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SEVEN SLEEPERS THE LOST CHRONICLES

1

**The
Spell
of the
Crystal
Chair**

GILBERT MORRIS

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CHICAGO

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1

A Discontented Crew

Abbey Roberts knelt beside a small creek washing her hair. She was a most attractive girl, thirteen years old. At the moment her long blonde hair was filled with white suds, and for the most part she kept her eyes closed to keep the soap out. From time to time she would open them, though, and glance over at Sarah Collingwood, who sat on the bank, reading a book.

Sarah was only one year older. Her hair was as black as Abbey's was blonde, and her eyes, which were more than half closed with sleepiness just now, were large, brown, and wide-spaced.

The two girls had come away from the rest of the Sleepers to spend some time alone.

There were times when Sarah and Abbey did not get along. They were very different. Abbey spent a great deal of time making herself more attractive, a habit that irritated Sarah considerably.

"You're always primping, Abbey. Don't you ever get tired of trying to make yourself look better?" Sarah had said this more than once, and that irritated Abbey considerably. She always responded, "It's a girl's responsibility to look as good as she can, Sarah. It wouldn't hurt you to take a little bit more care of your hair and to spend a little more time with makeup."

As Abbey got on her hands and knees to let her hair fall forward into the water, she thought, *If we were*

back in Oldworld, Sarah and I would never be friends at all. We're just too different.

She splashed the cold water over her hair, keeping her eyes tightly shut, and for a moment her mind went back to the time before the world as all the Sleepers had known it was destroyed by atomic war.

That time was like a dream now. She knew she would probably never see again such things as Popsicles, which she loved, or all the other little things that had filled her world. As she rinsed out the last of the soap, she thought with discontent, *It doesn't do much good to pay attention to your looks here in Nuworld. Nobody's going to see you except maybe some sort of weird mutants like Mat and Tam.*

She squeezed her hair to get the water out, then picked up a towel. It was not really a towel. It was simply a large piece of cloth. As she tried to dry her hair, she wished for a thick, fluffy white towel such as she had used every day before Oldworld disappeared. The cloth seemed a sort of sad symbol of all that she had lost.

Abbey and the other Six Sleepers had been placed in protective capsules before the bombs went off. The seven young people had "slept" for many years. She was not quite sure how many.

When they emerged, the world was different. Geography had gone crazy. Even the continents had changed, for the oceans had washed away many old lands and new ones had been formed. Strange mutant forms had arisen—giants, dragons, dinosaurs . . . Abbey suddenly thought, *No one ever knows what sort of monster he'll meet in Nuworld.*

She longed for the old days. The lives of the Seven Sleepers had been filled with little but hard adventure

since they had been awakened. They had become the servants of a strange man called Goél, whom Abbey could never quite figure out. He would appear from time to time, give them orders, and in obedience they would throw themselves into an adventure. Often their lives were at risk, yet Goél seemed as much interested in making them into something different—*better*, he said—as in anything else.

“I guess Goél will be coming along soon to send us on another quest against the Dark Lord, Sarah.” She glanced in Sarah’s direction.

But Sarah apparently had not heard. The book she had been reading lay in her lap, and her arms had fallen to her side. Abbey knew their last adventure had taken every bit of Sarah’s strength. Perhaps the warm sun overhead had been too much for her. She began to slump down.

Abbey’s eyes flew wide. “Sarah! Wake up! You’re falling in!”

And Sarah Collingwood *was* tilting over. The bank was steep where she sat, and she simply flipped over headfirst in a rather boneless fashion and hit the cold water. The stream closed over her head, and her arms beat at the water as she attempted to come up.

Then Abbey remembered that Sarah was wearing heavy hiking boots. They would fill with water at once and drag her down. *Oh, no!* She thought. *We’ve been through all sorts of dangers, and now Sarah’s going to drown by falling into a creek!*

Upstream from the two girls, Josh Adams sat with a small sapling in his hand. At the end he had tied a stout cord, and a bit of light wood served as a cork. He and the other male members of the Seven Sleepers had

decided to come to the creek to fish. They were tired of their monotonous diet.

“I wish I was back home in Arkansas,” Bob Lee Jackson said. “I bet I could show you how to catch fish then.” Bob Lee was called just Reb by the other Sleepers. He was fourteen, tall and lanky. His light blue eyes were half shaded by the cowboy-style straw hat he wore, and strands of tow-colored hair straggled out from beneath it. “I’ve been fishing there when the fish bit so good that you had to hide behind a tree to bait your hook.”

Josh grinned. “Don’t you ever get tired of telling those lies?” He was almost as tall as Reb but was rather skinny, being on the brink of young manhood but still not fully coordinated. Although he had been chosen to be the leader of the Sleepers, Josh was shy and unsure of himself and could not believe he was the leader of anything.

Dave Cooper laughed aloud. At fifteen, he was the oldest of the Sleepers. He was a handsome boy with brown hair and gray eyes and was very athletic. “Back home where I lived, we’d catch fish that weighed twenty or thirty pounds.”

“Were they catfish, or is that another one of your educated lies?” Reb sounded suspicious.

“No, we lived right on the Gulf. We’d go out on charter boats. We caught many an amberjack that weighed twenty pounds. Wish I had one now.”

The other two members of the group sat side by side, quietly fishing. Jake Garfield, a Jewish boy, was the group’s mechanical genius. He could make anything work. Now he nudged the Sleeper beside him, saying, “Hey, Wash, let’s get away from here. They’re starting to swap those lying fish tales. I don’t want to hear it.”

Wash—Gregory Randolph Washington Jones—was twelve, the youngest Sleeper. He had ebony black skin and a beautiful white smile. He giggled and lifted his fish hook to examine it. “I wonder which one of them’s going to tell the biggest lie about fish.”

“I don’t think—” Josh Adams began.

And then someone screamed.

Josh threw down his pole and leaped to his feet. “That’s Abbey!” he cried and took off at a dead run.

“It sounds bad,” Dave said at the same moment, and all of the boys dropped their poles and raced off after Josh.

Josh ignored the brambles that clutched at him. A branch scratched him across one eye, half blinding him. But Abbey’s screams were serious, and he sped on. He had toughened up since coming to Nuworld and was not even breathing hard when he burst into the clearing where she stood, pointing down at the water.

“She fell in, Josh! She’s drowning!”

Taking in the situation at one swift glance, Josh kicked off his shoes and made a shallow dive into the creek. It was something he would not have done otherwise, for he knew that diving into unknown waters could get a fellow hurt quick. But he saw Sarah struggling and knew there was no time to lose.

The mountain creek closed over him, its coldness taking his breath. He was thankful that swimming had always been his best sport. He came to the surface, his arms pumping and his feet kicking frantically. Just ahead, Sarah’s hands broke the surface, and he drove himself toward her. When he reached where she struggled, sinking again, he grabbed a handful of her hair and pulled her head above water.

But Sarah began to clutch at him, threatening to drag them both under.

“Don’t grab at me, Sarah! Just let yourself go! Relax, I’ve got you!”

As is true with most drowning people, Sarah Collingwood was beyond reason. Frantically she kept clutching at Josh.

But he continued carrying her entire weight by her heavy hair. As she sputtered and struggled, he swam strongly, towing her toward shore.

And then he felt his feet touch bottom. “It’s OK,” he gasped. “You’re OK now, Sarah.”

But now her heavy hiking boots sank into the mud. Josh put both arms around her and pulled her free, then staggered toward the bank.

“Give me a hand, you guys! She keeps getting stuck in the mud.”

Dave jumped in and took hold of Josh’s waist, and Jake did the same for Dave. The others formed a human chain, and a tug-of-war with the creek bottom began.

Sarah’s feet came out of the squishy mud, but her boots remained there. She was dragged unceremoniously to shore, and as soon as she was there she did a very ungrateful and surprising thing.

Turning around, she slapped at Josh. “Get your hands off me!” she cried.

He stared at her, then looked wildly around at the group. “Get my hands off of you? You would have drowned if I hadn’t put my hands on you!”

“No, I wouldn’t have! I can swim as good as you can!”

“You didn’t look like it,” Wash protested. “You looked like a goner to me, Sarah. I think Josh saved your life.”

“He’s always showing off,” she said, next to tears. As a rule, Sarah was very sweet and reasonable, and Josh was sure she liked him. But she lashed out at him verbally now. “I didn’t need your help! I was just about ready to kick off my boots and start swimming.”

Reb shoved the straw Stetson back on his forehead and grinned broadly. “You sure gave a good imitation of a girl drowning,” he said. “You ought to go on the stage and be an actress if you can act that good.”

“You hush up, Reb!” Sarah said furiously.

Dave too could not help teasing her a little. “You look like a drowned rat,” he said. “What did you do, just jump in to make yourself look funny?”

But then Wash interrupted. “Hey, you guys! Let up a little. That was a pretty bad scene.” He went over to Sarah. “That wasn’t too funny, was it? That stream’s swift. I nearly drowned in it myself the other day. It’s worse than the Old Man.”

“What old man?” Abbey asked.

“Oh, that’s what we used to call the Mississippi River back in Oldworld. I used to just about drown in it every summer.”

Sarah, Josh thought, must have felt absolutely stupid. She was looking down at her dripping clothes and her ugly, now black socks, which were covered with mud. Her hair streamed down in her face. She repeated, “I didn’t need your help, Josh. I would have gotten out all by myself.”

She turned then and ran away as quickly as she could. The stones must have hurt her bare feet, but she paid no attention.

Josh watched as she disappeared. He had known Sarah Collingwood back in Oldworld when she had

lived with his family. He had thought then that she was the prettiest girl alive and was in awe of her.

Now as he stood there soaking wet, looking after her, he shook his head. "Girls are sure funny."

Reb took off his hat and ran his hand through his sandy hair. "They sure are. I had this kooky cousin called Mary Belle Smite. She was bigger and stronger than any boy, and she liked to wrestle with the mule we had on our place. She was almost tough enough to throw him down. Most of us figured any girl that could throw a mule down would be too hard on a feller, so she didn't have many boyfriends. She was a funny one."

"Sarah was just scared and embarrassed," Wash said. "Abbey, why don't you go see if she's all right?"

"All right. I will." She looked at Josh with admiration. "You sure can swim, Josh."

Josh basked for a moment in the warmth of her compliment, but as Abbey left them, he shook his head again. "Sarah sure was mad."

Wash was always the peacemaker. He struck Josh lightly on the arm. "Don't worry about Sarah," he said. "Like I said, she was embarrassed. She'll be all right."

"I hope so," Reb grunted. "I'd hate to think she was gonna be that mean and nasty all the time."

Supper that night was a somewhat tense affair. For one thing, Sarah had not gotten into a mood that was much better. She realized that she had done a very stupid thing. Abbey had told her it could happen to anyone, and most of the others had been sympathetic, but she could not see it that way.

She had done the best she could with her hair, but there were no hair dryers in Nuworld, and her hair was

long, coming halfway down her back. She'd dried it by simply sitting out in the sun. For supper, she tied it into a long braid. She ate little and said almost nothing.

