

The Tear of Isis

N. de Bertrand Lugrin

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THE TEAR OF ISIS^[1]

BY N. DE BERTRAND LUGRIN



and everywhere, of course there was sand everywhere. Was this not the desert and Egypt! And always before until he had disembarked at Port Said, Egypt, the Desert and the Sand had been synonymous to Halliday. Like many another of us he had never expected to get farther in the Nile country than his imaginings carried him. But now, having come, he had found that Egypt was made up of many things beyond his farthest fancyings, scents and colours and sounds, unsensed in any of his thoughts and dreamings, and over all and through all, the beginning of all and the end of all—mystery. He had loved it too, with the very deep love of an intensely romantic undemonstrative middle-aged Englishman who would rather be cut in little pieces than let one suspect he regarded anything in the world from any attitude except a frivolous one.

When for the first time, standing on the outskirts of the encampment he had watched the sun go down into a sea of golden sand, that had not seemed so much to receive it quiescently as to mount in any ecstasy of glittering joy to meet it, he had almost swooned at the marvel and the magnitude of it; but he had abruptly turned from the sight with a curt command to his orderly, an unnecessary command made simply to hide the tremor of his lips and hands. When, the first day of his arrival he had seen the too slender khaki column swing off and away until it was lost to sight behind the hummocks and the palms, he had had to grind his teeth together to keep the sobs from choking him, so swift his imaginings carried him forward to what was in store for the men, who scorned to send an equal force to meet a force in ambush; who would be ashamed to fight an enemy which did not outmatch them two or three to one. He watched them go, and the realization of what the British in Egypt meant made his head throb with the splendour of it. The Sand itself, the Queen of Rivers, the ancient Trees, the Monuments, and millions of voices from the great Tombs all had been calling, calling for centuries to a deaf world, until England had heard and English men had come to restore through untold sacrifice the ancient glories of a civilization more marvellous than our own. That was what the little khaki column marching over the Sand

spelled to Halliday. Outnumbered they! when all the hosts of the dead Pharaohs and Ptolemys marched beside them to spur them on to victory. He had stood there long after they had gone, visioning a rushing joyful host in the heavens, hearing the clash of cymbals and the song of those who will triumph, until a brother officer called him laughingly from his reverie, and he had turned with a quick jest on his lips which entirely belied the tears on his cheek.

Yes, he had loved it all. He had loved the narrow, old-world streets of the cities, where romance and intrigue lurked and beckoned round every corner; he had loved the way the sun embraced everything, the tall leaning buildings, the dusty mosques, the squat little shops, even the warm worn cobblestones under foot, which could they speak might tell tales that would put Scheherazade to envy. He had peered through his monocle into the shadowy incense laden, musky depths of the bazaars and his heart had swelled to the suggestive stimulus of them. He had looked, not too intently, for he would not spoil by reality the loveliness of his ideals, at women with veiled faces, and had brushed against slim shoulders, and once touched furtively a pink-palmed slender olive hand. But only as one reads a book, feeling nothing but the impersonal interest conjured up by the mind alone. He had loved the little naked, round-stomached, black-eyed children, playful as puppies and colourful as bubbles. He liked to think that the blood of forefathers dead four thousand years and more still flowed in their veins, and that instinctively their little feet and hands kept time as they danced and played, to rhythms and songs born of poets who were old when the pyramids were in the making. But if you had asked Halliday as he had been asked again and again how he liked campaigning in Egypt, he would have answered as he had answered a score of times. "Rather rotten, beastly hot, and all that sort of thing you know."

