



The Publicity Princess

By A. T. LOCKE

PERHAPS you never heard of Lotus Blossom, the reincarnation of the beautiful Princess Azamaranth of ancient Egypt, and then again you may remember her name.

A great many people did hear of her and, in these specious times, she might be making a million dollars a year as a screen star if she had not been bitten, in a way, by a tiny stone scarab, an Egyptian beetle, set in a ring that Ben Milliken wore for awhile under the misapprehension that it would bring him good luck.

Ben Milliken was the publicity director for the old H. and K. Film Corporation and, in his own profession, he was somewhat of a genius. Because of his ingenuity and originality he was, in fact, more than publicity director for the concern. He actually was the right hand man of Hyman & Klipstein and the two partners, who had abandoned the cloak and suit business in favor of the picture industry, consulted him on many details of their affairs that were in

no way related to spreading glad tidings regarding forthcoming productions.

While Ben was bombarding the trade papers with erudite interviews purporting to come from Mr. Hyman or Mr. Klipstein, interviews couched in language that neither of them could understand, he also was recommending stories for production, cutting and assembling film, suggesting players who might be cast in various rôles, and taking an occasional whack at revamping scenarios which had been prepared by less talented writers than himself.

I know all about Ben because I was his incompetent assistant and I occupied an office with him in the H. and K. studios at Fort Lee, back in the days before Hollywood was on the picture map.

"I see," he said one morning when he dropped into our sanctum, "that Mr. Hyman has a new stenographer."

"Well," I replied, "there's no news in that. If he didn't have a new one, that would be—"

Mr. Hyman was a fiery little fellow who never hesitated to air his opinions of dumb Doras and, as a result, he seldom ever kept a secretary more than a month. They usually floated out on a flood of tears after they had tried for two or three weeks to put up with his chronic indigestion.

Ben didn't make any reply to me, but just sat down at his desk and started to fumble around with some papers in an aimless sort of way. I took one look at him and I had a hunch, right then and there, that something was disturbing him.

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Miss Bodkin," he told me. "Sarah Bodkin."

Right then I knew that Ben had been struck by love because he never had paid any attention, as far as I had seen, to any of the stenographers who littered up the place.

"H-m-m-m," I continued, "is she a good looker?"

"Well," Ben sighed, "you might not think so. She's not exactly pretty, of course," he added, "but there's something about her." He paused a moment. "She's not the type you'd expect a stenographer to be. She's—"

"Sure," I replied, "I know. Well, she won't stay here long, that's one consolation," I added maliciously. "When Mr. Hyman starts to shoot some of his reverse English in her direction, she'll—"

"Mr. Hyman wouldn't have the nerve," interrupted Ben. "He wouldn't talk to a lady like he has talked to these pot-hookers he has had before."

Then he drifted out of the office and I knew that he had gone down to consult Mr. Hyman on something touching on and appertaining to the affairs of the H. and K. Film Corporation.

Later in the day, being rather desirous of getting a close-up of Sarah Bodkin, I went to Mr. Hyman's office to ask him if, in his opinion, the motion picture was all arts in one art and, if in his opinion it was, would he have any objection to being quoted to that effect in the daily prints.

Mr. Hyman, responding to many leading questions, expressed the belief that the motion picture was a composite of painting,

sculpture, drama, prose, poetry, æsthetic dancing and music. It was, in the opinion of Mr. Hyman, not only greater than any one of the old arts, but greater than all of them together. And he did not have the slightest objection to being quoted to the effect that H. and K. productions provided a perfect confirmation of his belief.

While Mr. Hyman was talking I was stealing a few glances at Sarah Bodkin.

Ben had told me that she was not exactly pretty, but that is exactly what she was. Her hair was jet black and abundant, and it was piled rather carelessly and caressingly on top of her shapely head.

Her olive-complexioned face was enchantingly oval, her lips were tiny, and her features were regular with the exception of her eyes. They were dark, of course, and they had an almost imperceptible slant which gave an alluring Oriental aspect to her countenance.

She was an adept at make-up, too. Just a touch of mascara on her long lashes, a discreet application of rouge, nails that were delicately pink and well-kept hands that were slender and white.

A little barbaric touch was added to her prettiness by her cheap, but becoming jewelry, which consisted of small ear-rings, a couple of bracelets, and a coral necklace.

She rose, to bring a letter she had just finished over to Mr. Hyman and I saw that she was slender and graceful. She stood close to me while her employer, with a frown on his face, was looking over her work.

"Hey!" exclaimed Mr. Hyman. "Even don't you know how to spell. Rejected, young woman, ought to be spelled r-e-j-e-k-t-e-d." He turned to me with a laugh. "She spells it," he said, "r-e-j-e-c-t-e-d. And look," he added. "She spells fillum f-i-l-l-u-m."

She looked at me rather appealingly.

"She spelled rejected right," I explained to Mr. Hyman, and then added diplomatically: "At least, according to common usage. Your spelling of the word is phonetic but that system has not been generally adopted yet."

"So," said Mr. Hyman, "that's all right, then."

"But I spelled fillum the way you pronounced it, Mr. Hyman," the girl protested. "I thought it was right."

"Well, you wasn't," replied Mr. Hyman. "It's f-i-l-l-m, *fillum*!"

I left in the middle of the spelling-bee because, after all, I had had my close-up of Sarah and that was what I had gone to the office for.

I found Ben in our sanctum, sitting at his desk with his chin in his hands, looking dreamily at the barren plaster wall in front of him.

"Well," I announced, "I've just seen the divine Sadie."

"The divine Sadie?" he questioned dumbly.

"Yes," I told him, "the divine Sadie. Sarah Bodkin—Miss Bodkin—Mr. Hyman's new secretary."

Ben came to life and appeared to be very much interested.

"She's nice, isn't she?" he suggested.

"So-so," I admitted, with a careless shrug of my shoulders. "There are lots more like her in New York, though. I bet when she goes home at night, it's to some Bronx apartment where the old folks are about four hundred years behind her."

"Well, what of it?" he countered defensively. "That doesn't make her any less wonderful, does it?"

"It couldn't, as far as I'm concerned," I told him.

"I was just sitting here thinking about her," Ben said with a dreamy expression on his face. "Just consider her romantic ancestry," he continued. "Her blood is the blood of Egypt, of Phœnicia, or ancient Araby. Her ancestors were living in golden civilization when our progenitors were prowling through Europe like wild beasts."

Ben had a faint idea of history despite the fact that the celebrated "Outline" was still to be given to the world.

"She may even be a throw-back," he went on, "to some girl who really lived by the Mediterranean in bygone days. Such things happen, you know."

"What makes you think I know?" I asked. "As a matter of fact I don't know any such thing."