Then, Reb and Dave got into an argument. Dave had acted as the cook that night, and when Reb tasted the meat, he said, "Dave, you're the worst cook I ever saw. Why, this meat's raw!"

Dave, who did not like to cook anyway and was, in fact, not very good at it, said, "If you don't like it, don't eat it!"

Reb was quick to take offense. "I've seen cows hurt worse than this and still get well," he said. "It ain't fit to eat."

"Will you two calm down?" Wash put in quickly. "Dave did the best he could, Reb."

Josh said little. His eyes kept going to Sarah, as though he was expecting her to apologize or to at least say some kind of thank you. But she sat with her head down, saying nothing.

Finally Josh sat down beside her. "Are you still mad at me?"

Sarah looked up and felt tears coming to her eyes. "I'm—I'm not mad at you, Josh. I just felt so stupid. Imagine, just falling in the river like that! I'm the dumbest girl that ever lived!"

"It could happen to anybody," he said.

She blinked her tears away then and managed a smile. "You're the sweetest boy, Josh."

He lowered his head and said, "Aw, shucks! It wasn't anything!"

"It was, too. I really would have drowned if I couldn't have gotten those old boots off. I guess you saved my life."

"Well, what would I do without you, Sarah?"

At that moment, a voice outside caught everybody's attention. Instantly, the Sleepers jumped to their feet. Nuworld was a dangerous place, and they all grabbed weapons—swords, knives, anything. Josh seized a staff with which he had become quite handy. "Who's out there?" he called.

"Why don't you open the door and find out?"

The voice was rough and sounded vaguely familiar. "I know that voice," Josh said. "I just can't place it." He opened the door and gaped in amazement. "Mat," he said, "it's you!"

"And me. Tam. Can we come in? We're starved to death."

Grinning, Josh stepped back. The two strange looking individuals who entered were identical twins. They were not more than three feet tall and were fat as sausages. Their bellies gave promise of exploding any minute were it not for their broad, black leather belts with shiny brass buckles. Both had round red cheeks with small black eyes peering out from under impossibly bushy eyebrows. Both also had bushy beards that covered their chests.

"Well, I don't see much improvement around here," Mat said, scowling. But Tam was going about greeting everyone with a happy smile.

Mat and Tam were Gemini twins, a strange mutant form that had occurred in Nuworld. The Gemini mothers gave birth to twins every time, and the strange thing was that these twins were usually as different inside as they were alike outside. Mat, for instance, was grumpy, always complaining, always seeing the dark side of things, while Tam was the cheerful optimist who saw good in everything.

Mat and Tam were scarcely inside when Tam said,

“Oh, we forgot someone!” He went back to the door and said, “Come on in.”

The room suddenly seemed to be filled, for an enormous man stooped and came through the door.

“Volka!” Sarah cried. She ran to him and reached up her arms for a hug. She could not reach the neck of the giant, who stood well over eight feet tall. “Ho,” he said, his eyes twinkling, “my Sleeper friends.” Volka’s voice was as big as his body.

“Here, sit before you knock the ceiling down,” Josh said. He waited until Volka was seated on the floor and Tam and Mat were sitting at the table. “Now let’s give these fellas something to eat.”

The three visitors ate like starving sharks.

After they were finished, Mat said, “Well, it’s happened again.” His eyes were gloomy, and he hunched his shoulders in despair. “I know it will turn out to be no good.”

“Sure it’ll be good,” Tam said. “I’m glad to be here.”

“Me too,” Volka boomed. He had cleaned up all the food and sat looking hopefully for more.

“What are you fellows doing here?” Abbey asked. “We didn’t expect you to come.”

“It’s that Goél again,” Mat said, a woeful look on his face. “He told us to come here.” Then he glared around angrily. “We’ve got to take care of you babies again!”

“Goél told you to come here?” Josh said, suddenly alert.

“Yes. Worse luck,” Mat complained. “To be baby-sitters.”

“What did he tell you to do?” Dave asked, puzzled. All of the Sleepers knew that any message from Goél must be obeyed instantly.

“Didn’t say,” Mat said. “Just gave us a map and said

to be here. Well, here we are. Now we'll just have to wait until he shows up."

"It'll be fun," Tam said happily. He hit his twin in the side with his elbow. "Cheer up! Things could be worse."

Mat glared at him. "They probably will be."

SEVEN SLEEPERS THE LOST CHRONICLES

2

The
Savage
Game
of
Lord Zarak

GILBERT MORRIS

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1

The Stranger

Sarah Collingwood took a deep breath, filled her lungs with air, and bent her body. Then she dove into the blue-green waters of the bay and kicked with her fins. The water was as warm as a bath. In front of her she could see Josh Adams swimming downward toward the reef.

Maybe sometimes Josh is awkward on land, Sarah thought, but he's sure a great swimmer!

The two were down ten or twelve feet now. They passed a huge school of brilliantly colored fish—red, green, yellow, orange, and more—more colors, it seemed, than in a rainbow. Then they swam by an enormous fish that Josh had told Sarah was a sea bass. He looked big enough to take off one's leg, but he hung suspended in the beautiful green water, simply fanning his fins and tail gently.

Sarah loved to scuba dive. Back in Oldworld, her parents had once taken her to the coast of Belize, where the second largest barrier reef in the world was located. As usual, when she thought of the way life was before the world had been practically destroyed by atomic warfare, it made her sad. But then she glanced at Josh, who had suddenly stopped to investigate something, and she thought, *But now I'm one of the Seven Sleepers, and I've got six good friends, and I've got Goél. I just won't think about the past.*

Goél. Since being awakened from the sleep capsules that had saved them from the atomic war, the Seven Sleepers had served Goél. He was a mysterious

but noble figure. He led an ongoing battle against the Dark Lord, who had set out to enslave Nuworld.

Josh was still looking at something. He turned toward her and gestured wildly.

She looked to where he pointed—toward the reef—and could see a shadowy shape. Shock ran along her nerves. She did not know what the shape was, but Josh was obviously alarmed. She followed him as he swiftly swam upward, his fins thrashing. When they broke the surface, he yelled, “That’s a barracuda down there! He could take a plug out of you.”

Sarah was not as afraid of barracudas as Josh seemed to be. She had never heard of a barracuda attacking a human being, although they did look vicious. “Come on, Josh! Let’s go back down and pull his tail!” she joked.

“Are you crazy?” Josh had shoved his mask back from his face and now wiped the water away. “Those things look like they’re bad tempered.”

“Well, come on. I’ll race you to shore, then.”

They swam toward the beach, and it was easy with the flippers on. Sarah did not even have to use her arms but, with legs thrashing, just drove herself forward. Since she was keeping her head high, she could see that the other Sleepers were playing volleyball on the beach. When she got close in, she pulled off her flippers and waded the rest of the way. She was careful not to step on any jellyfish, for she was very sensitive to them.

“Hey, you didn’t wait for us!” Josh called to the volleyball players. He tossed his flippers and mask onto the blanket where he had been lying earlier, getting a tan. “How do you expect to win without your star player?”

There were three players on one side: Dave Cooper, the oldest of the Sleepers, at the age of fifteen; Jake Garfield, thirteen, with short red hair; and Abigail Roberts, a blue-eyed blonde who was, in the opinion of some, the prettiest girl around.

On the other side of the net stood Bob Lee Jackson and Wash Jones. Bob Lee was never called anything but "Reb." Although he wore only swimming trunks, he had his cowboy hat perched on top of his tow-colored hair. His light blue eyes squinted in the sun as he said, "Why don't you all go on back and swim? We don't need help. We're beating these folks like a drum."

Wash Jones was standing close to the net. He was the youngest of the Sleepers and the most cheerful. His white teeth now gleamed in his dark face as he said, "Aw, you can come and help us, Sarah. We need somebody good-looking over here to balance out us ugly folks."

With a laugh Sarah went to Reb and Wash's side of the net. "All right," she said.

But Josh said, "Aw, I think I'll just go lie down and watch you guys play." He walked toward his blanket.

Sarah's close friend Josh Adams was very tall for almost fifteen. She knew that he was also very shy and unsure of himself, although he tried to keep this covered up for the most part.

"Come on," Reb yelled. "Let's see what you all can do."

The volleyball game went on for some time. There was a lot of laughter, and no one really cared much who won.

Finally, from the sidelines Josh called, "I vote we cook us some hamburgers."

“Yeah!” Reb said. “That sounds good to me. You girls get to cooking!”

Abbey made a face at him. “Who died and made you king?” she said. “You can cook as well as I can!”

In the final event, the boys built the fire and set up the homemade grill. The girls made the hamburgers. Soon the burgers were sizzling, and when they were cooked, all the Sleepers sat down on the sand.

Reb Jackson put his between two slices of bread and scowled in disapproval. “Sure wish we had some real hamburger buns,” he complained. “Don’t seem like a hamburger with just putting it on bread.”

“Tastes all right to me,” Jake said. He took a huge bite, chewed, and then winked at Wash. “If Reb ever gets married, his wife will have an awful time. He demands the best of everything.”

“I’d hate to be married to *him*,” Abbey said. She was taking dainty little bites and chewing them thoroughly. The sun caught at her blonde hair, making it seem there were threads of gold in it. “He’s impossible!”

“No. I’m possible,” Reb said. “I’m so possible I can’t tell you how possible I am. As a matter of fact, I’m the most normal person I know. Everybody else is abnormal.”

Dave laughed aloud. “If you’re normal, and we’re all abnormal, then we’ll have to put you in a cage. Because when all the abnormal people outnumber the normal people, then they become normal.”

This foolishness went on until suddenly Josh glanced back toward the woods behind them and said, “Who is that? I never saw him before.”

Sarah looked. Someone was walking toward them from the trees.

“Neither did I,” Abbey said. Then her eyes nar-

rowed, and she murmured to Sarah, "But whoever he is, he sure is good-looking, isn't he?"

Sarah was not surprised that Abbey would at once analyze the newcomer as far as looks were concerned. She was slightly boy crazy and had been so ever since they had come to Nuworld. Many of their troubles had been the result of Abbey's fondness for good-looking boys.

Josh got up and walked toward the stranger. "Hello," he said. "You looking for someone?"

"I'm looking for the Seven Sleepers, and I guess you're it."

The speaker was more than six feet tall. He was young—eighteen or so. He had reddish hair and wide-spaced green eyes. He was tanned, he was indeed handsome, and he appeared to be very strong. He was wearing a pair of light tan slacks, a white shirt, and a pair of low-cut, tan half boots. "My name's Roland Winters."

"I'm Josh Adams, and this is Sarah Collingwood. This is Abbey Roberts and Dave Cooper and Jake Garfield. This tall guy here is Reb Jackson, and this is Wash Jones."

Roland Winters let his eyes run over the group as if he wasn't too pleased with what he saw. "I didn't expect you to be so young," he said.

Somehow his remark irritated Sarah, but Josh just said, "People often say that. Sorry to disappoint you. But what can we do for you?"

"Nothing." Roland Winters grinned. "It's what I can do for you."

