THE BAT FLIES LOW

Sax Rohmer

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THE BAT FLIES LOW

By

Sax Rohmer

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CHAPTER ONE

MOHAMMED AHMES BEY

LINCOLN HAYES drew back into the shadows of the box.

The house lights had been lowered. The curtain rose on the last act of *False Gods*. John Barrymore's performance as the renegade priest had held the audience. But it was the character of the play and its Ancient Egyptian setting which had urged Hayes to accept this invitation to a first night.

Norman Bel Geddes' temple scene was weirdly impressive; it met with an ovation. But Hayes, after one glance at the stage, turned his regard in the direction of the opposite box. An interest deeper than Brieux's strange play or Barrymore's acting could induce had claimed him.

Yes, she was back again, leaning over the edge of the box, the man standing in the shadows behind her.

Even in the dim light her hair was like a subdued flame. Hayes had feared that they had left; he was glad it was not so. She was watching the stage intently. Hayes was watching the eyes of the man who stood behind her.

Could it be merely some trick of reflected light? No, this time he was all but satisfied that it could not be. It was, then, phenomenal. Who was this man and who was the woman?

He watched intently. Not even the entrance of a famous English actor in the rôle of the High Priest distracted his watching. The man standing motionless at the back of the opposite box did not move.

But in the darkness his eyes shone greenly, like the eyes of a cat. . . .

Then, either he took a seat or moved further back. The glittering eyes became invisible. Hayes wondered if others had noticed this phenomenon. The women of his party had not failed to discuss the dark man's companion, but the eerie quality of those eyes seemed to have escaped them. Even now, he might be mistaken. Some queer arrangement of the stage lights might be responsible. It was possible.

He watched the bent head of the woman, trying in the dimness to distinguish that flower-like face. Except for gleaming shoulders and the fire of her hair, he could get only misty outlines. He thought of flame on an ivory altar.

"Still intrigued, Lincoln?" his hostess whispered.

Lincoln Hayes looked down at her (he was standing) with his slow, thin-lipped smile. But he did not speak.

Mrs. Mornington Dobbs, one of the prettiest and smartest widows in New York society, turned around yet further and touched his arm.

"Have you really seen your ideal at last?" she went on, still in a whisper, which, however, was unpleasantly audible in a house hushed by the quiet action of the play. "Perhaps she'll come around to see Jack Barrymore. They must be somebodies, or they wouldn't be here tonight."

Hayes was embarrassed, but he did not regret having come. He was always embarrassed by women who called men by their abbreviated Christian names, however slightly they might know them. He had never forgiven Mrs. Mornington Dobbs for exclaiming to him at a gathering in Rome: "Why, there's Ben, and looking so pensive. Of course you know dear Mussolini——?"

Nevertheless, he hoped that these mysterious "somebodies" would join the party behind stage, and for that reason, although he had intended not to go, he now determined that he would.

On their way to the reception:

"All New York would quiver, Lincoln," said his hostess, "if you presented them to a barbaric girl friend." She hugged his arm very tightly. "You have had every kind of adventure—except adventures with women; or so everybody says. Don't miss that thrill, Lincoln."

Every once in a while Mrs. Mornington Dobbs hit the nail on the head. It was not a rumor but a fact that Lincoln Hayes, president of Western States Electric and one of the wealthiest men in New York, had never loved any woman since the death of his mother. At the age of thirty-five, with millions at his call, the dignified old Hayes mansion with its historic treasures still lacked a hostess. Tall, lean, grim, taciturn Lincoln Hayes, whose disconcertingly frank gray eyes had fluttered many a feminine heart, remained unmarried.

He smiled at the pretty widow but made no reply.

Except for this slow smile, anything identifiable as an expression rarely disturbed the sun-browned mask which was the face Lincoln Hayes showed to the world. As he entered with his party the room where first-night guests were being entertained, no one would have supposed that he was excited. As a matter of fact, the cold eyes did not miss a person present, and somewhere in Hayes' brain a quiet voice kept asking: Is she here? Is she here?

Then, on the opposite side of the room, he saw the man.

Impossible to mistake him, although now he wore slightly tinted spectacles. He was tall, as tall as Hayes, and as lean, but yet, in some subtle way, of a totally different leanness. He was notable for profuse coal-black hair brushed straight back from a high yellow brow, for his classically regular features, for the unruffled perfection of his evening dress. He wore a large scarab ring upon the second finger of his left hand.

But the woman—his companion? A glance told Lincoln Hayes that she was not present. Yet no one would have known that he was disappointed.

The man, then, was an Arab, or possibly an Egyptian. He was talking with a sort of aloof, dignified courtesy to the actress who had shared honors with John Barrymore.

"What a shame, Lincoln!" The voice was that of Mrs. Mornington Dobbs. Hayes forced himself to listen. "I have found out who the man is. The Pattersons know him well: he's a diplomat. Come and be introduced. He is a romantic person from Egypt with the delightful name of Mohammed Ahmes Bey. The girl is his *niece*." She emphasized the word spitefully. "These uncles and nieces who travel together are so old-fashioned. She has gone back to the hotel to finish packing. They are leaving in the morning. Isn't it disappointing?"

The words were barbed, for assiduous gossip mongers had failed to discover any trace of a woman in Hayes' life. He was a most annoying man. Following in the footsteps of Lincoln Hayes senior, his father recently deceased, he had excavated in Egypt, adding to the treasures of the Hayes Bequest in the Metropolitan Museum. He had shot big game in Nairobi. He had taken the team to Europe which had won the world's fencing championship. He was a magnificent horseman. He piloted his own planes, of which he had a fleet of four. And only a month earlier, driving an American car, he had narrowly missed a first prize at Monte Carlo.

But Lincoln Hayes' subconscious mind had assumed control again. He heard Mrs. Mornington Dobbs' words as through a mist. Mentally he had removed the spectacles from the hawk-like face, had set a crown above those majestic features. The result was an Ancient Egyptian god. But, in spite of his knowledge of the subject, he could not determine with which of the many headdresses to crown this god.

She had gone, and they were leaving in the morning.

He was introduced to Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

"Dear Lincoln is so disappointed." (Mrs. Mornington Dobbs again.) "He had so hoped to meet your niece. She is very beautiful, isn't she? And such a delightful name!"

Mohammed Ahmes Bey slightly inclined his head.

"I accept the compliment on behalf of my niece, Mrs. Mornington Dobbs." He spoke perfect English. His voice had a quality rarely heard in those untrained in elocution. "As you say, she is beautiful." He turned to Hayes. "We know you well in Egypt, Mr. Hayes, and respect you because you love our ancient past. My niece, who bears a strange name, or one strange to modern ears——"

"Oh, yes! Ahmes Bey," Mrs. Mornington Dobbs interpolated, "please *do* tell him her name. It's so fantastically adorable."

"The name," Mohammed Ahmes Bey continued, "of Hatasu, was so-called because her family, of which I am a member, traces its pedigree back to the real or so-called Ancient Egyptians."

"Isn't that too sweet?" said the leading lady.

"I am doubly disappointed," continued Mohammed Ahmes Bey, contriving with a courtesy which would have graced a king to ignore the remark, "first, that you could not meet my niece, who will be disappointed; and second, that an urgent telegram which awaited me when I arrived this morning in New York demands that I shall leave tomorrow for Washington. I had counted, Mr. Hayes, upon seeing the treasures of my country which are contained in your home. And also those others which your father and yourself have given to the nation in the Hayes Bequest."

Lincoln Hayes was watching the speaker's eyes. Except that they were very large and held a compelling regard, they seemed, otherwise, behind the tinted glasses, to be normal.

"The Hayes Bequest—" he replied, in his slow, somewhat monotonous voice; "difficult. Don't think even personal influence could open Metropolitan Museum tonight. But the private collection, Mohammed Bey, more than happy to show you, if you have time to come back now."

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Hayes. I shall be delighted."

"You may wonder how some things got here," Lincoln Hayes' slow smile rippled for a moment over his stoic features, "but don't ask me—ask my agent, Captain Rorke."

"Captain Rorke? But of course, I know of Captain Rorke. He acted for your father."

"He did."

"He is a brilliant Egyptologist. If my government has failed to take toll of his discoveries, then my government is at fault."

There was a dry humor in the words which Hayes immediately detected and appreciated. He wanted to like Mohammed Ahmes Bey, but perhaps, for the first time in his adventurous life, he was conscious in this man's presence of something unpleasantly resembling fear.

Mohammed Ahmes Bey had a dominating personality which his gently courteous manner could not mask. Many eyes were turned upon him. The presence of the famous Lincoln Hayes usually was a lodestone, but even when John Barrymore came in, there were many visitors, male and female, who continued to watch Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

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Hayes contrived to slip away early on the plea of urgent business, taking the distinguished Egyptian with him. Slim, his town chauffeur, was waiting at the stage door. Hayes had inherited his father's genius for appointing the right man to the right job, and Slim was a traffic wizard. Guided apparently by some extra sense, he rose superior to lights. They never seemed to be against him. And he could insinuate the big French car into narrow gaps which one would have sworn inadequate to accommodate a perambulator.

"Your driver is uncannily skillful, Mr. Hayes."

The Egyptian spoke without seeming effort, yet his voice was clearly audible above the agonizing din of Broadway.

Lincoln Hayes nodded.

"What I have him for."

They reached the Hayes home—a rather somber stone-faced building, a relic of an older, more dignified New York—in roughly the same time that a fast car could have done it if, instead of the after-theater block, the streets had been quite empty.

The door was opened by an English butler so perfectly in character that he seemed unreal. He might have been any age between forty and fifty. His straight, dark-brown hair showed no trace of graying; his short side-whiskers, sometimes called "pantry panels," were razor-squared to perfection. He was pale and thoughtful. His dark eyes were expressionless.

They stepped into the warmly lighted lobby, one of New York's show places. Stairs led up right and left to a gallery broken by pointed arches. The staircase and the gallery had come from the Gandolfo Palace in Venice. There was a piece of all but priceless tapestry on one wall, and the silver standard lamps which occupied the two recesses as

one entered were converted candelabra and had come from the workshop of Benvenuto Cellini. Immediately facing the door was a Correggio which had been insured for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The mosaic floor was from a Roman villa in Capri; the Persian and Arab carpets were unique, each designed and loomed to the order of the late Lincoln Hayes senior and never repeated. It was a very beautiful place but quite unhomely. It resembled a stage-set for *Othello*; but Hayes' father had devoted years to assembling it and had loved it. And so it remained as it had been in his lifetime.

Mohammed Ahmes Bey surrendered a fur-lined coat and a silk hat to the butler. He was looking about him speculatively.

"One has heard of your Venetian lobby, Mr. Hayes," he said, his musical voice echoing about the lofty place, "but it is something one must see to appreciate."

"Frankly, theatrical," Lincoln Hayes replied, his rather harsh, monotonous voice a strange contrast to the music of the Egyptian's. "But my father worked to build it—here it is—here it stays."

"It is very beautiful."

The butler reappeared, bowed, and:

"A cold buffet in the oak room, sir," he said, addressing Hayes. "Are you expecting other guests?"

"No."

"Captain Rorke is in the library."

"Yes?"

"And Miss Wayland would like a word with you at your convenience, sir."

"It is possible," said the Egyptian with delicate courtesy, "that I find myself here at an inconvenient moment. Please, Mr. Hayes, do not hesitate to say so."

"My dear Mohammed Bey, shall not be detained more than a few minutes."

Hayes turned to the butler.

"Lurgan—Miss Wayland to join us in oak room. Please come this way, Mohammed Bey. I will see you are taken care of until I return."

They walked along a short corridor to an oak paneled room. Heavy curtains were drawn before the windows. But the room was well lighted by standard lamps set upon a refectory table, upon which a cold repast was spread.

"Would suggest a glass of wine, Mohammed Bey——"

"But you fear I am a Moslem? Although I am not a Moslem, Mr. Hayes, I am, nevertheless, a total abstainer. Thank you. Here, I see, are tomato sandwiches, and here is dry ginger ale."

"Cigar?"

"I thank you, but I never smoke."

At which moment Ann Wayland came in. She was quite simply dressed. She was very attractive, with her wavy chestnut hair, peach-like skin, and slender, athletic figure.

Such a secretary, for she was Lincoln Hayes' secretary, in any bachelor household but that of Lincoln Hayes must have created comment. She was the daughter of a

lifelong friend of Hayes' father and belonged to a family which without patchwork could trace back to the *Mayflower* settlers.

At first, it was true, when Lincoln Hayes had employed her, she had been conscious of pique. She was no slave of vanity, but she was used to attention from almost any man with whom she came in contact. Sometimes Hayes would squeeze her shoulders appreciatively when she had done something particularly clever or self-sacrificing, but he seemed to be blankly unaware of the fact that she was a very pretty girl. She had nearly been in love with him—as later she realized. But now she had settled down to the truth, as she saw it: that Lincoln Hayes was an adorable monk; a sort of charming young uncle. No doubt this frame of mind had been induced, or assisted, by the arrival of someone else. . . .

On the threshold of the oak room she pulled up suddenly, looking from face to face. Her eyes, which were dark blue, appeared black in the dim lighting.

"Come in, Ann," said Hayes. "Mohammed Ahmes Bey. And as I am going to leave you to this young lady's mercies for a while, I think you should know she is Ann Wayland, daughter of very old family friend, and best secretary in New York City."

Mohammed Ahmes Bey bowed deeply.

"Want to see me alone?" Hayes went on.

"No, not at all. I only wanted to tell you that Paddy . . . Rorke——"

The interval between the two names she had been unable to mask.

Lincoln Hayes reached out a long arm and squeezed her shoulder. Ann colored like a blush rose and went on hurriedly:

"That is—he asked me directly he arrived . . ."

"How long here?"

"Not more than fifteen minutes. The *Berengaria* docked tonight, after all, and he asked me to tell you to see him the moment you returned and to phone for Ulric Stefanson. I phoned at once."

"Rorke wants him tonight?"

"Yes. He was out, but I left a message."

"Right, Ann."

There was nothing in the voice or in the appearance of Lincoln Hayes to suggest that he was moved in any way. One watching closely and knowing him as well as Ann Wayland knew him, for instance, might have noted that he brushed imaginary cigarette ash from the lapel of his dress-coat. He turned to Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

"If I leave you, I leave you in good company. Whenever you please, Miss Wayland will show you around the museum. Originally built for ballroom; museum during my late father's lifetime. Rejoin you very soon."

He inclined his head and turned to go, when:

"There *was* something else I wanted to mention," said Ann rather breathlessly.

Hayes glanced back.

"What?"

Lurgan came in and stepping behind the table began to officiate.

"There is no hurry," said Ann; "it will do later."

"Whisky-and-soda and sandwiches are served in the library, sir," Lurgan murmured.

"Thank you."

Lincoln Hayes went out.

A few moments later he entered the library, one of the two finest rooms of its kind in New York City. The volumes, in massive mahogany cases which lined the walls, were many of them unique first editions. There were specimens of early printing; rare bindings; a Shakespeare First Folio; a Book of Hours which had belonged to Marguerite de Valois, and a hundred and one other rare pieces, in addition to the normally fine books which comprised this magnificent collection.

Although absent from the lobby, the queer, mystic note of Egypt might be heard here. There were busts and statuettes from that home of ancient learning; fragments of mural decorations framed upon those walls not occupied by bookcases.

A log fire blazed in the open hearth.

Upon a large writing table littered with books there was a steel dispatch box, and a man was standing in the hearth, kicking a burning log back into the fire. He turned as Lincoln Hayes entered.

He was dressed in a well-worn but well cut flannel suit; and, as he came about, his eyes opened widely, and his habitually gloomy expression became that of a boy just home for the holidays.

"Lincoln!" he cried, and literally sprang forward.

"Paddy!—good to see you!"

Their hands became locked in a grip which would have extracted howls of agony from a normal townsman. They grinned into each other's faces with a gladness only possible in deep friendship.

"You've got it, Paddy?"

With his left hand, for Lincoln Hayes still grasped his right, Captain Rorke pointed to the dispatch box upon the big table.

"There must be millions in it, Lincoln; there have been three attempts upon me since I got it——"

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"Mr. Stefanson."

Lurgan stood aside, and Ulric Stefanson came into the library.

Stefanson was a young man with a mane of limp blond hair, so blond that in artificial light it appeared to be white.

He paused in the doorway as Lurgan went out, staring vaguely in the direction of the big table. He saw a sheet of faded papyrus pinned upon a drawing board, with some sort of manuscript lying beside it; then:

"Evening, Stefanson," said Lincoln Hayes, and dusted imaginary ash—he was smoking a cigar—from the left lapel of his coat. "Rorke's got a problem for you."

Stefanson came forward, shaking hands with his host and with Captain Rorke. He appeared to be utterly bewildered. He was very short-sighted, so that even through the powerful lenses of his spectacles he peered, continuously. He wore ill-fitting dinner kit, and his tie was a ghastly parody. He was loose-limbed and tall, but stooped much.

"G-good," he replied, for he was afflicted by an impediment in his speech. "I l-l-love problems."

It had called for the inherited acumen of Lincoln Hayes to discover inside this unprepossessing exterior a scientific genius.

"Drink, Stefanson?" Hayes continued, and moved towards the side table.

"You know I never dr-drink wh-whisky."

"Of course! Truth is, Stefanson—excited. Ring, Paddy."

Lurgan, in response to the ring, appeared as if by magic. His immobility was wonderful; but his keen hazel eyes missed nothing of importance in the library.

"Three bottles Liebfraumilch small bin," Hayes ordered.

Lurgan bowed and went out.

"Normally should have remembered you drink nothing but Rhine wine."

"You don't know anything about this, Stefanson," said Rorke pointing to the papyrus pinned to the drawing board. "But tonight, you are going to know everything about it."

"G-good," said Stefanson.

Lincoln Hayes walked across to the fire and leaned upon the mantel, staring down into the flames. There was a moment of silence interrupted only by the crackle of a log. Stefanson was peering at the papyrus. The door opened, and Lurgan came in carrying a large ice bucket in which were three long-necked bottles of wine.

"It may not be cool enough for you, sir."

"Q-quite cool enough."

Pale-faced, nervous, and possessed of very large, aimless hands, Ulric Stefanson was one of the most helpless-looking young men one could have found in all New York City. He was also chief technician of Western States Electric, and in his own province second to none in the country.

With deft efficiency Lurgan opened a bottle, poured out a glass of wine for Mr. Stefanson, replaced the bottle in the ice, and withdrew.

"You remember," said Rorke abruptly, "the experiments which you made two years ago with a fragment of an Egyptian lamp which I brought back, and which is now in the Metropolitan Museum?"

"I re-remember per-perfectly. I s-spent s-several months on the s-silly thing."

"Not silly," jerked Lincoln Hayes, without turning around.

"This papyrus—" Rorke pointed, his light, flexible voice giving no indication of the seriousness of his subject—"should enable you to continue your experiments."

Although not much above medium height, Captain Patrick Rorke, late Royal Engineers, was built upon such finely slender lines that he appeared to be as tall as Stefanson. Far short of forty, his wavy hair was quite gray, but his thick Irish lashes

retained their original color, lending extraordinary luster to cold blue eyes, which nevertheless were capable of softening. He wore a close-cut "regulation" mustache. His lean face had a sort of ascetic beauty as he watched the scientist. Here was a poet or perhaps an actor. The sun had baked his pale skin dark brown.

Stefanson moved to the side table and poured himself out another glass of wine.

"I do-don't follow," he declared.

There was a rap on the door, and Lurgan came in. He addressed Hayes.

"Excuse me, sir, for interrupting you, but Miss Wayland would like to speak to you for a moment."

"Is she there?"

"Yes."

Ann Wayland came in.

"Mohammed Ahmes Bey has been called by phone to return to his hotel immediately," she said, glancing about her and nodding smilingly to Stefanson. "He is awfully sorry, but he must go."

"Rude on my part, matter of fact," Hayes muttered. "Excuse me." He started for the door. "Where is he?"

"He came back from the telephone to the museum; I suppose he's still in there."

Hayes hurried through to the big lofty room which enshrined the treasures of the Hayes Collection. He took very long strides, leaving Ann behind. He was conscious of a breach of hospitality.

The door was open, and he burst in, looking right and left. It was a strange apartment, resembling the second Egyptian Room in the British Museum.

There were rows of cases along the center of the parquet floor, some containing mummies, notable either for their state of preservation or because of their historic importance. In others were scarabs, rings, and various kinds of Egyptian jewelry. In the wall cases were sarcophagus lids, statuettes, examples of furniture, arms, and domestic utensils.

Above the cases, framed upon the wall surrounding the entire museum, was a perfectly executed copy in colors of the Hayes Papyrus. The original was in the Metropolitan Museum. It was a curious variation of the usual ritual, discovered in the Theban tomb of a prince of the Fourteenth Dynasty by Captain Rorke's predecessor, Lincoln Hayes senior having been actually present at the opening of the tomb. He had purchased it from the authorities on the understanding that it should never be re-sold except to them.

The place was lighted by many hanging lamps. Haggard outlines beneath saffron-colored wrappings stared up at the lamps; bright colors gleamed from wall cases. The strange silent apartment otherwise was empty.

Lincoln Hayes turned to Ann, who had entered behind him.

"Must have gone. Very strange!"

"He told me the message was urgent, Lincoln."

"May be Lurgan knows."

Hayes pressed a bell. Following a lapse of less than twenty seconds the butler appeared in the open door.

"Did you see Mohammed Bey out?"

"No, sir."

"Why?"

"I last saw him in here, sir—in this room. He was called to the phone, and I showed him the way. Miss Wayland then rang and asked me to tell you that Mohammed Bey must leave, and I came to the library. I haven't seen him since, sir."

"Did Slim drive him?"

"No, sir. Slim is outside now."

Lincoln Hayes glanced sharply about. It was not in his breed to doubt the honesty of a guest.

"Annoying," he muttered. "These people very touchy. Away too long."

"His hotel is not more than four minutes off, sir. He probably decided to walk."

"Call through. Hold him if you get him. Don't stay up, Ann."

Lincoln Hayes returned to the library.

CHAPTER TWO

TEMPLE LAMPS

"VERY mysterious," said Rorke; "but Mohammed Ahmes Bey is a highly mysterious bloke. He's well known in Cairo, where I believe he has a villa. He has some sort of official standing. I have never actually met him to speak to. Where did you bump into him?"

"Theater tonight. Jim Patterson introduced us. He was in a box facing me. Very pretty woman with him. Flame-colored hair. But I was watching the eyes of Mohammed Ahmes Bey."

"What was strange about them?"

"They gleamed in the dark like the eyes of a cat."

Captain Rorke crossed to the fire, tossing the end of a cigarette in among the burning logs. While a physiognomist might have been mistaken in the temper and make-up of the man, the lamented Mr. Sherlock Holmes could not have failed to note his hands. Although well cared for, they were significantly muscular, with a predominance of thumb which told its own story.

Stefanson looked from man to man in undisguised bewilderment. Lincoln Hayes, leaning on a bookcase, stared across at Rorke.

"Flame-colored hair," Rorke muttered. "Not just red hair, or golden hair—but flame-colored?"

"Yes. Very unusual," said Lincoln Hayes. "No better way of describing it."

Rorke turned.

"I am beginning to wonder," he declared.

"What about?"

"About the origin of the several attempts which have been made upon me since I acquired that."

He pointed to the papyrus pinned to the drawing board.

"I d-don't think," said Stefanson, "th-that you make yourself t-too clear."

"Had the story, Stefanson," said Hayes, "before you arrived. Important you should know. Give Stefanson a brief outline, Paddy."

"Right."

Patrick Rorke selected a cigar with careful discrimination from a large cedar-wood box on the table, nicked it and lighted it, with the care due to a cigar of its pedigree. He settled himself back in the big writing chair placed before the table. Hayes crossed and leaned upon the mantel. Ulric Stefanson sat facing Captain Rorke, and bending forward, peering, wine-glass in hand.

"You know my theories," Rorke began, "about the lamp fragment in the Museum. I am by no means the first man who has believed that the Egyptians possessed a system of lighting of which, today, we know nothing. This theory has a rational basis. The

wonderful wall paintings in some rock tombs, far removed from natural light, can only be appreciated by the employment of magnesium ribbon, for instance. Since those paintings were done on the spot, what light was used by the painters?"

Stefanson crossed to the ice bucket and replenished his glass.

"I could s-suggest s-seven alternative th-theories," he remarked and sat down again.

"Very possibly," Rorke replied; "but when you have heard me out I don't think you will consider it necessary to tax the tired brain."

Lincoln Hayes rang a bell. Lurgan entered almost immediately.

"Open the other bottles."

"Very good, sir."

The other bottles being uncorked, Lurgan withdrew, and Rorke continued.

"I have been working recently at no great distance from the Great Pyramid. There is a big discovery there waiting for the man who is clever enough to make it. I used to spend any spare evenings I had in Cairo, putting up for a night now and again at Shepheard's. It was during this time that the very curious document on the table came into my possession. I won't go into details—Hayes already knows them—except to say that I acquired it. I realized at once that I had got hold of something unique in the history of Egyptology: part of a chapter of the fabulous *Book of Thoth*—and the chapter was entitled 'Temple Lamps!' . . ."

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"It is purely and simply a scientific formula for preparing a certain kind of light," said Rorke.

"Sci-scientific," echoed Stefanson, engaged in pouring wine from the third bottle.

"I said 'scientific.' It contains signs unfamiliar to any student of Egyptian hieroglyphics, but the text which I have translated makes it clear that these are really diagrams. I have assembled them imperfectly. Here is the result." The casual voice could not conceal his enthusiasm. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, this is a figure of a complete lamp, similar to that of which there is a fragment in the Metropolitan Museum. And the text—" he brought his muscular hand down upon the papyrus —"describes the making of such a lamp!"

Stefanson, glass in hand, came to the big table, almost pushing Rorke aside, as he bent, peering, at the written notes.

"You see what I mean, Lincoln," Rorke went on: "I realized that this wasn't just an archæological treasure—it was a practical discovery which might revolutionize the lighting systems of the world."

Stefanson was in the chair now, busily scribbling on a writing block.

There came a rap on the door. Lurgan entered.

"I got through to Mohammed Bey's apartment at the hotel, sir," he reported, "and a lady—his secretary, I presume—requested me to offer the Bey's apologies, but he was

summoned to a vital conference. He will call you, sir, directly he is disengaged, to apologize in person."

The "secretary" Lincoln Hayes mused, was probably the girl of the flame-colored hair. He permitted her bewitching image to dominate his mind for a moment, then:

"Good," he said.

The butler went out.

"The man from whom I got the thing—he wanted the money to escape from Egypt—was hauled out of the Nile the same night."

"Goo-good God!" muttered Stefanson, without looking up from his task.

"I temporarily abandoned the other job," Rorke went on in his cool, rather tired voice. "I worked on the papyrus—it was not an easy matter. I should have loved another opinion, but, of course, I dared not take one. I cabled you about this time, Lincoln. I don't know if some leakage occurred there, but the next thing of interest cropped up a few nights later. . . .

"It was my custom to lock the papyrus in that steel dispatch box—" he pointed—"which I had bought for the purpose, and to lodge it in the hotel safe. But my notes and translation, upon which I sometimes worked until very late at night, usually lay upon a writing table near the window. I had one of the old rooms with a wooden balcony overlooking the gardens. And on the night in question, I suddenly woke up ——"

"G-g-good God!" Stefanson exclaimed, "this is rev-revolutionary!"

Both men stared at him sharply. He was absorbed in his work, penciling at feverish speed.

"—A man wearing a half mask was bending over the writing table and was reading, as far as I could make out, my notes which lay there, by the light of a torch which was dimmed in some way!

"I suppose I awoke with a start—at any rate, I disturbed him. He came around in a flash, and just before the light went out I saw that he held a pistol in his hand. I couldn't reach my own gun in time. The shutters were ajar. He went through and out over the balcony, dropping into the garden below. He hadn't touched the notes: they were intact."

"You mean," said Lincoln Hayes slowly, "the man was not an Arab; he wore European clothes?"

"Exactly. That's the queer feature. Naturally, I didn't report the matter—I didn't want to draw attention to what I was doing. The thing was beginning to develop. I saw where it was leading me. The second attempt was more curious than the first."

"Gr-gr-great Scott!" Stefanson exclaimed, moved across, and poured out the last glass of wine from the third bottle in the bucket, immediately returning to the writing table.

Lincoln Hayes smiled his slow smile.

"Go ahead, Paddy," he directed.

"Sometimes, when I worked very late, I would lock the box in the bathroom and draw my bed up in front of the door. There was no other way of getting in. One night I

dreamed that I moved the bed, opened the door, and took out the box. I unlocked it and placed it on the desk near the shuttered window. A curiously slender brown hand reached out of the shadows—when a shot sounded—another—another. I woke up."

He paused, staring across at Lincoln Hayes.

"As I afterwards discovered, a spot of trouble had broken out in the native quarter on the other side of the Square. It saved me . . . because I had really got the dispatch box out, unlocked it—and taken out the papyrus. It was lying on the desk . . . and my shutters were open again!"

"This is an amazing story," said Hayes.

"I was on the balcony in a jiff. Somebody—clearly an Egyptian this time—was slinking away around an angle of the building. Attempt Number Two. Attempt Number Three was even more——"

A cry rang through the house—the scream of a terrified woman!

Stefanson sprang to his feet. Lincoln Hayes turned and exchanged glances with Rorke. In three strides Rorke was at the door.

"It was *Ann*!" he said.

From beyond the door came a sound of running footsteps, a dull groan—a thud . . . Rorke's hand grasped the doorknob. Stefanson, stoop discarded, stood bolt upright by the big table . . .

There came a blinding flash—and complete darkness.

"Who turned the light out?"

The voice was Stefanson's.

"I can't open this door!" cried Rorke; "someone's holding it."

Lincoln Hayes, in the blackness of the library, began to grope his way towards another door. He bumped into someone. He grabbed—but touched nothing.

"Who's that?" he cried sharply. "You, Stefanson?"

Stefanson's voice came from the other end of the room.

"I haven't moved—I da-daren't."

"Paddy?"

"Still at the door. There's a dead weight behind it."

Sounds of movement ceased. Hayes reached the other door, but the corridor beyond was in complete darkness. He groped for the switch—found it . . . and discovered that it was depressed!

"Main fuse or blow-out at power station," he commented. "The switch is on. But *someone else* is in the library!"

"There's a dead weight behind this door," said Rorke, his voice less casual than usual.

Then the stutter of Stefanson came:

"I've got a t-torch in my p-pocket." A moment of silence, and: "Da-damn! the thing won't f-function!"

Nothing relieved that Stygian darkness.

“D’you mean to say,” cried Rorke angrily, “that you can’t switch your light on, Stefanson?”

“S-simply can’t.”

“Uncanny.” Lincoln Hayes’ tones were quite even. “Going to grope my way out to the lobby. Can’t imagine what has become of Lurgan and others. . . .”

“Get around back of this door,” said Rorke. “I’m afraid to shove. There’s—something *inert* there. . . .”

Familiar with the way—he had been born in this home—Lincoln Hayes went blindly along the corridor which led to the Venetian lobby. When he knew, by instinct, that he had come to the end, he pulled up.

Movement.

“Who’s that?”

He grabbed—and caught a man!

“Only me, sir!” Lurgan’s voice was hysterical: Hayes’ hold was like that of a bear. He released it. “There’s something very funny going on. Who screamed out, sir? All the staff are upstairs in their rooms.”

“Been to the main switchboard?”

“It’s in my room. But I can get no light. I’ve burned my fingers with matches—but got no flame I could *see*! I’m terrified, Mr. Hayes! I believe I’ve *gone blind*!”

“Brace up!” Lincoln Hayes’ cool voice was a sedative. “All in the same boat.”

“Do you mean *you* can see nothing, sir?”

“Absolutely. If you’re blind, we’re all blind. Where’s Miss Wayland?”

“I don’t know, sir . . . by heaven! I’m beginning to *see* again!”

“Keep cool. Light’s coming on. Stay where you are.”

As through a mist the distinctive features of the Venetian lobby began to manifest themselves to Lincoln Hayes. He saw Lurgan—more pale than usual, rubbing his eyes and glancing about him. Hayes set out.

In twenty seconds he was at the door of the library. Lighting now was nearly normal.

Ann Wayland lay on the polished floor—still, and deathly white.

Hayes stooped, gathered her up in his arms, and stepped back.

“Paddy!” he called.

The library door opened—and Stefanson stood there.

“M-my God!” he exclaimed, staring wildly. “R-Rorke r-ran out when the l-light came up. But *the pap-papyrus has gone*!”

Came a sound of racing footsteps across the lobby. Rorke ran up, pale under his sunburn.

“Ann!”

“Stand clear, Paddy.”

Lincoln Hayes carried Ann Wayland across the lobby and laid her gently upon the divan set between the silver candelabra of Benvenuto Cellini. Lights now were

perfectly normal.

"Lincoln—she's dead!"

Lurgan stood, pallid, watching. Stefanson came out. There were hushed voices on the higher staircases.

"Lurgan," said Hayes, "get Dr. Brodrick. If away, Dr. Muller. Then get police headquarters. Have them call District Attorney Maguire."

CHAPTER THREE

THE MYSTERY INVESTIGATED

DR. MULLER came downstairs. He descended very slowly, or so it seemed to the two men in the Venetian lobby. Captain Rorke, upright, his hands behind him, looked very slim against a tapestry background. Lincoln Hayes, in an armchair near one of the tall silver candelabra, glanced upward and backward over his shoulder. Rorke was biting his lower lip, but Hayes' face was expressionless.

At the foot of the stairs Dr. Muller paused. He was dark and still young, wearing black-rimmed spectacles. He had a very fine forehead, and that entire absence of humor which sometimes goes with scientific enthusiasm. Lincoln Hayes had marked him for a coming man. Dr. Muller looked from face to face.

"Well?" said Hayes.

Captain Rorke ceased biting his lip. He took a cigarette from a box on a ledge near by and lighted it.

"Adderley is still at work," Dr. Muller replied: his tones were gloomy. "He is brilliant, but . . ."

Dr. Eldon Adderley was certainly brilliant. He was perhaps the most famous consultant in New York City, and Muller—an indication that Muller really was a clever man—had called him in immediately.

"I suppose you mean," said Rorke in an overcasual voice, "that in your opinion the case is hopeless?"

Dr. Muller turned to the speaker; his expression was deeply sympathetic. He gravely inclined his head.

"If any man in the world can restore her to life," he replied, "that man is with her now."

He turned and slowly went upstairs again.

Mysterious horror hung like a cloud over the Hayes home. The distinctive note of a police car proclaimed itself in the street. Lurgan, the butler, appeared from an arched Moorish doorway and crossed. There was a moment of complete silence. Rorke puffed at his cigarette; Lincoln Hayes sat motionless. Lurgan reëntered.

"Mr. Maguire," he announced, "and another . . . gentleman."

There was an almost imperceptible pause before the last word. District Attorney Maguire came in: a big man buttoned up in a big check overcoat, a soft hat held in his hand. His profuse silvery hair, brushed straight back from a square brow, oddly emphasized the blackness of his thick, shaggy eyebrows. The remainder of his face was a hundred per cent jaw.

His companion, who wore a blue overcoat, was smallish, thick-set, and bullet-headed. He had wrinkled, leathery features and quickly moving dark eyes which might have reminded one of those of a weasel. He held a hard black hat and had an unlighted cigar clenched in the left corner of his thin mouth.

“Ah, Maguire!” Hayes stood up. “Sorry to dig you out. Felt I wanted to see you.”

Lurgan took the check overcoat and the hat from District Attorney Maguire and turned to the other; but:

“Thanks. I’ll stay the way I am,” he drawled.

Lurgan disappeared.

“This is Captain Rorke, whom I don’t think you’ve met, Maguire.”

Maguire, who wore a check tweed suit of a pattern even more violent than that of his overcoat, shook hands with Rorke, then, turning:

“Detective Sergeant Hawley of the Homicide Bureau,” he said, in a rich actor’s voice. “I’m sorry there’s trouble, Hayes. What’s happened?”

Detective Sergeant Hawley, hat in hand, and cigar protruding from thin lips, stood on the exact spot which he had reached at the moment of entry, his eyes darting left and right.

“Attempted murder,” Hayes answered dryly. “At least—maybe successful. We don’t know yet. Sit down, gentlemen.”

Lurgan reappeared as if in response to a telepathic message.

“A highball for you, sir, I believe,” he said, addressing Maguire. “And for you, sir?” turning to the detective.

“Nothing. I’m thinking.”

Captain Rorke knocked ash from his cigarette end.

“What were you thinking, sergeant?” he asked.

“I was thinking there’s a curious smell around here.”

“What kind of smell?” growled Maguire, sniffing deeply.

“I couldn’t just give it a name, but it kind of reminds me of the sea.”

“Quite right,” said Rorke quietly. “I had already noted it.”

“That so?” said Hayes. “I note it now it’s been mentioned, but hadn’t noted it before.”

There was a dreadful tension present. Observers less experienced than District Attorney Maguire and Detective Sergeant Hawley, could not have failed to become aware of it. Hayes and Rorke seemed both to be listening for something and from time to time glanced in the direction of the staircase.

“Now,” boomed Maguire, as Lurgan withdrew. “Let’s have the facts, Hayes.”

2

When an admirably brief but lucid account of the mysterious tragedy had been given by Lincoln Hayes:

“You speak, Hayes,” said Maguire, “of certain valuable manuscripts which have been stolen. Do you mean of value as curiosities?”

“Yes.”

“Any other kind of value?”

"Yes."

"I mean to a person not interested in Egyptology?"

"Yes."

"Commercial value?"

"Definitely."

Maguire, standing up, stared at Hawley.

"Anything to say?" he challenged.

"Yes, sir. I should like to know what has become of the man Stefanson, who seems to have been present at the time of the occurrence."

"He's in the library," Rorke explained, glancing in the direction of the staircase.

"Why isn't he here? Doesn't murder interest him?"

"Has a very remarkable memory," Lincoln Hayes volunteered. "He's in there, trying to reconstruct the notes which were stolen. Do you wish to interview him. Sergeant Hawley?"

"Later, maybe." He turned to Captain Rorke. "You say you had noticed this curious smell, sir, before I came in?"

"I had."

"Ever smelt it before?"

"Yes. At sea, under certain conditions, and where ozone was being used."

"Ah! Ozone." The detective's beady eyes twinkled appreciatively. "That's the word I was after. Ozone! It's stronger over there, in that passage, than it is out here. Where does that passage lead?"

"Library," said Hayes slowly.

"Where this thing happened?"

"Exactly."

"Seems queer."

Hawley glanced at Maguire.

At which moment a sound of footsteps came from the corridor indicated, and Ulric Stefanson entered, carrying a sheaf of notes.

"There's been s-something like an electric dis-discharge to-tonight," he declared. "S-something has b-burned the atmosphere."

"This is Mr. Stefanson," said Lincoln Hayes. "Maguire, you know one another. Detective Sergeant Hawley."

Maguire stared across at the newcomer, and:

"What do you mean by 'burned the atmosphere'?" he demanded.

"You can s-smell it."

"I don't know," said Hawley in his hard, dry voice, "that your remark means anything to me, Mr. Stefanson. How do you burn the atmosphere?"

"L-lightning does it."

"You, mean that this house has been struck by lightning?"

“N-not likely; but a s-similar effect.”

A sudden silence fell; there were footsteps on the staircase.

Dr. Adderley came down. He was tall and saturnine. His deep-set eyes registered introspection. He aimlessly twirled a tortoise-shell-rimmed monocle upon its dependent cord. At the foot of the stairs:

“Excuse me, Hayes—” he habitually spoke in a very low voice—“I want to use your telephone. Don’t bother the butler. I know where it is.”

He moved across, when:

“Any news?” Hayes asked.

The famous consultant shook his head but did not speak.

“Excuse me, D-doctor,” came suddenly, “but have you ever attended a p-patient who had been stru-struck by lightning?”

Eldon Adderley pulled up at that, adjusted the large monocle, and turned, staring at Stefanson.

“I’m not jo-joking,” the latter assured him. “Would the s-symptoms correspond?”

Adderley began sniffing, while continuing to stare at Stefanson.

“Does your remark mean anything in particular?” he inquired, “or was it inspired by this peculiar odor which I did not notice when I came in?”

“It m-means s-something. I have a the-theory.”

Adderley was aware that the speaker was a brilliant chemist and biologist. He paused. For some moments there was complete silence in the Venetian lobby.

“I think you have helped me,” he said, and crossed to the telephone room.

As he went out:

“You say it is certain, Hayes,” Maguire asked, “that none of your staff left this house tonight?”

“It’s certain. Slim was outside, right along. He’s there now.”

“But there’s a basement door to the kitchens?”

“He can see that, too, where he stands beside the car.”

“Shall I get him, sir?” Detective Sergeant Hawley asked.

Maguire nodded. Hawley crossed and went out.

“It seems to me,” said Maguire, in his deep, booming voice, “that your butler, Lurgan, ought to know more about this business than he seems to know. He’s fairly new here, isn’t he, Hayes?”

“Three months next Tuesday. First-class references. Excellent man.”

Maguire nodded and began to light a cigar which he had just placed between his small, even teeth. Captain Rorke helped himself to a whisky-and-soda, as Hayes turned to Stefanson, who still stood at the entrance to the corridor, peering about him blindly.

“How far do your notes go?”

“Pr-pretty far. But cer-certain things have ess-sc-caped me.” His vague glance sought the staircase. “You d-don’t think . . .”

"I don't know what to think. If she's dead—I'll spend every cent I possess to get the man who killed her."

It was not a dramatic gesture. Lincoln Hayes meant it and would do it. Detective Sergeant Hawley reappeared on the other side of the huge lobby, in which, now, tobacco smoke floated like a mist. He was accompanied by a small, wiry man, wearing a very smart chauffeur's uniform—a truculent-looking little man, who looked about him challengingly.

"Here's Slim," drawled Hawley. "Maybe you'd like to ask him a few questions, Mr. Maguire."

Maguire nodded.

"I've met you before, Slim, and I reckon I can trust you to see straight and talk straight."

"That's right," said Slim—he spoke broad Cockney.

"You have been outside all evening since you brought a party to the house from the theater?"

"That's right."

"When did the Egyptian gentleman leave?"

"He ain't left," was the astonishing reply. "So far as I know, 'e's still 'ere."

Those simple words spoken by Slim electrified his listeners.

"Hold on, Slim," Maguire's scowl was very threatening, his voice very deep. "He left here . . . what was the time, Hayes?"

Stefanson answered.

"It was q-quarter of twelve when Lur-Lurgan ca-came to the library. I n-n-noted it."

"Nobody didn't leave at a quarter to twelve," said Slim challengingly. "I've bin standin' beside me car all night. Nobody didn't leave."

"What about the area door?"

"Nobody could 'ave come out o' there without me seein' 'em. And nobody did come out. But I did see one thing. I should 'ave rung an' reported it, only nothing 'appened."

"What was it you saw?"

"I see a blindin' flash of light through a chink in the lobby curtains. It shone right across the other side of the street. In fact, I jumped for the steps; then, I sez to meself—it's somebody takin' a flashlight photograph of the curios, and as nothing 'appened, I didn't do nothing."

Lincoln Hayes exchanged glances with Captain Rorke.

"You say you jumped for the steps?" came the dry drawl of Detective Sergeant Hawley. "Did you actually go up the steps?"

"That's right."

"Right up to the door?"

"Yes. Right up to the door."

"How long did you stay there?"

“Long enough to change me mind about ringin’ the bell.”

“That’ll do, Slim,” growled Maguire. “You’ve told me all I want to know.”

Slim, with a final truculent glance around, turned and went out.

Dr. Adderley came in almost at the same moment, twirling his monocle. He glanced about him vaguely.

“Some apparatus will be here from the Columbia laboratories,” he said in his low voice, “at almost any moment.”

He went upstairs. There was an uncomfortable, silent pause, broken by District Attorney Maguire.

“The witness we really want isn’t available,” he remarked. “But I should like a few words with Lurgan.”

3

Lurgan crossed the lower end of the lobby, went out, and opened the front door. A man came in carrying several bulky packages. Lurgan led the way upstairs. These were the supplies from Columbia University. A hush fell on the party, and all eyes followed that procession of two, bound for the room where Ann Wayland lay strangely poised between life and death. Captain Rorke selected and lighted another cigarette.

Detective Sergeant Hawley came back from the telephone. His unlighted cigar remained jammed in one corner of his lean mouth; his ferrety eyes were angry. He stared at District Attorney Maguire.

“Well,” growled the latter, “have you made a mess of the inquiry already? Speak up.”

“The man known as Mohammed Ahmes Bey,” the dry voice replied, “with a woman companion, left the hotel a half hour ago.”

“For where?”

“Destination unknown to hotel manager.”

“You instructed headquarters to move?”

“Naturally, Mr. Maguire. If they left by air, road, rail, or sea, we shall know in quarter of an hour.”

“Much good that’s going to do us.”

There was a pause.

“Not at all sure,” came Lincoln Hayes’ monotonous voice, “that Mohammed Bey has anything to do with the matter. No evidence to that effect.”

“On the con-contrary—” Stefanson became suddenly lighted up—“if you’ve l-lost Mohammed Bey, you’ve l-lost your m-man!”

