

## CHAPTER X

### The Terrible Tumble

We arose in the midst of sunshine, tropical scenes, sweet birds and sweet flowers, and after breakfast started up Meadow Creek in search of the mysterious woman.

In a short time we passed out of the lawn, across the meadow, and into a shadowy forest whose moss-covered tree tops filled the scene with gloom.

With searchlights in our hands, we continued up the creek for some miles and came, at last, in sight of what seemed to be the side of an old rock building.

“Go slow, Bill, for that is a house. Be careful.”

Creeping nearer, we saw an ancient wall forty feet high, made of stone the shape of brick and as long as a man. Then we walked up to it and stood amazed. It was not a house, as we had supposed, but a great wall stretching across the valley.

"Maybe it is a mill dam," Dave suggested.

"Well, let's turn south towards the creek and see," I said.

Then we walked a short distance to the creek and found it boiling up through a tube from under the wall.

"What can this wall mean, Bill?"

"I do not know, I said, "but let's follow the wall and see where it leads."

Crossing the creek we followed the wall about two miles to a point near the range of hills. At this place it turned west, and keeping parallel to the hills, ran for four miles; then bending suddenly it angled toward the hills on the other side of the valley.

We followed the wall to Meadow Creek, which

sinking passed through the wall in a huge tube below the surface of the water.

We crossed the creek and followed the wall to another turning point near the opposite range. Bearing east, we crept along the wall for about four and one-half miles at which point it rose over a rocky peninsula that led off from the main range of the mountain, and descending on the other side for a short distance we came to a place where the wall made an abrupt turn towards the creek again.

We followed the new turn for some two miles and came back to the starting point.

"Now we have been all around this wall and did not find a hole large enough for a rat to enter. What do you think of this?" Dave asked.

"I do not know," said I. "Things are strange, and grow stranger. The Snakehead Indians knew of this island, and shuddered when they saw us start this way."

"Do you believe the counterfeiters or sea pirates built the wall?" asked Dave.

"Neither," I said. "That would be unreasonable, but I want more facts and time before I advance a theory. Just wait awhile."

This disappointed Dave, but he continued to ask questions.

"What do you suppose has become of the woman, Bill?"

"I do not know. We have not found one trace of her but she may be on the other side of the wall. So we must get over and explore the country within."

"Do you believe we shall find the counterfeiters or the treasure diggers over there?" said Dave.

"I can't say, but I do know I am bound to get inside and explore the country over there," I said.

"But how are you going to get over the wall, Bill?"

"We could climb a tree and walk out on a projecting limb and reach the wall and go down on limbs and trees on the other side, but to do so



would expose us to view, and might thus lead us into a trap," I explained.

"Well, let's be careful," Dave insisted.

"There probably is a secret passage into the country on the other side and we must find it," I urged. "I believe the Pink Spring woman is over there now, and we must find her."

Dave appeared pleased, and at the same time displeased, at the idea of meeting her.

"If we find her are you going to speak to her, Bill?"

"All depends," said I. "If she is the wife of a counterfeiter we must avoid her, but if she is the companion of a treasure seeker, we shall address her."

"It may be that she is a wild woman—a descendant of the sea pirates," Dave said.

"If so we will catch and talk to her. But come and let's go to the point where the wall rose over the rocky ridge and look for a secret entrance, for there, in those rocks and cliffs, I believe we will find it."

So we went back to the ridge, and turning up the east side of it, through awful jungles, we soon came to an overhanging cliff.

"Look, Dave. There is a large hole under that shelving and overhanging rock. I am sure it will lead down under the wall and open on the other side."

"But who would be brave enough to enter that dark and dismal passage?" asked Dave.

"You and I. Get ready, for we will go right now. Be in a hurry for the sun is getting low."

Dave begged to wait.

"Bill, let's not go into this awful place and meet that wild woman and other things."

"Dave, you are too brave to fear a woman, tame or wild. Come, I am gone." Saying this I walked up to the entrance to the passage.

"This entrance is veiled with spider webs. If that woman is on the inside she entered some other way," I remarked.

Then we turned on our searchlights, and with

guns in one hand and knives in the other, we started in.