Sarah glanced back at Josh and saw the puzzled look on his face. "What does that mean?" she asked Roland Winters. "What could you do for us?"

“Well, Goél sent me.”

At the name of Goél, everyone became more alert.

“Goél sent you?” Jake exclaimed. “For what?”

“I guess he thought you needed some help for some reason or other, so he asked me to come and meet him here. He told me a little bit about you kids.” The newcomer hesitated, then shook his head. “I’ve heard some stories about you, but I guess they were exaggerated. Kids like you couldn’t have done as much as I hear.”

The manner of Roland Winters as well as his words irritated Sarah greatly—and probably all the other Sleepers too. Good-looking and strong and able as he seemed to be, there was an arrogance about him that grated on her nerves.

“Well, if Goél sent you, I’m glad you’re here,” Josh said. “Join us and have a hamburger.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Coolly Roland Winters picked up some bread. He put some mustard and pickle on it, and made a sandwich with the meat patty. When he took a bite, he said, “Next time maybe I’ll do the cooking for you. I can do a little bit better than this.”

“Oh, that’s just great,” Reb said with a frown. “You can do all the work you want to around here. I won’t stand in your way.”

Roland ate two hamburgers and then some cookies that Sarah had made the day before. Apparently he found the cookies not too much to his liking, either.

Sarah grumbled to Josh, “He is so unbearable!”

“Unbearable he sure is! I just hope he’s not going with us on whatever mission Goél sends us on next.”

Sarah scowled. “I’ve got a feeling that he will be.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Womanly intuition. I just feel it.”

“And I sure hope your womanly intuition isn’t right this time. In any case, he seems to be rubbing everybody the wrong way.”

After they had finished eating the hamburgers and cookies, they started the volleyball game again. Nobody was really eager to have Roland Winters on their team. So he just joined in.

He wound up standing next to Sarah.

“You just set ’em up,” Roland said, “and I’ll knock that ball right down their throats, Sarah baby!”

“I’m not a baby!”

“Aw, come on. You almost are. How old are you anyway? Twelve?”

Sarah was so furious that she could scarcely see. She refused to answer, and the game went on.

It soon became clear to her that the annoying Roland Winters had great athletic ability. He could leap higher in the air than any of them. And when he struck the ball, the sound exploded like an artillery shell. He laughed every time he drove the ball past the opponents, which he did often.

Even so, perhaps all would have been well, but then Wash lobbed the volleyball just over the net. Roland leaped high in the air and returned it with all of his strength. The ball was nothing but a blur. It struck Wash on the forehead and knocked him down. He lay flat in the sand for a minute, unable to get up.

Sarah guessed what was going to happen next. Reb Jackson had a rather quick temper, and he had become best friends with Wash. She could see the anger flare up in Reb’s face.

He ducked under the net and walked straight to Roland Winters. Without hesitation, he put a hand on the stranger’s chest and gave him a shove backward.

“You didn’t have to do that!” he said, his eyes blazing. “It’s just a game!”

Roland did not hesitate, either. He moved so quickly that Reb had no chance to stop the blow. It caught him high on the cheekbone and knocked him down.

As Reb struggled to his feet, Dave, the largest of the Seven Sleepers—almost as tall as Roland but not nearly so heavy—came over. His face was flushed. “We don’t need any bullies around here, Winters! If you’re going to pick on somebody, pick on me!”

Roland did not say a word but struck out again. His fist caught Dave in the mouth, and, although Dave did not fall, he staggered backward in the sand.

Now Sarah came running. She had no chance, of course, but she beat on Roland’s chest, shouting, “You leave them alone! Who do you think you are, anyway?”

Quickly the stranger pinioned her wrist and held her easily. “They started it!” he said. “If they’re going to start something, they’ve got to take the consequences.”

Next, Josh came up. “Turn her loose, Roland!” His face was pale. He glanced over to where Wash was helping Reb to his feet. He glanced at Dave and saw that his friend’s mouth was bleeding. “We don’t need any of this.”

“You’re just a bunch of babies. All of you. You can’t take it.”

Roland Winters turned around and stalked off down the beach. He seemed totally unconcerned about what he had done.

“What a bully!” Sarah exclaimed.

“He’s hateful!” Abbey cried. She went over to Dave and said, “Let me see.” Frowning, she studied his face. “Your mouth is cut. We’ll have to put something on it.”

As Abbey led Dave off, Sarah went to Reb. “Are you all right, Reb?”

“I reckon I’ll live.” But Reb’s pale eyes glittered, and he added, “It’s not the last of it, though.”

“Aw, come on, Reb,” Wash, the peacemaker, said. “We’re not really hurt.”

Reb did not answer. His eyes were on the form of Roland Winters, still walking away from them. “I never doubted that Goél knows what he’s doing, but if he’s really chosen *that* one to go with us, I reckon he’s made a pretty big mistake this time.”

SEVEN SLEEPERS THE LOST CHRONICLES

3

The
Strange
Creatures
of
Dr. Korbo

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PRESS
CHICAGO

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1

A Strange New Friend

The rain poured down like a waterfall. It had drenched the small party that emerged from the jungle so that there was not a dry thread on any of them. Overhead the sky was leaden gray, and it looked as if the sun had hidden itself permanently.

The two girls struggled along side by side. The mud was sticky and thick, and each time they took a step it made a hollow, sucking noise.

Sarah Collingwood, at fifteen, was the older of the two by one year. Her glossy black hair was now soaked and hung down her back in strings. Her jaw was set; she was absolutely exhausted. Looking over at her companion, she said, "Pretty bad, isn't it?"

Abbey Roberts had hair as blonde as her friend's was black. She also had much more pride and usually took much more time with her appearance. Now as she looked down at her muddy feet and worn, stained clothing, she gritted her teeth. "Sarah, I'm going to just die if we don't get out of this pretty soon!"

Knowing that her friend was always given to overstatement, Sarah found herself able to grin. She reached over and gave Abbey a pat on the back. "You'll feel better when we get into some dry clothes."

Abbey jerked her shoulder away from Sarah's touch. She was ordinarily a rather sweet-tempered girl, but days of hardship on a mission that had failed had discouraged her.

Sarah knew that. The last mission of the Seven Sleepers had been a failure indeed.

Sighing, she looked at the line of teenagers strung out ahead of them along the muddy trail. Her eyes went first to Josh Adams, the leader. Josh was fifteen, tall and awkward. He was also shy and unsure of himself. It had come as a great shock to him when Goél, who was heading a worldwide fight against a sinister figure known as the Dark Lord, had chosen him to be the leader of the Seven Sleepers.

A nuclear war had destroyed Oldworld. But kept safe in sleep capsules, the teenagers known as the Seven Sleepers had escaped the devastation and had awakened years later. Now as Sarah trudged along, she had a sudden longing to be back in Oldworld and have things as they were.

She wanted to go up and walk beside Josh, but she saw that he was busily talking with Reb Jackson. The thing that stood out about Reb was the large cowboy hat perched on top of his blond hair. Water poured off its brim in a miniature waterfall, but he walked straight and tall as he always did.

Gregory Randolph Washington Jones was slogging along behind Reb. Nobody ever called him anything but Wash. He glanced up from time to time at Reb, his best friend. Sarah thought Wash looked as miserable as everybody else.

The other two members of the group were Dave Cooper and Jake Garfield. Sarah's gaze went to them next. At sixteen, Dave was the oldest Sleeper. He was also the most athletic and the best looking. He made quite a contrast to Jake, who was short, had red hair, and right now seemed to be eagerly talking in spite of his misery.

Reb Jackson tilted his head forward and let the water run off his hat brim. "It sure does look like Niagara Falls, doesn't it?"

"Niagara Falls is gone, Reb," Josh Adams said gloomily.

Josh was ordinarily not so short-spoken, but Reb knew the total failure of their last mission was weighing heavily upon him. Josh was sensitive and had little self-confidence as it was. Now, ever since they had failed to defeat the enemy and had to flee in disgrace, Josh had said little to anyone. Why had Goél let this happen?

Reb let more water run off his hat brim. "What's the matter with you, Josh?" He spoke with a Southern drawl that probably existed nowhere else in Nuworld. "You look like an accident going somewhere to happen."

"The accident did happen, Reb."

"Oh, we took a licking this time, but you can't let that get to you. Goél knows. He's got something in mind."

"Yes, I *can* let it get to me!" Josh said crossly. He clamped his lips together and tried to outwalk the Southerner, but Reb's legs were much longer, and he kept up with him.

"Look here, buddy," Reb said. "You know the old saying, 'Never was a horse couldn't be rode.' And the other part of it is, 'Never was a cowboy couldn't be thrown.'" He laughed aloud and shook his head. "I done proved that many a time, Josh. We got 'thrown' this time, but there's always another day."

But Josh did not smile as he usually did at Reb's words. He plodded on, keeping his head down, and a doleful expression settled over his face. He muttered, "I just can't do it anymore, Reb."

“Can’t do what?”

“Can’t be a leader of the Sleepers anymore.”

Reb Jackson stared at him with surprise. “Well, ain’t you a caution now!” he exclaimed. He reached out and poked Josh’s arm with his fist. “Like I keep saying, you can’t win ’em all. You’ve got to expect some failures along the road. But that doesn’t mean you quit.”

Josh just shook his head. He plodded on for some time before mumbling, “I can’t be the leader anymore. I’m just not fit for the job.”

Reb was disturbed by Josh’s words. He himself had never given up on anything. “You think Goél made a mistake? Not a chance.”

Josh didn’t talk anymore, and finally Reb dropped back and fell into step with Wash. “I’m getting worried about Josh,” he said.

“I’m worried about all of us,” Wash grunted. His legs were much shorter than the tall Southerner’s, so he had to walk faster. “You reckon we’re ever gonna get out of this rain?”

“Sometime. But what worries me is that Josh has given up. He just wants to lie down and quit.”

“Well, who doesn’t!”

Reb grinned in spite of his misery. He pulled Wash’s dripping hat down over his face. “Come on,” he said. “We can’t quit now. Too many miles to go.”

The weary travelers stumbled on for what seemed hours. The rain poured down only intermittently now, and it was in one of those brief times of respite that Sarah called out, “Look, everybody. Isn’t that a house over there?”

Jake Garfield wiped the raindrops from his face.

“Let’s go see who lives there, if anybody does. Maybe they’ll take us in for a while.”

“I don’t know,” Dave said. “It doesn’t look like much of a house to me.”

“Anything would be better than this. At least we’ll have some shelter for a while. Come on.”

They slogged toward the shack, their boots making squishy noises in the soggy ground. They had not gone far before Sarah could see that the little house was made of saplings. They had been stuck into the ground in a circle and tied together with vines. The thatched roof seemed to be made of saplings also. A chimney at the side emitted little gusts of black smoke. Obviously, someone lived here.

Reb was walking up front with Josh again. He called out, “Hello, the house! Anybody home?”