"If you'd read a little biology you

wouldn't be so ignorant," he advised me indignantly.

"I'll do that," I told him, "after I tell the world that Mr. Hyman believes that the motion picture is all arts in one art. Maybe," I suggested as an afterthought, "that Mr. Hyman is a throw-back, too. Such things happen, you know."

With that I left the sanctum hastily because, after all, love at first sight is too sacred a thing to snicker at.

II.

THE advent of Sadie, as I persisted in calling her much to the disapproval of Ben, upset the men attached to the studio in much the same way that a well-directed bowling-ball upsets the pins in an alley.

Johnny Hazleton, the scenario writer, confessed that the new jane made it almost impossible for him to think in logical sequences and "Red" Phelan, the camera man, started to crank his machine backward one day when Sadie happened to come in on the set.

Augustus Q. Roberts, the leading male star of the H. and K. outfit, bought himself a new wig and Merry Merriwell, who was being featured in stellar rôles, became very apparently jealous of a mere stenographer.

But, despite all the distant adulation she received, Sadie Bodkin rather held herself aloof from the rest of us at the studio.

I figured to myself that Sadie was a cautious girl and that, if she had any intentions toward men, matrimonial or otherwise, she was looking for the one best bet before committing herself. That let me out, so I was content to stand on the sidelines in a watchful-waiting attitude.

Effie Elkins, who was Mr. Klipstein's secretary, managed to get acquainted with Sadie and the two of them, for awhile, used to have lunch together in the restaurant that was run in connection with the studio. Effie was a good-natured kid and she could chatter about inconsequential things by the hour and I noticed that, when the two girls were eating together, it was Effie who did all the talking.

"Miss Bodkin seems to be a nice girl," Effie complained to me one day, "but hon-

estly—" She paused a moment. "You know," she continued, "I don't like to knock any one, but I don't really think that Sarah ever had an idea in her life. I talk to her until I'm blue in the face and she never says a word."

"Maybe you never give her a chance to say a word," I argued.

"Of course I do," replied Effie, "but if you ask me, her mind's a perfect blank. But then, I suppose," she added charitably, "I suppose the poor kid never had many opportunities at that."

"Maybe she's just dumb," I suggested.

"Maybe," conceded Effie, "but I don't think any one could be born as dumb as she seems to be and still survive. She's like a phonograph record with nothing on it."

Ben spent more time than ever in Mr. Hyman's office, apparently discussing the affairs of the H. and K. Film Corporation with the boss but, in reality, looking with soulful and pleading eyes at Sadie. I dropped into Mr. Hyman's ornate den myself, once in awhile, and had no trouble in deducing the fact that Sadie was a better looker than she was a stenographer.

She and Mr. Hyman usually were arguing over spelling and neither of them, as a rule, was right. I walked in one day and saw Sadie wiping the tears from her dark eyes with a wisp of handkerchief while Mr. Hyman was glaring at her with rather a helpless expression on his face.

"My Gawd!" he exclaimed, waving a letter at me. "I tell her a thousand times that the way to spell story is s-t-o-r-y, and she spells it always s-t-o-r-e-y. What'cha goin' to do, I ask? What'cha goin' to do?"

"It won't be long now," I told Ben when I got back to the sanctum.

"What won't be long?" he asked.

"Sadie—Miss Bodkin—won't belong to the stenographic staff of the well known H. & K. Film Corporation," I asserted with a grin. "She and Mr. Hyman just can't agree on how words shouldn't be spelled."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Ben.

"All right!" I exclaimed. "I thought that you were crazy about Sadie."

"I am," he admitted. "She's a wonderful girl. I'm glad that she won't have to grind away at a typewriter much longer."

"Congratulations," I said, reaching for Ben's hand and, at the same time, trying to figure out where and when the courtship had flourished.

"Oh, it's not that—not yet," Ben told me. "But I had Red Phelan make a screen test of Miss Bodkin to-day, and, if I'm not all wrong, there's a treat in store for people who like the movies."

Then he got enthusiastic.

"She has talent, that girl has," he continued, "and I'm going to see that she gets an opportunity to use it. If I once get her to acting, she'll send a lot of these hams right back to the smoke house."

I saw the test the next morning, and, there was no doubt about it, Sadie photographed beautifully. She appeared to much better advantage on the screen than she did at her typewriter, where she usually was registering dismay and bewilderment while she was trying to figure out the meaning of a meaningless jumble of pot-hooks or the proper spelling of some long two syllable word.

Ben was jubilant, and he went to Mr. Hyman and asked him to come into the projection room. Mr. Hyman was not aware of the fact that a test of Sadie had been taken, and, when she suddenly appeared on the screen before him, he opened his mouth as if he was all ready to start an argument over spelling.

"There's a discovery for you—right out of your own office," Ben whispered impressively. "Isn't she a knockout, Mr. Hyman?"

"H-m-m-m-m," said Mr. Hyman in a noncommittal manner.

"And she's a new type to the screen, too, Mr. Hyman," Ben urged. "The people are tired of seeing blond, baby-faced ingénues."

"H-m-m-m-m," said Mr. Hyman.

"She's a good bet, Mr. Hyman," Ben persisted. "Feature her in a production and—"

"Feature her!" exclaimed Mr. Hyman. "Say, do you think I'm crazy, yet. Nobody ever heard of her but me, and I wish I never had."

"I didn't mean feature her," Ben lied easily. "I meant, of course, to give her a

small part at first and then, if she makes good, give her a chance at a lead. I tell you, Mr. Hyman, she's a find!"

"Well, Bennie," said Mr. Hyman, "use your judgment about that. Maybe it is that you are right."

"We'll give her a part in 'The Fatal Spell' then," said Ben. "I'll get Hazleton to write in a part for her."

"You should change the title to 'The Fatal Speller' and give it to her the lead," said Mr. Hyman dryly.

Ben laughed heartily, because he had gained his point, and that was all he was looking for at that time.

The next day Ben and Sadie had lunch together at a table for two in the restaurant, and they certainly appeared to be interested in each other. I was sitting with Johnny Hazleton, Billy MacDougall, and Effie Elkins and we all, out of the corners of our eyes, watched the tête-à-tête.

"Look at her!" whispered Effie. "She's actually talking. She's talking at length. I'd give anything if I could listen in on the conversation."

"No wonder she's livening up," commented Billy. "She thinks she's going to become a star overnight."

"I wish Ben never had laid eyes on her," groaned Hazleton. "The script for 'The Fatal Spell' is almost finished, and now, just to favor Ben, I've got to tear it apart and put in a rôle for Sadie. Well, Ben has got me a lot of publicity, and I'll do what I can to accommodate him."

According to Ben, when I met him later in our sanctum, a sort of a macadamized road to happiness, without ruts or detours, was stretching out before him.

