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1

The End of the Rope

Come on, Abbey. You can't sit down!"

The group of teenagers straggling through the depths of the jungle were completely exhausted. One of the young men reached down, seized the blonde girl by the arm, and pulled her to her feet. "They've almost caught up with us!" he gasped. "We've got to keep going!"

"I can't go any farther!"

"You've *got* to, Abbey," the boy said firmly. "They're only a few minutes behind."

The speaker was tall and gangly, with auburn hair and blue eyes. His name was Josh Adams, and he was the leader. He looked around quickly and saw that Sarah Colingwood was not in much better shape than Abigail Roberts.

Sarah, however, had her lips drawn up in a determined line. She took Abigail by the other arm. "I'll help you, Abbey," she said. "We can't stop here."

The other four members of the group, all young men, looked to be as bad off as these three.

Dave Cooper, at fifteen, was tall, athletic, and handsome, but now his clothes hung on him in rags, and his cheeks were hollow.

Jake Garfield was a slim redhead. His clothes also were ragged, and he was huffing and puffing. "Don't know if we can make it this time!" he gasped.

Another fifteen-year-old, with light blue eyes and pale bleached hair and wearing a cowboy hat, looked in better shape than the others. He was breathing hard, but there

was still a natural strength in him, and he said quickly, "Maybe I should go back and head them off."

Josh managed to grin at him. The boy's clothes were in tatters, but the hat looked good. "No, let's stick together, Reb," Josh said. "I know you're ready to fight a sack of wildcats, but we don't have anything to fight with. Let's just get going."

"Are you all right, Wash?" Reb turned to a small black boy, the youngest of the group at thirteen. He was sitting on the ground, drawing in deep gulps of air.

"Yep, I'm all right," he said, getting up. "But my feet won't go any faster." He looked over his shoulder and shivered. "I heard a fellow say once, 'If you hear a foot-step behind you, don't look back, 'cause something might be gaining on you.'"

Josh slapped the boy on the arm. "I guess that's right. And it's hard not to look back when something's after you."

He'd no sooner spoken than Abbey slumped down again and put her head in her arms. She began sobbing without control, and the others looked at her helplessly.

Sarah Collingwood leaned over and patted her shoulder. "We're all right. We've been in worse spots than this, Abbey."

"No, we haven't! We've been running for days now. Every day we've almost got caught. We're all going to die!"

Her hysteria was almost infectious, Josh saw. Everybody, weak from lack of food and sleep, was in bad shape. He thought, *If I were just a good leader, I'd know what to do. But we've run so hard and long, it looks like the Sanhedrin's going to get us this time.*

As he stood there despairing, wondering when the soldiers of the Sanhedrin would come bursting out of the jungle, he thought about how far he and his friends had

come since being brought to this strange place called Nu-world.

All seven of them had been hidden in sleep capsules on planet Earth, just before a nuclear war. Years had rolled by, changing almost everything, including the geography of the earth and the beings that inhabited it. And they came out of the sleep capsules to find that the world was in a struggle between good and evil. The evil was led by a strange being called the Dark Lord. His henchmen were a council called the Sanhedrin. They were a powerful force and were filled with hatred for a good leader called Goél.

At the thought of Goél, Josh said as heartily as he could, "We'll get out of this. Goél won't let us down." He sincerely hoped this was true.

He knew Goél was gathering his forces in Nuworld for a battle against the Dark Lord and the Sanhedrin. Goél had already sent the Seven Sleepers to several places to help Goél's people. Now, as they were returning from one of their missions, they had been ambushed by the Dark Lord's soldiers. For days they had struggled through this thick jungle, and now it looked as if they were not only lost but doomed.

Wash was watching Josh's face. "It don't look too good, does it?"

Reb slapped Wash on the back. The two had become fast friends, though they had not liked each other at first. "Why, sure, we'll get out of this. I remember the many times General Robert E. Lee got penned up and looked like he'd lose, but he'd come out of it."

Jake stared at the tall cowboy with a sour expression. "He lost the war though, didn't he?"

Reb didn't like to be reminded that the South had not won the Civil War. He glared at Jake. "Well, we ain't losing this one. I think—"

"Be quiet, Reb! I hear something." Josh held up a hand with alarm.

Instantly Abbey stopped crying and sat up. As they all listened hard, she said under her breath, "We're going to die—I just know it!"