“Why do *you* say that?” Maguire challenged. “Have you got information that we haven’t got?”

“I th-think so.”

“So do I,” said Captain Rorke. “But I don’t want to say too much, now.”

"Why not?"

Detective Sergeant Hawley was the speaker, and his bright eyes were fixed intently upon Rorke.

"Because, in the first place, I may be wrong, and, in the second place, I don't want certain facts known to myself and to Mr. Hayes to go any further than these four walls."

Lurgan was crossing the lobby from the stairs, when:

"Hi! you!" Maguire shouted.

Lurgan pulled up and turned.

"Yes, sir."

"Come back here; I want to talk to you."

"Very good, sir."

"If I might make a suggestion," Rorke went on, "while you, Mr. Maguire, are obtaining any available evidence from Lurgan, here, I would suggest that Detective Sergeant Hawley and myself take a look around the museum."

Hawley had never ceased to watch Rorke. Now his expression changed and:

"All ready here," he replied; "just where I want to go."

"Come this way, Sergeant Hawley."

The two went out. . . .

"You're an Englishman, aren't you?" said Maguire, staring at Lurgan.

"By parentage, sir," the butler replied, seeming more than normally pale as he stood facing his interrogator, "but an American citizen. I was born in Buffalo."

"Always been in the buttling line?"

"More or less, sir. My father was a butler in England, in the household of the late Duke of Orrey."

"Who was your employer before Mr. Lincoln Hayes?"

"General Petherington, sir."

"Oh, yes. I remember meeting you there. How long with the General?"

"Two years, sir. I went to Europe with him, as you may remember, and supervised his London flat for nine months."

"Why did you leave?"

"This vacancy offered, sir. I naturally wanted to better myself."

"You gave in your notice, then, to the General?"

"Yes, sir."

Except for his pallor, Lurgan's behavior was that of the perfectly trained servant which he was. Stefanson was staring at him in a curious way; Lincoln Hayes watched with his usual air of indifference.

"Give me," Maguire directed, "in your own words, a brief account of what happened here, tonight."

"Very good, sir. From what time in the evening?"

"From the time Mr. Hayes left you to join Captain Rorke in the library. You and Miss Wayland and the Egyptian were in the oak room."

"I brought refreshments to Mohammed Bey and Miss Wayland, and then Miss Wayland asked me to go and turn up the lights in the museum, which, as you know, sir, is more or less detached from the main building. I proceeded there and turned the lights up. I waited until Miss Wayland and Mohammed Bey came in, inquired if I could be of any service, and then went to my own room."

"Where is your room?"

"Downstairs; immediately below the oak room."

"Go on."

"The phone bell rang, and I went upstairs to the lobby."

"Stop a minute. Were there any other servants on duty?"

"No, sir."

"Are there any other menservants?"

"Slim, but he was outside. The woman, Mrs. Dimes—the housekeeper—and two resident maids, were upstairs in their rooms."

"Good. Go ahead."

"I went up to the telephone room. The call was from Mohammed Bey's hotel."

"Who was the caller?"

"A lady."

"I wonder how she knew Mohammed Bey was here?"

"I don't know, sir, but I proceeded to the museum to inform Mohammed Bey that he was wanted on the telephone. I showed him to the instrument, and then stood by, in the lobby. After a short time, he came out. I showed him into the museum again. I had returned to the lobby when I heard a bell. I went back. Miss Wayland was standing at the door of the museum. She instructed me to notify Mr. Hayes that Mohammed Bey was leaving. . . ."

Lurgan paused, as if thinking—or listening.

"Right, go on."

"I went to the library, knocked, and . . ."

There came a sudden interruption. Detective Sergeant Hawley appeared at one of the several doors.

"Excuse me, Mr. Maguire," he said, "but we've found something funny in there."

"Funny? You don't seem to be laughing," Maguire growled.

Lincoln Hayes stood up.

"What is it?"

"Well, one of those painted lids has been moved—and a wall case is open!"

Hayes strode out, taking long, rapid strides; Maguire followed. As he turned to bring up the rear, Detective Sergeant Hawley stared at Lurgan, and:

"Stay here with Mr. Stefanson," he directed; "I've got a few questions to ask you, presently."

He went out. Stefanson peered blindly at Lurgan. . . .

4

In the museum with its pendant lights and gruesome exhibits, Captain Rorke was standing by an open wall case. The case contained a beautifully painted sarcophagus lid, that of a priestess who had been a member of the family of Rameses III. Its usual position was indicated by a wooden peg upon the wall, which normally secured it. It stood now a foot removed from its proper place.

"Did you find it this way, Paddy?"

Lincoln Haves' monotonous voice was normal, but he was dusting the lapel of his coat.

Rorke nodded. His cold eyes were colder than usual; the humorous lips beneath his brusque mustache were set in a grim line.

"Door of the case was ajar. Do you keep it locked, Lincoln?"

"Yes. Ann would have got the keys, though."

"She wouldn't have moved that lid."

"Unlikely—next to impossible."

"I'll tell you what *I* think, Mr. Hayes," said Sergeant Hawley. "Somebody hid in here tonight, behind that lid. Why, I can almost reconstruct what happened! Assisting the lady who was showing him around, he pretended to re-lock this case, but didn't do it. He aimed to hide there later on. There is something else." His beady eyes glanced alternately at Captain Rorke and Lincoln Hayes. Maguire was examining the open door. "We've only got the word of Lurgan that he left this room when Mohammed Bey and Miss Wayland came in. I'm going to tax him with that."

He stared at the lid of the mummy case as though he hated it.

"Get headquarters when you're through," Maguire directed. "Have Stainer come right along to hunt fingerprints. Nobody touch this door."

"Queer thing!" Rorke murmured. "That odd smell which we have noticed isn't perceptible in here at all. It seems to center in the library and lobby."

"If I may say so," said Hawley, "you've got a theory about this smell."

"Suppose I have, sergeant?"

"I want to know it."

"I am afraid," said Captain Rorke, with a faint smile, "you will have to wait. You see, there's more behind this case than you appreciate at the moment."

"There's a lot behind it," the drawling voice replied, "which I mean to find out."

"Good luck to you," said Rorke.

They returned to the Venetian lobby. Hushed but excited voices might be heard from some upper landing. Hawley stared up.

"I should be glad," he said, with harsh distinctness, "if all members of the staff not on duty went to their rooms and stayed there."

Silence fell above.

Stefanson was standing near one of the Cellini silver lamps, scribbling notes on the margin of a loose page. Lurgan remained where they had left him. Stefanson looked up.

"W-well?" he said.

"Looks like someone hid himself in the museum tonight, Stefanson," Lincoln Hayes replied. "What for—I don't know."

"Perhaps," growled Maguire, suddenly glaring at Lurgan, "*you* can tell us."

"No, sir, I assure you. I can't."

"Might *I* say a word, sir?" came the dry voice of Detective Sergeant Hawley.

"Go right ahead."

"You stated, Lurgan," the detective sergeant went on, "that you left the museum almost directly Miss Wayland and the Egyptian came in and went to your room."

"That is so."

"I suggest you're a liar."

"In that case," Lurgan replied, "I hope I may never have to come to you for a reference."

He suffered a barrage of stares from Detective Sergeant Hawley, District Attorney Maguire, and Captain Rorke. He was pale but unmoved.

"The last of your evidence I heard, Lurgan," said Maguire, "took us up to the time Mohammed Bey disappeared while you came to the library."

"I rapped on the library door," Lurgan replied quite tonelessly, "under the impression that Miss Wayland had remained in the museum. Apparently, however, she had followed me. I suddenly discovered, as I opened the door, that she was behind me in the corridor. . . . When it was found that Mohammed Bey had gone, and when you, sir—" he addressed Lincoln Hayes—"and Miss Wayland went to the museum, I looked through the lobby curtains and saw that Slim was standing beside the car outside. You may remember, sir, that I told you he was there when you asked me if he had driven Mohammed Bey."

He turned again to District Attorney Maguire.

"I saw Miss Wayland go upstairs, presumably to her room, and I returned to my room."

"Where's Miss Wayland's room?" Hawley asked.

"She has a bedroom, sitting room, and bathroom almost immediately above us."

"Go ahead."

"I was making up a few accounts when I heard a terrible scream——"

"How long had elapsed?" Maguire's deep voice interrupted.

"I should say, sir, less than ten minutes. But I have no means of being sure on the point. I rushed upstairs and had begun to run across the lobby when I saw Miss Wayland just ahead of me, running in the same direction——"

"Where had she come from?" Lincoln Hayes inquired.

"I don't know, sir. She was heading for the library when I saw her. I called out, but she didn't stop. I saw her race to the library door—as though she were demented, sir. Then suddenly everything went dark. There seemed to be a sudden flash, as though all the lights flared up—and then it all went dark."

"What did you do?" Detective Sergeant Hawley asked.

“I groped for the nearest switch. It was on; I thought the main fuse had blown. I could see no light anywhere. I groped my way downstairs—I know the house very well—and reached my room: the fuse box is there. There were matches on my table, and I struck one. It showed no light . . . but it burned down to my fingers!”

“What do you mean?” Maguire growled.

“Already heard this,” said Lincoln Hayes. “Don’t quite understand, but it corresponds to my own impression.”

“Sounds tall to me,” Hawley drawled. “D’you mean to say you struck a match and it burned down to your fingers but you saw no light?”

“That was what I said.”

There was a momentary awkward pause, then:

“Let it pass,” said Captain Rorke; “queer things have happened here tonight.”

“Evidently.” District Attorney Maguire’s voice was pitched in its lowest register. “I came here as a friend, Hayes, but it’s just as clear as can be that you’re keeping something back. I don’t call that fair.”

There was a second pause.

“You have all the facts,” said Lincoln Hayes, “known to us. We don’t want to confuse you with theories. Theories can come later.”

“Qui-quite!” interrupted Stefanson, “but I th-think I can explain this phe-phe-phenomenon.”

“It wants a bit of explaining,” commented Detective Sergeant Hawley.

“Go ahead, Lurgan,” Maguire growled . . .

There came a sound of footsteps on the stair. It induced a sudden silence.

All eyes watched Dr. Muller as he descended. He did not hurry, but his very atmosphere spelt news. At the foot of the stairs:

“I’m very happy to report——” he began.

Rorke crushed a cigarette in an ash tray and locked his hands behind him.

“—that my brilliant confrère has demonstrated the impossible. He has restored the dead to life. Miss Wayland will live.”

He turned, in his queerly pedantic manner, and remounted the stairs. Rorke walked across the lobby and went out in the direction of the street entrance.

Detective Sergeant Hawley stared, but Lincoln Hayes understood. Yet neither his understanding nor his sympathy found expression upon that immobile face. One would not have supposed him interested in the life or death of Ann Wayland; in the happiness or the sorrow of his friend Patrick Rorke.

As a matter of fact, a dark curtain had been lifted from his mind. The dreadful idea that Ann Wayland had been murdered no longer obtruded itself between his vision and those distant, strange things on which he wanted to focus. He saw again the delicate face, crowned with flame-like hair, of the girl in the theater box; the dark features of her companion, Mohammed Ahmes Bey. He felt again the thrall of the dignified Egyptian; he realized, against his will, that Mohammed Ahmes Bey, in all probability,

was responsible for the occurrences in his house tonight. He challenged himself: where did his interest lie?

And instantly he knew the answer. He was in love with a woman he had seen only at a distance; never before had he known this intense desire for contact with any human being. It was a kind of madness. He had exchanged one long glance with her across the breadth of the theater; he had called to her, and she had seemed to understand. Afterwards, she had given no sign. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

"HE IS CALLED THE BAT"

"THE phone is ringing, sir."

"I don't hear any bell," growled Maguire.

"I'm used to it, sir."

"Answer, Lurgan," Hayes directed.

Lurgan inclined his head and walked across the lobby. As he went out:

"What do you make of that bird?" Maguire asked, addressing Detective Sergeant Hawley.

"He's clever, but he knows more than he tells."

"In regard to his tes-tes-testimony," Stefanson interrupted, "I th-think he's t-telling the ab-absolute truth. He may know s-something b-bearing on the matter, but I think his evidence is sq-square."

Captain Rorke came back. He overheard Stefanson's words.

"I'm with you, Stefanson," he said: "we have to look elsewhere for the clue to this mystery."

Lurgan reappeared.

"Police headquarters, sir," he reported. "Captain Anderson is asking for Mr. Maguire."

Maguire stood up and went out.

Lurgan was crossing the lobby when:

"Hi! you!" The harsh voice was that of Hawley. "Don't go: I've got something else to say."

Lurgan paused, turned, and inclined his head. He stood still.

"I won't say it now," the detective sergeant went on, "but just stay where you are."

Lincoln Hayes and Rorke exchanged glances. Stefanson expressed himself:

"In s-s-some ways, Detective S-Sergeant Haw-Haw-ley, y-you're right," he proclaimed, peering in that officer's direction. "In another w-way—y-you're wr-wrong."

"Thank you," said Hawley. "I guess I can manage my own affairs."

Another awkward hiatus occurred. It was broken by Lincoln Hayes.

"Help yourself to a whisky, Paddy," he directed: "it's just at your elbow. Maguire could do with another one, I think; and I. And Lurgan——"

"Sir?"

"Two more Liebfraumilch small bin for Mr. Stefanson."

"Very good, sir."

"Have you relented, detective sergeant, or still on the water wagon?"

Detective Sergeant Hawley watched Lurgan as he moved across the lobby and disappeared; then:

"I suspect that man, Mr. Hayes," he said harshly, the beady eyes registering anger. "If he makes a getaway, I'm the rabbit that's going to be shot at."

"Don't worry," Hayes replied, "he won't make a getaway. Slim is outside, and so is the driver of the police car. Duties of a host, you know . . . What about a lager beer?"

Detective Sergeant Hawley met the uncompromising stare of those strange, ingenuous eyes for a few moments . . . and then gave in.

"Maybe two fingers of Scotch wouldn't hurt me," he admitted.

Maguire came back; his heavy-jowled face registered anger.

"Listen." He stood in the doorway, his powerful voice audible across the wide lobby. "The *Berengaria* was late. They just turned her around. She sailed at 1 A.M. That is—" he glanced at his wrist watch—"half hour ago. Mohammed Ahmes Bey and his—niece are on board!"

Lincoln Hayes stood up, dusting ash from the lapel of his coat. He was smoking a cigarette.

"That certain?"

"It's certain."

"Good enough."

"Well, what'll I do? All evidence points to the fact that this Egyptian bird, spite of his credentials, has attempted the murder of your secretary and stolen valuable manuscripts from this house. Do we notify the French police and hold him at Cherbourg? It's up to you. You haven't taken me into your confidence. I don't know the strength of these documents that have been stolen. What'll I do? Say the word."

There was a short tense silence. During it, Lurgan returned quietly, carrying two bottles immersed in an ice bucket. Everyone else was watching Lincoln Hayes. Presently he spoke.

"Do nothing," he said. "I make no charge. I have my own plans."

Detective Sergeant Hawley had crossed to a side table and poured himself out a drink. Now, he turned. He was a man who believed in Detective Sergeant Hawley. Lincoln Hayes automatically had earmarked him for success. Hawley was no respecter of persons: he had tremendous self-confidence.

"May I say something, Mr. Maguire?" he interrupted.

"Say what you like."

"What I want to say is this:" (He pointed to Lurgan, who was uncorking one of the long-necked bottles.) "That man's a *spy*!"

Lurgan did not turn; he continued to manipulate the corkscrew. Lincoln Hayes watched the speaker.

"What he said may be straight talking," Hawley went on, "but what he hasn't said is what we want to know. It isn't his fault that murder hasn't been done here tonight. Answer up, Lurgan. Am I right or wrong?"

Lurgan removed the cork, sniffed it, and placed it beside the ice bucket. He turned.

At which moment:

"*Sssh—ssh!*" came a voice from the balcony above.

A hush fell upon the company in the Venetian lobby. All stared upward.

Ann Wayland was coming downstairs!

She wore a flimsy nightrobe and was barefooted. An anxious-faced old nurse hovered behind her, hands outstretched to catch her if she should stumble. Dr. Adderley, from the balcony above, made imperious signs indicating silence.

She reached the foot of the stairs; she looked pale but very beautiful. In the sudden awesome quietude which her presence had created:

"He is called 'the Bat,' " she said, her musical voice seeming to come from far away, her eyes staring straight ahead. "He is as old as Egypt and as wise. His wings hide the light because no one must see it. And so he is called 'the Bat.' To look upon the light is death. . . ."

She extended her hands before her, gropingly, then clasped them, turned, and began to mount the stairs again. The anxious-faced old nurse pressed herself against the wall to allow Ann Wayland to pass—then followed her up.

Adderley's hand remained outstretched, commanding silence. The slender figure, appropriately set in that strange apartment, retreated into the shadows above. On the balcony she stopped and looked down:

"He is called 'the Bat,' " she said softly, her voice echoing about the lobby. "He has great power. . . ."

2

Slow footsteps descending the stairs: the three men in the Venetian lobby stood up.

"I must return to the hospital," said Dr. Adderley, pausing on the bottom step and twirling his monocle upon its pendent cord, "where I am watching a very difficult case." His low-pitched voice had a curiously soothing quality. "You will find me there, however, any time during the next two hours, if there should be any development. Muller is remaining—and the nurse, of course."

He lingered, staring about the lobby. Stefanson, standing near one of the lamps, had been making notes upon a sheet of loose manuscript. Captain Rorke stood by the door leading to the library, and Lincoln Hayes had just dropped back upon the arm of a chair.

"The curious instance of somnambulism which you witnessed earlier tonight," Adderley went on, "had interesting features, and I hoped that something might result from it. Possibly Miss Wayland's words conveyed something to you, Hayes?"

"Very little."

"For certain reasons I suspect post-hypnosis, but we need not go into that now. The patient is sleeping quite peacefully. I anticipate that she will be normal when she wakes."

He sniffed.

"That curious smell seems to have disappeared," he commented.

Lurgan conducted him to the door. Lurgan was quite composed: his composure under the circumstances was phenomenal. He had undergone a grueling examination at the hands of Detective Sergeant Hawley. He had not only survived it successfully, but had reduced that officer to a state of inarticulate wrath by pointing out that since there was not the slightest evidence of attempted murder, the case strictly did not come within the province of the Homicide Bureau.

As Lurgan went out, now, Maguire and the redoubtable Hawley entered, coming from the direction of the museum. They were followed by a busy-looking little man carrying a busy-looking attaché case. He crossed the lobby with never a word and disappeared in the direction of the street door. He had been photographing fingerprints.

"If, as I expect," drawled Hawley, "Master Lurgan's paws moved that mummy lid, then I've got Master Lurgan where I want him."

Lincoln Hayes stood up.

"There is one thing, Sergeant Hawley, which in my opinion Lurgan couldn't have done. He couldn't have called down that plague of darkness. I grabbed him out here. He was a badly frightened man."

"Maybe," Hawley admitted reluctantly. "But he's in on it somewhere. My idea is to search his room."

He glanced angrily at District Attorney Maguire.

"No good," said the latter, shaking his head. "He's too clever a man to have hidden it in his own room. If he took it, it's not there. What kind of a looking thing was it, anyway?"

His deep-set eyes were turned in Lincoln Hayes' direction.

"It was a sheet of ancient and very fragile papyrus," Captain Rorke replied. "It was pinned to the drawing board which you have seen on the library table. There were six steel pins in all; I attached them myself; and during the . . . darkness, those pins were removed. We found them lying on the table. The papyrus had gone—as well as Stefanson's notes."

"Seems to me," Maguire growled, "that, considered from this new angle, *you* don't come off too well, Stefanson!"

Stefanson peered blinkingly at the speaker.

"D-d-don't be so s-silly," he replied. "I had m-moved away from the t-table when we heard the scream. Th-that wasn't *normal* darkness! I sw-switched my torch on—and n-no light came! I didn't m-move after that until I could s-see again. Then I s-saw that everything had gone."

There was an interval of silence.

"So *you* say," drawled Hawley, watching Stefanson. "What you say isn't evidence."

"Any one of us in the room," Lincoln Hayes interrupted dryly, "would find it hard to prove his innocence."

"That's true, Hayes," Maguire acknowledged. "The thing is bewildering. . . . Hello! what's this?"

Dr. Muller was coming downstairs.

He carried a sheet of paper. He reached the lobby level, crossed, and handed the paper to Lincoln Hayes.

"In accordance with Adderley's instructions," he said, "I have not checked the patient in anything she wished to do. A few moments ago she sat up and asked quite normally for a writing block, as she had an important message to send. The nurse called me—and I saw at once by the patient's eyes that she was not awake but still in a state of somnambulism. I handed her a writing block and pencil. She wrote this message, and—then went to sleep again."

He returned upstairs.

Hayes leaned back, holding the sheet to the light.

"I don't like these queer symptoms," said Rorke. "It seems as though some awful thing had temporarily affected her brain."

"I shouldn't worry," Hayes replied. "I have every confidence that when she really wakes she will be quite normal. Just listen to this."

He read aloud:

> "*What I wanted to tell you when you returned from the theater tonight, Lincoln, was this: I overheard Lurgan speaking on the telephone. He said that Paddy Rorke had just arrived with a steel dispatch box. He was talking to Simon Lobb. I heard him ask to speak to him personally. Ann.*"

Someone snapped his fingers so sharply that everybody started.

"What did I say?" Hawley asked harshly. "Did I say that bird was in on it or didn't I?"

3

"What I want to know, Hayes, is just this—" District Attorney Maguire stood glaring at Lincoln Hayes—"You asked me to come along tonight on the strength of our being old friends—because you knew I had authority, if necessary, to gag idle gossip. That's how I read it, anyway. Well, the thing you were afraid of hasn't happened. I'm glad. Nobody more so. There's no case of homicide, but there's a case of theft. Very good. Do you want this inquiry to go on officially, or do you want it to close, now?"

"Close now," said Lincoln Hayes.

"It can't!" said Detective Sergeant Hawley. "Robbery with violence has taken place here, in this house. You owe it to the State to help apprehend the culprit."

Detective Sergeant Hawley was an awkward man.

"It's true, Hayes," growled Maguire.

"In which case," Hayes replied, unmoved, "I suggest we adjourn to the library. Lobby rather public. . . . Seems to be something you want to know, Maguire?"

"There is." Maguire's unflinching glare remained fixed upon the speaker's face. "It's this: Where does Simon Lobb come in?"

"Simon Lobb is president of Lobb's Central Electric."

“I guess he’s your big business rival—but what I want to know is—would the thing stolen from here tonight be of any commercial interest to Simon Lobb?”

“It would,” Captain Rorke interjected. “Suppose we adopt Hayes’ suggestion and assemble in the library?”

“What about Lurgan?” Hawley drawled. “I want a few kind words with that bird.”

“I suggest, Hawley,” said Maguire, “that you send for him, right away, and interview him in the library. Is that O.K. by you, Hayes?”

“Quite. But *I* will conduct the interview.”

Lincoln Hayes pressed a bell. Lurgan appeared, unperturbed and immaculate, from the shadows of a Moorish archway.

“Bring refreshments to the library, Lurgan.”

Lurgan bowed and withdrew. The party went into the library, led by Lincoln Hayes. Hawley brought up the rear, glancing back to the lobby. And as they all gathered in the book-lined apartment:

“I have it in mind that bird’s going to make a getaway,” Hawley muttered.

“I d-d-don’t agree,” Stefanson said.

“You don’t have to!” Hawley snapped back. “It’s not your business, but it is mine.”

“Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen,” said Lincoln Hayes; “looks like being a nasty session.”

Lurgan came in wheeling a silent dinner wagon laden with sandwiches and other snacks: whisky, beer, and two bottles of Rhine wine in an ice bucket.

“Shall I serve, sir?”

“No.” Hayes moved around behind the big table. “But I want a word with you, Lurgan.”

“Very good, sir.”

“This evening,” Hayes went on in his unemotional voice, “just before I returned from the theater, you called Mr. Simon Lobb and gave him certain information. Shall I tell you just what this information was?”

Lurgan retained his magnificent composure, slightly inclined his head, and:

“That is quite unnecessary, sir,” he replied. “I can only suppose that you obtained this information in some way from Miss Wayland. Miss Wayland is very clever and has suspected me for a long time past.”

“Then you don’t deny it?”

“It would be useless to deny it. You could so easily confirm it.”

“Well—I’m damned!” Maguire growled.

Hawley stood, hands in pockets. His expression, as he watched Lurgan, was that of a bird of prey about to pounce. Stefanson looked frankly bewildered. Captain Rorke had taken up his favorite pose on the hearth. He was staring down into the embers.

“In other words, you have been in my household as a spy?”

Lurgan hesitated for a moment, and then:

“In a sense that’s true,” he admitted; “but I have scrupulously attended to my other duties.”

“This bird will choke me,” Hawley drawled, clenching his fists and plunging them deeper into his pockets.

“Am I to suppose,” Lincoln Hayes went on, “that when my former butler, Parker, gave notice, he had really been bought off by Simon Lobb?”

Lurgan slightly shrugged his shoulders.

“I could not say, sir. It is possible that an even better position was found for him.”

“You mean this vacancy was artificially created, so *you* could get in?”

“Something of the kind no doubt took place, sir.”

“Are you regularly employed by Lobb?”

“No, sir. This is the first time I have acted for him.”

“*Acted* for him?” Maguire boomed, his huge voice suddenly raised. “You seem to regard your lousy trade in the same class with that of an attorney . . . *acted for him*!”

“What were your particular duties?”

“My instructions were to report instantly to Mr. Simon Lobb in person the arrival here of any consignment from Egypt or of anyone coming from Egypt. Nothing of a criminal nature, sir, in my activities.”

District Attorney Maguire uttered a sound which resembled a muffled roar, threw up his fists, and walked to the further end of the library.

“I am glad, Mr. Maguire,” Hawley drawled, “that you are beginning to share my views about this bird.”

“Despise your methods, Lurgan,” said Lincoln Hayes.

“I regret that, sir, for they are not uncommon in the business world.”

“If you’re an English butler,” rasped Hawley, “I don’t wonder, in their country homes over there, that they keep battle axes on the wall. Anyway, the game’s up, Lurgan. So be careful what you say. I am going to charge you with the attempted murder of Miss Ann Wayland and with the theft of valuable commercial documents from this room tonight. . . .”

CHAPTER FIVE

EGYPTIAN GODS

WHEN the doors of the Metropolitan Museum opened at ten o'clock on the morning following these strange occurrences in Lincoln Hayes' home, Ulric Stefanson was among the first to enter. In fact, he had been promenading Fifth Avenue fully half an hour earlier.

His memories of the notes upon which he had worked up to the time when darkness had come were provokingly incomplete. He looked to the famous lamp to assist them.

He knew, beyond question, that he had seen and had touched documents of a scientific importance so great that modern industry would be revolutionized by the man who could harness those forces. The greater part of Rorke's translation he had no more than scanned up to the time of its mysterious disappearance.

In the North Wing, where the Egyptian Collection is housed, he learned that the curator, Dr. Bardollf, was not yet arrived. However, the doctor's assistant, who was on duty, immediately proffered his services on glancing at a letter signed "Lincoln Hayes."

A very earnest, bespectacled young Oriental student, guide book in hand, was the only visitor to the Tomb of Perneb, perhaps the most impressive exhibit in the fine collection. As they passed from the Entrance Hall, he was closely studying the inscriptions in the tomb vestibule and apparently comparing them with the account in his guide book.

That curious coldness which seems to belong to places where sibilant echoes abound, struck Stefanson here.

"It's a peculiar fact," said the assistant curator, "but we get more Oriental and Middle-European visitors here than we get Americans! Look at that Egyptian we just passed. As likely as not he was born no great way from where that Tomb came from!"

"The typ-typical New Yorker," Stefanson replied, "is not c-crazy on culture. In London I've m-met men who were nev-never in the B-British Museum or the Tow-Tower of London."

They passed through many rooms until they reached the Seventh Room. Here, part of the Hayes Bequest was housed. Glass-framed around the walls ran the famous Hayes Papyrus.

Although they had not dallied, the earnest young Egyptian was ahead of them. He was bending over an exhibit of early glassware.

The celebrated lamp occupied a small case by itself near the middle of the room. The lamp was in the form of a metal tripod some seven or eight inches high. The tripod supported a ring of some unknown substance: it had puzzled the specialists of America and Europe, but it was generally believed to be composed of an unidentifiable vegetable gum. The diameter of this ring was rather more than three and a half inches. Below it was a second and much smaller ring of the same substance. Incredibly slender wires—composed of an alloy of copper and some other, unknown, metal—passed from the hollow legs of the tripod to the smaller ring and then, in an intricate pattern, up to

the larger. At all points of contact they were delicately "insulated" by a covering of the strange gum. Many of them were broken or missing.

A few fragments of a substance resembling fine Venetian glass lay in a saucer beside the tripod. A "reconstruction," drawn by Dr. Bardollf (with acknowledgements to the late Thomas Edison and to Senator Marconi—both of whom had been deeply interested in the subject), occupied a small easel beside the tripod.

The card inside the case read as follows:

EARLY EGYPTIAN LAMP
(*Old Kingdom, circa 2895-2500 B.C.*)

Discovered by the Hayes Harvard Expedition, in 1921, in the tomb of an unknown priest near Sakkara (Ancient Memphis). The principle of this lamp is lost.

"You know," said the junior curator, producing a formidable bunch of keys, "there have been several attempts to steal this thing—heaven knows what for."

"I know th-there was one, s-some years ago."

"A night watchman was nearly murdered the first year we had it. He caught a masked man at work on the glass. Man got away, unfortunately. Old Hayes used to keep it in a safe, didn't he?"

"I b-believe so—I d-don't know."

"Should have thought you were about sick of it," the curator went on, vainly hunting for the wanted key. "You borrowed it for a month, two years back, didn't you?"

"Y-yes. I d-don't want to t-take it away this time. I m-merely want to con-confirm one p-point."

He was intensely excited. The junior curator's struggles with his keys was reducing him to frenzy. He was satisfied that he stood on the threshold of a new scientific world—new to modern civilization because the ancient past had buried it. Oddly, he experienced a sense of *fear*. Those strange forms depicted in the Hayes Papyrus seemed to be conferring together—moving, subtly, from point to point on the walls.

The "Old Kingdom" was watching him. . . .

At long last the right key was found; the case was opened.

"Let me lift it out," said the assistant curator. "I'm responsible for the thing—and it's very fragile."

He belonged to the unimaginative school of archæology.

Excepting the earnest young Cairene, not another visitor at that early hour had penetrated to the Seventh Egyptian Room. The student, guide book in hand, was absorbed in contemplation of a case containing rings, necklaces, and other feminine decorations, forming part of the Hayes Bequest.

The assistant curator unlocked and raised the lid of the case containing the lamp at roughly the same moment that Dr. Bardollf came striding through a private doorway in the Fourth Room and crossed the Sixth. He had just arrived and had been notified of Stefanson's visit.

"Hayes Lamp," as it was known to the Museum staff, was a pet exhibit of the doctor's: he resented its being disturbed.

Dr. Bardollf had just entered the Seventh Egyptian Room when it happened. . . .

The junior curator, fragile lamp in hand, was on the point of turning to Stefanson, when the Egyptian student, who had approached very closely, uttered a strangled scream, clutched at his throat, and staggered——

Foam was emitted from his lips. He threw his arms out, seeking support, missed the assistant's shoulders . . . but grasped the lamp!

Wrenching it free with the frenzied strength of an epileptic, he crashed to the floor. . . .

Writhing, foaming, he lashed about—and tore the delicate tripod to pieces between contorted fingers!

Emitting a wild-animal roar, Dr. Bardollf—big, bearded, powerful—sprang upon the Egyptian. The assistant curator joined in the attack. Ulric Stefanson, staggered by the suddenness of the thing, stood peering, blinking.

The victim of this dreadful ailment had, temporarily, the strength of a demon. Dr. Bardollf—his face white with despair—looked up at Stefanson.

"You!" he roared—"get a physician!"

Ulric Stefanson groaned and ran out.

The Hayes Lamp was a memory. Its fragments lay littered about the floor. . . .

2

"That's Mr. Maguire," said Lincoln Hayes. "Open, Slim. Show into library."

Slim, the chauffeur, who had temporarily taken over butler's duties, crossed the lobby to open the street door. Hayes walked into the library.

Paddy Rorke was there, reading a morning paper. He looked up. He was spruce but haggard.

"Hullo, Lincoln!" he said, a ghost of the cheery grin appearing. "Seems I was first man in?"

Lincoln Hayes slapped him on the shoulder.

"Had breakfast, Paddy?"

"Rather. Ham and eggs."

"Then don't talk cricket. World's dullest game. Maguire's here."

"Where's Stefanson?"

"Metropolitan. Joining us later."

He dropped into an armchair.

Maguire walked into the library.

"It won't have done that British butler any harm to cool his heels in a cell for a night," he remarked. "I guess they'll get no more evidence, but he's safer where we know we can find him. He comes from one of the big private agencies, but he won't

admit it—nor would they. When this blows over they'll just shift him to a different area."

"Morning, Maguire," said Captain Rorke. "Hope you slept well. Had a foul night, personally."

He leaned on the overmantel, newspaper in hand. Lincoln Hayes, from the depths of the big armchair, watched the district attorney with no expression whatever upon his face.

"Glad you're here," he said, pointing to a laden wagon.

Maguire nodded and crossed in that direction.

"When the party broke up last night," Hayes went on, "you seemed to remain doubtful, Maguire, as to what reason Simon Lobb could have for employing detectives to shadow me and to shadow Rorke. We were all tired. The answer is simple: Stolen papyrus contains a formula for a system of lighting."

"What kind of lighting?"

"Don't know. Something better than any invented by modern science. If anyone knew how to do it and did it, Western States Electric and Lobb's Central could scrap their plants right away."

"Hell!" said Maguire, "that's talking big stuff!"

"It's big, beyond a doubt," murmured Captain Rorke. "Bigger even than I thought. It's my opinion, Maguire, that an agent of Simon Lobb was covering me in Egypt."

"Sure of it," said Hayes. "Accounts for attempts which you outlined."

"It accounts for *one* of them," Rorke agreed quietly.

"Why not both?"

"Well—I think I told you that the man from whom I got the thing was hauled out of the Nile on the following day. He was apparently a Copt. But the most curious feature, which the police never succeeded in clearing up, was this—" he paused to light a cigarette—"the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic, *akhut*, meaning the rising sun, was branded on his body just over his heart."

"Branded?"

"Yes. That was what it looked like. I know the Cairo coppers very well. They thought this case would interest me. Hence my glimpse of the defunct."

"Had it been done before death or after?"

The speaker was District Attorney Maguire.

"Long before. The doctor who examined him was of opinion that it had been there for a great part of his life."

"You mean he belonged to some secret order?" Maguire suggested.

Captain Rorke nodded. He was placing a lighter in his pocket. Hayes noticed how haggard he had grown since the previous night.

"That man's murder," Rorke went on quietly, "for he was certainly murdered, wouldn't be the work of a private New York detective agency, do you think?"

"No," said Maguire, "I don't think."

“The man who climbed into my window at Shepheard’s one night was probably an agent of Simon Lobb. But whoever tried to hypnotize me, another night——”

“Hypnotize you?”

“Exactly—was out of another stable, I believe. And then there was a third attempt.”

“Mentioned it before,” came the monotonous voice of Lincoln Hayes. “Should welcome details.”

“It occurred in the train to Port Said,” Rorke went on, “when I was leaving Egypt. As I have already explained to you, Lincoln, when the steel box wasn’t locked in the hotel safe I never let it out of my sight. I had it, now, in a small suitcase, which I carried myself and placed in the rack above my seat in the Pullman car. It was just about dusk; my ship sailed early on the following morning, and I intended to spend the night in Port Said. Very few people were traveling—in fact, it was not until the train was actually pulling out that anyone entered the compartment of the car in which I was seated. Then, a woman came in.

“A native porter was carrying some small baggage, and the woman took a seat at a table only one removed from my own. Of her type, she was, I think, one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen in my life.

“She wore a coat with a turned-up fur collar which formed a frame altogether too harsh for her delicate features, which were flower-like; perfect. I thought of a moss rose. Her eyes were particularly wonderful—very large and luminous. And her smart little hat did nothing to conceal the beauty of her hair. She spoke to the attendant in Arabic.

“But I was completely baffled in my attempt to identify her real nationality. In fact, I realized that I was staring rudely, because it had dawned upon me that I had never before seen a woman of quite this type.”

He paused, knocking ash from a cigarette into the log fire, and staring with his cold blue eyes at Lincoln Hayes.

“In spite of her almost unreal beauty, her hair was truly her crowning glory. It was neither Titian, auburn, nor golden. I can only describe it as flame-colored.”

Lincoln Hayes looked up sharply. Not one line of that Sioux-like face changed; nothing even vaguely resembling an expression indicated the fact that his heart was beating faster. Rorke had paused, but:

“Go ahead, Paddy,” Hayes said tonelessly.

“You know now, Lincoln, why I said last night that I was beginning to wonder about the identity of the people anxious to secure possession of the papyrus. When the train started, this woman and myself were the only occupants of the car. This was peculiar. Perhaps only a man with an intense curiosity about details would have noted the fact that all the other tables were marked ‘Engaged’!

“After a while, I rang for a waiter and ordered a whisky-and-soda. The tables had been laid for dinner. As I did so I caught the eye of the beautiful traveler, and she smiled quite unmistakably. I stepped along to her table, introduced myself, and asked her to join me for dinner.”

“You’re a fast worker,” Maguire commented.

"A man who has traveled so much alone as I have done," Rorke replied, "learns that most conventions are stupid. She received the offer in the spirit in which it was made. But she said: 'Would you mind coming to my table, instead? If you will please sit down, I shall be delighted. It's so silly for two people to travel in solitude just because there is nobody to introduce them!'

"She was altogether charming. She spoke with a faint accent, the character of which quite eluded me. But it is certain that if I had not had other interests I should have been desperately in love with her in the course of the next hour. She was one of the three most fascinating women I have ever met in my life. She introduced herself as Mrs. Fulton but volunteered no other particulars.

"She was sipping one of those gruesome cocktails, warm, and poured out of a glass bottle, which are served on these trains, and I was thinking about ordering another whisky-and-soda, at about the time that the train pulled into Helwân.

"I suggested that there must be a lot of Air Force leave-going, or something, owing to the number of reserved tables, and that we might expect a crowded car at any moment. Then I discovered that I had left my cigarette case on my own table. I stood up to go back and get it.

"One look was enough. . . . The suitcase containing the steel box had disappeared!"

"Sympathize," said Lincoln Hayes: "every man is caught off his guard once in a while."

"I just made a plunge for the Arab attendant. My knowledge of Arabic served me; otherwise, frankly, I should have been done. A gentleman, he told me, from the adjoining car, who had lost a suitcase, had come in while I was talking to Mrs. Fulton and had claimed my case as his own.

"Was your case initialed?" growled Maguire.

"It was. But the stranger had assured the attendant that the initials were his! It had all been done without attracting my attention. Very clever! I barged into the adjoining car, the Arab at my heels. He pointed the man out: a stout Egyptian who was preparing to leave the car. He carried my suitcase in his hand!"

"What did you do?" Maguire asked.

"Very simple. There was no time for formalities—he might have been mistaken or he might not. I just grabbed the suitcase and said, 'Excuse me, sir, you have made a mistake.' "

"What did the Egyptian do?"

"He was disposed to contest the matter, but I had got hold of the suitcase before the argument started! He left the car with his other gear, and I went back."

"And—the woman?" Lincoln Hayes queried.

"She had gone too! She had left by the other door, taking all her light baggage with her. I had the car to myself. Nobody came in. I stared out of the window, but I could see no trace of Mrs. Fulton nor of the ruffled Egyptian from whom I had reclaimed the doings. Somehow—" he stared at Lincoln Hayes—"I don't think attempt number three was directed by a New York detective agency."

There was a short silence, and then:

"Nor do I," said Lincoln Hayes. "Any further trouble, Paddy?"

"No chance. I just lived with that box until I got here. It was locked in the manager's safe at the Eastern Exchange; it was locked up on the *Kurachi* to Southampton; and I slipped right across to the *Berengaria*, which was leaving in twelve hours, and locked it in the purser's safe on board. I drove down here last night with two ship's officers as escort. Lurgan served them a drink apiece—and they went uptown to play.

"There's more still, Lincoln. But the facts are these: We have *two* enemies—Simon Lobb is one of them."

3

Ann Wayland opened her eyes and without stirring tried to puzzle out why a kindly-looking old nurse was seated in the armchair by the window, reading. To Ann, this problem was very difficult. Why should a nurse be in her room?

However, she liked the look of the nurse very much, and so she decided that she must be there for some friendly reason.

She closed her eyes again and began thinking hard. She felt perfectly well; normal in every way. But she experienced some difficulty in recalling what had happened on the previous evening.

Paddy Rorke had arrived long after she had given him up. She glowed happily at the recollection of their meeting. There had never really been any doubt, from the first time that she had set eyes upon him. But she had imposed one more journey to Egypt before she made up her mind. Because, in a way, she had believed herself to be in love with Lincoln.

Long before Paddy's return she had realized that her heart had followed him to Egypt. Yes—Paddy had appeared, after she had given up hope of seeing him until the following morning. And he had brought a wonderful papyrus in a steel box! A papyrus which, he had told her, was going to revolutionize science. She had seen his letters to Lincoln about it, months before, and had sent off long answers.

Then, what had happened?

She opened her eyes and looked again. The old nurse was still reading by the window. Something very queer indeed must have happened. Ah, of course! It began to come back to her. Lincoln had come home from the theater, bringing a strange Egyptian with him—a very dignified and courtly Egyptian who wore slightly tinted glasses. And then—what?

Of course! the most important thing of all! Just before Lincoln's return, and quite by accident, she had overheard Lurgan, in the telephone room, call Simon Lobb. She had heard him tell Lobb, whom she detested, that Paddy Rorke had arrived with a steel box.

From that point onward everything was clear enough, up to the time when that Egyptian, whose name she could not recall, had been summoned to the telephone.

When she and Lincoln had returned to the museum, the Egyptian had gone. After that she had gone up to her sitting room. Owing to Lincoln's abrupt manner, she had had no opportunity of telling him about Lurgan. Lincoln was entirely absorbed in whatever he was doing in the library with Paddy and Ulric Stefanson.

Good heavens! the horror of what had occurred next reappeared before her mind terrifically.

She sprang up in bed. . . .

The nurse rose from her chair and crossed.

"My dear!" she said, and she had a sweetly sympathetic voice, "what is it? There's nothing to be frightened about."

Ann clung to her for a moment, trembling wildly. It was good to have her there. If she had been alone, Ann thought that she must have screamed at the recollection.

It was this:

She had found that she had no cigarettes in her room and had then remembered that she had left them in her handbag in the museum. She had gone down to get it. There was no one in the lobby, and she was just crossing, when *something* had come out from the arched doorway which led to the museum. . . .

At first it had shown as a shadowy figure, so that she had pulled up sharply. Then, as the shadow had stepped forward into the lighted lobby, Ann had realized that the figure was that of an Ancient Egyptian god . . . not a man in fancy dress, but a supernormal being!

He was a realization of one of the figures from the wall paintings that decorated the museum. His head was the head of some animal or bird—she could not be sure which. But his blazing eyes, which were like lamps, were fixed upon hers. She felt that if she sustained their glance for another moment she must become petrified.

She had screamed—turned—and run for the library.

There was no sound, but she knew that that presence was behind her . . . those green eyes blazing in the darkness, like the eyes of some nocturnal beast. . . .

CHAPTER SIX

PERAZ, CAIRO

"THIS is how I should sum up," said District Attorney Maguire, in his deep booming voice.

Dusk was creeping into the library. Maguire, presidentially, sat behind the big table, a number of notes before him. Rorke leaned upon the mantel, gazing down into the log fire. Stefanson sat in an armchair staring at the speaker, and Lincoln Hayes was standing before one of the heavily draped windows, looking at Ann Wayland half reclining on a settee in front of him.

"The possibilities of this light, in which, personally, I don't believe, struck Simon Lobb a long time ago. His man, Dr. Steiner, according to Stefanson here, made drawings of the lamp in the Hayes Bequest as long as a year ago. Also, there's evidence suggesting he tried to steal it. Both Steiner and Stefanson failed to make any sense of this lamp. . . .

"Then Rorke, here, blundered onto a certain papyrus. He secured it. I still await details of this transaction, but he secured it. Murder followed. He set to work on it. There was some leakage on a cable—and Simon Lobb got to know what was afoot. He instructed Donoghue's International Detective Agency to act in the matter. I am guessing Donoghue's, because Lurgan won't say a word. But I think I'm right. Rorke was covered in Cairo. Three attempts to secure the papyrus failed. Months ahead of Rorke's return here they bought off Parker, your former butler, and put Lurgan in—one of their agents. Lurgan sticks to his story—we haven't got a word out of him. But his position in the case is clear enough.

"Owing to precautions taken by Rorke, they fail all along the line till last night, here. Then, they succeed. In case Stefanson had remembered enough of what he had seen to be able to piece the crazy formula together with the aid of the Hayes Lamp . . . they covered Stefanson—and smashed the lamp!"