Walking erect, for twenty or thirty feet, we came to a descending rock stairway, and continuing in the large and comfortable hall for some six hundred feet, we walked out into a beautiful forest on the other side.

Going to a spring, that rose from beneath an old cedar, we ate supper, and crawling into our nest we were lulled to sleep by the hooting of the great owl and the songs of the whip-poor-wills.

Next morning we came down from our lofty nest, ate breakfast and started down towards the creek to investigate, and reaching the stream we turned up it. After walking about one mile through a very dense forest, we came to an immense mound with steep sides and a flat top that covered an area larger than a city square.

"This is an old mound, Bill, and it is covered with large trees."

Then we walked over and around it 'till we came to the south side, and there found a door



made of huge stone set in the side of the mound. Inching up, we peeped in and saw a sombre rock hall that faded away in darkness.

"What a strange odor comes out of that tunnel, Bill. Have you noticed it?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed, but I cannot tell what it is like," said Dave.

"This place is being used, for the door is slick and there are no spider webs over it," I suggested.

"It may be the home of the Pink woman, and the thing we smell may be the odors from her kitchen," Dave hinted.

"Well, let's go in and see."

"No, Bill, no. This dark underground house may be the home of goblins, ghosts and all the other outlandish creatures that inhabit this island."

"I believe this old house is in some way connected with the Coat mystery, and I am going in there and investigate or die in the attempt,"



I said. "But you can remain outside if you wish."

"No, Bill, I will go if you do."

Then we flashed our searchlights, and with guns and knives drawn, we started in, and groping for about one hundred feet we came to a door on the right, the width of a man, and peeping in heard a rattlesnake rattle. The hair stood erect on my head.

Then we passed the door and oh, what unearthly odors filled the hall. A few steps further we came to a point where the hall forked off into four different directions.

Turning to the right we soon came to another room whose door was too narrow to let us in.

"Great stars, Bill! Look at the rough pieces of metal in the corner. It looks like silver."

"Put your head in and see, Dave."

Just at this moment something hissed, and another rattler began to rattle.

"Hush, Bill, hush!"

Then we heard rattlers in many directions.

"What strange noise is that?" Dave asked.

"It is wild animals growling," I said.

Looking down the old gloomy hall, we saw two balls of fire the size of grape-fruit.

"Panther! panther!" Dave cried, and away he flew for the outer door, dropping his light.

Reaching the forks, he took the wrong hall, and the next instant he tumbled down an old flight of steps to be met by the rattle of snakes and growls of animals.

"Bill, Bill, Bill!" he cried.

I rushed in after him with my light.

"Save me, Bill, save me!"

He sprang to his feet and we rushed back up the old steps and dashed out into the open world, and great was our joy. This done, we lay down to quiet our nerves and rest.

"Bill, that is the awfulest place on earth. I am done with old houses, now and forever," Dave groaned.

"Did you see anything in the old room at the foot of the steps, Dave?"

"I saw nothing except an old door that led into another hall. Did you see anything?" Dave replied.

"Yes, the back end of the room, or hall, was filled, like a corn crib, with some strange looking substance," I answered.

What color was it, Bill?"

"I could not tell but I thought it had a yellow cast. I know I saw things sparkle like diamonds, but I think it must have been the eyes of snakes or rats."

At this Dave opened his eyes.

"Bill, do you suppose it was a room full of gold and diamonds?"

"No, no, I guess not."

"Bill, Bill, what do you think of this old house with a thousand rooms? What theory have you to offer?"

"I confess I am staggered by the multiplying mysteries. The white metal in the metal room," I said, "would suggest and support the counterfeit theory, but if the room at the foot of the

steps be full of gold nuggets and diamonds, this would sustain the pirate theory."

"Well, what do you really believe?" asked Dave.

"I confess I hardly know, though I have been working on a new theory of late."

"Well, what is that?" Dave demanded.

"It is too vague yet, to mention. I am noting everything I see and hope to evolve a theory that will explain each and every fact and phenomenon with which we have come in contact."

"Let's go back and explore the room at the foot of the stairs," I said.

Dave was astounded at my suggestion.

"Not I Bill, not I. I would love to be rich to splurge in New York, but I would not go back into that terrible hall for all the wealth of Croesus. No! not me."