So, no one really knew Halliday. Everybody liked him. He was a favourite with his brother officers, a capital story-teller and the lightest-hearted man among them, in spite of his fast-graying hairs and a bit of sciatica. His men were a little afraid of him but rendered him unswerving obedience, and women found him pleasant of manner and banteringly flattering of speech, but entirely cold and unmoved by the warmest coquetry. No one would have believed that Halliday was the shyest man in the regiment, and that his dreams were made up of rosy and golden tissues as beautiful and vagrant and unsubstantial as the air-castles of a little boy; that, having learned the deepest lessons in life from a mother who was love personified, and from another woman whose love was no less pure though an impassable barrier separated her from him in life, he had come to love so

widely and deeply and impersonally that his love embraced the whole world and beyond, but was quite impractical from a wholly material point of view. And that was how he had loved Egypt.

And it had brought him to this, nothing but Sand.

It was very dark, darker than the cellar in his father's house in boyhood, and the feel of the Sand and the smell of the Sand were everywhere. He had not minded it before because there had been the sun before or else the stars; but just now it was dark and it was wet, the rain was falling. It had been falling for an eternity. Sheets of it, blankets of it. He had never in all his mind's conjuring pictured the desert in the rain. He could not see anything, not even his hand before his eyes. He could not visualize the desert in the rain. By now you will understand that that was Halliday's life, standing on a plane a little apart from his fellows, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, thinking compositely. But just now he could not seem to get away from the Dark without and the Dark within. He tried to. He tried to detach himself, to think of the rain and the desert apart from himself; of himself as looking on while the dark clouds sent down their overflow and the thirsty sand reached up its billions of parched mouths. He almost succeeded. He almost began to rejoice in that cosmic sense of rejoicing which had come to be so much the greater of all his senses; and then—the Rain and the Sand came closer, closer, and pressed against him and smothered him with their smell and he had to fight hard against an inclination to cry out.

But presently his trained mind began to exert something of its normal control over his faculties, and he tried to remember what had happened. The enemy had been retreating when night and the storm came, and the army had kept following to make sure of a complete rout. He had no idea when he had dropped out of the ranks. He had been wounded just previously somewhere around the shoulder and had dropped his revolver from his left hand. He was carrying his sword in his right. He recalled distinctly that he had shouted to one of his lieutenants but that his voice did not seem to carry and the other had not answered. They had all been running, madly exultantly running, and he hated dreadfully to fall back. He had tried to keep on, but it was dark and the rain blinded one still further, and besides he was losing a lot of blood. Where was he? He tried to feel around him, then he tried to stand. Something wrong with one of his legs or back. He essayed crawling next but that was quite as useless as trying to stand. Furthermore it brought a very terrible dull grinding pain down one side of his body. Then he smiled. That was it. That was why he could not keep the press of the Rain and the Sand away and lift himself to the plane outside where he belonged. He had not

understood before. Now that he did, what had frightened him ceased to be a terror. It was only his wound.

But the pain was not to be minimized and vanquished in a moment. It was too real, and the cold and the wet were too real. He tried to reach his haversack. He had a first-aid kit and such like in it. But he could not reach it, he could not. He ground his teeth and concentrated all his strength of mind and body on the effort, but his muscles at both shoulders seemed paralyzed. With a sigh he gave up for the time. Well then, now to put his theories to the test. If he were part of the Infinite, a little thing like a broken leg, or a broken shoulder or even a broken body could not matter. He tried to fix his mind on that one great fact; to get his normal philosophical mental poise. After a time his mind let go of the pain as the predominant thing and he began to reason more clearly. Halliday believed he was fatally wounded, but the idea of death had no more terror to him than going to sleep has to a child, so he dismissed that phase of the situation. But if he were going to live even until the morning he must make his plans. Of course they would come back for him, might be on their way back now, and possibly others might have fallen near him, though he doubted that. The enemy had not been firing as they ran except a few fitful shots. However he would send out a call. He did so and was surprised at the faintness of it. It only penetrated about two inches of the dark and then returned to him. Something wrong with his vocal chords evidently. He gave up the idea of trying to summon help. He was sorry he had lost his revolver, he might have sent out a shot or two. Well, there seemed nothing left to try unless it was to sleep. There would be several more hours of dark. He was not sure how many but he thought it must be close to midnight. He closed his eyes and put the thought of being cold and wet away. Fortunately he was not thirsty, the rain attended to that. Having by this time grown surer of himself mentally, he ventured to feel out again with his uninjured arm and his hand came in contact with what was either a large or a small sand mound. He must reach that and get the protection of it. With infinite patience and fortitude he worried the few feet towards it. It took him a long time, moving by inches, but it was worth the effort, for he could lean against it and it sheltered him a little from the slanting rain. But he was quite exhausted, and he thought he must have fainted, for it suddenly came to him that the left side of his body was in a torture of pain. Unconscious of what he did he began to pick up the sand in handfuls and throw it from him mechanically, trying with all his mental strength to get a grip on his will. Presently his fingers closed on something hard, a round, flat object. He sifted the sand from it and felt it with dull

