but could not leave him. Despite her assistance the Doctor had not been able to overpower his brown-skinned opponent. She would have to leave him; Wilding was in urgent need of help.

In an agony of indecision Dorothy stared round the laden walls in the hope of finding something which could be used as a weapon. Her eyes fell upon a curiously shaped native club which hung in a collection on the wall near the image of Sähr. With a bound she crossed the room, wrenched the club from its clip, and rushed to the struggling figures on the balcony.

Just as she reached the archway a glancing blow from Lemiere's legs struck Wilding heavily upon the ankle. His foot slipped on the stone floor, and he crashed on top of Lemiere. For a split fraction of a second they swayed on the ledge like a balanced see-saw, and then, before Dorothy could raise a hand in assistance, they were gone. Locked in a grip of steel to the maddened scientist, Arthur Wilding, world-famous explorer, a man who had taunted Fate a hundred times and more, went to his death without a sound. As they flashed out of sight that hideous cackle of Lemiere's floated upwards on the sunlit morning air to the ears of the



horror-stricken girl; and then, after what seemed an eternity of time, there came a faintly ominous *splash* that told its own grim tale. . . .

Shocked beyond thought at the tragedy she had witnessed, Dorothy leaned helplessly against the archway, staring in fascinated horror at the low stone wall by the edge of the balcony. She longed to creep forward—to take one short glance far down below. . . . She dared not take the risk. . . . Her head was swimming, her brown eyes filled with tears of grief. But a merciful call to action drove the memory of that frightful sight temporarily from her mind. She heard her name shouted sharply from the room, and spun round to find her father in the grip of the native he had tackled. The brown-skinned figure was on top of the Doctor, his long fingers choking the life out of him.

"Dorothy! That club! Quick!" Dale, unable to leave his own captive, had seen the Doctor's danger and his shouts aroused Dorothy to instant action.

But help came swiftly from an unexpected source. In the distance there sounded the dull roar of a sudden explosion, reverberating and echoing through the temple. It was followed by another and yet another, following in quick succession, and above the booming roar came the sharp bark of a revolver, and the shouting of native voices.

At the first explosion the native who had pinned the Doctor to the floor sprang swiftly to his feet, a look of alarm upon his face; at the second he took to his heels and had vanished through the doorway in an instant. With a quick wriggle Dale's captive shook himself free and, rolling the young man on the floor with an unexpected push, sprang up, eluded a slashing blow from Dorothy's club, and also dashed for the door. When Dale jumped to his feet the Sacred Room of Sähr contained only the three friends. The natives had disappeared.

The Doctor was sitting up, tenderly feeling his throat, which showed the livid marks of those twining fingers.

Dorothy bent over him in anxious solicitude. And outside the noise grew louder and louder, the shouts of the natives and their scampering feet mingling with the booming explosions and the crackle of the revolver.

"Hurt, Doctor?" Dale asked the question with some anxiety, for the native had seemed to be throttling the life out of the Doctor.

"Groogh! No; I'll be all right soon," gasped Dr Treloare, breathing heavily. "Gad, I was nearly a gonner, though! I'm a bit too old for this sort of thing."

He got slowly to his feet, and leaned on Dorothy's arm for a moment. In the excitement of this unexpected interruption neither he nor Dale had noticed Wilding's disappearance.

"What the deuce is all this noise?" There was a puzzled frown upon the Doctor's face and an air of bewilderment, which they all shared. And then a sudden thought striking him: "And where's Wilding?" he demanded sharply. "And Lemiere? Where are they?"

"By Jove!" Dale started violently. "Wilding's gone too! What has happened, Dorothy?"

Under the keen scrutiny of the two men Dorothy averted her gaze. Her lips were twitching, but she managed to control herself.

"They—they fell over the balcony there," she faltered, in a low tone. "Lemiere got a hold on Major Wilding and dragged him over. I—I saw them go. They were gone before I could get near them." Her voice trailed away into a choking whisper.