"There's absolutely not a scrap of evidence," said Rorke, "that this Egyptian smasher from Columbia had ever even heard of Lobb; you can pin nothing on him. His record as a student over there is clean enough. He has been certified an epileptic subject. But although I'm sure that what he did was done deliberately—he wasn't acting for Lobb."

"Agree," came Hayes' cold voice.

Maguire growled contemptuously and then went on as though he had never been interrupted:

"I say that Simon Lobb has got the papyrus—that's my opinion, and I'm sticking to it."

Ann Wayland looked up at Lincoln Hayes. He bent forward and squeezed her shoulder reassuringly.

"Speaking as a practical man of affairs," he said, "your view has points of interest. But you are shutting your eyes to certain other facts."

"What facts?" Maguire growled.

"The th-things that h-happened last night," Stefanson burst in, "c-couldn't be managed by D-Donoghue's Agency, or any n-normal agency. D-Detectives aren't m-magicians. S-somebody, last night, b-burned the atmosphere. D-Donoghue's can't do th-that."

"Wait a minute," Maguire growled, "wait a minute. I've heard everybody's story about what happened last night, and it seems to me it could be explained by a clever man just switching the lights off in three apartments."

"What about the bright light seen by Slim?" Rorke interjected, looking down into the logs.

"It's one man's word—he might have imagined it."

"Ruling out Lurgan's evidence," Rorke went on, "which personally I believe to be true, consider my own. Following a sudden and complete darkness, the light didn't come up again with a jerk: it returned slowly. Also, as I can testify, and so can Lincoln, the lights were never switched off! And you yourself have checked the fact that there was no failure at the main switch."

"That's true," Maguire admitted.

"Then," came Lincoln Hayes' voice, "there is the case of Ann. She has told us what happened and what she thinks she saw. Read it how you like; or merely focus on what we know happened *to her*. You have seen Adderley, and you have seen Muller. What's your theory of the condition in which she was found last night?"

"Lurgan might have given her a sniff of some anesthetic."

"Theory doesn't cover facts," said Lincoln Hayes. "Nor does it cover what we found in the museum. Lurgan wasn't hiding behind that sarcophagus lid: he was on duty, later. Someone else was hiding there. You wanted to hold Mohammed Ahmes Bey at Cherbourg—but I said No. You don't forget that, do you, Maguire?"

"I don't forget it, but I've been thinking it over. I had an idea, as my examination of Slim indicated, that this Egyptian was in the job up to his neck. But further thought has made me wonder if I was right. There's such a thing as the long arm of coincidence. I'm inclined to believe, Hayes, that Lurgan, and perhaps somebody else we haven't met yet, could explain all the mystery of last night."

"N-n-not the li-light and the s-smell," Stefanson insisted.

"Nor Dr. Adderley's opinion and consequent treatment regarding Ann," said Hayes. "He believes she was subjected to a violent electrical shock."

"He may be right and he may be wrong," said Maguire grudgingly, "but he certainly got her on her feet again."

He beamed at the charming convalescent with a geniality which was almost ferocious.

"Shall see Lurgan myself," Lincoln Hayes went on. "Then he'll have to be set free. There's no charge against him."

"As you say," Maguire growled.

"I've re-recalled enough of the for-formula," Stefanson burst in excitedly, "to sh-show that it's a r-revolutionary s-system. The latter p-part, I hadn't g-g-got to. But

there's s-something in it."

"I realized that, Stefanson," said Rorke, turning, "when I first began to work on the papyrus. Unfortunately, I can be of very little use to you, even if my memory served in regard to the facts that you lack."

"A p-peep at those lig-ligaments in the lamp—might have d-done the trick!"

"So *somebody* evidently knew," Ann murmured in a low voice.

"The papyrus," said Lincoln Hayes, "and your translation, Paddy, are on their way back to Egypt."

"I agree."

"There's not a darned thing," boomed Maguire, "to show that they are not in the possession of Simon Lobb! Except that juggling with the light, nothing happened last night, nothing of which we have acceptable evidence, which could not have been worked by a couple of clever agents. As to Rorke's experiences in Egypt, what happened at Shepheard's and what happened on the train, Donoghue's might easily be responsible for the lot."

"Nevertheless," said Lincoln Hayes, "I don't think Donoghue's were; and I am going to ask you, Stefanson, to be ready to sail for England tomorrow, and you, Paddy. You, Ann, had better come along. Going to be useful."

Maguire stood up. He had just put a cigar into his mouth, but now he took it out.

"Do you mean to say," he blurted, "that you're going off to tail this Egyptian, Mohammed Bey? D'you mean to say you think you've got a million-to-one chance of recovering the stuff that way?"

Ann Wayland suddenly stood up.

"Excuse me, Lincoln," she said, and walked out of the library.

Hayes stared hard for a moment, and then, directing his attention to Maguire:

"I have no other chance," he replied, "and it's worth a fight."

"It's worth all the m-money in the B-Bank of England," Stefanson interjected.

Maguire growled angrily and lighted his cigar.

Very unobtrusively, Captain Rorke strolled out and followed Ann Wayland. She had gone to the telephone room. . . . Without any pricking of conscience, because he had noticed the expression in her eyes as she had left the library, he stood listening at the door.

She was dictating a cable.

"To Peraz, Cairo, Egypt," her clear voice reached him. "Lincoln Hayes leaving for Europe on Saturday. Stop. Proceeding from England to Egypt. Signed Ann Wayland."

CHAPTER SEVEN

HATASU

LITTLE more than a week later, Lincoln Hayes looked down upon the traffic of Piccadilly.

He knew London well, always came to this hotel, and always occupied the same suite. It was on the second floor, so that from the windows of his sitting room he could watch the life in the streets below, which fascinated him, while he found the hum of the traffic, so gentle in comparison with that of New York, merely soothing.

He was smoking a cigar and, hands in pockets, staring down at the ever changing picture, no expression whatever upon his face. Ann Wayland was off on a shopping expedition with Paddy Rorke.

Hayes had noted latterly that wherever Ann might be Rorke would not be far away. He knew nothing of the strange episode of the cable to "Peraz, Cairo." Rorke had remained silent, preferring to watch. . . . But "Peraz, Cairo" had never received the message.

Stefanson was at the London offices of Western States Electric, where he had friends. Wintry dusk was descending upon Piccadilly, and lights began to peep from many windows. Shop fronts and illuminated signs sprang to life, reminding Hayes suddenly of New York. Mentally, he lingered there awhile, lingered so long that in spirit he found himself in Mrs. Mornington Dobbs' box at the first night of *False Gods*. He stared again across the theater at an opposite box and saw those delicate features which had so strangely bewitched him: the flaming hair, the satin shoulders.

A wisp of smoke arose from the end of his cigar, but no expression crossed the stoic features of the man standing in the darkening room, to indicate that he was struggling to bring his mind back from that too fascinating contemplation—the contemplation of a vision he might never again behold.

Oddly enough, the delusion persisted.

He had dismissed the chimera of New York, blotted out the crowded theater. But, magically, *the woman remained*!

The thin-lipped mouth tightened. His hands, plunged in his pockets, were clenched now. Otherwise, he did not stir. Yet he was fighting against what he believed to have become an obsession—fighting for reality, for freedom from this mysterious thrall of a kind which he had never before known.

In little more than thirty seconds he had resolved part of the mystery.

A room in the big hotel on the other side of Piccadilly and on a level with his own had suddenly been lighted up. He could see a maid moving about there. And a woman was seated at a dressing table in such a position that it was her reflection in the mirror, and not herself, that he saw. . . .

She wore a light wrap with some kind of fur trimming about the shoulders; otherwise her neck and arms were bare. She was bending slightly forward as he

remembered the woman in the box—and, as it seemed to him, looking through the mirror directly into his eyes!

A pendant light turned her hair to flame. She sat there motionless.

Could she possibly have seen him?

Lincoln Hayes' jaw muscles protruded more than usual. He turned his eyes sideways and glanced slightly downward. The hotel floodlights had just been turned on. Standing where he stood, it was quite possible that he was visible from the room over the way.

The maid drew heavy curtains before the window. The vision was lost.

But it was *she*—Hatasu—the companion of Mohammed Ahmes Bey!

Lincoln Hayes was not dressing for dinner. He left London on the following day, and the party had decided to dine informally in the grill room and to go on to a music hall. He took his cigar from his mouth and placed it in an ash tray. He had bitten right through the end.

He moved quietly to a side table and took up the telephone.

"Get me through to the Ritz Hotel," he directed in his monotonous voice.

He waited, staring in the direction of the window, now a frame for many dancing lights. Presently:

"Ritz Hotel," said a man's voice.

"Reception Office."

A momentary delay, and then:

"Hello, Reception, Ritz Hotel."

"Please put me through to the apartment of Mohammed Ahmes Bey."

A further delay, and then another voice:

"You asked for someone called Mohammed Ahmes Bey?"

"Yes."

"No one of that name is staying here."

"Thank you."

Lincoln Hayes replaced the instrument upon its rest.

Selecting and lighting a fresh cigar, he went out into the lobby and turned up the light. He put on a fur-lined overcoat, for Lincoln Hayes was curiously susceptible to climatic chill in England; and carrying a soft felt hat, very wide in the brim, and of a pattern specially made for him by a firm on Fifth Avenue, he went out to the elevator. These hats were irreverently known by his associates as "Hayes' stacks."

A few minutes later the tall figure came through the swing doors of the Ritz Hotel entrance. Hayes knew the place well. He knew a seat from which he could command a view of any resident leaving the building. He dropped down in a big armchair, throwing his coat open; his hat lay on the carpet beside him. A waiter came up.

"Pink gin," said Lincoln Hayes.

The waiter retired, and Hayes looked about him.

It was only three minutes after legal "opening time," but there were two or three parties, mostly composed of women, already sipping cocktails at neighboring tables. Hayes' cold stare rested upon every face in turn but discovered nothing of interest. Every time the elevator descended he glanced sharply in that direction.

Just as the waiter brought him his pink gin a man came in from the street.

Hayes watched him.

Beneath a dark overcoat he had a glimpse of dinner kit and, by the cut of the collar, knew that the man was an American. He carried a soft black hat which he placed upon the carpet beside him as Hayes had done, taking a seat almost facing the latter. The same waiter appeared, but the man shook his head gloomily.

In fact, he was as gloomy-looking a man as Lincoln Hayes remembered ever to have seen: very pale and cadaverous. He was staring miserably about him as if expecting to recognize someone there. His gaze lingered longer on Hayes than on anyone else, and as the latter sipped his pink gin and set the glass down upon a little table before him, the newcomer stood up and very diffidently approached.

"Excuse me if I'm wrong," he said, and Lincoln Hayes decided that the man came from New York, "but you don't happen to be Mr. McKinley of the American Express Company?"

"I don't."

"Sorry!" said the man sadly. "Excuse me," and went back to his seat.

Lincoln Hayes continued to watch the elevator abstractedly. He was surprised, presently, on glancing aside, to find the pale-faced stranger standing at his elbow.

"I thought, maybe," the man said, in his pathetic way, "that I ought to apologize for speaking to you."

"Not at all."

"You see, it's this way with me: I was told at the American Express down there on the Haymarket that their Mr. McKinley would meet me here sharp at six. It's kind of awkward, you understand, because he has my passport as well as my rail and steamer coupons. That's all it was. That's how I came to make the mistake."

He smiled sadly and went back to his chair. Then another idea seized him, apparently. He stood up and walked slowly away. Hayes could see him talking to a hall porter . . . at which moment he entirely forgot the existence of the pale stranger.

The woman he was waiting for stepped out of the elevator.

She wore a black fur coat, the collar turned up, so that it partially concealed her shimmering hair. A page ran to the door and swung it into position. Clearly, she was going out; in fact, even as Lincoln Hayes stood up, the door revolved and she was outside on the steps.

Picking up his hat and leaving his drink unfinished, Lincoln Hayes followed.

Hatasu—he could never forget that strange Egyptian name—was just entering a car drawn up to the steps. It was a Daimler, and, he suspected, hired.

As it drove away, the interior lights were extinguished; and he had an impression—but could not be sure—that those wonderful eyes had looked out at him for a moment.

A taxi man on the neighboring rank raised his hand, and Hayes signaled to him to pull across.

"You saw the Daimler that just went off?"

"Yes, sir."

"Follow it. It should be easy enough in the traffic."

"Right-oh, sir."

They started. The Daimler had turned left and was heading in the direction of Hyde Park Corner. There was a fair amount of traffic all along by the Park: no difficulty in keeping the Daimler in sight. The taxi was a new one and capable of a fair turn of speed. So much assured, Lincoln Hayes leaned back, cigar in mouth, and asked himself the question: what were his plans?

Primarily (he could not deny it) he sought an opportunity to speak to Hatasu. Next, he was anxious to know if her journey led to Mohammed Ahmes Bey. He was aware that he could learn at leisure in what name she was booked at the hotel, but by covering her movements he might learn far more.

They came to Knightsbridge, where the Daimler turned left into Sloane Street; on to Chelsea Bridge and over it. A floodlighted smokestack of the power station on the opposite bank reminded him of a gigantic Egyptian pylon.

Through suburbs with which he was quite unacquainted the chase led. The Daimler maintained a moderate speed, and the taxi driver experienced no difficulty in keeping it in sight. Lincoln Hayes began to wonder. Where could Hatasu be going? He had not bargained for so long a journey. And once in the open country he feared that the quarry would hopelessly outdistance him. Yet for the open country it appeared that the Daimler was bound.

They passed Cheam—as he learned from a signpost—and presently found themselves on a by-pass. For one thing he was grateful. The driver of the Daimler showed no disposition to increase his speed. They came out onto a heath or common. But Lincoln Hayes had lost his bearings. He opened the little window in front, and:

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Banstead Downs, sir."

"Where does this road go to?"

"Brighton!" the man replied cheerfully; "but we come to Reigate first."

"Keep right on."

He reclosed the window. He had never been to Brighton, but he knew that it was not a seaport, so that a momentary fear that Hatasu might be going to join a ship was dispelled. He consulted his watch.

Seven o'clock. Paddy and Ann would be back at the hotel now, wondering what had become of him. However. . . .

The car ahead consistently kept to the main road until, at a point where a footbridge crossed, it suddenly turned left into a narrow lane. Lincoln Hayes began to wonder again. In spite of intervening traffic, and later, of open road, there had been no difficulty whatever in the pursuit. It was very queer. The taxi driver, in turn, plunged into the lane with its overhanging trees. Hayes spoke through the window.

"Where does this lead to?"

"I don't know, sir. First time I've ever been here."

"Go right ahead."

The lane developed a steep gradient. The night was misty and moonless. And to the right, below what looked like a sheer drop, lay a deep wooded valley, hills rising dimly in the distance. The lane grew more and more narrow; there were only two houses in it. Then, at its foot, came a little group of habitations and a tract of common land with a windmill away to the left. . . .

Right the chase led, and right again up another narrow, badly paved lane, and past a gray stone house guarded by gray walls. The going became very rough. The rear lights of the Daimler could still be discerned ahead. . . .

On they went. Then the taxi man pulled up with a jerk, opened the window, and:

"They've stopped, sir!" he reported.

"Back there—there's an open gate," Lincoln Hayes said, "where it has a board up, 'To be sold.' Wait there."

"Right-oh, sir," the taxi man replied, that intuitive knowledge of human nature which belongs to his kind telling him that his fare was in no danger.

Lincoln Hayes walked on slowly; then pulled up, standing well in shadow. The Daimler, he saw, had stopped before a low-pitched cottage—white plastered, gray roofed. Some room on the ground floor seemed to be illuminated, but he had an imperfect view. Clearly, however, he saw Hatasu descend and go in at a little gateway.

A moment later the Daimler pulled off and disappeared around a further bend at the end of the lane. Lincoln Hayes walked on.

He was a man who took big chances but who always had at least two lines of retreat prepared before he took them. He entered the gate of the white cottage and saw that a paved path led around to a porch on the right. He walked on without hesitation.

The woman called Hatasu had gone in two minutes before.

He passed the porch and found himself in a small garden. A lighted window cast a broad path of light across the paving and over the edge of the flower beds, where now no flowers remained. He moved clear of the band of light, and away from the cottage, until he had a prospect of a large kitchen garden beyond a hedge, an orchard, and an uprising green slope upon the crest of which was the gray stone house.

This, then, was a gardener's cottage, attached to a larger property.

The thing became more queer minute by minute.

What could this elegant woman, who less than an hour before had left the Ritz Hotel, be doing in such a place?

A faint sound brought him sharply about—that sound which is made by curtains hung on rings being drawn along a rod. The band of light was blotted out, only one

spearlike streak remaining.

Hayes stepped quietly forward and peered in at the chink between the two drawn curtains. And what he saw increased his wonderment.

The room, which was larger than he had anticipated, was furnished with Oriental simplicity: carpets, rugs, cushions, and some few pieces of Arab woodwork. A perforated bronze lamp, apparently fitted with electric light, illuminated it—and Hatasu, her fur cloak discarded, and now revealed in a sheath-like evening frock, sat in a low chair by a little table which supported a brass tray.

She was making coffee over a spirit lamp. A log fire burned in a metal basket set back on an open brick hearth.

Lincoln Hayes watched her for a minute—two minutes—with rapt attention. She was more satisfyingly beautiful than even he had supposed. Her arms and shoulders were perfectly molded; her slightest movement was graceful; and the glory of her hair dazzled him.

He moved back and looked up at the other windows. All were in darkness. Immediately he determined upon his next step.

Walking around to the porch he looked for and found a bell; he pressed it. Silence followed—to be broken by a sound of light footsteps beyond the door.

Then, the door was opened. . . .

Hatasu stood there, in some shadowy place which lay beyond, looking out at him.

"Possibly I intrude," said Lincoln Hayes, "but I hope not. Have urgent reasons for being here."

"I know," she replied.

Her voice was very low and possessed an oddly soothing quality. She continued to watch him but did not move.

"Would it be possible to have ten minutes' private conversation with you?"

"Of course. Please come in."

Hayes entered. Hatasu walked ahead of him and drew a portière aside. He found himself in the room where the log fire burned. As he entered, she turned and smiled.

"You see," she said, "Mr. Lincoln Hayes, I was expecting you!"

3

Some simple statements have the power of a blow.

Lincoln Hayes stood upon the threshold of the room looking at Hatasu. Externally, he was unmoved, but his heart was beating faster. He understood, now, the ease with which in a London taxicab he had succeeded in following the Daimler; but there was much that he did *not* understand.

Hatasu was kneeling on a cushion, pouring out coffee. There were *two* cups on the tray. She looked up at him—and her smile was the smile of a young girl.

"Perhaps it is a strange time for coffee," she said, speaking with only the faintest trace of accent, "but it has become a custom of my country, and I know you love my

country."

"Thank you," said Lincoln Hayes.

"Won't you please sit down?"

She pushed forward the low chair. Hayes, laying his coat and hat on a teak chest which stood just inside the door, crossed and seated himself. Hatasu handed him one of the tiny cups. Their eyes met for a moment, but she dropped back on the cushions and settled herself comfortably.

"You mean," said Hayes, in his dry, monotonous voice, "that you meant me to come here tonight?"

"Yes."

Hatasu looked up at him. Her eyes, he saw now, resembled deep violet pansies flecked with gold; her lashes, which he supposed to be artificially darkened, were incredibly thick and long. She lowered them quickly as his cold regard met hers.

"How did you know I should follow?"

"It was my business to see that you did so."

Again he was reduced to silence. He set down his coffee cup and stared at the bowed, flame-like head of the girl kneeling among the cushions at his feet.

"How did you know I had seen you?"

"I saw *you*—I was watching for you. In the mirror, I saw you at your window. And when I came out of the hotel I saw you in the lobby. And I knew that you were going to follow me."

There came a further spell of silence. Lincoln Hayes had forgotten his coffee.

"Did you see me in New York?"

"Yes." Her long, graceful fingers opened the lid of a metal box. "There are all kinds of cigarettes here. Won't you smoke?"

Lincoln Hayes began to wonder what age Hatasu could be. Her nationality quite eluded him. Her manner was that of a very young girl and, in spite of her astonishing statement and the coolness with which she had carried out this singular device, was not free from embarrassment.

"Thank you, no. I just want to talk to you."

Hatasu smiled and glanced aside. Her skin was fair as a lily. He found it hard to believe that the wonderful hair was a product of art. Yet, in some subtle way, her slightest movement was Oriental. She was of the East, but the problem of her race baffled him. Nevertheless, being an Oriental, he realized that she was probably much younger than he had supposed.

"Hatasu," he said. "You see I know your name——"

"I know you do."

Her amused but slightly uneasy acceptance of a situation unique in Hayes' experience stopped him short again for a moment; then:

"You admit that you lured me here tonight?"

"*Lured* you?"

She glanced up, and there was a new expression in those gold-flecked eyes.

"How should *you* express it?"

"Yes." She dropped her lashes. "Perhaps I did lure you."

"In whose interest did you do this? Is Mohammed Ahmes Bey up at that house?"

"No. Why do you ask? Because you think he stole the papyrus from you in New York?"

Lincoln Hayes was silenced once more, but only for a matter of seconds; then:

"I know that he stole it," he said quietly. "No doubt he thinks he has a better right to it than I."

"He has—otherwise he would never have touched it." Her eyes were fixed upon him now, and he watched her fascinatedly. "The man you call Mohammed Ahmes Bey has codes higher than any you have ever known." Her low musical voice seemed to become infused with new power. "You are what is called a gentleman. But what would you do if someone dug up the body of Abraham Lincoln, pulled down the monument to George Washington, and took them to Egypt? What would you do?"

Lincoln Hayes did not reply immediately. But he continued to watch her.

"The case is different."

"Different!" Now the beautiful eyes blazed, and he had a glimpse of another Hatasu. That glimpse chilled him—steel-nerved though he was. "Because you know that the fellaheen, the present people of Egypt, are not of the race of the Great Ones. But how do you know that there is no one left in Egypt who is kin of the old kings, who reveres them? Ah! you are ignorant, so mercy has been shown to you."

She stood up, rising from her knees with effortless grace, and, hands outstretched, every line of her seeming to be inspired by an internal fire bright as that which glowed in her hair, confronted him.

He had thought of her as a little girl. Now she was a Cumæn oracle, an ageless priestess. He experienced an unaccountable, an unusual chill. In the same instant that he recognized it, he remembered when and where he had experienced it before . . . in the presence of Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

"Much my country has suffered from Western robbers. But steal our secrets for which your world is not ready? No! This we shall never suffer!"

She watched him unflinchingly—her eyes seemed to have grown even larger. His spirit sprang to arms, warning him that Hatasu was beginning to dominate his will. Some strange force had come to life in her. In those few minutes which had passed she had changed from an embarrassed girl who finds herself in a difficult position, to a woman, confident, authoritative. Her fixed regard was difficult to sustain, but the cold gray eyes sustained it.

Suddenly opening her clenched hands and shrugging her shoulders, Hatasu dropped back upon the cushions. Kneeling, she looked up at Lincoln Hayes.

"You know where *the Temple* is," she said softly, "and you are going to it."

Nearly, very nearly, that level brain faltered; Hayes all but fell into the trap. In the nick of time he recovered himself. It was true. The "Place of the Lamp" was indicated in the stolen papyrus!

Paddy Rorke had returned to New York for the purpose of urging Hayes to undertake an expedition in search of this "Place." They had been buying equipment in London. But now he was master again of his own cool self.

"To what temple do you refer?" he asked dryly.

Hatasu regarded him under drooping lashes.

"You are clever," she replied. "And you are a brave man. But neither your bravery nor your cleverness will save you if you persist in what you intend to do."

"Do you mean, try to recover my stolen property?"

Hatasu laughed. It was light musical laughter, the laughter of a young girl.

"You are funny," she said, and the wisdom of the ages seemed to have dropped from her, leaving her a child again. "And your coffee is quite cold."

But Lincoln Hayes, watching her, knew that more than any commercial triumph lay in her hands. Mohammed Ahmes Bey had claimed to be a descendant of the Ancient Egyptians and had said that Hatasu was a member of the same family. In the case of Mohammed Bey, it was possible, but Hatasu, except for her name, did not correspond to Lincoln Hayes' ideas of an Ancient Egyptian. Was it all some fantastic practical joke?

"Who owns the gray house on the hill?" he asked suddenly.

"A true friend of Egypt," Hatasu replied in a very low voice. "To this room he comes to meditate."

She stood up again, tall, slender, ivory crowned with fire, and held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she said; "you have told me all I wanted to know."

Hayes took her hand and held it, and the eyes which looked into his were the eyes of a girl unused to the world. He knew that he was not entirely master of himself. Although within the meaning of American law Hatasu was the accomplice of a thief, there was no possibility of regarding her in that light. She was dangerous—for she had tricked him tonight. And closely though he had guarded his words, he believed her when she had said that he had told her all that she wanted to know.

She glanced aside, and the expression of her beautiful face changed slightly. Lincoln Hayes wished that his brain could control his heart.

"I have never said good-bye with such reluctance," he said. "I accept my dismissal but ask a favor."

"What favor?"

Hatasu's words were scarcely audible.

"I want to see you again."

At that she looked up, studying the inscrutable, cleanly chiseled face, the fine head and virile hair receding at the temples; finally looking into those frank gray eyes, almost wistfully. She laid her left hand gently on Lincoln Hayes' right.

"Thank you," she answered very softly. "I should like to see you too. But—it is no good. . . ." She hesitated for a moment. "Don't go to Egypt," she added. "If you will promise me to give up what you intend to do, perhaps——"

"Perhaps, what?"

"Perhaps—" she looked at him intently—"I might see you again. But even so—it would be no good. . . ."

4

Out in the darkness of the winding lane Lincoln Hayes took himself to task. Had he failed in some way? Had he permitted his personal interest in this woman, who fascinated him utterly, to interfere with his better judgment? It seemed that one glance, exchanged in a New York theater, had told her that she had power over him. She had used it now for some strange purpose.

It was not quite clear to him what she had gained by the device of tonight. Yet in his heart he knew that in some way she had found what she had sought.

Deep in reverie he walked along—then pulled up and turned sharply.

Footsteps were following him.

He crouched back in the hedge which bordered the grounds of the gray house, endeavoring to penetrate the misty darkness. He could see nothing—hear nothing.

But he was now fully alive to dreadful possibilities. He desired this woman intensely, but he had glimpsed in her a remorseless purpose. Here was an enemy more dangerous than Simon Lobb. It occasioned him a pain, almost physical, to think of her as an enemy, but it was something he must suffer.

He turned and walked rapidly in the direction of the drive up to the empty house, in which he had instructed the taxi man to await him.

Once he stopped suddenly, listening. He thought that again he had detected following footsteps. But all was silent, and he went on.

"Hello, guv'nor!" came a cheery hail. "I was beginnin' to wonder."

"Everything O. K.," said Lincoln Hayes. "But did you see anyone go down this lane after I had gone?"

"I didn't *see* anyone, guv'nor. But it's a bit quiet-like down here, and once I got the jim-jams. I thought I heard somebody, but I couldn't see anybody."

"Ah!" said Hayes, and got into the taxi. "Berkeley Hotel."

He lighted a cigarette; but as the taxi man pulled out of the drive, he looked back through the rear window.

A figure was standing twenty yards down the lane, looking after him—a dark, indistinguishable figure.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RORKE'S MAP

THE S.S. *Bramahpoona* left Marseilles at about eight o'clock at night. A suite with private bath had been secured by Lincoln Hayes. He had been compelled to pay for the reservation as far as Java, although the party was leaving the ship at Port Said. These small comforts are some of the minor things which millions can command. Slim, Hayes' town chauffeur, usually accompanied his employer abroad, for Slim, apart from his amazing traffic sense, had other qualities. He was an unexcelled manservant, with a peculiar knowledge of foreign peoples and an aptitude for picking up their languages.

Lincoln Hayes, once the ship was clear of dock, walked out on deck. Slim might be relied upon to unpack and to prepare the staterooms, not only for himself, but also for Paddy Rorke and Stefanson.

Ann Wayland was used to traveling. Within an hour her stewardess would be her devoted slave. Her inclusion in the party might have aroused comment among the prurient, but Lincoln Hayes throughout his life had ignored the prurient and, by virtue of his blameless record and the high standard which he demanded of his associates, had confounded them.

It was a cloudy night, with a heavy, greasy swell. An uncomfortable drizzle was falling, and the decks were deserted. There was some activity forward where hatches were being battened down, but it was not the sort of night which tempts promenaders. Lincoln Hayes, muffled up in white oilskins and wearing a very large tweed cap with a very long peak, paced round and round the ship, a cigar protruding from the corner of his thin mouth.

His heart was elated but his mind was depressed.

He had met and had spoken to Hatasu! She was even more desirable than he had dreamed her to be, and he thought that she was attracted to him. The more he considered that strange interview in the cottage in Surrey, the more he realized that some barrier which might prove to be impassable stood between them. He had refused to abandon his purpose; yet at their final parting her hand had lingered in his.

Then had come that strange, gaunt figure in the lane. . . .

He could not conquer his idea that Hatasu's enmity was active.

Twice, thrice, he walked around, meeting never a soul. Lights streamed out from public rooms upon the wet deck. He saw people playing cards; others gathered around tables in the smoke room. Two elderly ladies in a small room amidships were reading.

Then another hardy traveler appeared, braving cold and drizzling rain.

He wore a heavy traveling coat of a depressing brown color, and the pallor of his face was accentuated by the presence on his head of a Breton beret. Once he passed Hayes—for he was promenading in the opposite direction; but as they met for a second time on the starboard side:

"Excuse me, sir——"

Lincoln Hayes pulled up and stared.

"Yes?"

"You don't remember me?" the other traveler went on mournfully. "Natural enough. But you may recall, sir, that I made the mistake of speaking to you in the Ritz Hotel day before yesterday?"

And then, suddenly, Lincoln Hayes remembered. This man *had* spoken to him in the lounge of the Ritz.

"I was looking for Mr. McKinley of the American Express Company." Hayes moved slowly on, and the other fell into step beside him. "Well, if you can believe me, he didn't turn up."

"Bad business."

"It *was* a bad business. What was I to do? He had my passport and my coupons for the journey right through to Egypt. I rang up the Haymarket, and they said he had started out. So I just waited."

Something naïve about this gloomy little soul appealed to Hayes' sympathetic nature, and:

"Must have come all right," he said, "since you're here."

"It did. I don't deny I have wonderful luck. But not being used to traveling the world, if you understand what I mean, it was a tough break for me."

"What had become of this Mr. McKinley?"

"He'd gone to the Savoy! Can you beat it? He'd gone to the Savoy!" The speaker was becoming almost animated. "It was close on eleven o'clock before I established contact. Boy! what a relief!"

"Must have been."

"I'd given up hope—I may say I was desperate."

"Anyway, you're here all right."

"That's just my wonderful luck." They continued to pace round and round the deck, the pale man having now adapted his step to the long strides of Lincoln Hayes. "It's this way with me. My name is Mick."

"Mick what?"

"I knew you'd say that. Everybody does. But it's just Mick—Mr. Mick."

"Uncommon name."

"Yes, I know it's a funny name—everybody laughs; but I got it from my father, and what can I do? But I certainly have the most wonderful luck."

"That's clear."

"I do. Nothing can beat it. I'm ordered a sea voyage, and to go right on to Egypt for my health. I nearly don't get there—but here I am."

"You are undeniably here," said Lincoln Hayes dryly. "What about a drink?"

"I'm on a quota, by doctor's orders."

They had pulled up before an entrance to the smoke room.

"Exceeded the quota, yet?"

"One drink on the credit side."

"Come in and have it. My name is Lincoln Hayes."

2

Last night on board (the ship was due to dock at Port Said in the morning) a council of war was held in Lincoln Hayes' stateroom.

Unrolled on the table and kept flat by means of a number of books lay an ordnance map covering a wide area of desert from the Gizeh Plateau out to the Oasis of Sîwa. The famous steel box stood upon the table, and in it lay Stefanson's notes, now as complete as he could make them. The box had been taken out that evening by Hayes from the purser's safe.

The Mediterranean was calm as a lake. Hayes' stateroom lay forward, and through two portholes looking out on the well deck beyond which rose the foc's'le head, battalions of diamonds held the night. The movement of the ship was scarcely perceptible; but in spite of increasing heat, Hayes had the door of his stateroom bolted.

Half kneeling on a settee, he was bending over the map; Stefanson stood on the other side of the table, also looking down; and Rorke, standing between them, traced with the point of a pencil a zigzagging red line which he had drawn from the village of Gizeh out across the desert to a spot some twelve miles east of a place called Aghormi.

"As I have explained," he said in his somewhat casual manner, "this route is partly imaginary, because the indications in the papyrus were maddeningly indefinite. I had not finished it by a long way at the time that the papyrus disappeared. So that from this point—" he indicated a deviation in the red line—"it's more or less guesswork. Of one thing only I am sure: the general direction is right."

He looked up and glanced at his wrist watch.

"Ann's a long time," he remarked.

"Sympathetic soul," Lincoln Hayes murmured. "She's quite upset about our poor little acquaintance."

Mr. Mick, the pale traveler who had been ordered to Egypt for his health, had had a severe relapse two days before and was in the hands of the ship's doctor. The doctor had intimated that his patient was suffering from an obscure form of endocarditis. Ann Wayland, who had taken a fancy to the little man, insisted upon visiting his cabin twice every day. Hayes usually looked in as well—but Ann was the popular visitor.

"She'll be here in a m-minute," said Stefanson, bending eagerly over the map. "You say th-that this d-dotted circle in your opinion embraces the s-site of the t-temple?"

"So I believe."

"It s-seems to me that your m-map is nearly as hazy as m-my n-notes."

"By overtaxing that mighty intelligence," Rorke replied, "you may be able to grasp the elementary fact that this route leads to nowhere, so far as the man who made the map was aware. Therefore, anyone, observing this red line, and following it, might realize, if possessed of an ordinary C 3, or subnormal, brain, that something of importance must be contained within the dotted area."

“Q-quite!” said Stefanson.

“Only had the thing out of the safe once before since we sailed,” said Lincoln Hayes, “and you remember what happened?”

“I d-do.”

On the occasion to which Hayes referred they had held a conference respecting the route to the temple. The cabin door had been on the hook when some instinct or chance sound had warned Stefanson, who was nearest, of an eavesdropper. Quickly as he had sprung forward and thrown the door open, he had been rewarded with no more than a glimpse of a retreating figure darting into a cross alleyway.

“Don’t forget that there happens to be an Arab steward among the crew,” Rorke said quietly. “He’s working his way to Egypt. I spoke to the purser tonight.”

“Doesn’t attend on these cabins,” said Hayes.

“No. He’s in the second class. But still, he’s on board. Hello! this will be Ann.”

There was a loud rap on the door. Rorke stepped across, freed the bolt, and opened.

Ann Wayland came in, smiling radiantly.

“Poor little Mr. Mick is definitely better,” she reported as Rorke closed and rebolted the door. “Although he is so weak that I am afraid he will have to be carried ashore. I think it was wicked of his friends to allow him to travel alone.”

“So do I,” Rorke agreed. “What did you smuggle in there tonight, contrary to doctor’s orders?”

Ann laughed delightedly. The sea air had enhanced her beauty—she was glowing with health and high spirits. Paddy Rorke’s eyes rarely left her.

“Half a bottle of champagne. He *was* glad.”

“You’ll k-kill the poor little devil,” Stefanson declared.

Ann laughed, squeezing his arm affectionately.

“You took him whisky,” she charged; “you can’t deny it!”

“Anyway,” Lincoln Hayes interrupted, “we are all up to date so far as our information goes. Let’s put the map back in the box, and perhaps Paddy will return it to the safe.”

Rorke folded up the ordnance map and replaced it in the steel box with Stefanson’s notes. He was about to close the lid, when:

“Man overboard!” came a chilling cry from somewhere above.

It was echoed from point to point: “Man overboard! . . . Man overboard! . . .”

There was a dim sound of a bell, and a sort of quiver ran through the hull of the ship. The engines had been rung off.

Then came shouted orders and the tattoo of running feet upon the deck.

“By heavens!” said Rorke. “Who can it be?”

“Oh, let’s go and see!” cried Ann.

All were of the same mind. But as they ran out of the alleyway:

“One moment,” said Lincoln Hayes grimly.

He turned and locked the door of his stateroom and then followed the others.

The decks were crowded on the port side, where a boat was being lowered away with that smooth efficiency which belongs to the Dutch mercantile marine. There was a nearly full moon. The oily surface of the sea resembled a steel mirror. Several passengers were focusing glasses. The ellipse of the ship's wake could be traced for a great distance. Nothing showed upon the surface.

"Who gave the alarm?"

Lincoln Hayes asked the question of a passing deck hand.

"Officer of the watch."

The man hurried on his way.

The boat rode the water and was pulled clear of the side. The *Bramahpoona's* engines began to move again slowly, and the ship was swung about so that her searchlight could be brought into play. It suddenly cast its dazzling gleam on the mirror-like surface, which it began to explore in slow arcs.

Lincoln Hayes walked to the foot of the bridge ladder at the top of which the Dutch commander was standing, night glasses focused on the path of the light.

"Any idea who's overboard, Captain?"

The captain lowered his glasses and looked down: a fine-looking old man, white-bearded and mustached.

"No idea at all, Mr. Hayes," he replied, speaking the perfect English of his class. "Mr. Fisher, here," he indicated the second officer, who stood at his elbow, "reports that he heard a cry for help from the after end of the boat deck. Running to the wing of the bridge, he saw a body plunge overboard, just forrard of number two lifeboat."

He returned to his inspection of the distant sea.

"A damn mysterious business," Rorke remarked.

An hour had elapsed. No trace had been discovered of the man overboard. The search party had been ordered back. In the meantime, the purser had called the roll. No passengers were missing in any class, and the total of the crew was complete!

"Very mysterious," Lincoln Hayes agreed as he inserted the key in the door of his stateroom. "What do you think, Ann?"

"Well," Ann replied. "I am naturally glad. But I can't make it out."

"N-no m-more can I," said Ulric Stefanson.

They filed into the stateroom.

"Hell!"

The exclamation came from Lincoln Hayes.

Rorke's steel box, empty, lay upon the carpet near the settee: the map and Stefanson's notes had disappeared!

“What is the character of these documents, gentlemen?” asked Captain van den Heyde.

He had much the appearance of a judge as he sat in his revolving chair, turned around, now, back to the desk, so that he could face his visitors.

Lincoln Hayes and Rorke sat upon the sofa; Rorke was smoking a cigarette and sipping a glass of the commander’s excellent curaçao. Lincoln Hayes, cigar in mouth, met the steady gaze of the seaman expressionlessly.

“Difficult to explain,” he replied after a moment of consideration. “We are on a very delicate mission, Captain. These documents are practically indispensable to our purpose. There are two: one a map; the other a manuscript.”

“And you have reason to believe that others are interested in these?”

“We know,” said Rorke in his casual way. “The originals were stolen some time ago. Now, they have the duplicates. Somebody climbed up from the well deck to a porthole of Mr. Hayes’ cabin tonight. He must have had a rod with a hook on the end. He hooked the box by a handle, took the contents, and threw the box back. At least, that’s what——”

There came a rap on the door. In response to the captain’s order, it opened, and a thick-set, swarthy-featured man wearing steward’s uniform was ushered in. He was a good-looking fellow of his type, and he saluted the three men in the captain’s room with dignity.

“He speaks very little English and no Dutch,” Captain van den Heyde explained. “I speak the language of my native crew, but I have no Arabic. Perhaps, sir——” he turned to Rorke.

“It would be better, you think,” Rorke suggested, “to examine him in Arabic and to give you the result afterwards?”

“O.K.,” said Lincoln Hayes, and the captain nodded.

“We are troubled about something which occurred on this ship tonight,” Rorke went on, addressing the steward in Arabic. “And perhaps you can help us.”

The man started, and then smiled, hearing his native language spoken with such fluency.

“I am your servant, effendim.”

“What is your name?”

“Mabrouk.”

“Where do you come from?”

“I come from Tantah.”

“What is your trade?”

“I have had many, effendim. Last, before I left Egypt, I was a waiter in a café in Tantah.”

“Why did you leave Egypt?”

“The police, effendim!”

And the glittering grin which accompanied his words Rorke would have taken oath to be that of an honest man.

“Did you kill somebody?”

“Not so. But he was hurt.”

“How did you get away?”

“I was employed as a steward on a French ship from Alexandria.”

“How did you get to America?”

Mabrouk stared uncomprehendingly.

“I have never been in America, effendim. I get as far as London but can find no work. I walk from London to Southampton. There I am fortunate. I get this employment which will enable me to return to my own country: God be praised.”

“I see.” Rorke crushed out the end of his cigarette in an ash tray. “And now, Mabrouk, about tonight. When the cry of ‘man overboard’ was raised, you were down on the well deck?”

“But no: I was in the foc’s’le.”

“That’s near the well deck.”

“It is true, effendim. When I hear the cry I run up with the others. I had gone there with a message from the quartermaster.”

“Then you did not see the man go overboard?”

“I saw nothing, effendim. I only heard the cry.”

“Where did you go?”

“Along the deck on the port side.”

Rorke stared coldly at the man for a while. Mabrouk watched him unflinchingly.

“There is one other thing, O Mabrouk. Take off your coat.”

Mabrouk smilingly obeyed the order.

“And now peel your shirt down to your waist.”

Mabrouk did so.

“I see you are indeed a powerful fellow, O Mabrouk.”

“It is so, effendim.”

The man inflated his chest proudly. But Lincoln Hayes, who had succeeded in following the examination up to this point, divined Rorke’s purpose.

“Resume your dress, Mabrouk. You have done well. There is nothing else which I desire to ask you.”

The Egyptian readjusted his attire, became serious again, and saluted everybody.

“You may go,” said the captain.

Mabrouk retired.

“I gather that you have learned nothing,” Captain van den Heyde continued.

“No. I am satisfied that Mabrouk knows nothing.”

“Why did you order him to strip to the waist?”

“I was looking for a certain mark, Captain. It is not there.” He turned to Lincoln Hayes. “Mabrouk is not the spy in the camp. We must look elsewhere.”

CHAPTER NINE

THE SOUND OF COLOR

ON the terrace of Shepheard's the following evening, just as dusk was falling:

"Nothing to be discouraged about," said Lincoln Hayes.

Stefanson, lying back in a cane armchair, was staring about him through the thick pebbles of his spectacles with that interest in Oriental life displayed by a traveler who sees it for the first time. A tall glass, empty except for two straws, stood on the table before him. The life of Cairo of today, which, if reluctantly, is nevertheless leaving behind the Cairo of yesterday, moved in the street below.

The usual collection of intensely uninteresting tourists occupied surrounding tables. Camels and donkeys—which provide much of the color of the East—being prohibited in Sharia-Kemal, failing the character of the buildings, a peppering of native costumes among the European, and that unique smell which belongs to the soil of Lower Egypt, one might have supposed, by closing one's eyes and listening to the sound of motor transport, that this was a busy Western street.

"Q-quite!" said Stefanson. "It's n-not s-so much that I c-can't reconstruct the n-notes, although that's a b-bit of a s-sweat, but wh-who's got them?"

"Whoever has Rorke's map," murmured Lincoln Hayes.

He had been recognized by several American travelers present, but had studiously avoided contact. He was puzzled and worried. The problem of the missing map and notes had defeated his orderly brain. Difficult to search a liner for a number of sheets of paper; additionally difficult by virtue of the fact that, Mabrouk acquitted, there was no suspect aboard. On his own initiative, and in face of Rorke's assurance that it was time wasted, he had promoted a secret search of the effects of the Egyptian steward. Nothing had resulted from it.

He stared in the direction of the steps. Paddy Rorke and Ann Wayland were saying good-bye to a party of three leaving for Mena House; two elderly but charming ladies from Toronto and Mr. Mick, the invalid of the *Bramahpoona*. He was much improved but still very weak. As the car moved off, he waved a feeble hand in the direction of the balcony. Hayes and Stefanson stood up and waved in return. Then Rorke and Ann came up the steps and joined them.

"I think it's time, Lincoln," said Rorke, holding Ann's hand, "as you more or less stand for the family, to announce that Ann and I are engaged."

"Knew it," said Hayes. He grasped their clasped hands in both his own, and squeezed tightly. "Wise man, Paddy. If I had had sense, you would never have had a look-in."

"I know it," said Rorke; "I'm not sure now that you are not going to be a sad sweet memory."

"Shut up, Paddy," said Ann. And then: "Oh, Lincoln. I am terribly fond of you, and —" she hesitated, looking at him with her frank eyes—"I don't really want to drop my work; I love it. But——"

She sank into a chair as Lincoln Hayes removed his manacle grip.

"But," said Rorke, signaling to a waiter, "she has decided to marry at her own convenience."

"Paddy!"

"I mean, when it suits her."

"Paddy! You are simply horrible!"

"I mean, she has decided to marry—when you consent to release her, Lincoln—a retired officer of Royal Engineers whose only expectation of having any money to support her centers on a very wild aunt, passing sixty, who rides to hounds and dances into the small hours."

"Con-congratulations," said Stefanson. "I-I envy you, Rorke."

"So do I," murmured Lincoln Hayes.