curiosity. He put it on his wet knee, and, holding it with the ball of his hand, examined it more minutely with his finger tips.

It seemed to have characters scratched upon its smooth surface. A little flutter of excitement moved Halliday, though he smiled grimly to himself for evincing any interest. Even if he had found something, something of tremendous archaeological value, of what earthly use would it be to him when he was going to die in a few hours. He pictured others seeking for him and discovering the stone with its hieroglyphics, clasped in his hand, and picking it up and examining it, and the good old colonel getting out his spectacles to try to decipher the characters.

His pain suddenly began to grow surprisingly less and a little drowsiness fell upon him. He clasped the stone closely in his hand, and leaned more comfortably against the sand mound. He supposed he was dying and smiled a little deprecatingly, for to die so gently made him feel humble for the great mercy of it. He was not sorry to die. Of course there was his mother, but she was as philosophical as he, and he had no manner of doubt that it was only a question of a short time when they would be reunited. He would have liked to live longer if he had had his choice, just long enough to see the end of the war, the Holy War, as Halliday named it in his heart of hearts. But he knew how it would end ultimately and his being alive or not would make no difference one way or the other. There were a few memories he wanted to carry away with him, and these he recalled lovingly, dwelling upon them as one dwells upon the beautiful pictures of some favourite story while one turns the leaves of a book many times read. And he had always thought he would like to go out holding fast by a hope that had been long deferred, but that he felt quite sure would be realized in some form or another after life was done. So he reached down through the years to a picture that was the most beautiful of all, and, as his mind held it, and his inner vision dwelt upon it, the old wistful longing which had been his through all his youth returned. He was surprised that it should be so, surprised that he could feel an emotion so poignant after so many years of quiescent patience. But there it was, the old ardent eagerness which had belonged to those wonderful days when the future was a rainbow-coloured, unknown quantity. Again he smiled at the fantastic tricks his drowsy mind was playing him, and, leaning more heavily against the sand, he opened his eyes slowly to recall the present.

What was this! The Dark and the Rain were falling away from him! He sat up straight, unconscious of any pain, and looked about marvelling. Every moment it was growing lighter, brighter. Stay! there was the sun, and low in

the west. And hark! What was that! A bird's note. And that! The croaking of frogs in some distant meadow. There was a flutter of wind on his cheek and in it was the scent—the scent of clover and sweet-briar and balm-of-gilead and and—the sea.

There was the sea, there was the white fringe of it only a few yards from his feet, and beyond—the blueness of it, and beyond again—the rose and the gold of it where the sun was sinking. There were the mountains rosy, too, with purple shadows crowding the foothills, and here close about him was still the sand, but the sand of the seashore, and behind him was a granite boulder with grasses and little white-tipped flowers growing in the crevices. A bee droned lazily by him, heavy with its load of honey, and a sea-gull circled high above a little white-sailed boat a mile from shore.