"My God!" The Doctor's horror was shared by Dale, who, recovering himself quickly, dashed to the balcony and peered over the low balustrade. "Wilding gone! Killed by a madman!" Oblivious to the growing crescendo of mingled shouts and explosions that came ever nearer the Doctor sank his face in his hands, and his shoulders shook convulsively. Dorothy watched him with infinite tenderness in



her tear-dimmed eyes. Instinctively she measured the depths of his emotion; she knew the esteem and regard he had felt for Wilding—an affection, almost, that seldom arises between men of such short acquaintance. He seemed distraught at the realization of his friend's tragic death.

"Wilding gone," he muttered again, half to himself. "And all for us! . . . God! I can't believe it! He can't be dead! Surely he must have escaped."

He looked up quickly as Dale came back into the room, searching the younger man's face with keen, anxious eyes. Dale answered his question before he asked it. He shook his head slowly.

"Not a sign of them," he said sombrely. "From that height I—I don't think they could have escaped. . . . They would go under like a stone."

The Doctor groaned and turned away to hide his twitching lips.

Without warning a terrific roar occurred just behind the curtained doorway. The heavy cloth quivered in the wake of the shaking air, and the nearness of the unexpected sound startled the three fugitives into confused surprise. The acrid smell of gunpowder permeated the air.

"What on earth—" began the Doctor, when of a sudden there came a sound that sent a thrill of hope through the black despair which enveloped them. For an instant it seemed as though the natives, enraged at the death of Lemiere, were rushing to wreak their vengeance on the three survivors. But the cry that rang through the air, high above the reverberations of the successive explosions, quickly dispelled the thought.

"Run, yer critters, run!" bawled a well-known voice. "Out o' the way, yer brown-faced, pie-eyed, shameless niggers! Get! or, by hivins, none of yer'll ever see the sun rise again! Forward, me bhoys! Oireland fer iver, and damnation ter these cowardly skunks!"

Another loud explosion rocketed through the ancient

temple, followed by howls and yells as the natives scampered, terror-stricken, through the passages. The three friends in the Sacred Room of Sähr stared at each other in wondering silence for a moment, their lips framing the same two words—"Pat Murphy!" And then Dale made a rush for the doorway, tearing down the heavy curtain as though it were paper.

"Pat!" He bellowed through cupped hands. "This way, Pat! Here we are!"

An answering hail greeted him from somewhere in the distance. "Sure, we're comin'!" bawled the Irishman. "Clear the way there, yer varmints! Come on, Captain, up this way we go!"

Ten seconds later he appeared round a corner along the passage, with Captain Dixon close behind him. Round the excited Irishman's shoulder was slung a bulging canvas bag; Captain Dixon waved a revolver in his left hand and a massive club cut from a young sapling in his right.

A strident yell of triumph burst from Pat Murphy's lips as he spied Dale standing in the doorway. "Glory be, they're here!" he shouted, dashing forward. "Thank the saints we came in time! Where's that Gregory Lemiere?"

No pen can describe the welcome which Pat Murphy and Captain Dixon received from the Doctor and his friends. For several minutes everyone seemed to be talking together. The opportune arrival of the two newcomers had relieved the tension completely. From blank despair the outlook had now changed to one of hope and freedom.

In a few words Captain Dixon told how, dreading what might have happened in the storm, he and Pat Murphy had left the *Jessica* just after dawn, and struck out along the same inlet which had been followed on the previous morning. They had discovered the temple after much wandering around, and had lost no time in attacking it and scattering the natives, who had fled instantly on their approach. The loud explosions had been caused by giant gunpowder



"crackers," carried by Pat Murphy for just that purpose, and to frighten them still more Captain Dixon had fired his revolver over the heads of the fleeing natives.

"I think we've routed them completely," wound up Dixon. "What between the roar of the exploding crackers and the barking of the revolver, most of 'em probably reckoned the end of the world had come. Well, here we are, and glad to arrive in time. . . . But I say, Doctor," his eyes roamed round the strangely ornamented room with growing alarm, "where is Major Wilding? Isn't he here? Or has he gone back another way? And where's this fellow Lemiere?" He glanced from one to another, perceiving their curious silence in some surprise.

The Doctor cleared his throat. "The fact is, Dixon, Wilding is—dead!" He spoke the word in a hushed tone, while Dixon and the Irishman stared at him in astonishment.

