

2 THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN HEART

was just about to go down to open the boathouses. Hearing the hullabaloo, he put his head out of the window and espied a strange young man, holding a hand to his heart as though to help his breathing, and so very white and shaken that the importance of his words could no longer be doubted.

"Ay, mate, and who be you?"

"I'm Huggins from Oxford. We're taking the ships down to the races, but were held up last night by way of Streatly. Here was I about to make the lock just now when my mate see the thing. I tell you it's a boat and a lady in it. You'd better come down quick."

The old man muttered something about a boat with a lady in it being no new thing in these parts; but he went down nevertheless, and as he went he awakened his master. The loud knocking had brought other inmates to the windows, and one of these, a young physician from the Addenbrooke Hospital at Cambridge, now put in his word.

"What's up, my man?" he asked.

Huggins repeated his story.

"I see the boat in the long grass. She's dead, or I don't know the likes of it. A fair lady, too, with diamonds on her. That's what sent me here."

"Did you wake the lock-keeper?"

"What's the good of he? I was through the St. John Ambulance class in Oxford and I know it's a doctor we want. If you can tell me——?"

"I am a doctor. Wait a minute and I'll come down. Where do you say the boat is?"

"It's over agen the weir bridge. You'll see it if you step across. I tell you it's given me and my mate a rare fright and no mistake."

The doctor made no reply, but withdrew to dress himself. When he arrived upon the scene there was quite a little group of pale-faced men standing upon the bank hard by the boathouse. Day had broken with a heavy haze, which promised heat later on. The wind whispered in the reeds, and the water lapped coldly in the channels by the sheds.