It was all dearly familiar. He saw a dozen old landmarks that he well knew. Presently he ventured to stretch his body a bit. He felt no discomfort. He tried to raise his left hand, and he did so without effort. Then he opened very timidly his right hand, and closed it quickly. He held the round flat stone there. It was pearly white and scratched with infinitesimal characters. Curiously enough, he was not greatly amazed or perplexed. He felt a mild wonder and an intense satisfaction, and his body seemed to throb and glow as the body of one who has taken his first champagne, but with more vital, forceful energy. His eyes seemed suddenly clean-washed, and all his senses quickened. He knew it was a miracle, but he had no desire to understand it.

Then he saw Her coming. His eye caught the flutter of her dress first, then her little feet, her round white chin and the brim of her wide hat. He could not see her face until she was before him and had tilted up her head. By that time he had sprung to his feet breathless, speechless. Her cheeks held sprays of wild-rose colour, she bit her red lower lip with her little white teeth to hold back a smile.

And so they stood and looked at each other, and he was so tumultuously happy and confounded that he was afraid to speak.

At last she released her lip, and an irrepressible dimple came in her left cheek. She spoke very softly with a delicious shyness, lowering her head a little and lifting up her thick-fringed lids to look at him.

“Perhaps,” she said, “you did not expect me after all.”

Hesitatingly, stammeringly Halliday responded, “I did—did—di—didn't dare to expect you.”

“But I promised,” she said with sudden gravity, “and I saw your mother in the rose garden and she told me I would find you here.”

Then Halliday knew that it was a dream or that it was magic. At first he had thought he might have died and gone to heaven. Now he knew that instead he had gone back more than twenty years, and that he was dreaming what had happened then. But he was very timid. He was living his most sacred memory over again, and he felt ashamed and almost afraid. His heart was beating fast and he dared not move nearer her lest he should wake up. He clutched the talisman tightly in his hand and spoke.

“You are Letty, aren’t you?”

She nodded. It was an odd question, but she did not seem to find it so.

“Of course I am Letty, and this is the hour we are to have out of a lifetime, the hour we are to remember until we go to heaven.” She smiled swiftly and bravely, though her lips drooped a bit when the smile was done.

“I know you—you Letty. I have never forgotten you,” Halliday said, “but I am a bit confused. I can’t think coherently and I don’t want to, that’s the odd part. I want to put out my hand and touch you too, but I am afraid.”

The dimple came in her cheek again and she bit her lip quickly to stay the smile. She moved toward him softly and laid her hand in the one he held out. As the warm little palm touched his own, all Halliday’s youth, all his old memories, emotions, desires rushed upon him. The past became vivid, alive, the only reality. He held her hand tightly and drew her closer to him. The twenty odd years which had passed since he had seen her vanished with all that they meant of everything. He was young again, and there was no room in his throbbing heart or brain for anything but the supreme demands of that moment.

“Letty,” he said, as he had said twenty odd years ago. “It’s all nonsense and it’s all wrong. I thought about it all night. For myself it does not matter so much. I would not mind if I had to suffer alone, but to know that you must suffer too is unbearable.”

“I am not suffering,” said she, smiling again. “I am entirely content. Did we not promise one another one happy hour with no regrets and no vain complaining? To-morrow we will go separate ways. This one hour is all our own. I do not suffer.”

“One hour out of a lifetime,” said he, with unsteady lips, “and life is so infernally long. I thought last night would never end. It isn’t fair, Letty. What did mother say to you?”

“She said she knew we would do what is right.”

He dropped her hand. Unconsciously he thrust the talisman into the breast pocket of his shirt.

“Let us walk down the beach a little way,” he said, “there is a tree that overhangs the bank. It is very pretty. I wish I could show you all the beauties of this place, Letty. I wish it was yours as well as mine. We should build a boathouse near that willow with a verandah on the south side, where we could have tea; and mother and I had planned a pergola from the rose garden to the bank. I’m not going to build the pergola.”

