

## CHAPTER XI

### The Jessamine Vale

Then we started up the Meadow Creek again, and going about one-fourth of a mile, we suddenly came to an immense irregular mound of made earth, and crawling upon it we saw a great railroad cut enter a cluster of high hills.

"Here, Dave, is where the mound builders got the dirt with which to make the mound we have just left."

We walked up to the cut.

"That is not a railroad cut," said Dave, "it is entirely too wide and deep."

"I never thought it was a railroad cut, but it

does resemble one. Look at the pretty little brook that flows out of it," I said.

"Your late supper is now ready," said the porter, "come in."

"Excuse us, ladies and gentlemen, 'till we drink a cup of tea, and after that we will return, and I will begin the story where I left off and will finish it."

The two young explorers withdrew into the dining room to refresh themselves, while the guests gathered together to discuss the thrilling things Bill had been telling them.

"When those two young men came in to-night they both had a grip in each hand, but the ones in their right hands were so heavy they could not walk straight, but bent away over," said Mr. Hannah, the fat man.

"Well, what does it mean?" asked Mr. Whitmire, the hotel keeper.

"I believe they found treasure over there," said Mr. Hannah, "and those grips are full of it.

The railroad cut of which Mr. Argo spoke is an ancient mine of colossal wealth."

"The West Indian inhabitants told Ponce de Leon that Bimini was an island not only of youth, but of treasure of El Dorado," said Mr. Bingham, the banker.

The guests looked up astounded.

"Yes, all the chroniclers so declare," Mr. Whitmire said.

Then Mr. Hannah walked over and picked up one of the satchels.

"This valise feels as if it is full of lead. Let's open it and see, for pure curiosity," Mr. Hannah suggested.

"No, no, that would be wrong," said the guests. "Don't do that."

"I am not going to take anything but I am bound to see what is inside this grip," said Mr. Hannah.

Then he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, and in a moment unlocked the satchel and opened it.

"Great stars!" he exclaimed. "It is full of diamonds!"

Then they all ran over and looked into the grip.

"They are the size of oranges," said Mr. Whitmire.

"There is one as large as a cocoanut," Mr. Bingham exclaimed. "Look!" exclaimed Mr. Hannah. "There is a gold nugget the size of a baby's head. Fortunes, fortunes!" he exclaimed in subdued tones.

By this time the guests were greatly excited.

"Mr. Argo will finish this tale, but he won't say one word about the treasure. Stand up and let's swear to keep this a secret and go over there ourselves and make a great fortune."

This said, they all stood up and took the oath.

"Sit down. Be quiet. They are coming," urged Mr. Hannah.

"Well, now, ladies and gentlemen, I will begin where I cut off, and finish the story."

"We spent the night at the mouth of the cut,

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but next morning started on up Meadow Creek, and going about one mile through the deepest forest of all, we suddenly came upon a wonderful lake that lay east and west, like a great river.

Following the lake for some three miles we came back to the starting place. We were tired, so we sat down to rest and think.

"Dave, this lake is three miles around, and over there in the middle sits the most gorgeous little island under the sun."

"And look, Bill, at the Egyptian trees, shrubs, flowers and the massive water oaks and palms that adorn that beautiful rise."

"Well, let's go over there and explore it," I said. "Surely we shall find someone on that enchanted hill."

"Look at the alligators and snakes. I would not swim over that lake for all the gold on Wall Street," said Dave.

"You are a city boy, Dave. Come and help me make a raft of dry logs, and we will row over."

Then we made the raft, and rowing over, landed and started towards the center of the island, through the darkest, deepest forest yet encountered.

Creeping along for some distance we came to a gentle rise, and ascending it for about one-fourth of a mile, we saw through the timber, vines and moss, another wall.

Inching a little nearer we discovered an immense two-story, rambling castle that would have covered a city block. It was made of marble blocks, each the shape of a brick, but larger than a man.

"Let's move on a little, Dave. I smell the yellow jessamine—the sweetest of wild flowers."

"Look at that stump, Bill. It is covered with that vine and flower!"

Then we walked up to it.

"This is not a stump," I said, observing it closely, "it is the statue of some man."

"What!" exclaimed Dave.

Then we pulled off the jessamine vine and

saw a marble statue of a man that stood nine feet high.

"What a giant!" whispered Dave. "Look at the strange letters cut deep in the pedestal."

"They do not look like any letters I ever saw," I exclaimed, "but they spell the name of the man, no doubt."

"There are six letters in all and they are the same shape of the mound letters we found on the open plain the other day," said Dave.

I confess I was bewildered.