Drops of rain began to fall again, but they were all so wet it could not possibly matter. Then the door—a piece of animal hide strung over the opening—was drawn back, and one of the strangest figures Sarah had ever seen stepped outside. At first she could not make out the face, because the man had on a floppy black hat pulled down over his ears. He was very tall and very skinny. He wore colorless pants and a coat held together in front by what seemed to be pieces of sharp thorn in place of buttons.

“Hello, strangers!” The owner pushed back the hat, and Sarah could see that he was a young man. His stringy hair was brown. He had large eyes that seemed to be gray green, set in a thin face. He had a long, sharp, pointed chin and sunken cheeks. Everything about the man seemed to be long—arms, legs, fingers, nose, everything.

“Reckon there’s gonna be a storm that’ll blow us all away, don’t you think?” he said by way of greeting.

“We’ve come a long way,” Josh began. “We’re very tired and—”

“And hungry,” Reb put in. “Reckon you have room in your house to take us in for the night, sir?”

The man reached his long fingers upward, pulled his hat off, and clawed at his uncombed hair. “Well, I’m expecting the house to blow away if this storm gets any worse,” he said mournfully, “but you might as well blow away from here as anywhere else. Come on in.”

“Strange looking fellow, isn’t he?” Dave muttered to Sarah. “He’s nothing but skin and bones.”

“If we can get out of this rain, I don’t care what he looks like,” she said. Sarah had reached that stage of fatigue where she could hardly talk, so she thankfully followed the strange young man inside.

By way of furniture, the “inside” had two chairs and a wooden table with an oil lamp hanging above it. To one side was a stone fireplace. In it hung a cooking pot, and from it a cheerful fire threw its yellow gleams over the small room. The ceiling went up to a point and somehow managed to give the little house a rather spacious look.

Going over to the fireplace, their host said, “You all look pretty worn out. I guess some stew would go down pretty good. Just made a big potful.”

“Sure would,” Jake said quickly. “We’ve got our own bowls.”

The tall man’s face was highlighted now by the glow of the fire and by the lamp that hung from one of the rafters. Sarah thought he certainly had a mournful look about him. Partly, she decided, it was the effect of his long nose and jutting chin and the deep creases beside his mouth.

“My name is Gustavian Devolutarian,” he told

them. He picked up a big spoon and reached for the tin bowl that Abbey had fished out of her pack. "But if you forget it, I could always tell you again."

There were seven hungry visitors, but the cooking pot was large. He ladled out plentiful portions for them all.

Reb said, "I don't think I can handle that whole name of yours. You got anything shorter?"

"Well, you could call me Gus. It doesn't matter much. How's the stew?" He seemed surprised when everyone said it was delicious. Then he stroked his long chin. "I expect you just got nice manners. I can tell you're well-brought-up young people."

Gus brought out bread to go with the stew. Finally he brewed something that tasted vaguely like coffee. Ordinarily the Sleepers would not have been thrilled with this, but as it was, it tasted very good to them indeed.

"Now," Gus said. He pulled out a pipe and filled it with black tobacco. He lit the pipe with a coal from the fire and sent forth puffs of foul smelling smoke that wound their way heavily toward the chimney. "You folks are criminals escaping from the law, I suppose."

"Why, no!" Sarah said quickly. "Not at all. Whatever made you think a thing like that?"

"Oh, I don't know," Gus said. "Most people who come this way are in trouble some way or other."

Seeing that Josh apparently had decided not to say anything, Sarah explained that they had been on a long journey. They needed to rest somewhere, she said, before they made the rest of the trip.

"Actually, we could use a ship to continue the journey," Sarah said. "It would be a lot easier to get home if we could find one."

Gus puffed at the pipe until it glowed, then took it out of his mouth. "Might find that a little bit hard," he said. "Unless you've got a lot of gold."

"We sure don't have much of that," Josh muttered. He was sitting slumped over with his back against the wall.

Dave said, "It's too late in the day now, but tomorrow we can go try to find a shipowner who would give us some credit."

Gus said sadly, as he said most things, "Well, I wish you luck. Doesn't seem likely, though."

For all his gloom, Gus did his best for his visitors. They all had sleeping bags, and there was just room enough on the floor for everyone. Gus even managed to block off a corner with a blanket hung from the rafters to give the girls their own private room. Just before he blew out the light, he said, "In case a wild animal, such as a wolf or something, comes in, it's been good knowing you folks."

"Gloomy Gus," Abbey whispered. "I've never seen such a pessimistic fellow."

"But at least he's friendly, and he gave us something to eat," Sarah whispered back. "And a place to sleep. Maybe we can get out of here early tomorrow."

But the next day everyone was so weary that they slept until nearly noon.

When the Sleepers finally awoke, Dave saw that Gus had been out hunting. He had brought back some sort of waterfowl and was plucking off the feathers. Sarah and Josh volunteered to help him, while Dave and Jake set off for the village to look for a shipowner.

"Don't tell 'em you're friends of mine," Gus warned as they left.

“Why not?” Jake asked with surprise.

“The fellows in that village don’t like me much.”

“You too cheerful for them, Gus? Is that it?” Dave was standing behind Gus, and he winked at Reb.

“Well, it’s partly that. They *are* mournful kind of folks, them folks in town. And they say I do have too much life about me. But the main thing is I’m such a good looking fellow that all the girls like me too much.”

“Is that a fact, Gus?” Dave said with a straight face. “That’s a real problem.”

“Yes, it is.” Gus was obviously totally sincere. “It’s a burden all right, but us good looking folks just have to bear up with it. Try to get back as early as you can, boys. This is tornado weather. If the house isn’t here, we’ll be scattered out somewhere.”

As they left, Dave said, “I sure hope the townspeople are a little bit more cheerful than he is.”

“I doubt it.” Jake frowned. “Not from what he said.”

While Dave and Jake were gone, the other Sleepers spent most of the day resting. Josh was still downhearted and said he was going for a long walk beside the river. Sarah wanted to join him, but she saw that he wanted no company.

By the time the two boys got back from the village, the girls had managed to roast Gus’s waterfowl. Everyone had been eagerly awaiting their return, but as soon as they stepped into the house, Sarah saw the grim expression on their faces.

“No luck, eh?” Reb asked.

Dave burst out angrily, “No luck at all! We talked to every shipowner down there, and not a one of them is willing to trust us!”

“You can’t blame them much, I suppose,” Sarah said. “They don’t know us. We’re strangers.”

“So what are we going to do now?” Dave asked no one in particular.

Silence fell over the room. Everyone looked out of sorts and cross. And then an argument began as to what should be done next.

When the argument was at its peak, Gus said, “Well, I’ve been thinking, folks. I’d like to take a sea voyage. For my health, you know. I’m not really well. Never expected to live this long. Always heard that a sea voyage would be good for me.”

“What are you trying to say, Gus?” Dave asked, sounding puzzled.

“Well, there’s one captain down there that knows me pretty well. Besides, I’ve got a little stash of money. I can pay him, and you can pay me back when we get to where you’re going.”

“Gus, that’s wonderful!” Sarah beamed. She went to him and took his hand and shook it warmly. “What a kind thing to do!”

Gus nodded and then smiled a rather ghastly smile. “There must be lots of ladies there that would appreciate me. I’ll have to try not to be too attractive, though. That always causes trouble.”

“So when can we leave?” Reb asked eagerly.

“Anytime you like. I’ll have to dig up my little stash of gold, then away we go.” He crossed to a cracked mirror on the wall and studied his reflection for a while. Then he nodded with satisfaction. “Yep, I’ll have to uglify myself a little bit. It wouldn’t do for a handsome fellow like me to be thrust on all those unsuspecting ladies over there!”

SEVEN SLEEPERS THE LOST CHRONICLES

4

**City
of the
Cyborgs**

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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1

Captured

The only thing moving in the sky above was a single vulture. It kept circling high over the small band of teenagers stumbling through the desert. Only a dot at first, it made a slow swooping curve, coming closer and closer. Something ominous lay in the way it descended.

Finally the bird came close enough so that Reb Jackson lifted his head and gazed at it.

“That’s all we need. A vulture to keep us company!”

Reb was a lean boy of fifteen. He was the tallest of the young travelers who plodded painfully over the sand and rocks that made up this bad country. He had on a well-worn Stetson that shaded his eyes from the blistering sun. Now, stopping and taking it off, he pulled a scarlet bandana from his pocket and mopped his forehead. His face was red. Reb glared up at the vulture. “You come a little closer, and I’ll bust you with a rock!”

“Better save your strength, Reb.” Josh Adams and all the others stopped as well. Josh’s face felt sunburned, and his tongue was thick in his mouth. He shook the leather bottle at his side. “Not more than a few swallows here,” he said. “How much have the rest of you got?”

“I don’t have anything left.” Jake Garfield, short and fourteen, had red hair now shaded by a straw hat. He held up his own leather bottle. It was flat. He could hardly speak. “We’ve got to get to water soon, Josh, or we’re goners.”

Josh looked at the others. Brown-haired Dave Cooper was ordinarily strong and athletic. But their trek across the desert had worn him down. He did not speak at all but suddenly just sat down on the ground and hung his head.

“Come on, Dave, you can’t give up.” Gregory Randolph Washington Jones—Wash—was, at thirteen, the youngest of them. He held out his own water bottle and said, “Here. I got a little left. I’ll split it with you.”

Dave looked up at the black boy. “No,” he said stubbornly. “I’ve drunk mine. You’d better save it for yourself.”

“Aw, go ahead and drink some, Dave,” Wash urged. “I’m smaller than you are. I don’t need as much water.”

“That’s plain silly,” Dave mumbled.

Josh wanted to sit down and rest, too, but he knew that would be fatal. He squinted at the sky. “About three hours of day left. We’ve got to find a spring or a pool or something. The heat will be better when the sun goes down.” Then he walked over to the two girls. Both were sunburned and looked ready to drop. “You girls all right?”

Sarah Collingwood had on a pair of brown shorts, and her unprotected legs were blistered. She wore a bloused hat over her black hair, and that sheltered her face. She tried to smile at him. “We’ll be all right, Josh. Don’t worry about us.”

“Be all right!” Abbey Roberts wailed. “How can you say that? We’re going to die of thirst out here in this desert!” Abbey was usually very careful of her appearance, but now she was dressed in faded, worn clothes as were the rest of the Sleepers.

Josh knew that he had to get them moving. He was the leader of the Seven Sleepers. So he said as cheer-

fully as he could, “Come on, gang. We’re bound to find water. And one thing’s for really sure—that sun has got to go down.”

It took some encouraging, but he finally got the group going again. He tramped ahead of them, his eyes searching for any spot of green. After a while, Sarah came up beside him, and he said, “If you see anything green, we go for it. If it’s green, there has to be water close by.”

“They can have this land of Grobundia,” Sarah said. She took a small sip of water from her bottle.

Josh glanced at her. She was holding the liquid in her mouth, enjoying the delicious moisture as it soaked into her dried tissues.

Then she swallowed and said, “We’ve heard some pretty bad things about Grobundia. After this, I believe them all.”

