

CHAPTER XXVI

THE guests refused to go back to their city homes until they had seen the contents of the chest that had brought such woe to Kastle Krags; and there was nothing to do but to make an immediate search. When daylight came again Edith announced that she had fully recovered from the adventure of two days before, and was ready to help me recover the chest.

"I can't wait to see if it's really there," she confessed.

We went in flow-tide, and we guided a boat over the place. But we weren't trusting entirely to our theory that the sink-hole was only dangerous when the tide was running out. A stout rope was attached to the prow of the boat, and I lashed it about my waist before I stepped off into the water.

We had guessed right about the underground channel. At flood tide a swimmer could pass directly over it in safety. I located a great limestone boulder that I thought was undoubtedly the "white rock" of the script, but as the

surface was rough and choppy from the tidal waves breaking against the rock wall, it was impossible to find the chest by power of vision alone. I found I had to dive again and again, groping with my hands.

But in scarcely a moment my foot encountered an iron chain at the base of the rock. In a moment more the search was ended. A small, iron-bound chest, hardly of twelve inch dimensions, was fastened to the chain, which in turn was hooked securely in a crevice of the boulder.

It was a rather wide-eyed, sober group that rowed back to the shore. In the first place it was almost impossible to believe that such a seeming legendary thing was actually in our hands, a thing of weight and substance and unquestioned reality.

The chest had been made of some sort of very hard wood, chemically treated, and showed not the slightest sign of decay in the eighty years it had lain in the water. How many little crafts had passed over it! What a scarlet trail it had left since the *Arganil* had borne it from Rio de Janeiro, so long ago. "But naked treasures breed murder!" Nealman had said—speaking truer than he knew. . . . "They get home to human imagination and human wickedness as nothing else can."

The boat touched the shore. Nopp lifted the chest easily on the ground. "Don't be too hopeful," he advised Edith quietly. "If it's gold that's in it, you couldn't have much over a thousand. It only weighs nine or ten pounds, box and all."

It was true. And the box itself, bound with iron, could easily weigh that much. Had we been hoaxed by an empty chest?

Somehow or other, nervous and fumbling, we got the thing open. Some of the rods we broke, others we bent back. And at first we only stared in blank surprise.

It did not look like gold—the contents of the chest. Nor was it a string of precious jewels. It seemed merely a bent, shapeless object of some dark-colored metal, and a few dull stones, some of which were as large as hickory nuts, loose in the bottom. Certain words were said as we looked on, certain questions asked—but all of them were dim and lost in a great, wondering preoccupation that dropped over me.

Nopp reached a big hand, took one of the stones, and rubbed it on his trouser leg. Looking at it, he rubbed it again with added vigor. Then he stared at it in sudden, fascinated *wonder*.

"Good Heavens!" he suddenly exclaimed in

tremendous excitement. "Do you know what this is?"

We turned to him, staring blankly. "What is it?" Edith asked. Her voice was quiet; only the bright sparkle in her eyes revealed how excited she really was.

"It's an emerald. That's what it is. One of the finest in this country. It's worth a whole chest of gold. Killdare, the story was that it was a *Portuguese* ship—bound out from Rio?"

"Yes——"

"And the chest was the property of some noble family, Portuguese princes at the time the court of Portugal was located in Rio de Janeiro?"

"Something like that——"

"The property of a noble family! Edith, it was unquestionably the property of the ruling house itself. Wait just a minute."

He took the shapeless thing of metal, rubbed it until a little of the tarnish was gone, revealing yellow gold beneath, and slowly bent it in his hands. It took a circular shape. Then he showed us little sockets, set at various points, that had been the settings for the jewels. We saw the truth at once.

"A crown!" Edith said.

"Unquestionably the famous crown that the Portuguese king wore at his Brazilian court—one of the richest courts in history. The jewels came from Brazil, from Peruvian temples—Heaven knows where. And for Heaven's sake, Edith, send it away and get it changed into securities. It's death—that's all it is. It's the kind of thing that drives men insane."

We took the yellow thing, and in a wonderful, elated mood, we set it on her own golden curls. But she removed it quickly. We were all instantly sobered as she put it into my hands.

"It's bad luck to wear it," she said. "It makes me creep to think what wickedness it has caused—clear through the centuries. I'm an American—and being a queen has never appealed to me."

Nopp smiled quietly, into the depths of the lagoon. "But you intend to be *somebody's* queen, don't you, Edith?" he asked.

And thus the matter of Kastle Krags came to a new beginning. Edith changed the jewels into securities, just as Nopp advised, and a tenth of them paid the obligations that were left after Nealman's estate was settled up. The rest provided an annual income that, while it would have been considered moderate by such great

financiers as Marten and his fellows, seemed of kingly proportions to me. At least it provided for the maintenance of the old southern manor-house according to its best traditions.

And when Edith and I go sailing away to strange lands beyond the sea, bent on scientific research and adventure, we often wonder what haughty princes and bearded pirates, lurking in the shadows of the deck are saying among themselves. Things have taken a great turn, they whisper together, when the jewels for which they lived and fought, did murder and died, have gone to sustain a rich man's secretary and a peniless schoolmaster! Perhaps lovely Portuguese princesses watch with contempt; and ear-ringed villains, scornful of such science as mine, swear evil oaths and wonder how the times have tamed!

But perhaps they are glad that their watch of the lagoon is over! There is nothing to hold these restless spirits now, and you can hear them rustling no more in the forest, or feel their tragic presence in the gardens. Some way, the house is more cheerful, and the sea no longer conveys the image of desolation and mystery. When our young friends visit us, to play golf on our links and shoot and fish in the lakes and rivers, they invariably speak of its homely charm

and cheer. We have, however, made certain improvements in the grounds.

We have huge, black-lettered signs posted here and there along the lagoon, giving certain advice concerning swimming at ebb tide.

THE END.