"Hush, Dave, hush. Do hush!"

"What, what?" Dave exclaimed.

"I thought I heard a human voice in that desolate old castle."

We stood breathless.

"It is a monkey. I see it Bill, and hear it too. But we will find the Pink Spring woman in this castle, I am sure."

Then we cautiously neared an open court on the west side of the castle, and concealing our-

selves in some tall ferns and old shrubbery, sat down to look and listen.

In a few moments an English mocking bird coming, lit on an old orange tree and sang, and sang and sang.

"Bill what connection can you see between all these strange things and the Coat man?"

"There may be no connection, but somehow I feel there is. I believe we shall yet discover something that will explain every fact."

"Hush Bill."

"What?"

Again we sat as mute as mice.

"I thought I heard someone drop a tin pan in the castle. Be still, it may be the counterfeiters at work," Dave said.

"I doubt the counterfeit theory," I said, "but I am looking for the Pink Spring woman to walk out at any moment."

"I doubt if she comes out," said Dave, "because we have found no path or other sign of humanity within these walls. It looks too



gloomy and neglected for human habitation."

We were startled again.

"There! I did hear a pan fall, Bill. I did. They are cooking supper."

"It did sound like one," I said.

At that moment a beautiful little curly-haired girl, about three years old, dejected and neglected, walked out of the side door and sat down in the open court on the ground and began to play in the sand. We were astounded.

"Bill, whose child is that? Though plainly dressed she looks like the daughter of a King."

"She seems to be at home, and she is certainly a beautiful little creature," I said.

"But that house may be full of counterfeitters right now, making money," Dave whispered. "Look, Bill, I see some smoke oozing out through the moss-covered limbs. It may be counterfeitters yet. Be careful, Bill, for if they be outlaws we may never live to tell the story."

When the sun dropped behind the tree tops the little girl got up crying, and calling "Oh

mamma, mamma!" ran back into the castle and vanished.

"Hush, Dave, hush, what on earth is that?"

"It sounds like a hundred counterfeiters coming through the woods from the west," said Dave. "I know it is they. Let's fly."

"No. Be quiet," I said. "It is safer now to crouch here than to rise and run."

The noise ceased for a time, only to begin again. Then it drew closer, nearer and louder, and then hushed again. We sat breathless.

"Bill, the outlaws are coming."

As darkness fast approached, we heard the noise start again. Thrash, thrash, thrash!

"Bill they are coming. We are gone!"

The next moment something like a cabin moved out from under the limbs to the center of the open court and stopped, our hair stood on ends.

Hesitating a moment, the strange thing thrust something into the air and began to blow.

"Great stars, Bill, that is the bugler! What is it?"

"It is an elephant trumpeting," I replied in a whisper.

How peculiar we felt.

Soon the moon rose and revealed five large African elephants lying asleep on the plaza.

After this, a dog, more wolf than otherwise, came out of the castle, and sniffing the air towards us, went back inside and vanished.

"That dog means mischief, Dave. So let's slip down the hill a little way and get out of his reach."

Then we walked for about one-third of a mile, and coming to a heavy-topped cedar, we crawled up into it and made a nest and lay down to rest, breathing the fragrance of the jessamine.

"Bill, I think I can tell you the name of the marble man."

"Well, who is it?"

"He is Cheops, the Egyptian King who

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reigned and built the Pyramids on the Nile four thousand years before Christ."

"Why do you say such a thing as that?" I asked.

"When I was in Egypt, last year, I saw the same six letters which they said stood for Cheops. I remember the shape and appearance of those letters, and these here have the same form exactly."

"Dave, you don't say so!" I exclaimed.

"Yes I do."

"Well, this explains why we have found so many African animals and plants here. This ancient king, who evidently owned the island and built that castle, must have brought them to this country and must have given them a start and they have persisted to this day," I argued.

"There is no doubt that the Egyptians once owned this island and lived here," said Dave. "This might have been King Cheops' winter home six thousand years ago. Think of it!"

"The metal in the metal room may have been left here by Cheops, or it may be material of the counterfeiters, or the depository of the sea pirates," I suggested.

"What a wonder!" exclaimed Dave. "But what connection has this puzzle with the Coat Man?"

"The accumulating facts, instead of solving the mystery, seem to deepen it," I said, "but I affirm again that I believe all these phenomena are connected, and can all be explained, by one theory, some day."

"The two old Snakehead Indians suspected these things and shuddered when we came this way, but to-morrow we shall explore the old Cheops castle and know the history of things within."

Then we drifted off to sleep, listening to the song of a lone whip-poor-will that seemed perched on the steps of the castle door.