

mense depth. Turning around, I heard a sound of bubbling water, and going forward, saw against the inner wall in the corner, a clear spring of water that bubbled from the sand and fell with a musical sound into a curiously moulded iron pot, from whence it flowed into the lake below.

Here, indeed, was the well, and here the pot, but where was the ring to pull? With a rapidly beating heart, I examined the sides of the cave, but found nothing. Then I took the pickaxe, and began to probe the sand floor. I was much excited and worked hard, but was getting discouraged, when my axe-point struck something hard. Hastily brushing the sand aside, I found an old rusted iron ring. Inserting the axe-point, with a wrench and pull, up came a small square of wood like the hatch of an old boat, which revealed an opening in which was another iron pot filled with something that scintillated in the afternoon sunlight that now slanted into the cave. Wrenching up the pot by its rusted handle, a sight met my eyes that I had never dreamed in my wildest moments. It was filled to the brim with jewels of wonderful beauty, and doubtless of inestimable value.

I sat down in a dream and emptied its contents out on the sand, and counted nearly fifty necklaces and bracelets of pure gems strung together in a fine setting of antique gold.

They were of but three kinds, rubies, emeralds, and opals, but all apparently of the purest water. There was no clue of any kind to explain the mystery of their presence, but there they gleamed red, green and violet in the lonesome sunlight, and my mind began to conjure up the old-time beauties whom they had once adorned, until a sense of their great value grew upon me, and of the responsibility of the vast wealth that had come into my possession.

Just then a movement of my foot overturned the hatch, and there, attached to it, face downward, where it had evidently kept silent watch during all those years, was a hideous grinning skull.

Then a horror of the place and jewels overcame me. The gems seemed to move as if touched by unseen hands. Sudden-

ly, an eerie laugh sounded through the cave, and with a cry of terror, I sprang to the chimney and climbed rapidly up, and fell shaking and exhausted out into the upper sunlight.

Even out there, with the lake and sky all about me, it took some time for my nerves to recover from the horrible sensation that that skull and those jewels had conjured up; but that laugh, it could hardly be mere fancy. Cursing myself for my cowardice, I climbed down once more. The spring and the pot were as before, but the gems and the skull had vanished, and the place was as silent and empty as the tomb.

For a moment I stood in amazement, while my terror returned; again that laugh rang out, but nearer, and I turned to retreat, but started back in wonder and astonishment, for before me appeared a most remarkable and beautiful sight. Between me and the opening where the afternoon sunlight and the blue lake shone in, stood Laeta Merton, her beautiful dark face wearing a half mocking, half playful smile, and her splendid arms, head, breast and neck literally gleaming with the magical radiance of those mysterious jewels. It seemed as if by heredity, something subtle in those old gems had passed into her simple girlish nature, transforming her; for she looked, standing there, like some magnificent reincarnation of old days.

Intoxicated, carried out of myself by her strange, fatal beauty, I sprang forward, with a cry of passion and wonder.

"Laeta," I cried. But her face on the instant changed as I have never seen face change before or since. In it there grew infinite scorn and defiance, and as if to escape, she stepped quickly back, when her foot slipped, and in an instant with a quick cry she sank into the inky waters outside.

With a shout of horror, I sprang forward and leaned over the edge, but saw only the inky deeps that blinked at me from below. She and the jewels, between which and herself, was such a strange, mysterious association, by some mystic fate had sunk forever, taking with them the secret that enshrouded them.

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