"Lincoln dear." Ann laid her hand upon his arm. "You are a monk, but a very dear monk."

"There was once a monk called Paphnutius," said Lincoln Hayes.

He was thinking of Hatasu. He had told no one of his interview with her in the cottage in Surrey; for the oldest friends grow reticent when a woman intervenes.

He might have felt easier in mind about his silence had he known that Paddy Rorke had overheard Ann Wayland dictating a cablegram to "Peraz, Cairo," but had never spoken of it.

Rorke, throughout the journey, had been watching Ann with intense anxiety. He had not forgotten the words of the celebrated specialist: "I suspect post-hypnosis." He was convinced that she had acted on that occasion under the influence of some outside stimulus; hence his reticence and his anxious watching. "Peraz, Cairo," he had so far failed to identify; but a friend in the Egyptian police had the inquiry in hand. . . .

Lincoln Hayes believed intensely in the sincerity of Hatasu. A hundred times—many hundreds of times—he had heard again her inspired voice speaking those words: "Suppose somebody were to dig up the body of Abraham Lincoln . . ." It had put a new complexion upon his quest, upon his interest in Egyptology, and upon the achievements of his father in that field . . .

Ann Wayland and Paddy Rorke chatted together in low voices. Stefanson lay back luxuriously, staring up at a palm top. Lincoln Hayes glanced around appraising the people who surrounded him, knowing from experience which were the officers of the garrison, which were members of the Royal Air Force. The wealthy Egyptians did not as a rule linger on the terrace but went through to the lounge. He knew many of them by sight and a few personally. But Mohammed Ahmes Bey did not appear!

His every movement had been covered from the moment that he had left New York. Hatasu had warned him of this. But the theft of the map and the notes he could not understand, unless these mysterious Egyptians were unaware of the fact that Stefanson possessed a phenomenal memory. Already Rorke was at work upon another map: Stefanson's contemplation of a palm top was not that of an idle man enjoying the sunshine but was an aid to concentration.

2

Ulric Stefanson announced after dinner that he proposed to retire to his room and to commit the formula to paper once more if he sat up all night in order to do it. He was satisfied that he had recalled all of the vital details. Lincoln Hayes had two large ice buckets and half-a-dozen bottles of hock sent up to Stefanson's apartment—which, by an odd coincidence, was that formerly occupied by Captain Rorke.

When this fact had first appeared: "Look out, Stefanson," Rorke had said; "don't forget to bolt your shutters."

"I've g-got nothing to p-pinch," Stefanson had replied, "unless they p-pinch my m-memory."

He actually set to work at ten o'clock.

When at work, Stefanson was a heavy smoker as well as a heavy wine drinker. But, methodical in all things, his method was this: he would carefully load six pipes with some kind of dark Cavendish, which was his favorite tobacco and which had to be teased in the palm before stuffing into the bowl, this necessitating interruption of one's task.

The six pipes were an ancient and curious collection. He always smoked these in the same order; viz.: a very yellow English clay of a variety now difficult to obtain; an ancient and wheezy corncob; a large and beautifully colored calabash; a cherrywood; a straight briar, and a curved briar.

Having uncorked one of the bottles of wine, sampled it, and found it to his satisfaction, Stefanson adjusted the lamp on the writing table, placed a writing block there, made sure that his fountain pen was in order, and spread out a number of notes scribbled on various scraps of paper. Then, extracting tobacco from a pound tin, he proceeded with meticulous care to load the six pipes.

These he laid on the table in their proper order; set a box of matches conveniently at hand, drew the first ice bucket nearer to his elbow, and settled down.

He lighted the ancient clay pipe and leaned back in his chair for a moment, eyes closed. Clouds of smoke began to surround him. The night was still and hot and the air quite motionless.

Suddenly he sat upright and turned sharply, looking in the direction of the shuttered window.

He thought he had detected a faint sound on the balcony. He was not a man to leave any problem, however small, unsolved, especially one calculated to interfere with concentration. He crossed and threw open the shutters.

Right and left he looked. But neither on his own balcony nor on those adjoining it was anyone to be seen.

The gardens bathed in moonlight lay below him. He was nearly on a level with the tops of some of the palms. Lights far beyond marked the presence of a native café; crickets were chirping in the garden, and a frog was croaking in the pond. A large bat flew quite close to his face.

Stefanson returned to the room, reclosing the shutters. He poured out another glass of wine. His scientific mind was immune from superstition. Yet, he remembered—

indeed, he could never forget—those eerie words of Ann Wayland's: "He is called 'the Bat.' . . ."

His doorbell rang.

"D-damn!" said Stefanson, standing up again.

He crossed to the door and opened it. A native servant stood on the landing, white-coated and red capped.

"Wh-what is it?" Stefanson asked irritably.

"Ali Mahmoud say he must see you, sir, for a moment."

"Who the d-devil's Ali Mahmoud?"

"He a dragoman, sir."

"But I d-don't want any dra-dra-dragoman!"

"He say very urgent, very particular."

"Go to the d-devil!" Stefanson exclaimed, clay pipe fuming between his teeth. "Ask him to c-come up here."

"Dragoman not allowed upstairs, sir, and he say very particular."

"D-d-damn it! What can he p-possibly want?"

He closed his door, and remembering the random notes on the table, locked it, then followed the man to the elevator. He presently found himself in the big lounge.

There were not very many people about to take an interest in the fair-haired young man with the clay pipe, and he crossed to the terrace, the servant leading, without attracting undue attention. As he stepped through the doorway a tall and dignified Arab, black robed, white turbaned, saluted him deeply.

"Dr. Stevenson," he said, "you wish me to take you to the tombs of the Mamelukes tomorrow morning?"

"What the d-devil——!" Stefanson looked for the hotel servant, but he had disappeared. He turned again to the dragoman. "My n-name's not Stevenson."

"I am sorry. That foolish Abdûl has made a mistake. Your name is not Stevenson, sir?"

"It is n-not!"

"And you do not wish to visit the tombs of the Mamelukes?"

"I d-d-don't!"

"It is something, sir, which every gentleman who comes here should see."

Stefanson blinked indignantly through the thick pebbles of his glasses, blew forth a great cloud of tobacco, turned, and went back to the elevator.

These fellows were very cunning. Probably his name, and his address, New York, had prompted the attempt. No doubt they got business in that way, sometimes; presumably the man Abdûl, if it had come off, would have touched a spot of commission. He had glanced about the lounge for other members of the party, but had then remembered that they had gone out to the Great Pyramid, for it was a moonlight night, and Ann had never seen the Pyramids.

Stefanson reëntered his room, crossed and poured out another glass of hock, and then settled down to his task. He wrote busily, covering half a page with facility; his handwriting was small, neat, but very illegible. His clay pipe began to burn hot. He set it in an ash tray with which he had provided himself, and automatically took up the corncob. Having lighted it and got it well going—it was a pipe that bubbled a lot—he poured out another glass of wine and resumed his writing.

He reached the bottom of a page, checked over what he had written, altering two words and one figure. Then, tearing the page from the block, he set it aside, found that his glass was empty, and refilled it.

At the top of the new page he began to draw a rough but neatly executed figure, which looked like the outline of a tulip. . . .

The crickets were very audible in the garden outside, and also the croaking of the frog. But human interference was distant and muffled. Sometimes, he could hear the trams over by the Esbikeyeh Gardens . . . and it was at this point that Stefanson began to doubt his own powers.

The diagram, he saw at a glance, was out of drawing. It did not convey what he wished to convey. Also, the ancient corncob tasted foul.

He laid it in the ash tray and mechanically lighted the calabash.

Then he tore up the page upon which the diagram had been started—and began to draw the same diagram on a new page. He wondered vaguely, at the outset, why he was drawing it so large, but nevertheless went on.

It was half completed when he realized that he was adding wings to the figure . . . which now crudely resembled the outline of a bat.

Stefanson stared at this queer creation which now, he saw, occupied fully half the page. . . .

A bat! Why had he drawn a bat?

The pen dropped from his fingers so that a blot appeared upon the strange diagram. He fell back in his chair staring straight before him.

The dimensions of the room had changed! He saw that he sat at a table as large as a billiard table. His impression that the diagram which resembled a bat had occupied half the page was wrong. It was the page which was so large. The writing block was the size of a daily newspaper! The room, too, was incredibly lofty. Its dimensions grew greater as he looked, until presently the entrance door was so far away that he could only just discern it.

He decided that the roof was at least as high as that of St. Peter's in Rome. There were queer sounds, too, which presently he identified as *the voices of the colors*. The green of the carpet was very low and plaintive. The white plaster shrieked unmusically. He took the calabash from between his teeth, and laid it in the ash tray with the other two pipes.

But this simple action occupied a period which he estimated to be not less than five minutes. The contact of the pipe with the brass tray produced a flash of purple color.

At which moment some remnant of sanity in Stefanson's reeling brain, some knowledge which had survived the onslaught, tried to make itself audible, amid the

wild phantasms which surrounded the bewildered man.

It reached him as a voice, accompanied by a fetid breath.

"The tobacco—the pipes—the tobacco—the pipes . . ."

What did he know about these pipes? He looked at them. It took him a long time to turn his head. And they were so far away on the huge table that he found it difficult to distinguish them one from another.

The corncob had tasted foul—this he recalled. The last time he had smoked it (he thought quite six months ago) it had tasted foul. He extended his hand towards the giant ash tray. His fingers, he saw, were of incredible length: they stretched out like tentacles to clutch the corncob.

He closed his eyes. He wanted to shriek, but his sane brain had succeeded in synchronizing taste, smell, and symptoms. He knew, but too late, what had happened.

Someone, during his absence, had added hashish to his tobacco! He knew what to do now, but was incapable of doing it. He opened his eyes again.

The room was growing smaller, and the notes of the colors growing louder. He dragged himself about in his chair. A curious perfume resembling that of burning incense seemed to be wafted in through the closed shutters.

And as he looked he saw that the shutters were opening; at first very slowly, and then at a quicker pace. A tall, an extremely tall man, dressed in black, stepped into the room.

With a last despairing effort to hang on to sanity, Stefanson fought with this new phenomenon. He had been drugged. Now, someone had entered the room, reaching it probably by means of an adjoining balcony, as had happened to Paddy Rorke.

Who was this someone, and why had he come?

Piercing eyes, which seemed to be illuminated from within, fixed themselves upon him. They carried a message which reached him on a wave of incense, so that he seemed to be enveloped. *All* his senses received the message—hearing, sight, taste, smell, touch . . . so that he was shattered by its portent.

"I am the Bat . . . I am the Bat . . . I am the Bat. . . ."

CHAPTER TEN

STEFANSON'S STUTTER

"NEVER really get used to the Great Pyramid," said Lincoln Hayes.

They had halted well away from that strange, majestic ruin in a fringe of vegetation, remote from the sounds of car engines and hooters. Rorke, drawing upon his remarkable knowledge of the subject, had been endeavoring to paint for Ann a picture of the world wonder as it once had been—how it must have looked on such a night as this, moonlight gleaming on its facing stones.

"It's the fashion to debunk everything," Hayes' monotonous voice went on. They were standing in a little palm grove actually touched by the shadow of the great building, with all the peace of the desert behind them. "But only a man whose imagination was dead could debunk the Pyramid."

"In some way," said Ann in a very low voice, "it frightens me."

"It's part and parcel of the job we're here to do," Rorke replied, in that easy voice which so rarely displayed any depth of feeling. "Our route really starts here, from the plateau of Gizeh. The secret of the Light was held, in the first place, by the priests who supervised the building of the Pyramid. If we found the Light, we should probably solve the age-old riddle of the Sphinx."

He pointed.

"The Sphinx lies in a hollow across there and faces in that direction—" he moved his arm. "The Sphinx is our compass, except that it's impossible to follow a straight course owing to the character of the desert. In other words, Lincoln—" he turned to Lincoln Hayes, silent, motionless, behind him—"the Sphinx is watching over the distant Light."

There were some moments of silence.

"Is it possible to go inside the Pyramid at night?" Ann asked.

"Quite possible," Rorke replied, "but it's a populous village of bats, and there is much coming and going after dark."

Ann clutched his arm tightly but did not reply. Some dim, subconscious memory stirred at the name—at the thought of a bat. . . .

"Is it a fact, Paddy," said Lincoln Hayes, "that the Pyramid bats come out at night and fly to great distances?"

"It's a fact that they come out, Lincoln: how far they venture from their base, I couldn't say."

"More and more," Ann whispered, "I am getting frightened."

"There are times in Egypt," Hayes replied quietly, "when something stupendous seems to bear down upon one—a sense of some ancient knowledge greater than ours. Don't find it frightening; on the contrary, find it stimulating."

"All the same," Ann went on, "I wish I could share Mr. Maguire's views now: that our only enemy is Simon Lobb."

"Maguire might change his opinion—" Hayes' monotonous voice came out of the shadows—"if he knew as much as we know. Let's walk along to Mena House and have a drink."

They set out for the hotel which watches the Pyramids as the Sphinx watches the desert—the hotel with many balconies, overlooking that scene which the imagination of man has failed to reconstruct. Not all those modern conveniences which enable one to park one's car in the very shadow of the world's most majestic ruin; not all the picture-postcard stores, tramcars, and other modern "improvements," can rob the plateau of Gizeh of its ancient dignity nor draw one nearer to the heart of its mystery.

Although this was not full season, there were many visitors to Mena House. And as they walked into the American bar:

"I wonder if your patient has gone to bed, yet, Ann?" said Rorke mischievously.

Ann turned on a tall stool, looking disapprovingly at the speaker.

"I like poor Mr. Mick," she said; "he's a dear little man."

"Very sick man," murmured Lincoln Hayes.

Rorke was giving an order to the bartender, when:

"You spoke of Mr. Mick," came a voice with a marked Teutonic intonation.

Hayes and Ann turned to look at the speaker: a thick-set, bespectacled man with crisp, wavy gray hair and a very merry eye twinkling behind his spectacles.

"Yes," said Ann, in her charmingly naïve way; "he crossed on the ship with us, and we all got so anxious about him."

"You were rightly anxious," said the other, suddenly becoming grave. "My name is Dr. Schultz—I am attached to this hotel; and Mr. Mick comes to me on an introduction from his New York doctors."

The party became acquainted, and:

"What exactly is Mr. Mick's case?" Lincoln Hayes asked.

Dr. Schultz shook his head.

"It is very obscure," he confessed. "Altogether, I do not, you understand, agree with the American specialists." His eyes twinkled, and he smiled. "I know you are American, but I am entitled to my own opinion. His dossier I have in my room. It is confusing. I do not make the same reading from his symptoms."

"Has he got any chance?" asked Rorke.

"He has *every* chance. I am doing this—" Dr. Schultz raised a forefinger forensically—"I am sending him out into the desert. He must not stay here, in a room. I am sending him out to live for two, three weeks in the dry air of the desert. This, believe me, will make a great change in Mr. Mick."

"I am awfully glad to hear that," said Ann.

In the car, on the way back to Cairo:

"Do you think you can fix things up finally tomorrow, Paddy?" Lincoln Hayes asked.

"I can count on Hassan ès-Sugra," Rorke replied. "He has never let me down in all the years we've worked together. He understands the necessity for secrecy, and he is assembling a party of five or six men—we don't want more. He is reporting again in the morning, and I fully expect that he will have everything ready. You know Hassan."

"Like him," said Hayes briefly. "Sound man."

"He was with Petrie, he was with the Harvard-Hayes Expedition, and he's been with me on and off for the past seven years. The story is—and we've all got to stick to it; I include you, Ann—that we are looking for the Path of Harmachis; the traditional road that leads from the Sphinx to some unknown spot on the horizon. As a matter of fact, that's what we *are* looking for. But our aims imply that we don't intend to dig anything up—a very important point."

"Got all the permits?" Lincoln Hayes inquired.

"No—there's been a bit of a hitch; but I expect to clear it tomorrow."

"When can we start?"

"I am planning for Thursday, Lincoln."

As they left the avenue of lebbekh trees and neared the outskirts of Cairo, all became silent. Captain Rorke, who was fully alive to the fact that some kind of fanatical côterie, heavily backed financially, was opposed to their plans, wondered if he were justified in exposing Ann to the obvious dangers of the expedition. He had made guarded inquiries regarding Mohammed Ahmes Bey but had been credibly informed that Mohammed Ahmes Bey was abroad.

Lincoln Hayes, while not unmindful on the same score, lived in his mind over and over again that half hour or less with Hatasu in the Surrey cottage. Beyond any question he knew that they would meet at least once more. He wondered what that meeting would bring. . . .

He wondered if his presence here, in Egypt, had been inspired by commercial aims, scientific aims, or merely by a desire to solve the mystery of Hatasu; to seek her out, to strip her of her cloak of secrecy—to find, and to claim, the real woman.

"Haven't I read somewhere about a 'Woman of the Pyramids'?"

Ann's voice was barely audible. She felt very small and insignificant, and in a way lonely, too, although she sat sandwiched between the two men.

"Yes," Rorke answered; his tone was ironical. "An Arab myth, invented by the historian El-Murtâdi. She is supposed to have a weird but fascinating smile and to lure men out into the desert." He laughed. "The Arabs are insanely superstitious. To this day they call the Sphinx 'the Father of Terror.' Fortunately, Hassan ès-Sugra is more up to date. . . ."

Ann was half terrified and half elated: elated because she was with Paddy; terrified because of her memories of that awful and godlike creature whose eyes had pierced her brain, had seemed to reach her spirit. Sometimes she wondered if she had quite shaken off the thrall of those eyes: Paddy watched her in a queer way, sometimes—doubtingly.

Slim was waiting for them at the top of the steps leading up to the terrace at Shepheard's. Lincoln Hayes got out of the car and went up the steps three at a time.

"What is it, Slim?"

"It's a very nasty business, sir. Something funny's 'appened to Mr. Stefanson."

"What kind of thing?"

"I don't know, sir—but it looks to me as though 'e'd gone barmy!"

2

"Perhaps I had better go up alone," said Lincoln Hayes. He turned to Rorke. "You and Ann wait for me down here."

Slim had told his strange story.

Some time before, a native servant, summoned by the bell to Stefanson's room, had discovered Stefanson to be in such an extraordinary state of mind that he had sought out Slim, the only other member of the party then in the hotel, and Slim had gone up. What Slim had found had so greatly disturbed him that he had telephoned to Mena House but had been informed that Hayes and his friends were already on the way back.

"Whatever does it mean?" Ann whispered.

She had grown pale.

"I'll go and see."

Hayes stepped into the elevator and went up to Stefanson's room.

As he rapped on the door it was opened from within. Stefanson, his eyes staring wildly through the lenses of his spectacles, stood there glaring at him.

"Hayes," he said—and, miraculously, his stutter had disappeared! "Hayes! Where am I, and what am I doing here?"

"What's worrying you, Stefanson?" Hayes drawled in his cool way and stepped inside.

He saw a chair drawn up before the writing table, several pipes in an ash tray, and three others filled but unsmoked lying by a writing block upon which was some kind of drawing. One of the shutters was ajar.

"Hayes!" Stefanson grasped him by the shoulders. "Thank God you've come! But where are we—and what are we doing here?"

Lincoln Hayes glanced at the ice bucket. Only one bottle seemed to have been broached. There was a smell of stale tobacco smoke mingled with another peculiar odor which at first he was unable to identify.

"Sit down, Stefanson," he said, "and let's talk."

Stefanson dropped into the chair set before the writing table, watching Hayes pathetically.

"I must be dreaming," he went on.

"Not dreaming," Hayes replied. "Can clear this all up if you'll just tell me what occurred."

"What occurred? . . ." Stefanson laughed rather wildly. "What occurred was this:" (The miracle of his absent stutter had about it something appalling.) "I came along to your house because Ann had left a telephone message for me."

Lincoln Hayes stared uncomprehendingly but did not interrupt the speaker.

"Lurgan showed me into the library. You and Paddy Rorke were there. You asked me to have whisky-and-soda and then said that you were excited. Lurgan brought two bottles of Liebfraumilch." (The man's amazing memory was demonstrated in his recollection of these details.) "I had a drink, and Rorke drew my attention to something on the library table. I sat down to look at it . . . and I must have fallen asleep."

"Fallen asleep?"

"Exactly. Because when I woke up—" he extended his arms, looking about the room—"I was *here*! When I rang the bell, an *Arab* came. He seemed to be frightened, and he went and fetched Slim. Slim tried to tell me that I was in Egypt. Ha, ha! . . ."

He began to laugh again.

"Steady, Stefanson," came the cool voice, and Lincoln Hayes rested a hand upon his shoulder.

"But what is it? A ghastly practical joke?"

"It's no joke. On the other hand, Stefanson, it's nothing to be alarmed about."

The monotonous voice was having a soothing effect. Stefanson stood up.

"These are my pipes," he said, "and there's some of my kit in that wardrobe. But look at this! Just look at *this*!"

He was pointing with an unsteady finger to the writing block upon the table. Hayes crossed and looked down. He saw a crude drawing of a bat with a great blot of ink partly defacing it.

"Well?"

"Who drew that?" Stefanson demanded. "Who drew that thing? But more particularly, Hayes, what am I doing here, and how did I get here?"

"You are here with me—we are all here—Ann and Paddy Rorke are downstairs."

"But where is it?"

"Shepheard's Hotel, Cairo."

"But, Hayes—this is raving lunacy! We don't live in the days of the *Arabian Nights*! A man can't be picked up from your home in New York and magically translated to Cairo. . . ."

The voice without the impediment was the voice of a stranger. And Lincoln Hayes was hard put to it to combat a sense of the uncanny which this phenomenon was forcing upon him.

"No question of translation," he replied coolly. "You just came along with the rest of us. The explanation is simple." He observed a copy of the *Egyptian Gazette* lying upon the side table, and taking it up: "Tell me the date," he said rapidly.

"April eighteen!"

"Look!"

He held up the front page of the paper so that the date was clearly visible.

"May the second!" Stefanson whispered.

His natural pallor grew even greater, and he dropped back into the chair, clutching the table edge and staring up madly at Lincoln Hayes.

"Something has gone in my brain," he said in a low voice. But this fact of the date had clearly steadied him, at the same time that it had frightened him. "You mean that we all came along together, to Egypt—that I was one of the party?"

"Surely."

"We have been traveling on and off for three weeks?"

"We have."

Stefanson relaxed his grip of the table and leaned back in the chair. He was making a palpable effort to grapple with the situation.

"It's a case of lost memory, then. . . ."

"Surely."

"Please post me up, Hayes," said Stefanson, his tones nervous but very quiet, "on the missing part. Just give me an outline of what has really happened since I came into your library on the night of April eighteen up to now."

Lincoln Hayes nodded. In his condensed but lucid way he outlined the story of the papyrus, the darkness, the strange symptoms of Ann Wayland, the arrest of Lurgan. He told Stefanson of the destruction of the Hayes' Lamp in the Museum and of their later loss on board the *Bramahpoona*. He brought the story nearly up to the time that Stefanson had come to his room in Shepheard's to reconstruct, from memory, the formula for the lamp.

His unemotional style of narrative and the strength of his cold personality exercised their due effect. Stefanson crossed to the ice bucket and poured out a glass of hock. He took up the curved briar—the only evidence that he was still not wholly himself being that this was a breach of routine.

At a point when Lincoln Hayes had practically reached the present moment, Stefanson struck a match and lighted his pipe. Immediately:

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, and took the pipe from between his teeth. "This is simply foul!"

A stronger whiff of that curious smell had reached Hayes' nostrils, mingled with the tobacco smoke. He knew now what it was.

"Part of the mystery is solved, Stefanson," he said, quietly. "Someone has mixed hashish with your tobacco."

"I know." Stefanson laid the pipe in the ash tray and began sniffing one of the others which he had already smoked. "I've been drugged! I realize it now, anyway. Perspective's all wrong, and rather swimmy in the head. But—" he pointed to the drawing of the bat—"this?"

"This," Lincoln Hayes replied, "may be accounted for by *that* . . ."

He indicated the open shutter.

"You mean . . . someone came in?"

"Remember what happened to Ann, in New York?"

"Yes." Stefanson ran his fingers through his long fair hair. "Thank God you were here, Hayes. I think I should have gone mad. In fact—I thought I had." He peered at Lincoln Hayes in almost his old way. "Do you know," he added, "this business of

Paddy Rorke's has brought us up against some queer people . . . and they are very powerful."

"I agree. But all the same——"

"Yes?"

"We are going on."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HADJI BEN AZRÎL

BRIGHT EGYPTIAN sunlight poured into Lincoln Hayes' sitting room.

"Notes up to date, Ann?" he asked calmly.

"Yes."

Ann Wayland nodded, looking up from her notebook with a puzzled frown.

She was watching Lincoln Hayes. Paddy Rorke, stretched in an armchair, was watching him also; and Stefanson, seated on the edge of the writing table, had never removed his gaze from Hayes since last he commenced speaking.

He had been telling them the story of his interview with Hatasu in the cottage in England. Ann Wayland had taken a shorthand report of his account.

"Thought it was time you all knew," he went on, "because, although it doesn't add much to our information, it points to the identity of our enemy. Your theory was the right one, Paddy. This light is the secret of some queer organization which may or may not date back to Ancient Egypt. To them, its preservation has a religious significance, and I doubt if they would stick at anything to hold it. Mohammed Ahmes Bey is probably the present custodian. I can only suppose that Hatasu is a member of the order, which is clearly of a religious or semi-religious character. Apart from their expert knowledge of drugs, they seem to have brought hypnotism to a fine art. Ann was under control for some time—and Stefanson—" he turned in Stefanson's direction—"remains so now."

"I have had a whiff of it myself," said Rorke. "In my case, it nearly came off, too."

He spoke vaguely: his mind seemed to be elsewhere.

"Attempts by Lobb's agents," Hayes went on, "although efficient, are mere bungling beside methods of the Egyptians. One fact sticks out—can't overlook it: This thing which we aim to exploit commercially is the private property of these people. Don't let us shut our eyes: we are just pirates."

"You mean," said Stefanson, with no suggestion of a stutter, "that, morally—we ought to give it up and go home?"

"Yes." Lincoln Hayes' disconcerting eyes looked in his direction. "But, nevertheless—I'm not going home."

"You almost had me convinced for a moment," Rorke said. "What is your idea, then?"

"My idea is that nobody is entitled to suppress a scientific fact useful to humanity."

"But *is* it useful?"

"Prepared to discuss possibilities with the people who hold the secret. Don't look for profit; but I'm hungry for knowledge."

And everybody knew that Lincoln Hayes spoke the truth; for he never prevaricated.

“The cards being laid on the table,” said Rorke, “I have a small contribution to make.” He glanced at Ann Wayland. “This concerns you, dear, but I want everybody to know what I know.”

He related the queer episode which had occurred in Lincoln Hayes’ home in New York; telling how Ann Wayland had gone to the telephone and had dictated a cable to “Peraz, Cairo,” advising “Peraz” that Lincoln Hayes was leaving for Egypt. In conclusion:

“I realized,” he explained, “that she was acting under some sort of control. I have watched her anxiously in the interval, but I think she is now free of that strange influence.”

“Paddy!” Ann exclaimed, “why didn’t you tell me?”

“It would have frightened you. But now it’s all past. Freeman of the police is trying to trace this ‘Peraz,’ but to date he has failed.”

Lincoln Hayes walked across the room and selected a cigar.

“You said, Stefanson,” he remarked, “although you don’t remember it, that all these people could do was to steal your memory. That’s just what they have done.”

“Quite!” said Stefanson—and the word without the familiar stutter had almost an uncanny sound.

“I don’t want to go on,” said Ann, her eyes very widely open as she watched Lincoln Hayes rolling the cigar between finger and thumb. “I am not afraid of detective agencies, however clever they may be. But when I think of that awful creature I saw in your lobby——” She paused and shuddered. “And now—” she glanced at Stefanson —“what has happened to him . . .”

“I agree,” Rorke broke in; “it isn’t quite a woman’s job. We are dealing with methods against which we have practically no defense.”

“There’s one thing I don’t understand,” Stefanson said.

“What is it?”

Lincoln Hayes was lighting his cigar.

“It’s this: the theft of my notes and Rorke’s map on board the *Bramahpoona*—which you have explained to me in detail, Hayes, although I don’t remember a thing about it—was what I might term a practical affair. I mean, there was no hocus-pocus. These people seem to be very material, when material methods are called for.”

“True,” Lincoln Hayes agreed. “Only one minor mystery added to the big one. Let’s get down to facts.” He stood facing them in front of the window, feet wide apart, hands in pockets. “If you would rather stay in Cairo, Ann, I can dispense with you—although I should like a complete record of this journey. One thing I want to make clear.” He stared from face to face. “*I’m* going ahead.”

No one spoke, although the challenging gray eyes rested upon each in turn.

“Hassan ès-Sugra got his men together, Paddy?”

“Yes. Five good specimens. It’s not a job of excavation. In fact, they are more of a bodyguard! I have the cars, and I have given Hassan the route to the first camp.”

“Fixed up official business?”

"Yes. The men will be ready to start at dawn tomorrow, go ahead, and fix camp for us. I have arranged for two cars for ourselves, in case one should break down. Equipment goes with Hassan."

"Does he know the real object of our journey?"

"Not from me—but what Hassan doesn't know about Egypt nobody can tell him."

"You mean he suspects there's something else in it?"

Rorke stood up and lighted a cigarette.

"I have long ago ceased to try to conceal my real motives from a cultivated Egyptian," he replied; "but I would trust Hassan with my life."

"Good enough. He's reporting here this evening, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"And now—" Lincoln Hayes turned to Ann—"if Paddy's game, *I'll* take the chance. Want to come or stay in Cairo?"

"I'll come," said Ann in a very low voice.

2

After lunch, Rorke took Ann Wayland for a tour of the bazaar district. Ann's travels had never before touched the East: this was a new and thrilling experience. It did much to raise the pall of gloom which had been descending upon Ann.

The voyages from America to England, and from England to Egypt, had enabled her to throw off to some extent the horrifying memories associated with that night when darkness had descended upon the library and lobby of the Hayes home. Her terror of this unknown menace had returned somewhat today: Stefanson's loss of memory and the miraculous change in his speech had brought back to her very sharply the fact that this uncanny power which had touched her in New York, was operative, and perhaps even more potently, here. . . .

They traveled in an arabiyeh—at Ann's particular request.

Rorke instructed the driver to wait for them by the mosque of el-Azhar. From here they set out on foot, and the wonders of an Arab bazaar claimed Ann.

True that the Mûski has lost much of its Oriental character, but yet it retains, and can never lose, while those narrow ways and overleaning houses remain, some faint perfume, now growing a little vague, of the great days of the Caliphs.

There were not many tourists yet to introduce that note of hurry which is destructive of the color of an Arab street. The seller of lemonade jangled his cups, as sellers of lemonade have jangled their cups from the days of Haroun er-Rashîd; great-wheeled carts, laden with greenstuff, passed along; old men with white beards bestrode tiny donkeys. By intricate byways they came to the bazaar of the jewelers; deft fingers fitted gold wire into patterns engraved upon silver vessels, and little bowls of rubies and emeralds employed by the jewelers stood within reach of any passer-by. . . .

The Khân Khalîl, much fallen from its ancient splendor, yet was a place of wonder to Ann. Stacks of carpets and *mushrabîyeh* furniture; fierce-eyed Arab dealers from the

desert; the subdued clamor of Eastern trade and barter; a smell of Turkish tobacco mingled with that of coffee.

And then the clatter in the market of the Coppersmiths, with clinking of numberless hammers; very, very old men whose eyes appeared to be quite sightless tapping out intricate patterns upon vases and caskets. The streets devoted to foodstuffs and sweetmeats presented battalions of flies and a strange variety of smells. But even this did not dismay Ann. Her happiness was infectious. Wizened old tradesmen, meeting her laughing glance, smiled sympathetically and recaptured a moment of their lost youth. Frequently she held Paddy's hand, and so, by easy stages, and under the cunning pilotage of Rorke, they presently came to the Sûk el-Attarin, Mecca of every woman who visits the bazaar quarter.

In the shop of old Suleyman, dean of the perfumers, Ann uttered a long sigh of delight. Suleyman sat at the far end of the tiny apartment, which resembled nothing so much as a hole in a wall or a small cave. Shelves lined it all around, and upon them stood the most intriguing looking glass-stoppered bottles, with sandalwood boxes and a number of those cut-glass phials like small bâtons, which come from Persia, each containing a minute quantity of that heavy oil which is the true attar of roses.

Upon a narrow divan at the left side of the shop, Rorke and Ann sat down. Old Suleyman bowed slightly without standing up, and clapped his hands. A boy who had been standing outside the shop in the narrow street of the Perfumers, disappeared into a sloping alleyway which opened immediately right of the door. As he did so, Suleyman proffered a large box of cigarettes. Rorke took the box and offered it to Ann.

"The large ones are the amber," said Suleyman, his voice softly unctuous, "which the ladies love. But the others are Turkish Régie, as in the Imperial days."

"I don't think you'd care for the amber," said Rorke easily, "but the others are first-class."

The boy reappeared as if by magic, carrying a tray which he placed upon a little table before them. The tiny cups were filled with aromatic coffee.

The time-ignoring routine of Arab bargaining was opened by Rorke. On a previous visit to New York he had brought Ann an excellent preparation of jasmine from this perfumer, and she was anxious to renew her stock.

At the end of twenty minutes or so, after many cigarettes had been smoked and much coffee consumed, and old Suleyman had agreed to accept, for a small bottle of the priceless extract, the sum of two pounds English, the price originally quoted having been six—Rorke knew that he could get it for five dollars if he cared to remain there for another quarter of an hour—a strange figure entered the shop.

He was a big man with somber dark eyes and shaggy black brows. He wore a black robe and black leather slippers. A pattern of green was woven in and out of his white turban. His entrance produced a remarkable effect upon old Suleyman—who immediately stood up, saluted deeply, and pronounced the *takbîr*.

The newcomer replied in a monotone and dropped down upon a chair placed just within the door, and upon which Suleyman sometimes sat to watch passers-by in the street. Drawing a string of amber beads between long, powerful brown fingers, the stranger, staring straight before him, plunged into a monotonous muttering.

Ann was startled: it was an episode outside her experience. Rorke glanced aside at Suleyman.

"It is the Hadji ben Azrîl," Suleyman whispered; "a very holy man."

He spoke in English, covertly watching the Hadji, and turning to Ann:

"He is a dervish, Ann," said Rorke, "a sort of monk."

"He has nine times performed the pilgrimage to Mecca," Suleyman interjected.

The Hadji continued to count his beads, muttering monotonously, and Ann, who sat near to him, suddenly clutched Rorke's arm.

"I am frightened of this man," she said; "let's go!"

"Nothing to fear, lady." Suleyman had overheard her words. "Very holy man, very good."

But Ann was insistent; and Rorke, offering Suleyman two one-pound notes, requested him to wrap up the perfume. This he proceeded to do, slowly and deliberately. When at last the task was accomplished, Rorke took the package, and Ann, standing up, made for the doorway. At which moment the Hadji ben Azrîl also stood up, confronting her.

His string of beads hanging from one outstretched hand, his deep-set eyes fixed upon her, he spoke rapidly.

Ann shrank back.

"What did he say?" she whispered to Rorke.

Rorke put his arm around her shoulders, squeezing her reassuringly, and:

"He said, Ann, that you are like a rose in the desert."

No expression crossed the face of the Hadji, but he slightly inclined his head in Rorke's direction and then spoke again, in the same rapid monotone.

"He says," Rorke continued, smiling slightly, "that you are a refreshment to his tired eyes, a song, and a cooling stream. It would give him happiness if you would accept a small offering in return for the joy which he has derived from contemplating you."

Ann flushed, and glanced up into Rorke's eyes:

"Is that what he *really* said?"

"As nearly as I can translate it."

"But I couldn't possibly accept a present from him!"

"Please, my lady," came urgently from Suleyman. "Do as the holy man requests—please do not offend him."

The Hadji ben Azrîl, slow and dignified, stepped out into the street.

"But does he want us to go with him?"

"Please do as he asks, lady."

The Hadji turned and spoke again.

"He wants to give you a small phial of a priceless perfume unobtainable elsewhere in Egypt."

"It is very kind of him, but, of course, we shall have to pay for it."

"No, no, lady. No, no!" Suleyman's voice was growing ever more urgent. "The Hadji very great *hakkim*. Very, very great physician. You must not offend him."

But the Hadji, as though he had forgotten their existence, was walking slowly down the center of the street. His passing had a strange effect upon those who witnessed it. Shopkeepers, lemonade sellers, mendicants alike, stood up and saluted him.

"Please follow, sir; please follow, lady. It is very great honor. . . ."

3

Upon the nail-studded door of a native house in a narrow lane approached under an archway, and almost overhung by the minaret of a mosque, the Hadji beat with his fist. The door was opened from within, revealing a small courtyard in which an orange tree grew. He crossed, in his silent, stately manner. Rorke looked back. A Nubian wearing a kind of uniform and crowned with a *tarbūsh* on the front of which there was some gilt emblem, was reclosing the heavy teak door.

Into a small house faced with white stucco and tiles the holy man led the way. Ann, clinging to Rorke's arm, felt herself shrinking.

"Don't be afraid," said Rorke in his quiet, cool way. "In the first place, I've got a gun. In the second place, old Suleyman wouldn't do the dirty. He's straight—according to his lights; and I once did him a good service. Thirdly, these religious blokes are men of their word. There may be a catch in it, but there's nothing to be afraid about."

The courtyard was cool and shady; it had been freshly watered. The interior of the house was very dark. They found themselves in a long, narrow *diwan*, very simply furnished. At the raised end, where there was a deep recessed window, presumably overlooking another street, there were a number of phials, bottles, caskets, ranged upon shelves, so as to resemble a miniature drug store. The Hadji spoke over his shoulder.

"What does he say?"

"He requests us to be seated."

"But where do we sit?"

"On these cushions."

The Hadji ben Azrîl approached the dais, removed his slippers, and barefooted ascended. He took a small ebony box from a shelf, turned, and seated cross-legged on the edge of the raised platform, faced them. He opened the box.

It proved to contain, in a number of wooden compartments, tiny cut-glass phials of various colors. One, of a pale rose color, he extracted, and then reclosed the box. He began speaking in a low voice but without looking at either of his visitors. Rorke, in a whisper, translated.

"He says that this is a perfume made from the Sacred Lotus of Egypt; that it was used only by members of the Pharaohs' families; that the secret of its preparation was known only to the priests."

The monotonous voice of the Hadji ceased. He was holding the tiny phial between finger and thumb, contemplating it raptly. He began to speak again.

“He says, that this secret, with many others of the temples, has been hidden for thousands of years, that you will be the only woman in the world who has possessed any of this extract since the days of Cleopatra.”

“But can it be true, Paddy?”

“I don’t know.”

A faint note of doubt had crept into Rorke’s voice. The place was strangely silent—no sound from the outer world reached them. And as the Hadji ceased speaking again, Rorke found himself thinking about the uniformed Negro who had opened the door. This man was some kind of *darwîsh*, but it was not characteristic for people of his class to possess wealth or to inhabit such an abode as this. He was not exactly uneasy, but his curiosity was mounting higher and higher. The Hadji began to speak again.

“He says that he is honored in being permitted to bestow this small token upon you; that in accepting it you do him a greater service than he can hope to repay.”

The Hadji ben Azrîl stood up and extended the small phial towards Ann.

“Stand up and take it, dear,” Rorke whispered.

Ann advanced, her big eyes fixed upon the strange face of the giver. She took the phial from his hand and smiled her charming smile. The Hadji bowed low, saluting her ceremoniously. Looking, not at her, but over her head, he began to speak once more. Rorke, standing at Ann’s elbow, translated:

“He says that thanks should be returned, not to him, but to his master who has honored him with this small commission.”

A deep voice spoke from the entrance door behind him:

“And who is honored to receive you as his guests today.”

Rorke turned in a flash, and Ann also twisted about, clutching his arm.

Standing in the doorway through which they had entered, so that his figure was silhouetted against the light of the little courtyard where the orange tree grew, was a tall man dressed in white drill and wearing a *tarbūsh*.

It was Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE BOOK OF THOTH

LINCOLN HAYES stared down upon the sun-bathed garden. An Arab who possessed a monkey-like agility was perched in the top of one of the palm trees, trimming the branches. He could see a second man raking a sanded path: otherwise the garden was empty.

The cigar which Hayes held between his teeth was not lighted; his lighter was in hand. The stoic face bore no expression whatever, but Hayes' imagination was at work.

Mohammed Ahmes Bey, or the group which he represented, had scored, so far. Stefanson's memory of the formula had become a complete blank. One asset only they retained. Paddy Rorke knew, or thought he knew, the way to the Place of the Lamps. As Hayes watched the Arabs at work in the garden, that air of slumber which descends upon Cairo when noon approaches began to claim him. A subdued hum of distant traffic reached his ears soothingly. Several crows were floating, effortless, high up in the blue. On a neighboring roof which he overlooked he could see and hear a man sawing wood.

A bird flew past his balcony; another followed. Martins—newly arrived from Europe, perhaps from England—perhaps even from Surrey.

Only an hour ago, and just after Ann and Rorke had left for a tour of the Mûski, Hayes had received a cable from his London agent. The gray house in the Surrey hills belonged to a Dr. Volnay, author of two much discussed books on time and space, but principally celebrated as an Egyptologist, and at one time attached to the British Museum. . . .

There came a rap on the door.

"Come in."

Slim entered. His expression was unamiable.

"A lady 'ere, sir."

"What name?"

"No name, sir." Slim glanced over his shoulder, endeavoring to veil his natural truculency. "But she'd got right up when I spotted 'er."

"What does she want?"

"She won't say, sir." He stepped aside. "But 'ere she is."

Hatasu came in.

She wore a costume of loosely woven cream tweed of native workmanship. It clung lovingly to her lithe figure. Stockingless, her slim feet were revealed by red-and-cream sandals. There was a cowled cape embroidered in fanciful patterns of red and green. Since she wore no hat, the glory of her hair, touched by reflected light, crowned her with flame, as Hayes always remembered her.

"You may go, Slim."

There was no alteration of tone, no trace of expression on the lean face.

The door closed behind Slim.

Hatasu extended her hand. Lincoln Hayes stood quite still, unlighted cigar clenched between his teeth.

"I had to come," she said. "I am not here on behalf of anyone but myself. I am here because—I wanted to come."

Hayes tossed his cigar backward out of the window. He took Hatasu's hand and raised it to his lips. He held it so for a long time; then:

"I have dreamed for days and nights that you would come to me and say that," he said.

Even now a listener must have failed to detect any emotion in his voice or a watcher any in his expression; but he dusted invisible ash from the lapel of his coat. Hatasu, as he dropped her hand, looked down for a moment at the reddened knuckles. He was fascinated by a long lapis-lazuli ring which she wore upon an index finger. She raised her long lashes, watching him.

It was a child who watched; a maid newly upon the world who doubts and wonders, uncertain—still uncertain—if her instincts are to be trusted. This was no Sybil, no inspired priestess, but that same Hatasu who had exhibited such exquisite embarrassment in a Surrey cottage. . . .

When she dropped down on a settee, left of the open window, Lincoln Hayes sat beside her and took both her hands. It was their second meeting only. But Hatasu's eyes bridged a hundred ages.

"Why did you come, Hatasu?"

"I had to come."

"To try to stop me going on?"

"Yes."

"But you said you came on your own behalf."

"I said I came because I wanted to come. That is different."

Hayes was silent for a moment; but Hatasu averted her glance.

"You mean—" his voice was quite even—"you want to save me from some peril which you think I shall incur if I go on?"

Hatasu nodded, still glancing aside. He continued to hold her hands.

"I warned you in England. Then, I was doing my duty. Now I come to warn you . . . for myself."

Lincoln Hayes conquered an insane urge to bury his face in the flame of her wonderful hair, to clasp her, to hold her, to deny her escape ever again into that misty background out of which she came—in which she threatened to be lost. Her eyes had told him that an Oriental infatuation, swift, born as a desert dawn, had responded to his own intense desire for this woman . . . or, was it mirage—created to delude him?

He dropped her hands suddenly and clenched his fists.

"Please!" She was staring out of the open window. Her soft voice was very unsteady. "Don't speak for a moment, because what you want to say would be untrue. Just listen to me. Let me tell you what I came to tell you."

Lincoln Hayes stood up, took a cigarette from a box upon a near-by table, and lighted it. He stood three paces away, watching Hatasu and smoking.

"It has only been possible"—Hatasu continued to look away from Lincoln Hayes and out towards the palm trees—"for me to be here today, to be here now, because he whom you call Mohammed Bey is not watching me."

"He whom I *call* Mohammed Bey?" Lincoln Hayes murmured dryly.

"He is known in Egypt as Mohammed Bey—to us, he is known by another name."

"The Bat?"

Hatasu was silent for a moment; she closed and relaxed her slender hands.

"The wings of the Bat only open in darkness," she replied—and Hayes recognized sharply that her tone had changed. "And so, by some, he is called 'the Bat.' "

"Hatasu——"

"Darkness is the cloak of light. It is not always good"—she turned her head very slowly, and now regarded him, her beautiful eyes widely open—"for the world to have Light."