"Dead!" Captain Dixon echoed the word dully. "But—good God! what's happened?"

The Doctor sighed a little wearily.

"It's a long story to tell now, Dixon. I'll give you all the details later. . . . Wilding, in struggling with the madman who had taken up his abode in this old temple, got drawn over the balcony yonder. Both of them fell into the water below. They'd be stunned and drowned in a few minutes. It was all over in a moment; we could do nothing."

His steady voice died away and a silence of several seconds followed in the quiet room. Both of the newcomers were obviously moved at the tragically unexpected news, and for a while no one spoke. It was Captain Dixon who broke the silence. With swift impulsiveness he flung out his hand, gripping the Doctor's in a clasp of deep sincerity.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Doctor," he said simply. "He was your friend more than mine, but I'd learned enough of him to know that he was a real white man."

"Thanks, Dixon, thanks." Dr Treloare's voice was husky as he returned the other's warm hand-clasp. For a moment

his head sank upon his breast, then he straightened himself and turned suddenly.

"We may as well go," he said quietly. "There is nothing to keep us here now. By the sound of things you seem to have frightened the natives right out of the place." A faint smile appeared on his haggard, care-lined countenance. "Where did you get those fireworks, Pat?"

"Sure, they've been on the boat for years, sorr," the Irishman said, with a broad grin. "We use 'em sometimes in the fogs on the river." He took one from his bag and held it in his fingers—a long, red-coloured object nearly twelve inches in length and two inches across. "Stand clear in the doorway, Doctor, and I'll light this one and heave it at that brass image there—just as a farewell greetin' like. If there's any more niggers about, this'll scare 'em away again."

He touched a match to the long wick, waited a moment as it sizzled steadily down, and, judging the time nicely, flung it towards the grinning image of Sähr in the opposite wall. The explosion in the confined space of the room was deafening. It was easy to understand now why the natives had fled in terror before the dreadful noise. The air rocked with the force of the explosion; the pungent smell of gunpowder filled the room.

"Saints presarve us, what's that! Look, Doctor, look!"

At the Irishman's excited exclamation the little party, which had already set off down the passageway, turned sharply. Pat Murphy was standing in the haze of smoke which drifted through the doorway of the Sacred Room of Sähr, an expression of utter astonishment stamped upon his broad countenance. Dr Treloare strode back to him, and his sudden "Great Scot, Dixon, look at this!" brought the others running back in surprise.

A strange sight met their gaze. Hinged upon its left side, the whole of the massive image had swung bodily away from the wall, the secret lock apparently having been released by the detonating explosion of the gunpowder. The outer



image was only a shell, constructed of some heavy metal half-an-inch in thickness, and in swinging open it had revealed a cavity in the wall in which reposed another huge image of the same gleaming metal, beautifully finished in exquisite detail, and set with eyes of a startling blue.

But it was not just the sight of the blue-eyed idol which brought the cry of astonishment to every lip; round its massive neck hung a huge rope of nuggets of gold, the highly polished smooth yellow metal gleaming dully in strong contrast to the darker metal of the image itself.

"The Golden Rope!" Dorothy breathed the words in a quaint combination of awe and excitement. "The Golden Rope of Sähr!"

With difficulty restraining their intense excitement the men lifted the massive chain of nuggets from the grinning idol and laid it down upon the rush-covered floor. It was indeed a wonderful sight. More than ten feet in length, the chain was composed of many huge oval-shaped nuggets, each identical in form and size, and measuring some eight inches in length and six inches across the thickest portion. They were joined together by means of a fine wirelike thread of extraordinary strength and flexibility. The value of the chain must have been enormous, for its weight was such that it required the united efforts of the four men to lift it.

"There's a fortune in it," declared the Doctor, gazing at the magnificent necklet in admiration. "Fancy a thing like that round the neck of that idol!"

"But how on earth did it get here?" There was a puzzled frown on Captain Dixon's brow. "There's nothing about this image in your chart, Doctor."

"No, but apparently some of the natives found it, and the idol itself may have been in the cave. Lemiere told us he had it here, but I would never have dreamed of looking for it in such a place. And if it had not been for that last explosion we'd have gone away without knowing where it

was. The vibration must have loosened the catch that holds this shell in place. It was a lucky thought, Pat, that made you throw that giant cracker."