"We've got it all set, Sarah and I," he told me enthusiastically. "I'm a lucky man, kid. Sarah is there with the appearance and the talent and I'll be there, when the time comes, with the publicity. I'll even do her stories when the company starts to star her. We're going to work together, Sarah and I," he said happily, "and when we both get across in a big way—"

"Then," I finished for him, "let the wild wedding bells ring out."

"That's what I hope," he admitted, "and I think that she feels the same way."

"Atta boy, Ben!" I exclaimed, slapping him on the shoulder. "I hope you have the best of luck."

I really wanted to tell him that I thought he was a dreaming damn fool and that he ought to wake up. But I didn't want to play the rôle of an alarm clock, because most people don't like alarm clocks any better than I do.

And, anyway, they say that it is dangerous to awaken a man who is walking in his sleep along the edge of a precipice.

III.

"THE Fatal Spell" was one of those thrillers that were laid somewhere in the East, and Sadie played the rôle of an Oriental dancing girl. I forget just what part of that extensive territory, the East, the story was supposed to take place in. It was Abyssinia or Armenia or some one of those countries where, according to returning travelers, women don't wear any more clothes than a modern Broadway flapper.

Maybe it was Egypt. I remember that there was desert in the picture, and that we had to go 'way over to Staten Island to get a suitable location for the scenes that took place on what Hazleton, in the scenario, described as "a limitless expanse of rolling dunes."

I remember that Sadie, at first, seemed to be a little bit abashed at the scantiness of her Oriental costume. Girls wore petticoats—you just knew they wore 'em—back in those days, and most of them didn't feel quite at home, in the daytime, without them on.

But after Sadie had wandered around for a couple of days in Don Johnson's conception of the attire of a dancing girl, she seemed to be perfectly at ease.

Johnson was directing the picture, and, at first, he had not taken kindly to having Sadie foisted on him. But when he began to look over the "takes" he was somewhat surprised. For, when Sadie was on the screen, she sort of took your attention away from the rest of the cast.

She had youth and grace and an Oriental aspect that made her ideal for the part she

was playing. You did not feel, in fact, that you were watching some one act. You were seeing, right before your eyes, an Oriental dancing girl.

For Sadie, I believe, was at that time entirely devoid of imagination. She lacked the slightest conception of what acting meant, and, for that reason, she did not ruin her effectiveness by overacting.

She didn't try to live the part of a dancing girl because she didn't know anything about them. She did her stuff as Johnson told her to do it, and, like a good little dumb-bell, went through it naturally and without any affectation.

"Johnson is tickled to death with her work," Billy MacDougall, his assistant, told me. "The old boy thinks she is a real find."

Ben Milliken, those days, was walking around with a triumphant didn't-I-tell-you-so expression on his face.

"I knew the minute I lamped Sarah that she was a genius," he told me. "Look at the work she is doing in that little part we fixed up for her. Wait until she gets a real chance!"

"Having nothing else to do," I said, "I'll stick around and wait a little while."

"Even Mr. Hyman admits that she's a wonder," added Ben, as if that settled the whole proposition.

"I bet he spells it w-u-n-d-e-r," I snickered.

"You don't seem convinced yet," Ben came back, a little snappish. "No fooling, kid, you're seeing the beginning of a new star. It's a serious matter."

And it seemed to be a serious matter—to Ben, at least.

Every noon he and Sadie had lunch together in the restaurant and, instead of eating, they spent most of their time talking.

"We're discussing the details of a story I am writing for her," Ben explained to me. "She will make such a hit in 'The Fatal Spell' that I won't have any trouble in persuading Mr. Hyman to feature her in a production."

"What kind of a story are you dopping out for her?" I inquired.

"I've got an idea," he told me, "that really is more than an ordinary idea. It's

nothing less than an inspiration. I'm going to do a story for her in which she will play the part of an old Egyptian princess."

"But," I objected, "she's too young to play the part of an old woman. And, besides, I never heard tell of a princess getting old. When a princess gets along in years she gets promoted and becomes a duchess or a queen or something like that."

"Ah, cut the kidding," said Ben. "I mean a young princess in old Egypt. There has never been a picture of that kind made, and it ought to be the best kind of box office stuff."

"Well?" I questioned.

"Can you imagine Sarah in a rôle of that sort?" he asked enthusiastically. "How she could put it across! The bit she is doing in 'The Fatal Spell' proves that. Why, this new idea of mine could be shaped into one of the greatest productions ever made!"

"It's a new idea, all right," I conceded, "and I guess that maybe Sadie could turn the trick. What does Mr. Hyman think of it?"

"I haven't put it up to him yet," Ben confessed. "I want to see what happens when 'The Fatal Spell' is released. And then, too, I want to dope out a good publicity campaign for the Egyptian picture. I want to show Mr. Hyman how we can get a lot of sensational advertising out of such a feature. I want to think up some stunt that will make Sarah the most-talked-of girl in the country."

"They'll talk about her in the country," I told him, "when they see her dressed in nothing but mosquito netting in 'The Fatal Spell.' They'll even talk about her in the city."

"Well, laugh if you want to," said Ben cheerfully. "You'll admit some day, though, that I know what I'm talking about."

The next noon in the restaurant Ben called me over to the table where he and Sadie were sitting.

"Sit down and join us," he said. "You know I'm working on a feature story for Sarah, and maybe you can help me out. You see—" he went on, but Sadie cut him short:

"What's that funny ring on your little finger, Ben?" she asked. "I never noticed it before."

"That?" he replied, folding up his digits and extending his hand so that she could see the stone. "I found it in the street one day," he continued. "It's an imitation of an Egyptian scarab. The old Egyptians worshiped scarabs," he explained, "and copied them in stone for decorative purposes."

Sadie, of course, didn't know whether scarabs were a breakfast food or a skin disease, so she sat there and looked beautifully dumb.

"A scarab was an Egyptian beetle," Ben told her, "and it was venerated because it was supposed to bring good luck. Like a cricket, you know."

"Oh," breathed Sadie, looking as though she didn't know anything at all.

Ben slipped the ring from his finger and extended it toward her.

"Put out your pinkie," he said in a sappy tone of voice that he never used when he was giving me orders. "I'm going to make you a present of my lucky ring."

"You're going to give it to me?" she murmured as though she had heard something far too wonderful to believe.

"Of course I am," he said. "You ought to have it. Do you know," he cooed, "that there are times when I believe that you are nothing less than the reincarnation of some beautiful princess of Egypt. The moonlight of the Nile seems to shine in your eyes and—"

"Excuse me, folks," I interrupted, "but Hazleton just caught my eye. I guess he wants to tell me something. I'll be right back after I find out what he wants."

