

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SLEEPER

THE Ry of Rys sat in his huge armchair, his broad-brimmed hat on his knee in front of him. One hand rested on the chair-arm, the other clasped the hat as though he would put it on, but his head was fallen forward on his breast.

It was a picture of profound repose, but it was the repose of death. It was evident that the Ry had prepared to leave the house, had felt a sudden weakness, and had taken to his chair to recover himself. As was evident from the normal way in which his fingers held his hat, and his hand rested on the chair-arm, death had come as gently as a beam of light. With his stick lying on the table beside him, and his hat on his knee, he was like one who rested a moment before renewing a journey. There could not have been a pang in his passing. He had gone as most men wish to go—in the midst of the business of life, doing the usual things, and so passing into the sphere of Eternity as one would go from this room to that. Only a few days before had he yielded up his temporary position as chief constable, and had spent almost every hour since in conference with Rhodo. What he had planned would never be known to his daughter now. It was Rhodo himself who had found his master with head bowed before the Master of all men.

Before Fleda entered the room she knew what awaited her; a merciful intuition had blunted the shock to her senses. Yet when she saw the Ry on his throne of death a moan broke from her lips like that of one who sees for the last time someone indelibly dear, and turns to face