The Irishman grinned his delight. "Sure, Doctor, I aimed at his nose, but hit his ear. I never could throw anything straight."

"Just as well!" said the Doctor, with a smile. "If you had struck the nose nothing might have happened. See, the catch is located in the ear. . . . And now, the next thing is to get this out of the temple and down to the boat without being interrupted by the natives. They may be inclined to cause trouble if they see us depriving their idol of its necklet. Dorothy, you had better take Captain Dixon's revolver—load it for her, Dixon—and don't hesitate to use it if you have to. It will take the four of us to carry this out. You will have to act as guard."

When they were ready to leave the room a sudden thought came to the Doctor. Leaving Captain Dixon and Pat Murphy on guard, he and Brian Dale, with Dorothy as guide, made their way to Lemiere's laboratory in the hope of discovering the secret of the ill-fated scientist's strange invention. But they were doomed to disappointment. At the threshold of the oddly equipped room they were assailed by the noxious odour of burning rubber, and a thin cloud of pungent smoke was observed rising from the cabinet in which was contained the apparatus for producing the ray. A hurried examination disclosed the inside of the cabinet to be a smouldering mass of burnt wire and twisted electrical material.

There was deep chagrin on the Doctor's face as he surveyed it, and realized that not one atom of useful information could be gained from that confused jumble of charred parts. And as he stood in silence, gloomily surveying the wreck, Brian Dale's voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"This has been started through a time-switch," said the young man. "Here it is, connected to the clock on the wall-shelf. Lemiere must have set it to close the switch at



a given hour, so that if anything stopped him from returning the short-circuited current would destroy the parts, and no one else would know his secret."

"You are right, Brian." Dorothy's voice rose on a note of excited curiosity. "Look, Daddy, at that little plate fixed to the back of the cabinet! There's some writing on it—in French."

"By gad, so there is!" The Doctor peered closely at the small white plate upon which had been carefully etched a few strange words :

*Moi Seul, Je Saurai le Secret.*

"'I alone shall know the secret,' " he translated slowly, in a low, hushed voice.

For a moment they stood in silence, staring at the ruined work of the man who had been determined to carry his secret with him to the grave.

And then the Doctor turned swiftly away.

"Come!" he said briefly, and strode towards the door.

Dorothy and Dale followed his bowed figure in silence. They knew what lay in his thoughts—that more precious even than the Golden Rope would have been that amazing invention could they have brought it back with them to civilization.

Dramatic in death as in life, Lemiere's strange personality seemed suddenly to fill the room where he had laboured so long. As she stepped through the curtained doorway Dorothy cast one backward glance into the stone-walled chamber. "Science and sentiment cannot go hand in hand," he had told her. "That is where so many men fail who otherwise would have won fame." Those prophetic words came back to her now with startling clearness. How near he had been to fame, she thought. But now, through his own attempt to mingle sentiment with science, he, too, had failed. Insane, uncontrollable passion had brought about his downfall, just as it has done to so many men in the past. . . .

Pausing momentarily in the curtain-covered doorway Dorothy closed her eyes and bowed her head. As in a vision she saw again the lithe, brown figure of Lula stretched out upon the canvas-topped table, and by the panelled cabinet, his twitching fingers upon the master-switch that would close no more, the tall, grim, sinister figure of Gregory Lemiere.

Not a sign of a native was seen as the little party slowly made its way with its precious burden out of the temple and through the covered archway down to the landing-stage, where the motor-boat in which Captain Dixon and Pat Murphy had travelled was moored.

The Rope was carefully laid along the bottom of the boat, and then, the need for silence being less urgent, the motor was started up and the boat travelled rapidly down the inlet. The narrow, winding stream along which Captain Dixon and the Irishman had journeyed earlier that morning was discarded as too dangerous with its numerous opportunities for ambush; so the boat was headed in the opposite direction, and travelled swiftly along the broad sunlit waters which less than twenty-four hours before had been lashed to foam by the storm. A careful watch was maintained to guard against possible attack, but the journey proved uneventful.