"We'll fight 'em with whatever we've got." Reb pulled a pocketknife out of his tattered trouser pocket, opened it, and looked into the jungle defiantly. "They're getting close, I reckon. I can hear them."

Someone was indeed coming through the jungle, and it could only be an enemy.

"Get ready," Josh said. "We'll do the best we can. You girls head on out of here. We'll hold them off. Maybe you can get away."

"No, we're all staying together." Sarah's blue eyes flashed as she faced the wall of green jungle. "There," she whispered. "There they are. They're coming!"

Forms moved out of the greenery, and Josh, who had been ready to see the red cloaks of the soldiers of the Sanhedrin, yelled, "Look! It's Mat and Tam! And Volka too!"

The two approaching in front were short—not much more than three feet tall. They were fat as sausages. Their bellies gave promise of exploding any minute and were held in by broad, black leather belts with shiny brass buckles. Both had plump red cheeks and small black eyes peering out from under bushy brows. Both had beards that came almost down to their belt buckles. The newcomers looked identical.

"Well, I knew I'd have to come and get you out of a mess sooner or later!" one of them declared crossly.

Grinning, Josh said, "I know you're Mat. Still the eternal pessimist." He shook the dwarf's hand and turned to his exact replica. "And you're Tam. I know you've got a good word."

Tam grinned broadly. "Why, we'll get out of this. It's just a piece of cake."

Mat and Tam had been with the Sleepers on their first adventure. They were Gemini twins, looking exactly alike but the exact opposite in spirit. Whereas Mat was grumpy and always seeing the dark side of things, Tam was jolly and always cheerful.

Tam turned now to the third newcomer and said, "We've got your old friend here. You remember Volka, don't you?"

Volka was no less than a giant. He was enormous, towering over the Sleepers, twice their height. He had huge bulging muscles and a rather simple face. "Ho!" He beamed. "It's me!"

At once he was surrounded by Sleepers pulling at him. They'd always liked Volka.

Sarah said, "Now I feel safe with you around."

Mat scowled. "Well, you're *not* safe. The Sanhedrin troops will be here in five minutes."

"What're we going to do?" Abbey wailed. "I just can't go any farther."

"Why, don't worry about that." Tam grinned. "Pick her up, Volka." He watched the giant reach down and do so. "Now," Tam said, "come this way. We'll show you something you'll like."

The Gemini twins turned and plunged into the jungle, and the Sleepers followed. Volka brought up the rear, carrying Abigail, speaking to her from time to time, but she appeared too worried to answer.

They made their way down a trail, and though they were exhausted, the Sleepers were so cheered by the sight of old friends that everyone seemed to gain new strength.

"How did you know to come after us?" Jake asked.

Tam looked back and grinned. "Why, Goél sent us to get you."

"Is he close by?" Wash asked hopefully.

"Not far," Tam answered.

"Far enough that we need to hurry up. If you'll stop dragging your feet," Mat complained.

The Sleepers moved as quickly as they could. The rain-forest trail was very narrow, and the trees were so tall that little sunlight filtered down below. The jungle floor was almost bare here because small plants could not grow due to the lack of sun.

After they had crossed two small streams, Tam directed them to walk through the trees to their left for a hundred yards. "This probably won't throw them off our trail completely," he said, "but it's the best I can do. Come along."

Soon the forest began to grow less dense, and finally when they were all practically falling down, Tam said cheerfully, "Look, there it is!"

Josh, right behind him, looked up to see a house with a steep thatched roof. A half dozen strange-looking figures stood in front of it. His heart leaped up.

"I'm so glad to be away from the Sanhedrin!" Sarah said.

Abbey raised her head from Volka's shoulder and looked. "Why, it's just an old house!" she exclaimed. "Surely Goél won't be *there*."

"Any port in a storm," Dave Cooper said. "As long as they've got something to eat and some clothes for us to put on, I'll be happy."

They walked into the clearing, and indeed the house was very old. It was built of small logs.

One of the odd-looking people came forward—a shaggy-haired man, his garments made of black fur. "You found them," he said in a deep voice.

"Yes, Zohar," Tam said. He turned to the Sleepers and said, "This is Zohar. He is our leader. And Zohar, these are the Seven Sleepers you've heard about."

He named them off, and the strong-looking man's gray eyes gave each one almost a physical touch.