“Life is very long,” she reminded him softly. “You have such a beautiful home here. I want to think that by and bye after I have been gone a while, you will marry and have little boys and girls who can play about and—”

“Letty,” he stopped abruptly, and putting his hand on her shoulder moved her about to face him. “Letty,” he repeated, his face paling a little, “do you want to think that?” His eyes sought hers. The rose colour in her cheeks grew rosier, her glance wavered and fell. “Do you want to think that I will marry and have children, Letty?” he insisted, “do you, Letty?”

“I want to think it,” she said slowly. “I really do want to think it, but—but—I can’t.”

“Very well,” he let her go, and they walked on. “Don’t try, it’s not worth while.”

When they reached the seat under the willow and sat down beside one another, he noticed that her lashes were wet, and he was hot with self-reproach in a moment. “Don’t think I was vexed,” he pleaded. “I was only hurt for a minute. It is all over now,” and because he must not do anything else he clenched his hands in his pockets and bit his lip hard. She shook her head and smiled faintly.

“This is the most beautiful hour in the whole day, isn’t it?” she asked, her eyes on the glowing west. “We could not have chosen a more lovely one unless it had been the sunrise time, and that is far too early for a lazy boy like you. Look, Philip, all those wonderful clouds give promise of a bright to-morrow, and that’s the promise we are looking for, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Halliday, his eyes on her face.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said steadily “how long or how dark the night is, if the sun shines in the morning we forget all about the darkness in a

moment. It is as if it had not been. And it must be the same way with life when we leave it and wake up in some other Light than the sun.”

He did not answer, and she turned to him. “It must be, mustn’t it, Philip?” she asked.

“I suppose so,” he nodded, smiling wistfully, and suddenly she put her hand up and touched his cheek with timid fingers.

“Don’t doubt it,” she said entreatingly. “It’s so true. It will all be made up to us by and bye.”

He held the hand that she would have withdrawn. It was the left hand, and he sought gently to take off the wedding ring from her finger. As he did so the knowledge thrust itself upon him again that it was only a dream, and he thought impatiently that he ought to have the weaving of his own dreams. He remembered that she had not let him remove her wedding ring before, had not let him even keep her hand in his, and that at the end of the hour which was torturingly happy, and that spelt their final separation, she would not discuss any other farewell than a quick pressure of her hands. Well then, this was a dream and he would have it to suit him. That was twenty odd years ago, and there would be no manner of harm to anyone to change things in a dream now. So with her eyes rather fearfully fixed upon his, he persisted in trying to take off her wedding ring.

“You must not,” she said faintly. She had said that before, and her wild rose colour had faded before just as it was fading now. He must get beyond the dream. He felt if he could get beyond one point in the dream that an indescribable difficulty might be overcome, that he could take her in his arms and keep her there, never to let her go again, because holding her close the dream would end and he would go out of life at the same moment. He had no doubt whatever that this enchantment that was upon him was the semi-consciousness that comes to many people just before the end, and that he would never waken to realization again.

All of these thoughts passed through his mind in an instant, even while he smiled into her frightened eyes and drew her closer to him.

“It’s all right, dear,” he said, “quite all right. It’s only a dream anyhow. You’re not afraid of me in a dream now are you?”

She smiled tremulously, keeping her wide eyes on his in questioning doubt. What would she say? He turned a little cold with apprehension. What would she do? Would the dream end abruptly and would she vanish before

his eyes, under his touch? He had changed the dream already, could she change it too? He gripped her little hands and held her eyes compellingly.

“You said before,” went on Halliday, “that it would all be made up to us by and bye, and no doubt it will, dear. But you know I mayn’t want to kiss you in the by and bye when you are only a vague little spirit and I a tall gaunt-looking shadow, and you may not want to let me. And Letty, I do want to now. I want to kiss you more than I ever wanted anything in my real life. I don’t care if it is only a dream. I want to kiss you more than I wanted to kiss you twenty years ago.”