As they travelled down the inlet the sharp *chug-chug* of the little engine echoed and re-echoed from the massive rocks, and gradually behind them the grey-white walls of the Temple of Sähr fell away until a bend in the stream hid them from view. As the boat swung round the rock Dorothy turned her head for one last look at the dread place in which she had spent such an eventful time. Sharply and clearly against the dome of blue sky in the background the massive sun-splashed walls rose sheer from the water's edge high into the air, and her last impression of the ancient temple was that of a brooding sentinel maintaining silent, unceasing watch over its strange surroundings.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE END OF THE ADVENTURE

LATER that afternoon, when they had recovered somewhat from the intense excitement of the morning, and Dr Treloare and Brian Dale had given Captain Dixon an outline of the extraordinary events which had befallen them in the old temple, the three friends, with Sandy MacTavish, climbed into the motor-boat and headed once more in the direction of the grim-walled building. Dorothy, resting in her room, heard them go, and guessed their destination. She knew, though her father had not told her, that the Doctor hoped to find the body of his ill-fated friend, whose bravery and unselfish sacrifice alone had made possible their escape, and to give it decent burial.

For there was no denying that Wilding's magnificent action in arousing Lemiere to apoplectic fury and then attacking him had turned the tables completely. She knew that had Lemiere still been in command when the skipper and Pat Murphy arrived, unsuspecting the presence of such a man in the temple, they too would have been caught in the meshes of his net, and swift disaster would have overtaken them all. Wilding alone had broken the power of the mad scientist, but the effort had cost him his life.

In vain Dorothy endeavoured to erase from her mind the memory of those last few moments when she had seen him alive; she felt again that thrill of despairing horror which had transfixed her to the vaulted stone archway as the vision rose before her of Wilding, grim-faced but unafraid, locked in the grip of a madman, swung hurtling to his death. The girl buried her tear-stained face deep into the pillows in an effort to forget that dreadful scene, but

though time might soften the sharpness of its stark clarity she knew that Lemiere's last hideous shriek of triumphant, maniacal laughter, floating up over the balcony, would ring in her ears to her dying day. . . .

Cruising slowly around below the grey-white walls of the Temple of Sähr, it was not long before the Doctor and his friends came upon the dead body of Arthur Wilding, floating face up in the calm water of a narrow creek just off the main inlet. Of Lemiere there was no sign; nor did they spend further time in searching for him. The Doctor and Dale were the only two in the boat who had seen him, and in their inmost hearts they hoped that he had gone from their sight for ever.

Very gently, very carefully, as though he were still alive and sorely injured, the body of the explorer was lifted from the water and laid in the bottom of the boat. The tears rolled unchecked down the careworn face of Dr Treloare as he gazed upon the fine stalwart man whom Death had claimed with such tragic suddenness, and his emotion brought a lump to the throats, and tears to the eyes, of his three companions, as in silence the boat was turned and headed back towards the launch. Even in death Arthur Wilding's face bore no sign of fear or distress. Calm and serene, his fine features reposed in the tranquil expression which they had invariably worn in life. Unafraid and unashamed, he had met his death with the steadfast courage that had been his outstanding characteristic through an eventful life.

When they reached the *Jessica* Pat Murphy and Sandy MacTavish immediately began to make a casket from the timber which was available on the launch. There was nothing elaborate about it; just a plain, unornamented, rough-hewn coffin, yet somehow the Doctor knew that Wilding himself would have preferred this simple home for his mortal remains to one of costly embellishment. When it was ready they laid the still cold body, wrapped in several thicknesses of heavy canvas, within it, screwed down the



rough lid, and swung it carefully into the boat below. And then the Doctor went with steady footsteps to Dorothy's room.

In answer to her response to his gentle tap he entered, to find her standing near the foot of her bed. She read his message in his pale face before he spoke, and her own cheeks went swiftly ashen.

"We have found poor Wilding, Dorothy, and we are going to give him decent burial on the hillside overlooking the lake." His voice was steady, but his lips trembled slightly. "Dixon will read the Burial Service. Will you come with us? You need not, dear, unless you wish; you may please yourself."