Zohar nodded when Tam had finished and said, "You are tired and hungry. We will eat, then we will talk."

"I say amen to that," Wash said. He looked at Reb and winked. "I wish they had some hominy grits and hog jowl, don't you, Reb?"

Reb grinned faintly. "I bet you'd settle for moon pie and Dr Pepper, wouldn't you?"

Wash nodded. "I sure would. Seems like the things I miss most from the old time is moon pies and Dr Peppers."

The Sleepers threw themselves down to rest while some of the inhabitants began cooking over an open fire. They were strange-looking people indeed. Some were tall and thin and pale, others short and muscular, not much larger than Tam and Mat. The nuclear explosion had done strange things to the inhabitants of Earth, so that these human descendants looked little like people from the time of the Sleepers.

Yet they seemed to be loyal and good, so the Sleepers relaxed. They sat around sipping the delicious liquid that one of Zohar's helpers had produced, and soon the meal was ready.

When the seasoned meat was put before them, Reb opened up his knife and began slicing it. "Where's Goél?" he asked. He stuffed a huge piece of meat in his mouth and chewed furiously. "Boy, that's good!" He closed his eyes and chewed even faster. "What is this anyhow?"

"Wild pig," Zohar said. "We had good hunting this morning."

"If I just had some barbecue sauce to put on it," Reb said, "it'd be perfect. But is Goél here?"

Zohar looked around and shrugged. "He was, but he had to leave."

"When will he be back?" Josh asked.

"He not say," Zohar grunted. He seemed to be a man of few words, and Josh could get nothing more out of him for the time being.

Looking around her, Sarah saw another house down the way. Other people were moving about it, and some of them finally came to greet the Sleepers. They were mostly wounded men, some of them terribly so. There were also women and children. All looked tired and frightened.

After the meal was over, Zohar sent the people away and sat down to talk. "Goél says that you should rest until he sends for you."

Abigail was looking up at the rather dilapidated house. It seemed ready to fall in. "I'd hoped we'd get something better than *this*," she whispered to Sarah. "It looks awful."

Sarah did not complain, however, and soon the two girls were shown their sleeping quarters.

Zohar led them into the house and pointed to a ladder, then upward. "You sleep there." He nodded at a woman, who gave them two rather thin blankets, and then the girls climbed to the dim loft, where they found some straw and nothing more.

At once Sarah began to fix a bed for herself. "I'm so tired, I could sleep on stone."

She lay down and watched Abbey try to fix her hair.

They had lost all their baggage, and now the blonde girl's hair was stringy and her face was dirty. Her mouth was turned down in a sour look, and she said, "I'll never get clean again. And look at my hair—it's awful!"

"Well, we all look pretty awful, but we'll get cleaned up tomorrow. I'll fix your hair for you, and we'll find something to wear."

Abigail gave her hair a yank, then plopped down on her blanket. Pulling half of it over her, she began to complain again. "What good does it do, Sarah?"

"What good does what do?"

"All that we've been doing for Goél. We've been here for over a year, living with cave people, living under the ocean, living with bird people. And we've helped all of them—but the war isn't any closer to being over."

"Goél sent us on those missions. If we hadn't gone," Sarah said, "these people would all have been lost to the Dark Lord."

"But we can't go *everywhere*. You've seen the Dark Lord's soldiers—there are thousands of them. They have weapons. What do we have?"

Sarah was almost asleep, but she heard Abbey's question. She turned toward her and said gently, "We have Goél." It disturbed her that Abbey was so bitter.

She had known for a long time that Abbey was spoiled. *And if I was as pretty as she is*, she thought, *I'd have been spoiled too*. But now she saw that there was resentment in the girl. "You've got to learn to look on the inside of things, Abbey. Not the outside."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, no matter how bad things look—circumstances, I mean—there's always hope." She tried hard to think of an example and said, "Remember the American Revolution at Valley Forge? The Americans were starving and freezing, and the British had so many trained troops with all the weapons they needed and food. If anybody looked at that, they would've said, 'Those Americans will never win their independence.' It just looked hopeless."

Abigail looked over at her friend, and there was rebellion in her smooth face. "That doesn't have anything to do with us," she muttered.

Sarah reached over and patted Abbey's hand. "Yes, it does. Washington and his army were in a hopeless situation—but they won. And we'll win too. You'll see."