"Hatasu!" Hayes' tones lost their monotony, so that the name was given new, strange music. "Hatasu! You threaten to slip away again to some strange world which you have come to regard as the real world. Hatasu!"—his lighted cigarette followed the course of the unlighted cigar—"I am going to call you back!"

He reached her in two strides. She shrank, looking up. But he knelt at her feet and rested his crossed arms on her knees.

"There is something you want to tell me. What is it?"

"You must not go on! I came to tell you that if you go on . . . you will never come back!"

She was young again, a child-woman, straining against some mystic leash; hesitant, longing, questioning eyes looked down at him.

"Is that all you came to say?"

"Yes. I came to try to save you—disappearing from the world you live in. . . ."

Lincoln Hayes unclasped his arms; they had rested on her knees like bars of steel. And suddenly they were locked about her. Implacably she was drawn to him—gray eyes looked into violet eyes. . . .

"Hatasu!" The word was spoken in a voice which no one of those associated with Lincoln Hayes would have recognized. "You want me to give up? For your sake, I will. But *you* are my price!"

2

At about the same moment, in that barely furnished saloon of the house near the Mûski, Captain Rorke and Mohammed Ahmes Bey faced one another along the length of the room. Ann, turning, had taken a step back, had clutched Rorke's arm. The holy man had effaced himself. There was a moment of complete silence.

Something in the bearing and the glance of Mohammed Ahmes Bey, now that she saw him without the tinted glasses that he had worn in New York, communicated a queer shock to Ann. Always, since they had told her what had happened on that night, she had associated the apparition of the god—the god she couldn't identify—in some way with Mohammed Bey. Now she found herself seeking through her memories of old Egyptian headdresses, for one with which to crown that majestic brow.

"Miss Wayland, Captain Rorke," came the vibrant, musical voice, and the Egyptian moved forward in their direction. "I beg of you to be seated for a moment."

With a sweep of his arm he indicated a long divan set just right of the open doorway. Words trembled on Rorke's tongue, words which he suppressed. Whatever his private conviction, he remembered that there was not a scrap of evidence to connect this dignified Egyptian with any of the misfortunes which had befallen them since the papyrus had come into his possession. Furthermore, he knew that Lincoln Hayes was inclining more and more to the view that Mohammed Ahmes Bey, in all likelihood, had a perfect right to protect the secret of the Lamps from anyone who tried to obtain possession of it.

He grasped Ann's arm, squeezing it reassuringly, and led her to the divan. They sat down.

The Egyptian seated himself upon a wooden chest inlaid with silver and copper, facing them. Ann glanced at the little phial which she held in her hand and then up again quickly at Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

"Yes, Miss Wayland," he answered her unspoken question; "the Lotus essence is my present to you. A peace offering because I frightened you in New York."

Again Rorke was about to speak, and a second time he hesitated. The frank admission was rather disarming.

"It is as the Hadji represented it to be," Mohammed Bey continued. "It is a perfume which the world has not known, certainly since the days of the Cæsars, even if the secret survived so long. This house is not, as you may suppose, my own. It belongs to a friend, a learned Arab physician attached to el-Azhar, who frequently carries out experiments for me. The cut-glass phial which you hold in your hand, Miss Wayland, contains a quarter of a drachm of one of his recent successes."

"Thank you," said Ann, in a smothered voice.

The gaze of the Egyptian's large luminous eyes had rested upon her for a moment. She had twisted her head sharply aside. A power seemed to radiate from those eyes which could almost physically be felt. But—and it was this recognition which chilled her—they were unmistakably the eyes that had looked out from the head of the weird Egyptian god who had confronted her in the lobby of Lincoln Hayes' house!

"May I take it," said Rorke, in his light, quiet voice, "that you do not deny having stolen the fragment of the *Book of Thoth*?"

Mohammed Ahmes Bey stared at the speaker for a moment: Rorke's cold blue eyes remained fixed upon the hawk-like face, but they met a regard which, to his intense anger, Rorke found himself unable to sustain. He lowered his glance protectively.

"I will plead guilty to that charge, Captain Rorke, if you, on your part, will plead guilty to having obtained this fragment from one whom you knew to be a thief."

"I admit no legal culpability on my side."

"I admit none on mine. Apart from any claim which the Department of Antiquities may have had in the matter, you must admit that you made no attempt to learn the identity of the proper owner."

"No." Rorke forced a smile. "Let us say that, believing himself to be justified, each of us is a thief."

Mohammed Ahmes Bey did not respond to the note of badinage in the speaker's voice. He inclined his dark head very slightly and:

"As you please," he said.

Rorke looked up quickly. Mohammed Bey's expression had changed: it was as though some mysterious power had suddenly been switched off. He found it quite possible now to meet the man's glance without experiencing a sensation as though an X-ray were piercing his brain.

"I see, now," said Ann, still speaking in a very low voice, "that we were tricked into coming here today."

"I have been awaiting such an opportunity," Mohammed Bey replied, "ever since you arrived in Cairo."

"But what is your object?" Rorke inquired.

"My object is this: I have access to certain knowledge lost to humanity for thousands of years. It is knowledge for which the world is not ready. Even I may only employ it when very great impersonal issues are at stake. To illustrate what I mean—" he extended an ivory hand upon one finger of which there was a large scarab ring—"I employed certain elementary powers of which I know the secret in the case of Mr. Ulric Stefanson recently. His phenomenal memory promised to inconvenience me. I was therefore entitled to act as I did, since the only alternative must have been his death."

He spoke of that alternative as lightly as another might have said, "his resignation."

"You mean," said Rorke slowly, "that you employ ordinary methods whenever ordinary methods are practicable?"

"Exactly. Hence my unspoken invitation to you to join me here today. I wished to employ 'ordinary methods.' "

"I am afraid, Mohammed Bey," Ann interjected, "that I don't quite follow you. Why did you wish to see us?"

"It was Captain Rorke with whom I desired a conversation." Mohammed Ahmes Bey bowed in Ann's direction. "But to see *you* at any time is a great and satisfying pleasure."

"You say you wanted to see *me*?" Rorke murmured.

"I did. You are the only member of the party who remains in any sense a menace to the safety of those treasures which I am compelled to guard. Mr. Stefanson probably will never recall the formula which he has forgotten. His recompense—an accident which I had not foreseen—will be that he will never regain his stutter, unless I will it otherwise; in which event, he will recover both. Your own memory, Captain Rorke, and your admirable knowledge of my country, demand my attention."

Rorke leaned forward, resting his arms upon his knees.

“What do you propose to do about it?” he inquired.

Mohammed Ahmes Bey slowly stood up. Ann watched him.

“I could quite easily have you expelled from Egypt,” he replied, his deep voice quite emotionless. “I have influence. This would be one ‘ordinary method.’ I could have your permits to visit the Oasis of Sîwa, canceled. This would be another ‘ordinary method.’ I have adopted the third, that of seeing you personally.” He paused for a moment; then: “I prefer to tell you,” he went on, “that if you ever reach the Place of the Lamps it will be because I have permitted you to do so.”

Rorke also stood up.

“I accept your assurance, Mohammed Bey,” he said. “One does not doubt your word.”

“The man from whom you originally obtained the papyrus was, I regret to say, a renegade member of the Order to which I have the honor to belong. That Lamp which for a time occupied a case in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, was discovered in the tomb of a priest who in his day had been a member of the Order. Why it was buried with him, I cannot imagine. In short, Captain Rorke, those glimpses of the Light which have leaked into the outer world have been due to accident, never to design of ours. Please inform Mr. Lincoln Hayes that exploitation of this system of lighting will be detrimental to the welfare of humanity as humanity is at present constituted. Consider this statement on your own behalf. Proceed, if you wish to proceed. I only desire to warn you.”

He clapped his hands, and the Negro servant wearing the *tarbūsh* with the gilded emblem in front, appeared from the courtyard, bowing deeply.

“I shall not offer you coffee,” Mohammed Bey proceeded, “since your silence implies that my warning is to be disregarded.”

“I know,” Rorke replied, “that Hayes will go on.”

Ann stood up.

“We must go and find our carriage,” she said.

“Your arabiyeh is at the door,” Mohammed Bey assured her. “One of my friend’s servants recalled the man from the Mosque of el-Azhar, where he was waiting.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE WOMAN OF THE PYRAMID

RORKE's route to their mysterious destination was largely exploratory. Few travelers would have undertaken it.

Lincoln Hayes had given him a free hand. The best cars Cairo could provide and refit at short notice had been obtained. Rorke driving and acting as pilot, with Hayes as his passenger, led in a Rolls. Slim, with Ann Wayland and Stefanson, followed in a big American car. The heavy cars which had gone ahead had been chosen with the same disregard of cost. In seeking to establish new records, millions can be useful.

Cultivated land, and then all traces of habitation were left behind. Their way lay along an ancient caravan road, ill-suited to motor traffic. There was nothing to see but sand and sky; nothing to break that sun-baked desolation.

Lincoln Hayes was continually reliving those last few moments which he had spent with Hatasu. . . .

"Yes, I will see you again if I can. . . . You don't know what I risk by being here now. . . . What you ask is impossible. I am not free—I can never be free. . . ."

But his pleading had not left her unmoved. He had felt her shaking in his arms when he had tried to detain her—begged her not to go back. It was the first great passion of his life—but she was an Oriental: as she averred and clearly believed, a descendant of that mysterious people who for many generations had ruled Egypt. The tradition of the harem was bad enough, but this was worse!

She lived no cloistered life. Her master or masters, as he knew, did not hesitate to use her as a decoy. Hatasu was enmeshed. In meeting him she had recognized the sweets of freedom. From being on the point of abandoning his quest, he was now set upon it with grim determination. His democratic mind demanded that every human being be free to choose the path in which his or her feet should wander. Not even Rorke's account of his interview with Mohammed Ahmes Bey could divert him from his purpose. As he looked out over the sun-parched sands, Hatasu's parting words echoed in his ears:

"Promise me, please, because I came today for you—just for you—that you will tell no one, no one, that I have been here."

"I promise."

The scene lived again in his memory: he heard his own monotonous voice answering, when:

"*There it is again!*" said Rorke quietly.

Lincoln Hayes aroused himself from reverie. He peered keenly ahead.

They were upon the lip of a long, deep depression, gloomily patched with dense shadow but boasting no scrap of vegetation. The path at this point, a particularly bad one, skirted this desolate valley and might be faintly traced by sundry indications, some

of them taking the form of little mounds of stone. It was already approaching noon, and a heat haze danced like running water over the wilderness.

A mile, perhaps two miles, ahead—difficult to estimate under the conditions—a figure, apparently that of an Arab woman, black robed and white veiled, stood up sharply on an irregular peak.

At the moment that Hayes caught sight of her she seemed to raise her arm as if beckoning to them. . . .

He leaned forward and swiftly drew a pair of powerful field glasses from their case, but before he could focus them . . . the figure vanished.

Hayes glanced aside at Rorke, then turned and looked back. The following car was just mounting the slope which led to the lip of this desolate crater.

"No check-up there," he muttered; "they couldn't possibly have seen it."

"I am glad *you* saw it," said Rorke. "I have come across mirage several times, but never in the form of a woman."

For this was the *third* time that they had sighted the beckoning figure!

They drove on in silence for a mile or more, Rorke keeping the Rolls on the track by virtue, apparently, of some extra sense; then:

"Better say nothing about it," Hayes murmured. "Sure to frighten Ann."

"Enough to frighten anybody," Rorke replied. "Only the Woman of the Pyramid, or some other apparition, could very well play the part. No human being could have kept ahead of us, unless employing a fast car. And as you can see from this point, Lincoln, there's nothing on the track right to the horizon."

Lincoln Hayes raised his glasses and peered ahead. He saw a tract of desert which would not have afforded cover to anything bigger than a jackal.

The black-robed woman had vanished into thin air.

"Some kind of delusion," he said monotonously, dropping the glasses back into their case. "As you say, peculiar form of mirage."

"Very peculiar."

Hayes had been wondering, ever since Rorke's account of that queer interview in the house near the Mûski, what link existed between Mohammed Ahmes Bey, who admitted that he was not a Moslem, and such fanatics as Hadji ben Azrîl. Had the Bey some sort of control of certain fanatical groups? It was just possible that the Hadji was a Senussi, and the Senussiyeh are the most dangerous fanatics on the Egyptian borders.

Their route lay through Senussi territory.

"We should sight a dome-shaped rock in the course of the next half hour," said Rorke suddenly, "unless I have missed the proper caravan road. It's quite easy to do so; they are all byways. We are already twenty miles south of the main route."

"You've planned to halt there?"

"Yes. According to my map it should be a shady spot on one side, and a rest and a whisky-and-soda will be most acceptable. This kind of driving is very trying to the eyes."

It was an hour later before they reached the domed rock, a forbidding natural formation which, nevertheless, plainly suggested the handiwork of man.

On one side was a sheer cleft, not unlike the entrance to a mosque, which cast a deep shadow over a wide area of sand. Here they parked the cars; and Slim, having opened the luncheon baskets, set to work to inspect the tires. Certain evidences of ancient litter in the neighborhood suggested that this was a former halting place for whatever caravans had used this dreary road.

To Rorke's great relief it was obvious that the occupants of the second car had seen nothing of the veiled woman. The silence was so complete as to be awe-inspiring. Nothing stirred right away to the horizon excepting waves of heat in the breathless air. High above them, as yet mere specks in the blazing vault, carrion crows were gathering.

2

The spot selected for the camp was in a shallow wadi overhung by a spur of a range of hills which, as could be seen against the darkening sky, developed mountainously in the distant west. At this point they were far south of the main caravan road and well away from observation by any other travelers.

They had no more than half an hour before swift dusk would fall, and although Rorke showed no outward uneasiness, he wondered if he had allowed sufficiently for the difficulties of the route. Once the swift mantle of darkness had fallen, further progress would be out of the question.

He was thinking of Ann. A night in the desert without proper food or shelter would not disturb him, personally, but he did not care to contemplate it in her case. Suddenly:

"That looks like the hill," he exclaimed.

Lincoln Hayes raised his glasses.

"According to Hassan, approached from this side," Rorke went on, "it should have something of the appearance of a kneeling camel."

"Good. That should be the spot. Can we do it?"

"Just about, if the road gets no worse."

Great bowls of shadow lay in the gullies of the hills, dark as pools of ink. Almost perceptibly they widened out, at one point touching the faintly visible path.

"Is the camp just beyond that hill?" Hayes asked.

"In a narrow valley southwest of it."

They pressed on as fast as was practicable, the second car following closely. The spur of the hills, its shadows changing from purple to black, was a very deceptive sailing mark and much further away than it appeared to be. Lincoln Hayes continually raised the glasses, looking for evidences of the camp.

"What's that?" he exclaimed sharply.

A black-robed figure had appeared, silhouetted on the lower slope, peering under upraised hands in their direction.

"Good God!" Rorke whispered, "*not again!*"

Hayes continued to stare through the glasses, and now:

"No," he reported.

"Who is it?"

"Hassan ès-Sugra."

And as he spoke the figure raised a black-clad arm in salutation and began to descend the slope to meet them.

"Thank heaven!" said Rorke.

With ten minutes in hand they reached a point from which the little camp might be sighted. Shadow already touched the tents, but out of it glowed the cheerful spectacle of a camp kitchen.

As they climbed stiffly out of the car, Hassan ès-Sugra, the Arab headman, saluted them respectfully. He was an ascetic-looking Egyptian, his robe black and his turban white. A slender man with small, delicate features and the gentle eyes of a gazelle. He carried an ebony cane. His carriage and manner had a quiet dignity, but one would never have credited him with a capacity for the command of men. Yet, for this he was noted, and justly. As Rorke stretched his cramped limbs and returned the Egyptian's salutation:

"I have to report, sir, a somewhat serious matter," Hassan said.

"What is it?"

Lincoln Hayes was the speaker.

"When the tents were erected and the camp prepared, sir, which, as you see, has been done, I gave the men leave to rest for an hour. I also slept in the shadow of the big tent, for I was weary."

He paused, and smiled slightly, extending his brown palms. Ann Wayland came up, followed by Stefanson.

"When I awoke, sir, three of the men had gone!"

3

There was a momentary silence of consternation; then:

"What!" Rorke exclaimed. "Gone where?"

Hassan ès-Sugra's slender hands remained extended.

"I cannot say, sir."

"Stolen anything?" Lincoln Hayes inquired.

"Except a little food and water, sir—nothing."

Rorke stared at Hayes; Ann looked in a troubled way from one to another.

"What's all this about?" Stefanson inquired.

"Don't know," Lincoln Hayes replied. "Very mysterious."

"Never heard of such a thing in all my experience," Rorke declared. "You know these men?"

"Naturally, sir. Two of them have been with you before. All three I have known for many years; they are men of the Fayûm."

"Had there been any trouble?"

"None, sir."

"Do the three that stayed know anything about it?"

"If they do—" Hassan shrugged his slight shoulders—"they remain silent; although I have thrashed two of them."

Ann's eyes opened widely, and Stefanson peered through his spectacles with a stare of complete incredulity. He assumed Hassan ès-Sugra to be joking, until he detected Rorke nodding grimly to Lincoln Hayes.

"The hand of Hassan can be very heavy," Rorke explained in a low voice to Stefanson. "I have seen him break up a minor riot armed only with his ebony cane. But this thing really disturbs me."

"The three men who remain, sir," Hassan ès-Sugra went on in his gentle way, "should be sufficient. Fortunately, one of them is the cook—and all three are drivers."

But the mysterious episode had created a highly unpleasant atmosphere, which appetizing odors from the camp kitchen—presided over by a big, bearded fellow with glittering white teeth—could not entirely dispel. A quota of water was available for washing purposes, and after the trying journey the scanty comforts of the tents seemed almost luxurious.

One of these, a bell tent, designed to accommodate Lincoln Hayes and Rorke, had been prepared as the dining room. Slim, who was sharing a tent with Stefanson, waited at table, an office which he performed admirably. There was nothing in his manner to suggest that this queer business was anything out of the ordinary. Only once did he venture on a comment, overhearing a remark by Lincoln Hayes:

"If those three blokes are going to walk back, they're welcome to the stroll."

Dinner dispatched, Slim set about the task of cleaning the cars by lantern light, whistling the ancient war melody "It's a long way to Tipperary," varied by "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag."

Ann retired to her own tent after dinner to write up the log of the day's journey. The natives had gone to their own encampment farther along the wadi. Excepting snatches of "The old kit bag" and a sound resembling that made by a groom rubbing down a horse, she could hear nothing whatever.

The silence of the desert night seemed to hem her in like a high, dark wall. She found herself *listening* to the silence, until it became so oppressive that with a shudder, although she wore a warm coat over her dress, she forced herself to concentrate upon her notebook. . . .

In the larger tent Hassan ès-Sugra had been summoned to a conference.

"Did anything occur, Hassan," Rorke asked, "on the journey today to account for the desertion of these three men?"

"Nothing, sir, that I saw myself, but—" he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously —"they were ignorant fellows, and superstitious."

"Ah!" Rorke glanced at Lincoln Hayes. "What were they superstitious about?"

“They were in the big car, sir, the stores car, and although the driver who is here now swears that he saw nothing, they claimed, these poor fools, these low carrion—” he spoke the words almost tenderly—“that a woman beckoned to them from the path ahead.”

“Hmm!” Lincoln Hayes lighted a cigar with great care. “Why should that frighten them?”

“They say, sir, these eaters of pork and camel dung, that such a sight is a sign of destruction. . . .” He shrugged his shoulders. “In their case it may easily prove to be. It is a long journey they have undertaken on foot, and there is no water. . . .”

“Speaking of water,” said Lincoln Hayes, “how are we fixed for tomorrow?”

“We camp at a well tomorrow night,” Rorke replied, bending over his map, which was spread upon the table. “At this time of the year there should be water there—you think so, Hassan?”

“But, yes, sir. I am sure of it.”

“You have been there before?” Stefanson suggested anxiously.

“Three times, sir.”

“Good.”

Stefanson looked longingly at a half-empty bottle of Hochheimer which stood upon the table, but sadly shook his head and placed the cork more firmly in position. He had been put on a strict allowance.

“Did those swine take any of the arms?” Rorke asked abruptly.

“No, sir.”

“More and more mysterious,” Hayes murmured.

“I am sure that it was fear that drove them, those sons of mules and shames of their mothers. They are honest enough and would not steal.”

“All the same,” said Rorke, “I begin to wish we had gone by air to Matruh.”

“Too much publicity,” came Lincoln Hayes’ monotonous voice.

“I can’t make head nor tail of it,” Stefanson declared.

“I think, sir,” the gentle voice of Hassan ès-Sugra began, when his words were interrupted. . . .

A terrified cry, resembling a suppressed scream, broke the eerie stillness. The three men at the table—Hassan was already standing—came to their feet at a bound.

“It was Ann!”

Rorke raced out of the doorway. The others followed pell-mell—and almost collided with Slim, who, deserting his task further along the wadi, was running in the direction of the girl’s tent.

Rorke was first in, the others crowding behind him and staring over his shoulder. Ann, looking very pale in the light of a lantern swung from the tent pole, sat in a canvas chair, clutching the arms. A notebook and pencil lay on the floor at her feet.

“Ann darling! What is it?”

Rorke dropped on one knee and threw his arms about her. She stared at him, vaguely; her lips were twitching; for a moment she was unable to speak.

“Pour out some water,” said Rorke urgently, nodding in the direction of a bottle of Vichy water standing upon a little table. Stefanson, somewhat unsteadily, did as directed, and Ann swallowed a few sips, Rorke holding the glass. Then, her voice almost a whisper:

“*Wings!*” she said—“I heard the sound of *wings*!”

She looked up towards the tent opening, while Lincoln Hayes stood watching her, Hassan ès-Sugra at his side.

“Something flew past the door. I was frightened. And then . . .”

She ceased speaking and raised her hands to her eyes.

“And then, what, dear?” Rorke prompted gently.

She lowered her hands and looked up with an expression of horror.

“*A bat flew in!* Not an ordinary bat—” again she shuddered violently—“but a great thing—a horrid thing. I could see its *eyes*. . . .”

Rorke held her tightly, pressing her head against his shoulder.

“A very nasty experience, darling,” he murmured; “enough to frighten anybody. But it didn’t actually . . . touch you?”

“Thank God, no! If it had, I should have died. It just flew around and out again.”

Rorke looked up, exchanging a significant glance with Hassan ès-Sugra.

“There are big bats in this neighborhood, are there not, Hassan?” he asked.

The gentle eyes regarded him fixedly for a moment, and then:

“Oh, yes, sir,” Hassan replied. “But they are quite harmless.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MYSTERY CAMP

"THE modern girl, good for almost anything," said Lincoln Hayes monotonously, "and I'd back Ann against most. But this bat business is breaking her nerve."

"I admit, Lincoln," said Rorke, "that I am sorry she is with us, now. It's one thing to be up against the agents of a commercial competitor—but these other people are a different proposition."

Ann, exhibiting magnificent courage, had quite reconquered her composure; had, indeed, resumed her notes. But Hassan ès-Sugra was on duty immediately outside her tent.

"Once superstition gets hold of one," said Rorke, "it's a hard taskmaster. It's a thousand to one against finding a big bat in this neighborhood, and I can only suppose that the bat and the woman——"

He ceased speaking, glancing at Stefanson. He had remembered just in time the agreement with Hayes to keep the apparition of the veiled woman a secret from the others.

"Do you think she imagined it?" Stefanson asked.

"Possible! It's also possible," Rorke replied, "that there *are* large bats in the neighborhood. There must be caves up there on the hillside, I suppose. Nevertheless, I should not have expected it."

"Hassan and Slim," said Lincoln Hayes, "are standing guard, turn and turn about, all night."

"I think," said Rorke, lighting a cigarette and speaking without any evidence of urgency, "that it may be desirable in future for us to split ourselves up into watches. I mean—" he glanced around—"there may be spies about. If so, we want to know . . ."

The little camp was very still when suddenly, soft-footed, Hassan ès-Sugra appeared at the open door, one slender forefinger raised to his lips. He bent forward and, speaking in a whisper:

"Sir," he addressed Rorke, "I do not wish to disturb the lady again—but I heard a sound on the hill!"

"What?"

The inquiry came from Lincoln Hayes, a toneless, unemotional inquiry.

"Someone or something is moving, sir, just beyond the ridge." He moved his arm indicating the slope which overhung the tents. "If you would be so good as to ask Mr. Slim to take my place, I shall be glad to see to this affair, sir."

The three men came quietly out of the tent. All stood there, listening.

Nearly a minute passed in absolute silence; it was so still that the ruffle of paper as Ann Wayland, in her neighboring tent, turned over a page, could quite clearly be heard. The natives were asleep, and Slim had ceased his whistling.

"You hear it, sir?" Hassan whispered.

All had heard it, although it was no more than a faint movement as of stones being disturbed, such a movement as one would have made who walked up there on those desolate slopes.

"Get Slim," Lincoln Hayes spoke tersely. "He is to stand by outside Ann's tent."

He stared upwards. Moon-gray highlights with pools of black shadow extended to the jagged crest sharply outlined against a sky the color of lapis-lazuli, pierced by a million points of light.

"You know the route to the top, Hassan?"

"Certainly, sir," Hassan ès-Sugra's gentle voice replied. "If you will please follow."

"Rorke, stand by with Stefanson; nothing to gain by anyone else going."

Rorke shrugged his shoulders and then nodded.

"This way if you please, sir. Follow me closely."

The slender Hassan ès-Sugra apparently possessed the agility of a mountain goat, for Lincoln Hayes, iron muscled though he was, discovered himself to be bathed in perspiration when they gained the crest. How Hassan had found or retained his memory of the path defeated conjecture. But within three paces of the top:

"If you please, sir, lie down here."

They had made little sound and heard none throughout their ascent. And now, crawling cautiously forward, Lincoln Hayes saw straight below him a prospect of moon-dappled desert extending, it seemed, to infinity.

"There!—where I am pointing."

Hayes glanced at the outstretched hand of the Egyptian, turned, and, shading his eyes from the moon, stared into the northeast.

A point of light glowed redly in the desert.

2

Lincoln Hayes lay prone among the limestone boulders, watching that distant light in the desert.

"It is, I think," said Hassan ès-Sugra, whose gazelle-like eyes masked the vision of a hawk, "a small camp. It may only be Bedouins or a caravan of merchants."

"Arabs wouldn't interfere with us; merchants wouldn't be interested," came Hayes' monotone. "But somebody was right on this hillside tonight, spying us out."

"It is true, sir, yet he has gone."

"Heard us coming."

"If you wish, sir—they are no more than two miles away—I can approach near enough to see who they are, and report to you."

There was a momentary silence, and then:

"Good," said Hayes. "But first, go ahead and show me the path down to the camp."

Ann was in the big tent when he returned. She had got wind of the fact that something was afoot.

“Another camp,” said Lincoln Hayes dryly, “opposite side of the ridge. Somebody seems to be interested in us.”

“Quite!” said Stefanson, absent-mindedly uncorking the bottle of Hochheimer and filling a glass. “Quite!”

“It’s a queer route,” murmured Rorke, “even more queer than ours.” He glanced uneasily at Ann. “But I don’t think it’s anything to worry about.”

She had quite recovered her natural gayety and smiled in the old, fascinating way.

“Whoever they may be,” she declared, “I rather welcome them in this awful desert.”

“Notes up to date?” said Lincoln Hayes dryly.

Ann stared at him wide-eyed for a moment, and then:

“No,” she confessed. “I came along to see what was happening.”

He smiled and, throwing one arm around her shoulders, squeezed her affectionately.

“You’re a grand boy,” he said.

Rorke grinned at the pair, lighting a cigarette.

“I suppose, hated rival,” he remarked, “Hassan has gone to investigate?”

“Yes.”

“How far away is the camp?”

“Two miles.”

Rorke glanced at his wrist watch.

“Hassan will report in about half an hour,” he announced. “He is a very remarkable man, as I know from experience. May I suggest, Lincoln, that the rations run to a drink all round and one for Slim?”

Slim, who stood at the door of the tent, immobile as a graven image, permitted a slight grimace to cross his features.

“Idea a sound one,” Hayes agreed. “Slim, serve. If this thing looks like we’re being covered, is the route onwards possible for cars by moonlight, Paddy?”

“Well . . .”

Rorke bent over the map which remained spread upon the table. Slim opened the wicker basket and produced bottles and siphon.

“Up to this point—” he rested his finger on the map—“it is. After that for camels—possibly, yes; for cars, I doubt it. We might manage forty miles, halt until dawn, and then push on, if you think it advisable.”

“Depends on Hassan’s report.”

They became restored to better humor and succeeded in banishing some of their ghostly memories: on the one part, of the veiled woman, on the other, of the bat. Then, unannounced by any sound of footsteps, Hassan ès-Sugra bowed in the opening of the tent. His ascetic features exhibited no evidence of fatigue; his gazelle-like eyes were kindly.

“Well, Hassan,” said Rorke, “what did you discover?”

Lincoln Hayes, cigar in mouth, watched the Egyptian with that appraising eye which never missed a good man. Stefanson and Slim, who had been talking together, stood up. Ann Wayland, who derived some odd sense of comfort from the mere presence of the imperturbable Hassan, watched him from her chair fascinatedly.

"It is some traveler, sir." Hassan's voice was as musical, his breathing as regular, as usual. "There are three cars and two tents, but everyone seems to be asleep except the guide."

"The guide?" said Stefanson interrogatively.

"He was smoking by the door of one of the tents. I know what he was smoking—" he shrugged contemptuously—"hashish."

"Hashish?"

Stefanson emptied his glass and hastily refilled it.

"These poor people," Hassan went on sympathetically, "form the habit, sir. But except for this he is a good guide. He is Ali Abdûl Baruch."

"Who is Ali Abdûl Baruch?" Lincoln Hayes inquired.

"The best dragoman in Cairo, sir. Where he leads his party, I cannot say: but, for a dragoman, he is a good man."

"Very queer," Hayes muttered.

"I was rather thinking," said Stefanson, and his voice without his stutter invariably alarmed Ann, "that your idea, Hayes, of pushing on, may not be a bad one."

"It is as you wish, sir," said Hassan ès-Sugra, looking at Lincoln Hayes. "After two hours I can order the men to get ready."

Rorke, studying the map, looked up at the speaker over his left shoulder, and:

"That would do, Hassan," he said, "and give us all two hours' sleep. It's not a bad move, Lincoln, if we are really covered."

3

"Effendim."

Lincoln Hayes awoke with a start. A dim light, the light of the false dawn, showed him a figure vaguely silhouetted against the lifted tent flap.

He experienced some difficulty in placing his whereabouts; then he remembered—this was the last night of their outward journey. The long and weary trek—since the desertion of the three men—had passed off practically uneventfully. His confusion was due to the fact that he had been dreaming that Mohammed Ahmes Bey was following them. Rorke stirred on a neighboring camp bed and sat up.

"Hassan!"

"Yes, sir. I have to report an unfortunate occurrence."

"Nothing has happened to Stefanson?"

Stefanson had taken second watch.

"Not so, sir. He is up on the mound to the south of the camp, watching, I think, for the dawn. They stole away unknown to him."

“Stole away?” said Lincoln Hayes, groping for his cigar box.

“Except for ourselves and Mr. Slim—” it was possible now more clearly to distinguish the figure of Hassan ès-Sugra, and his palms were extended—“the camp is empty!”

“What!”

“The other three men have deserted in the night, sir. I waked to call them to their duties, for it was arranged that we should move at dawn. They had gone!”

Lincoln Hayes lighted a lantern which stood upon a table between the two beds. He held a cigar in his teeth. Rorke was groping for a cigarette.

“This thing is getting monotonous,” said Hayes. “I take it”—turning to Hassan ès-Sugra—“the nearest town from here is Sîwa?”

“Yes, Hayes Effendim, they will have gone to Sîwa, although for what, I cannot imagine.”

Hassan ès-Sugra, holding the flap aside, they went out into the dim light. They moved quietly.

“Who’s there?”

Stefanson came doubling up, a rifle across his arm. He peered for a while, and then:

“All right, Stefanson,” said Rorke quietly. “What got you up beyond that mound?”

And before Stefanson could reply, from Ann’s tent:

“Paddy!” came a cry. “Lincoln!”

The disturbance had awakened her, and therefore in a whisper, Stefanson replied:

“It was a damn great bat! I mean, not an ordinary bat—an enormous thing. It flew around my head and then went off in that direction.” He pointed. “I followed. I don’t deny I was scared. I hoped to get a shot, even at the cost of waking everybody. It disappeared in the darkness.”

“You heard nothing else?” Lincoln Hayes asked, quietly lighting his cigar.

“Not a thing—only the whir of the bat.”

Ann appeared, muffled in a fur coat. She ran forward and squeezed herself in between Lincoln Hayes and Rorke, grasping an arm of each.

“Please!” she said, “what is it? I was fast asleep but having the strangest dreams.”

“Just a spot of difficulty,” Rorke replied, “reported by Hassan, here.”

“What? What has happened?”

“The other three men, our cook and the two drivers, have deserted.”

“Good heavens!”

“Yes,” said Rorke, “it’s damnably inconvenient.” His casual manner, although affected for Ann’s benefit, seemed very natural. “This means a round-table conference, darling, and you have got to join it.”

In the big tent, bending over the map spread upon the table:

“We are now,” said Rorke, in his quiet manner, “about five miles inside the dotted area.”

Ann Wayland leaned upon his shoulder, looking down in the lantern light; Stefanson and Hayes stood upon the other side of the table; Hassan ès-Sugra kept his place by the door.

"At the bend, here—" he pointed—"where we changed our route yesterday morning, we veered sharply north. You remember we passed a big camel caravan. Well—they were on the main road, and we were cutting across it. We are now twenty to thirty miles northeast of the Oasis of Sîwa. The town of Sîwa possesses a district officer. I had hoped to keep out of his way, but this latest development makes that idea rather difficult."

He paused, and traced with a pencil a smaller area within the dotted line.

"This is where I believe the Place of the Lamp to be, assuming my reading of the papyrus to be correct. Hassan tells us that the early Egyptian ruins in this area are practically nil. But there is a very old Coptic monastery dating back to early Christian times and still occupied by a community of monks. That is so, Hassan?"

He looked up.

"It is so, sir. I have never visited it, nor do I know anyone who has. But the monastery exists."

"My theory," Rorke went on, "as Lincoln knows, is this: The ruin of the great Temple of Jupiter Ammon, a survival of the earlier Temple of Ammon Ra, are in this village, just outside Sîwa. The Oracle of Jupiter Ammon was celebrated throughout the ancient world, as you know—thousands of pilgrims came annually. This created queer superstitions in the Oasis of Sîwa, centering around the old temple, and in my opinion the Temple of Jupiter Ammon was at one time the Place of the Lamp."

"But you said it was in ruins, Paddy!" Ann exclaimed.

Her eyes were widely opened—she had forgotten the shock of awakening to find that the other three Arabs had deserted.

"It is," Rorke replied. "But I believe—and Lincoln agrees with me—that the treasures of the temple and its secrets were removed—probably in Roman times—to some safer place. I believe that there was a college for the training of priests about five miles from this camp. This was indicated in the papyrus and elaborated in my notes. But I also believe—" he looked up—"that the college is still in existence!"

"Point is," said Lincoln Hayes, "got to get reinforcements. Let's trace back. Somebody working against us—suspect who it is, but don't know—has bought off our men. Not afraid of the Egyptian side of the enterprise. Am prepared to make a fair proposition. Not out to steal anything. If I know their headquarters, would walk in, alone. But when light comes—we have to move."

He paused suddenly—his attitude suggested that he was listening.

Something beat upon the roof of the tent, once, twice, three times, dully.

"By God!" It was Stefanson's voice. "It's that damned bat!"

He still carried his rifle, and, ungainly but agile, he now darted past Hassan ès-Sugra and rushed out.

Silence followed his departure; Ann was clinging very tightly to Rorke.

"What did he mean?" she whispered.

Rorke, silently cursing Stefanson's forgetfulness, hesitated, and then:

"Stefanson doesn't know a bat from an owl, dear," he replied. "There are a number of owls in this neighborhood."

Lincoln Hayes exchanged glances with Hassan ès-Sugra. Less than half a minute had elapsed when Stefanson returned.

"Not a thing!" he reported. "If I could get that brute he would be a museum piece."

He ceased speaking, suddenly uneasy, and silence fell again.

There came a sound of approaching footsteps, and then:

"Excuse me, sir, but what's up?" a plaintive voice inquired. "All those damned gyppies 'ave buzzed orf!"

It was Slim.

"Come in, Slim," called Lincoln Hayes. "Just woke up?"

"Just this minute, sir. I was asleep in the baggage car. What's gone wrong? This is a funny go."

"Very funny, Slim."

Slim, fully dressed, his hair disheveled, looked around with blinking eyes and then took his place near Hassan ès-Sugra near the entrance to the tent. He liked and respected the imperturbable Egyptian and, bending to his ear, began to ask questions in a hushed whisper.

"Soon as it's light enough to move," Lincoln Hayes went on, his voice exhibiting no emotion whatever, "what we do is this: You, Paddy, acting as pilot, will take the Rolls. Ann will go with you——"

"But Lincoln! where do you want me to go?"

Ann turned and stared at Lincoln Hayes.

"Into Sîwa. Gather it's an odd sort of town, but, anyway, there's a British officer there, and he's attached to the Camel Corps. Don't say anything, Ann—just listen." And the power of domination which had made Lincoln Hayes what he was, imposed silence. "Slim follows in the second car——"

" 'Alf a mo', guv'nor——"

"When I wanted your advice, Slim, have always asked for it."

"Very good, sir."

"Stefanson—opportunity to visit ancient walled city of Sîwa; may never recur. Suggest you go with Slim. What you'll do is this: Go straight to the district officer. Explain we have a bunch of cars but no drivers. You know the rest of the story—stick to it. Get drivers. Terms don't matter. Aim to be back by nightfall. Can you do it, Paddy?"

Rorke knocked the ash from his cigarette and bent over the map.

"I don't know," he replied. "It may mean a wide detour—there's a sort of mountain road possible for camels or mules, but I should doubt if one could get a car along it. Anyway, Lincoln—" he stood up and turned—"there's no reason why you should be left alone here all day."

"Shan't be alone," Hayes replied. "Keeping Hassan."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE PATH OF HARMACHIS

WHEN in the early morning light, the second car driven by Slim had disappeared around a high shoulder of rock, Lincoln Hayes turned to Hassan ès-Sugra, who stood at his elbow. The landscape was utterly desolate, one of rock, shingle, and sand; beyond doubt, as Hayes had always believed, once the bed of a great ocean. The story of Atlantis fascinated him, and here, in this bleached wilderness, he believed had once lain the sea which had overwhelmed that great and civilized continent.

In the stillness of the desert it was possible for a long time to hear the sound of the engines. But at last it became inaudible. The two men were left standing in silence and solitude.

Below them were the cars deserted by their native drivers. The tents remained standing. Hayes turned, facing Hassan ès-Sugra for a moment, then began to descend the slope.

Outside the big tent:

"Hassan," he said.

"Sir."

Hassan ès-Sugra's gentle eyes met Lincoln Hayes' penetrating stare. Neither of those oddly contrasted faces registered the slightest change of expression.

"Captain Rorke believes that the people who inhabit this monastery near by know the secret of the hiding place of the Lamps. If we came to steal—people to avoid; but I come with a square offer. I propose to head for that monastery."

"As you wish, sir."

"You know where it is?"

"Only the general direction."

"Likely to be marauders in these parts?"

"No, sir, except, perhaps jackals, and I have fastened all the stores in the tin boxes. We are hidden here from the caravan road. We are very short of water, but there is said to be a small well near the monastery."

"The heavy cars?"

"Mr. Slim has removed several plugs and hidden them."

"Good."

Lincoln Hayes nodded. From the breast pocket of a very worn drill jacket he produced a cigar, nicked it, and thoughtfully began to light it. The only evidence of unusual excitement an observer might have detected was in the fact that in place of a sun helmet he wore today one of those wide-brimmed, high-crowned hats dubbed by his New York associates "Hayes' stacks."

"What kind of people live at this monastery, Hassan?"

“I cannot say, sir.” Hassan ès-Sugra extended his slender palms. “But people in monasteries are not as a rule to be feared.”

By a glance Hassan ès-Sugra indicated that he appreciated Lincoln Hayes’ plan.

“Make up rations, Hassan. Going to look for that monastery.”

“As you wish, sir.”

“Are they Christians, there?”

“I believe not, sir.” Hassan ès-Sugra’s voice grew very grave. “Little is known about them. The place, I am told—I have never seen it—was built by Christian monks, long, long ago. But these—” he hesitated—“others, who now live there, so the story goes, belong to an order which is neither Christian nor Moslem.”

“Queer order.”

“It is very strange, sir. I have heard that they come to the aid of those in difficulties in the desert but that they do not welcome visitors.”

“Come under the control of the resident officer at Sîwa?”

“Probably, sir. But it is also probable that he has orders to——”

“Leave them alone?”

“Very likely, sir. I cannot say.”

Mohammed Ahmes Bey had declared that he was not a Moslem. Nevertheless, a fanatical Moslem of the type of Hadji ben Azrîl had willingly acted in his service. Lincoln Hayes flicked the lapel of his dingy jacket. Rorke had been damnably reticent—it was the Celtic sense of the dramatic. But here in this monastery—it was possible, if not probable—might lie the secret of Hatasu’s subjection, of those strange vows which cut her off from the world!

When later they set out, Hassan ès-Sugra was armed only with his ebony stick, but Hayes had a repeater in his pocket; both men carried packs. The morning was developing a stifling heat. Hayes had changed his hat in favor of a pith helmet.

It was not unknown, Hassan ès-Sugra had said, for small parties of travelers to be attacked in this part of the desert. It was practically unmapped, near as they were to Sîwa. The sentiments of any tribes who might occupy the small and unvisited oases were unknown to the authorities. It was partly for this reason, but not wholly, that Hayes had insisted upon the three men escorting Ann. For himself he had no fear. He believed in the divine right of the just.

Clear of the rocks fringing their camp, and traversing a gloomy little valley beyond which lay stony foothills developing westward into dim blue mountains, the heat of the sun began to make itself felt. Hassan ès-Sugra, however, whose appearance suggested a very delicate constitution, exhibited no signs of distress.

It became a deepening mystery to Hayes by what sailing marks the Egyptian was making his course, and:

“Sure we are heading in the right direction, Hassan?” he asked.

“We are following what is called the Road of the Sun, sir.”

“The Path of Harmachis?”

“It is the same.”

"We left that more than two days back."

"It is true. But now we are upon this path again. Once, when I was in Sîwa, not the last time, but the time before, a very old man told me the way to this monastery. Captain Rorke, sir, who is very clever, made our last camp, which we have just left, upon the Road of the Sun."

"How do you know?"

"Did you notice, Hayes Effendim, two little mounds of stones on a high point to the west of the camp?"

"No."

"They were there. They are put there to guide travelers."

"H'mm!" said Lincoln Hayes, for all his fitness, bathed in perspiration. "Travelers *do* make for the monastery, then?"

"The stones are not there for that purpose, sir," Hassan ès-Sugra replied gently. "They are intended, I think, I do not know, to help any who are lost or sick to a place of refuge."

Lincoln Hayes tramped on. The scene resembled an illustration to Dante's "Inferno"; not a scrap of vegetation was visible—the sun was merciless. This journey with Hassan ès-Sugra definitely was not in accordance with Rorke's plans. What these had been, Lincoln Hayes did not know. Perhaps, in fairness to Rorke, he should have notified him before he left for Sîwa that he intended to endeavor to penetrate to the monastery. He knew why he had refrained from doing so. He had feared that all of them would make trouble. Yet, that they suspected, he could not doubt.

The weary march went on.

"It is told, sir," said Hassan ès-Sugra, "that the Path of Harmachis ends at the foot of these mountains. It is an old superstition—like the name of the path. I cannot say where it comes from, but they say that the Sphinx watches over the path to these mountains; that here—and not at Gizeh—lies the secret of the Father of Terror."

It was a scene to have inspired the wildest legends. The prospect immediately before them reminded Lincoln Hayes of a giant stepped pyramid. Actually, it was a small mountain composed of limestone, but it rose in nearly regular terraces, each some fifty feet high. They were irregular, jagged and broken upon their surfaces, but the several plateaux, or so it appeared from where they stood, presented a fairly smooth appearance but no vestige of vegetation.

Hayes, who had dropped down upon a rock, unslung his glasses and inspected the prospect closely.

He was still staring through the powerful lenses when:

"Observe, sir," came the gentle voice of Hassan ès-Sugra, "the two piles of stones."

"Where?"

Hassan touched his shoulder and, extending a lean arm, pointed.

Lincoln Hayes focused on the indicated spot, and sure enough, there were two mounds of stones flanking a faintly traceable path—a mere goat track!

"I see them, Hassan," he said quietly.

He explored beyond the guiding mounds and, searching the rock surface yard by yard, presently made a curious discovery. Part of the third and fourth terraces was artificial or semi-artificial. It was composed of stone, or mud, walls! He could see windows and loopholes. An extensive building lay hidden here in the mountain side.

He lowered his glasses and turned to Hassan ès-Sugra. Perspiration trickled in rivulets from his sun helmet to his chin, but there was no expression upon the sun-baked face.