I knew that I would have to guffaw if I had to sit and listen to any more of the bunk that Ben was passing over to Sadie. So I hustled over to the table where Hazleton and MacDougall were sitting with Effie.

"He just gave her a ring," I said breathlessly.

"What!" exclaimed Effie. "An engagement ring?"

MacDougall pretended that he wasn't at all interested in the subject.

"No," I told her. "A ring with a stone bug in it—that fake scarab ring that he found."

"Oh," Effie said, as though she was somewhat disappointed.

"And he's telling her," I continued, "that she must be the reincarnation of an Egyptian princess, that he can see the Nile moonlight shining in her eyes."

"Moonlight!" sniffed Effie. "That's belladonna. What he don't know about make-up 'would convert a Swedish hired girl into an artist's model."

"Well, don't blame me," I began, "because I—"

I happened to glance over toward Ben and Sadie just as Ben raised his arm and crashed his fist down on the little table. The dishes jumped and rattled and made so much noise that every one in the place started up in alarm. But Ben, paying no attention to the others, beckoned wildly to me, and I trotted back to his table and sat down.

"I've got it!" he exploded, his face bulging red with excitement.

"What?" I asked. "Apoplexy?"

"I've thought of the way to put Sarah over," he continued, paying no attention to my crack. "I—we're—going to claim that she is the actual reincarnation of an Egyptian princess. I guess that won't appeal to the public, eh?"

Ben was full of enthusiasm, but Sadie, who didn't know what it was all about, sat there dumb with her mouth half open.

"I guess it won't," I told Ben, "but then, again, it might."

"It might," he exclaimed scornfully. "It will, you mean. I'll take the testimony of scientists and psychologists to prove our claim. I'll sell the idea to the public all right. Let's see," he mused, "we'll have to have a name for Sarah—a name that will sound sort of Egyptian. Let's see," he repeated, and then relapsed into silence. I made believe that I, too, was deep in thought.

"How about Olive Obelisk?" I asked him after awhile. "That suggests Egyptian atmosphere."

"Not at all," he said impatiently. "Not at all. It's—well, it just won't do. Don't

bother thinking any more," he told me coldly, as if he thought I was hopeless. "I'll get what I'm after pretty soon."

So the three of us sat there as if we were at a séance waiting for the table to get up on its hind legs and strut across the room. Then Ben suddenly came to.

"I've got it!" he announced. "We'll bill Sarah as *Lotus Blossom*, the reincarnation of the Princess—let's see—the Princess—Azamaranth."

"Was there ever any such princess in Egypt?" I asked Ben.

"How do I know?" he replied. "There might have been. I don't know that there wasn't. Anyway, I like the name—it sounds authentic. And I like *Lotus Blossom*, don't you, Sarah?"

"Of course I do," she said. "I think it's wonderful. It's so—er—flowery."

IV.

So Sadie Bodkin became a thing of the past, and, like a grub being transformed into a butterfly, she became *Lotus Blossom*.

"*Lotus Blossom*," sniffed Effie Elkins, when she heard Sadie's nom de screen. "That's a hot one, that is."

But *Lotus Blossom* she was, according to the mandate of Mr. Hyman, and *Lotus Blossom* she remained.

She and Ben became more intimate than ever, and he spent most of his time worrying over the Egyptian story he was writing for her and dopping out plans to publicize her when the moment arrived for her to make a shadowy bow to the great and palpitating public.

I had to do most of the work of our department, but Ben's earnest enthusiasm afforded me so much diversion that it made the routine drudgery easy. Merry Merriwell was inclined to be rather huffy most of the time because she thought that she was not getting enough publicity, but I managed to smooth her feathers every time they got ruffled.

There was no question about the fact that Sadie—I mean *Lotus Blossom*—was stealing the picture. She was young and good-looking and without artifice, while

Merry, at twenty-six, was getting along in years.

Then "*The Fatal Spell*" was released, and it made a decided sensation in the motion picture world.

And while every one, from Johnson, the director, down to the postman who delivered mail at the studio, was claiming credit for the success of "*The Fatal Spell*," a sudden deluge of letters began to arrive for *Lotus Blossom*.

For Ben had started sort of an endless chain without consulting either Mr. Hyman or Mr. Klipstein. The stunt, indeed, was a secret between Ben and myself.

We had sent out two or three hundred letters at random, instructing the recipients to write to *Lotus Blossom* and tell her what they thought of her work in "*The Fatal Spell*." Upon the receipt of the letter they would receive a beautiful picture of *Lotus Blossom*, autographed by herself.

Those who took advantage of this offer also had the privilege of telling any seven of their friends to submit their impressions of the talent and beauty of *Lotus Blossom* and receive, in return, beautiful pictures of her in Egyptian costume. And each of the seven friends could, in turn, whisper the secret to seven of their friends, and so on *ad infinitum*.

When the letters started to pour in by the thousands, each one of them containing the most extravagant praise of *Lotus Blossom*, Ben went to Mr. Hyman with a smile on his face.

"Didn't I tell you so," he boasted. "The public is going crazy over our new star. She's the biggest find in the history of the industry."

"Yeah," agreed Mr. Hyman, "but what about all of these pictures of her we're sending out for nothing. They don't grow on trees, them pictures. They cost money, Bennie."

"Money!" exclaimed Ben. "Say, that is nothing. You'll get your money back a hundred times over. Don't fail me now, Mr. Hyman. You'll find out that I'm right if you will back me up a little while."

Mr. Hyman looked at him out of opaque eyes.

"All right, Bennie," he said. "Use

your own judgment about it. Maybe it is that you are right."

More than a hundred thousand pictures of Lotus Blossom were mailed out and the campaign cost H. and K. something like ten thousand dollars.

It resulted in a lot of sensational publicity for the girl, however, and that was what Ben was after. On the back of each print there was a typewritten description of her.

She had been born in Egypt, it stated, and it was believed, for many convincing reasons, that she was the reincarnation of the Princess Azamaranth, a young and beautiful scion of the mighty rulers of the ancient empire by the Nile.

The campaign aroused a new and sudden interest in the theory of the transmigration of souls, and inasmuch as there was no particularly attractive murder or divorce cases before the public, the subject of reincarnation was seized upon by various magazines and newspapers and discussed in many articles.

One Sunday paper, in the magazine section, ran a two-page spread featuring Lotus Blossom.

It was profusely illustrated, and one picture purported to reveal her as she appeared on her throne back in the days of the Ptolemys. There she was, seated on a dais, the central figure in a scene of splendor, while two big Nubians were keeping her cool with long fans of ostrich feathers.

Then, in the same spread, there was a beautiful photograph of her in modern attire, and, thrown in for good measure, three or four scenes from "The Fatal Spell." If you could believe the sensational story that accompanied the pictures, there wasn't the slightest doubt but that Lotus Blossom, who was born in the shadow of the pyramids, was the reincarnation of the long-dead, once exquisitely beautiful Princess Azamaranth, daughter of the Ptolemys.