This was a very long speech for Halliday. He looked at her anxiously. “I’m so afraid of saying the wrong thing,” he said. “But you know, don’t you, dear, that it may be nearly the end of things for me, and I want what belongs to this life before I go. Can’t you understand?”

He held her little hands against his breast, her face was just beneath his own, and it was very pale, only her lips were scarlet, and her eyes were dim with unshed tears. And that was all, as it had been before, all as he remembered it. She had done nothing, said nothing outside of the dream. After all he could not change it unless she changed it too. And she looked so frightened!

“I’m a beast,” said Halliday wearily. “It’s all right, dear. Don’t worry about it. We’ll just sit here quietly together, as we did twenty years ago, and watch the sun go down.” He dropped her hands and turned away from her. But he was sick with disappointment. He suddenly felt very old and tired, and then his leg began to ache dully and his back gave a twinge of pain. He turned to look at her again and found she was not there. The seat beside him was empty. He stared up and down the beach, there was not a soul in sight. And the colour was fading from the sky. It was growing dark, growing dark rapidly. The air became damp and the fragrance of sweet-briar and clover vanished. Strange scents came to him. He felt the rain on his face and behind his back the wet sand. He was awake!

He closed his eyes. He tried to sink into merciful sleep again. He even whispered softly over and over “Letty, Letty!” and endeavoured to bring the pictures of his dreaming back. But the pain of his wounds was hot upon him, all drowsiness had left him utterly. And he was very cold in spite of the burning pain. He had a flask in his haversack, he thought of it longingly, and lifted his right hand. Suddenly he realized the talisman was gone. He felt cautiously in the pocket of his shirt and found it there. He tried to lift his hand higher but he could not.

It was not so dark now, and he knew that in a very few minutes daylight would come as swift as the rush of a bird's wing. Presently he would be able to get a view of those characters on the disc, providing the lasting darkness did not come before daybreak; providing the increasing pain in his side left him a desire for anything save a surcease of suffering. If only he could reach his haversack. What did people do when they were tortured like this and helpless and alone? Halliday checked a groan. No use to give way. He tried again to reach the strap on his right shoulder, tried until his whole body steamed with perspiration and his back throbbed as though a furnace burnt inside it. Then he realized that he was still instinctively holding fast to the talisman. His hand dropped to his knees, and a sudden thought came to him.

Supposing, just supposing there were magic in the talisman! He had read of such things, since coming to Egypt he had heard of them. What if there were some latent power in this flat object he held in his hand which a word of his could call into life. It might be a wishing stone, the sort of thing he used to love to read about when he was a lad. If it were a wishing stone what would he ask for? It was not hard to answer that question. He would ask for his haversack, and then, and then—he would ask to go to his last sleep with the touch of those lips denied him in life on his. Was it fancy or did he feel the talisman move slightly in his hand. "I want," said Halliday aloud, his voice and his whole body trembling very much. "I want my haversack and I want Letty," and then a blackness came upon him just as the sun reached the sand's rim and sent its glittering heralds far and wide.

When he came to himself he was conscious of no pain. He opened his eyes. The light dazzled them at first and anyway he thought he must still be dreaming. Someone stood beside him, a gray clad figure, and tender hands were binding up the long gash in his left shoulder. He kept his eyes closed, unquestioningly accepting the amazing change in his condition, too faint and too happy to bother about the why and the wherefore of anything. The whole of his left side was numb, there was no pain anywhere. But he was faint and a little thirsty and he asked for water.

He felt his head lifted with hands so tenderly soft that a sob came to his throat for the compassion of them. He swallowed gratefully the liquid held to his lips. Stronger in a few moments, he opened his eyes again. He was lying back on the sand, the mound sheltering him from the direct heat of the sun's rays; his folded coat was under his head and the sand had been scooped away that his wounded arm might rest easily. He felt warmly comfortable, and he refused to puzzle where and how the gray-garbed woman got there to minister to him. She was bandaging the calf of his leg

now, putting a splint on it, and he saw his haversack and its contents spread out on the ground beside him. Her head was turned from him, he could see only her white coif.