Abbey stared at her unbelievably. "I'm going to see if I can go to sleep. This blanket's probably got fleas in it."

2

The Rebellion of Abbey

I'm worried about Abbey." Sarah looked over to where Josh was struggling to repair one of his shoes.

"I'm worried about all of us," he said. "Look at this!" He held up the tattered shoe and shook his head. "It's falling to pieces."

Sarah held up the blue shirt she was mending. A large rent had been made in it, and she had borrowed needle and thread from one of the women to sew it up. "Well, what about this? All of our clothes are worn out. But that's not what's bothering me most."

Josh picked up an awl and punched a hole in the thin leather. Then he took a piece of rawhide and shoved it through the hole. Making a knot, he said, "This will have to do, I guess. We've got to be shod if we're going to do very much." He glanced at her. "I know what you mean about Abbey."

"She's not very strong. And she's not as tough as the rest of us."

"That's right. And besides," Josh said, "she's worried about her looks all the time."

"She can't help that, I suppose."

"*You* help it," Josh countered. "Why, with a big glob of dirt on your face, you don't even care. Think what a fit Abbey would have."

"Dirt! Where's dirt?" Sarah groped in the small bag at her feet for a piece of mirror. She stared into it, then glared at the boy, who was laughing at her. "You're a beast, Josh! Just a beast!"

"I guess I look like one." Josh ran a hand through his long hair. "We all need haircuts and baths and clothes—just about everything."

The two sat talking, and finally Sarah asked, "Do you ever miss things back in Oldworld?"

"Sure I do. But we can't go back, so we'll have to make the best of things here."

Sarah stared at him, thinking how Josh had matured so much. "Well, you're right. We've talked about that too many times, I guess. But about Abbey—she's just not . . . not mentally ready for these hardships. She's too soft and genteel."

"Well, she's had a year to get toughened up. I don't know what else to do for her." Suddenly he looked up. "Look, there comes Zohar. He's kind of a mean-looking character, isn't he?"

"Yes, but I'm sort of glad for that. It feels good to have a strong man like him around. Hello, Zohar," she said when he got closer. "Did you come to help us with our sewing?"

Zohar had little sense of humor. "No," he said. He stood over them and was indeed formidable-looking. He was dressed in a ragged bearskin, tied with a wide leather belt around his middle. Inside the belt was tucked a wicked looking battle-ax with a razor edge. He stared at them for a moment, then said, "We go."

Sarah and Josh looked at each other. "Go? Go where?"

"Goél sends message. We go there." He pointed toward the north. "We go soon. Tomorrow."

"What did the message say?"

"It say, 'Some of the House of Goél need help.' We go help."

"We're not in very good shape to help anybody," Josh said. "We're not even able to help ourselves much. Did

Goél say that everybody was to go? What about your women and children and the wounded?"

"They stay. Strong men go." He put his hard, dark eyes on them and nodded firmly. "Goél say all Seven Sleepers go to help those in the House. We leave early."

As he walked away, Josh said, "You know, every time he walks I expect to feel the earth shake."

"Abigail's not going to like this. I don't like it much myself."

"Neither do I. But if Goél ordered it, then we've got to go. I'll tell you what—I'll let you break the news to Abbey, and I'll tell the rest of them."

Sarah found Abigail in the loft trying to brush her hair.

As soon as she spoke of their new mission, Abbey's eyes flashed. "I'm not going!" she said. "And that's final."

"But you've got to go, Abbey. We all do."

"No, we don't. Anybody with half sense knows we wouldn't be of help to anyone. Why, we're half-starved—we don't have decent shoes—and look at this awful thing I'm wearing." She held out her knee-length tunic. It had been well made and still had a little color left in it, but many washings and mendings had rendered it decidedly sad-looking. "I wouldn't be seen *dead* in this thing!"

"It won't matter. We're all in the same shape." Sarah began to grow irritable. Abbey was a sweet girl, but her moods got on Sarah's nerves. *For some reason she thinks she's better than the rest of us*, she thought. "You'll *have* to go, Abbey."

"I'm not going. You can tell Josh and that awful Zohar that I'll wait till they get back."

Sarah stared at the petulant girl, then shrugged and climbed back down the ladder. She went to find Josh and report Abbey's response.

"Why, she's *got* to go!" Josh snapped. "That's all there is to it."

"I think the only way she'll go is if you tie her and have Volka carry her. She won't go under her own power."