“We didn’t have any choice,” Josh said. “We had to go through this territory. There’s no other way. Couldn’t go around it. Couldn’t fly over it. Wish the eagles were here to carry us over.”

“The eagles! I’ve been thinking about them myself,” Sarah muttered. “Wish they’d show up again.”

“Maybe they will. Maybe Goél will send them. He knows what we need. The eagles came before when we needed them—just like we do now.”

Josh looked up at the sky. It looked unfriendly and hard enough to scratch a match on. There were no eagles. “Not a cloud,” he said, trying not to sound bitter.

“Well, don’t give up, Josh. We’ve been in tighter spots than this in Nuworld.” Now Sarah was being the encourager.

Nuworld. That weird place that now existed after an atomic war had destroyed most of the world as it

had been. There were strange mutations here. There were giant eagles large enough to ride on. More than once those eagles had carried them away from danger. But now, looking up, Josh saw only the lone vulture.

“We’ll make it,” he said grimly. “Goél hasn’t forgotten us, and we’ll make it. That old buzzard might as well go fly someplace else.”

The sun seemed pasted in the sky, as though it were not going down at all. On and on the Seven Sleepers trudged with sore feet and sunburned skin and mouths as dry as dust.

Of course, finally the sun did go down, and, just as it did, Josh suddenly cried, “Look over there! There’s a patch of green! Come on!”

The stones bruised his feet as they straggled, half-running, across the desert floor. At the green patch, a small spring was making a pool no more than three feet across. Water from the pool trickled off for a little ways and then disappeared into the dry earth.

“Be careful,” Josh said as they knelt about the pool. “We drink what we can, then we fill our water bottles.”

“I could drink it all!” Jake cried.

“Save some for me, Jake,” Reb grinned through chapped and dried lips. “I need an ocean!”

“The girls first,” Josh said.

Not all could drink from the small water supply at one time. The girls drank, and then the boys took turns.

Josh was the last. He drank and drank, then said, “I’ve drunk all I can, and I’m still thirsty. My tissues are all dried up.”

“We’ll have to fill the water bottles a little at a time. This isn’t much of a spring,” Reb said.

Night came on quickly. Overhead the stars glittered like diamonds. A full moon rose above the eastern horizon.

They had lost all of their equipment including their weapons. They had nothing to eat. They were without blankets. All they could do was to curl up on the sand.

Sarah and Abbey huddled together because, as hot as the day had been, the air cooled off rapidly. Josh could hear their murmured conversation.

“I wish we had something to eat,” Abbey said.

“We’ll get to someplace tomorrow. There’s probably a village up ahead.”

“I surely hope so,” Abbey said, “and I need some makeup. I must look awful.”

“Makeup!”

“I don’t feel *human* without makeup, Sarah. You know that!”

Listening, Josh could not help but smile, miserable as he was. He had often noted that no matter how bad things were, Abbey’s first thought was either of boys or her makeup. *Oh, well*, he thought as he started to doze off, *I’d settle for a good steak myself. Abbey can have the makeup.*

But the water had refreshed him, and the singing winds of the desert lulled him to sleep.

Josh did not know how long he had slept. He hated to come out of it, though. Consciousness slowly came back, but he still felt he was half asleep.

I wish I could just sleep for a month, he thought, and wake up in the middle of a nice, green place with lots of lakes and rivers and streams and . . .

More and more he came out of his almost comalike sleep, and his mind began reviewing what had hap-

pened. Since coming to Nuworld, he had been leader of this small group of young people who had been safely brought from Oldworld by means of sleep capsules. The Seven Sleepers soon found themselves under the command of a strange and wonderful figure named Goél.

Their mysterious leader appeared to the Sleepers from time to time. He led the battle against an evil force commanded by the Dark Lord, and often he had sent them on dangerous missions. Right now Josh lay thinking, *I'd be happy if we didn't have any more missions. I'd just like to take a break for a while.*

A slight sound caught his attention, and he opened one eye. He expected to see one of his friends turning over in his sleep. Instead, what he saw brought him fully awake. Instantly.

At first he could not make out what it was, and then he saw someone's feet standing not three feet away from him!

In alarm, Josh instinctively made a grab toward his waist, but no sword was there. He came to his feet then with a bound but stopped stock-still at once, for something sharp probed right at his heart. He looked down and saw a long, cruel knife, held in the hand of a small, strange being.

Josh looked around wildly. *Dwarfs!* Their entire camping area was surrounded by little men wearing flowing desert robes and carrying blades that glinted in the moonlight. The bright moonlight fell on their dark-skinned faces too. Their robes had hoods that could cover their heads. Their faces were thin and hard. Worst of all, none of them seemed friendly.

Looking down at the little man who held the knife, Josh swallowed hard. "Hello," he said. "My name is Josh Adams."

“I am Gulak. And you’ll have no name soon.”

Gulak had slanted eyes. When he grinned, as he did now, he showed stained, broken teeth. And although he was no more than three feet tall, he appeared tough and wiry and dangerous.

One of the other desert raiders said, “Let’s kill them now.”

“Why should we kill them, Mudnor?”

By now the other Sleepers were on their feet. But they were as weaponless as Josh was. Mudnor laughed evilly as he looked about at them. Suddenly he reached out and grabbed Abbey Roberts by the hair. With the other hand he whipped out a knife and held it to her throat. “Just for the pleasure of it,” he said. “I have not killed anyone in weeks now.”

“Wait a minute!” Josh cried. “You can’t kill us like that!”

Laughter went up from the surrounding band of dwarfs. Gulak said, “Who are you to be telling us what we can do? You come into our land uninvited, and we will do as we please with you.”

“Let me have this one to play with,” Mudnor said, keeping the blade at Abbey’s throat. The girl’s eyes were wide with terror, and she struggled to free herself. But Mudnor was very strong, though not as tall as Abbey.

Gulak laughed at this, but he said, “No, we will sell them as slaves.” He looked up at Josh and, grinning, prodded him with the knife point. “You will not like it in the mines,” he said. “You will go down there and work until you die. You will never see daylight again.”

One of the other dwarfs went up to Sarah. “I’ll take this one. I’ll pay for her myself. She can be my slave.”

He gripped her arm roughly, and she cried out.

“Let her alone!” Josh said. He had time to say no more, for Gulak swiftly reversed the knife and struck him right between the eyes with its heavy handle.

“Hold him!” he said, and instantly Josh felt his hands seized by several of the little men.

“I’ll give you a taste of what to expect in the mines!” Gulak laughed. He drew out a short whip that hung from his belt. It made a whistling sound as he swung it in the air. Then it struck Josh’s back.

A band of fire ran across Josh’s shoulders, and he bit his lips to keep from crying out.

Sarah twisted herself free and threw herself at one of the men holding Josh, dragging him backwards.

“Well, you have spirit,” Gulak said. He started toward Sarah. “I will keep this one myself!”

The one dwarf’s grip had been broken, and Josh struggled to get free. But other hands held him. Then he heard the hissing of an arrow, and Gulak fell to the ground.

Mudnor shouted, “Look out!” He had time to cry no more, for another arrow felled him.

Screams of rage and fear came from the other little men. One of them cried out, “Quick, we’ve got to get away!”

And the band of dwarfs took flight.

It all happened so fast that the Sleepers could only stand there speechless.

SEVEN SLEEPERS THE LOST CHRONICLES

5

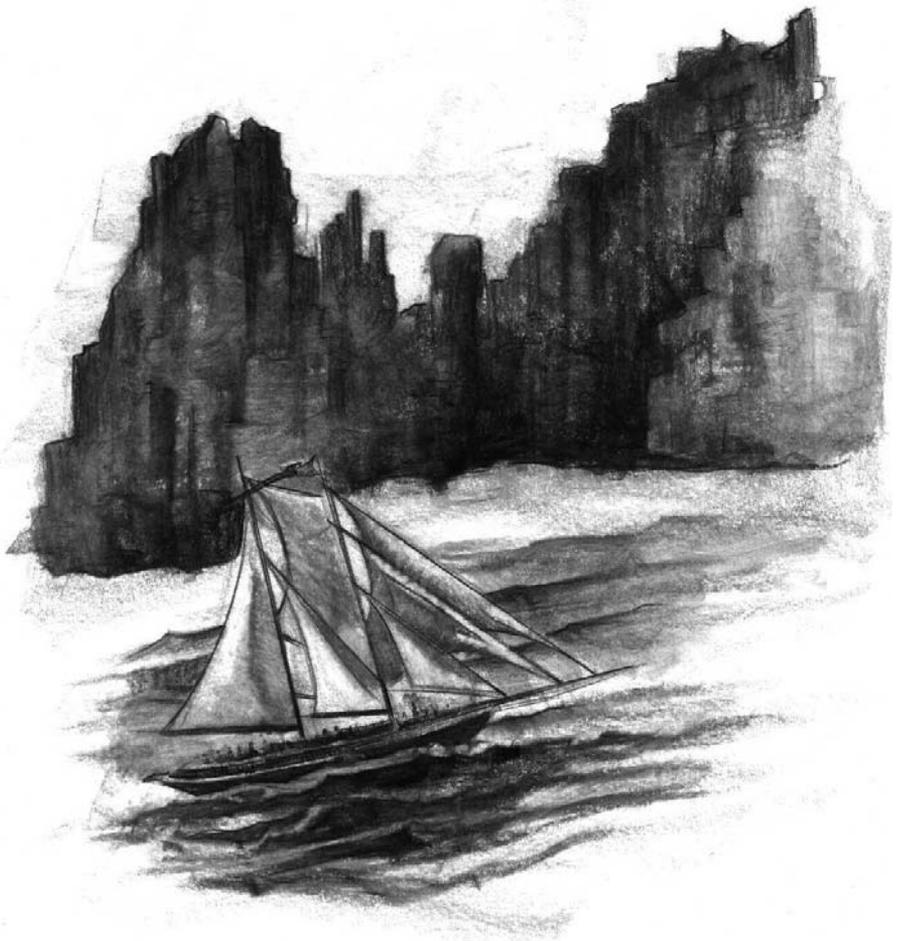
The
Temptations
of
PLEASURE
ISLAND

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PRESS
CHICAGO

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1

Pleasure Island

It is time for your departure,” Goél said in a quiet voice that was mild and yet at the same time strong. He looked around the small dining room, and a warm light filled his eyes. He put his gaze upon each of the five young men present and then looked directly across the table to where two girls completed the company of the Seven Sleepers.

Their leader did not make a kingly figure. He was dressed merely in a simple light gray robe. The hood was pushed back from his face, and his auburn hair caught the light from the lamp that illuminated the room. He seemed as much a simple workman as anything else, yet every member of the Seven Sleepers knew that this man had powers that could not be explained in natural ways.

Josh Adams, the leader of the Sleepers, sat studying Goél’s face. At the age of fourteen, Josh was tall and awkward. He was still shy, but his entire loyalty went to this one who had saved him and the others from death many times.

“Will you be going with us on our new mission, sire?”

“No, my Joshua. I have another mission, but you will find this task mostly to your liking, I’m sure. At least at the beginning.”