"We have found the monastery," he said.

2

They halted for half an hour, Hassan ès-Sugra ate a few dates and drank a little water. Lincoln Hayes nibbled a bar of chocolate, washing it down with a mildly brewed whisky which he carried in a flask.

They set out again.

The climb to the second step of the mountain was more arduous than it appeared. The path, which was composed of small stones, was evidently nothing else than the channel of a dried-up stream. There was no evidence of any human presence ahead. Lincoln Hayes' hopes were growing less and less. After all, in all human probability this desolate place was deserted. He pulled up suddenly, looking ahead through his glasses, and:

"Hassan!" There was something tense in his voice. "What did the head of a ram stand for in Ancient Egypt?"

"A ram, sir?"

Lincoln Hayes dropped the glasses and turned, looking at Hassan ès-Sugra. A curious puzzled expression was just discernible.

"It is the sign of Ammon Ra, the god of Light."

"So I thought."

Hayes returned the glasses to their case and pressed on. The head of a ram, very badly defaced, was still discernible cut upon a boulder to the right of and above the path which they were following!

Here was confirmation of Rorke's theory that this place at some time had been affiliated to the great Temple of Ammon Ra, more than thirty miles away.

They pressed on to a point where the path entered a ravine—a black, forbidding-looking gully, for shadow lay ebon-like in it. Beyond, the path might be traced, rising higher, seeming to end before the face of a straight upstanding rock.

Actually, in the higher part of this rock, as now could quite clearly be discerned by the naked eye, were many unglazed windows appearing in groups of three. As they entered the gully:

"Here, sir," said Hassan ès-Sugra, "we are likely to be ambushed."

"Never mind," Lincoln Hayes replied; "we'll get out."

Hassan inclined his head, and they climbed on. Deep in the shadow of the ravine he spoke again:

"Look back, sir. We are followed!"

Lincoln Hayes turned, but not hastily, and looked back.

Silhouetted against the V shaped patch of light, so that one figure looked very tall and one figure very short, two men stood!

Except that their heads appeared to be shaven, that they wore some kind of robes, it was impossible to detect details.

"Expected this," said Lincoln Hayes; "but have made certain moves."

He was, as always, a man who took big chances, but never until he was assured of at least two lines of retreat. In this case he had the absolute honesty of the proposal he planned to put forward, the influence of Hatasu, and the fact that in a note which Ann Wayland carried for delivery to the district officer, he had stated that he and the headman, Hassan ès-Sugra, proposed to seek out the old monastery five miles from the camp, and to claim an interview with the principal. In the event of their failure to reappear, he had requested the district officer to take any necessary steps.

"Can you see if they are armed, Hassan?"

"They do not appear to be armed, sir."

For some reason (he could not think what reason at the moment) he had discounted physical violence in the case of the group associated with the Light. He might be wrong. For himself he cared little—but he had no justification for exposing an unarmed man to such a peril.

"Walk right ahead," he said tersely.

They resumed their progress. The two shadows followed silently.

"These people, sir," came Hassan's gentle voice, "speak some kind of Berber, with which I regret I am not acquainted."

"There are some who speak Arabic," Hayes replied.

"That is good, sir."

"Did you ever meet Mohammed Ahmes Bey?"

"No, sir. I rarely come to Lower Egypt. I know of him. Everybody in Egypt knows of him."

"He is respected, is he not?"

"Greatly respected."

"Yet he is not a Moslem."

"That is true, sir."

"Do you know his religion?"

They were climbing steadily through the shadows, mounting ever upward to where blinding sunlight cut across the gully. Their shadowy followers, as Hassan ès-Sugra had noted, retained always exactly the same distance, and followed silently.

"By some, sir, he is said to be a Copt. But this is not so. He is very wealthy and very charitable; he travels much."

Lincoln Hayes paused.

"I have seen you smoke cigarettes, Hassan; I am going to offer you one now."

"Thank you, sir."

The two cigarettes were lighted. Lincoln Hayes, out of the corner of his left eye was watching their followers. They remained motionless.

"They design no violence, sir," said Hassan, as Hayes proceeded on his way.

"What I wanted to know."

They came out of shadow into blazing light. The path ahead became steeper, but the high walls dropped away and widened out. Before them, perhaps three hundred yards away, rose the wall of the second platform, the windows now clearly visible since they formed small squares of dense shadow.

"The architecture, sir," came the gentle voice of Hassan ès-Sugra, "is similar to that of Sîwa."

"Is that so? Interesting fact."

"But I can see no way in, sir."

They had proceeded for about thirty yards when Hayes pulled up and looked back.

Their followers, now fully revealed in sunlight, resembled, as Hayes saw immediately, Buddhist priests. Their features were indistinguishable, but they appeared to be Egyptians. Their garments consisted of long robes or cloaks of some coarse woolen material with, apparently, sandals on their feet. As Hayes and Hassan pulled up, so did the two priests, and stood passively watching them.

"Shall I tell these men that you object to their presence, sir? They have the look of Egyptians. If it is so, they will understand me."

"Say nothing—walk right on."

"As you wish, sir."

No evidence of life was visible at the many windows which now came into view. They were within twenty paces of the sheer rock face when a hidden stone door opened, high up in the wall, and a gaping black opening appeared!

A wide, broad, ladder of palm wood was pushed out and down so that it rested on the stony path. Two more of the shaven-headed priests descended and stood one on either side of the ladder.

3

A single lamp burned at the end of a long stone corridor.

Ten or twelve of the silent priests or monks lined the walls. Their ages varied from about thirty to what might have been eighty or more. But all possessed one common characteristic—a strange serenity. Halfway along the corridor one of them stepped forward and tapped Hassan ès-Sugra upon the shoulder.

Hassan turned in a flash, his slender hand grasping the ebony cane in a manner not to be mistaken.

“Hassan!” said Hayes tersely. “He is requesting you to follow him. I am coming too.”

“As you say, sir.”

The monk led the way at a slow pace along a short rock passage in which presently appeared a wooden door. He opened the door and stood aside. Within was a small cell lighted by two large unglazed windows affording a prospect of the desert across which they had come. It was plainly but simply furnished in the native manner. A large porous bottle filled with water was set in a niche, a metal drinking cup beside it. There were a bed, a stool and a prayer mat. The wall in which the windows were pierced was very thick; the cell was quite cool.

“Evidently, Hassan, offering you this accommodation. Try the man in Arabic.”

Hassan spoke rapidly; when he used his own language he had a gravely imperious manner which Lincoln Hayes had not overlooked. He was, in fact, a man of great influence among certain of the Egyptians. But the monk shook his head, smiled slightly, and bowed, indicating the room with one extended hand. He walked out, beckoning to Lincoln Hayes.

Hassan looked to Hayes for orders; otherwise his gentle expression remained unchanged.

“Wait here until I send for you.”

Hayes went out.

He reëntered the long corridor where the monks were ranged like sentinels against the walls. He was led by the monk whose duty seemed to be that of guide, to the further end. Steps were mounted, and another dimly lighted corridor presented itself.

The monk who led went all but silently. Lincoln Hayes listened to the echo of his own footsteps, and tried to plan a move ahead. An L-shaped turn came: they followed it. At the far end a very wide, unglazed window set no more than two feet from the floor, offered a prospect of sun-baked desolation even wider and more awesome than that from the cell. Another monk appeared beside an open door on the right. He bowed slightly, and Hayes entered.

He walked into a room with two windows commanding the same prospect. It was larger than the cell in which he had left Hassan. There was a sunken bookshelf in one of the stone walls, but the volumes which occupied it had an unfamiliar appearance. A plain table was set before one of the windows, and a chair. There were mats on the floor, and an oil lamp of peculiar pattern stood upon the table. What other appointments there were, Hayes at the moment failed to notice. He walked through an opening curtained with a piece of pale purple material and found himself in a small sleeping room.

Another curtained opening communicated with a bathroom. The bath, which was marble, possessed no tap; it was presumably filled by servants.

“Looks like they expect me to stay,” Hayes murmured.

He turned to his guide, who stood just outside the door of the bathroom.

“I want to interview the principal of this monastery,” he said.

A slow smile and inclination of the head constituted the only reply. The man turned and went out. Lincoln Hayes stood still for a moment, looking after him, and then, in four long strides, he had reached the outer door, which the man had closed behind him.

It fastened with a wooden latch. He raised it. The door was unlocked.

The corridor was empty.

He looked out of the wide, deep window and, unslinging his glasses, tried to trace the path which led back to the camp. It was a curious termination to a long journey. He wondered if by some faulty reasoning they had reached, not the headquarters of the protectors of the Light, but some perfectly harmless brotherhood who had chosen this strange retreat for study and meditation.

A quiet voice back in his brain told him that no mistake had been made.

He reviewed the story, or what he knew of it, from the time the papyrus had come into Rorke's possession. The one questionable case was that of the man from whom Rorke had bought the thing. Since then, they had admittedly been subjected to various forms of attack, but no violence had been attempted.

The atmosphere of the place was definitely peaceful. He returned to the outer room and inspected the strange books upon the shelf. He saw that some were in Arabic and others in a script with which he was quite unfamiliar. No European language was represented. The character of the works he failed to make out: some of them were beautifully illuminated. They reminded him of rare books he had once been shown in the Great Mosque at Damascus.

The walls were undecorated. He saw on closer examination that they were of mud, of that kind which, owing to the salt found in this part of the desert, becomes nearly as hard as the native rock. The furniture was made entirely of palm wood. The marble bath which he went in to examine, he judged to have been constructed from fragments of some villa of the Roman period.

Had the monk understood him? Or was this merely the normal treatment accorded to travelers who strayed that way?

Came a sound of movement from the outer room. He crossed and looked out.

One of the monks, whose refined features he could have sworn to be those of a cultured Egyptian, was setting a tray upon the table, on which he saw cold viands cut up into small pieces, some cheese, a bowl of fruit, two slices of native bread, and some greasy-looking butter. There were a pitcher of water and a small glass bottle of light-colored wine. As the man was about to withdraw:

"One moment," said Lincoln Hayes. "I want to see the principal."

The man smiled slightly, inclined his head, and went out.

Hayes waited. He had meant to ask that Hassan ès-Sugra be sent to him. But the monk did not return. He unfastened his knapsack and compared the rations which he had brought with those upon the tray, to find that the latter were preferable.

He ate some fruit and tried the wine, but found it harsh and unpalatable. He was always chary of water in these districts, and he poured himself out half of what remained in his flask of whisky and Vichy.

Then he very deliberately lighted a cigar and, hands in pockets, stared out of the window across the desert.

He challenged himself without reservation.

For the first time in his life a woman dominated his motives. Yes, he was too honest to deny it to himself. In his heart of hearts he had abandoned the quest of the secret Light. Intense curiosity remained—yes, a desire for knowledge, for new experiences. This had driven him—up to a point. But primarily—he knew it well—something else had urged him on.

He heard the door opening, and turned . . . just as Hatasu came in!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"YOU WERE EXPECTED"

"PLEASE, LINCOLN, there is so much I have to say!"

"Answer me, then."

"Please let me go."

"Not until you answer."

"Yes, I love you—you know I love you."

Hatasu was breathless, bright-eyed, but at last Lincoln Hayes released her and, standing up, crossed to the window and looked out.

It was only by placing himself so that he could neither see her nor touch her that it was possible for him to comply with her request. He thrust his hands in the pockets of his shabby drill coat, and stared out over arid desert dancing in the heat haze.

"Promise to hear me out, Lincoln dear, because I have so much to tell you and very little time to tell it. If what I say seems to be foolish or improbable, please let me go on."

It was the voice of a young girl appealing to her lover, the voice he was always listening for. Hatasu ceased speaking for a moment, as if to collect her ideas. When she resumed her voice had changed. That far-away, mystical note, which he associated with her bondage, the barrier that divided them, had crept into the musical tones.

"The place in which you are was originally a rest house on a road which led from the coast. No trace of the port at which it began is left. This road led to Memphis. The old tradition of the Road of Harmachis is all that remains of it. The road was used in days that your students cannot imagine, long, long before those dates they give for the carving of the Sphinx and the building of the Great Pyramid. The god of Light, who came to be known as Ammon Ra, was worshiped then in Egypt.

"Many, many years later, when the Greeks and the Romans came, the sacred books and all the other treasures were removed from Memphis to a place of safety; to a small temple in the Oasis of Sîwa. The creed of the god of Life and Light is the good of humanity, and the First Prophet now lived at Sîwa, and continued, so far as was permitted, to direct the affairs of men. The temple became known as the Temple of Jupiter Ammon, but nothing had changed but the name. The First Prophet, up to the time the Romans left Egypt, was descended from the Pharaohs.

"Already the old road had disappeared, and this place had been taken over by early Christian monks. It was a monastery; but later still, when the monks had gone, it came again into the possession of those to whom it originally belonged. Some who had power in Egypt desired to overthrow the Oracle of Jupiter Ammon, and to seize the great wealth which was known to lie in the temple.

"It was wealth more than knowledge that they sought. For a second time the treasures were removed—they were all brought here; and to this day they remain under their hereditary guardianship. When a generation is born which the First Prophet,

whoever he may be at the time, recognizes as fitted for wisdom—wisdom will be given to them. Until that time, it is the duty of those who guard the secrets to ensure that they are always veiled by darkness. The *Book of the Laws* is legendary—it is sometimes called the *Book of Thoth*.

"It is here! It has been here for over a thousand years!

"Many belong to the ancient Order, men and women, for there is much work to do; but we are very wealthy. Very, very rarely in all our history, which we can trace back beyond any history you know, has a spy succeeded in joining us. One there was, and very recently, who secured possession of part of the third copy of the *Book*. You heard that his body was found in the Nile. . . .

"He was not murdered, as you suppose. He was reminded of his vows—and so, destroyed himself.

"Only the First Prophet may look upon the Light without being blinded. This is not a poetic fancy, but a physical fact. Aided by heredity, and trained in a particular way from infancy, the eyes gradually acquire this power. It gives them a luminous appearance; so that the First Prophet could be recognized anywhere by this peculiarity."

Although the desert was before him, Hayes could picture the speaker: in a simple white robe, fastened at the waist by a girdle, sandals on her delicately arched feet. There was a long, lapis-lazuli ring on her index finger.

"Those men you have seen are neophytes: they are bound by a vow of silence for a whole year. There are women members, also, and marriage is allowed within the Order. We are not all Egyptians, or even Orientals, and our duties take us all over the world ____"

"You mean"—Lincoln Hayes spoke hoarsely—"that Europeans and Americans belong?"

"Not many, but several. They have found their way here. Why not? All the knowledge that has ever been in the world is accessible if they care to strive for it. And our work is for the good of others who are less enlightened. Please, Lincoln, don't move yet."

He had taken his hands from his pockets and, fists clenched, was palpably about to turn.

"I am of the old blood and so intended for the office which my mother held before me. But I am not compelled to accept it." Her voice had grown soft again; the imperious note had quite died away. "You mean what you have said to me, Lincoln? That for me you will give up all that the world holds for a wealthy man? You must consent for the rest of your life to carry the brand of secret knowledge . . . you may look now."

He turned in a flash.

Hatasu had slipped her robe from those gleaming ivory shoulders; one slender finger rested upon a mark, the *akhut*, distinctly printed on the satiny skin directly over her heart. . . .

Hayes stood tense. His eyes watched her—devoured her. Very quietly she replaced the robe on her shoulders, and:

"Do you mean," he said; his speech was very staccato—"that if—I joined—this Order——"

"You would be able because of your wealth and social position to do greater good than you can even imagine."

"But you mean—" he took a step towards her—"that if I did this mad thing—and before I did it I should have to be satisfied as a normal man and a Christian——"

"The Maker of Christianity learned Eternal Truth from us, as Moses, the maker of the Jewish Faith, had learned it before him."

Lincoln Hayes was close to her now, and his regard was so vital that almost she shrank, but conquered the impulse and faced him proudly.

"If I join, I join for you."

"If you join, Lincoln, and you want me, you shall have me. I want you, too."

She did not resist him when he swept her into his arms. She returned his kisses until no renunciation had seemed too great to win such a prize.

2

One of the silent monks swung a door open and stood aside.

Lincoln Hayes entered a room which, but for the many books which lined the walls, was so austerely furnished that it might have been termed a cell. Books almost entirely occupied two of the walls. These walls were of that kind of plaster of which, apparently, the entire place was constructed, and the bookshelves were recessed.

From a beam, evidently a very old palm trunk, which crossed the ceiling, an oil lamp was hung—a very simple lamp, but of a very unusual pattern. There were some rugs upon the floor; more books, a number of papers, and a certain evidence of activity upon a large plain wooden table. A long high window revealed the thickness of the wall and overlooked the usual dreary prospect. Although the heat of the afternoon was intense, as the dancing haze over the desert indicated, the place was pleasantly cool. In a high-backed chair of some bleached wood, possibly teak, a man was seated behind a table.

He wore a robe identical with those worn by all the male members of this strange community. It was made of some loosely woven woolen material and possessed a hood. His hands rested on the table before him, and upon one finger was a large scarab ring. In this he differed from the others, and also in the fact that his skull was not shaven but crowned by a mass of jet-black hair. He did not stand up as Lincoln Hayes entered, but motioned him to a chair on the other side of the table.

Lincoln Hayes bowed slightly and sat down, facing Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

The two men watched each other in silence for a while.

Lincoln Hayes was less physically aware than mentally conscious of the fact that the eyes of Mohammed Ahmes Bey were different from any eyes into which he had ever looked. They possessed a quality of penetration unique in his experience, but because he did not resist it, but welcomed it, he was able to sustain that compelling gaze which perhaps not one man in a million could have suffered.

The Egyptian broke the silence, his voice vibrant even in that small room.

"Mr. Hayes, you were expected. My own brief observations and those of Hatasu, my sister's daughter, correspond. You are that dodo of our present civilization—a strictly honest man. Because you have nothing to hide, even I have little power over you. It is upon the hidden secrets of the mind that influence is built. I could sway you, but I could never move you."

Lincoln Hayes continued to watch the speaker but did not reply.

"I am in agreement with the Moslems, who hold that everything which happens was written, otherwise I should say that I regret your having crossed the path of my niece Hatasu. I know all the facts, Mr. Hayes, for after one momentary human weakness she has given me her entire confidence."

He paused for a moment, staring fixedly at Lincoln Hayes, and then:

"That we are the conservators of a certain kind of knowledge," he went on, "which differs from that your scientists of a mechanical age have acquired, you have personal evidence. What you have seen or experienced is only the fringe of the subject. All that you do now, with your radio, your aircraft, of which you are so proud, has been done in an age that is forgotten—but by other means. The most perfect machine in this material world is the human will. I could show you that it is possible to talk to your office in New York without the intervention of radio or cable. I could teach you, nor would it take me long, for you have a first-class brain, to travel from this spot to almost any other place in the world without the aid of mechanism."

"You are not suggesting"—Lincoln Hayes' voice remained quite toneless—"that when I saw you in New York you were not actually *in* New York?"

Something which might have been a smile crossed the hawk-like features of Mohammed Ahmes Bey, and:

"I came to New York and left New York by means of an ordinary modern steamship," he replied.

"I have already explained to your chief of staff, Captain Rorke, that only in a crisis calculated to damage humanity as a whole, are we justified in employing methods which a greater wisdom than mine has laid down to be unsuitable for the present age. The idea crosses your mind, Mr. Hayes, that this is mumbo-jumbo."

"Don't deny it," said Lincoln Hayes dryly.

"You think that perhaps for some petty gain, political or personal, we enlist the weak-minded and hysterical—drawn by the lure of the Unknown." He spoke firmly but without the slightest trace of emotion. "You may even confuse our ancient knowledge with the claims of Spiritualists or other gropers equally deluded. Dismiss such ideas from your mind, Mr. Hayes. We have no revenues. We live upon our ancient wealth, the tributes once brought to the temples. It is, I may say, almost inexhaustible. We do not seek disciples; disciples must seek us. Their faith may be that of Buddha, Moses, Christ or Mohammed—we do not ask them to disavow it. If they seem worthy, we give them access to a greater knowledge, in order that they may be of greater use to mankind."

"But you brand them with a mark. That's paganism."

Mohammed Ahmes Bey met the challenging stare.

"The mark to which you refer," he replied quietly, "is a diploma proudly borne by those upon whom it has been conferred. Few, very few, have ventured to forget that they bore it."

He ceased speaking; there was perfect silence. It was broken by Lincoln Hayes.

"I have never loved a woman in my life before," he said, "until I met Hatasu. I want her. She wants me. I told her I would give up all I had for her—and I meant it. I'll do it, if the deal is a straight deal. I came to make a different kind of proposal, but a proposal equally square. I withdraw that. I say this: If you can prove I lose none of my self-respect by joining this Order, I'll say Yes—if it enables me (not bargaining, but I want to know) if it enables me to claim Hatasu."

"If you succeed," the deep voice replied, "in passing your novitiate, which demands in the first place a year of silence followed by a number of most exacting tests; if, in short, you are accepted so that you bear upon your body the mark of your knowledge—you will be free to claim her. Her happiness is involved as deeply as yours. We *use* Nature's laws, Mr. Hayes; we do not endeavor to distort them."

"Would it mean I give up Western civilization?"

"On the contrary. It would mean in your case that you would retain your present place in society. There, with your new knowledge, you would be of inestimable use to a very unhappy section of humanity."

Lincoln Hayes stood up.

"I believe you," he said tonelessly. "I know that you mean what you say. But can you prove that you know what you claim to know?"

A moment Ahmes Bey paused, watching the speaker closely. His regard would have terrified any normal man.

"You come to me through unusual channels," he replied, "and therefore unusual methods may be employed. Strictly speaking, no other course remains open to you." He stood up. "You and your Egyptian servant are lost to the world. I need not comply with your conditions. What is the alternative?"

There was no change in the tone of his voice; he spoke quite evenly.

"News of my whereabouts, by now," Lincoln Hayes replied slowly, "in possession of the district officer at Sîwa. Are you prepared for a raid by the Camel Corps?"

Mohammed Ahmes Bey shook his head.

"When I have shown you that which no man of your race has ever seen, save one, for four generations, you will still be at liberty to decline what I offer. I only ask your word of honor that when, if you decide to leave as you came, no whisper of what has passed within these walls shall ever be communicated to a living soul."

"I give it. But if I decide to accept, does it mean I have to stay here?"

"It does not. You will be given your own time to make the final decision. . . ."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE SHEIKH ABDÛL EL-MANI

CAPTAIN RORKE, in the leading car, peered anxiously ahead. His former anxiety to avoid Sîwa had been succeeded by a keen desire for a sight of the palm groves and orchards surrounding that towering, rocky fortress town.

But to trace a route upon a map and to pursue it across actual territory are two very different matters, as many an officer has learned to his cost in warfare.

Rorke had no personal experience of the country between the camp and the town of Sîwa. True, a road was marked which went through a pass in the mountain ridge to drop down to a fertile oasis. He was doubtful of its character. Camels could no doubt have negotiated it. It remained to be seen if the cars could do it.

The path seemed to terminate at the foot of a jagged precipice, cloaked in purple shadow.

Suddenly Ann spoke.

"You know, Paddy," she said, "I am very worried about Lincoln."

Rorke did not reply for a moment; he was having difficulty in sticking to the path, but, the awkward patch negotiated:

"I don't think he's in any danger, if that's what you mean," he replied.

"I'm not sure even about that," said Ann. "But this woman, Paddy! He's mad about her. Who is she? *What* is she?"

"That's a poser, darling. But if she's the woman I met in the train, I can quite understand his frame of mind. Whatever else she is—she's certainly a beauty."

"So you have mentioned before," Ann said tonelessly.

Rorke grinned, staring straight ahead of him, keeping the Rolls at the highest speed possible under the conditions.

"I always try to be honest, darling, even with a woman. She was beautiful but altogether too mysterious for my taste."

Ann was silent for a while. Paddy Rorke's disconcerting frankness on all subjects robbed her of some of the armor which belongs to a pretty girl. His methods were so different from those of any other man who had courted her. But she recognized there must be something about them which appealed. She changed the subject.

"Do you think we have really arrived very near to this temple?"

"Yes."

Rorke nodded, wondering what lay ahead, where the path appeared to end.

He had visualized from the papyrus and his careful work upon a map the Place of the Lamp as a sort of rock temple possibly somewhat similar to that at Deir el-Bahari; probably hidden by generations of sandstorms, so that only by means of some secret tunnel known to this mysterious sect could access be obtained to the interior.

The existence of an ancient monastery reputed to be occupied to the present day had given him the idea that there might be some connection between the monks and the hidden temple. At least they must know of it and possibly hold the key to its secrets. They had come equipped, if it should prove to be necessary, for the clearance of a certain amount of débris, and even for some preliminary excavation. The desertion of the Arabs had rendered anything of the kind impossible. . . .

Now, staring ahead, he saw that the path which they were following plunged into a high, narrow gorge. It was the pass through the mountains. Beyond was the valley in which lay the Oasis of Sîwa.

And at the moment that he made this discovery, out from the gorge, two by two, came a troop of white muffled figures riding trotting camels!

"Oh, Paddy!" Ann cried. "What's this? Who are they?"

"I don't quite know," Rorke confessed.

He was making rapid mental calculations. To turn was impossible. Left of the narrow path the ground fell away, steeply, strewn with jagged boulders; on the right it had begun to rise to the wall of the gorge.

"Look back," he said tensely. "Can you see Slim?"

"He's about fifty yards behind, and—*oh!*"

"What?"

"There are more camels following!"

Rorke grinned and pulled up.

"Don't worry, Ann," he said. "I understand these local gentry. They probably expect us to pay toll for passing through their territory."

He was staring keenly at the approaching riders. He saw that they were armed with carbines, and now, between the ranks, on a nearly white camel, a man, evidently their leader, raced forward. Having outdistanced the leading pair he pulled up swiftly and raised his rifle high above his head.

The two lines of camels were checked as if by a single movement. The white camel dropped to the ground, and the leader alighted. His rifle slung over his left shoulder he walked slowly forward towards the stationary car.

"Stay where you are," said Rorke quietly; "don't show any alarm; there's no occasion."

He got out, closed the door, and walked forward to meet the oncoming man. The second car pulled up ten yards behind. It was backed by two rows of camels. Slim and Stefanson were just getting out.

The riders, judging from their robes and their queer muffled headdresses, were Berbers. But the leader, now within fifteen paces of Rorke, was of a different type, although he was similarly dressed. He had finely chiseled aquiline features, in a way not unlike those of Mohammed Ahmes Bey. He had a grace and dignity of bearing which spoke of high breeding; and, as the pair came face to face, he raised his right hand in a grave salute.

It was not the usual Arab salutation, more closely resembling that of the Fascisti. Rorke returned it, and they confronted one another.

"*Es-selâm 'aleykûm*," he said, his cold blue eyes fixed upon the man before him.

"With you, too, be health and God's mercy and blessing," the Arab replied in perfect English, his voice quiet and cultured. "If you prefer we converse in Arabic, I am agreeable, but English is your own language and equally familiar to me."

"Indeed," said Rorke, studying him closely, "I don't doubt it. My name is Rorke—Captain Patrick Rorke."

"I am known as the Sheikh Abdûl el-Mâni."

"But you are not an Arab."

The Sheikh smiled, revealing a row of white, very small teeth. His smile was most disarming.

"I have no nationality," he replied; "the world is my country. But I have certain orders in regard to yourself, Captain Rorke, which I must carry out."

"What are they?"

"Immediately beyond this gorge and on the edge of the Oasis of Sîwa suitable accommodation has been reserved for yourself and your party. I am instructed to conduct you there—to see that everything is done for your comfort."

"You are not acting for the authorities. These men don't belong to the Camel Corps."

"They do not, Captain Rorke." Again the speaker smiled. "They belong to my own corps."

"I don't know who you are," said Rorke; "your name conveys nothing to me. You are certainly not an Arab. But I do know that this is a hold-up."

"On the contrary, it is an invitation to luncheon in a very charming spot."

Rorke surveyed the files of camels ahead; glanced back and saw those behind.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you will lead the way."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE GOLDEN VEIL

LINCOLN HAYES sat in a chair by the window in the cell-like room which had been allotted to him in the monastery. He stared out across the desert but saw none of it. One observing him must have failed to notice any evidence of change upon that expressionless face. A cigar protruded from a corner of his lean mouth; hands thrust in pockets he leaned back in the chair, his feet resting upon the window ledge.

Yet, in the last two hours, secrets of nature hidden from common humanity had been laid bare before him.

The original temple, hewn out of the rock of the mountain side, lay far behind the superimposed building of mud bricks; in fact, the early Christian monastery masked the Temple of Ammon Ra. Mohammed Ahmes Bey had told him that during the generations in which Christian monks had lived there, adding from time to time new cells to their abode, few had known the secret of the great temple which lay behind the monastery.

It was entered by means of a formidable stone portcullis set in a low, dark corridor cut in the rock. Obviously, although it was in working order, the portcullis was Ancient Egyptian in origin. Beyond lay a further stretch of corridor, dimly lighted by oil lamps set in niches in the wall. Then came the great Hall, one of the most weird and impressive spectacles upon which Hayes' eyes had ever rested.

In certain respects it resembled the hypostyle hall at Karnak, being surrounded by colonnades of beautifully carved pillars. It was paved with black marble, of which the ceiling also appeared to be composed. Although no lamps were visible anywhere in that vast expanse, the place glowed with roseate light, resembling the light of dawn. Directly facing him as he entered, following Mohammed Ahmes Bey, he caught sight of black marble steps leading up to a curtain of what appeared to be cloth of gold. The place cut deep in the heart of the mountain was silent as a tomb.

"If I were to draw the Veil," said Mohammed Ahmes Bey, his voice booming awesomely about the pillared hall, "you would see the high altar and you would recognize the fact that in all essential respects the temple resembles a modern cathedral. I need not say that the very earliest cathedrals were based upon this plan, for this temple dates back to the time when the Great Pyramid had not yet been commenced."

Lincoln Hayes remained silent.

"I am not allowed, however, to show you the altar nor that which lies behind it. One day, Mr. Hayes, it may be your privilege to see the Veil drawn. But I can show you what, as a Christian, you might term one of the side chapels."

As he turned to follow his impressive guide, whose amazing personality, fight though he would, was beginning to dominate his will, Lincoln Hayes, owing to some change of position, saw that the golden veil which seemed to shimmer and dance in the roseate light bore an emblem faintly traced upon it.

It was the head of a ram.

He looked up above the curtain and saw carved upon a cornice the figure of a bat.

"Our methods should convince you," the Egyptian continued, "that we are no dealers in mumbo-jumbo. The precautions we take to retain our secrets and the ceremonies connected with this temple, have a sane and practical purpose. We do not indulge in impressive and mysterious rites, for there would be no one to impress. Only those who wish to share our knowledge and who have been accepted, ever enter this building. Access is difficult—but so is access to an explosives works. And there is material here more dangerous, if misused, than any high explosive invented by man."

They entered an arcade of pillars. The carving of some of the capitals was exquisite: nothing surviving in Upper Egypt could compare with their beauty. In a small square chamber permeated by the same rosy light three heavy chests, their lids decorated with intricate patterns, stood against one wall. They were apparently of solid brass, or so they appeared to Lincoln Hayes, until something softer in the texture of the metal disclosed to his amazed senses that they were of solid gold!

Mohammed Ahmes Bey raised the lid of one of the chests. It proved to contain a number of rolls of papyrus, neatly arranged in a cedar-wood rack.

"These three chests," he said, "contain the first copy made in the days of Seti I of the *Book of the Laws*, to which later writers refer as the *Book of Thoth*. The second copy is in another room. A chapter of this recently was stolen . . . but it is now restored."

As they passed out into the Great Hall:

"May I ask," said Lincoln Hayes, the echo of his own voice almost alarming him, "if this light is produced by—" he hesitated—"the means I had hoped to discover?"

"Yes." Mohammed Bey inclined his head. "Its full magnitude is so great as to induce blindness."

"How is the power produced?"

"By the sun."

"Do you mean there are no engines, no dynamos?"

"None. Only the Lamps. I will show you. Please follow."

They crossed to the other side of the hall and entered a chamber similar to that which contained the three golden chests. Here, on a long shelf, stood a row of lamps identical in construction with the Hayes Lamp, so recently destroyed in the Metropolitan Museum; except that these specimens were obviously perfect!

"You are naturally interested in the lamps." Mohammed Ahmes Bey took one up. "This is not, as you might suppose, of incalculable age—it was made quite recently. The original lamps, of which all others are models, are now, for practical purposes, useless." He touched the queer-looking tripod. "This lamp can produce light of 3,000,000 candle power! It induces instantaneous blindness; the blindness only lasts for a few minutes, however, in most cases. I employed a lamp, though not of this pattern, when I intruded upon your hospitality in New York, Mr. Hayes."

"You mean," Hayes spoke hesitantly, "it wasn't darkness that came?"

"No, it was light—insupportable light."

Mohammed Ahmes Bey replaced the lamp with the others upon the shelf.

"I can tell you no more now. It is not permissible that I should do so."

He took up a small ivory box and opened it, revealing an interior empty except for three strands of wire, stretched at irregular intervals across the interior of the box.

"Here is another secret of those forgotten people, which would, if I permitted its use, at once supersede your latest developments in radio and at the same time render further experiments in television unnecessary. I may add that that outstanding genius of your nation, the late Thomas Edison, was approaching strangely near to this at the time of his death."

"Suppose he had reached it?" Hayes asked dryly.

"Steps would have been taken to assist him in perfecting it. Because, if it had been written, as the Arabs say, that he should discover it, it had also been written that mankind was ready to receive it."

He drew a heavy black curtain across the opening. The effect was surprising. Not a speck of light was now visible in the apartment!

"I am going to ask you," the deep voice continued, "to rest your hand here, upon the closed lid of the box, and to think of any scene—you need not tell me of what you are thinking—that you would care to witness. When you are ready—raise the lid."

And in the uncanny silence of that mountain temple, that place more ancient than anything he had ever conceived to exist, Lincoln Hayes suddenly knew an intense desire for the human racket of Broadway, for the sound of motorcars, the sight of tall buildings, throngs of busy citizens on the sidewalk.

He raised the lid.

And in the very moment that he did so, it seemed to him that one wall of the apartment had dissolved . . . and he was looking out upon Broadway!

There was a traffic block. He could see a hundred cars, hear the bombilation of a thousand engines; hear the voices of the passers-by—every word they said! There was a newsstand not three paces from where he stood. He knew it—and knew the attendant! The roar of the great thoroughfare was deafening—astounding, crashing in upon the intense silence of a moment before. It was evening, and lights were just beginning to peep out from windows climbing high up into a leaden sky. A slight drizzle of rain was falling. Then, as he watched, a man bought a newspaper. Standing apparently directly in front of him, back turned, he began to read the first page.

In heavy block letters from side to side ran the headline:

LINCOLN HAYES DISAPPEARS IN
LIBYAN DESERT!

His nerves, all but unshakable, were shaken. He dropped the lid. Darkness. Complete silence. Then he heard the sound of a curtain being drawn, and rosy light crept again into the chamber. He clenched his teeth and, turning, stared at Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

"You say that Edison was on the track of this?"

"He was. A famous English firm, some twenty years ago, also, approached nearer than they knew to the secret of the Lamp. Although, Mr. Hayes, everything which is

unknown seems to be magical, these are merely inventions of a very advanced people —practically all other traces of whom have been lost. The fabulous wealth of the Temple of Jupiter Ammon, regarded as a myth of the Ancients, actually lies in the vaults below. . . .”

He had ultimately returned in a frame of mind unlike any he had ever known. Now he stared out across the desert with unseeing eyes. One of the last questions which he had put to Mohammed Ahmes Bey, or the strange man whom he knew by that name, recurred now to his mind:

“Suppose I were to tell the world what you have told me?”

“I assure you, Mr. Hayes, that you will not do so.”

“You don’t mean that you intend to detain me?”

“On the contrary, you may leave whenever you please.”

And now, powerful though those strange memories were, something that was happening out there on the desert drew his mind back to the present.

A party of men moved slowly along the track towards the monastery!

Hayes stood up, turned, and from the table took up his glasses. He stepped to the window again and focused them. The shadows of high rocks were trailing out across the sands; their peaks presented a pink color, becoming deep violet at the base.

He focused his glasses upon the path along which these ant-like figures moved. It was curiously patched and striated with shadow. Nevertheless, he presently succeeded in picking out the party.

It consisted of two men, one tall, black robed and white turbaned, undoubtedly an Egyptian; the other an Arab dressed in a striped *gibbeh* and wearing a *tarbūsh* wound around with a blue scarf. They were carrying a litter. He was unable to see the face of whoever lay upon it. . . .

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“Such occasions become more and more rare,” said Mohammed Bey, who had unexpectedly entered, “but today we have been called upon to maintain our ancient reputation for hospitality. A sick traveler has just been carried in.”

“Saw them coming, miles off,” Lincoln Hayes replied, “but couldn’t get a glimpse of the sufferer.”

“It is one of your own countrymen, Mr. Hayes, who has no knowledge of such traveling and has been rash enough to venture out into the Libyan Desert with a very inadequate party and equipment. He is, I fear, dangerously ill.”

Lincoln Hayes became deeply interested.

“What name?” he asked.

“I understand from the physician who is now attending to him that his mind is wandering somewhat. I have sent someone to inquire, from the Egyptian who was apparently acting as guide, for further particulars. But the interesting point, Mr. Hayes

—” those strange eyes, now clearly luminous in the shadows of the room were fixed upon him—“is this: he has several times mentioned your name.”

“My name?”

“Yes. I rather gather that he knows you.”

“Shall I see him?”

“I should be grateful if you would. He presents all the appearance of being *in extremis*.”

“I take it very few Americans ever penetrate here?”

“Very few.”

“It isn’t Stefanson?” Hayes suggested, a sudden note of anxiety in his voice.

Mohammed Ahmes Bey gravely shook his head.

“I am acquainted with Mr. Stefanson,” he replied, that curious light in his eyes seeming to dance momentarily, which was, perhaps, his method of smiling, “and the sick traveler bears no resemblance to him. In fact, Mr. Hayes, you need be in no anxiety respecting the other members of your party. Accept my assurance that they are safe and well cared for. If you will excuse me, I will send someone to lead the way.”

Mohammed Ahmes Bey withdrew, and Lincoln Hayes stood, hands in pockets, peering out of the window.

His position with regard to Hatasu had been made perfectly clear. The way it involved was a hard way indeed; the price of her love was a price few men would consent to pay. But now that he had known her kisses, could still feel her soft arms clinging about him, he knew that there was no price too high.

A momentary hope that it would be Hatasu who would come to guide him to the sick traveler died as quickly as it had been born. He must face the fact, the desolating fact that he had not one chance in a thousand of ever seeing Hatasu again unless he said the words which would cut him off from the world of men for at least a year, perhaps, in a sense, forever. It would mean that for the whole of his life he must be prepared to carry out the wishes of the master of the strangest community, and the oldest, in the history of mankind.

He tried to wrench his mind clear of those sweet longings only obtainable by dint of a struggle which might prove too great even for his own inflexible purpose.

The American traveler . . . He tried to concentrate upon the mystery of a sick man’s presence in that spot. And doing so, suddenly he remembered that unexplained episode of their first night in the desert—the disturbance by a human footstep of the silence of the mountain side; his climb with Hassan ès-Sugra to the crest—the sight of the distant light. . . .

This must be the man whose camp Hassan secretly had visited later the same night, and the tall Egyptian whom he had seen through his glasses in the distance, carrying the head of the litter, must be Abdûl Baruch, the Cairo dragoman.

So he reasoned, for he thought it improbable that two parties should have decided at the same time to pursue a route so strange and profitless, unless, of course, the dragoman had lost the way and the original objective of the expedition had been the Oasis of Sîwa. Yes, that was possible. . . .

A monk (whose head, however, was not shaven) but who wore the rough woolen garment of the Order, entered, bowed, and smiled.

“Lead on,” said Lincoln Hayes; “I am ready.”

The man was obviously not an Egyptian; indeed, as Hayes saw after a momentary scrutiny, was not an Oriental at all.

“I have outlived my vow of silence, Mr. Hayes,” he said, speaking English with a faint accent, “so that I may have the pleasure of conversing with you.”

Lincoln Hayes started. It was the first time he had heard one of these strange men speak.

“Thank you,” he said, “I am glad.”

“I am by profession a physician, and the condition of the patient, whose name I do not know at present, quite frankly surprises me. But he has several times pronounced your name. Will you please follow.”

They went along the wide corridor which Lincoln Hayes so well remembered, which, indeed, he could never forget. But at the end turned left and descended a long flight of steps. Here they turned right and entered a similar corridor which, he roughly estimated, ran immediately under that above. It was empty from end to end, but at a door corresponding to that of his own apartment, on the floor above, the monk who was a physician paused, opened the door, and beckoned to Hayes to enter.

He found himself in a room almost identical with that which he had left. It was empty, but the physician beckoned to him to follow into the sleeping room. He did so, walking very quietly.

On the bed, a blanket drawn over him, lay a thin, pale man, whose features it was difficult to discern owing to the deep shadow in the room. But at the moment that Lincoln Hayes entered:

“Mr. Hayes, sir,” came a faint voice, “this has been a bad break for me. But I must say, I have the most wonderful luck. I start to die in the middle of the desert, and I’m right outside a first-class hotel. . . . Sir, I’m real glad to see you.”

The traveler was Mr. Mick!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE DREAM KISS

WHEN night spread its myriad veils over the desert, transforming that dreary wilderness into a scene of beauty, as it passed through the wonderful phases of sunset, shutters concealed in the mud-brick walls were drawn across the windows by a silent monk—he whose duty was evidently that of waiting upon visitors.

Lamps were lighted in Lincoln Hayes' apartment, lamps of a pattern with which he was quite unfamiliar, but nevertheless very ordinary oil lamps. Twice since his return from the sick bed of Mr. Mick he had asked the taciturn attendant to send Hassan ès-Sugra to him.

But Hassan ès-Sugra had not come.

He was on the point of setting out to try to find the room in which he had left the Egyptian when a faint sound in the corridor arrested him, and a monk entered, bearing a large tray. Upon the plain table he set a repast consisting of some sort of meat stewed in an earthenware pot covered by a lid, a plate of dark native bread; various kinds of uncooked vegetables, a large dish of excellent fruit, a pitcher of fresh water, and a small bottle of the unpalatable wine.

Lincoln Hayes watched the man at work, and then:

"Know you are not allowed to speak," he said, "but if you understand English, send Hassan ès-Sugra to me, here."

The monk smiled; he was a man of not more than thirty, with fine ascetic features. He raised his finger to his lips, bowed, and went out.

Lincoln Hayes dropped down on the settee, staring at his dinner. The stew in the earthenware pot had an appetizing odor. He suddenly realized that he was very hungry. Perhaps after a meal he would feel more capable of dealing with the problem which immediately confronted him.

He took his seat at the table.

He had gathered from Mr. Mick, with whom he had been able to hold only a very brief conversation, that his presence in the monastery was due primarily to a miscalculation of route upon the part of the dragoman leading his party. He had not planned to travel so far as Sîwa. But, following the initial error in regard to the route, Abdûl had detected the presence of hostile Arabs—behind them, eastward.

They had endeavored to cut northwest to the old caravan road to the Oasis; and as a result of this hazardous speeding had come collapse. Abdûl, the dragoman, knew of the existence of a monastery in the neighborhood. They had been making for it—Abdûl, the sick man, and the Arab driver—when their car had sold out . . . "Packed up on me, Mr. Hayes. Another slice of hard luck. . . ."

Prospecting from a high point through glasses, Abdûl, it appeared, had actually seen Lincoln Hayes and Hassan ès-Sugra admitted to the place. They were not more than three miles away. They had extemporized a litter and had carried Mr. Mick the rest of the journey.

“I certainly get the toughest kind of breaks, Mr. Hayes. . . . But I must say, I do have wonderful luck. . . .”

Lincoln Hayes, cigar in mouth, lolled back in his chair staring ahead. He wondered what had become of Ann Wayland and Rorke. A queer aura of omnipotence surrounded Mohammed Ahmes Bey. That they had been diverted from their objective he strongly suspected; yet, oddly, or to his logical mind it seemed odd, he had no qualms respecting their safety.

The physician-monk was of opinion that a night’s rest, suitable nourishment and medical treatment would fit Mr. Mick to take the road on the morrow. Lincoln Hayes had no intention of leaving until the invalid was ready to accompany him.

He blew clouds of smoke into the still air.

His project had failed. The intrinsic honesty of the man could not deny the fact that Mohammed Ahmes Bey and the singular organization which he represented were entirely justified in retaining those secrets committed to their charge. “If you or any other,” the Egyptian had said, “can rediscover the principle of the Light, help will be given to you from us—that is the Law. Your recovery of the principle would mean that the world again was ready for this particular piece of knowledge. . . .”

But in regard to Hatasu?

Humanly, he had succeeded. She was his—if he were prepared to pay the price!

Her love was a possession more precious than any he had. He had won it. Dare he claim it?

Lincoln Hayes had never shirked either peril or hard work in his life; he knew what he wanted, and for what he wanted he was ready to make any sacrifice reconcilable with a stiff Puritan conscience.