The tender solicitude in his voice and eyes sent a swift feeling of emotion quivering through her. "You—you would like me to come, Daddy?"

"Yes, dear, I would," said the Doctor frankly. "We owe our freedom to Wilding. I would like you to join in paying our last respects to his memory, but I know what you must have suffered these last few days. If you do not feel strong enough you need not come with us."

Only for an instant did Dorothy hesitate. She had a vision of that moonlit space on the night of the storm, and felt again the clasp of those steady arms holding her with protective gentleness. Then she met her father's kind eyes bravely. "I will come, Daddy," she said simply.

In the quiet of the late summer afternoon, when all was calm and hushed, and not even a leaf moved in the stilly air, they committed to earth all that was mortal of Arthur Wilding at the foot of a huge rock which rose like a natural monolith above the towering trees of the forest. The solemn words of the Burial Service came with resonant clearness in the quiet surroundings, casting a mantle of reverence and awe over the scene. There was a silence as Captain Dixon's steady voice ceased, and he closed the book noiselessly. His deep "Amen" aroused a vibrant echo from them all, and a fervent prayer of gratitude found expression in every heart.

As the two servants began to refill the grave with the

fragrant earth, Dale, moved by a sudden impulse, stepped towards the mighty rock just in front of them, and, finding it soft and yielding to the blade of his jack-knife, commenced to carve an inscription in the stone. When he had finished his task he paused, and after a moment's thought added a line of four simple words, that spoke with fervent eloquence. And when he had done, and the grave was levelled off neatly with the rest of the surrounding earth, he stepped back a little, and in silence surveyed, with his friends, the roughly carved inscription:

ARTHUR WILDING

25-11-192-

A VERY GALLANT GENTLEMAN

Just that. A simple inscription cut deep into a tombstone that was symbolical of the man himself. In mute appeal the rough-hewn words silently voiced the highest tribute to one who had made the supreme sacrifice; for "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

And so they left him, slumbering deep in the wilds which all his life he had loved to roam, and whose fascination had ever held him in thrall. The clean, sweet scent of the open spaces wrapped the spot in an atmosphere untrammelled by the murk and smoke of man's handiwork, and although the manner of his death had been tragic, yet there was not one of them but knew that Arthur Wilding lay in a grave which he himself would have chosen above all others.

No time was lost in preparing the *Jessica* for the return trip to civilization, and the sun was sinking in the west when they were ready to enter the tunnel. As the Doctor concisely remarked, it would be as dark in the tunnel in the daytime as at night, and nothing would be gained by delaying the start until next day. The Christian burial which they had been enabled to give their former companion seemed to have lifted a great weight from the Doctor's mind, and, realizing



the uselessness of grieving too heavily upon past events which could not now be remedied, he endeavoured to set an example of cheerfulness, which quickly exerted its beneficent influence upon the others.

There was work to keep them all occupied, for Captain Dixon insisted upon a careful inspection of the whole of the launch, and particularly its mechanical and electrical equipment, before venturing into the depths of the tunnel. But at last everything was ready, and just as the sun was sinking behind the western hills the *Jessica* swung slowly round and headed towards the entrance to the tunnel through the range.

In the stern, Dorothy stood between her father and Brian Dale, and hand in hand they watched the slanting shadows come stealing across the rocks and hills. The rays of the setting sun flooded the lake in a blaze of golden grandeur, the limpid water sparkling brilliantly in the wake of the slowly moving launch. The sun-splashed rocky eminences shone like burnished gold, and here and there the slanting rays struck the green foliage, which scintillated with the brilliance of diamonds. In the mellow warmth of the sunset the lake and its picturesque surroundings underwent a remarkable transformation. Bathed in a flood of colour, they seemed to be enveloped in an aroma of softness and charm behind which the stark horror of tragedy melted into a vague, uncertain outline, dim and remote.

The *Jessica* entered the tunnel just as the sun sank, a huge blood-red ball of fire, behind the western hills. Instinctively the travellers turned for one final glance towards the massive rock in the north-western corner behind which, out of sight, but standing with vivid clearness in their mind's eye, loomed those towering grey-white walls with their strange secrets locked for ever in their keeping—the Temple of Sähr.

THE END