Mr. Hyman could not quite fathom the theory of transmigration, but he could understand the value of a two-page spread in a Sunday paper.

"H-m," he said when he looked the sheet over. "H-m-m-m."

It was then that Ben sprang on him the

proposition of featuring Sadie—I mean Lotus Blossom—in a picture laid in old Egypt.

Ben had taken me into Mr. Hyman's office with him on this occasion, and my function there was to "yes" my immediate superior whenever such a procedure seemed to be judicious.

"I've got an idea, Mr. Hyman," Ben began, "that I know you're going to fall hard for. I've got more than an idea. I've got a story—a knock-out of a story—and I want you to let Lotus Blossom play the lead in it. She's already had a million dollars' worth of publicity, and the eyes of the public are just popping out looking for a picture featuring her."

"Well," began Mr. Hyman, "maybe—"

"Listen!" commanded Ben. "We've got every one believing that Lotus Blossom is the reincarnation of the Princess Azamaranth." He paused a moment. "Maybe she is, Mr. Hyman, maybe she is. Who can say that she isn't?"

Mr. Hyman looked impressed and blinked three or four times. It was apparent that he didn't care to state, for publication or otherwise, that she wasn't.

"Now, Mr. Hyman," continued Ben, "I've got a story outlined in which Lotus Blossom will play the rôle of the Princess Azamaranth. Do you get it, Mr. Hyman; do you get it?" If Mr. Hyman did, he didn't admit it. "And I've got a wow of a story, too, Mr. Hyman!" exclaimed Ben. "Don't overlook that! And it's a new type of story—just what the public wants."

Then he outlined the plot to Mr. Hyman, and the latter, as he heard the melodrama unfold, seemed to be rather impressed.

"But there's no chase in it at the end, Bennie," he complained. "A picture needs a chase in it at the end. You know that as well as I do."

Ben was nonplused for a moment, and I knew that he was casting around for some argument to advance to Mr. Hyman.

"You could have the high priest chase the heroine up the side of one of the pyramids," I suggested. "And then there could be a fight right on top, a fight in which the hero throws the high priest off the pyramid to a horrible death far, far below."

"That's the stuff," said Mr. Hyman approvingly. "Could you get that in, Bennie?"

"Maybe," said Ben, looking at me with rather a cold eye. "What do *you* think of the whole proposition?" he then asked me directly.

"Yes," I said, remembering what I was there for.

Mr. Hyman tapped his desk with the end of a lead pencil for a moment.

"A production like that, Bennie," he finally sighed, "would make a big cost of money."

"Money!" said Ben. "Say, that's nothing! You'll get your money back a hundred times over!"

Mr. Hyman considered the matter for another moment.

"All right, Bennie," he said. "Use your own judgment about it. Maybe it is that you are right."

V.

I GUESS there must have been many times in the next three or four weeks when Mr. Hyman had his doubts as to whether or not Ben was right.

In the first place, he had to pay Lotus Blossom seven hundred and fifty dollars a week to hold her. This was an unheard-of salary in those days, but three or four rival producers, sensing the tremendous value of the publicity she was getting, kept raising the ante for her services, and Mr. Hyman was obliged to meet them.

In the next place, Merry Merriwell, who had been making money for H. and K., quit in high dudgeon because her stellar glow paled away into insignificance before that of Lotus Blossom. Mr. Hyman was a good sport, however, and he continued to back up Ben's estimation of the potential value of the new star.

After the appearance of the article in the Sunday paper the ferryboats to Fort Lee were thronged with nitwits who wanted to get a glimpse of the beautiful girl whose body was inhabited by the wandering soul of the Princess Azamaranth. Mobs of people, mostly women, milled in front of the studio all day.

But did they ever see the face of Lotus

Blossom? Not if Ben knew his publicity, which he did. All they ever saw was the graceful and slender figure of a veiled girl who was attired in a rather picturesque and somewhat diaphanous costume.

And did any one in the curious crowds ever have the opportunity to touch as much as a hem of her garment? Not so that you could notice it.

When she arrived at the studio in her limousine she was escorted by two colored gentlemen who were at least six feet tall. They too were garbed in Egyptian costumes, and they functioned as the bodyguard of Lotus Blossom.

Ben had picked them up in Harlem, and he paid them each three dollars a day for their services. He wasted good money doing that. Each would have paid him six dollars a day for the privilege of basking in the glory which Lotus Blossom reflected on them. It wasn't every day in the week that a Harlem black boy could get a job as an honest-to-Gawd Nubian.

When Lotus Blossom was in the studio, and was not engaged on the set, she spent her time in her dressing room reading the fan mail that came to her and browsing over books about Egypt. Every nut, both east and west of the Mississippi River, must have written to Lotus Blossom to tell her how wonderful and beautiful she was, and there was never a doubt expressed in any of the communications as to the reality of her being the reincarnation of the Princess Azamaranth.

As time went by a subtle change became apparent in the girl. Her manner became decidedly aloof, she was rather inclined to be haughty, and she took a very imperious attitude toward us common plugs around the studio.

The title of the story which Ben had written for her caused some difficulty before the production got under way.

Ben wanted to call it "A Maid of Memphis," but Mr. Hyman objected to this because it might be misleading to people. They might think that it was the story of a hired girl in Memphis, Tennessee, which of course would create an entirely false impression.

And then, too, some fellow named Grif-

fith was going to do a Southern story called "The Birth of a Nation," and Mr. Hyman didn't want his good production to be confused, by any possible chance, with some piece of punk. So Ben, after scratching his head industriously for a long while, changed the title to "A Nymph of the Nile."

Mr. Hyman was not particularly enthusiastic when he heard it, but it passed for a couple of days. At about that time I happened to drop into his office to ask his opinion, for publication, on some momentous matter.

I found him in an argument with his stenographer.

"Ha!" he said, looking at me. "Look, will you, how she spells nymph. She's got it down in a letter already spelled n-i-m-f. Ha, young lady," he said, turning to the girl, "don't be afraid to use letters. They don't cost nothing. Nymph is spelled n-i-m-p-f."

Even when Mr. Hyman finally did learn how the word was spelled it was very apparent that he did not like it.

"It don't mean anything," he objected. "I don't know what it means. If I didn't, who will? Huh?"

So Ben cast around some more, and finally hit on "The Shadow of the Pyramids," which was perfectly satisfactory to every one concerned.

I met Cassidy, the stage carpenter, when I walked in the studio one morning after the great production was under way.

"Well, I got it all fixed up," he announced agreeably.