He stood up, sighing. Speculations were idle; it was a matter of hard facts. . . . He would have liked half an hour’s exercise before turning in, and when the silent monk came to clear away the relics of his meal:

“Any place I could walk a while before sleeping?” he asked.

The monk smiled and invited him by a gesture of the head to follow. He followed to the end of the long corridor, where the monk set the tray on the floor. He then led him left and up a flight of stone steps; right again, and Hayes found himself upon a flat space surrounded by a low parapet, evidently the roof of part of the monastery. On one side another wall arose; he could see the blind eyes of many windows. The space, which was rectangular, was perfectly bare. The monk bowed slightly and retired through a dimly lighted doorway leaving Lincoln Hayes alone.

Here the air was cool. He found it invigorating. From none of the windows above him did a speck of light show, but the sky was a riot of stars amid which a sickle moon hung like a silver scimitar.

Cigar in mouth he began to walk up and down the length of the parapet, feeling like a sentry in some prehistoric fortress. When to the chill imposed by the evening a pleasant glow supervened, he returned, went down the steps, meeting never a soul, and found his way back to his apartment.

His bed had been prepared, and material for shaving placed in the bathroom. He was a man who possessed that quality common to most leaders, of closing down his brain on profitless speculation; he could sleep almost when he wished. In ten minutes he was fast asleep.

Unused though he was to dreaming, he began to dream vividly. . . .

A faint sound disturbed him . . . someone was moving in the room! Light came, and, lying quite still, he saw Hatasu lighting one of the lamps!

As she stood up on tiptoe to do so he was fascinated by the slim lines of her figure revealed beneath the thin robe. . . . He was dreaming of that which he desired most. Lying back upon his pillow he resigned himself to that sweet illusion.

Hatasu came softly across and seated herself beside him.

"Lincoln, dear——"

He raised his eyes.

She slipped her arm under his head and bent down. He grasped her and tried to claim her lips, but she kissed him on the forehead and strained back, watching him; and her wonderful eyes, velvet dark in the subdued light, commanded.

"I am here tonight, Lincoln," she said, and the voice was the voice of the inspired priestess, "because I have a duty to do."

He released his hold, watching her eyes.

"If this is to be our last meeting rests with you, dear. Remember all that I told you; although it must have seemed strange, nevertheless it was true. I am to take you to the temple. You will never see it again—unless you choose to do so."

And in his dream Lincoln Hayes slipped his bare feet into sandals which lay upon the floor and followed Hatasu. Outside in the corridor, lamps were burning in their niches. She led onward and downward until at last they came to that stone corridor which he remembered. Their going was very silent. Although she walked but two paces ahead he was restrained, almost it seemed by an unseen power, from touching her.

She opened the ancient stone portcullis, the secret of which was evidently familiar to her, and signaled that he should follow. A few paces further, and he found himself in the rose-lighted temple.

Hatasu raised her hand warningly.

"Please be quite still!"

Both stood listening. Hayes could not detect the slightest sound.

"Did you hear a footstep?" Hatasu whispered.

"No."

"Of someone—following?"

"No."

He continued to listen intently. Hatasu's eyes seemed to question him.

The stillness of the place was awe-inspiring; the softest voice echoed about it clamorously.

For a while they remained still, then Hatasu took his hand, and because of his love for her he followed like a child when she led along the length of the Great Hall and up

the black marble steps to the foot of the golden veil. She knelt and gently intimated that he should kneel beside her. Roseate light upon the ring of lapis-lazuli which she wore upon the first finger of her right hand turned it to deep violet. In his dream he thought that it was the color of her eyes—he thought her beauty supernatural.

"Now that you know what it means to claim me, do you still want me, Lincoln?"

"More than anything else in the world."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Promise that, if ever your heart changes, and few of us can know, you will never remove this."

She slipped the lapis-lazuli ring from her finger and forced it onto the lean fourth finger of Lincoln Hayes' right hand.

"I promise."

She stood up: he stood beside her.

Then, at the foot of the altar, at last, she resigned her lips to his.

2

Lincoln Hayes awoke with a start.

Someone was in the room drawing back the heavy shutters.

Blazing sunlight penetrated. He sat up, staring about him. It was one of the shaven monks, who now, smiling and slightly inclining his head, passed through into the bathroom. A second monk followed, carrying two huge leathern buckets filled with water. These he emptied into the bath, as Hayes could hear, and went out with the empty buckets. A third monk arrived with two more buckets, and then the first returned, laden as before. This apparently completed the proceedings. The first monk smiled and withdrew.

Lincoln Hayes had spoken never a word; just sat there staring about him vaguely. Some mystery lay like a shadow over his brain. He could not even identify its nature. What had happened? How did he come to find himself in bed in this room?

He clearly remembered his arrival some time on the previous day; he had been shown to this place, and refreshments had been offered to him. Later, Hatasu had come—Hatasu! He could remember every word she had spoken, every intonation of her soft voice. . . . Then, he had been taken to a queer cell resembling a library, where Mohammed Ahmes Bey had received him—had told him that he knew of his love for Hatasu; told him the strange story of her parentage and race. Yes, he clearly recalled the entire conversation, up to the moment that the Egyptian had said: "Nothing that has passed within these four walls shall ever be divulged to a living soul. . . ."

Then came the crowning recollection—and, strong-nerved though he was, it made him shudder. A bat—a great black bat had flown in through the open window, casting the entire room into shadow!

A bat . . .

It was unaccountable. He was not prepared to believe that even so strange an occurrence could have made him faint—a thing he had never done in his life!

What had happened from that unbelievable moment to this?

He checked his pulse. It was conceivable that without realizing the fact he had had a touch of sun. Sometimes it developed suddenly, in that way, as he knew from experience. It might account for that strange memory—the bat; the first phase of delirium.

His pulse was regular. He got out of bed and stood up to test his fitness. He felt as well as he had ever felt in his life; nor was he aware of any trace of headache. Yet there was a hiatus which he found himself unable to explain. He was wearing a kind of loose nightshirt—of very fine linen. His own clothes, which he remembered he had been wearing, were stacked upon the only chair in the sleeping room. But he had no recollection of having undressed—no recollection of anything that had happened from the time that Mohammed Ahmes Bey had spoken those words up to the present moment!

His jaws very tightly clenched but his face quite expressionless, he walked into the bathroom. He shaved, bathed—the water was lukewarm—and dressed. A movement in the outer room brought him to the door.

A monk whom he did not remember to have seen before was placing breakfast upon the plain table. Two eggs in wooden cups, native bread, and a bowl of butter; fruit and a pot of coffee. The man turned as Lincoln Hayes came in.

"I am past my novitiate, Mr. Hayes," he said, speaking English with a faint accent, "and therefore I am permitted to converse with you."

The words sounded like an echo coming from some vast abyss of time, yet Hayes could not remember where, if ever, he had heard them before.

"I am happy to see you yourself again. A slight touch of Berber fever, but your constitution is strong, and if you wish to leave us so soon, arrangements have been made for you to start this morning. The decision rests with you, Mr. Hayes."

"Berber fever?" Lincoln Hayes murmured.

"Rarely dangerous, Mr. Hayes, but it rapidly produces a very high temperature which as rapidly subsides. In this remote monastery of ours, we occasionally entertain rash travelers who are suffering in this way. We are happy to offer them any assistance in our power. We have another sufferer, a fellow countryman, as it chances, here now."

"A fellow countryman?"

"A coincidence, yes." The monk smiled charmingly. "But even a greater one—you are acquainted."

"What is his name?"

"A certain Mr. Mick."

"Mr. Mick?"

"We have patched him up also, although he, unlike yourself, is a man of very weak constitution. However, he will be ready to take the road. And now I must leave you, Mr. Hayes, for in this small community we have many duties."

He bowed smilingly and went out.

Lincoln Hayes throughout the interview had kept his hands thrust in his coat pockets. This, although a characteristic gesture, in the present case was dictated by a definite motive. Now he withdrew them and raised his right hand before his eyes.

On his little finger, where it fitted very tightly, was a ring of dull gold in which was set a large blue scarab cut out of a piece of flawless lapis-lazuli!

A great wave of exultation lifted Lincoln Hayes out of himself. He was a man transfigured—a man that no one of his associates would have recognized. He kissed the ring rapturously. His cold eyes were alight—they were cold no longer.

"Hatasu!" he murmured. "Hatasu!"

She had worn that ring the first time he had ever seen her, on the index finger of her hand. She had worn it in Cairo—and when she had come to him in this very room. The mystery of its presence baffled him. But its significance made his heart glad.

He could not—indeed, for all his level brain, he dared not—try to unravel the happenings of the night that was past. But the ring was a pledge. He turned the bezel inside. As long as he lived, and even if he never saw Hatasu again in the whole of his life, that ring should never leave his finger.

Berber fever?

It was possible. Certainly, he felt disinclined for food. He ate some fruit and drank a cup of coffee. The presence of Mr. Mick in the place was wholly unaccountable. The man seemed to possess an abnormal aptitude for turning up in the most unexpected places. However, he liked the little invalid, and his company would not be unwelcome. At least, with all his eccentricities, he stood for sanity, for that material world to which he, Lincoln Hayes, primarily belonged.

As he stood staring out of the wide high window, over that prospect of eternal desert, he felt that Mr. Mick was a rock of refuge to which he was prepared to cling.

Hatasu! When had she forced that ring upon his finger? For although, for a man of his build, Hayes' muscular hands were small, the ring fitted very tightly.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SÎWA

AN hour later he stood at the foot of the palm-trunk steps which seemed to be the sole means of entrance into the monastery. The English-speaking monk who possessed such a charming smile stood beside him, and:

"I should have wished," said Lincoln Hayes, "to say good-bye to Mohammed Ahmes Bey."

The monk shook his head.

"He whom you know as Mohammed Ahmes Bey rarely visits us, Mr. Hayes," he replied. "He was here last night, but he left before dawn."

"And his niece?"

"The Lady Hatasu?"

"If she is so called. Is she gone too?"

"Yes. It is my pleasant duty this morning to be your host, for I am now in charge of the monastery."

"Thank you," said Lincoln Hayes, "for all the hospitality I have received. Am I allowed to make an offering to your Order?"

"Most definitely no; although I thank you. We live in the simple manner that you see, Mr. Hayes, but we have adequate resources to enable us to entertain such travelers as come our way. It is a pleasant duty."

The Rolls which he had bought in Cairo was standing twenty yards away, a shaven-headed monk seated in front beside the driving wheel. Another car, which he did not recognize, was drawn up beside it, and a second monk sat in front. Hassan ès-Sugra, by the open door of the Rolls, saluted him gravely. Hayes returned the salute but did not speak.

"We arranged," his informant went on, "for your own car to be brought back for you. I assume that you will drive, and the brother whom you see will direct you to the point where the remainder of your party are waiting. We have made the same arrangements in regard to Mr. Mick."

Mr. Mick, very pallid and weak, was assisted down the ladder by a tall Egyptian, black robed and white turbaned; a second Egyptian, who wore a striped robe, followed. As he reached the foot of the ladder:

"Well, sir," said Mr. Mick, breathing heavily, "funny things do certainly happen to me. But I have the most amazing luck in finding myself in pleasant company. I am told we take the road together, and that's good hearing. I have had a bad time, but these kind people have patched me up in a wonderful way. Do you feel all right yourself, sir?"

"Great!" said Lincoln Hayes dryly.

That answer checked speech; he was uncertain of himself. The mystery of Mr. Mick's presence here was not the least of those which oppressed him. He wanted to think.

The Arab in the striped robe was evidently the driver. He took his seat at the wheel; Mr. Mick and the tall Egyptian climbed into the rear of the car.

Mr. Mick, whose state of weakness was distressing, appeared to possess a certain amount of hand baggage in regard to the disposition of which he was very touchy. At last, however, everything was arranged to his satisfaction. Hayes took his place at the wheel of the Rolls, beside the silent monk. Hassan ès-Sugra sat behind. Hayes turned for a moment and raised his hand in salute.

The monk-in-charge returned the salute gravely. The two cars set off, Hayes leading.

By means of a system of signs which was almost hypnotically clear, Hayes' silent guide indicated the path. Hayes was a clever and fast driver; but the character of this road demanded all his skill. He recognized the fact that Rorke was his superior on caravan tracks.

At the point where the camp had been . . . there was no camp! He did not even question this phenomenon. To bear sharply left was indicated by the monk. . . . He drove on and on until a sheer mountain barrier loomed ahead. It was split by a narrow pass which he remembered having noted in Rorke's map. The going was of such a character that he trembled for his tires.

The way through the pass was particularly bad—the actual track being not more than a foot wide, obviously one made by camels and bordered by the wildest irregularities. Here he was forced to crawl along. The road continually wound higher. Clear of it and of the shadows of the great cliffs, a distant streak of green appeared far below—then, dimly, groves of graceful palms. That distant oasis presented almost the only vestige of vegetation which Lincoln Hayes had seen since they had left the fringe of the Nile.

Several times he looked back. The Egyptian driver was never far behind.

Actually, it was a weary journey down to the trees, but at long last the road, if road it could be called, led into a grove of neglected date palms. Somewhere ahead, glittering through the palm trunks, was a building of bleached mud brick. Here, at a sign from the guide, Lincoln Hayes pulled up. It was a rest house of sorts, and in a compound he saw a collection of cars, some of which he recognized as those which had accompanied him from Cairo. He had little time to inspect them, however, for having descended from the Rolls, he was still stretching his cramped limbs when:

"Mr. Lincoln Hayes, I believe," said a pleasant voice.

Lincoln Hayes turned sharply and found himself staring into the face of a tall Arab, muffled up in white garments. The Arab had a glittering but humorous smile—a definite atmosphere of friendliness.

"My name."

"I am called the Sheikh el-Mâni. It has been my privilege to entertain the other members of your party. They are now at breakfast in a small villa some little distance away, where no doubt you would wish to join them. And this, I suppose—" he was glancing in the direction of the second car—"is Mr. Mick."

How this handsome Arab who spoke such faultless English could possibly be aware of the identity of the other traveler was a mystery beyond Lincoln Hayes' imagination.

Many theories suggested themselves, but his natural taciturnity conquered. He turned, glancing back.

Mr. Mick, leaning heavily on the black-robed Egyptian, was approaching, and:

"I must say, Mr. Hayes," he declared in a weak voice, "that that drive was tough! But we do certainly seem to have fallen in with nice people!"

They set out for a little bungalow perched on an eminence above the trees. The news of their approach had gone ahead of them.

"Lincoln! Lincoln dear!" came a happy cry.

Ann Wayland came racing down the slope, disheveled, flushed, her eyes very bright. She threw herself into Lincoln Hayes' arms, buried her face against his shoulder, and hid there awhile, clinging very tightly. He squeezed her affectionately.

"Did you think we were lost in the desert, Ann?"

"I don't know. I was frightened."

She refused to look up; he knew that she was crying. Rorke was coming down from the bungalow—the whiteness of his teeth in the tanned face enabling a glad grin to be distinguished even at that distance. Stefanson brought up the rear. He appeared at the door of the bungalow for a moment, glass in hand, but, darting back, came running down without the glass.

"Lincoln!"

Rorke grasped the outstretched hand.

"Good to see you, Paddy."

And that rare smile of Lincoln Hayes lighted up the lean face.

"Hello, there!" said Stefanson, arriving, breathless. "It's fine to see you again, Hayes."

Lincoln Hayes started slightly—then wondered if he would ever get used to Stefanson without his stutter. At which moment:

"Hello!" cried Stefanson and stared hard.

Mr. Mick had butted in on the reunion. And Ann, looking up at last, suddenly saw him.

"Mr. Mick!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Mick! if this isn't *too* wonderful!"

Mr. Mick's pale face was transfigured; his weak eyes became quite watery.

"I'll say it's wonderful!" he replied. "There's no man in the United States or out of it could ever beat my luck!"

"But I simply don't understand!"

"You'd understand less, Miss Wayland," Mr. Mick assured her, "if you had spent the night like I did, in a first-class hotel a thousand miles from any place. But I'm taking no more chances on this desert—no, ma'am. First moment I set foot in Sîwa—if I make it without passing out—I'm putting a call right through to Imperial Airways in Cairo. I'm all for home! If I have to die—I'll die where I was born!"

An hour later they set out for Sîwa.

There had been a three-handed talk between Lincoln Hayes, Captain Rorke, and the Sheikh el-Mâni. Rorke was disposed to be troublesome.

"In regard to your comfort, Captain Rorke," said the Sheikh with calm dignity, "you have no possible cause for complaint. If I detained you, I assure you that I did so in your own interests."

"Let it go at that, Paddy." Lincoln Hayes had clinched the matter.

The Sheikh had undertaken that all the service cars belonging to both parties should follow on without delay to Sîwa. He made himself responsible for their safety and the safety of their contents. They parted amicably. No guide was necessary. The road from this fringe of the Oasis to the walled town of Sîwa was comparatively good. Lincoln Hayes and Rorke, with Ann and Stefanson, went ahead. Slim, who seemed to accept these singular occurrences as part of his ordinary duty, followed in the American car, with Hassan ès-Sugra and Abdûl the dragoman. The Egyptian driver brought up the rear with Mr. Mick, the other native members of whose party the Sheikh undertook to transport safely.

They dined that night with the district officer.

The district officer, Mr. Gay, was a very blond young Englishman. He had long eyelashes which appeared quite white, and very weary-looking Cambridge blue eyes. His chronic state of boredom would have silenced a circus.

"I don't know," he said, when coffee was served, on a terrace framed by many flowers in boxes and overlooking from the heights of his rocky residence miles of palm groves and orchards, unreally lovely beneath a purple sky, "if you folks have really got very much to complain about."

He yawned. Stefanson yawned also. Rorke stifled an inclination to follow suit.

"You Americans seem to think," he went on, stifling another yawn, "that because your permits require you to report to a British officer it isn't necessary for you to do so."

"I don't happen to be an American," said Rorke quietly.

The district officer put down his coffee and yawned heartily.

"All the worse," he commented; "I mean—speaking as your host—you ought to know better. You go pottering about in some place which I've certainly heard of"—he was battling bravely not to yawn again—"but which I have never had time to visit, and get held up by a bunch of Arabs—what they wanted to hold you up for is not clear ——"

Stefanson was now thoroughly infected: he was yawning continuously; so was Mr. Mick.

"You must know the Sheikh el-Mâni?" said Rorke. "He's got about two hundred head of first-class fighting men out there."

"Heard of him," Mr. Gay admitted. "Much respected in these parts. You can't expect me to pick a quarrel with a high-hat like that simply because you take it into

your nuts to stroll through his territory!"

He shook his head sadly, yawning, and clapped his hands for more coffee.

"From what little I saw of the gentleman you refer to," said Mr. Mick, "I regard it as a great piece of luck that I had the opportunity of meeting him. If that's a regular sheikh—I don't blame the women!"

"Not a regular sheikh!" yawned the district officer. "Mysterious fellow."

The question of accommodation was settled, but not without difficulty. The district officer obviously was not used to entertaining so large a party. Mr. Mick's requirements were also dealt with.

"Airways are sending a bus first thing in the morning," the yawning voice announced. "My laddie has just fixed it up. They quote one-fifty pounds English to take you to Heliopolis—but you said expense didn't matter, I think."

"Nothings matters to me, sir," Mr. Mick replied fervently, "but just one thing: I want to go home."

"Same here," yawned the district officer.

Later, on the veranda of a small bungalow annexed to the Residency, and commanding an astonishing view of the tower-like walls of Sîwa apparently rising from a sea of foliage, Rorke and Lincoln Hayes found themselves alone. Rorke, leaning back in a cane armchair, watched his friend with a certain anxiety. Lincoln Hayes, cigar in mouth, lolled in a similar chair, staring up at the star-studded sky. Except that he had grown even more silent, perhaps only one very intimate with him would have noticed any change in Hayes. Nevertheless, Rorke had noted it.

"I rather think, Lincoln," he said suddenly, "that something very queer's happened to you since we parted. It's not like you at the first hint of opposition to throw in your hand. Yet, as I understand it, you propose to go right back."

Hayes nodded slowly, without looking at the speaker.

"Why?"

There was a moment of silence in that little hanging garden, high above the Oasis. It was a queer silence, seeming to belong to the scene, unreal—fairylike.

"Nothing to go on for," Hayes replied at last.

He raised his hand to his cigar. Moonlight glittered on the blue ring which he wore on his little finger.

"Lincoln!"

Lincoln Hayes removed his cigar and stared vaguely at Rorke.

"What?"

"That ring!"

"What about it?"

"I may be wrong—but I think I've seen it before."

Lincoln Hayes stared down at the ring, replaced his cigar, and leaned back in his chair.

"Where?"

“The lady who called herself Mrs. Fulton and whom I met in the train to Port Said wore that ring, or its double, upon the index finger of her right hand.”

Hayes did not reply for a moment, then:

“Quite right, Paddy,” he answered monotonously. “God knows I’d like to give you my confidence—ask your advice. First time, almost, in my life, I don’t see my way through.”

“Have you made a promise to keep silent about something?”

Hayes nodded.

Rorke took a cigarette from a box which stood upon a cane table set between the two chairs.

“I don’t suppose I could help anyway, Lincoln,” he said quietly. “Where a woman’s concerned, nobody can help—except the woman.”

Silence fell between them.

3

Certain formalities detained the party in Sîwa. To what extent they were inventions of the district officer was not clear. But that desolatingly bored young man rarely left Ann Wayland.

“I say,” Stefanson whispered to her when luncheon time approached, “you’ll have to be pointedly rude to this cavalier, or he’ll have us here filling in forms for the rest of the week.”

“I can’t,” Ann replied in her sympathetic way, “he’s so lonely.”

“They all say that. It’s as old as the confidence trick—and never fails with women.”

“It’s true.”

“It may be. Ask Paddy if you can stay behind.”

Lincoln Hayes’ phenomenal taciturnity had now become apparent to everyone. When they explored the mysteries of Sîwa, the district officer leading with Ann, always Lincoln Hayes brought up the rear of the party, ducking his head automatically in the steep, twisting tunnels which pass for streets—labyrinths of dark passages with openings supported on split palm beams. Apathy seemed to be claiming him, a fact which Rorke observed with alarm.

Actually, his mind was engaged with the puzzle which centered around the scarab ring. That he had been subjected to the same kind of hypnotic interference as that which had robbed Stefanson of his memory of the formula he was now convinced. But when this had taken place, by whom it had been exercised, he found himself unable to determine.

When had Hatasu placed that ring on his finger?

It represented a definite, a final understanding; but his gladness was clouded by the awful doubt—what was the nature of that understanding? Its presence could mean one thing only: that that which he had desired more than anything else in the world had come true. Hatasu had given him her love.

But of himself? What were his obligations? What was he pledged to do?

If, as he suspected, Mohammed Ahmes Bey had exercised his uncanny powers at some time during his sojourn in the monastery, what had occurred subsequently? Had Hatasu been with him, perhaps in his arms, but ignorant of the fact that his brain was under control?—that no memory of those precious moments would outlive them?

Was it his duty to her to leave the East? Had he perhaps pledged himself to stay?

Hour by hour, almost minute by minute, he hoped for some message, some sign . . . but none came.

His last conscious memory of Hatasu afforded no clue. Not prone to seek advice readily, in this, the supreme problem of his life, how he would have welcomed it! Surely, in the shadowy jungle of his mind, some clue must lurk, which examination by a clever and sympathetic friend might bring to light. Paddy Rorke? Ann? . . . It was impossible. He could not speak.

In due course an Airways pilot arrived, a stockily built man, very red-faced, snub-nosed, and stubble-haired. His face might otherwise have been described as a cheery grimace. He did not disguise the fact that he regarded moneyed Americans of Mr. Mick's type as highly amusing lunatics. He roared with laughter when he met Mr. Mick, and unmistakably screamed when the sick little man told his naïve story of desert wandering.

Mr. Mick looked pathetically straight faced.

"I will say," he stated, "that I don't find it funny."

Whereupon Captain Scotty, for such was his cheery name, leaned back in his chair and laughed till tears streamed down his red face.

"You are the limit!" he declared. "It's worth coming out here just to talk to you."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Mick solemnly. "It's this way with me. I am used to being laughed at—it's my name as much as anything else; but I don't mind. If I can make people happy that way, it's as good a way as any other. That's how I argue it out."

"You're completely potty," said the pilot, who possessed that staggering frankness of speech which ignores consequences, "but you are certainly a sport!"

"That's very kind on your part," Mr. Mick returned. "But I must say I've met with nothing but kindness right since I started out from home. I've met nice people and been to some nice places."

Whereupon, after a glorious struggle, Captain Scotty again collapsed.

Mr. Mick and Abdûl Baruch, the Cairo dragoman, with as much of their baggage as the pilot would allow, in due course waved their farewells to Sîwa and disappeared over the distant skyline. Ann had parted almost tearfully from her little invalid, and there was a queer, sad expression in Mr. Mick's eyes, also, as he held her hand before stepping into the plane. However, he had gone, to afford the party the memory of a strange, pathetic little figure whom Fate had cast across their path.

"May I remark, Mr. Gay," said Rorke to the district officer, and a certain acid had crept into the light voice, "that I see no reason why our party should not leave also."

Mr. Gay looked at the speaker and immediately began yawning.

“No good starting now; not till dawn tomorrow. Look at your map. Where would you camp tonight?”

“All the camp stores have come in—we could take an adequate supply of water from here so that we should be independent of wells. I would undertake to find a camping ground. What do you say, Lincoln?”

Lincoln Hayes stared towards the distant walls of Sîwa, pink turrets against a sapphire sky, a queer, unreal place, resembling a Dulac illustration to a fairy tale; then:

“We’ll start in the morning,” he said dryly, plunging his hands into his pockets, and began to walk towards the car.

Stefanson exchanged glances with Rorke. Ann had already been commandeered by Mr. Gay.

“Something funny about the chief,” said Stefanson.

Rorke nodded but made no reply.

This strange form of inertia was so totally unlike Lincoln Hayes, and it began to affect the whole of the party. In the late afternoon they went out to a deep pool, and the bathe was a luxury to the desert-weary travelers, but although it afforded much refreshment of body it failed to refresh their spirits. Even in the wonderful light which precedes the desert sunset, Ann was conscious of a cloud overhanging them. The mystery of Lincoln Hayes’ sojourn in the monastery—for of what had befallen there he had spoken no word to her—the mystery of his altered attitude towards the whole project, depressed her. Something resembling the fear which she had associated with those strange bat memories threatened to come back.

Mr. Gay was beginning to bore her intensely. She could no longer stifle her yawns in his company. In fact, he had the whole party yawning from morning till night.

“I can’t make out,” said Stefanson, “how it is that all the inhabitants of Sîwa aren’t yawning. I have never stopped since I met this record breaker.”

However, final arrangements were made for a start at dawn. And another yawning competition, interrupted by dinner, took place at the district officer’s house. During coffee, on the terrace, Stefanson, glancing at Gay leaning beside Ann on the flower-bordered parapet, turned to Rorke, and:

“Better look out, Rorke,” he whispered; “I believe he’s asking her to yawn through life with him.”

The party broke up soon afterwards, since so early a start was to be made. Ann retired to her apartment, where she had the services of a native maid, and the district officer, bidding the others goodnight, walked off to the lonely quarters which he had taken up since their visit, having given over those which he usually occupied to his guests. Lincoln Hayes, Rorke, and Stefanson sat on the terrace over a final drink.

They were very silent, each being in his way preoccupied. Yet, silent as they were, no one heard the sound of approaching footsteps. No one was aware of any other presence, until suddenly, out of the shadows beside them, a tall figure appeared.

Rorke started to his feet. Stefanson uttered an ejaculation. Lincoln Hayes removed his cigar and looked up from the depths of the cane armchair in which he was lying.

Mohammed Ahmes Bey stood before them!

His eagle features were set like a mask of doom; his eyes in the moonlight resembled jewels. He looked from face to face—and each man, meeting that piercing gaze, experienced the dreadful sensation of having his brain laid open for inspection. Then Lincoln Hayes spoke:

"Mohammed Ahmes Bey," he said monotonously, "this is an unexpected visit."

Mohammed Ahmes Bey, seeming to dismiss Rorke and Stefanson with a glance, focused the whole of his attention upon Lincoln Hayes. For ten, twenty, thirty seconds, their eyes met and clashed. Then the Egyptian slightly shrugged his shoulders and turned aside: his gesture was one of despair.

"Forgive an unworthy suspicion," he said, the bell note in his deep voice unusually pronounced.

A silence of astonishment followed his words. It was broken by Captain Rorke.

"If I may say so," he interjected, "Mohammed Bey, you seem to be in some kind of trouble."

Mohammed Ahmes Bey slowly turned his head in the speaker's direction.

"It is not I who am in trouble," he replied, "but others, who *may* be."

Lincoln Hayes' heart was beating very fast; a momentary sickening fear chilled him.

"What has happened?" he asked.

His voice was quite level.

"One of the temple lamps is missing!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

NEW YORK

SUBDUED lights twinkled on figures of Nile gods, half hidden in the shadows above lofty bookcases, gleamed on the gilt of rich bindings, picked out here a patch of vellum, there a spot of rich red morocco, glittered upon the appointments of the table. No log fire blazed in the hearth tonight, for a perfect spring had blessed New York, and the weather was warm.

In the chair behind the table, wearing a somewhat dilapidated red-silk dressing gown over dinner kit, Lincoln Hayes sat, cigar in mouth. He was more than usually tanned and more than usually drawn. He was reading—had read a score of times—a cablegram which lay upon the blotting pad before him. It had reached him the day after he had landed.

> TO LINCOLN HAYES NEW YORK CITY, N. Y., U. S. A. I COUNT YOU NOW A FRIEND AND SO ASK YOU TO AVERT WHAT MAY BE A GREAT CATASTROPHE. USE ALL YOUR RESOURCES. HELP ON THE WAY. MOHAMMED AHMES.

All facts pointed in the same direction. Mohammed Ahmes Bey, as he had frankly admitted, was neither omniscient nor omnipotent. The second theft, this time of a perfect lamp, established that fact. It also formed a link in a chain of evidence the strength of which could not be doubted. An expert in all the subtle arts of burglary had taken the lamp from its secret hiding place. Lincoln Hayes' mind was a blank respecting this place—for his brain had failed to bridge the hiatus. But coincidence has its limitations. . . .

The map and Rorke's notes had disappeared from the *Bramahpoona* almost as mysteriously. The same man had been present on both occasions.

That man was—Mr. Mick!

His nationality suggested, although evidence remained inconclusive, that he was acting for an American organization. It was not too much to assume that he was acting for Donoghue's, instructed by Simon Lobb!

But, reviewed in retrospect, his tactics excited Lincoln Hayes' unwilling admiration. It was an astounding imposture—that of a brilliantly clever man.

From the moment that Mr. Mick had left Imperial Airways flying ground outside Cairo, no trace could be discovered of him. There was a strong assumption that he had a second passport and a second personality, since he had successfully vanished from Egypt.

Hayes pushed the cablegram aside and, unlocking a drawer of the big table, took out a letter which he had received the morning before. It was on thick amber-colored paper, merely the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic, the *akhut* on the top left-hand corner of the paper. It was in handwriting small, firm, and curiously characteristic.

> *I shall wait, Lincoln dear, however hard it may be for you, however long for me, because I know that one day you will come.*

There was no signature—no signature was necessary.

Those few lines in a woman's hand had determined his course. In nearly all that he had ever sought to achieve he had succeeded. It seemed to him, as his eyes devoured every curve and line of that firm and delicate writing, that by this success, the winning of Hatasu, of a woman unobtainable by common humanity, he had crowned any previous effort. He who had gone through life heart-free knew that now the world held nothing else but Hatasu. . . .

Came a rap on the door. Hayes returned the letter to the table drawer.

"Come in."

Slim entered, very brown but otherwise unchanged. No butler having been appointed to take the place of the lamented Lurgan, he continued to act as general factotum.

"Mr. Maguire, sir."

"In."

District Attorney Maguire came in, big, black-browed, and white-headed. He wore a dinner suit, but there was something about his vivid personality which seemed to suggest that it should have possessed white stripes or something to distinguish it from *other* dinner suits.

"Hayes!" he exclaimed as the door was closed behind him, "this looks to me like another mare's nest!"

Lincoln Hayes pointed to a side table upon which refreshments were set.

"Help yourself, Maguire. Good of you to bother, but I don't know who else to ask."

"You're welcome," growled Maguire, helping himself to an enormous tot of whisky. "We're friends, young Hayes, as your father and I were friends. If I can't do a job when you ask me, then that all means nothing."

"Thanks," said Lincoln Hayes.

"I have to act under cover," Maguire went on, taking a cigar from the big cedar-wood box, "for, strictly speaking, this job doesn't belong in the police department at all."

"Know it."

"So do I. Acting officially, say on a complaint from the Egyptian police, the boys could demand a parade of Donoghue's outfit. Short of it, although from your description I could spot him at a mile range, it's pretty hopeless to try to identify this white bird who calls himself Mr. Mick. To begin with, you've no evidence that his passport was in that name."

Lincoln Hayes considered for a moment, and then:

"That's true," he admitted.

"One of those funny names that would naturally disarm suspicion. Nobody would suspect a man of adopting it."

"What about the ship's people?"

"—Mm, yes." Maguire admitted grudgingly, carefully snipping the end of his cigar. "But it's pretty easy to write in under a name on a passport, 'trade name,' or 'pen

name,' Mr. Mick, and scratch it out afterwards."

"Guess that's done sometimes?"

"Guess so," said Maguire dryly. "But that's neither here nor there. Whoever he is—he's no Mr. Mick. If what you tell me is true—and I must say you have recently told me some pretty tall stories—he's one of the brightest agents that ever came out of this continent. Why, damn it!—" he paused to light his cigar; his big voice boomed around the room—"he's pipped you at every move! And these other people too, for all their monkey cleverness! He got in right on your back—you've carried him all the way!"

Maguire extracted a sheaf of notes from an inside pocket of his dinner jacket.

"Results *re* Mr. Mick—Nil. Other inquiries certainly return curious facts, so that," he admitted reluctantly, "after all, there may be something in it."

"What facts, Maguire?"

"Dr. Steiner, Lobb's technician, was on vacation. He was suddenly recalled three days ago."

"May mean nothing."

"It may or it mayn't! Second point: Since his return, he's been living at Lobb's experimental laboratory down in New Jersey."

"Living there?"

"Living there."

"Seems like an urgent job."

"It does."

"Third point: In addition to the barbed wire which surrounds the whole place, as you may know, there are now armed guards, and I'm told, but I haven't confirmed it—dogs at night."

"What!"

Maguire blew cigar smoke into the air, then took an appreciative drink from his tumbler.

"I'll admit this much," he said; "there's a certain movement around the Lobb quarters. I don't say it's connected with what you tell me, but there's movement there."

"Failed to reply to personal letter," said Lincoln Hayes. "When I called, was out. . . ."

2

Stefanson burst into the library, unannounced.

"Hello!" Maguire exclaimed. "What's this?"

Stefanson wore a leather overcoat, his mane of fair hair was wildly disheveled. He peered about him through the powerful lenses of his spectacles in a state of obvious excitement.

"Glad you're back," said Lincoln Hayes, and pressed a bell.

"Hayes!" Stefanson burst out, "Greatorex and I only got back half an hour ago. I suppose you thought we had crashed?"

Maguire, under tufted eyebrows, stared hard at the speaker. To him, the absence of the familiar stutter was still a phenomenon smacking of witchcraft.

"Didn't think so. Greatorex very good man."

Greatorex was Lincoln Hayes' pilot. At this moment there was a knock on the library door and Slim came in. Hayes pointed to the side table on which, in an ice bucket, two bottles of Liebfraumilch reposed. Slim crossed and proceeded to uncork one.

"We took off as late as possible," Stefanson went on excitedly; "it was important they shouldn't see our number. By the time we got over the Lobb laboratory it was quite dark. Greatorex came down as low as he dared."

"Any signs of movement there?" Maguire drawled.

"Rather!"

Stefanson took a glass of wine from the tray which Slim extended, and sipped appreciatively. Then he took a longer drink and, as Slim went out:

"We saw them from miles off," he went on. "They've got rows of arcs swung in an open field, more than half a mile from the laboratory or any of the outbuildings—and the place was alive with workmen!"

"Rush job," Lincoln Hayes murmured thoughtfully.

"This is getting interesting," said Maguire.

"You know what it looks like to me?" Stefanson asked, peering from face to face.

"No."

"They seem to be building a tower."

"Building a tower?"

Maguire glared at him almost ferociously.

"Looked like that. We could see scaffolding, and figures moving about on it—at least *I* could, through my glasses. But I didn't have long to look."

Lincoln Hayes came from behind the big table and, crossing, helped himself to a drink. Over his shoulder:

"Why not?" he asked.

"We were chased!"

"What!"

"You know Lobb has a flying field near by?—Well, it was suddenly lighted up, and I saw a small plane taking off!"

"Whew!" whistled Maguire. "What in hell's going on there?"

"Don't know. Something very hot. This scout was fast. He chased us for miles. The night's crystal clear. We had planned to make a landing at the Aëro Club field, but he would have been right on our tail—would have found out what he wanted to know."

"Who you were," Lincoln Hayes murmured.

“Sure. So we led him a devil of a dance and pretty soon showed him our heels. Greatorex climbed to a tremendous height, then we doubled back, and finally landed without seeing a trace of the Lobb outfit.”

“I’m beginning to believe,” boomed Maguire’s great voice, “that what you think is true, Hayes. Even in these days of commercial competition, those are not just ordinary precautions.”

“Agree.”

“Listen here.” Maguire stood squarely before the open hearth, staring at Lincoln Hayes. “Put your cards on the table. When this thing started, way back, you knew that Lobb aimed to develop this fool light, which sounds like plain lunacy to me. But it was just a piece of close business. Who scored first?”

“Lobb. Planted a spy on me.”

“Same right along! Only now the position’s different. As I read it, it’s developed into a dog-in-the-manger act. You don’t want to commercialize this thing yourself ——”

“I don’t.”

“—And you don’t want Lobb to do it.”

“He must not do it.”

“Well, that beats hell fire! If you know it’s no good—and I can think of no other reason why you should throw it up—why not let Simon burn his fingers in peace?”

“Not bothering about Simon’s fingers,” Lincoln Hayes returned laconically, “but you see, Maguire, I have learned this: Lacking a detailed knowledge how to control this thing (neither Lobb nor Steiner can have it), desperately dangerous thing to monkey with. I mean, if—as Stefanson’s story suggests—they aim to run up an experimental plant of size suggested, wouldn’t answer for the safety of New Jersey.”

“What!”

Maguire was positively glaring.

“I’ve said it—and I mean it.”

Maguire helped himself to another drink, so did Stefanson. And as he replaced the cork:

“Speaking from a technical point of view——” he said.

Maguire growled like a bear.

“Please listen. I can assure you, Maguire, that this light, the source of which I am only just beginning to suspect, has unpleasant properties. It was used in this house, as you know. Something like 3,000,000 candle power must have been developed! Anyway, its magnitude was great enough to blind us all for more than two minutes, and the effect on the atmosphere was similar to that which would be caused by what is popularly called a stroke of lightning.”

He turned to Lincoln Hayes.

“I think you know more about this than I do,” he added, “and I can see what you’re afraid of. Steiner has got hold of a perfect lamp, for a sight of which I would cheerfully give every dollar I possess in the world! He has grasped the principle. He’s a brilliant

man. He has a very fine brain. He is probably scouring the country for material. What he plans to do is this: to build such a lamp on a magnified scale. . . .”

There was a short, complete silence.

“If you are right,” said Maguire, “evidently they have got light from the lamp in their possession. They wouldn’t start big-scale experiments otherwise.”

“Suspect they have,” came Hayes’ monotone. “It’s to shield it from onlookers that they are taking all these precautions.”

“But I’ve something else to say,” boomed Maguire. “If Steiner—and you think he’s a bright lad—knows, as you seem to know, Stefanson, that this thing acts like a thunderstorm, is he going to be fool enough to take a chance?”

Stefanson peered eagerly at the speaker, and then:

“He may think he can insulate it,” he replied, “in fact, he may have succeeded.”

“Oh!”

Maguire dropped ash from his cigar into a bronze bowl.

There was a rap on the door, and Rorke and Ann came in: they had been to a theater. Ann looked about her eagerly.

“Any news, Lincoln?”

“Yes,” Hayes answered, “there’s a certain development.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

AT THE LOBB WORKS

"QUICK! JUMP! BEHIND those bushes!"

The night was clear but moonless, and the bushes indicated were merely a deeper shadow in the darkness. Two figures darted across the narrow road. There was a muffled curse, a sound of stumbling, and:

"I'm in a ditch, sir, and it ain't too soft," came in a Cockney voice.

"Quiet! Watch for the headlights."

The nonchalant tones of the second speaker might have been identified by one who knew Lincoln Hayes, but, could one have seen the pair, their closest friends would have failed to recognize either the president of Western States Electric or Slim, his town chauffeur. They presented the down-and-out appearance of two workmen who had known no work for many weary months. Hayes groped and touched Slim.

"Hurt?"

"No, sir."

Hayes, crouching low behind the bush, peered out intently. He was watching the road. They had had ample warning of the approach of the car, for it was a lonely spot. And now came the glare of the headlights. It illuminated a high, barbed wire fence on the other side and lighted up the dusty road.

"Down!" snapped Hayes. "Duck."

The car swept by, leaving them covered in dust.

"Blimy, guv'nor—*'e* was goin' some!"

"See the man beside the driver?"

"I did."

"Who was it?"

"Mr. Mick."

"Right."

They scrambled onto the road again. Any doubt which might have remained in Hayes' mind, and there was little, now was dispelled.

The stolen lamp was in possession of Simon Lobb!

"Much farther, Slim, to the point you marked?"

"About another quarter mile, sir."

They trudged on. Following the brief illumination of the car lights, the night seemed darker than ever. Perhaps, in a sense, Hayes reasoned, the chief object of the expedition had been accomplished. This had been to obtain working data, or data upon which some action could be taken, to the effect that the missing lamp was actually in Simon Lobb's hands.

"One of Lobb's cars, Slim?"

"Yes, sir."

The presence of the man Mick under these circumstances was practically conclusive evidence.

And now, as they went trudging along the narrow, dusty road, Slim suddenly touched Lincoln Hayes' arm.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but do you notice a feelin' like——"

"Like what?"

"Like there was *somebody else* with us?"

The man spoke aggressively, but his tone masked a hidden fear.

Hayes pulled up and stared at his companion in the darkness. He realized that Slim had put into words a vague impression, hitherto indefinable, which had been creeping upon his own mind. Now, standing still, he was listening.

That vague distant murmur which belongs to a countryside pierced by arterial roads alone was discernible. Otherwise the night was still.

"It's the silence, Slim," he said quietly. "Just a fancy."

"It may be, sir, but I've still got it."

They pressed on, and now, undeniably, Hayes began to get it; an idea which seemed to be conveyed to his brain through no known sense, but a definite idea, that there was a *third member* of the party!

"There's somebody just a'ead, sir," Slim said suddenly. "Two paces a'ead!"

Then they pulled up and stood still, staring in front of them. Darkness. A vague, sketchy outline of posts and barbed wire on the right, shadowed bushes on the left, and the dusty whiteness of the road about their feet. Otherwise, nothing.

"Know what you mean, Slim," said Hayes. "But this part of Lobb's property practically a ditch in winter. Long, narrow hollow. Echoes."

"I hope it is, sir; I don't like it."

Once again they proceeded.

" 'Ere's the point. Now we 'ave to look out for the dogs."

They halted.

"Don't light your torch," Hayes directed tonelessly. "Must grope our way to point. Do dogs roam all over the property?"

"No, sir, not from what I've seen. There's a very thick thorn 'edge, the original 'edge, sir, twelve feet back of the barbed wire. It's in the gap between the two the dogs are loose."

"Spotted this last night?"

"Yes, sir, and night before."

"Hello!"

They became quite silent, then:

"There *is* someone near us!" Slim whispered.

At which moment, before Hayes could reply, came a distant angry barking, the noise growing ever louder.

"Scented!" Hayes muttered.

Nearer and nearer came the angry dogs, a pack of Alsatians, as the wolf note indicated.

"Back to the ditch!" Hayes snapped out the order with some energy. "Down flat and lie still."

They groped their way across, tearing their ragged topcoats upon thorns, but finally found a place where they could lie down. The dogs were now within thirty yards.

"Look, sir, look!" Slim whispered. "There's someone running on the *other side* of the barbed wire!"

Lincoln Hayes stared through the darkness, to which his eyes were becoming accustomed. He could not be sure, could not trust his own eyesight. Certainly, perhaps an illusion created by Slim's excited words, a vague, misty figure did seem to pass like a wraith along against the shadow of the distant hedge. Then came the dogs.

Hayes fully expected that they would pull up in an angry howling bunch, immediately facing the spot where they were hidden. Remembering that, according to Slim, there was a fault in the barbed wire at this point, he had his hand upon his repeater, anticipating that some of the dogs might get through. What happened left him speechless with wonder.

The dogs went by like a wolf pack in full cry, racing past the point at which he and Slim were hidden, as though ignorant of their existence! They were on some other scent. West they swept, full twenty strong, and the formidable sound of them died away in the night.