Bob Lee Jackson, always called Reb by his friends, was finishing a drink of refreshing tea from a large mug. He was the tallest of the boys. He was fifteen and

had light-blue eyes that appeared able to bore right through an object. He had removed the tall cowboy hat that he wore everywhere except when sleeping or at the table—and sometimes even then. Reb chuckled and said, “If I didn’t know you better, Goél, I’d think you were joking us. We’ve never had an assignment yet that was just fun.”

Josh knew that was true. The Seven Sleepers had come to Nuworld from the distant past. They had been placed in sleeping capsules by their parents just before Oldworld was destroyed by nuclear war. When they awoke many, many years later, they discovered that most of what they had known was gone. Life was completely different in Nuworld. But they soon gave their allegiance to Goél, who was fighting against the Dark Lord, an evil being who wanted to enslave everyone.

Goél perhaps was remembering this as he nodded. “Indeed, you have been hard pressed many times. You have not had an easy life in Nuworld. But—” he smiled quickly “—as you well know, it is the hard times that make men and women strong. Not the easy times.”

“Well, then, sire,” Jake Garfield put in, “we ought to be strong, because we’ve sure had some hard times.” Jake was a short boy of fourteen. He was of Jewish ancestry, he had red hair, and he had a quick, sharp wit. He was also great at inventing practically anything that he had the materials for. Jake grinned crookedly. “I agree with Reb here. You must be teasing us.”

Abigail Roberts, also fourteen, was the smallest of the Sleepers as well as the best looking. She had fair hair and eyes, blue as the sky. Unfortunately, she was somewhat proud of her good looks. Abbey said, “Is it really true, Goél? You’re going to give us a *vacation*?”

Before Goél could answer, Wash Jones—the young-

est Sleeper, a black boy of thirteen—grinned broadly. “A vacation! That’s what I need. I’d sure like to go somewhere where all I had to do was lie on my back and catch fish and then have somebody clean ’em and cook ’em for me.”

Goél laughed aloud. Josh had always suspected that their leader had a special fondness for Wash Jones. “That may be somewhere in your future, Wash. But I can understand why Jake and Josh are a little skeptical.”

Dave Cooper, a tall fifteen-year-old, was handsome enough to be a movie star, if there had been any movies in Nuworld. He had light brown hair and wide-spaced gray eyes. “Lead us to it, sire,” he said. “I’m ready.”

Goél then looked toward Josh’s close friend Sarah Collingwood.

Sarah was small and graceful. She had large brown eyes, very black hair, and was completely devoted to Goél.

“And what about you, daughter?” Goél asked. “Are you tired of fighting saber-toothed tigers and dragons?”

She managed a smile. “I think we all would welcome a vacation, sire, if you’re serious.”

Goél nodded and looked around at his young friends. “I am serious. I am sending you to Pleasure Island.”

“Pleasure Island!” Jake cried. “Is it anything like Coney Island? I mean are there carnival rides and stuff like that?”

The Sleepers began to fire questions at Goél, and Josh noticed that he managed to avoid most of them. He finally held up his hand, saying, “You have been in hard, dangerous places, but Pleasure Island has not yet

been infected by the Dark Lord.” A cloud seemed to go across his features. “I do not know how he has missed it, but no doubt he will find it someday. In any case, you will like the royal family. The king and queen are friends of mine. I should tell you that the king has had some difficulty, and I am hoping that you will be able to be of help to him as well as enjoy a vacation. That is my wish.”

“Is there a princess?” Dave wanted to know.

“Indeed there is. A very attractive one. Princess Cosima.”

“What is she like?” Abigail asked eagerly.

“I think she’s very much like . . . like Abigail. She loves to brush her hair and wear beautiful clothes.”

Everyone giggled at this, and Abbey herself blushed. “We’ll be good friends, sire.” She nodded vigorously. “I just know we will.”

“I trust that you will, indeed. Now—” Goél removed an envelope from a pocket. “Give this letter to the king. He will give you a good reception, I am sure.”

Josh, being the leader, was always trying to think ahead. “You mentioned a problem with the king that maybe we can help with. What is the problem? Is he sick?”

“No,” Goél said slowly. “He is healthy enough. Very strong and athletic in fact.”

“What is it, then?” Josh asked.

“He is subject to fits of discouragement, I’m sorry to say,” Goél told them sadly. Then he straightened his shoulders and added, “But he is a good man. He belongs to the House of Goél, and you will find him kind, I’m sure. Now—” he got to his feet “—come. The ship awaits.”

In a short time the Sleepers were standing on the

shore beside a beautiful ship with the name *Eagle* on the side. The sails were furled, but the sailors stood ready to set them as soon as the passengers were on board.

“You will have a safe voyage, my young friends.” Smiling, Goél went around and shook hands with each of them. He also looked deeply into the eyes of each one.

His gaze somehow made Josh feel that he was being searched. He supposed they all felt that way.

It's always like that, he thought after their leader had shaken his hand and looked into his eyes. *I feel as if he looks right down to the inside of me and knows what's going on. Makes a fellow uncomfortable sometimes. But, knowing Goél, you know he means only good.*

The Sleepers boarded, and the captain—Captain Leland, they learned—said, “Your baggage is all aboard. Are you ready?”

“Let's go, Captain. Take us to Pleasure Island!” Jake cried.

The captain shouted, “Weigh anchor! Hoist sails!”

Very quickly the *Eagle* caught the breeze and sailed out of the harbor. The Sleepers all gathered in the stern of the ship and watched Goél as they swiftly moved toward the sea. He grew smaller and smaller, and Josh said with a sigh, “I wish he were going with us, Sarah.”

“So do I.” Then she reached over and poked Josh's arm. “But we're going to have a great vacation. Our first vacation in Nuworld.”

The voyage on the *Eagle* was pleasant. There were no storms, and day followed day, filled with bright sun-

shine and a brisk warm breeze. The Sleepers enjoyed their sea voyage thoroughly.

Jake even rigged a line and managed to hook a shark, which nearly pulled him overboard.

“Let go of that line!” Josh screeched and made a grab for Jake as the shark was tugging him over the rail.

“That’s my shark!” Jake yelled back.

Josh pulled his friend’s hands loose from the line just in time and watched it disappear in the sea.

“That thing would have you for lunch. Let’s bait up again. Maybe we can catch something that’s both good to eat and safe to catch.”

Later they did indeed catch a fine marlin, which proved to be good eating.

The ship was comfortable, but it was small. By the time Captain Leland alerted them with, “Land just off the port bow!” Josh—and everyone else—was eager to set foot on land again.

The *Eagle* drifted into a beautiful harbor.

“Look at that beach!” Josh breathed. “Nothing but white sand as far as you can see.”

“It was like this on the beaches in Florida back in Oldworld,” Abbey said. “My family and I used to vacation there every summer. And see, there are lots of people out on the beach getting tans. I can’t wait! I want to get the best tan I’ve ever had!”

But Josh turned to Sarah. “You’ll have to be careful, Sarah, and so will I. You remember how badly we sunburned when we were in Trabango? And you don’t even burn easily.”

“Yes, I sure do remember,” she said. “We don’t want any more of that.”

The crew made the ship fast to a dock, and the Sleepers soon stood wishing farewell to their captain.

Captain Leland looked around with envy. “Wish I could stay with you. Pleasure Island. Sounds like a good place to be these days.”

“Why don’t you stay, Captain?”

“Under orders from Goél. Got to do my duty. But you youngsters have a great time. From what I hear, you deserve it.”

After the farewells, Josh looked around him and said, “I guess we’d better find our way to the palace. Let’s shoulder this gear.”

“Can’t we hire someone to carry all this?” Abbey said. “We’re on a vacation!”

“You’re right. We’ll do that,” Josh said.

Soon he had hired a man with a large cart pulled by a sturdy horse to haul their equipment. “We need to get to the palace. Do you know the way there?”

“Indeed I do. This way, sir.”

They started inland and soon were all exclaiming over the beauty of Pleasure Island.

“This is a beautiful place!” Dave marveled. “Beautiful trees, beautiful sky, the homes are nice, the people are so attractive.”

“A little different from what we usually find,” Reb said. He suddenly said, “And look at these horses coming!”

Two riders swept by, sitting on the backs of unusually beautiful horses.

“I bet they’ll win a race or two in their time,” Reb said with admiration. “I’d sure like to straddle a horse again.”

“Well, maybe you can play cowboy here,” Jake said. “I’d like to see what kind of science they’ve got going on Pleasure Island.”

“And I’d like to know if they have parties and things like that,” Abbey said.

They made their way steadily onward, led by the helpful man with the horse and wagon.

Josh was walking with Sarah. “Have you noticed all the posters that we’ve been passing, Sarah?” he asked after a while.

“I have. They seem to have a lot of sports events on Pleasure Island, don’t they?”

Indeed the walls of most buildings they passed were covered with announcements of all sorts of athletic contests. There were horse races, ball games, and even some sporting events that Josh had never heard of.

“They certainly do believe in games in this place,” he said.

“And parties and musical events too. I’ve seen half a dozen notices for balls and concerts and plays and things like that.”

Dave came up to walk with them just then. He was grinning. “So this is Pleasure Island. It beats having to fight a T-rex before breakfast.”

Josh remembered. The Sleepers had been in lands where they had to battle dinosaurs and, even worse, sorcerers and magicians skilled in the dark arts. Pleasure Island was definitely better.

Then they arrived at the palace. They stood before a magnificent building that rose at least five stories toward the sky. It was spread out over large grounds and was surrounded by a low alabaster wall. Inside the wall were gardens and fountains, and young people everywhere were engaged in various games. Some were playing tennis. Others were hitting a golf ball around. Play, Josh decided, was the order of the day on Pleasure Island.

When they reached the front gates, Josh went up

to a guard, who was dressed in white and scarlet. “I have a letter for His Majesty King Leo.”

“If you will come into the reception hall, I will see if the king is available.”

The Sleepers followed the attendant and soon were wandering about an elegant room. It was filled with beautifully constructed furniture, colorful pictures hung on the walls, and lights gleamed everywhere. They were served refreshments without being asked if they wanted any. The snacks consisted of a delicious cool drink that no one could identify and small cakes that melted in the mouth.

“I could get used to this in a hurry,” Reb said. He took another swallow of the drink and said, “This is even better than Pepsi!”

The attendant came back, smiling. “The royal family will receive you. If you will come this way, please.”

The Sleepers left the large reception room and followed the man down a wide hallway. It made several turns before they came to a door attended by two more guards, also in red and white. They swung open the doors, and the Seven Sleepers marched in.

They all gasped. This room made the other seem small by contrast. It stretched out in every direction. And there before them, seated across the room, were four people.

“I have your letter from Goél.” The speaker was obviously the ruler. “I am King Leo,” he identified himself. “And this is my queen, Tamsin.” He gestured then to a beautiful young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. “This is my daughter, Princess Cosima. And my son, Prince Derek.”

Cosima looked about fourteen and Prince Derek possibly twenty. All of the family was attractive.