“Is there any use bothering about me?” asked Halliday. “I supposed I was all in.”

She did not answer, she was working very swiftly and skilfully.

“Its awfully good of you,” said Halliday. Then because he knew that nurses and doctors do not like to be questioned he was silent until she had quite finished. But he looked about him. He could see miles and miles of desert but not a human being in sight save the nurse. Puzzled, he glanced at her again, and a sudden frightened expectancy seized him. He lifted the talisman before his eyes. It shone with a strange luminosity and the characters upon it were vividly gold. It felt warm in his palm with a warmth of its own, and as he looked it seemed to palpitate evenly like a living breathing thing. He thrust it in the bosom of his shirt. Then he stretched his hand along his body toward the white-coifed, gray-garbed kneeling figure.

“Letty,” he questioned, timidly, huskily.

She raised her head and he looked into a face beautiful, dearly familiar, with a spray of wild rose colouring in the cheeks, and the white teeth holding the red lower lip to check a smile.

“Is it you, Letty?” he whispered.

“It is I,” she said, releasing her lip and smiling frankly, and her voice was just as tender and soft, with a lower note of poignant sweetness.

“But I’m not dreaming now am I, Letty? This is the desert, isn’t it? And the morning after the battle?”

“You are not dreaming,” she answered.

“How did you come here all alone?” he asked.

But she only smiled again.

“Did you hear me calling you?” he asked.

She nodded, still smiling.

“Put your hand on mine, Letty dear. I can’t be quite sure of you,” he entreated her.

She laid it where he asked, curving her fingers about his.

“You have not grown any older,” he said, an exultant contentment upon him. “How is that, dear?”

“Under my coif,” she said, “my hair is white.”

“But your face is so young, as young as it used to be.”

“It is young to you, Philip.”

“All through these years, Letty,” he asked after a happy pause, “has life been kind?”

“As kind as it has been to you, dear dreamer of happy dreams.”

She stooped and pressed her lips to his other hand, the wounded one that lay helpless on his breast.

His body glowed and trembled under her touch, he heaved a great sigh that shook him from head to foot.

“Is the hope just as strong, Letty?”

“The hope is a certainty,” she smiled. “It will be made up to us.”

“It will all be made up to us,” he repeated, watching her face, drinking in the tender loveliness of it, the wonderful shining smile of her eyes, the soft bright smile of her lips.

Suddenly from far, far off came the faint notes of a bugle. He saw her start a little away from him, but his eyes held hers.

“Letty,” he entreated, “are you going?”

“For a little while,” she smiled happily.

“Letty, am I going to live on without you?”

Her smile was most beneficently tender and compassionate in a moment.

“For a little while,” she said.

Again the bugle call came to them, clearer, nearer now.

“Dear,” he whispered, the hot colour mounting to his pallid face, “I only want one thing more on earth.”

She leaned nearer to him, her face above his face, her soft hands on his cheeks. He held her slender body, warm and trembling in his arm, and then—all of his wish came true.

* * * * *

He knew nothing more until he heard men's voices around him, well-known voices talking in low tones. He opened his eyes. He recognized Seaton, a young lieutenant in his own company, and one of the doctors.

"Helloa," said the latter. "He's coming round. How about it, captain?"

"I'm all right," said Halliday. "How long have I been here? What day is this?"

"This is the 3rd of March, sir," Seaton answered. "You've been here all night."

"How did the fight end?" asked Halliday.

"We drove 'em across the river, and those that aren't drowned in the mud, are still running."

"By Jove," said Halliday with vast satisfaction.

