

Pine Bluff; and their visits there were gala occasions indeed. They lived over again every incident of those memorable weeks, when they had all been competitors for the Mortimer fortune and seekers after the jewel. There were, in the first place, many mysteries to unravel; and as many of these were connected with the grim and somewhat grotesque figure of Nicholas, the old man seemed to take particular pleasure in introducing the cousins to his most secret haunts.

For there was a whole labyrinth of secret passages and winding stairs,—some of them in the house and others without, leading into the forest or down to the cavern or the seashore. Most of them were known to the old servitor alone. He had spent many of his long years of service in their hidden recesses, and had his own apartments where no prying eyes might look upon them. This circumstance, with the antique style of dress he affected, his taciturnity, and his singular manner and appearance, had gained for him among the people about the reputation of possessing occult powers. Many amongst the generations of Mortimers whom he had served had not been altogether free from this super-