As leader, Josh spoke first, saying awkwardly, "You'll have to forgive us, Your Majesty. We don't know how to behave in the presence of royalty. Do we just bow or do you wish us to kneel?"

"Neither is at all necessary. You come as friends of Goél. That is sufficient. For state occasions we might show a little more formality. But come, sit, and we will have refreshments. We appreciate your visit, and we want to hear about your adventures."

Soon the Sleepers were all seated, and indeed the royal family did seem interested in hearing everything about them.

Prince Derek seemed to study them thoughtfully, but he said little for a time. When he did speak up, he said with a smile, "We've heard much about the Seven Sleepers, and I must admit I expected someone older."

Josh grinned. "People always say that. Well, we will be older someday."

The prince grinned. "I hope you will have a long stay with us. By the way, I'm entered in a race today. I would like it if you would be my guest in the royal box."

"A horse race or a footrace?" Reb asked quickly.

"A horse race, as a matter of fact. Are you interested in horses?"

"He's the best horseman you've ever seen, Prince Derek," Sarah said.

"Indeed! Well, that touches my pride! We shall have to look into that. Perhaps he and I could have a private race."

"We'd be glad to join you in your box, Prince Derek," Josh said quickly.

"And tonight there is a ball." Princess Cosima was beaming. "You all must come. It is going to be absolute-

ly fabulous. There will be many young people and music and entertainment.”

“Oh, but we can’t come!” Abbey said with disappointment written all over her face.

“Why is that?” the princess asked, surprised. “Have you other plans?”

“We didn’t bring any party clothes! I don’t have a single long dress—nor does Sarah.”

“Oh, is that all? That is easily taken care of!” Princess Cosima looked relieved. “We can have the royal tailors fit them, can’t we, Mother?”

“Certainly! It will be no trouble at all. And they are swift workers.”

“Then it is all arranged,” the princess said. “Now, girls, come with me. We shall talk about what kind of dresses the tailors can make up for you in a hurry.”

An attendant showed the boys to their quarters, and each of them was given a private room. As usual, however, they managed to get together in the sitting area to talk about their situation.

“This is about the best thing I’ve run into since I won the bronc-riding contest in Texas,” Reb said. He looked around at the luxurious room and sighed. “What a relief! No problems. No dangers. Just have fun.”

Josh found himself tremendously relieved. He was tired of responsibility and tired of tension. He expelled a breath and flopped into an overstuffed chair. “You’re right about that, Reb. Looks to me like we’re going to have a great time here on Pleasure Island. No dragons, no dangers, nothing but fun and games!”

SEVEN SLEEPERS **THE LOST CHRONICLES**

6

THE
VICTIMS
OF
NIMBO

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PRESS
CHICAGO

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1

Who Needs Boys?

Sarah Collingwood was ordinarily a most mild-mannered girl. At fourteen she even seemed to have a special ability for peacemaking. Whenever any of the Seven Sleepers fell into arguments, it was Sarah who managed to step between and pour oil on the troubled waters.

But right now Sarah's eyes glinted with anger.

She was small and graceful, with large brown eyes and black hair drawn back into a ponytail. The sun had given her a nice tan. She wore a light blue shirt, a skirt of darker blue that came down below her knees, and half-boots made of soft leather.

But there was nothing soft about Sarah's voice as she yelled, "Josh, I've told you a thousand times to leave my things alone!"

Josh Adams, at fifteen, was tall and awkward and unsure of himself, especially where girls were concerned. He had known Sarah even back in OldWorld—before the earth had been practically destroyed by a nuclear war. Ever since their adventures in NuWorld had started, he'd felt that Sarah was the steadiest of all of the Sleepers.

So now, bewildered, he stared at her and stammered, "But . . . but . . . what are you talking about, Sarah?"

"I'm talking about what have you done with my bow."

"Your bow?" She had to see that he was puzzled. "I

don't know what you're talking about! I haven't touched your bow!"

"Don't tell me that! You borrowed it last week without asking permission! That means you took it again."

"I didn't think you'd mind my borrowing it last week!"

"Well, I did mind!" Sarah put her hands on her hips, and her voice rose in anger. "Haven't you ever thought that it might be more polite to ask before you take people's things?"

By now Josh was speechless. The previous week he *had* taken Sarah's bow without asking her, but she had not seemed to mind at the time. As he blinked at her in surprise, he found himself growing a little angry. He found his voice.

"Anyway, I didn't take your old bow! And that's all there is to it!" he said defiantly.

Always before, Sarah would have taken Josh at his word, but her nerves were likely tense. The Sleepers had been involved in a very difficult and dangerous assignment. It was for Goél, leader of the forces in Nu-World doing battle against the Dark Lord, who sought to enslave everyone. Josh realized that the strain of the mission had taken a toll on all of them.

She shoved her face close to his. "You have no more manners than a pig!" she said.

"A pig! You're calling me a pig?"

"That's what I said! No. You're worse than a pig. Pigs don't take people's things without asking."

"I didn't take your old bow!" Josh's nerves were also tight, and he suddenly found himself angrier than he had ever been at Sarah. "I don't have to take this! If you can't keep up with your things, don't blame me for it!"

Their voices rose as they shouted at each other.

They were interrupted by a newcomer. A tall boy about their age appeared. Bob Lee Jackson, always called Reb by his friends, had light blue eyes, tow-colored hair, and a heavy Southern accent. He wore a fawn colored shirt, blue pants, and boots, but the most striking of his clothing was his high-crowned Stetson hat with a feather in its red band. He had been a rodeo rider before coming to NuWorld and probably was the strongest and toughest of the Sleepers.

“What y’all fussing about?” he asked with puzzlement in his eyes. “I could hear you a mile away. What’s the shouting about?”

Sarah turned to him. “He stole my bow!”

“I didn’t do any such thing!” Josh snapped. “I haven’t even seen your old bow!”

Reb said, “Uh . . . isn’t that it right over there, leaning against the tree?”

Sarah whirled. Sure enough, there was the bow she had accused Josh of stealing. It was a beautifully constructed weapon made of yew, and she had made it herself. It was smoothly polished and had a sixty-pound pull. Sarah was the most expert in the use of the bow of all the Sleepers, and her bow was as precious to her as Reb’s cowboy hat was to him.

A moment’s silence reigned, and then Sarah muttered, “I didn’t see it!” She walked away without an apology, her back stiff. Picking up the bow, she disappeared into the woods that surrounded their small house.

“What’s biting her?” Reb marveled. “Never heard her carry on like that before.”

“She’s getting impossible to work with,” Josh murmured. “I don’t know what’s the matter with her.”

“Well, mostly she’s just a girl. And you know how girls are. Not nice and steady like us guys.”

Josh could not hold back a smile. Reb was always cheerful. He knew also that Reb did not mean that. “I guess you’re right,” he said. “Have to make allowances for girls.”

Dave Cooper walked into the house and went at once to the kitchen. A pot bubbled over the fire in the fireplace, and he lifted the lid and sniffed. “Smells good!” he said.

At sixteen, Dave was the oldest of the Sleepers and a good-looking boy with slightly curly brown hair and gray eyes. He reached for a spoon.

But the girl who was making bread hurried over and slapped his hand. Abbey Roberts was a pretty girl of fourteen with blue eyes and blonde hair.

“Leave that alone!”

“Hey! Don’t go beating on me!” Dave protested. “I’m just hungry!”

“You’ll have to wait until dinner!”

He was irritated by Abbey’s shortness. “You’re sure getting snippy,” he said. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing’s wrong with me!” And she began complaining.

Dave listened for a while, shocked. Then he shook his head, picked up a spoon, lifted the pot lid, and tasted the stew.

“I told you to stay out of that stew! Didn’t you hear me? Have you gone deaf?”

Dave, like the other Sleepers, had not yet recovered from the trying time they had had on their recent adventure. He glared at Abbey and said, “That’s proba-

bly the worst stew I've ever eaten!" It was actually very good stew, but by now Dave's temper was out of order.

"You don't have to eat it if you don't like it!"

"Men always are the best cooks, anyway."

"What are you talking about?"

"I mean back in OldWorld. When you went to a fancy restaurant, all the chefs were men. You never saw a woman chef in a fancy restaurant, did you?"

"Then you can just go to your fancy restaurant!" Abbey said shrilly. Dave held a full spoon in his hand, and she reached out and slapped it. The stew flew onto his shirt. "You can just cook for yourself if you don't like the way I do it!"

Dave glared at her and then at the stain on his shirt. "You didn't have to do that."

"You didn't have to come in here and complain about the cooking! Now, get out of the kitchen!"

Dave left at once, biting on his lip to keep from retorting. He went across the open clearing to where Jake Garfield and Wash Jones sat with their backs against a big tree.

Gregory Randolph Washington Jones was the smallest of the Sleepers. He was also the best humored. He said, "What's wrong, Dave? You look like you've been stung by a bee."

"Worse than that," Dave growled. "I've been chewed up by Abbey. What's *wrong* with her?"

Jake Garfield, a year older than Wash, was short with red hair. He grinned. "She pull you up short, Dave?"

"Yes, she did. Again. And I'm getting tired of it!" He sat down by the two boys. They had just started to talk about their past adventure when Josh came by and joined them. He had a sour look on his face, and Dave asked, "What's wrong with you, Josh?"

“It’s Sarah. She accused me of stealing her old bow. I hadn’t even touched it. Really bawled me out for no reason at all!”

“You know what I think?” Wash said slowly. “I think those girls are just worn out. That last assignment we had was a stem-winder!”

“It was just as hard on us as it was on them!” Dave said stubbornly.

“Yes, it was,” Josh agreed. “Tell you what,” he said, as if a sudden thought had come to him. “I think they need some time to themselves, and I guess maybe we do, too.”

“What you got on your mind?” Jake asked.

Actually Josh had nothing on his mind. Sarah had hurt his feelings, and he thought it would teach her a lesson if she had to take care of her own things for a while. But he said, “Here’s what I’d like to do. You know that stretch of woods about twenty miles from here—the one that’s got the bayou on it?”

“Sure. Those are nice woods,” Wash said. “What about ’em?”

“I think we ought to go on a little hunting expedition over there. Just us guys.”

“You mean leave the girls behind?” Wash asked. “That might hurt their feelings.”

“It’s better than hurting *my* feelings all the time,” Josh said. “It’ll be good for them. Maybe they’ll appreciate us if they have to do without us for a while.”

“I think he’s right,” Dave promptly said.

“Well, it suits me,” Jake said. “Nothing to do around here while we wait for a new mission, anyhow.”

The four boys talked it over, and when Reb appeared, he too was eager. Reb was always ready to

go on hunting trips, but when Josh told him about leaving the girls behind, he grinned. "I don't think they'll like that. You're not in very good favor, anyhow, Josh. You'd better think it over."

But Josh's pride was severely bruised. "Nothing to think over," he said gruffly. "I'll go tell them. We can leave in the morning."

Sarah was helping Abbey get the noon meal ready when Josh came in.

"I've decided that the guys are going out on a hunt," he told them.