"Well, we'll just have to convince her." Josh's face was grim, and he went off to have a confrontation with Abbey.

When he came back, he was scowling. It appeared he had had no more success than Sarah. "We've got to leave in the morning. Try to talk to her again, Sarah."

But nothing availed, and the next day when the Sleepers prepared to march out with Mat, Tam, Volka, and the Nuworld warriors, there were only six of them.

"It seems a little bit funny with only six of us," Reb said doubtfully.

"Are you sure you tried everything, Josh?" Dave asked. "I don't like to see us split up like this."

"I don't like it either, but that's the way it is."

At that moment Zohar called out, "We go."

And the Sleepers trooped off. They all felt disturbed at leaving Abbey behind.

Abbey was watching from the loft window, and as the troop disappeared down the trail, she had a sudden impulse. She turned and started toward the door, thinking, *I've got to go with them. I can't stay here by myself.* But then, stubbornly, she stopped and shook her head. "No," she said aloud. "I'm not going. You have to draw the line somewhere."

She dressed and climbed down the ladder carefully. A few people were up and stirring, and Zohar's wife offered her some breakfast. It was a thin gruel and some sort of leftover meat.

Abbey shook her head. "No, thanks."

She stepped out into the open air and for a time wandered around the camp. More than once as she walked she had the impulse to run and join her friends. *It's not too late*, she thought, and she struggled between two desires.

But finally she said, "I'll rest up and maybe find myself something nicer to wear and maybe find some good soap. I'll be ready to go on the next mission."

She felt better after convincing herself of this and walked toward the stream that wound its way through the forest a quarter mile from the house. The brook was clear and bubbled merrily over the rocks. From time to time, she picked up a stone and threw it in. And more than one frog leaped off the banks with a croak of alarm.

She wandered farther than she'd planned and was about to turn back. But first she knelt at the water and washed her face, enjoying the coolness of it. "I wish I had some soap," she said aloud. "I'd give anything for a hot bath and to wash my hair."

"You should have it, my lady."

Abbey leaped up, startled by the voice. She turned to see a tall young man wearing a sky blue suit of some shiny material.

He pulled a hat with an eagle's feather in it off his head. His hair was long and black and fell over his shoulders. He smiled at her, his teeth very white.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"My name is Lothar. I have come a long way."

"What do you want?" Abbey was more impressed with his looks than she cared to admit. *He is handsome!* she thought. *And look at that diamond on his right hand. I've never seen such a large one.*

The man called Lothar put on his hat, looked around, and then glanced back at Abbey. "I seek a group called the Seven Sleepers. Do you know of them?"

Abbey was startled but said, "Yes, I know of them. Why do you seek them?"

"That," Lothar said politely, "I can only reveal to the Sleepers themselves. Can you direct me to where they are?"

Abbey hesitated. She had grown cautious in Nuworld, as had all the Sleepers. Strangers were not to be trusted until proven. But surely this one was safe. She took a deep breath and made her decision.

"I am one of the Sleepers," she said. "I am Abbey."

The dark eyes of Lothar fixed on her, and he smiled again. "Well, I am fortunate. Can you take me to your friends?"

"They're gone on a mission."

Disappointment swept over Lothar's face. "That I regret," he said. "Will they return soon?"

"They shouldn't be gone too long."

He stood and thought, as if he had forgotten her. "Well, that presents a problem."

As he pondered, Abbey studied his fine garments and noted that he was not only splendid-looking but was also strong and athletic. Finally she said, "Perhaps if you'll tell me what you want, I can help."

"Maybe so. In any case, I have no choice." He hesitated only a moment more, then said, "I come from the Empress of the Underworld. You have heard of the Kingdom of the Underworld?"

"Why, no, I don't think I have."

Amazement flashed across Lothar's handsome features. "I'm shocked to hear it. Your education's been neglected!"

"Is it far from here?"

"A two-day ride. Are you sure you have not heard of our Empress and her wondrous kingdom?"

"No, never."

"That will make things even more difficult. I have a message here for you." He pulled a parchment from the inner pocket of his tunic. "Are you the leader of the Sleepers?"

"No, Josh Adams is our leader."

"Ah, but he is not here. Still, you may read the message and give it to him."