He learned that his left shoulder blade had been shattered by a bullet; that it was weakness occasioned by loss of blood that caused him to faint and fall; and that in falling he had broken his leg above the ankle, wrenched his thigh and further complicated the injury to his shoulder. In the excitement of the chase, and the rain and darkness, he had not been missed until they reached the stream, where some of the enemy in ambush darted upon them and kept them engaged until daylight. He learned furthermore that owing to the first aid that had been rendered him, he would recover entirely in time. But when his puzzled fellow officers questioned him closely as to who could have rendered him such assistance, Halliday only shook his head. It was as much a mystery to him, he declared, as it was to them.

Through the weeks that he lay in the hospital he kept the talisman near him and looked at it now and then, though he always took care that no one else should see it. It had lost its luminous appearance, and no longer seemed a sensate thing, even the hieroglyphics seemed gradually to be growing fainter. There was a badly wounded native soldier in the bed next him who had won the D.S.O., and who kept him entertained by scores of stories about the country, its people and its history past and present. When they were both convalescent Halliday ventured to show him his treasure. From his bed he stretched out his hand to his companion, holding the disc in his palm. "What do you make of this?" he asked him.

The other was visibly excited and agitated in a moment. He muttered something in his native tongue and made a quick pass with his hands, all the time keeping his eyes upon the stone. Then whisperingly he asked Halliday

where he had found it. Halliday, watching the other's face eagerly, told him. It was some time before the Egyptian spoke. But first, he took the disc in his hand reverently, examined it minutely, muttering something in his own language. Then he gave it back.

"It is the 'Tear of Isis'," he whispered to Halliday, in so low a tone that no one else could hear. "Thou art beloved of the gods."

And then he rambled on to explain. He had heard of others who had found such stones though not for a generation or more. Their origin was a great and sacred mystery which no mere decipherer of hieroglyphics could translate. For himself he had no need of translation. He had read of it in the sacred books, and his father and his grandfather had told him of it. In the dawn of Egypt's history when, Osiris having been killed, Isis sought for his body over desert and hill and sea from the mouth of the Nile to the confines of Ethiopia, where ever her tears had fallen in the sand, the sun god had blessed them, and they had become sleep-stones. Over and over again those lost or dying in the desert had found them, and death had come to them in happiest sleep or had held them in its enchantment of dreams until aid had arrived. More than this, even as it is well-known that long after his death Osiris used to come to Isis by night to help her in various ways and advise her as to how she would bring up their infant Horus, so, it is said, that those who find these sleep-stones can call upon one whom they have loved and who has passed to the spirit land, and that one will return from the place of shadows to fulfil the desire of those who call and to obey any proffered request.

Halliday placed the talisman in the pocket of his pajamas, and thanked the other briefly. The latter after a pause leaned nearer, saying:

"The Tear of Isis accomplishes its purpose but once."

Halliday nodded. "I understand," he said. "I have nothing more to ask of it."

It was three months later, Halliday was at home on furlough. He was sitting in the bay window of the drawing-room with his mother. They had been talking since breakfast, and it was nearly lunch time. Halliday had only arrived the night before, and there had been a thousand things to discuss. Presently his mother rose and going to an escritoire near the fireplace unlocked a drawer and took out a newspaper clipping.

“My dear,” she said, as she came to his side, “I have something here to show you. I would have sent it to you, but thought I had better wait and give it to you when you came home.” She handed him the paper, and then moved away to the open window to busy herself among the rambler roses that hung in clusters around the casement.

Halliday read the clipping. It was from a paper three months old and ran as follows:

“Died at Saloniki on the 3rd day of March, 1916, nursing sister Letitia Eleanor, beloved wife of Colonel Hargreaves Hamilton, B.E.F.”

[1] The tears of the Egyptian gods and goddesses, particularly those of Isis, were supposed upon falling to the earth to be endowed with miraculous powers.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

A cover was created for this eBook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Tear of Isis* by Ann de Bertrand Lugrin (as N. de Bertrand Lugrin)]