Sarah looked up at him. "A hunt? Where to?"

"Over where that bayou is. About twenty miles north of here."

Actually Sarah was sorry that she had lashed out at Josh, but something about the way he looked and spoke irritated her. "What time are we leaving?" she asked.

"This is just for us guys," he said importantly.

"What do you mean, just for guys?" Abbey asked, looking surprised.

"I mean there are some dangerous beasts over there. You girls don't need to be going. It's too dangerous."

Abbey flushed, and Sarah felt her own face redden. They had been through many adventures together with Josh and the other boys. And now suddenly some place was "too dangerous."

"Too dangerous"? Let me remind you, Josh Adams," Sarah flared up, "that I was the one who saved you from that wild boar! If I hadn't put an arrow into him, he would have killed you."

"No, he wouldn't have," Josh said.

He knows very well that I saved his life, Sarah thought.

“You two girls have gotten impossible to live with,” he said sternly. “We’re going to go away and give you some time to think. Maybe you can get into a better humor.”

As soon as Josh left, Sarah slammed down a pan of biscuits on the table, jarring it. “Too dangerous! I like that!”

“Who do they think they are?” Abbey asked. She didn’t care much about hunting, but likely the thought of being deliberately left out was irritating. “Boys—who needs them?”

The rest of the day was tense, for the girls would speak only in short sentences. All the boys could see that they were ruffled.

Once Wash whispered, “Why don’t you break down and be generous, Josh? The trip’ll be fun for them. They’ll be all right.”

But Josh Adams, who usually was quite amiable, was also stubborn. “No, they need time to get over whatever it is that’s eating them. We’ll give them a couple of days.”

At dawn the next morning, when the boys got up, they found no one to cook breakfast for them. Wash did the best he could, but as they sat down to eat, he admitted, “Afraid I’m not the cook Abbey is—or Sarah.”

“It’s all right, Wash,” Josh said. “It’s good enough.” Actually he was already regretting his decision. But he did not want to back down, so after breakfast he said, “All right. Let’s go.”

Both Sarah and Abbey heard the door slam, but it

was Sarah who said, “Well, they’re gone. And good riddance.” She snuggled back under the warm covers and muttered, “Boys—who needs them? We can get along without them very well.”

SEVEN SLEEPERS THE LOST CHRONICLES

7

The
**Terrible
Beast**
of ZOR

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PRESS
CHICAGO

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1

The Dark Hour

The Royal Council of Madria was gathered around the long table, a table that occupied most of the room. They waited quietly, and Dethenor, Head of the Royal Council, was the quietest of all.

Dethenor was a thin man with long silver hair and gray eyes. The only sign of his high office was the round golden medallion that dangled from a gold chain about his neck. He fingered the medallion now as he glanced around the table, fixing his eyes briefly on each face.

All of the Council members were men of age and experience, and Dethenor trusted most of them. But things were going badly in Madria, and a trace of apprehension shot through him even now as he considered the perils that lay before the kingdom.

At the other end of the table sat Count Ferrod, nephew of King Alquin. Ferrod was a short man, heavy, with close-set brown eyes and thinning brown hair. Dethenor noticed that Count Ferrod's gaze too was moving from face to face, and Dethenor knew very well what was happening.

He's thinking of how to influence the Council again. And I must not let him do it. Once again he found himself thinking, *After Prince Alexander, Ferrod is next in line for the throne—and little could be worse than to have him become king of our land!*

The doors at the far end of the council room swung open, and two guards clad in green uniforms trimmed in gold held them back. The first to enter was

Alcindor, the young military aide and right-hand man to the king. Alcindor was almost like a son to the king—*perhaps even more of a son than Prince Alexander himself*, Dethenor thought.

Alcindor's eyes swept the room quickly, and his hand rested on the sword hilt at his side. He was always careful with the king's life, even in the apparent safety of the council room. Dethenor knew a moment of relief, because here was one loyal subject at least.

All stood, and every eye turned to the man who entered now. King Alquin had always been a strong, healthy, athletic man, skilled in all the arts of war. Now, however, the muscles of his body were shrunken, and he was bent over in an unnatural slump. His hair was gray, and lines were etched across his face. He painfully crossed the stone floor to the table only with the help of his wife.

Queen Lenore, in contrast, was a beautiful woman, tall and statuesque and strong. She too was older, but her auburn hair was still free from gray, and her eyes were bright and watchful as she too surveyed the Council.

She helped the king make his way to the heavily carved oak chair at the head of the table, and Dethenor, who would sit next to him, said quietly, "Welcome to the Council, Your Majesty."

King Alquin sat down, holding onto the massive arms of the chair. He moved slowly and carefully as a man who had been terribly wounded and had learned to adapt himself to the pain. He nodded to Dethenor, saying in a strained voice, "I am glad to see you, Chancellor."

Queen Lenore took a seat on the opposite side of the king, and the aide moved to his accustomed position immediately behind him. The young man's eyes

still moved restlessly, and not for one moment did he relax his vigilance.

King Alquin drew himself up in the chair, and his gaze traveled from face to face. The king knew these men well, Dethenor thought. He himself had chosen all of them for his counselors. There was only one empty chair at the table, and pain came to Alquin's expression when he looked at it.

Dethenor knew instantly what was occurring in his mind. *He's grieving that Prince Alexander is not here, Dethenor thought, and so am I. It's the prince's place, and again he has not seen fit to attend.*

"I think we will dispense with the ordinary business today," King Alquin said in a shaky voice. He shifted uncomfortably, and Queen Lenore leaned forward and put a hand on his arm. He gave her a brief smile, then his face turned very solemn. "What is the word from Zor?"

"It is not good, I'm afraid, Your Majesty," Ferrod answered. The count's eyelids drooped, giving him almost a sleepy expression. His garment was encrusted with jewels and gold, and he wore a magnificent stone on the middle finger of his right hand.

"The news from Zor is never good," King Alquin said wearily. "Then, what is the word from my army?"

"I have just received a message from Captain Asimov."

Dethenor watched Ferrod take a sheaf of parchment from his inner pocket.

The count began to read it aloud.

"The armies of Zor are pressing us heavily at every position. We must have reinforcements at once, or all will be lost. Numbers of our men have been

killed or wounded, and a detailed report follows. I recommend that we pull back and give up our present position.”

Alcindor snorted. “He always recommends that we pull back!”

“He is the captain of our army!” Count Ferrod said angrily. “We must trust his expertise!”

“I agree with Alcindor.”

Dethenor—indeed everyone—looked at the queen. Queen Lenore seldom spoke in council. But she spoke now, quietly. Her voice was clear and steady, though quite low. “We must hold the lines where they are. Once we begin to retreat—there is only one end to that.”

“But, Queen Lenore, we *cannot* hold the lines!” Ferrod protested. “Every day we are losing men, while the enemy grows stronger.”

The debate went on for some time. The king listened for a while, saying nothing. Finally he looked over at the chancellor. “Lord Dethenor, what say you?”

“I agree with the queen.” He fixed his gaze on Count Ferrod and waited for him to object, but the count was silent. “We must hold our lines. We must protect our kingdom!” He looked up at the aide. “Alcindor, what would you advise?”

Alcindor had grown up as a soldier. Though he was young, he and the king had been in many battles together, and now that the king was too feeble to go out to fight, he still knew the king’s heart. Dethenor was sure of that.

Alcindor stepped over to a map that was pinned to the wall and said, “Here is our kingdom of Madria.” His fingers swept in a circle. “Here are the Madrian Mountains that encircle us. They are a natural protection. As

long as we hold the mountain passes, we can keep the Zorians out. But once they break through, there is nothing to stop them from sweeping in on us. I say we send every available man and hold the mountain passes at all cost.”

Ferrod shouted, “It’s impossible! We only have a limited number of men. We are already heavily outnumbered.”

Dethenor listened for a time as Ferrod argued on. Finally he glanced at the king and interrupted. “Enough, Count! So what do you say, Your Majesty? What are your commands?”

King Alquin replied immediately, “Alcindor is correct. We must hold the mountain passes.”

“But, Your Majesty,” Count Ferrod protested, “be reasonable. Valor is one thing, but throwing away our lives for nothing—that is something else.”

“Would you have us to just give up our country?” the king demanded. His eyes flashed, and he sat up straighter in the carved oak chair. There was a hint of kingliness and power in him still as he said, “We will *never* surrender to Zor!”

“It’s not a matter of surrender, sire,” Count Ferrod kept on. Now he lowered his voice like a conspirator and leaned forward. “All that the Zorians ask is that we pay tribute to them once a year.”

“And we all know where that will end,” Dethenor said grimly. “The Zorians are not to be trusted. If we give them one inch, they’ll take another—and then another—until finally they will rule over us entirely.”

“You are correct, Dethenor. They would make slaves of us,” the king said. “Send orders to Captain Asimov to hold the lines. We will send him what reinforcements we can. This Council is dismissed.”

All except the king, the queen, Alcindor, and Dethenor rose and left the council chamber.

Dethenor waited until the door was closed. Then he said, “Your Majesty, I must say it again. Prince Alexander must cease his ways and join us. The people must have a prince to look to in times such as these.”

“I know. I know. You are right, Dethenor. I am too frail to go out and fight, and the people need to see a prince fighting for them. Otherwise *they* will not fight.”

The room grew quiet, as everyone was probably thinking the same thing.

Finally Alcindor spoke his thoughts aloud. “The prince must be urged to assume his rightful role, Your Majesty. There is no other way.”

“Alcindor is right,” Dethenor agreed quickly.

The king looked at his wife, and a silent message seemed to pass between them. “We have spoiled him, Lenore,” he said quietly. “We gave him everything—and now he has become a wastrel.”

“Perhaps it is not too late, my husband,” Queen Lenore said. “I know he has taken a wrong path, but there is good in him. He is of your bloodline. We must do whatever is necessary to bring him to what he should be.”

King Alquin’s gaze met that of Alcindor then. “Go,” he said. “Summon the prince.”

“What if he refuses to come?”

“Bring him here in chains if you must!” And a steely note had crept into the king’s voice.

Alcindor’s eyes glinted. “Yes, sire. It shall be as you say.”

Grenda, Ferrod’s wife, was waiting at the council chamber door. They spoke in whispers as they started down the hall.

Briefly he told her what had happened. “He is set on continuing the war.”

“Foolishness! Insanity!” Grenda spat. She was an attractive woman with black hair and black eyes, but the eyes were angry. Abruptly, she murmured, “You are the next in line for the throne.”

“Be quiet, Grenda! It is treason to even speak aloud of that.”

“It is only wisdom. The king may die soon. Indeed, everyone thinks he will. His wounds will not heal. That leaves only Prince Alexander, and he is a worthless young scoundrel.”

“He is still the prince.”

Grenda’s eyes glittered. “Many things may happen to a young man—sickness, accidents. Perhaps he will even go to fight in the war. If he dies, and Alquin is gone, you will be the king.”

Ferrod hesitated. Then he nodded. “And you,” he said, “will be the queen.” He saw the approval in her eyes.