"Fine, Cassidy!" I said enthusiastically. "Now if you'll tell me what you've got all fixed up I'll know all about it."

"Why, Lotus Blossom's apartment," he said, apparently surprised to find that I hadn't been able to read his mind.

"Lotus Blossom's apartment?" I repeated. "Has she got an apartment, then?" I added.

"Sure she's got an apartment," replied Cassidy. "Where do you think she's living—in a Bowery flophouse?"

"I hadn't been thinking about it," I apologized. "What has she got—two baths and a room?"

"Two baths and a room me eye!" exclaimed Cassidy. "She's got a room as big as a barn, with a balcony around it. Then there's three or four other rooms, too. I fixed up the big one, though, and believe me, it's some gorgeous. A big throne like at one end and—"

"A throne like!" I exclaimed. "What is that for?"

"To sit in, of course," replied Cassidy.

"To sit in?" I echoed. "What does she want to sit in a throne for? Did the old kitchen chair break a leg?"

"I don't know," Cassidy replied. "It's her idea, that's all. That girl's got ideas, I'll tell you."

"She's contracted them all of a sudden, then," I said.

"Well, wait and see," Cassidy told me. "She's gettin' ready to hold a reception, and we're all goin' to be invited."

"I'll accept with the greatest pleasure," I assured Cassidy; and then I went up to the sanctum, where I found Ben.

"What's all this I hear about Sadie's new apartment?" I asked him. "I mean the one with the throne in it?"

My curiosity seemed to be somewhat annoying to Ben.

"Who told you about it?" he asked irritably.

"I've forgotten," I answered. "Somebody was mentioning it, and I just happened to be listening in."

"Well, she has got a new place somewhere," he admitted. "A motion picture star, of course, can't live like a stenographer. I haven't seen her place yet, but she tells me that she's having it fixed up pretty decently."

"But what about the throne," I persisted. "Is it a two-seater, with room for your royal nibs on it, or does it only provide accommodations for one?"

"I don't know anything about it," he growled. "I haven't seen it yet any more than you have."

"Well, I guess we'll all get a look at it pretty soon," I told him. "I understand that the princess is going to throw a party and that all us vassals or tributaries or whatever she considers us are going to be invited."

"I don't know anything about it," he reiterated rather sourly and I could feel that he was not in any mood to be kidded.

I knew that Ben was somewhat distracted because things were not going so smoothly between himself and Lotus Blossom. The developments of a few weeks had made a startling change in the erstwhile Sadie Bodkin.

She now glided around the studio with an imperious air, and it was very seldom that she deigned to speak to any one. She no longer had lunch with Ben; she ate alone in the privacy of her dressing room. She seemed to be moving on a higher plane, in a more ethereal atmosphere, than any of the rest of us.

Her bodyguard, at her insistence, had been increased to six gigantic negroes and her progress to work each morning resembled the parade of a minstrel show.

I happened to be loitering around the ante-room of the studio one afternoon when a swarthy fellow who wore long hair and a pair of blue goggles came into the place. He was followed by two other dark-complexioned foreigners who, between them, carried a long black box which they seemed to handle reverentially.

The leader of the queer appearing trio inquired, in broken English, for the Princess Azamaranth and added the information that the box was for her. Old man Kelly, who was guardian of the gate, gruffly demanded a card which the man in the blue glasses could not produce.

"Just inform 'er that Prince Seti Thomes awaits the pleasure of an audience with 'er highness," he told the yawping Kelly.

"Huh?" asked Kelly in amazement.

"I'll take the message back to her," I told Kelly. "I think I know what it is all about."

As a matter of fact, I didn't know anything about it at all, but I intended to find out what I could.

I went back to the stage and learned that Lotus Blossom was in her dressing room so I sought her out there. To my great surprise I found that two of her bodyguard were standing by the door.

I was about to knock for admission, but they blocked my way and one of them in-

formed me that he would take any message for the princess.

"For two cents," I said, "I'd take a mallet and knock the blocks off of you big dinges. But, just to avoid trouble, I'll forego the pleasure. Tell Sadie Bodkin in there that there's three tough looking yeggs out here who want to see her and that one of them says he's Prince Seti Thomes."

With that I drifted away, wondering where and when the foolishness of Sadie Bodkin was going to stop. A minute later one of the black boys passed me on his way to the ante-room and shortly after that he came back escorting the three mysterious characters who had come to call on the Princess Azamaranth.

The man in the blue goggles was in the lead and the other two, carrying the box as though it was full of nitroglycerine, followed close behind. I wondered what it was all about and, lingering in the vicinity of the dressing rooms, I saw one of the black boys go out and find Cassidy and take him into the private room of the princess where the three strangers already had disappeared.

Cassidy was in there for several minutes and, when he came out, his eyes looked like big green gooseberries.

"She's got her husband in there!" he exclaimed in a voice that was quivering with awe.

"Who's the husband?" I asked. "The guy in the blue goggles?"

"No," whispered Cassidy. "Her husband's in the box that they had me open. He's all dead and dried up. He looks like a—like a—Gawd!—he looks more like a baked monkey than he looks like a man. But she's in there talking to him just as if he was alive!"

I went up to tell Ben what was going on and try to get some clew to what it was all about.

"It's that damn mummy, I suppose," he groaned. "Some faker has got hold of her and has convinced her that he has the mummy of a man she loved 'way back in Egypt. She told me something about it this morning and said that she intended to buy it."

"Somebody is playing her for an easy

mark," I protested. "You shouldn't let them get away with it, Ben."

"What can I do?" he almost wailed. "Most of the time she won't even speak to me. She eyes me like something that ought to be looked at through a microscope."

"Why don't you tell her where she gets off at!" I exclaimed indignantly. "You don't have to stand for that sort of stuff."

"But I do—that's the trouble," he replied disconsolately. "I got Hyman into this production and it's already set him back between forty and fifty thousand dollars. If Lotus Blossom should quit for any reason, everything would go blooey. Even Hyman knows that he's got to stand for anything she wants to do until the picture is finished. He's a good sport, the old man is."

"And he don't want to lose a small fortune, either," I added.

"If you ask me," Ben continued, becoming confidential for the first time in weeks, "I think that Lotus Blossom is just playing the game for publicity. I gave her the cue and she is following it up to the very limit. She is even trying to see if she can delude me into believing that she is the reincarnation of an Egyptian princess. She'll come up smiling some day and give us all the laugh."

"All the same," I told Ben, "I wouldn't let her get away with too much."

"What can I do?" he asked me somewhat desperately. "She's got those black birds eating out of her hand and she's even threatened, once or twice, to have a couple of them throw me out of the studio."

"The best thing that you can do is to stay out of the studio until the shooting of the picture is all over with," I suggested.