Abbey took the letter and opened it. It said, in beautiful script:

To: The Seven Sleepers

We have heard of your courage and willingness to serve those who are fighting against the Dark Lord. I, the Empress of the Underworld, beg you to come and help us. We are in great danger. We send the heir to our throne, Prince Lothar, with this message. He will accompany you back should you choose to come.

Empress Fareena

Ruler of the Mighty Kingdom of the Underworld

Abbey looked up at the tall young man. "We have gone on missions like this before. But, of course, what the Empress asks is impossible just now. When the others come back, we may be able to do something."

"Could not you come and explain that to our queen?"

"Oh, no. I couldn't do that."

"Why not? It would be very simple for you to leave a letter for this . . . Josh."

But Abbey could only shake her head. "No, it must not be."

"That is a regret to me."

"Can't you wait one night? Perhaps they'll make a quick journey."

Lothar seemed to think about her request and nod-

ded. "I could do that." He looked at her oddly then. "You would like my country, the Underworld."

Abbey wrinkled her nose slightly. "It sounds awful—like living in a hole in the ground."

Lothar laughed aloud. He was very good-looking when he laughed. "You would not say so if you were to come with me." He held up his hand with the huge diamond and asked, "Do you see this beautiful stone?"

"Yes. I've never seen one that large."

"Large? Why, I've often been criticized for wearing such a *small* stone. In our throne room the walls are lined with stones like this. Also red and green and purple stones, more beautiful than anything you've seen."

"Oh, it sounds beautiful! Not at all like a hole in the ground."

"A hole in the ground? No, indeed." He began to describe the underworld kingdom, mentioning that they had learned to spin beautiful silk and satin cloth.

And the thought of the women's gowns in yellow, red, pink, and gold made Abbey's eyes glow.

"We've learned to make good food too. Let me offer you some of this." He opened the bag that was slung over his shoulder. "Come and sit. While you eat, I will tell you more about my world."

Abbey sat down and began to sample the food. It was delicious! Better than anything she'd ever had. She said so.

"Why, this is just trail food. At one of our banquets you would taste something really good. Here—drink some of this."

Abbey took the small silver flask that he offered, tasted the drink, and said, "Oh, it's delicious. What is it?"

"Just something we make for the royal table. I'm glad you like it."

The food made Abbey's eyes brighter. She drew her

knees up and said, "Tell me more about your country, Prince Lothar."

"Oh, you must not call me that. Lothar is fine. And perhaps I may call you Abbey?"

"Oh, yes, please do."

She sat and listened, while the prince leaned back and talked. His country sounded like a fairy-tale land the way he spoke of it.

Then his face grew dark. "But we're in danger. Terrible danger."

"Danger of what?" Abbey asked.

"We may lose our kingdom to the Underlings."

"The Underlings? Who are *they*?"

"They are a terrible race who inhabit part of our kingdom. They're cruel and fierce." His voice shook with anger. "And they would kill us all if they could."

"How awful!"

"Yes, it is. They've already killed my father."

"Oh, Lothar. I'm sorry."

He shrugged and said, "They've tried to kill me many times. So far I've evaded them, but they grow stronger. Even while I'm away, I'm afraid they will strike at the queen. Then they will take the throne, and we will all be killed. Those beasts would rule our beautiful kingdom."

"Tell me about the empress."

"Ah, you would love her. She is beautiful and has many powers. Yet she is only one, and she has asked that you come. She has never asked for help before, so I fear the situation is perilous."

He talked for a long time, finally saying, "Will you not come with me, Abbey?" His voice was gentle, and he took her hand. "It would be a wonderful sight for you, and you would be a jewel in my kingdom with proper clothes and your hair done as only my people know how to do it. Be-

sides, you would be doing a great service for the House of Goél."

Abbey hesitated, then shook her head. "I can't decide now."

"Very well." He released her hand and got to his feet. "I can wait until morning, then I must return."

"I will find you a place to stay tonight. But it won't be what you're used to," she warned.

"No, I will remain in the forest. I would rather not be seen by anyone tonight. I will wait here, right at this spot. At dawn tomorrow, if you're not here, I will have to leave without you." He shook his head. "What a shame if you do not get to see the land of diamonds and rubies!"

As Abbey walked back to the old house, she longed to visit the beautiful kingdom that Lothar had described.

That night she slept poorly. She knew that she would have to make a decision—and somehow she knew she would *have* to at least see a country where diamonds lined the walls!