"Gosh!" said Slim, "*what* are they followin'?"

"Don't know—" Hayes sprang up—"but now is our chance."

"I shall 'ave to use me light."

"Go ahead, Slim. Got to jump."

They ran across the road, and Slim directed a ray from his torch on the powerful entanglement which bordered the Lobb property.

"Here you are, sir. It don't want much more cuttin'."

There was a ragged gap in the fortifications, but not quite wide enough to permit of the passage of a man's body. Lincoln Hayes whipped out a wire cutter and, while Slim held the light, enlarged the opening, gingerly pressing back the jagged ends until:

"Get through now," he said. "In you go."

They crawled through and found themselves in the narrow belt between the barbed wire and the equally impassable hedge.

"How far the first gate?"

"Three hundred yards, sir, this way."

"Lead," Hayes directed. "Keep light on."

They proceeded at a steady trot for all of three hundred yards.

"Here's the gate!" Slim panted.

A high, closely barred gate, padlocked, occupied a gap in the hedge.

"Over you go."

"Take the light, sir."

Slim scaled the gate and dropped on the other side.

"Pass the light through to me, sir."

A few moments later Lincoln Hayes stood beside Slim.

"Light out."

They were out of reach of the dogs, for the time being. They were also without the law and on the private property of Simon Lobb!

"What we've got to look out for now," said Slim, "is the guards."

"Prefer guards to dogs," Hayes murmured.

"The field w'ere the work's goin' on, sir, is 'arf a mile from this 'ere point."

"Where's the laboratory?"

"We 'ave to pass it to reach the field."

"Going to be tricky. Daren't use the light any more."

Up to their knees in undergrowth, they pressed on to where the ground sloped sharply upward. Over a dimly visible crest a belt of light glowed against the dark background.

"That light be the flying ground, Slim?"

"Maybe, sir; or the men at work on the tower. I don't think it's far enough away for the flying field."

"Good."

They waded on, silent, except for hard breathing, and presently came to the top of the slope. Here they pulled up, and a queer prospect confronted them.

A series of long, low buildings lay in a hollow below. Only one of these buildings showed any light. Hayes guessed it to be the experimental laboratory. There were some tall radio masts, and a jumble of what looked like yards and garages away down to the left. Beyond, the ground rose again. Work was in progress under the glare of a number of arc lamps.

A dim structure, resembling, as he saw it, the first platform of the Eiffel Tower, rose strangely amid a nest of scaffolding. Active figures could be seen moving about under the glare of the arcs.

Lincoln Hayes focused a pair of small Zeiss glasses.

It was difficult to make out with certainty of what the structure was composed, but, as seen through the glasses, it strangely resembled a metal tripod, and even more strangely resembled a colossal reproduction of that Ancient Egyptian curiosity, long enshrined in the Metropolitan Museum but now destroyed—the Hayes Lamp!

Hayes slipped the glasses back into his pocket and turned to Slim. A muted sound of hammering and riveting reached them from the scene of activity.

"What are you thinking, Slim?"

"About the dogs, sir."

"So am I."

"If I may say so, sir, that was a bit o' luck, w'otever we owe it to!"

"Quite! Let's make the building."

They pressed on down the long slope. To Hayes, who had spent so many months upon the quest of the secret of the Light, it was a queer thought that, in the eleventh hour, Simon Lobb, not merely his commercial opponent but an active enemy, although his activity was cunningly masked, should have succeeded. Yet, on his own part, it was not enmity which urged Hayes to destroy Lobb's enterprise. Lobb had pointedly avoided an interview, because Lobb was incapable of understanding motives other than his own. . . .

A faint sound disturbed his trend of thought.

"Take cover," he whispered urgently; "down flat."

2

A plane flying very low and carrying a Lobb searchlight came up over the crest!

In the short time at their disposal both men had taken cover scientifically: Slim was indistinguishably enveloped in a low bush; Lincoln Hayes, hacking with his wire cutter, had successfully covered himself with weeds and tangled grass. The light passed over them and on. There was no indication that they had been seen.

"Keep quiet," Hayes warned. "Guards may be following the plane."

For fully five minutes they lay there, and then:

"Think we might move," said Hayes.

In the darkness they slipped off their rugged topcoats. Both wore workmen's overalls beneath. With their artificially dirtied faces and hands they were a typical-looking pair of mechanics.

"Once among the sheds," said Hayes tonelessly, "we act in the open. Leave the coats."

Ten minutes later they reached the first of the outbuildings. It had no visible windows. But as their feet gritted on the ash path two men appeared around the corner of the shed carrying a long girder. The leader of the pair observed Hayes and Slim in the darkness.

"Lorry just in," he shouted. "They're waiting up there. Get busy."

Hayes squeezed Slim's arm significantly. They walked around the corner of the building as far as the open door. By the light of two lanterns a heavy-jowled man, evidently a foreman, was supervising the removal of another girder by two workmen. Hayes drew Slim back.

"Too risky," he whispered. "Man with that face will know all his gang."

They had not been observed, and as they crept away:

"Follow men with girder," said Hayes. "All we want is a glimpse of work."

They proceeded in the direction of that still distant field where arc lamps split the darkness. A lorry was being loaded with girders, but they cautiously circled around it. There was a well-made path; it led by the long, low building from which they had seen light stream out. The lighted windows, however, were evidently on the other side.

"Round here," said Hayes.

They left the path and waded through undergrowth, presently finding themselves on a strip of sloping grass upon which the light from a number of windows shone out. They crept towards the first of these windows and looked in.

The place was a long low workshop or laboratory, at the moment unoccupied. There were a number of working benches and a wealth of apparatus. Nothing was visible of any importance in regard to their investigation. Waiting until the small lorry with its load of girders had passed, they resumed their way towards the lighted area.

Several workmen they met, going in the other direction, but these seemed to accept their presence as quite normal. And so at last, unchallenged, they reached the scene of operations.

This consisted, as Hayes had seen through his glasses, of a sort of tall metal tower set in the center of a large meadow. At the point where the ash path reached the meadow its place was taken by planking which led to the foot of the tower. A wooden shed, open on one side, stood just right of this point. It was lighted up, and at a trestle table three men were seated, bending over a plan.

"Round back of here," whispered Hayes.

They darted clear of the path just as a group of workmen came along it, and took cover in the shadow of the shed. Lincoln Hayes, warning Slim to stay where he was, crept on and on around the corner; until finally he reached a point where, although hidden from observation, he could, by listening intently, hear something of the conversation taking place inside the shed. . . .

In the main it proved to be incomprehensible. He discovered that the three men were Simon Lobb, Dr. Steiner, and a certain Mr. Martin, possibly Steiner's assistant.

He directed his attention to the strange building being created away there to the right. Impossible to doubt that it was a giant reproduction of the Hayes Lamp!

Someone else had come in—evidently to make a report.

"The dogs behaved very strangely tonight, Mr. Lobb. They seem to have chased someone around three sides of the fencing. Jefferson reports they are pumped out. The guards found no trace. Leibig went up and searched the whole area with a light—but no result."

"I don't like it," came the oily voice, which Hayes recognized as that of Simon Lobb. "Hayes isn't twiddling his thumbs, whatever Donoghue may say. It's only a matter of days now, isn't it, Steiner?"

Steiner's reply was drowned by the sound of another lorry which now came along the path. Six men who traveled with it proceeded to unload kegs and carried them along the planking towards the arc-lighted structure.

Hayes rejoined Slim.

"Where we make our getaway," he said. "Try back the way we came."

Their working kit had served them on the scene of operations, but this disguise was unlikely to afford any advantage once they struck out across open country for the barbed wire. Extreme caution was indicated.

Once, by good fortune, they sighted a guard, his rifle across his arm, silhouetted against the dim skyline. They lay still, and he moved on to the south, not having seen

them. And so at last they came to the gate in the hedge.

They stood there for a while, breathing hard and listening keenly.

There was nothing to indicate the presence of the dogs.

“We’ll risk it. Come on, Slim.”

They scaled the high gate and dropped onto the path. Slim did not wait for the order to run. Shining his light upon the ground before him, he set out at a terrific pace. Lincoln Hayes did likewise. They reached the gap in the barbed wire and found themselves once more on the high road.

“If dogs came now,” said Hayes, “they’d pour through there like a cataract.”

“It’s my idea, sir, to keep on runnin’.”

He proceeded to illustrate his idea.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SIMON LOBB'S VISITOR

SIMON LOBB'S study in his Fifth Avenue apartment might have struck a critical observer as a burlesque, on a smaller scale, of the big library in the Hayes home. Its form was somewhat similar, including the open hearth and the big writing table. In fact, it was notorious, among those who knew the man, that Simon Lobb sought to copy, as he sought to rival, Lincoln Hayes. Background and inspiration were lacking.

The ornaments upon the bookcases were garish modern pieces; the books were all, without exception, magnificently bound but had obviously never been taken from the shelves; the rugs were too bright. The appointments of the big writing table glittered voluptuously. Lobb himself was a fine-looking man, but at forty-five he had run heavily to flesh. He had that personality which always seems to be overdressed. Later the same night, or rather, early the following morning, found him seated at this writing table, smoking a cigar larger than any which Lincoln Hayes ever attempted.

In an armchair, staring at the florid face of his chief, sat Dr. Steiner, a stockily built man, nearly bald but with a fine head. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles and had the appearance of a German professor. Seated in another chair and also staring at Simon Lobb was a thin, pale little man with a very earnest expression. Any member of Lincoln Hayes' party would have identified him as Mr. Mick.

"I don't understand," said Simon Lobb, in his full, unctuous voice, "why you should blather about those other dangers! *What* other dangers?"

"To me"—Dr. Steiner had a slight accent—"it is inexplicable."

"Because, doctor," said Mr. Mick, "you are only thinking of the opposition of Lincoln Hayes. I tell you, there is worse opposition."

"You haven't heard the whole story, Steiner," Lobb interjected.

"I know its essentials," the doctor protested, glancing at Mr. Mick. "How he secured the marked map and the notes on the ship and dispatched them to us here. Later, how he attached himself to Lincoln Hayes' party and finally found himself in the monastery from which he succeeded in obtaining the lamp."

"That's not all," Lobb broke in excitedly. "He was covering Lincoln Hayes, you understand. And a woman, a beautiful woman, from his account, led Hayes through yards and yards of passages in the middle of the night, and he followed."

"Very interesting," Steiner murmured.

"They came to a secret temple, all stage-lighted. Isn't that right?"

"It is true," Mr. Mick declared. "It was awful."

"Didn't awe you enough to make you forget your job," Steiner said.

Simon Lobb laughed gutturally and poured out another drink for himself without offering any to his guests.

"It was a great echoing place," said Mr. Mick; "I won't try to describe it to you, doctor."

"Thanks," said Dr. Steiner.

"But Hayes and the woman went in there. I was barefooted, and I crept in after them. I started exploring, and the first thing I saw in a side room was a row of lamps. I just grabbed one at random and made away."

"Very wise," murmured Dr. Steiner.

"I guess it wasn't missed right away, because I got clear down to Sîwa with it. But directly my plane landed at Heliopolis I made fast going. I know that territory well and how to move quick. I was in Cherbourg days ahead of any ocean transport. I just made the *Bremen*."

"You have done wonders about it," said Simon Lobb, "you and Donoghue's. But although you've tipped me off about Hayes' recent movements, I think you would be wise now to blot yourself out. In a few weeks' time you could show your face again."

"Good advice," said Dr. Steiner dryly.

Mr. Mick bowed and was about to go; at the door he paused, and turning:

"I think, Mr. Lobb," he said, "as you have been so generous to me, I ought to emphasize the fact again that Lincoln Hayes is not your only enemy."

"You've said that twice," said Dr. Steiner. "Make your meaning clear."

"Very well." Mr. Mick's weak voice changed; his appearance changed. The bulldog strength which underlay that mild manner came suddenly to the surface. "I will. You employed me through Donoghue's and profited by my work. I've worked hard and done my job well."

As he stood in the open doorway, looking back, he presented the figure of a particularly dangerous little man. Neither Steiner nor Lobb spoke.

"You have paid me well," he went on. "I don't deny it. But now that my work's done, you treat me as though it had been dirty work. I'm going to tell you this: it's no dirtier than your own. I'm going to tell you something else, although you don't deserve to hear it. The man you have to fear is called Mohammed Ahmes Bey. I haven't met him myself, and I don't want to, but I know about him. In telling you that I've earned every dollar you've ever paid me. Good-night."

He went out, closing the door behind him.

"Nasty fellow," muttered Lobb.

"Smartest agent Donoghue's ever had," said Dr. Steiner.

A curious silence followed Mr. Mick's departure, and then:

"Help yourself to a drink, Steiner," said Simon Lobb thickly. "There are points about this thing that I don't altogether like. The Lamp works—we've had it alight. What did it do?—blind us!"

Dr. Steiner moved quietly to a side table and helped himself to a highball.

"Simply because we were not prepared for its astonishing candle power," he replied. "My calculations are now complete. When the pylon is ready, unless we have made some grave error of orientation, which I do not believe, we shall be able to produce a light there adequate of Manhattan."

Simon Lobb rubbed his fat hands together.

“It sounds like a madman’s dream,” he said, “but I have seen the light from that little lamp, produced without any power, without any cost.”

Dr. Steiner sipped appreciatively from his tumbler.

“You are about to see something,” he replied, his voice guttural but very authoritative, “which means that the name of Simon Lobb will overshadow that of any man in Europe or America.”

“There doesn’t seem to be any evidence that Hayes is working along the same lines?”

“Obviously he is not.”

“Yet somebody flew over the New Jersey works and was never identified. And there was an alarm earlier tonight.”

“That’s true,” said Steiner quietly. “But in view of our rapid development I think we can afford to forget it.”

“You don’t attach any importance to what we may call the Egyptian side of the business?”

“None whatever.”

“If Mohammed Ahmes Bey, whoever he may be——”

“A mere name.”

“Nevertheless, now that our plans are complete, I think we were wise to bring the Lamp here tonight.”

Dr. Steiner smiled slightly and unlocked a stout attaché case which stood upon the floor beside his chair.

“Will you open the safe, Lobb,” he said.

Simon Lobb stood up and selected a key from a bunch which he carried. He stepped out from behind the table and swung open a secret safe concealed behind one of the bookcases. Dr. Steiner from the bag took out the stolen lamp. It was contained in a polished wooden case made specially to protect it.

“Don’t remove it from the case,” said Steiner warningly, “at any time.”

“Not likely.”

Lobb placed the precious object in the recessed safe and stood looking at it and rubbing his hands.

“I’m dashing back now,” said Dr. Steiner. “I shan’t leave the laboratory again until the job is finished.”

Simon Lobb nodded. He scarcely knew that Steiner had left, so absorbed was he in contemplation of the wonder lying in the safe, when there came a rap on the door.

“Yes?” Lobb’s voice was suddenly excited. “Who is it?”

The door opened, and his Cuban butler came in.

“A gentleman to see you, sir, by appointment.”

Lobb stooped to close the safe.

“I have no other appointment tonight.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Lobb,” came a deep voice.

The butler vainly tried to bar the way. But a tall man wearing evening dress and a French cape swept him aside and entered the study.

“Who are you?”

“I am called Mohammed Ahmes Bey.”

At which moment there was a blinding flash—and the study was plunged in darkness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A DAY LONG REMEMBERED

When District Attorney Maguire walked into the Hayes library early in the morning he found heavy curtains still draped before the windows, the table lamp alight, the atmosphere dead and heavy with cigar smoke. Lincoln Hayes, wearing the old red-silk dressing gown, stood before the open hearth. The rug upon which he stood was littered with newspapers.

He was smoking a cigarette, although stubs of cigars were to be seen in many ash trays.

"What's this?" growled Maguire. "Been up all night?"

Hayes nodded.

"Rum and milk," he suggested, pointing towards a buffet. "Good in early morning."

"Thanks, no. I've only just finished my breakfast."

He stared hard at Hayes in a very puzzled way, studying the lean, unemotional face of his friend. Maguire looked more like his real self in the morning. He wore a tweed suit which, spread out flat, would have made a very good chessboard.

"Got the details?" Hayes asked monotonously. "These reports all differ. What really happened around at the Lobb apartment last night?"

Maguire selected a cigar with great care. It seemed he had come from daylight into night, and he looked around him at the mahogany bookcases, the pools of shadow on the carpet, a man somewhat bemused. Finally:

"I've got it all for you," he growled. "But as it stands you have to read between the lines. It seems that Lobb and Dr. Steiner were out at New Jersey a great part of last night at work on some secret experiment."

"Know that," said Hayes tersely.

"There was a bit of a scare around there—maybe you know *that*. Well, as I see it, they decided to shift something, evidently something of great value, from the laboratory at New Jersey and bring it along to New York. What happened untied the hands of the Police Department to a considerable extent, and we've got your man Mick!"

"Sure?"

"Quite sure. He had to turn up as a witness, because Lobb's dago butler blew that he'd been there."

"I see."

"I've got his full description here." Maguire groped beneath the depths of the check tweed and produced a bundle of notes. "His name is Michael Truefitt. He describes himself as a journalist, known as 'Mr. Mick.' I guess that's how his passport reads. Actually, of course, he's Donoghue's star agent. He has operated all over the world, and always successfully, as far as I can gather. He certainly sold you a three-legged pup, and smuggled the goods away right under your nose."

Lincoln Hayes made no reply.

"He was down there at the laboratory last night, and all three of them came back together. I guess something he reported induced them to shift the goods. Well, he left first—this man Truefitt. We've got that from the dago butler. So the boys had their paws on him right away as a material witness. Then, it seems, Steiner left. He's gone back to New Jersey. But so far nobody's been able to get him—he's barricaded in there! But," Maguire added ferociously, "he's not going to stay barricaded. We'll get him if we have to send machine guns. Anyway, just after he'd gone, Mohammed Ahmes Bey arrived."

"Ah!" said Lincoln Hayes.

"He insisted on being shown right into the study. But the butler hadn't closed the door when something funny happened."

"Can guess what!"

"You've guessed right. That butler was blind for three minutes! Mrs. Lobb is away from home. There was nobody else in the apartment. The butler, who seems to have been crying with fright, judging from the report of the police officer who got there first, managed to find the phone and get through to headquarters."

Maguire paused, and in an absent-minded way crossed to the buffet, tipped some three fingers of Bacardi into a tumbler, and filled it up with rich milk.

"By this time the butler had begun to see again. The police found Lobb lying on the floor in front of a secret safe set in the wall behind the bookcase. There was an open leather bag on the carpet beside him but nothing in it. They got his secretary around about four o'clock this morning. He didn't know about this safe and couldn't say if anything had been stolen."

"But, Lobb?"

"He's the way Ann was," growled Maguire, "but worse. That's to say, he's as dead as a man can be without having actually passed across."

"Dr. Adderley been called in? He has experience of this type of case."

"I told them. He's there now."

"You mean that Lobb——"

"Still dead as a mummy. Going to be touch and go, Hayes. If it's go, the case comes within the province of the Homicide Bureau. This time your Egyptian friend, Mohammed Ahmes Bey, won't get away so easily."

"Has he been found?"

"No. There's not a trace of him. But he's a conspicuous-looking bird, and unless one of his tricks is becoming invisible, we'll have him safe in the next few hours."

"Is Sergeant Hawley on the job?"

"He is." Maguire smiled grimly. "He didn't get his bite the first time. He's been sharpening his teeth ever since. However you look at it, Hayes, it's robbery with violence as it stands."

Silence fell. Lincoln Hayes, with the toe of a leather slipper, was aimlessly turning over the pages of newsprint littered about his feet. Maguire drank rum and milk and smoked furiously, walking up and down before the curtained windows.

"There's something else," boomed Maguire suddenly.

"What is it?"

"That fool report that came through from Egypt while you were away—that you'd vanished in the Libyan Desert—brought you into the news. Now it's come out in the course of inquiries that you seem to be shuffling around with the idea of retiring from Western States Electric. If that isn't what you have in mind, I don't know what it means."

Lincoln Hayes twirled the scarab ring which he wore upon the little finger of his right hand. Then he dropped the stub of a cigarette into an ash tray and stared across at Maguire.

"Making certain adjustments," he admitted.

"You don't think you stand to be bumped off?"

"Not exactly." That very rare smile broke up the severity of the lean, clean-cut features. "But may be called upon to go abroad for a pretty long spell."

Maguire emitted a sound resembling a muffled roar, finished his drink at a gulp, and crossed to the buffet to prepare another.

"This Egyptian thing is a kind of plague," he said. "It's bitten you deeper than it ever bit your father."

He stared about him at those many strange relics of the Nile which had strayed from the museum into the library. The place had a curiously mystic atmosphere, disturbing in the subdued light with which the outside sunshine through chinks in the curtains was competing and painting weird shadows.

"There's a woman in it somewhere—I know the symptoms. When they show in on a man that's lived your kind of life, it frightens me." He turned suddenly, glass in hand, glaring under tufted brows at Lincoln Hayes. "You plan to go back to Egypt?"

"May be necessary," Hayes replied without emotion, "for me to return to Egypt. Yes. But before I go have work to do here."

2

That day was a day destined long to be remembered, not only by the principal actors in the secret drama, the scene of which had again been transferred to New York City, but by thousands of people totally unconnected in any way with the play or players.

The inexplicable outrage at Simon Lobb's apartment was a headline topic. Bulletins were issued. It was known that the president of Lobb's Central, one of New York's big business men, hovered between life and death, the victim of a form of attack beyond the experience of modern medicine. In spite of Maguire's efforts, the story had leaked out in one of the lesser journals that a similar episode had occurred at the Hayes home some months earlier.

Reporters flocked to the historic old house, knowing in their bones that there was a good story here if they could get hold of it. None of them got any farther than the Venetian lobby. Some did not succeed in passing the door. Slim was a doughty sentry.

And as for those who, by virtue of the prestige of the newspapers which they represented, demanded, and secured, admittance, Ann Wayland's charming tact defeated them.

The Venetian lobby was old stock, but they had to console themselves by writing it up from a new angle. There was no news value in any of their stories.

Lincoln Hayes declined to be interviewed.

Ulric Stefanson was in the house. But since his change of speech would have been a story in itself he remained invisible. The newspaper men were in a very evil humor, being baffled at every move.

Platoons of them had besieged the Lobb experimental works in New Jersey. But the works manager, McSweeney, a dour and formidable product of Alaska, had interviewed them through barbed wire entanglements. Important experiments were in progress, and nobody could be admitted.

This scanty news alone rewarded their enterprise. The Western States works were running normally. So that an attempt by one newspaper to build up a story of a neck-and-neck race for a new discovery between the two big rival concerns collapsed in the writing and never saw print.

Somewhere about six o'clock the material witness, Michael Truefitt, was lovingly deposited in the Venetian lobby by two police officers and District Attorney Maguire.

Lincoln Hayes lolled on the settee between the Benvenuto Cellini candlesticks; Ann Wayland sat at the little table near by. The police officers withdrew. The man they had known as Mr. Mick came forward, followed by Maguire's dominating figure. Mr. Mick remained pale, but he had lost his drooping aspect. He met the frank stare of Lincoln Hayes' gray eyes and looked aside. Ann Wayland was watching him pathetically.

"I kind of feel you expect something like an apology," he said. "You've worked it out that I imposed on your hospitality and your kindness. And I can't deny you're right. But when a man takes up my trade, Miss Wayland, Mr. Hayes, he's got to put all that stuff in his pocket. Otherwise he would be of no use to his employers."

Ann's eyes were very bright, but:

"Don't apologize," drawled Lincoln Hayes. "Hardened to Donoghue's methods. Just tell me what I want to know. Lobb had the lamp last night?"

"We took it to his apartment from the works."

"It's been stolen, but Steiner knows the principle."

"The plans are complete. There's day-and-night work going on there."

"Any idea when Steiner expects to be ready?"

"No, sir. He's using some kind of light metal—I don't know its name. It's the nearest to the stuff the original lamp was made of. I don't know how the light is produced. I packed the lamp in cotton wool and never touched it until it was in Mr. Lobb's hands."

"But Steiner *has* produced light with it?"

"I believe so."

"Thinks he can amplify?"

"So I understand."

"I want you to realize just one thing," came a bass roar: "If Simon Lobb passes out, you'll be called upon to repeat these statements before a jury. If you're keeping anything back—God help you! I've got about as much time for you gentlemen who call yourselves private agents as I've got for mosquitoes. Have you anything to say?"

"Nothing," Mr. Mick returned quietly. "I have done what I was paid to do, and I've told you all I know. I am employed by William Donoghue—if anything has gone wrong, he's the responsible party."

"He knows it!" bellowed Maguire. "He's had the worst quarter hour up there in his Broadway office that he's ever known in his life! That's where I've come from. Bill Donoghue and I get on well enough in a general way. If he sticks to pay rolls and divorce, I've got nothing to say. But when he muscles in on attempted homicide, I've got a hell of a lot to say!"

"There's no such charge against him, sir. Following the attack on Mr. Lobb, the police were called in immediately."

"That so?" drawled Maguire, glaring at the speaker. "You've got one redeeming virtue, and I'll say you need it. You stick up for the man who pays you. Cut it short. Can you tell us any more?"

"No, sir."

"All right, then, get out. You'll be wanted later."

Mr. Mick bowed to Ann Wayland, but she was not looking at him. He bowed to Lincoln Hayes but could not sustain the disconcerting stare of those ingenuous eyes. He went out. The sound of a powerful engine starting indicated that he was again in the hands of the police.

Maguire walked up and down the lobby like a bear in its den.

"Get me clear on this," he boomed: "I came in at the start as a friend, not as an official. It looks to me as though now the case would come properly into my province. If I'm to help, I want facts. Lobb may die or he may live. If he dies—" he turned in his promenade close to Lincoln Hayes and glared down at the immobile face—"who will have killed him?"

Lincoln Hayes leaned further back, staring up at the painted ceiling. Ann watched him anxiously, then:

"Death will be due to natural but unusual causes," he replied quietly.

"Causes produced by whom?"

Hayes' silence was so long that Maguire supplied the answer.

"Mohammed Ahmes Bey," he growled, "whoever he may be. And this is what I want to get clear: Is Mohammed Ahmes Bey a straight man or a crook?"

"Straight man," the monotonous voice replied. "Fighting not for himself but for the welfare of humanity."

"Is that so? Then why does he work under cover?"

"All doing the same, or have been. I was, Lobb was. Cunning against cunning."

"Is that so?"

Maguire continued to glare, then:

"Another question," he said: "Where is Captain Rorke?"

Ann Wayland answered:

"He is searching New York for Mohammed Ahmes Bey."

"Oh! That's news. Has he got some special information?"

"Yes," Ann replied quietly. "He believes, rightly or wrongly, that Mohammed Ahmes Bey wishes to see him."

"And I wish to see *him*!" bellowed Maguire.

A car drew up before the house. Dusk was just creeping into the street. At the dim sound of the bell Slim crossed the lobby and went out. There was a curious silence. All three people in the lobby were watching the entrance door. Then Slim came back, and:

"Captain Rorke is 'ere, sir," he reported, "and Mo'ammed Ahmes Bey."

3

In the library, dim in growing dusk, a hushed silence had fallen.

"I trust," the organ notes of the voice of Mohammed Ahmes Bey broke in upon it, "that I have made my meaning clear to all. Every man is entitled to protect that which has been placed in his care for safe keeping. You need not fear for the life of Simon Lobb. I have communicated with Dr. Adderley, and steps will be taken to correct his condition. He is a man in whom excessively high living has induced blood pressure. This I did not know—but I know it now. He will recover tonight. So that you see, Mr. Maguire, there will be no charge of homicide against me."

Maguire did not reply.

In a shadowy corner Stefanson stood, peering at the speaker. He had been silent for more than fifteen minutes. Ann Wayland from the settee watched Mohammed Ahmes Bey as of old devotees watched the First Prophet. Rorke sat on the back of the settee, one hand grasping her shoulder. Lincoln Hayes was behind the big table, in deep shadow. A moving point of light indicated the end of his cigar.

"Man is learning to control the elements," the dominating voice went on; "he gains his knowledge step by step. To leap to it is impossible. Although I am the curator of some of nature's secrets which the world had forgotten, I am, except for one or two small accomplishments, as helpless as any other in such an impasse as this. I have secured the property which is mine by right divine and human. But the man, Dr. Eric Steiner, a scientist with a nearly first-class brain, has entrenched himself in the experimental laboratory in New Jersey and, working with plans based upon the lamp now fortunately again in my possession, is aiming to revolutionize the lighting systems of the world. In such a case I turn to the authorities."

He stared into a shadowy corner where a dim figure was visible.

"Mr. Maguire, I will show you that Dr. Steiner's experiment will have the most disastrous and fatal consequences unless it is checked. I gather that, under your American law, you have no power to force an entrance to the works, although armed opposition confronts you. Upon this point I admit my ignorance. But, in detail, the

metal of which Dr. Steiner is constructing his tripod is unsuitable. The metal of which the original lamp was made is an amalgam the secret of which is known only to myself. Assuming his orientation of this giant lamp to be correct, he may produce light—I cannot deny this—but I tremble for the consequences. You have all realized, I think, that I speak with sincerity. I am not concerned with the unveiling of a secret guarded for many generations: my concern is for the fate of hundreds—perhaps thousands—of harmless people, ignorant of the monstrous thing which this man is planning to do."

District Attorney emerged from the shadow.

"I have certain powers," he growled, "although in these days my wings are trimmed pretty severely. I believe in you, sir, or I wouldn't say what I'm going to say. It's this: I'll slip along to the Governor. Only he can help in this case. If Lobb had died (and the police thought he was dead when they grabbed 'Mr. Mick') it would have freed my hands. As matters stand, I can't extract that clam Steiner from his shell without special authority. If he likes to gum in behind that barbed wire he can stay there quite a while."

District Attorney Maguire walked out, closing the library door behind him.

The room was growing ever more dark, and out of its shadows came the voice of the Egyptian.

"Mr. Lincoln Hayes, I know that you appreciate the truth. Will you give me your word of honor that you will never attempt to exploit the Light, privately or otherwise, except with my consent?"

"I give you my word."

"Mr. Ulric Stefanson, to your scientific zeal such a pledge will be difficult. Will you give it?"

Stefanson, enthralled, hesitated for thirty long seconds. And then:

"I give it," he said.

"Captain Rorke——"

"Yes."

"Miss Wayland—it is almost unnecessary—but I should like your assurance also."

"I promise," said Ann in a very faint voice. "I will never have anything whatever to do with this thing as long as I live."

There was a moment of silence which was truly awesome, and then:

"Mr. Hayes—" Mohammed Ahmes Bey stepped towards the table—"attend to me closely for a moment."

Lincoln Hayes looked up. In the reflected light the eyes of Mohammed Ahmes Bey glowed like lamps.

"I accept your word and rely upon your silence," said the Egyptian.

He turned to Stefanson, staring at him fixedly.

"Mr. Stefanson," he said, "you are also a man of honor, and so I have no doubt of you."

He glanced at Captain Rorke and Ann Wayland, his strange eyes dancing in what might have been a smile; then:

“I wish you both every happiness,” he said, “and I know I can always count upon you.”

Lincoln Hayes suddenly stood bolt upright. His fists were clenched. An expression quite indefinable—it might have been of pain or of rapture—momentarily stirred the stoic mask of his features.

Miraculously unfolding before him like a moving picture—but more real, more vital than any picture ever made—he saw those lost episodes of his life! He felt Hatasu’s kiss upon his forehead; he was led by her to the rose-lighted temple; he shared her fears of phantom footsteps which disturbed that sacred silence; he knelt before the golden veil and gave her his promise to come back, to suffer the dreary novitiate which alone could bring her to his arms; he saw and felt the scarab ring pressed upon his finger; the memory of her kisses was fresh as though her lovely lips had but that moment been withdrawn from his!

“L-l-look here!” Stefanson burst out, springing into the middle of the room and peering about him, wild-eyed. “I’ve re-remembered everything that’s ha-ha-happened! On the sh-ship and all! I can remember part of the f-for-formula. Oh, h-hell!! Am I g-going mad?”

Ann was breathing rapidly, her heart was beating very fast. Rorke bent over her and whispered in her ear:

“Don’t be afraid, darling. It was only a form of hypnotism. Mohammed Bey is a remarkable man but also an Egyptian gentleman.”

Low as he had spoken, Mohammed Bey had overheard his words.

“Thank you, Captain Rorke,” he said. “In a commercial age with a profit-making conscience I think I may say that collectively we represent a code of decency which, if it could be made general, would result in greater happiness for all. Knowledge which gives life can also give death. Although death in itself is nothing to be feared. Mr. Hayes—” he turned—“I feel that in this matter we are going to fail, but it is incumbent upon us to do our best.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE GREAT LIGHT

ANN WAYLAND crouched on the library carpet, her arms resting upon Lincoln Hayes' knees. She looked up at him pathetically.

"Lincoln dear," she said, "I feel that you have made up your mind to do something terrible, and somehow—I can't bear it."

Hayes rested his hand upon her head, ruffling mahogany curls affectionately.

"My mind is made up, yes," he admitted, "but not to do anything terrible."

"You mean you are going back to Egypt?"

Ann's big eyes were fixed upon him imploringly.

"Yes."

"You are going to marry that strange woman?"

"If she will marry me."

"You don't mean that . . . you will stay there?"

"Of course not." He ruffled her hair. "Shall return and bring her with me."

"Oh, Lincoln dear, I can't bear it! You are just a big, honest, silent child, and now . . . I can't help you!"

Her head dropped.

"You have the wrong angle, Ann. Really nothing strange or mysterious about her. Just a woman with more brains and grit than the average. Knows things I don't know—but that's an accident of environment. You will love her. Straight and decent right through."

"Somehow it seems all wrong, Lincoln. I am so fond of you. I am worried."

"Stop worrying. Best little pal I ever had—so I know you mean it."

"Of course I mean it, Lincoln. There's nobody in the world I care about so much except Paddy. If Paddy had never come there wouldn't have been anybody."

"My fault, maybe," Hayes said dryly.

"It was really, Lincoln. But Paddy's my man, I know that. Otherwise, of course, there's nobody else in the world—and I'm worried about you. I can see you love her, Lincoln, but can you ever be happy with her?"

"Never be happy without her, Ann."

Ann sighed and nestled her face down into her crossed arms.

"In almost everything else I trust you blindly," she said; "you are strong and cool and clever. But this woman terrifies me."

"Just . . . jealousy, Ann!" said Hayes, deliberately provocative.

"Oh, you pig! How could you!"

Ann looked up swiftly. Tears were streaming from her eyes, but quivering lips threatened a smile.

"It isn't—it isn't!"

"Paddy!" Hayes called.

The door opened, and Rorke came in. He grinned at Hayes: he had expected the tableau.

"Making love to the hated rival again?" he said lightly.

"Paddy!" Ann sprang up, ran to him, and threw herself into his arms. "Paddy dear, stop him! Don't let him go—don't let him go!"

"She thinks," said Hayes monotonously, "I'm going to marry a cannibal queen."

Ann turned and almost glared at him.

"I don't think," said Rorke, a serious note entering his light voice, "there's anything to worry about, Ann. Lincoln has always known what he wanted and taken it. So far he has made few mistakes."

"You see, Ann," said Hayes, lying back on the settee and staring up at the ceiling, "in all that has been left to me, and in all that I have done myself, have never found satisfaction. In what I aim to do, hope to find it. Not just love, whatever that may be (meaning varies in every man's mind), but knowledge. Have always hungered for knowledge. My father did before me. Can't make it clear to you what this thing means. I am so fond of you, Ann, that I dare to say this: wouldn't willingly see you go to any man but Paddy."

He dismissed the personal by exercise of that steadfast will which marked him out as an unusual man, as one born to eminence.

"What's the latest?"

Ann swallowed hard and then:

"As a matter of fact," she said, "*I* have the latest news."

"What is it?"

"Mr. Maguire is on his way here. He has federal authority to enter the Lobb works."

"Good. Where is Mohammed Ahmes Bey?"

There came a rap on the door, and Slim entered.

"Mo'ammed Ahmes Bey," he announced.

The Egyptian came in. His hawk features were set in a black frown.

"There is one chance in a thousand," he declared, "that we prevent a catastrophe. Failing to prevent it, we may share in it."

"What do you mean?" Hayes asked.

"This brilliant fool will have completed his pylon, as he calls it, by tonight, some time before midnight. I can only hope it is wrongly constructed—but this I doubt. He knows his business. I cannot say, I do not profess to know, if under these conditions he will secure the light. But if he does . . ."

He paused for a long time, and:

"I kn-kn-know," said Stefanson. "I kn-kn-know!"

"Your knowledge," the musical voice replied coldly, "is not perhaps so great as that of Eric Steiner, but you have a better brain, by which I mean a greater imagination. You

say you know. What do you know?"

Ann Wayland was standing very near to Rorke, her eyes were fixed fascinatedly upon Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

"Th-th-this," Stefanson answered: "he will cr-create a vac-vacuum!"

"You are correct. In the literal sense, these people are playing with fire. They will pay the penalty. This does not matter—but others who are innocent will suffer with them."

"Let's move," said Lincoln Hayes monotonously.

"We have to wait for Maguire."

Rorke was the speaker.

"Only hope," said Lincoln Hayes, "he gets here soon. Steiner working like a madman to complete experiment with no interruption. Won't come to phone—inaccessible."

At that moment the booming voice of Maguire made itself audible.

"I've been through hell," he was shouting long before he became visible, "but I've got a bunch of federals now. Hurry up, everybody!"

2

This night was destined to find a place in the records of the United States as a very dark night. Clouds obscured the sky; not a star was to be seen. It was a lowering, ominous night, a night of a kind which might have been predestined for tragic happenings.

The road out of New York was not unduly congested. It was that lull hour which comes between the dinner rush and the disgorging of the theaters. One evening paper was featuring "Simon Lobb Dead—Returns to Life." Another had the headline: "Egyptian Magic in New York."

In the leading car, driven by Slim, were Lincoln Hayes, Mohammed Ahmes Bey, Captain Rorke, Stefanson behind and District Attorney Maguire.

"I'll say this," boomed Maguire over the roar of the city, "whatever happens tonight, you're going to find it hard to avoid a prosecution, Mohammed Bey."

"Who will prosecute me?" the effortless voice inquired.

"Simon Lobb—for sure!"

"Permit me to contradict you, Mr. Maguire. He will not. . . ."

They had reached a stage in their journey at which town was giving place to countryside, buildings becoming infrequent, and in which long stretches of road were met with in which there were few habitations when:

"Stop!" came a cry.

It was the bell note of Mohammed Ahmes Bey.

"Shall I stop, sir?"

Slim spoke the words to Lincoln Hayes.

"Yes."

Slim signaled to the following cars. All became stationary.

"What's this?" cried a voice from behind. "Why have we stopped?"

No one spoke in Hayes' car for a moment, then:

"As I feared, as I know now," said Mohammed Ahmes Bey, "we are too late! Mr. Lincoln Hayes, the choice is yours. In the long run your decision means nothing. The position is this: I ask you all to be silent, to listen, and to feel, if you have sensibilities."

Rorke's light voice suddenly arose in the traditional army roar:

"Silence, back there!" came the order. "Everybody quiet!"

Silence followed. They were in a long straight country road, but not so far from New York City that its muted bombilation failed to reach them. Except for this distant hammering of a million engines in some thousands of streets, nothing disturbed the peace of the countryside. In all there were twenty men in that team of cars, men of various temperaments and powers of receptivity. But, in the minute which followed, every one of them heard, or sensed, that eerie *throbbing*. The atmosphere seemed to be laden with some new but subdued power.

"He has harnessed the force."

The voice of Mohammed Ahmes Bey, although very low, was very distinct.

"Meaning what?" came Lincoln Hayes' unmusical monotone.

"At any moment, it may be the next, he will take the fatal step. We are too late. We can do nothing to save others—but we may save ourselves."

That strange throbbing seemed to be growing in power.

"Let there be no argument," the voice of Mohammed Ahmes Bey continued. "Those of you who desire to survive, turn about and fly for your lives!"

3

The thing which happened less than twenty minutes later is common knowledge.

Ships two to three hundred miles out at sea (as the *Berengaria*, the *Bremen*, the *Île de France*) experienced broad daylight for periods varying from three to five minutes, followed by mountainous seas. Seismic instruments all over the world registered an earthquake in the West. Towering buildings in New York rocked upon their foundations, although in the city itself casualties were comparatively few, these being due in the most part to falling masonry. On the riverfront, however, the loss of life was tragically heavy.

That unnatural dawn, which through five states, in greater or lesser degree, appeared as a light resembling that of a tropical noonday during the darkest hours of a very dark night, filled the churches with unaccustomed worshipers. The Cathedral in New York became packed to overflowing, so that frightened people who believed that this was the Day of Judgment crowded, kneeling in rows, on the sidewalks outside.

All traffic was stopped. In all towns of the states affected people knelt in trains, on the tops of buses, in cars, in taxis; some recited the Lord's Prayer, others sang hymns in

unison; only the subways roared upon their courses, and only the drivers of trains, by the violent oscillation of their engines, recognized that anything was amiss.

During the time that the Light lasted, and before the coming of the awesome storm which followed it, which shook the very rocks upon which New York City is built, which brought terror to a million hearts and destruction to unnumbered buildings, amazing scenes were witnessed in the streets.

Then came that titanic thunder—and the Great Cyclone.

The worst catastrophes were in the New Jersey area. Many country houses with their occupants were literally wiped out of existence. The great Lobb experimental works disappeared, leaving nothing but vast mounds of débris and contorted metal to show where the works had been. No one of the staff survived, and of the scientific genius Eric Steiner the world heard no more.

Roofs of homes many miles from the center of the disturbance were stripped off and whirled into the air.

Finally, of course, preceded by a terrifying roar, came the tidal wave—which, among other things awesome and ghastly, swept a five-thousand-ton steamer from its moorings and bore it, the doomed crew aboard, to disaster four miles above Hoboken. . . .

The most distant reports collected of this phenomenal and artificially produced typhoon came respectively from a farmer in Toronto, from the meteorological observatory in Los Angeles, and from the skipper of a British freighter making for Halifax, Nova Scotia, and one hundred and fifty miles from land. Almost every observatory in the world recorded it, the Japanese accounts being the most accurate.

4

There was complete silence in the Hayes library. No one stirred.

"The catastrophe was of a kind which has not occurred," Mohammed Ahmes Bey concluded, "for more than a thousand years."

"I suppose," Rorke's voice broke in, "I am directly responsible."

"The responsibility can only be allocated by the gods. As the Moslems say 'it was written.' Certainly, Captain Rorke, you started the chain of events which led to this disaster, but your culpability is no greater than my own. At a certain price you have learned that there are forces in nature with which your boasted modern machinery is not equipped to deal. If the Higher Law had demanded that I should arrive here in time to intercept the work of Dr. Steiner, it would have been so. I did all in my power to help, before my arrival and afterwards. Mr. Maguire—" he turned—"am I at liberty to leave?"

"You have my consent to do so, Mohammed Bey."

"Mr. Stefanson," he fixed his piercing gaze upon the thick pebbles of Stefanson's spectacles, "you have, unless I am mistaken, evolved a theory to account for the tragic failure of Dr. Steiner's experiment."

"That's t-true!" Stefanson replied.

“Let it remain locked in your brain. Let us say that Dr. Steiner was too ambitious. Humanity must learn to crawl before it can walk—and walk before it can run.”

Ann Wayland spoke in a very low voice.

“Mohammed Ahmes Bey,” she said, “you have knowledge which makes me realize that all of us, even the clever ones, are children.”

“There was a world, Miss Wayland, before that which *you* call the world; a civilization higher, and finer, than this. One day your gropers, who call themselves scientists, will rediscover what the old world knew. They will cease to worship the things that mean nothing and will concentrate upon the truths which are life. It may not be today or even tomorrow, but sooner or later it must come.”

The voice was the authentic voice of a prophet. None could doubt the knowledge which lay behind the words, for they were fresh from a ghastly demonstration of misuse of one of the powers which this man controlled.

“I am unhappy,” Mohammed Ahmes Bey continued, “for in some way I have failed. I must return to the place I came from and meditate upon this matter.”

Outside, the streets were hives of rumor. The theory most widely accepted was that a volcano had broken out in New Jersey, that its eruption had been followed by a violent electrical storm. Some reporters were hurrying to the dreadful waterfront. Every unit of the Fire Department was on duty. Others sought frenziedly for transport to New Jersey. The telephone service was in a state of chaos.

In some way, from the destruction of the Simon Lobb works, clues had led the tireless newspaper men to Lincoln Hayes. Slim was dealing with them out in the lobby. Lincoln Hayes was seeing no one.

“I leave America tomorrow,” said Mohammed Ahmes Bey. “I have done my best.”

Lincoln Hayes lay back in the chair behind the big table. His eyes were closed. In spirit he stood before a golden veil. Hatasu’s soft arms were about him. He felt again the pressure of her lips.

“You sail tomorrow evening, Mohammed Ahmes Bey?” came the monotonous voice.

“Unless political obstacles are placed in my way, yes.”

“I sail with you.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Bat Flies Low* by Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward (as Sax Rohmer)]