"She might not like that, either," moaned Ben, "and, if she didn't, I suppose that she'd have the African army grab me and throw me *into* the studio. I don't know what to do about it all."

"It 'll come out all right," I told him.

"I don't care how it comes out, as far as I'm personally concerned," he said. "I'm only anxious to see that damn picture finished. And yet," he continued, "I do care, too. If I was ever in love with a girl, it was with Sarah. And she seemed to like me,

too. I can't make head or tail of the affair."

As the days went by the production of "The Shadow of the Pyramids" went on slowly but surely and Ben began to look quite hopeful despite the fact that Lotus Blossom was more and more aloof and regal in her attitude.

I was on the stage one day when I saw Cassidy beckoning mysteriously to me from behind a set which was about to be struck. I drifted over in his direction and he led me into a nook where no one could see us.

"I was over at the palace last night," he whispered to me.

I thought he meant the Palace Theater and wondered what all of the mystery was about.

"Well, how was the bill?" I asked.

"How did you know that she gave me a bill?" he queried. "She always gives me a twenty when I do any job for her and it's always all right as far as I know."

"Job for who?" I questioned. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Lotus Blossom," he replied. "I was over helping her fix up her palace last night."

"Her palace?" I echoed.

"Well," he said, "her apartment then. She calls it her palace, though."

"Oh," I said.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Cassidy. "It's some place! I don't like it very much, though," he added. "I don't feel very much at home in a palace."

"What!" I exclaimed. "You don't feel at home in a palace. I'm surprised at you, Cassidy!"

"I can't help it," replied Cassidy, "I don't. Not in that palace, anyway. Those six dinges and that guy with the blue goggles and his two friends gi'me the creeps."

"When is the big party coming off, Cassidy?" I asked him.

"The place is all set," he told me. "It won't be long now."

VI.

THE following day, Lotus Blossom arrived at the studio a couple of hours late, but she came riding in on a good excuse.

She had, it seems, abandoned her car and had taken to a camel that she had managed to pick up in some menagerie or circus.

It was a double-humped model, equipped with all the latest accessories, and the crowd that followed her, as she came in sight of the studio, must have been half a mile long and just about the same width.

Mr. Hyman happened to be near the studio entrance when she arrived and he greeted her with a forced smile on his face.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, making a courtly bow. "The charming princess rides in state this morning."

I don't know where he picked up the line, but it must have been a subtitle in some picture he had seen.

"In the way that a princess of Egypt should ride," she told him slowly, as if she were speaking in a trance. "I know now that—" She didn't finish her sentence. Instead, she glided majestically past him, followed by her bodyguard, and went back to her dressing room.

Mr. Hyman watched her until she disappeared, then turned and whispered to me.

"Thank Gawd," he gasped, "that there ain't many more scenes to shoot! But I wish she was all of them and that we was using cannons instead of cameras."

There were several important episodes left to take, however, when the "commands" to attend the court of the Princess Azamaranth were distributed through the organization by the black attendants of her royal highness. The court was to be held in the evening of the day the invitations were handed out and Mr. Hyman made it plain that he wanted those who had been invited to the affair to attend it.

"If we can only keep her satisfied for maybe a week more," he said. "Ha! Then we'll show that there princess something!"

The four of us went together that night, Ben and I with MacDougall and Effie Elkins. We entered a lofty, dimly-lighted room which was crowded when we got there.

It was decorated with Egyptian motives and, at the far end of it, there was a great draped throne upon a dais. At the foot of the dais, and flanking each side of it, there were censers from which the aromatic smoke of incense was rising in vaporous

clouds. Black attendants, male and female, clad in scanty attire were reclining around the ornate throne and grinning at the novelty of their jobs.

"It looks like a Harlem cabaret," sniffed Effie. "Where's Sadie, I wonder? When does the curtain go up on this show?"

For the throne, when we entered the room, was unoccupied and the Princess Azamaranth was nowhere visible. An orchestra was playing—and what an orchestra! The princess apparently had been unable to find any lute or rebek players listed in the musician's union and she had compromised by securing these saxophone tooters and three trap-drummers. The din they made was tremendous; it was almost impossible to hear anything but the cacophonous strains of the music.

Suddenly, however, the orchestra ceased playing and one of the black attendants sounded a couple of blue notes on an old cornet.

Then the curtains that were draped behind the throne slowly parted and the princess appeared with the man who wore the blue goggles. They ascended the throne and sat down on it together.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Effie. "There ain't no flies on them!"

And there weren't, either, because two black boys, one on each side of the throne, were keeping the air circulating around the royal domes by means of long ostrich feather fans.

"The whole thing looks like that picture in the Sunday supplement," said MacDougall.

"That's just where she got it all from," I told him.

Then a black attendant, standing near the foot of the throne, took to bellowing in a stentorian voice.

"Come fohwa'd, all o' yuh folks," he shouted, "an' make obeisance to th' Princess Azamaranth an' huh conso't, Prince Seti Thomes!"

"Sounds like a camp-meeting," sniffed Effie. "Let's get up closer and take a look."

We did, just in time to see Cassidy amble up toward the throne in a friendly sort of way as though he expected to have a pleas-

ant and informal chat with the royal couple. He was suddenly seized, however, by two big blacks who tipped him over, and laid him flat on his stomach and held him there.

"Make obeisance, Ah said," the official spokesman reiterated, "to th' Princess Azamaranth an' huh conso't, Prince Seti Thomes."

Cassidy remained right where they put him for a moment. Then he wriggled away and, red and perspiring, made his way back close to where we were standing. I heard him swearing volubly under his breath.

I saw the princess lean over and say a few words to the spokesman or herald or whatever the announcer in an Egyptian court was called and, as she was speaking to him, I heard the voice of Mr. Hyman.

"Ha!" he said to me. "I've seen enough of it. Right now I am going. What foolishness can all of this be anyway?"

But again the voice of the gigantic negro came rolling through the room.

"Isidore Hyman will now come fohwa'd an' pay obeisance to th' Princess Azamaranth an' huh conso't, Prince Seti Thomes."

"Hello, princess," said Mr. Hyman in a high and piping voice, at the same time waving a pudgy hand at her. "I'd come up, princess," he added, "only I got'a step along now. So long. I'll see you in the morning."

The princess leaned over and spoke to one of her bodyguard and immediately, four of the big attendants began to make their way through the crowd.

"Well, then, if you insist, princess," said Mr. Hyman moving forward until he stood in front of the dais. "This is is a nice place you've got, and it's a swell party that you're pulling."

"Make obeisance," boomed the announcer, "to th' Princess Azamaranth an' huh conso't, Prince Seti Thomes."

Then two of the giant blacks glided up to Mr. Hyman and, one on each side of him, they deftly prostrated him on the floor in a manner that was somewhat rough. They held him down there for an instant, then, lifting him up, tossed him onto his feet.

He backed away from the throne, mak-

ing a series of low salaams as he retreated. Somewhere he had heard of the proper method of making a retreat from the presence of an Oriental potentate.

"Ha!" he whispered in my ear when he was back by my side. "Ha!" He appeared to be speechless with indignation.

Then, to my unbounded delight, Ben Milliken was summoned forward to make *his* bow before the throne. I thought he would refuse to go, but when his name was called he strode quickly up to the dais and stood there for a moment looking at the princess.

"Prostrate yourself, caitiff!" she finally told him insolently. "Prostrate yourself before the Princess Azamaranth."

"Listen, Sadie!" snapped Ben, "and get this straight! You've pulled too much of this bunk already! You're overdoing the stuff! It's about time—"

She turned languidly to one of her big attendants.

"Off with his head!" she ordered, indicating Ben, and the giant black started in his direction.

I then saw Ben in the grasp of four of the great negroes who were carrying him out of the room despite his violent struggles. I caught a glimpse of his face which, at this time, had sort of a dying-gladiator expression on it.

Then I saw his opponents throw open the door of the apartment—or palace—and thrust Ben out. Having rid the place of him, they made their way to the dais again.

"Well," I said to Effie Elkins, "I'm ready for anything now. If the princess wants me to do a few handsprings, believe me I'll turn 'em!"

"Gosh!" Effie exclaimed with a little note of awe in her voice. "Look at the way Sadie sits there. Do you know," she added, "*I think she really believes that she is the reincarnation of an Egyptian princess.*"

VII.

"It was an interesting case," said Dr. William Slavin, the eminent psychopathist, "but, except for its rapid advancement and the extremes to which it developed, not an unusual one."

The day after the party, Ben had retained the services of the specialist and the latter, by making believe that he was an astrologer, had been able to observe Sadie Bodkin, alias Lotus Blossom, alias the Princess Azamaranth, while "The Shadow of the Pyramids" was being completed.

"Miss Bodkin," continued Dr. Slavin, "was a victim of self-hypnosis that was first induced by outside suggestion. From what I understand, the girl had very little education and she was entirely devoid of any reasoning power or mental stability. The first suggestion that ever made the slightest impression on her was the one to the effect that she was the reincarnation of an Egyptian princess.

"She held this in her mind, she thought of it day and night to the exclusion of everything else, until she became obsessed with the idea. Then she began to read books about ancient Egypt and she pored over them until she became saturated with the traditions of the country.

"But perhaps the most damning influence on her," continued the doctor, "was her reading of the thousands of letters which she received from the nitwits who saw her on the screen. The post office regulations ought to forbid the sending of letters of that type. They are written, in the first place, by mental incompetents and, in nine cases out of ten, they are received by people who lack sufficient intelligence entirely to disregard them.

"But to get back to Miss Bodkin," he added. "As I said before she was entirely lacking in reasoning power and, in this respect, was like any uneducated woman. The suggestion was made that she was the reincarnation of an Egyptian princess and it made a strong appeal to her. It must have been absurd to her at first, but there came a time when she wanted it to be true—and so she believed it."

"But I don't see why she beat it with that guy who wore the blue goggles," said Ben. "She had a good job and she would have become one of the biggest stars in the business."

"What's a good job to an Egyptian princess," laughed Dr. Slavin. "She's un-

der the delusion, wherever she is, that that faker is the reincarnation of her ancient lover. That is all that her mind is capable of grasping at one time."

"But is there any cure for her condition?" asked Ben. "Will she ever come down to earth again?"

"Of course," asserted the psychopathist. "When her ego is punctured, the delusion that she is the Princess Azamaranth will pass out of her like air from a cut tire. When her money is gone, and the faker has wandered on his way, she will become Sadie Bodkin again."

He was silent for a moment.

"There's one odd feature of this case," he finally said. "I happen to be quite a student of Egyptology—it's been a fad with me. Do any of you gentlemen happen to know that there was a Princess Azamaranth in the court of one of the Ptolemy's?"

"I didn't know it," confessed Ben. "I just made the name up on the spur of the moment."

"Nevertheless," said the doctor, "there was. She was not, as a matter of fact, a princess of the blood, but she was raised to very high favor through the efforts of a court scribe who was in love with her. When she gained her dominance, however, she turned her back on the scribe and ran away with some other fellow. It has rather an amusing similarity to this case. One of the other scribes put the story down on papyrus; it is one of the first so-called human interest stories ever recorded."

"It may be similar in some ways," growled Ben, "but there's one similarity that the two cases will lack. The first story was recorded, but you can bet your life that this one never will be set down!"

And yet, here it is. Well, after all, who can tell anything about it? Maybe a soul doesn't travel on a one-way ticket and perhaps it can come back, when it feels the urge, to look over this vale of tears and mingle with the old folks at home.

Quién sabe? as the title writer makes the romantic lover remark, sooner or later, in every picture laid in Spain, Mexico or South America.

THE END



Snowfall

By H. A. WOODBURY

THE snow started about dusk, at first to sift gently through the violet gloom of the pines and fall, melting, on the warm ground. Gradually, though, the wind shifted.

What had been but a timid freak of the weather became suddenly very much in earnest. It was a blizzard. The snow came in a whirling veil, sweeping down the mountainside to shroud the whole wide valley.

Ted Beach shifted his gaze from the window, now whitened beyond transparency. He gazed thoughtfully at his uncle.

In the yellow light of the oil lamp swinging on its chain overhead, the older man's face hardened into a mocking grin. Bill Beach's eyes grew every moment more and more brittly blue. His jaw, even in its smile, became more set.

"It's Providence, lad," he was saying, "Providence doin' to that sheep outfit what we'd of done—if we was men any more."

Ted offered no comment. His tanned face grew thoughtful as he turned back to the window.

He swept a large hand slowly through his black hair. He was striving, somehow,

to penetrate the whirling white veil outside to Buffalo Park, that clearing in the pines, where Jim Parker's sheep outfit was lambing.

Lambing on a night like this! And with the desert sweeps of their southern pastures only a week away. It was irony, grim and bitter.

He looked even farther into the whitish dusk—till he seemed to behold a face, softly beautiful and framed with a billowing luxuriance of chestnut hair.

It was a face that had haunted him for two days—ever since, when, riding across Government Prairie, the afternoon when the sheep outfit had come in, he had first seen the girl, sitting beside Parker on the jouncing box of a spring wagon.

He turned back to his uncle.

"Seems to me if we *really* were men, we'd go over and give 'em a hand. If they had enough help, they might save some of the lambs."

"Give 'em a hand!" The old man's voice mounted shrilly above the storm outside. "Give 'em a hand!" He burst into laughter.